

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 21, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: **STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY UPDATE**

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide an update on implementation of the City of Vaughan's Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy, highlighting significant achievements made since January 2021 and planned upcoming initiatives. This report is the first update since Council approved the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy in January 2021.

Report Highlights

- Through the Stakeholder and Engagement Policy, the City is making great strides toward ensuring the public is meaningfully involved in decisions on City matters that interest and/or impact them.
- Vaughan's citizens are active and engaged members of their community, with nearly 23,000 views of City engagement pages and 7,100 people directly participating in City conversations in 2021.
- The City launched a new online engagement platform – Have Your Say, Vaughan – making it easier than ever for the public to provide input.
- The City continues to improve its engagement practices, maintaining a roster of high-quality professional engagement consultants and launching a survey to collect feedback on the City's engagement performance.
- The 2022 Citizen Survey will be an opportunity to update the questions asked to best assess citizen needs and the evolution of City services in a post-COVID-19 era.

Recommendations

1. That the accomplishments outlined in this report and Attachments 1 and 2 be received for information.

Background

Community engagement is fundamental to the city-building process and recognized as a priority in the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan. Community engagement is defined as the process of inviting citizens and stakeholders to participate in conversations with their local government about municipal matters that interest or impact them. The City understands that insights collected through the community engagement process provide Vaughan Council and City staff with meaningful information to support sustainable decision-making.

On Jan. 26, 2021, Council adopted the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy and, with it, a framework for planning and executing engagement processes at the City of Vaughan. The Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy is not only a formal commitment to involving citizens, businesses and stakeholders in crucial conversations that will help shape the city they know and love – it also offers a directional process based on internationally recognized standards, best practices and methodology. Community engagement is also an exercise in relationship-building, which has the power to create a culture of trust and understanding between citizens and their local government while building healthy communities.

The plan was developed through extensive internal and external consultation, jurisdictional review and engagement benchmarking. Over the course of several years, Corporate and Strategic Communications conducted comprehensive internal consultation, including an executive summit with senior leaders, a one-day retreat for Members of Council and the establishment of an internal Community Engagement Working Group. Citizens were engaged through the 2018 Citizen Survey, which included a series of new questions to establish a benchmark for public perception of the City's engagement performance. Complementing these activities, Corporate and Strategic Communications conducted an extensive jurisdictional review and benchmarking analysis of engagement practices across 16 similar-sized municipalities and regions.

The City's Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy and framework are rooted in internationally recognized standards, best practices and methodology established by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The IAP2 is the preeminent international organization working to promote and advance the practice of public participation and continuously improve engagement best practices

throughout the world. Several members of the Corporate and Strategic Communications department have participated in IAP2-licensed training and have received internationally recognized certificates of completion. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (Attachment 1) is a core pillar of the IAP2's global mission, designed to assist individuals, government and institutions in defining the public's role and appropriate depth of engagement for any public participation project. It is used internationally and features prominently in many engagement plans across the world.

The Made-for-Vaughan Engagement Spectrum is a cornerstone of the City's engagement framework and defines the level of public participation for any given project (Attachment 2). Vaughan's adapted spectrum includes three main levels of engagement: share information, collect and compile information, and bring people together. The latter two levels each have two sub-levels: listen and learn, consult, include and co-create. Vaughan's Engagement Spectrum defines the role of the public when they participate in City engagement activities. As you move from left to right across the spectrum, there is an increasing level of public influence over decision-making, and the role of the public becomes more complex. Not all public engagement programs require the same level of participation, and all levels of participation are important. The spectrum is designed to help City staff determine the appropriate level of participation based on the input they need from the community. The levels are not to be considered in isolation – multiple levels of engagement may be selected for a single project depending on the phase and stakeholders involved. It's important to note that sharing information is expected to occur in all City engagements – but operating exclusively at the share information level is considered communications and outreach, not public engagement.

A comprehensive launch plan was employed to roll out the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy and associated framework to City staff. Following the adoption of the policy by Council, Corporate and Strategic Communications held two policy seminars to introduce staff to the new policy and framework, share engagement best practices and answer staff's questions. The seminars were attended by employees from across the organization. Training on key elements of the City's engagement framework was also delivered at the Manager Spring Conference in March 2021. Additionally, information on the new policy and framework was disseminated to all People Leaders and was highlighted in the September 2021 edition of the staff newsletter, Vaughan Connects. Most significantly, Corporate and Strategic Communications developed an extensive Community Engagement Resource Hub for staff on the City's intranet. The resource hub provides a step-by-step guide for planning engagement with associated templates, tips and information to assist staff in delivering

meaningful engagement processes that align with the City's policy. The resource hub is updated regularly as the City continuously advances its engagement practices. Stakeholder and Community Engagement is a business unit within Corporate and Strategic Communications that is staffed by two engagement professionals who support the entire corporation.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy](#) – Item 5, Report No. 1 of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted without amendment by the Council or the City of Vaughan on Jan. 26, 2021.

Analysis and Options

Key achievements following policy adoption

By the numbers: 2021 public engagement reach

Vaughan's citizens are active and engaged members of their community, and COVID-19 has not slowed down their interest in participating in City decision-making. In 2021, the City's engagement webpages received nearly 23,000 views. Through those engagement pages, the City invited citizens to learn about important city-building projects and join the conversation. Subscriptions to the Vaughan Engagement eNewsletter – a monthly eNewsletter highlighting active engagement opportunities issued directly to subscribed mailboxes one to two times per month – almost doubled, growing from approximately 600 to 1,100 people. Furthermore, subscribers to the eNewsletter show high interest in the content, with an average open rate of 62 per cent, roughly double the industry average. Additional engagement highlights for 2021 include:

- delivery of 49 engagement campaigns to support city-building projects.
- direct engagement with more than 7,100 people through virtual engagement meetings, surveys, workbooks, online interactive maps, virtual idea boards and more.
- hosting of 42 virtual engagement meetings, including public open houses, public information centres, workshops and focus groups.
- delivery of 28 surveys, which collected over 5,100 responses.

These numbers continue to grow as participation in community engagement processes remains strong through the start of 2022. Ensuring the City reaches impacted and interested citizens and stakeholders to notify them of opportunities to provide meaningful and informed input is a continued priority of Corporate and Strategic

Communications. Throughout 2022, the department will continue to build awareness of the importance of civic engagement and support all engagement processes with comprehensive communications plans.

Have Your Say, Vaughan

In February 2021, the City launched a new online public engagement platform – Have Your Say, Vaughan – elevating the City’s engagement infrastructure in a major way. Have Your Say, Vaughan is an online citizen engagement platform that provides an easy, secure and convenient way for the public to participate, learn, engage and give honest feedback online. The platform centralizes community engagement, making it easy to capture, analyze and report on city-wide engagement through one single platform. The software that powers Have Your Say, Vaughan – Bang the Table – works at the intersection of the latest web technologies and best practice stakeholder engagement to deliver world-class interactive communications solutions.

The platform was used to host online public engagement processes for several City projects throughout 2021, ranging from planning studies to park and trail design projects, horticulture service standards and by-law reviews. Citizens and stakeholders were invited to the platform to view presentations, review materials, take surveys, share ideas and more – all at a time and place that worked best for them. By the end of 2021, the platform had received approximately 7,100 visits and saw roughly 2,200 people participate in surveys, polls, feedback forums, virtual idea boards and interactive maps. The valuable insight collected through these engagement processes has been used to inform staff recommendations to Council and support sustainable decision-making.

Expanding the City’s ability to reach wider audiences through digital engagement is a key aim of the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy and was an immediate need during COVID-19. Even as the global pandemic eases and the City returns to in-person engagement activities, Have Your Say, Vaughan will continue to be a vital tool that can be used to complement face-to-face methodologies and extend the City’s engagement reach by providing convenient ways to share ideas and feedback.

Expanding the City’s roster of engagement consultants

Corporate and Strategic Communications maintains a vendor of record (VOR) of consultants who are pre-qualified to deliver simple to comprehensive community engagement plans and advise on public consultation. These consultants may be brought on to lead the development and delivery of inclusive, highly interactive and creative stakeholder engagement plans founded on measurable success indicators. To ensure vendor services align with the City’s engagement policy and practices, pre-qualified vendors are required to demonstrate their understanding and application of the

IAP2's principles and methodology in past work and are evaluated based on completion of IAP2-licensed training and certification. In 2021, Corporate and Strategic Communications, in partnership with Procurement Services, reissued the City's call for vendors and expanded the City's roster of pre-qualified consultants to ensure the City continues to receive high-quality, cost-competitive responses, thereby achieving cost efficiencies. The VOR is accessible to all City departments to quickly procure the engagement services they require, with Corporate and Strategic Communications available to support the procurement process.

Engagement Feedback Survey

In the spirit of Service Excellence and continuous improvement, in January 2022, the City launched an Engagement Feedback Survey on Have Your Say, Vaughan to collect citizen input on Vaughan's engagement practices. Throughout 2022, citizens who participate in a City engagement activity will be invited to complete an online survey to share their experience and provide input on how to make Vaughan's engagement process even better. The feedback collected will be analyzed on an ongoing basis to inform continuous improvements to the City's engagement practices, ensuring Vaughan's engagement opportunities are positive, meaningful and welcoming for all.

In alignment with the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy and the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan, the Engagement Feedback Survey will provide the following key outcomes:

- Ensure those who live, work and play in Vaughan continue to meaningfully engage in Vaughan's city-building process.
- Help inform strategies to reach and solicit input from the diverse citizens, businesses and stakeholders in the city of Vaughan for future engagements.
- Gauge the success of the Have Your Say platform, as well as other engagement methods used by City staff, helping to understand if these methods and tools resonate with the Vaughan community.
- Support ongoing evaluation and benchmarking of the City's engagement policy, framework and practices.

2022 Citizen Survey

Vaughan's Citizen Survey provides the City with essential data and insights that inform business planning, city-building and critical marketing and communication initiatives. Every two years, the City of Vaughan conducts a statistically significant telephone Citizen Survey, and a supplemental online survey, to gather input from residents on quality of life, delivery of City services, use of tax dollars and communications and

digital services, among other topics. In 2018, a series of engagement-related questions were added to the online survey, and one question to the telephone survey, to establish a benchmark for the public’s perception of the City’s engagement performance.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Vaughan has not conducted the Citizen Survey since 2018. Additionally, the questions have remained static since the survey’s launch in 2007. The 2022 Citizen Survey presents an opportunity to remeasure the public’s perception of the City’s engagement performance and refresh the survey to establish new benchmarks, ensuring an updated survey that best assesses citizen needs and reflects the evolution of City services in response to the new normal resulting from COVID-19.

The proposed project timeline is summarized in Table 1. Corporate and Strategic Communications will procure the survey vendor this summer, with survey redesign and development planned for early fall. The survey will be in field throughout November, with a report back to Council in early 2023.

Table 1: Proposed Project Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Procurement of survey vendor	June - August 2022
Citizen Survey redesign and development	September - October 2022
Citizen Survey implementation	November 2022
Delivery of survey results	December 2022 - January 2023
Final report to Council	Q1 2023

Additionally, the City of Vaughan has applied for an Inclusive Communities Grant (ICG) through the Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, with the intention to leverage grant funding to add a series of new questions focused on the needs and perspectives of Vaughan’s older adult community – and how those needs may have shifted as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The information collected will inform the execution of Vaughan’s Age-Friendly Action Plan. Specifically, Corporate and Strategic Communications will use the survey to solicit input on strategies to better engage older adults and seniors in conversations on City matters and enhance the online presence of information on the services available to older adults in Vaughan. Building on the data collected through the Citizen Survey, grant funding would also be used to host several workshops or focus groups with members of Vaughan’s older adult community to validate the survey’s key findings and more deeply engage with the community on key topics of interest.

The City is expected to hear back from the Ontario government by the end of Q2 2022.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts because of this report.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

None.

Conclusion

Community engagement is fundamental to the city-building process, and the City is dedicated to having constructive dialogue with the community that is accessible, inclusive, open and transparent. Through the approval of the Stakeholder and Engagement Policy, the City is making great strides toward ensuring citizens, businesses and stakeholders are meaningfully involved in conversations about municipal decisions that interest and/or impact them. The City continues to demonstrate its commitment to working with Vaughan's diverse communities to shape the city they love, a priority of the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.

For more information, please contact:

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Attachments

1. International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation, November 2018
2. City of Vaughan Community Engagement Spectrum, January 2021

Prepared by

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Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Spensieri', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nick Spensieri, City Manager