

The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council

SUBJECT: 2025 Community Engagement Opportunities

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Community engagement is a critical component of municipal governance, ensuring that community members have meaningful opportunities to provide input, stay informed, and participate in decision-making processes. The Town's goal is to build upon its current engagement opportunities, increase accessibility, and foster greater community involvement in key projects and policies.

Over the years, the Town has implemented a variety of ways to encourage public engagement, including online surveys, in-person information centres, open houses, focus groups, and social media polls. These tools have allowed the Town to reach residents across different demographics.

Recent engagement efforts have demonstrated significant success, reflecting a growing level of community interest in the Town's outreach initiatives. The Parks & Recreation Master Plan engagement in the summer of 2024 stands out as the Town's most successful project to date, with an impressive 501 survey responses. In-person initiatives have also proven highly effective; for example, the Lord Mayor's Village Open Houses, held earlier this year, attracted strong participation and meaningful dialogue across all communities, with approximately 300 community members in attendance. These outcomes highlight both the community's enthusiasm for actively shaping municipal plans and priorities, and the effectiveness of the Town's current engagement tools.

This Information Report aims to inform Council of the many opportunities on the horizon to continue building relationships and strengthening resident involvement. In 2025, the Town is moving forward with a number of key projects and initiatives that rely on strong community engagement. These efforts are closely aligned with Council's Strategic Plan, particularly the indicator of success to "increase levels of community engagement" under the pillar of Optimize Organizational Excellence. By prioritizing public participation, the Town continues to offer opportunities for community members to be involved in decision-making and the implementation of municipal initiatives.

2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This year, Niagara-on-the-Lake will implement various engagement opportunities to hear from multiple audiences within the community. A range of engagement tools will be used, such as:

- **Surveys & Polls:** Online and paper-based surveys to gauge community sentiment on various topics.
- **Public Information Centres:** In-person and virtual sessions for municipal projects, allowing residents to talk to Town Staff, ask questions, and provide feedback.
- **Social Media Engagement:** Expanded use of social media to foster informal interactions and better measure community sentiment, such as quick polls, utilizing comment sections, etc.
- **Focus Groups/Round Tables:** Continued collaboration with various groups to ensure diverse representation in municipal decision-making.
- **Interested Party Interviews:** One-on-one or small group interviews with key individuals or organizations directly impacted by or knowledgeable about a specific issue, providing in-depth insight to help shape policy and project development.
- **Comment Box/Forms:** Online comment boxes on the Town's engagement site that allow the public to submit open-ended comments, suggestions, or concerns.

For the remainder of 2025, the following public engagement opportunities are scheduled below. Each project reflects a unique level of community involvement and Town support, ranging from Town-led initiatives to collaborations with external agencies or consultants. The level of engagement is tailored to best support the goals of each project, ensuring meaningful participation.

Please note that this list is subject to change. Certain projects may be deferred to 2026 due to shifting strategic priorities, available resources, etc.

- **Planning & Policy Development**
 - Official Plan*
 - Transportation Master Plan*
 - Asset Management*
 - Fee Review – Community & Development Services*
- **Heritage & Cultural Preservation**
 - Heritage Conservation District*
 - Cultural Asset Mapping*
- **Site-Specific & Infrastructure Projects**
 - Former Hospital Site Usage*
 - Dock Area Master Plan Update
 - Airport Drainage System
 - Niagara District Airport
 - St. Davids Roundabout

- **Community & Recreational Initiatives**
 - Parks and Recreation Master Plan – Phase 2*
 - Playgrounds at Simcoe and Memorial Parks
 - Special Events Review
 - Heritage Trail - Phase 3

*Projects directly identified in Council's Strategic Plan.

NEXT STEP / CONCLUSION

To support these engagement efforts, Staff are taking the following steps:

- Developing a coordinated engagement calendar that outlines key initiatives and opportunities, taking into account timing, target audiences, and appropriate engagement tactics to ensure a strategic and inclusive approach. **(Appendix I)**
- Exploring enhanced promotional methods to increase public participation in municipal decision-making, including the use of digital platforms and targeted advertising to reach a broader and more diverse audience.
- Evaluating and refining engagement strategies based on community feedback and participation trends, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness to needs and preferences.

The Town will also be undertaking the development of a Community Engagement Plan, as defined in [Council's Strategic Plan pillar of Optimize Organization Excellence](#), to be completed by Q1 of 2026. This Plan aims to define engagement strategies and consider new tools to strengthen community engagement.

Staff looks forward to engaging with all community members and ensuring that community engagement remains a cornerstone of local governance in 2025 and beyond.

ATTACHMENTS

- 2025 Community Engagement Calendar (Appendix I)