



Development-Ready Communities

3rd in a series of 4 Briefs geared towards
creating an *effective and efficient*
approach to development

Great communities need to put their best foot forward to attract the kind of economic development that maintains or improves their quality of life. Up-to-date plan review services and development-related ordinances that incorporate state-of-the-art practices will send the message to prospective developers that the community values development and is therefore a sound investment. **This issue focuses on Communication & Cultivating Community Involvement.**

The review process is more efficient when everyone knows what to expect. Homeowners are prepared for future development, because they have helped shape policies and understand the long term goals of the community. Decision makers understand what the master plan says about future growth and they know how zoning regulations achieve those goals. Developers and property owners know what the community needs and envisions—it's not a guessing game.

Often communities make the mistake of seeking public input from the community only when creating the master plan. They may be disappointed by the relatively low turnout, and are often surprised by a mob of confused residents at a public hearing. Successful communities **cultivate community involvement** by reaching out to their residents and business owners regularly, providing information and encouraging dialog. Communities should use a variety of approaches to improve communication and increase community involvement. Some suggestions include:

- **Use local media** to communicate with the public on a regular basis. While newspaper readership declines, many still rely upon their local paper (which may only be distributed once/week) for community information. In addition, many communities are served by online news that welcomes stories about the community.
- **Develop a newsletter** that is distributed in both paper and electronic formats within the community on a regular basis. Residents and business owners will begin to expect this information and can pass it along and encourage others to take an interest in the community.
- **Maintain a website** that provides current information including, but not limited to, the master plan, zoning ordinance, maps, site plan review manual, and application forms that can be filled out and submitted online. Make this information easy to find and easy to download. Provide contact information to a person who is able to answer questions by phone or email.
- **Hold public workshops, open houses, and forums regularly** to provide opportunities for education and input by residents, business owners and the development community. Encourage elected and appointed officials to personally invite their friends and neighbors to meetings.
- **Meet with community groups** to make them aware of local land use issues and share what's happening in the community. Ask them for help with specific issues.
- **Encourage relationships with nearby communities** to discuss local/regional issues and future land use concerns, as well as share best practices and training opportunities.

Communication and public participation leads to a greater understanding of planning and design principles, the community's master plan, and zoning regulations. These active approaches to public involvement can lift the community spirit, instill civic pride and inspire leadership. This kind of spirit attracts quality development and makes the review process less prone to surprises.