PUBLIC INPUT TOOLKIT
FOR MUNICIPALITIES

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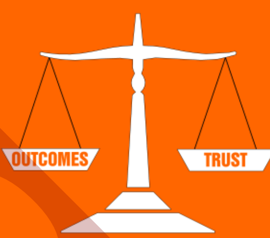
Introduction



An essential balance between outcomes and trust must be maintained in municipal decision-making: building trust is just as important as achieving outcomes—both are necessary for success.

Relationships among people are a critical element of municipal business. This Toolkit provides some guidance about how municipalities can maintain good relationships through appropriate public input into decisions made by Council.

It is anticipated that the principal readers of this document will be:

a) those in municipal administration who are responsible for integrating public input opportunities into municipal projects and plans,
b) those on Council who will be making decisions about appropriate public input, and
c) those in municipal administration who will be determining if developers or other proponents have provided for an adequate public input process.

Section 1 of the Toolkit describes how public input opportunities should be planned and designed in small and mid-size municipalities. The information will help with decisions about:

- the amount of public input,
- the structure of the input process, and
- the integration between public input and the municipal decision process.

Section 2 describes approaches and techniques to help people who carry out public consultation activities on behalf of a municipality. The emphasis in this section is on delivery.

The *Municipal Government Act* (MGA, 2000) specifies minimum requirements for public notification and input. It also enables municipalities to do more to ensure public input informs municipal decisions. If a municipality were to limit its public input to the requirements of the MGA, that input could be received late in the decision process.

The processes described in this Toolkit are supplemental to the legal requirements and are intended to provide more opportunity for public input, earlier in the process.

For convenience, many of the MGA sections that establish requirements for public input are described in the following table. However, this table is merely a "rough guide." *Check the MGA yourself to ensure you are fully informed.*

MGA Section	Summary of direction provided
197	Councils and Council committees **must conduct meetings in public,** unless section 2 or 2.1 applies.
227	If Council calls a **meeting with the public**, notice of it must be advertised and everyone is entitled to attend.
230	Describes when Council is required to hold a **public hearing** before second reading of the bylaw, or before Council votes on the resolution.
251 (3)	A borrowing bylaw must be **advertised**.
606	Describes the requirements for **public advertising**. Notice must be advertised at least once a week for two consecutive weeks or delivered to every residence in the area affected. Describes what a notice must contain.
636	Describes **notification and public input requirements** related to preparation of a statutory plan.
640 (2) (d)	Land use bylaw must provide for **how and to whom notice** of the issuance of a development permit is given.
692	Council must hold a **public hearing** (section 230) and **give notice** (section 606) before giving second reading to adopt or amend a land use bylaw or statutory plan, i.e. a. an intermunicipal development plan, b. a municipal development plan, c. an area structure plan, or d. an area redevelopment plan.

There are other sections of the MGA that describe public input requirements. For instance, if a municipality initiates an annexation proposal, then section 122 describes the notification and public hearing requirements. These sections are not described here because they do not directly affect the situations described in the Public Input Toolkit.

SECTION 1

Planning a public input process

1. Public input is part of the municipal decision-making process

If your municipality approaches decision-making with the assumption that communication and public input will improve decisions, your decision process will usually become more effective. Those who assume that public input is an "extra" demand often face more effort in the long run because affected citizens become more assertive in their effort to be heard. The municipality may find itself spending much more time resolving the issues that emerge.

Municipal councils make decisions in public for the public good. The process described in this section supports the involvement of citizens in these public decisions. Public input is sought by a municipality when there is a decision to be made. Public input during decisions is valuable to a municipality for three important reasons:

1. It leads to greater satisfaction and better relationships with citizens.
2. It reduces complaints and concerns that arise late in the process and cause expensive delays and responses.
3. It leads to better solutions.

Tip: A decision will not be effective if you fail to gain "desired outcomes" and "trust."

Elected officials play an important role in the process of gathering public input. They are the "empowering" agents who assure people their opinions and concerns matter. Many elected officials go out of their way to attend public meetings and hear public comments and discussion first-hand. Experienced citizens approach a councillor independently to ensure their questions and comments will be heard. In these cases, the councillor can help determine how to participate effectively, and can also ensure that important public questions are raised in Council.

2. When should public input be part of a decision?

Public input is essential to the municipal decision process. The *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) establishes a legal requirement for Council and Council committees to conduct business in public and to ensure the public is notified of certain kinds of decisions.

Much of the business of municipal councils is enhanced by public input. Nevertheless, there are decisions made by municipalities that normally do not include public input. **Directive** decisions are those made by a person authorized to do so, and are issued to others simply to inform them the decision has been made (see figure 1). Directive decisions are used in situations such as the following:

1. There is an urgent need to respond immediately (e.g. flood response).
2. A person in authority is acting within their authority (e.g. police carrying out their duties).
3. The decisions are routine and are accepted as part of the municipality's operations (e.g. snow removal after a heavy snowfall).
4. The decisions are dictated by law (e.g. improvements to water treatment plant).
5. The decisions have substantial effect only on those who have already agreed to be affected through some form of contract (e.g. employment, volunteerism, accepting elected office).

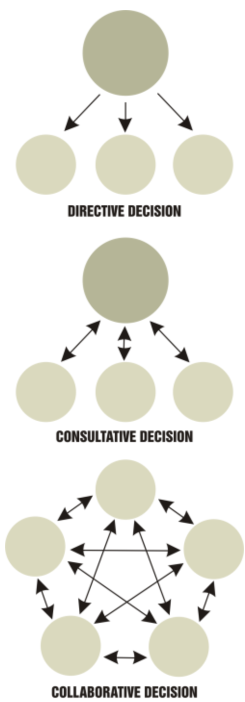


Figure 1: Types of decisions

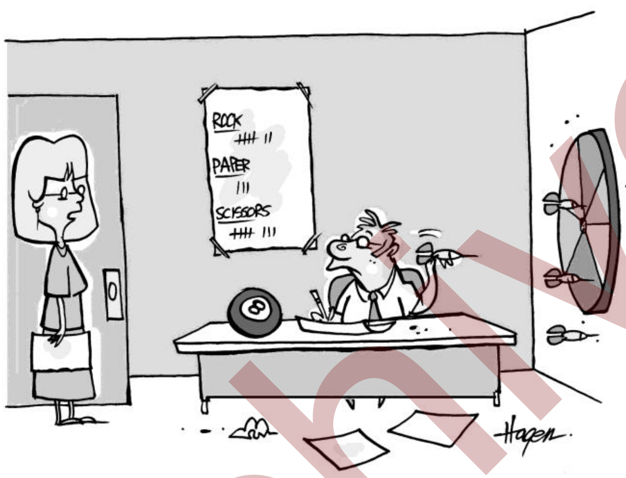
In these cases, the municipality is acting within its authority and is expected to implement the decision efficiently.

Public input processes become more important when the municipality is making decisions called **consultative** decisions. These have one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Public notification and input are required by law (see MGA requirements in the Introduction).
2. The decision is a known concern of other parties, or is likely to have a significant impact on other parties (e.g. a proposed casino).
3. The decision affects society's moral or emotional expectations (e.g. expansion of a recreation centre).
4. The decision affects the "comfort envelope" (lifestyle or habits) of citizens (e.g. road closure affecting how people access the highway).
5. People perceive there are risks associated with the decision (e.g. approving a "half-way" house to support convict rehabilitation).
6. Council or administration requests public input prior to making the decision (e.g. public buildings or open space management).

Consultative decisions are common in municipalities and are the type of decision primarily addressed in this section. However, the final decision rests with Council.

There are also **collaborative** decisions (or projects) in which the municipal representatives act in partnership with communities, organizations or individuals to deliver services or to respond to long-term challenges. In these collaborative situations, the municipality agrees to share the decision process with those at the table. Usually, those at the table must consult with their constituencies as part of the process. Collaborative processes are becoming more common because they can create greater "buy-in" and even "co-investment" (i.e. partners) from those at the table. Collaborative processes have been used in subdivision planning, business revitalization zones, recreational facility development and intermunicipal agreements.



MAYBE WE SHOULD ASK THE COMMITTEE FOR A RECOMMENDATION.

When a municipality embarks on a collaborative decision process, Council must recognize that parties who share in the investment expect to share in the decision. There must be assurances these partners will be heard and their wishes respected. However, Council must still approve all recommendations prior to implementation.

3. How much effort should be put into gathering public input?

The MGA defines the minimum legal requirement for a municipality to provide public notification and opportunities for input. However, as elected representatives of citizens, councillors have a further obligation to be aware of citizen expectations and concerns before making their decisions. Municipal administrators are usually aware of the value of public input.

Gathering public input requires a commitment of time and in some situations, the process can be costly. In this Toolkit, you will find a tool (worksheet 1) and advice to help you make decisions about designing appropriate public input processes, within your budget.

Most municipalities ask developers to consult with the communities affected by their proposed development. Two desirable outcomes should result from this effort:

1. Good relations between the developer and the affected communities, and
2. Better information for Council (or the committee) to consider when the application is brought forward for a decision.

A guide for developers is included with this Toolkit. It can be given to interested developers to support them in their public input efforts.

It is difficult to predict the perspectives of those who may be affected by a decision. Unconsciously, we make assumptions that would quickly change if we were talking to someone with a different perspective on the issue. We recommend the following QuickTest as a way to ensure you are making good decisions about public input requirements. This interview guide can be used by either councillors or administrators.

QuickTest

Select five people who could be affected by the decision being considered, and who are likely to have a different perspective than your own. Contact them (in person, or by telephone) and tell them you are thinking about how to approach public input-gathering. Let them know the situation and the decision being contemplated and ask for their thoughts:

- Do they feel well informed about this matter?
- Are they personally interested?
- Do they think consultation is important in this situation?
- What would be a convenient and effective public input opportunity?
- What do they think people will want to talk about?
- Who should be contacted for input?

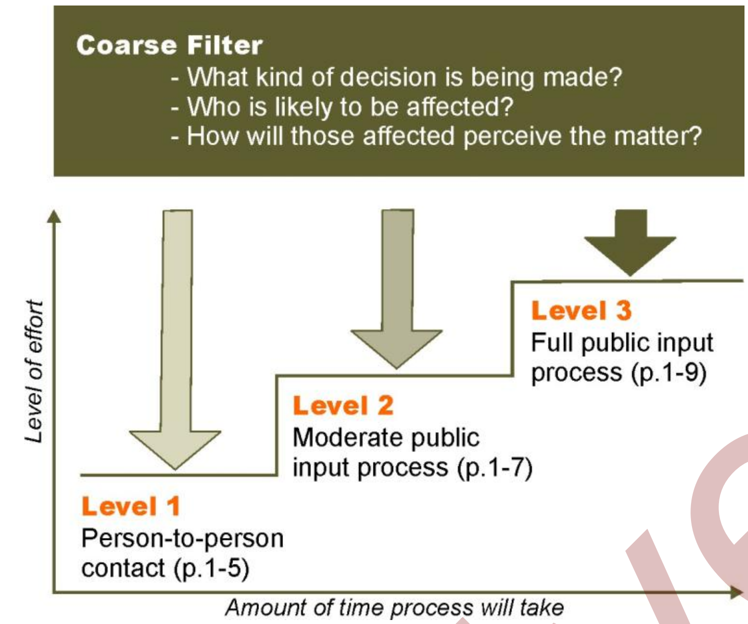


Figure 2: Initial screen to determine level of public input.

The screening approach illustrated in figure 2 can be used early in the decision process to determine an appropriate approach to decision-making and to public input. This approach is based on the theory that **early detection of concerns often reduces the time and effort required to achieve a solution.** There are many examples of situations where public input not only avoided opposition and complaints; it also produced a better solution to the problem than was originally proposed.

However, in some situations, municipalities are legally required to provide for public input, and in such situations the legal requirements **must** at least be met. This Toolkit describes three levels of public input process that can be used. The intention is to provide you with models you can compare. You are encouraged to "custom design" variations on any of these three processes.

See Worksheet 1: How much public input is appropriate?

Level 1: Person-to-person contact

The foundation for good public input processes in your municipality is maintaining good relationships with citizens and communities involved in municipal decisions.

My level of trust is a result of how you behaved in the past.

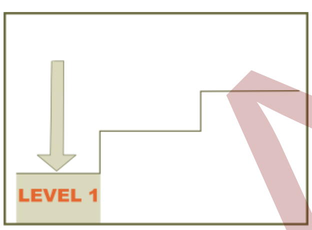
Municipalities benefit from developing a "client service" attitude that helps build trust and satisfaction from every individual encounter with a client. While many factors can affect this relationship, the following are key requirements for success at the front counter or over the telephone:

- Client is greeted on arrival.
- Client never waits more than 3-5 minutes without an acknowledgement.
- Response process is efficient for the client (i.e. remove need to re-dial; remove need to find additional paperwork or go to several people for an answer).
- Person serving client is genuinely interested and friendly.
- Person serving client does not defend or deny (clarification is OK).
- Person serving client ensures client's needs have been met before conversation ends.

Tip: The sooner people are informed of a change, the less likely they are to feel in conflict with the municipality.

This relationship can be achieved by modifying standard processes to ensure people are informed in advance of changes or to make sure individual concerns are heard and addressed. Given that the municipality has maintained good client relations, a great deal of public input can be addressed at the "person-to-person" level.

Examples of level 1 public input are described below. They all rely on early advance notice and personal effort to contact those affected. Assume it is **your job** to reach out to citizens who are likely to be affected by municipal decisions.



Situation	Suggested response
Developers express concern that they need to know of any changes to fees or application processes as soon as possible	▪ Hold an annual meeting with developers to inform them of any changes expected in the next year ▪ Identify a person whom developers can call anytime to get updated information
Several large trees have to be removed from the boulevard (*Note: emotions could make this a Level 2 process)*	▪ Provide advance notice of the tree removal to citizens who are in visual range ▪ Personal contact with affected citizens is recommended, where practical ▪ Staff should be prepared to spend time talking to neighbours and to explain why removal is necessary (and best) at this time

Situation	Suggested response
Recreation centre will no longer be open at 6:00 a.m. on weekdays	▪ Most municipalities will post an advance notice (more than a month) of the change ▪ Post a new and different notice within a week of the change ▪ Staff should personally explain the change to those using the facility during the affected hours

Budget:

Typically, a level 1 consultation is accommodated through adjusting approaches that would normally be part of the decision process anyway. However, level 1 consultation can require extra staff hours and communication efforts—so the budget may be anywhere from $500 to $2,500 or more, depending on the project.

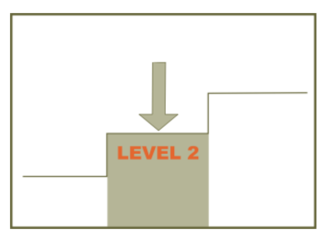
Level 2: Moderate public input process

There are a wide variety of situations where a level 1 approach will be inadequate, but a level 3 process would be "overkill." Level 2 processes work best where the issue and the stakeholders are readily defined (i.e. specific area, specific stakeholders affected). Worksheet 1 illustrates that any two of the following would make a level 2 approach necessary:

- previous concern from the community,
- emotional concern,
- factors such as direct impact on fees or rates, or
- concern over aesthetics.

Health and safety issues, or a concern by many "secondary audiences" will make a level 3 process necessary. Some examples:

Situation	Why level 2 is often appropriate
Installing a youth recreational facility (when zoning allows this use)	▪ Affects more than a few citizens, and raises some concerns about costs, aesthetics and nuisance factors
Replacement of existing utility line or relocation of access	▪ Affects more than a few citizens, and raises some concerns about costs, aesthetics and nuisance factors, during construction period primarily



Situation	Why level 2 is often appropriate
Altering application requirements for business licences	▪ Affects business owners only ▪ Not likely a "serious" issue ▪ Does not affect land use or taxes

The municipality is in the best position to determine an appropriate investment for a level 2 public input process. Many level 2 projects are proposed by a private company and the municipality may request the developer to undertake consultation to help fulfill consultation requirements. A level 2 process will generally require the following to be successful:

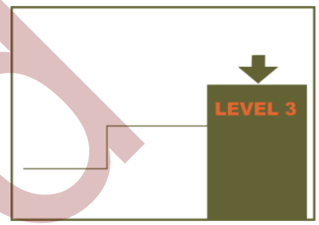
1. A municipal representative with specific responsibility for consulting with the affected public, with adequate communications support (i.e. a consultation coordinator).
2. Clear identification of the decision being made and a schedule that shows opportunities for public input. Clarify what is "on the table" for discussion and what is not "on the table." Establishing this boundary early helps everyone use their time well.
3. Early personal contact with some of the citizens who may be affected to determine the level of interest and concern (see QuickTest, p.1-4).
4. Identification and notification of the citizens (households, businesses) that may be affected.
5. One or more meetings to allow interested parties to become better informed and to raise questions or concerns (see meeting types, starting on p.1-15).
6. A responsive process that answers inquiries quickly and fosters two-way communication.
7. A direct linkage between the different groups (i.e. engineers, project planners, designers, etc.) who are working on the project.
8. A record of all contacts made, and all responses given to enquiries (this can be invaluable later when people fail to remember they were notified or satisfied with the proposed mitigation).
9. A willingness to try to address concerns through adjustments to the project timing, location, size or methods.

Budget:

The range of scale described by level 2 is fairly broad, and budgets will naturally vary with scale. The most costly items at this level of consultation are the staff time and the cost of communication support (e.g. displays for open house meeting). Typically, this level of consultation will require a support budget between $1,500 and $15,000.

Level 3: Full public input process

For some situations, a full commitment to public input is essential to success. These situations require good process, a committed municipal team, a consultation plan and a budget. Worksheet 1 will quickly identify the kinds of decisions most likely to require this level of commitment. Some examples:



Situation	Why level 3 is likely required
New municipal centre to house Council and municipal offices	▪ Concern about taxpayer expenditures and taxes in general ▪ High profile building that may be seen to favour politicians at expense of electors
Significant industrial plant development or expansion	▪ Fear of effects on health, safety and environment ▪ Potential linkage to property values
Change in transportation affecting established neighbourhoods	▪ Direct impact on lifestyle and habits ▪ Potential property value impact ▪ Concern about fairness
Public facility closure (or development)	▪ Direct impact on lifestyle and habits ▪ Potential property value impact ▪ Concern about fairness
Higher density housing, or low income housing, adjacent to established neighbourhood	▪ Potential property value impact ▪ Concern about aesthetics, safety and lifestyle impact
Landfill location	▪ Potential impacts on property values, health, safety and aesthetics ▪ Perception that location decision makes nearby residents disadvantaged while others benefit

In most cases, level 3 precedes a Council decision (i.e. the matter has not yet received first reading). Planning for a successful level 3 public input process is described in part 4 of this section of the Toolkit

Budget:

Level 3 is resource-intensive. While much of the staff time (evenings, etc.) in municipalities may be accommodated through time-in-lieu, the costs must still be considered as "above and beyond" other operations. Generally, level 3 processes will cost between $10,000 and $50,000 if a record of time and expenses is maintained.

4. How to plan a level 3 full public input process

A level 3 public input process requires thoughtful planning. The following text describes four process stages that will assist you.

Stage 1: Preparation

Purpose: To establish the requirements for success.

To do list:

1. Establish terms of reference for the process.

   The terms of reference clarify the scope of the consultation and the human resources and budget needed. Describe (and gain approval for) the budget as early as possible.

   At their simplest, terms of reference can be on one page and can simply identify the following:

   a. What is the objective of the project?
   b. What is the direction from Council?
   c. What level of public input is required?
   d. What is the timeline?
   e. What product does Council expect?
   f. Who is responsible?
   g. What are the budget limitations?

   To develop a more comprehensive terms of reference see:

   Worksheet 2: Developing the terms of reference, and **Attachment 1:** Sample terms of reference.

2. Research and assemble information necessary to support an informed discussion.
3. Identify who can act as reference persons (i.e. experts) during discussions.

   Assigning roles and responsibilities is important at this stage.

4. Develop a responsive internal communication and decision procedure.

   Keeping people informed internally and coordinating processes will take as much, or more, time than the external consultation process. Be clear about scope (what is not "on the table").

Tip: Information notices and materials usually have to be ready before the consultation begins—so they are a critical step in your project timeline. These early information materials must **not** attempt to sell a single point of view. They should provide background information and focus questions that will be the basis for a "conversation."

5. Select and train the consultation team (or hire appropriate contractors).

   During the "peak" of the process, it is essential to have a team of people who can commit the necessary time to the process and who share a commitment to providing an excellent "service" environment. Public consultation requires a project manager and a project team—just like planning or development projects do.

6. "Sketch" the consultation process as you imagine it.

   While the consultation process will definitely change, an initial sketch is invaluable to support project management.

7. Make tentative bookings for potential meeting locations.

   If meetings will be part of the consultation process, check room availability as early as possible. It can be frustrating when you cannot find an available facility appropriate for your meeting(s).

8. Refer to legislative requirements for notification. Determine how people will be notified.

   Refer to the MGA.

9. Create draft information materials to support the discussion.

   Thinking about the information materials will help organize your ideas about communication, in general.

Defining communities:

There is no singular "public" out there whose wants and needs are simply waiting to be discovered. It is more realistic to imagine many "communities of interest" that must be contacted and consulted. One of the first tasks in the process of consultation is identifying the "stakeholder communities" or the "communities of interest." Used in this way, the term "community" simply means a group of people who share something in common.

Examples of a "stakeholder community" include the following:

- People who live in the same part of the municipality (e.g. downtown residents, rural subdivision residents, lakeside farmers).
- People who share work or lifestyle perspectives (e.g. the agriculture community, the arts community, the business community).
- People who share culture, beliefs or principles (e.g. an environmental community, a senior citizens' community, a religious community).

In some cases, the "community" is defined by its response to the decision you are proposing to make. For example:

- The "community" of those who oppose public funding for libraries.
- The "community" of those supporting protection of Elk Ridge.

In most cases, when attempting to exchange information between the municipality and any given community, consider the following:

- Are there leaders, organizations or representatives who speak for this community? If yes, do they consult with the community before they speak?
- What is the best way to provide information to the members of this community?
- What constraints might limit the opportunity for members of this community to provide their input?
- Do we know anything of this community's perceptions about the options we are considering? If yes, what do we know? If no, can we find out more before we proceed further?

Stage 2: Information exchange

Purposes: To provide notification to anyone interested and to gather preliminary information that will improve public discussion.

Generally, before a formal examination of the options being considered in the decision, there is an exchange of information that helps everyone become more informed about the proposal and each other's needs.

Actions that can be taken during this stage are noted below. In all cases, the municipality will take action 1. In many cases, the municipality will also take actions 2 and 3. The options describe some methods that can be used. These are further described in section 2.

Actions	Some Options
1. Provide public notice	▪ Media release targeted to local media ▪ Newspaper advertisement ▪ Public notice bulletins on TV and radio ▪ Direct notification to any interested community or organization ▪ Notice with utility bills ▪ Networking (personal discussion with individuals or small groups)
2. Ensure people have the information they require and an opportunity to discuss the background information	▪ Website ▪ Bulletin, booklet or brochure (pick-up or direct delivery) ▪ Library and municipal offices ▪ Media releases and interviews ▪ Storefront or open house meetings ▪ Informal "doorway" meetings ▪ Seminar/presentation (guest speakers at organizations or events) ▪ Call centre ▪ Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
3. Receive initial comments (perceptions and expectations)	▪ Drop-in to municipal offices ▪ Focus group(s) ▪ Storefront or open house ▪ Informal "doorway" meetings ▪ Presentation, followed by "Q&A" at interested organizations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce) ▪ Call centre ▪ Networking (personal discussion with individuals or small groups)

Using focus groups early in the process

Focus groups can be used prior to the “public” discussion to test the information being presented. Participants invited to the focus group are asked to respond to specific questions or “mock-up” presentations. The intention is to learn more about how others perceive the situation, the municipality’s role, and the language and illustrations being used to support public discussion. This pre-test can help municipal representatives see the consultation process through the eyes of those being consulted. Focus groups are particularly valuable when the issue being discussed is relatively complex, and the impact(s) on citizens relatively unknown.

Definition: A “focus group” is a meeting of 6 to 12 invited participants who are asked to give their opinion in response to specific questions, proposals or “mock-ups.” The focus group works best when facilitated by someone independent from the municipality. Municipal representatives should not be in the room if they are likely to have a direct influence on the response of the participants.

Stage 3: Comparison of options

Purpose: Allow people to learn about available options and the benefits and costs of each.

This is the stage that has the highest public profile because it usually involves public meetings and is often the time when differences of opinion become obvious. During this stage, the municipality (or the developer) will provide a comparative description of the available options to interested people and organizations. The intention is to allow people to learn about the available options and the benefits and costs of each.

Tip: The most common mistake at this stage of consultation is to present one credible option only—take it or leave it. This leaves the impression the decision has already been made, and leaves little room to resolve conflict.

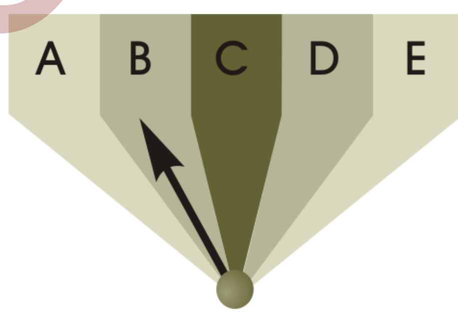


Figure 3: A decision is a choice among options.

During this stage, people often meet face-to-face to discuss options. Meetings can also be supplemented (or sometimes replaced) by other media, such as:

- telephone surveys,
- distribution and collection of questionnaires, and
- an interactive website.

Municipal staff (or consultants) prepare a description of the options in an illustrated format that encourages discussion and comparison. The purpose of meetings held during this stage is to learn about people's perceptions and preferences regarding the options. It is not unusual for new options to emerge during the discussion (especially combinations of parts of the options described).

Diversity of opinion at this stage should be expected—if all prefer the same option, why bother to meet?

What if there are no options?

Sometimes, there are no options about **whether** a development or activity will occur. In these cases, the public input process may be limited, for example, when a municipality has to replace a sewer line to increase capacity. In these cases, the public discussion usually focuses on **mitigation** rather than development options. Using the sewer line example, discussion would focus on matters where there are options about **how** the construction will proceed, such as:

- time of year when construction will occur
- length of time when sewer line will be affected
- factors that affect noise concerns, such as type of equipment, time of day
- alternate arrangements for affected households
- communication with affected residents
- safety controls around the site
- cost

When the focus is on mitigation of impacts, it is not usually desirable to hold a "town hall" meeting because of the risk of conflict that cannot be resolved. Impact mitigation is better discussed in formats that focus on "one-on-one" communication, such as open house, storefront (over-the-counter), or informal "doorway" meetings.

If you hold one or more meetings at this stage, think carefully about the kind of meeting to hold. A brief explanation of meeting types is provided below. Further information about choosing a meeting approach is included in section 2, page 2-17.

Type of Meeting	Advantages	Disadvantages
Storefront or **"over-the-counter:"** allows anyone to drop in and discuss plans "over the counter"	▪ Citizen can choose time to drop in ▪ Citizen gets one-on-one time with municipal representatives ▪ Great if a small number of citizens have a high interest	▪ Input is often verbal and must be recorded ▪ Relatively time-consuming ▪ Cannot accommodate large numbers ▪ Caution about "busy periods"
Informal "doorway:" small meetings that are informed neighbourhood discussions	▪ Builds trust and familiarity ▪ Gathers in-depth information relatively quickly	▪ May require several meetings to cover all interested parties ▪ Requires skill on the part of the municipal representative to keep discussion on track and record advice and questions
Advisory committee meetings: invited representatives meet several times to refine and discuss options	▪ Allows time for members to get to know one another and "do their homework" ▪ Builds consensus about detailed recommendations	▪ Committee may not be accepted by all communities ▪ Requires major time commitment
Round-table meetings: usually less than 20 people and includes a formal agenda	▪ Promotes exchange of ideas ▪ Good format for consensus building, if well facilitated	▪ Limited number of participants at each session ▪ Must be well facilitated and recorded ▪ Can be perceived as a technique to "divide and conquer"
Workshops: participants can "roll up their sleeves" and work together to assess information and create recommendations	▪ Promotes group problem-solving and exchange of ideas ▪ Can lead to creative recommendations	▪ Requires extensive preparation ▪ Must be well facilitated ▪ Requires time commitment from participants
Town hall meetings: larger meetings with a formal agenda and formal presentations	▪ Involves many people at once ▪ Everyone gets to hear what everyone else has to say	▪ Media often attend because meetings can become confrontational ▪ Must be expertly planned and facilitated ▪ "Showboating" at the microphone is a problem

Type of Meeting	Advantages	Disadvantages
Open house sessions: an opportunity for people to drop in, review information, talk to a municipal representative, and submit their preferences	▪ Allows many people to review information and talk to representatives ▪ People can spend as much, or as little, time as they wish ▪ Non-confrontational format	▪ Will not result in any definitive input unless designed to do so ▪ Does not promote interaction or consensus-building among communities

Tip: Encourage people to provide advice about the criteria (what do we want?) before they provide advice about the options (how shall we do it?).

Techniques that will improve most meetings:

1. Have an agenda which includes topics and timelines.
2. Clearly state the proposal and the situation that requires a decision to be made. It is usually helpful to identify who will be making the decision (usually a committee of Council makes recommendations Council may or may not approve).
3. Describe the purpose of the meeting to ensure everyone understands the options and has the opportunity to express their preferences, concerns and expectations.
4. Provide a plain-language description of each option (illustrate, if possible) and a "starter list" of criteria, with the pros and cons for each option displayed.
5. Allow people to clarify their expectations and to add any comments about any of the options.
6. Provide a means for every person attending to indicate which option they prefer, and to submit comments about any of the options.
7. Make all of the options feasible—do not provide an option "sandwich" (i.e. three versions of the same option, with the middle version being the obviously practical choice).
8. Do not "sell" one option in preference to others. Remain open to suggestions about new options or new combinations of options.
9. Be particularly attentive to **concerns** or fears expressed about any option. These statements should be recorded. In the next stage, some form of mitigation or monitoring will likely be required if this option is selected.

Stage 4: Implementing the decision

Purpose: Make a choice, while maintaining the trust of the communities affected.

When Council (or any other decision body) reviews the information necessary to support their decision, they should consider the public input they have requested. This input will provide insights into which options are preferred by the interested communities, and the concerns expressed about various options. Ideally, the interested communities (or citizens) should be informed that their concerns were directly considered and that either a) "we chose the option you preferred," b) "we considered other matters or limitations that led us to choose another option," or c) "we chose to modify the recommendation."

When the decision is to be implemented, the interested communities should be kept informed. In particular, if communities have raised specific concerns about the option chosen, they should be informed about how the potential impact they identified will be mitigated or monitored.

Closing the loop

From the outset, staff and councillors should know they will have considerable communication work after the decision is made. Trust and open discussion are reinforced by the effort to let people know what happened as a result of their input.

Delivering public input opportunities

If you are delivering a level 2 or level 3 public input process, then the next section of this guide has been written for you.

SECTION 2

Delivering public input opportunities

1. Start early with a plan

NOTE: If you have not already established a public input plan, refer to section 1 for guidance.

It is valuable to ensure a public input plan is established early, in all cases, rather than simply proceeding "one step at a time" to gradually discover how much public input is really needed.

Ten questions to ask before you notify citizens

Section 1 of the Toolkit discusses planning and design of public input. Ideally, the planning begins with internal discussions. If you are expected to implement the public input process, you need a plan. It may be a written document, but it is often notes from an interview with the project manager. A plan can be done on one page, in one hour, over coffee (i.e. the "napkin plan"). Here are the questions you need to have answered:

1. What potential decision is being considered?
2. What are its implications?
3. Who should we be notifying?
4. What input do we require?
5. How are we intending to gather the input?
6. What resources do we have available?
7. What are our timelines?
8. Is this likely to be controversial? If so, how should we manage the controversy?
9. How will the input be used in the decision?
10. What will success look like (i.e. what outcomes do we seek from our efforts to involve the public)?

If the answer to any of these questions is "we're not sure," then you need to do a little detective work to get a clear answer.

2. Appropriate effort to gain input

Section 1 of this guide describes a simple way to determine the appropriate level of input (level 1, 2 or 3). Refer to that section (starting at page 1-3) if you are in doubt about how much effort is appropriate.

3. Teamwork

Tip: Knowing the plan makes it much simpler to do a good job.

Teamwork is an essential part of public input gatherings. It helps immensely if everyone on Council and in the administration shares a common commitment to hearing citizens. In many municipalities, elected officials play an important role as part the team (see section 1, p.1-1).

There are several jobs that must be done, and it is important to participants that one person does not attempt to do all of those jobs simultaneously. Much of the credibility of public input processes comes, for instance, from a separation of the experts or advocates (those who are speaking about the content and benefits of the proposals) and the facilitators (those who are promoting open discussion and gathering all points of view).

Team member roles and responsibilities

Figure 4 illustrates the "basic" team you will require. The "coordinator" needed for level 2 or 3 may be a planner or manager or whoever seems best for the role. These five positions may be internal, contracted or a mix of both.

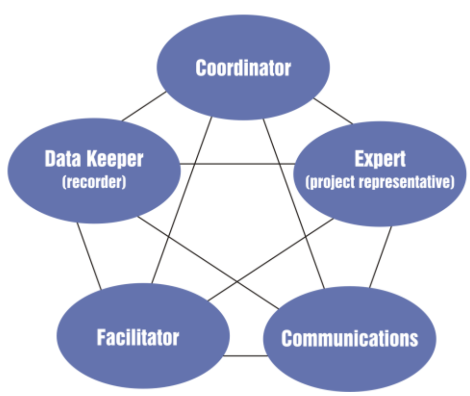


Figure 4: The team needed to support levels 2 and 3 public input.

The following table describes each team member's role.

Team Member	Roles and Responsibilities
Coordinator	The coordinator is the "conductor of the orchestra." The coordinator ensures there is a plan, that timely preparations are made, and all public communications and public involvement opportunities are delivered according to the plan. In a perfect world, the coordinator does not get involved in the specific tasks of writing public information or facilitating meetings. The coordinator is an important liaison between the public input team and the decision-makers. The buck stops here: the coordinator is responsible for quality control, on-time delivery, and team effectiveness.
Expert (Project Representative)	This is the "content" person. The expert is the person everyone asks about technical matters related to the project. The expert should also be the person who identifies specific limits (such as budget, specified timeline, Council directive, legislation, bylaws) and linkages (to other projects, timelines, decisions or policies)—a "library," NOT a "salesperson." *There can be more than one expert or project representative.*
Communications	The person(s) who produce the public information necessary to support public input. Their role includes advertising, media relations, production of written material and display/graphic materials.
Facilitator	The facilitator organizes and facilitates meetings and must support a productive discussion process in an organized, but neutral manner. The facilitator may be required to identify and mediate points of conflict and is often required to bring together the information from the public input sessions and consolidate the ideas in an unbiased manner.
Data keeper(s)	Often, public involvement processes produce a lot of advice and questions. Someone has to record all the information generated and produce a database that allows everyone to see the ideas, questions and concerns generated, and how they have been addressed. This role may also involve attending meetings and keeping a record of those meetings. Ideally, the data keeper(s) provide a single reference source for all public input received.

Some roles can overlap. For instance, the facilitator can also be a data keeper or a communication person. The coordinator can similarly also be an expert, or provide communications support to the project. However, the expert or the project coordinator should avoid acting as the facilitator or as the data keeper.

Staff must decide if they are acting as the expert/project coordinator, or as the facilitator/data keeper. Don't do both as you risk losing the trust of stakeholders. As an expert, you express certain views or values that may be seen as a "bias" (after all, you are trying to get this project completed). As a facilitator, you must be open to all points of view and give them equal attention.

Is public input a part-time job?

If public input requires a level 3 process, it is highly recommended at least one team member (usually the coordinator, but often one or two others) be assigned to the process on a full-time basis. It is very difficult to balance other roles and tasks when the public input process is underway.

Most team members can balance their work on the public input process with other duties, but all must be prepared for the public input process to intrude noticeably on their other duties. After-hours meetings are normal, and often the timelines for consolidating notes and preparing new drafts are short. Team members may also be required to spend time preparing and presenting information to administration or Council.

Scheduling the public input process

Tip: Advance preparation is the key to good public meetings.

Usually, public input is tied to a specific schedule (e.g. approval of a project or passage of a bylaw). However, you should allow time for delays that are outside of your control. Delays can arise from a variety of sources, but the most common delays are listed below:

- approval of the public input process by Council or senior administration,
- research (finding and consolidating the information you will require to answer questions and fully inform citizens),
- approval of the information pieces you intend to give to citizens (often, administration, elected officials, legal and communication advisors must meet; the approval process can take up to four weeks),
- production (writing, artwork, printing) of information pieces (after approval, it can take two weeks to finalize artwork and layout and publish the handouts),
- appropriate meeting rooms not available (if meeting rooms must be rented, you may be delayed if the rooms have not been pre-booked and are not available), and
- public notification (media placements) may delay your timeline if the media space has not been pre-booked.

Timelines for public input processes vary greatly, depending on the topic and situation. Typically, the preparation needed to support information exchange (stage 2) and comparison of options (stage 3)[1] takes longer than people expect (up to 8 weeks). Here is what you need the time for:

Activity/Task	Timing
Preparing public information	▪ Allow 4-6 weeks for research, writing, editing, layout, artwork and printing (more time is better) ▪ Book any "out-of-house" printing as early as possible, if specialty printing (e.g. four-colour posters) is required ▪ If you require scale models, allow more time (6-8 weeks)
Final copy approval	▪ Find out what is involved in getting approval to take your copy to the printers. In many municipalities, you will have to allow 2 weeks to get final copy "signed off"
Booking speakers or facilitator for meeting	▪ If you need a specific person (such as an elected official, an independent facilitator, or an expert on the topic), they may require more than 4 weeks' notice
Pre-meeting contacts	▪ Contact with the interested communities well before the public meetings is recommended ▪ Make sure communities are aware of the public input process and ask them about their expectations (e.g. timing, location)
Booking appropriate venue	▪ In many municipalities, there are only one or two rooms that will suffice, and they must be booked more than a month ahead
Notifying stakeholders and public	▪ If specific stakeholder organizations are to be invited to the meeting, they usually appreciate notification of the date more than 4 weeks ahead ▪ Public notice of the meeting should be posted (that means you already have approved copy) 2-3 weeks before the meeting, and again approximately 1 week before the meeting. Media space should be booked at least one week ahead of the day of posting ▪ Ideally, there will be reinforcement of the meeting dates a few days prior to the meeting (i.e. on bulletin board, sandwich board, on website) ▪ Note: the MGA requires public advertisement for two consecutive weeks for all statutory plan and land use bylaw adoption and amendment decisions ▪ Check the MGA to determine whether or not other requirements apply

Tip: Producing public information takes longer than you think. Finding graphics, getting approvals and printing all take time.

[1] The stages involved in a level 3 public input process are described in section 1: Leading a public input process.

Getting appropriate equipment	▪ If you require any specialized display equipment or audiovisual equipment, it should be booked about 10 days in advance
Team training	▪ Team training for the public event should happen close to the event (only 1 or 2 days in advance)

The timeline illustrated in figure 5 is rarely shorter than 6 weeks. Typically, it is 8 to 10 weeks. If holidays (Christmas, summer) or activities (harvesting, calving) intervene, and the project is complex, the process can take over 30 weeks.

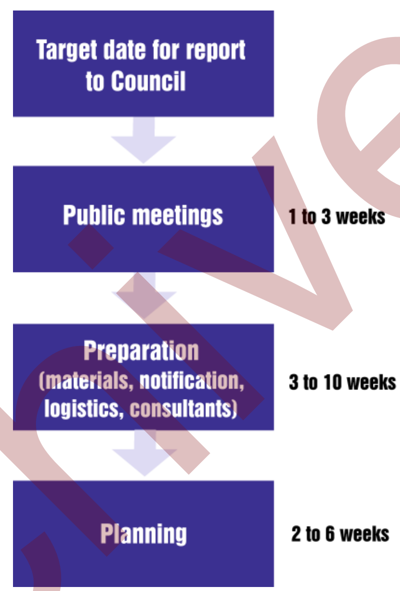


Figure 5: Plan back from your target date.

4. Good communication materials

Good communication materials are an essential part of the public input process. The key to good communication materials is to design the communication from the context and perspective of the receiver, rather than the knowledge and expectations of the sender. Key questions to ask are: "What does the receiver want to know?" and "what misconceptions might interfere with our conversation?"

It is difficult for an expert on a topic to write good public communication materials. They simply know too much about the topic and have difficulty returning to the initial point of enquiry that led to the decision now being discussed.

Simple Test

Show your communication materials to two people—an expert and a community member. If the expert says they don't provide enough background information and the community member thinks they provide good information, then you are on the right track.

Writing "open" information

If the information provided to people appears to "sell" one option solely, or in strong preference to other options, it may be discredited. Similarly, if information favours the perspectives of one community over another, it may become fodder for an argument.

Information materials should be conceived, written and illustrated as if they were an educational pamphlet on the topic being discussed. The writer should be aware of the perspectives of the potential readers and write in a manner that appeals to the reader.

Figure 6: Good communication is designed for the receiver.

An outside editor should be asked to read the material "cold" (i.e. without knowledge of the project) to ascertain whether or not the information is "reader-friendly" and the presentation is as unbiased as possible.

Make the scope of discussion obvious

Be specific about what is "on the table" for discussion. If necessary, point out the boundaries of the discussion.

Tip: Written information is intended to stimulate thought, not provide all the answers.

Keeping it simple

The toughest part of writing public input materials is deciding what to leave out. People will spend very little time reading the material—so be selective about what you need to say. It is often useful to keep the basic message simple, but then add detail and illustrations for the more intrepid reader, and for use in public discussions.

Illustrations are important

A "concept picture" or a process illustration will become a major discussion point. It will attract attention and improve memory of the information. Colour improves attention and memory. However, if four-colour production is too expensive, two-colour production is well worth considering.

Tip: People usually question and learn because they have a need. They rarely memorize information *in case* they will have a need.

Targeting information

Writing a single information piece that appeals to everyone and covers all aspects of the problem can be difficult. In some cases, it is much better to prepare several versions of the information. The most common example of this is having a simpler version for the casually interested citizen and a more specific version for vested stakeholders who have a direct interest and significant technical knowledge of the matter being discussed.

5. Information formats and publication

The format you choose to communicate your information will largely be determined by three factors: your target audience, your topic and your budget.

Choosing a format for your information

First, determine how you plan to get information from people (i.e. meeting, open house, survey), then develop the published materials you need to support the process. Often, it is desirable to tie the "background information" format to a "response form." People can then, for example, be directed to "see page 3 before answering the question."

Tip: Published materials are designed to support the discussion process.

Here is a basic guide to the most common information formats:

Format	Advantages	Limitations
Website	▪ Accessible to anyone with access to the web ▪ Can include links to a wide range of information ▪ Allows the participant to choose how much to review ▪ Can be linked to an electronic response format	▪ Not everyone can access information on the web ▪ Website must be kept operational and up-to-date ▪ Relatively expensive to establish a good functional site ▪ Participation information can be easily lost in the plethora of municipal information
Colour brochure	▪ Concise and graphic description of information ▪ Provides a standard reference for participants	▪ Often difficult to get into the hands of participants ▪ Expensive to publish ▪ Easily lost ▪ Takes a long time to write and publish (approvals are often not easy)
Displays	▪ Concise and graphic description of information ▪ Provides a standard reference for participants ▪ Can be produced on moderate notice	▪ Only available to those who attend display locations ▪ Can be costly ▪ Easily damaged ▪ Require people to set up, take down and explain
PowerPoint/ slide show	▪ Concise and graphic ▪ Provides the information needed in relatively short time ▪ Good support for live presentation of information ▪ Use of pictures and colour graphics enhances learning	▪ Rarely a "stand alone" format (needs someone to explain) ▪ Format tends to be "lists without context" ▪ People are getting over-exposed to the limited format ▪ Limited access (meetings primarily) ▪ Not a reference piece unless people get a printed copy of the slide content

Newsletter or leaflet	▪ Relatively inexpensive ▪ Provide information overview ▪ Can be distributed with other materials	▪ Can be mistaken for junk mail ▪ Not durable ▪ Will not be read if too "wordy"

Notification and distribution of information

Ideally, everyone potentially interested in providing input to the decision(s) you are considering will be notified, be aware of the coming decision(s), and be aware of the opportunity to provide input. However, this can be challenging—there are a few barriers to consider:

1. Information overload—most people receive so much unsolicited information they automatically discard or ignore the majority of it.
2. Competing messages—it is easy for people to confuse your message with others.
3. Distribution costs—it can be expensive to get information delivered directly to everyone interested in receiving it.

No notification system is perfect, so give yourself credit for your efforts to get the message out. Consider the following:

1. The *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) specifies notification requirements in some situations.
2. More than one notification process is generally needed to achieve success.
3. Word-of-mouth stimulates the most attendance at meetings, while standard notices in print media result in the least attendance.
4. A single image or eye-catching theme will help attract attention.

The following techniques, along with their advantages and limitations, are listed in order of effectiveness:

Techniques	Advantages	Limitations
Person-to-person (face-to-face, or telephone)	▪ Most effective approach ▪ Allows respondent to ask questions and get involved immediately ▪ Highly recommended if you need to invite a relatively small number of individuals	▪ Time-consuming ▪ Limits number of contacts ▪ Remember that people are tired of unsolicited sales calls

Techniques	Advantages	Limitations
Leadership networks (contacting known community leaders and giving them the information)	▪ Can be very effective, but depends on the skill of the leaders contacted and time available	▪ May be seen as "favouring" certain parties ▪ Tendency to attract the same people to meetings repeatedly (no matter what the issue) ▪ No control over how or when leaders will distribute the information
Direct correspondence (letter, e-mail, fax)	▪ Relatively effective ▪ Targeted to those who require notification	▪ Requires up-to-date mailing list ▪ Expensive if large numbers are mailed
Presentations at regularly scheduled meetings	▪ Provides on-site presentation at meeting organized by target group or association ▪ Very convenient for group members ▪ Promotes early involvement and learning ▪ Promotes networking	▪ May delay process—waiting for scheduled organization meetings ▪ May be seen as "favouring" organizations ▪ Requires a significant commitment of time (often evenings/weekends)
Bulk mail	▪ Covers a large area with relatively high assurance that each household and business are informed ▪ Relatively low cost	▪ Likely to be confused with unsolicited sales information ▪ Often discarded
News release	▪ Can create interest and attention if picked up by media ▪ Can provide background information that may stimulate interest	▪ Media tend to feature human interest stories that are interesting, timely and topical ▪ No control over when and where media will show the story ▪ The story may include misinformation from other sources
Displays, signs and bulletins	▪ Stimulates interest if placed in or near affected location ▪ Format requires simplicity and graphic approach	▪ Effectiveness depends on immediacy—close to location of change, close to time of change ▪ Relatively expensive to do well (exception: bulletins) ▪ Bulletins are cheap, but are often lost in a forest of other bulletins

Techniques	Advantages	Limitations
Public notice in media	▪ Required by MGA ▪ Some people review public notices as a matter of course	▪ Relatively small impact on number of people who get involved, unless there are leaders who distribute the information through their network (see leadership networks, at the top of page 2-11)

Your final choice will in all likelihood be an amalgam of the above options.

6. Making public meetings enjoyable and effective

Presenting information

Tip: Your role at public meetings is to help people evaluate choices.

People who take the time to attend public meetings should leave those meetings feeling well informed. However, in many cases, people sit through presentations that don't help them learn. This can be easily remedied.

1. **Your audience will learn more when you say less**
   The average audience member will be attentive for about 10 minutes (most speakers assume 30 to 40 minutes). Start with the presentation you think you ought to give, then cut it in half.

Tip: People only remember what they think is relevant to them.

2. **Few people memorize facts**
   If you attempt to present all the facts before people have a chance to ask questions, you will be disappointed with the level of understanding among participants. It is better for people to be able to ask about the facts as they consider the options being presented. Municipal staff can help people "find" the facts when they need them. Handouts are important because they provide a reference tool for participants.

3. **People learn by interacting with people**
   While people politely listen to presentations, their learning rate is relatively low. Learning is much higher when they are talking to others and examining information. People learn through a combination of auditory, visual and tactile information—and they learn better when they are not sitting still.

4. Some methods definitely help people learn

The following "embellishments" to a presentation will help people learn information and increase participant satisfaction:

- Connect the information to familiar situations or common experiences.
- Use colour pictures and photographs (especially when they show familiar places or people).
- Use humour to support key points in the presentation (this is different than telling jokes).
- Show your own enthusiasm about the topic.
- Ask others to contribute questions or ideas and pay close attention to what they have to say.
- Make eye contact and smile.

5. Other methods should be used with care

- Abstract graphics (graphs, maps, process diagrams) can be useful learning tools, if you understand that many participants will have trouble understanding the message encoded in the graphics. It looks crystal clear to you, but it may not make sense to others. You can overcome this difficulty if you use the graphic as a "prop" for your story, not as a self-explanatory learning tool.
- Technical data is even more difficult for people to understand. Describe what experts have concluded from the data, but leave the data aside for questions. Those who ask questions about the data will be motivated to understand.
- Case studies or explanations of experiences elsewhere can be useful occasionally, but they must be concise. A one-minute case study is more likely to be remembered than a 15-minute case study.

One method should be avoided

Selling one solution as the answer, without reference to other options, raises doubt and resistance. The more enthusiastic you are about one solution, the more energy others will have to oppose you. Things will get worse if you respond defensively to criticism of your idea.

Presenting options

The reason for meeting presentations is to help people learn about the options they are being asked to consider—to help them make informed choices about what they want to see in their municipality.

Ensure that people attending the public meeting are aware they are providing advice to Council about which option they prefer and why.

The following describes how options should be presented at public meetings:

1. **Describe the current situation** to participants. Why do we need to make a choice?
2. **List the criteria** that describe the ideal choice (e.g. no change in cost to property owners). Explain that you want their input: Are there other criteria that need to be considered? Should some of these criteria be changed?
3. **Show the options** being considered—ideally, presented side-by-side. This approach helps visual learners see the available choices. Explain that you want their input. Are there other options?
4. **Compare the options** against the criteria. It is important this part of the presentation be comparative: Which option seems to perform best? How do the other options compare to the best performer? Citizens have elected Council to make decisions; now they are informing Council of their preferences and concerns. Figure 7 provides an example of how to illustrate and compare choices in a way that will promote discussion and learning.

Criteria	OPTION 1 Incinerate 1/3 of solid waste	OPTION 2 Reduce waste production	OPTION 3 Extend size of existing landfill
Cost			
Impact on life of landfill			
Impact on residents			
Other considerations			

Figure 7: Comparing options at a meeting.

5. **Encourage identification of concerns about each option** by participants. It is valuable for people to identify their concerns as they describe the potential for undesirable consequences. This supports a risk management approach. When the planner (or municipal representative) informs Council, she/he should also inform Council of the concerns participants identified and identify possible ways to mitigate the concerns (or manage the risk).

Supporting public discussion

The following list describes the elements most often needed for an effective public meeting:

1. **An agenda or display plan**

   Whenever there is group discussion, an agenda is needed to provide a basis for managing the meeting. The agenda describes the purpose of the meeting, the topics to be discussed (along with the time allocated for each topic), and the intended outcomes of the discussion. If you are hosting an "open house" session, a display plan takes the place of the agenda.

   However, the agenda must be followed to be effective. A chair person or facilitator should be responsible for keeping the meeting "on track" with the agenda.

   See Attachment 2: Sample meeting agenda, and **Attachment 3:** Sample display plan for open house meetings.

2. **A facilitator**

   Although not always required, a facilitator is someone without vested interest in the outcome of the meeting, who is prepared to devote all of his or her attention to supporting the discussion process, ensuring participants have an opportunity to submit their views, and that all views are recorded.

   DO NOT place someone in the difficult position of being the main proponent of the plan or recommendation AND at the same time trying to be the facilitator (or chair). This approach reduces the credibility and effectiveness of that person.

3. A record of contacts and advice received

Following the meeting, councillors often ask two questions: Who came? What did we learn?

A record of meeting attendance is essential—a sign-in sheet is recommended. However, you should consult an advisor on the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP) regarding proper procedures for record-keeping.

It is equally essential that all input received be documented and recorded. When Council makes its decision, there should be a report that links the decision to the input received.

4. Expert advice

Since people cannot be expected to memorize and understand all of the information presented to them, it is always helpful to have an expert attend who can make brief presentations and (more importantly) can answer questions as they arise.

Tip: Experts gain credibility with participants when they carefully listen to questions and suggestions.

5. Suitable location

The best location for a meeting is one that (a) everyone can get to easily, (b) has enough room to comfortably accommodate the numbers you reasonably expect, and (c) has suitable facilities to support your meeting. While you cannot always get the best location, your chances are increased when you book as early as possible.

6. Time management

Most people who attend municipal meetings want them to be efficient. They plan to spend 90 minutes or less in the meeting. Don't spend any more time than necessary to have a good discussion. It is easy for the discussion to get "off track" (usually too detailed). The facilitator must ensure the agenda is followed as closely as possible to ensure all topics get discussed within a brief (but sufficient) time.

Note: In open house format, participants can manage their own time. Most participants will spend less than 45 minutes on site, but a few will choose to stay for hours.

7. Choosing and implementing the best approach

You can choose a meeting format based on the topic, the target audience, and your budget. Please refer to the description of meeting formats provided in Section 1, starting on page 1-15.

The following provides some advice to help you choose the appropriate format and to implement it well.

For decisions affecting only a few people

Use one of the following methods to discuss matters with these people and gain their input:

- Personal meetings (one-on-one, often with you visiting them).
- Storefront meetings (generally "over-the-counter" with one or a few people at a time).
- Informal "doorway" meetings (meetings with less than 10 people, usually held in someone's house or business, with no formal agenda).

All small meeting formats depend on your ability to give people your attention and to provide credible information in a friendly manner.

For decisions affecting more than 10 people

You must choose whether you want to implement an **open participation process** (i.e. hold a series of meetings that anyone can attend), or whether you want an **invited participation process** (i.e. invite a representative selection of people to address the decision prior to the Council hearing. For example, invited representatives participating in a committee or round-table discussion).

First, let's address the open participation processes:

1. **Open house meetings**

   Open house meetings typically employ a series of displays to present information to interested citizens. These meetings are useful when you cannot predict the number of people who will attend (they can accommodate a wide range of traffic). The format allows people to come at a convenient time and spend as much (or as little) time on-site as they wish.

   See Attachment 3: Sample flow diagram for open house meetings.

   Open house meetings are convenient and they avoid controversy because different stakeholders do not have a venue for a public exchange of ideas.

   Advice: You must manage your open house meetings to gather advice and input from the people who attend. Staff should actively interview people at each open house "station" and note any ideas expressed. A response form should also be provided, along with a "work area" where people can complete the response form and exchange ideas. Response forms should be collected before people leave the open house. Very few people send in their forms later, even if they say they will.

2. **Town hall meetings**

   This is what most people think of when you say "public meeting." In its worst form, these meetings can lead to vocal disputes and grandstanding (why the media make it a priority to attend). This format of meeting allows you to talk to a large number of people at one time, and to hear from some of those people.

   Advice: Town hall meetings are often associated with grandstanding, attacks on administration, and uncivil behaviour. You must design your meeting to avoid stimulating such activity. Here are some ways to ensure your town hall meeting is civil and contributes to shared agreement rather than enmity:

   - Do not seat municipal/project representatives at a table at the front of the room, facing the audience.
   - Do not have microphone stands in the middle of the room. Instead, use roving staff with hand-held microphones. Do not attempt to "get by" without microphones.

- If possible, have people sit at tables rather than in classroom rows.
- Use a facilitator.
- Make personal contact with people as they arrive and during breaks.
- Make sure community representatives are well informed before the town hall meeting occurs.
- Avoid long presentations by municipal/project representatives at the beginning of the meeting. Invite community representatives to present their perspectives early in the meeting.
- Have someone take notes of comments received.
- Have the facilitator ask people for their cooperation and immediately caution anyone who engages in personal attacks, inappropriate language or fear-mongering.
- Make sure people can provide their input without everyone having to get up and announce their views to the crowd. Suggestions include:
  - handing out response forms to each person attending and collecting the responses,
  - providing a suggestion box where people can submit their written views,
  - encouraging people to post their views on the displays, using Post-It® notes.

3. Workshops

These are longer meetings and require a greater degree of commitment from participants. Seating is at round-tables (i.e. in smaller groups) and participants are given specific instructions about preparing their input to the meeting. Each smaller group is asked to identify their response to the questions raised and to present them to the plenary (larger group).

Advice: Workshops require participants to be together for at least four hours; usually longer. Make sure you provide refreshments, meals or snacks (as necessary). The discussion process has to be carefully designed, recognizing that each report-back from each table can take 10 minutes or more allowing for questions of clarity (six tables reporting back can take an hour!).

You can avoid repetitive report-backs by having a group consolidate all the ideas for reporting to the plenary, but consolidation can take more than 30 minutes, so it should be designed to happen over a lunch break. If the smaller groups go to “break-out” rooms, you have to allow 15 to 20 minutes transition between plenary and break-out discussions (and vice-versa).

Now, let's look at the invited participation processes:

1. **Focus groups**

   Focus groups invite a cross-section of people to attend representing the full range of stakeholders. Participants are shown a series of statements or ideas and asked for their response. Participants may be asked specific questions and every participant is asked for an answer.

   Advice: Focus groups are not to "sell" ideas, but to "test" ideas. The meeting must be designed so participants do most of the talking. Participants should be given options to compare, and the best information will come from their comments about which option they prefer and why. It is best to invite people other than the community representatives you regularly see (i.e. not the formal community spokespersons).

2. **Round-table meetings**

   Meetings where 15 to 25 people are invited to sit "around the table" and provide their perceptions, concerns and preferences. At these meetings, everyone stays in the plenary most of the time (although there may be times for private discussion). Short presentations are used to provide information then participants are asked to provide their views and ideas. The intention of a round-table process is to encourage sharing of ideas among communities that have different needs or perspectives and to ultimately encourage cooperation and consensus-building.

   Advice: It's important to consider who will be invited to a round-table meeting. Often, the presence of known community advocates or representatives is important to the credibility of the meeting. Presentations should be short, with emphasis placed on hearing the people who attend. A record of the discussion is important. Even better is allowing people to see the record (e.g. on a screen or flipchart) as it is being recorded. It is valuable to have a means of testing each idea presented: Do most people agree? At the end of the round-table, summarize what has been learned, including points of consensus and points of disagreement.

3. **Advisory committee**

   This is very similar to the round-table process, except the committee meets several times and participants are therefore more likely to feel they have been heard, and are more likely to achieve consensus on difficult topics.

Advice: Someone needs to be the "secretariat" for the committee (keeping notes, giving out assignments, following up on actions, and arranging meetings). Someone must be assigned to prepare a report for the committee. This is no small task. Committee members will scrutinize the report closely, and the report is often the focus of discussion that leads to consensus. Usually, it is helpful to include a description of any points of disagreement in the report.

Evaluation forms

Should you ask people who attend a public meeting to evaluate the session? It is not mandatory to do so, but it is recommended. An evaluation of the meeting(s) can provide two important pieces of information:

1. People's preferences for future meetings.
2. Documentation of the level of satisfaction of people who attended the meetings.

In general, four items require evaluation:

1. Was the information provided easy to understand?
2. Did the meeting provide an opportunity to learn more about the proposal(s)?
3. Were peoples' suggestions or concerns raised at the meeting?
4. Do people have any suggestions for future meetings like this?

Working with the media

A good working relationship with the media can be of great assistance in conducting public input exercises. It is a good idea to have a relationship with a few reporters who will answer your call when you want to get your story out to the public. Here are a few guidelines to help you work with the media:

- Think of media coverage as a good thing. After all, you are trying to inform your citizens and get them involved. (You may want to discuss media relations with administration. Some administrators believe "the less media coverage, the better.")

- Treat the media as important stakeholders. Give reporters the information as soon as you give it to everyone else.
- Assign one person to answer media enquiries about your project. If you have an ongoing advisory committee, designate one person (usually the chair) to handle media enquiries.
- Be friendly and approachable. If you have a good relationship with reporters, it will often affect the tone of the coverage and the amount of coverage given to your event.
- Give reporters materials they can easily use and understand. If materials are already designed for media use, they may be included in the story. You want reporters to have their facts straight.
- If TV cameras are going to be at your meeting, make sure you prepare a place for them to set up where they will not be intrusive. Inform cameramen they may not walk their camera through the meeting room while the meeting is in progress.
- Ask reporters to conduct interviews at breaks or outside the meeting room. Inform your stakeholders they may be approached for an interview—they can choose whether or not they want to be interviewed.

8. Stakeholder relationships

Remember, building trust with stakeholders is just as important as achieving good decisions. Following are some important behaviours that will greatly improve the trust of your stakeholders:

Six behaviours that improve stakeholder relationships

1. **Keep promises**

   Nothing increases trust like a promise kept. You should go out of your way to make some promises as part of your "good service" attitude and then keep them. You might, for instance, promise to send several people a map of the proposed walking trail by Tuesday. Or tell someone you will have the public works manager contact them. When the promise is kept, trust goes up. If you cannot keep the timeline, you gain trust when you call to explain that you will be late. Do not make promises you cannot keep.

2. **Be clear about scope**

   Clarify what is "on the table" for discussion. It helps everyone to know what is not "on the table." If people have other issues to raise tell them where these issues can be directed. Be clear about any limitations or preceding commitments that may limit what is up for discussion.

3. **Demonstrate a "good service" attitude**

   You are the host of the input process, so you should go out of your way to greet people, make them feel at ease, ensure they have a place to sit and the meeting materials at hand. Your enthusiasm about having people in the room will be infectious.

4. **Keep in touch; verify information**

   Once you initiate contact with stakeholders, don't let long periods of time go by without contacting them. If they hear nothing after they have given their opinion, they will assume the worst.

   Keep a record of comments received during the process, and make that record available. Ask people to verify that you heard them correctly. Ideally, decisions should be made in a timely manner. However, if the decision stalls, let stakeholders know the reason for delay. In the absence of facts, rumours arise and gain credibility. As a rule of thumb, 3 to 4 weeks without contact will cause people to speculate on "what is really going on."

5. **Be accessible**

   If people find it easy to reach you, they will trust you more.

6. **Be empathetic**

   If people feel you are making an effort to understand their expectations and point of view, they will trust you more.

Minimizing difficult behaviours

Sometimes nice people can behave badly. Difficult behaviour can have a negative effect on meetings and make your job more challenging. There are some things you can do to promote helpful behaviour and dissuade annoying behaviour.

1. **Have a facilitator run meetings**

   The facilitator should explain the meeting process to everyone and should "take charge" of the meeting process so people can work together to achieve results. The facilitator is the only person in the room who has permission to do what might be interpreted as some rude things, such as interrupt people or directly tell them to sit down.

Some things facilitators (or moderators, or chairpersons) must do:

- Stop blame or personal attacks immediately. The facilitator can begin by encouraging people to express their own point of view, but not to speak about the opinions or approaches of others.
- Ensure everyone gets airtime. Sometimes, a few people will dominate the speaking time available, while others sit back feeling annoyed. The facilitator should directly ask "quiet" people for an opinion, and should ask those who dominate to allow time for others to speak.
- Stop emotional speechmaking. Occasionally, people mistake a public input meeting for Speaker's Corner. They launch into an emotional speech that is a thinly disguised attempt to raise applause from the "audience." The facilitator should interrupt such a speech and ask everyone to focus on the decision at hand.
- Do not allow implied threats. Very rarely, people will imply threats to others in their zeal to make their point. The facilitator must admonish the person immediately for any implication of threat and, if necessary, should ask the person to leave the meeting.

2. **Be a good host**

   Your efforts to make contact with people and help them feel comfortable at the meeting are very important. Most disagreeable behaviour is a result of fear or anxiety which is greatly lessened when people are politely welcomed.

3. **Encourage productive behaviours**

   In some cases, it is helpful to post a list of helpful behaviours before a meeting gets underway. In other cases, it is important to verbally state what behaviours will be helpful.

4. **Build common ground**

   People often agree about "what" needs to be achieved, but tend to disagree about "how" to achieve it. If the initial focus is on building a shared commitment to outcomes and empathetic discussion of people's concerns, there is much less emotion.

5. **Keep a "service attitude" but remain assertive**

   Your efforts to provide service to people will help them relax and be productive. However, occasionally there will be a person who mistakenly assumes you are being submissive. When people make unreasonable demands or too many demands, it is best to politely but firmly inform them how they can solve their problem without your involvement.

Conflict and consensus

Although "conflict" sounds like a bad thing, it is a normal and desirable part of the discussion process. You wouldn't be going to all this trouble if you were sure everyone agreed about everything. Good ideas come from the exchange of different points of view. However, you are trying to avoid emotional outbreaks and accusations (see the previous section about "minimizing difficult behaviours" on page 2-23).

Tip: Emotional confrontation at meetings often results from fear or anxiety. Help people stay calm and reduce the threat they feel—give them back some control.

Building consensus:

While "consensus" is not always achieved, it is always the ideal outcome of public input. Ideally, everyone either supports the decision or is not vocally opposed. Commonly, people are willing to drop their opposition, if certain mitigations, controls or compensations can be assured.

Here are the common requirements for building consensus among a group that initially expresses conflicting expectations:

1. Have some method to test the level of agreement. You cannot assume persons making speeches at a meeting represent the whole. Often, there is more agreement in the room than the speeches would suggest. Use some means to find out how many people support option A, B, or C.
2. Ensure people understand and agree to the outcomes ("what"), before they discuss the options ("how").
3. Ensure the range of options being described is complete and well described. NEVER suggest there is only **one** option—(i.e. take it or leave it).
4. Have people describe the criteria or conditions that affect their level of support for an option (e.g. level of traffic noise, preservation of trees, access to facility). It is much more productive for people to talk about why they are concerned or enthusiastic than for them to "take positions" for or against ideas.
5. Test the level of support for each option. Encourage people to express "conditional support" (i.e. I could support the option if I could be assured a proper fence will be erected so we don't have to look directly at the pump).
6. Seek combinations of options or modifications to options that could gain more support. Ask people in the room to help you find the best option—remind them there is no "perfect" option.
7. Test the revised option(s) to determine the level of support. Note the level of consensus or diversity that exists at this point. Note any concerns and find out what mitigations, or accommodations would be the best response to the concerns.

Conflict resolution:

If there is obvious conflict in the room, leading toward emotional disagreement, you must intervene to prevent the argument from becoming the focus of the discussion. Here are some suggested steps:

- Acknowledge the difference of opinion. Find out more about the needs or perceptions that lead to a difference.
- Ask for suggestions about how to address the conflict. Let the combatants present ideas about possible ways to reach common ground. Describe the conflict to the entire group and offer suggestions about how the conflict could be addressed. If you are at

an impasse, suggest a separate meeting with those who are in disagreement.

- Expect to allow for venting (if people get angry, they may be accusative before they get to the point they want to make).
- Take a break if necessary. Allow everyone some time to consider what they have heard. Speak to the main proponents of the argument to determine what they see as the best way to resolve the emerging argument. Remember, stress is a major contributor so your efforts to reduce stress levels are valuable.
- If the parties cannot reach agreement on their own, suggest a mediation process. In this process, the parties work with a mediator in a concerted attempt to reach agreement (Municipal Affairs can help you with this process and suggest mediators).

9. Following through

Never underestimate the amount of work you will have to do after the meetings are over and response forms are submitted. Take the time to congratulate your team on what they have achieved, but don't lose momentum. Here are some tasks that typically require your attention after the input is received:

- Thank those who have helped you.
- Keep any promises made; do you need to send out any information?
- Collect and inventory all notes and input in one place.
- Ensure all input received is analyzed and summarized. (This may require some time editing and refining notes.)
- Brief the project team as soon as possible and inform those responsible for the project of any concerns that might affect their planning, design or implementation.
- Review and summarize evaluations. Document any advice for future meetings.
- Brief elected officials about the public input process and the advice received.
- Report back to those who have taken the time to participate. Make sure that they can see the input that the municipality has received.
- Connect the decision to the input. In your report to the participants, note where the decision is a direct response to the input received. Explain why, if the decision does not reflect the majority preferences of participants.

Do not assume that people will connect their input to the decision. Be prepared to explain why some ideas could not be supported by Council.

- Write or redraft reports as necessary. It is often advisable to verify that you have interpreted the public input correctly. This means some (or all) participants have the opportunity to review your draft to verify it is accurate.

Closing the loop

People must be informed about the decision and about how their input was used as part of the decision. If Council chose an approach different than many citizens recommended, it is essential that citizens are informed why another option was chosen.

Online

Online guides can be found at the Local Government Commission (an American non-profit organization) website, located at http://www.lgc.org/freepub/land_use/participation_tools/index.html

An excellent overview of public consultation and engagement guidelines and resources for local governments can be found at an Australian website—the Local Government Consultation and Engagement website—located at http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au

You can find further discussion of consultation tools at the website of the International Association for Public Participation, under "Practitioner Tools" at http://www.iap2.org/

If you are interested in applying Geographic Information System technology to public participation in your municipality, you may wish to visit the website of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) http://www.urisa.org/. Look for any references to PPGIS (Public Participation Geographic Information Systems), including the conference held in summer of 2005.

Desmond Connor, of Connor Development Services Limited, maintains a useful online library of public consultation references, bibliographies and case-studies at http://www.connor.bc.ca/connor/library.html

Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing maintains the Municipal Excellence Network, a website initiated to assist in effectively managing challenges in today's municipalities. A dedicated collaboration between municipal councillors, municipal administrators, municipal associations, the University of Alberta and Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing, it can be found at http://www.menet.ab.ca/bins/index.asp

PUBLIC INPUT TOOLKIT

FOR MUNICIPALITIES

HANDOUTS & ATTACHMENTS

Worksheet 1: How much public input is appropriate?

1. What decision is being made? (see question 2 on worksheet 3)
2. Who is likely to be affected? (identify the “communities” that care about this decision)
3. Do stakeholders have specific perceptions related to this decision?

Will this decision be perceived to:	No (1)	Mixed or Unsure (5)	Yes (10)
▪ be connected to any significant past issues or poor relationships with stakeholder communities?			
▪ decrease property values, or increase taxation levels?			
▪ create or increase any health or safety risk?			
▪ given anyone an unfair advantage (i.e. Create “winners”)			
▪ create undesirable aesthetic changes (e.g. view, odour, noise)?			
▪ interfere with daily lifestyle and habitual patterns of people (i.e. loss of access, congestion, restriction of activity)?			
▪ be an emotional or moral “hot button?”			
▪ other:			
TOTAL OF RATING SCORES			

Score 1 point for each “No” rating, 5 points for each “Mixed or Unsure” rating, and 10 points for each “Yes” rating. Total the ratings. If there are any other factors that would add to the risk of public controversy, add up to 10 points to the total (i.e. rate “other factors” on the same 1, 5, 10 scale).

If you have difficulty answering any of the above questions, call five or more stakeholders to find out how they perceive this decision (see QuickTest, Section 1, p. 1-4).

After you have rated each of the above questions, calculate the appropriate public input level, based on the total of the rating scores.

If total is in the following range	Select this level of public input
> 50	Level 3
30 - 50	Level 2
< 30	Level 1

Note: Consider the level of resources you have available before you finalize your recommendation. In some cases, you may choose a lower level of input than the initial score would suggest if your municipality cannot afford to do more. Remember, these figures only provide a rough guide. Your good judgement is more important than the numbers.

Worksheet 2: Public input sketch for municipal planners

Case Study Name: ....

Two Communities of Interest: ....

1. What will make each community interested in participating? How would you contact them?

2. What kind of meeting process would you use to hold a conversation about comparison of options? Why is this a good start?

3. What challenges might you anticipate that could affect satisfaction with the outcome?

4. Select a municipality represented in your group. What resources (personnel and funding) would likely be available to support this public input process?

5. What information do you need from these communities to ensure that you can confidently present recommendations to council?

Worksheet 3: What is the best way?

1. Which case study are you going to discuss (and which host municipality)?

2. Is the decision defined in a way that leads to open discussion, and unbiased selection of the best option? If not, re-state the decision.

3. Is there a good match between the resources (people, money, rooms, etc.) and the process we are proposing? If not, how can you adjust the resources or the process so that they are well matched?

4. What are the best ways to identify the "communities of interest", inform them on the issues, and engage their participation?

5. What factors will have the most impact on the level of satisfaction with the input process?

Worksheet 4: Developing a terms of reference

Note: This worksheet is generic, so it is designed to accommodate the information you will require for a Level 3 process. Smaller processes require less information. See Attachment 1 for a sample terms of reference.

1. **Purpose:** *Why is a decision required at this time? Describe Council or administrative decision.*

2. **Decision statement:** *Describe the decision that needs to be made. Describe it as a choice among options, not as a "take it or leave it" proposition.*

3. **Public decision:** *Will Council make a public decision based on this input? Are other communities or agencies involved in the decision process? Is there an appeal process?*

4. **Public input:** *What public notification and input are required (by legislation or bylaw)? How will public input be linked to a decision by Council (e.g. reports, public hearing)?*

5. **Intended results:** *What does the municipality want as a result of requesting public input?*

6. **Principles:** *What will make your consultation process credible and effective? Refer to adopted principles and ethical guidelines (including privacy requirements).*

7. **Scope:** *Define the communities (of people and of interests) that need to be consulted (see Defining the Communities, p. 1-12). Describe the methods you would like to use to support public input.*

8. **Initial schedule and budget:** *Describe the schedule you propose for public input, including all key steps in the process. Identify the budget and resources available.*

9. **Consultation team:** *Describe who will be responsible for supporting the consultation process, including the following areas:*

Area of Responsibility	Person Responsible
Coordinating consultation with planners/designers	
Media relations	
Public information development and dissemination (including meeting posters)	
Developing and maintaining a list of stakeholder contacts	
Developing and maintaining a database showing input and municipal responses	
Organizing and conducting meetings	
Organizing and coordinating correspondence (mail or electronic)	
Other	

Attachment 1: Sample terms of reference

PUBLIC INPUT TERMS OF REFERENCE
Responding to Market Demand for Commercial Lots

1. **Requirement for a Decision**
   Administration has informed Council there is only one serviced commercial lot remaining in the commercial zone, which was established in 1995. The municipality is considering whether to provide additional land zoned for commercial use in order to meet growing demand.

2. **Decision Statement**
   What is the best way for our municipality to respond to expected demand for serviced commercial lands?

   Public discussion of this issue is required because Council may have to amend or pass a zoning bylaw, or even request an annexation. The options likely to be discussed include the following:

   - *Make no changes at this time.*
   - *Expand the existing Egmont commercial zone (zone 13) into the southeast (this would reduce the supply of residentially zoned land in that area).*
   - *Create a new commercial zone in the southwest area (this would affect traffic and existing residents to some degree).*
   - *Work with Stepford County to develop an intermunicipal plan that identifies shared plans and options for commercial expansion.*
   - *Initiate negotiations with Stepford County regarding annexation of lands to the north of the existing Egmont commercial zone.*

   Other options may be identified.

3. **Public Decision**
   Currently, public input gathered would be provided to the Planning Committee (a subcommittee of Council) to be considered when the Committee produces a recommendation to Council. If they recommend changes to zoning, there will be public hearings on the matter. It is expected that Council will eventually pass or amend a bylaw to address the matter. There is a possibility an intermunicipal plan will be required.

4. **Public Input**
   In order to make a well informed decision, the Planning Committee wishes to hear from citizens living in areas that may be affected by any of the options being considered. At this time, the Committee is particularly interested in which options citizens prefer (public input), and also would like to hear about any concerns that arise as these options are discussed.

If the Committee makes a recommendation to Council which includes changes to zoning, intermunicipal plan or potential annexation, then formal public notification and a public hearing will be required before Council can proceed to second reading of the proposed bylaw or bylaw amendment.

5. Intended Results

The Planning Committee would like to achieve the following results during the public input process:

- All citizens who may be affected are informed of the decision being considered, and of the opportunity to provide input.
- Citizens are given fair, and accessible opportunities (more than one) to provide input.
- Our neighbour municipality, Stepford County, is kept well informed of the discussion and good relations with County administrators and elected officials are maintained.
- A full range of citizen opinions about this matter are identified and reported.
- The Committee has a clear understanding of citizen preferences, and the reason for those preferences, as a result of the public input process.

6. Principles

The public input process will conform to the municipal public input principles listed below:

- Early, open dialogue will be encouraged.
- All options being considered will be clearly described.
- Public information will be fair and every effort will be made to remove bias.
- Ample notice will be given to all citizens who are affected. Where there is doubt, the municipality will err on the side of providing notification.
- A summary of all public input gathered will be made available to any interested person.
- The process will be run in a manner that promotes cooperation, trust and community ownership.

7. Scope of Consultation:

The matter being discussed could potentially affect any citizen of our municipality, the administration and elected officials of Stepford County, or citizens of adjacent areas of Stepford County. The process will be designed to ensure media notification of all affected citizens, and direct notification of the following:

- Residents living within 250 metres of the potential expansion area southeast of Egmont commercial zone.
- Residents living within 250 metres of the potential new southwest commercial zone boundary.
- Developers who hold property within either of the areas described above.
- The Benchlands Protection Group (which has expressed an interest in conserving portions of the possible expansion area).
- Transportation Committee members.
- Stepford County administration.

While these groups are a priority for notification, input of any interested person or agency is valued and will be considered.

8. Preliminary Schedule and Budget

The preliminary schedule for the public input process is described below:

Approval of public input process	September 4
Finalization of meeting dates and public materials	September 16
Public notification (direct contact sent out)	September 21
Media notification	September 20-29
Neighbourhood contacts and public meetings	October 6-30
Initial meeting with Stepford county	October 5-10
Draft summary report of input received	November 12
Planning Committee review complete	November 26
Revised summary report made available to public	December 8
Submission to Council, first reading	January-March

The initial budget for the public input process is $10,000.00

9. Consultation Team

The following persons would support the public input process:

Coordinating consultation with planning	Monica Reddens
Media relations	Carolyn Spacini
Public information development and dissemination	Jerry Turner and Carolyn Spacini
Developing and maintaining a list of stakeholder contacts	Jerry Turner and Brenda Chynoweth
Developing and maintaining a database showing input received and response to input	Jerry Turner and Brenda Chynoweth
Organizing and conducting meetings	Jerry Turner (with Monica Reddens and Carolyn Spacini)
Organizing and coordinating correspondence	Jerry Turner
Intermunicipal liaison	Monica Reddens

Note: Councillor Cheryl Battinski (chair of the Planning Committee) has indicated a high interest in this process and will play an active role in establishing good public information and in organizing effective public meetings.

Attachment 2: Sample meeting agenda

TOWN OF BRAVEBROOK
Public Meeting Regarding Access Changes to Brookside Park

Date: August 15, 2010
Time: 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. (coffee, juice and donuts will be served)
Location: Downstairs meeting room at the Recreation Centre (103 - Fifth Avenue)

Purpose: To inform citizens about potential access changes to Brookside Park, and to gain advice about planning and implementation of the changes.

Situation: The existing access to Brookside Park is currently creating a congestion and safety problem on First Avenue. The access could be moved to Fifth Avenue or to Rose Street in order to minimize the problem. *(Note: An explanation of the access concerns and options is available at the information desk in the Recreation Centre, weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.)*

AGENDA

1. **Introduction**
   - Review of Council direction
   - Overview of problem and potential solutions

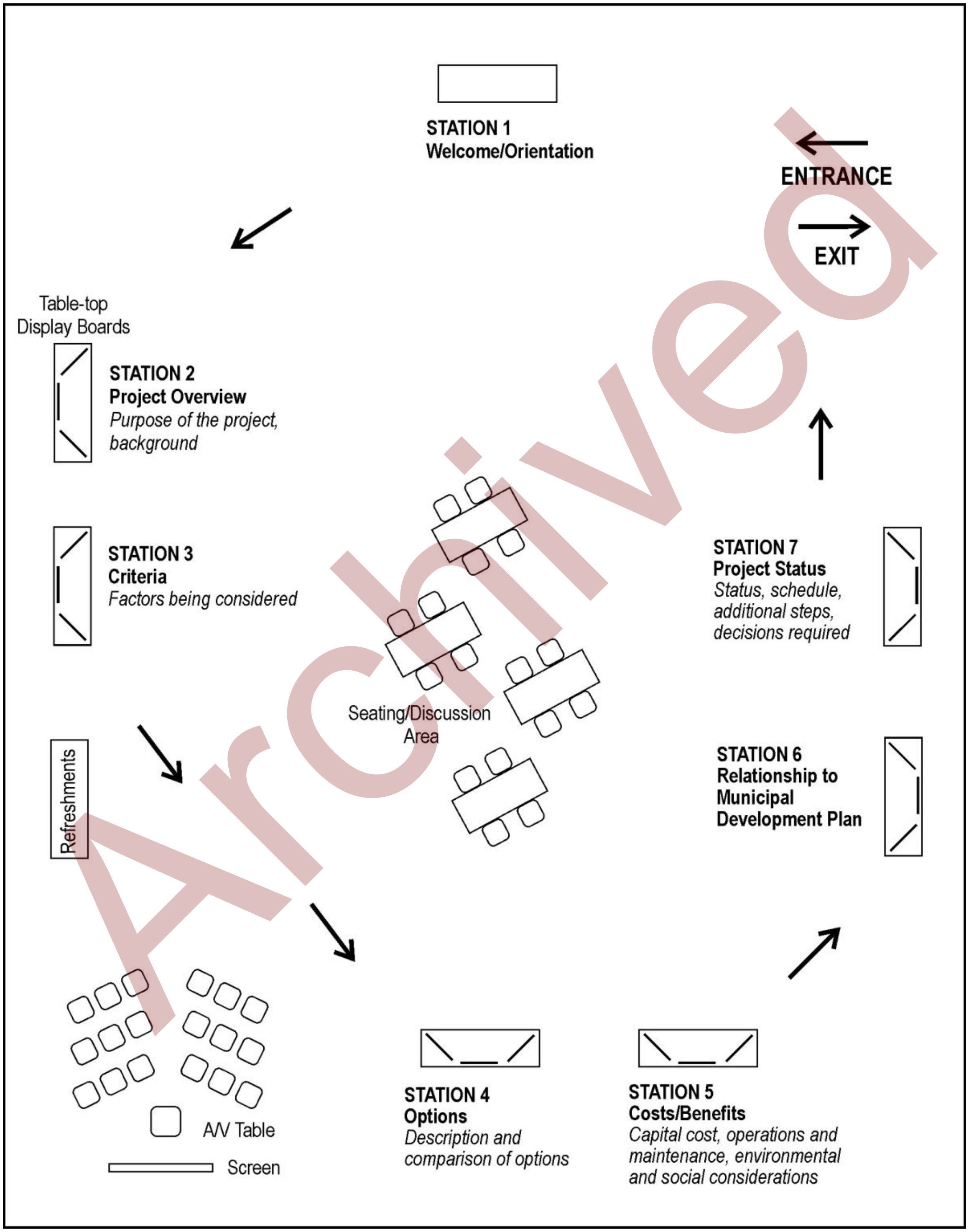
2. **Review of criteria for access location**
   - Public input about what factors should be considered

3. **Review of access location options**
   - Public input about which option is preferred

4. **Next steps**
   - Summary of meeting
   - Committee and Council review
   - How to stay involved

5. **Adjournment**

Attachment 3: Sample display plan for open house meeting



Attachment 4: Guide for Facilitator & Recorder

The basic activities of the FACILITATOR are to:

- Keep everyone on time. Establish how much time each part of the discussion should take and make participants aware when it is time to move on.
- Keep everyone focused on a single question. Display the focus question and keep bringing people back to that question. (e.g. "...can you tie that idea into the question we are working on?")
- Help participants clarify their point to the group. Make sure that everyone understands the point that is being made. It is helpful to summarize the point if the speaker has rambled.
- Ensure that many people are heard, and intervene if any individual takes up more than a fair share of the available time. It is ok and necessary to point out to people that they have already made more comments than anyone else and that you want to hear from others. It is also ok to specifically ask for comments from people who have not yet said anything.
- Summarize the discussion at appropriate times (e.g. when closing discussion of a point and moving on to another point).
- Prevent personal comments, especially blame or slander.
- Show an unbiased interest in every comment that is brought forward. Be enthusiastic about the discussion.
- Help the recorder accurately record the point that is being made. If you are unsure that the recorder got the point, ask the recorder to state what they have recorded.

The RECORDER record what people say at the meeting and produces an accurate record of the meeting as soon as possible after the meeting. In some cases the record is unseen by the participants. In the course, recorders will produce a "group memory" which is prominently visible to the participants. The basic activities are to:

- Be clear before you begin whether the comments are to be attributed to individuals, to communities of interest, or rather are to be unattributed.
- Keep each point brief, but do not leave out critical facts or information. When you are recording a "group memory", expect that the speaker will correct you from time to time. If you are unclear about the point being made, ask the facilitator to clarify the point.
- Ensure that every point that is made is "tagged". This can be simply done by writing the date and/or location on each page, and then numbering or lettering each point. Also number the pages. The tags help people refer back to the point, and also ensure that the pages are in the right order after the meeting ends. If you one of several recorders, put a name on the file so that it is easy to determine which group you recorded.
- Make eye contact with speakers from time to time to confirm that you are listening. If the record is not visible to the participants, then make it obvious that you are recording.

Attachment 5: List of Challenges for Group Discussion

Challenge A - At least two council members are suspicious of the process and have already indicated their concerns to a few citizens.

Challenge B - Council has set aside 45 minutes for the public hearing, but the coordinator feels it will take twice that long.

Challenge C - A few of the "communities of interest" have not shown up for the last few public issues, but individuals from these communities have expressed concerns privately to council members.

Challenge D - Citizens are having trouble understanding why the decision is needed. The issue seems to o technical for them.

Challenge E - Three individuals often dominate the public discussion and others are becoming frustrated.

Challenge F - There is a perception that the mayor "already has her mind made up" about this issue and that the public input process is a waste of time.

Challenge G - Attendance at public meetings is very low.

Challenge H - One media outlet has reported in a manner that is incorrect—in fact, they have presented a view that appears to be biased against the project.

Challenge I - ....

....

Challenge J - ....

....

Challenge K - ....

....

Challenge L - ....

....

Attachment 6: Public Input Case Studies

A. Waste Management Facility

Gleason County is running out of room in their landfill facility. The County has experienced considerable growth in the past five years, and a new facility is needed. Five years ago, council attempted to prepare for this moment, but the site that was chosen was so unacceptable to surrounding residents that the matter became an election issue. The next council didn't want to touch the issue. Now this council has to find a solution. A consultant has been quietly retained and has informed administration that there are three suitable sites in the County.

B. Bursting at the Seams

The Town of Ida has been experiencing a boom for the last two years. This has been great for the tax base and for local business. However, there is not enough commercial land available in the downtown commercial district, and if the town does not expand the available commercial land, some businesses will local elsewhere.

Downtown is surrounded by established neighbourhoods. Town councillors are well aware that neighbouring residents are concerned about commercial expansion.

C. Party!

The Town of Glory Bee is blessed with a great location that has made it a tourist destination. The tourism industry is a major player in town, and the last town council amended the commercial zone to allow a wider range of uses. Now, one of the motel owners is proposing to develop a nightclub. This use is allowed within the amended zoning requirements, but it is opposed by many citizens. The citizens indicate that no one asked them about this kind of land use and that is "completely inappropriate".

D. Care Home

Two years ago, a new senior's centre was developed in Frog River. Now, the Salvation Army has applied to convert the former senior's centre into a care facility for persons struggling with mental illness. They have applied for a development permit because they plan to renovate and increase the size of the building. The centre is across the street from some of the nicest homes in town, and next to a playground. Two of the housewives that live nearby are well known to the town administrator because they take a very active interest in any new developments.

E. Industry and Residential

The City of Carville has an old industrial area that has become an increasing source of complaints from nearby residents. The industrial area is near the outskirts of the city and is used mainly for storage and staging facilities. Over the past ten years, it has been surrounded by two residential neighbourhoods. The industrial area is now a constant source of complaint. The nearby residents think that the storage areas are an eye-sore. Administration thinks that if screening were required at the industrial sites, this would mitigate the problem. Industrial landowners are opposed to this idea—they say that it is an unwarranted expense, imposed on them “after the fact”.

F. A New Boat Launch

The Town of Chadwick is blessed with a beautiful river. It has been a constant challenge, though, to keep the river attractive but still accessible. The Town has decided to improve the boat launch to provide better access to the river for recreational users and for outfitters (who use the crowded parking lot as a staging area). The new site will have more parking and will provide safer access to the river. The boat launch is located across the street from a residential area.

G. New Industry Comes to Jackfish County

After three years of effort, Jackfish County is the benefactor of not one but two announcements that major industrial facilities plan to locate there. One of the industrial proponents has been quietly purchasing land. Councillors are delighted because new industry will increase the tax base, and the population. A number of citizens, however, are worried. They feel their rural way of life is at risk.

H. Oh, *That* High Density Zone

When Sherman Heights was developed as a residential area three years ago, the town planner had the foresight to allow an area for higher density development. Now, a developer has purchased the property and is proposing to build three buildings that will contain a total of 80 apartments.

People who bought homes near the site are outraged. They say that this development will block their few of the farmland to the east and that they have heard bad things about the developer.

I. Is It Good News of Bad News

The complaint about the retail sector has always been that they charge too much. People have travelled 120 kilometres to save in the "big box" stores. Well, the answer is at hand. Now a big box store wants to open locally. But many residents don't think that's good news. They are concerned that the new entrant will destroy the character of the town. The applicant is being submitted for council review. No zoning change is required, but councillors are deluged with both positive and negative comments. If only there had been this much interest in the municipal development plan…

J. We Need More Gravel, Don't We?

Swanson Gravel owns several acres of land along the river. They have a gravel pit at the south end of their land. They have notified the M.D. that they plan to open a new pit at the north end of their property. Administration is aware that a new company—A&J Ltd.—has enquired about accessing gravel on lands south of Swanson's property.

There have been several complaints in the past about dust and noise related to Swanson's operations.

K. A Perfect Site

The M.D. of Kalmoss is planning to attract industrial growth from the increase in oil and gas services operating in the area. They have a site that would be excellent for industrial lots. Access is good, and servicing would not be difficult. The only concern that has crossed the mind of the area councillor is that there are two "country estate" subdivisions located not far from the site. Many of the residents would have an unobstructed view of the industrial buildings.

L. Ramps and Rails

The Downtown Business Association in Hollyhock has complained that teens on skateboards are a nuisance, and they want something done about it. The Town has posted signs restricting the boarders, but it has not alleviated the problem.

The Mayor has proposed that a skateboard park could be built in the middle of Roselyn Park. The land is already zoned for recreational facilities, and the Downtown Business Association will contribute to the construction cost.

Several neighbours who look out at the park (about 300 metres away) complained when they heard a rumour of a skateboard facility. They think that skateboards are undesirable to have near their neighbourhood.

M. Green Power

Mardy Semmler's family and several friends moved to the town of Marville three years ago because they wanted to return to simpler living. Six families bought adjoining lots in the new subdivision next to the marsh, and they soon had an impact on the town. They turned their yards into small farms and attended meetings to promote green, pesticide-free living.

Now they have a new idea. They have noticed the amount of wind that blows across the marsh flats and they want to erect three wind towers to produce 20 KW of wind energy. They want the town to provide a lease on the land for a nominal fee and they are willing to invest their own money in the towers.

Several residents of the town think this may be an important step for the future of Marville. They imagine a gradual conversion to green energy sources, and they feel that this will help revitalize interest in their town. A vocal opposition is growing, however. Council is reviewing a proposal from Semmler's newly formed non-profit corporation. Councillors realize they need something of this sort, but are concerned about aspects of this proposal. Mayor Neufeldt asks the town manager for advice: how should they proceed?

N. Bus or Bust?

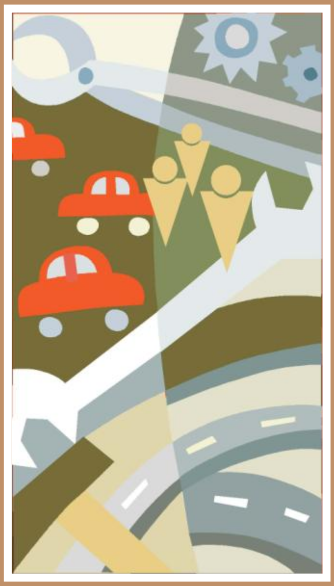
Crowfield is the sixth-fastest growing suburban community in the province. What used to be a rural town is now a classic "bedroom community". Most of the people commute into the city during the week for their jobs and want a bus service.

Council is reviewing a transit plan that shows that bus service will cost the town a significant amount of money over the next five years, with significant initial costs. Council feels the pressure to deliver a bus service but knows that ratepayers won't like the tax increase this is going to require.

O. Affordable Housing Has a Price

Cranmeer is a great place to live and work. However, the cost of housing has risen 90% in three years. Since it is a tourist town, many of the residents do not make high salaries…but businesses critically need the service workers to stay in town. There is huge pressure for affordable housing. Council has already attempted to require developers to include affordable housing in any new development that has more than 20 households. Developers indicated they would voluntarily comply, but this has not solved the problem.

Council has an option to use a federal infrastructure grant to develop affordable housing instead of upgrading the troublesome intersection at Lexington. However, developers are opposed to this intervention in the market and the town's many affluent commuters are opposed to the delay in the intersection upgrade.



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION
FOR DEVELOPERS

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The Public Input Toolkit is available online at
www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca

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Contents

COMMUNITY
CONSULTATION

for developers

This guide provides suggestions to help developers organize and implement a process to consult with communities. If you are reading this guide, we assume you are proposing a plan amendment and/or change in land use to a municipal council in Alberta.

1. The value of public input

When a municipality or municipal councillors review a proposed plan amendment or a proposed land use change, they must consider the expectations and perceptions of the surrounding community that may be affected by the change. When you have done an effective job of gathering public input, you make it much less likely that worried and uninformed constituents are calling their councillor to express concern about your project. You also help the councillors feel confident about their decisions regarding your application, and increase the likelihood that Council will support your project (assuming the project has merit that is obvious to councillors and their constituents).

Public input is not an "add-on" to your project. Instead, it is an integral part of the process of making application to the municipality. Most developers learn sooner or later that public input improves their project and hastens the approvals required before construction can begin.

Good relationships with your neighbours, and a good image in the community, will benefit your current project and future projects as well.

2. Communicate before you file your application

Before you submit your application to the municipality, there are some things you can do to help you be successful:

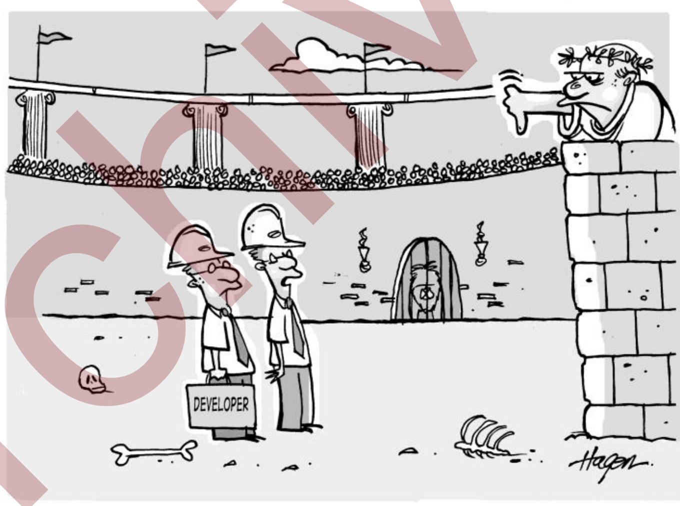
1. Talk with a municipal planner and a municipal councillor to ensure you know any requirements or expectations that may affect decisions about your project. Ask for information about the community and the people most likely to be interested in your project. Ask for any knowledge gained from recent experience in the municipality with similar projects. Ask if there are any spokespersons who have represented the community in discussions of comparable projects.

Tip: Start early. The longer you wait to contact neighbouring landowners, the greater the risk you will have unresolved concerns.

2. Walk through the surrounding community and talk with people. Learn about their perceptions of their community and (if your project is already public knowledge) your project.
3. Contact community spokespersons and get to know them. Learn their perceptions and expectations.

3. Communicate after you file your application

When you make your plan or land use application to the municipality, you may be asked to notify affected citizens (usually surrounding landowners) of your application. If a change in zoning or subdivision is necessary the *Municipal Government Act* requires the municipality to notify affected property owners. This usually requires (a) a sign posted on the property that informs passers-by of your application, (b) a printed notice in the local newspaper, and/or (c) letters sent to adjacent/affected property owners.



PERHAPS WE SHOULD HAVE CONSULTED WITH THEM FIRST.

You can greatly improve the likelihood of gaining Council approval, and community support, if you invest in communication and trust-building from the initial stages of your proposal. In established communities, people are likely to feel vulnerable to the changes they see around them: growth, traffic, density increases, and commercial land uses. Neighbours who know who is "behind" the project, and who feel their questions are being answered and their concerns are being addressed, are less likely to oppose a project and may even actively support it.

Reaching out to the communities around you can only improve your presentation to Council. The following activities are recommended for any development project:

1. Contact community leaders to let them know you would like to meet with them to ensure they are informed about your proposal. Let them know up front what the decisions will include (i.e. be clear about the scope).
2. Make it easy for interested persons to contact you (or your organization).
3. Learn what kind of "meeting" format will work best for people (time, place, length, discussion process).
4. Provide convenient opportunities for people to learn more about your project (i.e. hold meetings, maintain a storefront office, be available at the development site).
5. Return calls and e-mails, and keep people informed of any changes that may interest them.
6. Keep the planner and your local councillor informed about your efforts to stay in touch with the communities and their spokespersons.

In some cases, your proposal will require a significant public outreach effort. Key factors that signal the need for greater effort include the following:

- Scale of development (i.e. larger scale = more communication)
- Change of neighbourhood character (i.e. the proposal changes the scale, aesthetics or character of the neighbourhood)
- Perceived health or safety risk
- Perceived impact on lifestyle (i.e. blocks access to river, blocks view of foothills, brings "strangers" into the areas, includes late night activity)
- Moral issues (e.g. religion, gambling, sexual issues)

Greater public outreach means you may need to include communication and consultation activities in your project's plan. These include:

- Media relations
- Community outreach (personal communication with community residents)
- Preparation and distribution of informative materials
- Hosting meetings that help people get answers to their questions

Tip: Consider the "48 hour rule." No one should wait more than two days for a response to their question or concern. The sooner the response, the more you will be trusted.

4. Plan to document what you hear

While consultation includes many informal conversations, it is important that you have an orderly plan from the outset. Plan to document your efforts to talk to people and the information you gather. At the end of the process, you should be able to produce a record that shows:

1. How you informed interested citizens about your proposal.
2. What opportunities they had to learn more and provide input.
3. How many people attended meetings and/or provided input.
4. What concerns or suggestions people raised.
5. Any adjustments made to your project as a result of what you heard.

This record demonstrates your commitment to good community relations, and will be helpful if later there is a difference of opinion about what was said and what was provided.

If you have taken time to learn about the surrounding communities, it is easier to put together an effective plan. Your plan will help ensure you keep a record of contacts and input received. It will also keep you on track toward the Council decision you are seeking. If you proceed "one step at a time" you may find the process takes longer and you are constantly reacting to new information and requirements.

Planning made simple

Ideally, planning begins with discussions about your project. As you talk to the municipal planner, councillors, and community spokespersons, start assembling a simple consultation plan. This can be done on a few pages, in a few hours. Here are questions you should answer in your plan:

- What decision are we requesting, and what are its implications for the communities?
- Whom should we be notifying?
- Whom should we try to get input from?
- What input do we require?
- How are we intending to gather the input?
- What resources and information do we need?
- What are our timelines?
- What is likely to be controversial—and how should we manage the controversy?
- How will we respond to the input we gather, and how will we present the information to the municipality?
- What outcomes do we seek from our efforts to involve the public?

Working with municipal representatives

It is always a good idea to ask municipal representatives for advice about how to proceed. Keep them informed—both the municipal planner (or development officer) and the elected councillor will appreciate your effort to keep them "in the loop."

5. Teamwork

Public input is an integral part of your project and requires teamwork. Several jobs must be done, and it is important to participants that one person does not attempt to do all of those jobs simultaneously. It is critical that there is coordination between your public input activities and your project design and management. You may have to contract people with communications skills to support consultation during the application review period. People involved in the project may bring excessive zeal to a public discussion. If citizens get the impression there is no flexibility regarding the "best" way to do the project, they may feel they are wasting their time talking with your people—and move on to talk to elected officials.

Skills that will be helpful in your project management include:

- Coordination – Someone to ensure all those little "promises" are communicated to everyone
- Facilitation – Someone to run public meetings, or to impartially hear what individuals have to say
- Communication – Someone to develop communication materials and meet with media
- Data keeping – Someone to record all public input

Consider having at least one person support the public input process on a full-time basis. For a brief period of time (usually about a month), there can be many calls and individual contacts to make. After-hours meetings are the norm.

Tip: Advance preparation is the key to good public meetings.

6. Scheduling the public input process

Usually, public input is tied into a specific schedule (for the approval of a project, or for the passage of a bylaw). However, implementing the public input opportunities can be a challenge.

Allow time for delays. The most common sources of delay are listed below:

- Approval of process or of public information
- Production (writing, artwork, printing) of public information
- Appropriate meeting rooms not available
- Research (ensuring accurate information)
- Public notification (media placements) or notification of stakeholders
- Re-drafting proposals after initial public input is received

In most cases, the municipal requirements for planning and development establish a clear process and timeline. However, other issues such as environmental concerns, health and safety, and utility and road considerations can alter time requirements considerably.

It is advised you develop an activity schedule that addresses the following four process stages. Ideally, these stages will be completed before you make formal application (i.e. while you are discussing matters with the planning officer or administrator).

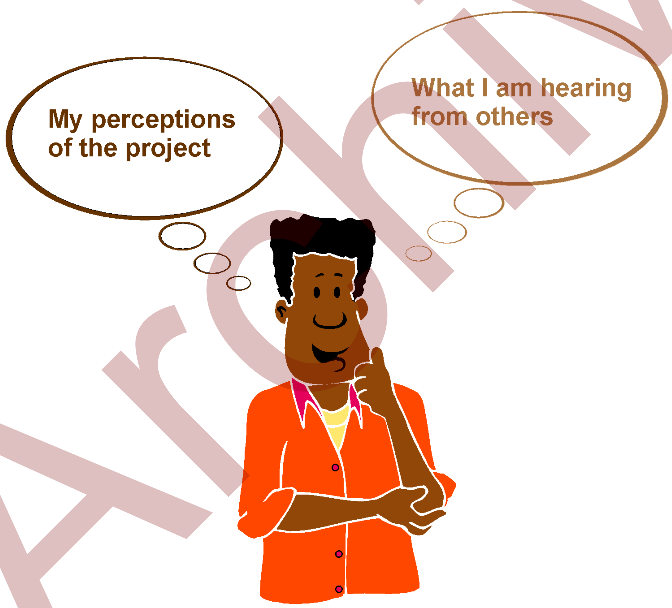
Stage 1: Preparation	▪ Creating your initial plan ▪ Building and training your team ▪ Drafting public information ▪ Making bookings for meetings
Stage 2: Information Exchange	▪ Communicating with affected persons, agencies or neighbourhoods ▪ Gathering preliminary information before formal public meetings ▪ Providing advance information to interested persons or agencies

Stage 3: Comparison of Options	▪ Presenting the analysis of potential choices to interested persons or agencies
	▪ Learning about their perceptions and preferences
	▪ This portion of the process usually involves:
	  ▪ Scheduled and unscheduled meetings
	  ▪ Telephone surveys
	  ▪ Distribution and collection of questionnaires
	  ▪ An interactive website
	▪ Noting and organizing the input received
	▪ Verifying what you have heard and addressing it in your application

Stage 4: Decision and Implementation	▪ Responding to the input received (possibly by making changes, or providing additional information) ▪ Presenting the preferred option to the municipality in your application ▪ Receiving the municipal decision ▪ Determining what is required for successful implementation ▪ Initiating implementation (note that interested citizens remain interested during this stage)

7. Good communication materials

Good communication materials are an essential part of the public input process. The key to designing good communication materials is to design the communication from the context and perspective of the receiver, rather than the knowledge and expectations of the sender. The key questions to ask are: "What does the receiver want to know?" and "what misconceptions might interfere with our conversation?"



Remember: The receiver may be confused by possibly conflicting "other" messages.

Write "open" information

If the information provided to people appears to "sell" one option solely, or in strong preference to other options, it may be discredited. Similarly, if information favours the perspectives of one community over another, it may become fodder for an argument.

Make the scope of discussion obvious

Be specific about what is "on the table" for discussion. If necessary, point out the boundaries of the discussion.

Keeping it simple

The toughest part of writing public input materials is deciding what to leave out. People will spend very little time reading the material—so be selective about what you need to say. It is often useful to keep the basic message simple, but then add detail and illustrations for the more intrepid reader, and for use in public discussions.

Illustrations are important

A "concept picture" or a process illustration will become a major discussion point. It will attract attention and improve memory of the information. Colour improves attention and memory. However, if four-colour production is too expensive, two-colour production is well worth considering.

Notification and distribution of information

The *Municipal Government Act* specifies a municipality must notify adjacent landowners of applications to change land use or subdivide land. In addition, it is common for municipalities to notify adjacent landowners about property development proposals. Therefore, you will be asked to pay for the cost of this notification as part of your application.

Ideally, everyone potentially interested in providing input to the decision(s) you are considering will be notified, be aware of the coming decision(s), and be aware of the opportunity to provide input. You may choose to notify more parties than is required by provincial legislation. However, this can be challenging–there are a few barriers to consider:

Tip: Building trust is just as important as gaining input. Focus on building good relationships, and plan to keep those relationships as the project proceeds.

1. **Information overload:** Most people receive so much unsolicited information they automatically discard or ignore the majority of it.
2. **Competing messages:** It is easy for people to confuse your message with others.
3. **Distribution costs:** It can be expensive to get information delivered directly to everyone who is interested

The municipality will usually purchase formal notification advertisements in a newspaper. However, you are encouraged to provide additional notification. No notification system is perfect; more than one notification approach is recommended.

Some notification methods that can be used to supplement public notices placed in newspapers:

1. Face-to-face discussion (or telephone discussion)
2. Direct correspondence (including e-mail)
3. Networking with community leaders
4. Presentations at meetings
5. Bulk mail
6. Media release
7. Displays, signs and bulletins
8. Media advertisements

8. Making public meetings enjoyable and effective

Presenting information

People who take the time to attend public meetings should leave those meetings feeling well informed. Here are some guidelines to consider:

1. **Your audience will learn more when you say less**

   The average audience member will be attentive for about 10 minutes (most speakers assume the number is 30 to 40 minutes). Start with the presentation you think you ought to give, then cut it in half.

2. **Few people memorize facts**

   If you attempt to present all the facts before people have a chance to ask questions, you will be disappointed with the level of understanding among participants. It is better for people to be able to ask about the facts as they consider the options being presented. Project staff can help people "find" the facts when they need them. Handouts are important because they provide a reference tool for participants.

Tip: The purpose of public meetings is not to "educate" people, it is to help them evaluate choices.

3. **All the facts must be available**

   While your presentation must be concise, it is equally important that people have ready access to all the relevant information about your proposal. Remember, your presentation raises awareness; now people are more likely to want to know more. Open access is important.

4. **People learn by interacting with staff and information**

   While people politely listen to presentations, their learning rate is relatively low. Learning is much higher when they are talking to others and examining information. People learn by seeing, hearing, touching and smelling. It helps when they are not sitting still for long periods. They usually learn more when conversation is "two-way," not when they are sitting still and listening.

5. **Some methods definitely help people learn**

   The following "embellishments" to a presentation will help people learn information and will increase participant satisfaction:

   - Connect the information to familiar situations or common experiences.
   - Use colour pictures and photographs (especially when they show familiar places or people).
   - Use humour to support key points in the presentation (this is different than telling jokes).
   - Show your own enthusiasm about the topic.
   - Ask others to contribute questions or ideas and pay close attention to what they have to say.
   - Make eye contact and smile.

6. **Other methods should be used with care**

   - Abstract graphics (graphs, maps, process diagrams) can be useful learning tools, if you understand that many participants will have trouble understanding the message encoded in the graphics. It looks crystal clear to you, but it may not make sense to others. You can overcome this difficulty if you use the graphic as a "prop" for your story, not as a self-explanatory learning tool.
   - Technical data is even more difficult for people to understand. Describe what experts have concluded from the data, but leave the data aside for questions. Those who ask questions about the data will be motivated to understand.
   - Case studies or explanations of experiences elsewhere can be useful occasionally, but they must be concise. Note that examples can be misinterpreted, so be cautious about how you link the example to your proposal.

One method should be avoided

Selling one solution as the answer, without reference to other options, raises doubt and resistance. The more enthusiastic you are about one solution, the more energy others will have to oppose you. Things will get worse if you respond defensively to criticism of your idea.

Selecting the meeting format

When you hold your public meeting, you can choose a meeting format based on the topic, the target audience, and your budget. The following section describes the most common meeting formats and provides some advice to help you choose the appropriate format and to implement it well.

Type of Meeting	Advantages	Disadvantages
Storefront or **"over-the-counter:"** allows anyone to drop in and discuss plans "over the counter"	▪ Citizen can choose time to drop in ▪ Citizen gets one-on-one time with project representatives ▪ Great if a small number of citizens have a high interest	▪ Input is often verbal and must be recorded ▪ Relatively time-consuming ▪ Cannot accommodate large numbers ▪ Caution about "busy periods"
Informal "doorway:" small meetings that are informed neighbourhood discussions	▪ Builds trust and familiarity ▪ Gathers in-depth information relatively quickly	▪ May require several meetings to cover all interested parties ▪ Requires skill on the project representatives' part to keep discussion on track and record advice and questions
Advisory committee meetings: invited representatives meet several times to refine and discuss options	▪ Allows time for members to get to know one another and "do their homework" ▪ Builds consensus about detailed recommendations	▪ Committee may not be accepted by all communities ▪ Committees can be construed as "under the table" ▪ Requires major time commitment

Type of Meeting	Advantages	Disadvantages
Round-table meetings: usually less than 20 people and include a formal agenda	▪ Promotes exchange of ideas ▪ Good format for consensus building, if well facilitated	▪ Limited number of participants at each session ▪ Must be well facilitated and recorded ▪ Can be perceived as a technique to "divide and conquer" ▪ Make sure such meetings are not seen as "closed door"
Workshops: participants can "roll up their sleeves" and work together to assess information and create recommendations	▪ Promotes group problem-solving and exchange of ideas ▪ Can lead to creative recommendations	▪ Requires extensive preparation ▪ Must be well facilitated ▪ Requires time commitment from participants
Town hall meetings: larger meetings with a formal agenda and formal presentations	▪ Involves many people at once ▪ Everyone gets to hear what everyone else has to say	▪ Media often attend because meetings can become confrontational ▪ Must be expertly planned and facilitated ▪ "Showboating" at the microphone is a problem
Open house sessions: an opportunity for anyone to drop in, review information, talk to a project representative, and submit their preferences	▪ Allows many people to review information and talk to representatives ▪ People can spend as much, or as little, time as they wish ▪ Non-confrontational format	▪ Will not result in any definitive input unless designed to do so ▪ Does not promote interaction or consensus-building among communities

1. If the decision affects only a few people, then you will naturally use one of the following methods to discuss matters with these people and to gain their input:
   a. Personal meetings (one-on-one, often with you going to them)
   b. Storefront meetings (generally over the counter with one or a few people at a time)
   c. Informal "doorway" meetings (meetings with less than 10 people, usually held in someone's house or business, with no formal agenda)

All small meeting formats depend on your ability to give the people your attention and to provide credible information in a friendly manner.

2. If the decision affects more than 10 people, then you must choose whether you want to hold a series of meetings that anyone can attend; or whether you want to invite a representative selection of people to address the decision prior to the Council hearing (i.e. invited representatives participating in a committee or a round-table).

Tip: A public input plan makes it much simpler to do a good job.

Options are the basis for productive discussion

When you talk to citizens and municipal representatives about your proposal, try to define more than one way the project could be structured. If there are two or three options to discuss, then the discussion will be more about "which one is better" and less about "take it or leave it." Additionally, if others are encouraged to think about the best way to approach your project, they often come up with very good ideas that will benefit the project.

Based on your early discussions with municipal and neighbourhood representatives, you can likely identify some factors that will most influence their perceptions about the project. These include items such as the following:

- Changes in parking or traffic patterns
- Changes in aesthetics (blocked views, shading, appearance of exteriors, greenery)
- Nuisance factors (noise, dust, odours, rubbish)

It is helpful if you display the options available, and provide comparative information that reflects the factors municipal and neighbourhood representatives are most interested in.

Retirement Facility Criteria	OPTION 1 85 suite facility	OPTION 2 120 suite facility
Range of services provided		
Green space & landscaping		
Parking arrangements		
Size & location of facility		
Community access to facility		
Construction costs & operating efficiency		

Mitigating development concerns

In many cases, public concern will focus on the disturbances created by a development, rather than the actual intended structure. In these cases, the public discussion usually focuses on mitigation options, rather than development options.

For instance, the discussion may focus on matters such as the following:

- Time of year when construction will occur
- Length of time when traffic will be affected
- Factors affecting noise concerns, such as type of equipment and time of day
- Alternate arrangements for affected households and businesses
- Communication with affected residents
- Safety controls around the site
- Visual barriers
- Landscaping and external appearance

Tip: When the focus is on mitigation of impacts, it is not usually desirable to hold a "town hall" meeting.

Discussions about mitigation work best when they are more personal or informal. Community leaders can play an important role in identifying (and supporting) appropriate mitigation techniques.

9. Conflict and consensus

Although "conflict" sounds like a bad thing, it is a normal and desirable part of the discussion process. You wouldn't be going to all this trouble if you were sure everyone agreed about everything. Good ideas come from the exchange of different points of view. However, you are trying to avoid emotional outbreaks and accusations.

Tip: Emotional confrontation at meetings often results from fear or anxiety. Help people stay calm and reduce the threat they feel—give them back some control.

You do not have to have consensus from affected citizens and landowners about the best way to proceed with your project (although a consensus of support would make the Council decision easy). Your target should be to achieve credible documentation of the preferences and expectations of those affected, and to clearly show how you have responded (in a practical way) to concerns raised.

In many cases, people can live with the new project if (a) their proposals or preferred option is seriously considered (or adopted), or (b) acceptable mitigations, controls or compensations can be assured to address concerns they have in relation to the preferred option.

10. Following through

Never underestimate the amount of work you will have to do after the meetings are over and questionnaires are submitted. Take the time to congratulate your team on what they have achieved, but don't lose momentum.

Here are some tasks that typically require your attention after the input is received:

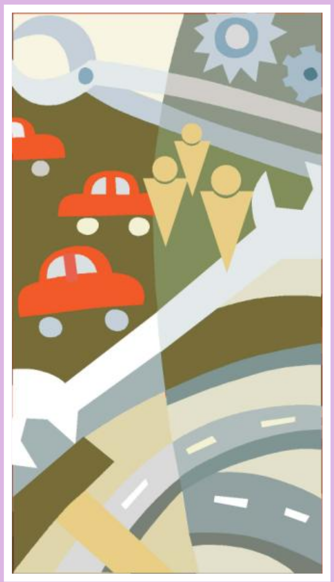
- Thank those who have helped you.
- Keep any promises made; do you need to send out any information?
- Collect and inventory all notes and input in one place.
- Ensure all input received is analyzed and summarized (this may require time editing and refining notes).
- Brief the project team as soon as possible and inform those responsible for the project of any concerns that might affect their planning, design or implementation.
- Inform municipal representatives and elected officials about the public input process and the advice received.
- Provide some information to the interested participants involved in your process. Let them know you appreciate their participation and give them some idea of what you have heard.
- If you have made adjustments in order to make your proposal more satisfactory, make a specific connection between what you heard and the changes you have chosen to make.
- It is a good idea to verify you have interpreted the public input correctly. Ask some (or all) participants to comment on the accuracy of your summary. It is better they make these comments to you than to councillors.

Role of municipal officials

Municipal officials are an important source of information about your project, so keep them well informed. Usually, they will not represent your project publicly, but they may attend public meetings and will often help explain the bylaws or the application process you are working within.

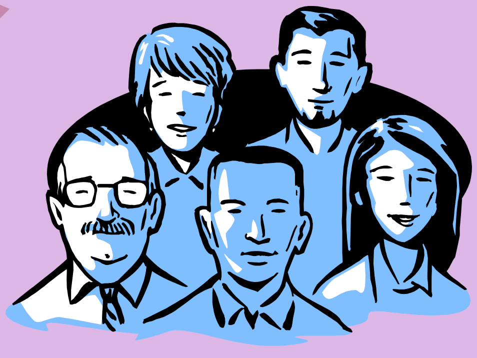
People must be informed about the decision and how their input was used as part of the decision. If an approach is chosen that is different than many people recommended, it is essential they are informed <u>why</u> another option was chosen.

Closing the loop



CITIZEN'S GUIDE

TO PARTICIPATING IN MUNICIPAL DECISION-MAKING



For further information, contact:

Municipal Dispute Resolution Services
Alberta Municipal Affairs
17th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 - 102 Street NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4

Tel: 780-427-2225
To be connected Toll Free: 310-0000
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The Public Input Toolkit is available online at
www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca

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Contents

CITIZEN'S GUIDE

to participation in municipal decision-making

This guide will help you become an active citizen in your municipality. It will provide the essential information you need to be part of the municipal decision process.

1. The value of participation

Municipalities are established to serve people. They become better (and happier) places when people get involved in decisions. Decisions made by your local (municipal) government affect your day-to-day life and deserve your attention. You may be affected by decisions about annual budgets, public transportation, garbage pickup, new building developments or whether the house next door to yours can be enlarged. As a citizen and taxpayer, you have a stake in the outcome of municipal decisions.

Tip: There are usually community groups or associations that can help you become familiar with municipal issues and processes. Working together helps to ensure success.

There are many opportunities for the public to become involved and take part in decision-making. Municipal officials welcome input from the public; in some cases, they are required by law to seek it. However, the final decision rests with Council.

In some situations, the public will be directly notified and asked to respond (e.g. by completing a survey or attending a meeting). However, in many situations, you must make an effort to become informed and involved. Often, the municipality is not obligated to notify the public personally about an issue or decision process taking place.

Become more proactive in the decisions affecting your municipality. You have the opportunity to help your municipal Council make better decisions and to improve the quality of life in your community.

2. How to succeed at public input

If you want to get the best results in return for your effort to participate in municipal decisions, consider the following:

Learn what is going on. Sometimes a little detective work is needed to find out what changes are being considered. Be aware of what is going on around you so you know when public input is being requested or when you can request to give public input. Early enquiries are always a good idea.

Learn about the Decision. Learn what decisions have already been made, and what decisions or parts of decisions remain to be made and will be affected by public input, and what the public input is intended to achieve. Sometimes your input addresses only a part of a decision, and other (and possibly larger) parts may already have been decided and are no longer open for public discussion.

Work with others. There is more power in a group approach. When citizens work together, they are more likely to influence municipal decisions. However, this means you must achieve consensus with others and any differences should be discussed within the group, not with others.

Respect the processes established by municipalities and recognize that staff and councillors may have real practical and legal constraints on what they can do. Municipalities must consider what is good for all.

Tip: Be open to compromise. Remember, there are often several perspectives to an issue.

Be realistic about your goals. Municipal Council must make decisions that consider the needs of all parties concerned, within the zoning established in the municipal development plan. Study the situation and consider your requests carefully. If a developer is acting within the requirements, you may want to discuss possible modifications that would reduce the impact on neighbours (e.g. entry area, parking).

Never underestimate your power as a citizen and member of community organizations to effect change in a positive and calm way.

Other levels of government may sometimes need to be involved in what appears to be a simple municipal matter. You can take the initiative to involve other government officials or take your input to forums set up under provincial or federal legislation.

3. Learn what is going on

Find out about your municipality

Familiarize yourself with the particular ways that your municipality operates. The Government of Alberta's website (www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca) includes useful information about how municipalities operate.

Your municipality may have a website. If not, look at websites for other municipalities to find out general information that might also apply where you live. For example, the process of development applications is largely set out in the *Municipal Government Act* and applies to all municipalities regardless of size. Larger municipalities such as Edmonton and Calgary have information in printed form and on their websites which explains the process. The local county or municipal district website may offer information valuable to a summer village resident.

Go to your municipal office or local library and look for brochures about anything connected with the municipality, including procedures, bylaws and dates and times of Council and committee meetings. If you need clarification on a particular aspect, make an appointment to talk with an administrator or call and ask your questions.

Work together

If you want to get better information about the municipal decisions that may affect your neighbourhood, become part of the "network" of people who are likely to know. These people include:

- Your elected municipal councillor
- The municipal administrator or planner who deals with zoning and planning
- A local community association or non-government organization

It is recommended you attend a Council meeting and see how decisions about zoning, development or services are handled. Introduce yourself to some of the interested citizens, if you do not know them already.

4. Provide input to municipal decisions

Does Council or administration make the decision?

The Municipal Government Act provides guidance about who has the power and responsibility to make various decisions. Only Council can decide to rezone a piece of land, but administrative staff can determine whether or not to issue a development permit. Council makes policy decisions about such things as budget, budget allocation, bylaws, or land use.

There is an exception. Council may have established an area as a "direct control district." These districts have specific requirements that must be met by all proposals (e.g. preservation of historic buildings). In these cases, Council approval is required.

The following table describes three types of municipal decisions, noting where formal public notification is required, and whether formal public input is normally suggested.

Type of Decision	Description and Notification
Council, e.g. bylaw change	A bylaw that must be advertised.
Administrative with a right of appeal, e.g. a development permit that generally conforms to the zoning	Decision made by an administrator or administrative committee. Those affected are notified. Those citizens may appeal to a civic board within an established timeframe.
Administrative without right of appeal, e.g. installation of a new sewer line	Administration has the power to make many decisions about municipal services, signs, construction, etc. These decisions <u>may</u> be advertised if they affect the community (notification is not legally required). Public input may or may not be requested.

When will a municipality inform citizens about a decision or request public input?

Public input is required before a municipality can change certain bylaws, for example, when a road is closed. In this case, the municipality is required by law to formally notify you (the citizen) by advertising or mailing a notice, and to seek public input before a decision is made.

In many other situations, the municipality (usually Council) will decide it needs to gather public input <u>before</u> it makes a decision.

If public input is required by Council, the administration may do one or all of the following:

1. notify citizens (mail, direct contact, media),
2. hold public meetings,
3. request input through a survey.

The earlier you can become involved, the better—especially if municipal staff are not yet able to make plans public. For example, if property is being developed in your area, the plans may be fairly well advanced before there is any legal obligation for the developer or municipality to notify the community or neighbours. If you notice surveyors on a property or roadway that may concern you, call your municipality and ask questions. Sometimes administrative staff may not be able to divulge confidential information (perhaps the developer has not yet made a formal application), but they may then recommend to the developer that some discussion takes place with the community. Also, if you know who is potentially developing a property, you may contact them directly and ask for a meeting to which municipal staff could then be invited.

Council decisions

Decisions by your elected Council can only be made by passing a bylaw or resolution. Once a decision is made in this way, it is very difficult to have it reviewed or changed. You could only do so by persuading councillors to reopen the decision or by challenging the decision in court. It is much better to try to influence Council's decision by providing input before the bylaw or resolution is passed.

There are different ways to provide input to high level decisions under consideration by a Council:

- In some situations the law requires a municipality to hold a **public hearing** before it makes a decision on a particular issue (e.g., a road closure or land use rezoning bylaw). This would be a **statutory public hearing.** In other situations, a municipality may decide to hold a public hearing because of the nature of the issue. This would be a **non-statutory public hearing.** Public hearings are advertised in the press and may also be noted on a municipal website or by notice in public buildings. If you have a specific interest in the issue, you may receive a mailed notice about the hearing. Some tips about presenting at meetings are provided under item 5, on page 9 of this guide.
- In larger municipalities, decisions made by Council are often based on information from **committees** of councillors. The committee will review an issue and report to Council with recommendations, so it's best to try to influence those recommendations. Municipalities will each have their own policies as to when members of the public may make presentations (either to Council or to a committee). Find out what these policies are in your area so you do not miss the opportunity to give input to the decision process at the appropriate time. In some municipalities, citizens may make presentations to committees (e.g., transportation committee) but not to Council when it is making the decision.
- Some Council decisions are prompted by a municipal **department** that may have been looking at an issue for many reasons. For example, the department may be responding to an enquiry from a Councillor (often initially from a citizen), a department may of its own volition be seeking to take an action for which it needs Council approval, or the department is responding to an issue raised with them directly by a member of the public. It is always possible for you to contact administrative staff to ask for a meeting on a particular issue, or to request that a public meeting be held in the community.

  As a result of its deliberations in any of these situations, the department will ultimately be sending a report to Council with recommendations.
- Lobby, write and talk to your councillors. Remember to talk to all councillors, not just the ones that represent your area, because they all have a vote. Group action is often more effective than individual action, so if appropriate, try to involve other groups who may also be affected by the decision.

Examples of high level municipal decisions:

- Rezoning land
- Adopting an area structure plan
- Adopting an annual budget
- Closing a public roadway
- Privatizing a municipal service

Administrative decisions, with right of appeal

Some decisions that might affect you as a community member are made by administrative staff. In situations where these decisions have a significant impact on the lives of particular citizens, the law provides for a system of appeal to a board made up of citizen volunteers, councillors or a combination of the two. For example, a Council can establish an Assessment Review Board which deals with complaints about taxes and tax assessments.

If you have an interest defined by the law, you will be notified of appeals before such boards. For example, if a development permit is granted which requires variances from the established requirements, nearby neighbours may be notified and given an opportunity to appeal to a Subdivision and Development Appeal Board.

There are also situations where a matter does not go before a municipal appeal board, but where the law allows a citizen to appeal a decision of Council to the Courts or to a provincial appeal board. For example, if an administrative decision is given to a community member to remedy unsightly property, there is a right to request Council to review the decision or, in limited circumstances, to challenge Council's decision in the Courts. Some decisions concerning municipal utilities can be appealed to the provincial Public Utilities Board.

Tip: Every municipality has to establish (or share with another municipality) a Subdivision and Development Appeal Board for the appeal of subdivision issues and development permits.

As a community member affected by a decision made by the administration, you can always contact your municipality to discuss a situation before a decision is made. Once a decision is made, you are bound by the strict procedures of appeal which you should be careful to follow. With regard to making appearances before appeal boards, see the tips under item 5, on page 9 of this guide.

Administrative decisions, without right of appeal

Other decisions made by administrative staff do not have to be reviewed or passed by Council and are not subject to formal avenues of appeal. Such decisions might include whether a recreation program will continue or not, when street cleaning will take place in a particular area, or what traffic measures might be appropriate or not in a certain area. Following are some suggestions on how you can provide input to these decisions:

- Generally, the earlier you are involved in a decision process, the better chance you will have to influence the outcome. Don't expect to be formally notified.
- It is always possible to contact administrators (by e-mail, phone or in person) to discuss the decisions they are making. Even if a decision has

been made, it might still be important to talk about the effects of the decision and request a review.

- If you think the decision affects a number of people, think about organizing a public meeting and asking civic staff to attend.
- If you are part of a community group or association, maintain ongoing links and good relations with municipal administrators. This can be time-consuming and is not easy for volunteer groups, but can pay dividends in the long run.
- Be aware of notices either in the press or mailed to your home which might be asking for input on a decision. Generally, municipalities want to make decisions that are good for most people and therefore public meetings will often be held to canvass certain issues.

Advisory boards

Sometimes municipalities will set up advisory boards relevant to particular areas or issues. The boards serve to advise Council and the administration, when requested, on matters such as heritage and historical issues, recreation issues or public services such as fire protection. Citizens are generally invited to apply to sit on the boards and it is usually possible for members of the public to make representations to an advisory board in regard to any particular issue either in writing or in person.

5. Tips on making meeting presentations

The following tips will help you to prepare:

Learn the date and time for the meeting. Contact the municipal office or visit the municipal website.

Learn clearly the issue at hand and understand the particular decision being made by the municipality or Council. If you are "on topic" and clearly address the issue at hand, your input will be much more valuable to those making the decision.

Register in advance to speak. Some municipalities have registration forms online, or you may contact the municipality by telephone. If you need presentation equipment (e.g., a computer, projector, etc.) request it at that time.

Find out what the meeting process will be. Your municipality may have policies about how meetings are organized (e.g. presentations by the public may be limited to five minutes). Also, try to observe a meeting before you attend your own to see how the forum works. Many board/committee/Council meetings are open to the public, as are public meetings and hearings.

If providing any supporting materials, make sure you have enough copies for each board/committee/Council member. Call in advance to find out how many copies are needed. Note: Providing a summary of your speaking notes allows the listener to focus on you rather than taking notes.

Be prepared to make your point succinctly. You will be better received if you are ready and prepared. If you only have five minutes to speak, the time can go very quickly.

If presenting as part of a group, use your time wisely. Each group member should plan to present different points. Repetition of the same point(s) can irritate those hearing the issue.

Remain civil, no matter how deeply or passionately you feel about an issue. Members of the public can be asked to leave meetings if their conduct is improper.

If you cannot attend a meeting in person, you may write to the Council or committee members in advance of the meeting.