

# Not Just a Task to Check-Off:

## How community engagement has shaped the planning process for the CPR Yards Crossing - Arlington Bridge Solutions Project

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### Abstract

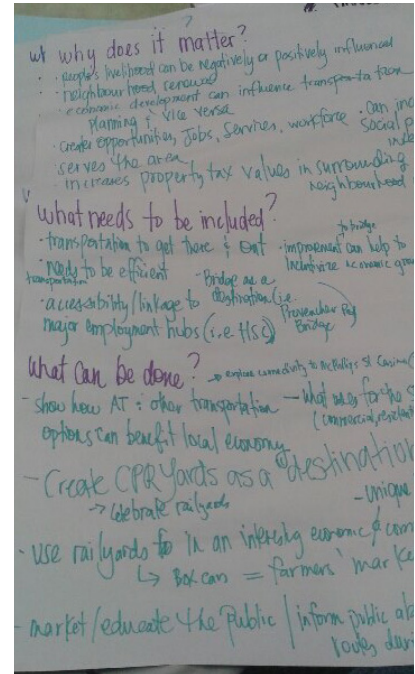
key words  
Community  
Engagement;  
Public  
Participation;  
Community  
Workshop.

Community engagement is fundamental within city planning. The American Association of Planners (APA) defines planning as a dynamic profession that works to the betterment of people and their communities by creating more equitable, healthy, efficient, and attractive places for present and future generations (2012). Through public participation, planners engage citizens to play a meaningful role in the creation of their communities to enrich people's lives (2012). However, despite the understanding that public engagement is good, "there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). Creating a notion that public engagement is just a task to check off. Despite the negative connotation, "public participation. . . is of utmost important in the development process and transformation of cities for the future" (Amado et. al, 2010, p. 103). It helps to create an engaged city, which brings people together to address issues of common importance, to solve problems, and to bring out positive social change (The City of Vancouver, 2012). The CPR Yards Crossing Study-Arlington Bridge Solutions Planning Project has undertaken a collaborative planning process to actively engage, inform, and work with citizens in the re-development of a better crossing for the north and south communities of the CPR Yards in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## Background

This case-in-point analyzes the meticulous processes involved in a successful public engagement strategy, specifically those leading to the second community workshop of the project. By exemplifying the importance of the community in the planning process, this case in point argues the importance of public participation for urban planning; as it is clear that, “reaching out and engaging citizens and stakeholders is not just a fact of life for planners but a cannon of good and ethical planning practice” (Seltzer and Mahmoudi, 2012, p.3).

collaborative planning approach, the project has sought to create a better connection for people across the railway yards, which has historically stood as a barrier for the north and south communities. The CPR Yard Crossing Study is not only looking at a new crossing, but ways to improve the connection between the two adjacent communities. The study includes reviewing traffic routes that lead onto and off the bridge; planning for all kinds of transportation in the area; considering designs that fit well into the local community; and reviewing the intersections in the area. The project takes on a unique



Above: Flip Chart Data from Workshop and received from Robert Falcon, 2015



Above: Public Art in Winnipeg's North End and received from the City of Winnipeg, 2014

## The CPR Yards Crossing Project

As the current Arlington Street Bridge has reached the end of its useful life, the City of Winnipeg has partnered with Stantec Engineering and Freig & Associates to create an interim plan of a sensible crossing over the CPR Yards. Through a

collective strategy that puts community engagement at the forefront of the planning process, by putting power and decisions in the public's hand.

In this collaborative planning process, people have and continue to work in groups to find possible crossing options for the betterment of the community-at-large. A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was formed

to represent people and key stakeholders in the community to work closely with City staff to form ideas, suggestions, and possible ways to meet the project's goals and decide which ones may work better than others. The general public has been involved in a number of ways, such as through dialogue groups at community organization, going on a public site tour, attending community workshops, answering a telephone survey, and visiting public open houses. The City has also provided an online interactive website to make it possible to offer their opinions and stay updated on the project.

## The Community Workshop

The second community

workshop is an excellent example of how community engagement leads the process in the CPR Yards Crossing – Arlington Bridge Solutions project. The workshop occurred on Saturday March 21, 2015 at King Edward School in Winnipeg, Manitoba. There were over 70 community members in attendance. The workshop focused on gaining insight, ideas, and information about how the project could be used to the betterment of the community and where and how people currently cross the CPR Yards or would like to in the future.

The goal of the workshop was to gain informed community input about travel habits and needs, as well as crossing opportunities that could be incorporated in the project planning process. To reach this goal, 3 clear objectives were stated. First, that participants were given the background to participate knowledgeably; secondly, that participants were satisfied with the opportunities to participate; and lastly, that the planning team would get usable information that was on-topic so it could further the planning process. Participants were given the background knowledge through a presentation that provided the public engagement context, the vision and goals of the project, public input to date, technical information and participation guidelines. Participants were given opportunities to participate through two activities. The first activity sought to learn more about community

member's travel habits, mode of transportation and preferred crossing zones through small group discussion and mark-up of zoned and traffic maps. The second activity obtained community member's thoughts, ideas, needs, and wants on possible topics supporting the project and its vision and goals. This information was all on-topic and allowed for the project planners to gain a clearer idea of where people wanted a crossing, what type of crossing they wanted, and what modes of transportation they wanted the crossing to support. In addition,

was a general consensus that attendees were satisfied with the opportunities to participate and the workshop and facilitation itself. Overall, all parties involved saw the workshop as a success!

In regards to community engagement, the workshop particularly showcased the consultation/participation dimension of public participation. It provided a close examination of the collaboration that has shaped the process and the project's outcome. It also helps to reiterate the importance of community engagement in



Above: Group Discussion at Community Workshop and received from Robert Falcon..

they were able to further understand what the community wanted in terms of a better crossing to create a more livable and connected community. This information has been brought back to the PAC to further explore in collaboration with their creation of crossing options and possibilities. In regards to the satisfaction of participants, there

planning. Public participation helps to create an engaged city, which brings people together to address issues of common importance, to solve problems, and to bring out positive social change. An engaged city involves people in city hall's decision-making process, improving decisions and building trust that is needed to plan for a common future (The City of

Vancouver, 2012). The second community workshop provides a better understanding of how the collaborative process creates a more complete project for the community. Through analysis of the steps, execution, and reflection of the workshop, lessons and take-aways for professional practice can be deciphered in the emphasis towards a complete and collaborative approach to community engagement.

## A Collaborative Approach . . .

A collaborative planning process “involves interaction in the form of a partnership throughout consensus building, plan development, and implementation (Lowry et. al, qtd. in Margerum, 2002, p. 238). It puts the community at the forefront of the planning processes by including them in decision-making roles. This

particularly the PAC, with the planning and engineering team to direct the development of finalized crossing options. The workshop sought to gain a greater and wider relationship with community members through the community workshop. This collaborative approach makes use of the consultative and participative dimension of community engagement. The consultation/participation dimension of community engagement refers to community members being given and taking on different degrees of power and responsibility. Following Arnstein’s ladder of participation - research, consultation, participation, and self-government are the key components in the characteristics of the engagement (Rogers and Robinson, 1970), and evident in the workshop’s process. These factors work to put decisions in the public’s hand. Looking at the community workshop

of transportation should the crossing support. Although the workshop was designed and executed by the planning team, the participants saw if through due to the consultation that occurred and the communication that sought to inform and direct the overall planning process.

## A Complete Approach . . .

A collaborative planning process is argued to be a complete approach. The City of Vancouver’s spectrum of public participation (seen in the figure below) provides an in-depth and complex continuum of various levels needed for a successful community engagement project and process. The workshop, as well as the process at large, follows the participative spectrum to create an empowered community engagement session. It first informed the community to provide an



Above: Complete Engagement Spectrum Graphic and received from The City of Vancouver

concept puts the power in citizen’s hands, emphasizing Arnstein’s equation of participation as citizen control. This collaborative planning process partners the public,

as an example, it is clear that the consultation sought to gain an understanding of what the community desires to see in the community, where they want a crossing, and what modes

objective and explanatory presentation of the project. It consulted to gain feedback on issues, opinions, ideas, and decisions. It further strengthened involvement of the community

by addressing all concerns and questions, in addition to gaining considerations and viewpoints for the project. Next collaboration sought to create partnerships with the public in all aspects of decision-making. This allowed for empowerment of the community

in the planning process. The project has the possibility to provide a better connection to two communities that have been historically barred by the CPR Yards. By listening to the community and involving them in the planning process, it is hoped

community, planners can gain an understanding as to what the community truly desires, wants, and needs - not just what the planner thinks a community wants or needs. It also helps to reiterate the trust and relationship that the community

can have with planners and the city itself.

The success of the second workshop was due to intensive and well-thought out processes that led to its collaborative form. It is hoped that the duration of the project will continue to deliver the interactive engagement that



Above: Community member in front of the Arlington Bridge and received from the City of Winnipeg CPR Crossing Project Website

by placing the decisions in the hands of the public. A complete approach not only hears the community, but values their input by directly involving them in the decision-making. This allows for a complete and collaborative community engagement.

## Lessons Learned

The second community workshop in the CPR Yards Crossing – Arlington Bridge Solutions project is an advocate for the need for collaboration

that the public will become invested in the project and the exciting possibilities the resulting interim plans could have.

By making use of a complete collaboration strategy, the workshop informed, consulted, and collaborated with the community to empower them to make decisions that will shape and guide the future of their community. This example emphasizes the idea that planning for cities should involve the community that makes up the city. By working with the

empowers the citizens of the community.

## Conclusion

Community engagement should build knowledge, capacity, trust, and power (City of Vancouver, 2012). By taking on a complete and collaborative approach, the CPR Yards Crossing - Arlington Bridge Solutions project and workshop emphasize the need to not only hear the public in engagement, but involve the public in the planning process to better the project itself.



## Resources

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Above: Street Mural in the North End of Winnipeg and received from the City of Winnipeg CPR Yards Crossing Project Website