



## **NOTE OF KEY CONCERNS FOLLOWING THE FIRST WEBINAR ON DRAFT MASTER PLAN 2041 ORGANISED BY DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

As part of the ongoing process for inviting citizen's objections and suggestions to the draft Delhi Master Plan 2041, the Delhi Development Authority has announced a series of Webinars. Their stated aim in this 'to facilitate the general public to understand the draft plan better and give more constructive suggestions (Reported by The Times of India on June 26). The first in this series was held on the 1st July, 2021 (Thursday) focusing on the first six chapters in the draft plan. The members of Main Bhi Dilli campaign participated in this meeting, and were once again witness to the inadequate and superficial ways in which citizen participation is claimed but prevented from being substantive.

The meeting was delayed by over 40 mins as the Vice Chairman of DDA could not participate and subsequently, he had to brief his introductory note in the conclusion segment. When the participants were belatedly informed of the delay, many used it as a welcome opportunity to engage and share their views. This shows that the residents of Delhi and members of civil society and campaigns are eager for an opportunity to engage directly with the planners on their issues of Delhi's development. However, many of these comments were not received appropriately by the Authority officials who sought to postpone them till after their presentation and warned that this forum is not for the public hearing and was primarily for a one-sided exchange to build 'awareness' rather than take comments.

One of the key issues that many participants, including members of the Main Bhi Dilli campaign, tried to raise was the concern that participation by merely 200 odd people does not represent even a fraction of Delhi, and should not be construed as the planners having reached out to the 2 crore residents of Delhi. It was also shared that the city is still recovering from an enormous health emergency, and it is still difficult and unsafe for campaigns and civil society members to have consultations on ground to engage citizens to share their suggestions and objections on the draft plan. At such a time when there is also a significant digital divide, the DDA must recognise that a short 45 day time span is not enough for people to read and understand 450 pages of the highly technical draft plan which was prepared by the DDA and NIUA over the last four years, and engage effectively in the process. The participants firmly demanded DDA to extend the timelines as a special case in this context. The participants were also able to swiftly point to the precedent set in other Indian cities like Bangalore and Mumbai to extend the

deadline for citizen engagement, as the DDA planning commissioner said that they were abiding by the DDA Act.

It is also important to point out that the presentation made in the webinar was a rote repetition of what is written in the plan, and was almost entirely spoken in English. There was virtually no attempt to simplify or explain any technical aspects and was only focused on board strategies rather than the detailed mechanisms which have a big impact on people's lives and livelihoods. When several participants raised their objection to this and requested that the forum be used more effectively to listen to and answer their queries, the authorities redirected them to the web portal and alternatively asked them to post their comments on the chat and that these would be accepted as a suggestion/ objection.

The Main Bhi Dilli campaign is strongly opposed to these tactics to prevent meaningful public engagement with the Master Plan, and registers its concern on the lack of communication and accountability from DDA's side. This approach in fact is not only characteristic of the process but also the content in the Master Plan which moves to institutionalise it as only being the concern of government authorities and ill-defined 'apex committees' rather than the people of Delhi. For instance, this is evident in the removal of any mention of Local Area Plans in the draft.

Thus, while we welcome and appreciate the move of DDA to share online updates through the website and other virtual modes, we also urge them to recognise that in a city like Delhi, there are many who do not have the same digital and language access as imagined by them. We feel that there is a need for more participatory provisions with people's representation and engagement in the planning process now and going forward.

We demand that the DDA make the following changes in the upcoming webinars-

1. There must be dedicated time to have discussions on people's opinions, suggestions and objections.
2. The presentation should be made in both Hindi and English languages, and also disseminated in different mediums before and after the meeting.
3. The proceedings of the meeting should be updated along with the video recording and key decisions/ minutes.
4. In the next webinar, there must be involvement of Local Urban Bodies and government departments, as it is mandated in the DDA Act.
5. While discussing the draft, DDA must give reference to the baseline study, research, and consultations that it conducted while preparing the plan.

6. In the next webinar, we demand an update on the decision of extending the timeline for people to submit suggestions/ objections.

*Main Bhi Dilli campaign is a citizen's collective aiming to make urban planning in Delhi more social, inclusive and participatory.*

*For more information, please visit our website <https://www.mainbhidilli.com/>*

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