

# Report

Date June 3, 2020  
 To Council  
 From Megan Jordan, Manager, Communications & Public Engagement  
 Subject Creation of a Public Engagement Framework and Policy

File:

Endorsed:



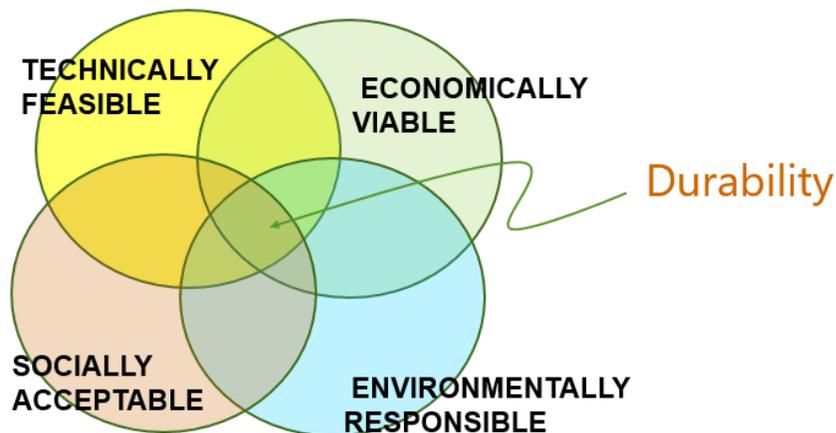
## Purpose

To seek direction from Council on establishing a select committee to guide staff in developing an engagement framework and policy.

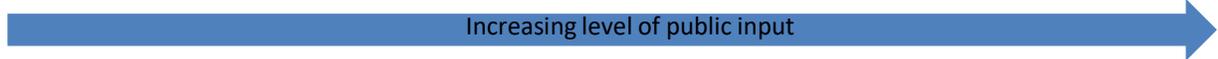
## Background

When making decisions that impact the lives of the people who live, work, and play in North Cowichan, many different factors are often considered. One of the key factors in decision making is how the decision will impact those who will be affected by it. Through public engagement, elected officials and staff often seek feedback, input, and collaborate with the community and stakeholders so their vision, values, needs, and preferences can inform the decision.

While the results of public engagement are an important part in decision making, the process itself helps to support a deeper, shared understanding of complex issues, trade-offs and choices. In planning, implementing, reporting back, and evaluating our public engagement processes, as a sponsor of public process we facilitate the sharing of different perspectives, while building social capital and trust between the public and decision-makers. Ultimately, carrying out meaningful engagement helps to build buy-in and support for the final decision because people understand it and have an opportunity to participate and contribute to it. This leads to more durable decision-making: decision-making that doesn't get "un-done."



## IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Increasing level of public input 

	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	To provide balanced and objective information and assist employees in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	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.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
<b>Promise to the public</b>	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide

Public or community engagement can be any kind of interaction where information and opinions are shared and used in the decision-making process. Some traditional examples of techniques for engagement include open houses, surveys, citizen committees and advisory panels, task forces, public meetings, workshops, and a table or pop-up at a community event.

### Discussion:

One of Council's strategic pillars from the 2019 Council Strategic Plan (CSP) is engagement. In the CSP, Council identified the following engagement goal: *Through collaborative relationships with other governments, Indigenous Peoples, stakeholder partners and engaging the community at large, we achieve optimum outcomes for all.* It is with this direction, that all public engagement activities are undertaken. In order to further support this goal, developing an "Engagement Framework" would further define Council's vision, values, and commitments while articulating a shared, community-wide expectation for how our community defines meaningful public engagement.

Currently, the only guiding document for engagement is a Council Communication Plan (the "Plan") that was created in 2012. It outlines some commitments around transparent communication, but mostly deals with public engagement (see the Council Communication Plan appended to this report). This Plan has good bones, but is largely out of date and is in need of an update. As such, one of the deliverables in the Communications and Public Engagement Department's annual business plan is to facilitate the development of a new engagement plan to support Council in their decision-making processes.

Much has changed in the community and the organization since the Plan was developed in 2012. At the time, there were no dedicated communication or engagement staff at North Cowichan. There are now 1.8 full time equivalent staff focused on communication and community engagement and three additional staff (Planners) that have taken the 5-day IAP2 Foundations Training.

While staff across the organization engage the public on a number of issues ranging in scale and complexity, it is important to ensure Council's needs are met and that there is clear organizational policy and expectations about how and when to engage the public. This is an opportunity for Council to help shape our engagement strategy and to help staff carry out meaningful engagement, when appropriate. The burden on staff and cost of engagement is ever increasing with the demands the public has for transparency and inclusion in decision making and having an up to date plan/policy is critical to addressing community expectations.

More tools, training, and support will create a wider base of knowledge amongst staff, thus creating increased capacity within the Communications and Public Engagement Department to best support more projects as the need to engage grows. Moreover, building in consistent measures of effective engagement will allow the Framework to facilitate a culture of continuous improvement. While increasing consistency in our approach to engagement will allow for timely community and stakeholder-centric decision-making as feedback will be collected and presented in a way that is both understandable and useful.

As a result, staff are seeking to develop a straight forward toolbox to allow for a streamlined and values-driven approach to engagement. The toolbox would include:

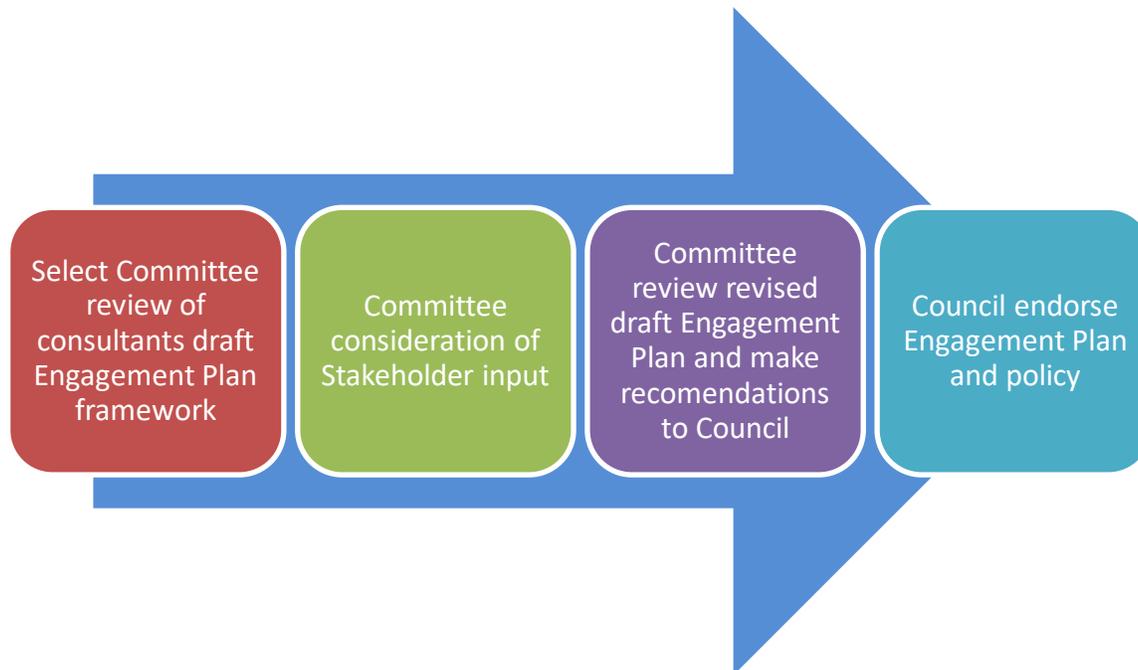
- A **Public Engagement Policy** (the "Policy") which would articulate the values, principles and commitments of the organization to meaningful engagement and detail the roles and responsibilities for all parties when we are conducting engagement.
- A **Public Engagement Framework** (the "Framework") would be developed, primarily for internal stakeholders (Council, leadership, and staff). This would help to determine if and when engagement is required, and a methodology for implementation of the engagement plan for each respective project needing public engagement. The Framework would also include evaluation methods to ensure engagement is meeting the needs of all stakeholders and the public, while also creating a way to benchmark results so we can work towards continual improvement.
- **Tips sheets and templates** (tips sheets) would be developed to support staff in implementing engagement plans and may include technique specific tip sheets, like agendas, questionnaires, and other resources as identified by staff.

The Framework is proposed to be based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement (as shown above), which is the Canadian recognized standard best practice for engagement, and which has been endorsed previously by Council. As a suite of resources, the purpose of the framework is not to prescribe a set of rules to follow for each engagement, but rather to support a consistent approach to engagement which leverages internal best practices across all departments. Staff have engaged a consultant to help craft and implement the Framework and Policy for Council's consideration.

To help steer this process staff is proposing a Select Committee of Council be established to work with staff and the consultant to develop the Framework and Policy to be brought forward for Council's consideration. As Council is aware from past discussions about Committees, Corporate

Services staff support committees, and in order to support new, community based committees, additional staffing would be required. The Select Committee, composed of 3 members of Council, will allow this limited time committee to instead be supported by the CAO's admin staff, as is now provided to the First Nations Relations Committee, and therefore requires no new, additional staffing.

*Engagement Plan Review Process:*



## Implications

**Financial** – There will be no additional budgetary impacts as the Communications and Public Engagement department will be using a portion of their existing 2020 Consulting Budget to facilitate this project.

**Engagement Fatigue** – Some stakeholders may be involved in other concurrent and competing engagements and/or projects and be unable to engage fully with this project at this time. It is not meant that this review will impact the other larger processes underway. This is a higher level discussion about how future engagement processes can be more consistent and formalized.

**Capacity** – Although staff have already engaged a consultant to help write the Plan and Policy, it will require some time for the Manager, Communications and Engagement to prepare and carry out stakeholder engagements. Since this project was in the Communications and Public Engagement departmental business plan, the workload is expected. In addition, Information Technology support may be needed to facilitate digital meetings, as stakeholder meetings likely cannot take place in person due to the COVID-19 crisis.

## **Recommendations**

That Council establish a select committee to work with staff and the consultant engaged to develop a Public Engagement Policy and Engagement Framework; and that Mayor Siebring and Councillors \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ be appointed to the committee.

Attachments:

- Council Communication Plan (2012)