



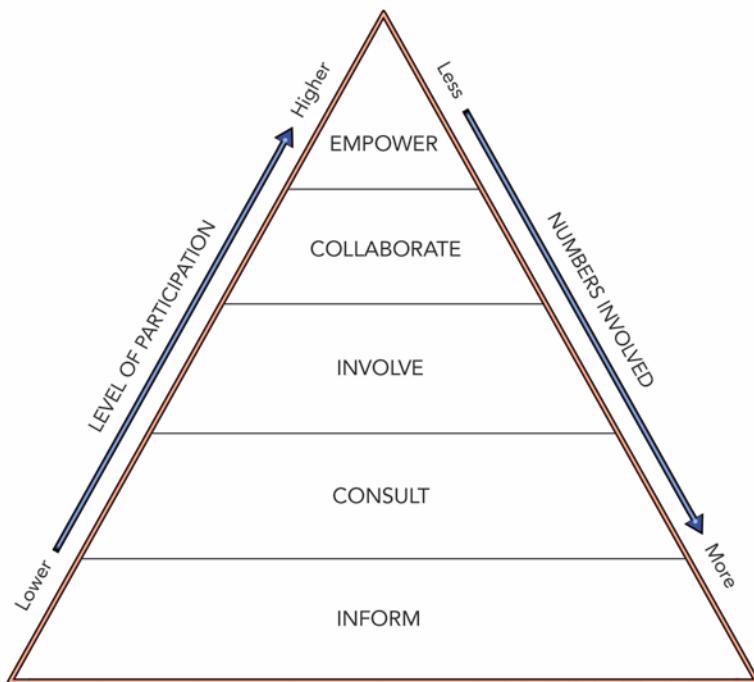
engagement

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12. Consultation and Engagement

The overarching vision of Regional Planning is “excellence in planning Niagara through innovation, engagement and customer service,” demonstrating the central importance of the Region’s commitment to engagement in the planning and decision making process and fostering strong partnerships with local municipalities, stakeholders and agencies.

The planning process can be considered as a cycle involving three basic functions: creating leading edge policy, implementing that policy, and continually monitoring and reporting on results. Monitoring and reporting of results is very important in updating this Plan. Meaningful consultation and engagement is fundamental to effective decision making throughout this cycle and is critical in demonstrating clear accountability.



There are various levels of engagement that define the public's role in any public participation process. Depending on the goals, time frames, resources, audience, level of concern and scale of the issue requiring community and stakeholder involvement, the Region will utilize the most appropriate methods and tools to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with or empower Niagara's citizens.

This Chapter outlines the vision and objectives for the consultation and engagement approach undertaken in Niagara, provides a description of the roles and responsibilities of various groups through the consultation and engagement process and, finally, provides policies for consultation and engagement to ensure the needs of the communities are being met. The consultation and engagement policies outlined in this Chapter support excellence in planning and foster a sense of shared responsibility in decisions that affect individuals and communities throughout Niagara. Ultimately, a commitment to the engagement of citizens and stakeholders will result in better decisions and a stronger plan.

12.A Vision and Objectives

12.A.1 Vision – “Proactive & Responsive Region”

Niagara Region will be known for its effective decision making, strong partnerships, clear accountability and service excellence in land use planning.

12.A.2 Objectives:

- i. To recognize the shared partnership with the Province, the Region, and Local Municipalities on planning in Niagara.
- ii. To identify the Region's policies for engagement on planning matters.
- iii. To support meaningful participation in the planning process through dialogue and conversation.
- iv. To inform, consult, involve, collaborate, or empower, as appropriate, through effective consultation and engagement processes.
- v. To provide a framework that enables the Region to use a variety of tools and techniques that allow for two-way communication with Local Municipalities, residents, businesses, stakeholders and agencies.
- vi. To provide enhanced opportunities for stakeholders and the public to participate in decision making.
- vii. To explore, pilot and implement innovative tools and processes for engagement.
- viii. To demonstrate a commitment to accountable and transparent government by making data freely available to the public, helping ensure the citizens, local municipalities, agencies, and consultants of Niagara are informed and engaged in an open and accessible government.



Open Data refers to the practice of making government data freely available in machine readable formats to enable citizens, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations to leverage it in innovative and value-added ways.

Niagara Region's Open Data catalogue can be found at niagararegion.ca/government/opendata

12.B Engagement Policies

- Policy 12.B.1** On matters of Regional interest, the Region shall involve various stakeholders from across Niagara, including Local Municipalities, residents, businesses, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, the Niagara Peninsula *Conservation Authority*, and other levels of government.
- Policy 12.B.2** Consultation will take place in a timely manner to ensure an accountable and transparent decision-making process on land use planning matters.
- Policy 12.B.3** The Region will engage, consult, and partner, as appropriate with First Nations and Métis Nation communities when considering planning matters and planning applications that may affect their interests.
- Policy 12.B.4** The Region shall provide opportunities for public and stakeholder participation in the *development*, adoption, implementation and monitoring of Regional planning policies in accordance with this Plan, the **Planning Act**, the **Environmental Assessment Act** and other relevant legislation and policy.
- Policy 12.B.5** The Region, together with Local Municipal Partners and the Niagara Peninsula *Conservation Authority*, are signatories to the “Memorandum of Understanding on Planning Services in Niagara” (“MOU”). The MOU is a guiding document for continuous improvement and stronger relationships in providing planning services and shall be reviewed in accordance with the timeframe indicated in the MOU.
- Policy 12.B.6** The Region will take a leadership role to develop and implement outreach and education on planning issues.

12.C Communication and Engagement Tools and Techniques for Public Participation

Policy 12.C.1 Niagara Region is committed to communication in plain language on land use planning matters.

Policy 12.C.2 The Region will employ appropriate tools and techniques which are consistent with the intended consultation and engagement goals (to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with or empower). Accordingly, on matters:

- i. Where the goal is to inform, the Region will provide the public with balanced and objective information. Tools and techniques suitable for informing the public include direct mail outs, email newsletters, web sites and web content, radio, television and web-based advertising, and public notification signs and newspaper ads.
- ii. Where the goal is to consult, the Region will obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or recommendations. Tools and techniques suitable for consulting with the public include surveys (electronic or mail-out), focus groups, key informant interviews, public information centres and open houses, and blogs, social media, or other web tools that allow commenting.
- iii. Where the goal is to involve, the Region will work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. Tools and techniques suitable for involving the public include workshops, design charrettes and online forums or other innovative digital engagement tools.
- iv. Where the goal is to collaborate, the Region will partner with the public and stakeholders in the decision-making process, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solutions. Tools and techniques suitable for collaborating with the public include citizen advisory committees, participatory decision-making or consensus-building processes.
- v. Where the goal is to empower, the Region will enhance the decision-making process through utilizing tools and techniques suitable for empowering the public, such as citizen juries, ballots, or advisory committees.

Policy 12.C.3 In all cases of engagement, Niagara Region will provide responses to feedback received including how feedback has been incorporated into the matter being addressed.

Policy 12.C.4	From time to time, it will be necessary for the Region to hold traditional public open house style events to engage stakeholders and the public. Where appropriate, the Region shall carefully consider venues for these events and will be consistent with the Region's standard and the standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act , including places which are accessible to a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including but not limited to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Gathering places, such as community centres, libraries, galleries and recreational areas (e.g. arenas, parks); ii. Places of commerce, such as shopping malls and downtowns; iii. Special events where people congregate, such as festivals, cultural events and farmer's markets; and, iv. Holding events in the community that is specifically impacted by an application or matter under consideration.
Policy 12.C.5	The Region will use a variety of communication methods, including innovative and enhanced participatory methods, to seek input on planning matters or to provide information to the public. Depending on the issues and in accordance with the Planning Act, the Region shall choose the most appropriate method of communication or form of engagement.
Policy 12.C.6	When preparing materials for public consumption, the Region will ensure that the graphics, legibility and presentation mediums are consistent with the Region's standard and the standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act .
Policy 12.C.7	When undertaking engagement, the Region will provide a safe and comfortable environment where individuals can freely contribute their thoughts, opinions and directions.
Policy 12.C.8	When undertaking engagement, the Region will ensure that adequate documentation of all comments is recorded in a transparent and easily accessible manner.
Policy 12.C.9	Where a decision under the Planning Act is required, the Region shall make available all relevant materials and information, including a copy of the proposed plan, at least 20 days prior to the date of the Statutory Public Meeting. At a minimum, all documents shall be made available at the Region's office and on the Region's website.
Policy 12.C.10	The Region will monitor the effectiveness of its consultation and engagement tools and techniques on an on-going basis. Within two years of adoption, the Region will develop and implement a program for monitoring the effectiveness of its engagement and consultation policies and practices.

Policy 12.C.11

Advisory Committees may be established to provide input and advice to Council on particular planning issues and to assist with projects and initiatives. Advisory Committees are subject to the following:

- i. Advisory Committees shall draw upon members of Regional Council as well as members of the public as deemed necessary;
- ii. Advisory Committees shall abide by established Council approved Terms of Reference;
- iii. Advisory Committees may be added, disbanded, or altered, including mandate changes, by Regional Council, without an amendment to this Plan; and,
- iv. Advisory Committees existing as of the date of the adoption of this Amendment shall have their existing policy references placed in an Appendix to this Plan for purposes of transparency.

12.D Consulting and Engaging with Other Governments

- Policy 12.D.1** The Region will be proactive and, where appropriate, provide practical and meaningful input to the Province where changes are proposed to Provincial Plans and legislation. The Region will collaborate with Local Municipalities on the development of joint input to the Province to ensure Area Municipal perspectives are incorporated into the Provincial input. It is a priority that the Region and Local Municipalities speak with one voice on Provincial matters.
- Policy 12.D.2** The Region shall include Local Municipalities in discussions with the Province on key policy, development and provincial technical guideline interpretations.
- Policy 12.D.3** The Region will be proactive and, where appropriate, provide practical and meaningful input to adjacent municipalities where proposed plans may have potential for impact on the Region, Local Municipalities, stakeholders, businesses and/or the general public at large.
- Policy 12.D.4** Where appropriate, the Region will seek out opportunities to collaborate with the Federal government, the Province, adjacent municipalities and bi-national communities on matters of cross jurisdictional, including cross-border, interest.

12.E Consulting and Engaging Local Municipalities

Policy 12.E.1

The Regional Official Plan includes specific, detailed policies that identify how and when the Region will work with Local Municipalities on various projects, studies, and documents. In all instances, the engagement with Local Municipalities shall be guided by:

- i. A shared partnership with Local Municipalities;
- ii. A shared collaborative approach;
- iii. A commitment to early and meaningful engagement; and,
- iv. All efforts will be made to achieve consensus on planning and land use issues.

Policy 12.E.2

The Region will circulate studies, amendments, and documents to Local Municipalities and other partners for their comment. For routine matters, a comment period of a minimum of sixty (60) days will be used. For more complex matters, a comment period of a minimum of ninety (90) days will be used.

Policy 12.E.3

The Region will co-operate with Local Municipalities in public participation programs, including the holding of joint public meetings, where appropriate, during the processing of amendments to this Plan and Local Municipal Official Plans, and for other initiatives where interests are common.

Policy 12.E.4

The Region will partner with Local Municipalities and other agencies, as appropriate, on complex *development* applications with Regional and Local interests to provide an integrated and timely decision-making process.