

Practices for Public Engagement on Planning and Land Use Matters

At The City of Calgary, decisions are made daily related to programs, services, and investments that serve more than a million Calgarians. The City recognizes that these decisions are improved by engaging those who may be interested in, or affected by, these decisions. Engagement helps to ensure that the voices and values of Calgarians are reflected in City decision-making; and engagement feedback is one of the many inputs that is considered.

The goal of public engagement is not to reach consensus. Different individuals involved in public engagement bring different perspectives and opinions. As such, public engagement is about a balance – achieved by considering the input, ideas, and perspectives of those who are interested in or affected by decisions - before they are made. Public input is considered in decision-making alongside: Council priorities, City policies, professional expertise, context trends, and equity.

The City's Engage Framework provides Administration a guide to conducting public engagement. It helps increase understanding of the purpose and benefits of public engagement, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and includes tools to support the public engagement process.

The Engage Framework includes six main steps:

1. **Do you need engagement:** work with project teams to understand if there is a need for engagement, or if project communications only are appropriate.
2. **Develop a plan:** identify areas for engagement, who should be involved and to what extent, and tactics and timelines.
3. **Tell the story:** develop all necessary content and materials for engagement.
4. **Raise awareness:** work with Communications to inform interested and impacted parties of opportunities for engagement.
5. **Connect:** conduct engagement opportunities outlined in the engagement plan.
6. **Report back and evaluate:** analyze and theme feedback, report back to participants on results of engagement, and where appropriate and able, show where feedback was and was not used to inform a project.

The City conducts, or is involved in, a range of engagement activities on Planning and Land Use. The majority of this engagement can be grouped into three unique streams:

- City-led Planning Policy Engagement
- Local Area Planning Program
- Applicant-led Outreach and Engagement

Citywide Planning and Policy

Policy planning happens at a citywide scale and can vary depending on the policies being addressed, and the scope and interest that these policies have for Calgarians. For this reason, engagement programs related to new policy, or updates to existing policy are tailored to meet the needs of the specific policy or topic. Engagement programs are developed in alignment with The City's Engage Framework.

Depending on the project needs, a multi-phased engagement program may be used. This would require repetition of steps three through six for each phase, and regular review of the engagement plan to ensure it remains responsive to the changing needs of the project.

Developing an engagement program

Preparing for engagement begins early in City-led Planning policy projects, with project teams working to determine:

- **What is open for feedback:** what are the discreet aspects of the project that require or could benefit from input from Calgarians? These could include aspects of a project's design or specific decisions to be made over the life of a project.
- **Who needs to be involved:** which communities, organizations or businesses need to be involved to inform the project? Special consideration is taken during this discussion to identify equity-seeking communities to be engaged as part of the project.
- **What is the level of influence:** to what extent will we incorporate Calgarians' feedback into a project? This can vary by both the group with whom we are engaging, as well as the phase of the project. The levels of influence and associated commitments from The City can be found in [CS009 – Engage Policy](#), within the Spectrum of Strategies and Promises.
- **What are the project timelines:** how much time is available to complete project engagement? This timeline considers council and committee dates, time required to write supporting reports, and time required between phases of engagement to complete technical project work.

Based on these considerations, the team develops a project engagement program that is understandable, transparent, and responsive to the unique needs of the Calgarians being engaged, as well as purposeful and productive for the project team.

Conducting and reporting on engagement

During project engagement, The City creates transparency by ensuring that Calgarians involved in the process understand why they're being engaged, what will be done with their feedback, and when they can expect to see how their feedback was incorporated into decisions. If changes are made to the engagement program, once underway, Calgarians involved are informed of the reason for this change, and how it will impact scope and timelines. In subsequent phases of engagement, or at the end of a single-phase engagement program, we communicate to Calgarians how their feedback was used, as well as reasons for why certain feedback could not be incorporated. When combined, these efforts provide clarity and transparency for Calgarians throughout the engagement process.

The City selects engagement tactics based on the groups with whom we are seeking to engage, with special attention placed on creating accessible and equitable opportunities to provide feedback. This can include, but is not limited to, accommodations such as translated materials, online or in person activities, selecting accessible venues for in-person meetings or events, and providing childcare during working sessions. Accommodations and inclusive approaches are identified early through evaluation of interested and impacted parties to determine what they need to participate fully.

Ensuring space for emotion and empathy

We recognize that conversations around planning policy can be personal for some, and The City works to ensure staff have the tools available to have difficult conversations in productive ways. This includes facilitator training prior to events, advanced training in addressing emotion and outrage, and creating spaces and contingencies at engagement activities. When issues fall outside the scope of a specific project, project teams make best efforts to inform relevant groups at The City whenever possible. When

reporting on engagement, we seek to represent the feedback we receive accurately and transparently, including both summaries of comments received as well as the verbatim feedback for review.

Local Area Planning Program

Our city, communities, and the streets we call home have changed and will continue to evolve. Working together with a range of participants, local area plans are created to guide growth, change, redevelopment and community improvements in communities across Calgary. Engagement undertaken as part of the Local Area Planning Program is a key opportunity for Calgarians to get involved in discussions about the evolution of their communities and surrounding local areas.

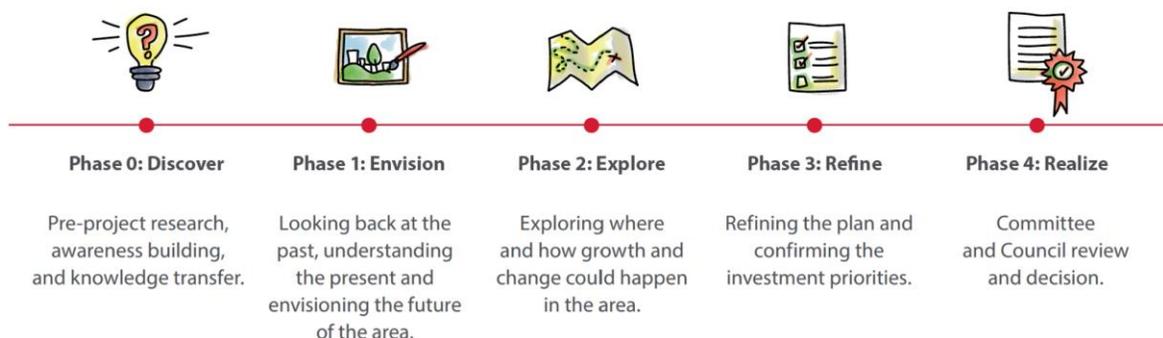
Growth and change are driven by the market and people's changing needs and preferences will happen within communities with or without a local area plan in place. Local area plans help increase predictability about how an area could change and provide direction on development and community improvements that residents, landowners, builders/developers, City Planners and Councillors refer to, as new ideas are proposed within the area.

Engagement Approach

A multi-phased approach to engagement enables discussion, consideration, creation and refinement of the local area plan with participants over time. Information and education about key considerations, benefits and trade-offs are woven directly into the engagement topics within each phase to build participant capacity as each chapter of the local area plan is engaged on and refined. An iterative approach allows for education and discussions to start at a broad and visionary level and progress to become more focused and refined through the process. Our approach continues to evolve and improve based on lessons learned.

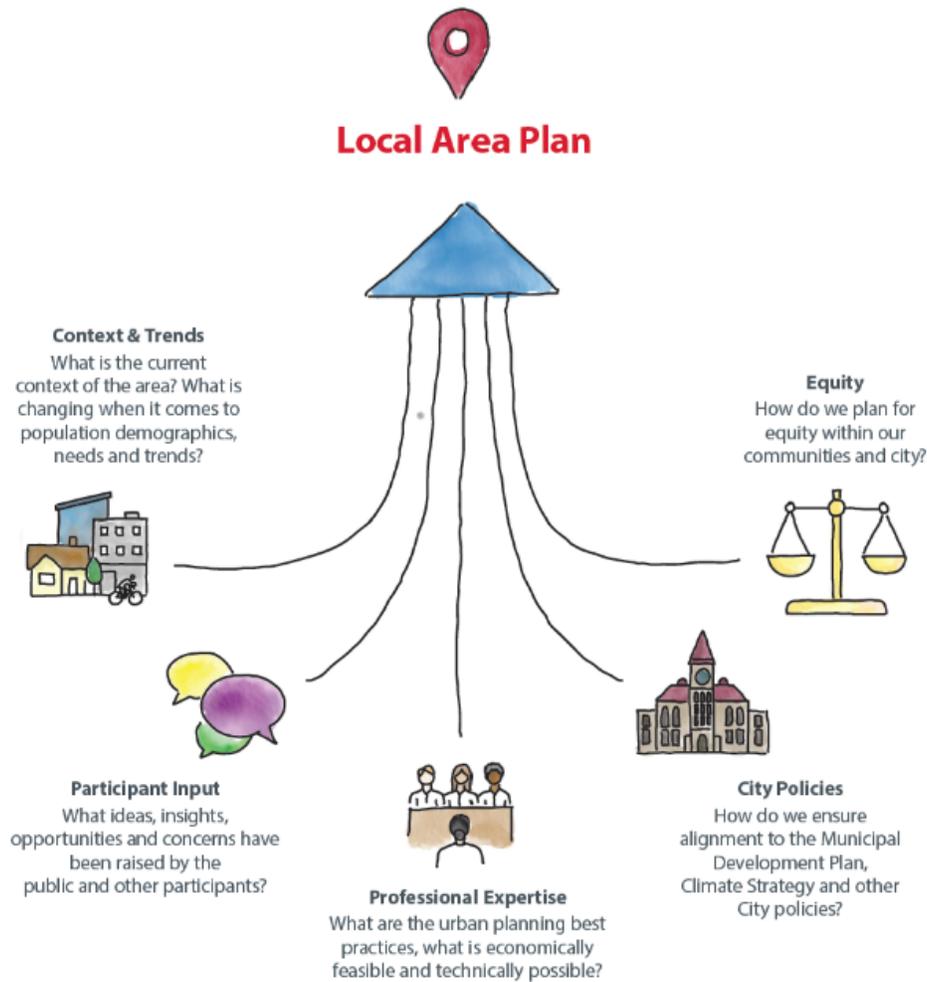
The local area plan itself goes from visionary (Chapter 1) to more focused local-specific guidance and direction (Chapter 2), to very specific investment priorities and implementation options (Chapter 3). Aligning the phases of engagement to the creation and refinement of each chapter provided participants with iterative opportunities for feedback with clear outputs at the end of each phase.

Figure 1: Local area planning project phases



Participant feedback is a crucial input as local area plans are created; however, it is one of many inputs that is considered. Key inputs that shape a local area plan include context and trends, participant input, professional expertise, Council policy, and equity as explained in *Figure 2: Key inputs*.

Figure 2: Key Inputs



Communicating Engagement Opportunities

Robust education and awareness is undertaken with each local area planning project to increase understanding and ensure meaningful involvement in their creation. Key communications goals include:

1. Reach a broad and diverse range of participants (through a variety of targeted channels, using clear, concise, and engaging content) to let them know about the project and opportunities to get involved (e.g., learn more, provide your input online/via mail/via engagement sessions, apply for the working group, stay connected, etc.).
2. Help citizens and participants understand why this work is happening, what's driving the need for growth and change, and how a local area plan is part of the solution.
3. Provide a range of ways for people to get involved (at various depths), aiming to increase opportunities to participate by reducing and removing barriers (time/commitment, understanding, interest, ability etc.).
4. Build relationships and trust by connecting on an individual level, through open dialogue and by clearly connecting input to action.

5. Help build participant understanding of the project and discuss opportunities to work together and with the broader community moving forward.

Effective communication channels and tactics used consistently in each local area planning project include:

- Geotargeted digital (e.g., web advertisements, social media advertisements);
- Radio (in-language);
- Direct mail (mailed engagement booklets and community association newsletters); and,
- In-community channels, such as: large format road signs, engagement stations, and digital billboards/screens in high-traffic areas such as along roads, in restaurants, malls, elevators, etc.

While some communication approaches can be seen consistently across the different projects, different methods are also utilized within each project to best suit the demographic and socio-economic needs within the area. For instance, tactics are often customized for hard-to-reach or equity deserving groups (like youths, cultural groups, non-English speaking participants, seniors, etc.). Translations of information and materials are often provided, where there is a higher percentage of non-English languages predominately spoken in the area.

Opportunities for Involvement

A variety of opportunities for involvement are available that offer a range of participation interest and intensities (high, medium, low) and remove barriers to participation (time, understanding, trust, audio/visual, mobility, internet, language, etc.)

- **Working Group Sessions:** all local area plans offer the opportunity to apply for the working group – a high-interest/high intensity opportunity. The working group is designed to have more in-depth discussions, diving deeper into public feedback and guiding planning policy and building on the knowledge and insights of previous sessions.
- **In-person and Virtual Engagement Sessions** (public community association, and industry representative): In-person and virtual engagement sessions are offered to the general public as a medium interest/intensity opportunity. Virtual engagement sessions are offered throughout the project via Microsoft Teams as a method to engage virtually and directly with the project team. In addition to the general public opportunities, more targeted in-person and virtual engagement sessions are also offered for community association board member and development industry representatives.
- **Mailed Engagement Booklets:** engagement packages and booklets are mailed to households and businesses in each plan area to ensure people are aware of the project, have key information directly in their hands, and have the option of mailing back a feedback form (as an alternative to in-person virtual or online engagement). Mailed engagement packages that include a pre-paid feedback form are an alternate medium internet/intensity way to provide feedback (pre-paid postage is included to reduce financial barriers associated to return postage fees).
- **Engagement Stations:** These are similar to little libraries in communities and each station contains engagement booklets. They are placed in high-traffic and accessible locations throughout the plan area to ensure a strong visual identity and physical presence in the community to help raise awareness. In addition, if someone does not receive a mailed engagement package or booklet, they are able to pick one up at an Engagement Station in the plan area or download a booklet online.
- **Online Engagement:** Online engagement opportunities such as online feedback forms and interactive tools offer a way for participants to get involved at the times and in the ways that work best for them. Online feedback forms provide a chance for The City to learn share specific details or information, while virtual open houses and online presentations provide real-time two-way engagement and communication.

- **Community Walk-and-talks:** community coffee or “walk and talk” sessions with community representatives allow project leads to meet with community member who are interested in discussing their feedback.
- **Conversation Series:** this new initiative allows people to book time in small groups to chat with the project team about the Plan and gives more time to answer questions, learn from fellow participants and discuss concerns.

How is Input Used & Clear Engagement Reporting

Input provided by participants helps the project team understand perspectives, opinions, and concerns throughout all phases of the project. Input collected in each phase of the project helps influence and inform the concepts and policies that are created and refined throughout the process.

Transparency and an open process is demonstrated through clear reporting and connecting the dots between the input that is provided and how it is considered as decisions are made through the process. What We Heard reports share verbatim feedback as well as key themes following each phase of engagement. What We Did reports are also created for each phase of the project, and outline how the project team consider and respond to each of the key themes emerge through each phase of the project.

Applicant-Led Outreach and Engagement

Engagement for Land Use Amendments and Development Permit Applications remains the responsibility of the applicant.

An [Applicant Outreach Toolkit](#), launched in 2019, was created by The City for applicants proposing rezoning or development. The Applicant Outreach Toolkit includes information and resources to support applicants with their outreach efforts and is included as part of the Community Outreach on Planning and Development Toolkit. This broader toolkit encourages an iterative engagement approach with a range of impacted parties, with clear roles and responsibilities defined, and tools and resources included to ensure Calgarians can be successful in their community outreach roles.

Outreach recommendations and requirements are provided by file managers and discussed with applicants. Applicants are encouraged to review the Applicant Outreach Toolkit and complete an Outreach Assessment Tool, which helps to assess the potential impact of their proposal within the context of the community.

Applicants are also encouraged to connect with the surrounding neighbours, community association or relevant member-based organizations and area Councillor early in the process to discuss their development ideas. From there, applicants are likely to gain a better sense of the sentiment toward the proposal within the community and can then make a more informed decision about what additional community outreach efforts may be required and/or beneficial. File managers also support applicant-led outreach efforts (i.e., participating in applicant-led sessions, providing citizens with information about City policies and clarifying The City review and decision-making process, etc.).

When an application is submitted, applicants are required to submit an Applicant Outreach Summary to explain what community outreach efforts were undertaken. The Applicant Outreach Summary is now included on the Complete Application Requirement List (CARL).

It is important to note that although community outreach is highly encouraged, and supporting tools and resources are available to assist with each step in an outreach process, it is ultimately up to applicants to determine if they will undertake outreach and at what level.

If an applicant chooses not to undertake community outreach, they must provide rationale. The City is required to share information and collect feedback on applications in alignment with the Municipal Government Act and Land Use Bylaw 1P2007 through notice posting, circulation and the commenting

process. The most recent shift to online advertising is an example of how we are continuing to evolve how we communicate. In addition, Administration supports the community outreach process by:

- providing applicants with community outreach recommendations and advice through the Applicant Outreach Toolkit, through key stages in the applications process and/or by providing customized recommendations,
- sharing information with the community and answering citizen questions about: City goals, City policies, City application review and decision-making processes as well as clarifying outreach roles and responsibilities and explaining where, when, and how community members can get involved in planning decisions throughout the planning process, and
- attending applicant-led outreach sessions to speak to the above.

Land Use Amendments

A Land Use Amendment (also called a Land Use Redesignation) is an application to change the land use designation of a property to allow for future development that is currently not allowed. There is a land use district for every parcel of land in the city and each district is identified in the Land Use Bylaw (LUB).

Tenure or tenancy, and user are not considerations during the evaluation of a land use amendment. When processing a proposed land use amendment, the proposed use is reviewed and evaluated against several factors including applicable policies, appropriateness of the location, the compatibility of the use with others in the surrounding area, access, servicing, and sound planning principles. Each land use district in the Bylaw has a purpose statement that captures the intent of how the district should be used and what the intended outcome of using the district is (i.e., on a major road, requiring commercial at grade etc.) Approval or refusal does not hinge on the merit of a development application but on the appropriate attention to policy and sound planning rational. Further, the approval of a redesignation does not indicate or guarantee the approval of a development permit. It is possible that not every use within the district will be appropriate for the site.

Development Permits

A Development Permit (DP) is an application to develop a specific parcel, or several parcels of land where the applicable land use district, identified in the Land Use Bylaw, allows for the proposed use. When processing a DP application, Administration must take into consideration the application's planning merits, applied against the rules of the Land Use Bylaw and applicable policies, while balancing the needs and inputs of the community. Some of these considerations are context, shadowing, massing, overlooking, landscaping, amenity space, location of the development on the parcel, access, parking, utility servicing, options for waste and recycling etc.

In some instances, Administration may propose to relax some of the rules of the Land Use Bylaw. At such time the test for granting a relaxation must be applied and only granted where, "in the opinion of the Development Authority the proposed development would not unduly interfere with the amenities of the neighbourhood or materially interfere with or affect the use, enjoyment or value of neighbouring properties."