

Public Engagement Techniques

In response to Covid-19, required public engagement had to be moved to a virtual format, whereas in the past Public Information Centres (PICs) were one of the main tools of engaging the public and seeking feedback.

The Engage Hamilton (<https://engage.hamilton.ca/>) portal was the central platform used. It is a community engagement platform that went “live” in Summer 2020 and allowed staff to present materials and information for participants to access. Further, there are numerous components of the portal that can be used to enhance user experience and provide feedback.

One of the goals was to produce material that would educate the public and explain the importance of increasing the supply of housing by allowing secondary dwelling units city wide. Further, it included information on what Zoning By-law regulations were proposed to ensure a seamless integration of SDU’s into neighbourhoods while at the same time protecting the health, safety and environment for all residents. These materials and engagement techniques were developed in a number of formats that ranged from a quick summary guide to an in-depth Discussion Paper; it also included videos for people to listen to as well as live events where interaction with staff occurred.

Material and tools that were used during in the engagement included:

- Digital versions of the Discussion Paper, Information Brochure, and Summary Chart;
- Project Video summarizing the Secondary Dwelling Unit Project, including the proposed regulations;
- Urban and Rural Area online surveys;
- Dedicated email address;
- Question and Answer widget;
- Virtual Town Hall meetings held over two days.

This Appendix outlines some of the technical components and tools used in the Secondary Dwelling Unit project page, and a discussion on how staff were able to address matters such as accessibility.

1.0 Council Direction for Public Engagement

On September 30, 2020, Council directed staff to conduct public engagement with respect to the Secondary Dwelling Unit project in order to allow public to be informed and the ability to submit feedback, with the intent to bring a recommendation to Council by Q1 2021.

With the assistance of the Engage Hamilton public engagement staff through the City Manager’s Office, the project specific portal was created and went “live” on October 17, 2020 and remained open until December 13, 2020.

Using this new public engagement platform allowed participants to submit feedback. To assist with communication between staff and participants, a dedicated email address (ResidentialZoning@Hamilton.ca) was created prior to the project page, and has been instrumental for participants to submit comments. A summary of the comments received via other methods is contained in Appendices “K-1” to “K-5” of Report PED20093(a).

2.0 Accessibility of Online Platforms

Not everyone is able to access the Engage Hamilton website (reasons include: access to technologies (such as a computer, tablet, or smart phone), the lack of knowledge on how the technology could be used or are not comfortable with using the technology, or individuals who may have impairments such as losses in visual or audio abilities).

Advertisements to the Engage Hamilton Portal was conducted through several means such as through e-blasts, the Hamilton Spectator, social media platforms (Twitter), YouTube video posts, banners on the City’s website, and newsletters. Therefore there were many avenues that an individual could have been informed of the public engagement process.

Staff endeavor to address as many accessibility matters as possible and have done so through the following additional approaches:

- Videos included closed captioning to ensure that the audio impaired were able to watch the video while also reading the information. Conversely, having video content allows the visually impaired to access content without the need to read material. Contents in the video contains graphics with minimal text to ensure the information is easy to understand; and,
- Segments of the population may still prefer printed material rather than view content on the screen. Hard copies of the materials were made available for distribution.

3.0 Engage Hamilton Portal Contents and Outcomes

3.1 Discussion Paper, Brochure, and Summary Chart

All documents such as the Discussion Paper, Brochure, and Summary Chart were presented to Council in October 2020 and have been made available through the Engage Hamilton project page in a pdf format. These documents can also be downloaded for reading offline. Based on the analytics, these documents were downloaded a total of 552 times. The documents will remain on-line for the duration of the Residential Zone Project as archived material so anyone can access the documents even after the project’s conclusion.

3.2 Video Presentation of the Secondary Dwelling Units

An important component of a traditional Public Information Centre are panel displays, which present information through a series of boards. Panel displays also accompanied the staff presentation. However, as public engagement has been moved to an online format, new tools were used to present the information. A video presentation was prepared by staff which included graphics and minimal text to provide a visual presentation. As noted in the accessibility section below, closed captioning was embedded in the video to ensure those with audio impairment could follow along. Through YouTube, the video was viewed about 100 times.

3.3 Urban and Rural Area Online Survey

One feedback tool was the use of Urban Area and Rural Area surveys. A survey was created for each area due to questions specific to either areas of the City. Survey results can be found in Appendix “L-1” to Report PED20091(a) for the Urban Area Survey and Appendix “L-2” to Report PED20091(a) for the Rural Area Survey.

3.4 Question and Answer Widget

One of the features of the Engage Hamilton portal is to allow participants to ask staff questions pertaining to the project. This widget would be similar to attendees to the Public Information Centres asking questions directly to staff. Throughout the public engagement period, a total of seven questions were submitted to staff. The widget remains archived and is available for viewing.

3.5 Virtual town Halls

One component of the public engagement process is a staff presentation which outlines the scope of the project, proposed regulations, and next steps. Two Town Hall-style online meetings were conducted via WebEx Events:

- November 12, 2020 7:00pm – 8:30pm
- November 16, 2020 1:00pm – 2:30pm

The meetings were hosted with the assistance of an independent facilitator and included the opportunity for participants to submit feedback and ask questions. Participants were required to register for the event and an opportunity to ask questions ahead of time. The 1.5 hour meeting consisted of a 30-minute staff presentation summarizing the project and present information on the proposed regulations. The remainder of the meeting was a discussion period where attendees provided feedback and ask questions to staff. A total of 30 attendees attended for each of the meeting. One of the virtual town hall meetings was uploaded to the portal if someone was not able to attend. A feedback report of the virtual town halls by the facilitator is available in the Engage Hamilton Project page (<https://engage.hamilton.ca/>). Comments received

during the Town Hall meetings are available in Appendices “K-1” to “K-5” to Report PED20093(a).

3.6 Stakeholder Meetings – Industry Leaders, Neighbourhood Association, and Special Interest Groups.

In addition to the two Town Hall meetings, two facilitator-led stakeholder meetings were held in the afternoon and evening of November 9, 2020. The afternoon meeting was held for the Industry Leaders and were represented by architects, planners, the West End Home Builders Association where 12 attended. The evening meeting was specific to the Neighbourhood Associations and were represented by nine associations and Environment Hamilton. For each of the meetings, a staff presentation provided a general overview of the project and information on the proposed regulations, followed by a Question and Answer Session. Comments received during the meetings are available in Appendices “K1” to “K-5” to Report PED20093(a).

Notifications for both meetings included a “save the date” eblast to each of the industry leaders and the Neighbourhood Association main contact person, both sent immediately following the commencement of the public engagement on the Engage Hamilton portal two weeks before the stakeholder meetings, followed by additional reminder emails to those people who did not RSVP or declined the invitation. Invitations were sent to 12 industry leaders and 50 Neighbourhood Associations listed. Invitees who were not able to attend the stakeholder meetings could also attend the November 12 and 16, 2020 Town Hall meetings and staff were available for off-line discussions with stakeholders as required.

Staff presented to the Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee on November 27, 2020. The minutes of this meeting was contained in the February 2, 2021 Planning Committee agenda.

Comments received during the meetings are available in Appendices “K-1” to “K-5” to Report PED20093(a).

The facilitator’s report of the Townhall and Stakeholder meetings is available on the portal.