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Planning Commission Should Delay Public Hearings Until It Releases Entire Master Plan Draft

Tomorrow evening, the City Planning Commission will hold the first of three public hearings on the city's draft master plan. The Planning Commission has scheduled a second hearing for Friday and the final one October 27. It intends to vote on adoption of the plan November 10.

Unfortunately, as of today, the Planning Commission has not yet released critical components of the draft plan. These include a chapter on citizen participation and a chapter on plan implementation, as well as an appendix to the draft plan. According to the master plan website, the Planning Commission is still revising the public participation and implementation chapters.

The Planning Commission is absolutely correct to delay the release of these chapters until it is satisfied with them. However, the Planning Commission has no business holding public hearings on an incomplete draft.

The lack of the citizen participation chapter – when citizens are supposed to be considering the plan and making comments – is painfully ironic. It is also troubling, since that chapter is clearly intended to form the basis for the neighborhood participation ordinance required by the city's home rule charter. Citizens should have ample opportunity to comment on this chapter, since it could significantly alter the way they interact with government.

If the implementation chapter is to live up to its billing, it will illuminate how the city plans to execute the goals it sets. It should go without saying that the public needs to see that piece before the Planning Commission asks them to comment on the plan.

Finally, citizens should have the opportunity to evaluate proposals in the plan against the studies and other information on which they are based. The appendix is necessary for such an evaluation.

BGR assumed that the missing chapters and appendix would be released in advance of the public meetings this week. Since they have not, we are

calling on the City Planning Commission to delay public hearings until the public has a complete document on which to comment. To provide citizens time to read and consider additional chapters, the public meetings should not take place until at least a week after the draft plan is released in its entirety.

In 2008, the citizens of New Orleans voted to revise the city charter to, among other things, enhance neighborhood participation in the formulation of the master plan. The City Planning Commission should honor the spirit of that amendment. If the Planning Commission is dissatisfied with portions of the draft plan, it is appropriate to delay their release. But it is not appropriate to proceed with public hearings when vital parts of the plan remain under wraps.

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