



**SUBJECT:** Engagement, communications and volunteer update for 2022

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

**FROM:** Corporate Communications and Engagement

Report Number: CC-01-23

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 170-01

Date to Committee: March 29, 2023

Date to Council: April 18, 2023

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### **Recommendation:**

Receive and file corporate communications and engagement department report CC-01-23 providing a status update on engagement, communications, and volunteers; and

Approve the continuation of Food for Feedback as an annual engagement event to be located at Central Park.

### **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

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### **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. 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 Community 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 was 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 Vision 2040 Strategic Plan. This strategic direction clearly demonstrates the City's commitment to include residents in decision making. In 2020, there was a department name change to "Corporate Communications and Engagement" which emphasized the importance the City places on community members being engaged, empowered, welcomed and well-served by their City through outstanding customer experiences.

It should be noted that 2023 marks the 10-year anniversary of the Community Engagement Charter. The community has changed in the last 10 years and staff plan to engage with residents to refresh the charter and to capture the essence of what engagement looks like in Burlington for 2023 and beyond.

## **Discussion**

Prior to the adoption of the Community Engagement Charter and Engagement Charter 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 for items 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 include:

- 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 the 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 or was not used and next steps, etc.
- All surveys are reviewed by 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.
- Training has been provided to staff to facilitate virtual and hybrid engagement using a variety of online collaboration tools. i.e. MURAL, Zoom and Teams Live.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to keep staff and the public safe, 2022 was very similar to how the City engaged with the community in 2021. Most engagement was virtual with some exceptions of in-person or hybrid opportunities as COVID-19 restrictions began to lift.

Although engagement was almost exclusively virtual, the uptake is impressive as demonstrated both in the body and in the Appendix A of this report. In 2022, staff and Council used the following tactics to engage with the community and each other:

- Online surveys
- Food for Feedback event returned in person in September 2022. This is an event where City initiatives and projects requiring public feedback are offered in one location. In exchange for feedback, residents are offered lunch from a food truck.
- Polling – including online (virtual meetings and quick polls) and telephone keypad polling.
- Social media
- 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, polling, MURAL (virtual whiteboard) or chat functions during virtual meetings.
- Hybrid meetings, where residents had the option to attend a ward meeting either in person or online.
- Walking tours
- Data walks
- Use of postcards/door hangers in targeted areas where input was required.
- City wide mailer, i.e. CityTalk election edition.

## **Corporate Communications & Engagement Service**

The Corporate Communications & Engagement department is the service at the City that supports staff and council in producing timely and effective internal and external communications and engagement and leads the strategy and support for engaging residents in decision-making.

The goal of the service is to communicate and engage people using various mediums that reaches our aging, growing and diverse community; to be recognized as a municipal leader in community engagement, collaboration and volunteerism; have more informed and connected city employees who believe we have good internal communication with each other; provide graphic and web design support; provide digital printing, print finishing, wide format printing, mail, courier and distribution services to the corporation and affiliates.

As outlined in the appendixes attached, we engage with the community in many ways using many different tactics, which include the City's Get Involved Burlington portal, the City's website, City's social media accounts and our online volunteer management software Better Impact.

### **2022 Corporate Communications and Engagement by the numbers:**

- 8,800+ registered users to the Get Involved Burlington portal
- 50 surveys issued
- 125 opportunities posted in the public engagement calendar
- 495 volunteer profiles created in the Better Impact software
- 154 media releases issued
- 17 Instagram reels created
- 28,000+ subscriptions to all newsfeeds
- 80,000+ followers across social media channels
- 6M+ web page views on burlington.ca

### **New Events Calendar (includes Engagement calendar (July 21 – Dec 31, 2022))**

- 16,061 Users
- 23,641 Views
- 1,263 Unique subscribers to all Public Engagement calendar categories (Development Application Meetings, Engagement Opportunity, Public Information Sessions, and Surveys)

## **Strategy/process**

## **Food for Feedback**

Food for Feedback is a community engagement event where City staff and members of Council can get feedback from residents on projects, initiatives and programs at the City.

The Food for Feedback event has been held twice. The initial event was in 2019 and it was paused in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic but returned in 2022. The event has been well received by staff and residents who have attended. The 2019 event included members of Council who also provided positive feedback about the event. In non-election years, members of Council will be invited to attend and have a booth in which to obtain public feedback.

The 2023 Food for Feedback is scheduled for September 16. There are two areas that require Council direction, 1) Direction past 2023 to continue the event with associated budget and 2) Location of future events.

For the event location criteria, we have reviewed options in each ward in Burlington. Below is a summary of the criteria:

- The list below is all outdoor locations.
- Due to the potential of inclement weather, we require an indoor space as a rain location. Without an indoor location, we would have to cancel the event.
- We strive to ensure our events are accessible so all residents may feel included.
- Ample parking is needed for the event attendees and participants.
- Transportation options, such as being along a bus route, is an important feature we'd like to promote.
- We are not permitted to host the event on sports fields, due to potential damage to the turf and taking away space from user group renters. Depending on the potential level of damage, it could remove the sport fields from availability.
- Washrooms are needed for the event attendees and participants.

The event layout is also a factor to ensure the proximity for the amenities we have, including event booths, food trucks and activity areas. We strive to ensure the event flow is fluid and cohesive for the attendees, event booths and safety of our participants.

**City of Burlington – Food for Feedback Criteria for Event Location**

Location	Ward	Outdoor location	Indoor/ rain location	Accessibility	Parking for event	Bus route	Sports fields	Washrooms
LaSalle Park	1	Yes	No**	No	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hidden Valley Park	1	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Central Park	2	Yes	Yes – Seniors' Centre	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Brock Park	2	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Mountainside Park	3	Yes	Yes – Mountainside Recreation Centre	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Brant Hills Park	3	Yes	Yes – Brant Hills Community Centre	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tansley Woods Park	4	Yes	Yes – Tansley Woods Community Centre	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Nelson Park	4	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Orchard Park	5	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Emerson Park	5	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Ireland Park	6	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Millcroft Park	6	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

\*Accessibility concerns expressed at the 2022 event by residents, they can be addressed

\*\*Previously a third party operator, would need to check the availability through them. The future status of this facility is to be determined.

**Options Considered**

Location of Food for Feedback event post 2023:

Council members have expressed a desire to rotate the location of Food for Feedback at various locations throughout the city. This option was reviewed and can be considered for Council approval. Other options considered are:

- 1) Host Food for Feedback at Brant Hills Park and alternate years at Central Park

- 2) Host Food for Feedback in various wards and locations throughout the years

## **Financial Matters:**

2022 operating budget included funding for:

- Software for the two online engagement portals (public and staff sites), MURAL which is a virtual whiteboard, Konveio which is a software used to receive input on draft documents, Zoom license for webinar and virtual polling, handheld polling software, volunteer management software.
- Food for Feedback event. Funds used to pay for rentals, logistical items, marketing and promotion, food trucks, and giveaways.
- Captioning for virtual meetings (both public and staff recordings).
- Translation services. Funds were used to translate surveys and promotional materials into several languages for key projects.
- COVID Telephone Town Hall.
- Marketing and promotion of the Get Involved Burlington portal and City projects.

## **Food for Feedback**

Total cost for the 2022 Food for Feedback event was \$27,000. To help offset the cost of the 2023 event, staff are investigating possible sponsorship opportunities for an activity zone and picnic zone. If successful in 2023, sponsorship agreements would be applied to future Food for Feedback events.

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## **Climate Implications**

Community engagement regarding the climate/environment is an important practice. In 2022 the community and staff have provided input on items such as the Climate Resilient Burlington, Electric Mobility Strategy, Integrated Mobility Plan, Forest Protection/Urban Forest Master Plan, and Transit to name a few.

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## **Engagement Matters:**

This report and appendix have been developed in collaboration with City staff and the offices of the Mayor and Council. Citizen Advisory Committees submit their own status reports and work plans to Council and are not reflected in this report. Engagement, Communications and Volunteer highlights are found in Appendix A of this report and outlines:

- Engagement statistics from the online Get Involved Burlington portal, web, media relations 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
- 2022 Municipal Election statistics
- How feedback was used or influenced decision

### Conclusion:

Burlington has been and continues to be a leader in community engagement. In 2017, the City of Burlington was awarded “Organization of the Year” in Canada by IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation). In January of 2022, Council was presented findings from the statistically valid 2021 Community Survey; there were continued gains made in the area of engagement.

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

Statement	2015	2019	2021
Residents have enough opportunities to provide input into decision-making about city projects and service.	65%	77%	<b>79%</b>
I would like to provide input to the City for the purpose of influencing decision-making about city projects and services.	63%	76%	<b>80%</b>
The City does a good job of engaging residents in decision-making about city projects and services.	54%	71%	<b>75%</b>
The City would welcome my opinion when making decisions about city projects and services that impact me.	57%	71%	<b>75%</b>
The City uses input from residents in decision making about city projects and services.	50%	70%	<b>71%</b>
The City’s decision-making about projects and services is reflective of the voice of the majority of residents.	46%	63%	<b>65%</b>

The consulting firm that facilitated the 2021 Community Survey remarked that the findings in all categories, including engagement, were very high and not often achieved

by municipalities. The next Community Survey is scheduled for the fall of 2023. 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 in-person, virtual and hybrid engagement opportunities to allow for broad participation and to give people a choice for their voice.

2023 will be a year where there will be a variety of large and small initiatives that require public input, and it is also the 10-year anniversary of the Community Engagement Charter.

**Some of the engagement goals for 2023:**

- Establish a resident roster, which was previously paused due to COVID. The aim of the roster is to create a ready list of residents that represent a cross section of the community. This roster can be used for activities such as focus groups or user testing of new City initiatives.
- Launch the 2023 Community Survey
- Continue to on-board the remaining City services that require volunteers into the new volunteer management software and program
- Celebrate and refresh the Community Engagement Charter
- Creating a demographic profile of Burlington to help with communications and engagement
- Explore innovation and engagement best practices

Through the efforts of staff, council, members of advisory committees, 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.

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Respectfully submitted,

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**Appendices:**

- A. 2022 Engagement, Communications and Volunteers Statistics and Supporting Information
- B. 2022 Social Media Analytics
- C. 2022 Year Review Media Monitoring Report
- D. 2022 Social Review Recreation, Community and Culture

**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.