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## 12.02(11): Citizen Participation

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### Introduction

The Holyoke Redevelopment Authority's (HRA) Center City Plan is the culmination of an extensive public outreach and participation process starting in the Summer of 2010 through the completion of this report. Prior to this time period, a number of public meetings were held as part of the City's preparation of the 2009 *City Center Vision Plan: A Plan for the Heart of Our Community*, the 2008 *South Holyoke Revitalization Strategy* and this URP.

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### City Center Vision Plan Public Process

Holyoke is proactively planning ahead for the future reinvestment in its Center City area by working closely with its diverse community of residents, business owners, institutions and numerous community organizations. In 2008 the City formed the HRA, whose immediate focus was the revitalization of the four neighborhoods that make up the Center City. The Vision Plan identified opportunities to capitalize on the unique aspects of Holyoke's industrial heritage and green power generation, while embracing new opportunities for job growth, population growth and place making. A major component of this planning study was significant public outreach to assure that the Vision Plan evolved from the community. The outreach process included focus group meetings with numerous interest groups and three public meetings as well as additional outreach by City staff. The outreach concentrated on building and strengthening existing community collaborations and initiatives as well as working to build new relationships with organizations, community groups, and individuals.

The result of this public visioning process laid the groundwork for this URP to create vibrant, diverse, and safe neighborhoods in downtown Holyoke where all residents can live, work, and play.



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## Stakeholder Interviews

The Center City Vision Plan was developed over a five month period structured around initial stakeholder interviews and three public workshops, each organized to gain input about issues and opportunities, the Vision Plan alternatives, and the preferred Vision Plan. The planning process began by conducting a series of interviews with stakeholders over a two-day period to gain insight on the issues and opportunities that were relevant to the Center City study area. The interviews were held at City's Office of Planning and Economic Development and at the Visitors Center in Heritage State Park, where more than 100 people attended. The interviews were organized by topic area and included representatives from the business, non-profit, housing, healthcare and education industries. In addition, City Councilors, multiple City departments, private property owners, retailers, realtors and developers were interviewed.



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## Public Workshops

The three public workshops were advertised through the local media including the City cable access channel, City web site and Spanish radio Station WSPR, at local churches, as well as through the use of flyers and community boards that were distributed and/or placed within the neighborhoods in the study area. These materials were translated into Spanish to expand community outreach efforts.

The extensive outreach efforts led an average turnout of 80 to 100 people for each of the public meetings, where the consultants and City staff provided a brief presentation followed by "break-out" group discussions on the material that was presented that evening. Translation services were provided at the public meetings to accommodate Spanish speaking participants. Each group was asked to "report back" what they discussed so that their concerns and goals could be considered in developing the vision for the Center City. The meetings focused on the following topics:

- First Public Forum: "Understanding the Issues and Opportunities" and "Set a Vision/Framework for the Alternatives"
- Second Public Forum: "Review the Preliminary Vision Plan Alternatives"
- Third Public Forum: "Review Downtown Vision Plan" and preliminary "Urban Renewal considerations"



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## Steering Committee

The City appointed a Steering Committee that worked closely with the consultants throughout the development of the Vision Plan. The committee consisted of

members from the City Office of Planning and Economic Development and members of the HRA, the Holyoke Planning Board and the Holyoke Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (HEDIC). Meetings with the Steering Committee were held regularly to provide guidance on project coordination, development of the alternatives, refinement of the preferred Vision Plan and strategies for implementation actions.

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## URP Public Outreach Process

Following completion of the Vision Plan in 2009, the preparation of this URP began, which had a separate public input process. The following sections describe the key components of the public outreach efforts of this URP.



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### Neighborhood Public Meetings

The following lists the meetings with local departments for information and data collection:

- February 16, 2011 – Churchill Neighborhood, Wistarishurst Museum
- February 17, 2011 – Downtown Neighborhood, War Memorial Building
- March 2, 2011 – South Holyoke Neighborhood, Morgan School
- March 3, 2011 – The Flats Neighborhood, Kelley School

Furthermore, one public hearing and three public informational sessions are scheduled for September and October 2012.



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### Agency Meetings

The following lists the meetings with local departments for information and data collection:

- August 17, 2010 and September 28, 2010 – Meetings held with the Holyoke Department of Public Works



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### Citizen Participation Committee

The key component of the planning process was the active participation of the Citizen's Participation Committee (CPC) assembled by the HRA as an advisory committee for this URP. The CPC is comprised of the following individuals representing local long-time and short-time residents, local business owners, local property owners, a representative from each neighborhood and a representative from PVPC, the regional planning agency:

- John Aubin
- Ellen Bernstein
- Daphne Board
- Jodi Lyn Cutler
- Calvin Ellis
- Bruce Fowler
- Joshua Garcia
- Timothy Grader
- Yesenia Jusino
- James Mazik,  
Chairperson
- Maryliza Ortiz
- Jim Reidy
- Jose Rodriguez
- Lisa Rogers
- Sue Rosa

The CPC has over the course of the URP process attended the following meetings and worked to advise the HRA on issues pertaining to the revitalization of Holyoke's Center City.

- September 21, 2010
- October 14, 2010
- January 12, 2012
- January 28, 2012 (tour)
- February 8, 2012
- February 16, 2012
- March 1, 2012
- March 8, 2012
- March 15, 2012
- March 21, 2012
- March 28, 2012
- April 4, 2012 (presentation to HRA)
- July 23, 2012

At the meetings, presentations were made on site conditions, economic analysis and market demands, redevelopment options, the elements of this URP, infrastructure improvements, implementation strategies and funding initiatives, with discussions encouraged on all outstanding issues. The following CPC report describes the purpose and role of the Committee during the public hearing process, the CPC proposed actions evaluation process, and the CPC findings and recommendations.

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## 11 Holyoke Citizen Participation Committee Report

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### Purpose of the Citizen Participation Committee (CPC)

As part of the City of Holyoke's development of its Urban Renewal Plan (URP) for the central downtown area, the Holyoke Redevelopment Authority (HRA) formed a Citizen Participation Committee (CPC) to evaluate the public participation process and to insure that public sentiments and comments were integrated into the URP.

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## Role of the CPC During the Public Hearing Process

The HRA held public meetings in each of the four neighborhoods that will be directly impacted by the URP. These meetings in the Churchill, Prospect Heights/Downtown, Flats and South Holyoke Neighborhoods took place in February and March 2011. Members of the CPC helped coordinate and also attended the meetings to observe the presentations made on the URP relative to proposed neighborhood impact and the comments and feedback from those in attendance. CPC members also attended regularly held HRA monthly public meetings to participate in the progression of the URP.

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## CPC Evaluation Process

The CPC met approximately 12 times throughout the development of the URP. In early 2012, the CPC reconvened as a formal group to comment on the consistency between the recommended actions of the URP and the public comments from the four neighborhood Public Meetings. The CPC met on an aggressive schedule beginning in February through early April 2012 conducting eight working meetings to discuss the "URP Proposed Actions" as well as participation in a guided tour of the ten project areas within the four URP neighborhoods.

The formal evaluation process consisted of reviewing the URP's Proposed Actions for each of the 10 project areas by neighborhood and comparing them to the actual comments and feedback obtained from the HRA-sponsored neighborhood public meetings. The CPC evaluated the URP Proposed Actions in relation to the needs, desires and comments of the public. On an area by area basis, a determination was made as to the consistency of the URP's Proposed Actions with that of the sentiment as expressed at all four of the neighborhood meetings. Additional comments and recommendations were made by the CPC based on its review and interpretation of the recorded feedback of the four neighborhood public hearings. This evaluation is provided over the following pages.

The URP 10 project areas as identified by neighborhood are as follows:

### Churchill Neighborhood

- Cabot and Chestnut Area
- Parsons Paper Redevelopment Area

### Prospect Heights/Downtown Neighborhood

- Dwight Street Gateway
- Veteran's Park Area
- High Street Area

The Flats Neighborhood

- Passenger Rail/Transit Oriented Development Area (TOD)
- Riverfront Area along Third Canal

South Holyoke Neighborhood

- High Performance Computing Center
- South Holyoke Area
- Cabot Street Gateway

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## CPC Findings and Recommendations

### Area 1 – Dwight Street Gateway (Prospect Heights/Downtown Neighborhood)

#### Urban Renewal Plan Actions:

This area includes both sides of Dwight Street from Beech Street to Elm Street, which serves as a western gateway into the downtown area. There are a number of vacant lots and 6 City-owned parcels along this section of Dwight Street. Recommendations include the acquisition of 3 vacant lots, combining lots where necessary to create larger redevelopment parcels, and then selling the lots to be redeveloped for mixed residential and retail use that is in the same scale and character as the abutting neighborhood. Streetscape improvements are also included.

#### CPC Comment:

The proposed URP actions for the Dwight Street Gateway Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. The CPC feels that due to recent building loss resulting from fire and/or demolition, this neighborhood should be prioritized for redevelopment due to the substantial loss of buildings and housing stock in recent years resulting in the creation of extensive slum and blight. Redevelopment should be consistent with the surrounding area. If redevelopment is not imminent, the promotion of green spaces should be encouraged to minimize the blighted appearance. In addition, a formal themed “gateway” through the use of art and visual elements could be created.

### Area 2 – Veteran’s Park Area (Prospect Heights/Downtown Neighborhood)

#### Urban Renewal Plan Actions:

This area includes the old Holyoke Diocese property which Dennis Walsh plans to redevelop for residential use, Veteran’s Park and key vacant buildings in the area. The Dennis Walsh project will rehabilitate the vacant diocese buildings to include approximately 50 new residential units. Veteran’s Park will be upgraded. Streetscape improvements will be included. 5 vacant buildings will be acquired and many will be slated for rehabilitation for mixed-use opportunities.

#### CPC Comment:

The proposed URP actions for the Veteran’s Park Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. However, the CPC feels that the Mater Dolorosa Church area is of local, historical and architectural significance not only to this neighborhood but to the City as a whole. It is further recommended that any future use of this property should be consistent with the neighborhood and the

preservation of the existing character and architecture should be strongly encouraged. The CPC also feels that efforts need to be made to improve the connectivity to the PVTA bus terminal to enhance its use.

#### **Area 3 – Cabot and Chestnut Area (Churchill Neighborhood)**

##### **Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes parcels around the Holyoke Public Library, Lawrence School, and Senior Center. Actions in this area include supporting these projects with residential infill by partnerships where possible. Also in the vacant Chestnut, Cabot, Elm and Hampshire Street block (former Perpetual Help) construction of a neighborhood school was expressed by members of the Public. If a new school is not in conjunction with the School Department plans, residential infill was also supported for the vacant block.

##### **CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the Cabot and Chestnut Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. The CPC notes that housing was discussed during the public review process but is not fully addressed in the proposed actions for the Cabot and Chestnut Area. The CPC recommends that the URP be amended to insure that a variety of housing options and redevelopment, as identified in the public meetings, occur in this neighborhood in a manner consistent with existing and adjacent housing. Further, buildings that are in a state of disrepair should be addressed to further minimize demise (e.g. repair roofs, as appropriate). In addition, the CPC feels that a specific action plan for redevelopment of the former Armory site should be incorporated into the Cabot and Chestnut Area proposed actions.

#### **Area 4 – High Street Area (Prospect Heights/Downtown Neighborhood)**

##### **Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes area between High Street and Nick Cosmos Way/Heritage Street, and the Lyman Terrace complex. Recommendations include either the Hope VI project for Lyman Terrace – or rehabilitation of the Lyman terrace buildings, rehabilitation of the existing Dwight Street parking garage, reconstruction of the parking deck along Heritage Street, demolition of the old Police Station and construction of a small park in its place, streetscape improvements and the acquisition of 5 vacant buildings in the area for rehabilitation and reuse.

##### **CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the High Street Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public; however, the CPC feels that further evaluation and actions are necessitated for both the Holyoke House building and the Lyman Terrace housing development. The proposed demolition of Lyman Terrace would not only eliminate an entire urban neighborhood, but would result in the destruction of a significant piece of downtown Holyoke’s architectural heritage, history and character. The CPC feels that demolition of this site is contrary to the URP which is looking to revitalize urban Holyoke through appropriate adaptive reuse, preservation, rehabilitation and new construction. Furthermore, the displacement of hundreds of long-time residents from this area will dramatically change the character and culture of this neighborhood. Similarly, the redevelopment of the Holyoke House should be done in a manner which insures the preservation of the building’s historic character and attributes and which is complementary to adjacent properties.

#### **Area 5 – Passenger Rail/Transit Oriented Development Area (TOD) (The Flats Neighborhood)**

##### **Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes the site of the proposed new passenger rail stop at the old train station along with associated parking. Other actions in the area include the HRA acquisition and redevelopment, as well as support for private redevelopment, of vacant buildings and lots, additional parking, streetscape improvements (Lyman and Main) extension of Canal Walk along Race Street, improved pedestrian connections to the Flats. There are many vacant buildings at the Main Street and Lyman Street intersection. Many actions on this area will be further explored and recommended in a TOD study to be conducted by the City through a PVPC Grant.

##### **CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the Passenger Rail/Transit Oriented Development Area (TOD) Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. The CPC echoes the comments of much of the public concerning the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the old train station in a manner that embraces the historic character of the building. The CPC also feels that efforts need to be made to improve the connectivity to the PVTA bus system such that the rail and bus transit systems operate efficiently and in tandem. Support appears strong for retail (grocery), commercial, restaurant and additional parking in this area. However, the CPC feels that based on public comment, redevelopment of this area should encourage a food co-operative and the marketing of locally grown produce. Strong support for arts inclusion was noted and, therefore, should also be incorporated into this redevelopment area. Although this area is more industrial/urban in nature, existing green spaces should be maintained to provide “pockets” of natural vegetation for both resident and visitor.

#### **Area 6 – High Performance Computing Center (South Holyoke Neighborhood)**

##### **Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes underperforming buildings and parcels surrounding the site of the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center (MGHPCC). Building off the investment in the MGHPCC, actions in the area include the HRA acquisition and redevelopment, as well as support for private redevelopment, of vacant buildings and lots, additional parking, streetscape improvements (Appleton and Cabot) extension of Canalwalk along Race Street. There are a number of vacant and underutilized buildings along Race Street and the Second Level Canal.

##### **CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the High Performance Computing Center Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. However, the CPC strongly recommends that if properties housing active businesses are to be acquired and redeveloped, the HRA should make efforts to relocate those businesses within the South Holyoke Neighborhood or other locations within the URP, including the provision of incentives.

#### **Area 7 – Parsons Paper Redevelopment Area (Churchill Neighborhood)**

##### **Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes the 4-acre Parsons Paper site. Actions include acquisition of the site, completing the demolition of the existing building, site clean-up and hazardous material remediation and selling of the site for commercial/industrial reuse.



**CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the Parsons Paper Redevelopment Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. However, the CPC recommends that the reuse of this site should incorporate historic and cultural considerations as part of its overall redevelopment. This could include interpretive weather resistant panels containing historical information of the area as well as a site for arts and cultural displays and/or activities.

**Area 8 – South Holyoke (South Holyoke Neighborhood)**

**Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes the central portion of the South Holyoke neighborhood around the Morgan School. Recommended actions in the area build off of the recommendation of the South Holyoke Revitalization Strategy prepared with neighborhood input in 2008. Actions include building acquisition and redevelopment, new open space adjacent to the school, new housing, roadway improvements and neighborhood retail.

**CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the South Holyoke Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. The CPC recommends that the URP be amended to specifically echo the public sentiment that mixed use housing and affordable home ownership be the priority for housing development in the South Holyoke Neighborhood. In addition, strengthened efforts should be undertaken to improve overall pedestrian access and walkways to enhance neighborhood connectivity and use. In conjunction with pedestrian improvements, improved lighting throughout South Holyoke should be undertaken to improve visibility, improve safety conditions and deter crime and undesirable activity. The CPC noted the extensive number of comments relating to crime and public safety and recognizes the direct correlation between a successful revitalization/redevelopment and a safe environment. Therefore, the CPC strongly encourages the development of a police substation in South Holyoke to create a greater police presence and a safer atmosphere for both residents and visitors.

**Area 9 – Cabot Street Gateway (South Holyoke Neighborhood)**

**Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes both sides of Cabot Street between the Third Canal and South Bridge Street. Actions in this area are intended to form a public/private partnership between the HRA and private land owners to develop a retail core with grocery store to serve the South Holyoke and Flats areas. Linkages to the Flats would be improved through streetscape improvements and extension of the Canal Walk system along the Third Canal. Some key acquisitions would allow larger parcels to be created to allow the HRA to work with private land and business owners to develop retail and grocery businesses to serve the larger project area.

**CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the Cabot Street Gateway Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. The comments provided in Area 8 – South Holyoke are equally relevant to the Cabot Street Gateway Area and, therefore the CPC recommends that these are hereby incorporated in their entirety.

**Area 10 – Riverfront Area along Third Canal (The Flats Neighborhood)**

**Urban Renewal Plan Actions:**

This area includes parcels along the Third Canal and Connecticut River from the Route 116 bridges out past Cabot Street. Actions in this area are intended to stimulate the private redevelopment of many of the vacant

buildings and parcels in this area. One acquisition and two demolitions are proposed for buildings in poor condition and with contamination issues. A new public parking facility is proposed to support private redevelopment. Other infrastructure improvements include streetscape improvements and the extension of the Canal Walk system along the Third Canal, conversion of the private Water Street to a public street, extension of water service improvement into the area, and rehabilitation of the old bridges that cross the Third Canal. These actions are intended to support the redevelopment of many of the vacant lots and one existing industrial building in this area.

**CPC Comment:**

The proposed URP actions for the Third Canal Riverfront Area are generally consistent with the comments and desired actions of the public. The CPC also felt there was strong demonstrated interest in dedicated bicycle lanes and/or pathways and therefore encourage the incorporation of such access ways. Although this is a mixed use industrial area, views to the canal (water) should be provided wherever feasible. The CPC also recognized that the mixed uses of the area involving close proximity of industrial to residential is “challenging.” As this area continues to change, heavy industrial uses should be relocated to more appropriate and solely industrial zoned areas. At a minimum, industrial use regulations, including those limiting noise levels and hours of operation must be fully enforced to protect the quality of life of abutters and area residents.