



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Planning Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 6, 2020
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Planning Division Consultation and Engagement Strategy in Response to COVID-19 (PED20174) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Tiffany Singh (905) 546-2424 Ext.1221
SUBMITTED BY:	Steve Robichaud Director, Planning and Chief Planner Planning and Economic Development Department
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

N/A

INFORMATION

The purpose of this Information Update is to inform City Council and the broader community on the recommencement of public consultation and engagement for Planning Division projects. This report provides an outline of what is happening with consultation and engagement on Planning Division projects, and how and when the Division will proceed with continuing consultation and engagement during this time.

Responding to Operational Constraints Affecting Community Engagement Due to Covid-19

Public consultation and engagement plays an essential role in informing, shaping, and refining the projects, policies and initiatives of the Planning Division. City Planning Staff value public input and champion meaningful public consultation and engagement. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, formal community consultation and engagement associated with statutory projects and City-led projects was suspended as a result of the closure of City facilities and restrictions on in-person gatherings.

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Recognizing that physical distancing and limitations on the number of people permitted for indoor group gatherings for organized public events will likely continue for some time, traditional in-person public engagement meetings and events that have been used to receive input from the public are not feasible.

Since the City’s State of Emergency declaration on April 17, 2020, and the uncertainty as to when the restrictions on public gatherings will be further relaxed to allow for traditional open houses, in person workshops and community meetings to occur, there are implications in delaying engagement for certain projects. Staff have analysed the Planning Division workplan to identify those:

- With statutory consultation requirements;
- Deemed as “essential” projects under Ontario Regulation 82/20 – Closure of Non-Essential Businesses; and,
- Having a level of risk with further delay associated with project timing, cost, resources, development dependencies and quality of engagement.

Using this analysis, projects were identified where proceeding with engagement is recommended. It is noted that, Planning Committee resumed on June 16th, 2020; and Committee of Adjustment resumed on June 25th, 2020. Both Committees include statutory public engagement component and have resumed using video web conferencing software to facilitate this component and lessons learned in the resumption of these Committee meetings are transferable in the development of public engagement opportunities for other initiatives.

Presently there are ten City-led Planning Division projects that have a level of risk with further delaying planned community consultation and engagements in 2020. These projects are outlined in Table 1 to this report, their anticipated date of completion, and the areas they impact across the City.

Table 1 – Planning and Economic Development Department – Projects Requiring Community Engagement			
Project Name	Anticipated Completion Date	Area Affected & Engagement Groups	Project Lead
GRIDS 2 - Growth Management Strategy and Municipal Comprehensive Review	Q3, 2021	City Wide; General Public	Heather Travis
Residential Zoning Project (Zoning By-law No. 05-200 – Low Density Zones)	Q3, 2021	City Wide; Various Stakeholders and General Public	Tim Lee

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Dundas Node Study & Urban Design Guidelines	Q4, 2020	Ward 13; General Public	Jennifer Roth
Bayfront Industrial Area Strategy (Including Urban Design Guidelines)	Q1, 2021	Wards 2, 3, and 4; Various Stakeholders and General Public	Tiffany Singh
Community Energy Plan	Q2, 2021	City Wide, Various Stakeholders	Christine Newbold
Waterdown Community Node Secondary Plan Study	Q3, 2021	Ward 15; General Public	Melanie Pham
Elfrida Growth Area Study	Q1, 2021	Wards 9 and 11; General Public	Melanie Pham
Family Friendly Housing and Review of Condominium Conversion Policies and Processes	Q1, 2021	City Wide, General Public	Melanie Pham
Pier 8, Block 16 Opportunity Study	Q4, 2020	Ward 2, General Public	Jennifer Roth, Alissa Mahood
Urban Forest Strategy	Q2, 2021	City Wide, General Public	Catherine Plosz

Community Consultation & Engagement Principles

As staff proceed with community consultation and engagement, staff strive to consult and engage with the public in a consistent and considerate manner respectful of the shared global pandemic experience. Until such time that large in-person gatherings are permitted again, the following principles are being applied to engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- No in-person engagement events or meetings;
- Project Leads will work with the local Councillor on appropriate timing, engagement methods, and notification;
- Virtual consultation or engagement events will be conducted through City supported video web conferencing tools (i.e. Cisco WebEx);
- Engagement activities may be conducted through web-based engagement and surveying platforms (ie. Engage.Hamilton.ca) and/or with universally accessible method (e.g. telephone, direct mail, and e-mail);

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- Engagement during popular vacation weeks and dates of significance should be avoided in keeping with regular engagement practices;
- Online engagement will remain open to receive input for a minimum of 3 weeks, where possible; and,
- All public online meetings will be:
 - Live streamed
 - Recorded
 - Posted to YouTube or the project webpage.

Purpose of Consultation & Engagement on City-led Planning Initiatives

Public consultation and engagement provide staff the opportunity to involve targeted stakeholder groups or the general public to better understand the range of impacts a decision, plan, or project may have. By involving the stakeholder groups and the general public, a broad range of public interest perspectives, is incorporated into the decision-making process.

Tools for Consultation & Engagement During Social/Physical Distancing

Face-to-face interactions has historically been the standard tool for engagement purposes. Due to social/physical distancing measures as a result of Covid-19, online tools for engaging with stakeholders and the general public is an alternative means to consult with the community. There are both opportunities and limitations in the use of online tools that must be taken into consideration when developing an online public consultation strategy. For example, while online consultation may increase the geographic scope of potential participants, there may be technological or economic barriers that preclude participation and an online strategy must plan for and accommodate those individuals who cannot participate. The following tools are available for staff to use to inform and engage with the public on projects.

Online Tools

Online tools for consultation refer to the use of the internet. Webpages, email and social media may be used to distribute information and provide an opportunity for feedback. Internet connectivity has enabled more people to receive information and to also provide feedback on their own schedule. Project webpages created in-house or using tools such as ArcGIS Story allow information to be shared to the broader public through a guided tour of content. There is a large degree of customization, which allows project leads to coordinate the layout online to simulate an open house.

Online options reach a broad spectrum of stakeholders, there may be access issues for marginalized communities who may not have access to computers or the internet (ie. seniors, low income, new immigrants). In addition, using online and virtual methods for engagement presents some new challenges. For example, to avoid “Zoom-Fatigue”, rather than having one 3-hour public information meeting, it may be necessary to have three 1-hour sessions spread out over multiple weeks and opportunities for 1-on-1 dialogue by email, traditional mail, or telephone conversations followed by reporting back to all participants with a consultation report that documents what we heard and a response to how the feedback was incorporated into the final outcome.

Traditional Media Release/Printed Mail

Traditional forms of media, such as printed newspapers, posters and radio commercials can reach populations that may not have access to the internet and is intended to build awareness about a project.

Similar to traditional media, printed mail can reach populations that may not have access to the internet (i.e. seniors, low income, new immigrants). Mailing lists can be used strategically to target areas of smaller geographic scale than traditional media.

Telephone

Telephone is most often used by seniors. Similar to print mail telephone lists can be created to strategically target areas of smaller geographic scale than traditional media. However, it takes time to develop phone lists and requires a number of staff, and training of staff to best execute cold calling dialogue and verbal surveying.

Billboards/Bulletins

Outdoor billboards or bulletins are a great way of communicating information to more vulnerable populations that may have no fixed address. Interactive bulletins can be an effective and interesting visual engagement activity (ie. leaving chalk for people to write down one worded response to a question on what they love about their community.) This tool is better for building awareness and communicating information, rather than comprehensive surveying or feedback. In addition, this tool may be costly to erect and difficult to monitor regularly.

It should be noted that the tools discussed for consultation purposes may also be used for advertising and outreach for online community engagement, where appropriate.

Social Media

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (specifically Instagram Stories function) allow users to create a project account to advertise and share content (PDF, images, and videos) as well as survey and poll audiences. Drawbacks include a lack of customization of content layout and monitoring of public comments received.

Surveying/Commenting/Forums/ Crowd Sourcing/Spatial Feedback

The City's new Engagement HQ platform (Engage.Hamilton.ca) allows for an enhanced online experience beyond that of a typical project webpage. Content sharing is partnered with a myriad of interactive tools like surveying, polling, forums, spatial mapping, general commenting and questions to facilitate engagement with the broader public. Furthermore, Engagement HQ has recently partnered with Konveio a platform that provides an interactive document tool that allows for overlays on large documents to facilitate understanding and receiving feedback on more complex items (ie. reports, policy documents). This tool will soon be available to the City for use on Engage.Hamilton.ca.

Virtual Presentations/Webinars

The City's preferred video conferencing platforms are Cisco Webex Events as well as YouTube. Both platforms allow for audience members to attend to watch a presentation or panel discussion live and use a chat function to ask questions. These tools are best for large audiences where organizers want minimal confusion while communicating information. Webex Events also allows for live polling within the chat function. Both tools allow for the event to be recorded and can be embedded in a webpage for access and viewing after the live event.

Virtual Working Group Meetings/Workshops

The City's preferred video conferencing platform for interactive communication is Cisco Webex Meetings and Webex Teams. These tools allow for two-way video conferencing, where every attendee or participant can engage, share content, be heard and or seen. Similar to in-person workshops or working groups, this tool is most ideal for smaller groups where conversing and sharing content is easier.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting physical distancing measures has changed how the City of Hamilton and the Planning Division conducts engagement with residents. In-

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person engagement has always been a valued and important part of the process for City-led projects.

In addition to using tools like Cisco Webex and Engage.Hamilton.ca Staff recognize that there may be barriers that prevent some residents from participating in an online engagement. To bridge this digital divide, project leads will be reachable by phone and mail to receive comments, questions, and input on projects. In addition, staff will use alternatives (mail, telephone, billboards, print media) to reach marginalized groups, where appropriate.

In summary, Planning Division community engagement efforts will proceed in a modified evolving framework, Staff will continue to consult in a consistent and well-considered manner respectful of the shared global pandemic experience and follow the principles set out in this report.

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