



## POLICY MANUAL

<b>Legal References:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Municipal Government Act, Public Participation Policy Regulation, Governance, s.216.1</li></ul>	<b>Policy department:</b> CAO or Communications
<b>Cross References:</b>	<b>Policy Number:</b> S3
<b>Adoption Date:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>June 11, 2018 – CM#20180611.1035</li></ul> <b>Revision Date:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li></li></ul>	<b>Policy Title:</b> Public Participation Policy, Strategy and Toolkit
	<b>Review Date:</b> June 11, 2021

### POLICY PURPOSE:

In accordance with Section 216.1(1) of the Municipal Government Act, this Public Participation Policy has been developed to recognize the value of public participation and create opportunities for meaningful public participation in County decisions that directly impact the public. This Public Participation Policy is in addition to and does not modify or replace the statutory public hearing requirements in the Municipal Government Act.

The Public Participation policy establishes clear processes and guidelines to guide future interaction with a wide range of stakeholders in County decision-making and on delivery of policies, programs, projects and services, where public participation is beneficial. The Public Participation Policy is accompanied by a detailed strategy that guides staff and council through a consistent process for the design and implementation of customized participation plans (see schedule “A”), a toolkit with methods and formats to ensure effective participation (see schedule “B”), and a process for implementation and evaluation of the public participation strategy (see schedule “C”).

### DEFINITIONS:

- 1) **“CAO”** means the chief administrative officer, appointed by Council, of the Municipality or their delegate under the Municipal Government Act for the County of Grande Prairie No. 1.



- 2) **“Municipal Stakeholders”** means the residents of the Municipality, as well as other individuals, organizations or persons that may have an interest in, or are affected by, a decision made by the Municipality.
- 3) **“Municipality”** means the municipal corporation of the County of Grande Prairie No. 1 having jurisdiction under the Municipal Government Act and the application legislation.
- 4) **“Public Participation”** includes a variety of non-statutory opportunities where Municipal Stakeholders receive information and/or provide input to the Municipality.
- 5) **“Public Participation Strategy”** means the detailed guide prepared for the County that staff will use to design and deliver effective “public participation plans”.
- 6) **“Public Participation Plan”** means a plan which identifies which Public Participation Tools to be used to obtain public input in a particular circumstance.
- 7) **“Public Participation Tools”** means the tools (contained in a document called a “Toolkit”) that may be used, alone or in combination, to create Public Participation opportunities.

## PRINCIPLES:

Council recognizes that good governance includes engaging Municipal Stakeholders in Public Participation by:

- 1) Creating opportunities for Municipal Stakeholders who are affected by a decision to influence the decision;
- 2) Promoting sustainable decisions by recognizing various Municipal Stakeholder interests;
- 3) Providing Municipal Stakeholders with the appropriate information and tools to engage in meaningful participation; and
- 4) Recognizing that although councilors are elected to consider and promote the welfare and interest of the Municipality as a whole and are generally required to vote on matters brought before Council, facilitating Public Participation for matters beyond those where public input is statutorily required can enrich the decision-making process.

Key elements of effective public participation include ensuring that:

- information provided is timely, complete, and accessible;
- a reasonable timeline for participation (i.e. early involvement to avoid the notion that a decision is already made) is provided;
- the appropriate level of engagement is undertaken for the issue or project;
- those who are affected by the issue or initiative are able to participate;
- the process is adaptive to the needs of Municipal Stakeholders; and



- results are transparent and are communicated in a timely manner.

The purpose of the definitions is to help the person reading the policy understand what they are reading. It refers only to those words used in the policy.

## **POLICY STATEMENT AND GUIDELINES:**

The County will consistently use the Public Participation Strategy and Toolkit to design, execute and report back from custom-designed public participation projects whose outreach and participation activities are properly matched to issues that arise, to questions or choices that council and staff require input on, and/or to program/service revisions.

The policy applies when engaging Municipal Stakeholders on County-led projects, policies or initiatives to ensure there is a consistent and effective approach to public engagement.

All County staff will follow the seven-step design process described in the Public Participation Strategy (schedule A) to ensure the appropriate selection of both the level of participation and associated tools.

Care will be paid by all departments to early and inclusive identification of audiences who need to be informed and offered opportunities to participate in worthwhile initiatives where public input is needed; formats and tools spanning in-person and online communication and participation activities will be selected based on audience need.

The County commits as a whole to reporting out broadly and to participants specifically on the input received and on how it was used. Note that no single input, comment or activity determines the outcome of a given process, and that council (as elected decision-makers) ultimately reserves the right to decide as they see fit as outlined by the Municipal Government Act and amendments thereto.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**Council** is responsible for:

- Being familiar with the County Public Participation Strategy and promoting its proper use, including clarity of roles between staff, council and residents;
- Reviewing and approving Public Participation Plans developed by the CAO in accordance with this policy or as directed by Council;
- Ensuring that sufficient staff and financial resources are dedicated to solicit public participation in accordance with this policy;
- Promoting awareness of and participation in the County's Public Participation activities;
- Considering input obtained through Public Participation; and



- Reviewing this policy to ensure the policy complies with all relevant legislation, municipal policies and the spirit and intent of Public Participation.

**Chief Administrative Officer** is responsible for:

- Ensuring that this policy, Public Participation Strategy and Public Participation Toolkit is used by all staff when they develop and implement projects that require public participation and having Public Participation project plans reviewed by council when necessary;
- Ensuring that there is an effective internal approval and coordination process for Public Participation initiatives by and through various departments, such that County capacity for such initiatives is not exceeded and so activities and events do not overlap or cause confusion;
- Ensuring that staff and financial resources are available to support the planning and execution of projects and processes that are approved under this policy;
- Implement approved Public Participation Plans;
- Report on the activities, the findings, and the quality and effectiveness of Participation efforts to Council; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the County in using this policy, Public Participation Strategy and Public Participation Toolkit over time, and keeping the roles of staff, council and public clear and distinct.

**Communications department** is responsible for:

- Maintaining County communication channels with up-to-date information and opportunities for Public Participation, in conjunction with communication champions in each department and their directors;
- Use the internal process to coordinate Public Participation activities to prevent overlap and confusion, in conjunction with department directors/staff;
- Maintaining the Public Participation Toolkit of participation activities/formats;
- Supporting departments undertaking Public Participation with social media, media, advertising and other promotion efforts; and
- Helping departments develop and resource their Public Participation projects and activities.

**Department Directors and Managers** are responsible for:

- Ensuring the proper use of the Public Participation Strategy and Public Participation Toolkit by their departments, consistently using the 7-step process to develop plans, and seeking approval and resourcing for those plans internally;
- Coordinating between departments to ensure that Public Participation projects are properly resourced, have a clear purpose and audiences, do not unnecessarily overlap or confuse the public, and respects County capacity as an organization;



- Assessing the capacity of their staff teams to develop and carry out effective Public Participation projects, and supporting with training and tool development as necessary;
- Maintaining contact lists to support outreach, promotion and reporting back;
- Coordinating with Communications to ensure all projects follow County policies for communications, social media, media, FOIP, etc.; and
- Ensuring ongoing reporting to participants about project activities and decisions, including communicating on the use of input gathered.

**Staff members** are responsible for:

- Being aware of the purpose and activities of current and upcoming Public Participation initiatives by the County so they can answer questions and direct the public to correct information and opportunities;
- Participating in the development and execution of Public Participation projects and events, sharing information, gathering input and helping report back on what has been learned and how the input gathered has affected decisions, policies, programs or services;
- Developing meeting design, group facilitation, and data analysis and reporting skills to support Public Participation; and
- Maintaining contact lists of stakeholder groups, community networks and the general public with interests in their area of service or responsibility, to support effective communications and recruitment for Public Participation activities.

## POLICY EXPECTATIONS

### 1) Legislative and Policy Implications

- (a) All Public Participation will be undertaken in accordance with the *Municipal Government Act*, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and any other applicable legislation.
- (b) All Public Participation will be undertaken in accordance with all existing municipal policies and bylaws and any of the applicable legislation.
- (c) This Policy shall be available for public inspection and may be posted to the Municipality's website.
- (d) This Policy will be reviewed at least once every four years.

### 2) Public Participation Standards

- (a) Public Participation will be conducted in a sustainable and inclusive manner having regard to different levels of accessibility.
- (b) Public Participation activities will be conducted in a professional and respectful manner.



- (c) Public Participation plans will consider early, ongoing and diverse opportunities to provide input.
- (d) Municipal Stakeholders who participate in any manner of Public Participation are required to be respectful and constructive in their participation. Municipal Stakeholders who are disrespectful, inappropriate or offensive, as determined by Chief Administrative Officer, may be excluded from Public Participation opportunities.
- (e) The results of Public Participation will be made available to Council and Municipal Stakeholders in a timely manner.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES**

- (a) The Chief Administrative Office may develop and implement a Public Participation Plan in the following circumstances:
  - i. when new programs or services are being established;
  - ii. when gathering input or formulating recommendations with respect to budget;
  - iii. when gathering input or formulating recommendations with respect to the Municipality's strategic plans or business plans;
  - iv. when gathering input or formulating recommendations with respect to the Municipality's capital plan and/or financial plan; or
  - v. as otherwise directed by Council.

## **ETHICS AND CODE OF CONDUCT:**

If you may need to reference existing documents such as that outlined in the Human Resource Policy Manual, contact Manager, Legislative Services for additional information.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The use and interpretation of all County Policies and schedules will comply with all aspects of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). Any breaches of the FOIP Act will be subject to disciplinary action.

## **RECORDS MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS:**

All documentation will be filed in accordance with the Records Management Policy and to comply with the Municipal Government Act (MGA), Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) and any other applicable legislation, regulation, or act.

## **NON COMPLIANCE:**



Consequences of non-compliance with this Policy may result in the potential for legal challenges and/or penalties to the County of Grande Prairie No. 1, its elected officials and/or staff.

The Chief Administrative Officer must approve any exceptions to the Policy.

### **POLICY AUTHORITY:**

The Chief Administrative Officer has the authority to amend the related Schedules of Policy **S3** from time to time to keep current, enforceable and compliant with statutes and legislation in the Province of Alberta. Any changes that are made to Policy are to be approved by Council.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Schedule “A” – Public Participation Strategy

Schedule “B” – Public Participation Toolkit

Schedule “C” – Process for Implementation and Evaluation of P2 Strategy