Participating in Municipal Decision Making

The Importance of Participation

Municipalities make decisions every day that affect their citizen. Citizens expect their municipalities to make decisions that are in the best interest of their communities.

For example, your municipality makes decisions on:

- Property taxation
- Municipal services
- Land development/zoning
- Infrastructure (roads, streets, bridges etc.)

Citizens have an important role in the municipal decision-making process and you can participate in different ways.

Attend a Council Meeting

Municipal Council meetings are open to the public. This provides an opportunity for you to hear the debate on municipal issues and know Council's decisions. Municipalities must prepare a formal agenda for each Council meeting. The agenda will include an opportunity for citizens to present their views directly to Council as Delegations or during the Public Input Period.

Speak as a Delegation

Delegations at Council meetings are required to register with the Clerk by 12:00p.m. noon on the Wednesday before the meeting so that adequate time is scheduled to hear the delegations and the meeting proceeds smoothly.

Speak during the Public Input Period

Public input is time set aside on each agenda of each regular meeting to permit anyone in attendance to speak on any issue with which they are concerned and presentations will be limited to three (3) minutes. Public input will be "received" by Council only. Questions may not be directed to Council for debate, nor shall any items raised be debated by Council during this portion of the meeting.

Attend Public Meetings

Municipal Councils are required to hold public meetings to obtain public input for matters that have a significant impact on citizens and property owners in the municipality (eg. annual municipal budget, planning issues).

At a public meeting, Council will typically present the proposal that is being considered. Citizens can then share their views about the proposal and ask questions of Council.

Know How to Participate

Your municipalities Procedures By-law establishes rules for how meetings will take place. This ensures that municipal business is undertaken in a transparent manner and citizens know how they can participate.

The Procedures By-law also establishes rules of conduct for the meeting. Rules of conduct apply to Council members and citizens.

Your Municipality's Procedures By-law has rules about:

- When citizens may register as a delegation
- Time limits for speaking by Council members and Citizens
- Public Input Period procedures
- Citizen conduct at the meeting
- Consequences for improper conduct by Council members and Citizens

The Municipal Office can answer any questions you may have about meeting rules

How You Can Participate More Effectively

- **Learn the issues that are important in your community** and understand the particular decision being made by Council
- **Know the date and time of the meeting**
- **Register in advance** if you intend to speak as a delegation
- **Bring copies of written materials**
- **Keep your presentation within the time allowed**
- **Remain polite and civil.** Members of the public can be asked to leave meetings if their conduct is not respectful
- **Respect the views of others.** There are often several perspectives on an issue. Council must make decisions that are in the best interest of the whole community.

Access to Information

Citizens need access to information on the way their municipality is operated in order to effectively participate in municipal-decision making. Some of the documents that citizens are required to have access to under legislation are:

- Assessment rolls
- Budgets
- Financial statements
- Council meeting minutes
- By-laws and resolutions of Council

Your Municipal Office can answer any questions you may have about access to information in your municipality. For more information contact:

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