

Public Engagement Policy

Purpose: To guide consistent, effective, and meaningful public engagement processes between the City of Hamilton, the public, and interested community partners to support decision-making of City Council and Administration. This policy will ensure that the City of Hamilton:

- Achieves a consistent, strategic, and outcomes-driven approach to public engagement;
- Establishes consistent expectations based on Hamilton's three levels of public engagement: consultation, involvement, and collaboration; and,
- Adheres to the public engagement requirements within applicable legislation, including but not limited to the Municipal Act, Planning Act, Environmental Assessment Act and Ontario Heritage Act.

Scope: This policy applies to all City of Hamilton departments and respective City policies, programs, projects, and services that have an impact on the public. There are many reasons why public engagement may be undertaken, but they should all ultimately support a decision-making process for the purposes of:

- Creating a new policy, program, project, or service;
- Evaluating an existing policy, program, project, or service;
- Fulfilling a legislated requirement;
- Responding to a Council-directed request; or,
- Building community and strengthening relationships.

This policy applies to public engagement processes led by City of Hamilton staff and City Council, as well as contractors, consultants, external organizations, and volunteers that provide services on behalf of the City.

This policy does not supersede the requirements and/or specific provisions of any current legislation that guides municipal engagement activities, including the Planning Act, the Environmental Assessment Act, or any other relevant federal and provincial legislation. This policy complements legislative engagement activities to meet internal expectations.

Responsibility: The Government Relations and Community Engagement Division is responsible for periodically reviewing and updating this policy.

Definitions

Interested Community Partner: refers to an individual or group who may have an interest in or be impacted by a topic, issue, or outcome. Interested partners may include

community members, groups, organizations, businesses, and/or City staff depending on the issue. This term “interested community partner” is used to replace the blanket term “stakeholder” which has colonial connotations.

Levels of Public Engagement: refers to the policy’s three levels of public engagement: Consult, Involve, Collaborate.

Public Engagement: refers to an intentional process involving participants in thoughtful discussion to help inform City decision-making processes.

Public Engagement Participants: refers to the idea that public engagement is grounded on the premise that members of the public have the right to have an informed say in decisions that affect their lives, the right to access information from their local government, and the right to transparent and open government that provides them with opportunities for engagement.

Principles for Public Engagement

The City of Hamilton’s strategic approach to public engagement will align with the following principles:

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.

Levels of Public Engagement

The City of Hamilton has identified three levels of public engagement: consult, involve and collaborate (as adapted from IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation). Each level outlines the City's responsibility within the public engagement process and identifies the extent of the public's influence in shaping the decision.

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

(*Adapted from IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. Used with permission from IAP2 Canada)

Informing the public is a requirement of all levels of engagement and occurs throughout the process including following a decision to ensure the public is:

- Aware of and knowledgeable about the project;
- Able to provide informed input; and,
- Aware that a decision has been made.

Policy Expectations and Standards

Public Engagement Plans: A public engagement plan is required for all projects and initiatives that will *consult*, *involve*, or *collaborate* with the community. Projects that only inform the public do not require a public engagement plan but may require a communications plan.

What We Heard Summary Reports: A summary report is required after each engagement phase of a project. This allows the community to see how their input has been considered as part of the decision-making process. What We Heard Summary Reports are required for all projects and should be posted to the Engage Hamilton project page within eight (8) weeks of the engagement phase ending.

Notice of Collection (Privacy): Personal information collected through City-led public engagement activities will be in compliance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M 56 as amended and section 227 of the Municipal Act. Privacy statements will be included as part of engagement activities hosted on the Engage Hamilton portal.

Respectful and Safe Public Engagement Spaces: This policy recognizes that the discussion and debate that underlies public engagement activities will be conducted in a respectful and safe manner by all participants, including City staff, contractors, interested parties and the general public. This applies to in-person and online public engagement activities.

Exemptions: Public engagement will not occur in circumstances that relate to:

- Standard operational procedures;
- Confidential or in-camera decisions;
- Emergency or public safety-related decisions; and/or,
- An instance when public feedback will either not influence a decision or when a decision has already been made.

Roles and Responsibilities in Public Engagement

Participant Role:

- Participate in respectful dialogue by offering ideas, suggestions, and alternative solutions.
- Request alternative ways to participate, if required.
- Recognize that citizens elect a Mayor and Ward Councillor whose role is defined in the Municipal Act. Council must represent the public and consider the well-being and interest of the entire municipality.

City Council Role:

- Endorse the public engagement policy and principles to cultivate a culture of excellence in City-led public engagement practices.
- Review and consider input gathered through public engagement in decision-making.
- Promote and support public engagement planning and identify sustainable human and financial resources required to implement this policy.

Administration Role:

- Promote and support public engagement.
- Ensure public engagement is considered for all policy, program, project, or service and that a public engagement plan and a communications plan is created when public engagement is required.
- Ensure adequate time, human and financial resources are dedicated to planning, implementing, and evaluating public engagement activities, both internally and externally.
- Consider input obtained through public engagement as part of their discussions and decision-making processes.

Project Lead Role (including consultants and community volunteers leading public engagement on behalf of the City of Hamilton):

- Adhere to the public engagement policy.
- Participate in respectful dialogue.
- Collaborate with the Public Engagement Team before a project begins to determine the level of engagement and the support required.
- Ensure allocate adequate project time and budget towards public engagement early in project planning.
- Consider input obtained through public engagement as part of their discussions and decision-making, including recommendations to Council.
- Report back on the public engagement findings and outcomes of decisions to participants and the public.
- Utilize the Engage Hamilton platform to its fullest capabilities to support online and hybrid public engagement activities.
- Select public engagement techniques that will support the objectives of the project.

Public Engagement Team Role:

- Participate in respectful dialogue.
- Develop Hamilton's Public Engagement Strategy to guide consistent, effective, and meaningful public engagement processes between the City of Hamilton, the public, and interested community partners.
- Work with corporate services to develop and implement appropriate public engagement training for City of Hamilton project leads.
- Ensure adequate time, human and financial resources are dedicated to planning, implementing, and evaluating public engagement activities.
- Review the Public Engagement Policy and Guidelines, together with supporting documents, and recommend updates when needed.
- Support project leads to implement this policy.
- Provide guidance on public engagement plans and project plans for Engage Hamilton.

Communications Team Role:

- Work with project leads to develop a communications plan when public engagement is required.
- Design graphics and supporting visuals which are accessible and appealing.
- Promote public engagement activities and opportunities through a variety of tactics using the varied media channels available to the City.
- Provide engaging information through City social media channels to reach various demographics and interested participants.
- Ensure adequate time is dedicated to communicating public engagement activities and opportunities.
- Communicate the outcomes of decisions to participants and the public.

- Utilize online and digital tools – Hamilton.ca and Engage.Hamilton.ca to provide information accessible to the community in accordance with web standards for accessibility.

Review: The City of Hamilton is committed to ensuring that this policy remains relevant and achieves its intended outcome. This policy will be reviewed, at minimum, every four (4) years.

History: This policy comes into force February XX, 2024.

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