POLICY #C-017

POLICY NUMBER:	**C-017**
POLICY SUBJECT:	**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICY**
DEPARTMENT:	**COUNCIL**
EFFECTIVE DATE:	**JULY 10, 2023**
INITIAL EFFECTIVE DATE:	**JUNE 25, 2018**
REVISION DATE (s):	

1. PREAMBLE:

The Town of Coaldale values the community's input on matters of civic importance and recognizes the critical role meaningful dialogue holds in decision-making processes undertaken by Town Council.

The Town's approach to public participation is guided by three overarching statements:

- *Effective public participation has the power to enhance decisions*
- *Effective public participation recognizes and responds to peoples' desire to engage in matters that may impact them*
- *Effective public participation is a learning opportunity*

Therefore, effective public participation may be considered to be participation that results from processes that are based on

- A clear understanding of potential impacts of a given proposal, process or project
- providing learning opportunities for the community and Town representatives
- clarity regarding the level of influence participatory outcomes may have on a decision

Within the context of effective public participation, not all proposals, processes or projects will require a comprehensive participation process. There are varying levels of participation that may be undertaken based on the scale, scope and potential impact to the community. If there is little room for change or a limited ability to influence a decision, an extensive participation process may not be appropriate, useful, or financially responsible. However, if a proposal, process or project has the potential for significant impact to the community, and there is an ability to allow input to influence decisions in a meaningful way, robust and inclusive participation processes will be undertaken by the Town.

This policy reflects the importance of community engagement as a key element of municipal governance and meets and exceeds the requirements of the Municipal Government Act (MGA),

Sec. 216(1) and the Public Participation Policy Regulation 193/2017 and any amendments thereto.

Legislative compliance and effect on other processes

It is noted that this policy does not modify or replace the circulation, notification, or statutory public hearing requirements of the MGA, nor does it modify or replace the circulation and notification requirements for development permitting processes as contained in the Town's Land Use Bylaw.

All activities undertaken as per this policy shall be compliant with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and associated regulations, and any amendments thereto.

2. DEFINITIONS:

Matter of civic importance
A matter of civic importance can generally be described as a proposal, process or project that has the potential to significantly influence parts or all of the community.

Municipal stakeholder
Municipal stakeholder means the residents of the Town, and other individuals, organizations or persons that may have an interest in or be affected by a decision made by the Town. For the purposes of this policy, community has the same meaning as municipal stakeholder.

Public participation
Public participation can generally be described as a variety of non-statutory opportunities, tools and mechanisms used to gather information from municipal stakeholders, and share information on proposals, processes and projects undertaken by the Town. Public participation may also be referred to as public input, public engagement, community engagement, or civic engagement.

Public participation tools, techniques and mechanisms
Public participation tools, techniques and mechanisms may include the following:

a) In-person participation

   Examples of in-person participation include but are not limited to an open house, workshop, meeting, interview, focus group, door-knocking, and so on.

b) Digital participation

   Examples of digital participation include but are not limited to online surveys and polls, workbooks, chat groups, webinars, message boards/forums, and so on.

c) Written participation

Examples of written participation include but are not limited to written submissions in the form of letters, emails, and mail-in surveys, polls and workbooks, graffiti walls, and so on.

d) Representative participation

Examples of representative participation include but are not limited to working groups, committees, citizen boards, citizen juries, and so on.

3. PURPOSE OF PARTICIPATION:

The Town will focus on the following goals and objectives when planning and undertaking participation with the community:

- engaging with the community proactively
- Increasing the number of participants
- Creating new channels for communication
- Recognizing and respecting the ways the community wishes to communicate
- Measuring the effectiveness of participation tools and techniques
- Providing information that is clear
- Keeping citizens informed
- Relationships and trust

4. PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION:

Empowerment
Participatory processes should empower the community by providing information on a given proposal, project or process in a proactive manner, in a way that is clear, and in a way that allows for shared learning from the community and Town representatives.

Meaningfulness
Participatory processes must be built on trust and accountability. Through trust and accountability genuine sharing of perspectives can result in a deeper understanding of the thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas of the community.

Transparency
Participatory processes must reflect transparency in all ways.
Transparency must be present in the information that is shared, in the ways the information is shared, in how the community is provided opportunities to respond to the information, and in the

level of influence the community's feedback may have on decisions to be made regarding the information that is shared.

Proactiveness
Participatory processes should be initiated as early as possible and provide enough time to allow for feedback to influence decisions in the way that has been indicated by Town Council.

Accessibility
There are members of the community who prefer information in digital format and through the use of digital tools, there are members of the community who prefer information in paper format, and there are members of the community who prefer information via presentation or other forms of verbal communication. The participatory processes undertaken by the Town will respect all ways the community wishes to obtain information and to communicate.

5. WHEN TO UNDERTAKE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES:

This policy will apply to any of the following instances where there is the potential for a significant impact to the community:

- Establishing Council priorities
- Developing municipal plans
- Creating or amending policies and bylaws
- Implementing programs, projects and other initiatives
- Major amendments to any of the above
- Any other matter as determined by Town Council

6. DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

a) For every proposal, process and project that fits within the instances outlined in Sec. 5, Town staff will provide Council the information necessary to determine what level of public participation is appropriate. Once a decision is made about the appropriate level of participation, the rationale for the decision will be shared with the community.

b) The potential impact of a given proposal, process or project will be the guiding factor when deciding what level of participation will be undertaken.

c) The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of public participation will be the guiding framework in determining the level of participation and influence decided upon for proposals, processes and projects.

7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANS:

a) For a proposal, process or project that is required to include public participation in accordance to this policy (see Section 5), a public participation plan must be prepared and submitted to Council for approval prior to participatory processes being undertaken.

b) Public participation plans will vary in complexity. For basic matters, a public participation plan may be considered a one-time opportunity that is noted in a staff report. For more complex matters, a public participation plan may be a standalone document that provides significant detail regarding the participatory process timelines, steps, tools and techniques that are to be applied throughout the life of the broader matter the plan has been prepared for.

8. EFFECT ON DECISIONS:

Regarding the effect community input may have on a decision, Town Council will:

a) Determine the effect community feedback may have on a given proposal, process or project.

b) Provide rationale for the level of effect that is decided upon.

c) Share the outcomes of steps a and b with the community in a timely manner.

9. SHARING OUTCOMES:

a) The outcomes of participatory processes will be shared in a timely manner.

b) Town Council will receive outcomes on a timeline that allows for thorough consideration of the outcomes prior to making additional decisions on a given proposal, process or project.

c) The community will receive outcomes on a similar timeline that Council receives outcomes.

10. TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES:

Public participation is a profession, a field of study and of practice, a process, and an activity. Given the history, theoretical and applied knowledge, and continuing evolution of public participation, this policy recognizes that there are many tools and techniques available to undertake effective public participation in the community. As a result, decisions regarding specific tools and techniques for participation should be undertaken within the context of the community, and the particular

proposal, process or project that is being considered.

11. CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE FORM(S) OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES:

a) Tools and techniques for participatory processes will be selected based on their effectiveness, in the context of the community and the proposal, process or project being considered.

b) The effectiveness of tools and techniques will be determined based on consideration of the following:

   i.   Direct feedback from the community regarding which tools and techniques are preferred (a typical question as a part of a public participation process)

        A typical question asked as a part of a participatory process is whether participants found the particular tool/technique to be useful to them. For instance, at an open house or on a survey.

   ii. The number of participants for a given participatory process

        The number of participants can provide an understanding of how effective a particular tool or technique has been. However, for processes focused on a particular group or neighbourhood, the total number of participants may be less relevant to the success of a tool or technique. This should be accounted for when considering the total number of participants as a measure of success for a participatory process.

   iii. The quality of the feedback collected with the tools and techniques selected

        The quality of feedback refers to the level of consideration a response has given to a participatory process. For instance, if a survey provides opportunity for comment, but the only comments received are that a particular proposal is not wanted, and no indication of why or why not is provided, this may not be considered quality feedback, and could lead to a change in a tool or technique.

12. RUNNING EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES:

Undertaking effective participatory processes means ensuring that the processes are sensitive to and reflective of the needs of the participants. The following elements will be considered when planning for and running public participation processes:
- Languages spoken
- Comfort with technology

- Accessibility of buildings
- Time of the day and day of the week, and the year
- Any other matter that is brought to the attention of the Town

13. TRAINING AND ONGOING EDUCATION:

As mentioned in Sec. 10, public participation is a broad topic that is continually evolving. A number of public participation training classes, programs and certifications are available. It is recommended that Town staff who regularly plan and run participatory processes take training and stay current with innovations and research findings, to ensure the practice of public participation is as effective and successful as it can be, for the betterment of the community.