Community Meeting - Charrette

In April 2003, the UIC presented the first draft plans for each district at a Community meeting-Charrette. Two distinct but inter-linked events took place at the cafeteria of the Percy Julian Middle School on the evening of April 3, 2003 and then all day of April 5, 2003. The meeting on the 3rd gave the Oak Park community an opportunity to review the first draft of plans for each district. Over 150 citizens attended this meeting. After presentations by the UIC team, stakeholders led discussions among small groups of citizens. Each group began the process of plan review and helped to identify the trade-offs that were needed to build community consensus.

The thirty stakeholders came together again on April 5, 2003. They worked in two groups in a structured process to develop a stakeholder plan that took into account the voluminous feedback gathered from citizens and based on their analysis of the community's needs. Village staff were invited to provide clarifications regarding existing design guidelines, parking and zoning regulations. In addition the UIC team provided immediate response to impact analysis questions so that the stakeholders were able to create a draft plan for each district at the end of the day. These plans were refined over a series of meetings held between May and June. Final plans developed by stakeholders can be seen in Appendix 6.

Stakeholder Meetings

Between March and June, five stakeholder meetings were organized. The first meeting took place in the Oak Park Conservatory. The other meetings took place in the studio space at 828 S. Oak Park Avenue. All meetings were open to any member of the public. The agenda for these meetings was advertised by the Village approximately 48 hours in advance of each meeting. Oak Parkers are familiar with a sense of geographic community in that they live in an urban village – accessible to many amenities and offering an excellent quality of life for its residents. The stakeholder meetings were intended to create a sense of community and provide opportunities for stakeholders to work together as a group.
Meeting Citizens

Studio Events
At the start of this project, the Village provided UIC with a workspace at 828 S. Oak Park Avenue. The space was critical to the development of our model of participatory planning process. It allowed us to open our planning process to the community. Urban planning and design, especially when it involves the physical redevelopment of a neighborhood is often a mysterious process for residents and ordinary citizens. What they often see is the finished product – a report, a plan, a drawing, a perspective rendering. Often these plans or drawings are presented as expert-driven solutions that have emerged from rational planning processes supported by evidence and analysis. However, the reality of planning is that it is messy, iterative, and often influenced by values and desires that may conflict with hard evidence.

In the initial stages, anyone who wandered into the studio was able to get a sense of how the students were developing their ideas and solutions to address perceived needs of each of the corridors.

The studio was open during pre-specified hours on some weekdays, weekends, and evening hours. While resource constraints precluded permanent staffing of the studio, a phone with voicemail was installed to receive comments and questions.

A computer with Internet access provided citizens with an opportunity to receive training on how to use the project website and receive customized training on the use of the digital applications developed for this project. Several events were scheduled in the studio over the course of the project year. In Fall 2002, there were focused presentations on a particular topic – e.g., presentation of existing design conditions.

In Spring 2003, faculty staffed the studio on designated days and were available to discuss any aspect of the project.

One-on-One conversations
Along the way, UIC team members had many one-on-one conversations about substantial issues concerning the project with many individuals. Some of these individuals eventually became part of the stakeholder process because of our discussions. Others opened their doors to offer space to hold meetings, and helped us in other ways. These conversations were informal, but were conducted on the phone, by email, in person. At each public meeting, we spent time before and after the meeting, lingering to be available to residents who wished to discuss a specific issue with us.

Meeting with Village Staff & Leadership
In addition to meetings described above, UIC team members met on a bi-weekly basis with village staff to provide them with updates and discuss specific issues related to the project as it evolved. UIC team members also presented project progress at study sessions of the Board at three different occasions.
Youth Involvement

Although too young to vote, middle school and high school youth possess plenty of ideas about improving their local neighborhoods and the Village. We wanted to tap some of this imagination and insight. We invited sixth, seventh and eighth grade students from the Percy Julian and Gwendolyn Brooks Middle Schools to offer their ideas about the two districts. Approximately 50 students prepared plans in April 2003. They publicly shared their ideas at the Village Hall on May 7, 2003. Stakeholders, Village staff, residents and UIC team members learned in many ways the importance of including places and spaces where young people can gather and play.