



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: Community Engagement Policy

Report to: Corporate Services Committee

Date of meeting: July 5, 2022

Report Author:

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Department responsible:

Corporate Services

Report Number: CS-10-22

Recommendation:

That the draft Community Engagement Policy be posted for community consultation.

Highlights:

- The Community Engagement Policy is part of a broader initiative to develop, update, and modernize policies, plans, and frameworks that fall under the Communications portfolio.
- The purpose of the policy is to better understand information involving community challenges, wants, and needs, and to foster conversations related to the future of the community.
- The policy outlines a streamlined process of community engagement and provides flexibility to ensure that stakeholder engagement is incorporated into the decision-making process.

Background:

Council approved additional staff resources in the Communications division to increase capacity and allow staff to commit more time and resources to addressing pressing strategic initiatives, including modernizing, updating, and developing policies, plans, and frameworks that fall under the Communications portfolio. To date, staff has revised, and council has adopted, the Communications Policy, Social Media Policy, and Notice Policy. To further fulfill this commitment, Communications staff present the attached Schedule A – Draft Community Engagement Policy.

The Municipality of Port Hope recognizes and values the importance of civic engagement as part of the municipal decision-making process. Community engagement and information sharing through two-way communication fosters trust between citizens and local government, enhances the Municipality's transparency and accountability to its stakeholders and builds capacity to gather differing perspectives on challenges and

items of community interest. The Municipality of Port Hope is committed to providing an inclusive community engagement process to better inform and engage stakeholders about municipal projects that have a significant scope and potential impact on the community, environment, level of service, and /or health and safety.

Discussion:

The purpose of the proposed Community Engagement Policy is to build capacity to better understand complex information involving community challenges and stakeholder wants and needs, and to foster conversations and differing perspectives related to the future of the community.

The Policy outlines the process of community engagement to:

- Ensure the purpose of engagement with stakeholders is meaningful and relevant and the methods used are well suited to generate highly effective feedback from the broadest range of stakeholders possible.
- Establish the process by which community engagement is activated by the Municipality.
- Establish the responsibilities for staff, Council and municipal stakeholders who participate in community engagement activities with the Municipality.
- Ensure that community engagement initiatives are presented in a professional, clear, easy to understand, and accessible manner to all people.

The new Community Engagement Policy appends current key policies and documents relevant to the engagement process, including the Accountability and Transparency Policy, Social Media Policy, Communications Policy, and Branding Guidelines. This policy applies to Council, appointed members of all municipal committees, staff, contractors, consultants, temporary and other workers, and volunteers.

This policy is intended to replace the previous Community Consultation Policy adopted under By-law 56/2011. The previous policy includes and recommends use of an outdated resource from the Local Government Participatory Practices Manual, which was originally published in 1999 and is 60 pages long. Best practices and technology advancements have evolved since its publication and the information within the manual is no longer current.

Additionally, the previous consultation policy outlines a prescriptive approach to engagement with municipal stakeholders. For example, the previous policy requires that all comments received by Council or staff are to be included in a report to Council and posted on the agenda. We have received a number of concerns from residents who would prefer that their feedback is provided as part of the decision-making process more generally, and not publicly shared verbatim. Additionally, under the previous policy when comments are received, they are posted on the Council agenda without summarization or recommended approaches based on the content of the feedback. This is highly inefficient for Council.

The proposed Policy allows for more flexibility to summarize and aggregate comments received to streamline the engagement results and allow for effectual and efficient consideration by Council.

The previous Consultation Policy also includes elements of the outdated policies, including the previous Public Notice By-law and does not reflect current best practices in community engagement industry standards, nor does it consider adequate municipal efficiencies in the decision-making process.

Financial Considerations:

There are no financial considerations for this Policy.

Communication and Public Engagement:

The intention of the Community Engagement Policy is to ensure that engagement with municipal stakeholders is meaningful and relevant. As such, posting this Policy for community feedback and comment is imperative. A project page on My Port Hope, the Municipality's community engagement platform, will be created and a comment form will be open throughout the month of July to receive feedback on the Policy. Staff will incorporate the feedback, where possible, and provide a report back to Committee with the necessary Policy revisions.

Conclusion:

Civic engagement provides Council, staff, stakeholders, and the public opportunities to foster conversations about the future of the community and builds capacity to gather differing perspectives on challenges and items of community interest. The Community Engagement Policy outlines the ways in which community engagement is conducted by the Municipality of Port Hope to build trust with the community and enhance the decision-making process for our elected officials.

Staff also plan to develop a standard operating procedure for community engagement, to align with this Policy and inform, streamline, and clarify internal processes for community engagement campaigns.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Community Engagement Policy