



# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICY

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| <b>Department:</b> Council    | <b>Policy Source:</b> Council             |
| <b>Authorized by:</b> Council | <b>Date:</b> November 16, 2017            |
| <b>Signature:</b>             | <b>Date Revised:</b>                      |
|                               | <b>Date Effective:</b> November 16, 2017  |
|                               | <b>Date to be Reviewed:</b> November 2022 |

**POLICY:** The Village of Alliance is committed to informing and actively involving citizens, community organizations and other interested individuals on issues that affect them, to the greatest extent possible. The Village of Alliance recognizes that decisions can be enhanced by engaging citizens, and is committed to a Public Participation process that is inclusive and authentic, meaningful and accountable, and that is an integrated part of the Village’s decision-making process.

**PURPOSE:** The benefits and rationale for a consistent, standardized and meaningful Public Participation Policy include:

- Reduces costly project delays by responding to problems and concerns before they develop
- Saves money and time by allowing good projects to move forward
- Provides an early warning system for public concerns and needs – creates a forum for sharing ideas and concerns
- Acts as a sounding board for proposed changes and develops a wider range of alternatives
- Increases two-way communication, which builds trust and fosters relationships
- Increases credibility for decision-makers and provides a clearer rationale for decisions
- Allows meaningful citizen input into decision making
- Provides a means to better incorporate the public’s values in local government initiatives
- Builds a stronger foundation for implementation
- Meets the public’s expectations of an open and transparent local government
- Develops a wider range of alternatives
- Facilitates understanding and fosters respect for different perspectives
- Improves the quality of democracy
- Creates a credible channel through which accurate and timely information can be disseminated
- Helps secure understanding and support for the Village’s goals

The main objective of the Public Participation Policy is to ensure that a two-way communication process exists to involve citizens and community organizations on issues that affect them and shall reflect the following six key principles:

*Inclusive & Authentic* – To the greatest extent possible, the Village will involve all stakeholders who are potentially affected by an issue in a transparent and equitable way.

*Sharing & Supportive* – Involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process where their input can impact the decision.

*Accountable & Committed* – Setting clear objectives and expectations for a public participation initiative and actively listening to the input of citizens, community organizations and Advisory Committees.

*Meaningful & Responsive* – Ensuring consultation is meaningful and valid, with clear objectives and expectations with respect to the ability of the public to impact the decision. Ensuring consultation is conducted in a timely manner that is appropriate to the issue and level of public involvement. Ensuring that participants receive appropriate feedback on the impact of their input is key to making public participation meaningful.

*Continuously Improving* - Continuously evaluating and measuring the success of the Public Participation Policy and public participation initiatives will form a fundamental part of ensuring public participation is effective and relevant. An annual review of the policy will be undertaken, and evaluation mechanisms for each consultation initiative will be used.

*Facilitating & Building Capacity for a Collaborative Community* – Strengthening links between the Village and the community on public participation initiatives and building capacity in the community for citizen engagement on issues that affect them.

**DEFINITIONS:** For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply.

Citizen - Any persons residing within the boundaries of the Village of Alliance.

Collaborate – To work together, a partnership. To facilitate consensus.

Community Organization – A group of individuals gathered together in a formal body for a specific purpose or issue, a community of interest.

Consult – to seek advice or information.

Consultation - A process designed to seek the views of citizens, community organizations, or the public at large, on issues that affect them directly or in which they have a significant interest. The process of collecting and analyzing public input and feedback.

Empower – to invest with power, to authorize.

Engagement - Refers to the process which seeks to encourage deliberation, reflection or learning on issues at preliminary stages of a process, with a more specific focus on values and principles that will frame the way an issue is considered. Citizen engagement differs qualitatively from consultation as it emphasizes in-depth deliberation and dialogue, focuses on common ground, requires a greater time commitment and works to build citizen capacity.

Evaluation – Ongoing tools and methods used to assess and improve the process as it moves forward.

Feedback - The sharing of the input and information received on the results of a public participation process with those involved or those who have an interest in the outcome.

Inform – to impart information and promote public awareness.

Input - Information or comments (verbal or written) provided on an issue.

Involve – To engage as participants or to include – to foster meaningful dialogue.

Principle - The foundation or fundamental values which guide actions and directions to be taken.

Stakeholder - Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision.

Public - Any individual, group of individuals, or organization within or without the boundaries of the Village of Alliance who are not part of the decision-making body.

Public Participation - Any two-way communication process that informs and involves the public in problem solving or decision-making and that uses public input to make better decisions. Public participation has several dimensions including inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Value - Principles or standards that determine what is valuable or important.

## **PROCEDURE:**

This policy applies to all sectors of the Village of Alliance, and for issues within the municipal jurisdiction, and should be followed in all public participation processes, whether the process is targeted to the general public, specific community organizations, voluntary or private sector stakeholders. The policy will impact all activities undertaken by the Village to inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower residents on issues that affect them. The policy shall complement, and be used as a guide, for those consultation activities mandated by statutory requirements.

The policy will be applied with flexibility and/or may be waived in emergency or urgent situations, issues relating to labour relations or negotiations, issues related to protection of privacy or freedom of information, specific directions from Council or those outlined under legislation where adequate time for public participation is not possible due to unforeseen circumstances.

Citizens will be encouraged to be informed and knowledgeable of the principles of the Public Participation Policy as it relates to the objectives and promises relevant to the public participation process in which they are participating.

The Public Participation Policy is based on the following **core values** for Public Participation:

1. The public will be kept informed about issues that affect them.
2. The public should have a say in decisions that affect their lives.
3. The public participation process will:
  - Include the promise/commitment that the public's contribution can influence the decision;

- Communicate the interests and consider the needs of participants;
- Seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected;
- Using appropriate feedback mechanisms, communicate to participants how their input affected the decision; and
- Provide participants with the information necessary to participate in a meaningful way.

The **six key principles of Public Participation** form the framework on which the Public Participation Policy is founded:

*Inclusive & Authentic*

- To the greatest extent possible, the Village will involve all stakeholders, or a representative number of stakeholders, who are potentially affected by an issue in a transparent and equitable way, and to the greatest extent possible be responsive to issues of equity and accommodation that may potentially impact involvement including language, gender, culture, race, disability and geography.
- Unequal access to information or inaccurate assumptions about the knowledge base of participants can negatively impact a Public Participation exercise – ensuring the participation of the broadest possible range of individuals who have an interest in or who may be affected by the decision is crucial. To the greatest extent possible, providing an opportunity for citizens who may be affected, and ensuring that the process is designed so that participants are able to participate effectively is required.
- Each issue, need, project or program will be assessed to determine those issues that require consultation, and where in the process the public should become involved, and the potential impact of the public on the decision. Public participation strategies should be designed when the issue is identified, early in the process, and be flexible enough to accommodate changing priorities or emerging issues.

*Sharing & Supportive*

- Involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process where their input can impact the decision.
- Effective and appropriate public participation processes build public trust, increases involvement of the public on issues that affect them, and can result in enhanced decisions.
- Involvement and support of decision makers in the participation process, and the potential impact of the public on the decision should be clear and transparent at the outset of the process.
- Provide participants with the information they need to be involved in an informed way.

*Accountable & Committed*

- Setting clear objectives and expectations for a public participation initiative and actively listening to the input of citizens.
- Participation programs should be open and accessible and recognize the value of opinions and expertise offered by the public.
- Through implementation of the Public Participation Policy, adequate resources should be available to carry out the public participation process and staff should be trained appropriately to conduct the consultation initiative.
- Feedback mechanisms to participants should be timely and clear so they can see the results of their input. As well, feedback should be provided to decision makers for them to make informed and effective decisions.

*Meaningful & Responsive*

- Ensuring consultation is meaningful and valid, with clear objectives and expectations on the ability of the public to impact the decision, and conducted in a timely way and in a manner appropriate to the issue and level of public involvement.
- Public participation programs should be designed when the issue or need is identified and be conducted throughout the process for projects with multiple consultations.
- Citizens, community organizations and other participants require adequate time to consider, consult others, and respond to consultation within time frames which strike a reasonable balance between the Village's needs or circumstances to achieve the end result, and the need for participants to be involved in a meaningful way. Public participation is most effective where the issues and timeframes permit the early inclusion of the public in the process.
- Involvement of community organizations as a means of building community consensus should be considered.
- Tools and techniques for public participation that respond to the identified needs of affected stakeholders should be used. These should be flexible and include alternate formats and various techniques such as face-to-face meetings, mail, and electronic consultation.
- Depending on the identified issue, Public Participation processes can be most effective when applied to the entire policy, program or project cycle from Issue or Need identification through to final decision and in some cases, implementation. This includes policy, specific project, program and service issues.

#### *Continuously Improving*

- Continual evaluation and measuring of the success of the Public Participation Policy and public participation initiatives conducted by the Village will be required.
- For a multitude of reasons, effective and successful consultations do not always lead to agreement or consensus. A more realistic measure of success is whether or not the consultation identified and included those affected by the decision, and to what extent they participated. All consultations lead to a better understanding of the positions and opinions of those involved, but consultations should not be used to lobby or advocate participants to accept or adopt a predetermined point of view. Involvement of community organizations as a means of building community consensus should be considered.
- An annual report and evaluation of the Public Participation Policy and implementation should be conducted to ensure flexibility and responsiveness as well as to identify improvements. This review will be conducted by Village Council.
- An evaluation framework for each public participation program should be built into the individual participation strategy.

#### *Facilitating & Building Capacity for a Collaborative Community*

- Building and maintaining strong, positive and cooperative relationships between the Village and the community to increase the potential for engagement and result in improved decision-making.
- Capacity should be built among staff and in the community to implement and utilize the Public Participation policy and principles.
- Tools, training and public participation advice/direction will be provided to staff for policy implementation.
- The community's leadership base for collaboration and engagement should be expanded, including but not limited to, annual priority setting meetings with geographic communities and communities of interest, and tools for establishing community associations and organizations. Supporting sustainability and rejuvenation for existing community organizations should be considered when undertaking consultation and community development initiatives.

**Public Participation Spectrum**

Public Participation programs and initiatives conducted by the Village of Alliance shall follow the goals, objectives and promises to the public, as outlined below, and shall make the expectations and promises of each public participation process clear to participants, and outline the potential impact on the decision from which their involvement will result. The Consultation Model and Public Participation checklists will be used by Corporate staff to determine the appropriate level of involvement and potential impact on the decision for a particular issue.

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| INFORM                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.</li> </ul>  |
| CONSULT               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</li> </ul>   |
| INVOLVE               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.</li> </ul>   |
| COLLABORATE           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To partner with the public in each of the aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</li> </ul>  |
| EMPOWER               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</li> </ul>  |
| PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</li> <li>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</li> <li>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</li> <li>We will implement what you decide.</li> </ul> |

- *Source – IAP2, International Association for Public Participation*

**TYPES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

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|---------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b> | <p><b>FACEBOOK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>updates on community events, articles of interest</li> <li>updates/announcements related to emergency situations such as water outages or weather related issues</li> <li>updates on Council resolutions including information about amended/new bylaws or policies</li> </ul>  | Monitor daily<br>Updated as needed    |
|                     | <p><b>WEBSITE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>updates on community events, articles of interest</li> <li>updates/announcements related to emergency situations such as water outages or weather related issues</li> <li>updates on Council resolutions including information about amended/new bylaws or policies</li> <li>Council agendas, minutes, bylaws, policies</li> </ul> | Monitored weekly<br>Updated as needed |

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| <b>NEWSLETTER</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices of new bylaws or policies</li> <li>• Notices of public meetings</li> <li>• Community group updates and schedules</li> </ul>  | Published Monthly  |
| <b>NEWSPAPER</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices as required by the Municipal Government Act and the Local Authorities Election Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land Use Bylaw Amendments</li> <li>• Mailing of annual property tax assessment notices</li> <li>• Election or by-election notices</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  | Published Weekly – used as required by legislation   |
| <b>PUBLIC MEETINGS</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All regular Council meetings are public meetings</li> <li>• Land Use Bylaw Amendments – as directed by the Municipal Government Act</li> <li>• Bylaw Amendments</li> <li>• Report on Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• audited financial statements;</li> <li>• a report respecting municipal services and operations;</li> <li>• a progress report respecting objectives and measures;</li> <li>• review of Council’s Strategic Plan; and,</li> <li>• a range of other information that the Council considers necessary.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Monthly<br>As needed<br>As needed - depending on the controversial nature of the bylaw<br>Annual |

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

It is the responsibility of the CAO to:

- Provide a supportive work environment that encourages the use of effective and consistent public participation within the Village
- Ensure this policy is available to all staff
- Support the public participation initiatives, by providing training and tools for staff
- Support an effective systems review including a review of internal policies and practices, to determine whether the tools and guidelines are being followed
- Support and communicate the Public Participation Policy and display a commitment to an accountable and committed process for public engagement.
- Ensure that the policy guidelines and public participation tools are being used by staff in a consistent manner for delivery of public participation relating to the Policy
- Evaluate the process in order to ensure it complies with the Policy and complements statutory requirements

### Council Members

Council Members are responsible for:

- Fostering a supportive environment that encourages the six principles of public participation; inclusive and authentic, sharing and supportive, accountable and committed, meaningful and responsive, ensuring continuous improvement, facilitating and building capacity for a collaborative community
- Understanding and supporting the policy, and ensuring that the policy and procedures are communicated to employees and are followed
- Ensure that the appropriate tools and guidelines are communicated to staff and appropriate training is provided

**RELATED DOCUMENTS & LEGISLATION:**

City of Ottawa, Public Engagement Policy  
Municipal Government Act, RCA 2000, M-26  
Local Authorities Elections Act, RCA 2000, L-21