

HOSTING A COMMUNITY MEETING ON SCHOOL SITING: MEETING IN A BOX

Minnesota School Siting Resources

JUNE 2022



Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the participation of the following individuals and organizations in the development of the School Siting Resources. Thank you to the Safe Routes to School practitioners and partners across the state who contributed by sharing their ideas and experiences during the process.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Dave Cowan
Minnesota Department of Transportation

Kelly Corbin
Minnesota Department of Transportation

CONSULTANT TEAM

Alta Planning + Design

Just Strategies

SCHOOL SITING WORKING GROUP

Carma Hansen
Safe Kids Grand Forks

Chris Berrens
MnDOT Office of Transportation Systems Management

David Rey
Bolton and Menk

Ellen Pillsbury
MDH

Jennifer McCoy
Bolton and Menk

Jenny Bordon
Minneapolis Public Schools

Jeremy Vann
MDH/MDE

Jill Chamberlain
Blue Cross Blue Shield Center for Prevention

Kristin Mroz-Risse
GreenStep Cities, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Paul Aplikowski
Wold Architects & Engineers

Penny Simonsen
East Central Regional Development Commission

Vaughn Dierks
Wold Architects & Engineers

Wayne Hurley
West Central Initiative





Table of Contents

- INTRODUCTION TO THE MEETING IN A BOX
- HOSTING A COMMUNITY SCHOOL SITING MEETING
- SAMPLE COMMUNITY MEETING AGENDA
- MEETING MATERIALS LIST
- POWERPOINT
- GROUP EXERCISE: COMMUNITY SCHOOL SITE DECISION PRIORITIES



MEETING IN A BOX



Introduction to the Meeting in a Box

School siting matters. Decisions about where to open or close schools and when to rehabilitate existing schools affect communities in many ways. Trends in school siting have led to schools often being located far from where students live. This is due to cheap land costs outside of town, ease of building in undeveloped areas, and an emphasis on large school sites and abundant playing fields. But schools located within neighborhoods are a core community resource.

This resource toolkit/meeting in a box provides templates and resources to help you host a successful community meeting on school siting and community centered schools. We invite you to edit and modify these models to meet your needs. Community meetings can play an essential role in ensuring that your local values are prioritized in the school siting decision-making process.

Hosting a Community School Siting Meeting

Community meetings are a great way to explore and identify key community values to inform school siting determinations. Community engagement, such as holding school siting community meetings, provides community members with a voice in school siting decisions and ensures that communities receive the benefits of community-centered schools.

WHY HOST A COMMUNITY SCHOOL SITING MEETING?

When community members understand the need for new or renovated school facilities, weigh in on their hopes and fears, and see their visions considered and represented, they feel invested in school siting decisions. This increases community support for financing measures and for local schools more generally. A community meeting can also be a good way to identify potential members for a site selection committee.

WHEN SHOULD A COMMUNITY SCHOOL SITING MEETING TAKE PLACE?

Although a community meeting can be useful at any point in the school siting and facilities planning process, holding a community meeting early on, while sites are first being identified and explored, has the greatest potential to influence school siting decisions. Districts sometimes hold off on community meetings at this stage. Districts may wait to go public until everything is lined up in order to reduce complexity and avoid driving up the cost of potential sites. A public meeting may not be a good place to debate the pros and cons of specific sites, but a meeting at this stage can build community support and determine community priorities, which can then inform site selection.

WHO CAN HOST A COMMUNITY SCHOOL SITING MEETING?

Any local stakeholders can host a community school siting meeting. The meeting will have a different flavor and different official impact if it is hosted by the school district and its consultants as compared to if it is hosted by a parent teacher association, Safe Routes to School task force, or other local advocates and community members. However, any of these hosts can create a constructive and influential meeting. Regardless of who hosts, all of these groups should be included in the meeting.

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO HOST A MEETING?

Hosting a community meeting can be simple or highly involved. Think through how you will approach the following steps:

- **Talk to key parties:**

Be sure that you have reached out to key decision makers, potential speakers, and other interested groups early on. Core parties include: the school district superintendent, facilities staff, board members, city or county planning staff, city or county elected officials, neighborhood associations, school community members, and more. They may have important suggestions around timing, outreach, and framing. They may want to co-host the event, join the project management team, or speak at the meeting. Sharing materials on the benefits of community-centered schools may be helpful in convincing these groups that the meeting and issue matter.

- **Create a meeting project management team:**

Convene a small team with two to five members to

plan, organize, and carry out the tasks necessary for a successful meeting. Include members with experience conducting inclusive community engagement to assist in designing an event that is appealing and accessible for diverse participants.

- **Select a time, venue, & features:**

In consultation with partners, determine when and where to hold the meeting to maximize participation. Consider whether to hold the meeting in person, using remote meeting technology, or both. Think about what time and location will make your meeting accessible to community members and key participants. Bringing meetings to locations that are convenient for different demographic groups and community members is key for attendance. Assess community language needs and provide an interpreter and appropriate translation equipment where needed to support engagement by all community members. For example, providing childcare and food can make attendance more feasible for stretched families and community members.

- **Conduct broad outreach:**

Engage in broad outreach to different community groups and other interested parties. Seek out local knowledge and contacts (cultural, neighborhood and business) to collaborate and better serve community members. Consider whether you can collaborate with trusted local individuals and organizations who can engage and invite a range of different demographic groups from the community, such as tribal groups, different racial or religious groups, neighborhood associations, and so on. Consider creating other means for community members to weigh in if they are unable to join the

meeting, such as a survey, written input, etc.

- **Set an agenda:**

Determine an agenda, secure speakers, and plan activities and timing. You can get started by tailoring to your needs the sample agenda, powerpoint, talking points, and group activity included in this document. Test equipment and practice using it to reduce the likelihood of mishaps and malfunctions. Decide whether to record the event and make it available to those who cannot attend.

- **Assemble the necessary materials:**

For an in person meeting, various materials may assist with the meeting and with engagement activities. Consult the meeting materials list in this document for an overview of basic equipment, sign-in materials, group exercise materials, and optional items like food and beverages. Fewer materials are required for a remote meeting; those that are required should be provided ahead of time.

- **Hold the meeting & conduct follow up:**

Arrive early to set up the room or space and to double-check equipment. Collect contact information for attendees so that you can follow up with them later. After the meeting, thank the speakers and give attendees a chance to give feedback on the meeting or share additional thoughts. Follow up on any actions that were committed to or identified in the course of the meeting, such as forming a site selection committee or setting out site selection considerations.



Sample Community Meeting Agenda

1 hour (optional 1 hour 15 minutes)

1. WELCOME BY HOST/S

(5 min)

The welcome can be provided by the superintendent, community group, planning department, or consultants.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

(5 min)

- a. If fewer than 10 people, have each person quickly introduce themselves
- b. If more than 10, have people identify their groups: e.g. stand up if you are a parent/family member, neighbor of existing/proposed school, teacher, school district staff, city/county staff, student, alum, etc.

3. OVERVIEW OF IMMEDIATE ISSUE

(5 min)

Have the school facilities department or a knowledgeable party provide a quick overview of the status and needs for school facilities that are informing the current situation

4. PRESENTATION ON SCHOOL SITING PROCESS AND CONSIDERATIONS

(20 min)

5. (OPTIONAL) PRESENT MORE DETAILED OVERVIEW OF BIG PICTURE SCHOOL SITING CHOICES

(15 min)

6. GROUP EXERCISE: COMMUNITY SCHOOL SITE DECISION PRIORITIES

(15 min)

- a. Brainstorm values/priorities (e.g. walkability, near park, big playing fields, lot of parking, near students' homes, room to grow, new building, retain elements of historic building, stay on site, etc.)
- b. Clump related values
- c. Dot voting (each person gets 5 dots to allocate; you can give people different colored dots based on their role of district, family, student, city, community)
- d. Group discussion

7. Q & A SESSION

(5 min)

8. WRAP UP & OVERVIEW OF NEXT STEPS

(5 min)

- a. Can solicit volunteers for advisory committee or site decision committee
- b. Overview of timeline

School Siting Community Meeting Planning Chart

START TIME	AGENDA TOPIC	DETAILS	LEAD (WHO WILL PRESENT/FACILITATE)	TIME ALLOCATED (MINUTES)	MATERIALS/ACTIONS
	Set Up			30 min	
	Welcome			5 min	
	Introductions			5 min	
	Overview: Immediate school siting issue			5 min	
	Presentation: School siting process & considerations			20 min	Slides, projector
	(Optional) More detailed overview of current school siting decision points			15 min	
	Group exercise: Community priorities			15 min	Group exercise materials
	Q & A			5 min	
	Wrap up & next steps			5 min	



Meeting Materials List

Meetings can include more or fewer materials, depending upon your vision and desire. Fewer materials are required for a remote meeting.

BASIC EQUIPMENT

- Seating for participants
- A space or lectern for speakers
- A projector and screen to show slides
- Microphone, if needed for space
- Long Term Facilities Plan

SIGN IN MATERIALS

- Sign-in sheets
- Name tags
- Pens
- Clipboard (optional)
- Table to assist with signing attendees in
- Related flyers or other resources

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Food and refreshments
- Activities for children (if childcare is provided or if children are present with family members)

FOR GROUP EXERCISE

- Large sticky easel pads
- Post its
- Colored dots
- Markers



PowerPoint

Download the PowerPoint template, [School Siting in Minnesota: Process & Considerations](#), and edit it or modify it to meet your community's needs.

PRESENTATION GOAL/USE

Provide community and decisionmakers with background information on school siting trends, tradeoffs, benefits of community centered schools, and process.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

1. Introduction: School Siting Trade Offs
2. Trends in School Siting in US & Minnesota
3. Benefits of Community-Centered Schools: Why Does School Siting Matter?
4. Process: Minnesota School Siting Process
5. Moving Forward: Incorporating Community Values into School Siting Decisions

Group Exercise: Community School Site Decision Priorities

Goal:

This exercise allows community members to identify values related to where schools are located within communities and then develop a participant-based prioritization of these values.

Materials Needed:

Sticky dots in various colors, stick-on easel paper, markers, post-its

EXERCISE STEPS

1. BRAINSTORM

In pairs or as an entire group, brainstorm values/priorities for school site decision (e.g. walkability, near community resources like parks or libraries, big playing fields, lot of parking, near students' homes, room to grow, new building, retain elements of historic building, stay on site, etc.)

2. SHARE & ORGANIZE VALUES/PRIORITIES

- a. Have people put values/priorities on wall/easel paper with post-its
- b. Facilitator/helper: Clump related values/priorities and spread out along the wall

3. PRIORITIZE

Have people engage in dot voting (each person gets 5 or 10 dots to allocate; you can give people different colored dots based on their roles, such as school district administration/representative, family member of current student, student, city, community, alumni)

4. GROUP DISCUSSION:

Facilitator summarizes results of dot voting, asks for reflections and thoughts from the group

Discussion Prompts:

- What do these priorities reflect as key values?
- What pros and cons are shown?
- Consider school community members who are not present. How might their priorities differ from the group's? How might they be affected by these decisions?
- Who/what groups would benefit the most from these priorities?
- Are there unintended negative consequences that may come out of these priorities? Who would be most affected by those?

Variation:

Virtual priority setting exercise through online whiteboard, voting tool, or word cloud apps.



MINNESOTA
SAFE ROUTES
TO SCHOOL

