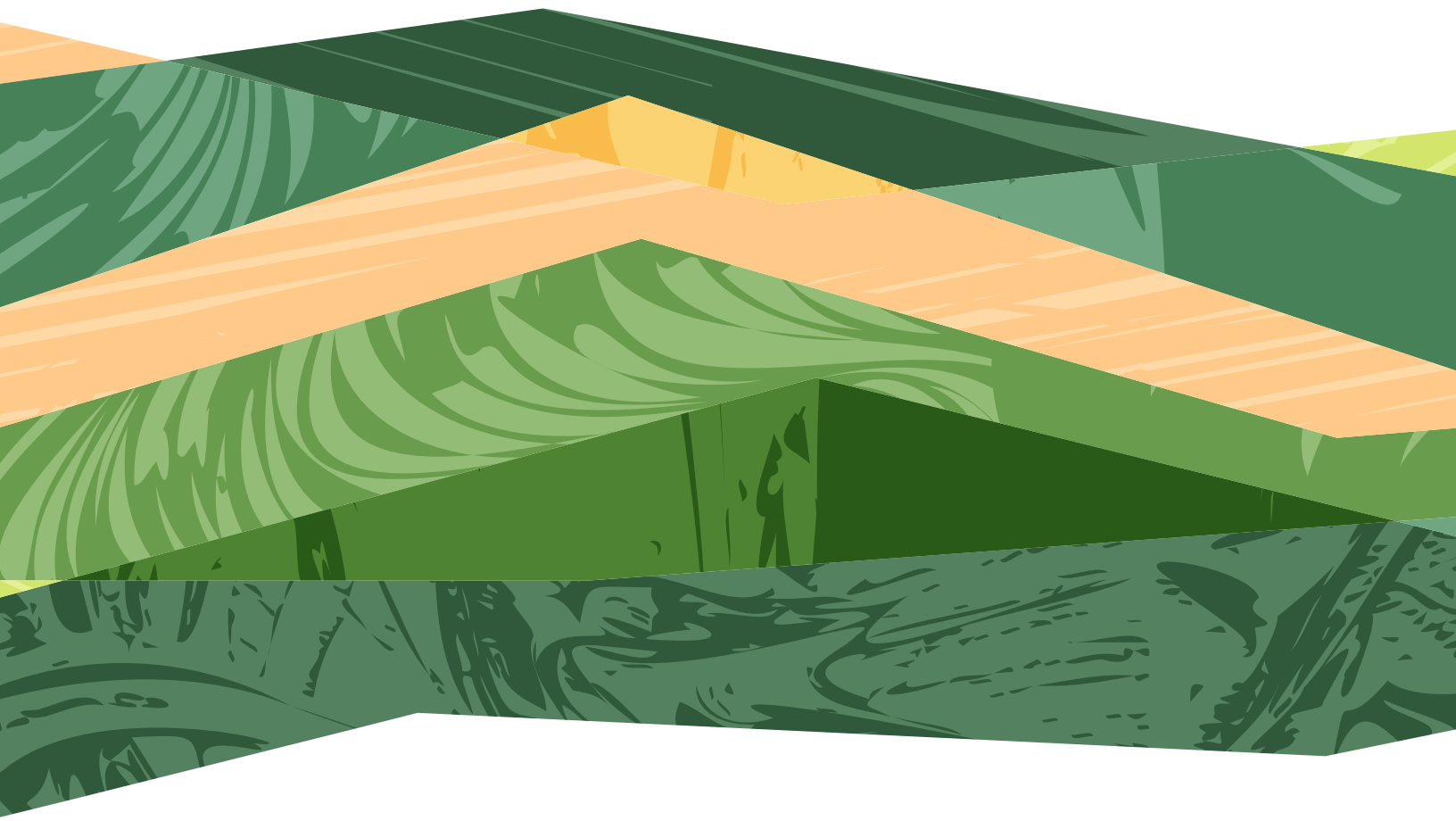


what we heard



Public Engagement Framework WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

NOV. – DEC. 2023

Contents

3		PROJECT OVERVIEW
3		HOW AND WHO WE ENGAGED
4		WHAT WE ASKED
5		WHAT WE HEARD
9		WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
10		APPENDIX A



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Public engagement at the Town of Cochrane (Cochrane) is about creating opportunities for the public to contribute to decision making about the municipality's policies, programs, projects and services. It involves public engagement activities, online or in-person, such as surveys, focus groups, or open houses.

To support public engagement efforts, Cochrane is developing a Public Engagement Framework (Framework) that will establish practices and processes for its engagement activities. To help create a Framework that supports meaningful engagement, Cochrane invited members of the public to share their experiences with public engagement including what is working well and what needs attention.

HOW AND WHO WE ENGAGED

Survey

All residents were invited to provide their input via an online survey available on the [Let's Talk Cochrane](#) website between November 20 – December 8, 2023. The survey was promoted through the following channels:

- Cochrane Website
- Newspaper
- Digital signs
- Community Road Signs
- Social Media
- Radio Ads
- Cochrane Business Newsletter
- Posters
- Community groups and associations, including but not limited to:
 - House of Oneness Board
 - District 4 Captain of the Metis Nation of Alberta
 - Cochrane Challengers
 - Cochrane Alliance Church
 - Cochrane Immigrant Services Committee
- Settlement Worker for Cochrane
- Filipino Canadian Association of Cochrane and Alberta
- Affordable Housing Organizations
- Seniors on the Bow
- Bethany Care Centre
- Spray Lake Sawmills Newsletter

A total of
697
participants
responded to the
online survey »

0.87%
STUDENT
in Cochrane

26.49%
WORK
in Cochrane

11.79%
OWN A BUSINESS
in Cochrane

97.36%
RESIDE
in Cochrane



Discussion Group

Cochrane also hosted an in-person discussion group on November 23, 2023. Individuals who expressed interest in future public engagement activities, via an online budget survey, were contacted by an independent third party and invited to attend the discussion group. A total of 25 people participated.

WHAT WE ASKED

Survey

The ***Let's Talk Cochrane*** website contained a link to the Public Engagement Framework survey and an overview of the project that included information about:

- the purpose of the Public Engagement Framework survey;
- what was being considered in the development of the Framework;
- how input from the public would be used; and
- next steps following public engagement.

Members of the public were invited to share their input on:

- why they would consider participating in a public engagement activity with Cochrane;
- what would encourage them to participate in public engagement activities; and
- what gets in the way of participating in public engagement activities.

Discussion Group

Discussion group participants were provided an email invitation that identified:

- why they had been contacted;
- information about public engagement and the Framework;
- what was being considered in the development of the Framework;
- how input would be used; and
- logistics on how to participate.

Participants were invited to share their input on:

- what is working well and what challenges there are with Cochrane public engagement efforts;
- what would be helpful to overcome challenges and/or leverage what is working well; and
- what successful public engagement would look like for Cochrane.

WHAT WE HEARD

Survey

Survey respondents were invited to review a list of options and share why they would consider participating in a public engagement activity with Cochrane.

The top three options selected by respondents were*:

- To share my ideas or concerns about what is going on in my community (77.73%).
- To contribute my thoughts and ideas and help find solutions (75.29%).
- To influence Cochrane's decisions (74.43%).

**Note: See Appendix A for full list and results.*

Survey respondents were invited to consider what would encourage them to participate in Cochrane public engagement activities.

A list of seven options was provided. Respondents ranked options in the following order*:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Knowing my input will make a difference. | 5. Access to updates on the project and how input was used. |
| 2. Access to information about the engagement topic. | 6. A variety of options for when I can participate (e.g., daytime, evening, weekend, on my own time, etc.). |
| 3. Understanding how my input from the engagement activity will be used. | 7. Knowing that diverse ideas and opinions are welcome. |
| 4. A variety of ways to share my input (e.g., online, attending an open house, participating in a focus group, etc.). | |

**Note: See Appendix A for detailed results.*



Survey respondents were invited to share what gets in the way of participating in public engagement activities.

Impact and Influence

- Perception that Cochrane has already made a decision and input will not be considered.
- Perception that some topics are being avoided.
- Not including public engagement as a part of the project planning process.
- Lack of trust in decision-makers.

Accessibility and Personal Barriers

- Other commitments that limit availability to participate.
- Lack of flexible participation options that accommodate schedules.
- Lack of transportation, technology, childcare and/or pet care options.

- Age, physical and/or mental health limitations.
- Not feeling safe to participate due to disrespectful dialogue and/or comments from other participants.
- Feeling disconnected or disengaged from the community.
- Not remembering to participate.

Awareness and Information

- Lack of information about the topic of the engagement, when the engagement will take place, how to participate and who to contact about the engagement.
- Lack of clarity about how input will be used by Cochrane.
- Short notice about engagement opportunities.



Discussion Group

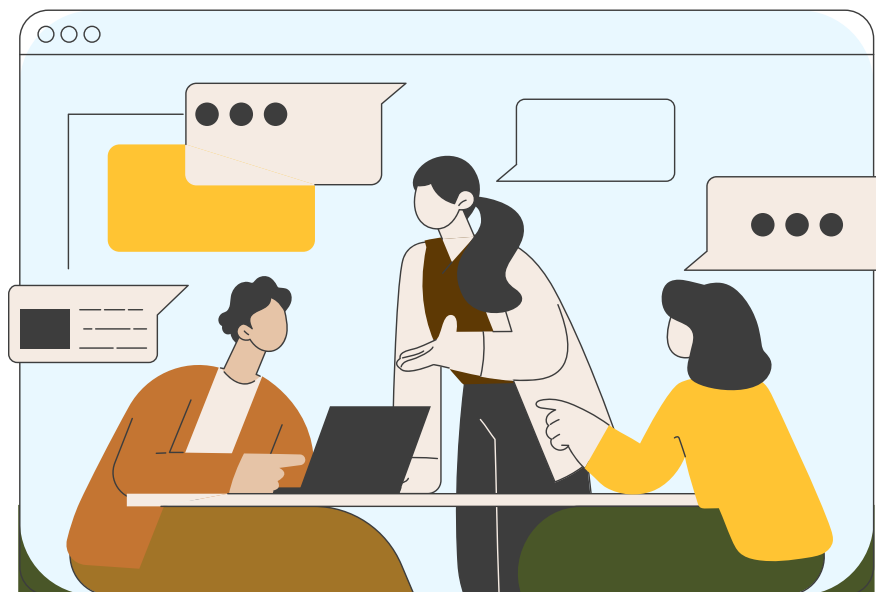
Discussion group participants were invited to share what is working well regarding Cochrane public engagement efforts. Participants indicated that Cochrane utilizes a good balance of communication to inform the public, including the [Let's Talk Cochrane](#) and municipal website, social media, surveys, QR codes, radio, newspaper and the Mayor's Address. They also identified the recent online budget survey and the public engagement discussion group as positive engagement activities.

Participants were also invited to identify challenges with Cochrane's public engagement efforts and share ideas about how the municipality could overcome the challenges.

TOPIC	CHALLENGES	IDEAS TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES
Social Media	• Outdated website. • Lack of timely updates on social media. • Lack of recognition that not all residents use social media.	• Update the website. • Create an app that can push notifications. • Turn off the comment function on social media to reduce disrespectful comments. • Incorporate a live streaming option for Council meetings.
Communication	• Lack of meaningful information, data and facts available to allow for informed participation. • Having to go to multiple places to find information. • Lack of clarity about what can be achieved with a project or initiative. • Calls to Council and Administration not being returned.	• Implement an online platform that is a central place for information and is accessible to all demographics. • Create a direct mail and/or email newsletter. • Inform the public on the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government. • Have a variety of ways to share information and communicate with people. • Be transparent about what is in scope for the project, what is known already and what input is being sought. • Ensure calls to Council and Administration are returned.
Decision-making	• Erosion of trust and confidence, based on perceived lack of communication, transparency, honesty, accountability and competence. • Perception about potential conflicts of interest. • Perception that input will not be considered.	• Incorporate public engagement into project planning. • Create a decision framework that shares the problem or issue to be solved and associated, facts, opinions, assumptions, alternatives and how public engagement and input will support decision-making. • Work to understand the needs of the community and how Cochrane can address them.
Engagement Opportunities	• Use of leading questions on surveys. • Lack of survey quality. • In-person engagement venues that don't meet participation needs. • Low turn out for engagement. • Lack of understanding regarding which topics people are interested in engaging with. • Lack of engagement opportunities at community events. • Lack of clarity about the purpose of the engagement and what influence people have. • Lack of variety and flexibility in the ways people can engage. • Financial barriers to share concerns through the SDAB Appeals process. • Lack of open houses.	• Implement more surveys that ask direct and simple questions on a topic. • Distribute surveys directly to households. • Hold more town hall meetings, open houses and/or discussion groups. • Be more visible at community events and use these events to gather input. • Ensure engagement is meaningful, accessible and includes diverse representation. • Provide refreshments and snacks at engagement events. • Increase the amount of citizen membership on Cochrane committees. • Proactively approach people to participate and share their input. • Manage expectations. • Identify and share where conflicts of interest amongst Council and/or Administration may exist. • Remove fees for sharing concerns at SDAB Appeals. • Establish a community service centre hub. • Create electoral wards for more direct representation.

Lastly, discussion group participants shared the following suggestions on what successful public engagement would look like for Cochrane:

- Town hall meetings on evenings or weekends with Council present.
- In-person engagement.
- A significant amount or percentage of people who are informed about and participating in engagement.
- A dedicated engagement platform for major projects to enable voting on a particular idea, option or alternative.
- Transparency on why, how, and what decisions are being made.
- Opportunities for people to share their input directly with Council.
- Consistently sharing back with participants and the community what was heard at engagement sessions and what was decided.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The input received will inform the development of Cochrane's Public Engagement Framework. Once approved the Framework will be posted on Cochrane's website.

APPENDIX A

Why would you consider participating in a public engagement activity with Cochrane? (Select all that apply)

BASED ON 696 RESPONSES

OPTIONS	RESPONSES
To influence Cochrane's decisions.	74.43%
To learn more about an issue.	50.67%
To share my ideas or concerns about what is going on in my community.	77.73%
To contribute my thoughts and ideas to help find solutions.	75.29%
To work with others in the community.	42.82%
I would not participate in Cochrane's public engagement activities.	3.59%
Other	2.16%

What would encourage you to participate in Cochrane public engagement activities? Please review the options below and rank them in order of most encouraging (1) to least encouraging (7).

BASED ON 683 RESPONSES

OPTIONS	AVERAGE RANKING
Knowing my input will make a difference.	3.20
Access to information about the engagement topic.	3.23
Understanding how my input from the engagement activity will be used.	3.72
A variety of ways to share my input (e.g., online, attending an open house, participating in a focus group, etc.).	3.73
Access to updates on the project and how input was used.	4.38
A variety of options for when I can participate (e.g., daytime, evening, weekend, on my own time, etc.).	4.33
Knowing that diverse ideas and opinions are welcome.	4.51