

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

Recommendation

That Executive Committee recommend to City Council:

That the revised Public Engagement Policy C593D, as set out in Attachment 1 of the April 2, 2025, Office of the City Manager report OCM02805, be approved.

Requested Action	Decision required		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	BELONG.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Catalyze and converge	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Conditions for service success
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C593C - Public Engagement • Indigenous Framework • Art of Inclusion • Corporate Policy Framework 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 27, 2021, Communications and Engagement CE00508, Public Engagement Policy Renewal • April 11, 2017, Communications and Engagement CR_4486, Improving Engagement in the City of Edmonton - Public Engagement Policy 		

Executive Summary

- The Public Engagement Policy is a document that states what the City intends to achieve with public engagement and the high-level direction on how to achieve it.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

- Edmonton's policy is inclusive, accommodating community-initiated requests and iterative feedback.
- Only Edmonton and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo explicitly prioritize Indigenous engagement, integrating memorandums of understanding (MOUs).
- Administration reviewed Public Engagement Policy (C593C) as per its four-year review cycle requirement mandated by the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA).
- The changes proposed ensure the policy reflects equity, fiscal responsibility, clear language and consistency with the Corporate Policy Framework, and with a specific section moved to the Public Engagement Framework that addressed operational requirements.

REPORT

City Policy C593C - Public Engagement was reviewed as per the *Municipal Government Act's* (MGA) four-year review cycle. Policy C593A was first adopted by City Council on April 11, 2017, through Communications and Engagement report CR_4486, Improving Engagement in the City of Edmonton - Public Engagement Policy. It went through a first review on June 7, 2021, Communications and Engagement report CE00508. This is the second review of this policy since its adoption.

The City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Policy is the foundation for the Public Engagement Framework. The purpose of the Public Engagement Policy is to ensure the City of Edmonton:

- Achieves a consistent, coordinated, outcomes-driven and equity-based approach to public engagement;
- Facilitates public input to decision-making through appropriate, effective and efficient consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment processes, and;
- Adheres to the public engagement requirements within the MGA and other applicable legislation.

The Public Engagement Framework supports Policy C593C by describing the City's overall approach and commitment to public engagement. The Framework provides operational guidance and methodologies for the implementation of engagement. It includes the six step Public Engagement Process, which is used to deliver meaningful, consistent, and outcomes-driven public engagement at the City. It is made up of six steps: Identification, Strategy, Planning & Design, Implementation & Data Collection, Analysis & Reporting and Evaluation. In general, the Policy governs the *when* and *why* engagement occurs, while the Framework guides the *how*.

The City's Public Engagement Policy and Framework follow industry best practices and have been internationally recognized for inclusive and representative engagement. Depending on project scope and objectives, the type and duration of engagement will vary. Public engagement efforts prioritize gathering diverse perspectives and ensuring inclusive participation to inform decision-making, rather than strictly aiming for statistical representativeness.

Statistical Representativeness is a term commonly used in the market research industry. It is about how well results from a survey completed by a small number of the population can project opinions of the entire population. Statistical Representativeness is a result of Probability

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

Sampling. A probability sample of 400 Edmontonians represents the voices of all Edmontonians with a margin of error of +/- 5 per cent at a 95 per cent confidence level. This means that if the same survey were conducted with all Edmontonians, the results would likely fall within this range, 95 out of 100 times. Currently in the market research industry, only phone survey results using Probability Sampling are considered statistically representative.

Engagement projects are designed to align with project scope and decision-making needs rather than adhering to a fixed sample size or method. Projects with a wide impact on Edmontonians tend to have larger participation numbers. For example, engagement for the District Plan involved approximately 5018 total participants for phases 1 to 3, whereas projects with a more localized impact may have fewer participants, such as the Hairsine Neighbourhood and Alley Renewal engagement, which involved approximately 1,030 participants.

The policy renewal process involved significant research and internal consultation. Based on that research and feedback, the proposed changes reflect the importance of equity, clear language and fiscal responsibility to address a desire to clarify policy definitions and streamline engagement. Attachment 1 provides a recommended version of the policy that reflects these changes. The policy continues to reflect the spirit and contributions made under the guidance of the Council Initiative on Public Engagement.

The policy was revised to ensure consistency with the Corporate Policy Framework. The “public engagement activities will consider” section of the policy was moved to the Public Engagement Framework as it addresses operational requirements. The revised Public Engagement Framework is provided in Attachment 3.

The changes proposed to the policy are also detailed in Attachment 2. The key additions include:

- Added clarity to the “shared responsibility” guiding principle by aligning the explanation to the principle by adding “Engagement is a shared responsibility between the City and people. Creating opportunities for engagement in an authentic way encourages people to choose to participate which supports democratic decision-making.”
- Added that: “Administration will use a data-driven approach ensuring the responsible use of City resources when considering public engagement” within the requirements section. This recognizes how the City will use funds responsibly when considering undertaking public engagement and reflects the understanding of current fiscal realities.

Jurisdictional Scan

The jurisdictional scan of public engagement policies across 26 Canadian municipalities highlighted a range of approaches tailored to diverse community needs and governance structures. While inclusivity, transparency and legislative alignment emerged as shared priorities, municipalities varied significantly in public engagement policy structures, evaluation mechanisms and role definitions.

Key findings include:

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

- **Standalone Policies and Frameworks:** Eight municipalities — Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Hamilton, Kelowna, Guelph, Halifax Regional Municipality and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo — maintain standalone public engagement policies and frameworks, ensuring clarity and adaptability. In contrast, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Vancouver take integrated approaches that mix policy, governance and implementation strategies.
- **Requirements for Engagement:** Edmonton’s policy is inclusive, accommodating community-initiated requests and iterative feedback. Other municipalities, such as Hamilton, explicitly exclude routine decisions or emergencies from the engagement process.
- **Evaluation Mechanisms:** While Edmonton emphasizes continuous improvement as a key Guiding Principle, cities like Saskatoon and Hamilton have structured their policies differently (either due to provincial and municipal requirement) by explicitly embedding evaluation as part of their public engagement policies.
- **Role Clarity:** Calgary detailed role definitions across governance levels, whereas Edmonton provides high-level descriptions.

Similarities among municipalities:

- **Guiding Principles:** Inclusivity, transparency and accessibility are universally emphasized.
- **Alignment with Legislative Frameworks:** Most municipalities align their policies with provincial or municipal regulations, ensuring compliance.
- **Engagement Spectrum:** The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower) is widely adopted, though with slight variations in interpretation.

Distinctions among municipalities:

- **Indigenous Engagement:** Edmonton and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo explicitly prioritize Indigenous engagement, integrating memorandums of understanding (MOUs). Other cities, such as Calgary, address inclusivity more broadly.
- **Evaluation and Accountability:** Saskatoon and Hamilton incorporate explicit metrics and public reporting, setting them apart from Edmonton’s broader focus on iterative improvement.
- **Scope and Boundaries:** Edmonton includes community-initiated requests, while Calgary and other cities exclude routine decisions, focusing primarily on significant projects.

Additional future work

Administration is undertaking a number of initiatives that could influence the Public Engagement Policy and Framework in the future, such as finalizing the Civic Engagement project, Indigenous engagement work and evaluating engagement at the City. If any of these have an impact on the policy, Administration will come back to Council prior to the next MGA mandated review date (April 2029).

Budget/Financial Implications

There are approved operating and capital budgets in place across the organization to address public engagement requirements. It is not anticipated adjustments to this policy will require additional public engagement budget requests.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

Legal Implications

The MGA requires every municipality to have a public participation policy. The policy must set out the categories of circumstances and approaches the municipality will use to engage with people. In addition, the policy must be made available to the public and must be reviewed at least once every four years. Policy C593C is posted on edmonton.ca, along with all other Council and Administrative policies and further details on public engagement.

Community Insight

Administration examined community insights from a number of perspectives, including members of the Edmonton Insight Community, under-heard communities, Civic Youth Fellowship (Internship) participants and through the development of the Corporate Accessibility Plan. It also conducted a review of feedback provided from engagement feedback forms over the past two years. In addition, the City sought feedback from City Council offices and City employees who have practical experience in conducting engagement to inform the policy renewal.

The following is a summary of the key insights gained from these various cohorts over the last few years.

Analysis of past public engagements

Related feedback from the Public Engagement Insights Survey - What We Heard Report

In September 2022, the City conducted a survey with the Edmonton Insight Community to understand residents' experiences with public engagement. The survey sought insights on attitudes, preferences and comfort levels with various engagement formats (virtual, in-person). It also aimed to gather recommendations for improving the planning and implementation of public engagement, understand how residents learn about engagement opportunities, identify barriers to participation and explore strategies to amplify diverse voices. Completed by 3,551 members, the survey provided valuable feedback that informs the City's Public Engagement Policy and updated Framework.

Feedback related to the Policy	How current Policy or proposed changes addresses the feedback
Ineffective communication was identified as a key barrier to awareness of engagement opportunities.	The current "proactive, timely and transparent" guiding principle addresses the input around communications. It states that when people have enough notice to engage early in the engagement process it enables input that can impact decision-making.
Trust was a theme heard, with some respondents feeling unheard and expressing a desire for more meaningful engagement. Some respondents held the perception engagement efforts often served to validate pre-made decisions rather than genuinely incorporate public input.	The current policy statement states engagement processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• create opportunities for people to contribute to decision-making• communicate how public input is collected and used
While digital engagement offers accessibility in	The digital engagement consideration has been removed from

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

terms of time and cost, it was raised that it can exclude those without internet access or technological proficiency, highlighting the need to balance digital and in-person methods to ensure inclusivity.	the policy and framework as it is an operational consideration. For flexibility, deciding which engagement tools to use is done on a project-by-project basis, considering the needs of the people and groups being engaged.
Safety concerns were raised regarding polarized or high-conflict engagement events, which led to discomfort and feelings of being unsafe.	The ability for everyone involved to participate safely in engagement is important to ensure depth and breadth of perspectives. Consideration of Respectful and Safe Discussion and Debate has been integrated into the Public Engagement Framework as it is an operational consideration.

Related preliminary feedback from under-heard community engagement project

The City is undertaking a project to increase awareness of public engagement among immigrant/newcomer communities. In the first phase, engagement was done with community members to identify an engagement approach that will support an increase in awareness of public engagement among immigrant/newcomer communities. Preliminary results of the first phase, which is still underway, have provided some insights that have already been applied to the policy renewal.

Preliminary feedback related to the Policy	How current Policy or proposed changes address the feedback
Building Authentic Relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members want to feel heard and valued through conversations and genuine connections. 	The guiding principle of “relationship-building and perspective-seeking” integrates this feedback within the policy.
Addressing Cultural and Lived Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement should revolve around and address the specific needs of immigrant/newcomer communities and equity deserving groups and the challenges they face. 	The guiding principle of “relationship-building and perspective-seeking” and “inclusive and accessible” integrates this feedback within the policy.
Education and Clear Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the importance of engagement and how feedback will influence decisions. Provide transparent communication about outcomes. 	<p>The guiding principle of “proactive, timely and transparent” integrates this feedback within the policy.</p> <p>The policy statement and outcomes address clear communication on how input was used and why decisions were made.</p>
Inclusivity and Accessibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide translations and culturally appropriate adaptations for diverse audiences. Meet people where they are, making engagement more inclusive and accessible. 	The guiding principle of “relationship-building and perspective-seeking” and “inclusive and accessible” integrates this feedback within the policy.
Meaningful Change or Don't Engage	The policy statement and outcomes indicate the link between engagement and decision making.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build trust by listening, acting on feedback and being transparent about how input will shape decisions. 	The guiding principle of “proactive, timely and transparent” addresses being transparent about how input will shape decisions.
<p>Responsive and Grounded Outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on reaching underrepresented voices. 	The guiding principle of “relationship-building and perspective-seeking” and “inclusive and accessible” integrates this feedback within the policy.

Feedback from Civic Youth Fellowship (Internship) participants

In June 2024, 10 (of 13) members of the City of Edmonton’s Civic Youth Fellowship (Internship) program participated in a workshop to gather their input on the Public Engagement Policy. The program provides opportunities for youth from equity-deserving backgrounds to apply for an internship with the City. A summary of the feedback they provided is below.

Feedback that related to the Policy	How current Policy or proposed changes addresses the feedback
Importance of education and communication	<p>Current policy includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guiding principle of “proactive, timely and transparent” integrates this feedback within the policy. The policy statement and outcomes address clear communication on how input was used and why decisions were made.
Importance of linking all engagement to decision making	<p>Current policy includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy statement and outcomes indicate the link between engagement and decision making. The guiding principle of “proactive, timely and transparent” addresses being transparent about how input will shape decisions.
Importance of relationship building in engagement	<p>Current policy includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guiding principle of “relationship-building and perspective-seeking” integrates this feedback within the policy.

Related feedback from the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan - What We Heard Report

The Corporate Accessibility Plan supports the Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy through actions. Engagement was undertaken to develop the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan to better understand the barriers people with disabilities experience when accessing City programs, services and public spaces.

Feedback that related to the Policy	How current Policy or proposed changes addresses the feedback
<p>City event accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include accessibility tools into events such as 	The guiding principle of “inclusive and accessible” integrates this feedback within the policy.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

accurate closed captioning and American Sign Language (ASL).	
Forty-one per cent indicated experiencing barriers or challenges when accessing City information, interacting with the City, or participating in public engagement events.	The guiding principle of “inclusive and accessible” integrates this feedback within the policy.

Related feedback provided from participants from engagement event feedback forms

An analysis of participant feedback forms from the last two years reinforces the link between engagement and decision making, the importance of communication and the importance of engagement being inclusive and accessible.

Feedback that related to the Policy	How current Policy or proposed changes addresses the feedback
Trust and feedback having an impact on decision making	The policy statement and outcomes indicate the link between engagement and decision making. The guiding principle of “proactive, timely and transparent” addresses being transparent about how input will shape decisions.
Clear communication of the engagement and how feedback will be used	The guiding principle of “proactive, timely and transparent” integrates this feedback within the policy. The policy statement and outcomes address clear communication on how input was used and why decisions were made.
Engagement being inclusive and accessible	The guiding principles of “inclusive and accessible” integrate this feedback into the policy.

Internal staff survey results

An internal survey was conducted (December 18, 2024 - January 13, 2025) to collect feedback from City Council, Executive Leadership Team and internal staff (subject matter experts and department business partners). The survey collected feedback on the proposed changes to the Public Engagement Policy to help shape recommendations for updating the policy.

Key themes emerged from the analysis, emphasizing the importance of balancing strategic objectives with community expectations. The current policy has been recognized for its foundational guidance, inclusivity and consistency in aligning with decision-making processes. As such, feedback indicated no need or desire for large scale changes to the Public Engagement Policy at this time. However, concerns were raised about overuse, unrealistic expectations and a lack of follow-up on public feedback. Respondents also expressed differing views on refining the scope of engagement, engagement requirements and exemptions for specific situations.

Key feedback included:

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

1. **Effectiveness of the current policy:** The policy is valued for providing foundational guidance, consistency and inclusivity. However, concerns that are better addressed through the framework, tools and templates, include the overuse of engagement as a default practice, limited influence on decision-making and unrealistic expectations set by engagement processes.
2. **Refining the scope of engagement:** There is broad agreement on assessing the impacts of City projects, programs and services on the public to determine the necessity and scope of engagement.
3. **When engagement is considered:** Refinement of the policy around when engagement is considered or not considered is tied to fairness, efficiency and alignment with priorities. Concerns with alternative wordings included potential risks to trust and equity. Feedback indicated the importance of communicating and ensuring the public understands when engagement is determined unnecessary.
4. **Guiding principles:** There was agreement that maintaining clarity and consistency in the guiding principles ensures alignment with the Policy's intent by promoting mutual accountability, encouraging democratic decision-making and strengthening collaboration and trust between the City and residents. There was support for refining some of the wording within the guiding principles but no consensus on language.

General feedback indicated a desire for clarifying policy definitions, streamlining engagement methods and fostering trust through transparent communication. Respondents' feedback showed a need for balancing inclusivity and efficiency while ensuring public input is meaningfully integrated into decision making processes.

While the survey primarily focused on updates to the Public Engagement Policy, feedback regarding the framework was also collected and will be used to refine and better align the framework with the proposed policy changes.

Feedback that relates to the Policy	How current Policy or proposed changes addresses the feedback
<p>Effectiveness of the current policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy is valued for providing foundational guidance, consistency and inclusivity. • Concerns include the overuse of engagement as a default practice, limited influence on decision-making and unrealistic expectations set by engagement processes. 	<p>Current policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes inclusivity, a commitment to involving the public in decision-making processes, and communicating how input will be used. It also indicates when engagement will be considered. <p>Proposed policy change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of a “data-driven approach to ensure the responsible use of City resources” wording within the requirements section of the policy when considering public engagement. <p>As a part of continuous improvement, Administration will integrate operational related feedback into tools, templates and training around engagement.</p>
<p>Refining the scope of engagement:</p>	<p>Current policy:</p>

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is broad agreement on assessing the impacts of City projects, programs and services on the public to determine the necessity and scope of engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlines when engagement will be considered. <p>Proposed policy change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of a “data-driven approach to ensure the responsible use of City resources” wording within the requirements section of the policy when considering public engagement to assist in clarification of scope. <p>Administration has integrated instances where public engagement may not be considered into the Framework. Administration uses public engagement tools and templates to assess the impacts of City projects, programs and services initiatives on the public.</p>
<p>When engagement is considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refinement of the policy around when engagement is considered or not considered is tied to fairness, efficiency and alignment with priorities. • Concerns with alternative wordings include potential risks to trust and equity. Feedback indicated the importance of communicating and ensuring the public understands when engagement is determined unnecessary. 	<p>Current policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlines when engagement will be considered as well as the importance of communicating how input was used. <p>Proposed policy change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of a “data-driven approach to ensure the responsible use of City resources” wording within the requirements section of the policy when considering public engagement. <p>Administration has integrated instances where public engagement may not be considered into the Framework.</p>
<p>Guiding principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was agreement that maintaining clarity and consistency in the principles ensures alignment with the Policy’s intent by promoting mutual accountability, encouraging democratic decision-making and strengthening collaboration and trust between the City and residents. • There was support for refining some of the wording within the guiding principles but no consensus on language. 	<p>Current policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes guiding principles around relationship-building, transparency, inclusivity and innovation. • “Shared responsibility” guiding principle does not match its description. <p>Proposed change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine the wording of the “shared responsibility” principle to improve clarity and consistency without altering intent.

GBA+

The Public Engagement Policy impacts all those who live within the City of Edmonton corporate boundary. As a municipality, the City provides residents with policies, programs, projects and services. The Public Engagement Policy and public engagement processes creates opportunities for people and residents to actively contribute to decision-making by City Council and Administration on its policies, programs, projects and services.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY RENEWAL

After completing a GBA+ analysis, Administration validated there are no additional recommendations for the policy. The process included research through the jurisdictional scan and reviewing applicable past engagement feedback as well as doing internal engagement on proposed changes to the policy.

The guiding principles within the policy that Administration uses to consider and conduct Public Engagement underscores the City of Edmonton's dedication to recognizing and ensuring principles of diversity and inclusion are incorporated in its engagement processes. As well, the principle of inclusive and accessible engagement further strengthens the City's ability to connect with and involve diverse communities, ensuring barriers to participation are minimized and all residents have the chance to shape the future of their city.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

Attachments

1. Proposed Council Policy C593D - Public Engagement
2. Summary of Changes - Proposed Public Engagement Policy
3. Public Engagement Framework - February 2025