

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY - HWY 2 EAST COMMERCIAL AREA STRUCTURE PLAN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Foothills County is committed to engaging with citizens and stakeholders when making decisions that have the potential to impact them. Foothills County’s Public Participation Policy states that:

Public participation in the decisions of local government is important to ensure that the desires, needs and expectations of the citizens and landowners who will be impacted by those decisions are considered.

In keeping with the County’s Public Participation Policy, the Highway 2 East ASP will be developed in consideration of feedback received from stakeholders and the public.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Following are the identified objectives for the engagement process:

- Identifying stakeholders in the planning process,
- Informing stakeholders and the public of the planning process and opportunities for participation,
- Addressing questions and concerns from stakeholders and the public throughout the planning process,
- Setting up realistic expectations regarding how feedback will be incorporated into the plan,
- Building relationships with stakeholders,
- Providing safe opportunities for stakeholder and public engagement in light of the COVID-19 pandemic,
- Gathering information from stakeholders on issues such as:
 - historic land use,
 - future plans for their property,
 - concerns regarding creation of a plan for the area,
- Gathering feedback from stakeholders and the public on potential land use and servicing concepts and the draft plan,
- Being accountable to stakeholders and the public regarding how their feedback influenced the planning process, and when it did not, why.
- Meeting requirements of existing legislation and policy including the Municipal Government Act, the CMRB Interim Growth Plan and the County’s Municipal Development Plan and Public Participation Policy.

3.0 PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The County’s Public Participation Policy provides the following guiding principles for engagement:

- Authenticity
- Timeliness
- Transparency

- Inclusiveness
- Responsiveness
- Accountability
- Privacy
- Fiscal Responsibility

This engagement strategy was designed in consideration of these guiding principles and engagement activities will be delivered in a manner that is consistent with them as well. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, we have also included an additional principle, and that is “safe”. We will ensure that opportunities provided for input into the planning process consider the situation as it develops and are safe for participants, consultants and municipal staff.

4.0 LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Foothills County’s Public Participation Policy describes four different levels of engagement (See Figure 1 - Foothills County Engagement Spectrum):

1. Inform and Educate
2. Refine
3. Collaborate
4. Empower

The engagement strategy for the Highway 2 East ASP will employ different levels of engagement depending on the level of impact that the plan is likely to have on an individual. Engagement will be divided into two categories, stakeholder engagement and public engagement. Stakeholders, those likely to be more impacted by the plan, will see more opportunities for engagement than the general public.

Figure 1 - Foothills County Engagement Spectrum



Adapted from IAP2 Spectrum for Public Engagement

4.1 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders for the development of the ASP include plan area landowners, adjacent area landowners, The Town of High River, and Alberta Transportation. It is anticipated that stakeholders will be engaged early in the planning process and engagement will occur regularly in order to foster confidence in the process, assist with relationship building and facilitate incorporation of stakeholder feedback into the plan from the early stages.

The plan is to form a stakeholder group for the planning process. This group is not considered a steering committee and will not be given authority to make decisions regarding the plan. They will be asked to provide their insights and every effort will be made to provide answers to their questions and to discuss their concerns. This engagement is envisioned to fall somewhere between “refine” and “collaborate” on the County’s engagement continuum, (See *Figure 1 - Foothills County Engagement Spectrum*).

The stakeholder group will be engaged early in the project and will provide input that will be considered when exploring preliminary scenarios for land use and servicing. They will also be provided with opportunities to provide feedback on land use and servicing concepts, and the draft plan. It is anticipated that this input will result in refinements, however, it is not intended that the stakeholder group would be involved in actually designing the concepts or creating policy for the plan.

4.2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

There is likely to be interest in this project from landowners and business owners outside the plan area, both in the Town and in the County. This group will have a lower level of engagement in the process than identified stakeholders. They will be engaged later and less frequently than the stakeholders. The engagement with the public on this project is envisioned as falling in the “refine” category of the County’s engagement spectrum (See *Figure 1 - Foothills County Engagement Spectrum*).

It is anticipated that the public will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the land use and servicing concepts and on the draft plan once complete. This feedback will likely result in some refinements to both the concepts and the draft plan.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

The engagement activities that will be incorporated into the ASP development process are envisioned in 4 phases. Stakeholders will be engaged at each phase, with the public participating in Phases 2, 3 and 4.

5.1 PHASE 1 - STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS AND IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

Stakeholder Letter:

The first task in the engagement process will be to make stakeholders aware that a plan is being undertaken and inviting them to participate in the plan development process. This will be done by sending a letter to each landowner and identified stakeholder by direct mail. Letters may vary slightly depending on the stakeholder (e.g. the letters for Alberta Transportation and the Town of High River will be tailored to them as deemed appropriate). It is anticipated that the letters will address the following:

- Announcing that the county will be undertaking an ASP for this area,
- Providing a brief description of what an ASP is and is not,
- Inviting stakeholders to participate in the initial stage of the planning process by setting up a telephone interview, with municipal staff,
- Identifying the proposed plan area on a map,
- Identifying and providing contact information for the project manager.

Stakeholder Telephone Interview:

Those stakeholders who chose to will be able to participate in a telephone interview (depending on the COVID-19 situation an in person meeting with appropriate social distancing may also be an option). There will be a loose script developed for this interview to ensure that important questions are asked, and responses recorded but it is anticipated that the majority of stakeholders will have questions and concerns so the interviewers will likely spend significant time on answering questions and addressing concerns. As part of this interview, participants will be asked how they would like to be contacted with future updates or opportunities for engagement (mail, phone or email).

What we Heard Summary:

Municipal staff will prepare a summary of the results of the interviews and provide it to Council.

5.2 PHASE 2 - PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EVALUATING OPTIONS

Advertising:

A public announcement indicating that the plan is underway and inviting feedback on preliminary concepts will be placed on County’s website where a project page will be created. This project page will have information on the planning process and any relevant documents. Newspaper or on-line advertising may also be considered.

Evaluating Preliminary Land Use and Servicing Concepts:

Stakeholders who participated in previous interviews will be contacted directly (using their preferred method as indicated in the first interview) and invited to provide feedback on the preliminary concepts. They will be given a choice to either complete the on-line survey or schedule a telephone interview (depending on the COVID-19 situation an in person meeting with appropriate social distancing may also be an option). The interview (or meeting) would go through the same questions as the on-line survey.

The public will be able to provide feedback on preliminary land use and servicing concepts through the on-line survey located on the project website.

Requests for paper copies of the preliminary concepts and the survey received by phone or email will be accommodated by sending out hard copies by mail including an envelope with return postage for the completed survey.

Foothills / High River Intermunicipal Committee:

If scheduling allows, preliminary land use and servicing concepts will be presented at a regularly scheduled Foothills / High River Intermunicipal Committee meeting.

What we Heard Summary:

Municipal staff will prepare a summary of the results of the survey and present it to Council. These results will be used to refine the land use and servicing concepts into one combined concept to carry forward through the project.

5.3 PHASE 3 - FEEDBACK ON DRAFT PLAN

Advertising:

Once a draft plan has been completed, an announcement will be made on the municipal website that a draft document is available for review by the public. Social media may also be used to get the word out. Stakeholders,

who have previously participated (other than Alberta Transportation and the Town of High River) will be contacted directly (using their preferred method as indicated in the first interview) to inform them that the draft plan is available for review. Those stakeholders who did not previously participate will be notified by mail.

Draft Plan Review:

Town of High River:

Administration from the Town will be invited to undertake a preliminary review of the draft ASP at this point to identify and mitigate any major concerns, in advance of the formal 30-day circulation. A follow-up meeting will be held if required.

Alberta Transportation:

Alberta Transportation, will not be asked to review the draft plan at this point as they will receive a formal 30-day agency circulation prior to the public hearing and will not likely want to review the plan twice.

Other Stakeholders and the Public:

The draft plan will be posted on the project page, with an executive summary and some frequently asked questions and answers, a recorded video presentation that provides the plan highlights may also be provided. There will be a survey to submit feedback on the project page and a link to a forum will be provided where people can submit questions and staff will answer them (the idea is that others would be able to see the questions and the responses).

Requests for paper copies of both the draft plan and the survey received by phone or email will be accommodated by sending out hard copies by mail including an envelope with return postage for the completed survey.

Foothills / High River Intermunicipal Committee:

Every effort will be made to ensure that the draft plan, once complete, is presented at an Intermunicipal Committee meeting. This will provide an opportunity to ensure that the Town's elected officials are aware of the collaboration that has been on-going through the development of the plan and to explain how concerns that were brought forward by Town administration through the engagement process have been mitigated or addressed.

What we Heard Summary:

Municipal staff will prepare a summary of the results of the survey and present it to Council along with staff recommendations for addressing the feedback received.

5.4 PHASE 4 - PUBLIC HEARING AND APPROVAL PROCESS

Public Hearing:

As a statutory document, the Area Structure Plan will require a public hearing prior to second reading. This will be done in whatever manner Council is holding hearings at that time. Subsequent to the hearing, Council may provide direction to staff regarding amendments to the draft plan prior to further readings.

Advertising for the hearing will be done in the method that is being utilized at the time, although stakeholders who have previously participated will receive notification via their preferred communication method. Council or administration may also choose to direct mail a notification of the hearing to landowners within an expanded circulation area (beyond the half-mile radius that would typically receive notification). As part of the public hearing process, a formal circulation will also be undertaken as required under the MGA.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This engagement strategy was designed to comply with the County's Public Participation Policy, the CMRB Interim Growth Plan and the MGA. It provides stakeholders and the public with opportunities to provide input into the development of the Highway 2 East Commercial ASP at several stages of the process.

The success of this process will depend on careful management of the expectations of participants as to the level of influence that they will have on the ultimate plan. It will also be important to balance the desires of individual landowners with the need to ensure that this area is developed to its highest and best potential for the benefit of the County as a whole.