

OPPORTUNITY IDAHO SPRINGS

ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



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Executive Summary

Community engagement is a complex process through which involved parties share power in the decision-making process. In the context of community change and development, community engagement is a required process for local governments when it comes to making policy and other administrative decisions that affect the entire community. How community engagement is enabled to be its most effective the primary focus of my Capstone project, *Opportunity Idaho Springs*.

Idaho Springs is a rural community in Colorado that has experienced many recent changes to their demographic, built, and political environment. These changes have prompted the update of a new comprehensive plan with the vision “Idaho Springs is dedicated to preserving its culture as a historic mining community, ensuring quality of life and its economic future through both preservation and responsible development, striving for an inclusive community, designing a complete transportation system, promoting recreational opportunities and implementing the wise use of community and natural resources” (Tiefenbach, 2017, 16). Although this vision and plan have been adopted, there is continuing disagreement over land use and development decisions.

Research shows that effective community engagement strategies include elements like robust and clear communication networks, opportunities for all residents and groups to participate at different levels, and strong leadership from the local government and community actors. This provides a basis for a mix of social interactions to occur that are important to bringing about positive change that outweighs negative externalities. This base is also critically important for the ability of developers to bring ideas and plans to the community without significant impacts or delays to a project.

Developers looking to invest communities, especially small communities, must understand their position and role in community engagement efforts and in the larger community. They must take the time to prepare ways of engaging that are able to provide a sense of authenticity, create spaces for listening, and be flexible to the needs of community members. Directly addressing any concerns at the moment that they are occurring is important to maintaining trust with community members. Communities have a say in these decisions and are not often going to approve a plan or process they do not trust. Working together in a way that builds trust and strengthens community understanding of change is the best way to navigate challenges during the engagement process.

While many indicators of effective community engagement were addressed throughout this report, it is important to further apply them to Idaho Springs. Based on research conducted, interviews with local officials, and community engagement experts, my final recommendations for enhancing Idaho Spring’s community engagement process are described below.

- Start a regular community engagement process.
- Strengthen and build leadership within the community.
- Determine if additional municipal funds can be utilized for engagement.
- Address the Vision Statement of the comprehensive plan with residents.
- Be clear and firm on community decisions.

Without attempting to address opportunities for enhanced community engagement, Idaho Springs will not be able to achieve their vision set out in their comprehensive plan. There needs to be a collective, concerted effort to address community sentiments and needs for the ongoing and future changes in their community.

Reference:

Tiefenbach, A. (2017 Nov 13). Envision Idaho Springs 2017: City of Idaho Springs Comprehensive Plan. City of Idaho Springs. Retrieved from: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/idahosprings/envision-idaho-springs>