



Baseline Engagement & Communications for Community Planning

Stakeholder Report Back – What We Heard

Project overview

The Baseline Engagement and Communications Project is led by Administration in collaboration with communities, industry and City Council. This project is looking at establishing a predictable engagement and communications approach for Community Planning projects.

The keys areas of focus include:

- Creating a level of predictability, without making things cookie cutter and ensuring we are customizing and tailoring our approach to address the unique needs and local context of communities and stakeholders.
- Pushing for better and more authentic outreach, earlier in the planning process.
- Defining roles and responsibilities connected to community outreach for all stakeholders involved in the process (The City, community and applicants).
- Creating a planning-specific outreach process and toolkit to guide best-practice outreach.
- Improving reporting to stakeholders and to Council – focusing on creating clearer linkages between What We Asked, What We Heard and What We Changed.

Engagement overview

Engagement for this project includes outreach to Council, development industry and community stakeholders. Through early engagement on this project, we were looking to learn about:

- What successes exist and what is working well with Community Planning outreach?
- What challenges exist and what needs to be improved for Community Planning outreach?
- What resources/ tools need to be developed to ensure more meaningful outreach can happen?

We achieved this through informal and formal meetings with stakeholders including:

- The City's Established Areas Industry Working Group and BILD members
 - Presentation on June 26, 2018
 - Workshop on July 26, 2018
- Calgary Planning Commission (CPC)
 - Lunch n' Learn on October 18, 2018
- Federation of Calgary Communities members
 - Workshop on October 22, 2018
- Inner City Community's Working Group members
 - Workshop on December 3, 2018
- nextCITY Advisory Committee
 - Quarterly update on December 12, 2018

In addition, feedback received from ongoing engagement efforts on City projects was also considered as part of our process.

What we heard

Throughout the engagement program there were common high-level themes heard from all stakeholder groups. These are:

- Early outreach is important
- The need for predictable outreach and engagement processes
- The effectiveness of engagement techniques and tactics
- Sharing better information and educating the public on planning process
- The need for defined roles and responsibilities for the community, The City and development industry/applicants in engagement

The chart below aims to break down these key themes further, using comments that were shared by stakeholders at our sessions. We have illustrated where common and shared ideas between stakeholders (inclusive of community, development industry, Council and CPC) emerged and where ideas unique to specific stakeholder group exist.

If after reading this section of the report, you feel a key point from your feedback has been missed, or has not been properly articulated, please email planning.engage@calgary.ca to share your idea.

THEME: EARLY OUTREACH IS IMPORTANT
COMMON/ SHARED IDEAS FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS
Starting conversations early with the community is critical.
Early outreach can lead to better and longer-term relationship building.
We need all decision makers at the table. Have City, applicant and community in the room together early.
When engaging early, ensure you continue the communication until the end.
Engagement and outreach should be proactive and not reactive.
IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
Engagement outcomes and areas open for input need to be communicated from the beginning. Define what is on the table.
Communicate pro-forma, economics of the project from the beginning.
If engaging early, ensure there are constant feedback loops.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
There are challenges in balancing the right level of detail early on. Starting with a blank slate doesn't give a starting point for conversation, but too much detail can be perceived as a done deal.

Concurrent applications can be beneficial for early conversations, but can present challenges and not always feasible.
THEME: A PREDICTABLE PROCESS FOR ENGAGEMENT
COMMON/ SHARED IDEAS FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS
Outreach and engagement programs should be scalable based on community context and application type.
Roles and responsibilities for the community, City, applicant and Council in engagement need to be defined and agreed to by all.
There is a need for agreed upon engagement principles and outcomes for all involved in the process for planning matters.
More clarity is needed on the intent of engagement. Engagement can mean many things to many people (i.e. community relations, communications, outreach, public input etc.)
IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
Community wants more certainty over the process, with defined points of input.
Need to clearly articulate where project is on engage spectrum. i.e. If it is just inform, tell us from the beginning.
Most engagement is at the inform level and community needs to be more involved in the process. Process should be more collaborative.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
Desire for the process to be flexible and not prescriptive.
It is not consistent in how we weight different stakeholder comments in the outcome. Need to formalize the weighting of various stakeholder groups. Not enough weight given to no response (e.g. people who do not comment).
When expectations are too high for engagement, this could add years and millions of dollars to the budget and make the project unfeasible.
Shouldn't allow buildings to be designed by community or committee.
IDEAS FROM CPC
No longer appropriate for applications to be approved on planning merits alone, need to determine what the role of engagement is in the process.
Suggestions to look at Vancouver's rezoning process for ideas.
THEME: ENGAGEMENT TACTICS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGAGEMENT TOOLS
COMMON/ SHARED IDEAS FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS
Open Houses are an ineffective tool for having meaningful conversations. Overuse of sticky notes and dots.
There are too many feedback loops happening, leads to burn out, confusion and a disjointed process. Need one window in for feedback to be considered holistically.

Need to evaluate the effectiveness of all tools in engagement.
Need to ensure tactics selected match the outcomes desired for engagement.
IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
Desire more variety in tool and tactic use. Variety of tactics allow you to reach more people.
Pop-ups are an effective tool to reach people where they are. Attend events in the community, lots of events in spring and summer.
Engagement tactics and techniques need to be more accessible and inclusive.
Question the effectiveness of what we heard reports, as there is no feedback loop provided or opportunity to confirm findings.
Online engagement allows people to complete on their own timelines. Should have online engagement period run longer.
Green Line charettes were effective.
Advisory committees allow for a great cross section of residents for better representation.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
Applicants don't always have access to online resources and tools for engagement.
Desire to be innovative and creative with choice of tactics, tactics shouldn't be prescriptive.
Being told not to engage in summer, which makes timelines difficult to achieve when window to engage is so narrow.
Social media is not an effective tool for applicants to use. Shouldn't be engaging in the comments section.
IDEAS FROM CPC
Often hear engaging in the summer months is bad. Need more acceptance for engagement over the summer months through pop-up events and acceptance for more online engagement.
THEME: SHARING BETTER INFORMATION AND EDUCATING THE PUBLIC
COMMON/ SHARED IDEAS FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS
City needs to create a library of reusable education materials that can be used by the community and applicants when engaging with the public (i.e. MDP goals, land use bylaw definitions, development economics etc.)
City needs to do a better job educating the general public about the planning process and when/ how decisions are made in the planning continuum (i.e. At this stage you can influence X, this stage Y).
City needs to create a common language for engagement that is used by all. i.e. Open House means engagement, Information Session means inform.
The City needs better online platform, one stop for all planning information. Currently too hard to find everything online.
The City needs to share the comments they receive through circulation with community association and applicant.
The City needs simplified information that is written in plain language for everyone to understand. Consider more images and infographics.

The City collects a lot of input through different projects and this information seems to expire with each project. Need to leverage data for future projects and not start from scratch with every new project in a community.
The City needs improve reporting to close the loop on engagement and connect-the-dots for stakeholders between what was heard and what changes were made as a result.
IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
Overall there needs to be more transparency. Share application details and studies, detailed team reviews, how decisions were made and why, comments made by all parties etc.
The City needs to remove barriers for community to review details of applications.
The City needs to improve the circulation process and allow commenting to be easier.
The City should consider implementing a “Meet the Planner” opportunity in each community.
Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators need to have a planning background
The City needs to create easy to share bite size educational videos about planning matters.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
The City needs to take lead on educating the public, as there is mistrust of applicants sharing this information.
THEME: CITY’S ROLE IN OUTREACH
COMMON/ SHARED IDEAS FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS
The City needs to lead engagement on policy.
The City needs to do a better job engaging on policy, this is currently challenging and takes too long.
The City needs to do a better job supporting applicants and the community in engagement. Provide resources (materials, facilitation, and planning expertise) and set the expectations for engagement.
The City needs to help close the loop on outstanding issues between the community and applicant, prior to CPC/ Council. What We Heard reports need what we did information (i.e. what was used and why/ why not). Also desire better reporting to Council.
City needs to be more creative and innovative with engagement.
The City needs to ensure the right subject matter experts are in the room when engaging with the public.
The City’s engagement on higher policy (MDP, DAG etc.) is disconnected, overlapping and seems rushed. Leads to confusion in how these initiatives fit together and understanding long term implications.
The City is over-engaging and there is engagement fatigue in the city.
IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
The City needs to have more proactive, solutions-based conversation rather than presenting an option and waiting for a reaction.
The City needs to provide resources to the community to help better analyze applications (i.e. dedicated planner for each community, software/ design tools).

The City is perceived to side with applicants more than community. Need to be more impartial and balanced.
The City needs to stick to the Engage Policy and Spectrum when engaging.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
The City needs to help mediate and facilitate difficult conversations with the community.
The City needs to take a change management approach when engaging. Not always about what's open for input but about future change.
The City needs to provide local context information to applicants to help inform their engagement.
The City needs to support applicant-led engagement, attend sessions to speak to planning process, MDP etc. This can help with credibility and trust issues.
If City does a better job engaging and educating on policy and having the hard conversations early, this will help future engagement for land use and redevelopment.
THEME: COMMUNITY'S ROLE IN OUTREACH
COMMON/ SHARED IDEAS FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS
Desire to reach the broader community and more marginalized and diverse groups when engaging, but lack of resources prevent this from happening.
Desire to leverage a community association's local knowledge to outline what tactics work best in their areas.
IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
Want a consistent and defined role in the process. Communities are capable of leading engagement.
They know the local context. Want to share best practices and what works best in their community when engaging.
Want to have a say in how engagement occurs in their community.
Community wants to be a partner in engagement.
Community wants to be an equal player and resources to help level the playing field for them in the process.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
The role of community associations is the planning process is inconsistent and unclear. Some are weighted more heavily than others.
Community can have unrealistic expectations (want blank slate, co-design, or sometimes no change at all).
Some community associations are more sophisticated and experienced with development than others, can make outreach hard to navigate.
Some community associations appear to not be representative of the broader community.
Some communities do not trust applicants and won't engage or provide comments.
THEME: APPLICANT'S ROLE IN ENGAGEMENT

IDEAS FROM COMMUNITY
Applicant should lead engagement for applications and conversation about built form.
Some applicants are not willing to engage with community and/or are too vague with details.
There is a power imbalance between the community and applicant, which pits them against each other.
Too much inconsistency in how different applicants approach engagement with the community.
Some applicants just want to check the box and engagement is not genuine.
Some applicants are dismissive of community concerns and don't respectfully address these.
IDEAS FROM INDUSTRY
Applicants want to lead engagement for Development Permits and conversation about built form/ design.
Applicants want to decide what is open for input on their applications and have flexibility
Applicants question why engagement is necessary if their proposal meets policy, bylaw etc.

Improvements made to date

The feedback received thus far has helped The City identify initial improvements to the engagement process. Improvements that have been implemented over the course of 2018 include:

Improvement 1: Collaborating within The City to identify community stakeholders

One of the fundamental improvements to outreach activities is the increased focus on community context. Understanding the specific needs and situation of each community that we are engaging helps us to ensure that we reach a greater number of community members in ways that they are expecting to be engaged as well as anticipating what their concerns and interests might be to aid in planning engagement activities.

We have begun implementing this strategy through regularly connecting with our colleagues who are aware of the specific community context from Calgary Neighbourhoods, Parks, Recreation, Calgary Fire Department, Community Standards and others. We are using this knowledge to drive our outreach strategies and sharing what we know with applicants.

Improvement 2: Preparing the community for the conversation and a predictable process.

When it comes to working with communities to create local area policies, special focus and attention has been given to the first multi-community approach to local growth planning, the North Hill Communities.

We are working to establish a positive process that can be adapted and utilized for future iterations of local growth plans beyond this pilot phase. The local area context has been considered in the development of the engagement and communications strategy. Although adaptations and customizations to each local growth planning process will need to be made to fit the unique local content, a general framework and process, as well as education,

communication and engagement materials are being created that will inform future local area planning initiatives.

Rather than proceeding straight to engagement, an intentional effort is being made to take time to create educational content to help build understanding about: why we are planning for future growth, why growth and redevelopment in developed areas is needed and how local area plans help guide redevelopment and are a key tool connecting the city-wide vision for growth to individual development applications. Example can be found at: calgary.ca/northhill

Improvement #3: Using community context & ability for meaningful change to drive the approach

We have implemented a more predictable, yet flexible approach to assessing City-led engagement opportunities for land use applications, that is driven by what we know about the community. The result of this upfront assessment is increased predictability for everyone involved (the community, applicants, Administration, City Council, etc.) about the level of public involvement throughout the planning continuum.

We have implemented tools that assesses:

- Community context (community expectations for involvement, level of community impact/change, community experience with redevelopment and planning matters) which is determined through regular connection with Administration's experts in the community (NPCs and other community-based teams); and
- The ability for change (has the applicant already conducted engagement and made changes based on community input, is there the ability for further changes and what level of community information is needed by The City to inform the application review).

Based on these inputs, a recommended approach is provided as an output.

Improvement 4: Earlier conversations about outreach with the applicant.

Another approach that has been piloted in 2018 is for engagement and communications staff to be part of the pre-application process on large and complex applications. The purpose of this pilot is to help encourage applicants to engage in early dialogue with both the community and The City before it is refined and submitted through a formal application. Through this process The City also provides advice about what kind of outreach activities may be needed and provides background on the local context to help ensure a successful outreach process.

Improvement 5: Better reporting and explaining how engagement informed changes.

One of the key outcomes of public engagement is clearly understanding what was asked, what was heard and how it changed outcomes or influenced decisions. One of the key steps being taken is to standardize how this information is reported to Calgary Planning Commission and Council and in our What We Heard reports.

Going forward, we will be summarizing findings from any City-led engagement and/or applicant led-engagement (when conducted and available) as well as information about the local context considerations that were made in developing any City-led strategy. We will also include what we heard and what we did, so we can provide assurance over how the feedback received was incorporated into the final proposal or how it was addressed.

Next steps

Moving forward and working together.

We're proposing to bring representatives from all stakeholder groups to WORK TOGETHER to:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities. Discuss who leads what part of engagement, who is involved when, who coordinates what, and who pays for what?
- Prioritize improvements and identify solutions. Discuss and prioritize the tools and resources needed to support improvements and help stakeholders be successful in their role.

We believe it is critical to bring all stakeholders together to have a collaborative discussion. The goal for this discussion is get to a place where there is mutual understanding and agreement on roles and responsibilities and discover what supporting tools and resources are needed to help all parties be successful in their roles for engagement.

We will be scheduling this next discussion in early 2019 with all stakeholders and will reach out to the stakeholder groups who have already participated to invite you to the future session.

If you would like to stay up-to-date on future engagement opportunities and updates, please sign-up to receive emails directly [here](#).