OFFICIAL PLAN 5-YEAR REVIEW

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2021

Elgin County
Progressive by Nature

Have Your Say!

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EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

A robust public engagement process will result in a stronger, more relevant Official Plan. The Communications and Engagement Strategy ("Strategy") will aim to make the most of stakeholder's and citizen's problem-solving potential, build community and create advocates for the Official Plan.

The Strategy is focused on ensuring public engagement is transparent, focused and accessible and will serve as a guiding document detailing the County's approach to external public engagement and includes:

- Background
- Purpose
- Our Vision and Promise
- Our Process
- Opportunities
- Framework
- Target Audience(s)
- Outreach and Communication Tactics
- Performance Metrics

BACKGROUND

•The County of Elgin adopted the current Official Plan (OP) in 2013. The Planning Act (Section 26) requires every municipality to update its Official Plan every five (5) years. Plans must have regard for matters of provincial interest and ensure consistency with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).

•The extent of engagement and participation at various open houses and meetings held during the Official Plan process in 2013 is unknown. The effectiveness of governance and committee support structures in place are also unknown and metrics/measures established upon which to assess the overall success of the engagement process held at the time the Official Plan was approved are not available. A new Strategy has been developed that builds on the County's recent public engagement initiatives.

•The purpose of an Official Plan Review is to: ensure it reflects the changing needs, opportunities and aspirations of the County; that changes to community vision/values, directions, policies and actions are reflected in the Official Plan; position the County for its next phase of growth until 2046; incorporate new provincial legislation and regulations (such as the new 2020 Provincial Policy Statement; and implement new policy initiatives and plans (such as the Elgin Natural Heritage Study).

•The County of Elgin is not developing a new Official Plan, we are reviewing the existing Official Plan to determine where updates need to be made.

•The County's Official Plan policies address important parts of community-building that affect everyone who lives and works in Elgin County, including agriculture, transportation, housing, culture and heritage, the environment and the economy. The various projects in
the Official Plan Review program must be coordinated with evolving Provincial legislation and policies.

Elgin County's Official Plan:

- •Makes the public aware of the County's general land use planning principles and policies;
- •Ensures growth is coordinated and meets our community's needs;
- •Helps the community understand how their land may be used now and in the future;
- •Helps decide where development will occur, and where roads and other services will be built;
- •Provides a framework to local municipalities in the preparation of their updated local Official Plans,
  Official Plan Amendments and Zoning By-laws;
- •Provides a way to prioritize conflicting land use principles while meeting local, regional and provincial interests; and,
- •Demonstrates Council's commitment to future growth of Elgin County.

BACKGROUND

The County is reviewing the current Official Plan to ensure it reflects the changing needs, opportunities and aspirations of our County. The review process will:

- Position the County for its next phase of growth until 2046 (time horizon based on 25 years);
- Incorporate new provincial legislation and regulations;
- Provides the policy framework for Local Municipal Partners;
- Implement new policy initiatives and plans (e.g. Transportation Master Plan, Elgin Natural Heritage Study, Emergency Services Master Plan, St. Thomas-Elgin Affordable and Social Housing Strategy);
- Consider new trends, ideas and policy implications; and,
- Engage with the community and consider community and stakeholder feedback when revising policies, developing new policies and amending the Official Plan.

A significant part of an Official Plan Review is to engage in considerable public and stakeholder consultations regarding the current Official Plan and any proposed changes.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS

There are active projects relating to Elgin County's Official Plan. They include:

- Transportation Master Plan
- Elgin Natural Heritage Study
- St. Thomas-Elgin Affordable and Social Housing Strategy
- Emergency Medical Services Master Plan(contingent on funding)

Throughout the OP Review process, we will coordinate with these projects, when possible. This will involve the following strategies:

- Incorporating lessons learned and building on input received through recent engagement activities;
- Aligning messaging;
- Coordinating engagement activities, when appropriate;
- Distributing communication materials at related events to spread the word; and,
- Cross-promoting at events or meetings, when possible.

There may be additional opportunities to coordinate community engagement at Elgin's library branches and at events attended by Elgin's Tourism Staff this summer. This is contingent on COVID-19 conditions.

OUR TIMELINES

01 OP Review Launch & Preliminary Planning

- Special Meeting of Council (Feb. 25, 2021)
- Introduction to Local Councils
- Launch of Survey (February 25 – April 15, 2021)
- Engagement Strategy Review
- RFP for Consultant support issued
- **What We Heard (May 1, 2021)**

02 Policy Review & Information Gathering

- Engage consultant to undertake population projections and review key studies
- Begin work on Provincial policy conformity and map new policies where needed (ongoing throughout)
- **June/July 2021 (ongoing research)**

03 Community Engagement

- Community outreach and information sessions
- Focus group meetings and interviews
- Written submissions (email, print)
- Advertisements, mailings, social media, etc.
- Community meetings
- **Ongoing until Plan is approved by County Council**

04 What We Heard

- Consolidate community & stakeholder feedback into "what we heard" reports which will be posted on the website and shared with County Council
- **What We Heard #1: May 1, 2021**
- **What We Heard #2: June 1, 2021**
- **What We Heard #3: September 2, 2021**
- **What We Heard #4: December 1, 2021**
- Other What We Heard reports will be published on an as needed basis

05 Plan Conformity

- Review feedback received
- Continue to engage the public in the review of draft policies and possible OP amendments
- Check-in with Council
- Review plan conformity (provincial policy) – ongoing
- **September/October 2021**

06 Council Review & Plan Finalization

- Council to finalize Official Plan
- Submit Official Plan to Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval
- **December 2021 – February 2022**

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Official Plan Review Communications and Engagement Strategy ("Strategy") is to be clear about the why we are engaging the community and how citizen input will be used to inform the Official Plan Review.

Our Community has told us that they want to be informed and heard. They want an open, transparent, accountable and accessible local government now, and for the future. It's our goal to build a community in which the public is engaged and active in decision making about local issues and where it's possible for anyone to join the conversation.

Our engaged County brings people together for conversations to address issues that impact them most, to solve shared problems, and to bring about positive social change. It involves people in the decision-making process, and encourages two-way dialogue with the County and helps us to make decisions that are more informed and reflective of our community's concerns and values.

Other benefits of engaging our community in decisions include:

- Fostering trust between the County and its citizens;
- Enabling more input from diverse audiences to be considered in key decisions;
- Increasing citizens' sense of civic responsibility and understanding of issues; and
- Reducing conflict and looking for common ground.

Elgin County is continually working to improve the ways in which citizens can participate in the decisions that impact them most.

OUR VISION

Our Vision:

•For citizens to have a meaningful role in the decisions that impact the quality of their life, specifically as it relates to the Official Plan Review.

OUR PROMISE

Our Promise:

- To provide meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate in key issues and policy review;
- Encourage two-way dialogue with the community;
- Make it as easy as possible for anyone to join the conversation; and,
- Listen and report back to our community about the outcomes of the process.

OUR FRAMEWORK

Our Framework

	Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Entrust
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed by providing information that is timely, accurate, balanced, easily understood and accessible.	We will inform you, listen to you, acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions, and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will work with you to reach a final decision and implement what you decide, to the extent that is possible within the constraints of provincial legislation.
What it means	To provide the public with balanced and objective information in plain language to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions.	To obtain public input into priorities or decisions through a publicly available process.	To partner with the public in various aspects of the planning and decision-making process including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.	To address the needs of the public.
What it looks like	Announcement of engagement opportunities, policy changes or other decisions of Council that impact citizens.	Seeking input on our Official Plan for the future, including policy reviews.	Working with established stakeholder groups, engaging our Local Municipal Partners, and providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the process.	Responding to citizen requests for enhanced feedback/engagement opportunities.
Tools and Techniques	Public Notices Website Social Media	Online and paper survey Public meetings and open houses Focus Groups/Interviews	Workshops Focus Groups	Promoting opportunities for engagement.

OUR PROCESS

These principles will anchor our actions and thinking as we engage with the public and stakeholders:

- Inclusive
- Accountable and transparent
- Built on partnerships
- Timely communication
- Supported and resourced
- Evaluate and improve

Inclusive:
We will design and deliver engagement processes that foster respect for diverse values, interests, knowledge and challenges of our citizens and which allow everyone a reasonable opportunity to participate, contribute and develop a balanced perspective. We will utilize plain language.

Accountable and transparent:
We will be clear about the reasons why citizens are being involved, their role, the level of engagement required and we will report back to our community about the outcome of the process.

Built on partnerships:
We will work with community partners, individuals, groups and organizations to increase our reach and seek mutually beneficial outcomes.

Timely communication:
We will provide information that is timely, accurate, balanced, easily understood and accessible and we will involve our citizens early in the process so that they have time to learn about the issue and actively participate.

Supported and resourced:
We will allocate sufficient staff and financial resources to implement and evaluate our community engagement initiatives.

Evaluate and improve:
We will review and adjust our community engagement initiatives, measure outcomes and look for ways to continuously improve on our efforts.

OUR GOALS

•Meet and exceed statutory requirements for citizen engagement;

•Effectively communicate the Official Plan Review process and scope to the general public and stakeholders, ensuring communications and engagement efforts are as wide-reaching as possible and are accessible in format and content (plain language);

•Educate the public about the Official Plan (what it is, what the potential is, what is the impact, frequently asked questions, etc.) and tailor these messages according to the audience;

•Engage the public to collect as much meaningful feedback regarding the Official Plan Review as possible;

•Ensure that as many members of the general public and stakeholders are informed about the review and consultation process through formal and informal means;

•Providing some “food for thought and points for consideration by the public” to aid in engagement efforts and education; and

•Ensure that underrepresented voices have a meaningful opportunity to participate in consultations.

OUR ACTIONS

•Use community feedback to aid in our understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, gaps, issues and opportunities in the current Official Plan to determine scope of changes and priorities for improvements to the Official Plan;

•Creatively engage and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, communities of interest, workers, organizations, and more;

•Provide opportunities throughout the Official Plan Review for participants to provide meaningful, appropriate and actionable input that will be used to inform updates to the Official Plan;

•Implement an engagement process that is open, transparent and respectful;

•Provide opportunities for involvement that are convenient and accessible and opportunities to engage communities of interest and under-represented communities that are harder to reach;

•Clearly communicate the Official Plan Review goals, what the engagement process can and cannot influence, and how public input was used to shape the Official Plan;

•Combine engagement events and conversations with other projects, when possible;

•Implement innovative communication and engagement tactics, when possible; and

•Understand the needs of the community and stakeholders.

OUR AUDIENCE

Effective engagement begins with considering the needs of different audiences and the engagement and communications tactics most appropriate for each group. The audience analysis ensures that the Official Plan Review process offers the variety required to generate broad interest and feedback. Different groups will be engaged at various times throughout the Official Plan Review Process.

Audience	Audience Composition
Residents	General Public, Home owners, Renters, Seasonal
Workers	People who work in the County
Visitors	Tourists, locals attending an event, other.
Businesses, Organizations and Institutions	Businesses, Service Clubs, Industry, developers, landowners, agri-business/farmers, other.
Communities of Interest	Lower-income groups, seniors, at-risk populations, people with disabilities, youth, parents, ecology organizations, other.
Stakeholders	Identified and self-identified groups

OUR ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Understand the Context
ENGAGEMENT: Survey & Special Meeting of Council

Develop the Plan
ENGAGEMENT: Visualize our Future

Gather information
ENGAGEMENT: Current State Assessment & Conceptualizing our Future

Finalize the Plan
ENGAGEMENT: Communicate appeals process

OUR OBJECTIVES

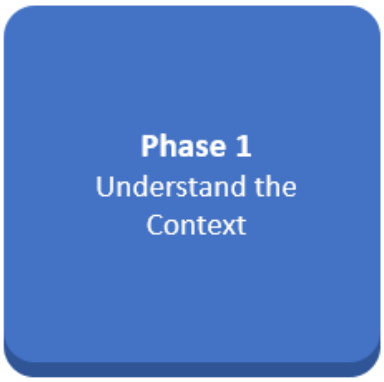
Phase 1
Objective: gather input about the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities in the current Official Plan

Phase 2
Objective: to work with the public and stakeholders to review the analysis and evaluate draft Official Plan and associated policies/technical documents

Phase 3
Objective: to work with the public and stakeholders to review the analysis, evaluate draft policies and provide feedback on Draft Official Plan.

Phase 4
Objective: to provide the public and stakeholders with information about appeals.

PHASE 1



Information to Present:

- Current Official Plan
- Introductory Video

Questions to Ask:

- What are the strengths of the current Official Plan?
- What are the weaknesses of the current Official Plan?
- What are the gaps in policy? What are the opportunities to improve the current

Official Plan?

- What is your vision for the Official Plan?
- Survey questions

How will input be used?

- The input will define the current state of Elgin County and will highlight areas for improvement that the Plan needs to address:
- Strengths to maintain and enhance
- Gaps to fill
- Weaknesses to improve
- Opportunities to realize
- The feedback will also inform policy work or adjustments to existing policies

Deliverables?

- Feedback received through the Special Meeting of Council held on February 25, 2021
- Online survey
- "What We Heard" engagement summary report #1 & #2

PHASE 2

Information to Present:

- "What We Heard" engagement summary report #1 & #2 (gathered in Phase 1 and includes survey results)
- Suggestions for policy revisions

Questions to Ask:

- Have we missed anything?
- Review the suggested framework, policy updates (includes new and revisions), have we missed anything?

How will input be used?

- The input will be used to refine the analysis and revise the draft Official Plan
- The input will inform the draft Official Plan and associated policy updates/technical background documents

Deliverables?

- Engagement materials
- Online survey #2
- "What We Heard" engagement summary report #3
- Public Meeting regarding Natural Heritage Study (August 2021)
- Public Meeting regarding Population Projection Study (October 2021)

PHASE 3

Information to Present:

- "What We Heard" engagement summary report #3
- The draft Official Plan and associated policies/technical background documents

Questions to Ask:

- Present all changes according to priority and in accordance with legislation
- Ask people their level of agreement for the direction of the Official Plan and to comment if they feel anything is missed or should be changed.

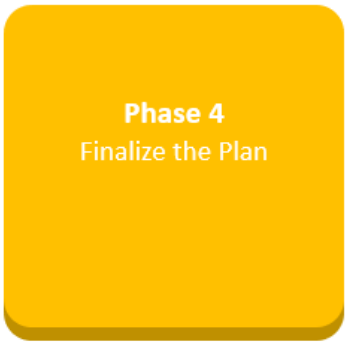
How will input be used?

- This will inform the final revisions to the Plan before presentation to Council for approval.

Deliverables?

- Engagement materials
- Online survey #3
- "What We Heard" engagement summary report #4
- Public Meeting Draft Official Plan Amendments (December 2021)

PHASE 4



Information to Present:

- "What We Heard" engagement summary report #4 (report to Council)

Deliverables?

- Public Meeting Final Official Plan Adoption (March 2022)
- Information about how to escalate concerns related to the Final Official Plan (to the Ministry)

BETWEEN ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT PERIODS

To maintain interest and supplement the feedback acquired during the engagement periods, the following communication tactics will be considered:

Goals:

- Maintain momentum
- Provide updates on OP Review progress and "What We Heard" from previous engagement periods

Information to Present:

- Interesting facts, educational materials, promotional materials
- "What We Heard" engagement summaries (#1-#4)
- Progress Updates
- Display and information material

OUR PLAN - KEY MESSAGES

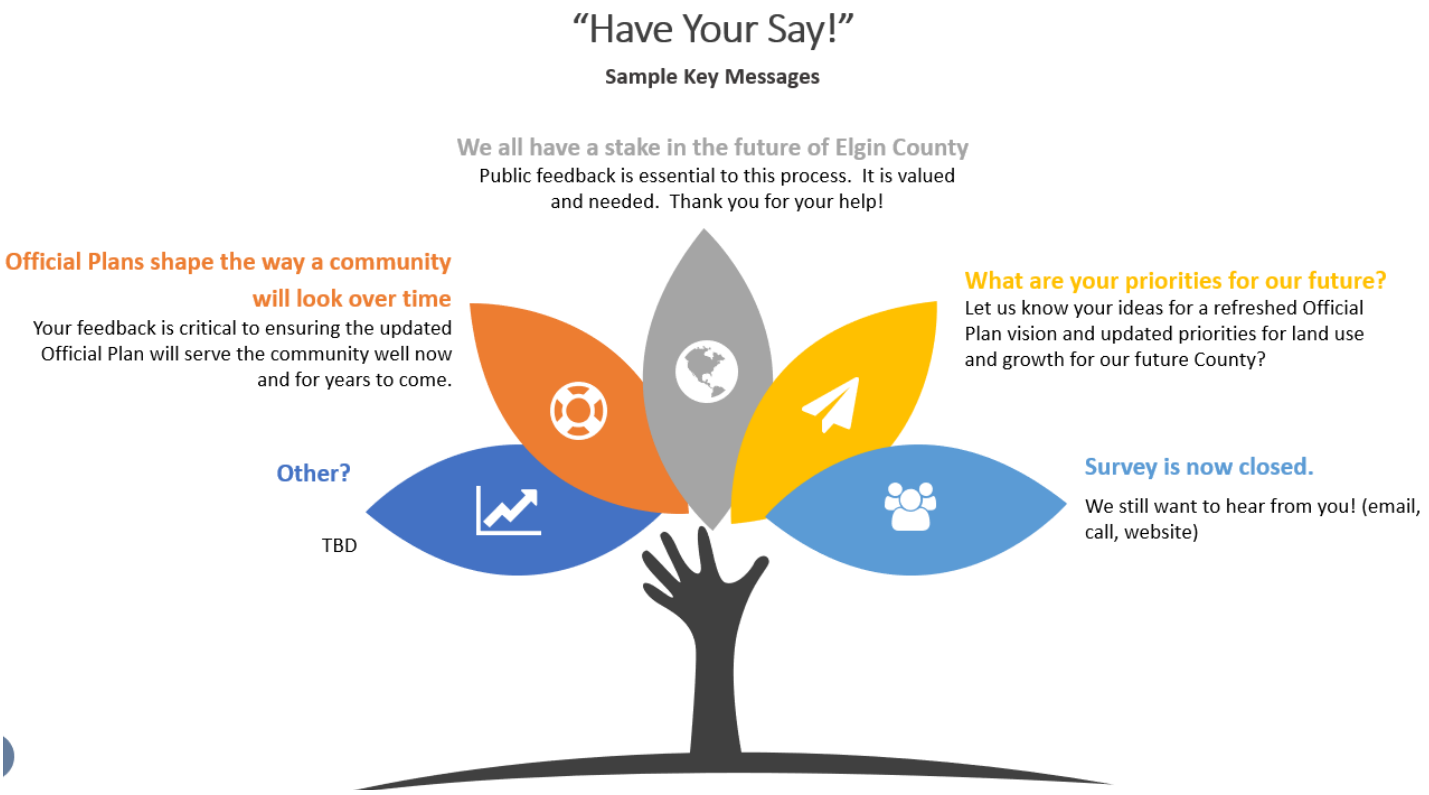
Key Messages

Key messages are the core of every communications and engagement strategy. Key messages will help start and support a conversation with the key audience and help create clarity and focus, while directing cohesive communications across all platforms.

OP Review messaging will include the following:

- Key Definitions
- The Importance of the Official Plan / Why you want to provide feedback and participate in the process / How the Official Plan is used
- Conversation starters "things to consider"
- OP Review Scope
- OP Review timeline
- How people can become engaged - Get Involved / "Have Your Say"
- Let us know what you think!
- Go online:
- Email us:
- Visit us during our engagement events.
- Messaging will include information pertaining to when and how, for example "attend the open house on X to share your thoughts" or "tell us what you think about X through this survey".
- Why Participate? This is your opportunity to share your vision for the future of Elgin County. Help shape the future of Elgin County.
- How input will be used to inform the Official Plan, policies and technical documents that will be reviewed by Council

OUR PLAN - KEY MESSAGES



OUR PLAN - COMMUNICATIONS

Communications

To reach out to as many people as possible, the Planning team will communicate regularly and effectively throughout each stage of the Official Plan Review. This includes advertising engagement opportunities, specifically online surveys and events, regular updates on the Official Plan Review status and check-ins regarding "What We Heard".

We anticipate that this will cultivate interest and understanding about the Official Plan, why it is important and why people should provide input into the Official Plan Review. This will be done through:

- Clear messaging about opportunities for engagement and how feedback will be used through promotional material, engagement displays and "What We Heard" reporting.
- Clear communications that build awareness and excitement about the significance of the Official Plan, potential evolution of areas of focus through promotional material.
- Why Participate? This is your opportunity to share your vision for the future of Elgin County. Help shape the future of Elgin County.
- How input will be used to inform the Official Plan, policies and technical documents that will be reviewed by Council

OUR PLAN - EVALUATION

Public engagement will be administered during engagement activities with "What We Heard" reports as the tool used to connect back with the community.

The Project Team (defined in Part II) will follow guidance from the Communications and Engagement Strategy to develop measures of success based on the following goals:

- Our community demonstrates a culture of public engagement
- Public engagement displays mutual respect and benefit
- Public engagement is inclusive and accessible
- Public engagement processes are effective
- Public engagement activities are well-managed and efficient

Broad themes of the evaluation will include:

- Overall acceptance of the engagement strategy (my voice was heard, this was a fair process)
- Awareness of the Official Plan and the Strategy objectives (I understand the information and how this impacts me)
- Inclusive and barrier-free engagement process
- Participants agree they understand how the input from the engagement activity will be used
- Participants agree they had enough information to contribute to the topic
- Relationship building between County staff, individuals and groups (engagement displayed mutual respect and benefit)

OUR PLAN - REPORTING & METRICS

Reporting:

"What We Heard" reports will be used to report back to Council, the public and stakeholders. These will be available to the public through the Official Plan Review website, distributed to stakeholders through regular updates (or mail, if requested), and distributed to newsletter subscribers via email.

- What We Heard #1: Deadline May 1, 2021
- What We Heard #2: Deadline June 1, 2021
- What We Heard #3: Deadline September 1, 2021
- What We Heard #4: December 1, 2021

Each "What We Heard" report will include a summary of the engagement tactics, numbers, themes, tensions and other relevant data.

OUR PLAN - REPORTING & METRICS

Quantitative Measures

The number of participants/responses will be recorded for the following:

- Targeted interviews/focus groups
- "Hard to Reach" events/interviews
- Public Events/Virtual Meetings
- Sounding Board responses
- Online survey responses

Reporting

If possible, a survey will be administered at in-person engagement events and following virtual events.

Questions will include:

- Was the time/location/date of the public engagement event convenient for you?
- Was the event accessible for you?
- The purpose of the engagement opportunity was clearly explained.
- I understand how the input from this activity will be used
- I felt respected during the activity
- I felt safe during the public engagement activity
- I felt my views were heard during the public engagement activity
- This activity was well-organized
- This activity was a good use of my time
- The information was easy to understand and informative
- The event set-up was appropriate
- What did you like most about this event?
- Do you have any additional suggestions on how the County could improve future engagement events?

"Numbers" are not always the best indicator of success. Quantitative data is useful in terms of making people aware of the Official Plan Review process, but often, the best information gathered comes from conversations with individuals or small groups of individuals. Qualitative data from small group conversations can be more meaningful and relevant.

OUR PLAN - TACTICS

Communication tactics are about spreading the word and the engagement tactics focus on collecting feedback.

The following methods will guide our communications and engagement tactics:

PLACE-BASED

Place-based, If possible

Target Audience	Engagement Tactics	Communications Tactics
• Residents • Workers • Visitors • Businesses, Organizations & Institutions • Communities of Interest • Stakeholders	• Displays • Pop-ups • Sounding Boards*	• Displays • Posters • Postcards (libraries/municipal offices, community locations)

- *Sounding Boards are group forums designed to elicit opinions about a particular matter.
- ** Pop-ups are short information sessions held a different locations across the County.

STRATEGIC INTERVIEWS AND/OR PRESENTATIONS/WORKSHOPS

In-Person

Target Audience	Engagement Tactics	Communications Tactics
• Interested Residents/Workers or Businesses/Organizations /Institutions • Communities of Interest • Stakeholders	• Focus Groups • Workshops • Presentations/Feedback events	• Direct contact

ONLINE

Online

Target Audience	Engagement Tactics	Communications Tactics
• Interested Residents/Workers or Businesses/Organizations/Institutions • Communities of Interest • Stakeholders	• Online Questionnaire(s) • Surveys • Social Media • Website	• Website • Email Updates • “What We Heard” Reports • Social Media • Advertisements (print/online) • News Releases

HARD TO REACH

Hard-to-Reach

Target Audience	Engagement Tactics	Communications Tactics
• Interested Residents/Workers or Businesses/Organizations/Institutions • Communities of Interest • Stakeholders	• Print-based surveys • Other?	• Mass mail-outs, if possible • Postcards (with information about how to participate)

IN-PERSON

In-Person

Target Audience	Engagement Tactics	Communications Tactics
• Interested Residents/Workers or Businesses/Organizations/Institutions • Communities of Interest • Stakeholders	• Focus Groups • Workshops • Presentations/Feedback events	• Direct contact