CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG

Division:	**Corporate Services**	**Effective Date:**	
Department:	**Legislative Services**	**Approval Level:**	Council
Policy Title:	**Public Engagement Policy**	**Section #**	**2-5**
		Policy #	**LEG-ADM21**

Purpose

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

1. Citizen Engagement: 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 Town of Cobourg's Public Engagement & Community Consultation Plan will ensure people are treated with respect, honesty and integrity.

3. Accessible Involvement: 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 Town of Cobourg acknowledges a form of formal public engagement is a valuable contribution to the Town of Cobourg's decision making process.

It is the policy 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 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 Town.

1. **Accountability**: Town leaders 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.

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 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.

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.

"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 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 though 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.

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 thier 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.
- 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.

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.
- 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.

Resolution #	Revision Description:	Signature/Municipal Clerk:	Council Approval Date:

VERSION 1.0

NOVEMBER 8, 2016

Community Engagement Guidelines

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

55 King Street West, Cobourg, ON, K9A 2M2

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Introduction

The purpose of this Community Engagement Guideline is to establish consistent and effective strategies for engaging constituents, citizens and stakeholders in Council decisions that may impact them. This handbook will provide definitions and guiding principles for public engagement followed by practical tools for implementation.

In addition to the Town of Cobourg **Communications Policy,** established to encourage a culture of community participation in governance, and the **Public Notice Policy,** which outlines legislative requirements that the municipality has to provide reasonable notice to the public, this guideline is a supporting document of the **Town of Cobourg Public Engagement Policy** which states "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."

The Corporation of The Town of Cobourg is a dynamic municipality that recognizes the need for a range of flexible public engagement techniques, both in person and online that can be used to engage the community in decisions that affect them.

Clear and consistent guidelines to engage the community will assist Cobourg Municipal Council make decisions that are more informed and considerate of public concerns, values and input. This guide should be used at the initial stage of every project to ensure that the appropriate engagement tool(s) are being used.

The Community Engagement Guideline will be a living document that is continually re-evaluated and updated.

What is Public Engagement?

Public engagement is based on the understanding that citizens should have, and want to have, input in the decisions that affect their lives. Engagement in municipal government begins when citizens select members of Municipal Council who they believe represent the community's best interests. The Town of Cobourg Public Engagement Policy and the Community Engagement Guideline further this engagement by establishing additional opportunities to involve the public in municipal issues.

The Community Engagement Guideline will reinvigorate current practices, bringing meaning to people's participation and fostering a two-way dialogue between citizens and their local government. Citizens will be regularly engaged through a well-structured process of dialogue that offers opportunities for public opinion to be considered in Councils approval of Town policies, strategies and plans for strategic investments.

Effective community engagement will enable Council to make more informed decisions. By receiving diverse perspectives and potential solutions, the quality of decisions improve and subsequently a higher standard of citizen service is provided.

It is also important to note that not every initiative or project requires public engagement. Each activity, policy, or program development process requires a unique approach and adapted tools to address its specific needs.

Note: The Public Engagement Guideline will not apply to projects that are mandated by legislation, such as the Planning Act R.S.O 1990, Municipal Act 2001 or Environmental Assessment Act where public engagement is specifically addressed in the legislation.

Note: Public Engagement does not constitute decision making. The Public Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Guideline will ensure that the concerns and opinions of Cobourg citizens are heard to assist council in their deliberations. However, the final decision is always the responsibility of Council.

What Public Engagement Does and Does Not Do

Public engagement does:

- Involve citizens in policy or program development, which may include agenda setting and planning to decision-making, implementation, and review.
- Involve two-way communication regarding policy, program change or project development between local government and its citizens.
- Include forums and processes through which citizens come to an opinion that is informed and responsible.
- Generate innovative ideas and creates active participation.
- Contribute to collective problem-solving and prioritization.
- Require that information and deliberation be transparent.
- Depend on mutual respect between all participants.

Public engagement does not:

- Involve participants in the last phase of policy development only.
- Intend to fulfill "public engagement obligations" without a genuine interest in influencing the decision with the opinions sought.
- Conduct public opinion polls, focus groups, and other such exercises in isolation from specific initiatives, ideas, or programs.

What Makes Public Engagement Meaningful?

- **Clarity of Purpose:** Citizens must understand the role they play in the engagement process.
- **Reflective of Diversity:** Demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and place of residence can affect interests and values. A public engagement process should represent the community's demographic diversity and make tangible efforts to allow for that diversity to be reflected.
- **Based on Credible Information:** Participants must have balanced and accurate information about the major elements on any issue or initiative so they can refine their perspectives, voice their points of view, and better understand the points of view of other stakeholders.
- **Organized & Facilitated:** Engagement processes should be facilitated by someone whose role it is to encourage participation that is respectful and equitable to ensure that discussions stay focused and sufficient time is given to the most important issues.
- **Communication of Results:** Any results must be shared with the citizens.

Our 7 Guiding Principles of Public Engagement

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. The following principles outline what the public can expect from the Town:

1. **Accountability**: Town Council and municipal staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public engagement.

2. **Inclusiveness**: Public dialogue and decision making processes are intended to reach out to, and encourage participation by citizens of the community.

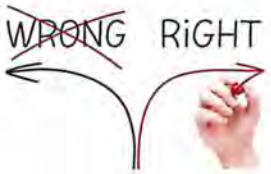
3. **Transparency**: Public decision-making processes are accessible, honest and understandable.

4. **Early involvement**: Helps identify issues and look at opportunities and challenges during concept development, design and implementation of municipal policies, projects and initiatives.

5. **Timely communications:** Ensure there is enough time within the engagement process to provide information to the community and allow for appropriate time for citizen feedback.

6. **Clear and accessible information**: Ensures the use of plain language in a wide variety of formats and channels of communication.

7. **Suitable process**: Design and implementation of public engagement processes and techniques that reflect the magnitude and complexity of the initiative. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.



How to Use this Plan: Six Steps

The Town of Cobourg will use this plan in six (6) steps, as listed below.

Note: Appendix A provides a toolkit to assist in the development of Town of Cobourg engagement programs.

1. Step one: Assess level of community impact

- Use the **Four Classes of Community Impact (Appendix A, Step 1)** to evaluate the level of impact the issue has on the citizens of the Town of Cobourg.

2. Step two: Identify appropriate type of community engagement

- Based on the level of community impact, use the **Community Engagement Guideline (Appendix A, Step 2)** to select the appropriate methods of community engagement that would help to best address your issue.

3. Step three: Choose techniques to engage the public

- Using the **Community Engagement Matrix (Appendix A, Step 3)** select the tools and techniques to be used to engage the public based on the level of impact assessed in step two.
- Consider the following policies and guidelines when developing a community engagement plan:
    - 8 Guiding Principles of Public Engagement
    - AODA standards for accessibility
    - Public Notice Policy
    - Communications Policy
    - Procedural By-Law
    - Advisory Committee/Local Board Policy

4. Step four: Develop Community Engagement Plan

Assess the situation and clearly define the objectives you want to achieve. Identify the key actions you will take, appropriate timelines and roles required.

5. Step five: Council Coordinator Input

Depending on the specific issue and strategy, a Director in consultation with a Council Coordinator will review the identified methods of community engagement. The Communications Officer should always be consulted before the engagement process begins.

6. Step six: Implement community engagement plan

Implement the plan making sure you are providing appropriate time for each initiative. Tracking results is important to prove success and identify tactics that need to be re-addressed.

Step 1: Assess Level of Community Impact

The Town of Cobourg refers to 'types of community impact' as the affect that a specific action or potential change may have within the community. Four (4) Classes of Community Impact are defined on the following page, each with a set of criteria that will be used to determine the potential level of impact of the issue.

The Town of Cobourg will identify the community groups and stakeholders that may be affected by the issue in order to determine the level of impact.

Note: The level of impact of a situation can still be considered "high" even if it only affects a small group of people. For example: Emergency street access for a subdivision of 10 homes. While the number of people affected is low, the potential danger to human health and wellness could indicate a high level of impact.

Note: See Appendix A, Community Engagement Toolkit "Step 1" for the Classes of Community Impact

1.1 Four Classes of Community Impact

Impact Class	Criteria	Examples
Level 1) High impact on whole community	• High impact across community including significant changes to the natural environment, government structure, or the general health and safety of all residents • High degree of interest across community • Strong possibility of conflicting perspectives on the issue	• Town Council's strategic plan • Town's Official Plan • Establishment or elimination of a facility or service that serves the whole community
Level 2) High impact on select area and/or community group	• High impact on a specific neighbourhood, group in the community or specific service or program • Strong possibility of conflicting perspectives at the neighbourhood level or the need for potential trade-offs among particular groups	• Relocation of youth centre • Proposed changes to a cultural program • Removal of a parking lot • Road construction or changes to street access (i.e. Spencer Street reconstruction)
Level 3) Modest impact on whole community	• Modest impact across the community • Sufficient degree of interest across the community to warrant public engagement • Moderate possibility for conflicting perspectives	• Proposed improvements to a community wide service, such as library services or brush removal program • Proposed improvements to customer services at community centres
Level 4) Modest impact on select area and/or community group	• Modest impact on a neighbourhood area, community group(s) or specific facility or service • Small change to a localized facility or service • Modest risk of controversy or conflict at the local level	• Local street cleaning • Upgraded dilapidated sidewalks • Changes to a local youth activity program, such as timing or venue

Step 2: Identify Appropriate Type of Community Engagement

The next step is to determine the appropriate type of community engagement. The information in this part of the plan will help to identify the general types of community engagement that are most appropriate for the Town of Cobourg's purposes.

Once the appropriate type of community engagement is identified, use the **Community Engagement Matrix (Appendix A, Step 3)** to select the community engagement tools and methods that will be used for the Community Engagement Plan.

2.1 Definitions of Community Engagement

There are three general types of community engagement that can be directly related to the activities of municipal government.

One-Way Communication (with ability for public response)

Communication is fundamentally important because it provides members of the public with information on the services, issue and/or prospective development in question. It is not possible to engage with citizens unless they are first adequately informed about the matter at hand.

The Town of Cobourg's Communications Officer will work with appropriate municipal staff to transfer relevant information to its citizens, reaching as many citizens as possible with as much of the information as possible.

Examples of common Town of Cobourg one-way communication methods include but are not limited to: press releases, public notices, radio, municipal website, newspaper ads, newsletters, cable TV, email campaigns, social media, presentations, information sessions etc.

Two-Way Communication

Two-way communication is the process by which people, organizations or governments seek the opinions, concerns and suggestions of the community. The goal of two-way communication is bringing information from the public to municipal Council for their consideration as part of the decision making process.

Examples of common Town of Cobourg two-way communications methods include but are not limited to: focus groups, committees, public input sessions, surveys, workshops, etc.

The Town of Cobourg recognizes that public input can improve municipal decision-making. Two-way communication provides an opportunity to invite new ideas and to gain a broader view of an issue. The two-way communications process encourages thorough planning, early input by stakeholders and careful consideration of all available options.

Participation in Decision-Making

Note: The fundamental method of citizen participation in decision-making is municipal elections. During elections, citizens select members of municipal government who they feel will best represent their opinions on Council.

It is the responsibility of Council to make decisions on Municipal matters. Council will make decisions based on input and suggestions provided by members of the public, staff, municipal committees and experts, however, the final decision is always that of Council.

Examples of public participation in decision-making include but are not limited to: opportunities for public input during public meetings, polling

When Council provides opportunity for citizens to be involved in the decision making process, their opinions are not only heard but have direct impact on the final outcome. For example, Council may choose to direct staff to commission a survey regarding the purchase of a new Town of Cobourg facility. Council will use the results of the survey to assist with the decision making process. However, the final decision will be that of Council.

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.

Note: See Appendix A, Community Engagement Toolkit "Step 2" for the Community Engagement Guideline. The Community Engagement Guideline will provide direction on the types of community engagement required to help address an issues.

Step 3: Choose Techniques to Engage the Public

In this step the appropriate engagement techniques will be selected based on the 'level of community impact' and 'type of community engagement' decided upon in Step 2. Depending on the scope of the project, the objective, timelines and budget, there are a number of ways to engage the public.

The Community Engagement Matrix found within Appendix A provides an overview of the communications methods that can be used to engage the public. Please use this matrix to identify the communications tactics to be used in your communications plan.

3.1 Methods used when seeking public participation

There are several ways in which to obtain public participation in engagement activities. Municipal staff must select the appropriate method based on the issue at hand.

- **Random:** This approach has the advantage of reaching people that other methods will likely not reach by randomly selecting a sample of participants from the target population in order to extrapolate findings to a broader population.
- **Purposeful:** If there is interest in the input of a specific population, the Town will do significant outreach to that community. This may include working with other organizations that have an established relationship with the community of interest.
- **Open Recruitment:** An open invitation is sent out inviting citizens to participate in an event. This method is conducted based on a simple first-come, first-served concept.
- **Self-selective:** This method can be used in combination with purposeful or open recruitment. Participants will be selected from those who respond to an invitation to create a group that represents the population(s) of interest to the public engagement goals

Note: See Appendix A, Community Engagement Toolkit "Step 3" for the Community Engagement Matrix. The Community Engagement Matrix provides examples of communications tools and methods to help create a public engagement plan.

Step 4: Develop a Community Engagement Plan

Appendix A is meant to serve as a planning guide in the delivery of successful community engagement plan.

Before developing your Community Engagement Plan you must fully understand the situation and objectives that are trying to be reached. Review the tactics you have selected in step three and ensure they will assist you in meeting your goals. Be sure to apply appropriate timelines to each tactic and identify roles that are required to be filled.

Your community engagement plan must take into consideration Town of Cobourg policies and procedures. The Communications Officer should be consulted on the development of all Community Engagement Plans.

4.1 Building successful and effective community engagement initiatives

The Community Engagement Guideline was developed to ensure a consistent and effective approach for engaging constituents, citizens and stakeholders in Council decisions that may affect them. The Town of Cobourg Public Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Guideline stem from the Town of Cobourg's core commitments:

1. **Citizen Engagement:** 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 Town of Cobourg's Community Engagement Guideline will ensure people are treated with respect, honesty and integrity.
3. **Accessible Involvement**: The Town of Cobourg will ensure involvement process are accessible to the public as per AODA legislation.

Four (4) considerations that will assist the Town of Cobourg meet this commitment include

4.1.1 Clear, accurate and consistent communication with community

The public must first be informed about a project or issue in a timely manner and be provided with sufficient information to make informed decisions.

The public must also be informed of the various ways to contribute to the process, which means that careful consideration must be given on how to properly promote the process. The level of promotion will always reflect the level of impact.

When writing the communication/promotional materials the language must be clear and produced in an accessible format. Technical terms, acronyms and jargon should be avoided. Promotional material should engage the public by making the topic relevant to their lives. Key questions to guide the development of promotional materials can include:

- **Who** is the issue affecting?
- **Who** should be involved?

- **What** is the decision?
- **What** does the public need to do?
- **What** potential impacts will this issue or project have on the public?
- **Where** will meetings be held?
- **When** is an activity taking place?
- **When** is a meeting taking place?
- **Why** is the municipality changing a policy?
- **Why** is the municipality providing advice?
- **How** can the public get involved?

Promotional material should always explain the process that was followed to come to a decision and answer why and how it was decided.

4.1.2 Transparent process that links results of community engagement

The community engagement process should be as transparent as possible in order to enhance public trust in municipal Council and to build confidence and assurance that citizens have been heard. The objectives of the process must be clearly defined and realistic. The public must also clearly understand how their input will be considered in the local policy or decision under discussion. IE: confirm that all opinions will be heard and considered in the decision making process, however, final decision will be that of Council.

The community will also require feedback after a consultation process. It is important to remember that citizens have given their time and it is essential to recognize this by keeping them updated. Information to provide may include:

- How participants input has been used
- Next steps
- Future opportunities for input
- Updated records or minutes

4.1.3 Recognition of knowledge of participants

Community engagement processes should involve and provide opportunities for the thoughts, opinions, ideas and vision of participating citizens to be expressed and incorporated into the project or policy under discussion.

4.1.4 Representative participation by relevant population groups

Processes should engage the appropriate groups such as those most affected by the issue and those who are able to provide the greatest input.

Step five: Council Coordinator Input

Prior to implementation of any plan, a Director in consultation with a Council Coordinator will review the identified methods of community engagement.

The Communications Officer should always be consulted before the engagement process begins.

Step six: Implement Community Engagement Plan

Implement the plan making sure you are providing appropriate time for each initiative. Tracking results is important to prove success and to identify tactics that need to be re-addressed.

Conclusion

Clear and consistent guidelines to engage the community will assist Cobourg Municipal Council make decisions that are more informed and considerate of public concerns, values and input. This guide should be used at the initial stage of every project to ensure that the appropriate engagement tool(s) are being used.

Please see Appendix A for a step-by-step guide on how to develop a comprehensive Public Engagement plan.

For questions please contact the Communications Officer at 905-372-4301 ext: 4105.

APPENDIX A – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

supporting document of the
Town of Cobourg Community Engagement Guidelines

How to Use this Plan: Six Steps

As a supporting document of the Town of Cobourg Community Engagement Guidelines, the Community Engagement Toolkit provides step by step instructions on how to create an effective community engagement plan.

The toolkit includes six (6) steps, as listed below.

1. Step one: Assess level of community impact

- Use the **Four Classes of Community Impact** to evaluate the level of impact the issue has on the citizens of the Town of Cobourg.

2. Step two: Identify appropriate type of community engagement

- Based on the level of community impact, use the **Community Engagement Guideline** to select the appropriate methods of community engagement that would help to best address your issue.

3. Step three: Choose Techniques to Engage the Public

- Using the **Community Engagement Matrix** select the tools and techniques to be used to engage the public based on the level of impact assessed in step two.
- Consider the following policies and guidelines when developing a community engagement plan:
    - 8 Guiding Principles of Public Engagement
    - AODA standards for accessibility
    - Public Notice Policy
    - Communications Policy
    - Procedural By-Law
    - Advisory Committee/Local Board Policy

4. Step four: Develop Community Engagement Plan

Assess the situation and clearly define the objectives you want to achieve. Identify the key actions you will take, appropriate timelines and roles required.

5. Step five: Council Coordinator Input

Depending on the specific issue and strategy, a Director in consultation with a Council Coordinator will review the identified methods of community engagement. The Communications Officer should always be consulted before the engagement process begins.

6. Step six: Implement community engagement plan

Implement the plan making sure you are providing appropriate time for each initiative. Tracking results is important to prove success and identify tactics that need to be re-addressed.

Step 1: Assess Level of Community Impact

Four Classes of Community Impact

Impact Class	Criteria	Examples
Level 1) High impact on whole community	• High impact across community including significant changes to the natural environment, government structure, or the general health and safety of all residents • High degree of interest across community • Strong possibility of conflicting perspectives on the issue	• Town Council's strategic plan • Official Plan • Establishment or elimination of a facility or service that serves the whole community
Level 2) High impact on select area and/or community group	• High impact on a specific neighbourhood, group in the community or specific service or program • Strong possibility of conflicting perspectives at the neighbourhood level or the need for potential trade-offs among particular groups	• Relocation of youth centre • Proposed changes to a cultural program • Removal of a parking lot • Road construction or changes to street access (i.e. Spencer Street reconstruction)
Level 3) Modest impact on whole community	• Modest impact across the community • Sufficient degree of interest across the community to warrant public engagement • Moderate possibility for conflicting perspectives	• Proposed improvements to a community wide service, such as library services or brush removal program • Proposed improvements to customer services at community centres
Level 4) Modest impact on select area and/or community group	• Modest impact on a neighbourhood area, community group(s) or specific facility or service • Small change to a localized facility or service • Modest risk of controversy or conflict at the local level	• Local street cleaning • Upgraded dilapidated sidewalks • Changes to a local youth activity program, such as timing or venue

Step 2: Identify Appropriate Type of Community Engagement

Once you have defined your class of impact (i.e. Level 1 – 4) the table below should be used direct the types of community engagement required to help address issues.

Note: See Definitions of Community Engagement (pg. 15-16) for additional information

2.1 Community Engagement Guideline

Level of Impact	Type of Community Engagement
Level one: High impact on the whole community	Issues that have an impact on the whole community require all three types of public engagement. It also may be necessary to form an ad hoc committee when the issues in question will have an enduring impact on the community to ensure any decision-making process involves the perspectives in the community.
Level two: High impact on select area and/or community group	Issues that have an impact in a particular area of the community or a group within the community, a combination of all three types of public engagement should be used. It may be necessary to work with a local organization to ensure that the populations affected by the issue are given an adequate opportunity to offer their input on the matter at hand.
Level three: Modest impact on the whole community	In most cases it is sufficient to inform and/or consult the public when dealing with an issue that falls in this category.
Level four: Modest impact on select area and/or community group	Similar to Level three, it is sufficient to inform and/or consult the public when dealing with an issue that falls in this category.

Step 3: Choose Techniques to Engage the Public

How to use the Community Engagement Matrix:

Each engagement technique in the Community Engagement Matrix is outlined based on the type of communication that you selected in Step 2. (i.e. One-way, two-way or participation in decision making)

See the list of methods (communications tools) listed under each type of engagement and select the ones that best fit the situation.

The matrix includes **26** different methods along with a description of each method offered.

Community Engagement Matrix

One-Way Communications Methods (with opportunity for feedback)			
Technique/Description	**Engagement Goal**	**Cost & Time (Level of Effort)**	**Tips & Accessibility Considerations**
A) NEWSPAPER ADVERTISTEMENTS Use to provide information/promote event, project, program, service.	Inform	Medium cost Medium time	Use plain language
B) INFORMATION ON WEBSITE Use the Town website to reach out & provide information.	Inform	Time & resource/expertise are required to create & maintain content	Use plain language. Websites can make information accessible and available to people who have vision loss, learning disabilities or difficulty getting to public meetings.
C) PRESS RELEASES/PUBLIC NOTICE Use to inform media of an issue, project or event, town positions/statements, progress on projects or in response to events that have occurred that require a Town response.	Inform	Skill and expertise is needed to prepare this properly	Corporate Communications issues news releases for the Town, involve them early in the process
D) POSTERS Use to provide information/promote event, project, program or service.	Inform	Printing costs; design expertise Medium time	Use plain language. Graphic depictions work well. Use colour contrast where appropriate to improve accessibility.
E) HAND DELIVERED LETTERS Used to inform residents of an issue that has direct impact on their home/neighborhood	Inform	Printing costs, mailing or hand delivered (staff time vs. postage)	Use plain language and graphics when available. IE. Road construction required for water pipe replacement.

One-Way Communications Methods (with opportunity for feedback)			
F) DIGITAL SCREENS *Coming in 2018* Used to advertise a meeting, event, survey, program or service. Will be located at Town Hall, the CCC and other municipal buildings.	Inform	Costs to prepare are minimal; however time and resource/expertise are required	Reaches those who attend Town facilities in-person. Corporate Communications designs digital screens, involve them early in the process.
G) PORTABLE (ROAD) SIGNS IE: Large Black signs with white lettering. Signs placed by the road to advertise a meeting, event.	Inform	Signs must be placed in accordance with the Town's Sign Bylaw. See the Building Department for a permit. Some fees may apply for rental of signage.	Reaches those who travel by the sign Information must be easily conveyed
H) TELEVISION/RADIO Use media such as talk shows and community TV (COGECO) to present information to a broad audience.	Inform	Can be done by pitching interview/story to station. Can be expensive if purchasing the air time/commercial Medium time	Can use audience reach/viewer numbers to measure impact
I) FACT SHEETS/FAQs Provide information about a particular issue or project, usually one page on Town website or print out.	Inform	Minimal cost, depending on distribution Low to medium amount of staff time to gather information and prepare this effectively	Materials should be in plain language and available in accessible formats Consider using question and answer style

One-Way / Two-Way Communications Methods			
J) EMAIL Use to contact stakeholders and solicit input. IE: Newsletter, informational missive	Inform Engage	No cost Medium to high amounts of time are needed to read, respond and direct input	Ensure you develop a way to analyze responses to make the data useful. If Emailing to a distribution list, make sure the Town of Cobourg has consent from each person on the distribution list as per Gov. of Ontario Anti-Spam regulations.
K) TELEPHONE HOTLINES (Public calling in, not Town calling out) Use to take calls from the public to gather information about issues or gauge concerns. Also used to provide information.	Inform Engage	If telephone is in place, costs are minimal Medium amount of staff time to create effective message and information	Need designated contact prepared for prompt and accurate responses Controls information flow Conveys image of accessibility
L) TWITTER Social media messaging tool where brief messages can be shared with followers. Can be used to inform of issues (such as service disruptions), upcoming meetings, events, programs.	Inform Engage	Costs to prepare are minimal; however time and resource/expertise are required Time needed to monitor and respond	Followers may share your message so the potential audience reach is significant. Social media may offer a platform for discussion/feedback to people with disabilities who find it difficult or cannot attend meetings. Remember that many popular social media platforms are not yet fully accessible Corporate communications drafts and shares information for the Town.
M) FACEBOOK Social media platform where meetings, events, photos, programs, services can be shared with followers.	Inform Engage	Costs to prepare are minimal; however time and resource/expertise are required Time needed to monitor and respond	Please see above

Two-Way Communications Methods			
Technique/Descriptions	Engagement Goal	Cost & Time (Level of Effort)	Tips & Accessibility Considerations
N) OPEN HOUSES Materials, plans and exhibits are displayed in a station format and the public is invited to tour through. Use to share information. Can be used in combination with other strategies to gather public perception/comment such as using comment cards.	Inform Engage	Preparation of materials, handouts, speakers and displays could be costly Usually more staff intensive than a public meeting	Information materials should be in plain language and available in accessible formats The location should be set up with several information stations, each addressing a separate issue. Venue should be accessible. May be difficult to document public input One perspective can dominate discussion
O) TOWN HALL/PUBLIC MEETINGS An organized large group meeting usually used to make a presentation and give the public an opportunity to ask questions and give comments. Public meetings are open to the public at large. Participants hear relevant information and have an open opportunity to ask questions and make comment People learn by hearing others' questions and comments	Inform Engage	Medium cost Staff resources can be high depending on issue, organization and set-up etc.	Facilitators needed to establish open and neutral environment for all views to be shared Emotions can be high and one perspective can dominate
P) TOURS & FIELD TRIPS Allows group(s) of stakeholders to tour specific site or sites. Opportunity for stakeholders to acquire greater knowledge about an issue or project.	Inform Can be used to engage, involve or collaborate by providing an opportunity for discussion	Costs of transportation must be considered Intensive planning and organization needed by staff	Be aware of accessibility needs such as accessible venues, and dietary considerations if food is provided. Be conscious of public safety and insurance coverage that may be required.
Q) INTERVIEWS A one-on-one meeting or a small group focused discussion designed for a specific objective	Inform Engage	Costs can increase if providing food and travel. Need to book a room/space Time needed to develop effective questions and approaches upfront	Be on time, polite and neutral Know your objectives/key messages for the interview Interview room/location should be accessible Provide the interviewee with information beforehand Helps build rapport
R) INFORMATION KIOSKS A station where project information is available. Can be used to solicit input.	Inform Engage	Can be minimal cost if materials are already prepared Staff resources needed to maintain and monitor	Can be permanent or temporary. Can use technology to make the kiosk interactive and to gather comments

Two-Way Communications Methods			
S) SURVEYS ONLINE, TELEPHONE, MAIL, IN-PERSON, HAND-OUT Use to obtain data on issues, needs assessments, satisfaction levels, opinions and concerns for a particular group or the entire community.	Engage		Determine whether the issue requires statistically valid data or qualitative input Questions should be worded carefully so as not to influence an outcome Written in plain language.
T) COMMENT FORMS/CARDS A form given to people to complete and return.	Engage	Costs are minimal Effective questions take time to create to ensure they solicit information that is useful for decision making Sufficient time is required to review all submissions.	Results may not be representative of larger population Plan to accept feedback in a variety of ways. For example, some people with low vision may prefer to give verbal rather than written feedback.
U) FOCUS GROUPS Small selected group that are formed to test ideas, messages and gauge public opinion. Good opportunity to test key messages before implementing program.	Engage	Facilitator is necessary	Be clear about the objective when inviting participants Allow for insights, perspectives, opinions, ideas and suggestions.
V) TASK FORCE A small group of stakeholders or experts formed to develop a product within a limited time, such as a set of recommendations, policy or proposal. The product is passed through to official decision makers.	Engage Involve	Costs will increase if a facilitator is required. Staff support/prep time is intensive.	Be prepared to work through to compromise. Venue should be accessible.
W) CHARRETTES/WORK SHOP Group working session or work shop. Often used with planning issues, the charrette is an intense problem-solving session where a facilitator leads a group to alternative solutions.	Engage Involve	Facilitator is necessary. Helpful to have staff on hand for additional help with each group. Scribe is helpful. Venue should be accessible	Be clear on the promise to stakeholders about how their input will be used Use of visual techniques in designing issues can be helpful. E.g. Have participants sit in groups with layout of draft plan in front of them. Allow participants to draw/write out ideas onto plan.

Participation in Decision Making Methods			
Technique/Descriptions	**Engagement Goal**	**Cost & Time (Level of Effort)**	**Tips & Accessibility Considerations**
X) CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES A group of stakeholders or representatives of stakeholder groups that provide input on a project or initiative. Group can also be ongoing.	Engage Involve Collaborate	Costs of staff time to support and resource the committee is substantial Volunteers must dedicate substantial time	Define the terms of engagement up front One perspective can dominate discussion Venue should be accessible Materials should be in plain language and available in accessible formats
Y) PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING Used to enhance participation in local democracy while improving community cohesion and ensuring delivery of cost-effective local services E.g. Public Budget Submission meeting	Inform Engage Involve	Staff resources needed to attend meeting, provide information and answers questions as needed	Facilitators need to establish open and neutral environment for all views to be shared Emotions can be high and one perspective can dominate
Z) VOTING Selecting an option based on a majority poll.	Involve	Substantial cost to ensure voting process is valid Intensive staff resources	Encouraging the public to vote is important Voting process should be accessible

Step 4: Develop a Community Engagement Plan

Before developing your Community Engagement Plan you must fully understand the situation and objectives that are trying to be reached. Review the tactics you have selected in step three and ensure they will assist you in meeting your goals. Be sure to apply appropriate timelines to each tactic and identify roles that are required to be filled.

Your community engagement plan must take into consideration Town of Cobourg policies and procedures. The Communications Officer should be consulted on the development of all Community Engagement Plans.

Four (4) considerations that will assist the Town of Cobourg meet this commitment include

4.1 Clear, accurate and consistent communication with community

The public must first be informed about a project or issue in a timely manner and be provided with sufficient information to make informed decisions.

The public must also be informed of the various ways to contribute to the process, which means that careful consideration must be given on how to properly promote the process. The level of promotion will always reflect the level of impact.

When writing the communication/promotional materials the language must be clear and produced in an accessible format. Technical terms, acronyms and jargon should be avoided. Promotional material should engage the public by making the topic relevant to their lives. Key questions to guide the development of promotional materials can include:

- **Who** is the issue affecting?
- **Who** should be involved?
- **What** is the decision?
- **What** does the public need to do?
- **What** potential impacts will this issue or project have on the public?
- **Where** will meetings be held?
- **When** is an activity taking place?
- **When** is a meeting taking place?
- **Why** is the municipality changing a policy?
- **Why** is the municipality providing advice?
- **How** can the public get involved?

Promotional material should always explain the process that was followed to come to a decision and answer why and how it was decided.

4.2 Transparent process that links results of community

The community engagement process should be as transparent as possible in order to enhance public trust in municipal Council and to build confidence and assurance that citizens have been heard. The objectives of the process must be clearly defined and realistic. The public must also clearly understand how their input will be considered in the local policy or decision under discussion. IE: confirm that all opinions will be heard and considered in the decision making process, however, final decision will be that of Council.

The community will also require feedback after a consultation process. It is important to remember that citizens have given their time and it is essential to recognize this by keeping them updated. Information to provide may include:

- How participants input has been used
- Next steps
- Future opportunities for input
- Updated records or minutes

4.3 Recognition of knowledge of participants

Community engagement processes should involve and provide opportunities for the thoughts, opinions, ideas and vision of participating citizens to be expressed and incorporated into the project or policy under discussion.

4.4 Representative participation by relevant population groups

Processes should engage the appropriate groups such as those most affected by the issue and those who are able to provide the greatest input.

Step five: Council Coordinator Input

Prior to implementation of any plan, a Director in consultation with a Council Coordinator will review the identified methods of community engagement.

The Communications Officer should always be consulted before the engagement process begins.

Step six: Implement community engagement plan

Implement the plan making sure you are providing appropriate time for each initiative. Tracking results is important to prove success and to identify tactics that need to be re-addressed.

Definitions of Community Engagement

There are three general types of community engagement that can be directly related to the activities of municipal government.

One-Way Communication (with ability for public response)

Communication is fundamentally important because it provides members of the public with information on the services, issue and/or prospective development in question. It is not possible to engage with citizens unless they are first adequately informed about the matter at hand.

The Town of Cobourg's Communications Officer will work with appropriate municipal staff to transfer relevant information to its citizens, reaching as many citizens as possible with as much of the information as possible.

Examples of common Town of Cobourg one-way communication methods include but are not limited to: press releases, public notices, radio, municipal website, newspaper ads, newsletters, cable TV, email campaigns, social media, presentations, information sessions etc.

Two-Way Communication

Two-way communication is the process by which people, organizations or governments seek the opinions, concerns and suggestions of the community. The goal of two-way communication is bringing information from the public to municipal council for their consideration as part of the decision making process.

Examples of common Town of Cobourg two-way communications methods include but are not limited to: focus groups, committees, public input sessions, surveys, workshops, etc.

The Town of Cobourg recognizes that public input can improve municipal decision-making. Two-way communication provides an opportunity to invite new ideas and to gain a broader view of an issue. The two-way communications process encourages thorough planning, early input by stakeholders and careful consideration of all available options.

Participation in Decision-Making

Note: The fundamental method of citizen participation in decision-making is municipal elections. During elections, citizens select members of municipal government who they feel will best represent their opinions on council.

It is the responsibility of Council to make decisions on Municipal matters. Council will make decisions based on input and suggestions provided by members of the public, staff, municipal committees and experts, however, the final decision is always that of Council.

Examples of public participation in decision-making include but are not limited to: opportunities for public input during public meetings, polling

When Council provides opportunity for citizens to be involved in the decision making process, their opinions are not only heard but have direct impact on the final outcome. For example, Council may choose to direct staff to commission a survey regarding the purchase of a new Town of Cobourg facility. Council will use the results of the survey to assist with the decision making process. However, the final decision will be that of Council.