

	THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG	
	COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE	
	STAFF REPORT	
TO:	Mayor and Council Members	
FROM:	Glenn J. McGlashon, MCIP, RPP Director of Planning & Development	
DATE OF MEETING:	April 23, 2019	
REPORT TITLE/SUBJECT:	Review of Public Notification, Engagement & Meeting Procedures for Planning Act Applications	
DATE OF REPORT:	April 11, 2019, Revised April 16, 2019	

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Cobourg has adopted a Public Engagement Policy to ensure a consistent, fair and effective approach to public engagement in the community. The Policy specifies that greater involvement by citizens through public engagement will result in a better-informed community, a greater sense of ownership and trust in initiatives, and increased public satisfaction with municipal programs, services and long-term plans.

While the Town's Public Engagement Policy applies to all Divisions, including Planning and Development, Section 9.15 of the current, approved Cobourg Official Plan (2017) specifies that the notification procedure for Public Meetings involving applications submitted in accordance with the *Planning Act* shall follow the procedures required by the Act.

At its meeting of April 30, 2018, Council passed a Motion directing planning staff to review the Town's public notification, meeting and engagement procedures pertaining to applications submitted under the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.P., as amended, and to submit a report to Council for consideration.

Planning Staff conducted research, consultations and surveys with other Ontario municipalities and land use planners to better understand the various approaches used to notify and engage the public on applications made under the *Planning Act*. In addition, the Communications Department recently launched its annual communications survey seeking input on how citizens stay informed on Town services and initiatives and how the Town can continue to improve.

This Report provides Council with:

- i) a summary of relevant background information regarding the provisions of the *Planning Act*, the Official Plan and the Town’s current planning application procedures;
- ii) an overview of the research and analysis conducted by planning staff on public notification and engagement procedures for *Planning Act* applications in other municipalities, and of the feedback obtained through the Town’s communications survey;
- iii) an outline of Options that may be used to enhance public notification and participation in the local planning process **beyond, in place of or in addition to the measures already implemented by the Planning Department**;
- iv) a draft communications and public engagement plan to inform members of the public and invite feedback on the possible Options; and,
- v) a recommendation for Council’s consideration.

As part of the Planning Department’s background research and review of the Town’s public notification, meeting and engagement procedures for applications made pursuant to the *Planning Act*, and in accordance with the recent amendments to the *Planning Act* regarding the need for public engagement policies for development applications to be incorporated into Official Plans, planning staff has investigated a number of Options for enhanced approaches to better inform and engage members of the public with respect to *Planning Act* applications. The intent of this undertaking is to increase public participation in the planning process and help inform decision-making, while continuing to maintain the Department’s existing service levels and ensure compliance with the regulations contained within the *Planning Act*.

There may be other Options that are also worthy of consideration, however the following is a summary of the Options identified to date **to enhance the Town’s current public engagement procedures** for Council’s consideration, taking into account the practicality of their implementation and the operational and resource capabilities of the Planning Department:

Topic	Options
OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium	<p>Option 1 – Sign Posting in addition to existing notification methods</p> <p>Option 2 – Public Open House</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2a) - for all applications; ▪ 2b) - for large, complex applications; ▪ 2c) - no change to current process of <i>encouraging</i> open houses <p>Options 3/4 – Radio Ads & TV Message Boards for special planning and development projects that affect the broader community</p> <p>Option 5 -- Planning Opinion Report before Statutory Public Meeting [if Options 2a) or 2b) implemented, after the open house and prior to the Public Meeting], with final Planning Recommendation Report after the Statutory Public Meeting</p> <p>Option 6 – Timing of Public Meeting -- Convene the Statutory Public Meeting no later than 30 days before the end of the respective <i>Planning Act</i> timelines</p>

Site Plan Approval	Option -- Enhance existing signage program for consistency and corporate branding
Consents & Minor Variances	Option – Sign Posting in addition to existing notification methods
Social Media Platforms	Option – Targeted Social Media Messaging ('hot button', calendars, webpages, newsletters, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter)
Public Meeting Procedure	No change to current procedure (standard municipal Agenda template)

In order to inform members of the public and invite feedback on the information and options contained in this Report, a comprehensive **Communications & Public Engagement Plan: Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications** has been developed in accordance with the Town's Public Engagement Policy in consultation with the Communications Manager (see **Appendix II**), including:

- the convening of a Council Public Meeting;
- the use of multiple newspaper advertisements of the Public Meeting in the Town's regular ad block section of Northumberland News;
- the posting of the Public Meeting notice on the 'News Centre' and 'Community News' homepages, 'Trending Services' hot button, Public Meetings calendar, and 'Engage Cobourg' webpage of the municipal website;
- the creation of a dedicated webpage for the Communications & Public Engagement Plan, which shall include this Report, an on-line survey, important public engagement dates and contact information;
- the issuance of an internal email to all Municipal Council members and Town staff of announcing the Communications & Public Engagement Plan to promote awareness of the plan;
- the development of a poster to be distributed to local service clubs, organizations and municipal offices;
- the issuance of a press release to all local media, posting the release on the municipal website, and promotion across digital social media channels (Facebook and Twitter);
- interview 'pitches' to local print, on-line, radio and television media; and,
- the use of weekly reminder posts to municipal social media pages (Facebook and Twitter)

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council receive this Report for information purposes;

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to implement a public engagement process in accordance with the **Communications & Public Engagement Plan: Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications** as outlined in **Appendix II** of this Report in order to obtain informed public feedback on the Staff Report and Options for improving public notification and engagement regarding applications submitted to the Municipality pursuant to the *Planning Act*.

3.0 **CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVE**

N/A

4.0 **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

As part of the Planning Department's review of the Town's public notification, meeting and engagement procedures, which included a survey of municipalities and planners in Southern Ontario as well as the public as part of a communications review, and in accordance with the recent amendments to the *Planning Act* regarding the need for public engagement policies for development applications to be incorporated into Official Plans, Planning Department staff has identified a number of Options for enhanced approaches to better inform and engage members of the public with respect to *Planning Act* applications. The intent of this undertaking is to increase public participation in the planning process and help inform decision-making, while continuing to maintain the Town's existing service levels and ensure compliance with the provisions of the *Planning Act*.

In order to inform members of the public and invite feedback on the proposed Options, a comprehensive ***Communications & Public Engagement Plan: Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications*** is recommended in accordance with the Town's Public Engagement Policy as outlined in **Appendix II**, including convening of a Council Public Meeting, the use of multiple newspaper advertisements of the Public Meeting in the Town's regular ad block of Northumberland News, the posting of the Public Meeting Notice in various locations on the municipal website, the creation of a dedicated consultation webpage, the development of a special community engagement poster, a press release, the use of various social media platforms (ie. Facebook, Twitter), and an on-line survey for public feedback. Based on the level of input garnered during this process, an appropriate option or package of Options can be recommended to Council for a decision.

5.0 **ORIGIN & PURPOSE**

At its meeting of April 30, 2018, Council passed a Motion directing planning staff to review the Town's public notification, meeting and engagement procedures pertaining to applications submitted under the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.P., as amended, and to submit a report to Council for consideration.

Over the course of the past 8 months, Planning Staff has conducted research, consultations and surveys with other Ontario municipalities and land use planners to better understand the various approaches used to notify and engage the public on applications made under the *Planning Act*. In addition, the Communications Department recently launched its annual communications survey seeking input on how citizens stay informed on Town services and initiatives and how the Town can continue to improve.

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with:

- i) a summary of relevant background information regarding the provisions of the *Planning Act*, the Official Plan and the Town's current procedures;
- ii) an overview of the research and analysis conducted by planning staff on public notification and engagement procedures in other municipalities, and in regards to the feedback obtained through the Town's communications survey;
- iii) an outline of possible Options that may be used to enhance public notification and participation in the local planning process **beyond, in place of or in addition to the measures already implemented by the Planning Department;**
- iv) a draft communications and public engagement plan to inform members of the public and invite feedback on the possible Options; and,
- v) a recommendation for Council's consideration.

6.0 **BACKGROUND**

In 2016, the Town of Cobourg adopted a Public Engagement Policy to ensure a consistent, fair and effective approach to public engagement in the community. The Policy specifies that greater involvement by citizens through public engagement will result in a better-informed community, a greater sense of ownership and trust in initiatives, and increased public satisfaction with municipal programs, services and long-term plans.

While the Town's Public Engagement Policy applies to all Divisions, including Planning and Development, Section 9.15 of the current, approved Cobourg Official Plan (2017) specifies that the notification procedure for Public Meetings involving applications submitted in accordance with the *Planning Act* shall follow the procedures required by the Act.

6.1 **Official Plan Amendments (OPA's), Zoning By-law Amendments (ZBLA's) and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium**

The primary, or major, planning applications that are considered by Cobourg Council and which involve a Statutory Public Meeting under the *Planning Act* include OPA's, ZBLA's, and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium. In these cases, the *Planning Act* specifies that at least one Public Meeting shall be held, and that the notice requirements for Complete Applications and Statutory Public Meetings shall include:

1. Notice by personal service or pre-paid mail to owners within 120 m of the subject area and by posting a sign on the subject property; **or**,
2. By publishing a notice in a newspaper that, in the opinion of the clerk, is of sufficient general circulation in the area to which the proposal applies that would give the public reasonable notice of the Public Meeting.

A municipality has **30** days to determine whether an application is "complete" (that it contains all of the prescribed information and documents required by the *Planning Act* and the

municipality's Official Plan) and to formally receive the application and begin the process under the *Planning Act*. Notice of a Complete Application must be made within **15** days of the formal receipt of the application by Council, and Notice of a statutory Public Meeting must be implemented at least **20** days prior to the Meeting. The Notices of a Complete Application and Public Meeting may be combined into one, single Notice, although it is not required.

The process for considering applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision is often complex and time-consuming, typically involving a comprehensive evaluation of numerous plans, studies and other documentation by municipal Departments, external agencies and the public, an examination of the application within the context of provincial and municipal policies, regulations and standards, along with minimum requirements for public notification and consultation. Accordingly, the *Planning Act* prescribes certain time frames for processing applications before an applicant may lodge an appeal. Specifically, the Act states that if a municipality neglects to make a decision within **150** days (in the case of a stand-alone ZBLA) and **210** days (in the case of an OPA, combined OPA/ZBLA and Draft Plan of Subdivision/Condominium), an applicant may appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT). These timelines have changed a number of times over the last few decades as illustrated in *Figure 1* below:

Application Type	Pre-1994	1994 -- 1996	1996 -- 2004	2004 -- 2017	2017+
OPA	30 days	150 days	90 days	180 days	210 days
Draft Plans of Subdivision/ Condominium	---	180 days	90 days	180 days	210 days
ZBLA	30 days	90 days	90 days	120 days	150 days

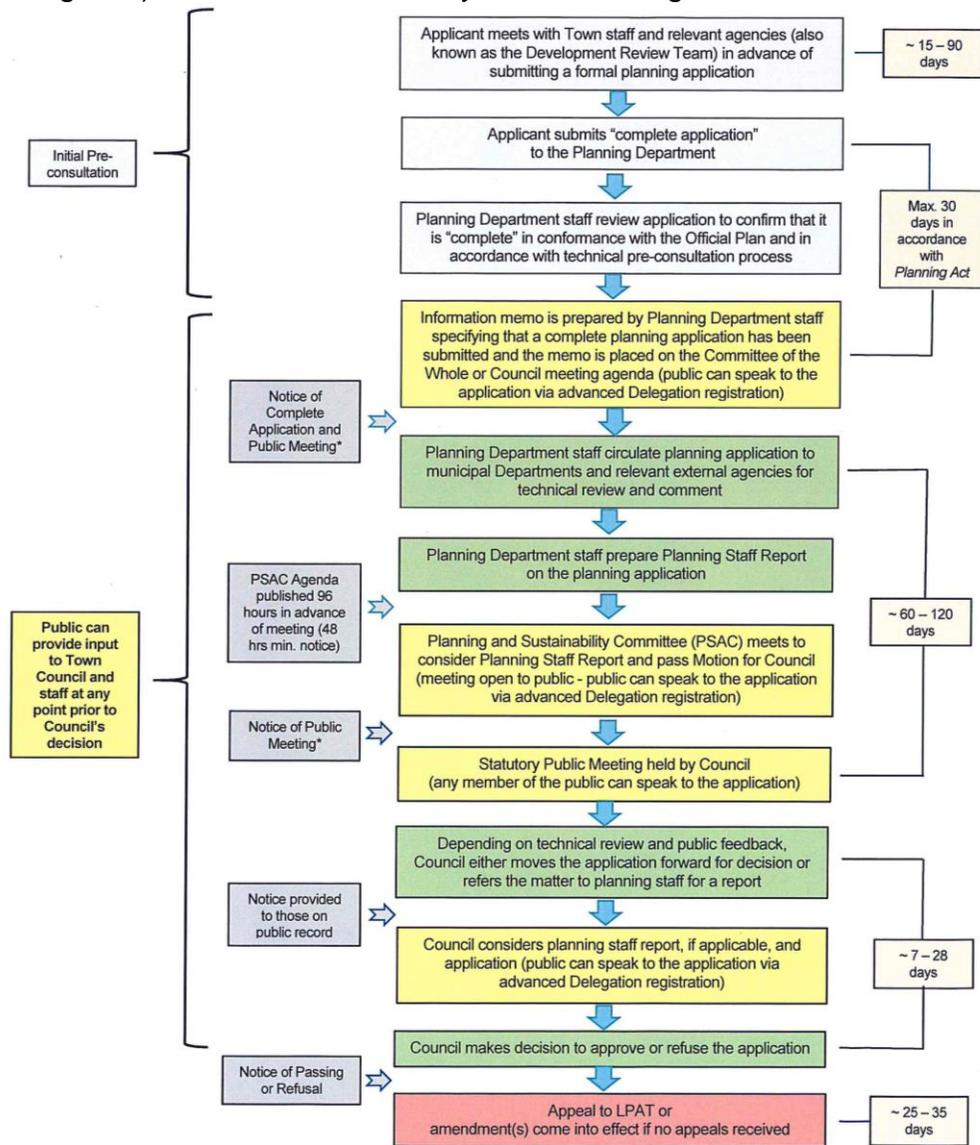
Figure 1: Historical Summary of Planning Act Timelines before an Appeal can be lodged

The Town of Cobourg's current, long-standing practice is to publish a Notice of Complete Application/Public Meeting in the local newspaper (currently the Northumberland News), which has been deemed by the Municipal Clerk as being of sufficient general circulation in the community to provide reasonable notice to the public. The Northumberland News newspaper is a weekly publication that has a general distribution of approximately 22,800 copies and serves Cobourg, Port Hope, and the Townships of Hamilton, Alnwick-Haldimand and Cramahe. The Notice is implemented at least **25** days in advance of the Public Meeting. For larger, more complex applications, the aforementioned Notices are often separated to provide adequate time to circulate and examine the application before a Public Meeting date is confirmed.

In addition, as an additional measure of notification, the Town circulates a written Notice to every owner within 120 m of the subject area, posts the Notice on the "*Public Notices/Planning Notices*" menu item of the 'News Centre' on the Municipal website, and includes the Notice and application particulars on the "*Planning Applications*" page of the Planning and Development website. A staff information memo indicating receipt of the

application(s) is also presented to Council in open session. The Town does not currently require that a sign be posted on the frontage of the property for these applications¹.

The flowchart in *Figure 2* illustrates the Town's current procedure governing applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium submitted under the *Planning Act*. At any time following the receipt of the application by Council and prior to the decision of Council on the application, the public may make enquiries, request further information and/or provide written and/or oral submissions on the proposal to the Town through a number of forums, including direct contact with the Planning or Clerk's Departments, to Council (via formal Delegation), and/or via the statutory Public Meeting.



*For larger and/or complex planning applications, the timing of a Public Meeting may not be confirmed at the initial stage of the process and therefore the Notice of Complete Application and Public Meeting may be separated

Figure 2: Current Procedure for OPA's, ZBLA's and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium

¹ Development signs are currently only required for applications for Site Plan Approval as per Council's direction in the 1990's, given that the *Planning Act* does not prescribe any public notification or public meeting requirements for this process, which is deemed to be a detailed, technical implementation step prior to development proceeding.

Municipalities have the option to employ “alternative measures” for notifying the public of applications for OPA, ZBLA, and Draft Plans of Subdivision that are submitted in accordance with the *Planning Act*, including measures which are more *or less* strict than what the Act requires. The Act specifies that such alternative measures shall be incorporated into the Official Plan. In 2017, the *Planning Act* was amended to require that all Official Plans must contain a description of the measures and procedures for informing and obtaining the views of the public with respect to the aforementioned applications. As this legislative amendment was proclaimed into law at around the same time that Cobourg’s Official Plan was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), these measures and procedures have not yet been incorporated into the Official Plan.

6.2 Site Plan Approval (SPA)

While the *Planning Act* prescribes minimum public notification requirements for applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium, the Act does not prescribe any public notification requirements for applications for Site Plan Approval (SPA). The SPA process is designed to be a technical exercise which involves the implementation of existing approved development policies, regulations and standards through the review of detailed site plans, and is typically the last step before a Building Permit is issued and construction commences. Authority to approve Site Plan Applications may be delegated to a municipal staff officer by Council by-law.

Given the above, the SPA process is typically shorter in length than the OPA and ZBLA process, since consideration of the land use and development policies, rules and regulations have already been determined and a public process is not required under the *Planning Act*. Accordingly, the Act specifies that if a decision on an application for SPA is not made within **30** days of its receipt by the municipality, if an application is refused, or if a condition of SPA is not agreed to, the applicant may appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT).

Notwithstanding the above, approx. 20 years ago, Council approved an enhanced measure to notify the public of the submission of Site Plan Approval applications pursuant to the *Planning Act* by requiring the placement of an information sign board on the frontage of the subject property. The information sign provides a brief overview of the nature of the application and how and where to obtain additional information. In addition, the process includes the presentation of a staff information memo to Council in open session indicating receipt of the application, and the application particulars are posted on the “*Planning Applications*” page of the Planning and Development website. Notification is also provided to those persons on public record as requesting such notice, usually as a result of prior applications for OPA and/or ZBLA or neighbourhood interest.

From the point of receipt of the SPA application to its consideration by Council, the public may make enquiries, request further information and/or provide written and/or oral submissions on the proposal to the Town through a number of forums, including direct contact with the Planning or Clerk’s Departments, and to Council (via formal Delegation).

Figure 3 illustrates the Town's current process for applications for SPA under the *Planning Act*.

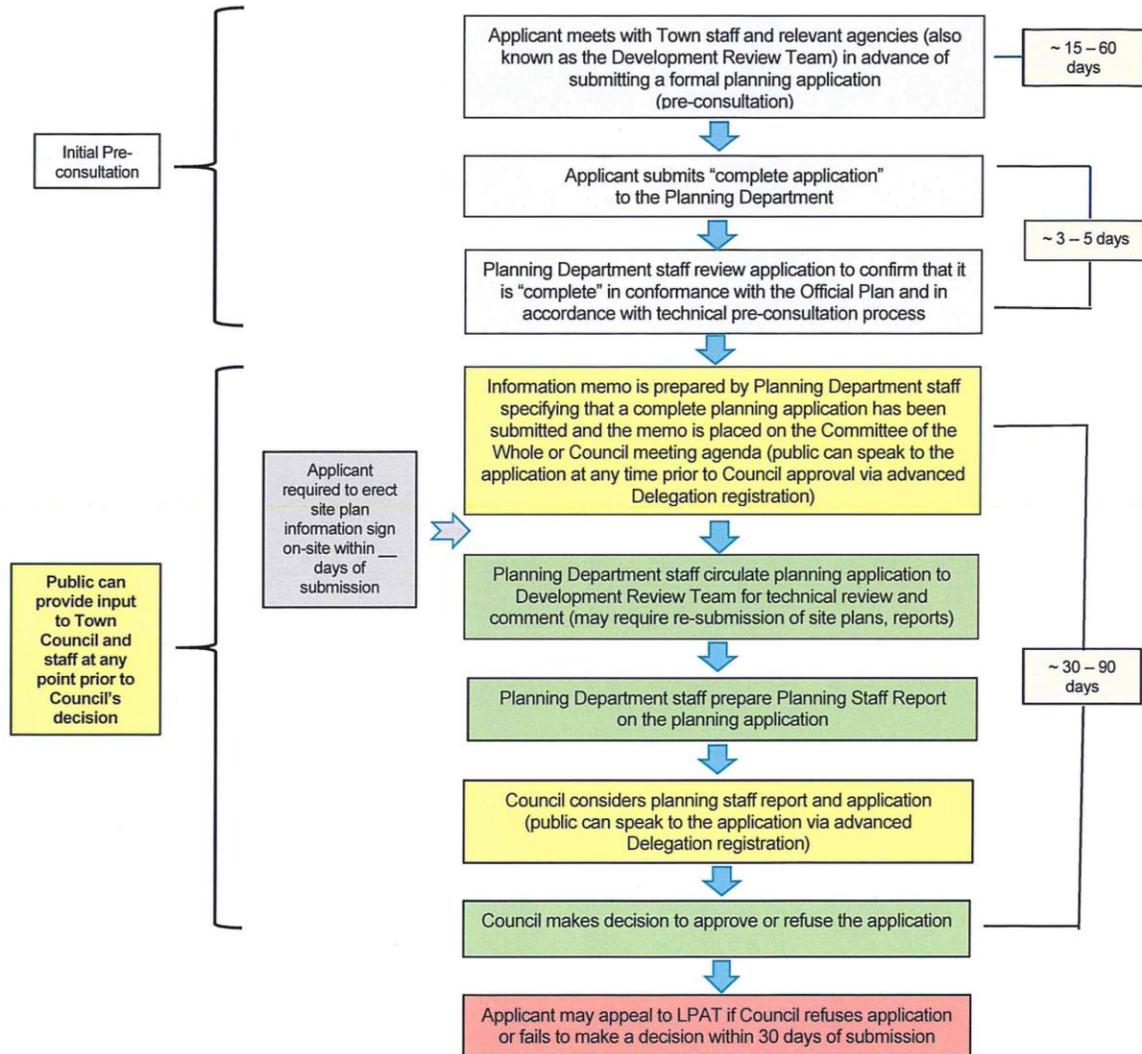


Figure 3: Current Procedures for Site Plan Approval applications

6.3 Consents and Minor Variances

Applications for Consent (individual lot creation, easements, rights-of-way, mortgages) and Minor Variances submitted under the *Planning Act* in Cobourg are administered by the Committee of Adjustment (CoA) – a quasi-judicial body appointed by Council to make decisions on such applications. Cobourg Municipal Council, in this case, acts as a commenting agency to the Committee and is not the decision-maker. The types of applications considered by the CoA relate more to technical, minor and often site-specific issues which mainly affect a relatively small segment of the public, usually properties which are immediately adjacent to the subject property.

For Consent and Minor Variance applications, the *Planning Act* specifies that a Public Hearing shall be held within **30** days after the application is received by the Secretary-Treasurer. The notice requirements for Public Hearings shall include:

1. Notice by personal service or pre-paid mail to owners within 60 m of the subject area and by posting a sign on the subject property; **or**,
2. By publishing a notice in a newspaper that, in the opinion of the clerk, is of sufficient general circulation in the area to which the proposal applies that would give the public reasonable notice of the Public Meeting.

Notice of a Public Hearing must be implemented at least **14** days prior to the Hearing for Consents and **10** days for Minor Variances.

The public notification process for the CoA over the years has remained constant, with a newspaper advertisement of the Notice of Hearing at least **20** days in advance (in the case of Consents) and **13** days (in the case of Minor Variances). As an additional measure of notifying the public, a written Notice is mailed out to owners within 60 m of the subject property and the Notice is posted on the “*Current Applications*” section of the Committee of Adjustment webpage. The Notice of Hearing and the Planning Staff Report on the application are also presented to Council in open session in advance of the CoA Hearing. Many years ago, the CoA required that a small laminated sign be posted on the subject lands however, however this practice was discontinued due to logistics, timing issues and lack of desired effect on the public. Figure 4 outlines the current procedure governing applications for Consent and Minor Variance:

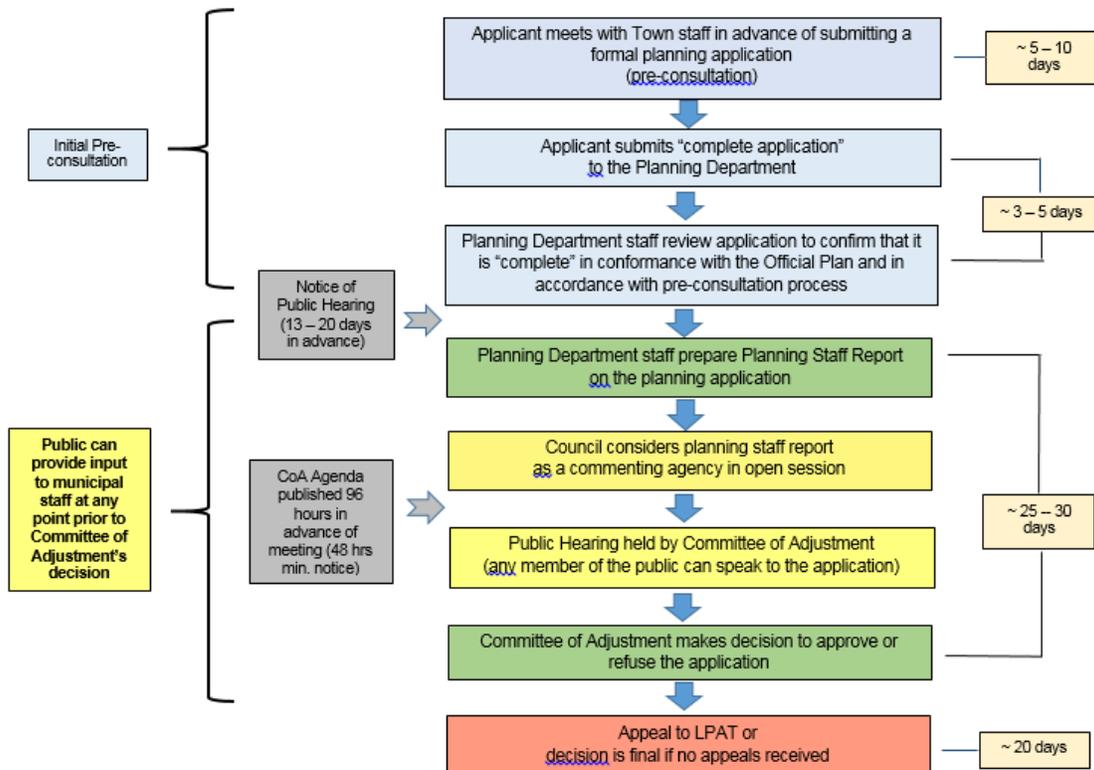


Figure 4: Current Procedure for Consents and Minor Variances

6.4 Public Meeting Procedure

A Public Meeting is an important tool which is intended to provide a forum for residents, landowners, businesses and other stakeholders to provide input towards an issue or topic prior to a decision being made.

The Town of Cobourg has utilized a standard approach for convening statutory Public Meetings for applications submitted under the *Planning Act*. The agenda template for planning applications is virtually the same as other Public Meetings convened by Council, such as the Cannabis Public Meeting, the Procedural By-law Public Meeting and the Strategic Plan Public Meeting, with minor variations to suit the topic. Figure 5 below outlines the current procedure for statutory Planning Public Meetings:

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. INTRODUCTION

Chair explains the general purpose of the meeting.

The purpose of the Public Meeting is for Municipal Council to consider an application for.....

III. DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

IV. NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

Municipal Clerk states that Notice is published in the local newspaper, posted on the Municipal Website www.cobourg.ca and circulated to neighbouring property owners in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act.

V. EXPLANATION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT/APPLICATION

1. Applicant/Agent to provide background and explanation of proposed amendment

2. Planning staff overview of Planning Report

VI. MUNICIPAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

VII. PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

1. Public submissions in support

2. Public submissions in opposition

3. Written comments/submissions received by Clerk as of printing of Agenda.

4. The Director of Planning & Development advises of any written submissions received from commenting agencies

5. Applicant Response, if desired

VIII. FURTHER NOTICE

Persons requiring further notice of Council's decision to advise Municipal Clerk in writing

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Figure 5 – Council Procedure for Statutory Public Meetings under the Planning Act

7.0 **RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

In late Summer/Fall of 2018, Planning Department staff conducted a survey of 29 southern Ontario municipalities to obtain information on their public notification and engagement procedures regarding applications submitted under the *Planning Act*. In particular, comparator municipalities of similar size to Cobourg (<25,000) were surveyed, along with a number of larger municipalities to expand the potential breadth of public engagement options (see *Figure 6* below). In addition, planning staff consulted with land use planners across Northumberland County and Ontario in order to obtain further background information on procedures and best practices. The results of the research process were quite informative and are outlined below:

	Municipality	Population
1	Cramahe	6,355
2	Hamilton Twp	10,942
3	Trent Hills	12,900
4	Port Hope	16,753
5	Midland	16,864
6	Selwyn	17,060
7	Pelham	17,110
8	Petawawa	17,187
9	Port Colborne	18,306
10	South Frontenac	18,646
	Cobourg	19,031
11	Springwater	19,059
12	Huntsville	19,816
13	Collingwood	20,102
14	Wasaga Beach	20,675
15	Strathroy-Caradoc	20,867
16	Uxbridge	21,176
17	Kingsville	21,552
18	Brockville	21,854
19	Clarence-Rockland	24,512
20	Orangeville	28,900
21	Innisfil	35,566
22	Quinte West	43,577
23	Belleville	50,716
24	Halton Hills	61,161
25	Kawartha Lakes	75,423
26	Milton	110,128
27	Kingston	117,660
28	Ajax	119,677
29	Oakville	193,832

Figure 6: Municipal Survey Responses from Southern Ontario Municipalities

7.1 Official Plan Amendments (OPA's), Zoning By-law Amendments (ZBLA's) and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium

Of the standard *Planning Act* notification procedure options governing applications for OPA's, ZBLA's and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium as noted in Section 6.1 above, just under one half of municipalities surveyed utilize a notification system consisting of mail-out, sign posting and newspaper advertisement. Another 38% implemented a combination of mail-out and sign posting. Cobourg's procedure of combining a mail-out and newspaper advertisement ranks quite low among municipal respondents at 10% (see *Figure 7* below).

Just over 2/3rd of respondents use various forms of social media for Notices of *Planning Act* applications, such as website newsfeeds, calendars, webpages, Twitter and Facebook. Cobourg posts Notices of Complete Applications and Public Meetings in multiple locations on the municipal website, including the "Public Notices/Planning Notices" page of the News Centre and the "Planning Applications" page of the Planning and Development site.

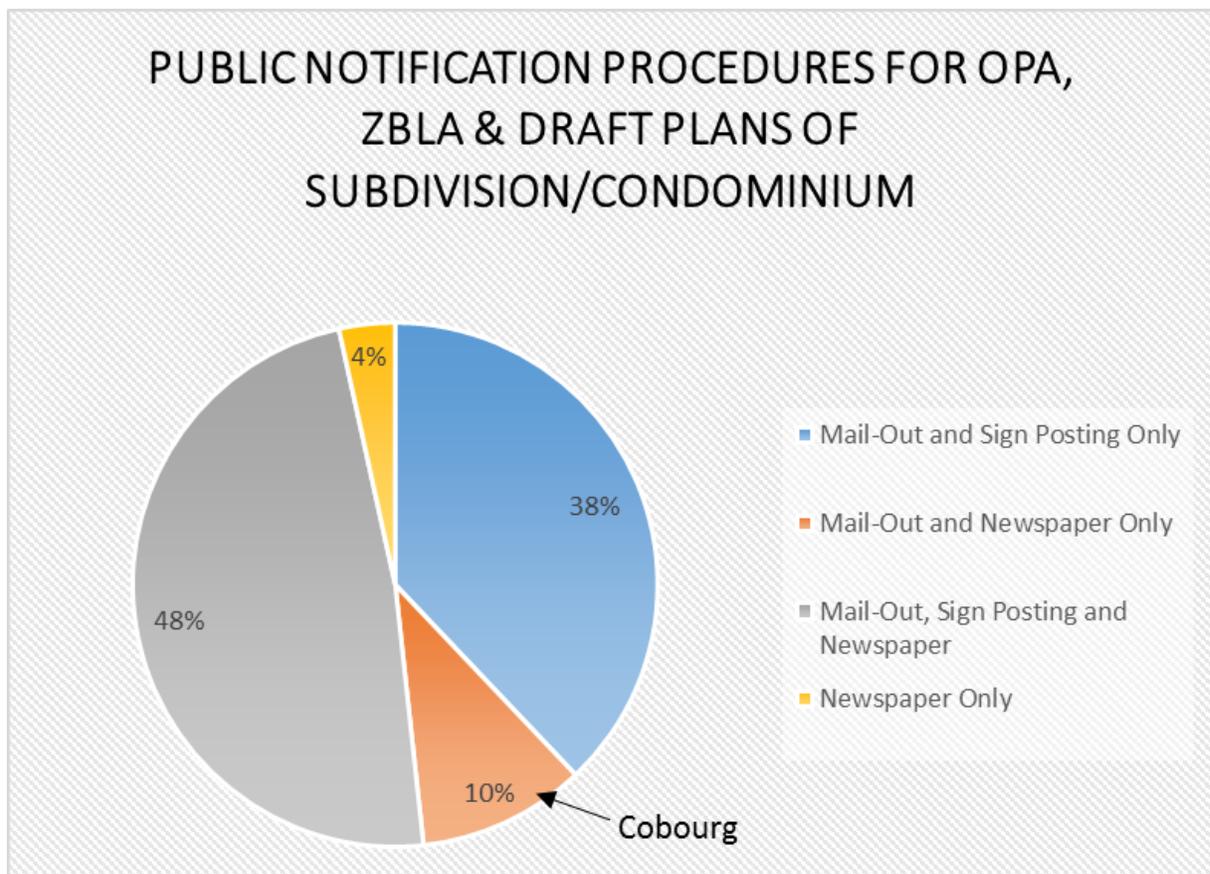


Figure 7: Survey Results from 29 Southern Ontario Municipalities regarding Public Notice Procedures for Applications for OPA, ZBLA, and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium

A large proportion (over 2/3rd) of the 28 municipalities who responded convene, or have the applicant convene, an informal, non-statutory public open house or neighbourhood

information meeting in advance of or after the statutory Public Meeting² for applications for OPA's, ZBLA's and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium. A large majority of public open houses are usually only required/requested in circumstances where applications are considered to be large, complex, and/or have the potential to be contentious, while less than 1 in 5 require an open house for all applications. Almost 1/3rd do not convene open houses at all (see *Figure 8* below).

For large, complex or contentious applications, the need for a public open house is typically determined by municipal staff and/or Council (as a whole or by an individual member who's responsible for the portfolio/Ward) on a case-by-case basis. In most cases, the applicant convenes the open house and provides a summary report of the session to the municipality.

As a practice, Cobourg has *encouraged* applicants with larger proposals to convene a neighbourhood open house early in the process however this is not entrenched within a formal policy or procedure and the uptake has been sporadic. When a public open house has been convened by the applicant, the feedback received from the public was that it assisted them in understanding the proposal and provided an informal forum to ask questions. The applicant has also commented that it helps them better understand the issues of the public and provides an opportunity to respond to questions, or clarify or resolve issues early on.

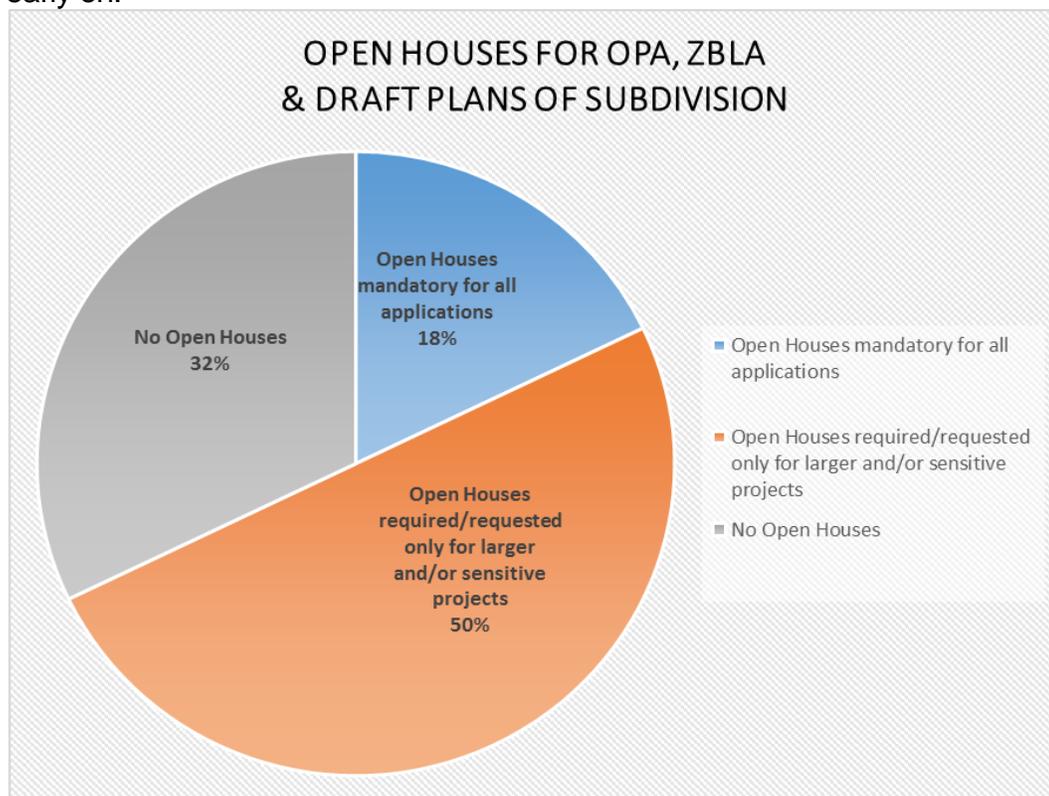


Figure 8: Survey Results from 28 Southern Ontario Municipalities regarding Open Houses

² A statutory Public Meeting differs from a public open house in that the former is legislated by the *Planning Act* as a formal vehicle for obtaining public input, whereas a public open house is an informal, non-legislated forum that goes beyond the legislative requirements but in itself does not satisfy the public meeting requirements of the *Planning Act*

A number of municipalities are in the process of reviewing their public notification and engagement procedures for *Planning Act* applications. Over the course of the past three (3) years, the City of Kingston has conducted a number of reviews of their planning public notification, engagement and communications programs. Kingston’s Planning Committee convened a Public Meeting in September of 2018 which considered a recommendation to implement a public open house for “complex” *Planning Act* applications, including large-scale multi-unit residential, institutional, commercial or industrial developments, as part of its review of public notification and engagement procedures. A further staff recommendation report was presented to Kingston Council in December of 2018 but was deferred until mid-2019 for a supplementary report.

In May of 2018, the Town of Milton Council endorsed a planning staff recommendation to enhance its public communication materials, including improvements to its development notice boards, notice templates, and digital media to improve public outreach and participation (accessible, visible, consistent and user-friendly), as well as invest in staff training. Milton’s approach to public notification and engagement includes mail-out, sign posting, newspaper advertisement and digital media – public open houses are only convened when deemed appropriate by municipal staff and/or Council.

Finally, municipalities were asked about the timing of planning staff opinion/recommendation reports for OPA’s, ZBLA’s and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium, specifically if they are prepared before or after the statutory Public Meeting. The results are fairly split, with 47% of the 16 respondents preparing the opinion/recommendation report prior to the Public Meeting, and 41% afterwards. Two (2) municipalities replied that they prepare the opinion/recommendation report before the Public Meeting only for simple or non-contentious applications with the remainder being prepared afterwards. See *Figure 9* below:

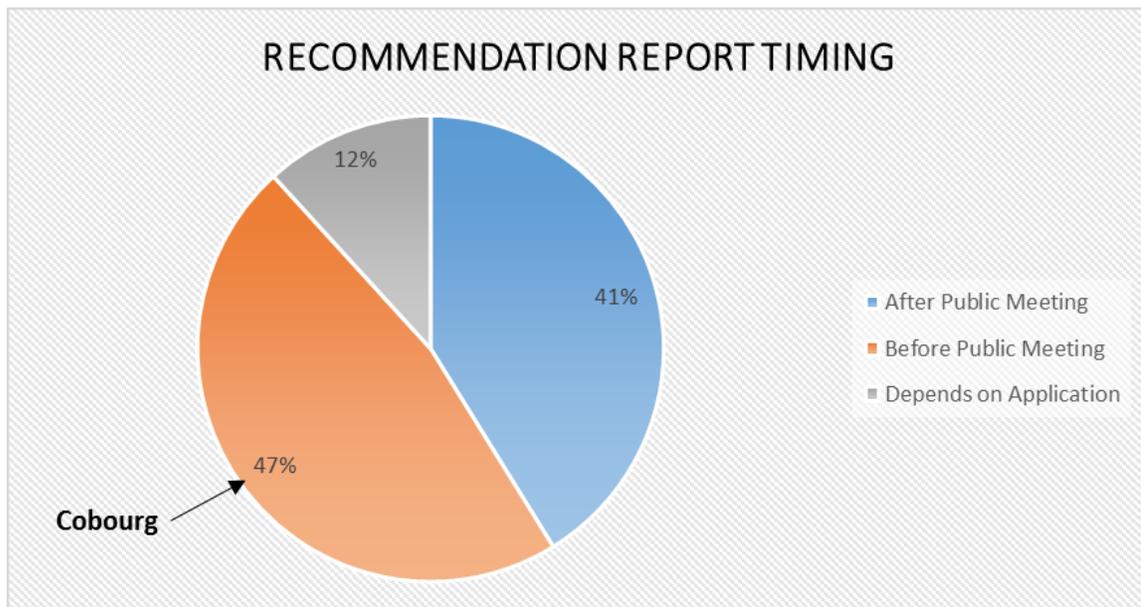


Figure 9: Survey Results from 16 Southern Ontario Municipalities regarding Timing of Opinion/Recommendation Reports relative to the Statutory Public Meeting

7.2 Site Plan Approval (SPA)

Cobourg's Site Plan Approval process, using a combination of a development information signage and website content, is relatively advanced when compared to other municipalities. Of 26 municipal respondents, a significant majority (81%) do not provide any Notice of an SPA whatsoever, whereas some municipalities like Cobourg require the use of an information sign on the property. A small number of municipalities provide notification through mail-out and/or a newspaper advertisements. See Figure 10 below. Approximately 35% of municipalities have delegated approval of Site Plan applications to a municipal staff official(s) where approvals are implemented internally.

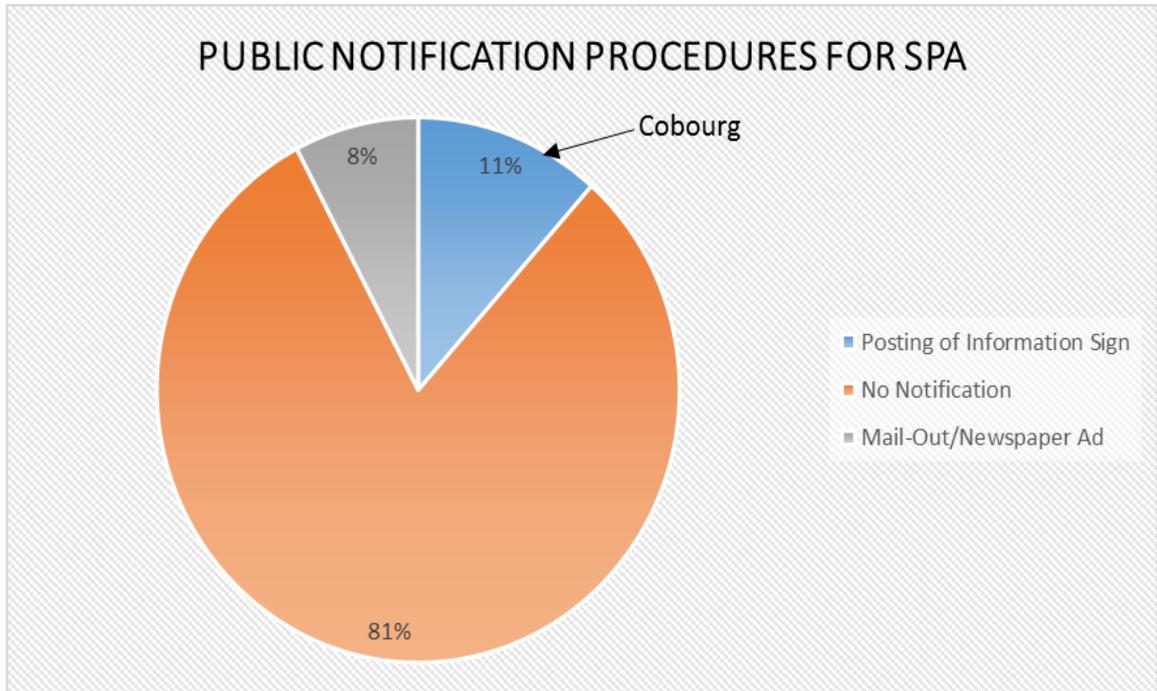


Figure 10: Survey Results from 30 Southern Ontario Municipalities regarding SPA Notification

7.3 Consents and Minor Variances

As illustrated in Figure 11 below, research results of public notification procedures for Consent and Minor Variance applications show that 62% of the 16 responding municipalities utilize a combination of mail-out and sign posting, 25% use mail-out, sign posting and newspaper, and only 13% of respondents implement a mail-out and newspaper procedure. Similar to the research results of public notification procedures for OPA's, ZBLA's and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium, Cobourg falls within the lowest percentile for procedures associated with Consents and Minor Variances.

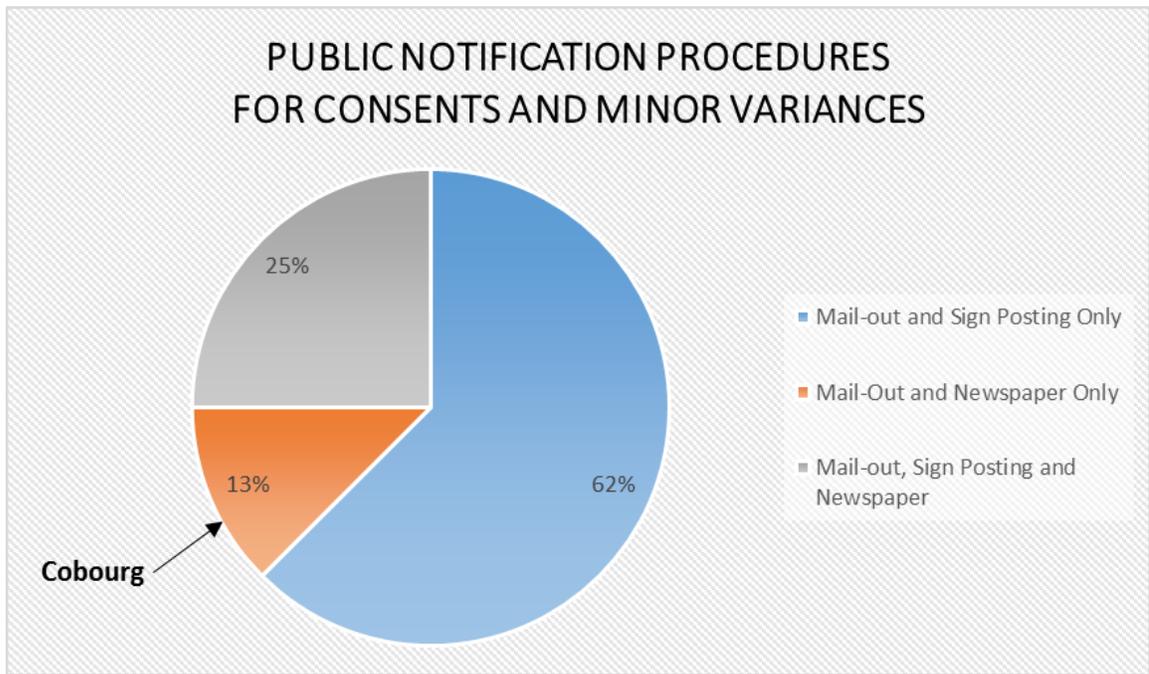


Figure 11: Survey Results from 16 Southern Ontario Municipalities regarding Public Notification Procedures for Consents and Minor Variances

7.4 Public Meeting Procedure

As shown in Section 6.4 above, the Town of Cobourg’s procedure, or agenda, template for Public Meetings, for both statutory Planning Public Meetings and other municipal Public Meetings, follows a deliberate and orderly approach to informing members of the public and Council of a municipal issue, and provides an opportunity for interested parties to seek clarity and/or make oral or written submissions to Council. A Public Meeting has not traditionally been a forum where Council debates an issue with members of the public or municipal staff. Cobourg’s Public Meeting Agenda, including all relevant supporting materials, is published and posted on the municipal website approx. four (4) days in advance of the Meeting.

Based on our research, the Town of Cobourg’s Public Meeting procedure is consistent with those in other municipalities across Southern Ontario. In fact, a number of municipal planners and clerks that I spoke to indicated that they do not use a formal written Public Meeting agenda at all, but rather the Chair reads out the procedure, or order of events, of the Meeting to the public from a script.

7.5 Social Media

Like Cobourg, most municipalities (71%) utilize some form of social media in conjunction with traditional (paper) methods of public notification for applications submitted under the *Planning Act*. The most common method of social media amongst the municipalities is website posting, while a small contingent (3 of 28) utilize multiple digital channels.

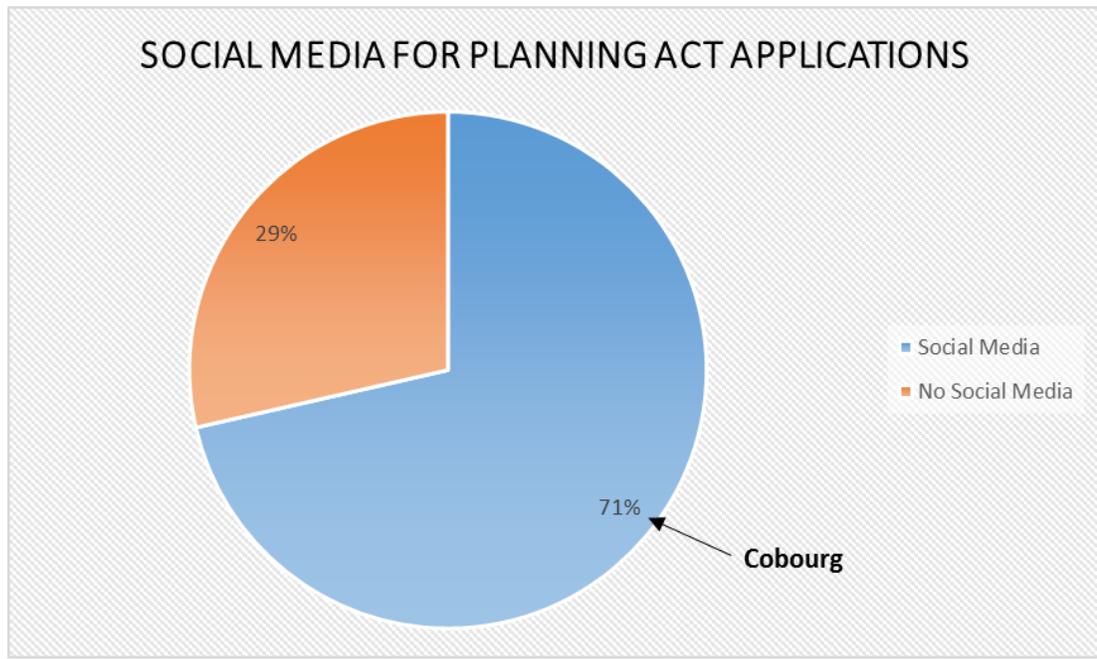


Figure 12: Survey Results from 28 Southern Ontario Municipalities regarding Social Media for Planning Act Applications

7.6 Communication Survey

In March of 2019, the Town of Cobourg’s Communications Department launched its annual communications survey seeking input on how citizens stay informed on Town services and initiatives and how the Town can continue to improve. The survey collected online feedback from March 11 -- 29 (three weeks) through the Town’s Municipal website www.cobourg.ca and gathered over 110 responses. Feedback focused on an analysis of current communication methods, public engagement procedures and protocols and suggestions for new ways in which to deliver effective communication of services, programs and events to the community.

The survey included two (2) questions on communications and engagement regarding development applications/proposals, namely:

- i) how people find out about new development applications/proposals in the community; and,
- ii) what improvements would people suggest to enhance public communications/engagement regarding new development applications in the community.

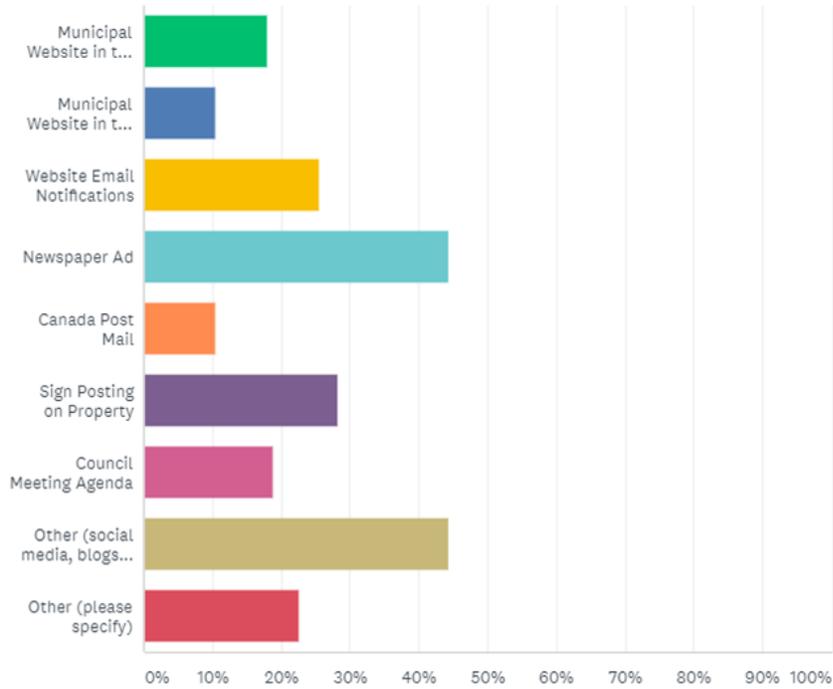
The survey data shows that a large proportion of respondents find out about new development applications/proposals via newspaper advertisements and social media. Other popular responses included a sign posted on the property and website e-mail notifications. Many written submissions noted the Cobourg Blog (Draper) site as a popular means of obtaining development information (see Figure 13 below).

Q6

Customize Save as

Planning & Development Communications How do you find out about new development applications/proposals in the community. Please check all that apply.

Answered: 106 Skipped: 4

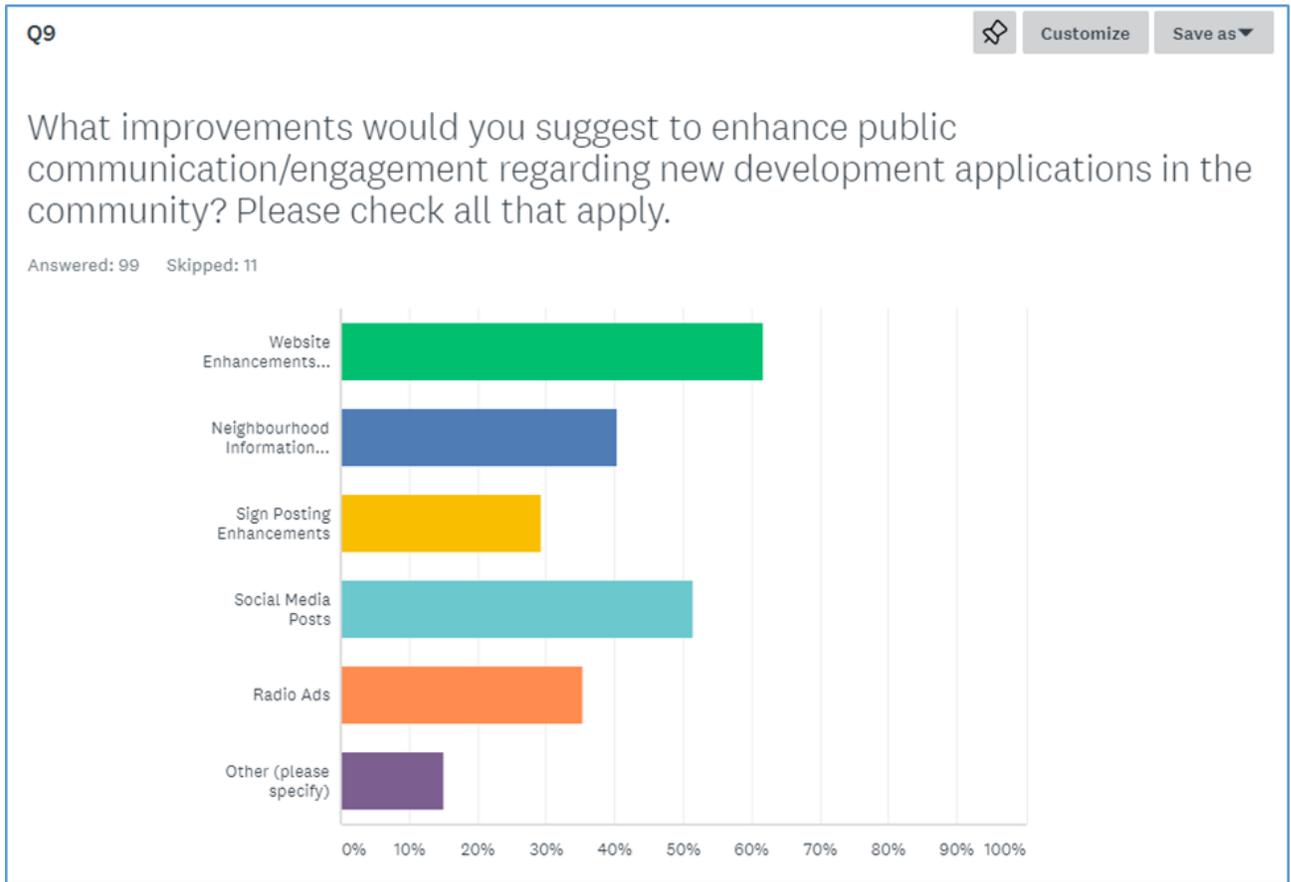


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Municipal Website in the "News Centre" / "Public Notices" / "Planning Notices" webpage	17.92% 19
▼ Municipal Website in the "Planning and Development" / "Planning Applications" webpage	10.38% 11
▼ Website Email Notifications	25.47% 27
▼ Newspaper Ad	44.34% 47
▼ Canada Post Mail	10.38% 11
▼ Sign Posting on Property	28.30% 30
▼ Council Meeting Agenda	18.87% 20
▼ Other (social media, blogs, radio, etc.)	44.34% 47
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 22.64% 24
Total Respondents: 106	

Figure 13: Cobourg Communications Survey – Information Sources for New Development Applications

Regarding suggested improvements to enhance public communications/engagement for new development applications, the most popular responses included website enhancements and social media posts, followed by neighbourhood information meetings/open houses.

Other suggested enhancements included radio ads, sign posting enhancements, e-mail notification “blasts”, and educating residents about where and how to obtain information of interest. Refer to Figure 14 below.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Website Enhancements (ex: ease of access, raise profile of public notices, etc.)	61.62%	61
Neighbourhood Information Meetings/Open Houses	40.40%	40
Sign Posting Enhancements	29.29%	29
Social Media Posts	51.52%	51
Radio Ads	35.35%	35
Other (please specify)	Responses 15.15%	15
Total Respondents: 99		

Figure 14: Cobourg Communications Survey – Suggested Improvements to Public Engagement Regarding Development Applications

8.0 FORMULATION OF OPTIONS

It is evident that there are a number of different approaches available to enhance public engagement in the planning process, using both *Planning Act* tools and other forms of communication. The initial thought would be to maximize the use of every tool available in

the engagement toolbox to ensure that the community is aware of issues and heard by Council prior to rendering its decisions. It will be important, however, to balance the need for public engagement with the ability or capability of municipal resources to deliver the desired results within *Planning Act* timelines and not impact departmental operations or the general delivery of planning services to the community. The purpose of this Section is to present a number of Options that planning staff has identified as being practical and reasonable to enhance public participation and engagement in the planning process **beyond, in place of or in addition to the measures already implemented by the Planning Department** (there may be additional options not identified in this Report which may be captured as the review process continues).

8.1 *Official Plan Amendments (OPA's), Zoning By-law Amendments (ZBLA's) and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium*

A number of options for enhancing the public notice requirements for applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium are identified below:

Option 1 – Sign Posting

Based on our research, a significant number of municipalities (86%) post a sign on a property subject to a planning application, in addition to other forms of communication such as mail-out, newspaper and social media/website. If such an option is accepted for all applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium in Cobourg, the Town would likely add this tool to its existing process, thereby utilizing a comprehensive, multi-faceted combination of mail-out, sign posting, newspaper and social media/website for its engagement approach in a manner which is consistent with or better than a significant number of Southern Ontario municipalities.

In consultation with the Communications Manager, a sign template which utilizes the Town's corporate branding scheme in the form of design, content and colours would be considered to provide a consistent appearance and an informative, legible notice for the public. A number of precedent examples of notice signs from other municipalities are illustrated in Figure 15 below:

City of Toronto

Notice

The site plan requires the applicant to construct the building with a minimum of 10% green roof area.

A change has been proposed for this site.
A Development Application has been submitted to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to allow a residential mixed-use building with retail.

Proposal summary:

414 Parking
414 Spaces

414 Residential Units
414 Units

414 Green
414 m²

District & Ward: Toronto & East York - Ward 22
Site Address: 123 Any Street and 456 Other Avenue
Applicant: ABC Development Corporation and XYZ Investment Group
Application File #: 15-12345-578-22-012

For information & to tell us what you think:

COMMUNITY PLANNER
Planner's Name
416-392-1234
email@toronto.ca

ONLINE:
www.toronto.ca/ci
File # 15-12345-578-22-012

IN PERSON:
All meetings are not yet been scheduled.
Details will be posted here and online as they become available.

City of Brampton

(A) → Notice: Official Plan Amendment

A proposal has been made to:

(A) → Re-designate From Neighborhood Retail To District Retail And Stormwater Management Pond

Owner:

Agent:

For more information about this matter, including information about obtaining a copy of the notice and about preserving your appeal rights, contact the Planning and Development Services Department, City of Brampton, by visiting the City Hall during regular business hours, by sending an email to planning@development@brampton.ca or by calling 905-874-2000. Refer to File #

Date Sign Erected:

City of Mississauga

NOTICE: OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT, REZONING AND/OR PLAN OF SUBDIVISION

AN APPLICATION HAS BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE CITY OF MISSISSAUGA TO DEVELOP THIS SITE FOR:

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL
(as determined by the planning and building department.)

Owner: D.E.V. Loper
Agent: P. Lanner & Assoc. Ltd. (905)896-1234
For further information, phone the City of Mississauga Planning and Building Department (905)896-5511 and refer to file #0Z-94/115 (W8)

MILTON PUBLIC NOTICE

A change has been proposed for this site.
A development application has been submitted to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to allow a residential mixed-use building with retail.

Proposal Summary:

414 Parking
414 Spaces

414 Residential Units
414 Units

414 Green
414 m²

Site Address: 123 Any Street and 456 Other Avenue
Applicant: ABC Development Corporation and XYZ Investment Group
Application File #: 15-12345-578-22-012
Agent: Name
Phone: 505-555-5555

Learn more and share your feedback:

Online:
www.milton.ca/311

In Person:
All meetings are not yet been scheduled.
Details will be posted here and online as they become available.

Notice

Proposed Zoning By-law Amendment to [include purpose and effect here]

Address
File Number D14-xxx-2016

Public Meeting

Date: Month day, 2016
Time: 6:30 p.m.
Location: Council Chambers, City Hall
216 Ontario Street

To obtain a copy of the application including the complete public notice and submitted drawings, access the Development and Services Hub (DASH) at <https://www.cityofkingston.ca/dash> and search this address.

For more information about this matter, including information about preserving your appeal rights, contact the Planning Division, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at: 1211 John Counter Blvd. 613-546-4291, ext. 3180

Figure 15: Precedent Examples of Public Notice Signs for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium

● Page 22

Public Engagement Benefit

The use of a sign posting would be seen as an added measure of notifying people in the neighbourhood or community who may not otherwise receive or see a notice via other means. The posting of a sign has proven to be quite successful in advising the public of applications for Site Plan Approval, which has no statutory requirement enshrined in the Planning Act. Approximately 30% of respondents to the Communications Department survey identified sign posting as a method of receiving notice of development applications. The suggested sign enhancements would be beneficial to present the information using a distinct, consistent corporate image.

Timing Considerations

Some municipalities as noted above have established standard sign templates using corporate branding and identity themes. A similar approach would be examined for Cobourg if this option is chosen. Accordingly, the design and specifications of the notice signs would require some up-front planning with the Communications Manager in collaboration with area sign companies. Modifications will be required to the application procedures, however this could be initiated in the short-term (<6 months) following Council's direction. Eventually, in the long term (>12 months), the Official Plan will need to be amended to incorporate the adopted public notification procedures in accordance with the *Planning Act*, which may be undertaken at the next general update/review in 2022.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

The applicant would be responsible for constructing and erecting the sign to municipal specifications at its cost, similar to Site Plan Approval applications. There will be some initial staff time and material cost imposed to establish the sign template, however ongoing administration of this option would have little impact on municipal financial resources or service delivery. The modifications to the Official Plan may be undertaken at the next general update/review in 2022.

Option 2 – Public Open House

As indicated in *Figure 8* above, almost ½ of municipalities surveyed require or request an informal public open house or neighbourhood information meeting for large, complex or contentious applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium, or for applications that may have a significant impact on a neighbourhood or the community as a whole. Less than 1 in 5 municipalities surveyed require a public open house for all applications.

The Town of Cobourg *encourages* applicants to hold a public open house early in the process, but it is purely voluntary. In cases where an information meeting or public open house has been held, observations have shown that residents responded well and had an opportunity to find information, ask questions, and provide useful feedback on the proposal.

Often the public information sessions alleviated many issues or concerns, or the applicant sought to address them prior to the matter coming before Council in a more formal setting.

There are three potential sub-options to consider:

2a) – All Applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium

Under this sub-option, an informal public open house or neighbourhood information meeting would be convened for all applications within approx. **30 – 45** days of formal receipt of the application by Council. Smaller, less complex applications (or special applications deemed to be of importance to the community, such as affordable/rental housing, downtown intensification, brownfield re-development) could be exempted from a public open house on a case-by-case basis in an effort to streamline the approvals process. A Statutory Public Meeting would still be required in accordance with the *Planning Act*.

2b) -- Large, Complex Applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium

An informal public open house or neighbourhood information meeting would be convened for *large, complex* applications for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium. The proposed criteria for such applications would be for any residential development proposal in excess of 25 dwelling units, and any commercial/institutional development proposal in excess of 1,400 sq m (15,000 sq ft)³.

Under this option, Council would reserve the right to require the applicant to convene a public open house irrespective of whether or not it meets the aforementioned criteria, based on the scope, impact or potentially contentious nature of the proposal. This would be determined on a case-by-case basis as part of staff's complete application memo presented to Council and prior to the application being formally received by Council. Following receipt of the application, should a 'smaller' application generate significant public interest, Council would have the ability to "bump up" the application and require a public open house by Resolution. The Town would still encourage *all* applicants to convene a public open house or reach out to the neighbourhood in some other capacity (ie. pamphlets). A statutory Public Meeting would still be required in accordance with the *Planning Act*.

2c) – No Change

This option would see no change to the current procedure of *encouraging* applicants to hold a public open house. At least one statutory Public Meeting would still be required in accordance with the *Planning Act*.

³ This proposed criteria aligns with the Cobourg Planning Application Schedule of Fees (By-law 030-2016) for "Major Residential" and "Major Commercial" development types

Public Engagement Benefit

In general, convening an informal public open house or neighbourhood information meeting would have the benefit of engaging stakeholders and obtaining feedback early in the planning process, as opposed to a Statutory Public Meeting which is typically later on in the process. Early input can also serve to educate applicants and the Town about the concerns of the neighbourhood, allow for responses and adjustments to a proposal and generally better inform the decision-making process. Furthermore, public open houses typically offer an informal, less intimidating forum for members of the public to participate in the process. Only 18% of municipalities currently require open houses for all applications.

Since not every application submitted is significant or contentious, a public open house may not be desirable or needed in these cases therefore Option 2b has been identified which would require a public open house only for larger, complex applications, with the caveat that the Town would reserve the right to require a public open house for select smaller applications or at any time in the process based on public feedback. Approximately 50% of municipalities surveyed require/request an open house for these larger or complex types of applications.

A third option (2c) is status quo, whereby public open houses are not mandatory, but rather would be *encouraged* (similar to 1/3rd of municipalities surveyed).

Timing Considerations

These options would require modifications to the application procedures, however it can be implemented relatively quickly over the short term following direction from Council. Eventually, in the long term, the Official Plan will need to be amended to incorporate the adopted public notification procedures in accordance with the *Planning Act*, which may be undertaken at the next general update/review.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

It appears to be common industry practice that public open houses or neighbourhood information meetings are being conducted by applicants and/or their consultants at their sole expense. Municipalities like Oakville, for example, require the applicant to submit a written summary report of the open house to the Town for use as part of its evaluation of the application. Using this model, the logistics associated with convening open houses would not appear to be significant to adversely impact limited municipal staff resources or the delivery of planning services to the public. The update to the Official Plan policies to incorporate any new public notification procedures may be incorporated into the next general review in 2022.

Option 3 – Radio Ads

Figure 13 above illustrates that just over 1/3rd of respondents in the Communications Department survey suggested that radio ads would enhance public communication/engagement of development applications.

Public Engagement Benefit

The use of radio ads may be seen as broadening the public's horizon on development activity in the community, possibly achieving a higher capture level of audience.

Timing Considerations

This option would require modifications to the application procedures, including the formalization of details regarding its administration, and can likely be implemented in the medium term (6-12 months) following direction from Council. Eventually, the Official Plan will need to be amended in the long term to incorporate the adopted public notification procedures in accordance with the *Planning Act*, which may be undertaken at the next general update/review in 2022.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

Although the implementation of radio ads would be at the proponent's cost, the set-up and administration of this task with radio stations would likely fall to planning and communications staff. For this option to be effective and reach a wider audience, a radio ad would need to run multiple times a day for multiple days on a number of radio stations, with a focus on peak listener times. Given the number of planning applications at any given time, there may be multiple radio ads required on an ongoing basis.

Depending on the number of options implemented through this process, the use of radio ads for development applications may impose challenges on the Town's resources, reduce service levels, and possibly threaten adherence to *Planning Act* requirements. As development applications typically, but not always, affect a more localized segment of the population (ie. a neighbourhood), the use of other "targeted" notification methods may be more effective in these cases, whereas radio ads may be better served and more practical for larger, special projects affecting the greater community, such as comprehensive updates to planning documents, Secondary Plans, etc.

Option 4 – TV Information/Message Boards

Although TV information notices were not identified as a suggested measure for public notification/engagement in the Town's communications survey, the use of community message/notice boards on the local TV station (Cogeco YourTV) to post development information may be an avenue to enhance public communication and engagement. Cogeco is a subscription TV service in the Cobourg area which captures some but not all households in the community. The Cogeco YourTV website <https://www.yourtv.tv/cobourg-port-hope>, however, contains community message boards for a variety of topics, such as arts, charity, entertainment, health, sports and public notices/announcements, which can be accessed regardless of being a Cogeco TV customer.

Public Engagement Benefit

The use of community information/news boards on TV media like YourTV may help in the distribution of general summary information and web links regarding development applications and special projects to a wider audience in the community.

Timing Considerations

This option would require modifications to the application procedures, however it can be implemented relatively quickly over the short term following direction from Council. Eventually, in the long term, the Official Plan will need to be amended to incorporate the adopted public notification procedures in accordance with the *Planning Act*, which may be undertaken at the next general update/review.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

There is no cost to post public announcements and notices on YourTV. The use of TV message/notice boards for development applications would involve some additional staff time to condense and distribute relevant information to the TV provider, which could impact resources and service levels depending on the extent of new notification/engagement measures being implemented for *Planning Act* applications. Similar to Option 3 above, the use of TV message boards and notices may be more practical for larger, special planning projects affecting the greater community, such as comprehensive updates to planning documents, Secondary Plans, etc.

Option 5 – Prepare Planning Opinion/Recommendation Reports Before or After Public Meeting

Figure 9 above illustrates that the number of municipalities who prepare their Planning Opinion/Recommendation Reports before or after the statutory Public Meeting is rather split. The process currently used in Cobourg involves a comprehensive evaluation of the application based on provincial, county and municipal (local) policies, regulations and guidelines and the provision of a professional, objective Planning Opinion Report to Council prior to the statutory Public Meeting. This approach provides Council and the public with a comprehensive package of background information, analysis, opinions and conclusions to consider at the Public Meeting, however there is no recommendation provided in the Report. Public input provided at the Public Meeting is typically referred back to the proponent and/or planning staff for a follow-up Planning Recommendation Report to Council before a decision is rendered.

If a public open house is convened early in the process per Options 2a) or 2b), this would provide the Town with a solid understanding of public response to the proposal early in the process and, thus, it would seem to be a satisfactory approach to have the Planning Opinion Report prepared after an open house and prior to the Public Meeting. In this capacity, Council and the public would have a considerable amount of information at its disposal at the

formal Public Meeting. If neither of Options 2a) or 2b) are implemented, Council may wish to re-visit the timing of the preparation of a Planning Opinion Report.

Option 6 – Timing of Statutory Public Meeting

There have been some concerns expressed by members of the public that some Statutory Public Meetings have been held very close to the end of the *Planning Act* timelines for rendering a decision before an appeal can be lodged by the applicant. This may have the unintended consequence or perception that Council is pressured to make a decision relatively quickly or soon after the Public Meeting to avoid an appeal (although statistics over the last 30 years in Cobourg have shown that the significant majority of applicants have not taken advantage of the timeline appeal mechanism of the *Planning Act* when exceeded).

As indicated above, the processing of an application for OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plan of Subdivision/Condominium involves the comprehensive review of detailed, technical plans and background reports by numerous external agencies and municipal Departments, which can take considerable time in the form of weeks or months, depending on the size and complexity of the application. A Statutory Public Meeting is typically not scheduled by planning staff until all commenting bodies have completed their review of the proposal and provided commentary to the applicant, and the proposal and supporting documentation has been modified, updated and finalized as the case may be and the proposal is in a position to move forward to a public meeting together with a Planning Opinion Report. The municipal review process can also be delayed or extended for reasons beyond the control of the Municipality. In such cases, the Public Meeting is pushed closer to the *Planning Act* timeline, or possibly beyond the timeline.

For larger, more complex applications, convening the Statutory Public Meeting early in the process will not have the benefit of any detailed analysis or opinions for Council and the public to view at the Public Meeting, nor would the public see any changes made to the proposal as a result of feedback obtained during the detailed review until much later in the process. As an option, the process could be modified to require at least one Public Meeting a certain minimum date (ie. 30 days) prior to the *Planning Act* timeline regardless of the status of the application, which may result in a further Public Meeting being required later in the process if significant changes are made to the proposal after the meeting.

It should be noted that the convening of a Statutory Public Meeting early in the process would preclude the implementation of a public open house per Option 2 above.

Public Engagement Benefit

While local statistics show that timeline appeals are not prevalent in Cobourg, scheduling a Statutory Public Meeting at least **30** days in advance of the *Planning Act* timeline would help minimize the public perception that Council is pressured to make a decision before the application could be appealed to the LPAT.

Timing Considerations

The use of an upset timeframe for Statutory Public Meetings would require modifications to the application procedures, however it can be implemented in the short term following direction from Council. As with the other options, the Official Plan will need to be amended in the long term to incorporate the adopted public notification procedures in accordance with the *Planning Act*, which may be undertaken at the next general update/review in 2022.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

A requirement to convene the statutory Public Meeting at least **30** days in advance of the timelines prescribed under the *Planning Act* would still provide a reasonable period of time for circulation and review of applications and associated documentation and, thus, should not have a significant impact on the Municipality's resources for the majority of applications. There may be occasions where deficiencies or outstanding information exist based on initial review, in which case Council may consider refusing the application or requesting that the applicant satisfy the outstanding requirements which may result in an exceedance of the timeline. Either way, the applicant still has the option of appealing the matter to the LPAT in accordance with the *Planning Act*.

8.2 Site Plan Approval (SPA)

As indicated in Section 7.2 above, the Site Plan Approval process is considered a detailed, technical review of development plans and supporting materials once the principle of development (ie. zoning) has been established. Accordingly, the *Planning Act* has prescribed a timeline of 30 days before an applicant can appeal a non-decision of Council, and no formal public notification is required. Survey results show that over 80% of municipalities do not provide formal notice of an application for SPA, and approx. 35% of municipalities have delegated approvals to a municipal official.

The Town of Cobourg's process which requires the posting of a development information sign on the property is relatively advanced compared to other comparator municipalities. Additionally, planning staff also provides an application receipt Memo at the beginning of the SPA process and an approval recommendation Report prior to Council approval in public, open sessions of Council. Information associated with SPA applications is also posted on the "*Planning Applications*" page of the Planning & Development website. Finally, planning staff notify members of the public of a SPA application where they are on record as participating in a prior process involving and OPA, ZBLA and/or Draft Plan of Subdivision/Condominium.

An additional measure of notifying the public of a SPA application could include a mail-out and/or newspaper notice, however given the relatively short timelines prescribed in the *Planning Act*, the additional staff resources required to implement such an option, and the fact that only 8% of municipalities surveyed implement this type of notification, this is not a recommended approach. Based on my experience, the Town's current procedure provides

reasonable notice of SPA applications to the public and is within the Department's service delivery capabilities.

Option – Enhanced Site Plan Information Sign Template

Notwithstanding the above, an enhanced site plan information sign template which utilizes the Town's corporate branding scheme in the form of standard design, content and colours would be beneficial to provide a consistent appearance and an informative, legible notice for the public (similar to the signs identified in Section 8.1 – Option 1 above). The implementation of this option would have the same timing and financial/budget/staff resource impact considerations as those found in Section 8.1 – Option 1.

8.3 Consents and Minor Variances

The following option is identified to enhance public notification procedures for Consents and Minor Variances:

Option – Sign Posting

As indicated in *Figure 11* above, 62% of municipalities utilize a combination of mail-out and sign posting for notices associated with Consents and Minor Variances, and another 25% combine newspaper notices with the aforementioned tools. Cobourg utilizes a mail-out and newspaper notice, which only 13% of municipalities implement.

This option would see an enhanced multi-faceted approach to public notification implemented for Committee of Adjustment applications, involving a combination of mail-out, sign posting, newspaper and social media/website. Because the Committee of Adjustment is a quasi-judicial body separate from Cobourg Council, a distinct sign template could be designed in consultation with the Communications Manager which would provide a unique appearance and informative notice of these applications for the public. Some precedent examples are shown in *Figure 16* below:

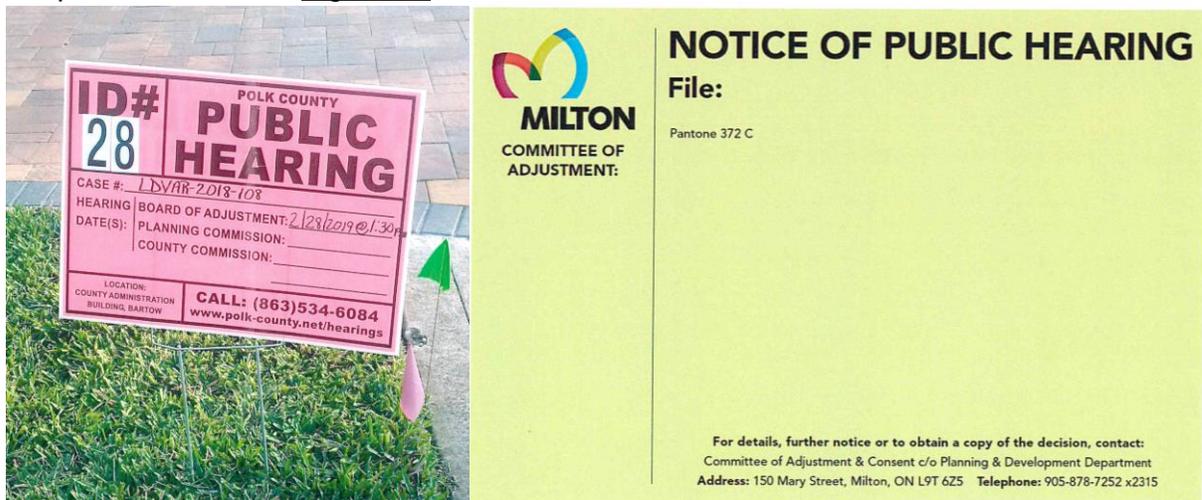


Figure 16: Precedent Examples of Public Notice Signs for Committee of Adjustment Applications

Public Engagement Benefit

The use of a sign posting would be seen as an added measure of notifying people in the neighbourhood or community who may not otherwise receive or see a notice via other means.

Timing Considerations

The design and specifications of the notice signs would require some up-front planning with the Communications Manager in collaboration with area sign companies, however this could be initiated relatively quickly in the short term.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

The applicant would be responsible for constructing and erecting the sign to municipal specifications at its cost, similar to Site Plan Approval applications. There will be some initial staff time and material cost imposed to establish the sign template, however ongoing administration of this option would have little impact on municipal financial resources or service delivery.

8.4 Social Media

As Figure 12 above illustrates, the Town of Cobourg's practice of including notices of *Planning Act* applications on one or more social media platforms is shared by 71% of municipalities surveyed. A review of the Town's website and survey information has revealed that it is relatively easy to navigate through the website and find notices of *Planning Act* applications, but it is always important to monitor, adjust and improve on an ongoing basis based on public feedback. As a value-added mechanism, the municipal website has a function whereby members of the public can sign up for e-mail notifications when new public notices are posted, which is a handy tool for those who would like to see municipal notices in their neighbourhood or the community in general, but do not want to check the website on a regular basis.

The Communications Manager recently conducted a survey which asked for public feedback on the current state of the municipal website and what adjustments would make it a more user-friendly experience in general, but also with respect to planning application notifications and information specifically (see Section 7.6 - Communication Survey above). The Town of Cobourg's social media platforms have a huge on-line reach with nearly 5,000 direct followers to the Facebook platform and 2,586 on the Twitter platform. There may also be other social media platforms that could be explored to enhance public engagement for planning applications. The following option is identified:

Option – Targeted Social Media Messaging

The Communications Manager is currently undertaking a redesign of the Cobourg.ca homepage and will incorporate a ‘hot button’ on the site’s main navigation that will redirect the user in ‘one click’ to a comprehensive listing of Planning and Development news and notices. These enhancements are aimed at simplifying the navigation process for persons seeking information and notices on planning applications and development proposals. In addition, the use of multiple on-line digital platforms will be explored to further engage a wider audience. For larger projects that have a broader community impact, the use of the new on-line community engagement platform “*Bang the Table*” will provide an easy and secure way for the public to participate on-line.

Public Engagement Benefit

The enhancement of the municipal website will enable a more user-friendly experience and simplify navigation and, thus, make it easier and quicker for the public to access planning application notices and information. Furthermore, the use of other popular social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, will be explored to target additional sectors of the community. The engagement platform *Bang the Table* is a new digital on-line community engagement tool the municipality can employ to reach out to the public and obtain feedback on projects that impact the greater community.

Timing Considerations

The implementation of this option would require initial consultation with the Communications Manager regarding information needs, organization and logistics but could be undertaken in the short term period following approval.

Financial/Budget/Staff Resource Impact Considerations

As indicated above, there will be some initial staff time required to implement enhancements to the website, as well as regularly administer other social media platforms. The Communications Manager has advised that the launch of the redesign of the Cobourg homepage will take place in mid-May, which will include enhancements to the Cobourg.ca homepage and the Planning and Development webpages.

8.5 *Public Meeting Procedure*

As referenced in Sections 6.4 and 7.4 above, Cobourg’s Statutory Planning Public Meeting procedure is well organized and structured to provide Council and the public with a reasonable overview of the planning application, associated reports, and other relevant information, and to provide the public with an opportunity to make representation, ask questions and provide input, orally and/or in writing, to Council for their consideration prior to making a decision. Public Meetings have not traditionally been a forum for debate, nor are

any decisions ever made at these meetings. The format and structure of Agendas are generally the same for all Public Meetings conducted by Council.

Of those municipalities that prepare a formal written Planning Public Meeting Agenda, the Town of Cobourg's is quite similar, if not more organized and structured in my opinion. Some municipalities do not have a written Agenda whatsoever, but rather follow a script that is verbally conveyed to the audience.

In light of the above, it is not recommended that Council change its current procedure for Planning Public Meetings. In the event that Council does wish to make a change in some capacity, it would likely necessitate a change to Council's Public Meeting procedures for all municipal matters.

9.0 CONCLUSION

It is widely recognized that greater involvement by citizens through public engagement results in a better-informed community, a greater sense of ownership and trust in initiatives, and increased public satisfaction with municipal programs, services and long-term plans. Cobourg Municipal Council is committed to ensuring that a progressive, methodical approach to citizen engagement is implemented, both in the development review process under the *Planning Act* and in everyday municipal initiatives, which will ultimately lead to improved decision-making.

The development approvals process in Ontario today is complex and highly regulated through Provincial and municipal legislation, plans, and policies, however it is evident that there are numerous innovative options available to municipalities which may help enhance engagement opportunities with the public. This Report was intended to provide an overview of the planning notification and engagement procedures currently in effect in Cobourg, paint a picture of what other municipalities are doing when it comes to public notification and engagement procedures regarding planning applications (best practices), identify a number of potential options for enhancing public engagement in the community, and propose an approach for seeking public feedback on this municipal engagement initiative.

While many options exist for enhancing the public notification and engagement procedures for Planning Act applications, it will be important to ensure that the implementation of any such changes are practical and mindful of the operational and resource capabilities of the Planning Department and Municipality in general, and maintain compliance with the *Planning Act*. The options identified in this Report have taken these important aspects into consideration.

10.0 POLICIES AFFECTING THIS PROPOSAL

The key policies affecting this proposal include:

- Cobourg Public Engagement Policy
- Cobourg Official Plan

11.0 COMMUNICATION RESULTS

This Report provides a summary of the feedback received from a selection of Southern Ontario municipalities and from the annual communications survey regarding development application notifications and procedures, and recommends that a comprehensive Communications & Public Engagement Plan be implemented in order to inform the public of this Report and the Options for enhancing the public notification and engagement process for *Planning Act* applications.

12.0 ATTACHMENTS

APPENDIX I: LIST OF FIGURES

APPENDIX II: COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN: REVIEW OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCEDURES FOR PLANNING ACT APPLICATIONS

13.0 AUTHORIZATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

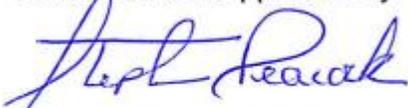
Prepared By:



Glenn J. McGlashon, MCIP, RPP
Director of Planning & Development



Reviewed and Approved By:



Stephen Peacock, P. Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

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APPENDIX II
**COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN:
 REVIEW OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCEDURES
 FOR PLANNING ACT APPLICATIONS**



April 11, 2019.

Town of Cobourg's Communications & Public Engagement Plan
RE: Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications
 Delivered by Ashley Purdy, Communications Manager.

Background

On April 30, 2018 Municipal Council passed a motion directing planning staff to review the Town of Cobourg's public notification, meeting and engagement procedures pertaining to applications submitted under the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.P., as amended, and to submit a report to Council for consideration. The report *Review of Public Notification, Engagement & Meeting Procedures for Planning Act Applications* has been submitted to Council for consideration along with the Communications & Engagement Plan to support it.

The Town of Cobourg has adopted a Public Engagement Policy to ensure a consistent, fair and effective approach to public engagement in the community. The Policy specifies that greater involvement by citizens through public engagement will result in a better-informed community, a greater sense of ownership and trust in initiatives, and increased public satisfaction with municipal programs, services and long-term plans. Planning Staff recently conducted research, consultations and surveys with other Ontario municipalities and land use planners to better understand the various approaches used to notify and engage the public on applications made under the Planning Act. In addition, the Communications Department recently launched its annual communications survey seeking input on how citizens stay informed on Town services and initiatives and how the Town can continue to improve.

The Town of Cobourg will be rolling out the **Communications & Public Engagement Plan: Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications** to its citizens in order to inform members of the public and invite feedback on the options worthy of consideration to improve the Public Engagement Process for Planning Act Applications, specifically:

Topic	Options
OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium	<p>Option 1 – Sign Posting in addition to existing notification methods</p> <p>Option 2 – Public Open House</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2a) - for all applications; ○ 2b) - for large, complex applications; ○ 2c) - no change to current process <p>Option 3 – Radio Ads for special planning and development projects that affect the broader community</p> <p>Option 4 -- Planning Opinion Report before Statutory Public Meeting [if Options 2a) or 2b) implemented, after the open house and prior to the Public Meeting], with final Planning Recommendation Report after the Statutory Public Meeting</p> <p>Option 5 – Timing of Public Meeting -- Convene the Statutory Public Meeting no later than 30 days before the end of the respective <i>Planning Act</i> timelines</p>
Site Plan Approval	Option -- Enhancements to the existing signage program for consistency and corporate branding
Consents & Minor Variances	Option – Sign Posting in addition to existing notification methods
Social Media Platforms	Option – Targeted Social Media Messaging ('hot button', calendars, webpages, social newsletters, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter)
Public Meeting Procedure	No change to current procedure (standard municipal Agenda template)

To encourage a higher level of public engagement The Town of Cobourg will be convening a Council Public Meeting on Monday, June 3rd, 2019 from 5-6 p.m. and will be launching a town-wide online survey. The survey will be active from Monday, May 6th until Monday, May 27th, 2019 giving citizens four weeks to provide feedback.

The Communications & Engagement Plan will employ a variety of tactics listed below in order to ensure that citizens are well-informed of the **Communications & Public Engagement Plan: Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications** and have had the opportunity to participate in the online survey, attend the public meetings and provide informed feedback to Council.

Final Communications & Public Engagement Feedback Report

A final Communications and Public Engagement Feedback report will be completed by the Communications Manager and sent to Municipal Council for the Committee of the Whole Meeting on Monday, July 22, 2019. The report will include:

- All public comments collected from the online survey (May 6-May 27, 2019)
- All public comments collected from Town staff and Council
- All public comments collected from the Council Public Meeting (June 3, 2019)
- Analysis of the communication and engagement reach metrics and tactics used

The Final Communications and Public Engagement Feedback report will be attached as an appendix to the Director of Planning and Development's report to Council.

Important Dates

- The Town of Cobourg and Municipal Council will be conducting the following engagement tactics and public meetings in regards to the **Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications**:
 - Communications & Public Engagement Plan Timeline – Monday, May 6-August 12, 2019.
 - Online Survey – Monday, May 6 until Monday, May 27, 2019.
 - Public Meeting – Monday, June 3, 2019 at 5 p.m.
 - Committee of the Whole Meeting – Monday, July 22, 2019 at 6 p.m.
 - Regular Council Meeting – Monday, August 12th, 2019 at 6 p.m.

Target Audiences

- Cobourg citizens
- Local news media

Budget

- Minimal budget required for communication activities including issuing of Press Releases, Public Notices, creation and execution of social media campaigns, etc. (No cost)
- Northumberland News Ad Block (No cost)
- Cost for design and printing of posters (\$100)

Tactical Deliverances/Timeline

Date	Audience	Action Item/Vehicle	Content
May 2019			
May 1/19	Media	Municipal Matters	Mayor John Henderson to add a topic discussion to YourTV's 'Municipal Matters' segment to discuss the plan and remind citizens to participate.
May 6/19	Council/ Town Staff	Internal Email	Internal email to all Municipal Council and Town Staff announcing the Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Communications and Public Engagement Plan and online survey process. All Council and Town staff should be aware and be ambassadors of the communications and engagement plan.
May 6/19	Citizens	Webpage Goes LIVE	<p>Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications webpage goes live. On the webpage citizens will find the Online Survey and be able to submit further feedback to communications@cobourg.ca.</p> <p>The webpage will contain the following key information: The Planning & Development Division's Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Council Report, the online survey, important public engagement dates (public meetings, council meetings, etc.) and contact information.</p>
May 6/19	Citizens	Online Survey Launches	The online survey goes live on the webpage. Deadline: Monday, May 27, 2019 at 4 p.m. EST.
May 6/19	Citizens	Poster Distribution	<p>Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Plan posters printed and distributed across the Town of Cobourg, to local service clubs and Municipal offices, etc.</p> <p>Distribution locations include: Cobourg Public Library, Cobourg Community Centre, Victoria Hall Administrative Offices, Finance and Planning and Development Offices.</p>
May 6/19	Media	Press Release	<p>Press Release outlining the Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Communications and Public Engagement Plan, re-direction to Town of Cobourg webpage and online survey. Public Meeting on June 3rd also announced.</p> <p>Press Release distributed to all local media, posted on the Town's Municipal website (www.cobourg.ca) under the 'News Centre' and 'Community News' homepage section and promoted across social media channels (Facebook and Twitter).</p>
May 6/19	Public	Municipal Website Posting	<p>Advertisement for Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Communications and Public Engagement Plan will be posted to the following pages on the Municipal website:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) 'Trending Services' – Hot Button 2) 'Community News' – News Post 3) Public Meetings Calendar 4) 'Engage Cobourg' webpage – section added. 5) Customized Webpage

Date	Audience	Action Item/Vehicle	Content
W/O May 6/19	Public	Social Media Posts	Weekly reminders posted to Municipal Social Media pages (Facebook & Twitter) increasing to twice a week as we get closer to the online survey closing date (May 27/19). Reminders will consist of redirection to the online survey, webpage and a reminder of the Public Meeting on June 3 rd .
W/O May 6/19	Public	Local Media Print and Online	Communications Manager to pitch interviews with local print and online media. E.g. Northumberland News, The HUB, Cobourg NOW, Cobourg Blog, etc.
W/O May 6/19	Public	Local Media Radio and TV	Communications Manager to pitch interview with local radio and TV media. E.g. MBC 93.3 and 107.9 FM, Northumberland 89.7 FM, YourTV (COGECO) Municipal Matters, CHEX News, etc.
May 9/19	Public	Town Ad Block	The poster* will be published in the Town's weekly ad block in the Northumberland News. A public notice** will also be published for the June 3 rd Public Meeting. <i>*Poster – View Appendix A. **Public Notice – View Appendix B.</i>
May 15, 22 & 29/19	Public	Social Media Posts	Weekly Wednesday reminders posted to Municipal Social Media pages (Facebook & Twitter) increasing to twice a week as we get closer to the online survey closing date (May 27/19) and Public Meeting date (June 3 rd , 2019). Reminders will consist of redirection to the online survey, webpage and a reminder of the Public Meeting on June 3 rd .
May 27/19	All	Online Survey Closes	The online survey will close on Monday, May 27 at 4 p.m. EST.
May 27/19	Media	Public Notice	Issue a Public Notice reminder of the Public Meeting in one week's time on June 3 rd at 6 p.m. and of the COW & Regular Council Meetings in June.

June/July 2019

June 3/19	Public	Public Meeting	A public meeting will be held to review and discuss the Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Report along with citizen feedback. Location: Victoria Hall, Council Chambers at 6 p.m.
July 22/19	Public	Committee of the Whole Meeting	Presentation, discussion and opportunity for citizen delegations. Location: Victoria Hall, Council Chambers at 6 p.m.

August 2019

August 12/19	Public	Regular Council Meeting	Council will accept or reject the Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications Report. Location: Victoria Hall, Council Chambers at 6 p.m.
August 12/19	Media	Press Release	Issue a press release advising the public of Council's decision.

R/O August Public

**Social Media,
Webpage, Town Ad
Block**

For the rest of the month of July remind citizens of the decision made by Council through various communication tactics including social media posts, updating the municipal website as well as the ***Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications*** webpage, placing advertisements in the Town Ad Block, etc.

Thank citizens for engaging with us. Encourage engagement in the future and promote active participation and engagement from Council, the Town and citizens!

-END-

Appendix A: Communications & Public Engagement Poster



PLANNING ACT APPLICATIONS

REVIEW OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCEDURES



ONLINE SURVEY

Complete the online survey
at Cobourg.ca by May 27, 2019.

Your Next Community Engagement Opportunities:

Public Meeting (June 3, 2019 at 5 p.m.)

Discuss the Review of Public Notification, Engagement & Meeting Procedures for Planning Act Applications Report and citizen feedback.

Location: Victoria Hall, Council Chambers, 55 King St. W, Cobourg.

Committee of the Whole Meeting (July 22, 2019 at 6 p.m.)

Presentation, discussion and opportunity for citizen delegations.

Location: Victoria Hall, Council Chambers, 55 King St. W, Cobourg.

Regular Council Meeting (August 12, 2019 at 6 p.m.)

Council will accept or reject the *Review of Public Notification, Engagement & Meeting Procedures for Planning Act Applications Report*.

Location: Victoria Hall, Council Chambers, 55 King St. W, Cobourg.

QUESTIONS?

Contact the Communications Department at communications@cobourg.ca or by calling 905-372-4301.

Appendix B: Customized Webpage (www.cobourg.ca/planningactapplications)

Planning Act Applications

Home / Town Hall / Current Projects / Planning Act Applications

A A A SHARE

- Current Projects
 - Cannabis Retail Plan
 - Cultural Master Plan
 - LAV III Monument
 - Planning Act Applications**
- Accessibility
- Agendas and Minutes
- Animal Services
- Applications, Licences and Permits
- Budget and Finance
- Bylaws
- Commissioner of Oaths
- Committees and Boards
- Community Grants
- Contact Us
- Departments
- Elections
- Engage Cobourg
- Freedom of Information
- Jobs
- Mayor and Council

Hide Sub-Navigation Menus Hide Banner Image Hide Quick Links Hide Contact Hide Page Subscription



- Quick Links
 - Applications Licences and Permits
 - Council Meetings
 - Departments
 - Job Opportunities
 - Mayor and Council
 - News Centre

Public Engagement Opportunity: Planning Act Applications

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Where are we now?

Planning Staff conducted research, consultations and surveys with other Ontario municipalities and land use planners to better understand the various approaches used to notify and engage the public on applications made under the Planning Act. The Town of Cobourg has adopted a Public Engagement Policy to ensure a consistent, fair and effective approach to public engagement in the community. The Policy specifies that greater involvement by citizens through public engagement will result in a better-informed community, a greater sense of ownership and trust in initiatives, and increased public satisfaction with municipal programs, services and long-term plans.

We are currently embarking on our Public Engagement Plan (see below). View the [poster](#).

We Want to Hear from You!

- Jobs ▶
- Mayor and Council ▶
- Mayor Website
- News Centre ▶
- Policies
- Report It ▶
- Reports, Studies and Plans ▶
- Taxes ▶
- Volunteer
- Have Your Say



We Want to Hear from You!

We are now embarking on our Communications & Public Engagement Plan to collect your feedback on the **Review of Public Engagement Procedures for Planning Act Applications**. We want to hear from you on how to better inform members of the public and invite feedback on the options worthy of consideration to improve the Public Engagement Process for Planning Act Applications, specifically:

Topic	Options
OPA, ZBLA and Draft Plans of Subdivision/Condominium	<p>Option 1 – Sign Posting in addition to existing notification methods</p> <p>Option 2 – Public Open House</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 2a) - for all applications; o 2b) - for large, complex applications; o 2c) - no change to current process <p>Option 3 – Radio Ads for special planning and development projects that affect the broader community</p> <p>Option 4 – Planning Opinion Report before Statutory Public Meeting [if Options 2a) or 2b) implemented, after the open house and prior to the Public Meeting], with final Planning Recommendation Report after the Statutory Public Meeting</p> <p>Option 5 – Timing of Public Meeting – Convene the Statutory Public Meeting no later than 30 days before the end of the respective <i>Planning Act</i> timelines</p>
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To encourage a higher level of public engagement The Town of Cobourg will be convening a Council Public Meeting on Monday, June 3rd, 2019 from 5-6 p.m. and will be launching a town-wide online survey. The survey will be active from Monday, April 29th until Monday, May 27th, 2019 giving citizens four weeks to provide feedback.

Online Survey

We are accepting comments on the above topic/options through an online survey as well as at our Council Public Meeting on Monday, June 3rd at 5 p.m.

Online Survey Survey Deadline: Monday, May 27, 2019 at 4 p.m. EST.

For a detailed list of Public Engagement opportunities please view the Public Engagement Schedule below.

Public Engagement Schedule	+
Town Issued News	+
Council Meeting Agendas, Minutes and Presentations	+
Document Library	+
Contact Us	+