

What is Community Aesthetics

Process

Below are some tips how as a Community Mediator you can undertake a informal consultation to gauge the concerns of all key stakeholders with the proposed building development. The tips provides what types of questions you should be asking the stakeholders, how to undertake the consultation, and who to include in your stakeholder workshops

Questions to be answered in an assessment of potential aesthetic and visual impacts from the building development project include:

1. What are the aesthetic resources of the community?
2. What are the aesthetic detractors of the community?
3. Will the community's aesthetic character be changed if the transportation project is implemented?
4. Will the change be for the better or worse?
5. How important is the change to various community stakeholders?
6. Is the design of the project compatible with community character and goals?
7. Has aesthetics surfaced as a community concern?
8. Can any potential impact be avoided or mitigated?

Consultation Techniques

Determining the aesthetic impacts of project alternatives is largely a qualitative process. Techniques that can be simply performed, are easily understood and incorporate the sentiments of the community at large are the most effective and valuable to the project development process. The technique should be tailored to the proposed building development project and the specific community, both in terms of detail and level of effort. In general, any assessment of aesthetic impacts involves: ②

Identifying existing aesthetic and cultural resources and detractors within the area and determining their relative importance to the community; and determining likely impacts, both good and bad, from the building development project.

Consider typical impacts by the building project:

The type of visual impacts will vary somewhat according to the nature of the project alternatives. An exercise to get started is to simply consider what type of general visual impacts each alternative might have on the study area. Below are some general examples of potential visual impacts of transportation projects: ②

Contrasts between natural landforms, landscapes, or features and engineering features of the roadways due to road alignments, cuts, fills, retaining walls, riveted embankments, clearing of vegetation etc.; ②

- Blocked views or reduced visual continuity due height of building, elevation of the roadway, etc.;

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- Building is out of scale with adjacent urban development,
- Construction materials or designs that is not consistent with the character of historic buildings or other buildings in the neighbourhood.

Stakeholder/Community Workshop

This technique involves gathering a group of stakeholders in a workshop format to identify important community aesthetic and visual resources and detractors. The number of stakeholders invited to participate should be manageable and appropriate given the size and diversity of the impacted neighbourhood.

It is recommended the most relevant stakeholders to invite are those with authority to represent many other stakeholders. Examples might include the president of the local chamber of commerce, the director of the local tourism association, a local elected official, the president of area home owners or neighbourhood associations, president of a local environmental group, the head of a local historic preservation society, the local planning officer(s), and so on. Always invite any member of the community who has expressed a strong interest in participating.

Below is a sample process for conducting the workshop.

1. Separate stakeholders into small groups and provide each group with an aerial photograph and video footage of a section of the impacted area.
2. Ask each group to collectively identify the important aesthetic and visual resources of the study area and any major detractors, and to circle or otherwise note the location of each important aesthetic community resource directly on the aerial photograph/video of the impacted area.
3. Next ask them to identify aesthetic detractors – structures or features that substantially detract from the aesthetic quality of the community.
4. Have each group prepare a brief written description of their identified resources and detractors. These descriptions could be attached to the aerial photograph on post-it notes or with tape.

Rounding Up

Upon completing your stakeholder consultation activities, the following actions should be completed:

1. Document all relevant actions taken, findings reached and commitments made as part of the aesthetic and visual impact analysis conducted per the workshops and discussions
2. Share your findings with decision makers and ensure you file all relevant documentation and have everything in writing.
3. Request decision makers to respond to your findings so that you can share with all stakeholders you engaged.