

<b>Title: Public Participation</b>	
<b>Resolution: 2026-0111</b>	<b>Revised:</b>
<b>Special Notes/Cross Reference:</b>	<b>Next Review Date: 2030</b>

**POLICY STATEMENT** : The Town of Westlock recognizes public participation as an essential component of good governance and informed decision-making. The Town is committed to fostering meaningful, inclusive, and accessible public participation processes that help community members stay informed, provide feedback, and contribute perspectives that support Council and Administration in decisions affecting the community.

**PURPOSE** : The purpose of this policy is to provide a consistent, transparent, and accessible framework for public participation, and to establish a shared understanding of when and how public participation will be used, ensuring alignment among Council, Administration, and the community.

**1. DEFINITIONS**

- 1.1. *Administration* – means the CAO, Senior Management, or designated support staff of the Town of Westlock.
- 1.2. *Council* – means the Municipal Council of the Town of Westlock.
- 1.3. *Engagement Plan* – means a structured document outlining goals, scope, participants, methods, timelines, reporting approach, and commitments for public participation activities.
- 1.4. *Public Hearing* – means the legislatively required process under the MGA to gather public input before Council deliberates and votes on specific bylaws or statutory plans.
- 1.5. *Public Participation* – means the process of involving individuals, groups, and community members in municipal decision making to inform, shape, or support decisions.
- 1.6. *Public Participation Spectrum* – means a standardized framework used to define the degree of influence the public has in the decision making process.

JK  
GJ

- 1.7. *Scope* – means the parameters of a public participation process that identify what decision is being considered, what elements are open for public input, what elements are outside the process, the extent to which public input may influence the outcome, and the constraints that must be respected throughout the process.
- 1.8. *Stakeholder/Partner/Community Member* – means any individual, organization, business, or group with an interest in or who may be affected by a municipal decision. The Town prioritizes use of accessible terms such as “community member” and “partner”.

**2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- 2.1. The Town of Westlock commits to the following principles in all public participation activities:
  - a) Purposeful  
Public participation will occur only when public input can meaningfully inform the decision.
  - b) Visibility and Accessibility  
Clear, plain-language information is provided.  
Public participation opportunities are easy to understand and access.
  - c) Respectful Dialogue  
All participants treat each other with courtesy and civility.  
Safe and inclusive spaces are prioritized.
  - d) Clarity of Scope  
Set expectations about what is open for input and what is not.  
Avoid introducing new questions mid-process without clear rationale.
  - e) Inclusive and Representation  
Public participation includes those most affected, including diverse and underserved groups.
  - f) Transparency in Process and Outcomes  
Reports findings to the public to clearly summarize what we heard and how input influenced decisions.
  - g) Evidence Informed Decision Making  
Public input is balanced with technical, legislative, and financial considerations.

- 2.2. All Public Participation will be undertaken in accordance with the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*, the *Access to Information Act (ATIA)*, *Protection of Privacy Act*

(POPA) and any other applicable legislation.

**3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

3.1. Council:

- a) Defining what is open for input and what is not as scope must be clear before public participation begins.
- b) Confirming there is genuine opportunity for public influence as public participation only occurs when outcomes can change.
- c) Respecting the approved participation scope throughout the process.
- d) Supporting decisions based on a combination of public input, evidence, legislation, and municipal realities.

3.2. Administration:

- a) Undertaking public participation only when input can meaningfully inform the decision.
- b) Designing an approach that is aligned with the approved scope.
- c) Ensuring the process is accessible, respectful, and inclusive.
- d) Collecting and analysing input to identify themes, impacts, and insights.
- e) Reporting results clearly and objectively to Council and the public.
- f) Ensuring follow through so residents see how their input was considered.

**4. PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM**

4.1. The Town shall utilize the following public participation spectrum to define public influence on decision-making:

<b>Level</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Town's Commitment</b>	<b>Typical Tools</b>
<b>Inform</b>	Provide balanced, timely, and accurate information.	"We will keep you informed."	Website, social media, notices, fact sheets, FAQs.
<b>Consult</b>	Obtain feedback on drafts, alternatives, or issues.	"We will listen and consider your feedback."	Surveys, open houses, comment forms.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Town's Commitment</b>	<b>Typical Tools</b>
<b>Involve</b>	Work directly with the public to ensure concerns are understood.	"We will show you how your input influenced the process."	Workshops, pop-up sessions, targeted outreach.
<b>Collaborate</b>	Partner with the public in developing solutions.	"We will look to you for advice and innovation."	Advisory committees, co-design sessions.
<b>Empower</b>	Place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	"You will be the final decision-maker."	Public votes, citizen panels.

**5. PROCEDURES**

5.1. When assessing whether public participation is appropriate, Administration will consider:

- a) Impact – who is affected and how significantly
- b) Controversy – level of polarization or disagreement
- c) Trust – whether trust is high, low, or mixed
- d) Flexibility – what aspects of the decision can actually change
- e) Complexity – how difficult or layered the issue is

5.2. Public participation will occur only when there is meaningful opportunity for public influence on the outcome, and only after Council has confirmed the participation scope and expectations.

5.3. Public participation may be used when:

- a) A decision involves significant community impact.
- b) Alternatives or options require public feedback.
- c) Multiple viewpoints or interests must be considered.
- d) The Town seeks to improve community understanding of complex issues.
- e) Public participation would add value to Council's decision-making.

5.4. Public participation is not required when:

- a) Decisions are operational or routine.
- b) There are immediate safety, emergency, legal, or regulatory requirements.


- c) Council has limited or no discretion under legislation.
  - d) Confidential or personnel matters are involved.
- 5.5. The Town will comply with all required mandatory processes and notice provisions under the MGA, including, but not limited to:
- a) Adoption or amendment of statutory plans (Municipal Development Plans, Area Structure Plans, Area Redevelopment Plans).
  - b) Land Use Bylaw amendments and re-zonings.
  - c) Borrowing bylaws requiring a public hearing or petition period.
  - d) Offsite levy bylaw creation or major amendments (if required).
  - e) These statutory requirements operate independently of the participation spectrum but may be supplemented with additional public participation where appropriate.
- 5.6. Administration will prepare an engagement plan for all formal public participation. Engagement plans will be reviewed internally to ensure the scope and expectations are clear to Council before any public participation begins.
- 5.7. At the conclusion of a public participation activity or phase:
- a) Administration shall prepare a "What We Heard / What We Are Doing" report.
  - b) Reports will be provided to Council and made available to the public when appropriate.
  - c) Reports will summarize:
    - i. Themes and patterns
    - ii. Areas of commonality and divergence
    - iii. How the feedback influenced Administration's recommendations or Council decision
- 5.8. The Town will:
- a) Use plain language in all public facing materials.
  - b) Consider translation, alternative formats, and disability accommodation where appropriate.

- c) Use multiple channels to increase accessibility (digital, print, in-person).
  - d) Seek ways to reduce barriers for participation by considering the needs of shift workers, out-of-town workers, youth, seniors, newcomers, people with disabilities, and community members who may experience challenges accessing traditional engagement methods.
- 5.9. Administration will evaluate the effectiveness of public participation activities after each project using criteria such as:
- a) Clarity of scope
  - b) Participation from those most impacted
  - c) Quality and usefulness of input
  - d) Accessibility and reach
  - e) Alignment with the chosen participation level
  - f) Outcomes and lessons learned

**6. REVIEW**

- 6.1. This policy will be reviewed every four years, or earlier if required, to ensure alignment with legislative changes, best practices, and municipal strategic priorities.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor Jon Kramer

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
CAO Simone Wiley