

NO: R190

COUNCIL DATE: October 17, 2011

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **October 13, 2011**

FROM: **City Clerk**

FILE: **o480-01M**

SUBJECT: **Community Consultation Project - Development of Consultation Principles Document**

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Endorse the Consultation Principles Document attached as Appendix "A" to this report as the basis and guide for communications by the City of Surrey with community groups and the community-at-large;
3. Request that letters of appreciation be sent to each of the participants who contributed to the development of the Consultation Principles Document; and
4. Instruct staff to include the Consultation Principles Document on the City of Surrey's website.

BACKGROUND

The Community Consultation Project (CCP) was initiated in early 2010 to refine and formalize the City's engagement processes with its residents. As the City of Surrey continues to address the demands of a growing community and the needs of its citizens, the expectation on the City to involve and engage its community associations and residents is increasingly important.

To ensure meaningful and equitable consultation, the CCP involved a group of representatives from the City's community associations in a process to establish principles and create standard protocols for community consultation (i.e., a formalized community engagement process). The objective of the CCP was to enable and facilitate citizen feedback/input to the City.

Based on the discussions and collective work of the group, a Consultation Principles Document was developed and then refined with broader consultation across all community associations.

DISCUSSION

1. INSPIRATION

The City of Surrey is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada, with approximately 800 to 1,000 people moving to the City each month. The population, currently 474,000, has grown by 25% over the past 9 years. In parallel with the rapid population growth, the City has experienced a significant amount of development – over \$6 billion in construction value in the last 5 years. This period of rapid growth offers a unique opportunity to build a vibrant, urban City with the help of citizens. To assist in ensuring that the City grows and develops in a way that aligns with the values and expectations of its residents, effective public consultation is essential.

In early 2010, it was determined that in addition to the various Advisory Committees of Council, further opportunities for engagement were required to enhance the ability for citizens to provide direct feedback to the City.

2. GOALS

The major goals of the CCP included:

- Ensure the City of Surrey is committed to public engagement that is relevant, proactive, equitable, partnership-based, ethical, responsive, accessible, available, balanced through education and communications, and consistent with following principles:
 - Two-way communication;
 - Respectful partnership;
 - Inclusive public process; and
 - Balanced.
- The City of Surrey supports the open flow of timely information between government, Community Groups and the community-at-large based on the following principles:
 - Early involvement;
 - Transparency;
 - Accountability; and
 - Knowledge and education.

The CCP has resulted in a protocol that will enhance the opportunities for public consultation and established principles that confirm expectations and commitments in relation to such consultation for both the City as well as its stakeholders.

3. PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSULTATION PRINCIPLES DOCUMENT

In May 2010, an area meeting (5 meetings in total) was held with the various community Associations located within each of the following areas:

- Cloverdale (5);
- Fleetwood/Guildford (3);
- Newton (11);
- North Surrey (7); and,
- South Surrey (12).

In total the meetings involved 38 Community Associations and their many representatives, including concerned residents. The objective of the five area meetings was to seek direct

feedback from the community associations in relation to how they would like to see consultation undertaken by the City and what consultation means to each organization. The participating groups were asked to provide feedback on where they saw opportunity for community engagement with the City; more specifically, what is working, and what is not working. A further overriding objective of the consultation program was to improve the customer service process so when individuals contact City Hall they are satisfied their concerns have been handled and that high quality advice is provided. It was also focussed on suggestions on what can be done to make things even better.

Following the five area meetings, two follow-up meetings were held in January and April of 2011 with all the Community/Neighbourhood Associations. These two meetings were used to review the “raw data” originating from the five area meetings with a view to drafting formal Consultation Principles to which both the City and the various Community Associations would be expected to adhere.

4. EXPECTED IMPACT

The Consultation Principles are expected to enhance the ability for the City to undertake consultation on various City initiatives and other matters with community groups and the community at large more effectively. The principles should allow all parties to become more efficient and timely with respect to communications and will assist in ensuring that resources are well-used. There are several opportunities for cost savings through the CCP including:

1. Reduction in staff time required to organize and manage the consultation process;
2. Improved consultation and planning should reduce the number of unanticipated issues, and staff time required to develop solutions after the fact; and
3. Reduction in the time citizens spend advocating and researching issues or concerns by creating better linkages with staff, increasing information flow and increasing certainty around opportunities for input.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

The process that was followed in developing the Consultation Principles by both the City and Community Associations is a demonstration of not only improving but formalizing accountability. Establishing formalized Consultation Principles clearly identifies the joint-responsibility on behalf of the City and its Community Groups to communicate and be accountable.

6. AWARENESS

Through the five area meetings and the two follow-up meetings, significant effort and commitment has been directed to ensuring the community is aware of the City’s various initiatives and to determining how best to communicate with the community. It is important to note that if proper and genuine civic engagement is in place, awareness of City activities and actions will be enhanced throughout the City.

7. INNOVATION

The Consultation Principles that have evolved from the process are unique and truly represent a long-term collaborative effort across the City and its community stakeholders. The City did not direct how consultation should take place but instead played a facilitator role and allowed the community groups to identify their needs and wishes.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

Subject to endorsement of the Consultation Principles, the principles will be applied by the City (i.e. individual departments) as a regular course of business. The staff time and resources to undertake consultation consistent with the principles will be assumed by all departments; however, the responsibility for fulsome consultation will not solely rest with the City as the various community groups will need to assign their own resources/representatives to meet the expectations of the Consultation Principles.

9. BEST PRACTICES

The manner in which the Community Consultation Project was undertaken is an example of a Best Practice mode of engaging the public and a model for communicating with the community as a whole and groups within the community.

Significant time has been taken to seek thoughtful feedback from the community and stakeholder groups within the community. At the outset, there was no predetermined deadline to complete the process – the process was not timeline-driven but rather results-driven.

10. TRANSFERABILITY

The Consultation Principles Document can be viewed as a best practice and could be used as a model by other local governments.

11. LEADERSHIP

With 38 community associations and various concerned residents involved in the process, establishing full consensus regarding a document such as the Consultation Principles Document is challenging. In this regard the City does need to take a leadership role to ensure the process maintains forward momentum. A commitment by the City and stakeholders to the process, an acknowledgement of the value of the outcome, a shared understanding of the objectives and patience will help build success.

12. OTHER INITIATIVES

The CCP is one component of the City of Surrey's commitment to improving communication with residents to reinforce accountability and transparency. A number of major initiatives are acting to compliment the CCP as follows:

1. The City's website was redesigned in 2010 to improve access to information for the public. Council meetings are now broadcast online, the search function for council reports has been dramatically improved and the website now includes significant youth-focused content. The City has also created a 3-person web team in the City Manager's Department

to ensure high-quality web content and to actively engage with citizens using both traditional on-line communication and social media channels.

2. The City's COSMOS Geographic Information System (GIS) online application provides a myriad of property-based information for properties across the entire City. Information such as zoning, development applications, the City's green infrastructure network, school catchment areas, parks, etc. is available through this system.
3. The City is using video communication techniques to communicate with citizens. As an example, a citizen-generated video was posted online regarding the need for a new pedestrian crossing in Cloverdale. The City's Engineering Department created a video response that was posted on YouTube that explained the City's assessment and planned action to address the community concerns.
4. The Engineering Department in association with SFU created an innovative new public engagement that involves representatives from community associations, transportation advocates and the general public. This 10-week Transportation Lecture Program is successfully promoting two way dialogue between City staff and citizens.
5. The Council agenda package production has been moved up earlier in the week so that the agendas and Corporate Reports are available to the public on the City website Friday morning, before Monday's Council meetings.
6. Based on feedback from the Community Consultation Project, the Engineering Department has recently established a Neighbourhood Enhancement Fund for improvement and beautification of Surrey neighbourhoods. This program has been launched with a \$500,000 budget for this year and residents can apply through the City's website or at Capital Project Public Open Houses.

13. UBCM 2011 EXCELLENCE AWARDS

In August 2011, the City submitted the Community Consultation Project to the UBCM Community Excellence Awards adjudication process in the Best Practices, Civic Engagement Category. At the 2011 UBCM Convention in September, Surrey received the Best Practices, Civic Engagement Award for this Project.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The Project and the Consultation Principles Document will assist in achieving the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly action items:

- SC8: Municipal Outreach, Public Education and Awareness; and
- EN14: Public Education and the Sharing of Information.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that Council endorse the Consultation Principles Document, as presented in Appendix A, to be used as the basis for communications between the City, the community groups within the City and the community-at-large. Endorsing these Principles mark the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with the community. It is also recommended that Council instruct that letters of appreciation be forwarded to those who participated in the Project and that the Consultation Principles Document be posted on the City's website.

Jane Sullivan
City Clerk

Attachment:
Appendix "A" – Consultation Principles Document

CONSULTATION PRINCIPLES

City of Surrey

Statement A:

The City of Surrey is committed to public engagement that is open, relevant, proactive, equitable, partnership-based, ethical, responsive, accessible, available, and balanced through education and communications, and guided by the following principles:

1. Two-Way Communication:

Communication between the City and Community Groups should be timely, all inclusive, responsive, transparent, collaborative, and provide opportunities for the engagement of the Community Groups and the Community at large at all phases via many communication modes.

2. Respectful Partnership:

The City and Community Groups will work to build and maintain relationships that reflect constructive, respectful, meaningful, inclusive and compassionate partnerships aimed at achieving outcomes built upon all voices. The City and Community Groups acknowledge that outcomes and priorities may change and that mechanisms for ongoing dialogue shall be in place.

3. Inclusive Public Process:

The City should ensure that public process is accessible to all members of the community via many communication modes, will encourage the equal involvement of Community Groups who wish to be heard, and will acknowledge the inherent value of all participant views.

4. Balance:

The City and Community Groups will work to acknowledge and understand the diverse needs and priorities that exist within the communities, and as partners shall commit to balancing these with the interests of the wider community.

5. Responsive Dispute Resolution:

The City and Community Groups acknowledge the value of dispute resolution and shall commit to jointly resolve disagreements as they arise to ensure that consultation proceeds in a balanced, timely and productive manner.

Statement B:

The City of Surrey supports the open flow of timely information amongst government, the Community Groups and the community-at-large based on the following principles:

1. Early Involvement:

The City should ensure that various input options are in place to enable Community Group involvement at all stages of City policy development, including inception, issue identification, concept development, design and implementation.

2. Transparency:

The City should ensure for adequate notification of initiatives and projects at all stages, and should be committed to provide substantive opportunities for public input and feedback to facilitate meaningful discourse that ensures a partner-based decision-making process.

3. Accountability:

The City should establish proper checks and balances on all initiatives and projects through timely, measureable, reasonable, achievable, and realistic feedback and reporting-out mechanisms. The City shall ensure the Community Groups have access to decision-makers as part of the feedback mechanism.

4. Knowledge and Education:

The City should undertake timely educational initiatives to ensure that all parties have the required information at all stages to enable an informed discussion, and the Community Groups need to be receptive and responsive to these initiatives.

5. Information Updates:

The City is committed to facilitate ongoing dialogue with Community Groups that represents effective, timely and two-way communication. The Community Groups will ensure the City is apprised of any contact changes and/or additions to community associations to ensure all groups are engaged and included in the City's communications.