

COUNCIL POLICY



Public Participation Policy

Number:	CP-02	Approved:	January 28, 2025
Department:	Communications		
Resolution No:	TP/25/32	Replaces:	GOV-001-001
Last Review Date:	July 2018	Next Review Date:	

1.0 Overall Policy Statement

The Town of Ponoka believes engaging its citizens in public participation contributes to better decision making and enhances the Town's ability to serve the community.

The Town of Ponoka uses effective and meaningful public participation approaches and techniques that:

- contribute to good decisions and policies that serve the community's interest; and
- assist with the establishment of effective programs to deliver services to the community.

The Town shall provide appropriate public participation opportunities in its decision-making processes based on the nature of the decision to be made.

2.0 Definitions

"CAO" means the individual appointed by Council to the position of Chief Administrative Officer as per the Municipal Government Act;

"Community" means the residents, landowners, business owners, organizations and agencies that comprise the people who reside, work and own property in the Town of Ponoka;

"Public participation" means the efforts the Town of Ponoka makes to interact with members of the community and the public when making decisions on behalf of the community related to policies, programs, projects, approvals, use of resources and services. These efforts are in addition to the Town's normal, routine interactions with members of the community through the day-to-day delivery of services and responses to inquiries;

"Public participation approach" or **"public participation technique"** means the processes and activities the Town may use to achieve public participation both in person and online. This may include surveys, open houses, public hearings, workshops, round tables, focus groups, Council advisory committees and Coffee with Council events.

3.0 Purpose

This policy provides direction for the Town of Ponoka on when and how to incorporate public participation into decision-making processes.

This policy provides the community with an indication of when and how public participation opportunities are expected to be undertaken by the Town.

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4.0 Principles

These principles will guide the Town of Ponoka when planning and implementing public participation opportunities:

Shared commitment and responsibility – for public participation to be meaningful, the Town must provide opportunities and community members must take advantage of these opportunities as part of our democratic decision-making processes

Transparent and accountable – opportunities for public participation, relevant information, and the ways public participation can influence a decision are clearly and openly communicated

Inclusive and accessible – the design and delivery of public participation is based on the diverse needs, abilities, preferences and viewpoints of members of the community and facilitates exchange and understanding of differing perspectives

Informed and open sharing of information – the process conveys accurate and appropriate information for all participants and includes opportunities to communicate and understand the views of other participants

Respectful and safe – open discussion and exchange of views occurs in a polite, frank, respectful and physically safe manner for all participants

Evolving and continuously improving – public participation approaches and techniques change and improve over time to best suit the needs and preferences of our community

5.0 Application

The application of this public participation policy must be balanced with the understanding that Council is elected to make decisions that set the direction for the municipality. While carefully considering all of the information available to them, including the input of the public, Council must ultimately bear the burden of making significant and often difficult choices. Furthermore, to allow for efficient governance and for decisions to be made in a timely manner, public participation must be proportional to the scope of the decision to be made.

This policy applies to the Town's policies, programs, projects, approvals and services. Public participation is intended to support and inform a decision-making process related to:

- Designing or implementing a new policy, program, project or service;
- Evaluating, changing or ending an existing policy, program, project or service;
- Establishing annual and multi-year operating and capital budgets;
- Fulfilling a legislated or regulated requirement; or
- Responding to a community-initiated request.

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Not all decision-making processes pertaining to Town of Ponoka policies, programs, project approvals and services require public participation.

The following factors shall be considered in determining if public participation is required and the level of participation to be used based on the Public Participation Spectrum (see Appendix A):

- Council priorities as identified in the Strategic Plan;
- Background and history of the issue;
- Opportunity for public input to influence the decisions and outcomes of the matter at hand;
- Scope of potential impact in terms of geographic area or amount of people involved;
- Previous expressions of public concern or interest in the decision or the results;
- Nature of potential impacts (financial, quality of life, health and safety, environmental, etc.);
- Time sensitivity in terms of when a decision needs to be reached; and
- Availability and allocation of resources.

The following items or circumstances shall require public participation:

1. Creation and amendment of a community sustainability plan;
2. Creation of annual and multi-year operating and capital budgets;
3. Creation and amendment of statutory plans and the Land Use Bylaw as described in the Municipal Government Act;
4. Creation and amendment of non-statutory plans related to a planning approval as described in the Municipal Government Act;
5. Creation and amendment of master plans for Town of Ponoka infrastructure and facilities, including such plans as the Transportation Master Plan, Recreation and Culture Master Plan, and Infrastructure Master Plan; and
6. Creation and amendment of offsite levy bylaws, local improvement tax bylaws, and special tax bylaws as described in the Municipal Government Act.

The following items or circumstances may require public participation:

1. Bylaw creation and major review/amendment;
2. Policy creation and major review/amendment;
3. Policy changes pertaining to Council remuneration and expenses;
4. Resolutions dealing with highly impactful matters such as the acquisition or disposal of assets;

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and

5. Site designs, conceptual plans and detailed plans for Town owned lands and facilities.

At the Town's discretion, items not specifically listed above may be subject to the requirement for public participation.

6.0 Limits on Policy

Nothing in this policy supersedes any provision in any Federal or Provincial legislation requiring the Town of Ponoka to undertake public participation events in the manner described in the relevant legislation.

The Town may conduct additional public participation efforts beyond the minimum levels prescribed by the relevant legislation (or require others working on the Town's behalf or applicants for approvals to do the same).

Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted as preventing the Town from using other forms of public participation or communication.

7.0 Public Participation Approaches and Techniques

The Town of Ponoka shall use a variety of public participation approaches and techniques to address the differing circumstances and needs of the various issues that may be the subject of public participation efforts. The Public Participation Spectrum (see Appendix A) provides guidance on the level of public participation that may be assigned to an issue based on the nature of the decision to be made.

The public participation approaches and techniques that may be used, either individually or in combination with each other, by the Town as part of a public participation process include:

1. Formal opportunities for meeting with Council members outside the regular Council meetings (e.g. coffee with Council);
2. A statistically representative citizen satisfaction survey to obtain the community's overall perceptions of quality of life in Ponoka and satisfaction with the services and programs provided by the Town of Ponoka (subject to funding);
3. Written and electronic surveys, polls and questionnaires;
4. Booths or displays at community events;
5. Open houses, community workshops, public meetings and design charrettes;
6. Public hearings and devoted times at regular Council meetings for public input;

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7. Letters and targeted notices;
8. General advertising using a variety of media (print, social, digital);
9. Task forces, steering committees and advisory groups; and
10. Focus groups and presentations to community organizations.

8.0 Council Responsibilities

Council shall:

1. Help identify issues and decisions that may need or could benefit from public participation;
2. Review staff recommendations on issues requiring public participation and assess the level of public participation to be undertaken relative to the nature of the issue and the capacity of the Town;
3. Support effective and meaningful public participation through the appropriate allocation of budget and staff resources;
4. Promote public participation opportunities and encourage participation;
5. Communicate positively to citizens and the media about the importance of public participation events to the Town and the Town's decision-making process;
6. Attend and observe public participation events when available;
7. Respect and support the role of staff in designing, executing and reporting on public participation activities and outcomes;
8. Respect and support the role of Council advisory committees in considering the input received from public participation efforts where applicable;
9. Carefully and thoughtfully review the findings of public participation events; and
10. Give careful consideration to the input received through public participation as a part of Council discussions, deliberations and decision making.

9.0 Chief Administrator (CAO) Responsibilities

The CAO shall:

1. Identify issues that may need or could benefit from public participation;
2. Assess the level and type of public participation that is appropriate and recommend an overall approach to Council;

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3. Prepare public participation plans for Council's consideration when so requested or when deemed necessary by the CAO based on the nature of the issue that is going before Council;
4. Execute public participation plans approved by Council as effectively and efficiently as possible;
5. Summarize and report to Council and the community on the input and results from public participation activities;
6. Support staff in designing, executing and reporting on public participation activities and outcomes;
7. Support advisory committees by providing timely access to input received from public participation efforts where applicable;
8. Consider the input received through public participation in creating recommendations to Council;
9. Evaluate public participation events and techniques for ongoing improvement and effectiveness.

10.0 Establishment of Procedures and Supports

The CAO may establish such procedures, forms, process templates and similar materials and tools needed to implement this policy.

11.0 Recording and Distribution of Information and Relation to FOIP

All public participation shall be undertaken in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP).

The CAO shall establish the methods and timelines for the retention of information pertaining to a public participation event.

12.0 Public Distribution of Policy and Schedule for Review

This policy shall be posted on the Town of Ponoka website at www.ponoka.ca and on the Town's online engagement website at www.LetsTalkPonoka.ca. Paper copies will also be made readily available to all members of the public.

This policy shall be reviewed every four years or earlier if deemed necessary by Council.

References:

- **Municipal Government Act R.S.A. 2000, c M-26**
- **Public Participation Policy Regulation, Alta Reg 193/2017**

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Appendix A

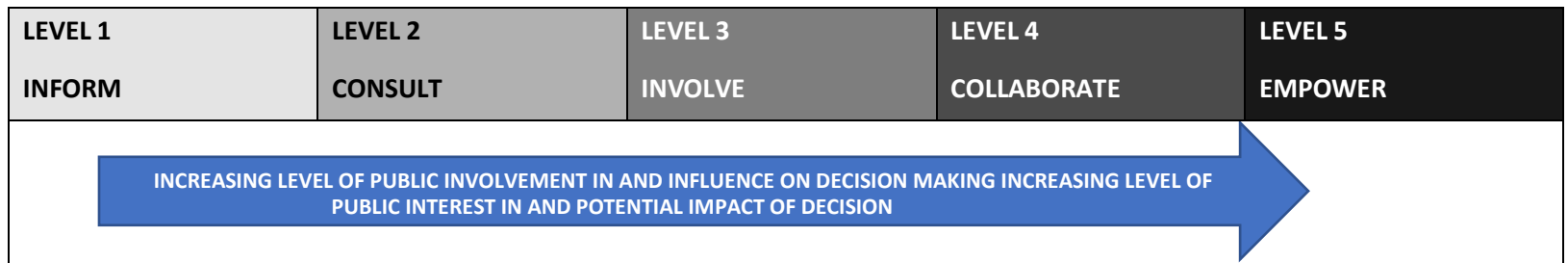
Role of Public Participation Spectrum

The table on the following page serves two purposes:

- First, it shows how the relationship between the public and the organization undertaking public participation can occur in many ways. At the far left of the table, public participation can be limited to mostly one-way communication where the public is being informed of a pending decision. Public participation becomes more involved, with more two-way communication and greater ability of the public to influence the decision, as you move across the table to the right.
- Secondly, it shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate and depend on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. Not every policy issue, program design or service level adjustment requires the same degree of public participation.

The example techniques shown in the chart are not restricted to a single level of public participation. Individual techniques may be combined and used as part of the process for any of the five levels. For example, a Level 3 public participation process may include the use of fact sheets and open houses as well as workshops.

Finally, the Spectrum is intended for a broad cross section of users and is not specific to local municipal government. Use of the Spectrum by a municipality needs to account for Council's legislated responsibility for all decisions made under their authority. This means most public participation conducted by a municipality will occur at Levels 1, 2 and 3 of the Spectrum and less frequently at Levels 4 and 5.



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the issue, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on the outcome.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on the outcome.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.



EXAMPLE TECHNIQUES	Fact sheets Website Social media Open houses Letters Direct verbal communication	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings Public hearings Council meeting delegations	Workshops Deliberate polling	Citizen advisory boards Steering committee Consensus building Participatory decision making	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decision
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APPROVAL

Original Signed

Original Signed

Signature of Mayor

Signature of CAO

Date

Date

POLICY RECORD

Approval and Amendment History

Date of Council Approval	Council Motion Number	Description	Date of Next Review
January 28, 2025	TP/25/32		