



WHISTLER

REPORT | ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: October 6, 2020
FROM: Chief Administrator's Office
SUBJECT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

REPORT: 20-098
FILE: 0640-00

COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the report recommendations be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council support the Community Engagement Review Findings and Recommendations Report, attached as Appendix "A"; and further

That Council adopt *Council Policy A-37: Community Engagement Policy* attached to this Report as Appendix "B".

REFERENCES

Appendix "A" – Community Engagement Review Findings and Recommendations Report

Appendix "B" – Community Engagement Policy

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with an overview of the Community Engagement Review project that has been underway from late 2019 through 2020, and present two documents for Council's consideration: The Community Engagement Review Findings and Recommendations Report and a new Community Engagement Policy. Endorsement of these two documents will provide the launching off point for the organization to implement recommendations over the coming months and years toward an expanded, more defined and easier to use community engagement program across the organization.

DISCUSSION

Background

Whistler has a long history of inclusive and meaningful engagement with the community, along with the belief that consultation and participation are the cornerstones of modern democracy, and that municipalities have a unique and critical role and responsibility in creating these opportunities. The Community Engagement Review project has been an opportunity to review the RMOW's practices, identify improvements, and provide the guidance to the organization for engagement processes moving forward.

There were three specific objectives of the review project, each resulting in associated deliverables:

1. Identify and implement improvements and additions to engagement and information channels.
Deliverable: Findings and Recommendations Report
2. Update and formalize RMOW engagement approach and commitment to the public.
Deliverable: Council Community Engagement Policy
3. Provide clear expectations and resources to staff to execute.
Deliverable: Staff guide/toolkit

Deliverables 1 and 2 are the subject of this report while Deliverable 3 is underway and will be an important aspect of implementation.

The project was initiated and guided by the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) Governance & Ethics Committee of Council, overseen by the RMOW Communications Manager, and delivered by WCS Engagement + Planning (formerly the Whistler Centre for Sustainability).

Scope

The project was scoped to include all of the RMOW's community engagement activities and communications, which is 'inform' on the IAP2 engagement spectrum. To provide structure to the engagement and communities initiatives, three categories were developed:

- Project-related engagement - Project-related engagement covers the activities that are undertaken to inform project-related decisions, where projects include planning, capital, and policy development projects.
- Required engagement - The required engagement category includes the community engagement activities that are required of municipalities by the Community Charter or the Local Government Act
- Ongoing engagement - This category covers the engagement (and communications) channels that provide community members with ongoing, continual, on-demand access to municipal staff, Council and other sources of information.

Community engagement defined

Community engagement (or public participation) is an umbrella term that describes the activities by which people's concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues. It includes the communications activities intended to inform the engagement process and decision-making.

Like most Canadian municipalities, the RMOW is using the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2's) framework for public participation, including the public participation spectrum below. Communications activities are considered as part of 'inform' within the spectrum. As such, they have been included within the scope of this project. Moving forward the IAP2 model will be more holistically incorporated into project planning and delivery at the RMOW through training and tools.

Timeline



The project has been taking place over the past year. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the project being placed on hold for about four months. Below is a high level summary of the project timeline.

Phase 1: Engagement Review Q4 2019 – Q2 2020

- External scan of trends and best practices
- Internal survey
- Community Life Survey
- Review of RMOW policies, practices and community participation
- Recommendations development

Phase 2: Policy and Guide Q2-Q3 2020

- Council policy
- Staff guide/toolkit for engagement design and execution

Phase 3: Implementation Q4 forward

- Recommendations implementation
- Staff training
- Monitoring and reporting

Components of the project

The project includes a variety of steps culminating in the recommendations report and policy including the following. These aspects of the review are provided in more detail in the recommendations report.

External scan

An external scan was conducted that included a review of the key trends (or external factors) at play that are affecting and will affect our engagement efforts, and the best practices being carried out by other communities and organizations that should be considered moving forward. Trends were gathered by reviewing credible sources online and then citing only those that were either supported by multiple sources or by defensible data. Best practices were drawn from project team knowledge, the staff survey and from a scan of the IAP2 (Canada) Core Values Award winners from the past few years. The awards focus on new engagement approaches and innovative ways of executing existing ones. Below are some of the high level findings from the external scan.

Key trends

- Levels of trust are declining generally
- Technology is improving
 - Improving engagement tools
 - Enabling quick/thin engagement for busy people
 - Replacing traditional forms of engagement (open houses, town halls, phone surveys)
- Social media for news and information
 - Overwhelming volume
 - Disinformation
 - Toxic/polarized atmosphere
- Expectations related to engagement increasing
 - More engaging, less one-way
 - Ease and convenience

Best practices

- Formalized systems and resources
 - Policy, toolkit, training, resource team, monitoring, reporting
 - Dedicated engagement platforms
 - Task forces/committees
 - Pop-up engagement
 - Mix of engagement types

- Research panels
- Surveying using texting apps (more conversational)
- Social media polls and text analysis
- Document libraries with searchable content
- Budget engagement tools
- 311 place-based channels

Internal review

The internal review element of the project involved a survey of staff and Council, and collection of information and data related to current policies, practices and performance. It also included input from the community through the Community Life Survey toward our internal communications and engagement activities and other related indicators. The internal review looked at the following areas (defined in the scope section of this document):

- Project-related engagement
- Required engagement
 - Select statutory requirements for land use and zoning bylaws
 - Public process related to the municipal budget and annual report
 - Committees of Council
- Ongoing engagement

A summary of recent engagement activity successes and analysis of the level of participation and levels of success was also compiled. Details of the aforementioned is provided in the report. The successful community engagement processes were defined by the following characteristics.

- Clear process and promise
- Large number and diverse participants
- Information quality and lead time
- Early and phased engagement
- Influence on decisions
- Reporting back

Community input

The Community Life Survey is the RMOW's statistically relevant, annual method for checking in on key community and organizational indicators, including those associated with communications and engagement. In 2020, several additional questions were added to the base survey to gather incremental information for the Community Engagement Review project. A variety of findings resulted from the survey.

Trust – 49 per cent agreed that municipal decision-makers have the best interests of the community in mind when making decisions. This result is the same as reported in 2019, but is lower than the median (52 per cent) and average (57 per cent) results from the past 13 years the question has been asked. In 2015, this question was benchmarked to other communities, and their average favourable score of 53 per cent is in-line with Whistler's median score over the 13 years, and slightly lower than Whistler's average score.

Participation - The survey asked respondents to indicate the number of times they participated in a municipal planning or decision process in the past year through activities such as taking a survey, emailing Council, or attending an open house, committee meeting or Council meeting. About 60 per cent of permanent residents participated to some extent, and 35 per cent didn't participate at all.

Barriers – Permanent residents who had participated in a municipal planning or decision process fewer than twice in the past year were asked for the reasons they hadn't engage more often. The most common reason provided was lack of time or priority (26 per cent), followed by distrust in the process (8 per cent) and no interest in participating (7 per cent).

Satisfaction – When asked about their satisfaction with existing opportunities to provide input into municipal decision making, 55 per cent of permanent residents responded they were satisfied. This is equivalent to the median satisfaction rating (55 per cent) and close to the average result (57 per cent) over the past 13 times the question has been asked. In 2015, this question was benchmarked to other communities and the result was an average favourable score of 53 per cent, which is slightly lower than Whistler's median and average satisfaction scores over the past 13 years.

When asked about satisfaction with access to municipal information via the website (whistler.ca), 72 per cent of permanent residents said they were satisfied (very/somewhat). The average satisfaction score over the ten years the data has been collected is 75 per cent.

Engagement channels - Online surveys are the clear winner when online survey respondents were asked about their preferred channels for providing input to the municipality, followed by events/open houses that include structured ways to give input.

- 78 per cent online surveys
- 46 per cent events/open houses
- 31 per cent email (down from 50 per cent in 2019)
- 34 per cent social media (up from 25 per cent in 2019)
- 31 per cent one-on-one conversations
- 19 per cent committee or advisory group

Communications channels – In this question we asked the preferred ways for the municipality to share public information.

- 72 per cent social media, mostly Facebook
- 72 per cent Pique Newsmagazine
- 62 per cent whistler.ca
- 59 per cent e-newsletter /email

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Community Engagement Review and with input from staff and Council, nearly 30 recommendations were identified. Recommendations range from specific tactical changes to more foundational items such as updated policies, procedures, guidelines and reporting mechanisms.

The recommendations have been categorized according to the relative resources required to implement them and according to relative priority in terms of their potential to improve RMOW engagement and/or communications. Implementation leads have also been proposed for each recommendation. The recommendations will be pursued as resources permit and opportunities arise, and more work will be needed to finalize lead and assist responsibilities, ensure alignment/ compliance with legal requirements, and budget for and develop the work plans necessary to deliver them over time.

Toolkit

One of the key deliverables will be a staff guide/ toolkit that provides accessible resources for consistent engagement planning and implementation. Work is in progress toward this important tool. The content is still in development and will include the following components:

- Guiding Principles
- Project planning guidelines
- Quick tips
- Project and engagement scoping
- Work plan and budget development
- Techniques
- Tools and templates
- Evaluation

Policy

One of the project recommendations is to update existing policies, procedures and guidelines. This Report introduces the new Community Engagement Policy. The purpose of the policy is as follows:

- Clarify when to engage the community.
- Guide design and delivery.
- Support good governance and decision-making.
- Improve mutual understanding and trust.
- Support the Vision, OCP and Corporate Plan which all reference the need to engage the community in decision-making.

The policy articulates a set of guiding principles upon which the organization will design and deliver engagement.

Resourced

- The financial and human resources allocated to each community engagement process are adequate and proportionate to the significance/scope of the decision-making process and the level of public engagement required, enabling the process to achieve the necessary objectives and to employ appropriate techniques.
- Key staff have the capacity and/or can access the external assistance needed to design and deliver successful engagement processes.

Inclusive

- The diversity of those affected by a decision are able and facilitated to engage in the decision-making process.
- Efforts are made to include under-represented and hard-to-reach groups, and barriers to access, such as physical, economic, language and logistical constraints, are mitigated as much as possible.
- Enough people are involved such that the input can be relied upon, where enough¹ depends on the decision being made and the stakeholders impacted.

¹ In some circumstances it could mean 30 people, and in other cases it could mean 300 or even 3000 people. For example, the use of a well-informed group (i.e. task force, advisory group) that includes members who represent the breadth and diversity of the stakeholders affected by a decision might well be the best approach for a project and, in this case, the 'critical mass' criteria might not be relevant.

Respectful

- Participants are treated respectfully, their time is used efficiently and effectively, and the process builds mutual understanding and trust.
- Privacy is respected and, in cases where public feedback is received in confidence, personal information and verbatim responses are securely stored and only aggregated information is released publicly.

Informed

- The community receives clear and broad-reaching communications about engagement opportunities through consistent channels.
- The information provided to enable informed participation in the process is easy to access, timely, clear, concise, complete, accurate, objective and jargon-free as much as possible.

Transparent

- The promise to the public about the level of engagement and the roles in the process are clear from the outset, including what is open for input, how the input will be used, and who has decision-making authority.
- The decision-making process occurs through an open process whenever possible.
- Process milestones and outcomes – including what decisions were made and why, and how public input affected the decision or why it didn't – are communicated to participants and the general public.

Meaningful

- Engagement processes are worthwhile for participants, utilize the appropriate level of engagement for the initiative being undertaken, and use techniques that achieve the promised level of engagement.
- The results of the process represent stakeholder input as clearly and accurately as possible, are relatively easy to use in decision-making, and are carefully considered through the decision-making process.

Monitored

- Project-related engagement includes opportunities for participants to not only provide input on the content of the process, but also on the process itself to help inform future improvements.
- Overall community engagement performance, preferences, levels of trust in decision-making, and other indicators related to community engagement are regularly measured to inform process improvements.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Official Community Plan

The Community Engagement Review project is consistent with and helps to achieve Whistler's Vision and Official Community Plan (OCP), both of which reference the need to engage the community in decision-making.

Whilst effective engagement touches many areas of moving toward our shared community vision in some way, the characteristics of the vision most pertinent to the engagement work are the following:

- **Conduct:** Everyone is treated with fairness, respect and care, and as a result we enjoy high levels of mutual trust and safety.

- **Participation:** We are able to meaningfully participate in community decisions, collaborating to achieve our Community Vision.
- **Partnerships:** We have established strong partnerships with the Squamish Nation, Lil'wat Nation, other levels of government and community stakeholders based on open dialogue, honesty, respect and collaboration, resulting in the achievement of mutual goals and shared benefits.

Further, the Health, Safety and Well-being chapter of the OCP (chapter 8) focuses on ensuring Whistler has strong community connections and social fabric—that Whistler is inclusive and affordable, and we enjoy high levels of trust, community engagement and good governance. The following OCP goal, objective and policies provide direction related to community engagement:

- **Goal:** Provide and support meaningful opportunities for community engagement.
- **Objective:** Encourage community engagement at all levels, from volunteerism to participation in municipal initiatives.
- **Policy:** Provide appropriate and meaningful opportunities for community and partner engagement in policy-making and other decisions where relevant and appropriate.
- **Policy:** Encourage greater diversity in municipally-led engagement initiatives, considering a variety of ways to engage diverse community stakeholders.

Corporate Plan

While not policy, the Corporate Plan also includes a commitment to community engagement as articulated by the following statement, which is one of six corporate goals: A high level of accountability, transparency and community engagement is maintained.

Other Relevant Policies

Resort Municipality of Whistler Council Governance Manual – The Governance Manual includes policy guidance around areas pertinent or specific to communications and engagement primarily contained in chapter 6 Guiding Principles and Policies for Constituency Relations. The work of the Community Engagement Review is in line with the guidance in the 2005 Governance Manual. Any future editions of the Governance Manual should be updated to be more timely (e.g. to include social media) and to reflect findings of this review project where applicable.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The Community Engagement Review project is being done through a combination of internal staff resource time as well as contracted services for the review conducted by WCS Engagement and Planning budgeted for in the current Five-Year-Financial Plan. While some recommendations contained in the report are achievable with existing operating budgets and limited staff time, others will be subject to incremental budgets in the coming or future years in various departments. The recommendations section of the Findings and Recommendations Report estimates a low, medium or high level of resourcing as well as the lead department and initiation timeframe. Staff will explore the possibility of grant funding that may be applicable for some of the recommendations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

The very nature of this work is community engagement and consultation oriented.

The work to conduct this review and develop recommendations was completed using a variety of internal and external input opportunities outlined in the Findings and Recommendations Report. These included a staff and Council survey and the 2020 Community Life Survey as well as engagement trend and best practice research from other municipalities and generally.

The Governance and Ethics Committee helped to initiate and guide the project and the report was presented to Committee of the Whole on September 1, 2020.

SUMMARY

This Report provides an overview of the Community Engagement Review project that has been taking place from 2019 through 2020, and presents two resulting documents: The Community Engagement Review Findings and Recommendations Report and a new Community Engagement Policy. These two documents will provide the foundation for the organization to implement recommendations over the coming months and years toward an expanded, more defined and easier to use community engagement program across the organization.

In addition to implementing the recommendations as resources allow and opportunities arise, the next steps in the project include developing the staff guide/ toolkit that will help staff deliver engagement processes aligned with the policy.

This 2019-2020 review of community engagement activities is the first of its kind for the RMOW. Building on the ongoing Community Monitoring Program and Community Life Surveys, improved tracking to evaluate the success of and satisfaction with engagement processes will be key to continuing to review and evaluate engagement activities moving forward.

All outward facing activities of an organization can either – depending on how they are conducted – help or hinder community participation, satisfaction with engagement and trust. While Whistler has had a history of inclusive and meaningful engagement with the community, this Community Engagement Review project and the successful implementation of the recommendations over time will enhance the consistency, accessibility and inclusion of organizational engagement practices with the aim of moving the dial further on levels of community participation, satisfaction with engagement and trust.

Respectfully submitted,

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for
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