



Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of principles for public meetings or consultations. This includes advising the public of their opportunity to be involved in local government.

Definitions:

N/A

Policy:

Statement of Commitment

- 1.1. Zorra Township is committed to communicating with residents to ensure we meet the needs of the community. The Township strives to ensure that the public is involved in all aspects of developing a safe, healthy and happy community. As a result, this guideline has been developed to provide staff with a set of core principles and objectives when initiating a project within the community.
- 1.2. The principles can also be used by citizens and stakeholder groups as a reference tool when attending a public meeting. The following principles reflect Zorra Township's commitment and approach to engaging citizens on government projects, policy development and programs.

Guiding Principles

2.1. Value and Encourage Public Involvement

Zorra Township values the views of the community and encourages public involvement on issues that affect them. The development of a public engagement plan in the early stages of a project or program will be encouraged.

2.2. Share Information and Educate

Zorra Township shall regularly share information and educate the public to promote awareness and discussion on issues of individual and community interest.

2.3. Early Involvement

To ensure opportunities for public input as early as possible, public engagement shall be incorporated into the design, development and implementation of Township projects, policies, programs and services.

2.4. Timeliness

Zorra Township will provide information to the public in a timely and regular manner. Note that timely notice may be influenced by: legislated timeframes, urgency (e.g. public safety) and degree of potential impact on affected parties. Zorra Township is committed to meeting, and where possible exceeding, notice requirements established in legislation or policy. If there are no specific requirements, Zorra Township will seek to notify the public not less than two weeks in advance of a planned engagement event or deadline. The extent of public engagement processes (including timing and notification), will reflect the magnitude and complexity of the specific initiative.

2.5. Openness/Two-way Communication

Zorra Township values information sharing. Opportunities for open, constructive and balanced discussion will be created to solicit input from the public. In addition, the Township will identify key stakeholders. Potential stakeholders may include:

- Community associations and neighbourhood organizations;
- Special interest groups;
- Township boards;
- Chairs of advisory committees or entire advisory committees;
- Councillors;
- Civic partners;
- Local governments;
- Provincial government;
- Federal government;
- Political leaders;
- Internal stakeholders;
- Non-government organizations (NGOs);
- Charities and service clubs;
- Sports and recreation groups;
- Business leaders and business associations;
- Umbrella organizations;
- Landowners and residents;
- Churches and religious groups; and
- Local schools/education institutions.

2.6. Accessibility/Diversity/Inclusiveness

Zorra Township's public engagement processes shall include those members of the public who may be affected by a particular issue. In keeping with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, consultation processes shall be inclusive through the use of consistent and plain language, accessible locations and scheduling. A variety of communication tools will be used to promote engagement opportunities.

2.7. Mutual Respect/Objectivity



Zorra Township will engage in a fair and respectful manner, considering all views to build trust with the public. Views will be considered in a non-confrontational and constructive manner.

Participants are asked to keep informed, identify issues as early as possible, work co-operatively within the process, keep expectations realistic and focus on the problem/issue/opportunity at hand. Zorra Township will endeavour to understand the interests of all impacted parties and balance those concerns with the interests of the broader community.

2.8. Transparency

At the beginning of a public engagement, Zorra Township will communicate the issue to be addressed, the objectives and scope of the engagement and the roles and responsibilities of participants.

2.9. Accountability

Zorra Township is accountable to the public for engagement processes, final decisions and outcomes.

Determining Level of Public Engagement

3.1. Public involvement will not be the same for every initiative. In fact, it's important that decisions about how best to involve the community are based on the project or initiative.

3.2. Less involvement is appropriate when:

- Interest in the policy issue is vested in one or a few interest groups;
- Perspectives are generally well understood and can be taken into consideration;
- The policy issue demands consistency with established professional or technical standards;
- Legislative guidelines define and/or limit the level of public involvement.

3.3. More involvement is appropriate when:

- Several groups have an interest in the outcome of the issue;
- Consensus among these groups is weak and uncertain; and
- Policy issue is value based and carries a high need for social acceptance.

3.4. After, identifying the scope of the project, it is important to correctly determine what level of public involvement will achieve the desired goals.

- a) Inform: to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
- b) Consult: to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

- c) Involve: to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
 - d) Collaborate: to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
- 3.5. The following factors can help determine which level of involvement is most suitable for a given project:
- Policy/statutory requirements;
 - Nature, complexity and risk associated with issues;
 - Timelines;
 - Financial implications;
 - In-house expertise;
 - Level of support/consensus from stakeholders/partners;
 - Level of influence the participants expect to have; and
 - Level of support from departmental and political decision-makers.
- 3.6. To ensure an appropriate cross-section of opinion is obtained, a survey may be chosen for one group and an information session for another, along with a small task force established with representative members. These techniques or others could be the mix chosen to reach and involve the most appropriate audience. A variety of these techniques will help balance the tendency for any particular stakeholders to dominate.

Strategies of Public Engagement

- 4.1. To assist staff with correctly identifying an appropriate path to engage and inform the public, this guide also provides **three strategies** based on the desired goals of public participation. These three strategies include:
- a) Inform
 - b) Consult
 - c) Collaborate
- 4.2. Through use of the three strategies provided, staff have the ability to gauge the nature of the issue, determine the level of public participation and obtain a clear understanding of standard practices of informing the public. As such, the three pre-designed strategies attempt to reduce the risk of miscommunication and encourage clear, consistent and timely notice from the Township. Recognizing that no two situations are the same, staff are encouraged to merge categories or go above-and-beyond in their efforts to involve the public in the governing process.
- 4.3. **Strategy 1 – Inform (day-to-day)**

- Planned road closures of one week or less
- Service maintenance at a municipal facility that will disrupt the public
- Service disruptions or office/building closure
- New recreational programs

4.3.1. Objective

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. Seeks to solely inform the public and key stakeholders.

4.3.2. Public Engagement

In general, staff should use the Strategy 1 – Inform of Public Engagement to inform the public of general day-to-day operations. Such operations should be limited to no impact on residential daily activities and should be routine in nature. Due to the nature of this strategy of public engagement, there is little need to involve the public in the decision-making or planning process.

Simply put, the goal of Strategy 1 is to inform the public of general maintenance to the community. The public should be informed of when the maintenance will occur, how long it will take, the geographic location, and the reason why the work is being completed. Understandably, there is no need to engage the public with mundane day-to-day functions of the municipality.

4.3.3. Notice

In all Strategy 1 – Inform cases, notice should be provided to the public at least 7 days prior to any planned work being completed. In these situations, staff are expected to reach out to the public via traditional communication mediums, including use of the Township website, social media, and to Council.

4.4. Strategy 2 – Consult (specific)

- Planned road closures of greater than one week
- Minor changes on municipal property that may affect adjacent property owners such as building renovations, construction of accessory structures or installation of new outdoor equipment
- Fencing By-law exemptions
- Noise By-law exemptions

4.4.1. Objective

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

4.4.2. Public Engagement

Strategy 2 – Consult is best used when a particular issue will affect a relatively small number of residents or a small geographic location. While the issue or project may be considered as routine in nature, there will be a slight impact on a particular community, which may impact the day-to-day activities of citizens. Public engagement is typically limited and staff should make a conscious effort to ensure residents and business owners are well aware of timelines and possible delays in their daily activities.

Still, the objective of Strategy 2 – Consult is to provide notice to the public and in certain circumstances to provide an opportunity for engagement with Council or a standing committee. Where engagement is not required, it is to share information to satisfy any possible omissions of public notice. Ideally, staff should engage in face-to-face communication with the limited number of residents and business owners who may be effected.

Similar to Strategy 1 – Inform, use of traditional communication mediums should be utilized, such as the Township website, social media, written notices, and notice to Council. Particular attention should be provided to effectively communicate any possible issues that may delay the day-to-day activities of citizens and business.

4.4.3. Notice

In all Strategy 2 – Consult cases, notice should be issued at least 14 days prior to the project start date or public meeting. In such cases, staff are expected to actively notify citizens and business leaders who may be directly affected by the project. Notification will be carried out using written notices that include the project scope and details.

4.5. **Strategy 3 – Collaborate**

- Making changes to cultural or historically significant municipal assets
- Selling of municipal assets
- Major changes on municipal property that may affect adjacent property owners including a change of use or introduction of a new use on the property, construction of a new building or structure
- Development or redevelopment of municipal lands
- Planning of celebrations

4.5.1. Objective

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. 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. Seeks to engage, involve or collaborate with the community and key stakeholders.

4.5.2. Public Engagement

Strategy 3 –Collaborate process promotes a significantly more proactive approach to public engagement. This Strategy of public engagement should be used for high priority issues that will affect many individuals in the community. Strategy 3 public engagement covers issues that may be considered contentious in the community. When in doubt, the CAO should be consulted for guidance.

Similarly, Strategy 3 public engagement covers issues that may impact the health and safety of members of the public or interrupt day-to-day living in the Township. Depending on the issue or project, staff may be required to engage the public, which includes receiving feedback, analysis, and providing alternatives to the community.

In these situations, the public is to be given an opportunity to preview any proposed plans or options and submit questions or comments to staff. As a recommended option, staff should make themselves available to the public via information sessions. Information sessions should be well advertised, timely, and accessible to all citizens. Special attention should be made to ensure all relevant material is distributed or made available to the public prior to the public information centre. Additionally, staff should be made available at any public information centre to record questions or comments the public may have.

4.6. Notice

In all Strategy 3 – Collaborate cases, notice should be issued at least 30 days prior to the project start date. In such cases, the need for active participation by the public is of utmost importance. Staff are expected to actively notify citizens and business leaders who may be directly affected by the project. Notification is suggested which utilizes multiple communication techniques as outlined.

Public Engagements Tools

5.1. Fact Sheets

Intended for information dissemination among the community. Fact sheets indicate a problem statement, all known relevant information, financial statements/projections, and the contact information for the applicable staff. Fact sheets can be produced as a proactive or reactive approach to a given issue. May be used to correct misinformation being shared among citizens.

5.2. Website

Intended for information dissemination among the community on a given issue. Websites can indicate a problem statement, all known relevant information, financial statements/projections, and the contact information for the applicable staff. Unlike Fact Sheets, the website can be used to attach large PDF documents that are impractical for printing.

5.3. Surveys

Surveys can be used to gauge public opinion. Surveys should be clear and concise, and include standard scaling (i.e. 1-5). Surveys should be accompanied by a Fact Sheet. Includes predetermined answers for given questions.

5.4. Deliberative Polling (sampling)

Similar to surveys, deliberative polling (or sampling) gauges public opinion on a given issue. The typical deliberative opinion poll takes a random, representative sample of citizens and engages them in deliberation on a current issue. Choosing a random, representative group of citizens allows for an accurate reflection of public opinion. This can be done easily by sending staff into the public to engage in conversation with random citizens. Should also be accompanied by a Fact Sheet.

5.5. Public Comment Forms

Similar to surveys, public comment forms gauge public opinion on an issue. Unlike surveys, public comment forms do not need to include predetermined answers to a question. The focus of public comment forms is to receive the exclusive opinions of the public in a greater level of detail. Public comment forms should be accompanied by a Fact Sheet.



Policy: Public Engagement

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Section: Administration

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Next Revision Date

This policy shall be reviewed every 5 years.

The next revision date is September 2024.

Accessible Formats

If you require this document to be in an accessible format, please contact the Director of Corporate Services at clerk@zorra.ca or 519-485-2490 ext. 7228.