



# City of Benton City

## *Public Participation Plan*

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### Benton City Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update

#### INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The City of Benton City Comprehensive Plan is a long-range planning document containing goals and policies, which are intended to be a guide concerning future land use, extensions of community services and facilities, parks and open space, designation of environmentally sensitive areas, and desirable urban design elements for the City. Periodic review and update of the County's comprehensive plan and development regulations is necessary to reflect current laws, local needs, new data, correct errors, and/or clarify intent. As the City of Benton City continues to grow and change, the City's Comprehensive Plan is intended to change and reflect the needs and vision of the community.

The City of Benton City recognizes that an effective participation process is a vital element in the updating and implementation of comprehensive plan. The Benton City Public Participation Plan (PPP) is a document that guides the city on how to reach out to the public and outlines methods and resources used to do so. Benton City is committed to providing opportunities to engage the public in the planning, development and implementation phases of the comprehensive planning process.

The PPP aids the City of Benton City by providing a framework for information distribution, public notice and input on key comprehensive planning decisions. It is important to Benton City to ensure local governments and agencies, state and federal partners, and the public are aware of the City's planning activities. This plan provides an outline of those activities.

The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A, sets forth several state planning goals. Included in the statewide goals is RCW 36.70A.020 (11), which states in part, "Citizen Participation and coordination. Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process ...". Citizen participation is further addressed in RCW 36.70A.035 Public Participation – Notice Provisions and 36.70A.140 Comprehensive Plans – Ensure Public Participation.

RCW 36.70A.140 of the GMA requires each city planning under the GMA to "establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program". This section of the GMA further requires the city provide for "early and continuous public participation in the development" of the city's comprehensive plan or any amendments.

The development of the public participation program is a responsibility of the City of Benton City as long as the program meets the requirements noted above. The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 365-196-600(3) provides recommendations for meeting the public participation requirements of the GMA.

#### INTENDED OUTCOMES

The public participation effort is intended to achieve specific desired outcomes, which include:

- A public involvement process that provides clear information to the public on the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan update and how the update process works;
- Public meetings and events designed to provide opportunities for all interested parties to be heard, and for people to listen and learn from one another;

- Broad participation of all interested groups and individuals regardless of point of view;
- A transparent process which clearly documents all public input and makes it available for any and all to review; and
- Improve the decision making process to include the interests and needs of stakeholders

## EARLY AND CONTINUOUS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The City of Benton City is committed to encouraging early and continuous public involvement in the update of the Comprehensive Plan. Methods to encourage public involvement include: a dedicated webpage on the City's website, consistent and regular notification to interested parties throughout the process, Planning Commission Meetings which are open to the public, Open Houses (hosted by the Planning Commission) to solicit public comments, and a Public Hearings before the Planning Commission.

The City of Benton City website has a page designed to provide information on the Comprehensive Plan update, post the proposed amendments as they are presented to the Planning Commission, and invite and encourage public comments. The website also provides an opportunity for people to sign up and receive email notifications when proposed amendments are added to the website and are available for review, as well as notification of upcoming Planning Commission and Council meetings where the proposed amendments will be discussed.

The Planning Commission will serve as the primary working group and advisory body for the Plan update and will review and provide input on the proposed amendments in a series of Work Sessions before holding a Public Hearing. The Planning Commission meetings are typically held on the last Wednesday of the month. These meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for public comment. Written and email comments received will also be provided to the Planning Commission for consideration.

A general Open House will be conducted following the initial Planning Commission sessions and prior to the issuance of a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Threshold Determination for the proposed amendments. The invitation to the Open House will be distributed through all public notification avenues available to the City including flyers, press releases, posting at City Hall and the Benton City Library, the City's website, and email notification to established email lists.

A Public Hearing will be conducted by the Planning Commission to solicit public comments prior to forwarding a recommendation to the City Council.

## PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES:

Several recommendations for meeting the GMA public participation requirements are included in WAC 365-196-600(3.a), which emphasizes the importance of involving the broadest cross-section of the community into the planning process. Moreover, the WAC encourages jurisdictions to involve groups not previously involved in planning to become involved in the comprehensive plan process. The following are the events proposed for the City of Benton City citizen participation process.

1. **Visioning Process** – This process is an excellent way to initiate a comprehensive planning process. This technique will provide the citizens an opportunity to establish a framework and context upon which the comprehensive plan will be based. It is anticipated that the Planning Commission meetings will provide the forum for the initial community visioning process.
2. **Communications Programs & Informational Services** – As staff and budgetary resources allow include the following citizen participation techniques in the city's citizen participation strategy:
  - a. **Interest Groups** – Contact local interest groups (i.e. Chamber of Commerce, home builders, environmental, neighborhoods, etc.) and arrange to meet and discuss relevant comprehensive plan issues.

- b. **Community Workshops/Open Houses** – Conduct community workshops hosted by the Planning Commission to encourage neighborhood participation in the development of the comprehensive plan.
- c. **Press Releases & Public Service Announcements** – Send information to local newspapers, (and radio stations and televisions stations if available) to promote significant events related to the comprehensive plan.
3. **Public Meetings** - Conduct a series of public meetings hosted by the Planning Commission on the preliminary draft comprehensive plan. This ensures that the City will meet the requirement for “early and continuous” public participation in the comprehensive planning process.
4. **Public Hearings** - Hold public hearings and provide public notice that meets the requirements of RCW 36.70A.020, .035, and .140. The WAC also recommends that the City Council conducts a public hearing prior to final adoption of the comprehensive plan.
5. **Written Comment** - Provide continuous opportunity for citizens to provide written comment. Written comments may be in the form of letters and other correspondence to the city regarding the plan or comments received electronically on the city’s website. Log in all written comments received according to specific area of comprehensive plan.
6. **Tracking Events and Actions** - Maintain a log of all public participation meetings, events and actions that the city engages in to provide documentation on the city’s effort to meet the requirements of the GMA.

## **BROAD AND EFFECTIVE NOTICING**

The public participation requirements of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) and the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) include notice procedures that are reasonably calculated to provide notice to property owners and other affected and interested individuals of proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and development regulation. Examples of notice provisions include:

1. Posting notice at City Hall, and the Benton City Library;
2. Publishing a notice in the Tri-City Herald, the City’s designated newspaper of general circulation;
3. Notifying public or private groups with known interest in a certain proposal or in the type of proposal being considered;
4. Press release notifying local papers/publications/ news and media outlets such as the Tri-City Herald Newspaper; and
5. Sending notice to agency mailing lists, including general lists or lists for specific proposals or subject areas.

In addition to the noticing techniques listed above, the City will maintain a dedicated page on the City’s website on the comprehensive plan update, which may include meeting agendas, minutes, staff reports, etc.