Town of Chapel Hill:
Stakeholder Feedback on the Public Participation Process for Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards

Prepared by John Stephens and Stefanie Panke, School of Government
May 9, 2014

Data was collected March 24 to April 7, 2014.

Respondents to the surveys:
 a) Community Participants = 68 (Results on pages 2-8)
 b) Staff = 23 (Results on pages 9-13)

About the surveys:
 a) A survey of top administrators and Town Council members did not receive a sufficient number of responses for analysis.
 b) Some respondents did not answer every question in the respective surveys.
 c) The Community Participant survey includes questions on the demographics of the survey takers. Responses to these questions were not required for submitting the survey.

Clarification/Editing of Comments

The School of Government was directed to apply the Town of Chapel Hill's criteria on public comment posts on social media platforms. No comment was edited or omitted using those criteria.

Some comments were directed at groups (e.g., ""town staff" or "Town Council") or individuals by name (e.g., Gene Peace, Council member Greene). There was no editing of these comments.

Respondents were pledged confidentiality. To maintain the anonymity of comments, an edited comment is flagged, *Edit*, with the specific changes designated [   ] References to other people or positions, which would not compromise the respondent's anonymity, are unchanged.

Community Participants

1. How did you participate in the Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards? Please check all options that apply.

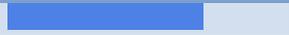| Answer		#	%
Spoke during the public comment period of a Town Council meeting		10	15%
Attended a meeting specifically about Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards		29	43%
Attended more than one meeting about Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards		18	26%
Phoned or emailed a town official		16	24%
Took a survey		20	29%
Served on a committee		24	35%
Gathered and presented information		2	3%
Other, please specify:		15	22%

Number of Respondents: 68

Other, please specify:
Attending a meeting, but not Town Council meeting
Attended a public work session on the role of environmental advisory boards
Served on library board and discussed there
Attended meetings on Advisory Board Restructuring
Serve on a board
Spoke directly with mayor and town council members
Reviewed proposal as planning board member
Made recommendations from our advisory board to Council
Did not participate
Presently serve on a commission
Attended advisory board input sessions
Attended meetings on transportation
Served on a Town Advisory Board
I am currently on Chapel Hill Planning and Advising Committee and have served on several selection committees.

Of those who selected 'other', 5 attended meetings or sessions of various nature, 6 serve on boards or a commission and discussed or reviewed the proposal there, 2 gave input to the council, 1 did not participate.

2. For your involvement in the Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards please respond by rating each statement below or choose 'not applicable'.

Question	Very much so	A medium amount	Some-what	Very little	Not at all	#	Mean
I believe my views were heard.	17	9	14	2	4	46	2.28
The participants reflected the diversity of the community.	5	9	14	8	4	40	2.93
Interaction among participants who were citizens/residents/business owners was respectful.	28	9	7	1	2	47	1.72
Interaction among participants and town staff was respectful.	37	4	5	0	2	48	1.46
Interaction among participants and town elected officials was respectful.	32	7	4	0	1	44	1.43
I learned important information through the process.	13	13	12	8	5	51	2.59
Town staff provided information in a new or interesting way.	8	13	13	4	8	46	2.80
I gained understanding of others' viewpoints.	11	22	9	2	3	47	2.23
The outcome of the public input was clear.	7	10	8	12	6	43	3.00
The outcome of the public input was satisfying.	5	11	11	9	6	42	3.00
My involvement in Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards makes me more likely to be involved in future discussions and plans for community needs.	6	13	8	2	5	34	2.62

3. What were the best parts about the public involvement? Check all that apply.

Answer		#	%
Inclusion of a diversity of people and a wide range of views		15	33%
I believe my views were respected		19	41%
I believe my views made a difference		10	22%
Better understanding among citizens – residents – business owners		15	33%
Information: created or compiled key material to help reach a good decision		14	30%
Promoted community values		13	28%
Created new alternatives		11	24%
Created feasible alternatives		12	26%
Other, please specify		14	30%

Number of Respondents: 46

Other, please specify
It felt like meetings and process were just a formality, that decisions were already made without input
I don't know the outcome of my participation
Need to eliminate unnecessary boards and committees
None
Better understood the impact of an unwieldy board structure to the cost of town staff and budget
Needs improvement
Edit - Is this survey about the advisory board restructuring or [another public involvement process]? Most of the questions imply the latter.
Was not part of this process - 2
Council member Greene was highly responsive, thorough and effective at soliciting input and advocating for effective solutions.
These questions do not relate well to the advisory board changes but are designed for development proposals.
n/a
I was impressed by our facilitators from the police and fire departments

4. What were the worst or least satisfying about the public involvement? Check all that apply.

Answer		#	%
My time commitment: not enough impact for the time I put into the issue		12	25%
I did not feel heard		3	6%
I did not feel respected		3	6%
Interaction among participants: several instances of not listening well and/or disrespect		4	8%
Staff and information: documents provided slowly or were incomplete		6	13%
Staff and information: individual contact by phone or email had a slow response		0	0%
Online survey: not clear if results were used by Town Council		7	15%
Poor set of alternatives		7	15%
Town Council – did not provide clear guidance for how public input would have an impact		15	31%
Town Council – did not follow the recommendations of the group		3	6%
Other, please specify		23	48%

Number of Respondents: 48

Other, please specify
I don't know
I had been involved in the process but I am unclear how it would affect my board.
Not enough community participation on discussions about Advisory Board restructuring
Not Applicable - 4
I am not aware of public involvement about my committee.
The advisory committee meetings at the CH Library were very poorly facilitated - the facilitators were new at it and quite submissive. Also, certain council members were very close-minded and controlling about the process of restructuring the boards. It seemed they'd unilaterally come up with a plan and were trying to jam it through without proper input from the public or other council members.
Meetings tended to lose focus
Groups did not address the scope
Lack of diversity of participants--it was the same old faces
I was not involved.
Edit – [comment about a different public participation effort].
Edit - Again, I thought I was answering a survey about advisory board restructuring. Apart from the planning board sessions, I didn't take part in the [other public involvement process].
Slow process
No worst parts. Process was okay.
Town staff leading process can be very difficult to work with and was too bound to her plan of how to lead the sessions.
None
Very good interchange between all participants

5. Other thoughts you have about your participation:

Text Response
I would have hoped to hear some follow up re: the working session. Also, no town council members attended our work session.
Much more an observer than participant
I was not on a committee that was targeted for change by the Town Council.
I was shocked at the inefficiencies.
I have gained far greater understanding about the development process in Chapel Hill as a member of its Planning Board.
The public input process could have been improved: 1) the library meeting should have been better facilitated to structure the discussion and get useful input; 2) the meetings in some respect seemed to be for show but not to truly get useful input - so that council could check a box but not really get useful input that would affect outcomes. It's great (and necessary) to get public input but not random, disorganized, uninformed, myopic input. You need to make sure that a wide range of people with informed, thoughtful perspectives participate and that input is filtered for its usefulness.
I attended two or three meeting where Gene Peace presented what the board was doing and why regarding advisory boards. He asked what we thought. These questions do not relate to the topic.
The workshops were really good and so well facilitated by the town staff.
Edit - Many of these questions seem to apply to [another public involvement process] where I was not involved. I only checked items relevant to Advisory Board changes.
I was disappointed in the communication with current Advisory Board members during the process. The timeline for implementation of the process and when Boards would be sunset was unclear, and it made it difficult for existing Boards and Committees to conduct business.
Some newer town staff seem not to accept the culture and continue to try to omit citizens from the process. Their views about development are not consistent with the culture. It is good to nudge the citizenry along toward change, but not good to omit them and forge ahead. Chapel Hill ranked 10th in best places to live because of the culture, not in spite of it.
It is not clear how the scopes of the advisory boards will be addressed; web site does not seem up to date; have had trouble finding out the results of what the Council did - not posted anywhere; next steps in "Part 2" are unclear.
The major drawback is the time commitment outside of the meetings: otherwise, I am very satisfied with my participation and experience in the advisory board.
Very good interchange

6. Your connections to Chapel Hill. Check all that apply, please.

Answer		#	%
I am a student at the university		1	2%
I work in Chapel Hill		17	38%
I live in Chapel Hill		35	78%
I have a business in Chapel Hill		7	16%
I visit Chapel Hill		4	9%
Other:		8	18%

Number of Respondents: 45

Other:
I was invited as a representative of a state agency
I live in Orange County
Edit- Member of Chapel Hill Public Arts Commission [spelled out CHPAC].
My position is supported by all four local governments and I help represent affordable housing stakeholders.
I live in the Joint Planning Area and am on Planning Board
Storm water board member
UNC employee, work in Durham
Lived in Chapel Hill, moved to Carrboro

7. Gender

Answer		Response	%
Male		24	55%
Female		20	45%
Total		**44**	**100%**

8. Your age

Answer		#	%
Age between 10 and 22		1	2%
Age between 23 and 30		3	7%
Age between 31 and 45		9	20%
Age between 46 and 55		10	23%
Age between 56 and 65		10	23%
Age 66 or older		11	25%
Total		**44**	**100%**

9. Race/ethnic/national identification

Answer		#	%
African-American		3	7%
Asian-American		0	0%
Caucasian		36	84%
Hispanic/Latino		0	0%
Native American		1	2%
Citizen of another country (e.g., Canada, Brazil)		0	0%
Other:		3	7%
Total		**43**	**100%**

Other:
Multi-ethnic
Mixed: Hispanic and Caucasian

Staff Members

1. What was your role in the Restructuring of Town Advisory Boards? Please choose the option(s) that best describe your involvement (select all that apply).

Answer		#	%
Project leader or co-leader		0	0%
Data and expertise: provide information/analysis, make presentation/s		2	8%
Provide resources to the project leader/s or other key staff		8	32%
Communication and Outreach		2	8%
Meeting management (facilitation, etc.)		10	40%
Other, please specify:		6	24%

Total number of respondents: 21

Other, please specify:
Staff Liaison for Existing Town Advisory Board
Staff liaison to an advisory board - provided information when requested (not often) and attended a couple of meetings to receive updates
Director of Town Department
Provided information from staff liaison perspective
Aid in meetings
Board liaison

The 2 staff members who indicated that their focus was on communication and outreach were asked to specify their role ('plan and advise', 'execute', 'other'). One selected an executive role. The other characterized the involvement as '*information conduit between commission and the project coordinator*'.

2. The time I invested in this project was...

Answer		Response	%
Too much		1	4%
About Right		18	78%
Too Little		4	17%
Total		**23**	**100%**

3. Comments:

Text Response
I invested a great deal of time, but felt that it was needed in order to adequately address the needs of the community.
Started slow but speeded up at the end input was more intensive at the end of the process.
With the exception of our "debriefing" after each meeting night, everything was timely
I did not feel like my input was valued in any decision making
My input wasn't asked for.

4. This project gave me an opportunity to develop my public involvement skills:

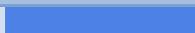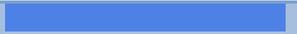| Answer		Response	%
Not at all		4	22%
A little		1	6%
A moderate amount		5	28%
To a great degree		8	44%
Total		**18**	**100%**

5. Comments:

Text Response
Absolutely, I gained a lot of experience and involvement skills in dealing with the community, in a different light than that of what my job with the town requires.
I would welcome opportunities for the public, Council, etc. to come visit us at work to more directly see and understand what we do.

6. This project gave me an opportunity to help other staff

Question	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	To a great degree	#	Mean
Develop their public involvement skills	5	3	9	2	19	3.42
Develop their project management skills	7	3	7	2	19	3.21

7. What were the best parts about the public involvement work? Check all that apply.
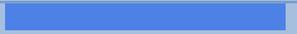
Answer		#	%
Inclusion of a diversity of people and a wide range of views		13	59%
Reasonable workload for me		4	18%
Reasonable workload for my staff collaborators on this topic		1	5%
Better understanding among participants		10	45%
Information: created or compiled key material to help reach a good decision		8	36%
Promoted community values		12	55%
Created new alternatives		5	23%
Created feasible alternatives		5	23%
The changes from the developer/staff's initial proposal were clear improvements		2	9%
Other, please specify		4	18%
Timeline was not altered (no "new things" from senior administrators or Town Council)		2	9%
The outcome of the work was professionally satisfying		9	41%
Different views by participants (citizens, businesses, etc.)		13	59%

Total Responses: 22

Other, please specify
It was interesting to see how a group of citizens felt about this change which would ultimately affect them.
On the periphery of this project
The Community Design Commission discussed the reorganization and came up with recommendations that they presented to Council and was accepted.
Did not participate in public involvement

Those who indicated that the different views by the participants were among the best parts of the public participation process, 12 of 13 responded about **how the outcome reflected different views:**

Answer		#	%
Participants reached a minimal compromise		4	33%
Participants reached a strong compromise		4	33%
Participants reached a consensus that went beyond obvious compromise choices		4	33%
Total		**12**	**100%**
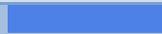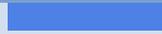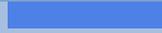
8. What were the worst or least satisfying parts about the public involvement? Check all that apply.

Answer		#	%
Interaction among participants: several instances of not listening well and/or disrespect		2	10%
My workload for this process		1	5%
Staff workload for this process		4	19%
Staff and information: individual contact by phone or email had a slow response		1	5%
Poor set of alternatives		1	5%
Town Council – did not provide clear guidance for how public input would have an impact		3	14%
Town Council – did not follow the recommendations of the group		0	0%
Other, please specify		8	38%
I did not receive the support I needed from supervisors/top administrators		0	0%
Timeline was altered (New things were added by senior administrators or Town Council)		1	5%
Town Council – did not support the process (allowed for "end runs" or favored an outcome while group was developing or considering alternatives)		3	14%
Different views by participants (citizens, businesses, etc.) were left unresolved		4	19%

Total number of respondents: 21

Other, please specify
Not Applicable - 2
I don't know what you mean by this question
Some citizens tried to push their agendas based on their previous experience serving on Town Boards. In particular those that served on the Planning Board thought that they were the ones that make all the decisions and the rest of the Boards are not important.
Not enough time for second phase
As a staff participant, there was not much work to do.
Groups did not have clear direction of how their input would be used because the end goal was still not set in stone.
Did not participate in public involvement process

Follow-up questions:
One staff member who indicated that the personal workload was among the least satisfying aspects of public participation was asked to specify the view of personal workload ('More than expected, 'An unreasonable overload (RE: queries from Town Council, participants or others)', 'Much more than expected'). The respondent selected 'more than expected' as a choice.

Four staff members indicated that the general staff workload was among the least satisfying aspects of public participation. They were asked to specify how they perceived staff workload ('More than expected, 'An unreasonable overload (RE: queries from Town

Council, participants or others)', 'Much more than expected'). All four respondents selected 'more than expected' as a choice.

Four staff members indicated being unsatisfied that different views by participants were left unresolved in the public participation process. They were asked to specify how they perceived this aspect ('Staff was expected to bridge differences: this was unreasonable', 'No bridging of differences – issue will just come back', 'Opinions were hardened and more polarized than at start'). Two selected the option 'No bridging of differences', and two selected 'More polarized than at start'.

9. Lessons or other reflections to share:

Text Response
This opportunity gave me a better understanding of who we serve which helps with the day to day operations when responding to calls for serve
I found the experience very rewarding. I think the process (reducing # of Town Advisory Boards) is critical to the future success of the Boards. I believe Jennifer Phillips did a wonderful job as Facilitator and organizer of the meetings.
Enjoyed the experience. Found that during some sessions, end results were altered slightly to allow for satisfying those community members present.
Have the information disseminated in a more timely manner.
The format for this project was close to working but not good. The small groups had good discussion but then to bring those ideas into a large group created redundant work and created a lot of backtracking, repetition, and aggravation among the participants. Facilitation of the large group was also patronizing and lengthy.
Overall, I believe community involvement like this is positive, and opportunities for Town employees to work with the public in these types of projects is helpful - The public gets to meet us, and we get to see things from the citizen's point of view. It is also beneficial to get to work with and interact with employees from different departments.   On the other side of the coin, public participation in things like this is usually limited to the most vocal and opinionated. In some instances we may have missed some valuable ideas and concerns from those less vocal or unable to participate. Also, follow-up is needed to be sure "parking lot" issues and concerns don't fall through the cracks and remain unaddressed. The Council must not focus on just the "political hot buttons" or fiscal elements to the exclusion of less visible concerns/ideas/issues.
It was great to work with folks from other departments as a facilitator. It built rapport and camaraderie across various disciplines and town departments.
Edit - I would have liked to be more involved from the beginning of the process to have a clearer understanding of the goals and why the change was necessary. This would have helped me to better relay the "message" to staff and to our boards and commissions. Our previous [department director] either wasn't involved or kept a lot of it to himself. Since I am the [department position], I find that I don't have enough information to explain the process and give it it's due.
None
Edit - There needs to be greater communications between Department heads with projects that involve intra [Inter?]-department teams. Team responsibilities and staff expectations should be fully understood and agreed to between Department head, and communicated to team members, before the project begins.