

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Tuesday, June 6, 2023
Subject	Components of the new Community Engagement Framework

Recommendation

1. That the revised Community Engagement Policy be approved, formally replacing the 2019 version of the Policy, and that staff be directed to apply the Policy when designing and implementing community engagement.
 2. That the draft Community Engagement Charter be approved, formally replacing the 2015 Community Engagement Framework, and staff be directed to develop necessary plans and initiatives for operationalizing the Charter.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

This report summarizes the recent review and modernization of the City's Community Engagement Framework (Framework) and brings forward two components of the modernized Framework for Council's approval—the Community Engagement Policy, for staff and Council use, and the Community Engagement Charter, our commitment to the community.

Our Community Engagement Framework and corresponding components set the standard and expectations for when and how we engage the community meaningfully on matters that affect them.

Key Findings

In 2022, the City's community engagement team initiated a review of the Framework and the City's engagement practices.

Through multiple phases of community engagement led by City staff, it was made clear how we could modernize the Framework to reflect the needs and expectations of our diverse community more accurately. It was also noted that City staff and Council required community engagement materials tailored for their use.

By approving the revised Community Engagement Policy and the Community Engagement Charter, the first two components of the modernized Framework, the City will have renewed direction and clear priorities for driving innovative and meaningful community engagement.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The Policy and Charter align with numerous aspects of the City's current strategic plan, Guelph. Future Ready. Specifically, they support the Working Together for our Future pillar through a commitment to advancing innovative community engagement practices and improving City services through rigorous and transparent use of community engagement data. Furthermore, the Charter's commitment to nurturing relationships and building capacity for participation supports the City's commitment to applying an equity lens to everything we do.

The City's new Framework also supports the Foundations theme of the evolving draft of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan coming to Council for approval in July.

Financial Implications

It's expected that the new Framework will have relatively minor financial implications. Some project budgets that include community engagement may grow marginally to accommodate some of the shifting requirements and commitments.

Existing and previously approved but currently vacant positions in the Strategic Communication and Community Engagement (SCCE) team will support what is estimated to be a minor increase in demand for community engagement support across the City, as well as any new work associated with nurturing relationships and building capacity for participation.

Any of these impacts will be reflected in the SCCE multi-year budget submission and tied to the advancement of the One City. One Voice. Shared Purpose. multi-year communications and engagement strategy (OCOVSP).

Report

Background

The Community Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Framework were first approved by Council in 2013 and updated in 2015. They were among the first in Canadian municipalities and became an inspiration for many other communities to develop their own.

Since their approval, the Policy and Framework have shaped how community consultations for hundreds of projects have taken shape across the City and how important City decisions reflect the community's input.

We've learned and grown a lot over the past decade. The time was right to review the City's Community Engagement Policy, Framework, and practices. Since their initial inception, we've updated the Community Plan, created the OCOVSP multi-year communications and community engagement plan and experienced the challenges (and opportunities) coming out of COVID-19 pandemic.

This work is rooted in the City's long history of community engagement leadership; a decade's worth of learning related to the implementation of the City's first Framework; and, input from community members, experts, and staff who contributed their time to this review.

The review had several objectives, including:

- identifying and correcting outdated information in the existing Policy and Framework. Ensure compliance with relevant legislation, regulations, and policies;
- ensuring alignment of the Framework with ever-evolving best-practices in community engagement and public participation;
- aligning engagement principles and approaches with emerging best-practices related to inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and anti-racism;
- ensuring the form of the modernized Framework (and all accompanying resources and tools) align with the desired functions and audience needs; and
- building on the innovative spirit of the initial framework, re-affirm the City of Guelph as a leader in engagement across the sector.

The review took place over three phases. With Council's approval, staff will initiate a fourth phase of work focused on operationalization.

- Phase 1 (November 2022 – February 2023)
Broad community engagement and review of best practices
- Phase 2 (February – March 2023)
Leveraging insights from phase 1, develop draft components of a new Framework
- Phase 3 (April 2023 - June 2023)
Validate draft components of a new Framework that pertain to governance and strategy with key audiences and seek Council approval
- Phase 4 (July 2023 and beyond)
Develop additional components of the new Framework that focus on implementation and operationalization

Consultations

A high-level summary of community engagement is outlined below. For more detailed information, please see Attachment-1 Comprehensive Report On Community Engagement - The City Of Guelph Community Engagement Framework And Practices.

Through multiple phases of engagement, staff had quality interactions with diverse audiences across the City. A mix of mostly qualitative methods (online, in-person, and virtual) created space for community members to share what was most important to them, for insights to emerge organically, and for staff to explore certain themes more deeply.

Staff spoke with

- local Indigenous community members;
- community members from equity-denied groups;
- community members from the broader public and the "silent majority";
- community members that frequently engage with the City;
- community partners, organizations, groups, and associations;
- business owners and operators;
- city Councillors;

- staff;
- public participation consultants, academics, and experts; and
- other municipalities.

Engagement during Phase 1

During engagement in Phase 1, participants indicated that the aspiration of the 2015 Framework was still relevant but work needed to be done to deliver on that aspiration more consistently. The community shared their desire for community engagement practices that:

- are more accessible and inclusive across various spectrums of diversity;
- reach more diverse audiences;
- meet the community where they are;
- focus on relationship development and trust building;
- build capacity in the community for participation;
- better connect the dots between past, current, and future engagement and decisions;
- report back more consistently to the community;
- strengthen the rigour of data collection, analysis and sharing;
- spark creativity, curiosity, and joy; and
- are measured not by how many people respond, but by the quality of engagement (e.g., diversity of input, depth of insights).

Specific to the previous Framework, they shared:

- it's unclear who the audience is;
- it's too long and too technical;
- the tools aren't relevant to the community; and
- an appreciation for the complexity of City decisions.

With this feedback—and feedback from other interested parties—the City created draft components of a new Framework.

Engagement during Phase 3

During engagement in Phase 3 of the project, the City shared portions of the Charter with the community. By and large, participants validated that the direction the City had taken was clear and they believed it would result in better community engagement. The feedback received also noted some specific areas that could be strengthened or made more clear:

- strengthen the focus on relationship development specifically with equity-denied groups and those with diverse living and lived experience;
- there should be explicit mention of anti-racism in the Charter;
- clarify that the City should focus on relationship development outside of typical project engagement;
- clarify how decisions are made about what level of engagement is appropriate; and
- use visuals and diagrams to help make the Charter more easily digestible.

We heard from some community members that a lack of trust in the City (staff, elected officials) meant they were suspicious of what the Charter was committing to.

Finally, City staff also brought draft components of the new Framework to the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). The AAC motioned to support the updated community engagement promise and community engagement design principles (with revisions to one of the engagement design principles).

The new Community Engagement Framework

The new Community Engagement Framework has been redesigned as a collection of key policies, documents, plans, and resources (see Table 1.1 on the next page), rather than a single document.

The new Framework separates components that are predominantly community-facing (the Charter), from those that are governance-related (the Policy) and from those that are operational or implementation-focused (the Community Engagement Honorary Policy, the Multi-Year Community Engagement Plan, and the Community Engagement Playbook).

Staff are seeking Council's approval of the Community Engagement Charter and the Community Engagement Policy. These foundational documents set the direction for developing other elements of the Framework—specifically, the Plan and the Playbook.

Overview: the draft Community Engagement Charter (Attachment-2 The City of Guelph Community Engagement Charter)

If approved, the draft Charter will replace the City's 2015 Community Engagement Framework.

The Charter was created in direct response to feedback received during Phase 1 community engagement and validated in Phase 3 community engagement.

The Charter was drafted primarily with the community in mind. It does not contain some of the staff-specific resources and references that were in the 2013 and 2015 versions. These will be contained in a subsequent Community Engagement Playbook, designed specifically for staff.

The draft Charter includes:

- the City's engagement promise (page 7)—to help create the conditions for meaningful community engagement by nurturing relationships, building capacity for participation, and ensuring there are meaningful opportunities to influence City decisions;
- details about when and how the City will engage the community (pages 8-10);
- Information about the City's community engagement process and community engagement design principles (the process and principles frame what the community can expect from engagement designed and implemented by the City) (pages 11-15); and
- refined roles and responsibilities associated with community engagement (pages 16-17).

Table 1.1 – Components of the new Community Engagement Framework

Focus	Component
Promise to the public	The Community Engagement Charter (Charter) Audience: The community • Communicates the City’s community engagement promise, process, and principles • Sets expectations about when and how the City engages • Frames roles and responsibilities Revision cycle: Ongoing
Governance	The Community Engagement Policy (Policy) Audience: Staff and Council • Ensures consistent, coordinated, and outcomes-centred approach to engaging the community • Necessitates the City prioritizes resources for delivery of meaningful community engagement • Helps staff and Council understand their responsibilities Revision cycle: Annually
Operational	The Community Engagement Honorarium Policy - recently approved Audience: Staff • Ensures consistent provision of honoraria to persons with living and lived experience and members of equity-denied groups who have been asked by the City to contribute their knowledge, skills, and emotional labour to inform decision-making and planning. Revision cycle: Annually
Operational	A multi-year community engagement plan (Plan) – to be developed Audience: Staff Outlines key initiatives that support the delivery of the Charter • Creating a relationships framework • Centralizing community engagement data • Developing resources and training for staff Revision cycle: To align with One City. One Voice. Shared Purpose. and the City’s strategic plan
Operational	The Community Engagement Playbook (Playbook) – to be developed Audience: Staff Will provide staff easy-to-use and easy-to-access resources for designing and delivering community engagement. Revision cycle: Ongoing

Overview: the revised Community Engagement Policy (Attachment-3 City of Guelph Community Engagement Policy)

If approved, the draft Community Engagement Policy will replace the 2019 version. Although the content within the Policy and Charter is tailored for different audiences, there is necessarily significant overlap between the two documents.

Key aspects of the revised Policy include:

- clarification of the purpose and scope of the Policy (pages 1-2);
- framing of the City's community engagement process (pages 2-3);
- new design principles (pages 3-4); and
- refined roles and responsibilities associated with community engagement (pages 4-5), including an in-depth breakdown of responsibilities for engagement staff, project managers, community members, and elected officials.

Financial Implications

Risks and mitigating factors

There's no doubt that human resources are a critical asset required to create the conditions for more meaningful community engagement. It's anticipated that between existing staff and other already approved but vacant staff positions, that SCCE has the human resources it will need to action the Policy and Charter.

Interviews and discussions with staff across the City during the review affirmed that "leading good community engagement takes time, expertise and resources". As the SCCE team supports City staff in implementing the Policy and Charter, it's anticipated that the portion of project budgets typically associated with community engagement may need to grow marginally. The SCCE team will work with staff across the City to incorporate these additional asks in their project budgets and ultimately, multi-year budget requests.

Opportunities

Work to better connect dots, centralize community engagement data, and coordinate community engagement across projects may mean more integrated and targeted engagement projects. This is likely to offset some of the additional resources previously mentioned.

Additionally, near term initiatives born out of the One City. One Voice. Shared Purpose. multi-year communications and community engagement plan (OCOVSP) will include capacity-building initiatives for staff across the City. These initiatives will be designed to increase staff's knowledge, skills and effectiveness related to community engagement, making engagement more efficient over time.

Finally, there are numerous opportunities for the SCCE team to support and collaborate on work happening across the City that in turn, helps advance the Policy and Charter. Some of these projects include:

- exploration of tools used for customer relationship management with the Customer Service and experience team. Such work would help improve services based on community needs and help the City nurture diverse community relationships;

- an exploration of community needs and goals related to civic participation and ensuring there are meaningful opportunities for participation. This work with the City Clerk's Office will provide further insights about barriers, needs, and preferences related to community engagement;
- the work of the Community Plan Working Group and various other initiatives that involve relationship development that ultimately support the goal of nurturing relationships with diverse community members; and
- numerous other City projects, such as projects connected to downtown renewal, that present a unique opportunity to coordinate engagement across multiple projects saving time, resources, and reducing community engagement fatigue.

Next steps

To meet the promise of the Policy and Charter, staff will need to develop the appropriate enabling infrastructure across the Corporation and in the community. This will involve developing a multi-year community engagement plan for operationalizing the Policy and Charter. It will include initiatives aimed at:

- nurturing diverse relationships across the community;
- building capacity in the community for greater participation;
- building capacity within the City around community engagement core competencies; and
- engaging the community outside of specific projects.

There are several specific initiatives already planned for later in 2023 or early 2024 (tied to OCOVSP) that will help advance the Policy and Charter. These include:

- continued roll-out of a recently approved Community Engagement Honorarium Policy that frames how the City compensates individuals from equity-denied groups it seeks to engage (Q3 2023);
- developing a relationships framework and plan for meeting the community where they are (later in 2023); and
- centralizing community engagement data (later in 2023) and finding ways to make insights from these data accessible to staff leading future engagement projects (in 2024 and beyond).

Attachments

Attachment-1 Comprehensive Report On Community Engagement - The City Of Guelph Community Engagement Framework And Practices

Attachment-2 The City Of Guelph Community Engagement Charter

Attachment-3 The City Of Guelph Community Engagement Policy

Departmental Approval

None.

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