



Public Participation and Communication Policy

Effective Date: July 17, 2018

Section: Council and Administration

Policy Statement:

In accordance with Section 216.1 of the *Municipal Government Act*, this Public Participation and Communication Policy has been developed to recognize the value of input from our citizens and landowners, and to create opportunities for meaningful public participation in decisions that directly impact them and other stakeholders. It is the policy of the Municipal District to engage and communicate with municipal stakeholders using various forms of media, including but not limited to, print media, electronic media, social media, municipal websites, general mail, email and the posting of public notices. The purpose is to inform the public and to receive feedback, which fosters participation in the municipal decision-making process.

Not every project or decision made by Council will require a comprehensive engagement process, and there are varying levels of engagement that may be undertaken. It is important for each project or decision to carefully consider what level of engagement is appropriate given the scale, scope and potential impact; and at what stage in the project it is most appropriate to initiate the engagement process. The level of engagement undertaken should consider the degree to which municipal stakeholder input is able to influence the project; if there is little room for refinement or limited ability to influence a decision then an extensive engagement process is not useful, cost effective or appropriate.

This Public Participation and Communication Policy is in addition to and does not modify or replace the statutory public hearing requirements in the *Municipal Government Act*.

I. GENERAL POLICY PRINCIPLES

Council recognizes that good governance includes engaging municipal stakeholders in Public Participation by:

1. creating opportunities and providing guiding principles for the public engagement process so those municipal stakeholders who are affected by a decision can provide comments on that decision;

2. outlining under what circumstances a public participation process must be undertaken;
3. describing the means of communication by which municipal stakeholders will be engaged;
4. promoting sustainable decisions by recognizing various municipal stakeholder interests;
5. providing municipal stakeholders with the appropriate information and tools to engage in meaningful participation; and
6. recognizing that although councilors are elected to consider and promote the welfare and interest of the municipality and are generally required to vote on matters brought before Council, facilitating Public Participation for matters beyond those where public input is statutorily required can enrich the decision-making process.

II. DEFINITIONS

1. “CAO” means the Chief Administrative Officer of the Municipal District or their delegate.
2. “Municipal Stakeholders” means the residents and landowners of the Municipal District, as well as other individuals, organizations or persons that may have an interest in, or are affected by a decision made by the Municipal District.
3. “Municipal District” means the Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66.
4. “Public Participation” includes a variety of non-statutory opportunities where municipal stakeholders receive information and/or provide input to the Municipal District.
5. “Public Participation Plan” means a plan that identifies those Public Participation Tools that are to be used to obtain municipal stakeholder input in varying situations.
6. “Public Participation Tools” means the tools that may be used, alone or in combination, to create Public Participation opportunities including, but not limited to:
 - a) In-person participation which may include at-the-counter interactions, interviews, meetings, round-tables, open houses and workshops;
 - b) Digital participation which may include message boards/discussion forums and online polls or surveys;
 - c) Written participation which may include written submissions, email and mail-in surveys, social media polls and workbooks; and,
 - d) Representative participation which may include being appointed to an advisory committee, ad hoc committee or citizen board.

III. POLICY RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1) Council Responsibilities:
 - a. Council shall review and approve Public Participation Plans developed by the CAO in accordance with this Policy or as directed by Council;
 - b. Council shall consider input received through public participation, and the input shall be used in the way it was said it would be used. All information will be collected and used in compliance with *FOIP* guidelines and practices, and every effort will be made to protect people’s personal information;
 - c. Council shall ensure that the public participation process will only be undertaken when it is beneficial and is thoughtfully designed to achieve the greatest value for the cost;

- d. Council shall review this Policy to ensure the Policy complies with all relevant legislation, municipal policies and the spirit and intent of public participation.

2) Administration Responsibilities:

- a. The CAO shall in accordance with this Policy or as directed by Council, develop Public Participation Plans for approval by Council;
- b. The CAO shall ensure the public participation process is initiated as early as is feasibly possible in a project i.e. when there is still time for the feedback received to influence the course of a project in a meaningful way;
- c. The CAO shall state up front how the feedback will be used and the degree to which it will influence the project or decision;
- d. The CAO shall make every effort to engage as many diverse groups as possible;
- e. The CAO shall report all findings of the public participation to Council, and the report shall include a summary of how the engagement was undertaken.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Public Participation and Communication Policy applies to any of the following when they are likely to have significant impact on a sizeable number of municipal stakeholders:

- a. The development of municipal plans;
- b. Creation or amendment of policies and bylaws;
- c. When innovative programs or services are being established;
- d. When there is significant amendments to existing programs, projects or other initiatives;

In addition, the Public Participation and Communication Policy applies when:

- a. There is legislation or regulation requiring engagement;
- b. There is municipal policy requiring engagement;
- c. Engagement has been requested by Council;
- d. There has been a promise of engagement made to municipal stakeholders; or
- e. The municipal stakeholders have requested engagement be conducted.

V. POLICY EXPECTATIONS

- a. All Public Participation will be undertaken in accordance with the *Municipal Government Act*, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and any other applicable legislation.
- b. All Public Participation will be undertaken in accordance with all existing municipal policies.
- c. This Policy will be reviewed at least once every four years.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANS

When so directed by this Policy or Council, the CAO shall develop a Public Participation Plan for approval by Council that shall consider the following:

- a. The nature of the matter for which public participation is being sought;
- b. The impact of the matter on municipal stakeholders;
- c. The demographics of the potential municipal stakeholders in respect of which public participation tools are to be utilized, as well as the level of engagement and time for input;
- d. The timing of the decision and time required to gather input;
- e. What information is required, if any, to participate; and,
- f. Available resources and reasonable costs.

Public Participation Plans will, at a minimum, include the following:

- a. A communication plan to inform the municipal stakeholders about the Public Participation Plan, and opportunities to provide input;
- b. Identification of which Public Participation Tools will be utilized;
- c. Timelines for participation;
- d. Information about how input will be used; and,
- e. The location of information required, if any, to inform the specific public participation.

VII. POLICY COMPLIANCE

While every effort will be made to adhere to the Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66 Public Participation and Communication Policy, s. 216.1(5) of the *Municipal Government Act* specifically states that “*No resolution or bylaw of a council may be challenged on the ground that it was made without complying with a public participation policy established by a resolution of the council.*”



Cam Gardner, Reeve



Kathy Wiebe, Acting Chief Administrative Officer