

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICY #12.0.15

POLICY STATEMENT

The County of Wetaskiwin believes that its success lies with the stakeholders it serves. We see the value in engaging the public through a variety of mediums and are committed to open, accountable and responsive decision making, including different levels of engagement with the public as outlined in this policy.

This policy speaks to the level of public participation and engagement opportunities the County will consider when addressing programs, services, policies, projects, plans or other issues and initiatives that may have an impact on ratepayers in the County. All Public Participation will be undertaken in accordance with the Municipal Government Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, any other applicable provincial or federal legislation and existing municipal policies.

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

This policy applies to all County of Wetaskiwin employees and Council, when they engage the public. It also applies to consultants working on behalf of the County of Wetaskiwin, as well as any boards, committees, and other quasi-judicial bodies as appointed by Council through a bylaw, policy or other legislation.

1. DEFINITIONS

- 1.1. **Council** is the Reeve and Councillors as a whole duly elected in the County that hold office at that time.
- 1.2. **Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)** means the person appointed by Council to the position of CAO under the authority of Section 205 of the *Municipal Government Act* or the individual(s) duly designated to perform the required functions by the CAO and for whom the CAO is accountable for.
- 1.3. **Stakeholders** means the residents of the municipality, as well as other individual, organizations or persons that may have an interest in, or are affected by, a decision made by the Municipality.
- 1.4. **Public** means anyone (including groups and individuals) who may have an interest in a specific topic or issue under discussion. The public may, or may not, be directly impacted by a decision on the issue.

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- 1.5. **County / County of Wetaskiwin** refers to all staff, representatives and consultants working for or hired by the municipality.
- 1.6. **Public Participation** creates opportunities for people to be involved in a decision-making process and help inform decision making.
- 1.7. **Public Participation Plan** means a plan which identifies which Public Participation Tools to be used to obtain public input in a particular circumstance.

2. GENERAL POLICY PRINCIPLES

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

- 2.1. Creating opportunities for stakeholders to engage;
- 2.2. Promoting sustainable decisions by recognizing various stakeholder interests;
- 2.3. Providing stakeholders with the appropriate information and tools to engage in meaningful participation; and
- 2.4. Recognizing that Public Participation for matters beyond the statutory requirements can enrich the decision making process.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1. Council Responsibilities

Council shall:

- 3.1.1. review and approve Public Participation Plans;
- 3.1.2. consider input obtained through Public Participation, keeping in mind that Council is responsible to make the final decision;
- 3.1.3. review this Policy to ensure the Policy complies with all relevant legislation, municipal policies and the spirit and intent of Public Participation.
- 3.1.4. ensure appropriate resources are available to solicit Public Participation in accordance with this Policy;
- 3.1.5. promote and support Public Participation.

3.2. Administration Responsibilities

The CAO shall:

- 3.2.1. in accordance with this Policy or as directed by Council, develop Public Participation Plans, for Council approval;
- 3.2.2. implement approved Public Participation Plans and Policies;
- 3.2.3. report the findings of the Public Participation to Council;
- 3.2.4. consider timing, resources and engagement when developing and modifying Public Participation Plans;
- 3.2.5. evaluate the effectiveness of the Public Participation Plan and the Public Participation Tools used in a particular circumstance;
- 3.2.6. communicate to Council and the public, when appropriate, the effectiveness of a Public Participation Plan and the Public Participation Tools used;
- 3.2.7. develop the necessary procedures.

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3.3. The County of Wetaskiwin:

- 3.3.1. Will inform, consult, and engage the public about decisions that may affect them, and will provide public participation opportunities that are open and transparent;
- 3.3.2. Will give consideration to the public's input gathered in public participation processes;
- 3.3.3. Is committed to working together with the public to continuously improve its public participation processes;
- 3.3.4. Supports the belief that involving the public and stakeholders in public participation can lead to better, more informed decisions.

3.4. The public and stakeholders of the County of Wetaskiwin:

- 3.4.1. Are encouraged to meaningfully engage so their voices strengthen decisions and their involvement helps to build a strong community;
- 3.4.2. Have the right to be heard, but also to listen and be open to different ideas and opposing views;
- 3.4.3. Are encouraged to increase their understanding and knowledge about local issues, as well as their role in County of Wetaskiwin's decision-making process so that they can participate in a meaningful way.

4. GUIDELINES/PROCEDURES

4.1. Public participation will be applied to decision-making processes that support:

- 4.1.1. when gathering input or formulating recommendations with respect to budget;
- 4.1.2. when gathering input or formulating recommendations with respect to the municipality's strategic plans or business plans; or
- 4.1.3. as otherwise directed by Council.

4.2. Not all projects require the same extensive stakeholder consultation, but the appropriate approach should be selected on a project-to-project basis. The various vehicles for communications and engagement are listed in the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

4.3. Administration is encouraged to use the following 11-step process, and are encouraged to engage citizens as early as possible:

- 4.3.1. Evaluate the purpose of the engagement.
- 4.3.2. Define the objectives and identify the level of engagement.
- 4.3.3. Identify those with a stake in the process.
- 4.3.4. Select the scope, size, and sample.
- 4.3.5. Review the time and cost factors.
- 4.3.6. Select the appropriate engagement tools.
- 4.3.7. Promote.
- 4.3.8. Implement the initiative.
 - 4.3.8.1. Communicate openly, honestly and proactively.
 - 4.3.8.2. Provide clear, relevant information.
 - 4.3.8.3. Keep citizens informed and provide notice of change.
- 4.3.9. Analyze the results.

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- 4.3.10. Be responsive and ensure follow up.
- 4.3.11. Celebrate successes and be honest about failures.

4.4. All participation activities will occur within approved plans and funding and any requests outside of these approved plans must be referred to Council.

4.5. County staff will support Council, staff, partners, and the public to build participation capacity within the County of Wetaskiwin. Over time, implementation of the standards will be supported with training, tools, and templates.

4.6. The County of Wetaskiwin will promote and communicate opportunities for public participation in a matter they feel is appropriate. This may include, but is not limited to, a combination of the following:

- 4.6.1. County Pages in the County contracted newspaper
- 4.6.2. Website
- 4.6.3. Direct Mail / flyers
- 4.6.4. Radio
- 4.6.5. Social Media
- 4.6.6. Open House
- 4.6.7. Surveys
- 4.6.8. Delegations

5. EVALUATION

5.1. An evaluation is necessary to assess how effectively the Public Participation Policy requirements and commitments were met. An assessment of whether the information was timely, balanced, accurate, accessible, etc. can be completed. In addition to the impact of the participation / engagement on decisions, stakeholders can be asked to express their level of satisfaction with the process and resolution of issues.

5.2. This policy will be reviewed by Council at least once every 4 years and will be posted to the County's website.

References:

- Communications & Engagement Strategy

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