



PART B

Citizen Engagement

SECTION B1

Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement is essential in building a plan that reflects each community's vision and provides continuing and meaningful opportunities to participate in the community development process into the future.

Background

Early public involvement and participation is an upfront investment that usually pays off at the end of the process by achieving policies and programs that are often perceived as fair and acceptable. If a municipality fails to involve affected citizens in a fair and open process, a community may not trust the process and will unlikely support the results. Implementing a public participation program to achieve consensus building often results in the establishment of long-term positive relationships and is a practical way to resolve conflicts that may lead to time-consuming and unproductive planning.

The Municipality's Plan Review Citizen Engagement Program, through a variety of means, permitted every East Hants resident, business owner and property owner the ability and opportunity to be meaningfully involved. The primary objective was to inform, consult with, and listen to the residents of East Hants on a variety of technically challenging and politically sensitive planning and development issues. This participation led to the establishment of the new East Hants Official Community Plan that will guide how East Hants develops over the next decade and beyond.

Additionally, this section outlines how ongoing engagement is to take place to ensure citizen engagement in decisions regarding development applications and changes to this Strategy.

The Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) is critical to a municipality's long-term strategic direction, and it is essential to managing future growth and development. The Municipal Planning Strategy, as the first piece of the Municipality's Official Community Plan, provides a comprehensive policy framework to guide the physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural development of the Municipality.

Plan East Hants – Citizen Engagement Program

Municipal Council adopted a Citizen Engagement Program for the municipal plan review, Plan East Hants. The engagement program was required to satisfy the *Municipal Government Act's* (MGA) minimum legal requirements in relation to a plan review public participation program but went well beyond minimum requirements.

The engagement program involved several components:

- Formation of a Citizen's Advisory Panel to provide advice on the public participation program and feedback during the policy development phase of the review.
- Use of various survey methods including a visual preference survey and questionnaires. Surveys were available by mail, in-person and on-line.
- Extensive use of area newspapers, community poster locations, municipal website, social media, stakeholder mailing list and quarterly municipal newsletter to inform the public at each stage of the review and solicit participation in surveys, open houses and other public meetings.
- Very early in the review, visioning sessions were held in 3 locations around the Municipality to ask broad questions (e.g., what do you want the municipality to look

like in 25 years?).

- Community design workshops were held in 8 communities with identifiable village centres (i.e. Enfield, Elmsdale, Lantz, Milford, Shubenacadie, Maitland, Kennetcook, and Mount Uniacke) to focus in on development issues in those unique places.
- Direct consultation was conducted with identified stakeholders including adjoining municipalities, Sipekne'katik First Nation, the development community, and the agricultural community.

The Citizen Engagement Program expressed Municipal Council's desire to establish a proactive program designed to involve all citizens in a fair and open process.

Ongoing Citizen Engagement

Ongoing public participation is intended to ensure the East Hants Official Community Plan keeps pace with the needs and desires of residents by designing a program that has the three key components of public participation: public consultation, public education and awareness.

This subsection outlines policy direction statements for the Municipality in relation to public participation, consultation, and education and awareness. These policies, techniques, and strategies are designed to ensure the Community Plan keeps pace with the needs and desires of its residents.

The policies are designed to maximize the involvement of the public in the planning process. There are two major goals in achieving this. First, make all future public participation processes as representative of the community as possible, and second ensure that the process is open. These goals attempt to ensure the following:

- A process that is representative will attempt to:
- Include all groups;
 - Accommodate differences in age, abilities, gender, and literacy, and so forth;
 - Ensure that participants at meetings are

broadly representative of the community, or accommodate nuances of individual groups in a setting that encourages their participation;

- Use a range of techniques to encourage participation; and
- Minimize barriers to participation (related to class, culture, literacy, education, age, physical or developmental challenges, time, and availability and cost of transportation and child care).

A process that is open will:

- Encourage people to freely debate issues;
- Encourage people to feel comfortable speaking in public;
- Encourage people to be receptive to other opinions;
- Attempt to avoid a "position-based" discussion;
- Let participants feel comfortable that their opinions won't be used against them;
- Value public input; and
- Minimize barriers to openness (e.g. intimidation, judgment of others, speaking in front of a large group, low levels of literacy or communication skills, social status, and a fear of being told that you are wrong, or that people will not listen to you).

Public pressure demands that municipalities better understand their relationship with the people they serve. The public is often concerned when something new, large, or different is proposed in or near their community. Communities live with the consequences of planning decisions and thus expects to share in and be responsible for their decision making. The greatest guarantee of the continuing growth of public involvement, however, is the public itself. If the public is not invited to participate, history shows that people will often demand it.

Effective consensus building and planning requires time to address conflict and differing viewpoints and depends on getting people to pull together. An angry public contributes to the erosion of our basic institutions. When important decisions must be made,

especially in times of emergency, no one will give the relevant decision makers the benefit of the doubt if the public's trust has eroded. Management of conflict through a proactive, thorough, and well established citizen engagement program is central to planning and provides a solid foundation for implementation.

Advisory Committees

Council has established committees to provide advice and recommendations to Municipal Council on land use planning related issues. These advisory committees provide a valuable service to the Municipality by investigating and reviewing issues within their mandate and forwarding their recommendation to Municipal Council for final decision.

Policy Goal

Council's goal is to establish committees which include members of the public and identified stakeholders to provide recommendations on community development issues to aid in its decision making process.

Policy Statements

CE1. Council shall establish a Planning Advisory Committee with membership consisting of both Council members and members of the public to provide recommendations to Council on land use planning and heritage issues.

CE2. Council shall establish an agricultural advisory committee with representation from Council, the agricultural community and the public at large to provide recommendations to the Planning Advisory Committee on land use planning issues related to agriculture or agricultural lands.

CE3. Council may establish one or more area advisory committees to provide recommendations to the Planning Advisory Committee on land use planning issues within specific geographic areas or communities.

CE4. Council shall advertise, through area newspapers, the municipal website and other means deemed appropriate, all public appointment openings on the various committees.

Citizen Engagement & Education

Citizen Engagement brings residents directly into the decision-making process. The degree of Citizen Engagement often varies depending upon the level of perceived threat or benefit to the public's economic, institutional, and personal interests. Citizen Engagement needs to be as open and representative of the community as possible to ensure residents have trust in both the process itself and their local government.



Policy Goal

Council's goal is to encourage and recognize citizen engagement as an important and essential part of the social, economic, and cultural development of the Municipality. Council aims to provide for, and facilitate sufficient opportunities for citizen engagement, which represents all geographic and demographic groups in all stages of the planning process. Council recognizes the importance of having an Official Community Plan which is amended to meet the changing needs and desires of its residents.

Policy Statements

- CE5.** Council shall provide ample and diverse opportunities for residents, representing all geographic and demographic groups in the Municipality, to participate in local planning and government through notification and outreach programs such as public meetings and workshops, information sessions, and pre-notification meetings and hearings at an early stage of the process, especially when dealing with issues of significant community impact.
- CE6.** Council shall explore the potential of new forms, techniques, and methods of public participation such as:
- a)** Digital visual model exercises;
 - b)** Guided site visits;
 - c)** Design charrettes;
 - d)** Drafting community character elements;
 - e)** Undertaking visioning processes with benchmarks;
 - f)** Proactive and aggressive advertising campaigns designed to solicit public involvement;
 - g)** Facilitated meetings and groups;
 - h)** Interacting with formal neighbourhood groups;
 - i)** Involving youth in planning processes; and
 - j)** Use of the internet, social media and Municipal web page.
- CE7.** Council shall encourage the identification and promotion of new opportunities for neighbourhood-based groups to contribute to the planning and development process.
- CE8.** Council shall encourage public attendance at Municipal Council and advisory committee meetings by various means such as notices in Municipally sponsored media.
- CE9.** Council shall make available on-line, in a timely manner, all approved and up to date minutes from Council and Advisory Committees. Council shall also make available Municipal bylaws including the Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use Bylaw and Subdivision Bylaw and explanatory information to provide an opportunity for a more informed public.
- CE10.** Council shall investigate and put in place effective avenues for the communication of Municipal matters by such means as Municipal community notice boards in convenient locations, information posters in areas or locations frequently visited by the public, local, and provincial newspapers, and by making use of the municipal website and social media.
- CE11.** Council shall take measures to keep residents of the Municipality informed about planning, development, and community matters and how they may have input into the planning and other Municipal processes on a regular basis and at all stages of these processes.
- CE12.** Council shall include relevant planning related information in the quarterly municipal newsletter distributed to all East Hants households.
- CE13.** Council shall encourage and explore

means to involve youth in the planning and development of the Municipality.

- CE14.** Council shall encourage its Planning and Development Department to participate and make presentations whenever possible to the various schools regarding planning, development, and community issues at such events as career day, open houses, and geography or civic review days.
- CE15.** Council shall utilize the subdivision and building and development permit process as an important means to educate and make the public aware of planning, development, and community initiatives; projects; and applications through the use of information such as brochures and pamphlets.
- CE16.** Council shall require public consultation, including a public information meeting, for any proposed development, whether as-of-right or through a planning application, on PID 45148111.

Amendments to East Hants Official Community Plan

This subsection outlines policy direction statements for the Municipality in relation to public participation, consultation, and education and awareness. These policies, techniques, and strategies are designed to ensure the Community Plan keeps pace with the needs and desires of its residents.

Development Applications

Development applications, whether rezoning or development agreement proposals, usually involve changing or expanding the use of a property or structure. In evaluating such development applications, it is essential that the public be involved in the decision making process.

Policy Goal

Council's goal is to ensure optimum consulta-

tion, participation, education, and awareness with the public and particularly those viewed as stakeholders, including abutting municipalities, in relation to any development application.

Policy Statements

- CE17.** Council shall, when considering amendments to the Land Use Bylaw, Subdivision Bylaw or approval of a development agreement, require the following:
- a)** Council shall, upon receipt of an application other than an unsubstantial development agreement amendment, place a notice in the newspaper & online.
 - b)** Council shall mail to all property owners and residents within 300 m of the proposed rezoning or development agreement application, a letter outlining the date, time, and location of any public information meetings and/or public hearing. Council may extend the notification distance greater than the 300 m. The notice shall also appear in an area newspaper to meet notification requirements of the MGA and on the municipal website in advance of the meeting and shall include the time and place of the meeting and where further information can be obtained.
 - c)** Following the initial report for a Land Use Bylaw or Subdivision Bylaw amendment; Initial Consideration of a development agreement; or following a public information meeting, where one is required, a questionnaire shall be sent to each owner and resident of a property within 300 m of the subject property. Council may extend the notification distance greater than the 300 m. The questionnaire package shall be accompanied by a prepaid self-addressed return envelope and provide a copy of Staff's preliminary

report on the application or a summary of the application. The questionnaire shall seek the property owner's and resident's initial opinion on the application. Council shall consider all questionnaire results before approving or rejecting the application.

CE18. Amendments to the Subdivision Bylaw or Land Use Bylaw, which are not site-specific, shall not require a questionnaire but will require an initial notice and public hearing notice published using an area newspaper ~~and the~~ municipal website, ***social media and may include community print media where available.*** In addition, notices shall be sent to any identified stakeholders and adjoining municipalities as deemed appropriate.

CE19. Where Council determines that an application has the potential for significant community interest, Council may require a public information meeting be held.

CE20. Council shall engage with an abutting municipality, by requesting comments, where a proposed rezoning or development agreement application subject property is within 300 m of the municipal boundary. Details of any public meetings shall also be provided to the same abutting municipality. Council may extend the notification distance greater than 300 m.

Amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy

This Municipal Planning Strategy was adopted by Municipal Council to guide land use and community development for the Municipality of East Hants over the next decade and beyond. In creating the Strategy, the Municipality undertook an extensive plan review process and accompanying public participation program.

This effort was designed to reflect the wishes

and desires of East Hants residents and how they want to see their community and Municipality develop. Therefore, apart from minor revisions, amendments to this Strategy should be reviewed with as much public input as possible.

Policy Goal

Council's goal is to achieve orderly and economic growth for compact and complete communities with sensitivity to the environment by following this Municipal Planning Strategy and achieving optimum public involvement. Amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy are only to be considered if the changes will, in Council's opinion, bring significant benefit to the Municipality.

Policy Statements

CE21. Council shall, when considering amendments to the East Hants Municipal Planning Strategy, require the following:

- a) Consultation requirements for Land Use Bylaw amendments, as outlined in this strategy, shall be followed.
- b) In addition, the Planning Advisory Committee shall conduct at minimum one public information and input meeting on the proposed amendments prior to Council holding a public hearing, unless said amendments are housekeeping in nature.
- c) Other consultation methods as deemed appropriate by Council such as design charrettes or organized site visits.

Disposal of Open Space Lands

Occasionally, it may be necessary or in the best interest of the Municipality to dispose of lands that are dedicated as open space. Opportunities may arise that requires lots to be configured to provide for better open space accessibility. The *Municipal Government Act* provides a method

of how Municipally owned open space shall be disposed of, Council has further expanded the public participation requirements for the disposal of open space lands so that residents have an opportunity to comment on the disposal of lands.

Policy Goal

Council’s goal is to ensure consultation with residents in the subdivision where an open space parcel is being considered for disposal.

Policy Statement

CE22. Council shall, when considering the disposal of open space lands , require the following:

- a) Council shall, upon consideration of the disposal of an open space parcel, place a notice in the newspaper &

online, at least 14 days prior to the Council meeting where the disposal of open space is expect to be voted on, describing the location and reason for the disposal, and indicating the date, time, and location of the Council meeting.

- b) Council shall mail to all property owners within 300 m of the proposed open space parcel to be disposed of, a letter outlining the date, time, and location of the meeting where Council is expected to vote on the disposal of the open space parcel, the letter shall include the time, date and location of the meeting and where further information can be obtained.

Policy	Amendment Date	Description
CE18	May 21, 2025	Amendments to the MPS in response to MGA changes.