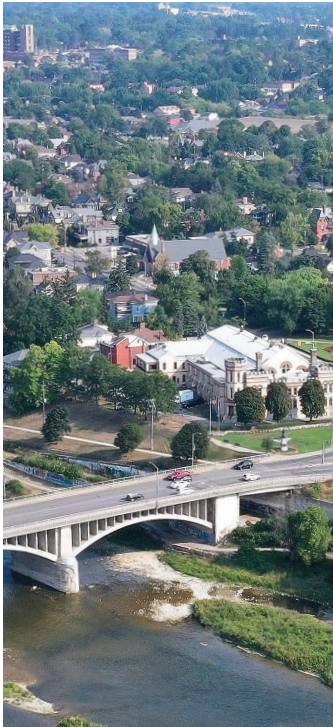


# CITY OF BRANTFORD

## Community Involvement Framework







### Executive Summary

The City of Brantford’s Community Involvement Framework provides a consistent, transparent, and meaningful approach to engaging residents, stakeholders, and partners in municipal decision making. Rooted in Council’s commitment to regularly engage with residents, the Framework outlines how the City informs, consults, and collaborates with the community to support well rounded, credible, and future focused decisions.

This updated Framework incorporates the guiding principles approved by the Public Consultation Task Force and City Council in 2025 and introduces a structured, tiered engagement model that aligns the intensity of engagement with the scale, complexity, and impact of City initiatives. By applying proportionality, transparency, accessibility, consistency, flexibility, and accountability, the Framework ensures all engagement activities, regardless of department or project follow predictable standards while allowing for customization based on community needs.

The City’s engagement process includes a wide range of tools, such as the Let’s Talk Brantford online platform, town halls, open houses, stakeholder workshops, focus groups, pop up events, and specialized advisory committees. Together, these tools make it easier for residents to share input in ways that reflect their diverse backgrounds, abilities, and preferences.

Central to the Framework is the expectation that every City project requiring community involvement will be guided by a formal community involvement plan. These plans outline objectives, roles, tools, timelines, and reporting strategies, ensuring that staff, consultants, and decision makers engage the community in clear, coordinated, and meaningful ways. The Framework reinforces the importance of inviting demographic diversity, providing balanced information, facilitating productive dialogue, and reporting back on what was heard and how public input informed both staff recommendations and final Council decisions.

By modernizing and clarifying its approach, the City of Brantford strengthens trust in local government, enhances the quality of municipal decisions, and builds stronger connections between residents and their city. The Framework supports a culture of openness, service excellence, and continuous improvement ensuring that community voices remain central to shaping Brantford’s future.

## Community Involvement Framework

### Introduction

The goal of this initiative is to provide decision makers, staff of the City of Brantford, and most importantly, Brantford citizens with a consistent genuine approach that will set a standard of excellence for community involvement plans.



The City of Brantford offers a variety of ways for residents to get involved, stay informed, and contribute to shaping their community. Through Let's Talk Brantford, residents can explore an interactive online space to learn about key City initiatives and share their feedback in meaningful ways. Community members can also connect with the Mayor and City Councillors to better understand local leadership and the ward system, or participate in Council meetings, whether attending in person or joining online to observe or engage in municipal decision-making.

Additionally, the City provides numerous public consultation opportunities on major plans and projects including master plans, environmental assessments, and corporate or construction initiatives ensuring residents have a voice in long term planning.

This document updates the City of Brantford's Community Involvement Framework by incorporating the guiding principles approved by the Public Consultation Task Force and City Council in 2025, and by implementing a tiered engagement model with defined thresholds.

A community involvement plan should be developed for every community involvement activity and be the result of using this Community Involvement Framework, regardless of who is responsible for the community involvement plan. If staff are using a consultant or facilitator, they should have an integral role in developing the plan and work collaboratively with the City's Communications and Community Engagement department to ensure that the campaign reflects the City's values and communication standards.

### The importance of community consultation

Involving the community in discussions on matters that affect them is a fundamental element of representative democracy. As part of Council's Priorities, Brantford is committed to developing strategies to build trust with Council and to effectively and consistently engage with the community. To ensure community involvement, in 2026 Brantford City Council approved the City of Brantford Community Involvement Policy, providing additional structure and guidance to Council and City staff regarding public engagement.

Encouraging participation in the municipal government process helps Council understand the needs and priorities of the community, so they can make decisions with the community perspective in mind. Community involvement is happening all the time and starts with information that is provided to the citizens of Brantford. Effective community involvement, however, considers opportunities to go beyond simply providing information and looks at how and when to best connect with community.

The result of effective community involvement is decisions that are often more reflective of community concerns and values.

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### Actively getting the community involved can:

- Build cooperative working relationships
- Clarify points of agreement and disagreement
- Promote positive attitudes and build support for new and ongoing programs and policies
- Gather a wide range of options for solving problems and improving service
- Prevent delays on projects
- Establish a positive environment where the community's opinions and feedback are valued and respected

Community involvement is a process that brings together individuals and groups from many levels, building cooperative working relationships and mutual understanding. Consulting with neighbourhoods, interest groups, businesses and other affected parties is both appropriate and necessary.



### Consistent use of the Community Involvement Framework will ensure that:

- The scope of the involvement plan appropriately responds to, and aligns with, the size and complexity of the decision being made
- All stakeholders and decision makers understand what information is being sought and how it will be included in the decision-making process
- The people who need to be involved have been invited to participate
- Timelines, budgets and other resources respond to the scope of the project
- The process clearly adds value to the quality of the decision

The Framework is intended to communicate that it is essential to take a strategic approach to every community involvement plan hosted by the City of Brantford and make it specific to the project/issue.



### When community consultation is required

Community involvement plans become more important when the municipality is making consultative or collaborative decisions.



These have one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Community notification and input are required by law (municipal environmental assessments)
2. The issue is a known concern of other parties, or is likely to have a significant impact on other parties (i.e. changes to parking, program services, traffic bylaws)
3. The issue affects society's emotional expectations (i.e. eliminating or expanding a City asset)
4. The issue affects the lifestyle or habits of citizens (i.e. road closures for events/construction)
5. People perceive there are risks associated with the decision (i.e. operating/capital budget)
6. Council or administration requests community input prior to making the decision (i.e. change in service levels)

### Roles and Responsibilities

There are five primary groups who will have a stake in decisions made by Council:

- 1. Citizens of Brantford:** The citizens' (community's) main role is to actively participate in the process, while balancing individual perspectives with the overall interests and future needs of the city.
- 2. Community Organizations & Groups:** As an important connection to communities throughout the city of Brantford, community associations and special interest groups play an integral role in facilitating and participating in community involvement. These groups typically have unique knowledge of a topic or issue or will be impacted in a unique and specific way. It is critical that these groups are identified and invited to participate.
- 3. Subject expert and Communications and Community Engagement staff:** Collaboratively, subject expert staff and Communications and Community Engagement staff define and implement the strategy, assess and evaluate the tools and facilitate community participation in forums/formats appropriate to the issue at hand. All staff are responsible for ensuring the proper process is established and used properly and that the guiding principles are consistently met.
- 4. City Council:** City Council acknowledges and values the community's involvement and Council members actively participate in engagement activities to better understand the needs, concerns, and perspectives of residents and stakeholders. As the final decision-makers, Council has a responsibility to carefully review and consider the feedback collected through the community involvement process. This includes understanding themes, weighing diverse viewpoints, and assessing how public input aligns with policy objectives, legal requirements, and long-term community wellbeing.

**5. The Business Community:** The business community, including small businesses, major employers, industry associations, commercial property owners, and entrepreneurs play a direct role in shaping Brantford’s economic vitality. These stakeholders bring forward perspectives related to workforce needs, economic development, infrastructure, land use, and the regulatory environment. Because their operations often have significant local impact, the business community is both uniquely affected by municipal decisions and well positioned to provide specialized insight into economic trends and growth opportunities. Engaging this group when appropriate ensures that Council decisions support a thriving, competitive, and sustainable local economy while balancing job creation, investment attraction, and community well being.



### Guiding principles of public engagement

The primary reason for involving the community in a project or initiative is to provide decision makers with insights of the community that reflect a diverse and balanced range of perspectives so they can make informed and credible decisions. The community should be involved when:

- Policies, procedures and/or programs are developed
- Input is required from the community on a specific project, program or initiative
- The community’s comments can have an impact on the design and development of a facility, structure, program or project
- It is important to build partnerships and strengthen relationships between the community and the City
- Community buy-in is important to achieve success

The City of Brantford recognizes the importance of involving residents, stakeholders, and community partners in the development of policies, programs, services, and capital projects. In 2025, City Council approved updated guiding principles to modernize the Community Involvement Framework and to provide clearer expectations for how the City plans, delivers, and reports on public engagement.

The following principles guide all City-led engagement activities:

#### 1) Proportionality

The level of engagement will be proportionate to the scale, scope, impact, risk, and significance of the initiative.

#### 2) Transparency

The City will clearly communicate why engagement is occurring, what is in-scope and out-of-scope, how input will be used, and how decisions will be made.

The City will report back on what was heard and how input informed the recommendation or decision.

### 3) Inclusivity and Accessibility

Engagement opportunities will be designed to reduce barriers to participation and reflect the diversity of Brantford, including language, cultural context, disability-related accommodations, time/format constraints, and digital access.

The City will use a mix of in-person and digital methods and provide alternative formats and supports when requested.

### 4) Consistency

The City will apply predictable engagement thresholds and baseline expectations to promote fairness and build trust across different initiatives and neighbourhoods.

### 5) Flexibility

While thresholds and baseline expectations are defined, staff will retain discretion to scale engagement up (or tailor approaches) based on community sensitivity, project complexity, equity considerations, legislative requirements, and Council direction.

### 6) Accountability and continuous improvement

Engagement processes will include clear roles, responsibilities, timelines, and evaluation measures.

The City will continuously improve engagement practices by evaluating outcomes, incorporating participant feedback, and leveraging updated engagement tools and technology.

## Tiered engagement model and thresholds

To operationalize the principle of proportionality, the City applies a tiered approach that aligns the intensity of engagement with the scale, impact, and significance of an initiative. Financial thresholds are one indicator of scale, but do not replace impact-based/emotional reactions.

### Level 1 – Inform

**Typical use:** common matters, low financial investment (generally under \$100,000), or initiatives with limited public impact.

**Baseline engagement:** public notice and information sharing (e.g., web updates, social media, project notices, Council agendas/reports).

This is the most basic stage of involvement. It means that citizens have the information they need to assess policies and initiatives to fully understand their impact. Or it is used to prepare the community for more intensive forms of community involvement. Information is shared through agendas, minutes, reports, budgets, newsletters, advertising, web site, open houses and other forums.

Through informing, the community can consume and perhaps comment on specific details within a proposal. Relying on “informing” as the sole form of community involvement should only be done where there is no opportunity for the community to influence policy outcomes because of technical or legislative constraints.

### Level 2 – Consult

**Typical use:** moderate investment (generally \$100,000 to \$1 million) and/or noticeable community resident impact (e.g., neighbourhood park upgrades, service changes with localized impact).

**Baseline engagement:** opportunities for feedback (e.g., online surveys, open houses, stakeholder meetings/workshops, focus groups).

At the Consult level, the City seeks community input before decisions are finalized, typically for projects with moderate financial investment, generally between \$100,000 and \$1 million or for initiatives with noticeable but localized impact, such as neighbourhood park improvements or service changes that affect a specific area. Engagement activities at this level move beyond simple information sharing and focus on gathering feedback that will help shape the staff recommendation brought forward to Council.

Community members are invited to provide their perspectives, identify concerns, and express preferences on early concepts, alternatives, or proposed changes. City staff then summarize this input, identify themes, and clearly describe how the feedback has influenced the refinement of the proposed recommendation.



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A wide range of tools can be used at this level. Digital methods may include online surveys or polls that capture resident preferences such as choosing between playground equipment options for a small park upgrade or interactive web maps where participants can pinpoint issues or preferred locations for amenities. Staff may also use targeted email updates or project newsletters to reach residents living near an affected site and keep them informed as the project evolves.

In-person and hybrid opportunities are also central to this level of engagement. These may involve drop-in open houses where residents can review concepts, speak directly with project staff, and provide comments through tools such as comment cards or dot voting. Engagement may also take place through pop-up booths at local events, where residents can share feedback in a convenient setting. For more targeted conversations, the City may hold stakeholder meetings or workshops with specific groups such as sports organizations, neighbourhood associations, or local businesses and may convene small focus groups to explore detailed concerns or considerations.

### Level 3 – Collaborate

- Typical use: major capital projects (generally over \$1 million) and/or broad citywide impact or high community sensitivity (e.g., downtown redevelopment, citywide plans, transit planning).
- Baseline engagement: multi-phase engagement with multiple feedback points (e.g., workshops/charrettes, citizen panels, advisory groups, deliberative sessions), with clear reporting on what was heard and how input affected the final recommendation.

The Collaborate level is intended for major capital projects exceeding \$1 million and for initiatives with broad citywide implications or high sensitivity. Examples include downtown redevelopment, major transit or transportation planning, major construction projects, the disposition of a major City asset and significant citywide policy updates. Engagement at this stage is multi phased, and highly interactive, with multiple feedback points that allow the community to partner with staff in shaping the direction and refining proposed solutions.



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At this level, the City is not simply asking for opinions; it is actively working alongside residents, stakeholders, and community partners to explore ideas, evaluate alternatives, develop concepts, and adjust plans based on what is learned through engagement. Transparency is a defining feature, with clear reporting at each step on what was heard and how that input influenced revisions to the emerging plan or recommendation to Council.

A range of intensive tools support this level of engagement. Co design workshops allow participants to collaborate directly with staff and each other, often sketching or building scenarios for spaces such as a downtown streetscape. Scenario-planning workshops help residents understand trade offs and implications when shaping long term plans such as an Official Plan update or a Transportation Master Plan. The City may also convene citizen advisory groups or community working groups that meet regularly throughout the project to provide ongoing insights and participate in detailed discussions.

Town halls and open houses play a foundational role and must occur at least twice for Level 3 projects. An early-stage town hall typically focuses on visioning and identifying community values, issues, and opportunities before any concepts are developed. As ideas evolve, an initial open house presents first-round concepts or scenarios and invites feedback on what is working, what is not, and what may be missing. Later in the process, a second town hall often serves as a forum to present a refined draft plan, explaining how earlier feedback influenced revisions and checking whether the direction aligns with community expectations. A final open house may follow, giving residents one last opportunity to review near-complete recommendations before they are presented to Council.

Through this collaborative, multi stage process, residents play a meaningful role in shaping major city initiatives, and staff demonstrate accountability by showing clearly how community voices influence staff recommendations to Council.

Note: The financial threshold for Level 3 does not apply to projects deemed necessary for public safety or required to maintain infrastructure in a good state of repair. Projects that are essential to protect public safety or maintain infrastructure in a good state of repair are exempt from the financial threshold because they often involve urgent or legislatively mandated work. These initiatives may require accelerated timelines to mitigate risks, prevent service disruptions, or ensure regulatory compliance. While they do not trigger Level 3 engagement based on cost alone, the City will continue to provide timely and transparent updates and use appropriate engagement methods wherever feasible.

### **How the tiered approach works**

The tiered engagement model is designed to help staff determine not only what type of engagement is appropriate (Inform, Consult, or Collaborate), but also how intensively that engagement should be delivered based on the scale, impact, and sensitivity of an initiative. The three consultation levels describe the purpose and depth of public input, from low input information sharing (Inform) to mid level opportunities for feedback (Consult), to high input involvement in shaping options and solutions (Collaborate).

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The tiered model then adds a proportionality lens, guiding staff to select the appropriate level of effort. For example, a Level 1 initiative will generally rely on the Inform level of the continuum, using basic information sharing techniques, whereas a Level 2 initiative will typically activate the Consult level with structured feedback opportunities. Level 3 initiatives that involve major investment, citywide impact, or high sensitivity often require multi phase engagement, advisory groups, and robust reporting to inform Council's decision. The tiered model creates a consistent, flexible system that aligns the type of engagement with the appropriate intensity, ensuring meaningful, transparent, and proportional community involvement.

### **Impact-based triggers that apply regardless of cost**

To ensure that engagement efforts are scaled appropriately, the tiered model considers not only financial thresholds but also the nature and sensitivity of the initiative. Some projects or policy changes can have significant implications for residents even when the dollar value is low. For this reason, staff must assess whether any impact-based factors are present that would require engagement to be elevated beyond what the financial threshold alone would suggest. These triggers help ensure that community voices are sought whenever decisions have the potential to meaningfully affect equity, access, quality of life, neighbourhood character, or public trust.

- Significant equity and accessibility implications
- Substantial changes to service levels or community amenities
- High perceived risk, controversy, or strong public interest
- Legislative or statutory requirements for consultation
- Initiatives that materially affect lifestyle, mobility, neighbourhood character, safety, or the local environment

### **Tools and techniques**

#### **Let's Talk Brantford**

Let's Talk Brantford is the City's centralized online public engagement hub designed to make it easier and more convenient for residents to participate in municipal decision-making. The platform brings together all active consultation campaigns in one place, allowing the community to learn about key initiatives such as the City Budget, the Transportation Master Plan and Downtown Revitalization and many other projects. It offers a safe, accessible, and user friendly space for residents to share feedback which becomes more important during periods when in person consultation is limited. By gathering all engagement opportunities under a single, recognizable brand and website, the City strengthens awareness and encourages broader participation across Brantford's neighbourhoods.



The platform includes a suite of interactive tools that help residents engage in meaningful ways and provide input on issues that matter most to them. Depending on the project, the site can feature online surveys, discussion forums, idea boards, question and answer tools, project timelines and interactive mapping. To ensure residents are aware of opportunities to participate each project is also supported through coordinated communications including social media promotion, media releases, website banners, and print and digital advertising. By offering diverse tools and clear information, Let's Talk Brantford enhances transparency, supports informed dialogue, and helps City staff and Council better understand community priorities as they develop policies, programs, and services.

### **Other methods of engagement**

In addition to digital engagement through Let's Talk Brantford, the City also relies on a broad suite of in-person and hybrid tools that allow residents to participate in ways that best suit their needs, abilities, and preferences. Traditional techniques such as town halls, open houses, community meetings, and pop-up engagements provide opportunities for face-to-face dialogue, allowing staff to answer questions, clarify information, and build relationships with residents. These approaches are particularly valuable for complex or high-impact projects where residents may need time to explore materials, speak with staff one-on-one, and voice concerns in a supportive environment. Complementary tools such as comment boards, interactive displays, visual preference prompts, and facilitated table discussions help create accessible ways for people to contribute regardless of their comfort level with public speaking or technical language.

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The City also incorporates more structured engagement techniques when deeper insights or specialized input are needed. Focus groups, workshops, citizen advisory committees, and stakeholder roundtables give participants the time and space to delve into detailed aspects of a project and explore solutions collaboratively. These formats are especially effective for initiatives with technical considerations that require targeted participation from subject-matter experts, lived-experience communities, service users, or directly affected neighbourhoods.

By combining a diverse mix of tools from high-volume online participation to in-depth discussion formats the City ensures that consultation processes are inclusive, proportional, and responsive to community needs, regardless of whether the project falls under the Inform, Consult, or Collaborate level of engagement.

### Initiating a community involvement plan

At any given time throughout the City of Brantford, there are projects underway that require community input and participation. Many of these projects impact the quality of life in Brantford and affect the day-to-day lives of the people who live, work, study or play here. A step-by-step approach has been developed to assist the City when evaluating community involvement.

The first step of any City led community engagement campaign is for subject-matter expert staff to contact the Communications and Community Engagement Department to begin a collaborative process of developing the Community Involvement Plan. Staff can initiate this process by completing a Communications Request Form, available through the Communications Toolkit on CityNet.

A community involvement plan must be developed for every community involvement activity. Each plan should be grounded in the Framework and reflect a coordinated approach, regardless of which department or individual is responsible for leading the activity. When external consultants or facilitators are engaged, they must play an integral role in shaping the plan to ensure alignment with the City's standards, principles, and engagement objectives.

### Making community involvement meaningful

To be considered meaningful for the community and the City, a community involvement project or initiative should meet the following criteria:

- **Clarity of purpose:** Participants must be clear on the role they will play in the process.
- **Reflect diversity:** Demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, ability, socioeconomic status and place of residence can affect interests and values. A community involvement should represent the community's demographic diversity and make tangible efforts to allow for diversity in the community to be reflected.

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- **Credible, balanced information:** Participants must have balanced information about the major perspectives on any issue or initiative, so they can refine their perspective(s), voice their point(s) of view, and listen to understand those of other stakeholders.
- **Organized and facilitated:** Most consultation and involvement processes are facilitated by someone whose role it is to encourage participation that is respectful and equitable, so that discussions stay focused and sufficient time is given to the most important issues.
- **Communication of results:** Results must be shared with the community. This includes reporting back through formal staff reports to Council, as well as posting clear summaries of feedback in the “What We Heard” section of the Community Engagement page on the City’s website so residents can see how their input was considered and how it informed next steps.

The Community Involvement Framework reaffirms the City of Brantford’s commitment to meaningful, inclusive, and transparent engagement. By applying consistent principles and a tiered model that aligns engagement efforts with the scale and sensitivity of each initiative, the City ensures that residents and stakeholders are informed, heard, and valued throughout the decision making process.

Meaningful community involvement strengthens municipal outcomes by incorporating diverse perspectives, enhancing public trust, and improving the long term success of City projects, policies, and services. Through clear expectations, coordinated planning, effective tools, and timely communication of results, the Framework supports an engagement culture that is accessible, accountable, and responsive to the community’s needs.

As Brantford continues to grow and evolve, this Framework will guide staff, Council, and community partners in building stronger relationships and shaping a thriving, well connected, and future ready city that reflects the voices of the people who live, work, study, and play here.

