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## Public Engagement

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### Policy Statement

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#### **1. The public and stakeholders of Strathcona County:**

- a) Have the right to be informed, consulted, and engaged in decisions that affect them.
- b) Are encouraged to meaningfully engage so their voices strengthen decisions and their involvement helps build a stronger community.
- c) Are encouraged to increase their understanding and knowledge about local issues as well as their role in Strathcona County's decision-making process so they can participate meaningfully.

#### **2. Strathcona County:**

- a) Will provide public engagement opportunities that are open and transparent.
- b) Will give serious consideration to the public's input gathered in public engagement processes.
- c) Is committed to working together with the public to continuously improve its public engagement processes.
- d) Supports County staff to build their skills and knowledge to engage the public in a meaningful way.
- e) Believes that involving the public and stakeholders in public engagement leads to better, more informed decisions.

### Purpose

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The purpose of this policy is to establish the foundation for the County's reasons, guidelines and procedures for conducting public engagement. This policy applies to both staff and external consultants.

### Definitions

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**External Public Engagement** - A formal, defined, interactive process between the County, the public and stakeholders, designed to increase mutual understanding, gather information, exchange ideas, and/or solve problems with the goal of making better, more informed decisions.

~~**Internal Engagement** - A formal, defined, interactive process between the County and its employees designed to increase mutual understanding, gather information, exchange ideas, and/or solve problems with the goal of making better, more informed decisions.~~

**The Public** - Anyone (including groups and individuals) who may have an interest in a specific topic or issue under discussion. The public may, or may not, be directly impacted by a decision on the issue.

**A Stakeholder** - An individual or group who has a specific interest or is impacted by a topic or issue. Stakeholders may include residents, non-residents, groups, organizations, individuals, representatives and/or County staff, depending on the issue.

## Guidelines

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### Principles of Public Engagement

Public Engagement in Strathcona County will be planned, implemented, evaluated and reported using these nine guidelines.

1. Public Engagement is **PROACTIVE**: it is initiated early enough for participants to make informed decisions and impact the outcomes.
2. Public Engagement is **RELEVANT** and **EFFECTIVE**: the process is planned, effectively communicated and implemented to encourage public participation and contribution in an appropriate manner.
3. Public Engagement is **EQUITABLE**: Members of the public are provided with a reasonable opportunity to contribute, developing a balanced perspective.
4. Public Engagement is **CLEAR** and **FOCUSED**: The County and the public understand their respective roles in a public engagement process, including the level of involvement and how input will be used to inform decisions.
5. Public Engagement is **INCLUSIVE**: It uses a range of methods to engage various audiences to maximize participation and improve the quality of feedback.
6. Public Engagement **INCREASES UNDERSTANDING**: Mutual understanding is increased through two-way interaction, where the information presented is easily understood by the intended audience.
7. Public Engagement is **RESPONSIVE** and **ONGOING**: Public engagement has an ongoing focus on relationship building, active listening, and increased understanding.
8. Public Engagement **BUILDS CAPACITY**: Staff, public and stakeholders are better equipped for future engagement opportunities.
9. Public Engagement is **ACCOUNTABLE** and **TRANSPARENT**: public engagement outcomes are measured, evaluated and reported in a timely manner.

### Public Engagement Circumstances

Public engagement is required when:

- Legislation requires it
- Council or County Administration requests it

Public engagement may be required when:

- Citizens or stakeholders request it
- Citizens' quality of life may be affected
- The natural environment may be affected
- Geographical communities or communities of interest may be affected
- There are already strong views on the issue
- Many people will be affected

Public engagement is not required when

- The decision has already been made
- The project- or issue-related decision has already been made
- The issue relates to the development of an administrative policy that doesn't require or involve public consultation
- Stakeholder input will not be considered

### Public Engagement Approaches

The Public engagement continuum gives guidance to County staff to determine the level of engagement for a particular project. The levels represent increasing degrees to which the public can impact the decision or outcome.

*Input* - Obtain feedback from citizens and stakeholders to test ideas or concepts, clarify issues, and identify possible solutions.

*Listen and Learn* - Create opportunities for County staff, Council, citizens and stakeholders to enter into a dialogue together to explore each other's perspectives, goals, plans, concerns, expectations, and possible solutions.

*Collaborate* - Partner with citizens and stakeholders in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives, recommendations and preferred solutions.

*Empower* - Delegate some or all aspects of decision making to citizens and stakeholders.

Clear, concise, non-biased information is the basis of all public engagement processes.

## Policy Record

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**Date of Approval by Council:**      **Resolution No:**

**Next Review Date:**                      **Policy No:**      GOV-002-025

**Last Review Date:**                      **Replaces:**      N/A

**Administrative Review:**      Communications