



**Subject:** *Plan Update - Community Engagement*  
**To:** CAO for Planning Advisory Committee, November 16, 2021  
**Date Prepared:** November 8, 2021  
**Related Motions:** None  
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**Approved by:** John Woodford, Director of Planning & Development

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### Summary

As part of the ongoing plan update, Planning staff are preparing background papers to discuss and propose approaches to different land use issues within the Municipality. The current background paper discusses the existing Community Engagement section of the Municipal Planning Strategy and suggests some changes.

### Financial Impact Statement

There is no immediate financial impact to the municipality from this background report. The changes outlined in the report have the potential to decrease advertising costs.

### Recommendation

Authorize staff to begin preparing amendments to the citizen engagement section of the MPS.

### Recommended Motion

*Planning Advisory Committee recommends that Council:*

- *Authorize staff to begin preparing amendments to the citizen engagement section of the MPS.*

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## Background

The current citizen engagement section of the Municipal Planning Strategy was approved by Council in 2016. Since the adoption of the current municipal planning strategy the Weekly Press is no longer in operation so the planning & development department uses the Chronicle Herald for its advertising needs. The Chronicle Herald is significantly more expensive than the Weekly Press was and this has a financial impact on the planning & development department budget but also on developers who submitting planning applications.

The Municipal Government Act sets out requirements for notification through a newspaper:

- Prior to holding a public hearing, a newspaper notice is to be placed each week for two successive weeks detailing the date, time and location of the public hearing;
- A notice that planning documents are in effect for MPS amendments is to be placed in a newspaper.
- A notice is to be placed in a newspaper setting out the right to appeal an approval of land use bylaw amendments or a development agreement.

The above requirements cannot be varied but staff would like to discuss if the current citizen engagement policies in the MPS are relevant still and if they can be amended.

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## Suggested amendments

The way that people obtain their news has changed significantly over the past several years. Newspapers were the main source of news for people but now a lot of people obtain their news online. The municipality has a website which makes accessible all notices. The municipality also has social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. In addition to the above, letters are mailed to property owners within 300 metres of an application property.

Staff feel that the number of people who only find out about an application or planning document amendments through newspapers is likely small. Analytics for the municipal website and Facebook show that people are viewing information on the applications and notices online. For example, the notice of public hearing for the Dr. Sheehy application reached 1.7k on facebook, meaning that 1.7k saw the notice. Of that number 55 people clicked the link in the facebook notice. The notice of approval for the Gail Sloane application reached 826 people on facebook with 23 of those people clicking the link in the notice. Removing the requirement for newspaper notices for applications and amendments will save developers and also the municipality money without compromising the ability to reach people through other methods.

These policy change suggestions do not remove the requirements under the MGA regarding newspaper notices and one of these would be the public hearing notice.

Current Policy	Suggested Approach
<i>Initial notice is placed in newspaper and online. We place the notice in the Chronicle Herald; municipal website; and on social media.</i>	Remove the requirement for initial notice in the newspaper. Continue with posting notice on website and social media.
<i>The notice (PIM) shall also appear in an area newspaper and on the municipal website. We place the notice in the Chronicle Herald; municipal website; and on social media.</i>	Remove the requirement for a newspaper notice for PIM's. Continue with posting on the municipal website and social media.  Where an application is site specific letters will still be mailed to nearby property owners/residents.
<b><i>Following first reading of a Land Use Bylaw or Subdivision Bylaw amendment or Initial</i></b>	For MPS amendments the policy be amended to enable a questionnaire to be mailed following a

<p><i>Consideration of a development agreement, a questionnaire shall be sent to each owner of a property within 300 m of the subject property.</i></p> <p>When an MPS amendment is also included which frequently happens with LUB text and zoning amendments, first reading will not be the first report to Planning Advisory Committee. This can mean that the questionnaire is not sent out until later in the process and requires a report requesting first reading before the questionnaire be mailed.</p>	<p>public information meeting (PIM). This will enable a more efficient process than waiting until after first reading.</p>
<p><i>Following first reading of a Land Use Bylaw or Subdivision Bylaw amendment or Initial Consideration of a development agreement, a <u>questionnaire shall be sent to each owner of a property within 300 m of the subject property.</u> 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.</i></p> <p>The cost of mailing each questionnaire package is approximately \$1.92, depending on the weight of the envelope, and \$0.90 is added to the return envelope. The number of addresses we mail to ranges from around 20 properties to up to approximately 500 properties. The number of returned questionnaires is typically low. For the River Country DA application we have received approximately 15% back. For the FH Development application we have received approximately 10% back.</p>	<p>Questionnaires be available online for property owners to complete. A letter will be mailed to those people inviting them to complete the questionnaire online. People who receive a letter from the municipality inviting them to complete the online questionnaire can request a paper copy be mailed to them if they prefer a paper copy. This therefore gives the option of either online or a paper copy. This is the same approach that the Town of Truro take.</p> <p>From the completed online survey, staff can seek to identify for PAC and Council which ones are properties within the 300 metre notification area.</p>
<p><i>Questionnaires and notice of public hearings/PIM's shall be sent to <u>each owner of a property</u> within 300 m of the subject property.</i></p> <p>Questionnaires and notices of public hearings/PIM's are only mailed to property owners and not the person residing in the property. In some cases where there are multiple properties or units only one person will be notified where the people residing in the existing buildings may be directly impacted.</p>	<p>Staff suggest mailing to property owners and where relevant to the resident too.</p>
<p><i>Council shall advertise, through area newspapers, the municipal website and other means deemed appropriate, all public appointment openings on the various committees.</i></p>	<p>This policy requires advertisements be posted in a newspaper. This may not be the most appropriate means of communication or promoting the openings on committees. Staff suggest this policy be amended to list newspapers as one of the methods which could be used.</p>

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## Conclusions

Planning staff have reviewed the citizen engagement section of the Municipal Planning Strategy and suggest that some changes could be made including removing the requirement for newspaper notices, create online questionnaires for applications, and to mailout questionnaires following a PIM rather than following first reading for MPS amendments. Staff do not feel that these changes compromise notifying or engaging the public in planning application processing.

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## Recommendations

Authorize staff to begin preparing amendments to the citizen engagement section of the MPS.