PUBLIC INPUT TOOLKIT

for Municipalities

Alberta

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

September 2005
ISBN #0-7785-4221-1

Acknowledgements

The author would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the following people who contributed greatly to the development of the Public Input Toolkit:

- Gary Buxton and Steve Burford, Town of Canmore
- Debra Korevaar, Barb Smith and Dave Dmytryshyn, Sturgeon County
- Louise Champis and Cathy Clarke, Town of Morinville
- Nancy Weigel and Wendy Cardiff, Town of Okotoks
- Marc Brown and Karolina Drabik, City of Cold Lake
- Dianne Johnson and Doug Balsden, Alberta Community Development

Special thanks to Bill Diepeveen, Michael Scheidl, Donna Rollie and Lyndsay Waddingham from Alberta Municipal Affairs.

And to Lynn Parish who provided invaluable advice and authored the Citizen's Guide portion of this Toolkit.

The project was funded through grants from Alberta Municipal Affairs and financially supported by the City of Cold Lake, Sturgeon County, Town of Morinville and Town of Okotoks.

Thank you all,

Bill McMillan, Equus Consulting Group Inc.

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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

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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.

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.

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

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).

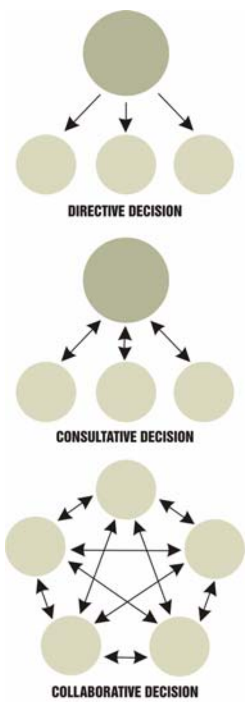


Figure 1: Types of decisions

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 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?

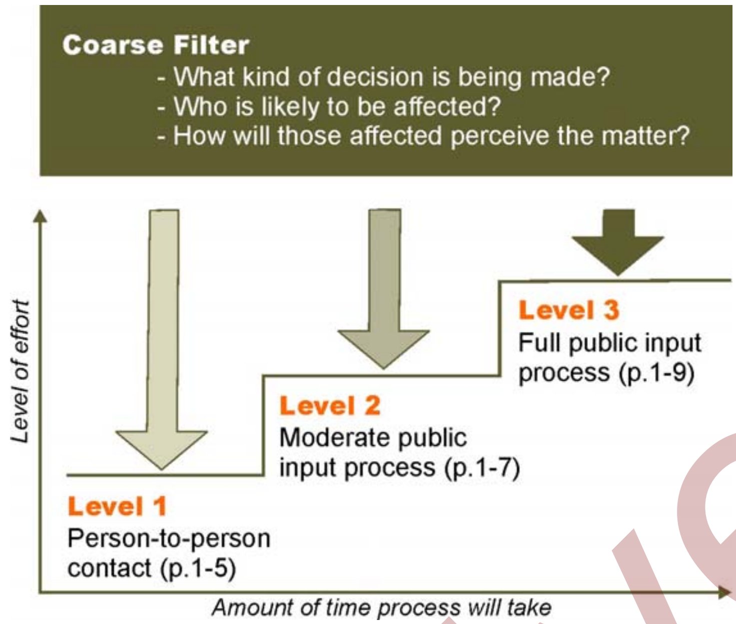


Figure 2: Initial screen to determine level of public input.

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.

In some situations, municipalities are legally required to provide public input (MGA). 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.

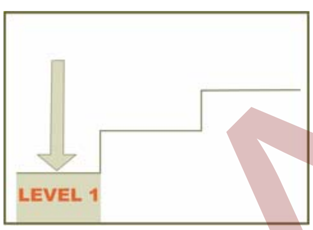
Municipalities benefit from developing a "client service" attitude that helps build trust and satisfaction from every individual encounter with a client. While many factors can affect this relationship, the following are key requirements for success at the front counter or over the telephone:

- 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.

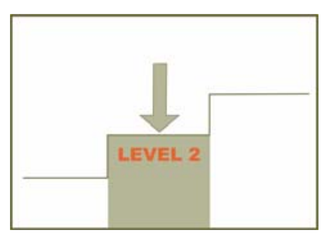
Level 2: Moderate public input process

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:

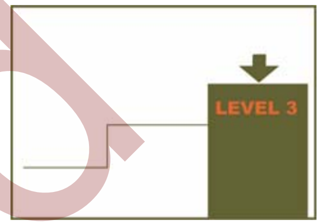
1. A municipal representative with specific responsibility for consulting with the affected public, with adequate communications support (i.e. a consultation coordinator).
2. Clear identification of the decision being made and a schedule that shows opportunities for public input. Clarify what is "on 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.

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."

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").

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.

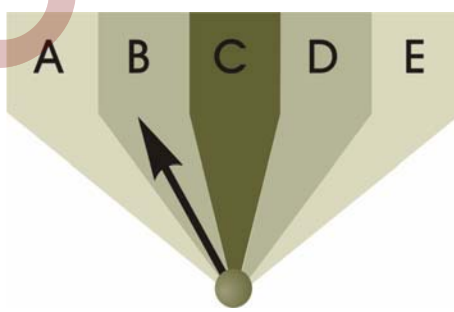


Figure 3: A decision is a choice among options.

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.

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"

Type of Meeting	Advantages	Disadvantages
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
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

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.

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?).

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.

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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 <u>why</u> 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 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, it can be found at http://www.menet.ab.ca/bins/index.asp

WORKSHEETS & ATTACHMENTS

PUBLIC INPUT TOOLKIT for Municipalities

Worksheet 1: How much public input is appropriate?

Complete the following worksheet, then select the appropriate level of public input.

1. What decision is being made? ____________________________
2. Who is likely to be affected? ____________________________
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?			
▪ have “winners and losers” (or to give anyone an unfair advantage)?			
▪ 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?”			
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
> 30	Level 3
15 - 30	Level 2
<15	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 experience and judgement are more important than the numbers, per se.

Worksheet 2: 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. 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 base 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 ethical guidelines does your municipality use to guide the gathering of public input? What will make your consultation process credible and effective?*

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 planning (or development or design)	
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 received and response to input.	
Organizing and conducting any meetings	
Organizing and coordinating any correspondence (mail or electronic)	

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, 2007
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 meetings