PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING GUIDE

Developers are required to hold Public Information Meetings before Council considers their development application. This gives community members the opportunity to learn more about the proposal beyond the information included in the standard application referral and public hearing process. Additionally, holding a Public Information Meeting will allow for any potential issues or concerns to be brought up and addressed early in the development application process.

This guide provides an overview of how to plan, run, and report on Public Information Meetings to ensure you gain the most valuable input from the community on your development application.

Developers are responsible for arranging, conducting, and covering the costs of holding a Public Information Meeting for their project.

WHY IS COMMUNITY OUTREACH IMPORTANT?

Informing and gathering feedback from community members about your development project can help prevent opposition, gain support from residents and local business owners, reduce risks, and make the approval process go more smoothly for everyone involved. Giving community members the chance to share their concerns can strengthen your proposal and demonstrate to City staff and Council that residents are informed about the project.

Consider using other outreach tactics in addition to a Public Information Meeting, such as:

- Online surveys
- Pop-up booths at community events or local businesses
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Social media polls

WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED?

Player	Roles	Responsibilities
Developer	Lead	- Inform community members, groups, and City staff about the project. - Determine what is on the table for discussion and change, and what is not open for discussion. - Provide clear, accurate, transparent information about the project to the community. - Report the findings from the meeting back to the people who participated through a summary report. - Provide City staff and Council with a summary of the outreach approach and findings alongside the application.

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City Staff	Support	- Provide advice on what is required for community outreach. - Provide resources for the applicant to run a successful public information meeting. - Provide suggestions on key topics that should be covered in the public information meeting.
Community Groups	Connect & Participate	- Help the developer raise public awareness of opportunities for public participation. - Provide insights to help develop a community outreach plan.
Community Members	Participate	- Seek out information about the project. - Listen and participate in the Public Information Meeting and other engagement tactics respectfully. - Provide appropriate and respectful feedback on the project proposal.

HOW TO PLAN A PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

1. Set a time and date

- If you're hosting an in-person meeting, select an easily accessible venue, and a date and time that most people will be able to attend.
- Consider if public transit is nearby, if the venue has parking or can be walked to, and if it's accessible to people with physical limitations.
- Holding meetings on weekday evenings usually results in the best turnout. Avoid weekends and holidays.

In-Person vs. Virtual Meetings

- The COVID-19 Pandemic has made more people familiar with virtual meetings.
- Virtual meetings can be more cost-effective and more accessible for people to attend.
- If you choose to hold a virtual meeting, have one person be responsible for running the meeting including admitting attendees, muting participants, and answering questions in the chat.

2. Invite the Community

- Think about which people you need feedback from the most. For example, neighbouring property owners, nearby residents, and local business owners.
- Use a variety of advertising and communication channels to promote the meeting and reach as many people as possible. Some ways of promoting a public information meeting include:
  - Road signs
  - Posts on community social media groups
  - Posters in local businesses
  - Notices in local papers or radio stations
  - Flyers dropped off door-to-door
- Send meeting time, date, and location to City staff at least 20 days in advance of the Public Information Meeting. City staff will send notices to residents within 100 m from the subject application prior to the meeting advising of the meeting Public Information Meeting.

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3. Prepare a presentation or meeting materials

- Community members may already know about the proposal, or they may have no prior knowledge about the project. Consider how much information you need to provide for community members to give valuable feedback, and the best way to share that information. Some ways of sharing the information include:
  - Giving a presentation at the meeting;
  - Providing handouts with key background information for people to read and take home; and
  - Displaying posters or information boards for people to view at the meeting.
- Anticipate which topics people may be most concerned about and prepare answers to the questions you expect to receive.
- Provide information that is easily understandable to the average person and focuses on how the project will impact their neighbourhood or day-to-day life. Consider using visual elements, such as maps or drawings, to illustrate the scope of the project.

Be clear about what parts of the proposal are open for discussion, and what parts will not be changed.

COLLECT FEEDBACK

- Include time for a formal Q&A or discussion in the meeting and assign a note taker to keep track of comments and questions.
- If you are holding the meeting virtually, record the session and generate transcripts. Make sure to inform participants that you're recording before you start the meeting.
- Use a sign-in sheet or virtual meeting attendance lists to record the number of participants and ask for contact information so you can follow up or provide updates through the development process.
- Distribute hard-copy surveys or provide a link to complete a survey online at the end of the session for attendees to share additional input or feedback about the session.
- Ensure attendees are provided with a point of contact so that they can follow up with any questions or comments after the session.

REPORTING BACK TO COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL

After you have finished any form of community outreach (e.g. public information meeting, survey, etc.), it's best practice to report back to the people you engaged with. This helps build trust and transparency and can go a long way towards gaining support from the community.

The input you gathered must be summarized and publicly released in a "What We Heard Report" that includes key themes and insights that emerged from the meeting. You must submit this report to the City to show how public feedback was considered in the application.

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This report should include the following information:

- When and where the meeting took place;
- How the meeting was advertised and how surrounding property owners were notified;
- How many people attended the meeting;
- What information was provided at the meeting;
- A summary of the feedback from community members, including what questions were raised, what comments were made, and what the discussion focused on; and
- How the feedback was/will be incorporated into the development application.

Upon request, the City can provide a Developer-Led Public Information Meeting Community Outreach Report Template can help you lay out the summary clearly and concisely.

HOW TO ANALYZE PUBLIC FEEDBACK

- Based on the recording or notes from the meeting, the public feedback can be analyzed by grouping comments into common themes.
- Once the comments have been organized into key themes, include sample comments to illustrate the sentiment.
- Not all comments will fit neatly within a theme. These can be included if they seem to represent a broader perspective from the community, but outliers can also be grouped in a “other” or “miscellaneous” category.
- It may not be possible to exactly count the number of comments in each theme. Using quantifiers like “most,” “some,” or “a few,” to indicate how common that idea was among the attendees.
- If you collected quantitative feedback using a survey or polling questions, considering including relevant numeric data to highlight key themes.

Tips for summarizing comments:

- Maintain anonymity /confidentiality: don’t include names, addresses, pronouns.
- Be balanced: include the comments that were supportive, and the comments that were critical.
- Focus on themes rather than individual comments. What are the big picture ideas that emerged, and what were the majority of people concerned about?

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