Although community involvement is often the exception rather than the rule, it is a central component of the planning process. City planning is intended to be a participatory process, and the more people who are involved, the better it works. Increased community involvement can help to ensure that the plans created are reflective of the needs and desires of the community. In addition, it can help to build support for the plans and make it more likely that they will be implemented successfully. When everyone is invested in the outcome, it is much easier to overcome any obstacles that may arise.
1 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In January, a new Public Participation Policy was released. The new policy recognizes that adequate time is essential for Neighborhood Councils, community-based organizations, and other affected groups to provide meaningful feedback on draft plans and ordinances. Accordingly, the public now has 60 days to review preliminary reports before the City Planning Commission (CPC) meets. During that time, staff will conduct a public hearing and consider all comments before preparing a final recommendation report for review and action.

In April, a new quarterly newsletter, appropriately named “pLAnning,” was published. Each newsletter will include a Director’s Message, feature a staff person, and highlight a community or neighborhood in Los Angeles. In addition, the newsletter will discuss a plan, policy, program or ordinance under development, recently adopted, or being implemented.

2 NEIGHBORHOOD LIAISON

In January, the Department’s first Neighborhood Liaison, Claudia Rodriguez, officially began her duties. An experienced planner transferred from our offices in the San Fernando Valley, Claudia is the point of contact for community and neighborhood groups seeking more information about planning processes or pending plans and projects. If she can’t answer your questions herself, she can point you in the right direction and connect you to the right staff. Claudia is also the editor of pLAnning and can be reached at claudia.rodriguez@lacity.org.

3 “ONE PROJECT, ONE PLANNER”

In February, the “one project, one planner” model of case processing went into effect. One planner now manages the review and analysis of all cases connected to a single project, including the environmental assessment (with the exception of EIRs, which are reviewed by a separate Environmental Analysis Unit). This same planner reviews applications for completeness and is responsible for making any corrections. The “one project, one planner” model significantly improves the quality of project planning and enhances service to the public.

4 SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

In February, the Development Services Center was launched. Applications for all discretionary land use approvals, including subdivisions, are now accepted at both of the Center’s offices in downtown Los Angeles and in the San Fernando Valley. Center staff also clear conditions related to applications for building permits, providing an extra level of service. In April, Case Management staff located in City Hall were transferred to new offices at the Department of Building and Safety’s headquarters at Figueroa Plaza. Planning staff now sit side-by-side with their colleagues at Building and Safety. Staff from the Department of Water and Power and the Bureau of Engineering will be relocated to the same offices, and in July, “Development Services Case Management” will be officially launched. Trained to “cut the red tape and roll out the red carpet,” DSCM staff are adept at advising applicants on the intricacies of the City’s planning and permitting processes.

5 LONG-RANGE PLANNING

In February, all long-range planning functions were consolidated within the Policy Planning and Historic Resources Division. The Division includes planners working on updates to community plans, citywide plans (such as our recently adopted Bicycle Master Plan) as well as other policy-related initiatives, such as new overlay zones and districts. This new Division, which brings extra focus and commitment to all of the Department’s long-range planning efforts, also includes the Urban Design Studio.

6 GEOGRAPHIC COORDINATION TEAMS

In May, ten Geographic Coordination Teams were established covering the North Valley, South Valley, Hollywood, East, Wilshire, Downtown/Westlake, South, West, Coastal and Harbor areas of the City. The Geo Teams” meet once a month to facilitate communication and foster a greater level of horizontal consistency across the various functional sections of the Department.

7 HISTORIC PRESERVATION

In February, a consolidated and centralized Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) Unit was created within the City’s Office of Historic Resources (OHR), as part of the Department’s Policy Planning and Historic Resources Division. The new HPOZ Unit enables streamlined review of projects and also benefits from close collaboration with OHR staff, bringing under one roof and management all of the Department’s preservation-related initiatives. Currently, 29 HPOZs have been designated in the City, with several more under consideration.

8 MAJOR PROJECTS REVIEW

In February, a consolidated and centralized Major Projects Section was established within the Plan Implementation Division. The Major Projects Section conducts comprehensive review of some of the City’s most complex and regionally significant projects, such as Westfield in Woodland Hills, NBC Universal in Studio City, and the NFL Stadium in downtown Los Angeles. The new section enables the Department to conduct a more thorough and focused analysis of projects that have the potential to generate the most significant effects on the City’s infrastructure, local economy and environment.