




CITY OF HAMILTON
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE
Government & Community Relations

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	January 17, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	City of Hamilton Public Engagement Policy (CM21011(b)) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Cindy Mutch (905) 546-2424 Ext. 4992 Jocelyn Strut, 905) 546-2424 Ext. 5702
SUBMITTED BY:	Morgan Stahl Director, Government Relations & Community Engagement
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the City of Hamilton Public Engagement Policy attached as Appendix "A" to Report CM21011(b) be approved;
- (b) That staff be directed to review the public engagement policy and report back to Council at a minimum of every four years on the implementation of the policy and any required updates;
- (c) That staff report back to the General Issues Committee in Q4 2024 with a status update respecting the implementation of the Public Engagement Policy and creation of a corporate-wide Public Engagement Strategy;
- (d) That one Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for a Performance Reporting & Impact Evaluation Specialist and one FTE for a Project Manager specializing in Public Engagement, at an annualized total of \$302,000 be referred to the 2025 Budget in the Government Relations and Community Engagement Division, to facilitate corporate-wide public engagement programming, training, and reporting; and,
- (e) That the items respecting the City of Hamilton Public Engagement Policy be removed from the Outstanding Business List.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Hamilton's (City's) Term of Council Priorities for 2022-2026 identifies responsiveness and transparency as a key component to supporting the City's vision to be the best place to raise a child and age successfully. Public engagement plays an integral role in advancing these priorities as it enables community members to participate in decision-making and problem-solving initiatives.

When a lens of inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) is applied, barriers to participation are reduced, allowing for a greater number of diverse voices to be involved in City-led public engagement activities. Meaningful and inclusive public engagement builds transparency, trust, and confidence in municipal government through increased public access to City information and participation in decision-making processes that impact residents and their community.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted City-led public engagement and highlighted the need to establish a corporate-wide Public Engagement Policy. At the October 6, 2021, GIC meeting (Report CM21011), Council unanimously supported the development of a corporate-wide Public Engagement Policy and Administrative Framework.

The draft Public Engagement Policy, attached as Appendix "A" to Report CM21011(b) has been designed to lead consistent, effective, and meaningful public engagement processes between the City, the public, and interested community partners to support decision-making by City Council and Administration. This policy adheres to but does not supersede the requirements and/or provisions of any current legislation that guides municipal engagement activities and represents the first step towards a broader Public Engagement Strategy that will be drafted in 2024.

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: There are no financial impacts associated with the approval of Report CM21011(b). Staff anticipate the future need for two FTE beginning in 2025 to support the full implementation of the Public Engagement Policy, with an annualized budget impact of \$302,000, which is recommended for referral to the 2025 budget process.

Staffing: Staff anticipate the need for two (2) full-time staff, commencing in 2025, to provide the necessary resources to implement the corporate-wide Public Engagement Policy and develop an Administrative Framework and overarching Public Engagement Strategy as it is not feasible to incorporate this volume of work into existing roles and deliver the intended results. To be successful and support the consistent application of meaningful public engagement practices related to Term of Council Priorities, dedicated

resources committed to this work will be required. It is recommended that an addition of one (1) Performance Reporting & Impact Evaluation Specialist (Grade 6) and one (1) Project Manager, Public Engagement (Grade 5) in the Government Relations & Community Engagement Division be referred to the 2025 Budget process. These roles would be responsible to lead, coordinate, implement, and analyse research/evaluation, performance measurement, and compare municipal best practices to ensure departmental, corporate, and Term of Council priorities and reporting requirements are met.

Legal: N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 2014, the Hamilton Engagement Committee was established to advise staff on how residents could be actively engaged in City decision-making processes, resulting in the endorsement of Hamilton's first Public Engagement Charter in 2015. Utilizing the principles of the Charter, staff captured the voices of over 55,000 residents from 2015-2016 to create the city's updated 25-year community vision (Our Future Hamilton).

In 2019, an internal corporate-wide Public Engagement Community of Practice was established for staff to share knowledge, explore best practices, and improve public engagement outcomes. The practice currently includes over 115 cross-departmental staff that meet quarterly. Through the Practice, an annual survey was developed to further understand the breadth of City-led public engagement initiatives and facilitate enhanced coordination. Since 2020, City-led engagement projects have grown by 43%, with 110 projects planned for 2024.

In 2020, the City invested in a centralized and interactive online public engagement platform, Engage Hamilton (www.hamilton.ca) platform offers residents the opportunity to learn about and contribute to important City initiatives and expanded engagement activities online to reduce barriers to participation. Since implementation, the site has featured 164 public engagement projects to-date.

Following Council's endorsement of the October 6, 2021, General Issue Committee Report CM21011 and Appendix "A", respecting the Scope of Work and Project Work Plan for the development of a corporate-wide Public Engagement Policy and Administrative Framework, staff launched a multi-faceted public engagement campaign entitled Reimagining Public Participation in February 2022 to better understand and address current needs and challenges. The outcomes of this campaign were presented at a special General Issues Committee meeting on June 23, 2022, followed by Report CM21011(a) on July 4, 2022. Eight key themes were identified:

**SUBJECT: City of Hamilton Public Engagement Policy
(CM21011(b)) (City Wide) - Page 4 of 11**

1. Incorporate public input into decision-making efforts;
2. Establish clear and consistent public engagement processes and expectations;
3. Lead authentic community collaboration and outreach efforts;
4. Ensure inclusive, equitable, diverse, and accessible public engagement planning and design;
5. Use multiple engagement methods to collect feedback;
6. Share information broadly, listen and report back;
7. Enhance capacity through public engagement training and awareness; and,
8. Strengthen public trust and improve transparency.

In 2023, two full-time staff members were hired to support the development of the public engagement policy. In addition to this work, the team provides strategic advice on a broad range of public engagement projects across all City departments, including defining public participation objectives, recommending tools and techniques, and providing strategies to support inclusive participation and mitigate potential risks.

Members of the public engagement team are trained through the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) and are experts in applying best practices for City-led public engagement activities. In the past 12 months, the public engagement team have applied over 465 staff hours towards supporting cross-departmental public engagement activities, including providing advice to over 50 City-led projects.

On November 9, 2023, staff coordinated a special GIC meeting for senior leadership, the Mayor and Members of Council which included IAP2 facilitated training on meaningful public engagement. This training was offered to support 2022-2026 Term of Council priorities related to improved City-led public engagement practices.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Federal and provincial regulations dictate a minimum level of engagement that must be carried out for certain projects. The Public Engagement Policy (attached as Appendix "A" to Report CM21011(b)) complements legislative engagement activities and does not supersede legal requirements for public consultation and/or specific provisions of any current legislation that guides municipal engagement activities, such as the Planning Act or the Environmental Assessment Act.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Community Engagement Campaign: Reimagining Public Participation

To inform the development of a public engagement policy, City staff launched a multi-faceted Reimagining Public Participation campaign in February 2022 to better understand resident preferences and experiences with City-led public engagement. Engagement techniques utilized multiple methods, including an online survey, one-to-

one interviews with key decision-makers, and specialized consultation sessions with equity-deserving and traditionally underrepresented groups in City decision-making processes.

Feedback from the campaign highlighted consistent insights, themes, and core recommendations. Of note, participants from equity-deserving communities shared that they are:

- Traditionally not well engaged in civic activities;
- Face multiple barriers to participation; and,
- Require different or alternate engagement methods.

The Public Engagement Policy, attached as Appendix “A” to Report CM21011(b), is the first step towards responding to and addressing the recommendations of the Reimagining Public Participation campaign.

Public Engagement Community of Practice Members

Staff provided an overview of the campaign’s results at the September 2022 meeting and facilitated a workshop session in December 2022 to understand existing challenges and opportunities related to City-led engagement activities. Results from both meetings were used to inform the Public Engagement Policy attached as Appendix “A” to Report CM21011(b). In 2024, the Public Engagement Policy will be piloted with strategic City-led engagement projects supported by members of the Community of Practice and other internal project leads.

Annual Internal Public Engagement Survey

The annual survey seeks to better understand the breadth of City-led public engagement initiatives planned for the coming year in addition to enhancing cross-departmental collaboration and public engagement planning efforts, identifying internal training needs, and reducing engagement fatigue in community by better leveraging City resources and activity scheduling.

The survey also considers how staff will engage with marginalized, equity-deserving and traditionally under-represented groups and populations. Results from the 2023 survey indicated greater intentionality in considering how to engage with equity-deserving communities. The results from the annual survey have informed the Public Engagement Policy (attached as Appendix “A” to Report CM21011(b)).

Public Works: Corporate Security Office

Based on an increasing need to focus on workplace safety for staff, as well as safety for members of the public, staff met with the Corporate Security Planning team to understand their role and opportunities to address safety in public engagement activities. These include:

**SUBJECT: City of Hamilton Public Engagement Policy
(CM21011(b)) (City Wide) - Page 6 of 11**

- Raising awareness of the role the Corporate Security Office can play in supporting events that may be controversial;
- Identifying timelines for Event Security Request Forms to be submitted by project leads;
- Requiring a minimum of two staff to be present at a meeting/activity; and,
- Including Guidelines for Respectful Participation that can be posted and shared at all public engagement events.

Corporate Services: Corporate Records and Freedom of Information
Staff worked with the Corporate Privacy Specialist to ensure the privacy information included in the Public Engagement Policy (attached as Appendix “A” to Report CM21011(b)) are in compliance with legislated standards and the City of Hamilton Protection of Privacy Policy (approved January 14, 2021).

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Foundations of Public Engagement

Public engagement is a term that is often used interchangeably with public participation, community engagement, and citizen participation. For the purposes of Report CM21011(b), the Public Engagement Policy (attached as Appendix “A” to Report CM21011(b)) will use the term public engagement. Public engagement is defined as an intentional process involving participants in thoughtful discussion to help inform City decision-making processes. Public engagement is most effective when:

- It is planned for at the start of a project as a series of events that works to build trust and foster increased understanding on an issue;
- The process is authentic;
- Residents feel their input is valued; and,
- The process results in informed decision-making, reflecting the needs, interests, and thoughts of the community.

Early and continuous public engagement activities for City-led projects provides opportunities for staff to better understand the wants, needs and expectations of the community. By engaging residents, community partners and other interested participants in projects and decision-making processes, the City can: achieve better outcomes; strengthen relationships with community members; and, build mutual understanding, trust, and confidence in City decision-making.

Core Values for the Practice of Public Engagement

In developing a new public engagement policy for the City, staff conducted an extensive review of best practices related to public engagement. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international association that promotes and advances the practice of public participation globally through targeted initiatives and is guided by

culturally adaptive standards of practice and core values. To align the City's approach to public engagement with that of IAP2, staff have based the development of the policy on the seven core values established by IAP2. These core values contribute to decision-making that reflects the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and participants. They include:

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

(Used with permission from IAP2 Canada)*

Key Principles for Effective Public Engagement

In addition to adopting IAP2 core values, staff have updated the City's key principles of public engagement, originally developed for Hamilton's Public Engagement Charter (2015) to help inform and guide staff choices and actions when planning City-led public engagement activities. The following five core principles for City-led engagement include:

1. **Building Trust and Relationships:** Meaningful and effective public engagement fosters mutual trust and is rooted in respectful relationships with community. Valuing and seeking community-based knowledge and experience through meaningful public engagement will contribute to a stronger, healthier, more vibrant Hamilton.
2. **Every voice is valued:** Public engagement will be inclusive and accessible to best serve our City by encouraging two-way conversations and strategies that reach diverse communities and ensure that people feel heard and know their input is valued.
3. **Clear, timely and transparent information:** The City will provide enough time and notice to support and encourage active public participation. The City will clearly explain why we are engaging, what information will be collected, and how public

input will be used. Information will be easy to find, access, and understand. We will ensure that outcomes and next steps are communicated in a timely manner.

4. **Adapting Along the Way:** The City will be flexible and open to shifting our engagement approaches based on the size and scope of our work, the needs of our community and the availability of resources.
5. **Continuously Improving:** The City will cultivate a culture of excellence in public engagement by regularly evaluating, co-creating, and embracing new and improved engagement practices.

Establishing Public Engagement Participation Levels

To define the role and influence that the public has in informing decision-making, IAP2 outlines five distinct participation levels, referred to as the Spectrum of Public Participation. The five levels of public participation: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower; each defines the role of the public in informing a project's recommendations and the promise that project leads commit to as part of their public engagement efforts. Inform represents the lowest level of influence, with the public having no influence on a decision through to Empower, which places decision-making authority in the hands of the public.

In identifying the levels of public engagement for the City, staff considered how decision-making occurs within a municipal context. As defined by the Municipal Act (Section 2), cities are creatures of the province, and decision-making authority is delegated to municipal councils (and their designate). To manage community expectations on how their involvement in public engagement activities will inform a decision by Council, staff recommend that three distinct levels of public engagement be identified (attached as Appendix "B" to Report CM21011(b)):

Level 1 - Consult: the City will listen to and acknowledge public feedback. The public will share their feedback and perspectives.

Level 2 - Involve: the City will work with the public to understand and consider their feedback. The public's feedback will be reflected in the decision.

Level 3 - Collaborate: the City will partner with the public to shape a decision. The public's feedback will be incorporated in each aspect of the decision (to the maximum extent possible).

When selecting a public engagement level, it is important that project leads select the level with which they can maintain the associated commitment (or promise) to the public. It is for this reason that Empower is not recommended as an engagement level for the City. The goal of Empower is to place final decision-making in the hands of the

public, with the associated promise that the City will implement what the public decides. This recommendation does not preclude aspects of a City-led project from engaging within an empowered level, rather it is respecting that Council (or its designate) is the final decision-maker with respect to City-led projects.

Similarly, because Inform does not involve the public in influencing a project, it is also not identified as a level of engagement for City-led projects. The role of Inform is to ensure the public has the necessary information to be aware of and knowledgeable about a project; to be able to provide informed input into a project; and, to ensure the public is made aware when a decision has been made. Throughout a City-led engagement activity, no matter which engagement level is selected, staff will provide the necessary information so that participants are able to understand the project, its goals and contribute in a meaningful way.

Investment in Public Engagement

Over the past five years, public engagement-related consultant fees have been estimated at an average of \$1.2 million each year, corporate-wide. Through Council's initial investment in establishing a centralized public engagement team, cross-departmental project leads have access to trained engagement experts who provide strategic advice, support enhanced planning efforts, identify appropriate engagement tools, leverage enhanced community relationships, and employ an IDEA lens to increase participation in decision-making activities by traditionally under-represented populations. With increased investment of human resources to this team, staff will be able to better support project leads and develop a culture of excellence in this field while also providing the opportunity to reduce related external consultant fees.

The Engage Hamilton platform is an invaluable online tool for public engagement, allowing for additional participation by community members. Since its launch on June 15, 2020, Engage Hamilton has featured 164 projects, welcomed over 331,500 individual visitors with over 97,500 participants undertaking further action such as clicking a link or downloading a document and over 52,100 individuals who actively contributed their feedback by using one of the site's many engagement tools (current as of January 5, 2024).

Engage Hamilton is now a well-recognized public engagement asset within the community and across the corporation. However, the digital divide also impacts many community members, affecting their participation in online or virtual public engagement activities. The platform is not intended to replace in-person engagement activities, but rather offer an additional method that can be used to expand the reach of a project.

To support additional reach and access within our community, the Public Engagement team is developing a comprehensive public engagement lending library and tool kit to further increase access and reduce barriers to participation. Investments include:

- iPads to facilitate real-time online engagement (e.g., survey participation) and may mitigate potential barriers experienced by some participants (e.g., addressing the digital divide). The investment in iPads also encourages multiple methods to be used as part of place-based public engagement activities.
- Meeting OWLs to create an immersive and collaborative hybrid meeting environment in any space using an integrated 360-degree conference camera, microphone, and speaker.
- Branded Engage Hamilton promotional items including tents, banners, tablecloths, comment cards, and additional engagement resources to establish consistent brand recognition and relationship building efforts between City and community.
- Child minding processes to support availability of licensed child minding services at in-person public engagement events to remove potential barriers to participation. This service is offered in partnership with the Children's and Community Services Division of Healthy and Safe Communities Department.

These investments further support the establishment of a centralized Public Engagement team to assist staff in delivering public engagement activities that are both meaningful, effective, inclusive, and accessible.

Risk Mitigation

While the Public Engagement team is active in supporting staff across the corporation, the present decentralized structure for City-led public engagement presents challenges for establishing clear and consistent public engagement practices, including:

- Providing a consistent, effective, and meaningful public engagement process that is transparent and establishes identified expectations for participants;
- Ensuring a clear and consistent understanding of the levels of public engagement, in addition to the appropriate application of related and relevant public engagement methods, tools, and techniques;
- Ongoing perceptions of reduced public trust and transparency in municipal government which in turn leads to increasingly polarized issues and high emotion conflict within the public engagement arena;
- Ebbing community relationships and limited incorporation of IDEA practices to support active and meaningful public participation in municipal decision making efforts.

The adoption of a corporate-wide Public Engagement Policy and additional resources to support the establishment of a centralized public engagement team will help mitigate these risks and contribute to enhanced service delivery.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report CM21011(b) – City of Hamilton Public Engagement Policy

Appendix "B" to Report CM21011(b) – City of Hamilton Levels of Public Engagement
Quick Reference