



## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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The incorporation of citizen participation is an essential component in the development of consensus building or “common philosophy” within a community. Engaging the community in the planning process can strengthen the plan by utilizing local knowledge of various stakeholders. Citizen involvement also gives planners the opportunity to inform and educate the public of the underlying issues that necessitate planning, anticipate and resolve resistance to change and help build political support for planning concepts.

Public engagement in the Village of Hamel involved local businesses, developers’ special interest groups, government representatives, Village officials, neighborhood groups and citizens at large. This was done in three ways:

1. Stakeholder Interviews
2. Town Planning Workshop
3. Steering Committee Meetings

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

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An important process to improve a plan’s strength and likelihood of implementation is to include a diverse group of stakeholders in the planning process. Originally, six (6) stakeholders were identified by the steering committee with the intent to diversify the group based on background, interest, profession, age and level of involvement in the community. Stakeholder interviews were arranged in an informal setting at a place of choice by the stakeholder(s). The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis, whereby the consulting team initiated a topic and allowed the stakeholder(s) to answer a predetermined series of questions. The consultant carefully recorded the answers throughout the interview. These answers generally were conducted as conversation which generally helped the stakeholder(s) become more comfortable in expressing his/her views. A list of stakeholders and discussion topics are provided in Appendix-I at the end of this document.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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***Housing and Neighborhood Stabilization:*** The following comments were recorded during stakeholder interviews:

- The stakeholders viewed Hamel as a safe place to live and work with a low crime rate
- Hamel is perceived as a perfect place to raise a family



- Well established neighborhoods, attractive, moderately priced housing and small town charm
- Hamel is conveniently located within a 15-20 minute driving distance from Edwardsville where shopping needs are provided
- Hamel is within 30 minutes of downtown St. Louis, MO.

However, some stakeholders felt that there is not presently enough diversity in the housing stock. More duplexes, apartment and condominium complexes are needed for seniors and first time home buyers. Respondents also stated that they believe New Urbanism would work well as a tool to diversify the housing stock.

A town square concept similar to Savannah, GA was envisioned for Hamel by one of the stakeholders. According to this respondent it would work especially well due to the aging population in that the design supports compact and safe environments.

One of interviewees had concerns about the demand for housing in the neighboring communities of Belleville and O'Fallon. This respondent wanted to see similar demands in Hamel.

The approval of a spite strip between parcels by the Village was seen as a condition that made it difficult for adjacent parcel owner(s) to develop their property. According to one of the stakeholders, the Village should make it necessary for all utility lines to extend onto adjacent parcels.

It was acceptable to the stakeholders that the Village use creative means to plan and control development such as restricting adjacent development until approximately 70% of ongoing development is complete, or postponing development for some period of time to prevent sprawl and encourages smart growth. Another stakeholder wanted the Village to be more cooperative with developers in the planning and implementation of public infrastructure.

***Downtown Revitalization and Commercial Development:***  
*During the public engagement discussions,* it was recommended the Village be more proactive in seeking and attracting new businesses to the community while simultaneously nurturing and supporting existing businesses. It was also recommended that development focus on commercial activities along the streets phasing into residential development behind any commercial investment.

Dense green buffering areas were recommended to be designed to delineate the various uses recommended, including creative use of existing tributaries and creeks that may allow for the



development of designated greenways, parks, and mitigation areas.

It was thought that Highway 140 is strategically important as a main downtown corridor which eventually connects to I-255 south and west of Hamel. State Route 66 provides dual market representation as a primarily industrial development area north of Route 140. To the south of Route 140 this same corridor changes market character as it becomes a blend of residential and small commercial development. State Route 157 was considered important to the community due to its connectivity to Edwardsville to the south.

Participants felt that Interstate 55 provides an excellent opportunity for businesses to flourish and grow, benefiting from an average traffic count of 55,000 cars daily. However, it was preferred that businesses do not rely exclusively on highway travel or tourism. It was felt that businesses need to be self sufficient and well-supported by the local citizens as well and target themselves toward the needs, services and conveniences of the local population.

Participants suggested list of new businesses and facilities that may help Hamel become more appealing to investors such as: a library, bookstore, larger grocery store, one stop shop, coffee house with light menu (some food), and carry out restaurants, pharmacy, dry cleaners, small plaza, and Wal-Mart. Adult uses should be strictly prohibited. It was also recommended that businesses be sought out depending upon the sales tax that they can generate to the Village.

**Transportation:** Traffic issues were not seen as a problem among stakeholders. Stakeholders acknowledged that heavy truck traffic is unavoidable. Presently, trucks pass through Hamel along Highway 140 as they travel toward Alton and along Highway 157 as a route to Edwardsville. Some of the suggestions to enhance transportation in Hamel were as follows:

- Sidewalks along Highway 140 and 157
- Prioritize connectivity within the Village making this a requirement for new neighborhoods
- Create and extend the east frontage road as a means to attract retail uses to Hamel along Interstate 55
- Work more closely with the Madison County Transit Authority to provide more transit choices not only to the elderly but people of all ages

**Parks, Recreation and Public services:** While stakeholders in general felt that the Village has a well maintained park; there was



an acknowledgement of need for more parks, trails and open space. It was also stated that there are many opportunities for (private) recreation such as four-wheeling and fishing due to the amount of open space available.

The need for a new water tower was identified by a stakeholder. It was also suggested that the Village be more flexible with extending utility lines to increase the feasibility of annexing new property into the Village.

Police and fire services were a concern among the stakeholders. Other services such as the elementary school and daycare facility were seen as an asset to the community. However, it was suggested that additional schools are needed since students are required to travel such long distances to attend junior high and high schools.

***Village and Neighborhood Identity:*** While the stakeholders felt that the Village is warm and inviting and has a “small town character”, it lacks identity. The single element that the stakeholders repeatedly emphasized is the image of the community as a safe, pedestrian friendly environment and that of all the elements that make up the streetscape; sidewalks should be made a requirement. Stakeholders felt that in order for Hamel to grow, it has to be more than a stop on the Interstate, it must become a destination.

It was suggested that the newly planned water tower may become a marketing tool for the Village. The view from the Interstate 55 and the gateways into the Village are important and need to be carefully planned in order to make a good first impressions to visitors and local citizens alike.

***Future Growth and Public services:*** Most of the stakeholders felt that the Village does not have enough land set aside for future growth. It was mentioned that one landowner holds a considerable amount of land in and around the Village. Land swaps in exchange for tax exemptions may be a tool for future growth.

One participant mentioned that annexing areas around the “Innkeeper property” may be an opportunity. One of the stakeholders felt that though there is a lot of developable land around Hamel, residential growth will be slow but steady as new single family areas are developed.

It was also felt that business growth may also be slow. The Route 66 connection is not significant enough to be exploited for future growth as an identity that is unique and attractive. One stakeholder doubted that a downtown historical Route 66



crossroads can be successfully developed and believed that Hamel should create a vision that is unique and separate from Route 66 nostalgia. Some public suggestions related to future development are listed below:

- The Village should aim at “planned growth” with developments having different intensities/densities
- Decide whether good farmland is more valuable as agricultural uses or marketed for development
- Land values need to be carefully analyzed with respect to preserving character and quality of the life styles in Hamel
- Stakeholders felt the Village should not let money guide all land use decisions
- Tools such as eminent domain should be used very cautiously to respect individual property rights
- The Village should collect impact fees and development costs to be passed on to developers including some infrastructure related costs
- Traditional neighborhood planning should be adopted for future growth



## TOWN PLANNING WORKSHOP

The Town Planning Workshop provides a forum for collecting, organizing, and recording public input. The Hamel Town Planning Workshop was tailored to the “citizen planners” within the community, with the purpose of utilizing their first-hand knowledge and experiences to identify problems and recommend solutions in a teamwork-based format.

The challenge of any public engagement activity is to obtain feedback from a cross section of the community. The intent for the Hamel Town Planning Workshop was to invite a wide range of individuals such as school officials, Village staff, business leaders and residents of various ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. To better attract volunteer participation and generate awareness of the Town Planning Workshop, notice of the workshop was delivered door to door to each resident in Hamel and a meeting notice was placed in the local newspaper and the Edwardsville Chamber of Commerce Newsletter. The most important goal in conducting an effective public participation event for the Village of Hamel was to attract a well-informed, dynamic representation of the community.

The Town Planning Workshop consisted of five teams of randomly selected participants. They were numerically assigned to a specific group as they signed in to the workshop. This procedure allows for the creation of evenly sized teams composed of members with varying interests. Three teams were assigned worksheets that consisted of discussion topics with emphasis on economic development and business stability and housing. The other two teams dealt with worksheets that had questions concerning transportation, future growth, parks and recreation. Each team was also provided with a map of Hamel depicting existing land uses within the Village limits. The groups were encouraged to use the map to visually present their ideas, visions and concerns. Each team was asked to select two representatives, a moderator to mediate the topic and a secretary to record the answers. The intent and purpose of the workshop was clearly explained at the onset of the session.

The findings of the Town Planning Workshop were based on workshop participants’ insight into their community and their perception of planning issues within their neighborhoods. The workshops were instrumental in identifying the needs of Hamel’s neighborhoods, businesses and quality of life concerns of the residents. The responses provided the planning team with an understanding of the issues that are most important to Hamel’s citizens, as represented by the workshop participants. This

Town planning workshop



Source: Arcturis



information will help establish a direction for the future of the Village and its neighborhoods and businesses.

### WORKSHOP SUMMARY

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***Housing and Neighborhood Stability:*** A diversified housing stock is needed to provide residential options for people of all ages and socio-economic levels. This diversity allows people to enter the housing market as a first time buyer and “age in place” rather than having to move outside the community at some stage of the life cycle. This concept is referred to as “life-cycle housing” and is often fundamental to stable and vital communities. Diversity also renders charm and identity to the community.

Given this information, the teams recognized the need to diversify the housing stock by allowing a range of housing types, such as apartments; homes for 1<sup>st</sup> time homebuyers such as attached single family, town houses, villas and condominiums; senior housing and low-maintenance housing types. While concepts such as higher density and good variety of housing styles were welcomed, participants did not like the idea of very large complexes or apartments that would not preserve the small town feel of the community.

It was agreed appropriately priced attached single-family dwellings, or “villas”, would do well among the empty-nesters, baby-boomers and families within Hamel looking for something other than a single-family home. Villas will also be attractive to similar home buyers wishing to move into Hamel.

Buffering between commercial and single family uses was highly recommended. The preferred residential development plan would contain alternative housing options, such as lofts, townhouses or other compact residential housing solutions. However, the teams cautioned that careful attention must be given to the design, massing, traffic circulation and site location of any non-single-family development to ensure minimal negative impacts to existing single family neighborhoods.

***Economic Development and Business Stability:*** According to the teams, the Village should ambitiously focus its attention on business recruitment efforts. Participants did not feel that the commercial areas in the Village are utilized to their fullest potential. One of the teams pointed out that two of four corners are not utilized at the highly visible, heavily trafficked intersection of Highway 140 and 157.



The participants envisioned the stretch of State Highway 140 from the Shell Station to the Community Park as their “downtown” area with main-street characteristics such as mixed use developments, small retail stores or family-oriented businesses that would provide quality services and products.

Participants wanted the Village to develop and enforce some uniform building codes and signage standards to create a unique and visually appealing pedestrian experience that is sympathetic to the human scale. This was concluded after reviewing the businesses that the workshop teams thought would do best in the Village of Hamel.

The new grocery store was seen as a positive development, although traffic generated by the proposed site was seen as a potential concern. The vacant lot near the Shell Station and reuse of the old Conoco were seen as opportunities for future development.

The participants listed the following establishment types when asked to identify various stores, activity centers and commercial uses that they would like to see in the Village downtown:

- Laundry and dry cleaners
- Bed and Breakfast, tea room
- Restaurants like Applebee’s and other sit down experiences
- Ice-cream, pizza, bakery, donut shop
- Library, daycare, video store
- Antique stores
- Small pharmacy
- Hardware store
- Florist
- Gas station that sells diesel fuel

Retail stores, restaurants and uses such as Hooters, adult uses, liquor stores, packaging, truck sales, used car sales, pawn shops, check cashing facilities and storage, trailer parks, or uses that would change the family oriented charm of the Village were recommended to be strictly prohibited in the Village

Fast-food type businesses were expected to flourish closer to Interstate 55 as they could take advantage of highway visibility and access. Big-box type developments such as Wal-Mart and Home Depot were not a welcome idea even near the Interstate. Stakeholders feel this type retail takes away from the small town feel that the participants wanted to preserve. Uses oriented towards medical services such as clinics or dental facilities were expected to do well in the Village and represent the type commercial development desirable in the community.





Participants felt that, by taking advantage of available state and federal grants and programs such as the Main-Street program, Route 66 grants, transportation project grants, in addition to tools such as Tax Increment Financing, and by increasing sales taxes, implementation costs associated with development could be off set and attract development investment in the community.

**Transportation:** The teams were asked to point out areas with a high frequency of accidents or other traffic related problems such as congestion, access management, and parking. The groups were also asked to provide recommendations to rectify these problems. The entire stretch of State Highway 140 and especially the intersection of Highway 140 and 157 was identified as a transportation concern. The teams suggested several access management techniques to improve the flow of traffic along Highway 140.

Pedestrian safety and accessibility along Highway 140 was a major concern among all the teams. These concerns included pedestrian crossings and lack of continuous, well-lit and shaded sidewalks especially on Highways 140 and 157. Other traffic related problems included lack of parking on the post office site and the future increase in traffic congestion due to the new grocery store. A summary of the team's transportation suggestions are as follows:

- Reconfigure Highway 140 and 157 Intersections and Install 4-way stops
- Reduce 55 mph speed limit on Highway 140
- Continuous, safe, well-lit and landscaped sidewalks all along Highway 140 from the Shell Station to the Hamel Community Park on both sides of road, on Highway 157 and preferably on the local streets
- Proper signage and stop signs at all intersections
- Pedestrian crossings at all intersections and push button signaling for crossing at the grocery store
- Paved instead of gravel roads and repair of damaged roads such as Allen Street
- Need a gas station that sells diesel fuel to service the transportation industry
- New an outlet road from Saddlewood Subdivision

**Parks and Recreation:** All teams had very positive remarks about the Hamel Community Park and considered it as a major asset to the community. While it was seen as well-maintained, clean, open and family-friendly, some suggestions to improve the existing conditions included the availability of restrooms and resurfacing of the tennis courts. It was also felt that the park was underutilized



because of accessibility issues. This is due to heavy traffic and high speeds on Highway 140, which in turn disjoints the northern portion of town from the southern where the park is located.

The teams also recognized that as the Village grows, the demand for more parks will rise. Small parks within a five minute walk from the subdivisions were desired by the teams. A lake in or at the outskirts of town was desired.

The teams were excited about the new bike trail planned. The participants agreed that a bike trail not only within the Village but also connecting other communities would be a very desirable amenity.

Community recreational activities and functions were seen as community binders and a means to increase the sense of belonging to a place. They were also seen as a medium of instilling pride and stewardship in the community. Some of the suggested activities are listed below:

- Movies and other activities in the parks for kids with some other activities for adults as well
- Winter uses for Community Center such as trivia nights
- Community yard sale
- Welcome packages for new residents
- Farmers' market
- Open house for fire and police stations
- Home-coming festival
- Agricultural Park and educational tours open to all

Regularly updating the Village website and periodic newsletters that inform residents of the activities in and around the Village was suggested to increase awareness among the residents. Activities such as the school bus auctions were suggested to be avoided in the future. Participants also expressed a need for other active recreational areas such as soccer fields, softball fields and ball parks for kids. However, they suggested avoiding skateboard parks.

Overall, the teams were generally satisfied with public services although concerns were raised concerning excessive fees for water. The teams would like to see the Village maintaining its own police service, fire department and emergency services such as ambulances.

***Village and Neighborhood Identity:*** Kevin Lynch, in his book "*The Image of the City*", summarizes five (5) physical elements that form the identity of a city or neighborhood. These elements include **paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks**. One



advantage to identifying these features is the strategic investment planning the community can facilitate related to the finance of enhancements and upkeep of the positive features that exist in the community. This process also identifies those amenities the community can plan as future enhancements.

However, it is also important for communities to plan for social aspects of the community such as public services, school systems, and infrastructure. The stakeholders were asked to list the physical and social attributes they feel render identity to Hamel and make it a livable “place”. The most frequently identified features included:

- Route 66
- Scotty’s
- Pottery shop
- Co-op facility
- Community Center and Park
- Good public services
- School system
- Well-kept properties
- Small town feel

When asked for recommendations to improve the image of the community, the participants came up with simple solutions that were practical and feasible. The teams acknowledged that while existing businesses and facilities such as a sewage treatment plant, steel yard, co-op, etc., are needed for the community, simple improvements such as green screening and buffering can make the area more pleasing to the eye.

Nevertheless, the participants felt that some run-down and poorly maintained properties need to be cleared to make room for new structures. There recommendations included:

- Town cleanup
- An entry gateway at intersection of Highways 140 and 157
- Improving streetscapes throughout the Village with sidewalks, street trees, and landscaping
- Signage and street lights
- Finding uses for vacant areas such as a farmers’ market
- Adopting a standardized building code
- Preparation of a market study for the Village to identify potential retail and commercial uses to create a brand for the community



- Participants also suggested cutting edge technology such as providing a wireless internet connection in downtown to attract coffee shop type businesses.

The teams suggested comparable towns that Hamel might look towards for inspiration. Suggestions included the City of Lebanon, Ohio – for town signage and Historic LeClaire in Edwardsville for their historic small town feel. However, the teams cautioned that Hamel should have its own unique identity and not attempt to duplicate one of the above mentioned communities.

***Future growth and developments:*** The participants felt that Hamel is strategically positioned with Interstate access and State Highways 140 and 157 passing through the municipality. The Village also has ample land for growth. However, the teams repeatedly emphasized the idea of retaining the small town feel.

New trends such as green buildings, low impact development and technologies, including wireless internet accessibility in the downtown area were seen as a good fit for the community.

Annexation of the surrounding area was strongly supported. Village owned land outside the community limits was seen as an area to be preserved for future parks as the town grows. When asked to identify future projects that would have the most positive impact on the community, the participants recommended the following:

- Find uses for the vacant lot by Shell Station and the old Conoco Station
- Attract small-scale retail and commercial uses to downtown
- Beautification of the “town center” with projects such as Co-op enhancements
- Construction of condominium structures
- Streetscape and sidewalk enhancements
- Development of a standardized building code
- Agricultural Park with educational tours
- Clear some rundown buildings
- Implement Tax Increment Financing, Increase sales tax
- Ambitiously seek federal and state grants and assistance from programs such as Main-Street for downtown revitalization and commercial development