

Staff Report

Report To: City Council

Report From: Michelle Palmer, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Operational Effectiveness

Meeting Date: December 18, 2023

Report Code: CM-23-016

Subject: Community Engagement Policy and Toolkit

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-23-016 respecting Community Engagement Policy and Toolkit, City Council directs staff to bring forward a by-law to approve the Community Engagement Policy.

Highlights:

- Effective engagement builds trust and strengthens the connection between the Council, staff, and the community.
- A Council policy provides clarity and consistency on when and how the City engages the community.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Collaborative City - KR4 - Develop and implement an engagement framework policy and tool to increase public input on projects / initiatives by June 2022

Climate and Environmental Implications:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Previous Report/Authority:

[CM-22-009 Community Engagement Review and Online Community Engagement Platform](#)

Background:

City staff are continually working to improve the ways in which citizens can participate in the decisions that impact them most. In June 2022, the City launched the community engagement website “Our City” to create more opportunities for the community to be consulted on various projects.

Throughout the remainder of 2022, a survey was launched using the “Our City” website to gather input from the community and staff undertook a review of the current community engagement practices at the City to assess how the organization’s public engagement is occurring, current practices and policies, consistencies, gaps, challenges, and potential improvements.

2023, staff researched best practice in community engagement from a variety of municipalities.

The intent of the review was to develop a formal framework that:

- Upheld the view that involvement of the community and key stakeholders in planning and decision-making for the City is fundamental to more effective governance
- Provided direction and guidance to ensure that the City’s responsibility to engage the community consistently is fulfilled; and
- Addressed any existing gaps.

Analysis:

The “Our City” page for the community engagement review had 200 people visit, and 40 people completed the survey. Staff also attended a public meeting session facilitated by the community with approximately 40 people to gather feedback. Consistently, the community identified the following themes:

- Provide more time and options for citizens to provide feedback, including having public meetings at convenient times
- Ensure citizens are included and represented
- Explain the purpose of asking for public input and how it will be used
- Make information easy to find and understand
- Notify the public about the final decisions and how their input was used

Interviews were completed with a sampling of staff which have led community engagement to gather their feedback. Common themes identified by staff include:

- Provide more training, support, resources, and expertise to staff delivering engagement activities
- Ensure appropriate staff and financial resourcing is in place for engagement initiatives

Based on the feedback received and best practice, it was determined that a formal community engagement policy and with a toolkit for staff would achieve consistency on when and how the City engages the community. It would also enhance clarity on roles while providing staff with the tools needed to plan and evaluate community engagement activities.

The objectives of the community engagement policy and toolkit include:

- Identifying clear, consistent guidelines for staff, Council and the public to facilitate a coordinated approach to community engagement
- Informing the community about the City's approach to consultation and engagement activities so that citizens know what to expect
- Facilitating Council decision-making that is open, transparent, responsive, and accountable to the community.

Upon approval of the community engagement policy, the next steps include implementing a communication and education plan for staff with the intent to roll out in early 2024.

Financial Implications:

There aren't any direct costs to implement the community engagement policy. Costs related to engagement for specific projects will be included in the project budgets as part of future budgets.

Communication Strategy:

The “Our City” page related to the community engagement review will be updated and the policy will be posted on the City’s website.

Consultation:

The Communications Advisor, and the Manager of Legislated Services were consulted in the development of this report.

Attachments:

1. CE003 Community Engagement Policy
2. Community Engagement Toolkit

Recommended and approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Michelle Palmer, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Operational Effectiveness, at mpalmer@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1246.