



Language Access Plan
Department of City Planning
City of New York



Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	3
II.	Agency Mission and Background	4
III.	Agency Language Access Goals	6
IV.	Assessment of LEP Population	7
V.	Service Provision Plan	9
VI.	Implementation Plan Logistics	12
VII.	Training	15
VIII.	Record Keeping and Evaluation	16



I. Introduction

In order to comply with Executive Order 120, the Department of City Planning has developed a Language Access Plan to provide persons with limited English proficiency (“LEP”) meaningful access to the agency’s services. The plan provides for meaningful access in each service area according to a needs assessment that balances: (i) the number or proportion of LEP persons in the eligible service population; (ii) the frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the agency; (iii) the importance of the benefit, service, information, or encounter to the LEP person; and (iv) the resources available to the agency and the costs of providing various types of language services. Pursuant to city policy, this Plan has been submitted to the Mayor’s Office for Operations as of January 1, 2009.



II. Agency Mission and Background

The Department of City Planning (“DCP”) is responsible for the city's physical and socioeconomic planning. The Department oversees land use and environmental review, the preparation of plans, policies and zoning studies to promote strategic development in communities throughout the city, and the provision of technical assistance and planning information to government agencies and public officials. The Department reports directly to the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, and through this office to the Mayor.

The Director of City Planning is charged with advising and assisting the Mayor in matters related to the development and improvement of the city and in issues with long-term implications for the city's built environment. In addition, the Director also serves as the Chair of the City Planning Commission (“CPC”). The City Planning Commission has 13 members, of which six (in addition to the Chair) are appointed by the Mayor. The other six members are appointed by the Borough Presidents and the Public Advocate. The City Planning Commission holds public meetings and Hearings, and considers and votes on land use and related applications.

DCP has roughly 300 employees who work in five Borough Offices, and among various planning, technical, environmental and land use divisions. The Information Technology Division (“ITD”), Counsel, and Operations provide support to the entire agency.

Direct Services

A. Land Use Review

The primary service provided by the Department of City Planning is the administration of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (“ULURP”). Pursuant to Section 197-c of the City Charter, land use decisions requiring discretionary action by the City Planning Commission are subject to a standardized process including Public Hearings and review by affected Community Boards, Borough Presidents, Borough Boards, the City Planning Commission, and the City Council. The Department of City Planning administers its portion of public review, including holding Public Hearings of the City Planning Commission and dissemination of related information to the public. City Planning Commission Public Hearings are generally held in Spector Hall at 22 Reade Street on alternating Wednesdays, 10am.

Other services of the agency related to the Land Use Review Process include:

- Providing opportunities to file applications for land use changes;
- Providing interested parties and the general public with information regarding applications entered into public review;
- Providing notice of and opportunities to testify at Public Hearings of the City Planning Commission.



B. Technical Assistance and Dissemination of Planning Information

The Department also provides planning and land use information to the public by providing direct assistance through the borough offices and the Zoning Help Desk. Additional information is provided to the public through the website and publications such as press releases and planning reports.

Technical assistance services are available in the agency's five borough offices, at the Zoning Help Desk, Central Intake, and to a limited extent via the DCP Bookstore (for a complete list of addresses, see Appendix A). The Borough Offices are all equipped to answer general land use questions, while the Zoning Help Desk is designed to field specific problems with understanding the Zoning Resolution. Central Intake answers questions regarding the filing and land use application process. The DCP Bookstore provides reference materials, and can direct customers to other service desks. In addition, inquiries can be submitted electronically, through the Zoning Help Desk or through the Correspondence Office.

The Department also assists the public by making informational and instructional materials available online and in print. Press communications are also utilized to further the agency's broader educational role.



III. Agency Language Access Goals

The Department of City Planning and the City Planning Commission place great importance on helping the citizens of New York understand and participate in the city's planning process. The Department's Language Access Plan seeks to further these goals by affording LEP citizens improved access to DCP resources, and additional and consistent opportunities to meaningfully participate in the land use review process.

A. Access to Technical Assistance

Through frontline locations, public correspondence, and online and published materials, the Department seeks to make zoning and land use information available and intelligible to all New Yorkers. This Language Access Plan seeks to make basic information and assistance available to LEP citizens, and to provide consistent guidelines, training, and resources to DCP staff to ensure their ability to interact with LEP citizens seeking assistance.

B. Public Participation

All members of the public should have the ability to participate in deliberations on land use issues affecting their neighborhoods. In order to effectively participate in a Public Hearing, the public must have access to written information regarding the subject application, advance notice of the Hearing, and the ability to give testimony to the CPC. This plan seeks to ensure that LEP persons have meaningful access to and can effectively participate in the land use review process.

The Language Access Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring the Department's implementation and ongoing compliance with this Language Access Plan. The Language Access Coordinator, working with the Language Bank Liaison (see Section VIIa) and other Agency Divisions as appropriate, will work toward the timely completion of each portion of this plan as outlined in Section VI: Implementation. As specified in Section VIII, the Language Access Coordinator will be responsible for monitoring and overseeing the effectiveness of Department's policies towards meeting the city's needs.

On an annual basis, the Language Access Coordinator will report to the Executive Director regarding the sufficiency and appropriateness of Language Services to ensure that the above goals are satisfied.



IV. Assessment of LEP Population

Language access requirements for each service area are evaluated according to a needs assessment that balances: (i) the number or proportion of LEP persons in the eligible service population; (ii) the frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the agency; (iii) the importance of the benefit, service, information, or encounter to the LEP person; and (iv) the resources available to the agency and the costs of providing various types of language services. The following assessment addresses the four-factor analysis on a service-by-service basis.

A. Technical Assistance Areas

Demographic Analysis: Technical assistance is available to all members of the public, and the service population is drawn from the full city population, containing some 1.7 million LEP persons.

Assessing Agency Need: In interviews with DCP's frontline service providers and Division Directors, little frequency of LEP contact was reported. The Zoning Help Desk and Central Intake reported no contact with LEP persons, and Borough Offices reported only occasional encounters ranging from several times a month to several times a year. It was reported that all encounters have been in Spanish.

DCP Press Office reports that foreign language media outlets regularly communicate with the Press Office in English, and that English language press releases do not limit access by, or dissemination to, the foreign language media.

Nature of Services: The Department of City Planning and the City Planning Commission place great importance on helping the citizens of New York understand and participate in the city's planning process. The Department's Language Access Plan seeks to further these goals by affording LEP citizens improved access to DCP resources.

Resources: DCP's current practice is to use existing bilingual staff to interpret and answer questions by LEP persons on an informal basis. While the perception of DCP staff who were interviewed is that the current availability of bilingual speakers, particularly in Spanish, is generally sufficient to meet need, there is a lack of established record keeping that would help gauge both the need for such services and the Department's success in delivering past services.

B. Land Use Review Process

Demographic Analysis: Given that applications are subject to review by the general public, the service population participating in the review process is drawn from all citizens of the city.

Assessing Agency Need: While interviews with staff do not indicate a historically high level of LEP participation in City Planning Commission Public Hearings, the likelihood of participation by LEP



persons has been greatly increased when property subject to an application is located in a Community District with a high percentage of LEP persons, and there is a high level of publicity or perceived impact by members of the community. Staff reports that LEP persons wishing to testify at past Public Hearings have generally provided their own interpreters.

Nature of Services: The City Planning Commission places great importance on receiving input from members of the public in the land use deliberations affecting their neighborhoods. Consistent with these goals, the Department seeks to ensure that all members of the public have access to and the means with which to provide testimony at Commission Public hearings.

Resources: DCP has historically relied on Community Boards, City Council Members, local civic groups and the press to disseminate information to foreign language communities regarding important applications, and in a few instances has translated materials and provided interpretation services. Based on available NYS Office of General Services contracts, providing on-site interpretation services at Public Hearings is estimated to cost \$300-\$1000 per language provided, based on the length of hearing (estimated at 5-10hrs) and the language requested. Because any member of the public may choose to participate in a hearing without advance notice, it is difficult to gauge the demand for such services in advance of a hearing.

Accordingly, the Service Provision Plan provides a framework for analyzing applications on a case-by-case basis to anticipate the demand and volume of appropriate LEP services. (See Section V.C – Land Use Service Provision Plan).



V. Service Provision Plan

A. Frontline Locations/Service Centers (Borough Offices, Zoning Help Desk, Central Intake, Bookstore, Correspondence Office)

DCP will employ policies to ensure that staff at frontline service centers can consistently assist LEP members of the public by ensuring availability of interpreters, training of frontline staff, and adequate signage.

- The primary resource for interpretation will be existing DCP staff. An agency “Language Bank” will be re-established to identify staff members who are available to interpret and translate on a voluntary basis. The updated Language Bank will be available immediately, and will bolster the existing informal efforts of frontline staff interpretation.
- A secondary resource “Language Line” contract will be established with DOITT to provide interpretation via telephone when DCP staff is unavailable. This contract will be established immediately, with resource allocation to be regularly monitored and reevaluated based on demand for service.
- For written correspondence, DCP Language Bank staff or Language Line translation services will be utilized as necessary.
- Service centers will be outfitted with new directional and welcome signage in the top six LEP languages, and DCP staff will be provided with Mayor’s Office of Operations “I Speak” language identification cards to assist in Language Identification. Training provided to frontline staff will ensure that upon greeting visitors, staff can assist in identifying LEP persons using the Mayor’s Office of Operations identification posters, and can identify the appropriate interpretation resource.

DCP will implement these policies to provide access in top six LEP languages, and will cover additional languages as our resources allow.



B. Basic Information and Instructional Documents

- In accordance with the Mayor's Office of Operations citywide policy and protocol, DCP will provide automated translation of all website material, through a third party translation tool (e.g., "Google Translate"). This function will significantly enhance access to reference information regarding the work of the agency, basic zoning concepts, regulations, and the public review processes.
- DCP will contract through Language Line for professional translations in the top six LEP languages of basic instructional material, beginning with:
 - Basic information about land use review
(<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/luproc/ulpro.shtml>);
 - Basic Information about zoning
(<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/zone/zonehis.shtml>);
 - Instructions on how to give foreign language testimony.
- A page of the website will be dedicated to foreign language material and professionally translated information will accompany an overview of available LEP services.
- These materials will be provided according to plain language principles as identified by the Mayor's Office of Operations.
- As financial resources become available, the Department will evaluate the need for additional professional translation of resources.

C. Land Use Review Process

General policies will be implemented to improve access to application information and Public Hearing notices, and to facilitate the submission of foreign language testimony. Given the high cost and widely varying need for language services during the public review process, the Executive Director must determine on a case-by-case basis, whether and to what extent additional measures should be taken to ensure access. Such determinations will be made in consultation with the DCP Borough Office Director and through consideration of the following factors: (i) the percentage of LEP persons in the affected Community District; (ii) whether the application will have impacts on the community generally or a limited number of properties; (iii) the interest demonstrated by LEP persons, their community groups, and the foreign language press; and (iv) the cost of supplemental services.

General policies to be implemented are described below, followed by additional measures which are recommended for instances which are deemed to warrant additional measures to ensure access.

1. Application Information



Application information may be obtained from a variety of sources including: official application files, docket language from the CPC calendar, CPC Reports, oral presentations at City Planning Commission Review Sessions and Community Board meetings, and website descriptions and presentations (only for DCP initiatives, not for private applications).

- For all applications, automated translation of the website will make application information more widely accessible, particularly for DCP Initiatives for which a significant amount of plain language description is provided. Standards for automated translation of NYC.gov websites are being developed by the Mayor's Office and DOITT on behalf of all agencies.
- For DCP applications which warrant additional measures to ensure access by LEP persons, additional project information may be professionally translated and made available on the DCP website. Professional translation will be arranged through a Language Line contract with DOITT.

2. Notice of Public Hearings

- For all applications, automated translation of the website will make Hearing schedules available.
- For applications deemed to warrant additional measures to ensure access by LEP persons, professionally translated notice can be posted on the website and disseminated through interested Community Boards.

3. Testimony at Public Hearings

- For all applications, the Commission will accept testimony from LEP persons in the six languages listed in the Executive Order. Foreign language testimony can be interpreted at the Hearing when practicable (see Section VI.F) or transcribed from the CPC audio recording, translated professionally, and provided to the Commission members for consideration.
- Directional signage at Public Hearing venues will be posted in the top six LEP languages, and instructional information will be made available in the top six LEP languages for LEP persons wishing to testify.
- For applications which are anticipated to elicit testimony from a large number of LEP persons, on-site interpreters may be retained by the agency.



VI. Implementation Plan Logistics

A. Creation of New Language Bank

(To begin immediately, completed in 1st Q 2009)

The DCP Language Access Coordinator and Language Bank Liaison will immediately implement plans to re-instate the Department's volunteer Language Bank. A new form for self-identification will be implemented, allowing volunteers to assess their expertise and comfort level in participating in each of the following LEP services: to in-person/telephonically interpret for frontline service operators; provide translation and quality assurance for translation of technical assistance public documents and Public Hearing notifications; provide on-site interpretation for 'greeting' and assistance at Public Hearings; and/or provide interpretation of testimony at Public Hearings. Requests will be made to registered volunteers on an as-needed basis, with copies of the request sent to the Language Bank Liaison for record keeping. Based on anecdotal evidence and prior experience of front line staff, demand is not expected to be high, but a new tracking system will allow the Language Bank Liaison to monitor demand and usage on an ongoing basis.

On an annual basis, the Language Bank Liaison will engage in recruiting new volunteers and update the bank as necessary.

B. Creation of Language Line Contract

(To begin immediately, completed in 1st Q 2009)

Working with the Administrative Division, the DCP Language Access Coordinator will set up a preliminary contract for telephonic interpretation, to be used generally by the eight frontline desks (each Borough main line, Zoning Help Desk, Central Intake, Bookstore), and accessible to all DCP employees with public contact positions. Staff will be instructed to use Language Line services only in cases where DCP Language Volunteers are not readily available.

DCP will also obtain preliminary translation services through Language Line for essential documents and foreign language correspondence.

C. Signage for Frontline Locations

(2nd Q 2009)

Mayor's Office approved signage will be implemented for all frontline locations to ensure that service locations are accessible, and that LEP citizens and frontline staff are able to identify the need for language services.



D. Integration of Automated Translation of Webpage
(TBD)

As standards are made available by Mayor's Office and DOITT, DCP Information Technology Division will implement standards for automated translation of web materials.

E. Creation of Foreign Language Webpage
(To begin 2nd QQ 2009, completion of 1st phase end of 3rd Q 2009)

Once the Language Bank and the Language Line contracts are in place, the DCP Language Access Coordinator will submit for professional translation in the top six LEP languages:

- a. Basic information about Land Use Review Process
- b. Basic Information About Zoning
- c. Instructions on how to give foreign language testimony (following implementation of Supplemental LEP Services, as described below)
- d. Fact Sheet of available Language Services

As available, Language Bank volunteers will provide quality review of documents translated into the top six LEP languages, prior to posting.

These materials will be used to create a Language Services section of the DCP website. The number of page views in this section will be tracked and used to determine whether the cost of translation of additional materials is warranted.

F. Foreign Language Testimony at All Public Hearings
(To begin 3rd Q 2009)

For all Public Hearings, LEP testimony will be accepted by the City Planning Commission, and additional time will be allowed for such testimony in order to accommodate the interpretation.

Once the Language Line contract is in place, special signage and instructions for giving testimony will be made available in the top six LEP languages.

When filling out a speaker card at a Public Hearing, speakers will be asked to indicate whether they are a Limited English speaker and request assistance providing testimony in a foreign language. If so, DCP will use its Language Bank to attempt to identify an available interpreter. If none are readily available, testimony will be recorded, and then transcribed and translated for distribution to the City Planning Commission. DCP is investigating the possibility of using Language Line as the sole provider for this combined interpretation/translation service. Because transcription and translation is relatively expensive, DCP will include a proviso on its website encouraging LEP speakers to request interpretation from the Land Use Review Division in advance of a Hearing, so that appropriate interpretive services can be identified.



G. Supplemental LEP Services

(To begin 3rd Q 2009)

For applications where additional measures are deemed necessary by the Executive Director to ensure access (see Section V(C) of the Service Provision Plan), the following actions may be taken:

1. Basic plain language information regarding the application/project will be posted on the DCP website, with translation provided in languages most appropriate for the affected Community District(s), as determined by the Executive Director (See V. Service Provision Plan). Language Bank volunteers, if available in the necessary languages, will be asked to provide quality assurance of documents prior to posting.
2. To supplement the legally required notice of Hearings, notice will be translated into those languages deemed appropriate, posted on the website, and circulated to affected Community Boards
3. Where significant numbers of LEP persons are expected to provide testimony, DCP may seek to provide interpretation by utilizing the volunteer Language Bank, Community Boards, or retaining professional interpreters. On occasion, volunteer civic groups may continue to provide interpretation services.

H. Outreach

(4th Q 2009)

Following the full implementation of public review and online services, the Department will reach out through local community boards to promote the existence of new available resources.



VII. Training

A. Training of Frontline Staff *(To begin in 2ndst Q 2009)*

Once the Language Bank and the Language Line Contract are in place, the DCP Language Access Coordinator will provide training on these policies and procedures for all staff in public contact positions. Staff will be given Mayor's Office approved "I Speak" cards and trained to assist LEP persons as well as to access wider interpretation/translation services through DCP's Language Bank and the Language Line.

This training will be provided to new employees as part of their orientation.

B. Training of Language Bank Volunteers *(2nd Q 2009)*

As part of the development of the Language Bank, the Language Access Coordinator and Language Bank Liaison will hold an orientation meeting with volunteers to discuss appropriate protocol and guidelines for providing interpretative and translation services.

C. Training of Land Use Review Staff *(To begin 2nd Q 2009)*

In addition, the Land Use Review Division will hold a training session to orient existing staff with new LEP policies, use of signage, and protocols for assisting LEP speakers.



VIII. Record Keeping and Evaluation

A. Record Keeping

1. Frontline Interpretation

For all interpretation services by DCP volunteers, staff will be asked to log the encounter via email to the Language Bank Liaison. The log will include the date, time, duration and nature of the encounter, the language used, and any other relevant comments.

For all interpretation provided using Language Line interpreters, the Department will rely on Language Line Reports to monitor usage.

On an annual basis, or if a significant increase in usage is noted, the Language Bank Liaison will report to the Language Access Coordinator to reevaluate allocated resources.

2. Online Documents

On an annual basis, ITD will report the number of page views in the LEP portion of the DCP website and which languages are accessed.

3. LEP Testimony

The Land Use Review Division will track LEP testimony and report annually to the Language Access Coordinator. In addition, DCP borough staff will be advised to monitor and convey any possible LEP interest in DCP projects to the Land Use Review Division in anticipation of CPC Public Hearings.

B. Overall Assessment

On an annual basis, the DCP Language Access Coordinator will evaluate the above data, reach out to frontline and land use staff for feedback, and report to the Executive Director regarding the sufficiency and appropriateness of Language Services.



Appendix A: Locations of Department of City Planning Service Centers

CENTRAL INTAKE

22 Reade Street, 2 East
New York, NY 10007
Hours: 9am-5pm
(212) 720-3382

ZONING HELP DESK

22 Reade Street, 3 East
New York, NY 10007
Hours: 9:00 am–12 noon
1:00 pm–4:00 pm
(212) 720- 3291

BRONX BOROUGH OFFICE

One Fordham Plaza, 5th Fl.
Bronx, NY 10458-5891
Hours: 9am-5pm
718-220-8500

BROOKLYN BOROUGH OFFICE

16 Court Street, 7th Fl., Room 705
Brooklyn, NY 11241
Hours: 9am-5pm
718-643-7550

MANHATTAN BOROUGH OFFICE

22 Reade Street, 6W
New York, NY 10007
Hours: 9am-5pm
212-720-3276

QUEENS BOROUGH OFFICE

120-55 Queens Blvd., Room 201
Kew Gardens, NY 11424
Hours: 9am-5pm
718-286-3170

STATEN ISLAND BOROUGH OFFICE

130 Stuyvesant Place, 6th Fl.
Staten Island, NY 10301-2511
Hours: 9am-5pm
718-556-7240