



## Advancing Community Engagement in Culver City

Bradley Bounds II, Lennox Chaiveera, Daniel Ruiz  
Professor Paavo Monkkonen  
Urban Planning 217A  
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## **Executive Summary**

This report provides a detailed picture of the current status of public engagement and participation within Culver City. Historically, attempts to understand public participation within the United States have been vague due to a lack of a unifying definition surrounding the concept. This report seeks to address this lack of clarity by identifying key literature and relating it specifically to the context within Culver City. Given that Culver City is in the process of updating its General Plan, ensuring that the participation of local residents is central to this process is necessary to create the most equitable outcomes. In order to further guide how decisions surrounding participation are made in the future, several key recommendations are provided to improve this process.

### ***Methodology***

In order to inform this analysis of participation within Culver City, the research team, a group of UCLA Urban Planning Master's students, gathered data through primary and secondary data sources. Outreach with Culver City officials, including council members, planning staff, as well as local community members and other stakeholders, has been instrumental in providing the information and background provided regarding participation within the city. Based on the literature reviewed and the data gathered, key recommendations are made that incorporate the varied perspectives gathered via outreach.

### ***Purpose***

This report was developed in order to inform city officials, community members, developers, as well as other stakeholders on how to best promote increased participation and inclusion outcomes in Culver City planning processes. Local community members should be central to most city initiatives, and their input is necessary to ensure that truly democratic outcomes are achieved. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that unrepresentative samples of the city are not the only ones providing input and to ensure that all city matters are representative of the community they seek to serve.

### ***Key Themes/Findings***

Five key themes and findings that emerged based on our research analysis include:

1. Past projects within Culver City have focused mostly on checking off the box of requirements, rather than truly engaging within their planning and development.

2. Having community buy in, meeting people where they are, and utilizing different methods of engagement stood out within our conversations as ideas that merit further attention.
3. Participation to what end is a concept that should be central to most development projects and city planning initiatives in order to maintain a higher level of meaningful participation.
4. Common barriers to inclusion within projects include time restrictions and a lack of funds.
5. Participation within the city of Culver City generally stems from the same couple of individuals and as a result more work is needed to engage community members that are not usually as involved.

These key themes are further expanded upon within the Key Themes/ Findings section.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the research and the interviews conducted, the following recommendations are made as to how Culver City can improve the public engagement and participation outcomes visible within its jurisdiction.

1. **Culver City should build a community engagement team.** Having resources allocated for this purpose will ideally facilitate participation and engagement efforts.
2. **Culver City should establish a Community Outreach Plan.**
  - Culver City should maintain an active and detailed list of its neighborhood groups and community stakeholders.
  - Culver City should conduct a regular assessment of the types of outreach performed by each of its departments. This will ensure comprehensive engagement practices are a goal of every department within the city. This can also play a crucial role in improving outreach to most marginalized members of the community.
  - Culver City should establish a list of suggested outreach methods that include printed, electronic or digital, and in-person options that are categorized based on the likelihood of reaching a large number of people and/or garner meaningful feedback.
    - Incorporated into these methods are specific standards to establish a standardized process for data collection and to ensure an equitable standard is applied to every project.
  - The City of Culver City should ensure that a specific degree of cultural competency is met by Culver City Council members as well as Culver City

Staff. The community engagement team should be tasked with creating the cultural competency framework and requirements.

3. **Culver City should amend the Culver City Municipal Code to reflect a required outreach plan for projects requiring discretionary review prior to the first community meeting.** This shall include the following outreach methods: printed, electronic or digital, and in-person; with the ability to use high impact digital engagement in lieu of in-person outreach in the event of an emergency or at the discretion of the Director.
4. **Culver City should host official meetings in various spaces outside City Hall.** Culver City should consider hosting meetings in different neighborhoods seeing as how alternate settings may facilitate increased community involvement
  - o As a part of providing alternate meeting spaces, Culver City should also consider how to improve its engagement via virtual platforms considering that remote meetings may be necessary for the foreseeable future to some extent due to the on-going COVID-19 Pandemic.
5. Given the increased racial diversity visible within the Fox Hills neighborhood, **we find it critically important that Culver City emphasize furthering the efforts made in Fox Hills under the community conversations held in conjunction with the National Institute for Civil Discourse.** It is imperative that the city continue to improve relations with the neighborhoods that are host to the most marginalized and disconnected residents.

## **Introduction**

The City of Culver City is currently updating its General Plan, the governing document that guides change in the city by outlining the vision, goals, and objectives of the city. It establishes a long-range vision and establishes clear goals, objectives, and actions to help the community determine its approach to the next 25 years and beyond. After the General Plan update is completed, the current planning process and city decision making processes more generally will have to reflect and enforce the updates of the General Plan.

As a part of the General Plan updating process, Culver City is seeking to create a more inclusive and engaged planning process to ensure it is representative of the city's celebrated diversity. This report positions Culver City's current planning process and development projects in the context of community input and seeks to influence the opinion of local developers across all project engagements towards implementing more inclusive and participatory practices. The research objective includes qualitative discussions on who has the right to participate in local government affairs, the power of public participation, and the impact of public engagement.

The key questions that result from this objective and guide this project are:

How does the planning process engage relevant stakeholders within Culver City?

Does community engagement play a role in the success of an entitlement project?

What community engagement strategies lead to more equitable and inclusive outcomes?

How can Culver City further advance its engagement strategies?

This report addresses these underlying questions through one comprehensive research question: *What are the essential factors to creating an inclusive planning process through community engagement in Culver City?*

To answer this question, we examined five case studies of development projects in varying phases of development in Culver City. Our case study analysis consisted of organizing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews of members of the city council, Current Planning Division, Advanced Planning Division, project stakeholders, and neighborhood groups. Based on the interviews, each case study was broken down

to understand key themes visible within each project as well as to understand what factors have impacted its outcomes. For interviews that were not focused on a specific project, we asked questions about community participation and engagement more generally within Culver City.

This report presents recommendations for inclusive planning through public participation and engagement based on the analysis of case studies:

1. **Culver City should build a community engagement team.** Having resources allocated for this purpose will ideally facilitate participation and engagement efforts.
2. **Culver City should establish a Community Outreach Plan.**
  - Culver City should maintain an active and detailed list of its neighborhood groups and community stakeholders.
  - Culver City should conduct a regular assessment of the types of outreach performed by each of its departments. This will ensure comprehensive engagement practices are a goal of every department within the city. This can also play a crucial role in improving outreach to most marginalized members of the community.
  - Culver City should establish a list of suggested outreach methods that include printed, electronic or digital, and in-person options that are categorized based on the likelihood of reaching a large number of people and/or garner meaningful feedback.
    - Incorporated into these methods are specific standards to establish a standardized process for data collection and to ensure an equitable standard is applied to every project.
  - The City of Culver City should ensure that a specific degree of cultural competency is met by Culver City Council members as well as Culver City Staff. The community engagement team should be tasked with creating the cultural competency framework and requirements.
3. **Culver City should amend the Culver City Municipal Code to reflect a required outreach plan for projects requiring discretionary review prior to the first community meeting.** This shall include the following outreach methods: printed, electronic or digital, and in-person; with the ability to use high impact digital engagement in lieu of in-person outreach in the event of an emergency or at the discretion of the Director.
4. **Culver City should host official meetings in various spaces outside City Hall.** Culver City should consider hosting meetings in different neighborhoods seeing as how alternate settings may facilitate increased community involvement

- As a part of providing alternate meeting spaces, Culver City should also consider how to improve its engagement via virtual platforms considering that remote meetings may be necessary for the foreseeable future to some extent due to the on-going COVID-19 Pandemic.
5. Given the increased racial diversity visible within the Fox Hills neighborhood, **we find it critically important that Culver City emphasize furthering the efforts made in Fox Hills under the community conversations held in conjunction with the National Institute for Civil Discourse.** It is imperative that the city continue to improve relations with the neighborhoods that are host to the most marginalized and disconnected residents.

By taking into consideration how differences in the socioeconomic standing of residents impact participation outcomes, this report adds to existing research on the topic of participation by providing a lens of inclusivity through which the planning process and local government can actively engage and empower people. Furthermore, it frames community outreach and engagement in the context of the individuals who regulate, host, or participate in the development.

## **Report Structure**

The report is structured as follows. First, we provide the hidden historic context of Culver City, summarize California State legislation on public participation in the planning process and Culver City legislation on public participation, and describe the community engagement practices of Culver City. Second, we frame the report with existing literature on public participation including theories, issues, and best practices of other cities. Then, we detail the selection of five case studies, 5 semi-structured sets of interviews, and the process of data analysis based on the comparison of key takeaways from each case study. Finally, based on this analysis, we provide a set of recommendations for the City Council and Planning Staff to consider to make the City more inclusive to its communities.

### *Considerations/ Future work*

The topic of community participation and engagement is not new, but there is still much work to be done. There is no consensus on how to best improve participation within cities and their different communities. As one of the first initial looks into the topic of community participation and engagement within Culver City, one of the main limitations is the limited data and writing on the topic. Consequently, our research approach and recommendations include more of the perspective of the individuals interviewed related

to the various current planning projects identified. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the engagement process within Culver City, we sought input from actors connected to a diverse range of projects in different phases of development, including projects that have failed, that are in development, projects that have already been approved, as well as projects currently under construction.

Another factor for our research process is the COVID-19 pandemic, which began as we were still conducting outreach, limiting the amount of data and interviews that we could gather. More time would have been beneficial to incorporate additional stakeholders in the Culver City community in our interview process as well as reaching out to developers. As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt, it is important that Culver City continue to hold discussions on the topic of community participation and that it continues to seek out innovative ways of reaching out to neighborhood groups and community members. Culver City should also seek to increase the use of quantitative data as it pertains to engagement activities. Quantitative data can provide a more objective understanding of who within the community participates in city matters and who does not.

## **Background and Context: Situating Culver City**

This section provides a background of the City of Culver City to understand its founding and how its history has facilitated and hampered different kinds of citizen participation. Included in this section is a discussion of different eras of exclusion, demographics, specific provisions of law that lend to participation in planning, as well as other knowledge related to the engagement of local residents.

### *1. A Model Little City: History of Exclusion*

Culver City, founded by Harry Culver in 1913, was incorporated in 1917. When Harry Culver created Culver City, the character of the town was rooted in exclusion. Harry Culver's advertisements to attract prospective residents described Culver City as a "model little white city" (Kent, 2019). In addition to this questionable statement, other statements made by Culver show that he intended for the tract to be subdivided to price out low-income African Americans and other low-income families out of the city. For example, when Culver made his initial announcement of his plans for the city, he emphasized that large residential lots would be the norm in the area. The intersection of race and economic class as applied within Culver City at this time meant that the exclusion of low-income residents also led to the exclusion of African Americans. Historically, the question of why segregation occurs and what its causes are has been

heavily debated. The history of segregation within Culver City showcases how governments have played significant roles in influencing segregation outcomes that have typically harmed communities of color more so than other communities. The exclusion of minorities and the segregation outcomes they have faced within housing is notable within Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law*. This book shows that although this form of segregation is visible in Culver City's history, segregation is not unique to Culver City and is also pervasive throughout other major American cities and regions.

One of the biggest issues with the emphasis on the large residential lots desired by Culver is that they are a part of exclusionary zoning laws that work to keep low-income minorities out of middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. On top of using large residential lot sizes as an exclusionary mechanism within housing, deed restrictions were also used to prevent "incompatible ownership occupancy", which was also used to prevent sales to non-white individuals (Kent, 2019). While explicit mentions of race are not as common today in crafting neighborhoods and life more generally within Culver City, it is important to acknowledge this history to truly understand how the city has come to be how it is situated today.

Today, Culver City is in the process of comprehensively updating its General Plan, with this process providing a tremendous opportunity to increase the level of citizen participation city-wide and to shape city life for residents for years to come. Thus far, Culver City has held workshops that approach multiple topics regarding their plan update. At their General Plan Vision Festival, there was an emphasis on diversity being something that is celebrated by the residents however diversity was never defined during these discussions. Therefore, a question that arises out of this context is: how diverse is Culver City despite its past history of economic and inherent racial exclusion?

## *II. Culver City Today (Demographics)*

Since it was incorporated in 1917, Culver City has grown significantly and is now made up of 39,214 residents. According to its 2019 Southern California Association of Governments profile, the population has remained relatively the same since 2000, with an increase of 1,044 being visible from the year 2000 to 2018. Regarding the percentage of homeowners vs renters, as of 2018 53.4% of Culver City residents own their home and 46.6% are renters. This is significant given that homeowners tend to participate more in city matters (McCabe 2013), meaning that attention needs to be given to the differences in participation of these two groups. A recent study found that homeowners are much more likely to participate in local elections and in elections more generally at the national level, with this increased participation being motivated in part

by their ownership (Hall and Yoder, 2018). Considering that a significant portion of Culver City is composed of renters, the city should seek to understand how to elicit participation from this group as well.

The primary racial demographics of the city are 62% White, 8% African American, 16% Asian, and 23% Hispanic/Latino. At Culver City's recent General Plan Visioning Festival, there were a total of 68 participants at this event. 60% of respondents identified as White or Caucasian (41), 7% identified as Black or African American (5), 16% identified as Latino or Hispanic (11), 13% as Asian or Asian American (9), and 3% identified as being of another race (2). Although this is just one event, it is notable that there is a slight underrepresentation of non-white groups in attendance. Increasing the participation of non-white groups is essential for diversity to truly be embraced within the city of Culver City and for participation outcomes to be more aligned with the actual demographic breakdown of the city.

Another significant component that continues to shape Culver City is that a large portion of its inhabitants on a daily basis is composed of people who commute to the city for work. The largest employers of Culver City are Sony Pictures, Southern California Hospital at Culver City, and Culver City Unified School District. Combined, these employers provide over 5,000 jobs in the area. It is also predicted that the city will continue to see gains in job creation with Google, Amazon, Apple, and several other companies moving into the area in the next couple of years (Pimentel, 2019). With so many jobs in the area, this raises the question of whether Culver City should include input on city matters from these employees if they do not live within Culver City, further complicating the participation and engagement process for the city.

### *III. The Participatory Process in Culver City*

Citizen participation and engagement is often seen as an ideal that every city and government entity should choose to participate in on their own. Additionally, legislation at both the local and state level within California has helped to facilitate and define it.

While participation can be viewed in many different ways, participation within the planning process as defined here is defined as the involvement of local residents in shaping outcomes within their city and their local neighborhoods. This differs from voting in that voting is just one form of political participation whereas participation in planning more generally is much more expansive.

## **STATE LEVEL**

At the state level, the California Government Code mentions public participation within the planning process and specifies some of the ways that the public should be involved. This section reads as follows:

“The Legislature recognizes the importance of public participation at every level of the planning process. It is therefore the policy of the state and the intent of the Legislature that each state, regional, and local agency concerned in the planning process involve the public through public hearings, informative meetings, publicity and other means available to them, and that at such hearings and other public forums, the public be afforded the opportunity to respond to clearly defined alternative objectives, policies, and actions.” - *Ca. Gov. Code § 65033*

Even though public participation is a nuanced topic without one single definition, its inclusion within the California Government Code shows how important it is. Within this section, the State of California recognizes the need for planning at multiple levels of government to have a mandatory public participation component and provides examples of what this process may look like. The fact that this section explicitly mandates and requires public involvement is significant in that it lays the foundation for public participation in government affairs surrounding planning within California more generally.

Another pertinent section of the California Government Code reads:

CHAPTER 9. Meetings [54950 - 54963] ( *Chapter 9 added by Stats. 1953, Ch. 1588.*  )

54950.

“In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and the other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people’s business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.

*(Added by Stats. 1953, Ch. 1588.)*

This section specifies that the purpose of public meetings is to conduct the people's business, meaning the business of local residents within a specified locality. Public representatives that work within the state must be open about their proceedings and inform the public of information relevant to them.

### ***LOCAL LEVEL***

At a more local level, the City of Culver City addresses public participation within its local laws in section 611. This section states that "during any public meeting, all persons shall have the right to address the City Council, and any City commission, board or committee, subject to reasonable rules of decorum and time limits established by ordinance or the presiding officer." The ability to address the city during any of its meetings is one of the most straightforward ways that local residents can exercise their right to public participation. Other Culver City code relevant to public participation is also visible in the section that outlines the powers and duties of the Planning Commission.

#### **CULVER CITY Planning: § 3.03.400 POWERS AND DUTIES.**

The Planning Commission shall have the following powers and duties:

- A. After a public hearing thereon, recommend to the City Council the adoption, amendment or repeal of the General Plan, or any part thereof, for the physical development of the City.
- B. Exercise such control over zoning, land subdivisions and building as is granted to it by the City Council and by the laws of the State of California;
- C. Make recommendations concerning proposed public works and for the clearance and rebuilding of blighted or substandard areas within the City and public improvement in general;
- D. Upon the direction of the City Council, issue Orders to Show Cause why use permits, exceptions or variances granted should not be revoked for violation and to hold necessary hearings, transmitting findings and recommendations to City Council. A person aggrieved by the action of the Commission may appeal to the City Council by filing a notice of appeal in accordance with the appeal procedures and within the time limits set forth in [Chapter 17.640](#) of this Code; and

E. Perform such other duties, not inconsistent with the City Charter or this Code, as may be prescribed by ordinance, resolution, City Council Policy or other City Council action.

(Ord. No. 2011-005 § 1 (part))

Considering that the planning commission has a tremendous amount of say in determining local city matters, ensuring diversity within this commission can also improve public participation more widely. Within Culver City, there are 5 members of this commission that are all generally appointed by the council after completing an application process. As is visible within the power and duties section of the Planning Commission outlined above, this commission often recommends decisions to be made to the City Council. Based on this, the planning commission's potential role in promoting more equitable participation and general outcomes should not be overlooked.

While both the state and local legislation highlighted thus far do make an emphasis on public participation and engagement, the requirements from this legislation for public participation are very general and do not necessarily lead to increased inclusion on their own.

### **City Planning and Public Engagement Overview**

To construct a comprehensive overview of how the city currently implements its outreach and engagement strategies, we interviewed multiple city officials (the former mayor, councilmembers, and Advance Planning Division members). We asked them what strategies the city currently employs to engage the public and what initiatives foster more inclusion and participation in the future.

#### *Assessment of Current Participation Efforts*

Within Culver City, the Advance Planning Division oversees the long term planning of the city. This division is different from the Current Planning Division in that it is specifically focused on future planning. Current Planning is more focused on development projects in the present. The Advance Planning Division is directly responsible for managing and overseeing the general plan update in Culver City, giving it a significant amount of leverage in shaping participation outcomes in the long run.

According to an interview with Culver City's Advance Planning Manager, Ashley Hefner, the division generally follows standard engagement practices in the state of California, including sending out emails, notices for meetings, as well as informing the public of the community meetings required for a specific project. This information shows one of the

weaknesses in the state and local law relating to participation in that cities can proceed with developments and other initiatives by completing the minimum public participation requirements without necessarily engaging residents in a more meaningful or sustained manner.

The Advance Planning division has sought to incorporate more emphasis on strategic messaging recently, with social media and other community organizations being used to spread the word about local events and happenings. The Advanced Planning Manager also noted that the people that are involved in city matters are generally also involved in self-formed groups at the neighborhood level. Creating incentives for the formation of resident groups at the neighborhood level may thus be a way for Culver City to garner a higher amount of participation at the city level. The Advanced Planning Division is also looking for ways to increase turnout at local meetings and discussions by making them more accessible. The city has recently begun offering child care to help with this issue of accessibility. The idea is that by providing child care, local residents will have one less challenge preventing them from participating in city affairs.

Interviews with council members have also been informative regarding the current status of public participation within Culver City. According to council member Daniel Lee, Culver City has made some steps forward in making it easier to engage the public, such as streaming meetings on Twitter and Facebook. However, the city generally has the same people showing up most of the time in spite of these efforts.

Regarding how the city has sought to engage residents in the past, Councilmember Lee also stated that the city has pretty much just done what is required by law, as was mentioned by the Advanced Planning division. He highlighted the fact that those that can participate in the city more actively tend to have more free time and are generally more affluent. Blacks, Latinos, and Asians were mentioned among the groups that the city needs to do a better job of reaching out to and incorporating in city matters.

Councilmember Lee also mentioned the provision of child care as a way to increase participation. Another idea that he had was for the city to rotate where it hosts its monthly meetings among different neighborhoods to make it easier for other residents to be able to access them. One significant takeaway regarding the planning commission is that Lee noted that it is reasonably traditional and conventional. City officials and others involved in city matters must be open to new ideas in order for successful increases in participation to become a reality.

An interview with Councilmember Meghan Shahli-Wells also provides insight into understanding the current status of participation and engagement in Culver City.

Salhi-Wells highlighted that since the city has set these areas as a goal, they seem to be improving. One of the changes that have made improvements to participation more likely is an internal culture change. The Councilmember feels that institutional evolution within the city is necessary for participation to increase. Whereas in the past, the city did not have a social media presence, for example, it is now more active online. The city has also hired a communications firm to assist with this process.

Creating multiple means of engagement was an idea provided as to how to improve the lack of involvement of residents within the planning process. As a part of this, the City is emphasizing a heightened sense of ownership within local residents in order to improve outcomes in an increased number of neighborhoods. While there is no standard method of evaluation yet as a part of this process, the fact that this is a city goal is a step in the right direction for improving engagement.

### General Plan Update

The City of Culver City has historically emphasized only the components of participation mandated by law. Recent efforts, however, have begun to be more focused on increasing inclusion. This is visible within the General Plan update process, and considering that it is being updated in a comprehensive fashion, which has not been done by the city before, it is even more critical that public participation be included as a part of this process.

The Advanced Planning department wants the update of the General Plan to have a significant impact by getting as many people as possible involved. They want to emphasize a more grassroots approach to these discussions. Strategic coordination of outreach is likely to play a pivotal role in whether more people actually are engaged.

### **Research on Public Participation**

In this section, we review the literature on participation in planning states as it pertains to citizen engagement. This includes an overview of the concepts of public participation, citizenship, and neighborhoods, as well as other, similar themes.

### ***Theories of Public Participation***

To discuss public participation, it is imperative to discuss who the public is. For our research, we define the public as a group entity that is generally made up of local residents and citizens. However, it is difficult to determine citizenship as well as to determine what the implications of defining it are. Hempel questions the concept of

citizenship by examining avenues for defining it such as political ideology or place of residency by recognizing the idea of exclusion based on geographic location. (Hempel, 1972) More specifically, where does citizenship begin and end when participating in community issues? Hempel goes further by questioning the decision to define a citizen by the neighborhood that he or she resides in and highlights the ambiguity of defining a neighborhood as well.

The concept of the neighborhood can be interpreted in various ways such as geographic location but other factors such as size, number, and social relations are often unknown to the inhabitants of the area (Hempel, 1972). In addition, when a geographic area is defined, Hempel questions what it means to belong to an area and what it is that makes one a citizen in the first place. It is important to note that local city governments are elected by residents within the city, factoring into the sense of belonging individuals feel. One option considered for defining what being a citizen revolves around individuals working or living in the city but under this specific definition participatory power would be in the hands of individuals of specific qualifications and excludes others who use the city (Hempel, 1972). In practice, this framework is reflected in government elections. However, in the planning process, the exclusivity of geographic citizenship can be detrimental towards creating an equitable city. For example, in today's housing crisis the population of the unhoused is increasing. If there are policies being created to address housing insecurity, such as a new shelter, should the unhoused have the ability to provide input in planning affairs, or would only residents with a proof of address have a say? Thus it is difficult to determine a universal definition of the public because citizenship is defined differently in multiple cases and under different scenarios.

In addition to the idea of ambiguity being visible in defining the public, participation as a term is also contested. The concept of public participation rests solely on the definition of the role of the citizen. If the role of the citizen is considered a legal construct by the Constitution, based on their perceived allegiance to the country, adherence to the law, and the defense of the country, then public participation is a process that does not aim to solve problems with a specific purpose (Roberts, 2004). An alternative to this would be viewing citizenship as having an identity based on the same moral values. With this method, public participation would require there be widespread conformance with one idea and if an individual acts in opposition, it is met with forbearance and tolerance to an extent. (Hart, 1984) The necessity of forbearance and tolerance permits the government process to maintain democracy. Considering public participation in this manner allows public participation to operate with a specific purpose of bettering the community through substantive citizenship. (Roberts, 2004) Substantive citizenship is the granted

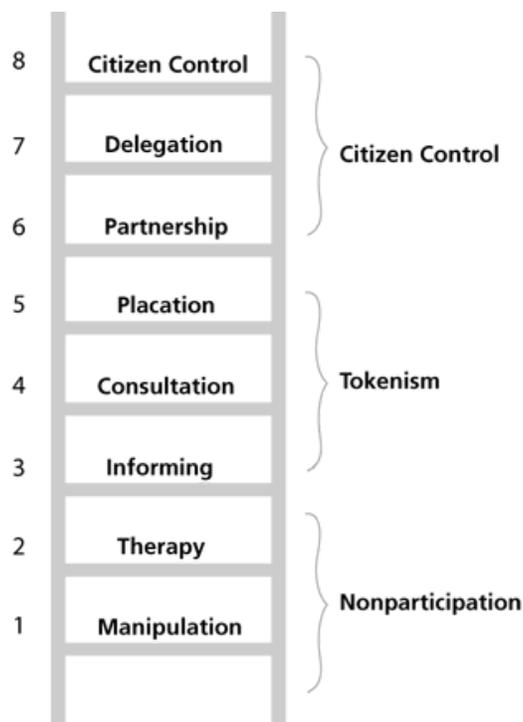
power to partake in the rights of citizenship such as voting power, a direct form of citizen participation.

The concept of citizen participation under substantive citizenship sounds ideal in the abstract, but the distribution of power through substantive citizenship is not always feasible nor equitable. Within local governments nationwide, William Fischel argues that “real power - at least in the small to moderately-sized municipalities in which the majority of Americans live—is held by homeowners, who are also interested primarily in maximizing the value of their property: their homes” (Hertz, 2015). This idea is a part of Fischel’s concept known as the “home voter hypothesis” which reflects the fact that homeowners are more likely to vote and have their voices be represented within official city matters. From this perspective, it is important that cities such as Culver City expand their notion of whose opinion matters in order to reflect the fact that the opinions of individuals who are not homeowners are relevant within the city’s jurisdiction as well. While the opinions of homeowners are important, not everyone is able to become a homeowner and not everyone votes within local elections. Given that homeowners tend to favor maintaining their own property values and tend to vote in higher numbers, it is unlikely that their own personal interests reflect what is truly needed to make participation outcomes within most communities more equitable.

Arnstein (1969) defines citizen participation as “a categorical term for citizen power”, with the redistribution of power being a means to purposefully include previously excluded groups in the process by which information is generated, decisions are made, and by which social reform is ultimately created. He highlights how while participation is a great principle to stand by in theory, debates often become more argumentative when discussing how to incorporate those who do not currently have power. These debates are generally visible in a form of disagreement between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. The “have-nots” are generally composed of ethnic minorities or those who are economically less well off and do not have much political power to begin with, whereas the “haves” are those who are generally more well off and usually have much more of a say in decision-making processes.

Arnstein makes the specific case that participation without power is essentially pointless, with only some groups benefiting under this scenario and the status quo being maintained. He aimed to address this uneven distribution of power by creating the idea of the Ladder of Participation. The Ladder of Participation is a method of analysis that allows one to determine the power of the public in government decisions, with the lower rungs of the ladder having less power and the highest rungs signaling a higher degree of citizen power in the decision-making process. From lowest to highest, Arnstein’s

Ladder of Participation includes the following degrees of citizen participation: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegation, and citizen control. These steps are visible in the image below. Including the public at the highest rung of Arnstein’s ladder is a process that needs to be more deliberate and thought out from the beginning. Without government actors being more intentional as to how they wish to involve the public, it is unlikely that the public will be involved in a meaningful way or that their participation will lead to significant outcomes that are of benefit to them.



**Arnstein's Ladder (1969)**  
Degrees of Citizen Participation

The intentionality required to sustain a level of participation commensurate with the higher degrees of citizen participation within Arnstein’s Ladder is an argument that is also made by Raymond Burby. Burby promotes the idea that “plans that matter” (2003), or plans that bring about action on the behalf of government issues they seek to address, require more attention. From his perspective, strong plans necessitate a broad array of stakeholders in order to truly be effective and create government action. As a part of this broad array of stakeholders, there is a need for “publics”, groups that can be readily identified who are interested in specific policy issues and actively involved in

efforts to deal with these issues (Burby, 2003). Without “publics,” the technical expertise of planners is relied upon and local knowledge is not implemented.

Burby also argues that citizen involvement has not been seen as beneficial to plan making from an evidence-based perspective, but it is ultimately important because planners make decisions that limit stakeholder participation. Many local efforts to involve stakeholders are often symbolic rather than substantive and choices of planners often limit further participation. This planning technique can be harmful towards specific groups of people that are absent in the planning process such as people of color, renters, and the unhoused. The choice of objectives, choice of timing, choice of whom to target, choice of techniques, as well as the choice of information are five areas that planners need to be more conscious about as they move forward in their plan-making processes.

According to Burby, the four most important decisions that planners are involved in include: the number of stakeholders that are actually targeted for participation, the number of different types of information provided to these stakeholders, the use of a citizen advisory committee, as well as making a conscious decision to find out citizen participation preferences. Planners can ensure more involvement by inviting a variety of groups and ensuring that participation is meaningful to citizens. Planners must be open to both educating and learning from citizens.

Davidoff’s work on “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning” emphasizes how certain planning values and attitudes are contentious. Disagreement over issues pertaining to distributive justice demonstrates this. To alleviate the burden of this contention, Davidoff presents the concept of advocacy and pluralism in planning to ensure that a democratic urban government is encouraged within the planning process and to ensure that the plans created by planners are well thought out with a diversity of input. Pluralism refers to ensuring that different voices are able to not only articulate their perspectives regarding planning decisions but also have their perspectives become reality via the planning process. Pluralism in planning does not shy away from alternative thought processes being a part of the planning conversation and actively seeks political debate as an essential component of it. As a part of this framework, Davidoff also calls for those within planning positions to become advocates for the least powerful.

Based on this literature, it is clear that defining public participation and citizen participation is difficult. There does not appear to be agreement regarding how to best implement public participation, but coming to grips with the fact that there is no consensus is key to actually establishing successful public participation measures.

Diane Day argues that while the bureaucracy of planning “has become a forum for the representation of all major popular interests and is recognized as such by interest groups” (Day, 1997, p. 421), citizen participation has often been proven to be a dilemma within planning. This dilemma stems from the fact that planning generally emphasizes technical expertise and impartiality as the way it functions but citizen participation tends to incorporate less technical perspectives into the process.

Confusion also tends to arise regarding what participation should look like as well as what its desired goals are. One final aspect of citizen participation that must not be overlooked, therefore, is to understand the “particular social theory, paradigm, or at least a set of assumptions” (Day, 1997, p. 422) that underlie any specific participation program or effort. By acknowledging this explicitly at the beginning of efforts to engage citizens, planning bodies can ultimately be more successful in the way in which their efforts are able to engage citizens in a manner that considers the lived experience and perspective of all groups of people.

### ***Barriers to Public Participation***

However, when considering the voice of residents, traditional public participation measures skew toward a specific group of people whose opinions have the potential to disproportionately influence government decisions. A recent study sought to analyze the patterns visible in the individuals that do choose to participate in local government matters, specifically within Massachusetts. The study finds that participants who attend meetings relating to housing matters are not usually representative of the broader public. Instead, they are older and more likely to be homeowners, male, white, longtime residents, and voters in local elections (Einstein, Palmer, and Glick, 2019). This type of participant wields privileges not afforded by those excluded from their status. An example of that privilege is residential stability which increases the likelihood of participation in local elections, the successful navigation of institutional challenges, and creates social networks that guide them towards participating in governmental affairs (McCabe, 2013). Thus, propertied individuals have a competitive advantage in public participation, based on resources, over individuals who do not own homes. Understanding who shows up to meetings such as homeowners is a key step in being able to reduce inequalities in citizen participation.

Given that homeownership plays a big role in determining inclusion and participation outcomes, understanding why opposition to local housing construction occurs is also relevant to this discussion. Monkkonen (2016) highlights how limits to construction tend

to make all housing less affordable by increasing rents and in the process make spatial inequalities worse. Spatial inequalities are exacerbated in areas with less housing availability due to spatial exclusion becoming more possible, spatial mobility being reduced, as well as due to homeowners being able to benefit from increased equity compared to renters. Because homeowners are more likely to participate in local government matters, reducing challenges to the creation of housing could potentially lead to increased inclusion and participation if the number of homeowners increases as well. Some of the highlighted reasons that people challenge housing creation include concerns over the built environment, the character of a neighborhood, as well as the development process.

Having this understanding up front can equip planners to not only know how to better engage those who already choose to participate, but also those who do not usually become involved with the government. One way to ensure public participatory power extends beyond those who have money and time, is for planners and local government to operate under a participatory planning framework that focuses on empowering the citizen regardless of propertied status.

### ***Participatory Planning***

It must be recognized that community engagement practices often favor white communities and overlook black and brown communities. However, beyond taking measures to ensure community engagement meetings are more diverse and inclusive, it is also imperative that the City of Culver City actively acknowledge and reconcile the racism and classism embedded in its past and present urban policies. In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests that have erupted across the nation in Spring 2020, calls for action have been made by demonstrators demanding cities to focus on furthering policies that address racial justice. Too often, urban inequalities in cities are perpetuated by the actions of both the public and private sectors. In fact, the impacts of Culver City's history of exclusionary zoning laws still affect poor communities within the city today, while the primary benefactors of the current systems in place are its white residents. Correcting these historical injustices will require commitment and effort from all city staff.

It is the responsibility of the city to see that its citizens have a right to the city. This means that everyone, including the disenfranchised, should be warranted the privileges of not only the right to urban life, but the right to shape, enjoy, participate, and create the city. However, not all people in the city of Culver City have the same right to the city. Communities such as the Fox Hills neighborhood feel that their issues are regularly

ignored by the city. For these reasons Marcuse states, “it’s crucially important to be clear that it is not everyone’s right to the city with which we are concerned, but that there is, in fact, a conflict among rights that need to be faced and resolved, rather than wished away” (Marcuse, 2009, 191). Culver City must assess itself and work to better improve engagement strategies in its communities such as Fox Hills who are denied these privileges.

Participatory planning is one approach to addressing inequities in urban planning. It can be more effective when applied with a social and racial justice lens. As traditional planning practices have often failed to include low-income communities of color in the decision-making process, participatory planning emphasizes and prioritizes inclusion through the participation of the entire community. Its aim is to reconcile conflicting opinions of different parties and ensure marginalized underrepresented communities have an opportunity to participate in the planning process.

### **What are Other Cities Doing?**

Influenced by a participatory planning framework, cities are now making strides toward improving community participation in the development process. To achieve this, cities are developing equitable engagement strategies and creating new standards for public engagement aimed at reaching underrepresented communities.

#### ***Long Beach, CA: Climate Action and Adaptation Plan***

The City of Long Beach has made efforts to be more inclusive in their public outreach and engagement. Fiahna Cabana, the Planning Analyst for Long Beach, highlighted the efforts being done by the city. One example is the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP). The Planning Bureau of Long Beach developed its community engagement strategy for its CAAP based on an equity assessment conducted a year prior with other departments. Staff considered each potential action based on the equity criteria developed for the plan. The public engagement and outreach consisted of:

1. Reaching out, via online, print, and in-person communications, to communities most impacted by climate change based on a vulnerability assessment.
2. Meeting communities where the residents were gathered such as school events, fairs, summer events, and cultural fairs.
3. Co-creation of knowledge and co-defining priorities and solutions.

4. Hosting events in community-friendly, trusted, and easily accessible locations during days and times that were convenient for attendees.
5. Considering cultural appropriateness of all the engagement activities and providing interpretation services.
6. Providing food and giveaways
7. Continuously seeking community input to shape the CAAP.

According to Cabana, the criteria lead to staff participating in 60 community meetings and events, while partnering with youth programs, schools, and scientific workgroups. These efforts ultimately engaged a total of ten thousand people (F. Cabana, Personal Interview, April 14, 2020). Of the 60 events, three were open house events to share the greenhouse gas inventory results, receive community weigh-in, and have a sustainability resource fair. The latter allowed students to showcase science projects, different city departments to communicate with residents, and created an interactive way for residents to learn about climate change. For example, a local chalk artist was hired to draw where sea level would rise based on a climate vulnerability study.

In addition, staff co-hosted Spanish-only and Khmer-only events to build capacity within their respective communities. The planning process went beyond holding a meeting but actually working with the community to create solutions for them. Also, the staff collaborated with every city department and council by holding two city department events and sit-down meetings with every council office. Also, Long Beach's Planning Bureau is currently working on a way to evaluate the engagements in a meaningful way (F. Cabana, Personal Interview, April 14, 2020). However, the result of their outreach process was a draft Climate Action and Adaptation plan that reflects the community's strengths, assets, and priorities.

### ***Seattle, WA: The Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide***

To create a more inclusive city, the mayor of Seattle, Washington, Mayor Nickels, established the Race and Social Justice Initiative in 2005. It was aimed at ending institutionalized racism in local government and promoting multiculturalism and full public participation by all residents. Also, in 2008 the mayor issued Executive Order 05-08 regarding the Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Policy. The executive order commits all City departments towards the development and implementation of outreach and public engagement that is inclusive of diverse people, cultures, gender identities, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic status. The order set the goal of increasing access to information, resources, and the civic process to people of color and immigrant and refugee communities. To achieve these goals, the City established

three guiding principles: 1. Enhance Relationships and Engagement, 2. Enrich Knowledge Gathering, and 3. Embrace Organizational Change.

To create cultural inclusivity, Seattle created a Cultural Competence Continuum that takes Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and modifies it to include cultural literacy and inclusivity. Arnstein's ladder does not address the racial and economic exclusion from public participation. The Continuum is a dynamic guide that leads an individual to consider behaviors, attitudes, policies, and practices relevant to understanding how cultural elements relate to public engagement. The tool forces introspection into the individual and department to determine if mainstream outreach strategies are enough or if a more culturally responsive strategy can be achieved.

Seattle's Inclusive Outreach and Engagement Policy demonstrates the capacity to include cultural qualities in the government process to ensure equitable engagement across all departments. The continuum ranges from "Cultural Destructiveness" being the lowest rank and "Cultural Competency" being the highest. The former is the result of the repression of other cultures in which only a specific group has power (Seattle Office for Civil Rights, 2012, p. 7). As discussed in this report, the majority of people who participate in local government affairs tend to be homeowners, male, white, longtime residents, and voters in local elections. By operating in this stage, minority representation has the potential to be diminished, other existing cultures are erased from importance, and public participatory power is not balanced. Alternatively, "Cultural Competency" is where cities should be striving towards when trying to be inclusive. At this stage, people view cultural differences in high regard and use that understanding to guide life choices and work decisions (Seattle Office for Civil Rights, 2012, p. 7). Individual and cultural differences as well as new approaches to engagement are considered within this stage. The identified community has real shared power in how their community is engaged with and how decisions are made for them. In planning practice, the "Cultural Competency" stage is exemplified through the hiring of planning outreach liaisons from diverse community groups to solicit input from traditionally underrepresented communities. The outcome can result in the empowerment of residents and they are able to contribute towards projects in their community.

Ultimately, Long Beach and Seattle's efforts towards inclusive engagement serve as models that cities can follow. Long Beach is currently building relationships with its residents by acknowledging the diversity of its communities and engaging them in a tailored way. Seattle's Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide fosters engagement beyond the stage of just notifying residents. The continuum extends into empowering underrepresented residents of different cultures and races. The importance

of empowering the underrepresented is necessary to truly create an equitable city. To do this, it begins with assessing who is absent from the planning process and how engagement can be done to reach them in a meaningful way.

## Data and Analysis

In this section, we captured various perspectives of public participation surrounding new development in the city to assess the extent of public participation and level of engagement currently exercised by developers in Culver City today. We studied five recent projects in Culver City as cases and interviewed individuals with different affiliations to those developments. After gathering information from interviews, we pulled out common themes centered around projects that go above what is required for public engagement: reaching out to known community members, cultural competency, the city acting as a liaison between developers and residents, navigating relationships between older and newer residents, and understanding the power dynamics of society.

### Case Study Overview

Table 1 presents information on our five case studies, which are either postponed, completed, or ongoing current development projects and a planning policy project. In the sections below, we describe each project’s process of public engagement. Then we summarize important insights and themes from these case studies.

Table 1. Five Project Case Studies

Case Study	Developer(s)/Applicant	Project Type	Status
6221 Bristol Parkway (Fox Hills Plaza)	HSH Management Group	Mixed-Use Complex plus Open Space and Parking Structure: 725 apt units, 50 live-work units, 21,000 sf commercial space, 800 parking spaces	Postponed Indefinitely
Reimagine Fox Hills - Community Conversations	Culver City National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD)	Project to enhance public engagement between Culver City government and Fox Hills.	Completed
11111 Jefferson Blvd	Joint Venture: 3MR Capital & The John Buck Company	Mixed-Use: 51,000 sf office space, 55,000 sf commercial space, and 252	EIR Process

		residential units, 836 parking at grade and two basement levels	
10858 Culver Blvd (Culver City Creative Community Center)	Wende Museum	Creative Community Center	Approved, Pre-construction
Culver Studios	Hackman Capital Partners	720,850 sf complex with production space, sound stages, and offices	Under Construction

***I. 6221 Bristol Parkway (Fox Hills Plaza)***

The Fox Hills neighborhood lies in the southernmost end of Culver City. Culver City annexed the neighborhood in 1964. It has the highest concentration of minorities in the City and one of the largest Black populations by percentage in Los Angeles County. In 2018, a developer proposed a new mixed-use development in Fox Hills that would have brought 725 housing units and 21,000 square feet of commercial space to the neighborhood. However, the project was met with heavy community opposition and was placed on hold while the Council and residents worked with the developer to establish a community benefits agreement.

For this case study, we interviewed Freddy Puza, a community stakeholder, Fox Hills Neighborhood Association Secretary, and General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) member. His perspective was valuable because he is a community stakeholder who is impacted by the development. Based on our interview, the public outreach for this project met all the mandated requirements for community engagement. Nonetheless, he attributed the project’s failure due to their inability to effectively communicate with the community and reach all those who would be most affected and include them in the process. This further frustrated Fox Hills residents who already feel overlooked and ignored by the City. After their annexation to the City, Fox Hills residents felt the City Council did not try to build better community relations with their neighborhood, which has ultimately resulted in their distrust of the City. During the public engagement for the Fox Hills Plaza, resident concerns were heard but then ignored.

Demonstrably, Councilmember Daniel Lee cites the Fox Hills Plaza development as a poor example of poor public engagement: “there was no real indication that any of the concerns of the community that were voiced in the first and second meeting, were incorporated into their plans... the community did not feel listened to” (D. Lee, Personal Interview, March 5, 2020). The project was eventually placed on hold in 2018 (Eriksson

and Clarke, 2018). It can thus be observed that the failure of this project highlights the importance of community engagement that is reciprocal in relationship building and emphasizes the role community approval plays in ultimately determining the success of a project.

## ***II. Reimagine Fox Hills - Community Conversations***

Reimagine Fox Hills is a program started to revitalize the commercial property in the Fox Hills neighborhood in 2014. The Fox Hills Plaza project created so much discord that the city partnered with the National Institute for Civil Discourse to hold two “community conversations” with the Fox Hills neighborhood. Under the leadership of former Mayor Thomas Smalls, in Fall 2018 Culver City utilized a grant provided by the National Institute for Civil Discourse’s Revive Civility and Respect Cities initiative. The initiative seeks to improve public engagement between citizens and elected officials by using civil discourse to bring the community together with local stakeholders. NICD’s method for enhancing civil discourse is by conducting a “deep dive” approach to address specific needs of the community, with Culver City’s Fox Hills being designated as a Deep Dive Community. (NICD)

To better understand the Reimagine Fox Hills - Community Conversations outreach, we interviewed Hala Harik Hayes - Director, Revive Civility & Respect Cities at National Institute for Civil Discourse and Bernardo Ferdman - Principal, Ferdman Consulting. Their perspectives were valuable because they worked with the project and are knowledgeable about community engagement and inclusionary processes. The Community Conversations project was a successful attempt to build capacity with the underrepresented Fox Hills neighborhood, discover what the residents wanted for their community, and create a safe space for stakeholders to converse with residents, developers, and the City.

The project’s goals were to “improve the relationship between [municipalities] and their stakeholders, to bring the community with the policymakers together to talk about an issue of need in that community, and help teach the city staff to do the work so that there is life beyond just the project” (H. Hayes, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020). To achieve these goals, Culver City staff and NICD interviewed nine stakeholders, which led to key themes of trust-building with the City, perceived neglect from the City, preservation of neighborhood character, and transportation. This also led to the formation of a 14-member Community Conversation Advisory Board to guide outreach for the two meetings held. (Culver City, 2018)

When asked how to attract people who normally do not go to events, Hala explained that they tried to push the City of Culver City to do more outreach than they typically do, with this expanded outreach including printing flyers, emailing association heads, and placing their message on the city website. The City began trying to create a target audience to be inclusive by considering the business community, homeless individuals, and non-native English speakers (H. Hayes, Personal Interview, April, 17 2020). However, the effort to be inclusive led to new challenges such as the people feeling meetings are “less inclusive when they are there, because there are people there who they think will not have their interests in mind...residents did not feel so comfortable that developers were there.” (B. Ferdman, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020) To create a safe space was a challenge in itself due to differences in opinions and identities. Bernardo highlighted that the point of their work was to talk across differences beyond just an ethnic dimension, but also their roles in the city. Bernardo explained that the residents see it one way while developers saw themselves as good guys because they were investing in the community. (B. Ferdman, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020) The developer and resident tension was an example of a broader challenge in inclusionary work.

By trying to be inclusive, there was a discussion about who should have a seat at the table and what happens when they arrive. Harik explained that when there were residents that lived in Culver City who felt like they had a stake in what happens in Fox Hills but the Fox Hills residents were uncomfortable with that idea. (2020) According to Harik, there were disagreements “between the older and newer residents” about transportation policies such as traffic and parking. (H. Hayes, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020)

In addition, there were difficulties in accessing people. The Fox Hills neighborhood’s multi-family housing stock makes it hard to get people out of their “micro-communities” (B. Ferdman, April 17, 2020). To address this challenge, the City created fliers and contacted property managers to inform the communities of meetings. However, having people know about the meetings was not the same as what happens when a resident participates. Per Ferdman, “a lot of times people focus on how we can get people there and may not really think about what’s the dynamic relationship.” (B. Ferdman, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020) The solution was to create dialogue and move away from the traditional town hall meetings so that everyone had a chance to participate and hear across differences. This was in contrast to the Fox Hills Plaza meetings where the developers were challenging and shouting matches occurred in a town hall format that involved two minutes at a microphone to speak towards a stage (H. Hayes, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020). The residents were not used to a dialogue format for

meetings; however, this made a big difference between the Fox Hills Plaza and the Community Conversations meetings.

When asked about best practices for community engagement, Hayes noted that for the Community Conversations a public meeting “run by the city [was held whereas the other] one was a public meeting led by developers” (H. Hayes, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020). The practices identified were identifying the target audiences while being aware of the hard to reach audiences, your means to reach them, finding “trusted amplifiers in the community,” grassroots organizing by knocking on doors, and utilizing digital means (H. Hayes, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020). The actual activities they used were small groups, Poll Everywhere - a polling app, and laptops at tables.

In addition to these best practices, Ferdman mentioned a caveat to best practices in which changing how people are engaged does not change the structure of relationships that extend from the economic, social, political realms (B. Ferdman, Personal Interview, April 17, 2020). This highlighted a broader national concern of the community engagement process around ownership of power in the municipal process that is fundamental to local politics.

Ultimately, the utilization of innovative engagement approaches such as identifying stakeholders, finding a liaison to the community, and facilitating small group dialogue serve a way to conduct improved engagement. The results of these engagement practices have the potential to be more impactful. If local governments do not alter their structural power dynamics, affected by economic, social, and political factors, then having more people speak will be ineffective in the development process.

### ***III. 11111 Jefferson Blvd***

The proposed development for 11111 Jefferson Blvd is a mixed-use project that would include 279 apartments, 55,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space, and 51,000 square feet of offices (Sharp, 2019). If approved, the project would replace a 3.4-acre commercial center at the intersection of Jefferson and Sepulveda currently consisting of three buildings occupied by a Post Office, Coco’s Restaurant, and Valvoline gas station. As of February 2020, the project is still undergoing the development process.

For the 11111 Jefferson case study, we interviewed two individuals: Allen Lulu, a community stakeholder; and Elisa Paster, a lawyer affiliated with the developers for this project. These interviews provided us insight into opposing perspectives of developers

and community stakeholders. We learned about the challenges of interfacing with the public from the developer's standpoint, as well as the sentiments held by local residents about the community engagement process.

From the developer perspective, much of their frustration with interfacing with the public stems from the need to deal with widespread factually incorrect information circulated online by local residents. The project has only hosted two large community meetings. Paster stated that most people tend to not support projects, however, a lot of the concerns were based on misinformation (E. Paster, Personal Interview, February 11, 2020). Naturally, these concerns were reflected during the initial outreach phase. Some community residents were vocally opposed to the project. The residents were also concerned with the format of meetings, such as large presentations and question and answer meetings. Paster noted that creating a short presentation and breaking up into small groups is easier to navigate because people "will actually talk to you as opposed to being angry" (E. Paster, Personal Interview, February 11, 2020). Small groups fostered a conversation between the developers and the residents that allows open communication and has the ability to address stakeholder concerns. Open communication and addressing community concerns has allowed the developers to begin shifting opinions about the project.

Additionally, Allen Lulu, a community stakeholder, regards the 11111 Jefferson development as one of the better examples of public engagement: "I think 3MR and John Buck have done a really great job of outreach, more so than other developers" (A. Lulu, Personal Interview, February 10, 2020). As part of their public engagement approach, they asked the community, "what do we, as the neighbors, want?" As such, he felt his input and request for a neighborhood coffee shop was heard and included in the planned mixed-use development. Subsequent public engagement meetings would also demonstrate their receptiveness to community feedback, as they presented a downscaled vision as a response to the early held community concerns.

While Lulu commended the developers' outreach efforts for 11111 Jefferson Blvd, he expressed that his primary concern was the need for internal community conversations about impending development in his neighborhood, outside the efforts of 3MR and the John Buck Company. He observes members of his community typically fall into two camps concerning new development: those who are averse to change and those who are open to it, explaining that these camps tend to sit within echo chambers. For this reason, he is organizing additional community meetings outside the public meetings by the 3MR and John Buck so that their community can come together on development issues.

Lulu also highlighted that Eric Shabsis was present at community meetings. As a longtime resident of Culver City, Shabsis served “as a conduit between the neighborhood and the developers” (A. Lulu, Personal Interview, February 10, 2020). Considering that Shabsis was raised in Culver City, Lulu praised the fact that Shabsis knows the neighborhood and community very well. Having a well informed and respected resident in this case helped to bridge the gap between the community and the developers.

After interviewing Paster and Lulu, it is clear that the quality of communication between developers and the public was stressed as important during the development of this project. Community engagement for this project began with conflict and the issue of misinformation. However, open communication and addressing the concerns of residents led to a better perception of the project. Having a respected individual to serve as a liaison between the community and developers to help foster a relationship can be helpful in the engagement process. Also, the development process became iterative and reflected the previous concerns of residents in the next proposal from the developers. Being receptive to residents and allowing them to contribute creates a slightly enhanced dynamic of participatory power. A power that is derived from a resident’s opportunity to be respected, heard, and provided with the ability to contribute.

#### ***IV. 10858 Culver Blvd (Culver City Creative Community Center)***

The Wende Museum of the Cold War is located at 10808 Culver Blvd. Justin Jampol founded the museum in 2002, which was originally housed in an office park before moving to its current location inside a former National Guard Armory Building. It sits on a strip of land along Culver Blvd, owned by the Culver City Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) Department. On the same strip of land owned by the city, there is a vacant lot, next to the museum between the building and a community garden.

Just a little over a year after the Wende Museum’s relocation to the National Guard Armory Building, the museum began organizing community input forums to develop a community-led vision for the adjacent parcel. In collaboration with the Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum, United States Veterans' Artists Alliance, CCUSD, and Upward Bound House, the Wende Museum developed a proposal for a Culver City Creative Community Center. The envisioned space would not only house these multiple organizations, but also provide supportive services for unhoused families and offer educational programs for the school district.

This case is significant and unique because the proposed project is a community-led initiative composed of multiple community-based organizations. For this case study, we spoke to the executive director of the Wende Museum, Justin Jampol. In describing their outreach process for this project, he shared their grassroots approach of convening the community around the future for this lot: “it's up to you, rather than the city, to reach out in ways that the city just won't do because they're just not headed up for that” (J. Jampol, Personal Interview, February 27, 2020). Their methods proved successful. In September 2019, City Council held a community meeting to solicit votes and input for the best use of the lot. The Culver City Creative Community Center won broad based support.

Councilmember Daniel Lee, however, expressed dismay with the project:

The Wende Museum put the cart before the horse and went out to do community meetings prior to actually having council approval. And I don't think things should be done that way. I think it should come from the public sector first. I think they could have approached the council then if we agreed, we could have done collaborative meetings. But in this way, you know, a more or less private entity who we've already gifted a whole lot of space for a museum went out and did public outreach, and I'm not a fan of that part of the process.” (D. Lee, Personal Interview, March 5, 2020)

Nevertheless, a key takeaway that can be derived from this project is that conducting outreach efforts that extend beyond city requirements leads to community buy-in and ultimately to the success of a project. In any case, in February 2020, City Council approved the Culver City Creative Community Center project.

## ***V. The Culver Studios***

The Culver Studios project is a redevelopment project on the historic 1918 movie studio lot located in downtown Culver City. Construction for the project began in 2018 and will double its current lot size to 720,850 square feet for additional production space, sound stages, and new offices. Following the project's completion in 2021, Amazon Studios announced they will lease more than 70 percent of the studio for production.

Councilmember Daniel Lee cited this project as a good example of community outreach and development. It won much praise with the community despite being a massive project. However, the project in its early stages was met with heavy opposition. The real estate firm, Hackman Capital Partners, purchased the lot in 2014 for \$85 million from Lehman Brothers Holding due to the latter's filing for bankruptcy. In the first iteration of the project's development, the Hackman Capital group performed the minimum outreach required. Although the project was approved and entitled in 2015, Hackman Capital group was met with much community opposition when the project went to Council. According to Eric Shabsis, the community relations liaison for the Culver Studios project, it was at this time Michael Hackman, the founder and CEO of Hackman

Capital Partners, became a “convert” to the idea that additional and quality public engagement is very important. They did not throw out the entitlement in its entirety but decided to follow through with the project considering lessons learned and treat this as the “floor as opposed to the ceiling” (E. Shabsis, Personal Interview, April 15, 2020).

Before it was determined whom the main tenant of the space was going to be, the community feared what the redevelopment would mean for their community. While Hackman Capital Group identified the Rancho Higuera neighborhood, a neighboring business district, and a local elementary school as their primary constituents, only a few ever came out to the community meetings. It was their partnership with the Culver City Educational Foundation (CCEF) that proved to be a game-changer to their efforts. Through their partnership, they were effectively able to engage residents better because the foundation allowed Hackman Capital Group to reach parents and other community stakeholders. Hackman Capital invested over \$125,000 directly to the elementary school across the street, hosted a movie day for their 5th graders at the Culver Studios and invested in building a butterfly garden for the school’s booster club, in the process building good rapport with the community. Additionally, they provided space to CCEF for their annual silent/live auction and provided them with in-kind contributions. Through these efforts to contribute to the Culver City community, Hackman Capital began to cultivate a trusted relationship with community stakeholders.

Even when construction for the project began, they felt it was important to keep communication lines open between themselves and the community. The school fielded calls from parents who had questions about the project and Hackman Capital Partners responded accordingly to concerns. This included hiring crossing guards and chaperones to chauffeur students across the studio lot. They also gifted air conditioners, noise-canceling headphones, and gift cards to residents who live in the apartment complex abutting the site, which primarily consists of 60-70-year-olds.

Furthermore, they worked with the Rancho Higuera neighborhood association who were adamantly opposed to the development project. One of the primary issues of the Rancho Higuera neighborhood association was cut-through traffic. Whereas their neighborhood concerns had no direct correlation to the Culver Studios redevelopment project, Capital Partners still felt it was important they assist them on this matter. In response, Hackman Capital Group offered their traffic consultant to the neighborhood association free of charge as an act of good faith. As a result, they eventually were able to present a traffic intervention that was accepted by the city. Moreover, they stood along with them in support when they presented their proposal to the council.

For these reasons, when the Culver Studios project finally went before Council for approval, they received an outpouring of support from the community from residents to business owners to local leaders speaking in favor of the development. This project exemplifies the importance of building community relations with stakeholders. The effort to address the community concerns solidified the developers as a part of the Culver City community. By going beyond the standard requirements for engagement, the

developers built relationships with various residents based on listening and addressing their concerns with proactive solutions.

### **Special Case: Culver Palms United Methodist Church Redevelopment**

The Culver Palms United Methodist Church is located at 4464 Sepulveda Blvd and has been around for over 134 years. Facing a declining congregation, the Methodist Church sought to put their 1.3-acre property to a higher purpose and redevelop their property to include 95 affordable housing units. The redevelopment project is a partnership between the Culver Palms United Methodist Church and Community Corporation of Santa Monica, a non-profit organization and affordable housing developer based in Santa Monica. For this project, we spoke with Tara Barauskas, Executive Director of the Community Corporation of Santa Monica.

At the time of their first community meeting, California Governor Gavin Newsom issued Stay at Home Orders in response to growing public health concerns over the spread of the coronavirus. As such, the meeting was conducted virtually over Zoom. Given the uncertainty of the duration of the virus, social distancing measures are likely to be our new reality and will have to be practiced for the foreseeable future. For this reason, we sought to learn what virtual community meetings mean for inclusion and participation from one of the first virtually held community meetings.

While the Community Corporation of Santa Monica has a longstanding reputation in Santa Monica, Barauskas prefaced our interview by stating that the redevelopment project is the organization's first affordable housing development project in the City of Culver City. Consequently, this project is the organization's first attempt at building relations with Culver City stakeholders. This could be a potential barrier of entry to the organization in presenting their project design to the community. However, through assistance with the church, they were able to conduct extensive community outreach, hold "living room conversations," and facilitate meetings with the congregation prior to their first community meeting. According to Baraukas, the online community engagement meeting was able to draw a considerably high number of participants by Community Corporation of Santa Monica standards. As such, this project has the potential to demonstrate that online public engagement can be an effective, far-reaching strategy for including participants that have been traditionally difficult to reach and are underrepresented. Moving forward, the City of Culver City should continue to monitor projects such as this one to better understand the benefits and effectiveness of remote participation.

## Key Themes/ Findings

Based on our research and interviews regarding the different projects highlighted above, five key themes have emerged.

First, past projects within Culver City have focused mostly on checking off the box of requirements, rather than truly engaging residents within their planning. Conversations with city planning staff and city council members highlighted that while the city does believe it has done a better job facilitating public participation and engagement more recently, improvements are still necessary in this regard and at the project level rather than the plan level. Some of the more successful projects have been those that have gone above and beyond simply meeting mandatory requirements. The Culver Studios project is an example. Within this project, those involved decided that it was necessary to conduct outreach early on and to continue to maintain a presence within the community even after the project began its construction.

Second, having community buy-in, meeting people where they are, and utilizing different methods of engagement are also ideas that have stood out within our conversations. Providing community incentives and truly listening rather than just passively hearing are some methods that help to ensure community buy-in. An example of an incentive provided to residents is visible in that child care was provided at the city's General Plan Visioning Festival. Easing accessibility concerns for residents with different needs is necessary to improve public engagement and inclusion within Culver City. Meeting people where they are refers to the fact that not everyone can meet at centralized sites such as city hall, so holding meetings closer to the homes of community members can have a significant impact on their level of participation. Utilizing different forms of engagement is also important in that different engagement methods such as having smaller size groups and having professional facilitators were mentioned as improving resident participation and inclusion outcomes. Within the General Plan Visioning Festival, smaller group discussions were held in which participants were able to emphasize the direction that they want the city to go in the future. The usage of a professional facilitator was visible in the General Plan Visioning Festival, in the NICD conversations within the Fox Hills neighborhood, as well as in the Culver Studios conversations.

A third key finding is that the idea of participation to what end is a common question within development projects. For example, while the NICD conversations were able to elicit the engagement of the Fox Hills neighborhood and try to bridge the gap between the city and the neighborhood, it is important that these efforts persist and that the city continues to try to involve local area residents in the city rather than allowing the conversations to be the end of their involvement.

Fourth, time restrictions and a lack of funds are seen as some of the common barriers impeding some of the projects and the city from being more successful in their inclusion of local residents. Considering that building the proper infrastructure for community engagement can take time, it is important that the city establish and maintain relationships with different members of the community and with different community groups as soon as possible. The city can also expand its role by acting as a liaison between developers and the community and taking on a more expanded role more generally. Rather than allowing local initiatives to only reach out to community members in a more transactional nature, the city can promote a more relational stance that will lead to better outcomes in the long run. Increasing collaboration between Culver City and the multiple organizations that operate within it is one of the best ways to address time restrictions and a lack of funds by having more resources available to pull from.

Fifth, another common theme that emerged via our research and discussions is that participation at the city generally stems from the same couple of individuals. There also does not appear to exist a more standardized form of measuring participation outcomes, meaning that some type of on-going community assessment on behalf of the city can be helpful in substantially improving how the city engages local community members. Ensuring that some level of cultural competency and that more of an emphasis on specific demographic groups is a part of the city's engagement process can help to expand the level of citywide participation. Considering that the city has a history of racial injustice, it is necessary that the city acknowledge its past and actively try to move away from this by being cognizant of the differences within the community and providing more services such as translation services to bridge the gap. Ensuring that community members feel comfortable speaking is also essential given that not all community members feel comfortable speaking with developers, across ideological lines, as well as with the city council itself.

### **Recommendations**

Considering the main themes that have emerged from our research, it can be evaluated that the current engagement strategies exercised by Culver City can better benefit from more equitable methods of engagement. Our findings and examples from other cities suggest that participatory planning practices are useful for addressing inequities observed and identified in current practices. As such, we make the following recommendations with the theme of a participatory planning framework in mind.

While the recommendations are made towards improving participation outcomes specifically within Culver City, they are for the most part also applicable towards improving participation outcomes in other jurisdictions.

1. **Culver City should build a community engagement team.** Having resources allocated for this purpose will ideally facilitate participation and engagement efforts.
2. **Culver City should establish a Community Outreach Plan.**
  - Culver City should maintain an active and detailed list of its neighborhood groups and community stakeholders.
  - Culver City should conduct a regular assessment of the types of outreach performed by each of its departments. This will ensure comprehensive engagement practices are a goal of every department within the city. This can also play a crucial role in improving outreach to most marginalized members of the community.
  - Culver City should establish a list of suggested outreach methods that include printed, electronic or digital, and in-person options that are categorized based on the likelihood of reaching a large number of people and/or garner meaningful feedback.
    - Incorporated into these methods are specific standards to establish a standardized process for data collection and to ensure an equitable standard is applied to every project.
  - The City of Culver City should ensure that a specific degree of cultural competency is met by Culver City Council members as well as Culver City Staff. The community engagement team should be tasked with creating the cultural competency framework and requirements.
3. **Culver City should amend the Culver City Municipal Code to reflect a required outreach plan for projects requiring discretionary review prior to the first community meeting.** This shall include the following outreach methods: printed, electronic or digital, and in-person; with the ability to use high impact digital engagement in lieu of in-person outreach in the event of an emergency or at the discretion of the Director.
4. **Culver City should host official meetings in various spaces outside City Hall.** Culver City should consider hosting meetings in different neighborhoods seeing as how alternate settings may facilitate increased community involvement
  - As a part of providing alternate meeting spaces, Culver City should also consider how to improve its engagement via virtual platforms considering that remote meetings may be necessary for the foreseeable future to some extent due to the on-going COVID-19 Pandemic.

5. Given the increased racial diversity visible within the Fox Hills neighborhood, **we find it critically important that Culver City emphasize furthering the efforts made in Fox Hills under the community conversations held in conjunction with the National Institute for Civil Discourse.** It is imperative that the city continue to improve relations with the neighborhoods that are host to the most marginalized and disconnected residents.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, improving public participation and engagement outcomes within planning and other city-related functions is something that does not have a universal solution. Oftentimes, what works in one community may not necessarily work in another community due to differences in underlying characteristics as well as due to other factors. This concept also applies to development projects as well. Within Culver City, it is clear based on the research presented that the City has continued to improve in how it has sought to incorporate residential feedback and participation within different development projects. It is also evident though that the City has much more work to do in order to be truly inclusionary and to more actively represent the varied voices that are generally not represented or visible within the City. It is important that the city does not grow complacent and that it continues to seek out modern and innovative ways of promoting participation, especially for its marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Implementing a participatory planning framework and instilling the values of participatory planning across most city initiatives is one of the most tangible ways that improvements to participation can be realized. Given the complexity involved in understanding how to promote engagement and participation better as well as the continually evolving nature of this topic, more research and a firm commitment to this topic are essential to produce the most desirable outcomes.

It is our goal that the recommendations and insight provided by this analysis will serve as a starting point for future research. While the process to update the General Plan within Culver City has the potential to influence participation and engagement for years to come, it is also imperative that the city seeks to implement more inclusive measures year-round not just as a part of this update. Effective communication and transparency are especially crucial in light of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, which could potentially be harmful to participation if not addressed properly.

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