

ENGAGE Lincoln City

A Framework for Communicating and Engaging with Our Community

FINAL PLAN

September 2026

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Welcome!

And THANK YOU for taking this first step in making Lincoln City a better place to live, learn, work, and play.

ENGAGE Lincoln City is a partnership with City staff, elected officials, and community members. Our goal is to involve more people in the decisions that impact them. We want to improve COMMUNICATION, LISTEN better, and create opportunities to work TOGETHER.

The ENGAGE Community Engagement Plan is a result of the work done to complete the City's Comprehensive Plan which set a 20-year vision for our community. The Comp Plan, adopted in 2023, included an objective to create an inclusive and transparent program for engaging our community. Completion of ENGAGE meets that important goal and allows us to begin the next step of implementation—where the real work begins.

For the ENGAGE Plan to succeed, we need YOU—business owners, parents, members of the media, young people, retirees, neighbors, City staff, and community leaders. ALL of us make up the community of Lincoln City and we each have unique skills, experience, and perspectives that can make a difference.

But not if we don't share them and not if we don't listen to one another.

Thank you to the members of our Ad Hoc Committee for contributing your time, energy, and your perspective, and thank you to those of you who participated in our workshop, visited our website, or commented on ENGAGE. You really did make a difference.

Executive Summary

The ENGAGE Lincoln City Plan, or **ENGAGE**, presents a framework for how the City communicates with, listens to, and engages the community in decisions that shape Lincoln City's future. Developed in response to the Lincoln City Comprehensive Plan, ENGAGE supports more inclusive, transparent, and meaningful engagement to build trust and improve decision-making.

ENGAGE is not a single program or checklist. Instead, it establishes shared values, goals, and strategies to guide engagement across City departments, boards, commissions, and projects. The framework supports consistent practices while ensuring flexibility to tailor engagement that reflects the scale, complexity, and community impact of specific decisions.

Creating the plan was a collaborative effort that included an Ad Hoc Committee representing diverse community perspectives, a public community workshop, and ongoing coordination with the Planning Commission. Community input helped identify local priorities, barriers to participation, and the need for clearer communication about how decisions are made and how public input is used.

ENGAGE is grounded in five core values: accessibility, transparency, respect, collaboration, and accountability. These values guide all communication and engagement activities and reflect the community's desire for processes that are welcoming, understandable, and responsive.

The plan organizes strategies around five goals: improving communication, expanding engagement, strengthening listening practices, supporting better decision-making, and evaluating progress over time. As the plan is implemented, residents can expect clearer information, more engagement options beyond traditional public hearings, and improved follow-through showing how input influences outcomes.

Implementation will occur in three phases—Quick Wins, Structural Improvements, and Walking the Talk—with progress tracked through evaluation measures and regular reporting. After these three phases, ENGAGE is intended to be a living framework that will evolve with the community to ensure engagement remains meaningful and effective as we grow and change over time.

PART I INTRODUCTION

Developing the Plan



AD HOC COMMITTEE

The ENGAGE Community Engagement Plan has been developed with ongoing input from our Ad Hoc Committee. This group was made up of diverse members of our community and represents various neighborhoods, ages, interests, income levels, and cultures. The group met for two hours approximately once a month from August 2025 until June 2026. They learned about Lincoln City government and shared their thoughts about how they would like to be included. In turn, City staff learned more about the broader community through their participation. This document incorporates their input within the values, goals, objectives, and strategies presented. A summary of findings from these meetings is provided in the Appendix.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Members of the public were invited to join staff and members of the Ad Hoc Committee at a workshop on March 31, 2026. The workshop was held at the Lincoln City Cultural Center for the purpose of getting more input regarding public priorities and concerns relating to communication and engagement strategies. More than twenty people attended the event to ask questions and contribute new ideas. A summary of the workshop is included in the Appendix.



PLANNING COMMISSION

The Planning Commission was instrumental in establishing the need for a Community Engagement Plan, incorporating specific policies and objectives into the Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in December 2023. Work sessions with the Commission in early 2025 helped to develop the process and timeline for

creation of the plan which is included in the Appendix. The Planning Commission also recommended the development of the Ad Hoc Committee to serve in an advisory capacity to ensure a more diverse set of interests were represented. Staff have provided ENGAGE updates to the Planning Commission throughout the plan development.

Building Community Trust

As we implement the recommendations in ENGAGE, we want to be aware of an unstated but very real challenge—that of building and/or rebuilding trust from the community. Overcoming both the real and the perceived historical barriers to meaningful two-way communication will be an ongoing task for staff and decision-makers. Why?

- Trust is something that we earn over a ***long period of time***. It is not just automatically granted to governments of any size. In addition, under-represented communities have experienced a long history of being disenfranchised, and memories will not fade quickly. On the flip side—damaging or losing trust can happen overnight.
- Simplifying a website or facilitating a successful focus group can be accomplished by individuals or by a staff team. Building trust will require ***contributions from across the City organization***, including elected officials, on an ongoing basis.
- Trust-building will rely upon our ability to successfully deliver on ***many other components of this plan***, such as reducing barriers to participation, ensuring transparency, providing accurate documentation and follow-through, and making better decisions.
- Unlike the completion of a construction project or the initiation of a program, the work associated with building community trust is an ***everyday activity***. Ongoing, consistent, and responsive community engagement through changes in personnel and leadership will be required to maintain the momentum gained with the completion of this plan.
- People throughout Lincoln City will be part of the solution, but they will also be watching to see *if* and *how* we conduct community engagement moving forward. Although missteps will happen, we can't afford any significant oversights—leaving out key stakeholders, not providing information in a timely manner, or ignoring community input. ***Our community will be paying attention.***

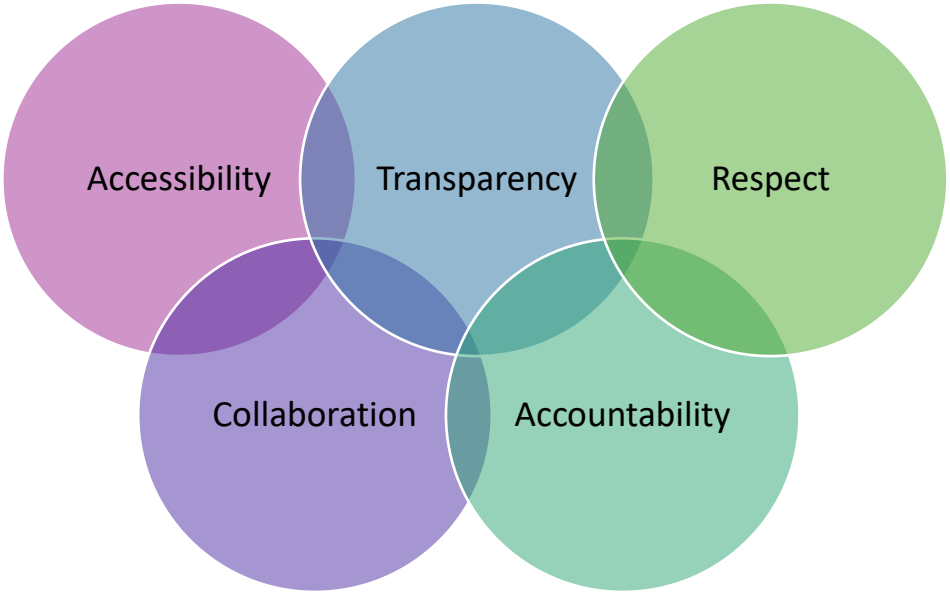
Key Terms and Concepts

The following core concepts and terms are used throughout this document. A concise definition of each is provided to ensure common understanding for all users of the ENGAGE plan.

Barriers	The actual and perceived obstacles faced by community members as they try to be heard. Examples include lack of time, inaccessibility, poor communication, and lack of trust in the process.
Community	A particular area or place—such as Lincoln City--considered together with its inhabitants.
Demographics	Statistical information about our population and how it compares to other communities, the state, or the nation as a whole, including age, gender, education, employment and income, and race/ethnicity.
Engagement	The process of involving members of a community to measure community needs, acknowledge shared values, and build understanding for making decisions about the future.
Input	Information staff and public officials receive from the community regarding their fears, hopes, ideas, interests, and perspectives.
Leadership	The ENGAGE Plan uses this term to apply to City staff who are directly responsible for supporting the City Council in setting priorities, carrying out initiatives, and making decisions that advance community goals
Outreach	The messages and information an organization proactively sends out to the community.
Stakeholder	Individuals and groups interested, involved, or impacted by decisions.

Core Values

The ENGAGE Community Engagement Plan reflects the following core values that have been distilled from the Comprehensive Plan and acknowledged by the ENGAGE Lincoln City Ad Hoc Committee:



- **Accessibility.** Information is easy to find and easy to understand so that people of all abilities are able to learn about and feel comfortable enough to participate. All community members—including those who are often underrepresented —have a meaningful voice.
- **Transparency.** Deliberations are conducted publicly, and the City is open and clear about information, processes, and decisions. Community members see how their input impacts decisions.
- **Respect.** Engagement activities foster an environment of mutual respect, and all members of the community feel valued and heard.
- **Collaboration.** Decisions are stronger and more supported because they are informed by the collective knowledge and lived experiences of all Lincoln City community members working together.
- **Accountability.** Both decision-makers and community members take ownership of their respective roles and responsibilities in working for an improved future for Lincoln City.

The goals, strategies and tools that are presented in this document are intended to put these values into action.

Key Goals

Lincoln City establishes these five primary goals for effective and successful community engagement:



TO COMMUNICATE:

More people—and more types of people—are **informed** enough to participate in the decisions that impact them.



TO ENGAGE:

More people—and more types of people—are **involved** in decisions that impact them.



TO LISTEN:

Community members feel **heard** and know decision-makers are listening.



TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS:

We make better, more informed, and more equitable **decisions** to move our community forward.



TO EVALUATE:

We continue to grow and improve our community engagement program by **measuring** our progress to know we are heading in the right direction.

Barriers to Engagement

To ensure everyone has a real chance to participate we must recognize and reduce the barriers that keep people from accessing information, joining public processes, or feeling heard. These barriers affect people differently based on age, culture, language, income, and ability. Prior to developing our objectives and strategies, we worked on identifying those barriers that are most prevalent in our community, but this work will be ongoing as we conduct engagement that is more reflective of the whole community.

Barriers should be acknowledged and addressed within each engagement program, and include the following:

- ***Structural barriers*** that arise from the design of systems, schedules, and processes that unintentionally exclude participants, include:
  - Meetings held at times that conflict with work or caregiving;
  - Lack of transportation or the cost of gas and need for childcare;
  - Alternatives to in-person meetings are not considered;
  - Activity locations favor some neighborhoods more than others; and
  - Long or complex processes that require inordinate commitments of time.

- Newly available digital tools can expand participation but also challenge residents who may have limited access or comfort with ***technology:***
  - Limited or unreliable internet access;
  - Lack of devices or shared household technology;
  - No or limited digital literacy;
  - Websites, forms, or engagement tools that are not mobile-friendly; and
  - Overreliance on digital methods without providing alternatives.

- People with different physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities face obstacles that may limit their ability to participate fully. ***Accessibility*** barriers include:
  - Lack of sign language interpretation or captioning;
  - Documents that are not screen-reader compatible;
  - Visual materials without alternative text or plain-language options;
  - Meeting spaces that lack proper physical access; and
  - Materials that use complex layouts, tiny fonts, color combinations, or jargon.

- ***Language and cultural differences*** can prevent individuals from fully understanding, trusting, or feeling welcome in government processes:
  - No consideration to provide translated materials or interpretation;
  - Meeting locations, activities, or communications that don't reflect cultural or community contexts;
  - Public speaking forums that feel intimidating and unfamiliar; and
  - Outreach that doesn't resonate with culturally diverse groups.

- Past ***experiences or perceptions*** of government processes can influence whether people feel safe participating:
  - Previous experiences of being ignored, dismissed, or disrespected;
  - Perceptions that decisions will not be equitable or fair to all;
  - Fear of negative repercussions, especially in small communities; and
  - Limited evidence that community input is connected to decision-making.

- Lack of ***clarity***—not providing compelling information about what decisions are being made, why participation matters, or how the overall process works:
  - Lengthy and overly technical documents used for background information;
  - Lack of concise and plain-language summaries;
  - Insufficient context about the overall purpose or goals driving a project or decision; and
  - Confusion about roles and responsibilities of staff, elected officials, and community members.

Understanding the implications of each type of barrier is essential to building a more inclusive engagement process and increasing participation by more people in our community.

PART II OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Communication

ENGAGE Lincoln City recommends a number of strategies on the following pages. The goal of the strategies in this section is **to inform more people—and more types of people—about the decisions that impact them**. These include improving our existing communication tools and proposing new ways to share information.

Communication Objectives

The following priority objectives provide the framework for all of our recommended communication strategies:

- Ensure ***accessibility*** of information to community members with a range of abilities, incomes, ages, and learning styles;
- Build ***civic knowledge*** so that people feel knowledgeable and comfortable enough to engage;
- Find ways to ***promote*** key communication tools and information to increase the number of people who access and use City resources;
- Improve the function and friendliness of the City's ***websites,*** expand the use of ***public media,*** and utilize ***social media*** platforms more effectively;
- Develop an ***email outreach program*** to provide public information via email directly to affected individuals and to augment required notices mailed to property owners; and
- Implement a new program to improve ***internal communication*** to and among City staff and empower employees to serve as ambassadors to the community.

Communication Strategies



ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY

To ensure information is accessible to a range of abilities, incomes, ages, and learning styles:

- Identify and eliminate barriers to communication and participation on an ongoing basis;
- Address the needs of people with a full spectrum of abilities and disabilities, including vision, hearing, and movement;
- Apply readability standards to public communication and public facing documents;
- Use a variety of communication tools that help people who learn through written, verbal, or visual means;

- Recognize cultural differences that accompany language differences, create awareness, and build cultural competency;
- Provide information in ways that accommodate varying levels of comfort and confidence with technology; and
- Seek technology that allows for ongoing accessibility and translation accommodations.



BUILD CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

To increase community understanding about the ways local government works and to ensure people feel confident about participating:

- Improve overall knowledge of the City and departments so that people can more easily identify where to go for resources;
- Link civic information hubs with emergency notification networks to ensure residents are aware of these resources before a crisis;
- Identify the most frequently asked questions and develop strong communication aimed at addressing these core issues;
- Provide background information that defines the role of staff, residents, advocates, and elected officials in the decision making process; and
- Identify sources of misinformation and look for best ways to counteract.



PROMOTE INFORMATION RESOURCES

To increase the use of and access to City information tools through promotion and outreach:

- Conduct outreach to welcome new community members and connect them with resources and opportunities for involvement;
- Use messages that truly motivate people to read, attend, speak, and participate;
- Present the City as a welcoming place where all are invited to participate; and
- Emulate the news and entertainment balance of small local newspapers, adding local interest items like sports, games, and human interest stories.

IMPROVE AND ENHANCE WEBSITES

To increase the use and friendliness of the City's existing web-based platforms, including the main site and the engagement platform:

- Establish and implement a website management policy throughout all city departments and service areas;
- Continuously test and improve all webpages, identify ways to automate updates and implement changes across the system;
- Review and report system analytics and consider changes based on findings;
- Make better connections between the ENGAGE platform, the main website, and various department hubs to ensure there are no "dead ends;"
- Ensure consistency between the front page calendar on main website to Agenda/Minutes;
- Ensure the website has the ability to easily conform to other formats, i.e., phone vs. laptop, and to various browsers;
- Provide clear links between similar program areas provided across Departments, such as grant opportunities or permits;
- Conduct ongoing upgrades that incorporate language translation and work to improve the quality of translation;
- Place key City website links on websites frequently visited by Spanish speakers;
- Seek out Spanish speakers who use the City's websites to request feedback on needed website improvements;
- Develop a site map, home base, or other universal landing spot with a basic introduction to the City before users have to select a specific department or service;
- Pursue technologies or applications such as a Bot or AI that can serve as a more helpful and intuitive website guide; and
- Utilize non-experts, such as community ambassadors or other users, to continuously evaluate the friendliness and usefulness of the website and other communication tools.

EXPAND THE USE OF TRADITIONAL PUBLIC MEDIA

To leverage limited local media sources, such as radio and print news, and to go beyond disseminating press releases:

- Develop guidelines for the use of public media;
- Improve partnerships with local media to identify common goals for keeping the community informed;

- Seek ways to support existing media outlets through subscriptions, paid advertisements, access to information, and by sharing resources;
- Work with media and education partners to establish a more interconnected public information infrastructure;
- Research Spanish language print media available locally to expand outreach to this demographic group; and
- Include Spanish language radio stations in press releases and public information notifications.



UTILIZE SOCIAL MEDIA MORE EFFECTIVELY

To utilize social media primarily to direct a broader audience to available City resources:

- Assess various social media applications for their suitability to reach specific demographics and stakeholder types;
- Develop guidelines for the use of social media to increase the number and diversity of people reached through this media;
- Expand use of video messages to reach a broader audience with a more dynamic type of message;
- Make more connections—link the City Facebook page with Instagram, with ENGAGE Lincoln City, and with YouTube;
- Find ways to be more dynamic and to move from space to space more fluidly;
- Energize City postings and use them to excite and engage the community in a more dynamic way;
- Employ more conversational methods, use videos, tell stories;
- Take advantage of social media apps that have successfully worked in an interconnected international space and that have already overcome some language and cultural barriers;
- Research Spanish language social media sites and work to make key connections to increase outreach to non-English speakers; and
- Connect with diverse stakeholders to leverage their preferred social media networks.



INITIATE A NEW PROGRAM FOR BETTER EMAIL OUTREACH

To provide public information via email directly to affected individuals and to augment required notices mailed to property owners:

- Incorporate language within notices to request email addresses for future outreach;

- Develop an extensive email database of stakeholders and stakeholder groups for various project types, neighborhoods, and/or issues;
- Connect with email communication networks established by other community partners;
- Develop notification templates to include an information overview, key issues, vicinity maps, and contact information;
- Use email to reach non-property owners, such as business owners who lease property, and those who live in rented homes or apartments;
- Document specific communication needs and preferences, e.g., Spanish or other language translation services or alternate formats;
- Conduct staff trainings as needed; and
- Evaluate the successes and lessons learned of the email communication program over time.



IMPLEMENT A NEW INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

To improve communication to and among City staff, and to empower employees to be effective ambassadors to the community:

- Develop guidelines that build an organizational culture based on excellent communication;
- Provide City employees with regular opportunities to learn and ask questions about issues and decisions impacting the community;
- Develop communication policies to ensure all staff receive consistent, accurate, relevant, and timely messages;
- Ensure that City employees are trained and informed enough to be good representatives of the City;
- Increase the number of bilingual staff and consider making Spanish language courses more accessible to staff interested in career development;
- Recognize cultural differences that accompany language differences, create awareness, and build cultural competency; and
- Build public confidence that City staff appreciate questions and comments and that people will be treated respectfully.

Communication Measures

We will know that we are making progress when:

PROJECT INITIATION

	Communication strategies are initiated
	Email outreach program is initiated
	Internal communication program is initiated

EARLY PHASE

	Staff receive training in communication
	Key public information resources are translated into Spanish
	Procedures are in place to respond to most languages
	Cultural awareness training is provided
	Video messages are developed
	More visual aids, diagrams, maps, and timelines are provided

ONE YEAR EVALUATION

	More registered users are using ENGAGE portal More diverse registered users are using ENGAGE portal
	More community members feel knowledgeable about local government More diverse community members feel knowledgeable about local government
	More people use the City websites More diverse people use the City websites
	More people follow the City Facebook page More diverse people follow the City Facebook page
	More people added to email distribution lists More diverse people added to email distribution lists

Measurement Tools

- ❑ Planning Department Annual Report (existing)
- ❑ ENGAGE portal analytics (existing)
- ❑ Lincoln City Website analytics (existing)
- ❑ Regularly scheduled Community Survey (proposed)

Engagement

The strategies presented in this section work hand-in-hand with the Communication Strategies described in the preceding section. The goal of this section is to engage more people—and more types of people—in the decision-making process, and ultimately to make better, more supported decisions. This work will not only improve community engagement, but it will also expand our community capacity for improved dialogue, effective conflict resolution, informed decision-making, and problem-solving.

Committee members identified a number of project and program types as high priorities for more intentional community engagement, including community needs assessments, long-range vision and strategic plans, major City funding changes, natural resource impacts, and key public health and safety choices.

Engagement Objectives

Recommended engagement strategies include improvements to existing methods as well as several new proposals to meet the following priority objectives:

- Support informed engagement by ***connecting participants*** to information and resources that build civic knowledge;
- Ensure a ***range of engagement opportunities*** that are accessible and inviting to community members of varying abilities, incomes, ages, and learning styles;
- Stay apprised of community ***demographics*** to note trends that may impact communication and engagement of underrepresented groups;
- Create clear and understandable ***messages*** about engagement and decision-making processes from beginning to end, including diagrams or other visual representations of process timelines, key outcomes, and input opportunities;
- Proactively ***promote and encourage participation*** through a variety of methods to increase the number and diversity of participants;
- Record, document, and synthesize ***community input*** in ways that are easy for the public to understand and follow, and that answer the key questions needed for decision-making;
- Define the ***roles and responsibilities*** for all participants, including community members, stakeholder groups, City staff, consultants, members of the media and elected officials;
- Continue to improve ***current engagement tools*** and practices to be more inclusive and to attract more active participants; and

- Develop and implement ***new engagement programs*** such as a community ambassador program, surveys and polls to validate qualitative data, create project-specific tools, and consider an engagement advisory committee.

Engagement Strategies



CONNECT PARTICIPANTS TO INFORMATION

To support informed engagement, ensure that participants have easy access to the project-specific information they need:

- Create a centralized project information hub that is easy to find;
- Utilize project or program stakeholder email contact lists to allow for consistent project communication and updates;
- Maintain a public-facing project web page that shares project details, including budgets and timelines;
- Provide direct contact information for assigned staff and consultants;
- Link projects and programs with stated community goals and values;
- Outline specific rules and regulations that apply to potential outcomes; and
- Clarify who is authorized to make final decisions, and the basis for authorization.



PROVIDE DIVERSE OPPORTUNITIES

To increase participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, including those with a range of abilities, schedules, ages, languages, and learning styles:

- Improve traditional engagement activities, such as public hearings and town halls, by addressing key barriers to participation;
- Provide online options, such as polls, surveys, or electronic forums for more tech-savvy individuals, and for those who may not be able to attend in-person hearings;
- Provide information verbally, graphically, and in writing and utilize comment sheets in English and Spanish to encourage input from people not comfortable with public speaking; and
- Conduct in-person interviews or focus groups to address specific issues of underrepresented groups, such as youth, people experiencing homelessness, or non-English speakers, tailoring the engagement tools to their specific needs.



UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY

To keep engagement relevant to the specific needs of the larger Lincoln City community:

- Conduct regular reviews of local demographic trends that may impact investments in communication and engagement of underrepresented groups;
- Provide relevant current data to inform project-specific engagement activities;
- Seek ways to measure inclusion and participation of diverse groups and adjust engagement strategies as needed; and
- Adjust ongoing outreach as needed to ensure inclusion of underrepresented groups, especially youth, families with younger children, senior adults, people with diverse cultural, educational, and language characteristics, renters, low income individuals, and persons with disabilities.



CLARIFY ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS

To ensure participants and decision-makers are clear about engagement processes from beginning to end:

- Include diagrams or other visual representations of process timelines;
- Spell out key questions that community input will help to answer;
- Clearly identify opportunities for input and the degree to which input can impact final outcomes;
- Include findings from community engagement activities in final documents and show how the findings were used to make decisions; and
- Continue communication through decision-making to implementation and share results of the post-engagement evaluation.



PROMOTE PARTICIPATION

To show a willingness to involve the community and to communicate the values of engagement:

- Promote the ENGAGE Plan as an important commitment to good governance;
- Incorporate community engagement values into other relevant documents, plans, and messages;
- Advertise various ways to be engaged, including the City's website, public hearings and town halls, community surveys;

- Find ways to acknowledge participants and to express appreciation for public input; and
- Utilize all types of media to invite interested parties to participate in community projects; include Spanish-language focused outlets.



MAKE INPUT A USEFUL RESOURCE

To ensure that community input from engagement activities serves the purpose of informing decision-makers:

- Record and document community input in a clear and concise manner that relates directly to program objectives;
- Synthesize community input so that findings respond to project-specific questions and decisions;
- Document discussions to clarify majority, minority, and/or consensus support for different options, and describe areas of conflict or confusion;
- Allow opportunities for participants to question, refine, or challenge components of the findings and conclusions made by staff; and
- Include requests for additional information as background for next steps or as context to consider findings.



CLARIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To provide an efficient and effective way for all participants to understand their unique contributions:

- Ensure community members are aware of how City government works and of the types of decisions that could affect them;
- Communicate the need for and value of stakeholder input;
- Define roles for participants from project initiation to project completion;
- Describe the tasks and work products that will be provided by City staff and consultants; and
- Clearly state the roles and responsibilities of advisory boards and committees, Planning Commissioners, and elected officials as they incorporate engagement into decision-making.



IMPROVE CURRENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

To be more inclusive and to attract more active participants:

- Increase opportunities for two-way communication through the City's websites and in public meetings;

- Utilize the ENGAGE portal as a centralized project hub with access to information, contacts, timelines, and engagement opportunities;
- Expand the availability of Spanish language materials and be aware of any other language needs;
- Incorporate Lincoln City demographic information and comparative data;
- Develop and maintain community-wide and issue-specific stakeholder contact lists to support effective and targeted communication and engagement;
- Increase the use of online public meetings and discussion forums, polls, and surveys to seek additional input; and
- Measure online activity and participation from the community as a whole and from underrepresented groups.



INITIATE A COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

To increase the overall capacity for public engagement and to take advantage of existing communication networks:

- Develop a draft program description for discussion by the community, Planning Commission and City Council;
- Clarify program goals, timelines, participant characteristics, training ideas, and needed resources;
- Research similar programs in other communities;
- Identify participants to assist in testing a model program;
- Complement the program with informal community hubs to be used for posting information in trusted spaces;
- Consider the potential for future neighborhood organizations that may arise from the program; and
- Evaluate successes and lessons learned in order to inform and improve next steps.



INVEST IN SURVEYS/POLLS TO VALIDATE QUALITATIVE DATA

To help validate qualitative public input gathered through community engagement:

- Conduct a statistically valid community survey on a consistent basis;
- Establish key goals/outcomes for quantitative data collection;
- Set schedule for conducting regular baseline surveys;
- Research estimated costs and identify funding;
- Incorporate demographic data to support results;

- Translate surveys into Spanish or utilize interpreters to maximize participation;
- Use survey questions to also inform and educate residents; and
- Collect email addresses to support follow-up communication.



CREATE A TOOLKIT FOR PROJECT SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT

To provide guidance for using community engagement strategies at a project level:

- Develop a toolkit to apply to specific projects, such as Comprehensive Plan Updates, visioning plans, zoning code updates, and large public infrastructure and park development projects;
- Describe the stakeholder identification process;
- Provide guidance for selecting strategies based on the spectrum of public engagement published by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2);
- Develop standard operating procedures for outreach, public workshops, focus groups, surveys, project evaluations, and summary findings reports; and
- Define staff training needs.



ACTIVATE THE PLANNING COMMISSION TO SERVE AS THE CCI

To fulfill the minimum requirements of Statewide Planning Goal One for a Committee on Citizen Involvement (CCI):

- Define the core responsibilities of the CCI;
- Identify annual reporting guidelines; and
- Prepare and disseminate annual report of required engagement related to land use planning.



ESTABLISH AN ENGAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

To implement the ENGAGE Plan and to provide ongoing evaluation of communication and engagement activities:

- Define the responsibilities of the committee and its relationship to the Planning Commission/CCI;
- Set membership guidelines to maximize participation of underrepresented groups;
- Utilize the committee to assess key metrics and performance measures for ongoing evaluation and improvement of engagement activities; and
- Identify annual reporting guidelines.

Engagement Measures

We will know that we are making progress when:

PROJECT INITIATION

	Engagement strategies are initiated
	Community Ambassador Program is initiated
	Project-specific Community Engagement kit is developed
	Statistically valid community survey is initiated
	Community Engagement Advisory Committee is considered

EARLY PHASE

	More projects/programs include community engagement activities
	More projects/programs include diverse types of community engagement activities
	Community demographics are updated on a regular basis
	More projects are included on the ENGAGE portal
	More community engagement activities are included for projects on the ENGAGE portal
	Community engagement summary reports are developed
	Decision-makers are aware of and have access to community engagement results

ONE YEAR EVALUATION

	More participants understand programs and projects More diverse types of participants understand programs and projects
	More people are aware of community engagement activities More diverse people are aware of community engagement activities
	More people participate in community engagement activities More diverse people participate in community engagement activities
	Community members, City staff, City Council, and other boards and committees understand their roles and responsibilities engaging in and contributing to decision-making processes
	More community members see positive and meaningful results from engagement More diverse community members see positive and meaningful results from engagement

Measurement Tools

- ❑ Planning Department Annual Report (existing)
- ❑ ENGAGE portal analytics (existing)
- ❑ Lincoln City Website analytics (existing)
- ❑ Regularly scheduled Community Survey (proposed)
- ❑ Community Engagement Annual Report (proposed)

Listening

Listening is obviously a core component of our Communication Strategies. The following objectives were created to speak specifically to the goal of ensuring our community members feel heard—making sure they know that decision-makers are listening.

Listening Objectives

The following priority objectives provide the framework for our recommended listening strategies:

- Consider listening as a ***proactive strategy*** for improving communication;
- Illustrate how input is received and processed by providing clear and accessible records, and ensure that we ***"close the loop"*** with our communication and engagement work; and
- Seek ways to ***acknowledge community contributions*** to improved communication and engagement.

Listening Strategies



LISTEN PROACTIVELY

To ensure that the City is in a position to learn about and understand local issues before they are formally communicated by the public:

- Attend community events and meetings of stakeholder organizations to meet community members where they are;
- Seek ongoing input from frontline staff to learn about trends in customer service issues and information requests;
- Subscribe to a variety of local news sources and monitor relevant community discussions and issues;
- Inventory opportunities to listen, and delegate assignments throughout the organization as applicable;
- Improve two-way communication beyond current public comment within Council meetings and consider more frequent town halls or open houses to allow opportunities for questions and answers; and
- Create a centralized hub of community conversations as a staff resource.



CLOSE THE LOOP--FROM INPUT TO DECISIONS

To show responsiveness to public input, and to show critical paths between input and output—where listening is happening:

- Clearly delineate what we heard, what we did (or will do), and what we will not do;
- Clarify how input from a wide variety of sources—written comments, public testimony, online forums, focus groups, or other—is brought together, compiled and utilized collectively;
- Communicate and reinforce the value of "closing the loop" with constituents who request information or provide substantive comments; and
- Identify and address misinformation or misconceptions about City programs and policies.



ACKNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

To build community trust in City decision-making, and to encourage additional participation:

- Honor the time and energy participants contribute to improving their community and sharing their ideas;
- Elevate underrepresented voices to ensure fair and equitable decision-making;
- Identify community voices that may still be missing; and
- Identify ways to monitor, evaluate, and improve the overall responsiveness of the City of Lincoln City.

Listening Measures

We will know that we are making progress when:

PROJECT INITIATION

	Inventory of ongoing listening sources initiated
	Guidelines for staff participation and reporting initiated

EARLY PHASE

	Schedule for community listening opportunities completed
	Options for acknowledging community contributions developed

ONE YEAR EVALUATION

	City representatives attend more community events and stakeholder events
	More people indicate they believe the City is listening to the community
	Program acknowledging community contributions implemented

Measurement Tools

- ❑ ENGAGE portal analytics (existing)
- ❑ Lincoln City Website analytics (existing)
- ❑ Regularly scheduled Community Survey (proposed)
- ❑ Community Engagement Annual Report (proposed)

Decision-Making

The goal of the strategies in this section is to utilize improved communication and engagement work **to make better, more informed, and more equitable decisions**. Elected officials, staff and community members must work together in a respectful and collaborative process to continue moving our City forward.

Decision-Making Objectives

The following priority objectives provide the framework for our recommended strategies for improving decision-making:

- Improve transparency in decision-making by establishing clear ***communication protocols;***
- Provide decision-makers and the public with a ***range of options*** to show consideration of multiple community needs;
- Present ***final decisions in context*** to clearly illustrate the relationship between input and final decisions or options selected; and
- Ensure ***ongoing evaluation*** of decision-making to inform future efforts and show continuous process improvements.

Decision-Making Strategies



ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

To improve the transparency of decision-making processes and establish clear communication protocols:

- Develop a tool for assessing which types of decisions require higher levels of communication with the community;
- Create a communication template to include key information, such as the decision-making authority, the timeline, and public input opportunities;
- Initiate communication protocols early in the process;
- Communicate existing plans, policies, and directives that led to the decision at hand, and note relevant public input that supports those documents;
- Set realistic expectations of the extent to which public input can affect final outcomes;
- Note specific stakeholders or stakeholder groups that may be more directly impacted by the range of options being considered; and

- Include relevant communication activities and findings within public documents and presentations relating to decisions.



PROVIDE A RANGE OF OPTIONS

To show transparency and consideration of multiple community needs:

- Present more than one viable potential outcome for discussion;
- Clarify the benefits, costs, and tradeoffs associated with various options;
- Consider how options may differently impact historically underrepresented communities; and
- Include "no action" as an option, and describe the costs/benefits, winners/losers of no action as appropriate.



PRESENT DECISIONS IN CONTEXT

To illustrate the relationship between input and final decisions:

- Share the results of related communication activities and findings with the final decision;
- Highlight decision components that relate directly to public comments;
- Address significant deviations from clearly expressed community priorities; and
- Close the loop with participants to show accountability.



EVALUATE DECISIONS

To inform future decision-making processes and to show continuous process improvements:

- Conduct post-decision evaluations, including input from stakeholders, staff, and elected officials;
- Utilize the five core values of accountability, transparency, respect, collaboration, and accessibility as criteria;
- Communicate findings with the Planning Commission, the Committee for Citizen Involvement (CCI), City Council, other boards and commissions, staff, and the public as appropriate; and
- Develop recommendations for improvements or adjustments to consider in future decisions.

Decision-Making Measures

We will know that we are making progress when:

PROJECT INITIATION

	Council/Board Communication Memo template updated
	Process outline presented/refined in staff discussions

EARLY PHASE

	Decision-making communication protocol developed
	Communication template developed

ONE YEAR EVALUATION

	Decision-making protocols applied
	Decision evaluation process developed
	More people indicate they believe the City is listening to the community

Measurement Tools

- ❑ Council Newsletter(s)
- ❑ General Public Comments
- ❑ Regularly scheduled Community Survey (proposed)
- ❑ Community Engagement Annual Report (proposed)

Evaluation

The goal of the strategies in this section is to **identify successes and share lessons learned** so that we continue to improve our community engagement program and build public trust. Evaluation will be incorporated into all activities to ensure ongoing improvements, not conducted as a separate and distinct activity.

Evaluation Objectives

The following priority objectives are recommended to ensure a commitment to ongoing evaluation and improvement:

- Integrate evaluation into all components of this plan, including Communication, Engagement, Listening, and Decision-Making;
- Establish clear and measurable criteria applying the five core values of accessibility, accountability, collaboration, respect, and transparency;
- Collect and analyze data from participants, staff, board and committee members, elected officials, and the broader community to achieve a comprehensive, 360-degree perspective;
- Consider the need for targeted evaluation strategies to assess participation levels of underrepresented populations, such as youth, working families, and communities of color;
- Report on progress on a consistent basis, possibly quarterly, compiling these findings annually for more in-depth review by the Planning Commission, the Committee for Citizen Involvement, and/or the Community Engagement Committee; and
- Apply evaluation findings to develop actionable recommendations that support continuous improvement of communication, engagement, listening, decision-making, and evaluation.

Evaluation Strategies



INTEGRATE EVALUATION INTO ALL ACTIVITIES

To ensure that evaluation is embedded throughout the plan and not a stand-alone activity:

- Utilize a range of tools to measure the effectiveness and accessibility of our communication strategies to reach more people and to reach more diverse types of people;
- Assess all engagement activities to measure levels of understanding, inclusion, participation, and impact;

- Evaluate the effectiveness of our listening strategies to make sure that the community feels heard by leadership;
- Conduct post-process evaluations to better understand if and how engagement has contributed to better decision-making.



ESTABLISH CLEAR CRITERIA

To develop an effective and efficient evaluation process:

- Develop criteria utilizing the five core values of accessibility, accountability, collaboration, respect, and transparency;
- Utilize Council strategic priorities to inform criteria and establish priorities;
- Consider the range of available data to develop clear and measurable criteria; and
- Set reasonable, realistic targets that easily inform the work on a consistent basis.



OBTAIN INPUT FROM DIVERSE SOURCES

To provide a comprehensive 360-degree perspective:

- Collect and analyze data from participants, board and committee members, and the broader community on a frequent basis;
- Include City staff in evaluation processes whenever feasible;
- Obtain input and feedback from City leadership, including City Council on a consistent basis;
- Communicate the value of feedback and participation in the evaluation process; and
- Consider the need for targeted evaluation strategies to assess participation levels of underrepresented populations, such as youth, working families, and communities of color.



DOCUMENT AND REPORT CONSISTENTLY

To ensure accountability and transparency:

- Publish or post findings regularly in a variety of formats and in multiple locations;
- Reference key findings within staff reports, as part of community engagement program materials, and as part of relevant staff communications;
- Share evaluation findings with the Planning Commission and other interested parties; and
- Utilize findings to solicit ideas for future improvements.



APPLY FINDINGS AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

To assess the results of our evaluation work and to apply recommended changes:

- Collaborate across departments and with community partners to identify, prioritize, and implement recommended improvements to engagement strategies and practices;
- Use evaluation findings to refine communication methods, engagement formats, timelines, and tools to better meet community needs;
- Adjust outreach and engagement approaches to address barriers to participation identified through evaluation;
- Incorporate lessons learned into future plans, policies, and project designs to strengthen long-term engagement effectiveness;
- Share evaluation insights internally to support staff learning, consistency, and capacity-building;
- Test and pilot new or revised engagement approaches informed by evaluation findings;
- Track outcomes of implemented improvements to determine whether changes result in measurable progress; and
- Revisit and update evaluation criteria and targets as strategies evolve and community needs change.

Evaluation Measures

We will know that we are making progress when:

PROJECT INITIATION

	Evaluation measures for communication and engagement drafted
	Evaluation criteria drafted

EARLY PHASE

	Baseline analytics complete
	Evaluation templates drafted

ONE YEAR EVALUATION

	Evaluation incorporated into a project from initiation through completion
	Documentation and reporting methodology in place
	Input from staff, leadership and community members obtained

Measurement Tools

- ❑ Planning Department Annual Report (existing)
- ❑ ENGAGE portal analytics (existing)
- ❑ Lincoln City Website analytics (existing)

PART III IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Roles & Responsibilities

Now that we have created a strong set of recommended actions, we want to be clear about WHO does WHAT. This section will provide guidelines about the roles we each have—including City staff, leadership and elected officials, and community members. For community engagement to work, we all need to participate and to start with a basic understanding of three foundational responsibilities:

- ❑ Lead, support, and/or participate in community engagement activities in accordance with the core values of collaboration, accountability, accessibility, transparency, and respect.
- ❑ Recognize that each voice is important, but that there are more than 10,000 voices in Lincoln City, and it is the responsibility of local government to serve all of them equitably.
- ❑ Understand that silence from our community members can mean many things. It may indicate a lack of trust that public opinion matters or it could be that people trust staff and elected officials to do what's right. It could also be a lack of awareness or a misunderstanding about the importance of input, or it could be due to one or more of the multiple barriers to participation we've identified. Good community engagement should help us to understand both the loudest and the softest voices in Lincoln City and to make decisions that are informed by both.

City Staff

Staff will be responsible for the day-to-day work of carrying out the ENGAGE Plan. They will develop the communication materials, create engagement programs, and ensure two-way communication between the public and elected officials.

- ❑ Establish and implement **guidelines, standards, and templates**:
  - Apply readability standards to all public-facing materials and ensure materials and participation opportunities are accessible to individuals with diverse abilities;
  - Use notification and communication templates that include clear summaries, vicinity maps, and next steps; and
  - Build project-specific email lists and request email addresses in mailed notices.

- ❑ Improve **accessibility** system-wide and continue to reduce barriers:
  - Recognize and work to eliminate barriers to communication;
  - Enhance the City's main website and the ENGAGE portal;
  - Host targeted outreach to underrepresented communities such as youth, seniors, renters, or non-English speakers;
  - Establish protocols needed for working with non-English speakers and clearly communicate through signs or images that the City is capable of providing service to people of all languages;
  - Translate key materials into Spanish and provide alternate formats (captions, audio, large print) as needed; and
  - Coordinate with local and Spanish-language media outlets and increase use of short videos and dynamic messaging.

- ❑ Implement **community engagement** programs:
  - Present project timelines, key decision points, and opportunities for public input;
  - Employ multiple engagement options including in-person meetings, surveys, focus groups, and online forums; and
  - Show how community feedback shapes recommendations or explain when it cannot be incorporated.

- ❑ Provide ongoing **documentation** and reporting:
  - Keep project information updated and clearly organized on the ENGAGE portal;
  - Track relevant demographic information as the community grows and changes;
  - Summarize input clearly and concisely, showing areas of agreement, disagreement, and remaining questions; and
  - Maintain organized, accessible records of engagement activities.

- ❑ Continue to **monitor and evaluate** communication and engagement programs to ensure ongoing improvement:
  - Conduct ongoing research relevant to communication and engagement;
  - Participate in relevant training in communication, cultural competency, accessibility, and engagement techniques;
  - Share information internally to ensure staff have up-to-date, accurate knowledge; and
  - Serve as ambassadors by answering questions respectfully and helping residents navigate City processes.

Leadership/Elected Officials

The role of leadership in community engagement is important throughout the process, but it is absolutely crucial at two key points: 1) at the very beginning when the City is contemplating a project or a new program and 2) when making final decisions. Excellent staff work and an involved community will not ensure success if no foundation has been set for engagement, and if decisions are or appear to be disconnected from community input. In the ENGAGE Plan the term leadership refers to those who manage City staff, including the City Manager and departmental directors.

Key responsibilities for City leadership and elected officials include the following:

- ❑ Show an understanding of the role of the community in decision-making and the value of engagement and two-way communication;
- ❑ Work with the Tribal Council of the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians (CTSI) through a government to government communication and engagement process;
- ❑ Recognize that building/re-building and maintaining trust with the community is a core part of this work;
- ❑ Acknowledge that meaningful engagement requires resources and support, but that it also helps prevent costly damage—not only to budgets, but to staff morale, the reputation of leadership, and the credibility of our organization;
- ❑ Become proficient at recognizing the types of barriers experienced by our community members as they work to understand and participate in decision-making processes;
- ❑ Make the goal of an engaged community a Council priority and incorporate a discussion regarding the level of community outreach and engagement within core decision-making activities;
- ❑ Support efforts to promote and celebrate the contributions and participation of community members in our boards, commissions, and committees as part of an effort to encourage more people to become involved; and
- ❑ Ensure significant decisions are informed by well-documented and consistently communicated engagement processes that equitably consider all stakeholders.

Community Members

The bottom line is that all community members need to do is ***show up***. Read public notices, understand the issues that you care about, and participate whenever and however you are able. But let's provide a few more specifics about responsibilities—and opportunities—that are yours and yours alone.

Key responsibilities for community members who want a better Lincoln City include the following:

- ❑ Engage with an open mind so that you can listen as well as speak;
- ❑ Share your thoughts, ideas, and ask your questions and value the thoughts, ideas, and questions of others;
- ❑ Communicate directly with people who are in a position to be helpful, including staff and elected officials, and avoid simply complaining or venting with strangers via social media;
- ❑ Encourage others to participate, even if they might have opinions that differ from yours;
- ❑ Participate using whatever method works best for you, and let staff know when access to those methods have not been provided;
- ❑ Work hard to eliminate any unhelpful assumptions you may have that prevent you from fully participating in community conversations;
- ❑ Learn as much as you can about an issue before drawing final conclusions and making decisions;
- ❑ Acknowledge that the resources required for meaningful engagement are important investments in the community;
- ❑ Take advantage of opportunities to increase your civic knowledge so that you are well-equipped to actively participate;
- ❑ Consider increasing your civic engagement by joining a board, committee, or commission or even running for a local office; and
- ❑ Participate in any evaluation processes that are made available to you so that you can be part of improving future engagement and communication efforts.

Phasing/Priorities

The work of engaging the community will be ongoing. To ensure that the goals of the ENGAGE Plan are realized, we propose a three phase implementation process:

- **Phase I: Quick Wins**. The purpose of this phase will be to take quick actions that have already been identified and fall within our current responsibilities. To some extent staff are already making these changes.

- **Phase II: Structural Improvements.** The purpose of this second phase will be to shore up existing infrastructure of communication and engagement and to build new structural components upon which we can build out the complete program.

- **Phase III: Walking the Talk**. This phase will begin once the load-bearing structural components of our communication and engagement infrastructure are in place. During this phase we will begin to use our templates and guidelines, apply the skills and capabilities we've developed, and operationalize our action plans.

PHASE I: QUICK WINS

- ❑ Reduce or eliminate as many barriers to participation and communication as possible;
- ❑ Conduct readability and accessibility reviews on all public documents and websites and translate high use forms and policy documents into Spanish.
- ❑ Promote our existing communication and engagement efforts more successfully;
- ❑ Complete worksheets, templates, and other guidance documents to assist staff in various departments with improving communication, engagement, and evaluation methods (first drafts of these resources are included in the Appendix);
- ❑ Determine the preferred approach for reenvisioning the current Committee for Citizen Engagement through discussions with the Lincoln City Planning Commission, the City Council, and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD);
- ❑ Initiate the collection of data to establish baselines against which we can measure progress; and
- ❑ Conduct formal and targeted presentations of the ENGAGE Plan to staff, the City Council, Department Heads and the Planning Commission and initiate more detailed work plans.

PHASE II: STRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENTS

- ❑ Implement the internal communication program and develop guidelines that help to build an organizational culture based on excellent communication;
- ❑ Institutionalize our email outreach program and develop robust distribution lists relating to our most pressing issues;
- ❑ Reinforce our relationship with local media and develop guidelines for how to use our traditional media outlets most effectively;
- ❑ Create detailed action plans for discussion with various City staff in Planning, Administration, and Information Technology;
- ❑ Develop more quantitative performance measures and standardize documentation and reporting methods;
- ❑ Develop guidelines for assessing the types of decisions that call for community engagement, the scale of engagement needed, and staff roles and responsibilities;
- ❑ Implement initial evaluation strategies, establishing clear criteria, identifying priority information needs, and seeking diverse perspectives;
- ❑ Consider the recommendations of the Planning Commission regarding the Committee for Citizen Involvement; and
- ❑ Develop a draft Community Ambassador program description for discussion by the community, Planning Commission and City Council.

PHASE III: WALKING THE TALK

The third phase will begin once the load-bearing structural components of our communication and engagement infrastructure are in place, and we can begin to use our templates and guidelines, use the skills we've developed, and operationalize our action plans.

- ❑ Complete all planned upgrades to the City's websites to improve readability, accessibility, mobile friendliness, and translation capacity;
- ❑ Maintain and utilize stakeholder email distribution lists and continue to build the stakeholder database;
- ❑ Implement and refine departmental work plans for communication and engagement, and incorporate ENGAGE plan recommendations into routine project management;
- ❑ Convene the designated Committee for Citizen Involvement on a regular schedule to review progress, advise improvements, and support accountability;
- ❑ Draft a community-wide survey to establish a baseline for measuring changes in community satisfaction with communication, engagement, and decision-making;

- ❑ Apply the decision-making communication protocol consistently for projects and policy decisions that have broad community impact or high public interest;
- ❑ Develop the project-specific engagement toolkit described in the engagement strategies, and apply to projects, incorporating evaluating methods to assess effectiveness and adaptability;
- ❑ Initiate and sustain the Community Ambassador Program, including recruitment, training, defined roles, support materials, and an annual review of effectiveness;
- ❑ Participate in proactive listening events, stakeholder meetings, feedback from frontline staff, and document themes and emerging issues;
- ❑ Record and synthesize input using consistent formats; identify themes, areas of agreement/disagreement, and remaining questions; and
- ❑ Produce an annual Community Engagement Report summarizing activities, participation, demographics where available, outcomes, and improvements made.

BEYOND PHASE III

Future phases of implementation should be based on the successes and lessons learned within the first three phases, developed in partnership with the community, and formally acknowledged by the Planning Commission and the Community Engagement Committee. Responses to the Community-wide survey and to the annual report will further inform what important next steps should be taken to continue the momentum of ENGAGE.

Appendices

COMMUNITY DATA

A. Lincoln City Stakeholder List

B. Lincoln City Demographics

PROJECT COMPONENTS

C. ENGAGE Lincoln City Project Timeline

D. Ad Hoc Meeting Summaries

E. Community Workshop Report

ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

F. Engagement Scoping Worksheet

G. Community Workshop Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

H. Meeting Evaluation Template