

Guidance Document for the Community Engagement and Benefits Task Force of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

INTRODUCTION

The Community Engagement and Benefits Task Force (Task Force) was established by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (Commission) to support meaningful engagement in the regional planning process and to ensure that plans consider the needs of all residents. The Task Force consists of 15 representatives from throughout the Region who meet regularly to gain an understanding of the Commission's technical work program and to provide input to that program. This document serves as the basis for articulating the purpose, activities, and structure of the Task Force. The Task Force reviews it for necessary updates every two years and may update it more frequently at the Task Force Chair's discretion.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Regional planning addresses development and infrastructure problems that often transcend an individual community. As the official areawide planning agency and metropolitan planning organization, the Commission's role is to help solve problems and provide objective information to aid decision-makers. The Commission believes that engaging residents and having them participate in its work helps produce plans and recommendations that reflect its vision for a connected and thriving community. The activities of the Task Force enhance the Commission's community engagement efforts, including consideration for and engagement of traditionally underrepresented populations,¹ and identify the benefits and effects of its planning efforts.

ACTIVITIES

The Task Force engages in the following activities to allow continuous interaction and communication between members and Commission staff about regional planning.

1. Collaborate with Commission staff to strengthen community engagement efforts and advise methods to meaningfully involve all populations in the regional planning process.

Commission staff regularly discuss community engagement efforts with the Task Force. The Task Force makes recommendations to strengthen engagement activities with the goal of ensuring traditionally underrepresented populations are meaningfully involved in the regional planning process. This may involve suggesting processes or products to better inform or equip the public, including ways that residents can support implementation of plan recommendations.

Task Force members are also asked to share information related to Commission planning efforts and recommendations with their networks. Members may assist Commission staff in obtaining community ideas, opinions, and feedback. Members are encouraged to report input and issues important to their communities at Task Force meetings or through other communication channels.

¹ Traditionally underrepresented populations groups include those protected under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other nondiscrimination statutes and regulations (e.g., American with Disabilities Act, Older Americans Act, etc.). Under 23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(vii), the metropolitan planning organization must also seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households.

2. Promote awareness and understanding of the Commission, regional planning, and its benefits.

The Task Force increases awareness of the Commission, various elements of the regional planning process, and the Task Force's role. This may include sharing opportunities to get involved, how to access resources, and ways to support implementation of Commission plan recommendations.

Task Force members are also encouraged to take an active role in generating applicants for open positions at the Commission, including sharing position announcements with their communities and reporting back to the Task Force and Commission staff on how they share positions.

3. Provide input and identify potential benefits and adverse effects of regional planning programs and activities on traditionally underrepresented populations.

The Task Force makes recommendations to the Commission and its advisory committees related to the regional planning program. The Task Force reviews and comments on demographic data and regional plans as they are being developed, with a specific focus on the effects on traditionally underrepresented populations and whether and how the benefits and burdens are shared.

Commission staff relay Task Force input and recommendations to committees, as appropriate, but certain Commission committees (e.g., Regional Transportation Planning Committee and Transportation System Planning and Programming Committee) may also include a liaison to the Task Force. The liaison's role is to ensure that Task Force feedback is shared with and considered by the committee, and that any feedback from the committee is relayed back to the Task Force. The liaison may participate in each meeting, regardless of whether the individual is a Task Force member. If not a Task Force member, the liaison is considered a non-voting member and does not count towards a quorum. As appropriate, the Task Force also identifies potential representatives of organizations who could be invited to serve on Commission advisory committees created for new planning efforts. In addition, Commission staff discuss the work of the Task Force at least annually with the Commission.

4. Monitor and recommend actions on issues and analyses relevant to the needs and circumstances of traditionally underrepresented populations.

The Task Force may suggest quantitative and qualitative analyses, research, or studies regarding issues impacting traditionally underrepresented population groups for the Commission to consider.

5. Evaluate the effectiveness of engagement and the activities of the Task Force.

Commission staff regularly evaluate the impact of outcomes from the Task Force, including the degree to which the Commission and the Region, respectively, have implemented Task Force recommendations. Staff track suggestions and requests from Task Force members (during or between meetings) in an action item list, which is discussed at each meeting. Task Force members receive updates on measures related outcomes for traditionally underrepresented populations, such as improved access to jobs by transit, increased income levels, or decreased housing cost burden.

In addition, the Task Force assists staff in periodically reviewing the effectiveness of community engagement methods to ensure a full and open participation process.

MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force is made up of 15 voting members appointed by the Commission. The Commission also appoints a chair and vice chair from among the 15 members. Members are asked to make an initial three-year commitment, which can be renewed at the Chair's discretion. Members are encouraged to recommend individuals to the Commission to fill any vacancies on the Task Force as they occur. The 15 members are appointed based on the following criteria:

- **Geographic representation:** To provide perspectives from across Southeastern Wisconsin and ensure representation from communities with the traditionally underrepresented populations, the Task Force is composed of:
 - Seven members to represent the counties in the region (one per county)
 - Three members to represent the largest city in the region (Milwaukee)
 - Three members to represent the three next-largest cities in the region (one per city)
 - One member from the remainder of the region outside the four largest cities
 - One member selected as an at-large representative
- **Community-informed perspectives:** It is important for the Task Force to include a variety of perspectives. The membership includes representation from different population groups, including traditionally underrepresented populations.
- **Relevant experiences:** While not required, knowledge of planning topics addressed by the Commission is highly desirable. The Commission is the areawide planning agency for land use and infrastructure, so topics related to transportation, land use, housing, economic development, and the environment are particularly relevant for Task Force discussions. Members should have demonstrated skills, knowledge, or experience to advise the Commission on meaningful and inclusive community engagement.
- **Participation expectations:** Regular participation by all members is critical to ensure each discussion by the Task Force includes a range of perspectives. Members sign a document of commitment that clearly indicates expectations. Commission staff track attendance and participation and inform a member having two or more unexcused absences within a one-year period of their need to participate. If the member does not increase their participation, staff and the Task Force Chair determine whether to propose the member's removal to the Commission. To be excused from a meeting, members must contact Commission staff prior to the meeting and Commission staff will note the absence as excused.

MEETINGS

The Task Force typically meets on a quarterly basis on the second Tuesday of March, June, September, and December. These dates are reviewed annually at the December meeting and adjusted as necessary at the Chair's discretion. Special meetings may be called at the Chair's discretion. A majority of voting members shall constitute a quorum at any meeting. Guidance on how meetings are scheduled and conducted is below.

- **Meeting location and format:** Meetings may be held virtually or in person at the discretion of the Chair. All in-person meetings include an option for joining remotely. In-person meetings are held in locations that are physically accessible to people with disabilities and served by public transportation, with a preference for community locations (e.g., schools, local organizations,

churches, etc.). Task Force members are encouraged to nominate and provide contact information for specific locations.

- **Public meetings:** Meetings are publicly announced, open to the public, and include a reasonable opportunity for public comment.
- **Meeting topics:** Commission staff propose initial agenda items for each meeting and encourage members to suggest additional agenda items. The final agenda is determined by the Chair. In addition to Commission staff-led agenda items, members are encouraged to suggest expert speakers, including members themselves, that could be invited to attend a meeting to discuss a particular topic.

* * *