

Appendix

Community Engagement Summary

Developing a Public Engagement Strategy

A significant feature of CMAP's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program is the commitment to broad-based public involvement. The local planning projects that result from the program's competitive application process are each strengthened by the engagement of residents, business owners, and other community members from each municipality or study area. In particular, the LTA program focuses on both reaching and involving those groups and populations that are traditionally underrepresented in planning processes, including low-income persons, minorities, non-English speaking persons, and persons with disabilities.

It is therefore essential to formulate an approach to public engagement that is tailored to each LTA community. In this way, both CMAP and municipal staff can set outreach goals for the project, and keep track of the effectiveness of various strategies to determine what is replicable for future public engagement. For the Blue Island Comprehensive Plan, this outreach strategy was supported by background research and initial conversations with the City staff and other key stakeholders.

The first steps to developing the public engagement strategy for Blue Island were to: find out what types of public participation had occurred in the City prior to this project (see Figure 5 for a relevant worksheet); to learn more about the demographics of the community; and to begin building a comprehensive list of the key stakeholders to involve in the planning process (see Figure 6 for a relevant worksheet).

From this background research, the initial direction of the outreach strategy was devised, establishing an overarching goal that the project's public outreach would draw from a wide variety of populations, each with specific interests in Blue Island's future. Since the Blue Island community has participated in numerous planning processes over the last decade, the outreach strategy focused on:

- 1) Building upon those previous efforts rather than repeating them;
- 2) Engaging stakeholders from neighborhoods across the entire city – specifically those areas south of the Cal-Sag Channel – rather than concentrating more exclusively on the issues of the central business area;
- 3) Increasing the participation of residents from a number of groups which had been typically harder to reach through similar planning efforts, including Latino residents (specifically non-English speakers), African American residents, and youth residents.

Therefore a concerted effort was made to reach residents with both English and Spanish language materials about the plan and about opportunities to be involved through public meetings. Additionally, public meeting locations were strategically chosen to be accessible to different groups of residents who live and work in different neighborhoods, rather than having all public meetings be held on government property in the central part of Blue Island.

Each LTA project also has a steering committee that serves as a review body at each step of the project. In the case of Blue Island's Comprehensive Plan, the City's Plan Commission acted as the project's Steering Committee. The Plan Commission met as needed to discuss the project and worked as a sounding board to assist City and CMAP staff throughout the process.

Overall Lessons Learned

Given the outreach strategy determined from the outset of the project, the community engagement activities throughout the project were relatively successful at reaching a diverse range of perspectives about Blue Island's future. Working directly with organizations and businesses that serve specific target populations – for instance, the Tommy A. Brown Sports Association, businesses in the Olde Western Avenue corridor, and Cook County School District 130 – was an effective way of connecting with stakeholders who had not been as involved in previous planning processes in the city.

In Blue Island, there is a core group of active citizens who are interested in community planning activities, which provides a strong base of public input. For some targeted groups – e.g., newer residents with young families, as well as non-native English speakers like some Latino residents – it proved to be more challenging to engage these stakeholders in the comprehensive planning process. These groups should continue to be the subject of targeted community engagement as the City both implements and updates its comprehensive plan. Additionally, Blue Island's institutions should continue to be involved with any future community outreach, as they are integral to reaching and connecting with residents.

Overview of Outreach and Engagement Activities

Community engagement activities occurred during the entire length of the comprehensive planning process, but a number of key community outreach meetings were facilitated, including: meeting with the City's elected and appointed officials, conducting community meetings to gain insight into issues and opportunities, holding a public visioning charrette, and holding a public open house to receive input on a draft of the comprehensive plan.

First Phase: Education and Visioning

For the first phase of public engagement, project staff set out to clearly outline the major topics of the comprehensive plan and raise awareness throughout the community about the goals and mechanics of this planning process. Community outreach efforts – designed to bring the project's targeted groups and populations into the process by inviting them to initial public meetings – included:

- Using community media outlets like the *Blue Island Forum* (both in print and electronic), as well as local access cable;
- Working with community institutions like the Blue Island Public Library, Tommy A. Brown Sports Association, Salvation Army Crossgenerations Community Center, Moraine Valley Community College, Blue Island Park District, St. Benedict parish, and (the former) MetroSouth Medical Center to disseminate printed materials and host meetings;
- Working with local businesses around the area to disseminate printed information to staff and patrons/customers, including businesses that primarily serve the Latino community;
- Using Cook County School District 130's online calendar and schools' weekly packets to parents to share information about the plan;
- Inviting previously identified stakeholders to spread information about the project to their family, friends, neighbors, and students.

The two main goals of overall community engagement were to familiarize both residents and community leaders with the process of planning for the City's future, and to learn from the community members about which issues were most important to them. This visioning and goal-setting process started with speaking to the City Council and the Plan Commission to learn about their goals and priorities.

Plan Commission Meeting

The Blue Island Comprehensive Plan's Steering Committee was comprised of the City's seven-member Plan Commission. This steering committee first met the evening of May 11, 2011, and CMAP staff attended this meeting to introduce members to the comprehensive plan project and gather feedback regarding issues and opportunities for improvement in Blue Island.

Issues

Steering Committee members noted a number of issues or concerns that they would like to see addressed in the comprehensive plan, ranging from aging infrastructure (including bridges, roadways, and sidewalks) to an incomplete zoning ordinance and lack of code enforcement. Several members raised issues about pedestrian and bicycle safety due to problematic roadway circulation and freight traffic throughout the city. Economic development was also a primary concern. Steering Committee members expressed that a multitude of absentee landlords make it difficult to address the commercial vacancies in the Uptown District. Committee members also acknowledged a loss of industry in the region and the community, and pointed to the broader need for business attraction and retention in Blue Island.

Top Issues:

- Aging infrastructure
- Zoning code enforcement

- Business attraction and retention
- Safety (public, pedestrian)
- Capitalize on assets

Opportunities

Next the Steering Committee members listed projects and redevelopment sites that could help address the issues and concerns they identified. Overall, there was a desire amongst the group to capitalize upon existing community assets. Some of the specific project ideas included:

- Updated and completed ordinances and easily searchable and enforceable codes
- Transit-oriented development around the Metra stations
- Repairs to bridges and other infrastructure
- The conversion of Western Avenue to a two-way street
- New pedestrian safety features at Western Avenue and 127th Street
- The addition of a new full-service grocery store at the former Jewel-Osco site
- More bike lanes and streetscaping throughout the city.

Key Person Interviews

In order to gain further insight into the issues and opportunities that exist in Blue Island, CMAP staff conducted interviews with several key stakeholders throughout the community. These individuals represented a wide variety of interests and perspectives, and ranged from institutional leaders to business owners to elected officials.

People interviewed included:

- Greg Lochow, Executive Director, Blue Island Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Owner of GL Studios
- Cynthia Anderson, Director of Academic Outreach, Moraine Valley Community College – Blue Island Educational Center
- David Seaman, CEO, Pronger Smith Medical Care Center
- Alderman Mark Potoska, 3rd Ward, Arts and Culture Committee
- Rita Pacyga, Director of Blue Island Senior Citizens Office
- Tommy Brown, Executive Director of the Tommy A. Brown Sports Association
- Sandra Wilks, Executive Director of Community Relations and Marketing, Metro South Medical Center
- Dr. Ray Lauk, Superintendent, Cook County School District #130

Issues

Collectively, these stakeholders brought up community needs that they hope the comprehensive plan will address, ranging from issues with the physical environment to economic development needs to social concerns. Many interviewees expressed that upgrading infrastructure like bridges, improving pedestrian safety, and dealing with the negative impact of certain roadway circulation are all necessary

steps to create the conditions for local businesses to thrive and for residents to enjoy a higher quality of life. Other issues focused on improving community identity both within Blue Island and around the region. Interviewees raised concerns about perceptions of public safety, a lack of strong identities for unique neighborhoods around the city, and the growing number of commercial vacancies in the Uptown district.

Opportunities

Although the issues that emerged from these interviews varied, a common sentiment was the desire to build upon the strong core of amenities in Blue Island to greatly improve the quality of life of its residents and the community's image throughout the region. The historic Uptown District, the variety of historic housing types, the access to multiple Metra and PACE transit lines, and the diversity of residents were all frequently identified as assets that the City needs to exploit further to increase livability and attract new residents and businesses.

Opportunities identified for improvements included:

- Adding more senior housing options;
- Increasing public art;
- Establishing Blue Island as a destination for its railroad history;
- Completing the Calumet-Sag Trail project;
- Increasing public bus service;
- Promoting public health;
- Improving community entrances and way-finding signage;
- Celebrating the city's ethnic diversity

Public "Kick-off" Meetings

To initiate the public's involvement in the comprehensive planning process, two separate meetings were held in different areas of the city to hear from residents and stakeholders about their main issues in Blue Island. Evening meetings were held at the Salvation Army's Crossgenerations community facility on June 20, 2011, and at the Tommy A. Brown Sports Association on June 21, 2011. Whereas previous planning processes throughout the last several years have held their public meetings in central locations near the Uptown district, these venues were chosen purposefully outside of the center of Blue Island in order to maximize the convenience of the meeting venues for different populations and to reach into neighborhoods that may have been underrepresented in past community planning.

The meetings were promoted both in English and Spanish languages, and bilingual staff allowed for translation services during the meetings. Over 60 residents and community stakeholders attended the two public meetings to share their ideas and concerns. Roughly a quarter all participants were teens and young adults under the age of 25.

Since several planning processes and related public engagement sessions had occurred in Blue Island throughout the past several years, there was a need to distinguish the comprehensive plan as a citywide

process that would tie together all of the public's valuable input on previous planning studies. Participants learned about comprehensive planning through a brief presentation from CMAP, and then were asked to share their main issue with the entire group. Next, participants were divided into small groups to work with aerial maps of the city to discuss their perceived opportunities for improvement.

Issues

Many of the top issues discussed concerned the physical and built environment, from dilapidated infrastructure (specifically, closed bridges) to needed streetscaping to vacant and non-maintained storefronts. Other issues related to social concerns, such as the need for safe gathering places for young adults and better access to information and community involvement. Public health and safety were addressed through expressed interests in healthy food options, more recreation areas, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian safety measures, as well as litter and garbage clean-up. Economic concerns surfaced as participants discussed the need for attracting more daily shopping options in Uptown and throughout the city.

Strengths

In each of these meetings, residents and stakeholders shared a myriad of strengths found in Blue Island. By identifying those assets which the community treasures most, the comprehensive plan can preserve and enhance those strengths as it prepares Blue Island for future development. The "word cloud" (Figure 4) illustrates the most commonly mentioned strengths that Blue Island possesses today.

Second Phase: Strategies for the Future

Building from the visioning that was expressed during the first phase of public engagement, the next step was to ask the community to help identify the strategies that could best achieve their goals for Blue Island's future prosperity.

Public Visioning Charrette

On October 19, 2011, residents and City officials gathered at the (former) MetroSouth Medical Center's community facility to partake in a visioning workshop, during which participants divided up into smaller groups to envision the City's future through a mapping exercise. The ideas and suggestions that were generated by this exercise are outlined in the following summary. During the visioning workshop, participants responded to a series of questions outlined in a discussion workbook. From these questions, residents developed ideas about topics including: residential, commercial, and industrial development; transportation and circulation; open space; and community infrastructure. After this exercise, each smaller group of participants reported their top two important ideas to the larger group, and then all participants voted individually – using live, interactive polling technology – for the idea they thought was most important to address to plan for the future of Blue Island.

The "Big Ideas"

Each of the smaller groups was asked to provide two of their most important ideas from the mapping exercise. Although all of the ideas and comments were taken into consideration, by forcing each group

to choose only two ideas, a view of the attendees' most pressing concerns and projects became more visible.

The top ten ideas expressed during the meeting which were then voted upon by individuals (both at the workshop and later through an online survey open to the general public in Blue Island) were:

- 1) Promote and market Blue Island's strength of having "big city" amenities and access (but without the hassles of a much larger city like Chicago) to potential new residents and businesses
- 2) Redevelop underutilized sites with wind turbines, solar panels, and/or other new "green" industries and manufacturing
- 3) Launch a water taxi service that docks at a new public events space on the Cal-Sag Channel
- 4) Increase the city's outdoor recreation options
- 5) Build upon Blue Island's railroad history and market that heritage outside the community
- 6) Attract grocery stores to key locations around the city
- 7) Promote the rich diversity of the community
- 8) Create a new botanical garden space along Vermont Avenue at the Cal-Sag Channel in an underutilized parcel
- 9) Build a police department and fire station at 135th and Western Avenue
- 10) Start a trolley service that connect Blue Island destinations (running through Uptown, along Olde Western, and between community parks)

Please see Figures 1-3 for the meeting slides that captured the demographic data of visioning charette participants, as well as Figure 4 to find the percentage results of all Blue Island community respondents' priority issues for the comprehensive plan.

Figure 1: Demographic poll – age

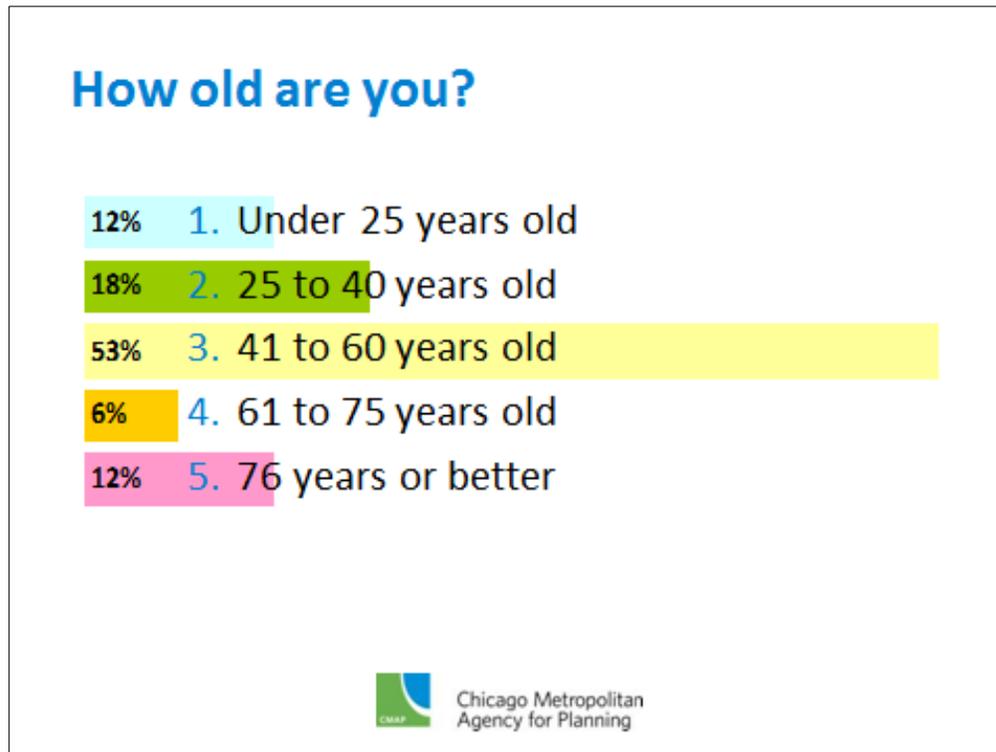


Figure 2: Demographic poll – race and ethnicity



Figure 3: Demographic poll – stakeholder type

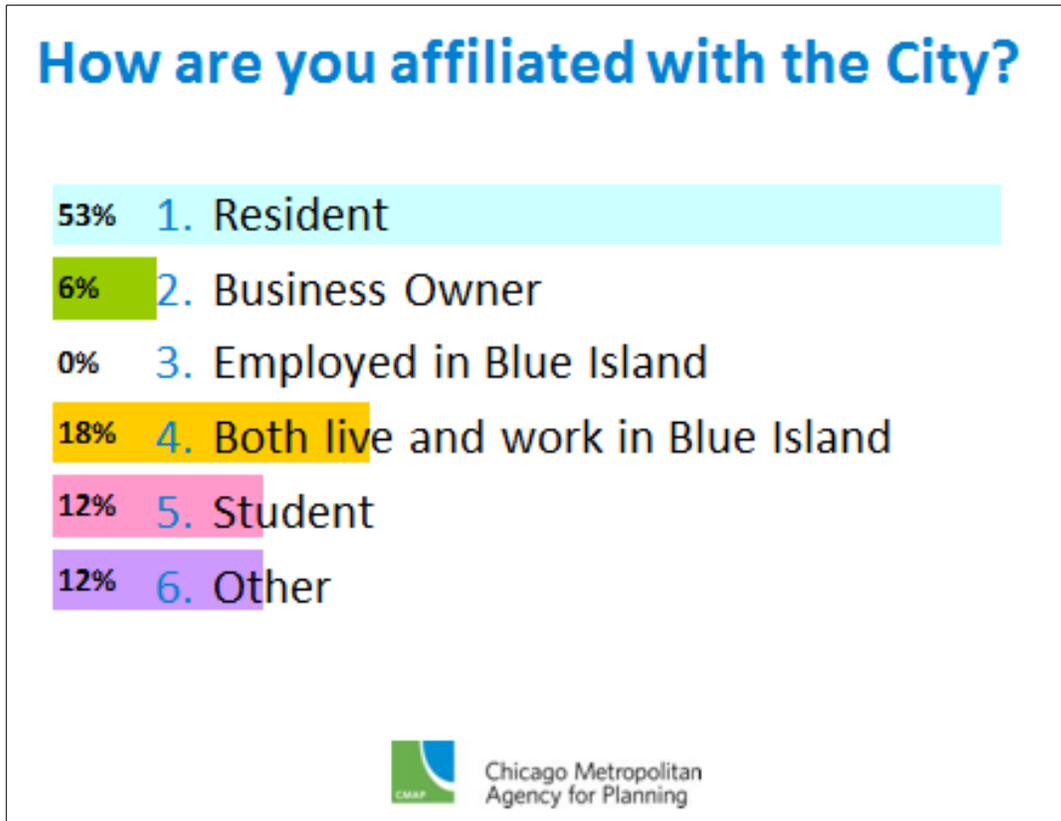
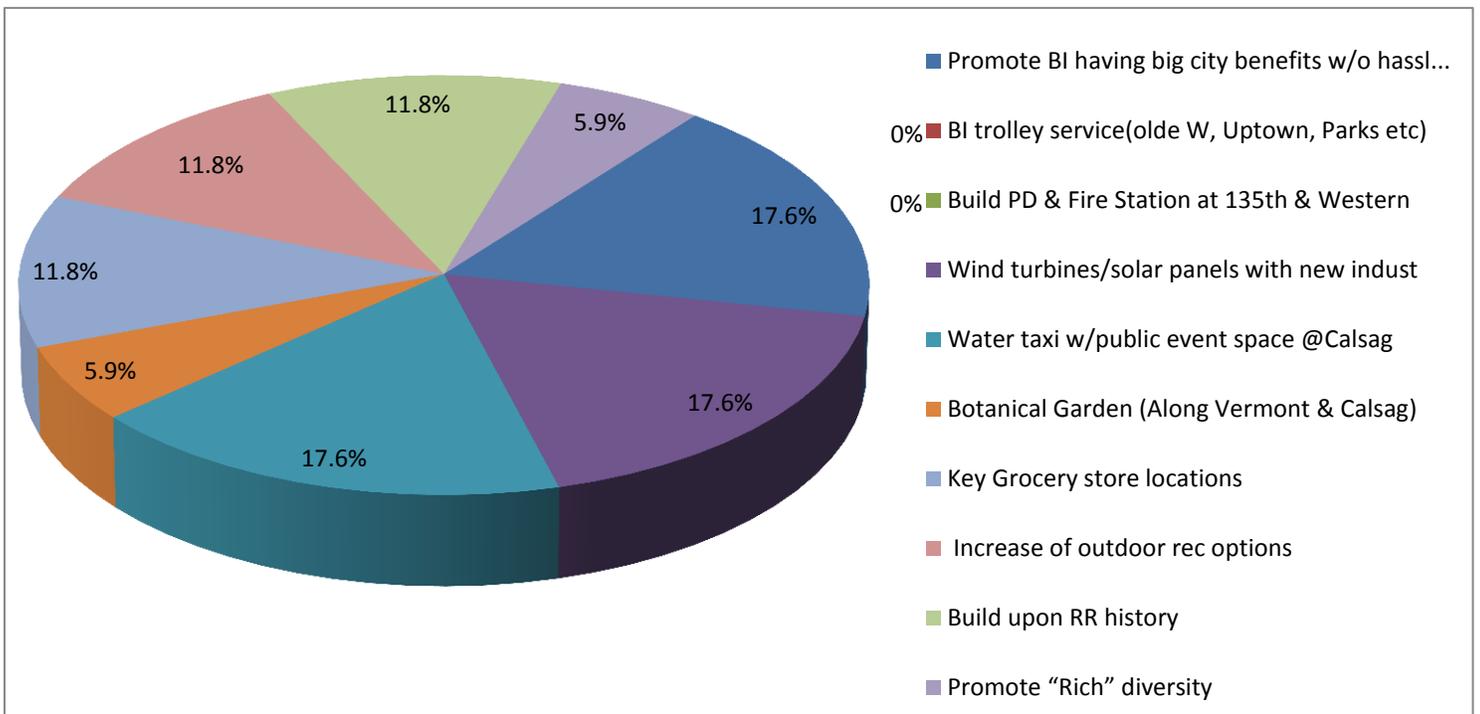


Figure 4: Blue Island Community Respondents' Top Priority (of top ten publicly generated ideas)



Third Phase: Review of Draft Plan

The final phase of the project's public outreach efforts involved allowing the public the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Comprehensive Plan, which they helped to shape with their input and ideas over the previous months.

Public Open House

On April 16, 2012, approximately 50 people attended the Open House, representing elected officials, community institutions, and residents from across the city. Some people in attendance had been involved in the comprehensive planning process since its outset in 2011, while for other attendees, the Open House was the first time they had voiced their ideas or concerns about the plan. This diversity of background and opinion led to robust discussions of the draft plan's main recommendations, ranging from broadening the types of housing available to the conversion of Western Avenue to a two-way street.

The Open House meeting was held to garner feedback from the general public in Blue Island on the draft of the City's comprehensive plan. Rather than having a formal presentation for attendees, this Open House was designed for members of the public to drop in whenever they were able to during the meeting's hours (running from late afternoon through the evening). Attendees were asked to review large maps, renderings, and images from the draft comprehensive plan, and then leave their written and verbal comments with the CMAP and City staff members who were present.

Additional Outreach Templates

The following worksheet template is used by CMAP outreach staff at the beginning of every LTA project, both to become better acquainted with the community and to ascertain what methods of public engagement will be most effective for the given project. The details gathered with this worksheet, along with additional research about the demographics and background of the community, form the basis of the project's outreach strategy.

Figure 5: Previous Public Participation Worksheet

LTA OUTREACH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION INFORMATION FORM

COMMUNITY INFORMATION			
Community Name & Address:			
Main Contact/Title:			
Main Contact Email:		Phone /Fax:	
Community Website:	Best time to contact:		
INSTRUCTIONS			
<p><i>To provide a clear concept of your community and to allow Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to assist with and/or generate a strong public participation process, please answer the following questions.</i></p>			
<p>What are examples of community participation that have occurred to date and relate to this LTA project (and how was such feedback incorporated into your planning activities)?</p>			
<p>Please describe a typical public meeting in your community. What have been the previous successes and challenges while utilizing community participation in any planning process?</p>			
<p>Please describe your priority audience and any specific goals when presenting community plans:</p>			
<p>What tools do you utilize to collect community input for various community projects?</p>			
<p>What are the “hot button” topics that tend to galvanize the public and get people to events in your community?</p>			

Please describe your typical methods for advertising a community/public meeting:

Who is your media contact, and will we want to distribute in languages other than English?

Do the constituents in your community tend to be tech-savvy and computer-literate?

Should we post event information on your municipal website, and if so who is the IT contact person?

Please list three ideal community locations for public meetings:

1)

2)

3)

What are the AV capabilities – projector(s), screen(s) or blank walls, local access TV broadcasting?

When are the preferred days and times of day to hold a public meeting in your community?

Are there other community events scheduled in the coming months when we could partner?

When are the Planning Commission and Zoning Board meeting dates (or are they accurate on your website)?

Figure 6: Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Identify potential stakeholder (individual or group)	Position regarding this plan (supportive, dissenting, etc.)	Potential Steering Committee member?	Candidate for other outreach?	Notes about resources	Contact person(s) & information
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
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