



CITY OF ST. ALBERT CITY COUNCIL POLICY

NUMBER	TITLE
C-CAO-20	Public Participation
ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	DATE LAST REVISED
March 20, 2017	November 21, 2023

Purpose

Public Participation is a crucial process that allows individuals to contribute to the decision-making of Council and Administration regarding the city's policies, programs, projects, and services. Furthermore, it ensures transparent communication regarding the collection and utilization of public input.

The City of St. Albert places great value on public participation procedures and efforts that contribute to shaping policy, program, service, and project decisions. These endeavours involve providing Council and Administration with accurate and comprehensive information, enabling them to make well-informed decisions.

This policy provides direction to Administration on how to involve stakeholders in providing input into decisions that affect the community and to ensure that the City of St. Albert:

- a) Implements a consistent and well-coordinated approach towards public participation aimed at producing the desired outcomes.
- b) Facilitates effective and efficient consultation, involvement, collaboration, and empowerment processes to solicit public input for decision-making.
- c) Complies with the public engagement requirements outlined in the *Municipal Government Act* and other relevant legislation.
- d) Establishes clear and accountable reporting mechanisms to communicate the outcomes of public participation, providing transparent information on how public input influenced decision-making processes, thereby fostering open and informed public participation.

It should be noted that public participation is a significant part of the decision-making process, though its influence and weight in that process may vary depending on other factors relevant to each specific decision.

The City also acknowledges its responsibility to inform the public about city developments, actions and the steps taken to address community needs. While regular communication is vital for providing information, this policy addresses the distinct circumstances and methods through which formal input is gathered from residents. This differentiation emphasizes that this policy pertains to the structured collection of information separate from the ongoing everyday feedback residents provide through various channels.

Policy Statement

Council and Administration recognize that quality public participation is a critical component of good governance and as such, adequate resources will be allocated and the appropriate level of public participation undertaken. The City is committed to public participation activities that are founded on the following principles:

Shared Responsibility and Commitment: Public participation leads to better decisions and is a shared responsibility of Council, Administration and the community.

Transparent and Accountable: The City communicates clearly and openly about public participation opportunities, its processes and provides factual and evidence-based information. It shares the outcomes of public participation, including how the information was used in the decision-making process and makes decisions in the best interest of the community as a whole.

Inclusive and Accessible: The City endeavours to provide opportunities for public participation that take into account the diversity of needs, abilities and viewpoints of the members of the community.

Appropriate and Responsive: Public participation activities need to be appropriate to the stated goals, and reflective of the varied preferences and needs of community members for receiving and sharing information.

Open and Informative: Reporting mechanisms employed by the City are designed to be open and informative, providing the public with clear, unbiased, and accessible information about the outcomes of public participation activities. These mechanisms ensure the community is well-informed, empowering individuals to understand how their input influences decision-making and the community's overall well-being.

Evaluation and Continual Improvement: Public participation is a dynamic and evolving process that needs continual evaluation and adjustment to continuously improve and address the changing needs of the community.

Spectrum of Public Participation:

1. Advise – The City invites the public to provide feedback and perspectives, which are thoughtfully considered in developing policies, programs, projects, or services such as:
 - a. City Budget Feedback: The public is invited to provide input on budget priorities, suggesting areas where funding should be allocated.
 - b. Park Renovation Input: Residents share their perspectives on proposed changes to a local park's design and amenities.
 - c. Transportation Survey: The City seeks public opinions on potential transportation routes and schedules changes.
2. Refine – The City actively involves the public to collaboratively refine and adapt approaches to policies, programs, projects, or services such as:
 - a. Street Redesign Workshop: Residents participate in workshops to discuss and refine plans for redesigning a street layout to accommodate pedestrian and cycling needs.
 - b. Policy Workshop: Stakeholders provide feedback on a draft policy, influencing modifications to align with community needs and concerns.
 - c. Housing Development Forum: The public engages in discussions to refine plans for new housing development, considering concerns raised by the community.
3. Create – The City collaborates with the public to create solutions for policies, programs, projects, or services. This can include community-initiated engagement for projects such as:
 - a. Community Garden Project: The City partners with residents to co-design and implement a community garden space, involving them in the planning and development.
 - b. Public Art Installation: The City collaborates with local artists and citizens to create a public art installation that reflects the community's identity and values.
 - c. Youth Center Planning: Young people work alongside the City to create a youth center, contributing ideas and design elements to ensure the space meets their needs.
4. Decide – The public is given decision-making authority for policies, programs, projects, or services, both directly and on behalf of the City such as:
 - a. Neighborhood Improvement Initiative: Community members can decide which projects receive funding for neighbourhood improvements, such as park or street enhancements.
 - b. Local Governance Committee: A committee of citizens is given the authority to make decisions on behalf of the City regarding specific local policies or initiatives.

Results

Through public participation, decision-makers can strive to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the public's perspectives and viewpoints on various topics and issues. This process allows for the consideration of public input in decision-making and fosters effective communication with the public regarding the use of their input and the rationale behind the decisions made.

Public participation provides City Council and Administration with the opportunity to:

- a) Enhance their role as representatives of the community by gaining a deeper understanding of public interests, values, and perspectives.
- b) Collaborate to identify areas where public engagement can have a meaningful impact on policy and program recommendations and Council decisions.
- c) Promote and direct the public towards engagement activities.
- d) Thoughtfully and attentively consider public input integral to the decision-making process.
- e) Strike a balance between public expectations for engagement opportunities and influence while also being aware of resource limitations, fiscal realities, and other relevant contextual factors.
- f) Clearly articulate the reasoning behind decisions made and transparently communicate how public input was incorporated into recommendations to Council and the decision-making process.

The City will incorporate insights from prior public participation activities wherever feasible. The outcomes of previous engagements shall also serve to inform decision-making, ensuring that community input remains a valued and enduring resource guiding our actions. This approach will further alleviate engagement fatigue and amplify the intrinsic value of public engagement initiatives.

Definitions

“City” means the municipal corporation of the City of St. Albert.

“Community” refers to the City, residents, businesses, schools, religious institutions and all other institutions and agencies that make up St. Albert.

“Public participation” means processes through which the City provides opportunities for the community to have input into decision-making through public

meetings, surveys, open houses, workshops, polling, resident advisory committees and other forms of engagement.

“Stakeholder” means an individual, organization or group that has an interest in an issue, will be or is likely to be affected by an issue, or has the ability to affect a decision or outcome.

“Statutory Requirement” means a requirement written into a law passed by the provincial or federal government.

“Non-Statutory Requirement” means a rule based on customs, precedents or court decisions.

Responsibilities

1. City Council shall:

- a. Consider public input obtained through public participation activities as part of their decision-making process;
- b. Promote public participation activities and provide, when appropriate, Council member representation;
- c. Establish consistent practices, processes and timelines for statutory and non-statutory requirements for public participation;
- d. Ensure appropriate resources are available to allow for the ongoing implementation of consistent, comprehensive and representative public participation programs and services;
- e. Request information from the Chief Administrative Officer on the scope, timing, appropriate methods and resources required for public participation, prior to directing Administration to undertake a public participation activity on a specific issue or item.

2. The Chief Administrative Officer shall:

- a. Maintain public participation processes that:
 - i. Ensure a coordinated and standardized approach to public participation across the organization;
 - ii. When determining the appropriate level of public participation that the City:
 - Provides opportunities for early and ongoing participation.
 - Aligns resources, types and methods of public participation with the impact of the decision to the community and/or key stakeholder groups.
 - Provides opportunities for ongoing engagement as well as for emerging issues.

- b. Recommend to Council practices, processes and timelines for statutory and non-statutory requirements for public participation activities.
- c. Develop all necessary processes and tools that support the implementation of this policy.
- d. Communicate to Council and community, where appropriate, how public input was gathered and used in Administrative recommendations to Council.
- e. Bring forward resourcing requirements to ensure public participation programs and services are run effectively and consistently.
- f. Make recommendations to Council on the appropriate resources required for public participation, when Council directs public input on a specific issue or item.

Service Standards / Expectations

1. The City shall comply with all provincial and federal statutory requirements for public participation.
2. The City shall offer public participation opportunities when:
 - a. Identifying Council priorities;
 - b. Formulating recommendations to Council regarding the proposed business plans and budgets;
 - c. Gathering community input following the presentation of proposed business plan and budgets;
 - d. Reviewing existing programs, services, and associated service levels;
 - e. Establish a new programs, services and service levels; or
 - f. Otherwise deemed necessary by Council or the Chief Administrative Officer.
3. The City shall organize at least one statistically representative public participation activity, at least every four years, to obtain the community's overall perceptions of quality of life and satisfaction with programs and services.
4. The City shall have the appropriate allocation of resources and governance mechanisms to build organizational and community capacity for public participation through community outreach and educational activities.
5. The City shall effectively communicate to the community its public participation goals, objectives and processes, including how information will be used and how decisions are made.

6. The City shall, where possible, use various methods and techniques for public participation that meet the varied needs of the community whether it be demographic, physical, social or cultural.
7. The City shall ensure the appropriate and consistent methods, levels and techniques for public participation are used in the appropriate context to avoid duplicating previous engagement initiatives as well as the inefficient and ineffective use of public time and resources.
8. The City will ensure the results of the public participation activities are publicly available, which includes posting them on the City's website.
9. The City shall evaluate and learn from the feedback received from the community, as well as continuously look for new and better processes and tools that address the changing needs of the community.
10. The Policy shall be updated at a minimum, every four years or as required by Provincial legislation.

Legal References

Municipal Government Act section 216.1
Public Participation Policy Regulation (Alta Reg 193/2017)

Cross References

Policy C-CG-06, Strategic Framework
Policy C-CG-02 City of St. Albert Strategic Plan
Policy C-CC-11, Public Hearing Process
Policy C-PE-01, Public Consultation requirements for Planning and Development Processes
Public Participation Policies and Public Notification – A Guide for Municipalities (publication of Alberta Municipalities)

International Association for Public Participation

Attachments

1. Spectrum of Public Participation



DATE REVIEWED	NEXT REVIEW DATE	REVISIONS
July 2018 – Strategic Services and Information Technology	2025 – Strategic Services and Information Technology	July 9, 2018 - POL-18-019 January 21, 2019 – AR-19-003 November 14 and 21 st , 2023 – CB-23-62