

## TAKE IT TO THEM - INSPIRING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As part of their mission, vision, and goals, the City of Hopkins has developed a “Take It To Them” approach to outreach, which emphasizes the importance of involving diverse populations, engaging the rental community of Hopkins, and inspiring community engagement.

Hopkins City Council provides many ways for residents to provide input through a variety of tools and approaches, which include public meetings at unique venues, meeting formats that invite a wider audience, and meeting people where they are. These creative techniques to engage local residents in planning has helped capture more voices of Hopkins residents.

## WHAT MAY HELP OTHER COMMUNITIES?

### Meetings at Alternative Locations

For City Council meetings, the City has been open to thinking outside the box, so that Council meetings are not only held at City Hall, but also in other parts of the community. Over 60 percent of Hopkins residents are renters, so each year a different apartment is chosen and events and meetings with City officials and residents are held monthly at the apartment to engage renters. The meetings discuss topics important to the renters and have included fun events like “Grilling with the Council,” where renters can meet with Council Members in a comfortable, relaxed setting.

The City of Hopkins isn’t afraid to take a chance and move meetings from traditional locations. One recent City Council open house was held at a local downtown business, LTD Brewery. The well-attended open house gathered positive responses with new residents involved. The City Council also got outside City Hall with its “Ride with the Council” event during National Bike Week, which included discussion of future Light Rail Transit (LRT) stations and a ride on Cedar Lake Regional Trail.

### New Approaches and Formats that Invite a Wider Audience

The City has found that a change in format can bring a wider audience to City events. They hosted a Visioning Hopkins Mainstreet event using the Pecha Kucha format. **Pecha Kucha** is a fast-paced, presentation format, where a presenter has 20 slides and 20 seconds for each slide. Each presentation was concise, fast-paced, and offered a low-pressure opportunity to share thoughts and visions for Mainstreet. City Council meetings can be intimidating to residents, and this event was a “fun, high-energy” event that got many

## COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT

**COUNTY:** Hennepin  
**POPULATION:** 17,591

### Hopkins:

- has been trying new and innovative approaches to community engagement in order to involve a wider mix of its residents in decision-making.
- adopted a “Take It To Them” policy, that lays out mission and goals of public engagement.
- City Council members are open to new ideas to accommodate the residents’ need and feedback.
- has been able to build support for larger policy changes, by starting with small, low-cost, low-risk pilot programs.

### CONTACT THE CITY:

Kersten Elverum  
Director of Economic  
Development & Planning  
(952) 548-6340  
kelverum@hopkinsmn.com

### OTHER RESOURCES:

- Partnership with other agencies to meet mutual goals
- Engaging residents in City learning programs



One of the most prominent features of the Artery was a temporary installation of a 0.2 mile cycle track. People were able to try it out and provide feedback.



The City Council took a chance and held a well-attended open house at a local downtown business, LTD Brewery.



Each year a new apartment is chosen and events and meetings with City officials and residents are held monthly at the apartment to engage renters.

people involved and could be easily replicated.

Another format that has been successful for the City, is its annual [State of the City/Taste of Hopkins](#) event. The event provides citizens and business owners with the opportunity to learn more about the City in a relaxed setting. The event starts with a “Taste of Hopkins,” which features free tasting of appetizers, entrees, and desserts from local Hopkins businesses. It gathers a wide audience and is followed by a “State of the City” overview with the Mayor, Council members, and City staff, and has even included a game show format

### Meeting Them Where They Are

The City’s “Take it To Them” policy includes meeting people where they are, and bringing the meeting to them. To gather community input, the City of Hopkins sometimes piggybacks on local events, such as outdoor movie nights or the City’s week-long Raspberry Festival, to engage more people and increase the visibility of upcoming projects. For example, the [City’s Artery Experiment](#) kicked off the 2015 Raspberry Festival and introduced the community to the [Artery project](#), an [Open Streets](#) event that demonstrated a pedestrian/cycle track connecting Mainstreet with the Downtown Hopkins Southwest LRT Station to get public feedback on its final design. The event was in partnership with others agencies, and featured temporary installations, including a protected bikeway, art exhibits, live music, food trucks, games, a 3D chalk artist, and free bike tune ups. The event had many opportunities for community feedback. It even included the offer of a free ice cream sundae for anyone who weighed in on the project! Following the event, the City shared the results in a [report](#), which included a summary of the installations, lessons learned for planning similar events, and a summary of the community feedback provided.

### Inspiring Community Engagement

Inspiring community engagement in a variety of ways is important to the City. The City offers a free [Citizens Academy Program](#) for residents who want to learn more about how their City works. Participants in the five-week program go behind the scenes to learn more about the City’s departments, programs, and operations. The Academy has been in place for ten years and can involve up to 20 participants per session. The program helps in developing relationships, understanding of staff responsibilities, and building personal connections. It has been a successful program with a strong alumni base, and even Academy alumni reunions.

The City involves a diverse range of community members. For example, while the City was working on the [Cottageville Park Redesign](#), they partnered with the nearby school to gather youth input into the park’s redesign. The City has also partnered with the school district for the use of school buses in providing rides to community members to meetings that are not held near a project site.



Cottageville Park Expansion was made possible through a joint partnership between the City of Hopkins and Minnehaha Creek Watershed District.

### Small, Low Cost, Low Risk Programs Can Support Larger Policy Changes

The City understands that starting small can result in larger changes. Hopkins had a pilot program to temporarily transform a few on-street parking spaces into miniature parks, or parklets, on a \$200 budget. The pilot was a success and the City later adopted a policy to allow local businesses to use the on-street parking spaces as a sidewalk extension for seating areas in the summer.

The City of Hopkins is always thinking of new, innovative ways to engage its residents. Luckily, the City is not afraid to take chances and has strong support from the City Council. The City has maintained a diverse public input base by thinking outside the box, collaborating with others to achieve mutual results, and inspiring community engagement.

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

- 2014 Local Government [Innovation Award](#) from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs (Cottageville Park Expansion Project)
- 2015 Minnesota National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) Conference Presentation (Kersten Elverum)

September 2015