

Merit Award - Community Engagement: Inspire Littleton



!nspireLITTLETON: Reaching the well-informed, but uninvolved

The results of planning processes strive to be representative of their communities. However, as planners know it is a challenge to first define and then achieve that representation. Having faced and lost that challenge several times, the City of Littleton's planning staff was particularly focused on increasing the number and diversity of people involved in the process.

To do this, the city engaged in a set of traditional participation methods and a network of social forums. As a result, !nspireLITTLETON reached new audiences, expanded the community's participation in the planning program, and generated more creative and far-reaching recommendations than would have been achieved using only traditional mechanisms. Utilizing traditional public participation methods including public hearings, surveys, newspaper articles, and attending community events, the planning team also worked with MindMixer to develop an interactive online town hall. Littleton communications and marketing staff made sure the effort was a prominent feature of cable channel programming, the Littleton Report, the city's webpage, a Facebook profile and Twitter account. All of the platforms were utilized to encourage people to join the conversation on the interactive website. The name !nspireLITTLETON and the address of the interactive website were emblazoned on t-shirts, mugs, teddy bears, beach ball, pencils, pens,

toy trains, and numerous other giveaways that the team dispersed at every opportunity.



The InspireLITTLETON public outreach program captured a broader audience, advanced the creation and confirmation of a collective vision for the community, generated public support for that vision, and effectively dissipated public opposition. As a result, the InspireLITTLETON program helped produce a citywide plan that more accurately reflects the community's dreams.

Early in the public outreach process, approximately 100 people participated in five traditional planning forums across the city. Attendance increased at each succeeding meeting as marketing accelerated, participation in the on-line forum took off, and on-line participants accepted invitations to be heard at the public meetings.

A pivotal moment in the process occurred at the fifth and final planning forum. With members of both the planning board and city council in attendance, the tenor of the discussion shifted. Using an audience response system, the meeting began by polling attendees on key issues. Answers were then compared to those received from on-line participants. The answers from the on-line participants were notably more positive and more supportive of the proposed framework to direct growth and change. From that moment forward, the planning board and council were more skeptical of the negative minority, and remained positive and supportive of a progressive vision for the city's future and the tools for achieving that vision.

InspireLITTLETON.org, the city's interactive website, ran throughout the planning process and welcomed more than 600 individuals. Nearly 1,000 people wrote ideas on sticky notes and posted them on the "What I Love about Littleton..." idea boards. Some drew pictures representing what they think would make Littleton an even better place to live. As of November 2013, the 608 active participants on the website, 7,106 visitors, and 51,752 page views generated 557 ideas and provided 857 comments on those ideas.

The numbers won. The city council, planning board, and staff noticed the disparity in the number of supporters and opponents, listened and discussed the ideas and comments, and incorporated their ideas into the draft plan. The resulting plan reflects the huge volume of ideas and comments heard from the public. After eight years of on-again / off-again efforts and one frustration after another, the city's 1981 comprehensive plan was updated. The Citywide Plan was adopted unanimously by city council.



RECOMMENDED
by planning board to city council
NOVEMBER 21, 2013

ADOPTED
by city council
JANUARY 21, 2014  Littleton

Citywide Plan

*a Section of the
City of Littleton Comprehensive Plan*



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