

### 1. Purpose

Public input is one of the factors Council considers when making decisions. This Public Engagement Policy recognizes the value of public engagement and provides a framework for opportunities for members of the public to be informed of, or involved in, meaningful public engagement regarding decisions that directly affect the community.

This Public Engagement Policy is in addition to and does not modify or replace the public information meeting/public hearing requirements set out in the Nova Scotia Municipal Government Act or as specified in other Town by-laws and policies.

### 2. Application

Public engagement supports decision-making processes related to Town policies, projects, and services that have an impact on the public. Public engagement tools may be used by the Town in the following circumstances:

- a) To fulfill legislation or regulation requirements;
- b) To respond to requests initiated by the community, staff, or Council;
- c) To support new policy, project, or service implementation;
- d) To support existing policy, project, or service evaluation and change;
- e) To address potential impacts on the community, such as quality of life or the environment; and,
- f) To address issues associated with strong community views, concerns, or emotions.

### 3. Definitions

a) "Public Engagement" includes a variety of non-statutory opportunities where stakeholders receive information and/or provide input to the Town.

b) "Public Engagement Plan" means a plan which identifies which public engagement tools are to be used to obtain public input in a particular circumstance.

c) "Public Engagement Tools" means the tools that may be used, alone or in combination, to create Public Engagement opportunities including, but not limited to:

- i) statutory public hearing requirements in the *Municipal Government Act*
- ii) in-person engagement which may include meetings, round-table discussions, town halls, open houses, and workshops;

- iii) digital engagement which may include online workbooks, chat groups, webinars, message boards / discussion forums, and online polls or surveys;
- iv) written engagement which may include written submissions, email feedback, and mail-in surveys, polls and workbooks;
- v) engagement by representation including the appointment of members of the public to Town committees; and
- vi) providing information through the media, websites, social media, and other channels.

d) "Staff" means the staff of the Town of Mahone Bay.

e) "Stakeholders" means the residents of the Town, as well as other individuals, organizations or persons that may have an interest in, or are affected by, a decision made by the Town.

f) "Town" means the Town of Mahone Bay.

#### 4. Objectives

It is the Town's intent to provide opportunities for the community to be informed of, and where appropriate be involved in, decision-making including:

- a) Providing timely information to the public concerning decision-making processes related to Town policies, projects, and services that have an impact on the public;
- b) Creating opportunities for stakeholders who are affected by a decision to provide input into the decision;
- c) Promoting sustainable, balanced decisions by recognizing various stakeholder interests;
- d) Providing stakeholders with the appropriate information and tools to engage in meaningful engagement; and
- e) Enriching the decision-making process leading to better, more informed decisions.

#### 5. Responsibilities

a) Council shall:

- i. request and review information from staff concerning the scope, timing, appropriate methods and resources required for public engagement prior to directing the development of a public engagement plan;
- ii. review and approve public engagement plans developed by staff as directed by Council;
- iii. consider input obtained through public engagement when making decisions;
- iv. review this Policy a minimum of once per term to ensure the Policy is in the spirit and intent of public engagement;

- v. ensure appropriate resources are available to support public engagement in accordance with this Policy; and,
- vi. promote and support public engagement opportunities.

b) Staff shall:

- i. ensure the Policy complies with all relevant legislation and municipal policies;
- ii. develop the necessary procedures to implement this Policy;
- iii. assess this Policy and make recommendations to Council about the public engagement and resourcing;
- iv. as directed by Council, develop public engagement plans for Council approval;
- v. consider timing, resources and engagement when developing and modifying public engagement plans;
- vi. implement approved public engagement plans;
- vii. report the findings of public engagement to Council; and,
- viii. evaluate and communicate to Council and the public, when appropriate, the effectiveness of a public engagement plan and the public engagement tools used.

## 6. Public Engagement Principles

The Town supports the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values and staff will apply these values and the principles expressed in this policy to all public engagement processes.

### IAP2 Core Values:

- a) Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- b) Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- c) Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- d) Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- e) Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- f) Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- g) Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

## Public Participation Spectrum

\*source: <https://www.iap2canada.ca/foundations>

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, 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 to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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.

### The Town's Public Engagement Principles:

- a) Engagement is meaningful (the questions used are genuine and the input gathered impacts the policy, plan, program, design, or service in question).
- b) Engagement is scoped and scaled appropriately to the issue's importance (or potential impacts), degree of potential conflict, and diversity of opinion it may engender.
- c) Engagement is informed (framing of issues and sharing of research or facts, and options supports thoughtful contributions of all concerned).
- d) Engagement starts early and continues throughout the process (input opportunities are integrated into all stages).
- e) Active outreach is undertaken to reach those most likely to be interested in or impacted by the initiative (communications and go to them approaches are key).
- f) Engagement is to be conducted in an inclusive manner having regard to different levels of accessibility.
- g) Diverse voices are heard, and conflict is reduced (a range of tools helps to access a broad range of ideas and opinions).

h) The process is transparent and communications-rich (sharing information/options, documenting input received, communicating results, decisions/actions).

## 7. Public Engagement Plans

a) When so directed by Council, staff shall develop a public engagement plan for approval by Council which shall consider the following:

- i. the nature of the matter for which public engagement is being sought;
- ii. the impact of the matter on stakeholders;
- iii. the demographics of potential stakeholders in respect of which public engagement tools to utilize, level of engagement and time for input;
- iv. the timing of the decision and time required to gather input;
- v. what information is required, if any, to participate;
- vi. available resources and reasonable costs;
- vii. particular circumstances including states of emergency and public health directives, which may limit the applicability of many public engagement tools.

b) Public engagement plans will, at minimum, include the following:

- i. a communication plan to inform the public about the public engagement plan and opportunities to provide input;
- ii. identification of which public engagement tools will be utilized;
- iii. timelines for engagement activities;
- iv. information about how input will be used;
- v. the location of information required, if any, to inform the specific public engagement.

Clerk's Annotation for Official Policy Book	
Date of notice to Council Members of Intent to Consider [minimum 7 days notice]	July 14, 2020
Date of Passage of Policy	July 30, 2020
_____	_____
Town Clerk	Date