

CITY OF OAKLAND PARK

Neighborhood Participation Meeting

Policy Evaluation Report

Prepared by:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper evaluates the City of Oakland Park's Neighborhood Participation Meeting (NPM) program, its current operational framework, applicable planning best practices, and a comparative analysis of Broward County municipalities to assess whether refinements are warranted while preserving the original legislative intent of the program.

Since 2009, the City Commission has progressively strengthened early public engagement requirements through three key actions: establishing enforceable public notice signage standards (Ordinance O-2009-016), creating a formal pre-application Neighborhood Participation Meeting requirement (Ordinance O-2009-017), and expanding the notification radius from 500 feet to 750 feet (Ordinance O-2016-007). Collectively, these actions reflect the City Commission's intent to require structured early neighborhood outreach prior to formal land use review while maintaining a clear distinction between applicant-led participation and the City's formal development review process.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary operational adjustments resulted in staff taking on an expanded administrative role in organizing virtual NPM meetings. Although this accommodation was necessary at the time, it was not consistent with the original intent of the Code and created increased public expectations for staff involvement, including the utilization of standardized virtual platforms, recording of meetings, as well as knowledge of project details. Subsequent consultation with the City Attorney clarified that NPMs are pre-application, applicant-led forums and not official City meetings. Staff attendance is not required by the Land Development Code and is not consistent with the legislative intent of the NPM process.

The responsibility for conducting and documenting the meeting rests with the applicant. Public concerns were also raised regarding notice practices, including whether all affected homeowner associations had been properly identified and notified. In response, staff conducted a comprehensive review of all Homeowner Associations and their primary contacts to provide accurate inclusion in future notices. In addition, the City provides supplemental notifications for NPM through the City's "NotifyMe" service, the weekly email blast which reaches more than 3,000 residents including all HOA representatives citywide, and placement on the official city calendar. These supplemental communications do not alter the applicant's sole responsibility for the meeting itself.

The report evaluates the City's practices against American Planning Association (APA) guidance, which emphasizes early timing, inclusive notice, accessible materials, neutral facilitation by the applicant, documentation, and access considerations. In addition, the report provides a regional comparison of 29 Broward County municipalities to further inform the analysis. Findings from the regional comparison demonstrate that there is no uniform regulatory approach to NPMs across the County. Approximately 31% of cities require NPMs, 45% do not require them, and 24% recommend them. Where required, the dominant model is applicant-led; staff attendance is not required in most jurisdictions, and format flexibility (in-person or virtual at applicant discretion) is the prevailing practice. The regional benchmark notification radius is 500 feet, making Oakland Park's 750-foot requirement comparatively expansive. Additionally, none of the cities mandate video recording of NPMs in Broward County.

The comparison further demonstrates that Oakland Park already exceeds or aligns with regional standards in several respects, including mandatory pre-application outreach, expanded notification radius, and documentation requirements. This report also identifies several areas discussed in planning practice and regional comparison data including, notice scope, accessibility language, and procedural clarity for in-person and virtual applicant-led meetings.

In summary, this assessment is intended to provide background information, comparative context, and policy considerations for Commission discussion regarding the City's current NPM framework, its administration, and its consistency with the original legislative intent of the Code.

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BACKGROUND

Since 2009, the City Commission has incrementally strengthened Oakland Park's public notice and early community engagement framework through a series of ordinance amendments to the Land Development Code related to Neighborhood Participation Meetings (NPM) and notice provisions.

On July 15, 2009, the Commission adopted Ordinance O-2009-017, formally creating the Neighborhood Participation Meeting (NPM) Program. This ordinance institutionalized early engagement prior to application submission for specified development types, including multifamily, non-residential, major expansions, and applications requiring public or quasi-judicial hearings. The ordinance established a 500-foot notification radius for outreach to homeowners' associations (HOA) and recognized neighborhood groups within that radius (plus the two closest HOAs outside the established radius) it also mandated the submission of a written meeting report and notarized affidavit of compliance. The Commission's action demonstrated a clear policy direction toward structured early dialogue between applicants and affected neighborhoods before formal hearings.

On July 20, 2016, the Commission adopted Ordinance O-2016-007, which expanded public notice provisions. The ordinance increased the notification radius from 500 feet to 750 feet for most applicable matters and revised the NPM "target area" to align with the expanded radius. This amendment reflected the Commission's intent to include a larger group of potentially affected stakeholders for both mailed notice and neighborhood participation requirements.

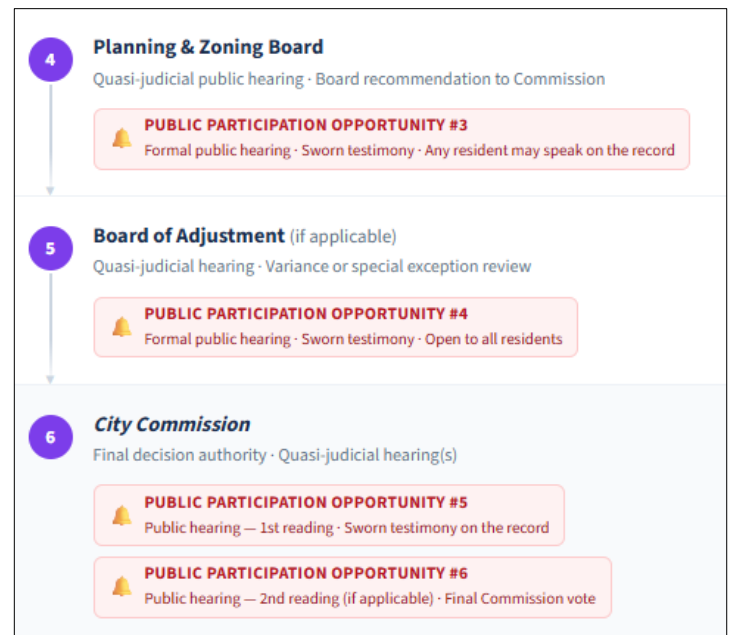
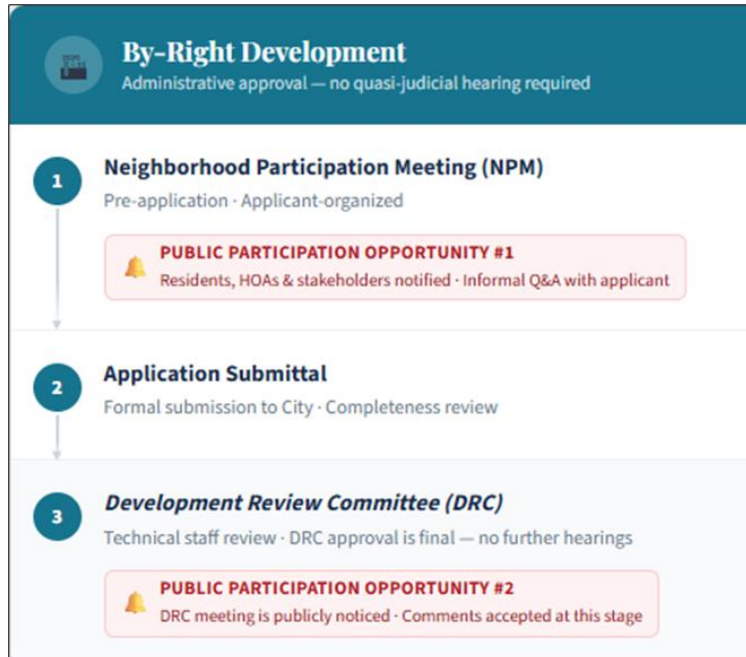
CURRENT SITUATION

Neighborhood Participation Meetings are required prior to the submission of certain development applications and are intended to facilitate early communication between applicants and affected neighborhoods before any formal City review begins. The NPM is one step in a larger development review process that includes multiple formal opportunities for public input after an application is submitted, including Development Review Committee review, Planning and Zoning Board review, Board of Adjustment review when applicable, and City Commission review.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings could not be safely held, which necessitated staff's expanded role in the administration of Neighborhood Participation Meetings (NPMs), an expanded role which has never returned to the pre-COVID intent outlined in the code. Though born out of necessity, this practice resulted in City Staff taking on responsibility for organizing and attending virtual applicant meetings held via Zoom. This change has resulted in increased public discussion regarding the City's role, meeting structure, and overall uniformity of the process.

Per Code, NPMs are required prior to the submission of a development application and are intended to facilitate early dialogue between applicants and affected neighborhoods. It should be noted that the NPM is the first of many opportunities for residents to provide public input in the development process, as formal public hearings are required for DRC,

Planning and Zoning Board, Board of Adjustment (if applicable), and City Commission. The chart below outlines the development application process for a by right development, conditional use, and a major site plan:



The City provides the applicant with the procedural requirements through the adopted **Neighborhood Participation Meeting Program Application Guide (2025)**, which outlines scheduling procedures, required documentation, presentation standards, and post-meeting reporting obligations. Applicants are responsible for conducting the meeting, providing required outreach to homeowners' associations and neighborhood groups within the 750-foot radius, submitting presentation materials in advance, and filing a meeting summary, attendance list, and notarized affidavit of compliance following the meeting. Staff will review these materials at the time of application submittal to confirm compliance with the Code.

There were several concerns raised by residents about the NPMs, namely; the notice of affected HOA(s) as staff provides the list of HOA(s) to the applicant, as well as concerns over staff knowledge of the project at meetings. In addition, correspondence submitted to the Commission reflected concerns about meetings being held in-person only without virtual access, lack of standardized meeting platforms, inconsistent recording of meetings, unclear identification of meetings as official NPMs, and limited means of verifying that meetings were conducted in a consistent and meaningful manner. Residents have suggested requiring standardized virtual platforms such as Zoom, staff attendance, mandatory recording and posting of meetings, as well as clearer procedural guidance.

Staff sought clarification on the Code intent from the City Attorney and it was confirmed that Neighborhood Participation Meetings are pre-application meetings and that staff attendance is neither required by the Land Development Code nor is it consistent with its legislative intent; as no formal application has been filed and staff has no knowledge of the project. The NPM is characterized as an applicant-led, pre-application forum designed to provide early awareness and dialogue prior to the submission of a complete development application. Under this interpretation, responsibility for conducting the meeting, selecting the platform, and fulfilling all notification and documentation requirements rests solely with the applicant. Staff's role is limited to procedural oversight and ensuring that required documentation is submitted once an application is filed.

This interpretation has created a distinction between community expectations for enhanced staff involvement and requirements, and the City's legal obligation to preserve applicant due process rights prior to formal application review. In response, staff updated the Application Guide to strengthen documentation and reporting requirements,

Accordingly, the City's present position reflects the following:

- NPMs remain mandatory pre-application meetings.
- Meetings are applicant-led and are not City-run proceedings.
- Staff does not attend, host, moderate, or participate in NPMs.
- Applicants are responsible for meeting notice requirements, conducting the meeting, and submitting compliance documentation.

The following is a review of the City's policy in an effort to ensure that there is a balance between the desire for increased involvement and consistency in Neighborhood

Participation Meetings and the statutory and legal framework governing pre-application engagement.

OVERVIEW

Why Neighborhood Participation Meetings Are Used

NPMs are widely used across the country as tools to promote early, transparent, and meaningful community engagement in land use decision-making. NPMs are intended to improve project design by seeking community input, clarify community concerns, and reduce adversarial dynamics later in the entitlement process. Although policies vary by jurisdiction, the underlying objectives are consistent with established public participation principles:

- Provide advance awareness of projects that may affect surrounding neighborhoods.
- Allow direct communication between applicants and impacted residents prior to formal review.
- Identify concerns, misconceptions, or design issues early in the process.
- Promote public trust by demonstrating that development proposals are not introduced without prior neighborhood awareness.

Legal Due Process of the Applicant

In the review of land use and development, due process refers to the constitutional requirement that government decisions affecting property rights must be made through a fair, impartial, and legally structured process. Because development approvals can directly affect an applicant's property rights, local governments must ensure that the review process does not create bias, prejudice, or procedural unfairness before a formal application is evaluated.

Neighborhood Participation Meetings (NPMs) are intentionally structured as pre-application forums to allow early communication between applicants and nearby residents. They occur before a development application is formally submitted and before any quasi-judicial decision-making begins. At this stage, the City has not yet received a complete application, conducted staff analysis, or initiated the formal review process required under Florida law.

Facilitating the meeting, advocating positions, or allowing the meeting to function as an early public hearing by City staff, could create the perception that a project is being evaluated or influenced outside the formal process. Applicants are entitled to have their projects evaluated only through the established review procedures (such as Development Review Committee review, Planning and Zoning Board hearings, and City Commission hearings).

For this reason, many jurisdictions, including the majority of cities in Broward County structure NPMs as applicant-led outreach meetings. This separation helps preserve the applicant's right to a fair and impartial review once a formal application is submitted, while

still allowing surrounding residents an opportunity for early awareness and communication.

Best Practices for Neighborhood Participation Meetings

Timing and Placement: NPMs should occur early in the review timeline prior to formal application submittal and well in advance of any public hearing. Early timing ensures that community input can realistically inform or influence project refinement before formal staff analysis and hearings begin.

Notice and Accessibility: Meaningful participation depends on clear and accessible notice. Best practice includes:

- Providing advance notice with sufficient lead time.
- Using multichannel outreach strategies.
- Including clear project information in notices: location, scope, meeting logistics, and how feedback will be used.

Meeting Structure and Facilitation: Effective NPMs are predictable, organized, and inclusive. Best practice recommendations include:

- **Neutral facilitation by the Applicant:** Ensuring the meeting allows orderly dialogue and does not become adversarial.
- **Understandable materials:** Presenting site plans, renderings, and project descriptions in plain language.
- **Multiple feedback modes:** Allowing verbal comments, written input, and follow-up communication opportunities.
- **Consistent documentation:** Recording attendance, summarizing discussion points, and capturing issues raised.

Accessible Engagement: Best practices emphasize inclusive outreach that seeks to reach under-represented populations, and individuals with limited English proficiency. Engagement design should consider barriers to participation and provide reasonable accommodation where appropriate.

Follow-Through: Participation is only meaningful if input is acknowledged, NPM best practice includes:

- Preparing a public meeting summary.
- Documenting responses to substantive issues raised.
- Clarifying next steps in the review timeline.

The following chart illustrates how the City of Oakland Park compares with the established best practice model:

APA Planning Standard	City Policy
NPM occurs early in the review timeline	City requires NPM before staff review
Provides broad and inclusive notice to owners and occupants.	City only requires that HOA and Neighborhood groups are notified.
Utilize multiple outreach methods.	HOA notification, City website, NotifyMe, Weekly email blast
Offer accessible, plain-language presentation materials.	Applicants prepare documents, City reviews to ensure guidelines met
Allow structured and respectful community dialogue.	Open public meeting format virtual or in person
Maintain neutral facilitation with appropriate staff oversight.	Guidelines provided, staff review of content
Document community feedback and responses.	Meeting summary report and documentation of follow up required
Integrate equity considerations into both notice and meeting design.	No formal policy (e.g. clear identification of the meeting as an NPM, accommodation notice language, and optional virtual accessibility),

ANALYSIS

In addition to evaluating nationwide best practices, it is also important in this process to evaluate how the City of Oakland Park's policies regarding NPMs compare to the other thirty (30) cities in Broward County. To do so, staff reached out to all Planning Departments in Broward County to obtain information about how their community uses NPMs in the development application review process. Of the thirty-one (31) cities in Broward County, the City was able to obtain information from twenty-nine (29), the cities of Sea Ranch Lakes and Lazy Lakes are not included in this analysis. Staff asked the following questions from each of the 29 cities:

1. Are NPMs Required by Code
2. Are Property Postings Required for NPM
3. Are Radius Mailings Required (For all properties or just Homeowner/condo Associations)
4. Who is the Responsible for organizing/conducting the NPM
5. Is staff Required to Attend
6. Do you specify meeting format (Virtual/In Person)
7. Do you require Applicants to video record NPM meetings

The following is a summary of findings that provide a detailed outline of results illustrated in the Broward County Comparison Chart below:

Are NPMs Required by Code?

Based on the Broward County comparison dataset, there is no uniform regulatory approach to NPMs across the county's municipalities. Of the 29 cities analyzed, 13 do not require NPMs by code, 9 explicitly require them, and 7 recommend them but do not mandate them. This reflects a structurally divided landscape.

Approximately 31 percent of Broward municipalities require NPMs, roughly 45 percent do not require them, and approximately 24 percent encourage them without making them compulsory. In short, there is no clear countywide mandate trend. However, a meaningful portion of cities particularly larger, more urban, or redevelopment-focused jurisdictions have codified NPM requirements as part of their land development review process. Currently, in the City of Oakland Park, NPMs are mandatory for the following kinds of development applications:

- **New Multi-Family Residential Developments:** Any project proposing 3 or more residential units.
- **New Non-Residential Buildings and/or Major Expansions:** Projects involving new construction or an expansion that exceeds 25% of the existing gross floor area.
- **Any Application Requiring Public Hearings or Quasi-Judicial Public Hearings.**

The NPM must be conducted prior to the submission of any development application. In addition, the Code requires subsequent quasi-judicial public hearings in conjunction with the DRC meetings, Planning and Zoning Board, Board of Adjustment, and City Commission meetings.

Are Property Postings Required for NPMs?

The comparison indicates that out of the 31 municipalities, only 13 have reference to property posting for NPMs and are almost evenly divided in the requirements. Among these 13 Broward municipalities, 6 expressly require on-site posting for the NPM itself, while 7 do not. This demonstrates that posting signage for the neighborhood meetings is distinct from required public hearing signage and is not yet a dominant or uniform regional standard in Broward County. Currently Oakland Park does not require property postings for NPMs.

Like the City of Oakland Park, in practice, many municipalities reserve property posting requirements for the formal public hearing phase rather than the applicant's preliminary outreach meeting.

Are Radius Mailings Required?

The review of Broward County municipalities shows that when radius mailings are required for NPMs, there is a discernible pattern in distance standards. The most frequently occurring mailing radius is 500 feet, which represents the regional benchmark. A 300-foot radius appears to be the second most common standard. Larger radii, such as 400 to 750 feet, are used infrequently, while distances of 1,000 feet or one-half mile are rare and generally case specific. In short, anything beyond 500 feet is atypical in Broward County practice. The City of Oakland Park currently requires a 750-foot radius for the notification of Homeowners Associations (HOA) registered with the City.

Who Receives Radius Mailings?

With respect to mailing type, the dominant approach is to provide notice to all property owners within the defined radius. Eight (8) municipalities follow this model, whereas only two (2) cities rely primarily on HOA-only or HOA-focused notification. In the HOA-only model, the applicant is only required to contact the leadership of each HOA within the prescribed radius. This indicates that broader property owner notification rather than limited association-based outreach is the prevailing regional standard where NPM radius mailings are codified. The City of Oakland Park currently requires HOA notification within the 750-foot radius.

Responsible Party for Conducting NPMs

The comparison of Broward County municipalities reveals a clear and nearly uniform standard regarding responsibility for NPMs. In fifteen (15) cities, the applicant or developer is expressly responsible for organizing and conducting the meeting, including issuing required notices and preparing documentation. **The City of Oakland Park is the only city that has a shared City/Applicant responsibility model.** This represents the strongest point of consensus in the dataset: across Broward County, NPMs are overwhelmingly structured as applicant-driven outreach processes, with municipal staff playing a secondary or administrative role rather than assuming any primary responsibility for coordination or execution. This is perhaps the most transparent part of the process as it keeps the City's out of this initial process by placing the responsibility of the meeting on the applicant to perform in a manner consistent with the intent of the meeting process. The city, acting as oversight, can then monitor the process to ensure compliance with the guidelines without blurring the lines of responsibility.

Staff Attendance Requirement

The comparison demonstrates a clear regional norm regarding staff participation in NPMs. Fourteen municipalities expressly indicate that staff attendance is not required at developer-hosted NPMs, while two (2) cities note that staff may attend but may not participate in discussions. This establishes a consistent and unequivocal pattern across Broward County: NPMs are structured as applicant-led outreach efforts rather than staff-facilitated meetings. This supports Oakland Park's current interpretation that staff should not attend NPMs and that doing so is not necessary to fulfill the purpose of the meeting.

Meeting Format and Recording Requirements

The findings indicate that most Broward County municipalities do not prescribe a specific format for NPMs. Of the sixteen (16) cities that encourage or require NPMS, 9 cities do not specify a required format, 4 require in-person meetings, one requires a virtual meeting, one encourages prerecorded and posted video presentations as an option specifically, and one expressly allows either format. This demonstrates that format neutrality or flexibility is the dominant regional approach. While a small number of cities continue to mandate in-person meetings, most jurisdictions either remain silent or allow flexibility. Virtual accommodation is emerging but has not yet been broadly codified as a universal standard. Currently, the City of Oakland Park allows flexibility of virtual or in person meetings at the discretion of the applicant.

With respect to video recording requirements for NPMs, the data shows that of the sixteen (16) cities that encourage or require NPMs, none of the municipalities require the applicant to video record meetings. The prevailing documentation model relies on written meeting summaries, sign-in sheets, and, in more structured jurisdictions, a comment-response matrix to capture public input and applicant responses. Like other municipalities, the City of Oakland Park does not require applicants to video record NPMs but does require proper documentation of the meeting in the form of a meeting summary and documentation of follow up action.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Based on the intent of the Neighborhood Participation Meeting (NPM) program, the current operational framework, national best practices, and the comparative analysis of Broward County municipalities, several policy considerations are identified for Commission discussion.

The analysis demonstrates that Oakland Park already aligns with or exceeds regional norms in several key areas: mandatory early engagement, expanded 750-foot notification radius, structured documentation requirements, and clear applicant responsibility.

The following policy considerations are provided for discussion:

Expand Notice to Include All Property Owners Within the Radius.

If the City Commission wishes to enhance notice, the Code may be amended to require the applicant to provide mailed notice to property owners within the 750-foot radius in addition to the currently required homeowner association and neighborhood group outreach. This would strengthen early awareness and align Oakland Park with the dominant Broward County standard and APA best practice without altering the applicant-led structure.

Incorporate Accessibility Language into the Application Guide.

The City may update the application guide to include guidance encouraging inclusive outreach strategies (e.g., clear identification of the meeting as an NPM, accommodation

notice language, and optional virtual accessibility), while maintaining flexibility in meeting format.

Maintain Meeting Format Flexibility Without City Hosting.

The Broward comparison demonstrates that format flexibility is the prevailing regional practice. If the applicant elects to hold the NPM virtually, the applicant should remain solely responsible for selecting, setting up, hosting, and managing the platform. The City should not provide a virtual platform, third-party host, or meeting operator, as doing so would blur the distinction between applicant outreach and City process. The City may, however, enhance procedural standards in the application guide for either in-person or virtual meetings to improve consistency and access.

Broward County City Comparison

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