

# THE BRAINERD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN



A roadmap for the Implementation of the  
**Mississippi River Partnership Plan**



# THE BRAINERD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

**Purpose**

**Definitions**

**Riverfront Scope**

**Stakeholders**

**Plan**

Approach

Audience

Techniques

Goals



**Our Vision—Maximize our Mississippi Riverfront by creating recreational, economic and cultural opportunities for Brainerd's residents and visitors.**



## PURPOSE

Community engagement is a vital part of a project's planning phase. It allows and ensures a public participation process to garner feedback from residents. Outreach efforts ensure that recommendations of the plan (or project) are based on a well-rounded understanding of community needs, aspirations, values, issues, and opportunities.

This *Community Engagement Plan* (CEP) will outline the avenues to be taken to garner community support and input regarding the Brainerd Riverfront. The goal of the plan is to collaborate with and involve stakeholders to ensure that aspirations are consistently understood and influence solutions aimed at revitalizing the riverfront corridor.

Our approach will implement authentic participation efforts and go beyond the minimum legal requirements to connect with citizens. The plan will outline innovative communication techniques and outreach channels and will serve as the idea-vehicle to invite the public to participate in the stages of plan making.

The following sections in the document will outline the outreach platforms in an effort to address the following vision and goals established by the riverfront committee.





## GOAL 1

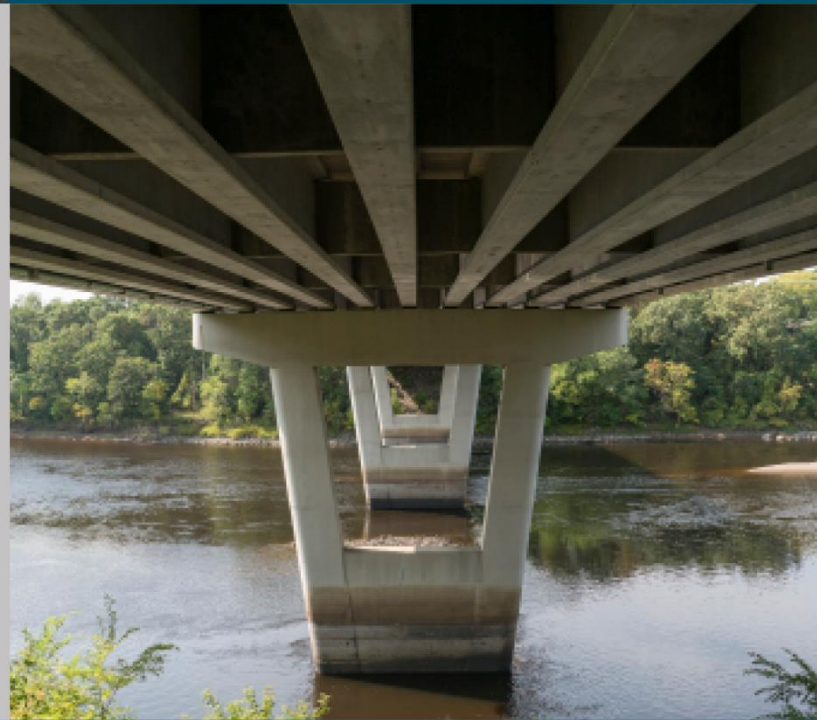
Prepare a phased implementation plan based on the Mississippi Riverfront Partnership Plan

## GOAL 2

Identify funding sources and uses.

## GOAL 3

Identify and begin one achievable and visible project within the first year



## GOAL 4

Create a community engagement strategy with a public relations campaign.







**Our Vision—Maximize our Mississippi Riverfront by creating recreational, economic and cultural opportunities for Brainerd's residents and visitors.**



## VISION

Our Goals—The Brainerd Riverfront Committee has established goals for 2016:

**1 Prepare a phased implementation plan based on the Mississippi Riverfront Partnership Plan.**

Identify and summarize similar successful riverfront projects in other communities.

Identify which projects are feasible and achievable.

Provide a timeline with benchmarks.

Identify property owners and parcel information along the corridor.

**3 Identify and begin one achievable and visible project within the first year.**

**2 Identify funding sources and uses.**

Provide a list of eligible funding sources based on identified projects.

Identify additional expertise.

Determine a budget.

**4 Create a community engagement strategy with a public relations campaign.**

Engage the community in the community in the process for their input.

Create videos, website, social media communications for the project.



## DEFINITIONS

The goal of engagement is to involve and collaborate with residents and stakeholders in an effort to ensure that community visions, aspirations, and concerns are directly reflected in not only current planning efforts, but the short, mid and long-range planning efforts of the river corridor. The following are principles of community engagement from the *Institute for Local Government, Public Engagement Program*:



***Inclusive Planning:*** planning will include input from local officials as well as from members of intended participant communities.

***Transparency:*** clarity about public engagement process and how decision makers will use the process results.

***Authentic Intent:*** primary purpose of public engagement is to generate public views and ideas to help shape the plan, rather than to persuade residents to accept a plan that has been already made.

***Breadth of Participation:*** process includes people and viewpoints that are broadly reflective of the population of affected residents.

***Informed Participation:*** participants have information and/or access to expertise consistent with the topic being discussed.





**Accessible Participation:** process is broadly accessible in terms of location, time, language and supports the engagement of residents with disabilities.

**Appropriate Process:** process utilizes one or more discussion formats that fit the needs of the participants and encourage equitable participation consistent with the purpose.

**Authentic Use of Information Received:** ideas, preferences and/or recommendations contributed by participants are documented and seriously considered by decision makers.

**Feedback to Participants:** Local officials communicate ultimate decision back to process participants and the broader public, with a description of how public input was considered and used.

**Evaluation:** facilitators and participants evaluate each public engagement process with the feedback and learning shared and applied to future engagement efforts.





## BRAINERD RIVERFRONT SCOPE

The City of Brainerd was awarded the Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation (BLACF) “Difference Maker” grant in 2015. In 2018 the grant was transferred from the HRA to the City of Brainerd to manage the final year of funding. The Different Maker Grant was awarded in an effort to implement the *Mississippi Riverfront Partnership Plan* which was created by the University of Minnesota Center for Rural Design in 2015.

### Following are the goals and objectives form the Vision Plan:

- Establishment of community gathering places along the Mississippi River.
- Potential for pedestrian/bicycle bridge across the river.
- A trail system along the entire project corridor.
- Enhancement and protection of the environment.
- Riverfront revitalization will be based upon the following principles:
  - Honoring the Mississippi River as an irreplaceable, natural, cultural and economic resource.
  - Understanding the benefits to local area citizens and visitors.
  - Preserving and enhancing the ecological health of the river.
  - A mixed use of activities.
  - Promoting partnerships between public and private entities.
- Address barriers to business growth and employment with active participation by private, public and nonprofit sectors.
- Identifying opportunities for Downtown to connect with the river.



**The following resources will be required:**

- Identify and prioritize what the needs and priorities for the project should be
- Develop a consensus on a proposal or plan
- Inform the decision-making or service delivery of a community, council or department, or players
- Develop new or collaborative ways of implementing elements of the MRPP
- Review progress on the community plan.

**Recommended action steps needed to meet objective:**

- Collect applicable visioning tools i.e. maps, photos, illustrations, and already formulated plans.
- Prepare information describing the need, vision, and benefits of the project.
- Collect information on rough cost estimates to determine scale of project and final funding needs.
- Begin communications with prospective partners.
- Complete trail connections throughout the city.

In an effort to develop actions to address **the public participation and outreach component** of each goal, the following five categories were formed to address each task: communication, gathering spaces, environment, trail connectivity, and education. The following charts provide the action, the role and capacity that the riverfront committee and/or coordinator will serve and the priority associated with each task.

**COMMUNICATION - ACTION ITEMS**

<b>ROLE/CAPACITY</b> Role of BRC and City of Brainerd on the progress of each initiative.	<b>TASKS</b> Work or efforts that need to be acted on to complete the goals and principles listed above.	<b>PRIORITY</b> Timeline associated with each project tasks.
LEAD	Identify channels to collaborate and connect with prospective partners.	Ongoing
LEAD	Build on the existing list of prospective partners.	Ongoing, evaluate quarterly
LEAD	Visually communicate the connection between downtown and the riverfront (through banners, graphics, signs, wayfinding).	Short-term
LEAD	Develop a cost estimate for each project and track the initiative in project panorama.	Ongoing
LEAD	Share success stories of the MRPP quarterly to shareholders.	Short-term

## GATHERING SPACES - ACTION ITEMS

ROLE/CAPACITY Role of BRC and City of Brainerd on the progress of each initiative.	TASKS Work or efforts that need to be acted on to complete the goals and principles listed above.	PRIORITY Timeline associated with each project tasks.
LEAD	Work with community members to identify assets along the corridor. Identify potential gathering spaces (active and passive).	Mid-term
LEAD	Study and inventory trail users and the needs of trail users. Collect data to influence progress.	Quarterly, ongoing
LEAD	Study park and trail users and identify programming for a mixed-use of activities.	Quarterly, ongoing
PARTNER	Hold community roundtables to identify gathering sites throughout the study area.	Short-term

## ENVIRONMENT - ACTION ITEMS

ROLE/CAPACITY Role of BRC and City of Brainerd on the progress of each initiative.	TASKS Work or efforts that need to be acted on to complete the goals and principles listed above.	PRIORITY Timeline associated with each project tasks.
PARTNERSHIP	Work with area partners and stakeholders to continue to improve, protect and enhance the environment.	Mid-term
PARTNERSHIP	Champion the Mississippi River's natural, cultural and economic resources.	Ongoing
PARTNERSHIP	Study the health of the environment and water quality of the study area. Identify a plan for preservation and enhancement.	Mid-term



## TRAIL CONNECTIVITY - ACTION ITEMS

ROLE/CAPACITY Role of BRC and City of Brainerd on the progress of each initiative.	TASKS Work or efforts that need to be acted on to complete the goals and principles listed above.	PRIORITY Timeline associated with each project tasks.
LEAD PARTNERSHIP EFFORT	Collaborate with trail advocates, walkable bikeable communities' group, and area stakeholders to develop an alignment for a trail through the length of the Mississippi River trail network.	Mid-term
PARTNERSHIP	Market and promote the existing network to community members and park/trail users.	Short-term
LEAD	Develop a follower base and begin to illustrate the gaps in the network.	Mid-term
LEAD	Engage with the community to gather feedback that can be used to support projects and initiatives.	Ongoing

## EDUCATION - ACTION ITEMS

ROLE/CAPACITY Role of BRC and City of Brainerd on the progress of each initiative.	TASKS Work or efforts that need to be acted on to complete the goals and principles listed above.	PRIORITY Timeline associated with each project tasks.
LEAD	Develop material, media, and content around the importance of the project (print and digital forms - using all outreach platforms necessary).	Mid-term
LEAD	Share visioning tools (maps, photos, illustrations, plans, etc.) with the public that are visually appealing.	Short-term
LEAD	Identify the barriers to <b>business expansion and development</b> . Work with area partners, hold meetings and interviews	Mid-term
LEAD	Identify the barriers to <b>development and redevelopment</b> . Work with area partners, hold meetings and interviews	Mid-term



## STAKEHOLDERS

Transforming the Mississippi Riverfront will involve multiple phases and require individuals, agencies, organizations, and institutions to work together toward a common goal. The following is an overview of the partners and supporters:

### **City of Brainerd**

The Brainerd City Council is overseeing the management and funds of this grant.

### **Brainerd Riverfront Committee**

Riverfront redevelopment efforts are led by an advisory committee made up of area residents and representatives from various groups and organizations. Over the course of the past two years, the riverfront committee has met monthly. An executive committee was formed and meets quarterly. The riverfront committee has helped to form a vision for corridor improvements and has assisted in implementing portions of the Mississippi River Partnership Plan.

A steering committee was appointed to lead the University of Minnesota Center for Rural Design (CRD) to oversee a process to develop design images for a two (2) mile section of the Mississippi River that was identified by the 2011 Vision Plan. The committee was made up of thirty-one (31) members.

### **School district ISD 181**

The school district borders the “boundary” of the riverfront district. The school district owns various influential parcels adjacent to our efforts, as well as small parcel adjacent to the river where a potential plaza will be developed. Collaborative efforts with the school district will provide opportunities for redevelopment and programming along the corridor as projects are formed and arise.



### Central Lakes College

The college is adjacent to the “boundary” of the riverfront district. The college offers great opportunity for collaboration with their departments for corridor projects and improvements. As redevelopment efforts and project identification progress, the following degree programs, and their respective departments, will be instrumental in implementation efforts:

- Marketing, arts, horticulture, landscape, natural resources, welding, agriculture, engineering, environmental, wildlife tourism.

### Local Groups

The Brainerd Riverfront effort is supported by a variety of area stakeholders and champions. As the project grows in its complexity, the list of partners and stakeholders evolves. The following is a core list of participants:

Local Groups	
Rotary	Major Employers: St. Joseph's hospital and Essentia Clinic, Ascensus, Mills Company. Employment Hubs.
Brainerd Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA)	
Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation (BLACF)	Brainerd Lakes Area Economic Development Corporation (BLAEDC)
State and Regional Entities	
Initiative Foundation	Region Five Development Commission
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR)
Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)	Mississippi Headwaters Board
Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (if awarded designation) (GMRPTC)	Trust for Public Land
The Nature Conservancy	Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MN-MRPC)

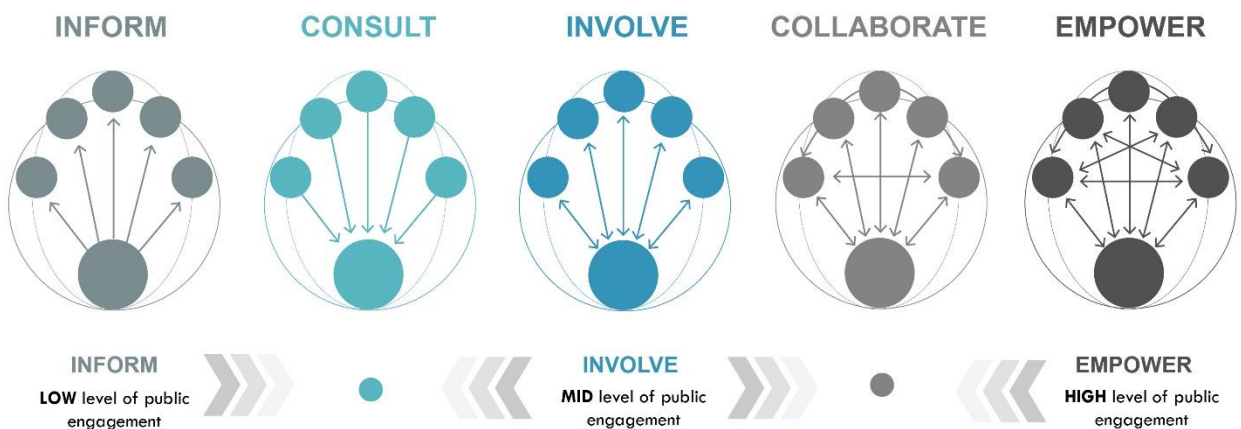


## PLAN:

The BRC/City of Brainerd will consult with the community regarding the five essential planning principles from the Mississippi Partnership Plan:

- Expand access to the river
- Educate about the value and benefits of the river
- Preserve/enhance ecological health
- Encourage private development/redevelopment
- Promote partnerships among public agencies, private land owners, developers, special user groups, and interested citizens

The Brainerd Riverfront Committee and City of Brainerd will collaborate with the community in framing equitable and authentic engagement for the planning and implementation process.



Source: IAP2 Best Practice Standards for Public Participation



	Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Partner
<b>Engagement Goal</b>	To provide stakeholders with the factual, balanced, and timely information to help them understand the project	To obtain stakeholder feedback on project analysis, alternatives, or decisions	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that perspectives are consistently understood, considered, and reflected in project decisions	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision making in order to develop and implement collaborative project solutions.
<b>BRC and City of Brainerd Promise</b>	To keep stakeholders informed on a monthly basis	Keep stakeholders informed, listen to and acknowledge feedback, and work to ensure stakeholder feedback is reflected in alternatives developed	Work with stakeholders for advice and innovation in forming solutions and incorporate recommendations to the maximum extent possible.	Regularly evaluate overall success of partnerships


[https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/\\_asset/b31f08/uht\\_community\\_engagement\\_plan.pdf](https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/_asset/b31f08/uht_community_engagement_plan.pdf)

## Approach

Communication and participation should occur at a range of levels – from providing advice to co-designing the process and delivering projects to meet some of the outcomes.

Community stakeholders can participate in a variety of ways in identifying needs, generating solutions, planning new initiatives and service delivery. Participation occurs in the form of the following types; users and beneficiaries, advisors, contributors to management, decision makers, deliverer's.

- **Users and Beneficiaries:** of the activities and funds of the partnership. This is the most basic level of engagement.
- **Advisors:** to the partnership through their involvement in consultations, working parties and evaluations which seek their guidance and feedback.
- **Contributors to Management:** through membership of forums and steering groups that work alongside staff supervising progress on partnership activities.
- **Decision Makers:** primarily through their membership of the partnership board, but also when periodic consultations are taking place about strategic choices and other major decisions.
- **Deliverer's:** of projects and programs on behalf of the partnership and as local champions that are being developed to take over projects and programs.



As a part of this project's outreach efforts it's important that any engagement, no matter what stage, should be informed or offered the opportunity to share the next stages of the participation process.

## Message

**Current activities:** messaging will highlight ongoing recreational opportunities on the Mississippi River.

**Plans and vision:** focus on the promoting the larger and long-term intentions of the Brainerd Riverfront

**Updates:** highlight the achievements and upcoming work of the Brainerd Riverfront. Share the experiences that can be had, both active and passive, with our membership and residents. Teach and educate our followers about the benefits of the river. Teach and educate our followers on the benefits and ways we can preserve and enhance the ecological healthy of the river corridor.

**History:** Focus on the history of the Mississippi River in Brainerd through photos and stories.

## Audience

As this progress propels forward and build in momentum, the following groups should be considered when designing the outreach plan.


- Area residents and citizens
- Area businesses and area commerce
- Walkers
- Bikers
- Kayakers/Canoe
- River-users
- Fisherman
- Drivers
- Boaters
- Business community

## Techniques

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/toolkit/Pages/PubInvTech.aspx>

### Techniques

Door to door visits with business owners (progressive focus group)	Listening sessions	Surveys (targeted and general)
Door to door visits with residents (progressive focus group)	Outreach platforms: city newsletter, Disbatch, area news providers, and BRC e-newsletter	Social media and informative messaging
Pop-up conversations (coffee shop and library)	Interactive stations along the riverfront	Social media information gathering – incorporate surveying mechanisms
Neighborhood meetings and area focus groups	Tactical urbanism	Trail survey and inventories
Community-wide meeting to validate projects within zone	Educational seminars – ecology, restoration, downtown revitalization	Check-in stations throughout the network



**Art and Creativity:** Some forms of community engagement are particularly good at encouraging participation and generating interest and ideas

**Photography:** photo contest or photo submission can be open to people of all ages to capture their likes and dislikes of an area. The results can be exhibited to generate further discussion or to promote additional events.

**Video:** short, succinct interviews with people in different locations at different times can be displayed and discussed more widely than photography.

**Artwork:** Invite residents to submit (possibly for a prize) a drawing that visualizes positive changes, or depicts their ideal environment.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Suitable for all age groups	Participants confidence in their creative skills
Interactive and engaging	Often a large space is required to exhibit or display results
Enables participants to express their creativity	It may be difficult to interpret participants ideas
Can help develop a common vision	
Can be exhibited to generate further discussion	

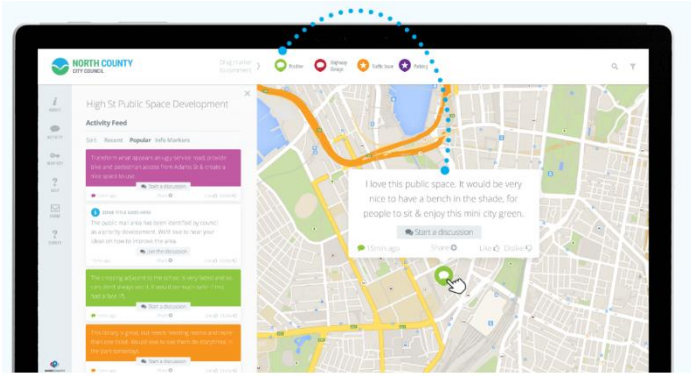
This type of outreach is applicable when you want to involve local people and include their expression of views and to generate ideas in a participatory approach. Art and creativity is a useful technique to engage people of all ages, ability, and education. This technique could involve school programs, local forums, and resident or interest groups. This technique would also be useful at the beginning of a community planning process in an effort to generate interest and raise awareness of the process.

**Mapping:** maps and photographs of an area or specific project location can be used to illustrate how people view the area; what are their likes or dislikes, what are the opportunities or constraints. Ideas that are generated within small group discussions should be diligently recorded. Discussion should be facilitated to help people explore issues, build consensus and identify areas of conflict.

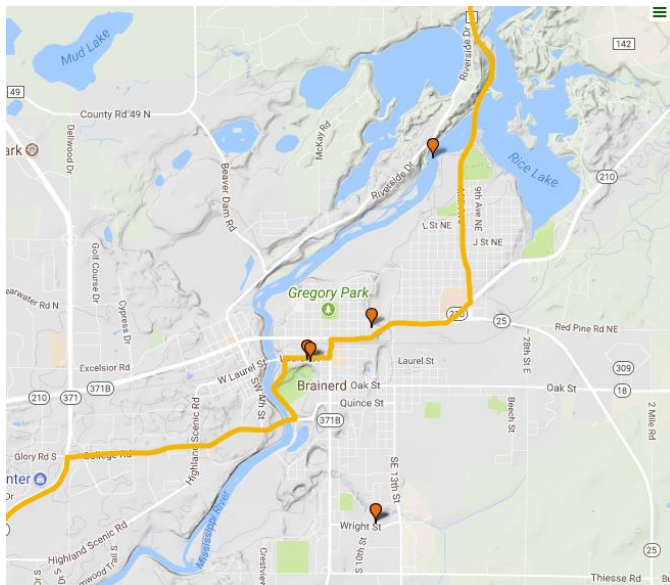
Strengths	Weaknesses
Stimulates discussion	Can generate ideas which are not possible to implement
Can build a sense of community ownership	May be difficult to interpret ideas
Can help people see and understand their community in a different way	Participants need to be familiar with the local area

Community mapping is a useful tool when needing to involve all people at all levels of capability. This technique is useful when studying land use, community assets, facilities, transportation options and an inventory, or snapshot, of the area. This exercise can be carried out through a variety of materials and methods i.e., chalk, dry erase markers, rendering markers, dots, etc.





^^Above: Social PinPoint interface.



^^Above: Interactive Map through the MN Great River Road Corridor Management Plan.

**Interactive Mapping:** online options provide residents the creativity, freedom, and anonymity to participate in community engagement opportunity from the comfort of their own home. This form of location based participation will provide immediate feedback to project managers, which will identify visual locations and solutions within the Brainerd Mississippi park and trail network.

The visual components of these maps could serve as a marketing tool and promotional push to get involved in corridor planning.

Platforms such as Social Pinpoint and MindMixer provide options for residents, business owners, and visitors the opportunity to provide location-based participation. These platforms will allow us to reach the right audience, understand who is participating, generate more input in less time, and measure our impact.

**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission** has developed the *Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Plan*. As a part of this effort an interactive mapping component was developed to help great river road travelers find scenic overlook locations, education and interpretation, natural areas, recreation, traveler amenities, and other points of interest.

**Public Meetings:** can provide an opportunity to consult a large number of people. Meetings can be structured to allow for small discussion or involve the entire group through polling. This platform can allow people to influence the agenda and to ask questions. Small group discussions are essential to the success of a public meeting and to engage people more effectively.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Enables large numbers of people to have their say	Unlikely to be representative – not everyone has the time or inclination to attend
Provides an opportunity to explain processes, give information and gather feedback	Attendance is often low unless people feel personally or deeply concerned
Demonstrates openness and transparency	Some people are likely to be inhibited from speaking in a large group
Can attract publicity or be used as a launch event	Traditional formats can limit audience participation and lead to conflict
Enables participants to develop networks	If confrontational it may lead to poor media publicity.



## Goals

1. **Communicate effectively, efficiently, and clearly with Brainerd residents, business owners, and tourists.**
  - a. Post bi-monthly informational updates on efforts to address the five planning principles from the MRPP
  - b. Ensure that website content is updated monthly, and that content is consistent with other platforms i.e., social media platforms and print based material
  - c. Share the experience of the active and passive spaces along the riverfront
  - d. Determine the targeted audience with each release
2. **Create an authentic and equitable process.**
  - a. Provide the opportunity for people to submit their comments
  - b. Ensure that engagement opportunities, whether online or physical, are accessible
  - c. Be transparent and strategically *over share*
  - d. Ensure that outreach and information sharing is posted on a variety of sources and platforms
3. **Allow for residents to participate in the progress of improvement efforts.**
  - a. Provide a comment or discussion board
  - b. Survey residents on a quarterly basis, using the website to host this dialogue
  - c. Gather trail, facility, and user data that can lead to further projects and initiatives
4. **Interact with residents, business owners and stakeholders face-to-face.**
  - a. Hold focus groups aimed at 1) idea gathering and 2) implementation
  - b. Begin to build consensus around riverfront redevelopment efforts
  - c. Encourage community collaboration and build