



Coalition for a
Liveable
Sudbury

Making connections. Working toward sustainability.

Citizen Engagement Review - Coalition for a Liveable Sudbury written input

June 24, 2014

First, we would like to direct you to the city's existing Public Participation Policy (2008), in particular the core values of public participation.

Core values of public participation (from the International Association for Public Participation)

1. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decisions.
3. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of participants.
4. The public participation process actively seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
6. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

There is a great deal of frustration among citizens and citizen groups who feel that public input is a futile exercise. Trust needs to be regained, and that will be done through good communication, transparency, accountability, and by demonstrating that public participation does influence decisions.

There are a great deal of people actively contributing to making their community better. An important step is fostering a collaborative relationship with these people and groups. Good communication is crucial.

Coalition for a Liveable Sudbury has been providing input to the municipality, participating in public sessions, and seeking information on municipal policies and decisions for over seven years. As a network, we have thirty-nine group members who are active in the community, and we have strong partnerships and communication with other active community groups. A number of our members are members of advisory panels. We also often hear from our members and from the general public about their experiences interacting with and working with the city, and are often asked for assistance in doing so. This breadth of experience means that we have been thinking about, and advocating for, improvements to the way the city engages with and communicates with citizens for many years. We have summarized our recommendations below.

Some of the key points touched on are:

- easy access and clear communication of basic information
- prescribed process and timeline for resolving issues & complaints
- early communication and on-going dialogue when it comes to important municipal decisions, projects and issues. A true, respectful two way conversation is essential.
- a clear path and support for citizens working to make their community better, whether in an advisory panel, in a CAN, as part of a community, as a neighbourhood or as an individual.

This spring, public outcry around proposed changes to Second Avenue led us to outline what we would like that particular process to look like. It's a good example to refer to. Please find an easy summary at:

<http://www.liveablesudbury.org/2ndAveReconstruction.html>

We hope that the first step in responding to these recommendations is a good follow up process to the input received. We will be watching for opportunities for further collaboration, dialogue and comment before a final report is taken to Council.

We have been surprised at the lack of outreach done for this review. In light of this lack of outreach, the high number of on-line survey responses is a strong indication of how much citizens want to engage with their city, and how much they wish to see improvements in how they can do so.

1. Access to basic information and basic communication

Website:

- easy, intuitive access to information, as well as an effective search tool
- contact information (with quick and effective follow up)
- 'portals' for:
 - transportation: transit service (complete information, easy to read maps, schedules & policies); cycling routes; trails; roadwork delays; diagrams, schedules, budgets and status for road projects.
 - basic services: libraries, leisure services programs and facilities, pet licenses, payments, etc
 - Council: councillors, wards (including address search to ID your ward), committees of council, advisory panels
 - community engagement: calls for feedback, surveys, open houses, applications for citizen positions, etc. Every call for feedback should have a clickable on-line submission form to go with it (and background information so people can make informed comments). Easy links to all current opportunities for feedback, plus input & results for past opportunities for input.
 - completed projects and upcoming projects
- bylaws, policies, staff reports, decisions should be available in a 'library', and be easily searched for, and searchable (searchable pdf's, not scanned documents). This

should include basic context information (e.g. what are zoning bylaws and how to read/interpret them)

- a chart of the organizational structure for the city – who is responsible for what, and how to contact them

Citizen centres:

- one stop shop approach. Whether you are paying a ticket, proposing a community project, or bringing forward a complaint, you should be pointed in the right direction. Many projects or issues are delayed or never resolved because they never reach the right staff person. It is crucial that staff at these citizen centres have the information they need to connect citizens to the right person or resource.

Citizens' guide:

- Develop a user friendly citizen guide available on-line and at citizen centres. This would contain basic information on how to engage with the city (including CAN's and neighbourhood associations), as well as easy to use 'how to' information for common situations including: resolving a complaint, the planning process and what to do when there is an application of concern to you; organizing a community project or event, making a community delegation, submitting a petition, finding out about and providing input to municipal decisions, etc.

On-going communication

- Reach out to citizens through diverse means and through the venues and networks they are already connected to. Make the latest news available on billboards at citizen centres, and in other public places like parks, transit shelters, grocery stores, electronic signs along main routes...
- Direct outreach to citizens in their neighbourhoods and communities about changes that will directly impact them –timely information and the opportunity to ask questions and have a voice.
- Signage at sites of future development whether private, or a public project to let people know what's coming, in what timeframe, and how they can have a say.
- Extend the 200m notification for developments that have an impact beyond the immediate neighbours.

2. Resolving complaints/issues

- When a citizen issues a complaint, or raises an issue, they should always receive a tracking number, as well as timely follow up. There should be a prescribed timeframe for follow up, and resolution of the issue.
- Citizens should be able to do this through 3-1-1, on-line (e-mail, website, social media), or by phoning a relevant staff person or their Councillor.
- However the complaint is received, all should be logged and tracked to monitor success of resolution, as well as collect statistics about issues raised by citizens.

3. Public Input

Public input requires a conversation, and it requires people to be comfortable.

- Provide diverse opportunities for public input: on-line, through social media; at citizen centres, at other community centres and places where people gather, in writing, or at public input sessions and charettes.
- Provide complete and easy to understand information before deadlines and public input sessions, so people can take time to think about it, and provide good input through whatever mode they choose
 - it starts with effective notice – people can't provide input if they haven't heard of the opportunity. Be sure to plug into existing relevant networks in a timely manner.
 - Prominently display all opportunities for public input on the main page of the website, and on an on-line calendar on the city website. Provide links to details and information that will be available at the PIC, as well as to background reports.
 - Go to where people are, and where they are comfortable:
 - partner with organizations that are already gathering with people and have developed a relationship with them
 - go to where people are gathering naturally (e.g go to parks to collect people's thoughts for the parks master plan...). Get out to public places and public events, fit in, talk to people, and most importantly, listen.
 - document the input, the response, and the rationale for the response, and make this information publicly available. Provide a follow up reply to people and groups who have commented.
 - Consistently document verbal comments at public input sessions.
 - Have multiple opportunities for input. Not everyone interested will be available at the dates/times given.
 - Make it a conversation, not a 'show and tell'.
 - When providing design plans or solutions to an issue, provide a range of options with an evaluation and rationale for each, including how it relates to public input received.
 - start the conversation early in the process, so citizen input, and input from key stakeholders, has the opportunity to shape the project
 - Staff at the public input sessions should be knowledgeable about the project and able to answer technical questions.
 - Combine public input sessions, especially for related topics, This will lessen time burdens for staff, and engaged citizens, make scheduling easier, and allow connections to be made among a number of projects/decisions.
- Meetings with the public and with stakeholders should: start with a clear statement about the purpose and expectations for the meeting; be well moderated so that it is respectful, comfortable, and effective; be followed up with shared notes (including action items), and follow up actions. On going communication is crucial.
- All projects above a certain dollar value or high community impact should require true community consultation (e.g, through charettes, focus groups, workshops and other means)
- Develop a list of stakeholder groups that should always be consulted for specific areas (e.g. transportation, water management, lake water quality, planning, neighborhood/community specific groups). Benefit from the local expertise of citizens,

tap into existing networks of citizens already engaged in an area or on specific issues, and show respect for work already done in the community in a given area or on an issue.

- Outreach to all those impacted (e.g. all citizens use collector roads, not only those in the immediate neighbourhood).

4. Municipal decisions

- Post agendas and background material 2 weeks prior to Council and Committee of Council meetings; post minutes within 1 week.
- Have a searchable on-line library of Council decisions and municipal reports
- provide early notice to stakeholders and involve them in an ongoing dialogue so that their input can shape the project/policy/decision
- provide an opportunity for questions from the public on agenda items.
- the municipal budget process needs more opportunities for providing public input, and better follow up on the input provided. There should be multiple opportunities for input, and it must go beyond recommendations on budget options, which do not speak to the core budget.
- all guidelines and policies should be easily available in writing, in one central place on the website
- There should be clear guidelines and transparency on what items are put on the agenda of Council and Committee of Council meetings.
- Critical processes that other decisions and progress rely on (e.g. the Transportation Study) must be held to a timeline. There should be published and up to date schedules, deadlines, timelines and contact information for all major processes and projects.
- retract new security rules (security 'greeting' citizens at the door as they enter Council Chambers, and the possibility of bag searches)

5. Advisory Panels

- advisory panels are meant to play an advisory role to Council, and should report directly to Council, not through staff.
- advisory panels must be provided the necessary support and information they need to fulfill their mandate. There should be a mechanism to report and resolve any situation where they are not receiving this support.
- the mandate of advisory panels should include input on, and on-going dialogue on, decisions relevant to their mandate (e.g. major roadwork for the Sustainable Mobility Advisory Panel), beginning early in the process (e.g. before projects are put to tender in the case of roadworks).
- the mandate of advisory panels should include hearing from and communicating with the public. For example, citizens should be able to bring concerns/suggestions relevant to the mandate of the panel directly to the panel, which can then provide knowledgeable responses, and pass on their concerns as appropriate. Panels should also be able to share public education material and hold relevant public events.
- policies and requests for decisions arising from the work of the panel should appear before committees of council in a timely manner, and should always include the opportunity for the panel to speak to it, and respond to staff recommendations. There

should be on going communication and a prescribed timeline for follow up reports/action by staff.

- panels with similar or overlapping mandates should be connected, and panels on subtopics should report to 'big picture' panels on that topic (consider an alternative structure for these, such as a working group of the 'big picture' panel, for more consistency, and less complexity)
- panel meetings are open to the public – meeting dates should be publicly available, and agendas and minutes should be publicly posted.

6. Community Action Networks

- CAN's are meant to play an advisory role to the local Councillor, but do not currently report to Council.
- there is a need for greater clarity in the terms of reference for CAN's. There is wide variation in the understanding of their role among CAN's and among staff and councillors.
- Community Action Networks should be provided with central support with basic needs such as communication with the community BUT without the restrictions of formal city communications. Communication to the wider community is a recurring challenge for CAN's.
- CANs should be supported in completing their projects – i.e. connecting with resources, volunteers, and the correct staff person to move things forward in a timely and transparent manner.
- There should be a mechanism to report and resolve any situation where they are not receiving this support.
- CAN's should be connected to neighbourhood associations which often have a strong volunteer base

7. Other community stakeholders

- The City should similarly engage with other community stakeholders with:
 - timely communication of relevant policies, decisions and opportunities for input (e.g. a lake stewardship should be provided notice of a development application on their lake; Sudbury Cyclists Union should be provided notice and ongoing communication regarding major roads projects, etc)
 - on going dialogue on relevant decisions/policy development beginning early in the process
 - collaborate!
- develop and sustain a collaborative relationship with community groups, be supportive of their work in the community, and learn from their areas of expertise.

8. Provide a clear path for citizens working to contribute to the community

- clear direction on who to speak to and get things done (don't bog projects down with barriers and lack of communication); timely follow-up; empower staff to be creative and take the initiative to help citizens get community projects done
- resources set aside for community led projects; available through a fair, transparent and timely process (quick turn around is very important)

- assign knowledgeable staff to play the role of a ‘navigator’ to guide citizens and groups through more involved engagement with the city (e.g. lengthy engagement with the planning process; completing a community project in collaboration with the city) so that they can clearly understand the process and get connected to the right staff/department.

9. Attitude and skills

- Create and sustain a culture of openness and support to public input and engagement among all staff
- Skill training for communication, listening, collaboration, mediation
- Staff person or outside support to bring strong listening and mediation skills to public meetings and meetings with stakeholders where needed.
- Provide a process to facilitate a solution when a stumbling block is encountered