

The Village of Colon, Michigan

Magic Capital of the World



VILLAGE OF COLON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

(Adopted July 9, 2019)

Village of Colon Public Participation Guide

1. Purpose

The Village of Colon Public Participation Plan is a guide to gathering public input during the planning and the development review and approval processes. The Village of Colon is required by State laws, as well as Village Ordinances and bylaws, to gather public input throughout the development process to ensure public involvement in all phases of the development process. This document shall serve as a guide for seeking and gathering public input, and to create a uniform understanding of all requirements and goals of the Village in utilizing public opinion.

Beyond State requirements, the Village of Colon will enable the public to participate in decision-making processes by providing clear information on the issues, the ways to participate and how the public's participation will contribute to the decisions made. In doing so, the Village is committed to maintaining a safe environment that cultivates and supports respectful public engagement and will expect all participants to do the same.

All meetings of the Village's boards and commissions will be made open to the public and as accessible as possible. When the gathering of broader public input is required, this guide will outline those procedures.

2. Public Participation Goals

The Village of Colon's commitment to public participation is reflected in this plan. The Village recognizes the importance of public input in all aspects of the development process. Additionally, the Village recognizes that effectively utilizing public opinion requires efficient means of gathering and reviewing these opinions. Therefore, the Village is dedicated not only to the gathering of public input, but also the regular review of the means used within this plan. The Village will regularly seek new and more effective means of utilizing public input to ensure the system at hand is most beneficial to the public. With that in mind, the strategies and goals outlined herein do not preclude any new efforts which may be used in the future.

- The Village of Colon shall conduct all matters of public business in an open and accessible manner.
- The Village of Colon shall seek public input in each phase of the planning and the development review and approval processes.
- The Village of Colon shall encourage the involvement of residents most affected by any planning activity or application and shall make reasonable efforts to ensure continued participation throughout all stages of the review and approval processes.
- The Village of Colon will seek input from a diverse group of stakeholders within the Village.
- The Village of Colon will strive to provide open, timely and transparent information to the public in relation to all planning and development processes.

- The Village of Colon will provide and make known the results of public input whenever feasible.

3. Key Stakeholders

As previously mentioned, the Village of Colon is committed to welcoming the input of all pertinent stakeholders within the Village. A different group of stakeholders may be addressed for any given project, depending on the location, size, scope, financial implications, community interest or any other pertinent factors of the proposed development. This list does not preclude any other current or future stakeholders.

- Residents
- Village Council
- Village Boards and Commissions
- Local Business Owners
- Colon School District
- Senior Citizens
- St. Joseph County
- Real Estate Professionals
- Commercial Developers
- Local Employers
- Chamber of Commerce
- Community Foundations
- Civic and Social Groups
- Students and Student Groups
- Environmental Groups
- Dial-A-Ride
- State Agencies
- Potential Investors
- St. Joseph EDGE
- Transportation Agencies
- Taxing Jurisdictions
- Neighboring Communities
- Resident Employees
- Public Employees
- Other Relevant Stakeholders

4. State and Local Regulations

The Village of Colon is subject to a number of state and local regulations pertaining to public participation. All Village of Colon boards and commissions follow the guidelines contained within the following acts:

- The Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976)
- The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)
- The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006)
- Village Code of Ordinances
- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act (PA 381 of 1996)
- Downtown Development Authority Act (PA 197 of 1975)
- Planning Commission Bylaws
- Other relevant local and State legislation.

5. Review Bodies

The Village of Colon provides numerous opportunities for residents, as well as the public at large, to present their opinion during the planning and development review and approval process. The Village also welcomes and encourages feedback on development proposals, zoning and planning applications, development assistant programs, and any other pertinent topics. Below is a list of review bodies before which the public has opportunity to provide their input directly to Village officials.

Village Council

Colon Village Council is the legislative body for the Village and is responsible for the creation of policies and ordinances related to the development process. Village Council is also responsible for final decisions on several development application related processes.

All meetings of the Village Council are open to the public, and public hearings are frequently held at such meetings. Through both formal public meetings and more informal opportunities for public comment on agenda-related matters, the community at large is provided the opportunity to voice their opinion directly to Village Council members.

Also provided for at every Village Council meeting is the opportunity for public comment on matters not listed on the Council agenda. During this public comment period, interested persons are able to speak directly to Village Council, raising any questions of items of concern. As appropriate, Village staff take such comments under advisement for later report and reply.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission is responsible for preparation and adoption of the Village of Colon Master Plan that guides the physical development of the Village. The Planning Commission is also the primary advisory commission to Village Council on development related applications including zoning petitions, conditional use permits, site plans, subdivisions and condominiums, and other related land use proposals.

All meetings of the Planning Commission are open public meetings and public comment is provided for on each agenda.

It has been an ongoing practice of the Village that the Planning Commission hold public hearings for land use and development applications that come before them. Notice of such hearings is provided in accordance with the public hearing notification requirements of the Zoning Enabling Act, PA 110 of 2006. Such notice is provided at least 15 days in advance of the public hearing to the applicant, the property owner, all property owners within 300 feet of an affected property, and by publication in the Sturgis Journal and the village website. The applicant and the Village Council receive written notification of the Planning Commission's recommendation.

Other Boards and Commissions

All meetings of the Village's various boards and commissions are open and accessible to the public. Public comments are taken during these meetings, allowing stakeholders in the Village of Colon to voice their opinions and recommendations.

Beyond the Village Council and the Planning Commission, public hearings may be held at various boards and commissions in regards to specific planning and development proposals. At these times residents may express their opinions and comments on developments slated for the Village, as well as ask questions concerning the development request. Boards and commissions most likely to consider such requests are:

- Downtown Development Authority
- Colon Community Parks Board
- Colon Township Lake Board

- Fire Board
- Zoning Board of Appeals

6. Development Project Review

The Village shall follow, at a minimum, the provisions of the local and State regulations, including those listed in this Plan, to review development projects related to planning and zoning applications, permits, and business assistance. This applies to the review process for site plans and conditional use permits, rezoning and variance request applications, brownfield or downtown redevelopment assistance, personal property tax exemptions, and industrial facilities exemptions. In such circumstances, the Village Council and its boards and commissions will hold public hearings, noticed in accordance with State legislation, and allow for public comment on the proposed development project during its regular meetings.

Depending on the nature of the project, the community's interest, and the community's financial involvement, additional methods of engagement may be used to gather community feedback.

Site Plan Reviews

The submittal, review and approval of detailed site plans are required for most developments that take place within the Village of Colon. In many cases, those site plans are reviewed by the Planning Commission and a public hearing is held before a recommendation is made to Village Council. This public hearing is noticed both in the local newspaper as well as by direct mail to all property owners within 300ft of the land proposed for development. This public hearing is when many members of the community first hear of the proposed development.

Unlike many of the other Village processes, site plan applications may only be reviewed to determine if they comply with the established standards of the Village of Colon Zoning Ordinance. The public hearing process allows for public input but the information received may only be used to determine ordinance compliance. While this can cause both confusion and frustration on the part of the public, the Village is required to comply with state law as set out in the State of Michigan Zoning Enabling Act. If and when a proposed site plan can show full compliance with the Village of Colon Zoning Ordinance, approval must be given.

7. Other Opportunities for Engagement

There may be times that the Village of Colon sees fit to gather public input outside of the instances mentioned above. While the previous methods of public participation can be viewed as "reactive" public participation, these methods can be viewed as "proactive." Instead of gathering public input as it comes in, these events are times the Village will actively seek public input.

Adoption of or Changes to the Master Plan

Periodically, the Village of Colon will find it fitting to review and update the Master Plan. At these times, the Village may take any of the outreach activities mentioned in this guide, or any other method not mentioned, which is deemed fit for the occasion. Depending on the scope of the change to the Master Plan, relatively small or relatively large outreach may be pursued, as decided by Village officials.

In preparing a new master plan or master plan update, the Village shall, at a minimum, follow the public notification provisions of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008.

Adoption of or Changes to the Zoning Ordinance

As local and state conditions and practices evolve, changes to the Village of Colon Zoning Ordinance will become necessary. Making these changes requires legislative action from Village Council. At these times, the public is welcome to voice their opinions on prospective changes to Village

representatives. The scope of the public outreach may be varied, depending on the scope of the ordinance changes, when broader community concerns are involved or broader public impact can reasonably be expected. The Village may decide to implement one or more of the methods outlined in this plan, as well as any other methods deemed fit, including options not specifically mentioned in this plan.

In preparing a new zoning ordinance or any amendment to the zoning ordinance, the Village shall, at a minimum, follow the public notification provisions of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, PA 110 of 2006.

Development Application Review of Projects with Broad Community Interest

The Village of Colon recognizes that at times development applications will involve matters of broad community interest or result in a need for heightened public involvement. At these times, the Village may decide to engage the public through more intensive means than those used during the typical review process. The Village may decide to implement one or more of the methods outlined in this plan, as well as any other methods deemed fit, including options not specifically mentioned in this plan.

8. Public Comments

The Village of Colon provides opportunity for public comment on every Village Council, board and commission agenda under a Public Comment section of each such agenda. The participation of every interested party who provides comment or questions to any of these public bodies is recorded in the meeting minutes.

9. Methods of Advertising Community Participation

The Village of Colon recognizes that to properly utilize public input, it is necessary at times to communicate the results of these efforts back to the public. These efforts increase transparency and allow the Village to gain a better understanding of public opinion.

Methods of Communication

The Village of Colon will continue to utilize multiple avenues of communications to present and make information easily available to the public. These methods of communication will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Village Website Updates
- Newspaper Postings
- Flyer Postings in Village Hall and the Village Library
- Social Media
- Press Releases and other communications to local media outlets
- Mailings and Email
- Community Newsletters
- Other Methods Deemed Appropriate

10. Additional Outreach Activities

The Village of Colon recognizes that certain times may arise when the typical avenues of public participation will not be able to fully evaluate the scope and depth of public opinion. These times could include large scale development, controversial applications, changes to the Village Zoning Ordinance or Code of Ordinances, or changes to the Village's Master Plan. The Village shall review and communicate the results of the following activities whenever feasible:

One-on-One Interviews

The Village may hold interviews with various stakeholders to get specific information on a topic. In general, the information collected during interviews will be kept confidential unless requested otherwise. The information may be compiled and analyzed together with other information collected from stakeholders on a specific topic.

Focus Groups

The Village may conduct focus groups for gathering the community's opinion on specific issues, developmental proposals, development sites of major importance, or the community vision, as needed. A variety of groups may be invited to attend the focus groups depending on the location and nature of the development site or project, including Council members, affected neighborhood associations, community members, business leaders, students, board and commission members.

The Village will choose sites that are accessible and barrier-free to accommodate all persons.

The minutes from the focus groups or community workshops may be shared with participants (that chose to share their contact information) and the community. The results of these meetings will be included in any report or plan generated based on the community feedback collected during these meetings.

Workshops

The Village may engage the community through workshops. This tool may most often be used for specific development projects that involve significant changes to the urban form and require public input on the design layout. The Village may encourage developers to hold workshops for specific proposed projects with significant community interest.

Steering Committees

For any project deemed necessary or appropriate, the Village may organize steering committees consisting of residents, business owners, board and commission members, and other stakeholders. Members may be selected based on their expertise, interest and background as they relate to the focus of the individual steering committee. This structure will allow for focused discussion related to a specific topic (e.g., economic development).

Meetings will be open to the public, and a synopsis of the meeting may be posted online. The results of the meetings and discussions of the steering committees will be incorporated into the plan generated based on the information collected during these meetings.

Surveys

The Village may employ surveys, whenever beneficial and feasible, to identify key citizen concerns. These surveys can provide valuable direction. The Village may design and implement, through a third-party partner or Village staff, surveys to gather the community's opinion with regard to specific topics (e.g., general Village services, housing needs, amenities, the downtown). The surveys may be distributed through various methods of delivery to ensure the broadest reach, based on the nature of the target group (e.g., mail, e-mail, website access, copies available at the Village Office).

The responsible party will compile the survey results following the closing of the survey. The survey results may be posted online, published in the Village's newsletter, and communicated to the Village council, residents, survey participants, investors, developers, and other stakeholders.

11. Accessibility and Availability of Information

The Village of Colon recognizes that all information and public events must be as accessible to all members of the public as possible to gather a broad and representative body of public input. The Village of Colon therefore strives to foster an environment of accessibility and, towards this goal, maintains several practices as follows:

Meeting Locations and Accessibility

Most meetings of public bodies are held at the Village Office. The Village Office is a centrally-located facility that is barrier-free and accessible to the entire community. Meetings may also take place at other locations, including the Colon Fire & Rescue Building or the Colon Township Hall, which are barrier-free and accessible.

Hearing Impaired Assistance

Sign language interpreting services can be provided with seven (7) days advance notice.

Meeting Minutes

Minutes of all public meetings are maintained by Village staff and are made available to the public online after approval at the next meeting. Minutes may also be obtained by contacting the Village Office.

12. Contact Information

The following contact information should be utilized for questions on the public participation process for Village Council or other boards and commissions:

Village of Colon
Attn: Village Manager
110 N. Blackstone Ave
Colon, MI 49040
(269) 432-2532
(269) 432-4116 fax

13. Third Party Compliance

The policies and procedures in this plan will apply to any third-party consultants who assist the Village with planning, and their adherence is expected. Professional economic developers interested in working in the Village are encouraged to engage with the Village Manager and/or the Zoning Administrator for early feedback on the project. In addition, it is strongly recommended that developers engage local residents for early input and support of the project. These directors can assist your engagement process.