

Coquitlam's Community Engagement Framework



Introduction

Community engagement plays an important role in realizing and shaping many of Coquitlam’s projects, policies and plans, and there is a public expectation to be reasonably engaged in the decision-making process. Effective engagement considers a spectrum of public participation levels—ranging from inform to empower—to involve people in the decisions that affect where they live, work, learn and play.

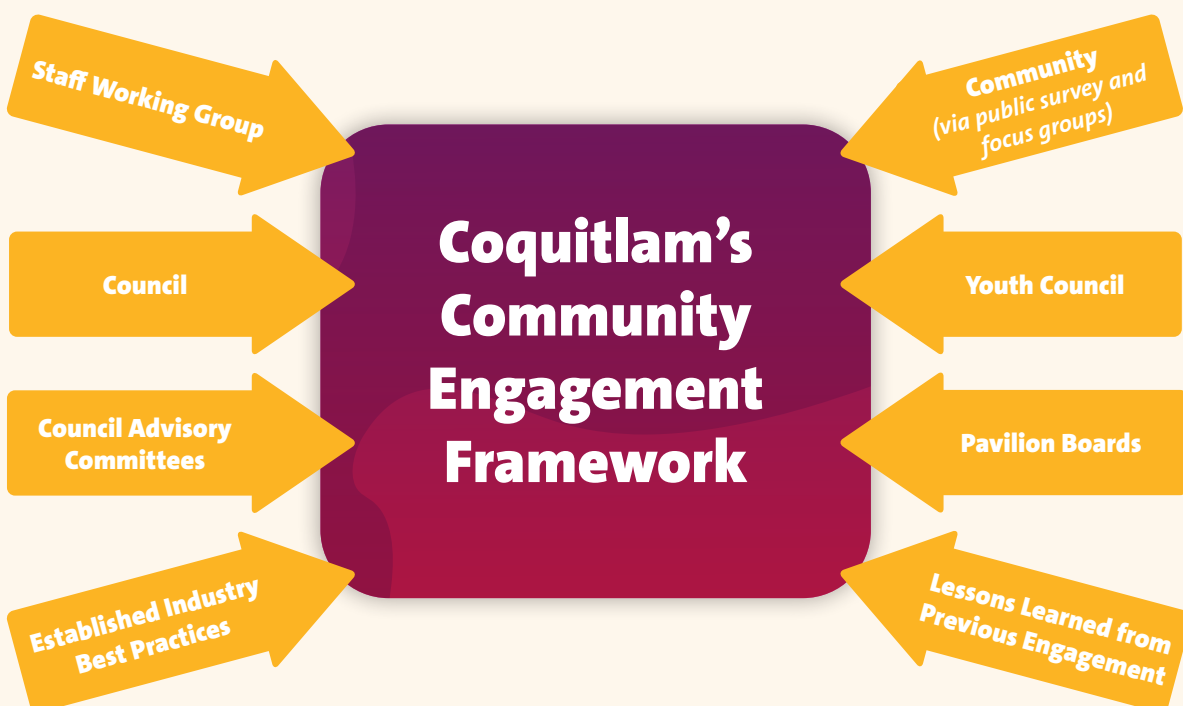
Coquitlam’s Community Engagement Framework formalizes and provides clarity to decision-makers, staff and participants about how Coquitlam informs and involves the community and interested parties in the City’s decision-making process.

The goals of Coquitlam’s Community Engagement Framework are to:

- Provide clarity and consistency on the City’s public engagement activities;
- Share information around the complex nature of decision-making in a public sector environment and the many considerations that inform City decisions;
- Support the spectrum of public participation and provide context around when, why, who and how the City informs or involves the community in decisions;
- Foster inclusiveness and diversity in the engagement process;
- Build on Coquitlam’s current engagement model to ensure consistency, data collection integrity and industry best practices;
- Provide clarity for the analysis, management and communication of data gathered through engagement activities;
- Support organizational engagement expertise and capacity; and
- Provide effective and efficient support to departments undertaking engagement activities.

How the Community Engagement Framework was Created

To help inform this Framework, the City used a number of tools and techniques to reach out to interested parties and the community.





How Local Government Decisions are Made

Engaging with the public or interested parties is **one part** of the City’s overall decision-making process. The City must balance public feedback along with a number of other factors including community need, budget, other strategies and plans, legislation, operational and technical considerations, and staff expertise.

Community engagement supports the City’s overall decision-making process by ensuring that the process is clear and transparent, and that everyone participating understands how and why a decision is made.

How Decisions are Made in Coquitlam

Every four years eligible residents elect a Mayor and eight Councillors who act as the City’s key decision-making body.

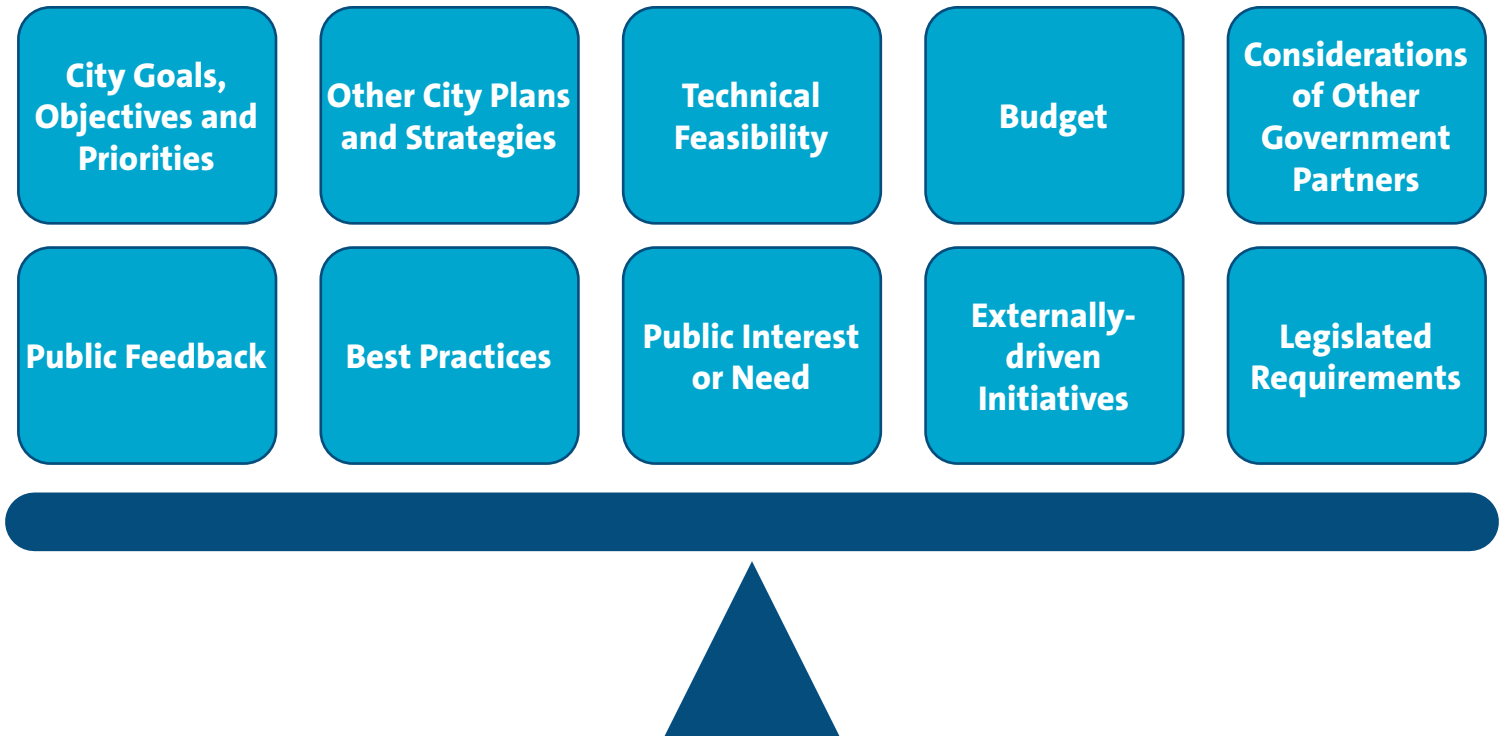




Making Balanced Decisions

Decision-making in the context of building complete communities relies on balancing various interests that can be competing, overlapping or even complementary. It can also mean balancing between our legislated requirements (e.g. bylaw amendments, Public Hearings, Council meetings) versus more optional activities (e.g. open houses, surveys, etc.)

Public feedback is one part of this balancing act. Sometimes this means that feedback we receive will be considered, but not acted on if it's not in balance with other elements of the decision to be made.



What is Community Engagement?

According to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Canada, “public participation is any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision-making” (*Foundations in Public Participation*).

In the municipal context, this means that we endeavor to keep the community aware, informed and, where appropriate, create opportunities to provide input in relevant ways on the City’s plans, policies and projects.

Community engagement fosters trust and understanding and helps improve decision-making by ensuring that different perspectives are heard and all issues or concerns are considered. Recognizing Coquitlam comprises diverse people with diverse needs, engagement considers a range of interested or invested parties, their information needs, and appropriate tools and techniques that bring diverse voices to the City’s decision-making process.

When we plan public engagement, we adhere to the best practices set out by IAP2 Canada.






Spectrum of Public Participation

Building on the above, when we determine that a project requires public input, we look to the Spectrum of Public Participation to help us determine the level of involvement from the public and/or specific interested parties. The Spectrum of Public Participation demonstrates visually that engagement goals change depending on the level of influence the public or a

specific group of people has on the decision being made. The spectrum is used to accordingly define the opportunities for engagement and the associated tools, tactics and techniques that may be used. The level of engagement can change over the course of a project, or between participating groups.

The majority of Coquitlam’s public engagement activities happen here.

In less frequent cases we engage with the public at these levels.

	 INFORM	 CONSULT	 INVOLVE	 COLLABORATE	 EMPOWER
Public Participation Goals	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Examples of engagement activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally informing about projects or decisions through tools such as website, social media, advertising, signage Information/question and answer sessions Late-stage or final decisions on projects (typically had other levels of engagement earlier on) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewpoint research panel Town Hall Meeting Information sessions / workshops that include feedback tools such as sticky notes or survey Gathering feedback on proposed concepts (e.g. park plans or land use plans) Legislated consultation requiring feedback (e.g. budget or rezoning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City-wide plans and projects such as Official Community Plan or Strategic Plan Early engagement on major capital projects Workshops, focus groups, interviews to gain input from a specific audience group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops, focus groups, interviews to gain input or test alternatives from a specific audience group Gathering feedback on clear trade-offs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Election

INCREASING IMPACT OF DECISION

This Spectrum is modeled after the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation.

Guiding Principles of Engagement in Coquitlam

In Coquitlam, all community engagement activities—whether they are at the Inform end of the public participation spectrum or include opportunities for input—will be guided by and adhere to the following guiding principles:

Transparent Because public engagement is only one aspect of the decision making process (see diagram on page 4), when consulting or involving the public we will be clear about what decisions have already been made and why. We will be clear about our engagement objective and how feedback will be used. We will articulate what is on (or off) the table for the decision-making process.

Authentic We look to best practices to determine what level of engagement (e.g. inform / consult / involve) is appropriate based on the ability for the public to influence the decision. We build our strategy in alignment with this determined level of engagement.

Inclusive and Equitable We will design engagement processes to ensure that barriers to participation (e.g. accessibility standards, child care/ activities, translation, location, time of day) are considered and, where feasible, addressed to the best of our ability and project resources.

Understandable Whether informing or seeking input, we will use plain language throughout the process and make available the necessary balanced and objective background information that people need to understand the information being presented.

Data-driven We will use best practices in the design and gathering of information and data.

Accountable We will inform the public about decisions that the City has made. If public input was part of the decision-making process, we will report back on how that feedback was provided to decision-makers as part of the decision-making process.



When and How We Engage

Not every project will require input from the community and other interested parties to make a decision. If there is limited ability to impact the decision being made (due to budget, technical constraints, external demands, etc.) the City will focus on information-sharing as the project progresses.

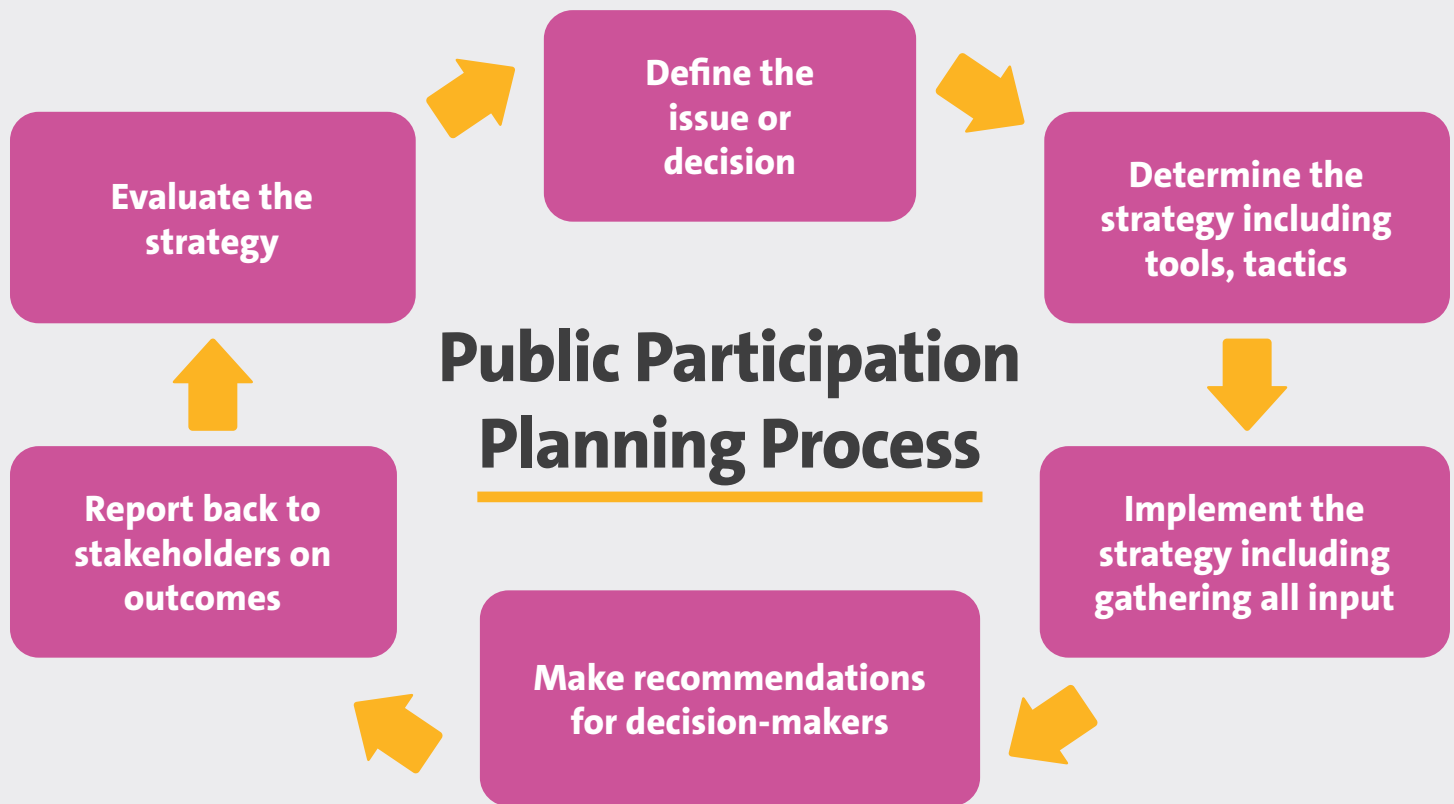
When does the City share information?

- When the major decisions about a project have already been made (due to factors such as budget, legislation, community need, external drivers, technical constraints, etc.).
- When we are reporting back on decisions that have been made with the support of previous community engagement.

When does the City seek input?

- When there are decisions to be made that the public or interested parties can affect.
- When we need information from the public or interested parties to make our decisions.

Based on the above, when the City determines that a project requires input from the public or interested parties, Coquitlam project leads, engagement staff and/or consultants will work through the following Public Participation Planning Process. The scope and complexity of each step varies and is scaled appropriately to the project or initiative.



STEP 1 | Define the issue or decision

What is the decision we are making? What information (if any) do we need from the community to help make that decision? What decisions have already been made and why?

STEP 2 | Determine the strategy/engagement plan including tools and tactics

Look to the Spectrum of Public Participation to determine our level of engagement—are we informing the public or do we need input? Consider who needs to know or who we need to hear from (public, specific interested parties, Council Advisory Committees with relevant mandates)? What information or support do they need to understand an issue or in order to provide input? Do the interested parties have any barriers to understanding or accessing the information or in participation that we need to address? What is our timeline and budget? Based on our timeline, budget and audiences, what tools and tactics do we need to use to share the relevant information and / or gather the feedback we need?

STEP 3 | Implement the strategy including, where applicable, gathering all input

Share the relevant information or, where applicable, share the engagement opportunities to raise awareness of the project and opportunity for input.

STEP 4 | Make recommendations for decision makers

Based on all of the information (i.e. related plans and strategies, technical studies, best practices, budget and, where applicable, public feedback) make recommendation(s) for decision-makers.

STEP 5 | Report back to the participants

Provide participants with information about the City’s decisions to help them understand what decisions were made. Where applicable, include tools such as a What We Heard report to share how their feedback was used or to share information about the feedback we could not use and why.

STEP 6 | Evaluate the strategy

What worked? What didn’t and why? Whether we informed, consulted or involved, did we engage at the appropriate level? Did we hear from the right people?

Types of Initiatives and Related Engagement

Different types of initiatives require different levels of information sharing or community engagement depending on the corporate priority, scope, budget, and the public's ability to impact the decision being made.

Types of Initiatives

- City-wide plans and policies
- Neighbourhood plans and policies
- Major facility capital planning
- Infrastructure project
- Park or facility master plan
- Legislatively-required engagement such as around financial planning or land use changes

Who Might Participate

- Residents
- Neighbourhood Associations
- Community Groups
- Business Leaders
- Council Advisory Committees (with a mandate relevant to the project)

Through stakeholder mapping and strong strategic planning, we consider who might want to be involved (i.e. our audiences and interested parties).

Ways to Participate

- Read information provided by the City (e.g. on the website)
- Watch or attend a Council meeting
- Attend or speak at a Public Hearing
- Attend an information session, focus group or workshop
- Complete a feedback tool such as an online survey
- Sign up to be a member of Viewpoint research panel.
- Sign up to stay informed on the project.
- Provide feedback directly to staff or Mayor and Council.
- Engage with content on the City's social media channels

The ways we share information or ask for input are selected at an appropriate level for the type of project, the decision being made, and the level of participation identified based on the Spectrum.



Ways to Engage

If you are interested in being more informed of the decisions being made by the City or to provide your input to projects seeking feedback, here are ways you can get involved:

- ✓ Watch or attend a Council meeting in person or online. You can watch live on Mondays at **coquitlam.ca/webcasts**, or watch archived videos at your convenience.
- ✓ Follow the City's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter or Instagram) to learn more about what's happening in the community.
- ✓ Read information provided by the City either online at **coquitlam.ca**, or when it comes to your home.
- ✓ Download the CoquitlamConnect App to your phone or tablet (**coquitlam.ca/app**) for information about City services, facilities, events and more.
- ✓ Sign up to receive email updates on projects or topics that are important to you at **coquitlam.ca/notifyme**.
- ✓ Contact relevant staff or Council by email, phone or in person with your questions or concerns (**coquitlam.ca/directory**).
- ✓ Register with the City's online engagement portal (**letstalkcoquitlam.ca**) or sign up to receive updates on individual projects.
- ✓ Attend or speak at a Public Hearing (**coquitlam.ca/publichearing**).
- ✓ Attend an information session hosted by the City.
- ✓ Volunteer for the City (**coquitlam.ca/volunteer**).
- ✓ Apply to join a Council Advisory Committee (**coquitlam.ca/committees**).
- ✓ Join the City's Viewpoint research panel and be informed of online survey opportunities at **coquitlam.ca/viewpoint**.
- ✓ Participate in your community or neighbourhood association.
- ✓ Submit a question, comment, service request or suggestion at **coquitlam.ca/feedback**.
- ✓ Volunteer for local community groups or service organizations who have mandates that interest you.
- ✓ Run for Council (**coquitlam.ca/elections**) or public office at other levels of government.
- ✓ If you own or operate a business, join the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce (**tricitiechamber.com**) or your local Business Improvement Association.



Coquitlam

City of Coquitlam

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