



**SUBJECT:** 2021 annual engagement report  
**TO:** Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.  
**FROM:** Corporate Communications & Engagement

Report Number: CC-03-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 170-01

Date to Committee: May 4, 2022

Date to Council: May 17, 2022

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**Recommendation:**

Receive and file corporate communications and engagement department report CC-03-22 providing a status update on community and staff engagement.

**PURPOSE:**

**Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation

To provide committee and City Council with a status update of the city's engagement activities for 2021.

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**Background and Discussion:**

The Community Engagement Charter (Engagement Charter) was approved by City Council in April of 2013. The Engagement Charter was created by residents with support from city staff and it is an agreement between and among Burlington City Council and residents concerning community engagement with City government and establishes the commitments, responsibilities and fundamental concepts of this relationship.

To ensure the continued success of the Engagement Charter, the City invited members of the Charter team to help develop an Engagement Charter Action Plan. This team of community members and staff was known as the Charter Action Team (ChAT). The Action Plan aims to bring the Engagement Charter to life and to embed engagement into everyday practice at the City of Burlington. The Charter Action Plan was approved and adopted in April 2014. Along with Vision to Focus alignment, community engagement is part of the strategic direction “An Engaging City” in the 2015-2040 Strategic Plan. This strategic direction or pillar clearly demonstrates the city’s commitment to including residents in decision making. In 2020, it was identified that engagement is considered a priority, so much so that the department name was changed to “Corporate Communications and Engagement” (previously Corporate Communications and Government Relations) to emphasize the importance and highlight engagement within the community and City staff.

### **Discussion**

Prior to the adoption of the Engagement Charter and Action Plan, staff connected with people in the community to make them aware of projects, files, studies and upcoming decisions to be made and to obtain public opinion and input to help shape decisions. Some of this community engagement and involvement was legally required under things such as the Planning Act, while other community engagement and involvement was part of department business practices. Previously, staff practices were not consistent in terms of approach, methodology, training and tracking. Through the efforts of City staff and the Charter Action Team, many changes and practices have changed so that there is a consistent approach and standards to community engagement. Examples of this includes:

- Using IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) model and spectrum for community engagement. The city has trained over 100 staff and 7 community volunteers in the 5-day IAP2 program and 31 senior staff and Council members in IAP2 for Decision Makers.
- Use of a standardized checklist for community engagement. This checklist is used each time staff initiates engagement in the community and asks probing questions such as “what is the decision to be made?”, “how much input can the public have on the decision?” “what are goals for engaging the community?”, “who may be impacted by the decision?”, “how will the loop be closed with the public?” etc.
- In June of 2018, the City of Burlington launched a new online engagement portal called “Get Involved Burlington”. Standards on the portal include identifying where on the IAP2 spectrum the project is, the key milestones of the project, contact person, closing the loop and letting the public know how input was/wasn’t used and next steps etc.

- All surveys are reviewed by key engagement staff to ensure survey standards are met and that plain, clear language is used.
- Engagement and Communications staff work closely to create engagement and communications plans for projects.
- Training has been provided to staff in order to facilitate virtual engagement using a variety of online collaboration tools.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to keep staff and the public safe and to adhere to Provincial guidelines, 2021 was very similar to how the City engaged with others in 2020. Almost all engagement was strictly virtual with a few exceptions of outdoor or hybrid opportunities.

Although engagement was almost exclusively virtual, the uptake is still impressive as demonstrated both in the body and in the appendix of this report. In 2021, staff and Council used the following tactics to engage with the community and each other:

- Online surveys
- Polling – including online (virtual meetings and quick polls), and telephone key pad polling
- Social media
- Telephone town halls (and/or virtual meetings that allowed participation using a telephone to dial in to join)
- Use of both the public engagement portal (Get Involved Burlington) and staff engagement portal
- Virtual meetings (includes Public Information Centres (PICs), workshops, town halls, ward or community meetings etc.). While facilitating virtual meetings, many staff and council indicated that they used screen sharing, PowerPoint, Q&A, polling, MURAL (online sticky note tool) or chat functions during virtual meetings.
- Hybrid meetings, where residents had the option to attend a ward meeting either in person or online
- Use of postcards/door hangers in targeted areas where input was required

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## **Financial Matters:**

2021 operating budget included funding for:

- Software for: the two online engagement portals (public and staff sites), MURAL, budget simulation, volunteer management.
- The Community Survey was completed in 2021 using an external vendor.
- Translation services. Funds were used to translate surveys and promotional materials into several languages for key projects.

- Captioning for virtual meetings.
- Telephone Town Halls
- Marketing and promotion of the Get Involved Burlington portal.

### **Total Financial Impact**

Funding to support community and staff engagement has been approved within the base budget in the 2021 Operating Budget.

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### **Climate Implications**

Community engagement regarding the climate/environment is an important practice. In 2021 the community and or staff has provided input on items such as the Climate Resilient Burlington, Rural Active Transportation Strategy, Integrated Mobility Plan, Private Tree By-Law/Forest Protection, Home Energy Retrofit project, Transit to name a few.

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### **Engagement Matters:**

This report and appendix has been developed in collaboration with City staff and the offices of the Mayor and Council. Citizen Advisory Committees submit their own status reports and work plans to Council and are not reflected in this report.

#### **Engagement highlights are found in “Appendix A” of this report and outlines:**

- Engagement statistics from the online Get Involved Burlington portal and social media
  - Awards/Conference Presentations/Studies and Webinars that Burlington has been part of
  - New or innovative engagement approaches
  - Training
  - Projects and topics the public was consulted on
  - Internal (staff) project consultations
  - How feedback was used or influenced decision
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### **Conclusion:**

Burlington has been and continues to be a leader in the area of community engagement. In 2017, the City of Burlington was awarded “Organization of the Year” in Canada by IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation). In January of 2022,

Council was presented findings from the statistically valid 2021 Community Survey, there were continued gains made in the area of engagement:

Percentage indicates a rating of either “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree”:

Statement	2015	2019	2021
Residents have enough opportunities to provide input into decision-making about city projects and services	65%	77%	79%
I would like to provide input to the City for the purpose of influencing decision-making about city projects and services	63%	76%	80%
The City does a good job of engaging residents in decision-making about city projects and services.	54%	71%	75%
The City would welcome my opinion when making decisions about city projects and services that impact me	57%	71%	75%
The City uses input from residents in decision-making about city projects and services	50%	70%	71%
The City’s decision-making about projects and services is reflective of the voice of the majority of residents	46%	63%	65%

The consulting firm that facilitated the 2021 Community Survey remarked that the findings in all categories, including engagement were very high and not often achieved by municipalities. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly made us rethink how to engage and collaborate with each other. Going forward, there will be a need to have in-person, virtual and hybrid engagement opportunities in order to allow for broad participation and to give people a choice for their voice. We will continue to investigate and use virtual collaboration tools in order to make the most of virtual engagement. The pandemic has continued to cause a delay in engagement opportunities such as the Resident Roster and the launch of the Volunteer Management software.

Through the efforts of staff, council, members of advisory committees, and the many passionate and engaged residents of Burlington, we will continue to work together to build capacity so that the best decisions are made. Together, we will continue to work to make Burlington one of the best cities in which to live, work, play and retire in.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Dwyer

Manager of Engagement and Volunteer

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**Appendices:**

- A. Engagement Statistics and Supporting Information
- B. Social Media Statistics

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.