CITY OF HAMILTON

Reimagining Public Participation Report

June 10, 2022

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I. INTRODUCTION

"The success of any engagement is on the relationships that you build."

Trust and confidence in government is critical for a well-functioning democracy.

But it is challenging to earn that trust and confidence if there is a divide between the governing and the governed. Public consultations and engagements can help bridge that divide, but when that process is flawed – or seen to be flawed – that divide must be bridged.

This effort is part of the City's Reimagining Public Participation project, a snapshot of the thoughts and feelings of key community groups, City Councillors and senior city staff on the public consultation and engagement process in Hamilton.

Across the spectrum of our research, it was accepted at public consultation and engagement in the City of Hamilton is not perfect. To help illustrate the direct feedback we had received, direct participant comments have been quoted throughout the document.

At a high level, there is a lack of consistency in the way an engagement exercise is executed, whether department by department or ward to ward. Sometimes a consultation is too insular, seeking feedback from a single ward on an issue that may have a pan-Hamilton interest. As was told to us, sometimes, there is "almost too much discretion."

There are challenges with the so-called "feedback loop". Residents are providing input, but then feel cut out of the process, unaware of their influence – or lack thereof – on the outcome.

For certain, public engagement in Hamilton is not reaching a broad enough spectrum of residents to be truly representative of the city.

The goal here is when you walk into a consultation you see the City of Hamilton reflected in its occupants.

But in most consultations conducted by the city, that isn't happening. If the City wants to hit its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion priorities, engaging with equity-seeking groups has to be a top priority and this needs to be reflective of the budgetary process.

We heard an acknowledgement from councillors, senior City staff and community groups that barriers stand in the way of certain segments of the community being truly represented in public engagement with the City.

Several factors – both systemic and practical – can create these barriers. A few examples:

- A lack of daycare that prevents a single mom from attending an event.

- The fears in communities that have been harassed their entire lives — such as LGBTQ+ or racialized groups — that they will be ridiculed, disrespected and, ultimately, ignored.

- A venue that isn't accessible to those with physical disabilities or is not close to a public transit line preventing those who do not drive from attending.

And all of these challenges and barriers existed before a pandemic that forced almost all of our interactions to a virtual platform, shutting out some rural residents, seniors and those facing socio-economic challenges from participating online.

Emerging from the pandemic is the ideal time to pause, take a step back and reconsider how Hamilton approaches public engagement.

The reality is that people want to be engaged in the decision making of their government — and engagement can't be limited to only the people who have the resources, whether that be the time or capacity, to do so.

"The worst thing that can happen to a city is apathy. There is no apathy in Hamilton. Just a lot of differing opinions on where we should go and how we should get there."

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project is to support the City's broader Reimagining Public Participation initiative with a series of one-on-one interviews to gather qualitative data on the City's public consultation process.

"We have to create an environment where there can be an honest exchange of information and opinions without offence being taken and people backing into corners."

METHODOLOGY

To execute this project, we completed a series of interviews with:

- 7 City Councillors, plus the Mayor;
- 8 members of the City of Hamilton Senior Leadership team; and
- 18 community stakeholder organizations.

The information collected in those interviews was collated, analyzed and summarized in this report.

A script of the questions used with each group consulted is included in Appendix A.

A summary of the feedback we received is included in Appendix B.

"As a City, if we are going to reimagine this, we can't do it to the lowest common denominator. We have to strive to be overachievers."

II. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

"What worries me about Public Consultation is it leads individuals to believe that whatever they say will become part of public policy."

Put simply, there is no consensus on what it is like to engage with the City of Hamilton.

Feedback ranged from pleasant to frustrated but there was no real anger encountered. It was noted repeatedly that the City's engagement process lacks consistency. From department to department or ward to ward, there is an inconsistent amalgamation of methodologies, approaches and even temperament in terms of how defensive or amenable the City is to receiving input.

For the most part, community groups and stakeholders reported that they were satisfied that the City was trying to engage, but their thoughts on the process and how effective it is were as varied as the different methods the City uses to consult with residents.

The Our Future Hamilton engagement was repeatedly mentioned as a model engagement process that people felt was effective and – perhaps more importantly – made people feel like they were being heard. In contrast to what we heard about the City's public engagement process as a whole, some of the biggest take aways from Our Future Hamilton were:

- People felt it was effective.
- Made people feel like they were being heard.
- Events were open to everyone.
- There was follow up and action on what was to come of the process.
- Included notes and quotes from the participants.
- Was interactive, and efficient way of collecting information from large number of stakeholders.
- Really well represented in terms of community stakeholders.

The COVID pandemic was also cited as an impetus for changing the way the city engages and the limitations it imposed on engagement.

Outside of Our Future Hamilton, respondents noted that the City wasn't always clear on what it wanted or needed from the effort. In addition, participants commented on a perceived lack of follow-up and next steps being communicated to those who engaged.

The impact of social media on public engagements was noted as a negative, for two main reasons.

1. It has a tendency to foment hostility, which can taint the relationship between those doing the consulting and those who are being consulted. Amongst the community stakeholders, there was a clear sentiment that if an individual or group has been critical of the City in the past, their feedback will not be taken into serious consideration.

2. It is an under-utilized tool for reaching a broader spectrum of residents and promoting City engagement events and efforts. Many felt that the City should be more active on more channels to expand its scope.

"The biggest problem with social media is it becomes a replacement for engagement. Often people will adopt a position on an issue, maybe go so far as submitting a letter or a comment, based on having read a 200-character tweet. There needs to be a push back against that kind of Twitter-framing, and people adopting positions or reacting based on how Twitter has framed something. It can be problematic."

It was also clear from the community groups — and also from some Councillors — that engagement should not be limited to specific issues.

There is not a magic solution that will forge a connection between the City and under-represented communities or equity-seeking groups. But those connections can be built with time and effort, spending time in their neighbourhoods and communities and truly engaging them.

The City should engage at the community level as a relationship-building exercise which will also build a foundation on which future consultations can be executed.

Throughout our engagement, several different kinds of consultations were highlighted: statutory, information sharing, relationship oriented, ward issue-focused, city planning and reports.

WHAT IS CONSULTATION?

"From a public perception perspective, feedback perspective, accountability perspective, news perspective, public engagement is a huge component of what a municipal government does as a whole."

Subjects in each of the three interviewed groups were asked for their definition of public consultation. There was clear consensus that consultations are a key tool for building trust and confidence between the City and its residents.

Almost without exception, the responses we received can be sorted into three categories.

1. TO INFORM

The City has an obligation to educate its citizens.

It is inherent in the function of a City Council to ensure that people living in its jurisdiction are aware — or at the very least have the avenues to be made aware — of the changes that are being proposed for their community, whether it is a new structure for a playground, the realignment of an intersection or the re-shaping of the city boundaries.

According to some City Councillors, this education piece needs improvement but is a vital element to ensuring the work of the City is meeting the needs of the residents.

2. TO LISTEN

Collecting thoughts and opinions from the community on a policy proposal or public project is critically important. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process is part of an open and transparent government and helps residents build a sense of place in their community.

While public feedback is important, staff recommendations are the advice of subject matter experts in a particular field. Good public policy finds the intersection of the two.

This requires Councillors to perform a delicate balancing act.

Sometimes, the public's thoughts on a particular matter simply cannot be ignored, particularly if it can be demonstrated that it is the collective thought of a truly representative sample of the city's residents. On the other hand, good public policy that will help the city advance is not always publicly popular.

It is the challenge of Council to identify those instances and vote accordingly.

3. TO FOLLOW UP

Consultation is more than just the process of getting input. There are questions about how that input is going to be used, and ultimately affect the results of the consultation.

This "feedback loop" was identified as an area that the City can improve upon.

Broadly, those interviewed felt that input provided to the City ends up in a void and has no impact on recommendations or decisions.

While most public engagements are captured in staff reports – perhaps as an executive summary or an appendix – how accessible these staff reports are to the public remains in question. They may be made available online as part of a council agenda package, but uncertainty remains first about how many residents are aware of that, and second how many residents can navigate through the City's website to locate the agenda package, then the relevant report and then the summary of the consultation within that report.

However, the public also bears an element of responsibility. While community stakeholders expressed the sentiment that not enough is done to make residents feel like they have been heard, the City feels that they face a challenge in that not all the feedback they get is feasible. Participation in a public consultation does not mean one's ideas will become public policy or impact a design.

"The City has been better at consultations – well organized and well led, teasing out voices – but the perception is still very true, and deservedly so, that the input goes into some report that they will never see or it will be gathering dust."

RISKS OF ENGAGEMENT

As vital as public engagement is for the functioning of a healthy democracy, it does carry an element of risk.

Making policy recommendations based on an engagement process that does not reach a representative sample of city residents may result in policy that is skewed towards certain groups over others.

There is also the risk of believing that louder voices share the opinion of the city-at-large or that a stakeholder group representing a specific community speaks for that entire community when that is not necessarily the case. It is important to remember that no community of people is homogenous, and every individual has different experiences.

"Is a decision overly influenced by those who show up? And those who show up are rarely representative of the city. Does NIMBYism overly influence decision making? There could be 30 people in a room who are loud, angry, vocal and opinionated. Do we do what they want knowing there are 500,000 other residents whose views are not being expressed at that time?"

STARTING THE PROCESS

There is no single solution to reimagining public consultation in the City of Hamilton, and from the perspective of the community stakeholders, there is a lot of work that must be done.

As a starting point, it is helpful to acknowledge where those we surveyed feel the City can improve its engagement process.

A perception exists that Councillors often don't want to hear what others have to say.

The message is listened to, but it isn't actually heard. This is particularly true if the view expressed by a stakeholder doesn't align with the views of Council.

Some expressed fear in talking directly to Council because of an expectation that they will be berated for their point of view or opinion, and that some concerns will be met with outright hostility. It is believed that if an individual or group has been critical of the city in the past, their feedback will not be taken into serious consideration. Some respondents shared direct examples of witnessing such behaviour.

A consultation doesn't have to be about a specific policy proposal or project.

It was widely cited that building a broad community for consultation starts with building relationships with the target communities that are under-represented in consultations.

One recommendation was submitted that the City spend time in the neighbourhoods and get to know the residents. They should attend community events without an agenda outside of building trust and connections, and engage at the community level as a relationship-building exercise that will build a foundation upon which future consultations can be executed.

Too often, a consultation is designed to meet the bare minimum statutory requirements.

Some previous consultation events were perceived to be put together just to check off a box that the public was consulted; they were poorly advertised (and hence, sparsely attended), had little useful information and no feedback to the folks who participated.

The City can better utilize the tools available.

Specifically, this refers to the double-edged sword that is social media. Many felt it is under-utilized as a promotional tool, and that the City is not active on certain platforms that speak to different pockets of the community, such as Facebook where many communities have group pages or TikTok where young people are engaged.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents felt that the City needs to embrace multi-modal forms of engagement, using a variety of tools in each outreach effort to capture a broad swath of city residents. Some of the tools that could be used for this include:

- In-person events
- Virtual meetings
- Focus groups
- Surveys – online, mailed, telephone

- Public Information Centres
- Town halls
- Telephone town halls
- Presence at community events

EXPECTATION SETTING

"We have to set expectations with council about a standardization of what public engagement should look like so there is less ability for griping or perceived expertise from council about how engagement occurs."

All of the groups interviewed felt that the biggest problem with the City's consultation process is a lack of consistency.

Respondents commonly felt that this should start with a Charter of Engagement, a Council-approved policy that establishes a general philosophy on the approach towards an engagement exercise — that includes direction on engaging with groups that are historically under-represented in the engagement process — with suggested tools, tactics and processes to solicit the best possible feedback.

This framework will also need to have the flexibility to be tailored to the specifics of a certain issue or engagement topic.

Based on the feedback we collected, a Charter of Engagement should be built on six key principles:

PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL ENGAGMENT

1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

One of the first questions that should always be asked in a consultation outreach is: *Who isn't in the room?*

There must be a commitment to hear from as many voices as possible. Each consultation project should have a clear idea of the people, groups, communities, neighbourhoods and stakeholders that have an interest in that particular matter and a clear plan for how those target audiences will be reached.

When all groups that should be involved have been invited to participate, review the list again to ensure that *all* groups impacted are being engaged.

The goal is to ensure that the group consulted is truly representative of the complexity of the city.

2. Scalability

While guiding principles are needed, so too is a recognition that not all consultations are the same. The ability to shift approaches and tactics based on the size and scope of the project is critical to success.

In each case, there should be multi-modal methods of engagement to help expand the reach. Much like in any research project, the more methods deployed in collecting the data, the more robust your findings will be.

3. Transparency

The City must be clear about why it is conducting the consultation, (statutory requirement, a ward issue, community building, a City bylaw), the information it collects and how it will be used.

A summary of the findings and the recommendations that come from it should be publicly available in accessible formats and easily found and referenced.

4. Reporting

This has two key parts.

First, the information received from residents must be reported to City Council in a clear and concise – yet still informative – format.

But it is also important that a consultation close the "feedback loop" and re-engage with those consulted so that they are aware of how their input was assessed and used.

5. Capacity

The staff resources required to do a consultation have to be a key piece of the process, ensuring they have the right tools at their disposal and the training and skill sets to do what is asked and expected of them. This may require consideration of public engagement specialists who are trained in matters such as data science and survey design.

6. Clarity

There is a need to distinguish between the different kinds of consultation or engagement; those that are mandated under statute versus those that are not. The City should also be clear about the purpose of consultation, the nature of the issue at hand and what response the City is looking to elicit from residents.

BUILDING TRUST FLOWCHART

People feel disenfranchised, but that can be addressed with a good process. Respondents recommended that the City develop a flow chart as part of the Charter of Engagement to guide all the steps and considerations that should be top of mind when planning and executing a public engagement.

To be built on the foundation of the six principles above, the flow chart should address the "Five Ws and How" of the consultation:

STEP 1 — WHAT?

First and foremost, what is the consultation about? Residents want and need to know the issue at hand.

STEP 2 — WHY?

Residents must understand the purpose and objectives of the consultation. In order to do this, the City needs to consider the following elements

- Define the nature of the consultation;
- Identify the information it requires from residents;
  - Background information needed for residents to participate
  - What metrics and information will the City need to collect
- How the information collected will be used; and
- How the City will report back to those who were consulted.

STEP 3 – WHO?

Who the City consults on any given issue is vitally important. The City has a responsibility to ensure that all of the groups potentially affected by the matter at hand are involved.

This is especially true of under-represented and equity-seeking groups who are not typically involved in a public engagement. At the outset, it should be asked who isn't in the room, and why aren't they there?

When considering what voices the City needs to hear from to make for a successful consultation, staff should consider;

- Is it a neighbourhood matter, ward issue or pan-city concern?

- Which stakeholder groups have an interest? Among the groups to consider:

  - Ethnic communities
  - Indigenous communities

  - Racialized communities
  - LGBTQ+

  - Newcomers / Immigrants
  - Disabled Community

  - Youth
  - Renters / Tenants

  - Homeowners
  - Business Owners

  - Developers
  - Rural residents

  - Transit Users
  - Cyclists

  - Sport facility users
  - Park users

  - Low-income households
  - Homeless

  - Environmentalists / Conservationists
  - English-as-a-second language residents

- How do we best engage our target groups?

STEP 4 — WHERE?

A commonly-heard sentiment was that the most effective consultations are staged where the people are.

In determining a venue, accessibility questions should be among the first considered:

- Is the venue on or close to a transit line?

- Can the venue accommodate the disabled community?

- Are translation services needed / available?

- Is sign language required?

- Will food be provided?

- Is child care available?

- Are any documents or presentation materials AODA compliant?

STEP 5 — WHEN?

When planning a consultation, consideration needs to be given to the timing of both the physical engagements and the necessary supporting steps:

- Is the engagement taking place at a reasonable time that is accessible to the broadest audience?

- Can there be multiple events or opportunities to engage to ensure that it captures the most people?

- Has sufficient notice been given to those engaging with the organization, promotion and participation in a consultation?

- Is there sufficient time for decision makers to weigh the considerations of the engagement in their deliberations?

STEP 6 — HOW?

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is more desire to ensure that consultations are conducted across multiple platforms. While many feel that the forced move to virtual engagements during the pandemic expanded the City's reach, there is also acknowledgement that not everybody in the city has access to the Internet, such as seniors, rural residents and residents in a lower socio-economic bracket.

A multi-modal approach to engagement was mentioned by many of our interview subjects as a preferred way to reach target communities. Some potential engagement methods include:

- In-person events.

- Virtual meetings.

- Town Hall meetings.

- City booth / presence at events around the community.

- Social media outreach.

- Polling.

- City call centre as a first point of contact.

- Telephone town halls.

- Door knockers.

- Mailers.

- Public Information Centres.

How the consultation is conducted also includes promoting the event, particularly targeting under-represented communities.

III. DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Without exception, across all three groups interviewed, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion was cited as the biggest concern for the City when it comes to consultations.

It wasn't felt that this is a result of malice, but it is very much a systemic problem. No concerns were raised about the City's attempts to make consultation outreach accessible to as many people as possible, but it was also clearly noted that providing opportunity to engage is not the same as an equitable outcome and representative engagement.

The City has a stated goal to create an atmosphere of inclusivity for everyone, but has more work to do to achieve that objective according to respondents; and that work starts at City Hall. The lack of diversity in City departments and on City Council tends to reflect the groups and individuals who are most likely to participate in consultations.

It was noted that Hamilton has never had a female mayor and it has never had a non-white mayor.

To truly begin breaking down the systemic barriers that are limiting representative consultation, every division of the City should prioritize DEI, a commitment that will require a comprehensive review of hiring and promotion practices.

- The only way the City will hear from DEI groups is to ensure it is to include them before a formal consultation process begins and work with them to co-design an effective and accessible engagement.
    - A monitoring committee was proposed — composed of DEI groups, LGBTQ+, black community, Jewish; folks who need to know their voices can be heard – that can provide guidance and direction to ensure a broader variety of people are coming to the table.
- The City can and should be much more thorough in engaging equity-seeking communities.
    - Prioritize the needs of these communities and address the systemic inequities that exist.
- Language is very much a barrier that needs to be overcome.

WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?

"The experience of a black disabled woman with cerebral palsy in a wheelchair is vastly different from someone who doesn't experience life in that way."

"I keep thinking about what it would be like to go present to council. It's an intimidating, structured environment that only gives you five minutes to make your point. That could be hard because of language barriers, or it doesn't flow with your communication style culturally. When consultation is shoved into the way council operates, there is an implicit bias. That is why certain voices are over-represented. They know how to talk and influence in this structure."

Accessibility is a concept that can be viewed through too narrow a lens. Traditionally, people have talked about accessibility in terms of accommodating the needs of people with physical disabilities, such as having closed captioning available for the visually impaired or wheelchair ramps for people with mobility

issues. These measures are certainly important and should always be factored in when conducting public consultation.

But accessibility as a concept has been broadened to go beyond ensuring that those with physical limitations are able to participate and is now viewed as taking steps to ensure that people feel both welcome and encouraged to participate, regardless of their individual circumstances.

A few examples to consider:

- A planning meeting should have information presented in plain language terms wherever possible. Overly technical or bureaucratic language can be difficult for community members to understand and hinder their participation.

- If the City were to hold public consultations on police services, having them at Police Headquarters could create anxiety for people from communities who traditionally have a tense relationship with the police, making them less likely to participate.

WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion is not only about ensuring that those from marginalised communities have received an invitation to participate in the public engagement process, but that they are also made to feel that their presence and input is valued and appreciated.

This means working with the principles of both co-design and collaboration to ensure that their voices and recommendations are being structured into the engagement process from the ground up. If a blind spot is not addressed in the initial creation of a public consultation, the barrier will continue to exist even if that community group is invited to participate.

When speaking of inclusion there are a number of key constituencies to consider:

- Indigenous groups have the most reasons to be skeptical of government efforts. Historically, through all levels of government, they have been taken advantage of in previous consultations so that the "Consulted with Indigenous Communities" box could be checked.

- Racialized communities and newcomers also require specific considerations, particularly if they are coming here from a country where there was a lack of trust in government or an oppressive regime. They also could be facing language and cultural barriers and could be uncomfortable or unfamiliar with public transit to get around the city.

- Families facing socio-economic barriers and generational poverty are less likely to engage with government. Across many equity-seeking groups, individuals facing socio-economic hardships are often stuck in a mode of survival that generally leads to a lower rate of electoral and community participation. These groups are some of the most important voices that our government needs to hear from as we look to strengthen programs and policies.

- The representation of younger people and children is also an important missing factor, but how to entice them is an ongoing challenge. An often-overlooked segment of the population in the context of governmental engagement, youth rely on and participate in many programs and services that are offered by the City. Having their voices at the table is important when considering fostering long-term citizen engagement.

- Special consideration should also be placed on increasing the representation of tenants as opposed to homeowners. Tenants in the City often have less interaction with the City. A concerted effort is needed to ensure that the voice of tenants is included in consultations.

- The disabled community and those with accessibility requirements have historically been left out of the engagement process due to lack of accommodations. With increased technology and the City moving towards AODA compliance, work needs to be done to bridge this gap.

- The homeless – who have become political pawns in a process that very much speaks to middle-class, single-family homeowners – are uncomfortable with what they are seeing on the Escarpment and in some parks.

- Rural residents face serious challenges due to the limited Internet available in rural areas and to those who are socio-economically challenged. This is exacerbated by the geographic barriers that exist in the City when it comes to in-person engagements. Members of our community who live in the rural and remote neighbourhoods of our city will have additional challenges to participating in events at City Hall and other "centralized" locations.

OVER/UNDER-REPRESENTATION

In the most general terms, the groups or individuals who are most likely to engage with the City are organized, informed and relatively sophisticated, such as the Chamber of Commerce, a development company or, from the other side of the table, Environment Hamilton. These groups are experienced, have the capacity to conduct research and often come to the table with an understanding of how to affect public policy decisions and political discourse.

If a sketch were to be sketched of the typical person engaging with the City, they would be over 40 years old, educated, an affluent homeowner and white. This caricature is not to suggest that these voices are unimportant or any less important than the rest of the community, but rather a way to identify the perception of who is currently at the table.

Another set of groups that is often represented at the vast majority of community engagements is community and advocacy organizations. While these organizations bring an immense value to the public discourse, it needs to be acknowledged that these groups do not directly represent the holistic voices of the community they purport to represent. As mentioned, this is not to suggest these voices are less important, but the city needs to recognize that more work needs to be done to properly consult with equity-seeking groups in Hamilton and not to conflate consulting community organizations with consulting the broader community.

In order to address this, we need to identify the barriers to participation and look at ways to facilitate more robust engagement. This is looked at in depth in future sections.

"The political process historically and will always over-represent the views of the affluent, educated, engaged homeowners and business owners; the folks who have access to power. If you want to re-balance that scale, you have to be intentional about drawing out the voices of people who have not been able to advocate for themselves."

HOW TO FIX THIS

"If you want to talk about parks, engage with people in parks, the people who use the parks. Don't do two sessions in a public library and call it a day."

Consistently through the interview process, two central themes and recommendations were raised in the context of increasing representation of equity-seeking groups in the municipal public engagement process. These recommendations should be seen as two equal elements.

As the city begins establishing a new public consultation process, effort should be made to work with third-party community group and service organizations that represent the populations that the city is trying to reach and improve engagement with. By including these organizations into the creation of the process, staff will be equipped to better understand the tools, methods and considerations that should be reflected in the overall engagement to address systemic barriers. If these organizations are not involved from the outset, this could lead to systemic barriers being built into the consultation process which will inevitably lead to less participation.

The other fundamental aspect of increasing representation of equity-seeking groups is to ensure that the city is hosting consultations in the physical communities of the populations that they are trying to reach. Systemic barriers and power imbalances between government and marginalized communities can lead to lower levels of engagement if these communities do not feel welcome or are uncomfortable participating at venues like City Hall or municipal buildings. It is important to ensure that the conversations taking place are physically taking place in a related location that makes it accessible to those impacted stakeholders.

"You have to give priority to listening to those whose voices can be neglected. That's very important. You can always hear the strong voices. You have to put a high priority on those whose voices aren't normally heard."

BARRIERS (INCLUSION)

"Councillors often comment that we are always hearing from the same people. That argument is presented as a means to dissuade the rest of Council from hearing or considering the concerns of these people, rather than Council looking in the mirror and asking, "why are we only hearing from the same people? Could it be because the process is broken?" That's the broader issue here. We're hearing from the same groups all the time because we have not gone out and engaged others in the broader community. Naturally, we are going to hear from the same people all the time."

Barriers to inclusion take many different forms. Overall, the comments received were defined by three main categories: physical, systemic and cultural. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive, but reflective of the information and feedback heard during this process.

Each one of these barriers can lead to lack of engagement and participation with the city. It is important to recognize that these barriers do not work in silos; they are often compounded, especially when looking at increasing the participation of equity-seeking groups.

PHYSICAL

Physical barriers are the most common barrier that comes to mind when individuals think about lack of participation. While progress has been made to ensure that venues and consultations are physically accessible, more work needs to be done to ensure this is balanced across all groups.

As the city works to build more inclusive and accessible public engagements, the following physical accommodations should be considered at every step.

- Physical accessibility of the location for those who use assistive mobility devices.

- American Sign Language interpreters and having closed captioning available.

- Braille and other devices and tools for individuals with sight loss.

- Lighting, room setup and accommodations for those with physical disabilities.

- Time of day to ensure a broad range of participants.

- Geographic location of the event, for those with transportation considerations.

- Hybrid and multi-modal engagement methods:

  o In-person

  o Virtual

  o Focus Groups

  o Surveys – online, mailed, telephone

  o Event pop-ups

  o Public Information Centres

  o Town Halls

  o Telephone town halls

  o Telephone surveys

SYSTEMIC

"The City and the people who work at the City have to reflect the community. The fact that they don't is not an accident. There are systems in place that value the same old, same old. Until we start breaking that apart, the City won't truly represent the city."

Systemic and organisational barriers are manifested through city procedures, policies and practices. These institutional barriers can lead to low levels of engagement and mistrust within equity-seeking and marginalized groups. Addressing these barriers is a critical component of both increasing representation and building trust in the City's engagement process.

The community's comments reflect a central theme that while the City is likely not acting in a malicious attempt to uphold these barriers, more needs to be done to recognize the blind spots of the City. It is a fair assessment that everyone has blind spots that are a result of their lived experience, socio-economic status and identity. When we speak of the City The only way to remedy these blind spots is to increase the representation of equity-seeking and marginalized groups within the establishment.

"We should see gender and racial diversity on Council and in the mayor's office. We have to have a discussion about changing the systems; Councillors need to understand that so that they can lead the charge."

In the absence of the City not holistically reflecting the diversity of the City of Hamilton, decision makers and City staff will need to recognize that the only way to build policies and engagement tactics that will be fully inclusive is to include these communities in the co-designing of the engagements themselves.

CULTURAL

The City of Hamilton is filled with a wide breadth of cultural diversity. Despite this, the City and City Council do not reflect this. The diversity of the City staff and elected officials is equally important for

eliminating systematic barriers as it to addressing the cultural barriers that can lead to a lack of participation.

Understanding these barriers requires individuals with lived experience to be at the table to identify the tools and methods that the City can use to build trust and higher levels of engagement. This is particularly important for the Indigenous community and newcomers to the country or city who could have experienced negative interactions with government and law enforcement officials in the past.

A particular example that was shared focused on the inherent lack of trust some refugee communities could have with government based on their experiences of fleeing an oppressive regime before immigrating to Canada. If we do not have these voices at the table helping to design engagement tactics, we can not be surprised when those groups do not participate.

Lastly, ensuring that language accommodations can be made available and are widely promoted would assist the city in building those relationships with under-represented communities and those in our community in which English is not their first language.

"In some communities, it will take a lot of time to build trust. You have to do a lot of getting to know a community before you get to the questions you want, and then you have to show some reciprocity in return. Don't just show up when you want something. Show up and be there for no reason at all."

"There is a lot of value in the voice of lived experience. Those are the people who have the expertise in those areas. You can't talk about homelessness unless you talk to people who are experiencing that in their lives. We should respect their testimony as much as we do that from 'experts.'"

IV. TRUST & CONFIDENCE IN CITY GOVERNMENT

"There are folks out there who are incredibly cynical and portray Councillors as conniving. But we create the environment for that type of conspiracy to flourish by not being more engaged with the public, and representing that engagement."

In the 2016 ten-year strategic plan, the City of Hamilton identified Trust and Confidence in City Government as one of Council's priorities. This goal includes promoting an open approach to government and ensuing that public information is readily available and accessible.

The City committed to strengthening its ability to consistently undertake coordinated, transparent and inclusive engagement practices rooted in an evidence-based approach. The desired outcome is to enable residents, business owners and community stakeholders to be more involved in the decision-making process and find value in the experience of partnering and investing in City programs.

Meeting this objective is a critical step in delivering effective, efficient and meaningful public consultations. Before the public can have faith in the public consultation process, there needs to be faith in the City's staff and the elected officials behind the process.

From a demographics perspective, it is patently clear that the current City Council does not reflect the broader diversity of the city's population. While there is approximately an equal number of men and women serving on council, there is only one person of colour.

The City of course cannot directly affect who is elected to council. Through hiring and management decisions, the City can demonstrate an awareness of the fact that residents want to see City officials that are reflective of the community as a whole.

Ensuring that public consultations involve City staff from a variety of lived experiences and communities creates a more accessible atmosphere for participants and will continue to build the positive relationships and trust in the process required for meaningful outcomes.

INTERACTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

"Many residents have been increasingly discouraged for fear they would be berated by a Council member for something they believe is a real concern."

An important consideration that was brought up across all interviewees was the need to foster a more hospitable environment for the general public to engage with the City and City Council. While the City is doing important work to increase participation in public engagement and consultations, there are extenuating factors that can lead to reduced levels of engagement.

At its core, there is a stated need for increased decorum and the creation of a more hospitable environment for delegates and community members to come forward to express their views. It should not be lost on the City and the decision makers leading this important work that any negative interactions with the general public during these processes will inevitably lead to roadblocks to success.

HOW IS THE CITY DOING?

"It is quite literally community engagement theatre. It is a process of 'check boxing' where the city comes to community engagement events with a pre-canned template to present to residents and take input, compile it into report somewhere and promptly ignore it."

"In general, Hamilton does a very good job of trying to listen and engage with people. Nothing is perfect, but based on my previous experience it is fairly solid."

There is a definite feeling that the City's approach to public consultations is haphazard and disjointed. This holds true at the Councillor level, where ward consultations vary widely across the city depending on the ward (and, thus, which Councillor is hosting the event).

Several Councillors raised concerns about consultations meeting the bare minimum statutory requirements, which is limiting awareness about the event and subsequently the participation of residents potentially impacted by the proposal in question. For example, information about an issue impacting the urban boundary may go out to houses within the mandated 120 metres, but if that urban boundary is in a rural area, there may be no homes to notify. This poses a particular problem when the impacts of urban boundary expansion have an impact on the entire city through changes in density and intensification.

On the opposite side of this, it is felt the City does consultations well when the process had asked for written feedback within a 30-day window. Mailed surveys were also mentioned to be effective, as was evidenced by the urban boundary expansion issue.

Complaints from residents can be loosely categorized into two groups:

1. Why didn't I know about this consultation?
2. My feedback was ignored.

WHY DIDN'T I KNOW ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION?

"If the City can track me down to mail me several reminders for every parking ticket, surely they can put a similar effort into notifying me about a public engagement opportunity"

The lack of awareness and accessibility of public consultation notices was a consistent theme throughout the interviews. This has been attributed to either short notification periods or the lack of a centralized system that holistically houses all engagement opportunities.

The Engage Hamilton platform was mentioned on a number of occasions as a great new tool in the City's public engagement toolkit, but many wish to see the functionality of the website improved to provide more methods of engagement, to promote timely and larger consultations at the outset, and better user journey to allow for easier access to pertinent information.

MY FEEDBACK WAS IGNORED

Respondents shared many experiences where their feedback – solicited by the city – was ignored. This is not to say the people and organizations we interviewed feel they weren't heard. Rather, it's that the City had already set itself on a course of action no matter what feedback it received.

We heard instances cited where it was apparent that public feedback influenced a decision — such as the urban boundary expansion — and where it was ignored, for example, the John A. Macdonald statue in Gore Park.

While there is an understanding that every community voice cannot be reflected in the final policy outcomes and decision made by council, there remains a consistent desire to see this feedback and have a more transparent process for how community comments were evaluated, actioned or disregarded.

"Sometimes I think it's performative. They have already made up their decision, but are required to ask people their thoughts."

CONSISTENCY

Outside of discussions about barriers and accessibility, the lack of consistency in public consultation was one of the top concerns raised among the three groups we surveyed.

There was a universal understanding that each consultation outreach will have its own unique nuances and requirements, negating any suggestion of a standardized approach.

However, it was also acknowledged that the City needs a set of standards or a framework outlining a common set of tools and philosophies that all City consultations should be expected to follow. To be most effective, this set of principles should be formalized by a vote of Council to be applied across the entire City.

STAKEHOLDER/THIRD PARTY FACILITATION

Participants were generally reluctant to have a third-party facilitator conduct public consultations on the City's behalf. It was acknowledged that there could be instances where it would be worth considering having an outside agency participate, but no examples were provided where this would be the preferred option.

Participants indicated a clear preference to have City consultations be organized and executed by City staff. The City should see public engagement as an opportunity to build trust within a community, which cannot be done through a third party.

MEDIA PARTICIPATION

Almost universally, it was felt the media should not only be permitted to attend public consultations, but should be encouraged to, as it has an important role to play in informing the public, both about upcoming opportunities to engage in consultations and what was said during them.

The media is a conduit of information for those who could not attend the engagement.

However, it was acknowledged that media participation can be a barrier to sharing sensitive information and an honest exchange of ideas. The presence of the media may influence who participates — and to what extent they will participate — and who doesn't.

In those instances, it was suggested that utilizing private focus groups will help collect real, honest feedback.

"Sometimes it is about creating a safe space for marginalized communities. Sometimes we need a space where people can speak their truth without fear of their mug appearing in the newspaper."

V. SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

In reflecting on everything we heard throughout these interviews and trying to draw conclusions for the future, it is important to first acknowledge that conducting these interviews and reviewing the process for public engagement is a laudable first step for the City towards better consultation. Even some of the harshest critics of the City's current engagements were encouraged by the fact that Hamilton is reviewing the process and reaching out to stakeholders to make improvements.

While opinions vary as to how successfully Hamilton currently conducts public consultations, there was near-universal agreement that the process can improve. The opportunity to use this review process to establish greater trust across communities cannot be overstated and serves as a reminder that process matters as much as outcome to stakeholders across the city.

Engage Hamilton was consistently held up as an example of public consultation being done well. It is worth exploring this topic further to understand how this program was developed, the features that distinguish it from other types of consultations and which lessons can be applied to public consultation efforts across the City's various departments.

While most respondents were not in favor of a standard approach across all departments, preferring to see consultations tailored to the communities and issues involved, it was expressed that having a standard "tool kit" available for the City to draw from would be beneficial. Reviewing Engage Hamilton is a good place to start in determining what tools can be developed and made available as a common suite of resources for public consultations.

To deliver the most value for the City, this report must be seen as a catalyst and not a conclusion. These discussions have brought out examples of practical and systemic barriers people face to participating in the civic discussion about Hamilton's future.

It is up to Councillors, City staff, and community stakeholders to ensure that discussions continue to explore how these barriers can be overcome. In doing so, not only can the City bring more people into the process, but it can establish stronger relationships and trust across communities that will deliver greater credibility for future engagements and decisions.

APPENDIX A: WHAT WE ASKED

Following are the discussion guides used to engage each of the three target groups.

STAKEHOLDERS

GENERAL

What has your experience been like either overseeing or participating in public consultations?

How would you describe the current process for public consultations by the City?

How would you define the purpose of conducting public consultations?

How well do you think the City meets that purpose?

Do you favour a standardized approach to public consultations by the City, or should it be tailored to the nature of the subject of the consultations?

Have you noticed a difference in how a public consultation is conducted depending on what city department is running it?

Would you support having an independent third-party facilitate public consultations?

Should media be allowed to cover in-person public consultations?

ACCESSIBILITY

How would you characterize the people or groups who participate in public consultations?

Are there groups that you feel are typically underrepresented at public consultations?

Are there groups that you feel are typically overrepresented at public consultations?

Do you think the City makes an effort to ensure that public consultations are as accessible as possible?

What can the City do to ensure that a wider range of people and groups participate in public consultations?

For in-person consultations, do you think the City should make child care available to allow more people to attend?

Have you ever been to an in-person public consultation where you were concerned about safety in any way?

PERCEPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

How effective do you think the City is at incorporating people's feedback into its plans?

Do you think people believe that their feedback during consultations has an impact on the outcome?

What can the City do to make you feel like your suggestions in a public consultation have been heard?

How would you like the City to share the information is receives during a public consultation?

What are some of the complaints that you have heard about public consultations?

Are there any public consultations that you have attended that stand out as being a particularly effective use of everyone's time?

What is your biggest concern about the way that the City currently conducts public consultations?

What would you like to see done to address that concern?

CITY COUNCILLORS

GENERAL

How would you define the purpose of conducting public engagements?

How would you describe the current process for City-led public engagements?

What parts of the City's public engagement process are working well?

What parts of the City's public engagement process need improvement?

What feedback have you heard from constituents on City-led public engagement efforts?

Do you think residents believe that their feedback obtained through City-led public participation initiatives informs Council decision-making efforts or has an impact on the outcome?

ACCESSIBILITY

How can the City of Hamilton ensure its public engagement process reflects an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens?

Specific groups that are either overrepresented or underrepresented?

Do you have any suggestions for tools or tactics the City can use to improve its public engagement processes and practices?

How would you characterize the people or groups who participate in City-led public engagement efforts or consultations?

Are there specific community groups in your ward that you feel are left out of the engagement process as a result of participation barriers?

Can you identify a few Council decisions where public engagement efforts were critical to your vote on the matter?

What can the City do to report on consultations to mitigate those kinds of dilemma in the future?

Have your own views ever been challenged by what you heard in a public consultation?

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Do you believe Council is receiving the advice needed from the citizen advisory committees to inform Council's decision making?

As a Council Representative on the Citizen Advisory Committees, what do you think is working from an engagement perspective and what do you think needs to change?

CITY OF HAMILTON SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

GENERAL

Why is public engagement important?

How would you define the purpose, role and risks of public engagement?

What are the elements of effective public engagement?

How well do you think the City meets that purpose?

Please describe your experience with the City's public engagement process.

What elements of the City's public engagement process are working well?

What areas of the City's public engagement process need improvement?

IMPACT OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

How does public input inform City decision-making efforts?

How does the City present/share the information and feedback it gathered from a public engagement process?

How does the public access this information? Is this consistent across the corporation?

The City's delivery of public engagement is highly decentralized and is carried out by staff from across all City departments. While the City has led many successful public engagement efforts, do you feel a decentralized approach can or does lead to inconsistencies in delivery?

The City is currently in the process of creating a Public Engagement Policy. What other steps should the City take to ensure a more consistent, transparent, accountable, equitable and inclusive approach for all City-led public engagement processes?

What are some key principles that the City of Hamilton should uphold for City-led public engagement efforts in the future?

BARRIERS

What do you see as key barriers to achieving more effective public engagement in Hamilton?

How would you characterize the people or groups who participate in public consultations?

Are there groups that you feel are typically underrepresented at public consultations?

What are some reasons for non-participation?

Are there groups that you feel are typically overrepresented at public consultations?

What can the City do to ensure a wider range of people and groups participate in public consultations?

What approaches should the City adopt to encourage harder-to-reach groups/stakeholders participation? (i.e., child care, increased notice, more dates/times, multiple ways to participate, accessibility supports and accommodations)

VI. APPENDIX B: WHAT WE HEARD

STAKEHOLDERS

EXPERIENCE ENGAGING WITH THE CITY

- No consensus.

- Feedback ranged from pleasant to frustrating, but there was no real anger encountered.

- City's engagement process lacks consistency, from department to department or ward to ward.

  o Mish-mash of methodologies, approaches and even temperament in terms of how defensive or accessible the City is to receiving input.

  o Disjointed, as if the City departments do not communicate with each other.

- Community groups and stakeholders reported satisfaction that the City was trying to engage, but the thoughts on the process were as varied as the different methods the City uses to consult with residents.

- Our Future Hamilton engagement was repeatedly mentioned as a model engagement process

  o People felt was effective

  o Made people feel like they were being heard.

  o Event open to everyone

  o Follow up and action on what was to come of the process.

  o Our Future Hamilton included notes and quotes from 50,000 participants – that's why it's the gold star example of consultation in Hamilton.

  o Allowed for interventions around small groups around the table.

  o Was interactive, and efficient way of collecting information from large number of stakeholders.

  o Really well represented in terms of community stakeholders.

- Too often, feels like Councillors don't want to hear what others have to say.

  o The message is listened to, but it's not necessarily heard.

  o Perception of a hesitancy from Council to accept certain points of view, and that some issues/concerns raised are met with hostility.

  o Felt that if an individual or group has been critical of the city in the past, their feedback will not be taken into serious consideration.

  o There is a hesitancy among Councillors to accept views that don't align with their own.

- COVID pandemic often cited in regards to changing the way the city engages and the limitations it imposes.

  o Combination of methods important when looking at communication engagement.

    ▪ In-person.

- Virtual.
- Focus Groups.
- Surveys – online, mailed, telephone.
- Event pop-ups.
- PICs.
- Town Halls.
- Telephone town halls.
- Telephone surveys

- Instances cited of communication breakdown, where the City wasn't clear on what it wanted or needed from a consultation effort.
- Impact of social media on public engagements is a negative
  - It is an underutilized tool but it also fosters dissent and hostility
  - Poor influence on the relationship between the consulters and the consultees.
- Not enough representation in who the City engages with.
- It is a long, tedious process.
- Councillors and staff have proven accessible for one-on-one meetings/engagements, but some are more available than others.

WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

PURPOSE

- About accountability to those who live and work in Hamilton.
- Educational obligation by the city to educate its citizens.
- To inform the decision making of council.
- Ensure the work of the City is reflecting the needs of the residents.
  - There are a variety of opinions across the city; it is a good idea to have an idea of what is being felt in all corners of the city.
- Inclusion – having conversations with a directive in mind
- Consultation is more than the process of getting feedback.
  - It is what are you going to do with the information?
  - What are the results of the consultation?
- Assess how the community thinks and feels, and then using that information to guide decision making.

HOW IS THE CITY DOING?

- Not too well.

- Many experiences where the feedback solicited by the city is ignored.

- People and organizations may feel they were heard, but the City had already set itself on a course of action no matter what feedback it received.

- Conflicting examples of engagement both influencing a decision and being ignored:

    o Urban boundary expansion.

    o John A. Macdonald statue in Gore Park.

    o Issues affecting the disabled are an afterthought.

- Some wards have better consultation than others.

WHERE CAN IT BE BETTER?

- Don't just inform residents. Truly engage them.

- Spend time in the neighbourhoods and get to know the residents.

    o Not every consultation has to be about a specific project or policy proposal.

    o City should engage at the community level as a relationship-building exercise that will build a foundation on which future consultations can be executed.

- The City will not get 100% consensus on any issue, but the process has to be allowed to play out.

- The difference between stakeholder consultation and community consultation are night and day.

    o Stakeholders (re: affluent voices, developers, business representatives) given louder voice, more weight in City decisions.

    o Community groups more likely allowed or treated as observers.

IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Meet people where they are at.

    o If you are doing a consultation about parks, hold the event in the park and talk to the park users.

- Universal acceptance that City should have the ability to tailor consultation projects to the issue;

    o One size fits all is not a good idea.

    o Develop a tool kit for engagement with best practices.

        ▪ Standardized methodology with flexibility to tailor to unique situations.

    o Also universal that this should rest on a set of standards or a framework that all city departments have to follow.

    o Each situation is different, requiring some nuance to be worked into the process, but the city should have a framework that guides every consultation effort — a common set of tools and philosophies.

    o Much like any research project — the more methods and ways you collect the data, the more effective your findings will be.

- o Whatever the policy framework, it shouldn't be considered a minimum standard; have to strive to go above and beyond.

- Use a third-party facilitator or organizer in strictly prescribed situations.

  - o Ideally, a City consultation is organized and executed by city staff.

  - o There are instances where it may be better that an outside agency manage the process

  - o Encourage residents to be more open and honest about their thoughts and feelings.

  - o The City should be looking at engagements as a way to build trust within a community, and it can't do that through a third party.

  - o Conflicting opinions

    - ▪ A third party may be better, more efficient, open-minded and not beholden to a pre-determined outcome.

    - ▪ Outside consultants are still beholden to the people paying the contract; not sure that would solve any of the core issues.

- Neighbourhood engagements (ward level) tend to be less confrontational

THE MEDIA

- Media should be permitted to attend public consultations

  - o Role to play in informing the public, both about upcoming opportunities and what was said.

  - o The media is a conduit of information for those who could not attend the engagement.

- Concerns that media presence may influence who participates, and who doesn't.

- Private focus groups are an alternative to engage groups who are media shy.

ACCESSIBILITY

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

- Providing opportunity is not the same as an equitable outcome.

- Timing and means are big barriers.

- Lack of diversity in City departments and on City Council; tends to reflect the groups/individuals who are consulted.

  - o Every division of the city needs to be made up of representation of EDI so everything has that semblance of importance.

  - o Hamilton has never had a female mayor and never had a racialized mayor.

  - o We should see gender and racial diversity on council and in the mayor's office.

  - o We have to have a discussion about changing the systems; Councillors need to understand that so that they can lead the charge.

  - o Change has to be led from the top.

  - o Look at hiring and promotion practices.

- Not enough representation, not enough authentic, genuine respect towards the needs of different, diverse groups.
    - Tends to shift lens and focus to what can we do monetarily rather than what we need to do.
- Broad call to engage, without specific outreach to desired communities, those groups who are under-represented will not participate.
    - Outreach has to be deliberate.
    - Have a checklist to reference to ensure accessing communities that don't typically participate.
- Build connections with under-represented and equity-seeking communities at times when a consultation event isn't under way.
    - Has to be a regular, ongoing engagement to build a trusting relationship.
    - There is no point in talking if it's just words. Needs action as a follow up.
- Have to think about who the City is trying to reach, and the best mechanism for reaching that constituency.
- Geographically, this can be a challenge.
- Make an effort to go to the people to remove barriers of time and planning.
    - On a bus route?
    - What are the facilities like?
    - Adequate advance notice of the event with all relevant details, including languages that will be accommodated.
- Go to where the people are.
    - Neighbourhood issues should not have consultations at City Hall.
- There are many engagement tools that could be used to encourage participating, but City only uses a few.
- Lack of translation services, closed captioning and/or sign language is a big barrier.
    - Zero translations of Council and consultation materials.

WHO IS BEING HEARD?

- Those most likely to engage with the City are organized, informed and relatively sophisticated.
    - Voices heard delegating to city council are the same voices time and again.
- Experienced, have capacity to conduct research and often come to the table with an understanding of how to affect public policy decisions and political discourse.
- People who are doing OK socio-economically; but this also doesn't mean that they shouldn't be heard.
    - But their participation cannot be mistaken for broader consultation.
- Self-advocates who believe they have something to say or contribute.

- Seniors - Active, invested retirees.

- Middle-class homeowners who have time to attend a session.

- Middle-aged white folks.

  - The typical person engaging with Hamilton are over the age of 40, white and affluent.

  - The heterosexual white man is highly represented.

WHO ISN'T?

- Should always be looking at who isn't in the room.

  - Who aren't we hearing from, and why aren't we hearing from them?

  - The people who have the least access – mobility/transportation, racial, disability, technology.

- Indigenous groups have the most reasons to be skeptical of government efforts.

  - They have been taken advantage of in previous consultations so that the "Consulted with Indigenous Communities" box could be checked.

- Racialized communities and newcomers, particularly if they are from a country where you can't trust the government.

  - Facing language and potentially cultural barriers.

  - May not be established in the community to have a reliable Internet connection.

  - Could be uncomfortable or unfamiliar with public transit to get around the city.

- LGBTQ+

  - City has not done a great job engaging the queer community.

- Those facing socio-economic barriers and generational poverty are less likely to vote and less likely to show up at a public meeting and share their voice.

  - Marginalized housing residents.

  - Those who use foodbanks.

- Families with young children and two working parents can't do daytime engagements and unlikely to participate in the evening – making dinner, taking kids to activities, relaxing

- Younger people, but how to entice them is an ongoing challenge.

- Tenants as opposed to homeowners.

- Disabled community.

  - Differences of individuals in disability community is ignored – all treated the same.

  - Consultations appease non-disabled community first, then refer to disabled community as an after-thought.

    - Example of sidewalk patios during COVID – made it difficult for people in wheelchairs to navigate through those areas.

- The homeless, who have become political pawns in a process that very much speaks to middle-class, single-family homeowners who are uncomfortable with what they are seeing on the Escarpment and in some parks.

- Rural residents - There are serious challenges because the limited Internet available in rural areas and to those who are socio-economically challenged.

- Introverted and quiet people, perhaps those for whom English is not their first language.

HOW TO MAKE ENGAGEMENT MORE OPEN AND INVITING

- There are two parts to this, fixing the process and fixing the tone.

- The process is the logistics, and as we enter the post-COVID era, this means giving deeper thought to the use of different modalities of engagement.
  - It is the "how" of the engagement process: The strategies to be used to connect with residents.
  - Physical characteristics of the buildings or facilities used to host events — accessible, near transit, adequate space, etc.
  - How the information gathered will be shared.

- The tone is more dismissive.
  - The attitude of Council to show they are receptive to feedback from all who take the time and effort to offer it.
  - It is the tone that can be alienating and off-putting, particularly to people who feel their voices won't, or can't, be heard.

- Provide alternatives for consideration.
  - If there is a consistent amount of feedback that goes against staff will, it never appears in reports; it should be included, can even say why staff doesn't agree with it (money, resources, feasibility) , but it should be included.
  - Provide reasons why they are recommending what they are recommending.
  - Then councillors can take the balanced info and decide as political leaders what direction to go in.
  - Helps citizens understand it is a complex system – if there is a way City can incorporate info, it closes the circle.
  - Provide an executive summary of the feedback received.

- Some suggestions to address the process challenges faced by the City include:
  - Provide postage-paid surveys

- Use multiple strategies in each engagement to ensure reaching a broad audience from different experiences.

- Improve access to City documents, in accessible formats.
  - Make City website compliant.

IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Grassroots engagement needs to take place well in advance of a consultation
    - Build relationships and credibility before you go looking for feedback or sharing information.
- Multiple time slots over different days
- Providing food at a consultation was almost universally cited as a way to increase engagement.
- Go to where the people are.
    - Work with community groups to be part of existing events; not crashing the party, but seeking permission to have a space to talk with residents during community festivals or celebrations or other such events.
    - Pop-ups at local festivals, fairs, events — there is value in setting up in a community neighbourhood.
    - Go to neighbourhoods, flyers, door knocking, sending letters, putting up posters.
    - Collecting data on where the bulk of info is coming from and identifying where the gaps are.
    - Make an extra effort to reach those communities/postal codes that don't often participate – and go to those communities
    - Places of religion.
- Child care can make a difference, accepted that logistically this could be a challenge.
    - Mentioned that there is opportunity to build future base for engagement by providing child care.
    - It supports inter-generational learning and gives children a first-hand sense of what it's like to be involved and engaged.
- Provide bus tickets or transportation.
- The Neighbourhood Planning Tables tend to attract a more diverse, engaged crowd with a sense of hope and optimism that their voices will be heard.
- Create a new department – Community Engagement.
    - Small team whose job it is to think about DE&I in every consultation event.
    - Own and enforce the council-approved engagement policy.
    - Engagement team to work in each ward, coordinate with Councillor, residents and staff to build bridges, trust and rapport.
    - Establish where under-represented groups are at and develop the asset lists where they can be contacted.

PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- City not seen to heed the advice or input of residents.
- The effort to hear has to be seen to be turned into action.

- It is part of human nature that those who are opposed to the final decision will feel that their voice wasn't heard.

- There are good examples of neighbourhood planning projects incorporating public feedback into their reports, and public housing was cited as being effective at listening to the voices of its residents.

- But when it gets to the level of City Council, there is definitively a perception that the relationship is paternalistic — that Council will tell you what is best.

HOW CAN RESIDENTS BE MADE TO FEEL LIKE THEY ARE BEING HEARD?

- People will be more willing to engage if they know what will happen with the findings.

- Response back to be timely – too much time passes and people get jaded about the process.

- More engagement on social media.

- Follow up meetings, or mailers, outlining what was heard.

- Not everybody is going to go to the City's website to look for a specific report in a council agenda package and leaf though to find the summary of the feedback.

  o There is a need to make a direct effort to close the feedback loop with the citizens who were consulted.

- Be up front and honest from the start of the process.

  o Acknowledge the limitations, whether they are fiscal, regulatory or political

  o Pretending those limitations don't exist guarantees distrust and skepticism.

- Build a communications plan around sharing the feedback from a consultation effort.

  o Emphasize elements that are influencing the decisions.

  o Provide reasons as to why or why not feedback was incorporated or rejected.

COUNCILLORS

WHY ENGAGE THE PUBLIC?

PURPOSE

- Collect feedback from the community on a particular initiative or policy proposal.

  o Getting thoughts and opinions is critically important

- Educate the public on an upcoming project or policy proposal.

- Solicit thoughts and opinions from experts in a specific field

"What worries me about public consultation is it leads individuals to believe that whatever they say will become part of public policy."

- The more focus we put on public engagement, the less flexible decision making is going to be.

- Build trust and confidence between the City and its residents.

- To have people feel like they can participate and their voice is being heard.

- To inform and seek feedback.

    o Missing element in much of our consultation is to educate.

CITY'S PERFORMANCE

- Approach to public consultations is haphazard and disjointed.

- There is no consistency to the process — differs from department to department, ward to ward

    o No policy or framework to which the process can be linked.

    o This holds true at the Councillor level, where ward consultations vary widely across the city depending on the ward (and, thus, which Councillor is hosting the event).

- Several Councillors raised concerns about consultations meeting the bare minimum statutory requirements.

    o Limits awareness about the event and subsequently the participation of residents potentially impacted by the proposal in question.

    o Information about an issue impacting the urban boundary may go out to houses within the mandated 120 metres, but if that urban boundary is in a rural area, there may no homes to notify.

"This city really sucks at planning. It does not use user-friendly language. It uses Planning Act language – a lot of thereofs, and heretos. It's not helpful."

- It is felt the City does consultations well, and receives thoughtful feedback, when it asks for written feedback within a 30-day window.

- Mailed surveys can be effective, as was evidenced by the urban boundary expansion issue.

- City should expand its use of social channels and use them more effectively to promote engagements.

    o Facebook where many Boomers and older GenX are active.

    o TikTok to engage youth and young adult residents

- Praise for City doing consultations at pre-existing events – going to where people are as opposed to making people come out to attend a consultation.

- Complaints from residents can be loosely categorized into two groups:

1. Why didn't I know about this consultation? And

2. My feedback was ignored.

- Similar to the community stakeholders, there was praise for the Engage Hamilton process.

    o Consistent place for residents to engage.

    o Advance information was provided to residents.

"There are limitations. You can engage until you are blue. It eats up an awful lot of time and resources and is not always helpful."

"Just because you didn't do what the people wanted, they think that means you didn't hear them."

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Council should cease the practice of waiving its bylaw that requires at least 48 hours between the decision of a committee of council and ratification by City Council.

- Conscious effort has to be made to let people know they have at least been heard; when residents raise concerns, those concerns should be documented in staff reports, with notes on what staff did to mitigate those concerns.

- Can't just listen to one sector – consultation has to be broad.

- Councillor offices can serve as project managers for local engagements.

    o Have a set of standards for them to follow to build consistency into the process.

    o A set council policy prevents individual councillors from dictating the process.

- Re-build a more amicable atmosphere in the council chambers.

    o Growing sense that councillors will only accept the results of a public engagement if the findings echo their personal stance on the issue.

- During the pandemic, some comments from residents that virtual consultation was limiting.

- Questioning of the value of newspaper ads to promote a public engagement event.

    o More use of social media.

- Make access to documents much easier – an online database that is easily navigated.

"Many felt the online portals don't capture the true narrative of the community. They just quantify input and it becomes so data-driven that priorities get skewed."

"You can do all the engagement and outreach and hand-deliver notices and knock on doors, but however you do it, you can put in the effort but you can't make people participate if they don't want to participate."

"It's easy for Councillors to come to the opinion that we have all the experts sitting around the table who have done their homework and reviews so we don't need to go out for public comment. But in a democracy, that is exactly what you do. They may not comment. But then again, they may."

BARRIERS AND ACCESSIBILITY

- It was largely acknowledged that most of Council is representative of the groups and individuals who are most likely to engage with the City.

    o Acknowledgement that they are likely not the best voices to provide thoughts on how a racialized or religious community would best welcome engagement.

- Universal acknowledgement that the City does have to improve its outreach into groups that are under-represented and/or silent in the public engagement process.

- Language is a big barrier.

    o Accommodating the different languages used in the city.

    o Also, City using plain language that everybody can understand.

"You can tell when they want to engage and when they don't want to engage based on the language they use during the consultation process."

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

- This is an area where the city is struggling; it's easy to say DE & I, but it's not as easy to play out.

- City's mission is and always will be to provide atmosphere of inclusivity for everyone – male, female, racialized, disabled.

- The only way the City will hear from EDI groups is to ensure it is doing the work that needs to be done to include them before a formal consultation process begins.

- A monitoring committee was proposed — composed of ED&I groups, LGBTQ+, black community, Jewish – folks who need to know their voices can be heard.

  o They can provide guidance and direction to ensure a broader variety of people are coming to the table.

- City can and should be much more thorough in engaging equity-seeking communities.

  o Prioritize the needs of these communities and address the systemic inequities that exist.

- Language is very much a barrier that needs to be overcome.

WHO NEEDS TO BE HEARD?

- Racialized / Ethnic groups were noted as some of the hardest to reach and engage.

  o The voice of immigrants is not being heard.

  o Newcomer family trying to raise their kids and navigate in a new country.

  o Challenge reaching people whose first language isn't English.

- Homeless / Socio-economically challenged.

  o More likely to be jaded and feel like no one is listening

- Many groups are under-represented, but the vast majority of residents simply aren't paying attention.

- Indigenous community.

- LGBTQ+.

- Disability Community.

"We have highest density of people with disabilities in the entire province, but I don't believe we capture that population properly."

"We will always have people who say we didn't reach out to them."

WHO IS BEING HEARD?

- There is a core group of engaged citizens who are "regulars" at City Hall and public consultation events.

- o "Squeaky wheels" who use every channel in the process to say the same thing over and over again.

- o 50-65 years old, skews predominantly white and female.

- Developers.

  - o City "definitely" hears more from people out to make a profit as opposed to those who are marginalized.

- City has to be cautious that it doesn't assume a representative from a specific group speaks for that entire population.

- Environment Hamilton.

- There is a really strong activist, racialized component that is noisy and loud

  - o These get the most attention because they are noisy and generate media coverage.

- Hear more from homeowners than from renters.

"There is a lack of understanding that we are giving too much credence to the smaller voices that are looking to divide us as opposed to the broader voices who are truly working towards EDI."

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

- Civic engagement should be the No. 1 priority for City Council.

- Need a more personal approach to engage isolated and ethnic communities

- Be on platforms where the people are active – but be cautious that aren't always engaging the same small group (i.e., on Twitter).

- Re-examine PICs – they are sparsely attended and largely ineffective.

- Sam Lawrence Master Plan consultation as a good example

  - o The City has ideas about what it wanted to do, but the process was driven by community feedback that implemented a variety of tactics and tools — mailers, advertisements, public meetings.

- Use Canada Post more often.

- Develop a Civic Engagement Charter; an outline of what the City is committed to doing when it comes to engaging the public.

- Tactics to engage broader audiences:

  - o Town Hall meetings

  - o City booth / presence at events around the community

  - o Social media outreach

  - o Polling

  - o City call centre as a first-point of contact

  - o Door knockers

- - Even more important in time when many city residents no longer have door-to-door mailbox delivery.
  - ○ Similar to what was heard from community groups, one councillor noted providing food

"Far too often today we rely on technology, and I think it frustrates a lot of people."

"It's a process the residents don't understand."

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES

ARE THEY WORKING?

- Some are more effective than others.
- Pivotal and tension-filled space with advisory committees right now.
- City is receiving advice, but often that advice is not acted upon or commented upon, which creates a cognitive disconnect with advisory groups.
- No – they are quiet bodies.
  - ○ Rarely receive citizen reports with recommendations.
  - ○ Wonder if the committees are aware of the matters council is deliberating that matter to them. i.e., Housing and Homelessness committee doesn't know what it can or cannot do about the encampments issue.
- Some of them have just become a special interest that really doesn't move the issue or the committee forward.

"Because we are at the stage we are – almost another stage of civil rights advancement and acknowledgement of DEI – those individuals who are participating on the committees and observing the committees have a sense that they are being contained and controlled by procedural stuff that does not enable them to actually advise. If that sentiment is there, will have to talk about it."

HOW CAN THEY BE IMPROVED?

- Could be more effective if they had action items as part of their minutes, require council to consider their recommendations for seriously.
- Remove the politics from the appointment process.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

PURPOSE

- Engage residents in the decision-making process and help them develop a sense of place.
- Key piece of an open and transparent government.
  - ○ Demonstrate the transparency of the decision-making process.

"From a public perception perspective, feedback perspective, accountability perspective, news perspective, public engagement is a huge component of what a municipal government does as a whole."

- Information and feedback to help shape public policy.

- Educating and informing the public.

RISKS OF ENGAGEMENT

- Making policy recommendations to Council based on an engagement process that isn't holistic, resulting in policy recommendations that may not be reflective of the community at large.

- Inconsistency.

- Over-promising and under-delivering.

- The loud voices of a few tainting or influencing the greater interest.

"Is a decision overly influenced by those who show up, and those who show are rarely representative of the city. Does NIMBYism overly influence decision making? There could be 30 people in a room who are loud, angry, vocal and opinionated. Do we do what they want knowing there are 500,000 other residents whose views are not being expressed at that time?"

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL ENGAGMENT

- Inclusivity

    o Who are we reaching with public engagement?

    o Know who to target, and how to reach them, for each engagement.

    o Need a broadly representative sample

- Scalability

    o If we are doing big, massive policy, we have to lean in

    o If doing something smaller that only impacts a certain group, it would be different.

    o Multi-modal methods of engagement.

- EDI

    o Recognizing all of the groups who should be engaged.

    o Noting "who isn't in the room."

    o Commitment to reach and incorporate as many voices as possible.

- Reporting

    o Providing the information that Council needs in a concise format with effective use of appendices.

- Transparency

    o Reporting back to the community

    o About the information collected and how it will be used

- Public availability of findings and recommendations
- Engagement should be baked into how the City does its work.

- Capacity
  - What are the staff resources required to execute a consultation?
  - Do they have the training and skill set to do this?
  - What tools do they have at their disposal to use?

- Clarity
  - There is a need to distinguish between the different kinds of consultation or engagement; is it mandated under statute versus those that are not.
  - The purpose of the consultation; the nature of the issue and what the City is looking to elicit from residents.

CITY'S PERFORMANCE

- There are pockets where Hamilton is doing well and others where it is not.
- An effort is made to go to the people
- Use of a variety of engagement tools.
  - The City has been doing well with engagement on virtual platforms.
- There are few significant policy initiatives in Hamilton that don't have any engagement tied to them.
- The input received is relevant and considered in staff recommendations.
  - Staff reports do outline what was heard in a consultation.

"The input matters. It gets analyzed. It affects staff recommendations. It shows up in reports and it gets discussed in committee. It matters."

WHERE CAN IT BE BETTER?

- There needs to be consistency built into the process, especially coming out of the pandemic.
  - Standardized principles of public engagement and what it looks like

"We have to set expectations with council about a standardization of what public engagement should look like so there is less ability for griping or perceived expertise from council about how engagement occurs."

- On EDI, there is a ways to go.
- How the City reports back to the public.
- Second-hand anecdotal evidence that some staff will do the bare minimum consultation because they have already determined their recommendation.
- Some tools aren't working that well; i.e. PICs
- Advertising or promoting a public consultation.

- Need to ensure balance between resources, time and effort.

- There is a need to update the current antiquated models of community engagement, and look at better formats of regularly engaging residents.

- A centralized approach would likely remove inconsistencies in the process, but is also likely cost-prohibitive.

    o   Require special skill sets like data scientists and survey design specialists

- Can be too technocratic and weighed down with jargon.

    o   Policy experts may use terminologies and not appreciate they are speaking a language the public doesn't fully understand.

    o   But also have seen things "dumbed down" too much where you can't do anything with the feedback you collect.

- Breaking out of the social media bubble.

"The biggest problem with social media is it becomes a replacement for engagement. Often people will adopt a position on an issue, maybe go so far as submitting a letter or a comment, based on having read a 200-character tweet. There needs to be a push back against that kind of Twitter-framing, and people adopting positions or reacting based on how Twitter has framed something. It can be problematic."

RE-BUILD THE CITY'S REPUTATION

- Improve the process for reporting back to the community;

    o   Maybe make City reports more accessible online

    o   Provide executive summaries of consultation events.

- There is a need for a policy, with clear procedures and protocols, to support the City's public consultation efforts.

- Find the right balance of public opinion, the expertise of City staff and the voices that aren't in the room.

- Acknowledge that sometimes good policy is not always going to be popular, but still need the political will to move forward.

- Preserve a process where the people who are writing the policy and making the recommendations are in the room / at the engagement.

    o   Interaction with the City shouldn't be filtered through a professional engagement person.

    o   But a centralized professional advisor can help set and enforce a process; ensure effort is made to bring in more groups who are typically underrepresented.

BARRIERS

- The lack of a council-approved policy for public engagement is a key barrier to more effective public engagement in Hamilton.

- From staff perspective, lack of knowledge of best practices in engagement.

- Structure.
    - Reaching under-represented groups isn't a matter of having a better mailing list; it's structural in how we conduct engagements.
- COVID-inspired reliance on virtual platforms.
- Timing and location.
    - In-person events should be on a bus route, and happen at various times to accommodate people who work different shifts.
- Language.
    - Is there tech available to translate on WebEx or other virtual platforms?
    - Keeping jargon out of the process so residents can understand what it is at issue; turn complicated policy initiatives into something people can understand and engage with.
- Promotion.
    - How much do you spend to inform the public?
- Diversity.
    - When staff itself is not particularly representative of the city at large, have to consciously go outside your comfort zone.

WHO IS BEING HEARD?

- Angry voices on Twitter – but that is not representative of the city.
- Development sector certainly over-represented on housing issues.
- Citizen groups who have their own perceptions, but lack understanding of what a pan-city organization can or should do.
- Most likely those who are directly and immediately impacted.
- Generally — older, whiter, wealthier, English is their first language, educated.

"The ones that are most popular are the ones where people are mad or upset about something happening. If you are building a high-rise apartment in their backyard, they'll show up."

WHO ISN'T?

- Have to be cautious; sometimes an organization says they speak on behalf of a group, but these groups are not homogenous.
    - If we hear from HCCI, does that mean we have heard from the black community?
- We have a ways to go with the Indigenous community.
- English-as-a-second-language residents.
- BIPOC and other marginalized communities.

"We can do better leveraging the various community stakeholder groups to be the communications pathway to inform those various groups about engagement. Sometimes hearing it from a trusted

voice and support for engagement would be different than it is just coming from the city's normal channels."

- Residents with limited access to communications channels.

  o No Internet.

  o Lack of transit/transportation.

- Lower income residents.

- Youth.

- The people who aren't here yet.

  o People who have yet to move to Hamilton, but will do so in the future, will be impacted by growth planning decisions made today. That person is not going to attend a growth planning session held in the city today, but they will be impacted by it.

HOW MAKE THE PROCESS MORE OPEN AND INVITING

- Provide opportunities.

- Come in with truly open eyes and ears.

- Be open and transparent about the matters that are not up for debate so that we can in turn be open and transparent about the subject of the consultation.

- Hybrid options; consultations should not be singular events.

  o In-person events should be accompanied by virtual options for participation.

  o Some may not feel comfortable speaking in a public forum, but are willing to fill out a survey.

- Engage with target communities and ask them what they want/need to participate in a public engagement.

- Provide child care.

- Multiple days/times for each engagement, multi-modal engagement tools.

- Accessibility supports and accommodations.