



# Getting Involved through Public Participation

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The City of Burlington's Charter Action Plan

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Committed to making the Burlington Community  
Engagement Charter come to life



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# Introduction

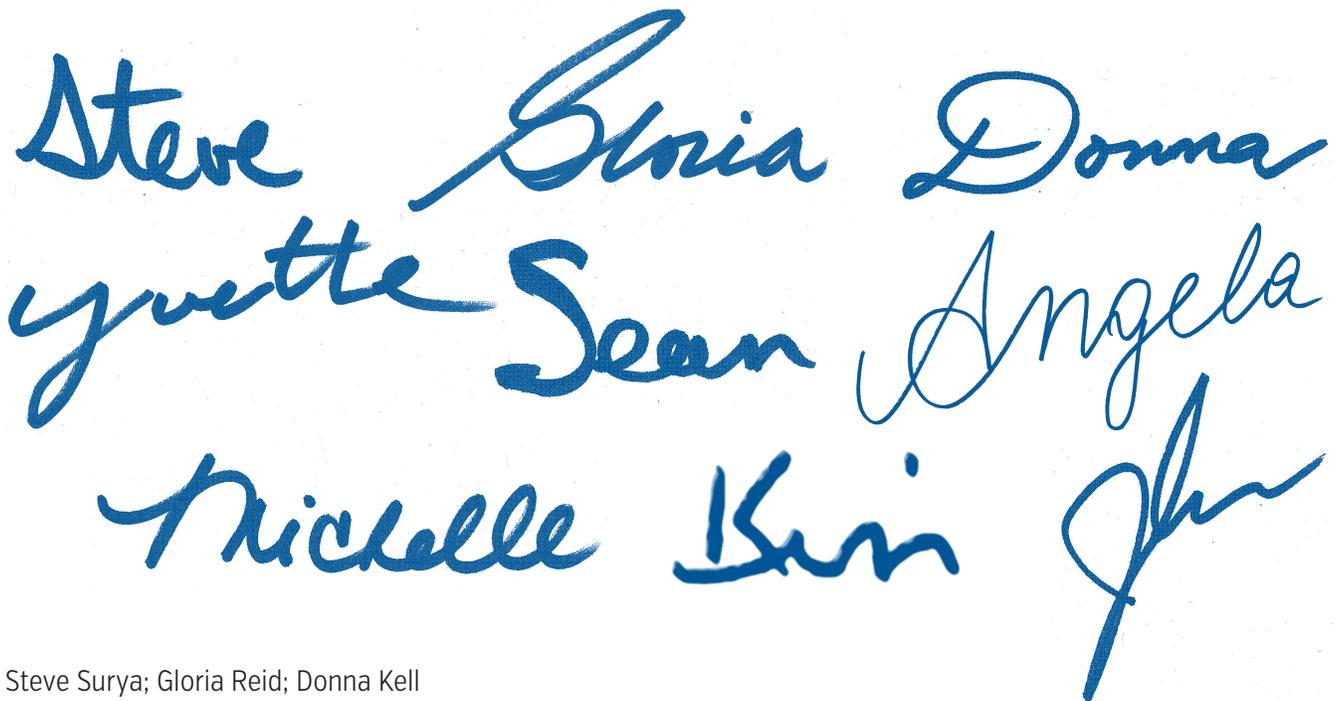
In April 2013, Burlington City Council approved the first Burlington Community Engagement Charter. The Charter was created by citizens with support from staff. It is an agreement between and among Burlington City Council and the community concerning citizen engagement with City government and establishes the commitments, responsibilities and fundamental concepts of this relationship.

To ensure the continued success of the Charter, the City invited members of the Charter team to help develop an Engagement Charter Action Plan. This team of community members and staff is known as ChAT, the Charter Action Team.

The Engagement Charter Action Plan is the product of consultation with City staff. It aims to bring the Charter to life and to embed engagement into everyday practice at the City of Burlington.

Each section includes a heading, a statement from the Engagement Charter, and an Action List to help us achieve the future we are striving for.

Please make good use of your Charter Action Plan, and feel free to make notes in your copy. Enjoy the engagement journey. – The ChAT team.



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# IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation has created a spectrum of participation that helps match the engagement objective with the related participation approach. Matching the approach to the objective helps ensure you meet the expectations of the community you are engaging.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the Public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advise and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>Example Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen advisory committees</li> <li>• Consensus-building</li> <li>• Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

# Early and Widespread Notification

Provide early and widespread notification about proposed developments, policies, initiatives, studies and municipal projects.

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**1. Ensure notification is as widespread as possible:**

- a. Use communication tools that include City of Burlington website, local print media, online digital communication, direct delivery and social media.
- b. Reach out to groups/individuals that may be affected by proposed developments, policies, initiatives, studies and municipal projects.
- c. Create and develop partnerships that will help reach out to citizens.
- d. Ensure that communication plans include early and widespread notifications.
- e. Where appropriate, provide progress and/or completion notices.

**2. Ensure notification is given early enough so that the citizens may be fully engaged:**

- a. Set up and maintain a way for citizens and groups to subscribe or sign up for early notification through email, social media or other means.
- b. Advise the public of proposed developments, policies, meetings and major projects as soon as possible. For major projects and public meetings, at least two weeks notice to the public is expected. Exceptions will be made in emergency situations where less than two weeks notice will apply.

**3. Support staff in providing early and widespread notification so that it becomes part of the corporate culture:**

- a. Provide staff training in effective public engagement practices through workshops and e-learning opportunities.

**4. Collaborate with citizens and partners in empowering citizens through different means of communicating:**

- a. Use existing resources in the community to help to provide information as soon as possible.
- b. Develop and use networks for information sharing of contacts.

**5. Clearly communicate meeting dates and deadlines:**

- a. Schedule public meetings to take place early and with opportunities for public input into decision-making.
- b. Create a central point on the City's website where all dates are available.
- c. Ensure dates are reflected on City project pages on the website.
- d. Include dates in all relevant communication materials.

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“Democracy is a daring concept - a hope that we'll be best governed if all of us participate in the act of government. It is meant to be a conversation, a place where the intelligence and local knowledge of the electorate sums together to arrive at actions that reflect the participation of the largest possible number of people.” – Brian Eno

# Communication and Outreach

Practice meaningful engagement that is timely, relevant, constructive and substantive as well as citizen-friendly and inviting.

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**1. Use many forms of communication:**

- a. Use traditional communication approaches (such as newspaper ads, media releases, brochures, public meetings, workshops and direct mail).
- b. Use electronic communication and social media (such as website, email updates, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube).
- c. Increase use of emerging engagement tools.

**2. Make communication and engagement citizen-friendly and appealing:**

- a. Use clear language in all City communication.
- b. Define, in advance, the level of engagement available to participants.
- c. Produce inviting and appealing design materials.
- d. Create a consistent look for major initiatives so they are recognizable.
- e. Use visual aids whenever possible to convey messages.
- f. Consider special needs, including language and type size.
- g. Provide printed options, where appropriate.

**3. Provide information on the City’s website for public use (open data):**

- a. Enhance searchability of City’s website.
- b. Provide interactive opportunities, wherever possible.

**4. Create a dedicated location on the City’s website that will provide one stop shopping for citizen engagement:**

- a. Create a web location that is easy for the public and staff to navigate that covers all the aspects of public engagement (notifications, project information, meetings, volunteers, Get Engaged, provide ideas or concerns, information on ChAT and Q and A.)
- b. Establish a “coming soon” section within City’s webpage that will give advance notice of upcoming engagement opportunities.

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“Harnessing new communications technology offers one promising way to make public participation easier and more effective.” – Peter Roskam

# Inclusion and Accessibility

Build a strong and inclusive community by reaching all demographic groups.

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- 1. Provide training for City staff to complement the existing training related to accessible customer service.**
- 2. Encourage citizens to inform other citizens and groups they belong to about Burlington’s Engagement Charter, opportunities to engage and the value of public involvement in building a community where people, nature and business thrive.**
- 3. Host a meeting of ChAT, the Burlington Accessibility Advisory Committee and Burlington Inclusivity Advisory Committee at least once per year:**
  - a. Inform citizens of alternatives available to enable their involvement/participation (e.g. captioning, assistive listening devices).
- 4. Make participation easier:**
  - a. In every engagement, consider customers, stakeholders and audiences so that they feel welcome to participate.
  - b. In every engagement, consider unique needs of the audience based on the topic and add content or adapt the delivery method of the notification to invite participation.
  - c. Plan in advance to consider the needs of individuals and be ready to respond to individuals with:
    - Disabilities including those with a service animal or support person
    - Assistive devices
    - Transportation or child care needs
    - Translation services needs.

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“In a democracy, the well-being, individuality and happiness of every citizen is important for the overall prosperity, peace and happiness of the nation.” – A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

# Capacity Building

Increase the number of citizens who take an active interest in City decision-making and are able to participate in engagement activities when they choose.

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**1. Gather data to determine the current extent of engagement – “where we are now” (from April 2013 to present) and communicate:**

- a. Create a database of City of Burlington events/work to date.
- b. Ensure that active community groups and committees are included in the Information Burlington database.
- c. Develop and implement an information campaign to raise community and staff awareness of the quantity and quality of the engagement activities to encourage future participation.

**2. Investigate volunteer management technology to:**

- a. Support recruitment and record-keeping of active volunteers and persons interested in volunteer opportunities.
- b. Improve feedback between the City and its volunteers.
- c. Make volunteer resources more readily available and easily matched through Volunteer Halton.
- d. Provide opportunities for volunteers to view and maintain their individual volunteer profile.

**3. Ensure the City provides:**

- a. Opportunities for citizen participation in citizen engagement training.
- b. Information about City-sponsored activities and a self-serve method to volunteer for a task, event, project or service.
- c. An invitation to neighbourhood groups and associations to provide information about their organizations and e-links, if available.

**4. Continue building capacity:**

- a. Maintain an ongoing database of techniques and practices that staff can draw upon for future engagement opportunities.
- b. Identify and implement new engagement techniques/practices.
- c. Ensure that emerging technologies are implemented to enhance engagement practices.
- d. Provide orientation session(s) to new council members to assist them in stimulating community engagement in their ward.

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“We always hear about the rights of democracy, but the major responsibility of it is participation.”  
– Wynton Marsalis

# Managing Different Viewpoints

Create a safe and welcoming environment for community engagement.

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**1. Provide clear communication about engagement expectations:**

- a. Define and communicate objectives for engagement, and the steps designed to reach those objectives, using the IAP2 spectrum.

**2. Strengthen engagement processes:**

- a. Develop a process to manage and reach resolution during engagement.
- b. Continue IAP2 and facilitation training for City staff who will be engagement leaders or be involved in planning citizen engagement.
- c. Continue conflict resolution training for City staff who will be engagement leaders in order to understand and address fear, disagreement and/or anger during citizen engagement.

**3. Strengthen relationships with stakeholders through customer-first service and welcoming, professional and responsive customer service:**

- a. Continue to provide customer service training and tools to staff, and enhance those tools to help build relationships.
- b. Follow customer service standards, including response times to requests.

**4. Allow for diverging opinions, creating a safe place to share and increase trust:**

- a. Develop and share engagement etiquette with the public in a variety of ways at the beginning of each engagement opportunity.
- b. Ensure that each viewpoint is respected during the engagement process.
- c. Use third-party facilitators when needed to create a safe, trusting environment.

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“A healthy democracy requires a decent society; it requires that we are honorable, generous, tolerant and respectful.”

– Charles W. Pickering

# Accountability

Measure how citizens are being meaningfully engaged.

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- 1. Develop a framework/criteria to determine how and which engagement activities will be evaluated.**
- 2. Prepare a summary at the conclusion of each project to capture the following information:**
  - a. The objectives of the engagement.
  - b. The degree to which the objectives of the engagement process were met through each engagement technique.
- 3. The City and ChAT will review the summary reports once a year to:**
  - a. Note best practices to be shared.
  - b. Determine solutions to challenges faced.
  - c. Assess whether the resources expended were in line with the impact gained from the engagement.
  - d. Capture the relevant data into the City's database of engagement activities.
- 4. The City and ChAT will review the Charter annually in the first two years and recommend any required changes to the Charter Action Plan:**
  - a. Assess the overall effectiveness of the Charter.
  - b. Take into account improvements in the practice of engagement, and the relevance of new factors, such as changes in technology and demographics.
  - c. Provide the findings and recommendations for change arising from this review to standing committee/council.
- 5. Provide a web-based update to inform the public about the City's engagement performance.**

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“You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve the world’s problems at once, but don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take a life of its own.” – Michelle Obama

# Discussion and Delegation

In general, citizen issues and concerns can be resolved through an informal discussion. However, any citizen can delegate to Council or standing committees or citizen advisory committees without prior discussion. The City of Burlington Council's delegation process, which allows citizens to address Council and Standing Committees on issues, will be respectful and welcoming.

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## 1. Discussion

- a. Citizens have the option and are encouraged to contact appropriate staff or a member of council to meet informally to attempt to resolve their concerns.

## 2. Delegation Process

Ensure that delegates are welcomed in the registration process and at the meetings where they speak:

- a. Ensure citizens know they have a right to appear as a delegation before standing committee, City Council and at citizen advisory committee meetings.
- b. Whenever possible, ensure citizens have the choice of being seated or standing during their delegations and that a microphone is available.
- c. Ensure citizen input is considered in the redesign of Council Chambers.

## 3. Share information with citizens about effective delegations:

- a. Develop a concise “delegation guide” or checklist to help citizens understand how to be most effective in conveying their messages.

- b. Provide an online video with citizens sharing their experience of preparing for and making an effective delegation.
- c. Once each council term, ensure citizen input into the booklet “Engaging with City Council and its Committees”.

## 4. After a delegation is registered:

- a. Provide a notification that thanks the delegation for registering, provides information on how to delegate and states that they will receive a confirmation and will be advised on where to find council's decision about the item and where to view webcasts of the committee and council discussion.

## 5. Consider formats that encourage the free flow of ideas and consideration of alternative points of view:

- a. Provide seating that mixes citizens, council members and staff, so that all are equally valued participants.
- b. Facilitate or chair in a way that respects different perspectives and is less structured than a formal committee or council meeting.

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“Democracy is not just voting for your leaders; it’s really premised upon ordinary citizens understanding the issues.”  
– Howard Rheingold

# Community Feedback

Inform citizens and stakeholders how their input was considered and used or why it was not used in City projects, initiatives and policy development.

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**1. Use a formal process to gather public input:**

- a. Using the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation, take steps to ensure that the appropriate level of participation is selected.
- b. Based on the level of participation selected, align the engagement technique and its promise to the public.
- c. At the conclusion of each engagement opportunity, gather and document public input.

**2. Consider and communicate public input:**

- a. Based on the project, initiative or policy development, analyze input.
- b. Prepare consolidated document that outlines how public input was/was not used and/or adopted.
- c. Determine options that will/will not be recommended.

**3. Prepare summarized feedback in order to inform public how their input was or was not used:**

- a. Provide summarized feedback to all participants and/or citizens at large. Consideration will be given to website, mailing lists, social media and other techniques.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

# My Favourite Approaches

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.





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