



Section <b>Communications</b>	Policy No. <b>18-2</b>	Page <b>1 of 4</b>
Policy Title <b>Public Participation Policy</b>	Date: <b>July 17, 2018</b>	Resolution No. <b>281/18</b>

**Purpose:**

Kneehill County is committed to open and accountable decision making, which includes appropriate levels of communication and consultation between Council and the public. Communicating with residents is a key function of the County, involving officials and employees at all levels.

The Municipal Government Act (MGA) establishes a legal requirement for Council and Council committees to conduct business in public and to ensure the public is notified of certain kinds of decisions. The MGA also requires every municipality to have a public participation policy in place which must identify:

- The types or categories of approaches the municipality will use to engage municipal stakeholders
- The types or categories of circumstances in which the municipality will engage municipal stakeholders

**Policy Scope:**

This policy applies to all Kneehill County employees and Council when it is required to engage the public, whether to inform, consult or engage the public regarding issues, projects, policies, initiatives and bylaws proposed by Kneehill County.

This policy also applies to consultants working on behalf of Kneehill County, as well as any boards, committees and other quasi-judicial bodies as appointed by Kneehill County Council through bylaw, policy or other legislation.

**Definitions:**

*“Public”* means anyone (including groups and individuals) who may have an interest in a specific topic or issue under discussion. The public may, or may not, be directly impacted by a decision on the issue.

*“Public Participation Plan”* means a written document outlining the level of public participation that will be used to address the issue, project, initiative or bylaw proposed by Kneehill County, and includes a communications plan outlining strategies required to activate the plan.

*“Public Notification”* means a method of informing the public as required for proposed bylaws, land use matters, and other notifications as specified in the *Municipal Government Act*.

*“Request for Decision” (RFD)* means a document that is presented to Council required to make a decision/motion. A RFD includes an issue title, background information, how it connects to the Strategic Plan, communication requirement, and recommendations by the CAO, Director or Manager.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

***Kneehill County:***

- Will inform, consult, and engage the public about decisions that affect them, and will provide public participation opportunities that are open and transparent.
- Will give consideration to the public’s input gathered in public participation processes.

Section <b>Communications</b>	Policy No. <b>18-2</b>	Page <b>2 of 4</b>
Policy Title <b>Public Participation Policy</b>	Date: <b>July 17, 2018</b>	Resolution No. <b>281/18</b>

- Is committed to working together with the public to continuously improve its public participation processes.
- Supports County staff to build their skills and knowledge to engage the public in a meaningful way.
- Supports the belief that involving the public and stakeholders in public participation leads to better, more informed decisions.

***The public and stakeholders of Kneehill County:***

- Are encouraged to meaningfully engage so their voices strengthen decisions and their involvement helps to build a strong community.
- Have the right to be heard, but also to listen and be open to different ideas and opposing views.
- Are encouraged to increase their understanding and knowledge about local issues, as well as their role in Kneehill County's decision making process so that they can participate in a meaningful way.

**Public Participation Circumstances:**

***Public participation is required when:***

- Legislation requires it
- Council or Administration requests it

***Public participation may be required when:***

- Citizens or stakeholders request it
- Citizens quality of life may be affected
- Geographical communities or communities on interest may be affected
- There are already strong views on the issue
- Many people will be affected

***Public participation is not required when:***

- The decision has already been made
- The project or issue related decision has already been made
- There is a development of an administrative policy that doesn't require public participation.
- Stakeholder input will not be considered

**Policy Guidelines:**

1. This policy is not to circumvent any statutory requirements as outlined in the *Municipal Government Act* or any other legislation to which Kneehill County must adhere to. This also applies to Planning and Development consultation processes.
2. The CAO may adopt procedures consistent with this policy to provide a framework and consistent approach when engaging the public for operational purposes.

Section <b>Communications</b>	Policy No. <b>18-2</b>	Page <b>3 of 4</b>
Policy Title <b>Public Participation Policy</b>	Date: <b>July 17, 2018</b>	Resolution No. <b>281/18</b>

3. All County staff responsible for projects or initiatives will be accountable for following this policy.
4. Not all projects/issues require the same level of stakeholder consultation. All participation initiatives will follow the Levels of Public Participation table:

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place the final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the Public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendation into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>Example Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fact sheets</li> <li>- Websites</li> <li>- Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public comment</li> <li>- Focus groups</li> <li>- Surveys</li> <li>- Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops</li> <li>- Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advisory Committees</li> <li>- Participatory decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ballots</li> <li>- Plebiscites</li> <li>- Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

Increasing municipal ownership of the decision making process and end decision

5. The CAO or Designate will include on each Request for Decision (RFD) a recommendation of public participation.
  - a. **Directive Decisions** (information sharing) – Staff and Council have the authority to educate and inform the public on any decision made by Council motion.  
*Tools may include: newsletter, annual reports, public announcements*
  - b. **Consultative Decisions** (consulting the public) – Staff and Council sets this level to receive public feedback and develop concepts using the Public Participation Plan.  
*Tools may include: resident meetings, public advisory committees, public hearings*

Section <b>Communications</b>	Policy No. <b>18-2</b>	Page <b>4 of 4</b>
Policy Title <b>Public Participation Policy</b>	Date: <b>July 17, 2018</b>	Resolution No. <b>281/18</b>

- c. **Collaborative Decisions** (active participation by public) – Council sets this level to share in the decision making process with the public/stakeholders, using the Public Participation Plan for the full public participation process.

*Tools may include: community visioning, community/regional agreements or initiatives*

**Procedures:**

A Public Participation Plan has been developed to support this policy. Administration will develop procedures over time to ensure effective implementation of this policy.

A communications plan to address the issue, project, initiative or bylaw proposed by Kneehill County may be attached to the RFD.



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Approved: February 24, 2015 64/15  
Amended: July 17, 2018 281/18  
**Review Date: July 2021**