

## REPORT

### Council

**Meeting Date: June 17, 2024**

---

**FROM:** Strategy, Policy and Communications Department

**DATE:** June 4, 2024

**SUBJECT:** **Public Notice and Engagement Policy and Procedure Update**

**LOCATION:** Town Hall

**WARD:** Town-wide

Page 1

---

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the updated Public Notice and Engagement Policy be approved.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Public Notice and Engagement Policy and Procedure has been updated; it was last reviewed in 2016.
- A number of public engagement activities were held to obtain feedback from the community on their experiences providing feedback on town initiatives; this included in-person sessions at community centres, one session at Sheridan College, two Residents Association meetings, and an online survey.
- Meetings with Councillors were held to understand their experiences and observations.
- Internally, a working group with representatives from each commission was formed, and a facilitated session to solicit feedback from town managers was also held.
- The Policy and Procedure have been reviewed by the Policy Review Administration Group.
- A number of changes to the Policy and Procedure have been made to provide staff with more direction on the guiding pillars, when engagement will be considered, how to consider public engagement and clarity on the engagement spectrum.

**BACKGROUND:**

The [Public Notice and Engagement Policy](#) was last reviewed in 2016.

Many town departments hold public engagement activities to obtain community feedback on a number of initiatives, projects, studies and policies. Staff determine how much engagement is necessary depending on the type of initiative. Typically, more complex initiatives require more extensive engagement.

Given that the Public Notice and Engagement Policy impacts the community, staff held various engagement opportunities to encourage feedback. The review also allowed staff to align the policy and procedure with Council's strategic vision, Community Belonging and Accountable Government priorities, as well as to review and update with an inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) lens.

The scope of this review (phase 1) included an update to the Public Notice and Engagement Policy (Appendix A) and the Public Engagement Procedure and related appendices (Appendix B). There are several other procedures within this policy that will be reviewed over the next 12 months (phase 2). These include:

- Communications Procedure
- Translation and Interpretation Procedure
- Corporate Gifts Procedure
- Customer Service Standards Procedure
- Electronic Messages and Anti-Spam Procedure
- Lost and Found Procedure

**Public Engagement Activities**

The phase 1 review included several discussions and planned public engagement activities:

- Councillor discussions to get feedback and observations on public engagement activities
- Online survey to ask community members how they would like to be engaged in town initiatives; the survey ran from March 7, 2024 to March 22, 2024
- Three in-person sessions to promote the survey and answer questions related to the policy were held on March 18<sup>th</sup> at Glen Abbey Community Centre and Trafalgar Park Community Centre, and on March 20<sup>th</sup> at Sixteen Mile Sports Complex
- One in-person session to promote the survey to students was held on March 21<sup>st</sup> at Sheridan College
- An internal working team was formed with representatives from each commission
- Staff attended a town-wide manager meeting to have a facilitated discussion on staff experience with public engagement, inclusivity, and possible staff training and supports

- Two virtual meetings offered to Residents Association (RA)
- The staff Policy Review Administration Group (PRAG) reviewed and updated the revised draft policy and procedure

## COMMENT/OPTIONS:

### Survey Results

Results from the online survey provided insight into how community members are currently engaged in town initiatives and how they wish to be engaged in the future. There were 183 completed surveys. A summary of the results can be found in Appendix C and are noted below:

- 50% of respondents said that they did not participate in any town activities over the past 12 months. 23% said they participated two to three times and 13% said they participated once.
- For those that did not participate in a town engagement activity over the past 12 months, 53% said it was because they were not aware of the activities hosted by the town and 20% said that the timing of the activity did not work with their schedule
- When asked “How you would like to be engaged?”, the top responses were:
  - 17% online surveys
  - 12% attend online meetings where information is shared via a presentation and I can ask questions
  - 11% attend in-person meetings where information is available and I can ask questions
  - 10% participate in “pop-up” events at various locations throughout the town that may include information sharing and interactive activities
- 66% of respondents follow the Town of Oakville on a social media platform
- Of those that follow the town on a social media platform, the top sources were:
  - 33% Facebook
  - 31% Instagram
- Respondents are subscribed to the following online town newsletters
  - 26% Mayor or Councillor e-newsletter
  - 13% Town’s corporate e-newsletter
  - 54% None of the above
- Time preferences for meetings are primarily online evening meetings at 30%, followed by in-person evening meetings at 22%

One of the questions of the survey asked “How could the town improve in keeping you informed and engaged about important initiatives that affect you and your community”. The responses focused on the following themes and are detailed in Appendix C:

- Information sharing and using a variety of tactics including options when sharing a proposal, different formats for sharing information such as mail, text

messages, and being transparent and accountable with sharing information and final decisions.

- Accessibility both physically and providing information through the website.
- More engaging activities that may include incentives and make activities more fun and entertaining.
- Timing to ensure early involvement and not making meetings run too long.
- Promote inclusion to include all voices and reach out to new residents.
- Standardization to have a consistent approach for initiatives.

### **General Themes**

The feedback received from all the engagement activities, including in person comments, was considered and where appropriate the policy and procedure has been updated accordingly.

The general feedback received, both internal and external, fall under the following themes:

- Be clear on the purpose of the initiative and the extent of public involvement;
- Provide a timeline of activities and when the public can be involved;
- Use social media and the town's website for sharing information;
- Expand reach to get to the people and look at ways to be more inclusive;
- More engagement is better than less;
- Provide options for residents to consider along with impacts and consequences for each;
- Find meaningful ways to engage and be more innovative;
- Use plain language; and
- Increase the use of training, resources and tools to help staff with engagement plans and activities.

There was some confusion from community members who attended the in-person sessions regarding the difference between the Public Notice and Engagement Policy and the Procedure By-law and whether Council members are subject to the policy. Other issues that were raised at the in-person meetings included noise as a result of gas-powered equipment; residents being disturbed in their neighbourhoods by ongoing construction causing noise and debris; and some feedback on the handling of delegates at recent Council meetings

Although two virtual sessions were offered and held to engage with residents association members, only one RA representative attended. The issues that emerged focused on the engagement undertaken as part of the Midtown project. A number of ideas emerged to increase awareness of town initiatives such as use of a QR code with the tax bill to redirect residents to subscribe to notices and newsletters and use of social media to attract younger people to participate.

## **Spectrum of Engagement**

Staff benchmarked engagement activities with other municipalities. Most municipalities use the [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#) spectrum of engagement when determining the type of engagement necessary for local initiatives. The spectrum of engagement provides a range of options from information sharing to more extensive involvement and collaboration.

The spectrum of engagement includes inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower. This spectrum was already included in the procedure, but more context has been added to clarify what is involved and to set expectations for residents.

The survey and other feedback received helped inform these changes to strengthen the use of the spectrum so that the level of engagement is appropriate for the type of project, study or policy under review. For example, initiatives that do not present a significant impact to the public would not require extensive resources or engagement efforts. For more complex projects with more implications to the community, businesses, financial/infrastructure costs, etc., these matters would require a more defined engagement plan and discussion with interested parties before recommendations are presented to Council for final decision.

## **Key Changes to the Policy**

The changes to the Public Notice and Engagement Policy are outlined below.

- The Purpose has been amended to align with the strategic priorities of Council's Strategic Plan to reference specifically "community belonging" and "accountable government".
- A new section is added that lists when the town will consider public engagement.
- The Guiding Principles are reordered and three new ones have been added: Indigenous Engagement; Options for Participation, and Technology.
- Indigenous Engagement is added as a guiding principle to show commitment to building the town's relationship with Indigenous Partners, with recognition that more consultation will be needed as we explore opportunities for future engagement which will be considered as part of the actions outlined in the IDEA Multi-year Plan.
- Options for Participation is added as a guiding principle to reflect the town's increased use of virtual engagement practices and reflect comments received to ensure options of timing are considered to accommodate participants.

- Technology is added as a guiding principle given the increased use of the town's website and social media important platforms to communicate engagement activities.
- Added wording to the scope to include that the policy also applies to persons and companies contracted by the town to perform engagement activities on behalf of the town.
- Added wording to ensure that the policy applies to staff who have been delegated duties on behalf of Council for those matters that require engagement.
- The definition for "public engagement" has been updated to better reflect the process of engagement in addition to the tactics used.
- The reference to the word "stakeholders" has been changed to "interested parties" to remove a colonial term.

**Changes to Procedure:**

- Name changed to include "Notice" since the procedure also deals with notice and to be consistent with the policy.
- Provide an explanation of the engagement spectrum that comes from IAP2.
- To clarify that "empower", as part of the engagement spectrum, applies to final decision-making authority of Council.
- To provide staff with more guidance on how to approach public engagement including:
  - clearly articulating the purpose of the public engagement and extent of engagement early on in the process
  - why staff are undertaking the initiative, to be clear when matters are before Council i.e. what the "ask" is - a decision, for information or to hold a public meeting, etc.
  - For larger, more complex projects staff should develop an engagement plan
  - Where reports on projects are presented to council, they should address the public engagement, themes that emerged, conflicting opinions, how recommendations may have been changed, etc.
- To include commitment to engagement with Indigenous peoples and acknowledge that the town may be delegated responsibilities to engage by the Province.

- 
- Public notice requirements have been added given the dissolution of the print version of the Oakville Beaver newspaper, to clarify that notices will be provided on the town website and may be provided on an Oakville online news outlet. Staff would still have the option to advertise in a printed newspaper if deemed necessary.
  - New definition added for “digital public notice ad”.
  - Definition for “notice by mail” amended to include email.
  - Appendix A of the Procedure is renamed to “Municipal Act Public Notice Requirements” and the first paragraph is added to be clear that the notice requirements listed in this appendix are required pursuant to section 270(1) of the Municipal Act that requires policies for specific notice requirements.
  - Appendix A of the Procedure is also amended to update Municipal Act references and to remove notice requirements that had been repealed or no longer applicable.
  - Appendix A of the Procedure is amended to provide definitions for form, manner and time which are required as per the Municipal Act requirements.
  - Appendix B of the Procedure is renamed to “Public Engagement Level of Impact and Notice Guidelines” to better explain the content of the appendix and explanation added to distinguish this appendix from Appendix A of the Procedure.
  - Appendix B of the Procedure is amended to remove Level 5 from the table related to “Empower – Stakeholders to make final decision”.
  - Appendix C of the Procedure is deleted which was an outdated copy of the notice template. Instead, staff are redirected to use the template that adheres to the Corporate Identity (CID) standards, to ensure they are using the current template version.

### **Other Implementation Opportunities**

The feedback received helped inform updates to the policy and procedure and also provided some insight into what the town may choose to do in the future to further advance engagement efforts. Pending budget considerations, the town may want:

- To explore online tools and platforms to make it easier for residents to actively engage with the town and for the town to gather information. There are a wide variety of tools on the market.
- Organizational oversight to better coordinate timing of engagement, combined outreach on multiple initiatives, maintenance of the online tool.

- In-house expertise to help train staff and provide advice on public engagement plans especially for more complex initiatives.
- Additional training options for staff to enhance their skillset.
- In-house oversight for and expertise on standardizing surveys.

Corporate Communications has recently launched a new [e-Alert tool](#), that enables residents, businesses and community groups to sign up to receive public notices and news releases delivered to their email.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

### **(A) PUBLIC**

In an effort to get resident feedback on the Public Notice and Engagement Policy update, staff hosted three in-person events at community centres, one event at Sheridan College and two virtual meetings with Residents Associations, in addition to an online survey that ran for over two weeks. All resident feedback was considered as part of the updates to the policy and procedure.

### **(B) FINANCIAL**

There are no financial impacts as a result of this report at this time. Additional training, online tools or resources to support enhanced public engagement at the town would be considered separately through the budget process.

### **(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS**

Staff from all Commissions were consulted as part of the policy and procedure update. A working team was formed with staff from those departments that are responsible for conducting public engagement activities as part of their portfolios. Managers from across the organization were consulted with to provide their thoughts and opinions on how to improve tactics used, increase inclusion and support staff.

### **(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

This report addresses Council's strategic priorities: Community Belonging and Accountable Government.

### **(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION**

There is no direct impact to climate change or action as a result of this report. However, climate-related initiatives continue to require ongoing engagement with residents, businesses and community groups to ensure that the town meets its climate action goals.



**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A: Public Notice and Engagement Policy

Appendix B: Public Notice and Engagement Procedure

Appendix C: Public Engagement Online Survey Results

Prepared by:

Shahada Khan, Corporate Strategy Program Advisor

Recommended by:

Swaraj Mann, Manager, Corporate Strategy

Submitted by:

Julie Clarke, Director, Strategy, Policy and Communications