



SUBJECT: 2020 annual status update on community engagement

TO: Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.

FROM: Corporate Communications & Engagement

Report Number: CC-01-21

Wards Affected: All Wards

File Numbers: 170-01

Date to Committee: April 7, 2021

Date to Council: April 20, 2021

Recommendation:

Receive and file corporate communications and engagement department report CC-01-21 providing a status update on community and staff engagement.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation

To provide committee and City Council with a status update of the city's engagement activities for 2020.

Background and Discussion:

The Community Engagement Charter (Engagement Charter) was approved by City Council in April of 2013. The Engagement Charter was created by residents with support from city staff and it is an agreement between and among Burlington City Council and residents concerning community engagement with City government and establishes the commitments, responsibilities and fundamental concepts of this relationship.

To ensure the continued success of the Engagement Charter, the City invited members of the Charter team to help develop an Engagement Charter Action Plan. This team of community members and staff is known as the Charter Action Team (ChAT). The Action Plan aims to bring the Engagement Charter to life and to embed engagement into everyday practice at the City of Burlington. The Charter Action Plan was approved and adopted in April 2014.

Along with Vision to Focus alignment, community engagement is part of the strategic direction “An Engaging City” in the 2015-2040 Strategic Plan. This strategic direction or pillar clearly demonstrates the city’s commitment to including residents in decision making.

In 2020, it was identified that engagement is considered a priority, so much so that the department name was changed to “Corporate Communications and Engagement” (previously Corporate Communications and Government Relations) to emphasize the importance and highlight engagement within the community and City staff.

Discussion

Prior to the adoption of the Engagement Charter and Action Plan, staff connected with people in the community to make them aware of projects, files, studies and upcoming decisions to be made and to obtain public opinion and input to help shape decisions. Some of this community engagement and involvement was legally required under things such as the Planning Act, while other community engagement and involvement was part of department business practices. Previously, staff practices were not consistent in terms of approach, methodology, training and tracking. Through the efforts of city staff and the Charter Action Team, many changes and practices have changed so that there is a consistent approach and standards to community engagement. Examples of this includes:

- Using IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) model and spectrum for community engagement. The city has trained over 100 staff and 7 community volunteers in the 5-day IAP2 program and 31 senior staff and Council members in IAP2 for Decision Makers.
- Use of a standardized checklist for community engagement. This checklist is used each time staff initiates engagement in the community and asks probing questions such as “what is the decision to be made?”, “how much input can the public have on the decision?” “what are goals for engaging the community?”, “who may be impacted by the decision?”, “how will the loop be closed with the public?” etc.
- In June of 2018, the City of Burlington launched a new online engagement portal called “Get Involved Burlington”. Standards on the portal include identifying where on the IAP2 spectrum the project is, the key milestones of the project,

contact person, closing the loop and letting the public know how input was/wasn't used and next steps etc.

- All surveys are reviewed by key engagement staff to ensure survey standards are met and that plain, clear language is used.
- Engagement and Communications staff work closely to create engagement and communications plans for projects.

Which brings us to 2020. 2020 was a year like no other. Due to COVID-19, we had to pause and then pivot how we engage. From mid-March to May/June most engagement was paused to focus city business on responding to the ever-changing COVID-19 crisis. In addition to the pause, city staff needed to pivot and learn how to engage with both residents and other staff remotely using technology to not only meet the needs of departments, but also to collaborate.

Although we had to pause or in some cases postpone engagement on projects during the pandemic, the uptake is still impressive as demonstrated both in the body and in the appendix of this report. In 2020, staff and Council used the following tactics to engage with the community and each other:

- In-person engagement (meetings, workshops, pop-ups, drop-ins etc.) between Jan until mid-March 2020
- Online surveys
- Polling – including online (virtual meetings and quick polls), key pad (in-person) and telephone key pad polling
- Social media
- Telephone town halls (and/or virtual meetings that allowed participation using a telephone to dial in to join)
- Use of both the public engagement portal (Get Involved Burlington) and staff engagement portal
- Virtual meetings (includes Public Information Centres (PICs), workshops, town halls, ward or community meetings etc.). While facilitating virtual meetings, many staff and council indicated that they used screen sharing, PowerPoint, Q&A or chat functions during virtual meetings.
- Videos were created to inform and engage residents on topics such as the 2021 Budget and the Private Tree By-Law
- Use of postcards/door hangers in targeted areas where input was required

Essentially, from mid-March to the time of writing this report, almost all of our engagement was virtual. From feedback from the community, we have learned that virtual engagement is not for everyone, and there is something that happens during face to face interactions that can't be completely replicated in a virtual format. Once it is safe to do so, the intent is to reinstate in-person opportunities. That being said,

we have also heard that we have a new set of residents engaging with the city because it is easier for them to engage virtually and it is their preferred method. We have heard that some groups in particular are much more likely to engage virtually including a younger demographic, working/commuting residents, busy parents, people with transportation or mobility issues, those that don't like to drive in the evening or during inclement weather etc.

Between December 2020 and February 19, 2021, a survey was posted on Get Involved Burlington asking residents about their preferences in how they engage with the City during and after the pandemic. From initial analysis of results, it appears that going forward, there is a need and desire to continue with some form of virtual meetings for projects and initiatives. Through the recent survey, residents shared that virtual engagement was beneficial because the City had recorded town halls/meetings and also posted a transcript so that if they missed the meeting, they had an opportunity to view meeting or read the transcript at a later date, whereas, in-person meetings are not recorded, so that if you missed it, you missed it. Early review of the results also indicate that some residents are concerned that feedback provided is not necessarily representative of all demographics in the community. This sentiment, is also shared by the Charter Action Team (ChAT), the Advisory Committee review team that presented their findings to Council in February of last year and our staff, as such the idea of a "Resident Roster" is discussed in the conclusion section of this report.

Financial Matters:

2020 operating budget included funding for:

- Online engagement portal software. In 2020, we piloted a new budget simulator software tool.
- Engagement Marketplace for staff (internal event that showcases tools, tips and resources available to staff and elected officials to assist with community engagement).
- Translation services. Funds were used to translate surveys into several languages for larger key projects.
- Marketing and promotion of the Get Involved Burlington portal.

Total Financial Impact

Funding to support community engagement has been approved within the base budget in the 2020 Operating budget.

Climate Implications

Community engagement regarding the climate/environment is an important practice. In 2020 the community has provided input on items such as the Climate Action Plan, Community Gardens, Integrated Mobility Plan, Private Tree By-Law, Home Energy Retrofit project, Transit to name a few.

Engagement Matters:

This report and appendix has been developed in collaboration with city staff and the offices of Council. Citizen Advisory Committees submit their own status reports and work plans to Council and are not reflected in this report. The Charter Action Team (ChAT) was engaged in an exercise to determine the next steps for the team and residents participated in a survey and poll to help guide the city's post pandemic engagement strategies. In addition, the recommendations provided by the Advisory Committee Review Team were reviewed and helped to verify that additional work is required in order to provide to Council, feedback that is more representative of the demographics within Burlington.

Engagement highlights are found in “Appendix A” of this report and outlines:

- Engagement statistics from the online Get Involved Burlington portal and social media
 - Awards/Conference Presentations/Studies and Webinars that Burlington has been part of
 - New or innovative engagement approaches
 - Training
 - Projects and topics the public was consulted on
 - Internal (staff) project consultations
 - How feedback was used or influenced decisions.
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Conclusion:

Burlington has been and continues to be a leader in the area of community engagement. In 2017, the City of Burlington was awarded “Organization of the Year” in Canada by IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation).

In February of 2020, Council was presented findings from the statistically valid Community Survey, there were significant gains made in the area of engagement:

Percentage indicates a rating of either “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree”

STATEMENT	2015	2019
Residents have enough opportunities to provide input into decision-making about city projects and services	64%	77%
I would like to provide input to the City for the purpose of influencing decision-making about city projects and services	63%	76%
The City does a good job of engaging residents in decision-making about city projects and services.	54%	72%
The City would welcome my opinion when making decisions about city projects and services that impact me	57%	71%
The City uses input from residents in decision-making about city projects and services	50%	70%
The City’s decision-making about projects and services is reflective of the voice of the majority of residents	46%	63%
AWARENESS OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CHARTER	2015 18%	2019 26%

Although we have made some significant strides in the area of community engagement, there is always room for continuous improvement.

The ChAT Team has decided to evolve the group and to support the idea of a roster system. Based on feedback from the community, ChAT, the Advisory Committee Review Team and city staff, engagement staff will be working with others to investigate the possibility of a “Resident Roster” approach. Essentially, this roster system can provide a ready pool of community members that are more representative and can provide feedback and insights on specific projects or initiatives and can be a pulse check for the Burlington community. The following are the benefits of a resident roster approach:

- Representativeness of participants
- Engagement design suited to the decision
- Short time commitment compared to being a member of an Advisory Committee or ChAT, tied directly to a specific project or aspect of a project or initiative
- Membership not limited
- Roster members ready to be engaged
- Timeliness of engagement
- Advice as direct decision input
- Form project specific teams quickly
- Engage the entire network of the roster when needed

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly made us rethink how to engage and collaborate with each other. Going forward, there will be a need to have both in-person and virtual engagement opportunities in order to allow for broad participation. We will continue to investigate and use virtual collaboration tools in order to make the most of virtual engagement.

Through the efforts of staff, council, members of advisory committees, ChAT and the many passionate and engaged residents of Burlington, we will continue to work together to build capacity so that the best decisions are made. Together, we will continue to work to make Burlington one of the best cities in which to live, work, play and retire in.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Dwyer

Manager of Engagement and Volunteers

289-208-0065

Appendices:

A. Engagement Statistics and Supporting Information

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.