

Community Engagement Charter and Framework

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CITY OF Burlington

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Land Acknowledgment

Burlington, as we know it today, is rich in history and modern traditions of many First Nations and the Métis. From the Anishinaabeg to the Haudenosaunee, and the Métis, our lands spanning from Lake Ontario to the Niagara Escarpment are steeped in Indigenous history.

The territory is mutually covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibway and other allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Purpose of the Charter

Vision

Burlington strives to support meaningful engagement and be an increasingly connected community.

Mission

To provide the Burlington community with a clear and inclusive engagement framework that guides and supports meaningful public engagement in the City's decision-making process.

Roles to initiate change

Successful public engagement is a group effort to foster open discussions that build mutual respect of all participants including residents, City staff, and Members of Council. Decisions made are influenced by and impact the diverse community that lives here, today and for generations to come.

Key Commitments of the Community Engagement Charter

Public engagement is engaging residents on decisions that affect their community. Good engagement is when the community, City staff and Members of Council work together to listen and participate in meaningful and respectful ways towards a goal of informed decision-making. It is two-way dialogue where all voices are listened to and heard. It is accessible, inclusive, and diverse.

Accountability

The community, City staff and Members of Council are all accountable for the Community Engagement Charter and Framework. This means working together in support of trust, transparency, and community engagement.

City Feedback

The City will inform the community about what was said, and how feedback was or was not used to shape, guide or inform projects, initiatives, and policy development. Feedback will be provided in a summarized format.

Communication and Clear Language

The City of Burlington will use many ways to communicate. Plain and clear language along with simple designs will be used in documents and public communications. This will allow for more accessible and user-friendly communications.

Continuous Improvement

The City of Burlington works to continually improve public engagement activities. This will include new and evolving technology and best practices. They will be evaluated, and improvements made when needed. An important part of continuous improvement is evaluation.

Early and Widespread Notification

The City of Burlington will provide at least two weeks' notice for city-wide notifications. This includes proposed developments, policies, initiatives, municipal projects, and engagement sessions. Exceptions may happen in emergency situations where two weeks' notice will not be possible. Resident notification is determined by the scale of the project.

Fostering Participation

The City is committed to fostering a culture of public engagement throughout the community. As Burlington continues to grow and diversify, there is an opportunity to connect with a broader range of residents. Expanding our reach will bring new perspectives and strengthen collaboration on engagement initiatives.

Inclusion and Accessibility

Everyone has the right to take part in public engagement. The goals of the Charter and Framework are to engage and enable participation for the Burlington community. The City will take reasonable actions to ensure residents from a variety of locations, languages, cultures, abilities and other demographics are accommodated.

Open Access to Information

The City of Burlington will provide a variety of ways for the community, City staff and Members of Council to access and share information, discuss ideas and provide feedback. The City will provide information to the public in recognized and usable formats. This includes virtual public meetings, in-person opportunities/meetings, print materials, media releases, engagement website, newsletters, and social media. These materials will help support healthy and respectful discussions.

Resourcing

The City of Burlington will support the Community Engagement Charter and Framework by ensuring that its engagement processes are adequately resourced with staff, time and financial resources.

Speaking at Council or Committee

The process by which the community speaks at a Council or Committee meeting will be respectful and welcoming. It gives the public the opportunity to speak to Members of Council on agenda items about projects, policies, or concerns. This can be done in-person, virtual or in writing. The City will focus on reducing barriers to make this process easier.

Transparency

The City's decision-making process will be clear to the public and will be made available through Committee of Whole and Council meeting minutes as well as follow up documentation. The City will actively encourage and facilitate meaningful public engagement. Residents will be informed of decisions in a timely manner at the end of all engagements.

Inform

To provide information to assist the public in understanding the topic, options, opportunities, solutions and/or decisions











Involve/Collaborate

To work directly with the public throughout the process including developing options and identifying the preferred direction.





Consult

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or recommendations









Empower

To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.



Roles and Responsibilities

Role of the Community

- Engage in City decisions by offering ideas, alternative solutions, and suggestions.
- Listen with an open mind to everyone's views and perspectives.
- Show respectful consideration and value for another person's point of view.
- Encourage others to participate in public engagement.
- Interact with City staff, Members of Council and other participants with mutual respect.
- Recognize the City aims to make decisions for and listens to many voices and considers all input. This could mean at some point; the decision aligns with your input and other times it does not.
- Understand that each person engaged represents one voice and does not represent the community. Change isn't made simply because one person is vocal. Input is balanced between engagement and expert opinion.
- Provide informed feedback, not simply saying "yes" or "no" to a project. This may mean reading reports or other documents.

Role of Members of Council

- Endorse the Community Engagement Charter and Framework and ensure it is embedded in the city's culture.
- Interact with City staff, the community and each other with mutual respect.
- Encourage residents to participate in public engagement.
- Listen with an open mind to everyone's views and perspectives.
- Work collaboratively with the community and City staff to find solutions.
- Attend and be involved in public engagement activities.
- Apply Community Engagement Charter and Framework when engaging with the community.
- Balance public engagement with other government, social, cultural, financial, and environmental considerations when making recommendations or decisions.
- Communicate how public engagement shaped decision-making.

Role of City Staff

- Actively implement the Community Engagement Framework and the principles of the Community Engagement Charter.
- Provide engagement using a variety of tools such as the online engagement platform, in-person and virtual opportunities, mail and print options and going out into the community to ensuring the community can share their voice.
- Work with residents and Council to provide transparent and collaborative efforts in engagement.
- Interact with the community and Council with mutual respect.
- Listen with an open mind to everyone's views and perspectives.
- Communicate how public engagement shaped decision-making.
- Balance public engagement with other government, social, cultural, financial, and environmental considerations when making recommendations or decisions.
- Ensure that consultants hired to assist with public engagement comply with the Community Engagement Charter and Framework.
- Ensure public engagement is inclusive and removes barriers to allow for equitable participation.

Rules of Engagement

Respectful Behaviour
All participants, including residents, staff, and Members of Council, must treat each other with respect.

Open-Mindedness
Maintain an open mind during discussions and consider different perspectives.

Discussion Over Debate
Engagement is for constructive discussion, not for debating or arguing.

Challenge Ideas, Not People
Challenge the ideas presented, not the individuals presenting them.

Topic Relevance
Ensure comments are relevant to the topic being discussed.

Equal Opportunity to Speak
Allow everyone the opportunity to speak without interruption, ensuring equitable participation.

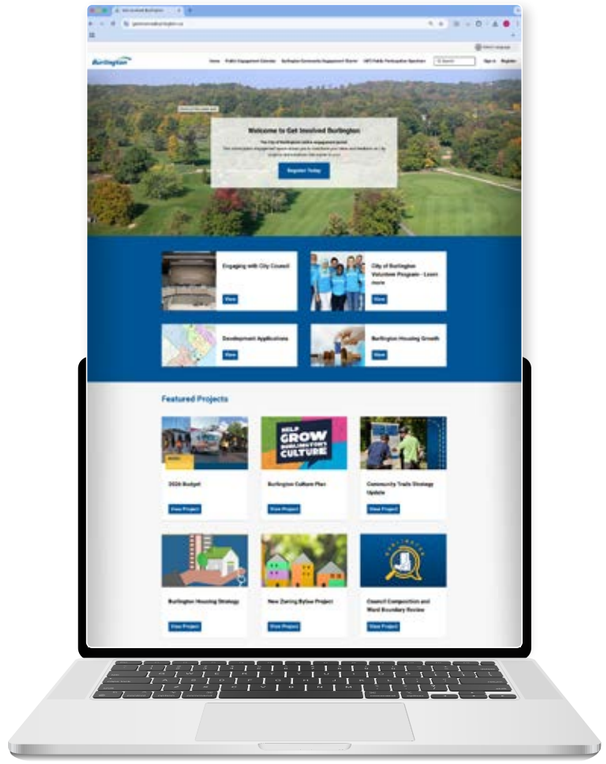
Community Benefit
Recognize that decisions should benefit the community as a whole, not just individual preference.

How to Engage with the City

The main mechanism for engagement with the City of Burlington is through **getinvolvedburlington.ca**. Through our online engagement platform, members of the Burlington community can:

1. Sign up to receive updates about engagement opportunities.
2. Provide feedback to the City through surveys and other engagement tools.
3. Participate in projects related to the city and track their progress through clear timelines.

Whether you have 10-minutes or 10 hours, getinvolvedburlington.ca offers opportunities to stay engaged with the City. Many engagements have both an in-person and/or virtual component to allow for flexibility in how you can stay engaged.



How Your Feedback Impacts Your Community

Example 1:
Annual City Budget Engagement

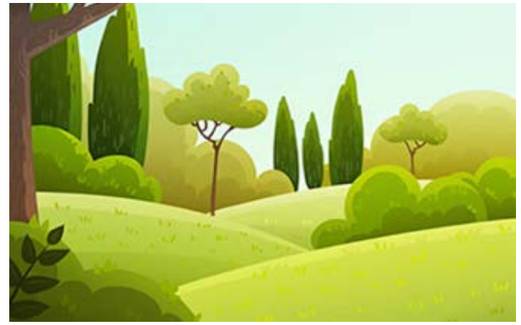
Through the various engagement opportunities such as in-person ward meetings, online surveys, community panel, and delegations, each year residents are able to inform Council on their thoughts and recommendations for the budget.



Budget

Example 2:
Park Renewals

Whether it's large parks that affect the whole community or smaller park renewals that impact the quality of life for neighbourhoods, and no matter what level of the work, the community affected by park developments are able to provide feedback into the project through a variety of engagements both online or in-person.



Your Parks: Parks Improvement









Planning for Public Engagement

Meaningful engagement takes time, people, and other resources to design and implement. The City uses a step-by-step approach (see page 14) to create meaningful, inclusive, and effective public engagement. Sometimes the steps go in order, while other times we might need to move back and forth between steps to ensure proper engagement.

There will be certain topics we don't ask the community about, like matters of immediate public safety, when change is legislated by other levels of government, or when change simply isn't possible. The City might choose not to engage if there's little or no public interest or if we cannot engage meaningfully. Other times, the City might only talk to a small group of community members who are most affected. When we are not able to engage with you, decision-making will be guided by our commitments to the community and the priorities established in the City's strategic plan.

The possibility of engagement fatigue can occur so the City will be mindful of what is happening in the community and try to build and coordinate engagements across City projects and initiatives. So they are streamlined where possible.



Learn more about City projects and initiatives.



Public engagement may include facilitated group work.



Residents of all ages can participate in public engagement.

Four Steps for Planning Public Engagement

Step 1

Define the Project - Establish the scope of the decision and determine if community engagement is required (goals, timelines, participants, resources, budget)

- Determine goals and objectives of engagement.
- Communicate the goals of the project.
- Assess what opportunities exist for engagement given timelines, resources, and interest.
- Assess what community data and insights already exist and may be relevant to the project.
- Identify and define members of the community who may be impacted by the outcome or decision.
- Determine how success will be measured.

Step 2

Determine the Level of Engagement and Techniques - Develop a community engagement plan that aligns with the objectives from step 1

- Determine the most appropriate level of engagement using Burlington's version of the IAP2 Public Engagement Spectrum to suit the project's needs.
- Determine most effective methods or techniques for engaging with the community.
- Identify timelines and project goals.

Step 3

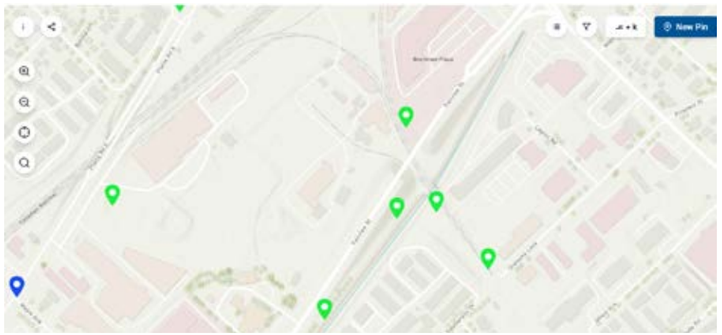
Implement Public Engagement - Implement the community engagement defined in step 2

- Promote public engagement throughout the project using various communication channels.
- Execution of engagement plan and associated tactics.
- Build collaborative relationships with the community.
- Collect and analyze all public engagement data.

Step 4

Share Results and Recommendations

- Share engagement data and insights.
- Share when and why public feedback was or was not considered or endorsed in the decision-making.
- Share how public engagement, as well as other key considerations informed a decision(s) or recommendation(s).
- Reflect on the public engagement process to determine its level of effectiveness and considerations for future engagements.



Engagement online tools, example: interactive maps

Burlington's Spectrum of Participation

	Inform	Consult
Purpose	**Communicate** • Share information to build awareness	**Listen – Learn – Dialogue** • Test ideas and concepts and develop solutions
Burlington's Action	To provide information to assist the public in understanding the topic, options, opportunities, solutions and/or decisions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or recommendations.
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed. We will provide timely and reliable information that is easy to find and understand.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge input, and provide feedback about how public input influenced the outcome.
Communication Style	**Burlington → Public**	**Burlington → Public**
Burlington's Responsibility	• Provide information • Make final decisions	• Provide information • Provide opportunity for the expression of views, values, and priorities • Work to incorporate solutions • Make final decision • Report back on final decision
Public's Responsibility	**Learn**	**Participate**
Most appropriate when	• Information needs to be shared to prepare for involvement in a coming project, to generate interest and involvement • Facts about a policy, program or process need to be described • A decision has been made and needs to be shared; input is not going to change the decision • The public needs to know the results of a process • An emergency requires immediate action – not discussion	• A policy is still being shaped and input and discussion is required • Interested parties ideas and concerns are wanted and will be considered and reflected in the end product • Feedback is required and will be considered in the final decision • Agendas/project parameters are still being set and advice is desired on issues that impact the public • When looking for expert advice from a number of interested groups • Looking to build consensus or negotiate solutions • Looking to build public ownership for a project, decision or eventual implementation

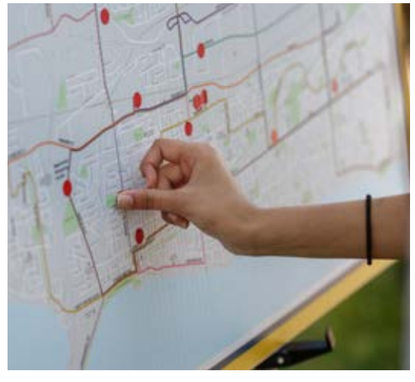
Burlington's Spectrum of Participation

	Involve/Collaborate	Empower
Purpose	**Active Participation** • Work with the public to develop recommendations	**Direct Action** • Public recommends actions
Burlington's Action	To work directly with the public throughout the process including developing options and identifying the preferred direction.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public	We will work with you to ensure your input is understood, reflected in the options developed and will look to you for advice. We will include your input and advice into the outcome to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Communication Style	**Burlington ⇄ Public**	**Public → Burlington**
Burlington's Responsibility	• Provide information • Provide opportunity to influence decision making by sharing views and values and setting priorities • Consider recommendations • Make final decision • Report back on final decision	• Provide information • Implement recommendations • Report back on final decision
Public's Responsibility	**Partner**	**Direct**
Most appropriate when	• A program is being designed and implemented that requires multiple sector buy-in and participation • Interested parties expertise and actions form an integral part of the solution • The solution requires changes at the system level across various institutions and organizations – policies, procedures, bylaws, and programs, for example • There is a need for early assurances that the final "product" has local relevance • Long term commitment and sustainability are key considerations	• Council has directed to empower the public to make recommendations/ decisions on an issue • Interested parties expertise is higher than staff expertise









Appendix

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed thoughts, suggestions, and updates to this Charter and development of the Framework.

This initiative represents a strong partnership between the community, City staff, and Council. By continuing to build trust, we can shape a Burlington that meets the needs of today and tomorrow—a place to live, work, play, and engage. We invite all residents to stay involved, share their perspectives, and help drive positive change.

How we developed our New Engagement Charter

The City would like to acknowledge those that helped update the Burlington Community Engagement Charter.

- Burlington residents
- Community groups including those representing newcomers, Indigenous people, youth, seniors, persons with disabilities
- Past members of the Charter Action Team
- Council appointed Advisory Committees
- City Staff
- Mayor and Members of Council
- Local businesses
- Associations
- Faith-based groups

The City of Burlington took a comprehensive and inclusive approach to engage the community in the refresh of the Community Engagement Charter. By engaging the public through various methods and platforms, the City was able to gather valuable input that will inform the development of an updated charter that truly reflects the community's aspirations and values.

Although the engagement was robust, we are committed to reducing barriers to increase accessibility and inclusivity of our engagement practices.

How we did it

Fall 2023
Phase 1 of engagement

September 2023
Participated at Food for Feedback and Appleby Line Street Festival

October 2023
Engaged with the community and advisory groups

Engaged with the public in five engagement sessions

Spring 2024
Phase 2 of engagement

April 2024
Engaged with the community and advisory groups

Engaged with the public in four engagement sessions

Spring 2026
Launch of updated Community Engagement Charter and Framework

This Engagement Charter has been developed through extensive consultation with members of the public, City staff, and Council. Their perspectives, experiences, and feedback have directly shaped the content, vision, mission, and commitments outlined in this document. While every effort has been made to ensure the charter reflects a wide range of voices and supports equitable participation, it is intended as a living document that may evolve over time. Ongoing input is welcomed to ensure the charter continues to meet community needs and provides clear guidance for meaningful, inclusive engagement.

Definitions

Accountability	The practice of being held to a standard of responsibility and fosters trust, transparency, and effective public engagement.
Burlington	This refers to everyone in Burlington, including residents, City Staff, Members of Council, organizations, businesses and groups.
City	The Corporation of the City of Burlington.
Communicate	To share or exchange information or ideas, two-way communication.
Community	The community includes residents, organizations, businesses and groups in Burlington.
Community Engagement Charter	An agreement between and among Burlington City Council, City staff and the community concerning resident engagement with City government and sets the commitments, responsibilities, and fundamental concepts of this relationship.
Decision Making	The process followed by Burlington's City Council to reach decisions on items that are presented in staff reports and recommendations.
Decision Statement	Asks these three key questions: 1. What is the intent of the project? 2. Who makes the final decision? 3. What is the timing for the decision?
Equitable	Something that is fair, just, or impartial. It outlines principles or systems that aim to ensure fairness, equality, and justice for everyone involved. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and gives the resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.
IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum	The International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) spectrum of participation is a recognized global standard for how much influence the public has on a project. The levels of engagement include Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.
Inclusive/ Inclusion	Making efforts to ensure all people who want to be involved, can be involved regardless of age, gender, creed, ability, family status, income, race, sexual orientation, or geography within Burlington.
Meaningful and Authentic Engagement	Meaningful and authentic engagement means people are asked for input before decisions are made and their input is used to support or change a project. Public engagement is not simply a "check-box" task; it is an important project-defining process used to enhance a project or service.
Project or Initiative	Refers to a topic, policy, initiative, or service that the City is engaging the community about.
Public Engagement	The process by which the community are informed on or given the opportunity to be involved in decision making that impacts the Burlington community. The community includes residents, organizations, businesses and groups in Burlington.
Public Engagement Techniques	A range of methods used to engage with the community in order to share or gather ideas and feedback that will assist the City with decision-making.

Sample Public Engagement and Communication Techniques

Inform stage of engagement

Burlington.ca	City of Burlington website
Fact Sheet	is a one or two page summary that highlights the most important facts, data, and messages about a subject, product, program, event, or issue in a clear and concise way
Open House	an informal, drop-in style event where people can learn more, ask questions or speak to staff about a project, initiative or program
Mailers	promotional materials sent through postal mail such as flyer, post cards, brochures, door hangers etc that are produced to inform, promote or engage an audience
E-newsletters	electronic newsletters that are sent via email subscriptions
Media Release	is a short, formal written statement shared with news outlets to announce something of value to the public and provide accurate information for journalists
Signage	variety of options such as posters, roll-up banners etc that are posted in City facilities for promotion of events, programs or projects
City Talk	bi-annual multi-page print brochure that is mailed to every resident in Burlington and available online. Provides updates and information about City programs, events and activities
Tv Advertising	this is an on-site information board or display that is in public view such as City Hall foyer or at a variety of recreation centres to communicate information or updates to the public on an issue or project.
Social Media	use of the City's social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram
Print/Digital Media	paid advertisements or public notices in newspapers or online media platforms
Word of Mouth	the organic, person-to-person spread of information, opinions, or recommendations, usually based on personal experience or trust
Get Involved Burlington platform	City's engagement platform that hosts all the details about projects, initiatives and policies that are seeking community engagement.

Sample Public Engagement and Communication Techniques

Consult stage of engagement

Surveys	an online survey through the City's engagement platform that collects data or feedback about a certain topic
Community Panel	a representative group of residents who give feedback or ideas related to a certain topic. Each panel is composed of different residents
Public Meeting	an announced meeting designed for participation in the decision-making process and to assist the public in gaining an informed view of a proposed project or issue as well as providing comments/feedback
Social Media Channels	use of the City's social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram
Interviews	when a staff member or individual involved in the consultation will invite individuals to participate in face-to-face meeting discussions to address any issues or concerns regarding a project or issue
Telephone Town Hall	a tool using phone calls where residents gain awareness of important issues, updates, future plans, provide feedback and connect directly with City leaders, and ask questions in real time.
Keypad polling	an engagement tool that allows those participating in a meeting to vote using clickers on the topics being presented. Gathers instant feedback
Workshops	a group of individuals that come together to learn, provide feedback or share their experience related to a topic. The information gathered can then be used to help inform a direction or recommendation
Going to where people are	setting up a booth where the public is gathered to provide information or gather feedback related to a specific topic.
Get Involved Burlington platform	City's engagement platform that hosts all the details about projects, initiatives and policies that are seeking community engagement.

Sample Public Engagement and Communication Techniques

Involve/Collaborate stage of engagement

Community Panel	a representative group of residents who give feedback or ideas related to a certain topic. Each panel is composed of different residents
Advisory committees	are groups of people brought together to provide expert advice, guidance, and feedback to the City, a project, or Council
Kitchen table talks	informal, small-group conversations, held in a relaxed, comfortable setting, where people can speak openly about their experiences, concerns, and share feedback and ideas.
Workbooks	are structured, often guided documents (digital or printed) that walk participants through a series of prompts, activities, reflections, or planning exercises. Their purpose is to activate participation, not just provide information.
Get Involved Burlington platform	City's engagement platform that hosts all the details about projects, initiatives and policies that are seeking community engagement.

Empower stage of engagement

Referendum question	is the precise wording presented to the public during a referendum that asks voters to approve or reject a proposed change–usually to a law, policy, or constitution. It must be clear, neutral, and easy for voters to understand.
Citizen task force	is a group of residents selected to examine a particular issue, gather and evaluate information, engage with the community, and develop non binding recommendations to guide a government's decision making.
Election	Municipal election where residents vote on and select ward councillors and Mayor

burlington.ca/engagement

CITY OF Burlington

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