City of Boston
Planning Department

IMPROVING OUR DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

ARTICLE 80 MODERNIZATION

PHASE 2
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FEEDBACK REPORT

AUGUST 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between May and June of 2024, City staff led a series of public workshops, provided an online survey, held focus groups, and publicized information through social media, emails, and flyering in neighborhoods across the City of Boston. This engagement intended to share and collect feedback on a set of draft recommendations for improving Boston's development review process, as outlined in Article 80 of the zoning code. This report summarizes the feedback we heard from community members.

Key takeaways:
- The recommendations overall are headed in the right direction and should all be developed further. The details matter, and some recommendations require further study and engagement to make sure implementation leads to intended outcomes.

Effective engagement key takeaways:
- Expanding inclusivity, broadening group member perspectives, and providing more support for advisory teams were identified as keys to success.
- Support and interest in a more fair selection process that also allows specific expertise and community knowledge to be included through appointees.
- The importance of having multiple community advisory teams across the City to allow for local knowledge and connection to citywide goals.
- Strong enthusiasm for starting engagement earlier in the development review process.
- Additional clarity needed on the details of the scope and role of Community Advisory Teams.

Consistent standards key takeaways:
- The new definitions for mitigation, community benefits, and enabling infrastructure are important for transparency and helpful for having more directed conversations.
- Support for the addition of a new anti-displacement disclosure and mitigation category.
- Additional work is needed to ensure that new standards will meet the needs of communities and balance standardization with neighborhood specificity.

Coordinated review key takeaways:
- There is enthusiasm for a more transparent and less ambiguous process with clear opportunities for feedback and accountability.
- Skepticism still exists about the effectiveness of community input, with many concerned that decisions are predetermined once certain project milestones are reached.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Steps taken to improve Article 80

Community members, developers, and City staff all agree that the Article 80 development review process is outdated, unpredictable, and lacks transparency. Mayor Wu, in her 2023 State of the City speech and Executive Order, charged the City of Boston Planning Department (previously the Boston Planning & Development Agency) with creating and implementing a reformed development review process that improves how communities, developers, and City staff work together to shape the city. To achieve this vision, the Planning Department is excited to work with the public to modernize the development review process.

The project to improve Boston's development review process kicked off in July 2023 and has included a series of engagement efforts across the City. City staff listened and learned from community members, developers, other city staff, and cities from across North America, to compile a list of potential policy and operational choices to improve Boston's development review process. In response to this initial feedback, the City shared a list of "Emerging Ideas" through a series of focus groups, two public meetings, and an open survey. This round of engagement provided detailed input to prioritize and determine the direction for future analysis and the draft recommendations released in May 2024.

You can learn more about the results of past engagement and research through visiting the following links.

Listening and Research Summary, available online:
www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/c73a4e89-319c-4807-aa17-f3cee4a25303

Initial Themes Feedback Summary, available online:
www.bostonplans.org/documents/projects/improving-our-development-review-process/article-80-modernization-phase-1-initial-themes

WORKSHOP & SURVEY APPROACH

City staff, in partnership with a consultant team, led a series of ten workshops, eight in person and two virtual, between May 11 and June 6, 2024. The two-hour workshops included four stations, each focused on one of the draft recommendations. Staff shared information about the proposed changes to the development review process and facilitated a conversation to discuss attendees' questions, feedback, and ideas.

All workshop materials and a recording of the virtual workshop are available on our project page: www.bostonplans.org/projects/improving-development-review-process-article-80

Workshop Schedule and Attendance:

- May 11, 2024, 2-4 PM
  Garage B, Brighton
  (28 attendees)
- May 14, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Civic Pavilion, Downtown
  (22 attendees)
- May 15, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Perkins Community Center,
  Dorchester
  (16 attendees)
- May 18, 2024, 2-4 PM
  Condon Community Center, South
  Boston
  (8 attendees)
- May 21, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Fenway Community Center,
  Fenway
  (22 attendees)

- May 23, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Veronica Robles Community
  Center, East Boston
  (17 attendees)
- May 30, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Menino Community Center,
  Roslindale
  (15 attendees)
- June 1, 2024, 2-4 PM
  Bruce C. Bolling Building, Roxbury
  (11 attendees)
- June 4, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Virtual
  (35 attendees)
- June 6, 2024, 6-8 PM
  Virtual
  (19 attendees)

To ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of the workshops, all materials were translated, interpreters were in attendance, venues were chosen based on their accessibility and proximity to public transportation, and food and childcare were provided.

As we know that not everyone can take the time to attend a workshop, all workshop materials and the survey questions were available on our online project page. We received 70 responses to the online survey. The online survey was open between May 13 to June 10, 2024.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Note: Overall Boston demographic information based on the 2020 US Census, unless otherwise noted.

Homeownership Status	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses	Boston Overall
Own my home	86	45%	32%
Rent my home	34	18%	68%
Living with family or friends	3	2%	-
Prefer not to say	70	36%	-
Total	**193**	**100%**	**100%**

Gender	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses
Man	66	34%
Woman	102	53%
Non-binary, gender non-conforming, or genderqueer	2	1%
Prefer not to say	23	12%
Total	**193**	**100%**

Language	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses
English	176	91%
Spanish	17	9%
Other	0	0%
Total	**193**	**100%**

Age	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses
<15	0	0%
15-34	31	16%
35-54	80	41%
55+	56	29%
Prefer not to say	26	13%
Total	**193**	**100%**

Race / Ethnicity	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses	Boston Overall
Non-white	68	35%	55%
White	96	50%	45%
Prefer not to say	29	15%	-
Total	**193**	**100%**	**100%**

Race / Ethnicity	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses
Asian	12	6%
Black or African American	19	10%
Hispanic or Latino/a	28	15%
White	96	50%
Prefer not to say	29	15%
Multiple	9	5%
Total	**193**	**100%**

Neighborhood	Count of Survey Responses	Percent of Survey Responses	% of Boston Population[1]
Brighton	48	25%	9%
Dorchester	41	21%	19%
East Boston	22	11%	7%
Roslindale	17	9%	4%
Allston	12	6%	4%
Charlestown	8	4%	3%
Jamaica Plain	5	3%	6%
Mattapan	3	2%	4%
South End	3	2%	5%
Roxbury	2	1%	8%
Back Bay	2	1%	2%
South Boston	2	1%	5%
West End	2	1%	1%
Chinatown	1	1%	1%
Downtown	1	1%	3%
South Boston Waterfront	1	1%	2%
West Roxbury	1	1%	5%
Fenway	0	0%	5%
Hyde Park	0	0%	3%
Mission Hill	0	0%	3%
Other	0	0%	
Non Boston	9	5%	
Prefer not to say	13	7%	
Total	**193**	**100%**	**100%**

1- Boston neighborhood information is based on the BPDA's 2017 Neighborhood Profile Report: https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/7987d9b4-193b-4749-8594-e41f1ae27719

SURVEY RESULTS

STATION 1: EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Community Advisory Teams

Question 1 at this station asked respondents to select the kinds of training they think would be useful for community members participating in this group.

Note: The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to three topics.

The top three training types selected as most important to survey respondents were:
- Development 101
- Urban Design and Planning
- Civics 101

Chart 1 - Question 1 Results

Question 1: What kinds of training would be useful for community members participating in this group?
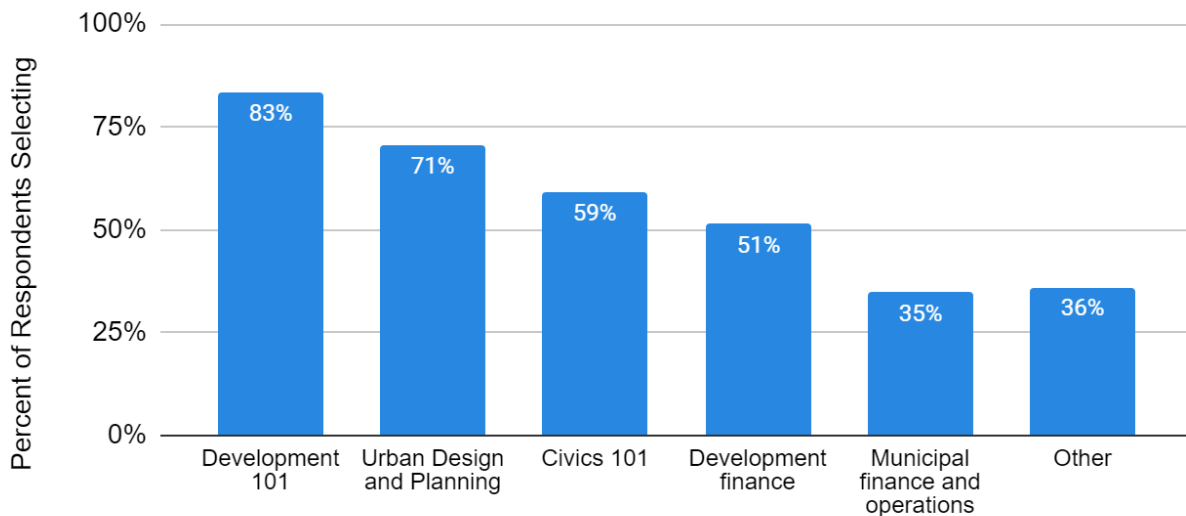
Table 1 - Question 1 Results

Topic	Count	Percent
Total Respondents	**78**	**100%**
Development 101	65	83%
Urban Design and Planning	55	71%
Civics 101	46	59%
Development finance	40	51%
Municipal finance and operations	27	35%
Other	28	36%

Question 2 asked respondents which categories should be included as we compose the new Community Review Teams.

Note: The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 6 categories in addition to a write in option

The top three training types selected as most important to survey respondents were:
- Age
- Housing Status (Renter, Homeowner, etc)
- Tenure (Time lived in Boston)

Chart 2 - Question 2 Results

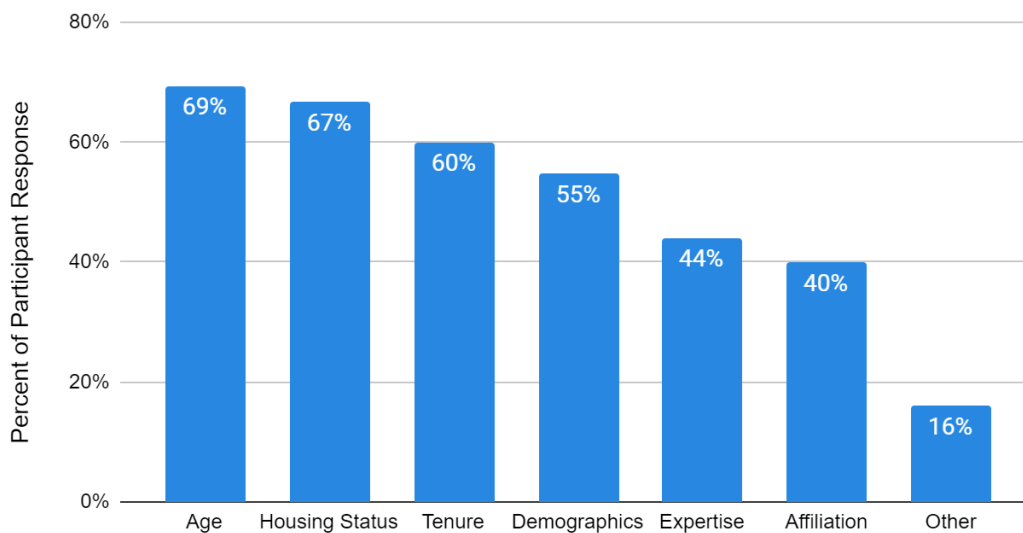**Question 2: Which categories should be included as we compose the new Community Review Team?**

Table 2 - Question 2 Results

Category	Count	Percent
Total Respondents	**75**	**100%**
Age	52	69%
Housing Status	50	67%
Tenure	45	60%
Demographics	41	55%
Expertise	33	44%
Affiliation	30	40%
Other	12	16%

Question 3 asked respondents what kinds of expertise would be most helpful to have in these new advisory groups.

Note: The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 5 categories in addition to a write in option

Chart 3 - Question 3 Results

Question 3: What kinds of expertise would be most helpful to have in these new groups?
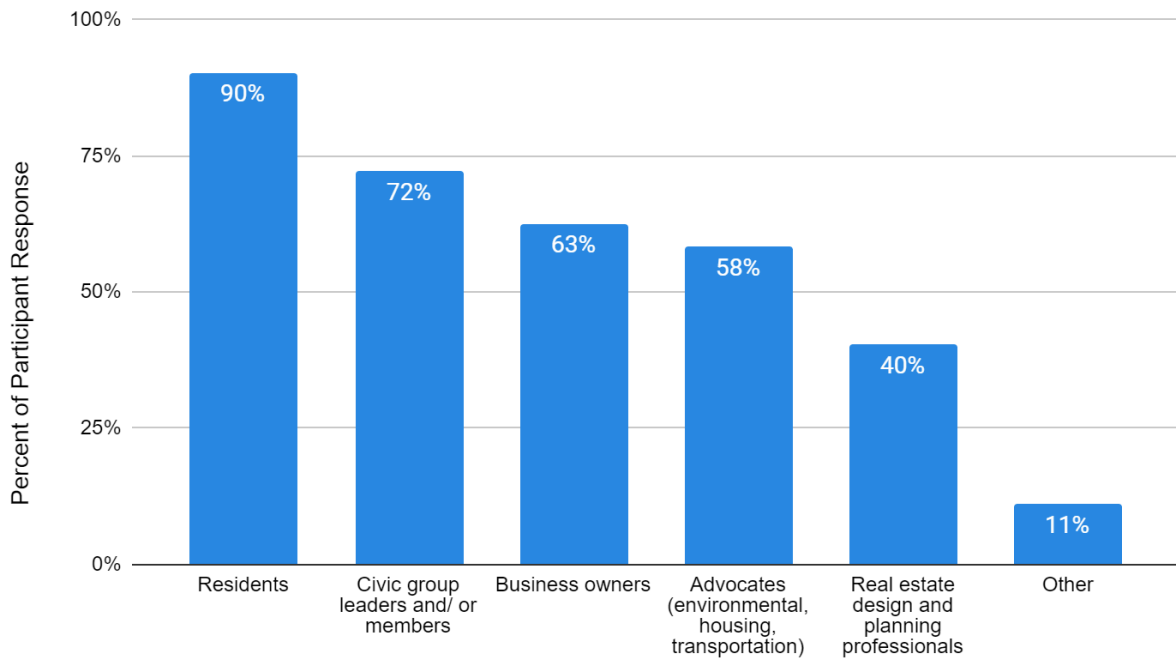
Table 3 - Question 3 Results

Expertise	Count	Percent
Total Respondents	**72**	**100%**
Residents	65	90%
Civic group leaders and/ or members	52	72%
Business owners	45	63%
Advocates (environmental, housing, transportation)	42	58%
Real estate design and planning professionals	29	40%
Other	8	11%

Question 4 asked respondents about term lengths for Community Advisory Teams.

Chart 4 - Question 4 Results

Question 4: How Long should Community Advisory Teams terms last?
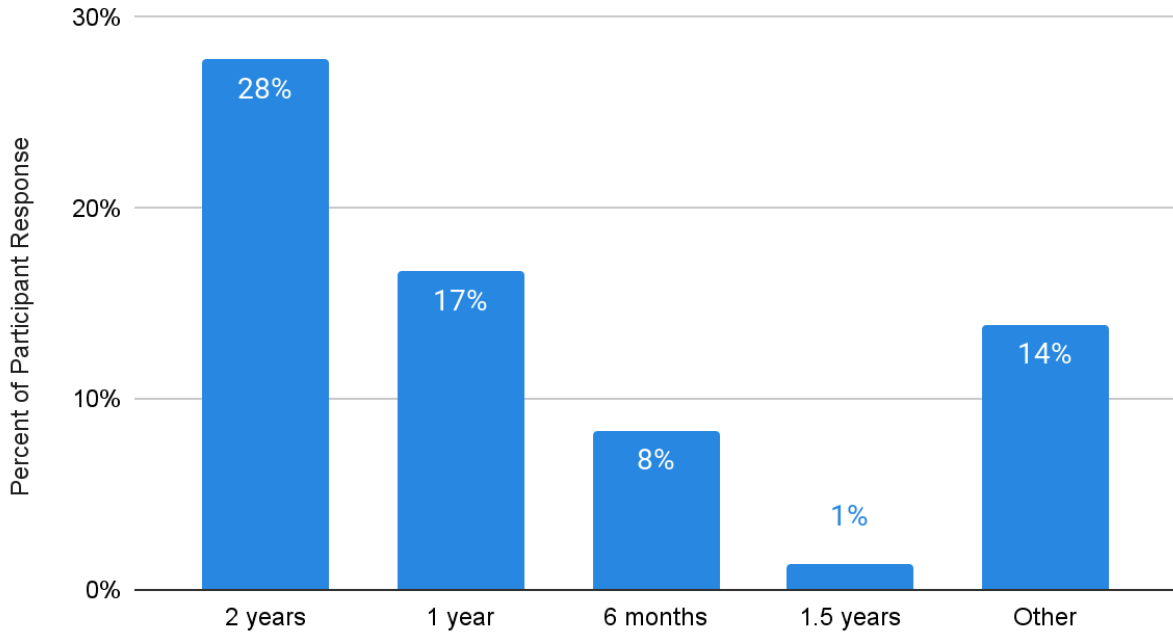
Note: Many of those who filled in the "other" open response section and in the workshop conversations indicated a preference for shorter, six month or one year appointments with the opportunity to extend by one term based on continued availability and interest in taking part in this work.

Chart 4 - Question 4 Results

Term Limit	Count	Percent
Total	49	100%
2 years	20	28%
1 year	12	17%
6 months	6	8%
1.5 years	1	1%
Other	10	14%

STATION 2: EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Early Engagement

Question 1 at this station asked respondents to pick up to 3 options indicating the preferred methods to learn about development projects proposed in their neighborhood.

Note: The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 3 options in addition to a write in option

Chart 5 - Question 1 Results

Question 1: How would you like to hear about development projects proposed in your neighborhood?
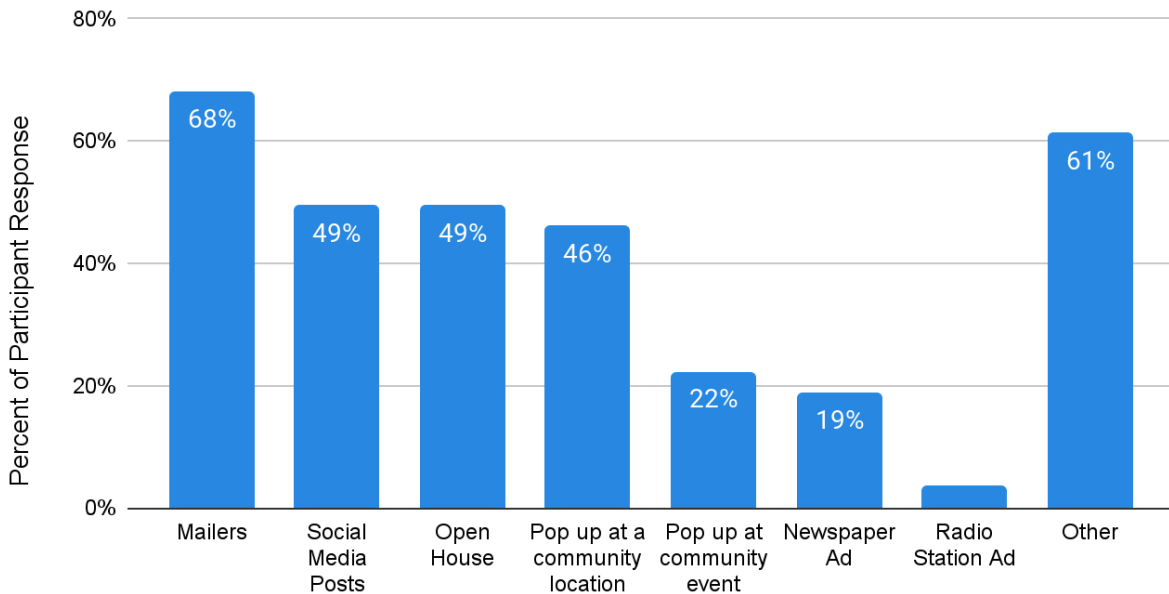
Table 5 - Question 1 Results

Method for Engagement	Count	Percent
Totals Respondents	**59**	**100%**
Mailers	40	68%
Social Media Posts	29	49%
Open House	29	49%
Pop up at a community location	27	46%
Pop up at community event	13	22%
Newspaper Ad	11	19%
Radio Station Ad	2	3%
Other	36	61%

Question 1 Additional Analysis: Responses to this survey question can also be grouped by category. Below, Chart 5B demonstrates the same data set as Chart 5 organized by engagement type. This grouping illustrates which methods of engagement are currently required by Article 80 in **red**, and newly proposed engagement methods in **blue**. The chart demonstrates that the current required methods of engagement are not meeting how community members want to be informed of project proposals.

Chart 5B - Question 1 Results Grouped

Question 1: How would you like to hear about development projects proposed in your neighborhood? (Grouped)
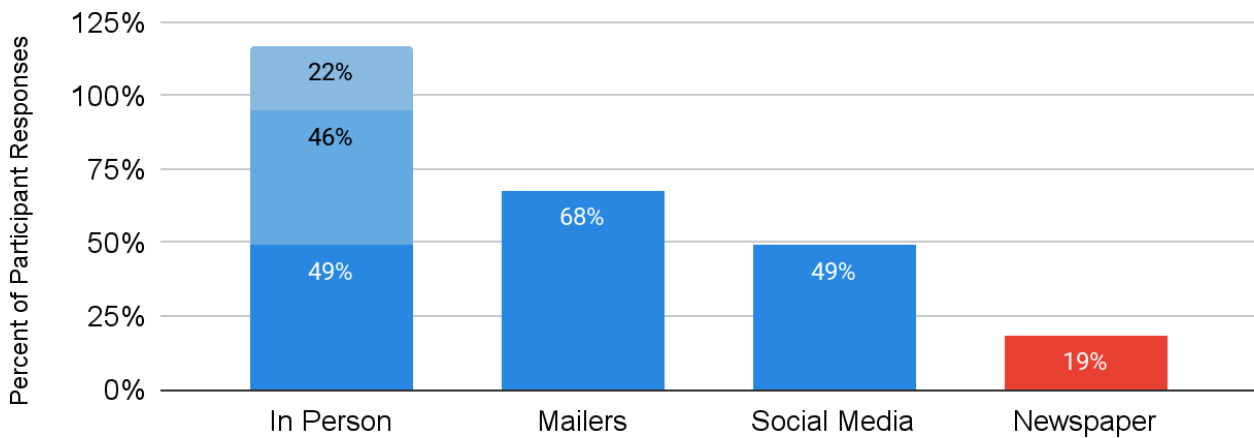
Note: The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 3 options in addition to a write-in option

Question 2 asked respondents to pick up to 3 options to indicate their preferred methods for sharing thoughts and feedback about proposed development projects.

Note: *The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 3 options in addition to a write in option*

Chart 6 - Question 2 Results

Question 2: How would you like to share your thoughts and feedback about a proposed development project?
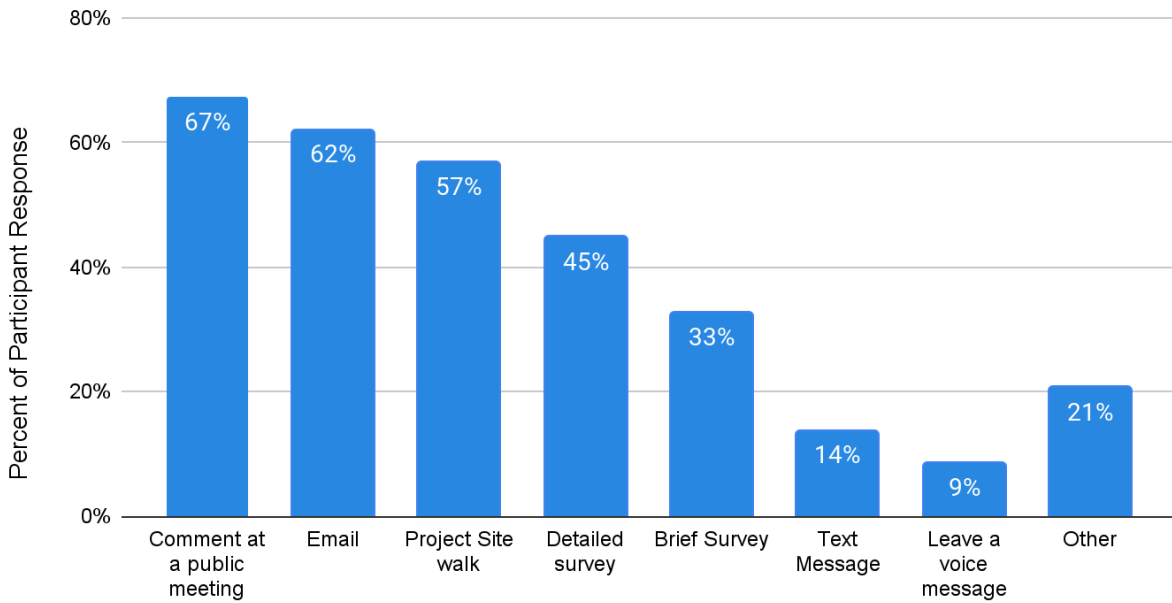

Table 6 - Question 2 Results

Methods to share feedback	Count	Percent
Total Respondent	**58**	**100%**
Comment at a public meeting	39	67%
Email	36	62%
Project Site walk	33	57%
Detailed survey	26	45%
Brief Survey	19	33%
Text Message	8	14%
Leave a voice message	5	9%
Other	12	21%

Question 2 Additional Analysis: When responses were separated by housing status (renters vs. homeowners) and age group (18-35, 35-55, 55+ years old), differences appeared in preferred feedback methods. People who are younger and renters both demonstrate a higher interest in providing feedback through surveys and lower preference in commenting at public meetings as compared to people who own their home or who are over 35 years old.

Chart 6B - Question 2 Results By Housing Type

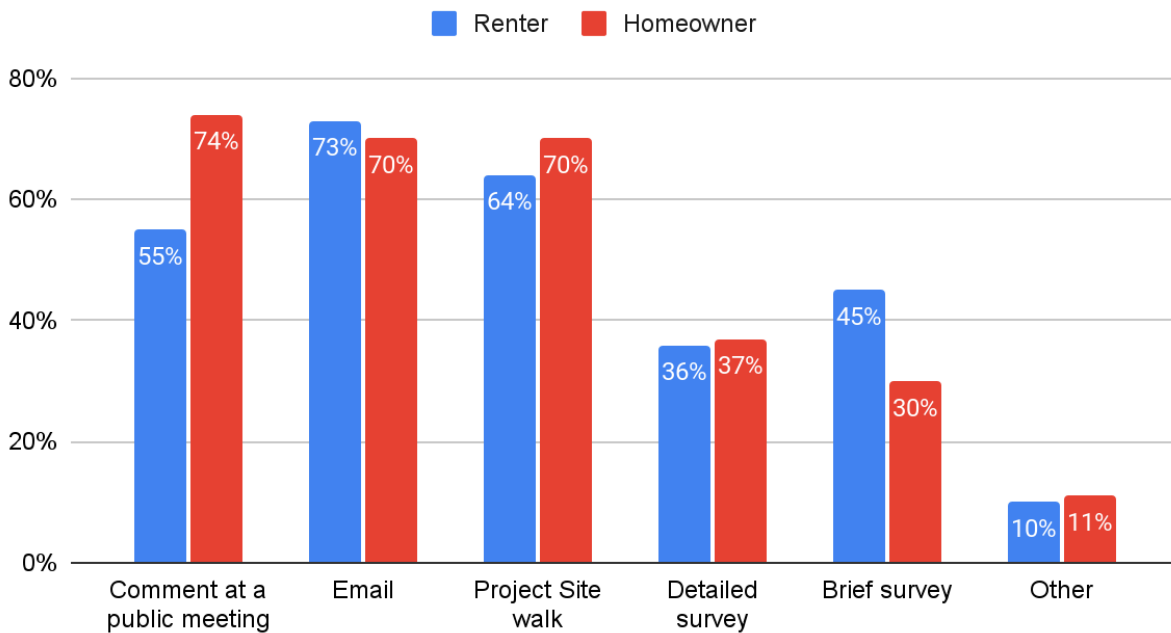## Question 2: Feedback preference by Housing Type

Table 6B - Question 2 Results By Housing Type

Feedback Preference by Housing Status		
Engagement Method	**Renter**	**Homeowner**
Comment at a public meeting	55%	74%
Email	73%	70%
Project Site walk	64%	70%
Detailed survey	36%	37%
Brief survey	45%	30%
Other	10%	11%

Question 2: Feedback preference by Age
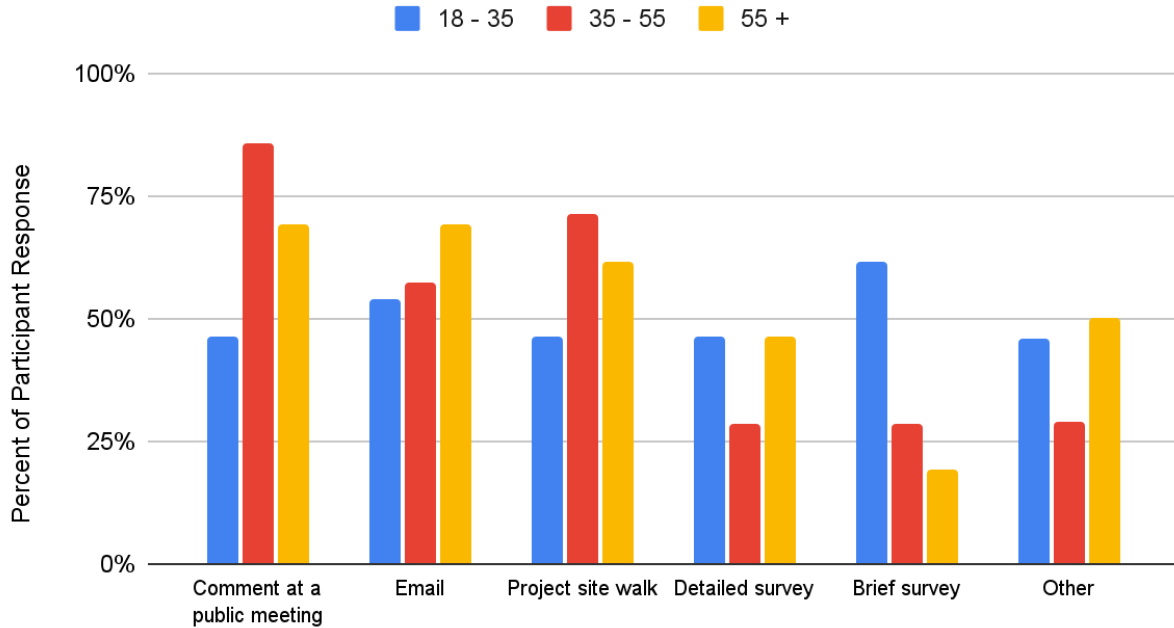
Table 6C - Question 2 Results by Age

Feedback Preference by Age			
Engagement Method	18 - 35	35 - 55	55 +
Comment at a public meeting	46%	86%	69%
Email	54%	57%	69%
Project site walk	46%	71%	62%
Detailed survey	46%	29%	46%
Brief survey	62%	29%	19%
Other	46%	29%	50%

Question 3 asked respondents what role City staff should have in developer-led early engagement.

Chart 7 - Question 3 Results

Question 3: What role should City staff have in developer-led early engagement?
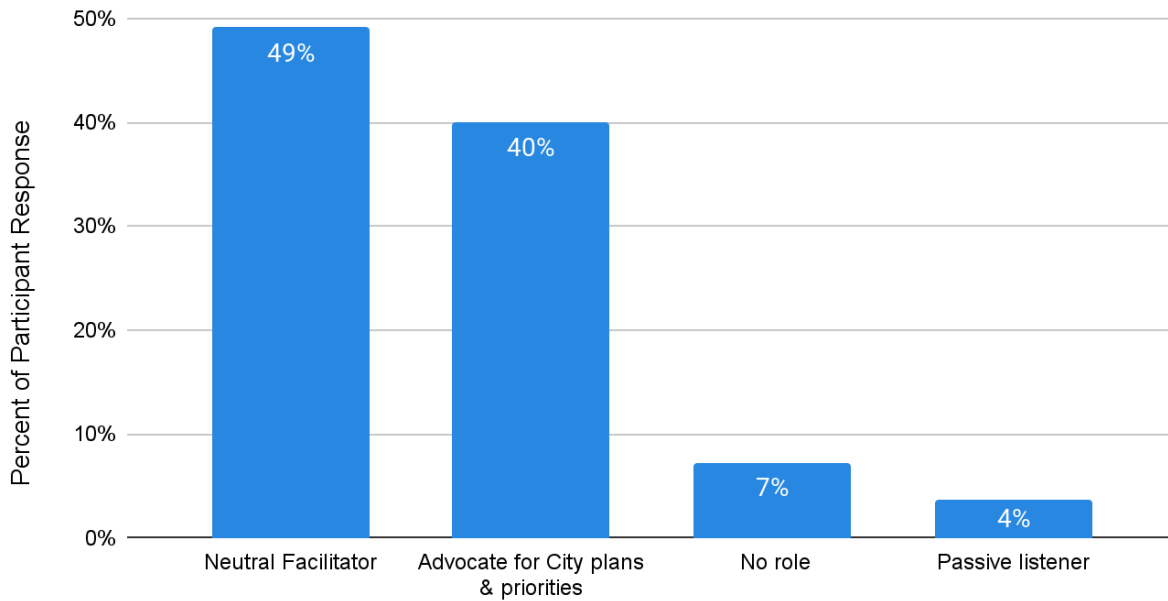
Table 7 - Question 3 Results

City Role in Developer Engagement	Count	Percent
Respondent Total	**55**	**100%**
Neutral Facilitator	27	49%
Advocate for City plans & priorities	22	40%
No role	4	7%
Passive listener	2	4%

STATION 3: CONSISTENT STANDARDS

Question 1 asked respondents to rank from 1-9 in order of importance (1 - most important, 9 - least important) nine categories of community benefits.

Chart 8 - Question 1 Results

Question 1: Which of the nine categories of community benefits listed above are most important to you?
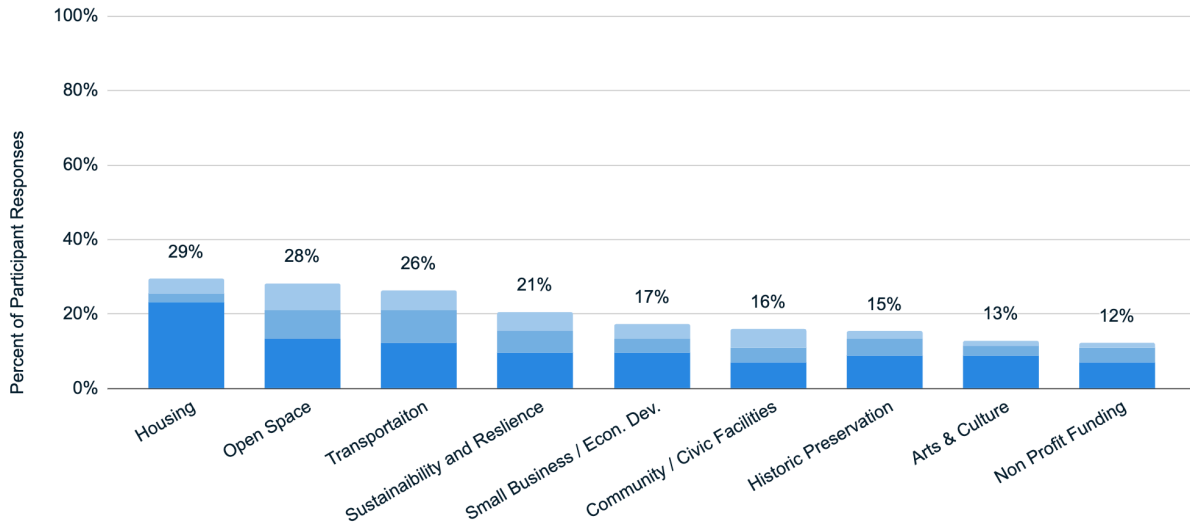

Table 8 - Question 1 Results - Count of respondents selecting each community benefit category as their Nth choice

	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Fourth Choice	Fifth Choice	Sixth Choice	Seventh Choice	Eighth Choice	Ninth Choice
Arts & Culture	14	4	2	9	2	9	6	6	7
Small Business /Eco. Dev.	15	6	6	9	9	6	6	6	9
Historic Preservation	14	7	3	3	4	4	13	13	14
Community / Civic Facilities	11	6	8	13	9	6	6	6	6
Sustainability and Resilience	15	9	8	10	6	5	6	6	8
Transportation	19	14	8	11	6	2	2	2	6

Open Space	21	12	11	9	2	4	1	1	8
Housing	36	4	6	9	7	3	1	1	5
Non Profit Funding	11	6	2	6	4	9	7	7	16

Rank of Choice %	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Total "Top 3" selections	Percent of respondents selecting as one of their Top 3 priorities
Housing	36	4	6	46	29%
Open Space	21	12	11	44	28%
Transportation	19	14	8	41	26%
Sustainability and Resilience	15	9	8	32	21%
Small Business / Econ. Dev.	15	6	6	27	17%
Community / Civic Facilities	11	6	8	25	16%
Historic Preservation	14	7	3	24	15%
Arts & Culture	14	4	2	20	13%
Non Profit Funding	11	6	2	19	12%

Note: *The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to rank multiple options under each ranking.*

Question 2 asked respondents what information should be used to inform community benefits during project review.

Note: *The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 3 categories*

Chart 9 - Question 2 Results

Question 2: What information can we use to help inform which community benefits are most important?
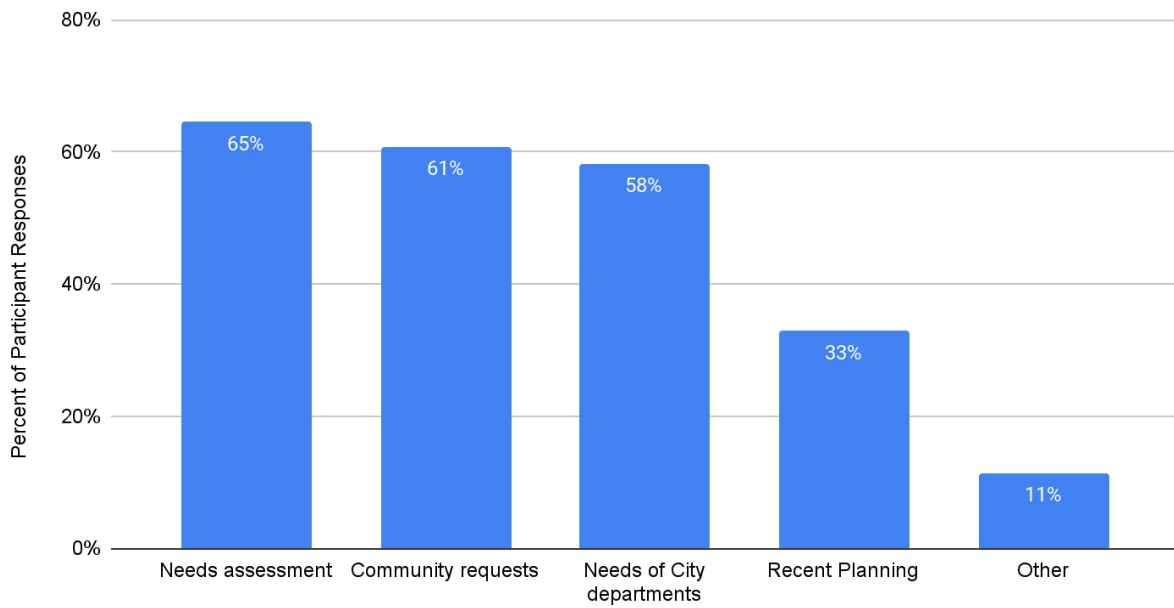

Table 9 - Question 2 Results

Topic	Count	Percent
Respondent Total	**79**	**100%**
Needs assessment	51	65%
Community requests	48	61%
Needs of City departments	46	58%
Recent Planning	26	33%
Other	9	11%

STATION 4: COORDINATED REVIEW

Question 1 at this station asked respondents to select the three aspects of a proposed development project they are most interested in shaping.

Note: The total percentages add up to more than 100% because each respondent was able to select up to 3 categories

Chart 10 - Question 1 Results

Question 1: Which aspects of a proposed development project are you most interested in shaping?
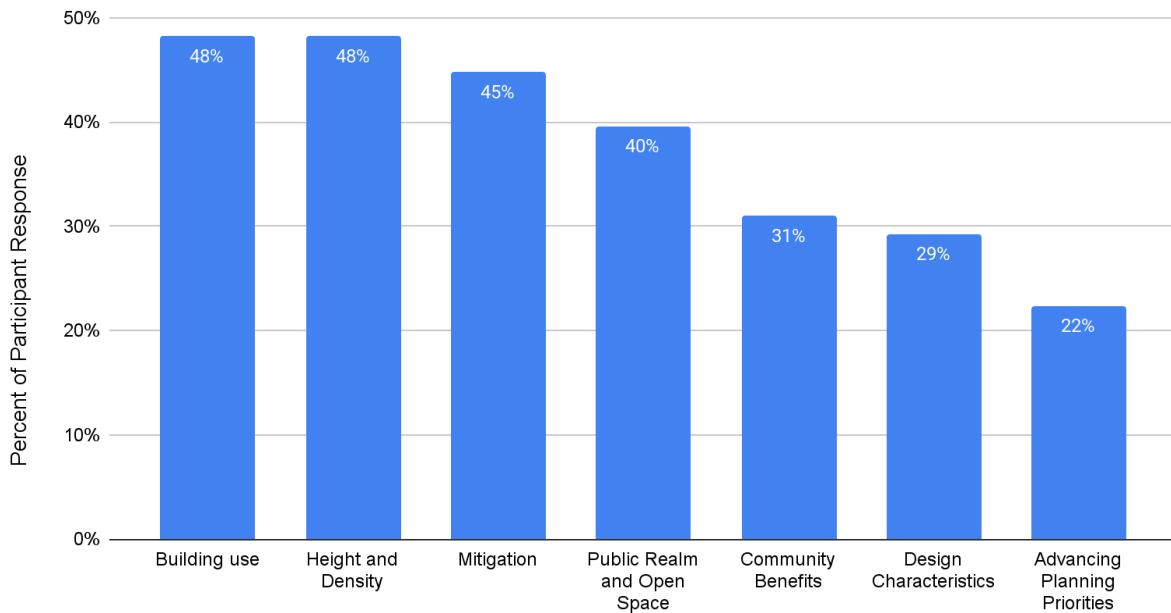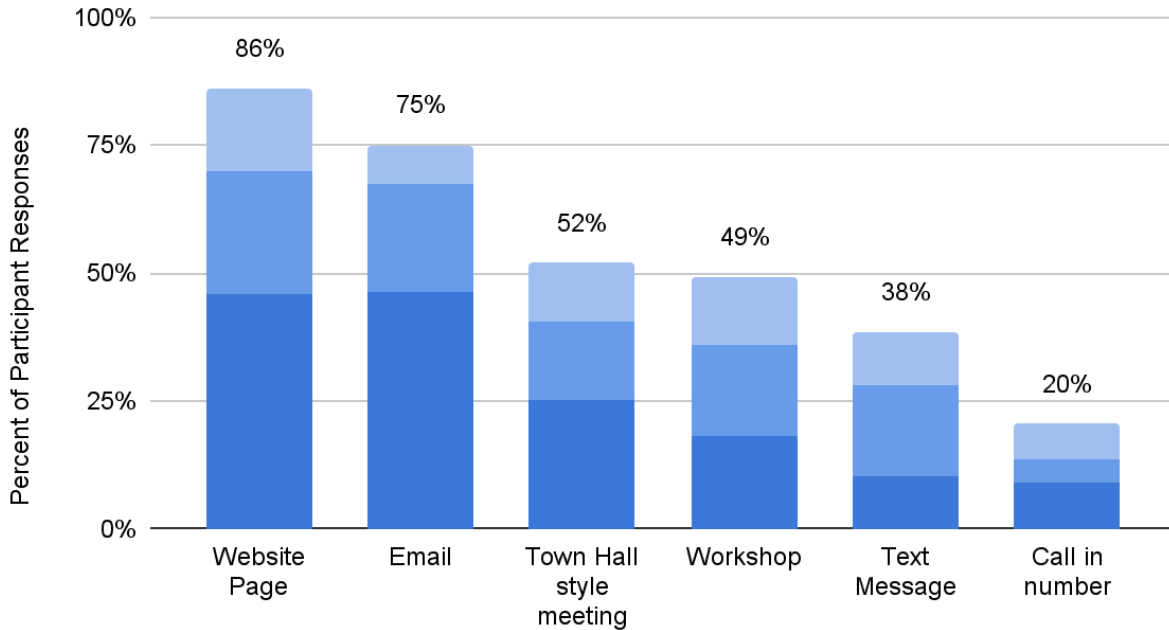

Table 10 - Question 1 Results

Areas of Development	Count	Percent
Respondent Total	58	100%
Building use	28	48%
Height and Density	28	48%
Mitigation	26	45%
Public Realm and Open Space	23	40%
Community Benefits	18	31%
Design Characteristics	17	29%
Advancing Planning Priorities	13	22%

Question 2 asked respondents what methods they prefer to learn about project updates and asked them to rank each method from a scale of 1 (Most Important) to 6 (Least Important).

Chart 11 - Question 2 Results

Question 2: How do you want to learn about project updates?

Note: Chart 11 demonstrates the percentage that each method was selected by survey respondents as either their first, second or third choice (ranked in order of priority).

Table 11 - Question 2 Results - Count of respondents ranking each communication method

	1st (Most Important)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th (Least Important)
Website Page	23	12	8	3	1	3
Email	24	11	4	9	1	3
Text Message	4	7	4	3	16	5
Workshop	8	9	10	12	4	1
Town Hall style meeting	13	8	6	8	8	2
Call in number	4	2	3	3	4	23

Table 11B - Question 2 Results - Count of respondents

	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Total "Top 3" selections	Percent of respondents selecting as one of their Top 3 priorities
Website Page	23	12	8	43	86%
Email	24	11	4	39	75%
Text Message	13	8	6	27	38%
Workshop	4	2	3	9	38%
Town Hall style meeting	4	7	4	15	23%
Call in number	8	9	10	27	20%

WORKSHOP QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

During the workshops, City staff held in-depth conversation with attendees to explore their questions, feedback, and ideas regarding each of the draft recommendations. Based on analysis of the conversations at each station, here are the key themes that emerged:

STATION 1: EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Community Advisory Teams

1. **Inclusivity and Accessibility**:
   - **Importance of Providing Training, Food, Childcare, and Stipends**: Providing training, food, childcare, and stipends will allow for increased participation, especially for low-income residents who may face financial or time constraints.
   - **Expanding Community Engagement Methods to Support Diverse Representation**: Using multiple communication channels and engagement methods to reach a wider audience and ensure everyone is informed and able to participate. With participants noting the importance of hearing from renters, young people, multilingual citizens, people with disabilities, and individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. **Balanced Representation**
   - **Varied Perspectives**: Residents emphasized the importance of geographic representation, advocating for a balance between veteran members and new voices to ensure diverse perspectives.
3. **Adaptability and Continuous Improvement**:
   - **Flexibility in Structure**: Participants were interested in exploring flexibility in the advisory group structure to adapt to neighborhood-specific needs while maintaining consistent standards.
   - **Ongoing Dialogue and Refinement**: Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the community to continuously refine and improve the advisory group model based on feedback and changing needs.
4. **Transparent Role and Report Backs**:
   - **Clear Goals and Roles**: Participants want more specificity on the roles and responsibilities of CAT members.

- ○ **Regular Reporting and Feedback**: Providing summaries of community feedback and maintaining open communication about the progress and decisions of the advisory group. Participants emphasized the importance of transparent processes for the CATs, including open meetings and sharing contact information among members.
5. **Capacity to Handle Portfolio of Projects**:
    - ○ **Calibrate the Number of Projects**: While participants appreciated the idea of the CATs reviewing groups of projects, they cautioned against having too many projects in the portfolio as this might overwhelm the team member's ability to keep track and might dilute the advisory team's effectiveness.

STATION 2: EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Early Engagement

1. **Formalizing and Standardizing Engagement Practices**:
    - ○ **Standardized Guides**: Develop guides or templates to clarify how and when developers should communicate with the community.
    - ○ **Clear Rules and Procedures**: Establishing clear rules for developer engagement will ensure effectiveness and transparency.
2. **Increase Engagement Options**:
    - ○ **Varied Formats**: Participants were interested in the City enhancing outreach and engagement by holding community pop-ups, virtual and in-person meetings, paper mailings, flyers on bulletin boards, and the use of digital tools like online polls, and social media posts.
    - ○ **Simplify Material**: Simplify project plans as much as possible to allow them to be more understandable and easier to review.
3. **Continuous Feedback and Education**:
    - ○ **Regular Meetings and Surveys**: Encourage continuous feedback through regular meetings and surveys.
    - ○ **Public Education**: Educate the public about city plans and goals to enhance understanding and participation.

STATION 3: CONSISTENT STANDARDS

1. **Fairness and Equity**:
   - Many participants approve of the proposal for a structured, formula-based system to ensure fairness and clarity in the distribution of benefits. Many participants also noted the importance of maintaining some flexibility, as standardized formulas may not in all cases adequately address the diverse needs of different neighborhoods across Boston.
   - There are concerns about disparities in benefit distribution, with some neighborhoods feeling neglected.
2. **Transparency and Accountability**:
   - A significant concern is the transparency and accountability of how mitigation funds are collected and allocated.
   - Residents want clear standards, timelines, and robust oversight mechanisms, including audits and community reporting, to ensure funds are used effectively.
   - There is a strong call for legally binding agreements and consequences for non-compliance to ensure developers fulfill their commitments.

STATION 4: COORDINATED REVIEW

1. **Early Community Involvement:**
   - Residents appreciate the idea of early community involvement and higher-level discussions at the initial stages of project planning. This early engagement is seen as an opportunity for more meaningful community impact on project designs.
2. **Transparency and Clarity:**
   - There is enthusiasm for more transparency and clarity about city regulations that developers must follow, aiming to reduce ambiguity and streamline the process.
   - Residents value the concept of separating the conceptual phase from detailed renderings, which they believe will provide clearer visibility and earlier input opportunities.
   - They appreciate the BPDA providing summaries of community feedback and enhancing communication transparency.
   - Participants appreciate having clear definitions for more clear discussions of mitigation and community benefits.

3. **Iterative Nature and Documentation of Feedback:**
   - Concerns were raised about the iterative nature and documentation of feedback throughout the process. Residents find it crucial to ensure that all voices are heard and that feedback loops are effectively closed.
   - There is a desire for more transparent communication and documentation methods, such as improved use of online options for community engagement and providing clearer, more comprehensive updates.
4. **Influence and Fairness:**
   - Residents highlight concerns about the method for weighing community input, indicating a desire for a fair and transparent process that accurately reflects community concerns and priorities.

APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONS:

- What kinds of training would be useful for community members participating in this group?
- Which categories should be included as we compose the new Community Advisory Team?
- What kinds of expertise would be most helpful to have in these new groups?
- How long should Community Advisory Team terms last?
- How would you like to hear about development projects proposed in your neighborhood? Pick up to 3 options
- How would you like to share your thoughts and feedback about a proposed development project? Pick up to 3 options
- What role should City staff have in developer-led early engagement?
- Early Engagement to me is _____
- Do not forget about _____
- Successful Early engagement looks like _____
- Which of the nine categories of community benefits listed above are most important to you? Rank from 1-9 in order of importance (1 - most important, 9 - least important)
- What information can we use to help inform which community benefits are most important?
- Which aspects of a proposed development project are you most interested in shaping? Pick 3 options
- How do you want the City to demonstrate the ways your input was used?   How do you want to learn about project updates? Rank in order of priority (1-6) (1 being the highest priority 6 being the lowest priority)
- Following up on the previous question, are there any other methods to notify you about project updates that we missed here?
- How should we communicate city policies in the public project review process?