



CLEAR HILLS COUNTY

Effective Date: **August 14, 2018**

Policy No: **1131**

Title: **Public Participation Policy**

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to underscore the value and role of public participation in Clear Hills County, and create meaningful opportunities for stakeholders to actively participate in the municipal decision making process.

This Public Participation Policy is in addition to, and does not modify or replace, the statutory requirements for public hearing and notification in the *Municipal Government Act*.

II. Definitions

In this policy,

- a) “Act” means the *Municipal Government Act*, RSA 2000, as amended.
- b) “Council” means the duly elected municipal Council of Clear Hills County.
- c) “County” means the corporation of the Clear Hills County.
- d) “Municipal Stakeholders” means residents of Clear Hills County, as well as individuals, organizations or persons that have an interest in, or are affected by, a decision of Clear Hills County.
- e) “Public Participation or Public Engagement” includes a variety of both statutory and non-statutory opportunities where municipal stakeholders receive information and/or provide input to the municipal decision-making process.
- f) “Public Participation Forms” means public engagement activities that occur in different formats and levels.
- g) “Public Participation Plan” means a plan which identifies which public participation tools are to be used to obtain public input in a particular circumstance.
- h) “Public Participation Tools” means the tools that may be used, alone or in combination, to create opportunities for public participation in the municipal decision-making process.

III. Policy Statement

Council recognizes that public participation is a critical component of municipal administration and governance, and that creating and investing in opportunities for authentic public engagement is essential for:

1. Ensuring good, responsible, transparent and accountable governance;
2. Improving the quality and outcome of the municipal decision-making process;
3. Deepening trust, fostering understanding, and strengthening the bond between County residents and their elected representatives; and
4. Promoting well-informed and active citizenry;

IV. General Policy Principles

The Clear Hills County's approach to public participation, including engagement opportunities, plans, tools and activities, will be based on the following guiding principles:

1. Commitment – public engagement is an ongoing process that requires intentional commitment of time, effort and resources to achieve meaningful outcome.
2. Shared responsibility – public participation is a shared responsibility between Council, Administration and the community.
3. Timely, transparent and accountable – vital information, including opportunities for public engagement, are communicated early enough to allow for thoughtful and increased participation by all stakeholders to the extent possible, and that engagement activities are conducted in a spirit of openness, with timely provision of feedback to participants on how public input was considered by decision-makers.
4. Inclusive and responsive – public engagement process and outcomes are inclusive and responsive, taking into account the diversity of stakeholders within the County having different viewpoints, needs, interests and capacity to participate in the decision-making process.
5. Evaluation and continual improvement – public engagement is a dynamic process that needs continuous evaluation and refinements, based on changing composition of stakeholders, technological shifts, public feedback, and new government legislation.

V. Policy Responsibilities

1. Council – Council shall:
 - 1.1. Provide leadership and overall strategic direction in respect of public engagement plans and activities in the Clear Hills County;

- 1.2. Promote public engagement initiatives throughout the County on an ongoing basis including, where necessary, providing Council representation as a means of demonstrating its commitment to public participation;
 - 1.3. Provide opportunities for public engagement, both legislated and non-legislated, to municipal stakeholders;
 - 1.4. Commit effort, time and resources, including embarking on capacity-building and training programs for councillors and appropriate staff, to ensure quality and meaningful stakeholder participation in the municipal decision-making process;
 - 1.5. Where necessary, direct Administration to prepare a participation plan in respect of a specific issue or item, and present the same to Council for review and approval;
 - 1.6. Establish consistent practices, procedures and timelines for statutory and non-statutory requirements for public participation, in accordance with the Act and or the County's Procedural Bylaw;
 - 1.7. Carefully and thoughtfully consider input obtained through public participation as part of the municipal decision-making process;
 - 1.8. Ensure that public expectations for and from public engagement opportunities are balanced with the awareness of resource, staffing, fiscal or other constraints;
 - 1.9. Review this policy from time to time, to ensure compliance with the relevant government legislation, municipal policies and bylaws, and adherence to the spirit and intent of public participation.
2. Administration – Administration shall:
- 2.1. Work with Council to identify appropriate opportunities for public engagement in both statutory and non-statutory contexts;
 - 2.2. Identify and advise Council with respect to:
 - a) the spectrum of public engagement opportunities available, including which forms of engagement may be suitable for a given issue or item, unless specifically dictated by the Act or a bylaw of the County;

-
- b) the range of tools available for public participation, including which tools may be appropriate for different types of engagement, unless specifically dictated by the Act or a bylaw of the County;
 - c) the different types of stakeholders within the County, and which forms of participation and tools may be appropriate for engaging them.
- 2.3 Provide timely and accessible information to municipal stakeholders regarding:
- a) opportunities for public participation and how they can participate in those opportunities;
 - b) the summary result of public participation activities;
- 2.4 Prepare and implement an approved public participation plan or strategy for a particular issue or item at the direction of Council;
- 2.5 Organize public engagement activities in accordance with this policy, or the Act or an approved public participation plan, or as directed by Council;
- 2.6 Report the findings of public participation activities to Council for consideration;
- 2.7 Provide feedback to Council on the effectiveness of a public participation plan, activities and tools used in a particular circumstance, and, where appropriate, make recommendations for improving same;
- 2.8 Develop the necessary procedures to implement this policy across the County Office;
- 2.9 Assess this policy from time to time and, where appropriate, make recommendations to Council for improvement.
3. The Community – As partners in the governance and decision-making process, it is expected that residents and other stakeholders within the County shall:
- 3.1. Actively participate in public participation activities organized by the County;
 - 3.2. Be willing to represent or be represented by other persons on behalf of the entire community or a section of it in contexts where direct engagement with the whole community or a section of it is either impractical or constrained by legislation;
 - 3.3. Provide truthful, accurate and relevant information when participating in a public engagement activity;

- 3.4. Maintain an attitude of respect and constructiveness when engaging in any manner of public participation;
- 3.5. Where not provided, request information necessary to participate effectively in a public engagement activity from the County Office;
- 3.6. Where not provided, request information pertaining to the results of a public engagement activity, the decision(s) resulting from that activity, and how public input was considered in decision-making from the County Office.

VI. Policy Application and Opportunities for Public Participation

1. This policy applies to the County's decisions, policies, programs and services that have an impact on the public.
2. This policy shall be considered when undertaking statutory forms of public participation, and may be considered when undertaking non-statutory forms of public participation.
3. Statutory and non-statutory opportunities where this policy may apply include when:
 - 3.1 Identifying Council priorities;
 - 3.2 Designing or implementing a new policy, program, program or service;
 - 3.3 Evaluating, changing or ending an existing policy, program, project or service;
 - 3.4 When undertaking major capital projects or revitalization initiatives
 - 3.5 Gathering input or formulating recommendations with respect to annual budget;
 - 3.6 Preparing, implementing or amending statutory plans (such as the Municipal Development Plan –MDP, an Intermunicipal Development Plan - IDP, an Area Structure Plan -ASP, or Area Redevelopment Plan – ARP) or the Land Use bylaw;
 - 3.7 Preparing, implementing or amending non-statutory plans (e.g. strategic plan; capital plan, etc);
 - 3.8 Establishing a committee or board that requires public representation (e.g., Subdivision and Development Appeal Board);
 - 3.9 Fulfilling a legislative requirement for public notification and participation; or
 - 3.10 As otherwise directed by Council.

VII. Forms of Public Participation and Engagement Tools

1. Council shall work with Administration to adopt appropriate forms and tools for public engagement suitable under different circumstances, taking into account:
 - 1.1 the nature of the issue, item or decision being dealt with;
 - 1.2 the type of stakeholder group(s) being targeted;

- 1.3 staffing capacity and commitment;
 - 1.4 type of technology available;
 - 1.5 fiscal resources;
 - 1.6 logistical constraints; and
 - 1.7 any applicable legislative requirements, including timelines.
2. Council may, subject to VII (1), undertake or direct Staff to undertake one or a combination of different forms and levels of public participation on a specific subject, which may include but not limited to the following forms:
- 2.1 Informative participation – where stakeholders are provided with information to inform and educate them about Council decisions or issues that, due to their routine or urgent nature or because of some legislative dictate, offers limited scope for public input.
 - 2.2 Consultative participation – where inputs of stakeholders are collected to improve the quality and outcome of Council or administrative decisions.
 - 2.3 Direct/in-person participation – which involves in-person, face-to-face interaction between municipal stakeholders and Council representatives and/or staff.
 - 2.4 Indirect/representative participation – whereby municipal stakeholders convey their views, inputs or concerns to Council or staff through a representative.
 - 2.5 Digital participation – whereby interaction between Council/Staff members and stakeholders occurs via a technological medium, such as telephone or a social media platform.
 - 2.6 Formal participation – where public participation occurs in formal, organized settings, such as Council sessions.
 - 2.7 Informal participation – where public participation occurs in informal contexts, such as community social events.
3. Council may, subject to VII (1), apply or direct Staff to apply one or a combination of public engagement tools to engage municipal stakeholders in the governance and decision-making process, which may include but not limited to the following:
- 3.1 Informative tools, such as:
 - a) newspaper Ads
 - b) mail outs
 - c) newsletters
 - d) council meeting minutes
 - e) notices posted on public bulletin boards provided for that purpose
 - f) media/press briefings and releases

- g) radio announcements
 - h) publication on the County's website
 - a) publication on any of the County's social media sites (e.g. Facebook)
- 3.2 Consultation tools, such as:
- a) paper-based surveys and polls
 - b) written submissions to Council or Administration in paper format
 - c) email requests and submissions
 - d) online surveys and polls
 - e) web-based submissions
 - f) social media interactions
- 3.3 Direct participation tools, such as:
- a) in-person meetings with a Council member or staff
 - b) over-the-counter interaction with staff
 - c) attendance at Council meetings
 - d) delegations to Council
 - e) public meetings
 - f) public hearings
 - g) public open houses
 - h) attendance at community social events (e.g. seniors night)
 - i) focus groups
 - j) interviews
 - k) information kiosks
- 3.4 Indirect participation tools, such as individuals appointed to represent the public on:
- a) committees or
 - b) boards

VIII. Public Participation Plans

1. When directed by Council, Administration shall, under the supervision of the CAO, develop a public participation plan for approval by Council, which shall consider the following:
 - 1.1 the nature of the matter which for which public participation is being sought;
 - 1.2 the impact of the matter on municipal stakeholders;
 - 1.3 the demographics of potential municipal stakeholders;
 - 1.4 which public participation tools to utilize;
 - 1.5 the form and level of public engagement to undertake;
 - 1.6 the type of input required from municipal stakeholders;

- 1.7 the type of information required by municipal stakeholders to effectively participate or provide input.
 - 1.8 the timeframe required for municipal stakeholders to provide input;
 - 1.9 the timing of the decision for which public participation is being sought; and
 - 1.10 available resources and, if any associated costs.
2. Public participation plans will, at minimum, include the following:
 - 2.1 a communication plan to inform the public about the matters for which public participation is being sought and opportunities to provide input;
 - 2.2 identification of which public participation tools will be utilized;
 - 2.3 timelines for participation;
 - 2.4 information on how input will be used; and
 - 2.5 the location of information required, if any, to inform the specific public participation process.
 3. Input obtained from public engagement through the use of a public participation plan will be reviewed by the CAO and a report shall be provided to Council for review, which shall include at a minimum:
 - 3.1 an overview of the public participation plan and how it was developed;
 - 3.2 an assessment of the effectiveness of the plan, based on the levels of engagement, tools used, and the quality of input;
 - 3.3 a summary of the input obtained and
 - 3.4 may include recommendations for future public participation plans.

IX. Policy Expectations

4. Legislative and Policy Implications

- 1.1 All public participation plans and activities shall be conducted in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*; the *Municipal Government Act* for statutory participation; all existing municipal policies; and any other applicable legislation. Specifically, all forms of public participation that takes place on social media will be conducted in accordance with the County's Social Media Policy 1130.
- 1.2 This policy shall be:
 - a) available for public inspection at the County Office and posted to the Clear Hills County website;
 - b) reviewed and, where appropriate, updated at least once every four years.

5. Public Participation Standards

2.1 The Clear Hills County shall:

- a) Consistently provide information, including publishing all municipal policies, minutes of Council meetings and any other information that may be of public interest, to inform municipal stakeholders;

Clearly communicate the purpose, goals, process, timeliness and outcomes of any public participation activity;

- b) Ensure that all public participation activities are conducted in a professional and respectful manner;
- c) Ensure that municipal stakeholders who are found to be inappropriate, disrespectful or offensive, as determined by Administration, are sanctioned, including possible exclusion from public participation opportunities.

X. END OF POLICY

ADOPTED: Resolution# C376-18 (08/14/18) Date: August 14, 2018