

Title	Reconnecting past and future: Community engagement shapes redevelopment in Portland's Historic Old Town Chinatown
Organizing Group	Prosper Portland (agency), JLA Public Involvement (consultant)
Location	Portland, Oregon, USA
Key Question/Problem	In a neighborhood where past public decisions had disenfranchised populations and severed cultural ties, how can redevelopment planning provide an opportunity to rebuild relationships, reconnect cultural ties, and honor both the past and future?
Sample Methods	<p>Process overview – <i>each phase reviews previous and informs next</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder interviews identify community members and groups who should be involved, inform engagement plans, build understand community dynamics and help raise awareness. • Listening meetings bring together interest groups and become positive catalyst for ongoing engagement. • Public meeting and online survey solicit community input on goals and objectives and recruit committee applicants. • Stakeholder advisory committee plays key role in developer selection, including writing portions of formal requests for proposals (RFPs), reviewing development proposals, and interviewing developers. • Selection of developers based on stakeholder committee recommendation.
Results	Development proposals recommended by the stakeholder advisory committee are moving forward. A community-centric approach was apparent throughout the decision-making process and, in partnership with developers who believe in these goals, will also be reflected in the final projects.
Impact Level	Stakeholder engagement was the main driver of project selection. Public engagement shaped the formal RFP that developers responded to, as well as providing a recommendation on final project selection. The agency put a high level of trust in stakeholders to shape an engagement process that was meaningful to them and to decide how development could best reflect community needs and goals.
Time Frame	Mid-2018 to June 2019
People Engaged	The engagement process centered around reaching and communicating effectively with stakeholders both with historical and current ties to Old Town Chinatown. Ten stakeholder interviews were conducted. More than 150 people participated in five listening meetings, 60 in an open house, nearly 140 people in online survey. 11 stakeholders served on the Advisory Committee.
Web Link	prosperportland.us/old-town-chinatown-development/

The Problem and Challenge

In a beleaguered downtown neighborhood with a distinct cultural history, Prosper Portland, the City of Portland's development bureau, needed to plan redevelopment of two key sites in the historic Old Town Chinatown. This area is known as the historic settling place for Portland's Chinese and Japanese immigrants, along with other communities of color. More recently, many historic residents have been displaced and the neighborhood has become a place of many challenges, including issues around houselessness and public safety.

An action plan adopted for the neighborhood emphasized that cultural and educational institutions must play an important role in community development and public conversations. However, many stakeholders with historic ties to the area had moved to other parts of the city.

The engagement challenge was not just to solicit public input about possible uses for the two sites, but to use the projects to reconnect lapsed ties to the neighborhood. The agency needed to find a way to reach the right people, as well as balance the variety of perspectives — toward the goal of a vibrant, walkable district that honors unique historical and cultural relevance.

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The Role of Public Participation

Prosper Portland's stated goal was to "select developers based on their ability to implement development plans that satisfy the goals of the Old Town/Chinatown Five-Year Action Plan and achieve the goals and benefits identified by the community through our outreach process."

The agency adopted an engagement process that put trust in the community to shape the area's future. Public participation identified community goals and benefits, as well as potential unintended consequences or disparities to mitigate or avoid. Community stakeholders helped identify target audiences, shaped engagement plans, envisioned what the community ultimately desired from the projects, crafted the RFPs that developers were required to respond to, and made final recommendations on project selection.

Public Participation Methods

Prosper Portland, supported by JLA Public Involvement, led a phased engagement process that intentionally did not rely on anecdotal knowledge but instead asked stakeholders to inform the process, including making recommendations on who to engage and how best to do so. The flexible structure was designed to respond to stakeholder needs.

Stakeholder interviews: In September and October 2018, JLA conducted ten interviews with key stakeholder groups with connections to the area. Interviewees identified that transparency about the decision-making process and awareness amongst all groups was of the utmost importance, citing past public processes that had seemed to discount stakeholder input. They also revealed segments within groups who carried distinct opinions and needs that would need to be considered, such as differences between the

Capturing nuanced

feedback: All engagement activities for this project — particularly stakeholder interviews and listening meetings — described highly complex and deep community dynamics. Since development projects are just one part of a larger revitalization strategy, the project team developed summaries with the intent that they could serve as starting points for future projects, so the City could confirm and build off past community dialogue.

younger and older Chinese generations. The interviews helped shape the engagement program, including identifying activities that would be relevant and increase community ownership and excitement about events.

Listening meetings: Based on feedback from stakeholder interviews, Prosper Portland conducted five focus group meetings in November and December 2018. The purpose was to better understand community needs, benefits and concerns; identify interested parties for a Stakeholder Advisory Group; and be transparent about the decision-making process.

As recommended by interviewees, two meetings were held with the Chinese community – one in Old Town Chinatown and one for community members living in East Portland but with ties to the project area or interest in the projects. The other three meetings engaged the Japanese community; Old Town Community Association; and neighbors / the general public. The project team worked with several community partners to plan and hold the listening meetings – again, based on recommendations from the interviews.

In total, the **listening meetings engaged 164 participants** (an interest level much higher than initially expected by the project team). Meetings were catered by local vendors from Old Town Chinatown and the Jade District. Chinese language interpretation was provided.

Public meeting and online survey: In January 2019, a public meeting was held to share findings from the listening meetings and hear additional feedback on community goals and potential redevelopment ideas. An online survey mirrored the open house to extend the opportunity for people to engage. More than 60 people attended the open house, and 137 participated in the online survey.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee: Also in January, the Stakeholder Advisory Committee was convened. The group met five times over the course of the project, refining the community goals and objectives for the development Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and then reviewing applications and interviewing teams.

The committee guided the selection of the developers based upon their ability to meet the community identified goals.

Key aspects of the committee process included:

- **Committee Recruitment Process:** The project team wanted a committee that represented the diversity of voices from interested stakeholders, not the “usual suspects.” The team solicited applications from interested parties to serve on the committee and conducted an impartial application screening process, in which they reviewed and scored responses to

Awareness raising and event notification

Email invitations and phone calls to stakeholder list:

Initial stakeholder interviews and focus groups helped the project team develop a robust contact list of highly interested stakeholders.

Door-to-door canvassing, postcards and flyers: Highly local methods were used to reach out to businesses and neighbors both in Old Town Chinatown (the project area) and the Jade District (contemporary location of many Chinese and Japanese community members). Flyers included all meeting dates and were in English and Chinese.

Newspaper ads: Prosper Portland placed ads in the Asian Reporter, the Portland Chinese Times, and Portland Chinese Media.

Partnership with Community Engagement Liaisons:

The team worked with the Community Engagement Liaisons program to recruit members of the Chinese community to participate in focus groups. The Liaisons also provided Chinese interpretation for a variety of dialects.

questions without knowing who submitted the application. The highest scoring applicants were then matched with the desired stakeholder representation categories. Some applicants were able to represent more than one category – for example, a University of Oregon professor represented both the Chinese community and local businesses. The resulting committee included people who had not participated on public committees before. Adrienne DeDona, the facilitator, described it feeling like a “grassroots” group – passionate community members coming together to influence outcomes important to them.

- **Committee as decision-making partners:** While Prosper Portland were final decision-makers and oversaw technical and legal aspects of the process, the committee developed the Community Goals and Objectives that developers were required to respond to in their responses to the RFP. Prosper Portland’s Executive Director, Kimberly Branam, attended the committee’s final meeting, a show of support and endorsement of the committee’s final recommendation. Adrienne DeDona remarked that Prosper Portland truly embraced the committee process, valuing their perspective and trusting them to provide thoughtful and practical guidance. The committee’s work included:
 - Writing and reviewing sections of the formal requests for proposals (RFPs)
 - Review of development applications
 - Interviews with development applicants
 - Providing final recommendations on application approval

Uniqueness of the Project

What was the decision statement and how were the public involved in framing the statement? How did public participation contribute to the resolution of the problem?

The problem statement was how to solicit development proposals that would be responsive to community needs and goals, considerate of both the area’s past and future identity, and viable for public-private investment. To give the community influence over this process, the project team led a phased engagement strategy that provided opportunities for a broad variety of stakeholders to learn about the project and influence outcomes. Throughout the public engagement process, main themes emerged of safety, affordability and acknowledgement of a rich cultural identity. A stakeholder advisory committee helped synthesize public input and created Community Goals and Objectives that were included in the formal development Request for Proposals. The committee reviewed applications and made a final recommendation for project selection, which Prosper Portland ratified. The projects are now moving forward.

In what way(s) did public participation improve the decision?

By advising the project team on the right people to engage and how best to do so, stakeholder input helped create a groundswell of public excitement and participation, which ultimately led to the involvement of many diverse voices. The committee’s high level of involvement and clear recommendations reinforced and made politically irrefutable Prosper Portland’s endorsement of their final selection.

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Describe the innovative participation techniques that were used?

While the engagement techniques themselves are common among our profession, the way they were chosen and level of influence and ownership by the community was what made this process special. Aspects of note include:

- **Early engagement:** Stakeholders reviewed and informed the engagement process; Culturally relevant meetings received a high level of community buy-in and excitement, with locations, language needs, food and activities guided by stakeholder input; How to best reach and engage both the historical and contemporary context and stakeholders of the project were a central focus throughout.
- **Committee process:** Recruitment through extensive community engagement process encouraged applications from variety of stakeholders, even those inexperienced with public projects; A “blind” review of applications supported an impartial member selection process; Committee had high level of decision-making involvement, including writing portions of the RFP, interviewing developers and recommending final project selection.

How did the project advance the practice of public participation?

This process represented an intentional shift in the way Prosper Portland conducts public engagement. Never before had so much influence been given to community members to shape a project. The agency committed to seeking out and hearing the broad variety and complexity of perspectives related to the project, and remained flexible and committed to creating a process that would incorporate diverse perspectives into decision-making.

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This process represented a genuine effort by the agency and community to work together to rebuild trust and create a project that met many needs. These development projects are just one part of a larger revitalization strategy; the city hopes engagement can serve as a starting point and model for future work with the community in Old Town Chinatown and elsewhere.

What evaluative and monitoring techniques were used throughout the project to provide evidence of public participation?

The project team paused after each round of outreach to consider what stakeholders had said and refine the engagement approach moving forward. Some examples of changes based on feedback from stakeholders and the committee included: including additional focus group meetings in the process; canvassing in both Old Town and the Jade District (another part of Portland); preparing an online open house in addition to the in-person open house; and adding additional committee meetings.

Project Results

The development proposals selected by the committee were approved by Prosper Portland and are currently moving through next steps. Though there were not a high number of applications, the two selected proposals were highly tailored and considerate of the community goals, and

expressed enthusiasm for working on these projects alongside the community. A community-centric approach was apparent throughout the process, and in partnership with developers who believe in these goals, will now be apparent in the final projects.

A community-centric approach was apparent throughout the process.

Alignment with IAP2 Core Values

How did the project ensure that those most affected by the decision or problem were involved? How did the project seek input from participants on how they wished to participate?

Early stakeholder interviews helped identify those who should be involved, and informed the public engagement plan. Throughout the project, stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on the process, while the project team remained flexible to incorporating feedback.

How was the outcome of the project influenced by the public's contributions?

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee played a key role in the development application process, including recommending which projects should move forward. Prosper Portland followed the committee's recommendations.

How did the project promote sustainable decisions and ensure that the needs and interests of all participants were communicated?

Extensive community engagement prior to committee applications resulted in a large, well-informed and diverse applicant pool. Impartial application review paired with stakeholder representation categories meant the committee represented diverse points of view, including those without prior experience on public committees. The committee's recommendations were informed by the community engagement process – resulting in a final recommendation with a high level of confidence from both the agency and community stakeholders.

How did the project seek out and facilitate the involvement of those most affected?

The central part of this engagement process was reaching and communicating effectively with stakeholders both with historical and current ties to the neighborhood. The project team partnered with community liaisons and service organizations to help recruit participation and create engagement processes that would be relevant and authentic. In considering and documentation of input, the team tried to faithfully incorporate the broad variety and complexity of perspectives that are part of Old Town Chinatown's history and future.

How did the information provided to participants contribute to meaningful participation?

Prosper Portland was transparent from the beginning that community input would shape the redevelopment effort. Broad advertising helped raise awareness, and thoughtful engagement activities ensured that stakeholder feedback directly influenced outcomes either by shaping engagement plans or supporting development of Community Goals and Objectives that would inform developer RFPs. Interpretation at meetings included several dialects of Chinese. The summary of input heard from listening meetings was available in English and Chinese.

How did the communication ensure that participants knew how their input affected the decision?

At each engagement point, the project team summarized what had been heard from engagement to date, and asked stakeholders to confirm and/or build on that understanding. Next steps were shared and stakeholders were advised how they could continue to be involved.

