Information Item

Metropolitan Council Committee of the Whole

Topic

Imagine 2050 Engagement Update: Activities and Theme Analysis

District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Stat. § 473.145
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Division/Department:	Community Development / Research, Local Planning Assistance

Background

At the Committee of the Whole meeting on November 15, 2023, Council staff will provide an update on engagement efforts for *Imagine 2050*. This includes extensive cross-divisional engagement and analysis for all policy areas in the regional planning process. Council Research staff will share the qualitative analysis and seek feedback on connecting important stakeholder feedback to policy and guidance on areas where there may be competing priorities. Councilmembers will be asked to share their experiences engaging with people in their districts, particularly underserved communities. The following information is important grounding material meant to help prepare members for the discussion.

Overview of Engagement Process

This presentation provides information about the *Imagine 2050* engagement process, the range of participating stakeholders, and key engagement results organized by the five endorsed regional goals.

To inform policies for *Imagine 2050*, Council staff have carefully engaged stakeholders across all policy areas (including Land Use, Housing, Parks, Transportation, Water, and more). The process has been community-centered, equity focused, collaborative, and expensive. Engagement has been recursive, with stakeholder groups consulted at ongoing points in the process. This engagement included hearing and incorporating input well before the formal regional planning process began and has continued through the development of visions and values and subsequent initiation of drafting policies. It will continue as drafts are ready for review and through the final public comment period.

Some stakeholders have a historical, ongoing connection to Council policy, and staff engagement with them is ongoing. Council Members, advisory board, local government, business, and nonprofit stakeholders have provided input well-before the formal *Imagine 2050* process began. Consultations with them have continued through articulation of vision and values and the beginning of the policy drafting process.

The input of longstanding traditional stakeholders is joined with new efforts launched with the current policy update process. Residents are a key focus of recent engagement, including frequent service users, historically marginalized communities, young people, new Minnesotans, and advocates. As with traditional stakeholders, staff have engaged with residents across the process, learning additional advice as the work proceeds.

Engagement thus far has included conversations with over 1,000 stakeholders as well as careful review of previous Council Member priorities. It also includes local government input from analysis of planning documents submitted to the Council in response to *Thrive MSP 2040*. Future engagement efforts and initiatives include reviewing engagement data with technical advisory groups, ongoing local government engagement, new study results across many policy areas, population forecasts engagement, additional regional land use cohorts, and "Creatively *Imagine 2050*," an arts in policy planning project. The presentation includes identified areas of competing priorities and a summary of themes by engagement goals. Sample supporting quotes are not in the presentation but can be found in this memo. Public and local government engagement will continue through the regional planning process. After the public comment period and adoption of the RDG, listening to stakeholders will continue as *Imagine 2050* is implemented and performance against the metrics is evaluated.

Considering Competing Priorities

Stakeholders articulated competing priorities as they talked about goals in the region. Council Member input on how to navigate competing priorities is needed. Some of these include:

- Bold action on key concerns (climate, equity, affordability, water sustainability, natural systems protection) compete with local control, capacity/resources.

- Desires for low-density housing and expanded transportation infrastructure compete with addressing climate change, walkable communities, or multimodal transportation options.

- Locations of high-quality affordable housing compete with desire for locations with cultural belonging and community ties.

- Safety is complex and requires understanding multiple perspectives. A top priority for Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) government stakeholders competes with police concerns from other stakeholders.

- Lack of affordable housing for young, older, and diverse family types compete with goals to maintain historic character and maintain low-density communities.

- Preservation of agricultural land and green space compete with housing development.

Engagement Findings Thus Far

Engagement findings and sample excerpts from engagement learnings are summarized under each of five *Imagine 2050* endorsed regional goals. In this memo, findings are numbered to clarify which engagement findings connect to each goal.

1. Our Region is Equitable and Inclusive

Finding 1.1. Residents experience challenges accessing Council systems and services.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"Working as water resource professional, I see the highest levels spending their time with affluent connected neighborhoods more than overburdened ones." "Stormwater infrastructure-grants only given to communities with money to match."* Minnesota Water Resources Conference

- *"Right now, as far as transportation goes, nothing is going well for me or my child… There is a lot that me and my son miss because of transportation… socially there's a lot that gets missed from lack of transportation. There's also a lot of essential things that get missed because of lack of transportation."* Hastings Transportation Values Research

- *"They are building all these buildings, but they aren't affordable. We need more housing for people like me. I'm going toward senior housing now. I've always had this problem. There is a need for it. But it's not there. Nothing fancy. Just a decent space."* Anoka

County HCV engagement.

- *"It doesn't feel safe until someone has shown you where to go. Especially for college students or for people who have just moved here. Or for people who don't have that intergenerational experience."* LGBTQ+ park engagement

Finding 1.2. Local governments largely support prioritizing equity in Council efforts; they want the Council to be aware of local context and to offer clear guidelines and support.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *Equity and Access are the policy values that resonated most with Park Agency workgroup, with respect, diversity, and inclusiveness the next most frequently mentioned.* Park agencies vision and values working group

- *Large majority of Subregional Water Workshop participants support equity measures in grant funding decisions and project enhancements.* Subregional Water Supply Workshop Survey

- *"Some communities have a lower percentage of minority populations but shouldn't be left out of the discussion [around equity transportation funding]."* TPP stakeholder listening session

2. Our Communities are Healthy and Safe

Finding 2.1. Residents want to live in communities that support social connections and vibrant cultural landscapes. Stakeholder recommendations include multimodal travel, outdoor access, walkable communities, acknowledging historical inequity and land use support for small businesses.

Cultural landscape refers to how space and land are modified over time to reflect culture, history, human necessities, and lifestyles of past, current, and future inhabitants. Engagement data suggest that cultural landscapes set the stage for people's access to community and cultural connection.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"Young people feel seen when their culture is reflected and valued in their communities. Feeling seen and having a sense of belonging can improve outcomes for young people, with more culturally appropriate opportunities for wealth building and social connection."* Raices Latinas Young Leaders Collaboration

- *Parks and outdoor recreation spaces are important to destress, build communities, make friendships bloom."* Environmental Stewardship Institute Young Leaders Collaboration

- *"One thing I have noticed is the downtown area I didn't know it really existed, I did not know about all the restaurants until I actually came down here for an event and it was amazing to see all these businesses, bring people in from all over. How to help them?"* Land Use Cohort Dakota County resident

Finding 2.2 Connection to nature provides physical, emotional, and mental well-being. *Water quality, environmental education, park system maintenance, and transit access were mentioned as helping people connect to nature. This connection becomes more valued as a refuge from heat and other climate change effects.*

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"Parks are a place for relaxation, positive feelings and emotions, and recreational activities/events. Trails are a spaces for well-being and need more resources."* Land use focus group, Scott County

- *"I love nature. That might be why I like my apartment so much. That's the extra incentive. It's calming. It's the one place in the world where I don't have anxieties."* Land use focus group, Anoka County

- *"I'm new here, I love the parks here, the lakes, the natural ... You don't feel like you are in the city. It's a big city but you always find green. You can walk, ride a bike, everything. So I love the parks and playgrounds."* – Housing policy focus group, Ramsey County

- *"Parks give people access to nature, a sense of community, and activities they can do like walking, biking, and playing sports. I don't go that often because there's not one close to the house."* Land use focus group, Hennepin County

Finding 2.3 Safety is a multidimensional issue, and a particular concern for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and transit users. *Rural crashes, affordability-safety tradeoffs are concerns. Conflicting views over use of policing.*

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"Providing a regional transportation system that is safe and secure for all users is fundamental to government."* Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) stakeholder listening session

- *"A lot of times safety is framed up as "homeless people sleeping on the trains make me feel unsafe." But in fact, those homeless people also feel unsafe, so it is really about safety for everybody."* TPP equity stakeholder listening session

- *"If money weren't an issue I would live in safer community, but since we can't afford to pay our rent and buy a good house we have to be in a cheaper and unsafe house."* Ramsey County Young Leaders Collaboration

3. **Our Region is Dynamic and Resilient**

Finding 3.1 Residents struggle with housing affordability, lack proximity to desired cultural landscapes and safety. *High housing costs pressure moves from neighborhoods where they'd like to live.*

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"I want to live in Washington County, but the rental application fees are too high for me to keep trying.***"** Housing policy plan (HPP) engagement, Washington County
- *"I like where I live. I have the underlying fear that you can get priced out of location. Every year it gets a bit harder to stay there. Where are you going to go? There's the same situation elsewhere, too.*" HCV holder engagement, Hennepin County
- *"Shakopee needs housing like the workforce family housing they have in Dakota County. That is a program that would help us get ahead, save money to become homeowners. Housing here costs too much for workers.*" Land use cohort, Scott County
- *"Immigrants and minorities are losing their heritage due to location. I've seen this personally. When I moved to the US, I lived in an apartment with other Karen people, bringing me closer to them. But it was a dangerous apartment. We had to move. We are farther from the Karen community now. This causes communities to drift away and kids to lose touch with their own culture. There is no safety or bonding.*" Young Leaders Collaboration St. Paul
- *"Many residents expressed an explicit preference for homeownership. Housing instability was experienced by many residents participating in Housing Policy Plan exchange sessions.*" HPP Preliminary Engagement Findings

Finding 3.2 Community land use needs include spaces for growing food, outdoor recreation, small businesses, and community interaction.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- "*Free community spaces. Our community likes to get together, but it is too expensive.*" Housing policy plan engagement
- "*We need space to grow our own food and medicine. [There's a] beautiful native corn that can grow anywhere. Out of its native environment, it will still grow – just not as well. We need to have space for our community to grow together.*" Land Use focus group, Minneapolis
- "*We need more grocery stores with healthier and more affordable food. We need space for classes to learn how to preserve and cook food. We need community spaces with educational programing.*" Land use focus group, Minneapolis
- "*We travel to Shoreview so the kids can go to the community center, almost every day. It's 30 minutes round trip. Would be nice to have something closer to home.*" HCV holder engagement, Anoka County
- "*A young leader from Bloomington expressed her gratitude for a Mexican grocery store in Bloomington. It was rare to see businesses specific to her culture, and that grocery store allowed her and her family easier access to culturally relevant food and groceries.*" Young Leaders Collaboration engagement

Finding 3.3 Regional thinking, collaboration, accountable policy implementation, understanding local context are key to region's success.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- "*The TPP should set goals based on benefit to the entire region, which is not necessarily the same goals as all the separate counties.*" TPP listening session, County participant
- "*Local governments expressed a desire for increased flexibility from the Council as the region is very diverse and different communities have very different needs and resources. Building on this, some communities requested to receive credit/consideration for housing they are building and policies they have in determining housing need allocation and their ability to meet targets.*" Land Use local government engagement
- "*Urban, suburban, and rural regional parks and trails have different service areas.*" Park agency system plan considerations working group

4. **We Lead on Addressing Climate Change**

Finding 4.1 Government stakeholders expect the Council to lead the region on climate change issues.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- "*Climate action should permeate throughout all our policy planning related to transportation. Without it, we are not doing our job or paying the right attention.*" Transportation Advisory Board member
- "*Regional policies can help with building foundation and connections, setting the goal and outcome that makes a difference, and standardization across the borders. Set metric-driven requirements at the regional level similar to what the affordable housing plan does.*" Climate/Natural Systems Technical Advisory Board Focus Group
- "*Consider how messaging is heard across the region. Avoid polarizing language around climate and natural systems when the outcome can be accomplished without it.*" Park agencies climate engagement

Finding 4.2 Stormwater issues and smart growth are top-level climate concerns for local government.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"The most important climate issue we are dealing with is storm water management."* Land use local government engagement, Dakota County
- *"There is an issue intersecting between storm water management and tree preservation. Ponding and infiltration requirements are the number one reason trees get cut down."* Land use engagement, Washington County
- *"Smart development is key (for climate change mitigation), and critical aspects of open space protection are built into this practice."* Metro Conservation Network

Finding 4.3 Requests for support around Council leadership on climate change include additional funding, technical assistance, and data resources. *Local government and residents seek idea sharing, funding, messaging assistance, research and mapping support.*

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"Cities and local planners wish to address climate challenges but need more resources. This includes collaboration, shared language, toolkits, research/data modeling, and Council convening."* Land Use local government engagement
- *"Providing resources and opportunities is one of governmental agencies' responsibilities. Since it is hard for North Minneapolis teens interested in climate issues to access information and resources, it is common for them to miss opportunities."* Northside Safety NET, Minneapolis
- *Needed data include analysis ROI of ecosystems in the regional park system, calculate of mitigating acres in park system, comparison analyses of other regions, and creation of a central information repository on climate change in the regional parks.* Requests from park agencies during 2021 climate engagement

5. We Protect and Restore Natural Systems

Finding 5.1 Habitat restoration and water resource protection are important for ecosystem health. Drought, as well as water and park pollution, are emergent concerns. Clean water is of the essence for current and future generations.

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *Drought is the top water-related climate change concern according to municipal and community water providers across the region.* Water utility outreach survey results
- *"The Council can set land use policies to protect groundwater and require pervious surfaces near open spaces."* Park agencies climate engagement
- *"Consider non-human species in Council decisions." "Plant and restore more native habitat at transit centers, water projects, and other Council locations"* Environmental Stewardship Institute, Young Leaders Collaboration
- *"I get a lot of phone calls from people who have half an acre or less, who are looking to increase native habitat on their space. Interest is there for private citizens."* Metro Conservation Network engagement

Finding 5.2 Preserving and increasing green spaces, tree canopy are important. *Green space in land use, large acreage park reserves, a metro natural resources corridor are desired efforts. Regulatory mechanisms and incentives for green spaces are needed.*

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"The Council should see the importance of park land acquisition as a resiliency strategy."* Park agencies climate engagement
- *"How can I get my city to use the Growing Shade information? This is very important."* Land Use cohort, Scott County resident
- *"The Council can help create a metro-wide natural resources corridor"* Metro Conservation Network, Park agencies climate engagement
- *"Align Council funding and land use policy to support parks contribution to climate resiliency (for example, address ENRTF funding constraints, fund fleet updates)"* Park agencies climate engagement

Finding 5.3 Connectivity is important. *Humans are a part of the environment. We need more connection to nature and across valuable ecosystems.*

Sample supporting engagement data:

- *"Incorporate land stewardship and climate advocacy into efforts to connect people to the outdoors."* Metro Conservation Network Engagement.
- *"Consider non-human species in Council decisions." "Plant and restore more native habitat at transit centers, water projects, and other Council locations"* Environmental Stewardship Institute Young Leaders Recommendation

Advice Requested from Council Members

To ensure that Council Member priorities are heard and understood to incorporate into the Regional Development Guide update, Council staff request the following advice during discussion:

1. What is your advice to address these competing priorities?
2. What have you been hearing from stakeholders on these topics as you engage with communities in your district?
3. How should staff prioritize and incorporate these engagement findings?
4. What are ways we can help you carry *Imagine 2050* engagement into communities in your district?

Details of stakeholders engaged: Government, private sector, nonprofit partners

Elected and Appointed
Council Members

Council commissions, advisory boards, and work groups

Imagine 2050 policy-specific virtual and in-person engagement

Private Sector and Non-profit
Affordable housing developers

Metro Cities

Economic equity organizations

Regional economic development organizations

Local Staff:
Water: Water suppliers, subregional groups, watershed districts, municipal wastewater operators

Parks: Agency directors, planners, outreach, natural resources staff

Land use: Local planners engagement, ongoing sector rep engagement

Housing: Affordability survey; planner focus groups

Transportation: Counties, transit providers, cities/townships

Policy advisory groups specific to Imagine 2050 process by policy area

Topic-specific consultation groups (agriculture, climate, housing, economic development)

Staff analysis of comprehensive plans and other planning documents submitted to Council

Council staff

Minnesota and Federal
MN-DOT; federal highway administration; MN Freight Advisory Committee

Tribal Nations Consultations

State agencies and Governor's Commissions

Details of stakeholders engaged: Residents and advocates

Historically excluded communities
Black, Brown, Indigenous affinity staff and community members

Disabled advocacy staff and community members

Residents experiencing poverty and housing insecurity

LGBTQ+ Communities

Residents using Council services
Housing Voucher Recipients

Metro Transit, Metro Mobility

Park and trail visitors

Youth
Young Leaders Collaboration

Young people from historically excluded communities

Transportation needs research

Specialized topic engagement

New Minnesotans
Affinity groups

Young Leaders Collaboration

East African, Hmong, Latino, and multicultural affinity staff and community members

Advocates
Climate

Aging, disability and social service

Neighborhood organizations

Affordable housing