

MACC Questionnaire: Question 3

3. Do you feel the City effectively engages residents and business owners with regard to land use planning? If so, please provide an example of a successful engagement process. If not, please identify how you would work towards improving the process of engagement between the City and the public?

Mayor

Rogers:

The bad and the good... An example of the bad is the District Energy System. A classic example of "extremely poor consultation and community engagement." Worse than that, when residents came to city hall to raise their concerns, some members of Council suggested the residents were just a bunch of protesters who just needed to be "educated".

An example of the good... (Okay I might be bias as I was Chair of the Trails Task Force but..) I believe our community engagement program which took us to community association meetings across the city, worked well because we took our concepts to the neighborhood meetings and got on their agenda instead of the usual call for people to attend yet another "public meeting".

Zurowski:

A large percentage of the time the engagement process works very well however some of the time it falls short. The OCP review process has been productive as have the majority of the neighborhood plans.

I propose to consult more on the front end of public projects and push back on third party inflicted urgency.

Council

Arcand:

I don't think that the City has effectively engaged or communicated with residents and business owners in areas in which controversial projects are proposed, and indeed has acted contrary to its own City plan on numerous occasion.

I believe in full consultation with those most affected by developments long before final plans are being made. Residents and business owners **MUST** be consulted, and their input given weight and value, not just received as a token gesture.

Town hall meetings, surveys, and depending on the sensitivity of the issue, even door to door interviews, need to take place to give those most affected adequate information, and then time to discuss, understand and make informed decisions. When the majority of the

neighborhood or area residents are vehemently opposed to a concept or development, the City needs to respect that, and either modify the plan, negotiate satisfactory changes, or not push the plan forward.

Basserman:

The City has made considerable progress in engaging residents and business owners with regards to land use planning. Are we perfect, probably not and I continue to look to additional ways to improving that engagement.

Currently, we have the quite formal processes of public hearings – both formal and informal. These are mandated by the Community Charter. Additionally, the City has facilitated open houses as a means of collecting citizen input as well as employing neighbourhood or stakeholder meetings. The preparation of ‘neighbourhood plans’ such as for the Gateway and for the Crescents areas also have employed meaningful public engagement. In my personal circumstances, I meet with interest groups or individuals on a “face to face” basis to exchange insights and information.

As enhancement to the consultation outlined, the City engages Dr. Alex Michalos and the Public Research Institute to conduct an annual community survey – providing an academic look at citizenry satisfaction and interest.

Successful examples are numerous and I’ll note five:

- 3.1 The non-market housing projects at 15th and Irwin and at Davis Road and Ospika.
- 3.2 The accommodation of the Sikh Temple on Davis Road.
- 3.3 The rezoning of lands to accommodate the Treasure Cove Casino and Hotel – with a particular focus on the relationship between the developer and the Van Bien neighbourhood.
- 3.4 Matters of in-fill housing in the Crescents area are notable in that council has listened to residents and respond in different ways based on knowledge gained from proponents and current residents.
- 3.5 The Official Community Plan was the product of very intensive engagements with many interest and stakeholder groups.

Cranston:

I feel that the City is effective engaging residents and business owners when there is a Public Hearing involved...however, I am not sure if every resident and business owner is always aware that a hearing is being held for every land use planning meeting. The Official Community Plan (OCP) is quite thorough and does try to maintain neighborhoods as the history of them has evolved. I have discovered through my own ignorance, that most of us have never even seen the OCP, let alone read the over 100 pages that makes up the plan. I am currently in the middle of reading it so that I have an inkling of what is going on. If I am elected to City Council, I will be a very loud voice

for monthly Town Hall Meetings...and if that is not enough, I will fight for more. Communication is integral to the value of the City Council and the trust of the Taxpayer. I was fortunate enough to go for the walk along the green corridor that was organized by the Millar Addition Citizens' Coalition and I found it to be an enriching experience. There were respectful conversations and a high level of positive energy...this is the type of group that I want to be involved in...people that step up to the plate and have a plan in place. You should each take pride in being a part of the vision of Downtown Prince George.

Derrick:

The city does not always fully engage the residents of Prince George. I believe that there does need to be a better form of communication between the city and its residents. Whether the city needs to its Webpage, Newspapers and other media as well as more town hall meetings. Communication is key to helping residents understand the issues.

Frizzell:

The "improvement of civic engagement" piece in the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) needs to be given higher priority by the incoming council. It is currently slated for attention as the last of all the ICSP components. Current processes would be dramatically improved with proper attention.

While the philosophy of improved communication takes on higher priority, I would also work toward this concretely by developing a portal (piloted by an online website, then expanded to ensure that non-internet users would be comfortable) that would provide communications between the city and the public. Portals are extremely common in identifying public opinion and communicating it to decision-makers (e.g. public weblogs at opinion250 and the Prince George Citizen have been responsible for determining what the public finds important and hearing salutation from the public, like using the amphibex to break up the ice-jam). Conversely, portals can be extremely valuable tools for a city to have, in identifying affected residents, and targeting communication to them (e.g. as policy around an energy system are developed, it would be simple to identify nearby residents, and invite their opinion, quickly and effectively).

Web-based portals should certainly not be considered a sole solution for communication problems... this would simply be one concrete way for starting down the path to ensuring that every project will begin with the city knowing as clearly as possible the opinions of the residents, and residents knowing as clearly as possible the intentions of the city.

Green:

I believe the City does what is required for engagement, but it is clearly not always effective. Sometimes perceptions are that things are "done deals" and then after the fact, public consultation occurs as a token event. I believe public hearings, especially hot button topics, should be held separately from regular council business, so full attention can be paid to the topic. I also believe decision should not be made at the conclusion of the hearing, but rather time given to reflect on all the information just presented, so

councillors can make the best decision with adequate time to weigh all the facts. The outcome may still not be what some people would want, but it gives more credibility to the decision because true consultation has occurred.

Kauk:

I am not certain that City Council practices good communication policies at all, much less when deciding on land use. That said, there are specific guidelines in place for all applicants of zoning changes to follow, including the size, colour, and type of sign that must be posted on the property in question, rules for who should be notified within a specific distance of the property, and of course, the public hearing at city council meeting.

If I am fortunate enough to be elected to City Council, I will make it my priority to meet with both applicant and affected citizens, to make myself available to anyone wishing to discuss a project, and to vote on land use according to the will of the community, not my own personal biases or beliefs.

Krause:

The City of Prince George certainly tries to effectively engage residents and business owners with regards to land use planning. For example every effort has been made over the years to engage citizens in Official Community Plans and more recently the Trails Master Plan. I know that there is a sincere desire on the part of Council and staff for citizen engagement. Historically it has been difficult to get decent turn outs at public sessions unless the issue is controversial or directly affects the participants. We are continually learning from best practices from elsewhere about how the process might be more successful.

Munoz:

L&M Engineering has successfully engaged the public on a number of their proposed residential developments, i.e., University Heights. In my view, proponents who submit major land use applications to the City should be mandated to effectively engage the public, through an open and transparent public consultation process, and well before the land use application comes before council. I am of the view that it is not the responsibility of elected officials to do this work on behalf of the applicant. Where the City is the land owner, the same should apply and well in advance of a public hearing at City Hall and long before the shovel hits the ground.

Nakamura:

I am not aware of an example where the City effectively engaged residents and business owners.

The process of what occurred with Friendship Lodge will not be repeated if I am elected to council. I supported the concept of Friendship Lodge because I had intuition that it was a done deal and felt it was better to work with the idea instead of opposing it.

I feel the City needs to review its method of consultation with the public and revamp their whole process of how to deal effectively with residents and business owners. When I hear candidates talk about moving services into the VLA, this only reminds me of our situation here in the Millar Addition. There is huge pressure for services to move out of the downtown core. I feel that certain services and businesses cannot operate in close proximity. It is fair to say that we have tried this for long enough and it is clearly not working. The City has in the past succumbed to businesses as what happened approximately 14 years ago when the sex trade workers were red-zoned out of downtown and moved up Queensway. This poor planning on the part of the City came back to haunt them because the problems are even worse downtown and neighbourhoods continue to be overburdened with social problems. The key to a successful downtown revitalization is fair and open engagement with all stakeholders.

Skakun:

The City has done a poor job of its communication at times. We as a City go by the rules in the Community Charter about notifications on zoning issues but it does not go far enough. I would think a good example of an engagement with the public would be the long term plans for Exhibition Park. There were neighborhood meetings, mail outs and a fair bit of dialogue between myself and some of the residents. Our staff listens to concerns and incorporated what they could in the park plans.

I think the bigger the project or the more impact that it would have on a neighborhood the amount of notification and consultation would go up. When I say consultation, I mean having some genuine two way communication that is agree on and recorded. I would also put more onus on the developer or organization to be properly prepared and prove that they did extensive consultation with the affected area before we voted on it in council chambers. Another option would be to do a community wide survey of the City and get feedback on what it is that the residents expect of the City when there is rezoning and land use changes.

Stoltz:

I believe that the process of engagement between the City and the public is very good.. The current Official Community Plan was Adopted on the 17th Sept, 2001. It was done with the assistance of the entire City Council of the day, an OCP Public Advisory Committee, the staff from the City, and UMA Engineering in conjunction with the general public through open discussions and feedback. However, the OCP was not created with the help of a crystal ball. As such, there are going to be items that come up that are going to require City Council to listen to the community and gather information with which to make a decision. Ultimately, they will make that decision which they

believe is in the best interest of the community as a whole. If that decision is against the wishes of the community, then they will have to account for that come election time.

Ulch:

Land use planning is when Council is approached to rezone for a purpose like the City Garage; to the Farmers Market. To re-zone is some-ones idea; positive or negative outcome. It is the Council that passes or rejects.

Wilbur:

There is room for improvement in how and when city management and council communicates its ongoing study of Land Use. A critical element of planning is dialogue with all stakeholders at all stages of planning. There appears to have been a jump to a plan to invest in a bio-energy system and the preferred location before engaging the most important stakeholders, the residents who would be impacted. The process of engaging stakeholders should be inclusive, transparent, methodical and accountable.