



CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG

Division: Corporate Services

Effective Date: December 12, 2016

Department: Legislative Services

Approval Level: Council

Policy Title: Public Engagement Policy

Section #

2-5

Policy #

LEG-ADM21

Purpose

The purpose of the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg's Public Engagement Policy is to ensure a consistent and effective approach for engaging constituent's, citizens and stakeholders in Council decisions that may affect them, including Municipal policies, plans, strategies, programs and services in order to make informed decisions that consider and address public concerns, values and input.

Policy

The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg recognizes that public input can improve municipal decision-making. In order to gather public input, the trademarks of the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg's Public Engagement Policy stem out of the Town of Cobourg's core commitments:

1. Citizen Engagement: The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg believes that a key element of local government is that people should be involved in the process of decisions that affect them.
2. Respectful Process: The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg's Public Engagement & Community Consultation Plan will ensure people are treated with respect, honesty and integrity.
3. Accessible Involvement: The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg will ensure involvement processes are accessible to the public.

Greater involvement by citizens through public engagement will result in a better-informed community, a greater sense of ownership in initiatives and increased public satisfaction with municipal programs, services and long-term plans.

The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg acknowledges a form of formal public engagement is a valuable contribution to the Town of Cobourg's decision making process.



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It is the policy of the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg to:

1. Align with Town Council priorities and the Town's corporate focus by expanding opportunities to engage and dialogue with citizens.
2. Support the Council decision making process by providing increased opportunities for citizens' and stakeholders' to provide input.
3. Ensure consistent and clear practices for involvement and/or information sharing.
4. Ensure an appropriate level of engagement is implemented/offered provided it is based on assessed community need and impacts and benefits.
5. Identify increased parameters and resources for public engagement.
6. Ensure adherence to the Public Engagement Policy and associated guidelines.

REQUIREMENTS

The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg will use various techniques and channels to encourage information sharing and dialogue based on the following eight (8) public engagement guiding principles.

These principles outline what the public can expect from the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg.

1. **Accountability:** Town Council and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public engagement.
2. **Inclusiveness:** Public dialogue, communication venues to, encourage participation and input from the community.
3. **Transparency:** ensure protocols and communication to the public is accessible, open, clear, and understood.
4. **Early involvement:** to help identify issues and look at opportunities and challenges during concept development, design and implementation of municipal policies, projects and initiatives.



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5. **Timely communications:** Ensure there is sufficient time within the engagement process to provide information to the community, or to engage the community at appropriate times.
 6. **Clear and accessible information:** Ensure the use of plain language in a wide variety of formats and channels of communication based on accessibility guidelines and principles.
 7. **Suitable process:** Design and implementation of public engagement processes and techniques that reflect the magnitude and complexity of various initiatives. Develop protocols to adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.

The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg will consider public engagement opportunities when developing communications and marketing activities for Town initiatives, programs and events.

A wide variety of perspectives are shared through public engagement. The engagement process is one tool, along with research, Council policies, legislation, expert advice and input from partner organizations.

The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg will review this policy on an annual basis in order to remain consistent with public engagement best practices and stake holder feedback.

Definitions

“Engagement” shall refer to the term used to cover the continuum of purposes or phases for involving the public in municipal issues. The continuum includes sharing information, consultation to test ideas and collaborating to build solutions and active participation in decision making.

“Media” shall mean representatives of the print and electronic media.

“Plain Language: shall mean effective communication that is clear, concise, relevant and easy to understand.



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“Public” shall mean the most general and inclusive term for participants of public process in the municipal context. This term includes individuals, not-for-profit, community and corporate organizations within the Municipality of the Town of Cobourg.

“Public Involvement” Will be used to represent the various methods of engaging the citizens of Cobourg in discussions about civic matters that affect them.

“Public Event” shall mean an event arranged by the Town directly, or in partnership, to release information, raise awareness, or to celebrate a civic milestone. Some of the most common include: award presentations, dinners, conference greetings, dedication ceremony, ground breaking, official opening, program launch, ribbon cutting, sod turning, major announcements.

“Stakeholder” shall mean any Cobourg individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization based within the boundaries of The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg, with an interest or stake in the outcome of a decision

Administration

The Chief Administrative Officer and Municipal Clerk shall implement and administer the terms of this policy and shall establish related operating procedures as required.

Municipal Clerk is responsible for implementing the Public Engagement Policy across the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg.

Council Responsibilities

The support of Town Council is important for successful community engagement as key leaders and elected officials. Council is asked to:

- Review information gathered through the community engagement process to better inform Council decisions.
- Consider appropriate project timelines and resources needed for community engagement.
- When taking a leadership role ensure all participants are comfortable in participating.
- Municipal Council has the responsibility to ensure staff are employing the policy as intended.



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- Municipal Council shall decide when public input is required in accordance with the policy.

Communications Officer Responsibilities

The role of the Communications Officer is to:

- Work with municipal departments to develop or review appropriate Public Engagement Policy and Guidelines.
- Work with alongside consultants, and Municipal Staff and departments shall liaise with the consultant to provide input from their community engagement work.
- Work with municipal departments to ensure the Corporation has effective systems to monitor, record, coordinate and evaluate its community engagement activities.
- Evaluate and update the Community Engagement Standards based on clear performance measures, employee feedback and emerging practices, on an annual basis.
- Provide Council and employees with annual performance reports regarding the success of the Public Engagement Policy.
- Work with CAO, Human Resources and Municipal employees to develop and implement appropriate community engagement training and supports.

Municipal Staff Responsibilities

Town employees who are responsible for the design and implementation of community engagement standards will:

- Pursue community engagement with the understanding that involving the community leads to better decisions.
- Ensure that community engagement activities comply with the Public Engagement Policy and related Guidelines.
- Design engagement processes that reflect the commitment made to stakeholders.
- Design engagement processes that reach out to those citizens or stakeholders that may be directly impacted.



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- Ensure community members who may want to be involved or have vested an interest in the matter/issue are included.
 - Ensure all communications are clearly presented, balanced and understandable to the target audience.
 - Ensure that participants are aware of their responsibilities in the engagement process and support participants to fulfill those responsibilities.
 - Foster long-term relationships based on mutual trust and respect.
 - Ensure the project report accurately reflects all the feedback received.
 - Ensure consultants or external organizations undertaking community engagement activities on behalf of a Town department comply with the Public Engagement Policy and Guidelines.
 - Responsible to ensure that the venue and the communications equipment are appropriate.

Citizen/Participant Responsibilities

Successful community engagement processes require respectful and constructive contributions of participants. Participants are responsible to:

- Pursue community engagement with the belief that community involvement leads to better decisions.
- Recognize the Town must consider the needs of the whole community.
- Strive to reach sustainable solutions.
- Request alternative ways of participating if required.
- Listen to understand the views of others.
- Identify concerns and issues early in the process.
- Participate openly, honestly and constructively, offering ideas, suggestions, alternatives.



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- Work in a transparent, respectful and cooperative manner which may include compromise.
- Stay informed of the project, engagement activities, its progress and related issues.
- Provide input and feedback within project timelines.
- Encourage others to become engaged, and offer input to the project and engagement activities.
- Provide contact information as requested in order to receive updates on the community engagement process.
- If meeting/participant is deemed to be disrespectful, vexatious or counterproductive they may be subject to termination of rights to participate

Scope

This policy shall apply to Council, Municipal Staff, Advisory Committees and Consultants or designates.

Cross Reference

[Public Engagement Guidelines Attached.](#)

<p>Resolution # 470-16</p>	<p>Revision Description:</p>	<p>Signature/Municipal Clerk: <i>Louaine Brace</i></p>	<p>Council Approval Date: December 12, 2016</p>
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