

City of Mississauga

Corporate Report



Date: February 12, 2021

To: Chair and Members of General Committee

From: Andrew Whittemore, M.U.R.P., Commissioner of
Planning and Building

Originator's files:
CD.21.COM

Meeting date:
February 24, 2021

Subject

Community Engagement – State of the City

Recommendation

That the report titled "Community Engagement – State of the City", dated February 12, 2021, be received for information.

Background

Community engagement as part of City-led projects is a key part of the City's decision-making process. In-keeping with the Community Engagement Strategy's commitment to meaningful engagement every time, staff continue to measure engagement performance through participant evaluations and project data.

Comments

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the City to initially pause community engagement associated with City projects in March/April 2020. Council subsequently endorsed principles to transition to non in-person forms of consultation. This included virtual community meetings in addition to an increased use of online engagement tools such as surveys, polls, questions/answers, forums, and idea walls. Traditional communication approaches such as direct mail, phone and email were available for those participants less comfortable with online engagement.

Many other innovative solutions were developed including:

- virtual interactive community meetings, with recordings for anytime viewing
- online narrated presentations for Public Information Centres
- "on-demand" open house with interactive display boards
- a digital feedback tool that measures customer experience online
- a virtual open data challenge spanning three weeks
- a virtual student ambassador program

- virtual “in-classroom” youth workshops
- survey process flexible for online or mail in responses

The 2020 performance measures for community engagement were adjusted to reflect the transition of engagement to virtual mediums with a focus on online tools. The results are presented in Appendix 1 and exclude community meetings associated with development applications under the *Planning Act*. Not surprisingly, the number of in-person and virtual engagement events was 67 less than in 2019. However, there were a comparable number of in-person or virtual event attendees in 2020 as there were in 2019.

Appendix 2 shows initial satisfaction and demographic data from a modest number of respondents. The data indicates that participants were satisfied with the engagement experiences. However, participants were not as satisfied with the information provided in advance to prepare them for the engagement sessions. This will be a point of emphasis for staff to improve on in 2021. The majority of participants who provided feedback forms were over the age of 55 years.

There are an estimated 72 City-led projects that will include community engagement for 2021 (see Appendix 3). This information will assist staff to look for collaboration and resource alignment opportunities.

Next Steps

Virtual and online community engagement practices developed in 2020 to accommodate for the pandemic will remain as part of the City’s ongoing engagement toolkit. These practices increase accessibility and flexibility for many participants. However, it is acknowledged that virtual approaches do not fully replicate the sense of community, intimacy and informal chats that are often present at in-person engagement sessions.

Staff will continue to build engagement capacity through training, ongoing refinement of tools and templates, community of practice and industry best practices. Specifically, staff will continue to strengthen outreach and awareness of participants to achieve a more inclusive and informed audience. It is intended that the participation results and project data from all City-led community engagement meetings, including those associated with development applications, be included in the future annual reporting to Council. Staff will report back to Council on when/how to restart in-person engagement once it is allowed by public health authorities.

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan’s Connect Pillar speaks to building socially and physically connected communities. Community engagement helps to build social connections and a sense of place.

Financial Impact

No financial impact at this time.

Conclusion

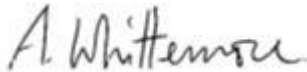
Public input continued to be received on many important City-led projects over the last year. The feedback and experience gained during the pandemic has resulted in many improved community engagement techniques that will be used well into the future.

Attachments

Appendix 1: 2020 Engagement Report

Appendix 2: 2020 Initial Satisfaction and Demographic Data

Appendix 3: 2021 Planned Community Engagement Initiatives



Andrew Whitemore, M.U.R.P., Commissioner of Planning and Building

Prepared by: Ruth M. Marland, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Community Relations, City Planning Strategies Division