

CHAPTER 22 – Community Involvement

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CHAPTER 22 – Community Involvement

ARTICLE 1 General

Philosophy

Caltrans' project development philosophy (See [Chapter 1](#) – Introduction, Section 5, for a complete description) is to consider economic, social, and environmental effects in order to make project decisions in the best interest of the public. Therefore, community involvement must be an integral part of the project development process.

Purpose

The purpose of public involvement is to develop projects that respond to transportation needs with a minimum of community and environmental impact. Project team members must understand community values and opinions. All affected interests must be aware of a project's impact on them. Affected interests include individuals, businesses, associations, other officials, and institutions that may be affected by a project.

ARTICLE 2 Securing Community Consent to Projects

Identify all Interests

Early in the project development process, the project development team (PDT) should identify all affected interests, determine the nature of their interest and attitude toward the project, and fashion approaches to these interests.

Elements of Communication

It is likely that a practical and acceptable solution to a transportation problem can be implemented if those affected by a project become convinced that the following holds true:

1. The transportation problem is serious.
2. Caltrans has the key responsibility for addressing the problem.
3. Caltrans process is fair and reasonable.
4. Caltrans understands and cares about the concerns of the affected interests.

Do not Minimize Project Effects

It is not necessary to convince affected interests that they will be undamaged by the project. Project development staff members should do everything possible to understand the project's negative effects and communicate with those affected.

Concentrate on Those Affected

The more seriously someone is affected by a project, the more they should be approached privately, informally, and in smaller groups. Those most seriously affected should be approached individually.

Early Contact

As early as is possible, the PDT should contact local, regional, State, and federal agencies with even a minor stake in a project. By working together from the earliest stages, it is possible to reduce the chance of conflict at critical times; this usually results in a better project.

ARTICLE 3 Community Involvement Plans

Community Involvement Plans

Community involvement plans should be developed for all potentially controversial projects; these should be included as a part of the project study report. The plans should be updated as studies progress.

Elements of a community involvement plan include:

- A list of those likely to perceive that their interest will be affected by the project
- A description of the potential concerns of each
- A description of techniques to be used to communicate with affected interests, such as newsletters, media, individual meeting, committee membership, etcetera
- A communications time-line, keyed to significant project milestones

ARTICLE 4 Initial Meetings

Definition

The initial meeting is held with affected local agencies or their technical and planning staffs, along with other interested or affected groups. The meeting may be combined with the scoping meeting for projects involving an environmental impact statement (see the [Standard Environmental Reference](#)). The meeting is open to the general public. It should be well publicized.

Purpose

The initial meeting provides an early exchange of information and ideas, as well as an opportunity to discuss the proposed project timetable. Other features to be discussed include preliminary data or issues bearing on the decision to proceed, focusing particularly on the need for the project.

Project Development Categories (see [Chapter 8](#) – Overview of Project Development, Section 5, for definitions) are useful classifications for helping to determine when it is appropriate to convene an initial meeting. Initial meetings should be held under the following circumstances:

- Category 1 and 2A projects—mandatory
- Category 2B / Category 3 / Category 4A projects—convene if sufficient interest or if local agency requests
- Category 4B projects—convene only if local agency requests

The matrix in [Chapter 8](#) – Overview of Project Development, Section 5, Figure 8-1, provides other useful information regarding the relationship between Project Development Categories and community involvement activities.

Format

The PDT may plan the initial meeting using any of the meeting types discussed in Article 7, “Meeting Formats.” Generally, the open house format is best for the initial meeting.

Publicity

Publicity about the initial meeting may include news releases, paid advertisements, or both. Paid advertisements will follow the general format and content instructions described in [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement. All publicity should be handled by the district’s public information office.

Individual invitations are sent to legislators, city council members and county supervisors, and to their technical and planning staff department heads. Invitations are also sent to agencies and groups considered to be mandatory contacts (see the [Standard Environmental Reference](#)) and other individuals, businesses, associations, officials, or institutions affected by a project. Local governmental units are to be consulted regarding civic and citizen organizations to be invited.

In addition to the preceding, individual invitations are to be sent to each city council and board of supervisors as a legislative body for Project Development Category 1 and 2A projects. The invitations will include an additional paragraph requesting that the “legislative” body comment on the meeting within 30 days, addressing the following: study objectives, organization, time schedule for the study, study limits, and suggestions for participation of affected interests.

Considerations

At the time of mailing, one copy of each typical letter of invitation should be sent to the Headquarters Division of Design, attention: Chief Office of Project Development Procedures, along with a list of those receiving the letter. Sample invitation letters may be found in [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement.

Summary

At the conclusion of the meeting, a summary of the meeting should note substantial items discussed and any agreements reached. A list of those attending the meeting by agency, organization, group and number of individuals and of those who submitted written material should be attached to the summary. A copy of the summary with the district’s conclusions on whether or not to proceed with the study should be sent to the Headquarters Division of Design, attention: Chief Office of Project Development Procedures.

ARTICLE 5 Principles and Techniques for Community Involvement

Open Up Communication Channels

Initiate Contact

As early as possible in the project development process, Caltrans should contact likely affected parties, to explain the following:

- What problem or need the project addresses
- Why Caltrans' overall transportation mission makes it imperative that we address the need
- How Caltrans develops projects
- Current status of project plans, current activities, and project schedule
- Caltrans' understanding of their interest and concern

Ask the affected party to contribute their advice and comments. Stress that the earlier their concerns are made known, the more likely a way can be found to accommodate them; but make it clear that Caltrans may not be able to satisfy everyone's concerns.

Document Discussion

Document discussions in writing. They should be part of the project file and will document citizen involvement in the project development process. As contacts continue, document those as well.

Use Best Communication Method

Select the best way to communicate with the affected party, based on the information to be communicated and how they may best be reached. Meetings, telephone contacts, letters, media, newsletters, and many other types of communication are available.

Open Communication

Once communication is flowing both ways, Caltrans should provide the affected party with any information affecting them, as it develops—whether it is good news or bad news. Bad news is best communicated informally, in a one-on-one exchange, rather than in large meetings or through the media.

Communicate Directly

Communicate directly with the most-seriously affected interests. Direct communication provides a far better chance to understand them and how they perceive the project or proposal. Do not filter their concerns through another party.

Involve Opponents

Those opposed to a project are much more likely to consent to the project if they are actively involved throughout the review process; their consent is less likely if they remain outside the process.

Use Existing Community Organizations

Identify Existing Community Organizations

Existing community organizations provide an effective avenue for communicating with large numbers of people to establish the legitimacy of the project. They are especially important for maintaining credibility during the sometimes lengthy time frame required to complete a transportation project. Include churches, service groups, fraternal organizations, business groups, civic and neighborhood associations, advocacy groups for the disabled, and professional and trade organizations.

Establish Clear Communications

From the outset, work out an understanding with each community organization to get clear communications between the project team and the community. Establish a working relationship that allows the organization to have an important role and a two-way communications channel between the community and the project.

Use Local Newsletters

Many community organizations have newsletters that can use information about the project, providing a relatively inexpensive communication channel for large numbers of people.

Meetings

Clarify Purpose for Meeting

Before planning a public meeting as part of the project development process, consider communications objectives carefully.

When representatives of different interests meet face to face, especially in front of large numbers of people or the media, they may make demands and ultimatums. Such demands become very difficult to back away from, and can result in a worsened climate for agreement on a project. Therefore, Caltrans should carefully consider if a meeting will be productive before agreeing to one or calling one.

Choose a Format

If a meeting is to be held, choose an appropriate meeting format; each has advantages and disadvantages. See Article 7 for a discussion on meeting formats.

Prepare a Meeting Summary

At the conclusion of a meeting (regardless of the meeting format), a summary should be prepared, noting those attending, substantial items discussed and any agreements reached. The summary should be circulated to those attending the meeting, as well as to any others with an interest in the items discussed.

ARTICLE 6 Meeting Formats

Open Houses

Definition

Open houses are informal meetings where individuals may attend at any time, observe displays, watch a presentation, ask questions of technical and other staff, and discuss proposals individually.

Applicability

Open houses are useful in establishing two-way communication, responding to community needs, understanding affected interests, seeing the project through their eyes, identifying problems, generating solutions, and establishing credibility.

Format

Open houses usually run for several hours: even for successive evenings. Ample Caltrans staff, including the project manager, should be available for discussion. Information stations may be organized by subject matter, such as “Environmental”, “Right-of-Way”, “Design”, or by project alternative, with several disciplines available to discuss each.

Displays

Displays should clearly and prominently advise the public of the purpose of the project and the purpose of the meeting.

Presentations

Presentations are best handled by an open captioned videotape, running continuously.

- Presentations should be brief (about 20 minutes) and comprehensible to the lay citizens. Presenters may use exhibits or slides and refer to handouts.
- In everyday language, state the need for the project with respect to quality of life. Address what today's need is, then follow with what will happen in the future if this problem is not addressed.
- Stress Caltrans' mission and responsibility for addressing the transportation problem, in language that makes it clear that it would be irresponsible not to address the problem.
- Describe the process being followed to address the problem, including:
 - Relationship to the local planning process
 - Alternatives
 - How alternatives were chosen
 - Assumptions governing studies
 - Kinds of studies being done
 - Approvals by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) and other permitting agencies
 - Tentative time schedule
- Descriptions of alternatives may include:
 - Type of facility
 - Ultimate number of lanes, if a highway
 - Ultimate median width
 - Basic right-of-way width for main line
 - Streets to be closed
 - Streets to be separated
 - Streets to be connected
 - Local streets to be substantially altered
 - Pedestrian separations
 - Railroad separations
 - Location of frontage roads
 - Noise attenuation
 - Truck inspection/weight and agricultural inspection stations

- Roadside rest areas and vista points
- Nonmotorized transit and park-and-ride lots
- Bus and carpool lanes
- Costs for right-of-way and construction
- Describe issues likely to be of concern to the community. These may include:
 - Regional and community growth, land use, economic activity, employment gains and losses, and community and neighborhood cohesion
 - Consistency with local transportation plans
 - Consistency with air quality plans, noise standards and federal or State water standards
 - Conservation and preservation, general ecology, wildlife and waterfowl areas, wetlands or base flood plains
 - Disturbance of hazardous materials
 - Public facilities and services, including park and recreational facilities, natural or man-made historic places, religious, educational facilities, public utilities, fire protection and other emergency services
 - Aesthetic and other values, including visual quality, such as view of the road and view from the road, natural landmarks, and joint development and multiple use of space
 - Public access to rivers over which a new bridge may be constructed
 - Displacement of people, businesses and farms, including relocation assistance, right-of-way requirements, schedule of acquisition, housing availability, and the Relocation Assistance Program. (Questions about individual parcels should be answered during recess or immediately following the meeting, if possible)
 - Other issues that may be associated with the proposal

Handouts

Handouts are important for open houses, especially those being used as public hearings. Individuals should be given written handout material outlining the basic problem being solved, the process for solving it, the alternatives being proposed, and how individuals may provide additional comments. Handouts should cover the same material as outlined previously for presentations. Handouts may also be required in alternative formats to aid those individuals with disabilities and in a foreign language for non-English speaking individuals.

Comments

There should always be a comment table to which individuals are invited to make written or oral comments.

Publicity

Purpose, agenda, time, and place are advertised and announced to those who may care to attend. The media is invited. If invitation letters are to be sent to legislators, city councils, etcetera, see sample invitation letters in [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement. All publicity should be coordinated with the district public information office.

Considerations

A “give and take” atmosphere is central to the open house format. Caltrans’ staff members should fully understand the project, since questions will be highly detailed. Caution must be taken not to mislead the public into thinking that the most popular alternative will be chosen.

Formal Meetings

Definition

Formal meetings are usually in auditorium-style settings where Caltrans staff make formal presentations, often using maps, charts and graphs, after which members of the public are invited to make presentations or ask questions.

Applicability

Formal meetings may be used to provide or receive information from affected interests.

Format

In formal meetings, Caltrans personnel are situated at the front of the auditorium; members of the public are seated in rows facing them. Typically, Caltrans staff present information about the proposed project, then members of the public are asked to comment. Often, slides, overhead projections, or films are used to present information. A microphone is provided so that members of the public may ask questions or make statements. Displays may be placed around the outside of the room for viewing.

The meeting should follow a formal agenda.

Displays

Displays should clearly and prominently advise the public of the purpose of the project and the purpose of the meeting.

Presentations

Formal presentations should follow the format discussed previously in the Sub-article “Open Houses.”

Publicity

Usually, because of the informational purpose of formal meetings, they are given the widest possible publicity. Contact the district public information office for assistance in issuing announcements.

Considerations

If issues are especially controversial, formal meetings are often attended mostly by project critics. The physical layout of formal meetings may result in a “We versus They” situation, which gives the impression that the majority of a community is against the project, even though that may not be the case. When holding a formal meeting, have a clear understanding of the issues and include this as part of the Caltrans presentation, so that those in the audience are assured that their thoughts and feelings are taken into account in project planning.

Informal Informational Meetings

Definition

An informal informational meeting is one that is held with an individual, group, association, business, or other social unit having a direct interest in a project. It is held in a place that is convenient to the group.

Applicability

Informal informational meetings are useful for identifying issues, establishing credibility, and achieving a sincere and open exchange of information, with the potential for reaching acceptable solutions.

Format

Informal informational meetings should be limited to fewer than a dozen people. The meeting may be chaired by Caltrans or by someone outside of Caltrans. Either way, the Caltrans representative will usually be asked to make a presentation and answer questions.

Presentations

Follow the rules for presentations under Sub-article “Open Houses.”

Publicity

Informal informational meetings should be publicized only to participants, since by their nature, their purpose is a frank and open exchange of information, with the potential for actual negotiations.

Handouts and Displays

Handouts and displays should be very informal, even casual. Assure that maps are timely and of adequate quality to illustrate the project proposal. See the description for handouts and displays under Sub-article “Open Houses.”

Official Record

Summarize the discussion in a memorandum to file. To assure understanding, send a copy of the record of the discussion to those in attendance.

Considerations

These meetings can provide useful exchanges of information, provided they are conducted properly. Listen sympathetically to the concerns of those attending and try to see the project proposal through their eyes, but make it clear that Caltrans may not be able to satisfy everyone’s concerns.

Working Meetings

Definition

Working meetings involve as many as a dozen people working together on issues. Most PDT meetings use this format.

Applicability

Working meetings are useful for identifying problems, articulating key issues, and searching for consensus. They focus on work to be accomplished, and are useful for resolving issues.

Format

The project manager (PDT leader for PDT meetings) should chair the meetings. An agenda should be established, either orally or in writing, and all participants should be aware of it. The order in which the agenda items are taken may be significant, depending on whether or not it helps resolve the issues in question. If so, the person who called the meeting has to see to it that the agenda is followed. Generally, no more than a dozen staff-level people should attend. Business proceeds informally, not by parliamentary rules.

Publicity

Working meetings are publicized only to participants.

Considerations

If the views or goals of some participants are so different and incompatible that it threatens the group's work, the group must focus on areas where they have something in common. Try to expand areas of agreement by building them into larger areas of overlapping views.

Open Meetings

Definition

Open meetings are working meetings conducted in public.

Applicability

Issue resolution in an open meeting is extraordinarily difficult but possible, with careful planning. Open meetings can be useful where there is distrust of Caltrans and its processes.

Format

Participants in the meeting work together in public. The PDT leader should chair the meeting or, if the issues are controversial, a neutral moderator may be used to assure that the agenda is followed or that deviations from it have group consensus.

Publicity

Purpose, agenda, time, and place are advertised and announced to those who may care to attend.

Considerations

Open meetings require skill in public negotiation: an extremely difficult process. If the audience is large and emotional, open meetings can degenerate—with participants playing to the crowd.

When planning an open meeting, assure that there is an objective process to resolve issues. The decisions reached when resolving issues should never be predetermined, and the process should be easy to follow. It is wise to seek counsel from a skilled negotiator when planning an open meeting.

Forums

Definition

A forum is a public meeting held in a public place, where any individual, either from public agencies or the community, may state his or her views about the project.

Applicability

Forums are useful only for eliciting information from various interests, and for exposing interests to other views when there is no proposal to put forward. Forums do not accomplish a task or resolve an issue.

Format

Forums are held in auditorium-style settings. Affected parties are invited to make presentations and if necessary, Caltrans provides technical assistance. Persons in the audience may speak or provide comments in writing.

A respected, unaffected individual should moderate and be the only person facing the audience. Any Caltrans presentation should be short, precise, and accurate, so that the meeting can be turned over to community presenters as quickly as possible. Each person making a presentation, either from Caltrans or the community, should sit in the audience and return to it when the presentation is completed.

Publicity

Purpose, agenda, time, and place are advertised and announced to the general public. The media is invited. If invitation letters are to be sent to legislators, city councils, etcetera, see sample invitation letters in [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement.

Considerations

Forums have only one purpose: to acquire “community input” without the “We versus They” standoff characterized by some public hearings. Use a forum only if Caltrans is truly open to any solution and is seeking public input. Make it clear that the PDT may not use all the suggestions given in the forum.

Public Hearings

Public hearings are discussed separately in [Chapter 11](#) – Public Hearing.

ARTICLE 7 Citizen Advisory Committees

Definition

Citizen advisory committees are usually made up of representatives of various groups or agencies of various levels of government likely to be affected by a project or proposal. They are distinctly different from technical advisory committees, in that their task is to express community opinion and concerns, not to provide technical expertise.

Applicability

If used properly, advisory committees can help to identify problems and articulate and clarify key issues. They should never be used as decision-making bodies, but rather, they should be clearly designated as advisory.

Format

It is appropriate for the project manager to chair the citizen advisory committee, although the project manager may choose a prestigious community individual as a co-chair.

- Try to keep membership in a citizen advisory committee to fewer than 20-25 persons. Interests may include neighborhood associations, business groups, environmental groups, agencies of government, institutions, advocacy groups for the disabled, and special interests.
- Citizen advisory committees should meet to comment about major project activities, such as choice of project alternatives to be studied, types of studies to be done, assumptions for traffic studies, environmental drafts, etcetera.
- Since advisory committees are not decision-making bodies, they vote on procedural matters—never on the technical details of projects.
- Always plan citizen advisory committee meetings with a purpose in mind, expressed in an agenda.
- Informal meetings, formal meetings, working meetings, and open meetings are all formats that may be useful for citizen advisory committee meetings.
- In extraordinary circumstances, such as when the interests represented are extremely polarized, a citizen advisory committee may be formed, but may never meet. Each member simply provides written comment on plans or proposals individually.

Considerations

The role of the citizen advisory committee is to advise on community sentiment regarding projects and their aspects. Be very clear from the outset that while input is being solicited, Caltrans cannot always act positively on the advice received.

ARTICLE 8 Newsletters

Newsletter Use

As the project proceeds, the PDT will need to keep agencies, individuals, groups, institutions, advocacy groups and others abreast of project progress and current issues.

Face-to-face meetings are a clumsy and expensive way to keep a large community informed. Using personal computers and desk-top publishing, it is very easy to produce a one or two page newsletter, copy it on the office copier, and get it out

quickly. A monthly or quarterly publishing schedule is reasonable for a large scale, controversial project.

Newsletter Guidelines

- Most readers are lay people, not professionals. Without talking down, aim the writing to the lay readers. Use acronyms sparingly, only when they increase readability or eliminate clumsiness. Always define your acronyms in an easy to find location.
- If people are going to read the newsletter, it needs to contain real news. Place the most important news first. Follow with the less important or less timely information.
- It is not necessary to do a slick or fancy layout. In fact, readers are more likely to trust it if it is rather plain.
- Always do a spell check. Always check for factual accuracy.
- Never use the newsletter as a propaganda sheet. Report embarrassing developments with candor. If readers feel the newsletter is biased, it will lose its credibility.
- Newsletters may need to be prepared in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities and in a foreign language for non-English speaking individuals.

ARTICLE 9 Written Notification of Initiation of Studies

Mailed after Agreement on Study Process

Upon achieving agreement on the study process, the district must provide written notification of initiation of studies for Project Development Categories 1, 2, 3, 4A and 4B. Apart from Caltrans' policy, this is actually a statutory requirement of CEQA and NEPA. In the case of Project Development Categories 2B and 4B, there may be an agreement with the local agencies exempting specified types of projects from the notification process.

Mailing List

Written notices for Project Development Categories 1, 2, 3 and 4A are to be mailed to legislators, local governing bodies, agencies, and groups considered as mandatory contacts and to other interested agencies, neighborhood organizations, citizen groups, and individuals. Environmental Deputy District Directors should be consulted for

the most current distribution lists. They are also responsible for knowing who mandatory recipients are under CEQA and NEPA.

The district is to establish a notification list upon which any person, group, or agency may enroll. Written notices for Project Development Category 4B projects are sent only to affected local agencies and regional planning agencies, unless historic properties are present or suspected of being present; in such cases, notices need to be sent to local historical societies and Native American groups, as appropriate.

Notification Letter

Separate notification letters should be sent to all agencies considered mandatory contacts. On projects which other agencies are the lead agency for CEQA, a separate notice may also be sent as an intergovernmental review notice of intent printout from the clearinghouses. The two submittals serve different purposes.

Individual notifications contain more information and solicit comments and suggestions. The purpose of intergovernmental review is to provide comments to lead agencies on impacts (traffic, noise, air quality, etcetera) their projects may have to Caltrans facilities under CEQA. No map is attached, nor is there room for much explanatory material.

Attachments

At a minimum, the notification letters should have a small scale map appended to clearly identify the location and limits of the study area. More detailed maps may also be appended to provide a better understanding of the proposal.

Sample Letters

Sample notification letters embodying pertinent content are provided in [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement. Letters should be modified to fit the project being considered, however much of the content of the letters is mandated by CEQA. Hence, deviations from the standard language presented in [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement should be reviewed and concurred with by district design and planning division chiefs.

One copy of each individual letter and one copy of each form letter with a mailing list is to be furnished to the Headquarters Division of Design attention: Chief Office of Project Development Procedures, for information. In Sample Letter #4, please note the additional paragraph required to a city or a county that is participating, or

planning to be a future participant in the National Flood Insurance Program administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. For more information on wetlands and floodplains, see [Chapter 8](#) – Overview of Project Development, Section 7.

Activated Projects Need New Notices

When resuming studies on a project that has been inactive for an extended period of time, particularly when this involves initiation of data gathering for the environmental document, a new notification of initiation of studies letter should be sent to the various agencies. When this involves an already adopted route, the notification would be to the effect that design and environmental studies are being resumed or undertaken.

ARTICLE 10 Media Relations

Staff Interaction with Media

Project development personnel and other staff members may deal with the media as long as there is prior planning with the appropriate public information office for each and every contact with the media.

On occasion, a Caltrans employee may receive an unanticipated call from a media person. If the subject of the call is controversial, the call should be referred to the public information office. If this is impossible, the employee should inform the public information office of what occurred during the call.

Working Relationship with Key Reporters

It is critical to have a good working relationship with key reporters in any area affected by a project. If the project is a major one, it may be one of the most important news stories in the community and will be the subject of news coverage. If the relationship with the media is poor, that coverage can kill the project.

Most media take their public service role very seriously and are likely to respond sympathetically if approached with a sincere, honest, and unbiased need to communicate with the public.

Initial Meetings with Media

To prepare for future coverage of the project, request an early editorial board meeting with each media organization. Media organization representatives should include: an editor responsible for assigning news coverage, a reporter whose regular beat would be to cover the project, and if possible, a publisher or editorial writer. Caltrans should be represented by a public information officer and the project manager.

The following should be communicated at the meeting:

- The problem being addressed is serious.
- Caltrans is the appropriate agency to deal with the problem.
- The project development process is fair and reasonable.
- Caltrans will pay attention to (not necessarily act on) community comments.

Reporting Strategies

Suggestions follow for building an ongoing relationship with key reporters.

- Ask the appropriate media to do a series of stories on the key issues likely to come before the public.
- Develop reasonably good background studies on complex issues and illustrate them well. Do not provide a one-sided picture or hold back potentially embarrassing information.
- Be the most convenient, and the most unbiased source of information for key reporters.
- Always put information in its proper perspective. Make the meaning of any announcement clear by giving sufficient background information.
- Be concise. Send a few short, well-presented messages rather than a big, complex, combined message.
- Clearly distinguish fact from opinion. While opinions or ways of interpreting certain facts can and should be communicated, be careful not to label opinions as facts.

Use Public Information Office

News releases—Information for publication in a newspaper should be prepared by the district public information office.

Public notices—Public notices are discussed in [Chapter 11](#) – Public Hearing, Article 2 and [Appendix HH](#) – Public Involvement.