

Together and Towards

A report to support the development of an engagement strategy for Pickering

Introduction

This report is intended to be the basis for an engagement strategy for the City of Pickering. It attempts to answer two basic questions that are central to the sense of purpose and unity that are important to any community.

How do we do things together? What are we working towards?

First, let's admit it: Engagement has become a buzzword. It's appealing because as a word, the idea of engagement sounds like a promise. And at a time when the bonds of community are strained, when neighbours can feel like strangers, and when any of us struggle to make time for family and friends, much less for civic good works and volunteer causes, engagement sounds like something we very much want — like a one-word solution to fix everything that doesn't feel right.

Unfortunately, engagement isn't simply something that you do or a set of techniques that you can apply — though some can help. Instead, it's a culture and an ethos that can only be built with time.

This culture of engagement gets built when we ask ourselves:

When we do things together, are we acting out of respect and appreciation for one another? Do we try to widen the circle or restrict access? When we do things together, are we left wanting to do more together, or do we become tired and feel worn down?

And, are we working towards the same goals? Do we share similar values? Do we understand one another's priorities? Are we thinking big picture and long-term?

Whether implicitly or explicitly, when we 'touch the state' by accessing local services, contacting an elected representative, or even when we board a local bus, read the news, walk through a park or attend a public meeting, we might ask ourselves any of these questions. Our response tells us whether we should do more, care more and invest more. In an engaged community, that answer will be yes.

Of course, these are difficult questions for government. After all, government exists to get things done. Government is how a community acts collectively. Governments must carefully steward their resources and weigh difficult priorities. On top of ensuring that roads get built, and sewers get drained, that fires are put out and inspections are conducted — and the thousand other practical tasks of local government — concerning oneself with such 'soft' questions can seem like just another distraction from the real work of running a city.

Rather than ask such open-ended questions, it's easier to focus on transactions you can measure where you can count how long a person waits on a phone, or evaluate the attitude and manner of city staff. As a back-stop, there's always the accountability of the electoral system. "Don't like my work? Then you can show me the door at the next election."

Responsive, excellent customer service. Effective representation. Make no mistake, both are essential elements to good local government. But the argument of this report is that when it comes to sustaining a positive relationship between residents and local government these two elements alone don't add up to an engaged, connected community. Something more is required.

What we need are better answers to the questions How do we do things together? and What are we working towards? As a matter of principle, an engaged community starts with these questions and keeps asking these questions. Deciding to ask is what gets you there.

Why focus on engagement?

Engagement isn't a panacea, but by focussing on the culture of engagement within a community, local government can begin to address many of the root causes of apathy, cynicism, misinformation and disinterest. In their place, a strong culture of engagement provides residents with a greater sense of agency, purpose, connectedness and responsibility — qualities which are sometimes referred to as 'social capital.' High levels of social capital are essential for healthy, well-functioning communities.

We focus on engagement in order to:

Build trust... between Pickering residents and local government

Build capacity... to support a vibrant civic economy

Build citizens... who are engaged, informed and able to make a constructive contribution to their city

Build culture... that is distinctive, welcoming and positive

Touching the State

Do encounters with city services, council, planning exercises and city communications foster more trust, capability and confidence or less? Each resident's impression works to either build up or wear down civic morale and engagement.



“The City Experience”

Five Premises

Here are five premises we've employed in drafting this report. Deliberately provocative, they are intended to help question the assumptions we easily make when we think about public engagement and the role of government. Together, they describe a 'paradigm of public engagement' where government has responsibility and must take the lead to create a local culture where government and residents work together more effectively towards common goals.

1. Engagement is something that you earn. It's not something that you do.
2. Engagement and learning are flip sides of the same coin. Government has a pedagogic responsibility to its citizens — to make its decisions, plans and services more intelligible — and create a more informed public.
3. Local government is a platform for social and civic development. It can become a platform for engagement and learning as well.
4. Effective communication is critical. Currently government lacks sufficient channels to adequately convey quality information and create a culture of engagement. It also needs to step off the 'message track'.
5. It's not them, it's you. Creating a culture of engagement starts with government — from council to managers to staff. Organizational change is the first step towards community change.

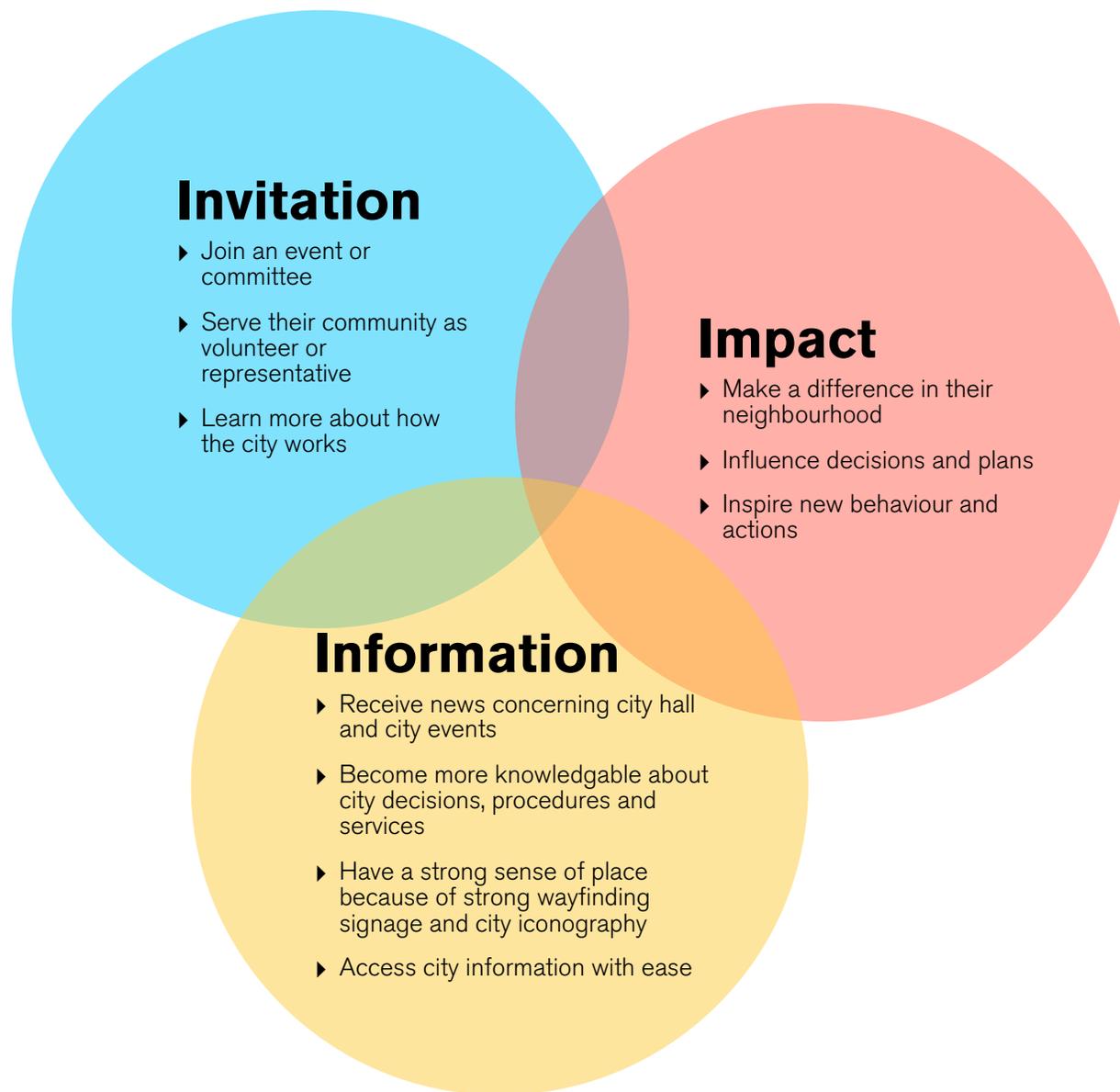
There are three 'i's' in engagement

If Pickering residents are going to work together towards common goals and a shared vision for their city, they need three things: They need to be invited, they need more information and they need to see the impact of their involvement.

An **invitation** needs to be more than a notice or an ad — it needs to be direct and, to the greatest extent possible, it should be personal and correspond to the resident's interests.

Information needs to be intelligible and accessible. City government can no longer rely on local press to carry the message. Nor can it trust in social media to organically convey information. Instead, government needs to create its own direct communications channels to residents and become increasingly skilled at differentiating between advertising, communicating and informing residents.

Residents have a strong sense of the value of their time. If they're to become involved than they need to see tangible results and understand to what extent their contribution will make an **impact**.



Mixed mindsets

When it comes to the business of satisfying citizens and residents, there are a lot of competing concepts and terms. Customer service, stakeholder consultation and public engagement are three major models for describing different approaches to government interaction with citizens.

Customer service

The drive across government to provide better 'customer' or 'client' service is in almost all respects a very welcome thing. A focus on service excellence has improved public satisfaction with government services, while in many instances, also reducing their costs.

Because government must constantly transact business with citizens, and these transactions are a touch point between government and citizens, it's reasonable that these transactions be as simple and pleasant as possible.

However, taken too far, this model can also imply that government is merely a service provider. Like a vending machine that dispenses goods, it gets kicked and rattled by users when the product gets stuck.

Treating citizens as customers also tends to reinforce the idea that residents are self-interested consumers rather than constructive and contributing members of the community. Left unchecked this mindset can lead government towards a restrictive and counterproductive view of the public as an insatiable and often irrational force that is out for individual gain and therefore must be managed.

Stakeholder consultation

As government evolves to legislate more widely and in greater technical detail, it necessarily relies on the counsel and perspective of those stakeholders most likely to be affected by government action. Stakeholders are useful to government: they bring expertise and usually advocate for a clear outcome which government can weigh against its own understanding of the issue.

What's more, convening stakeholders and soliciting their views is often much easier for government than approaching residents with little background or immediate interest in a government proposal. Stakeholders are a convenient source of input and have become increasingly central to the policy-making process.

However, relying too heavily on stakeholders can lead to interest-based negotiations among a professionalized cohort of advocates, and can lead government towards conclusions that may not accurately represent the best interests of their constituents.

Public engagement

Public engagement requires government to share some degree of planning and decision-making responsibility with citizens. It assumes that government will make better, more informed, and popular decisions when it enjoys the benefit of greater public participation and involvement.

Public engagement activities operate on two levels simultaneously. They are intended to help revitalize democracy and reinforce institutional legitimacy, build citizenship and foster a sense of community. At the same time and more visibly, any engagement activity is also directed towards a productive task. It is intended to help government create a plan, solve a problem or create tangible public value.

The Public Engagement model assumes citizens are curious, interested, and community-minded — even in the face of contrary evidence. It encourages creative problem-solving by knitting individuals and groups into larger and more extensive networks that support a shared sense of place and purpose.

Exchanging versus engaging

	Exchanges with Citizens		Engagement with Citizens		
Goal: Decision-making and problem-solving	Inform Provide the public with balanced objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and / or solutions	Consult Receive and respond to resident requests and complaints. Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and / or decisions	Include Work directly with citizens throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood by staff	Collaborate Partner with citizens in each aspect of the decision including the identification of issues, development of alternatives, choice of the preferred solution and implementation	Empower Place final decision-making authority or problem-solving responsibility in the hands of citizens
	Provide Provide services and enforce laws and regulations with courtesy, attentiveness and responsiveness to citizens	Consult Receive and respond to resident requests and complaints. Obtain public feedback on quality of or satisfaction with services	Include Involve citizens in deciding which services to evaluate and in assessment of results Involve citizens as volunteers in the production of services	Collaborate Partner with citizens in determining service priorities and taking actions to achieve objectives, e.g., crime watch Partner in services with NGOs	Empower Place final responsibility for meeting a community need in the hands of citizens or facilitate and accept citizen initiatives

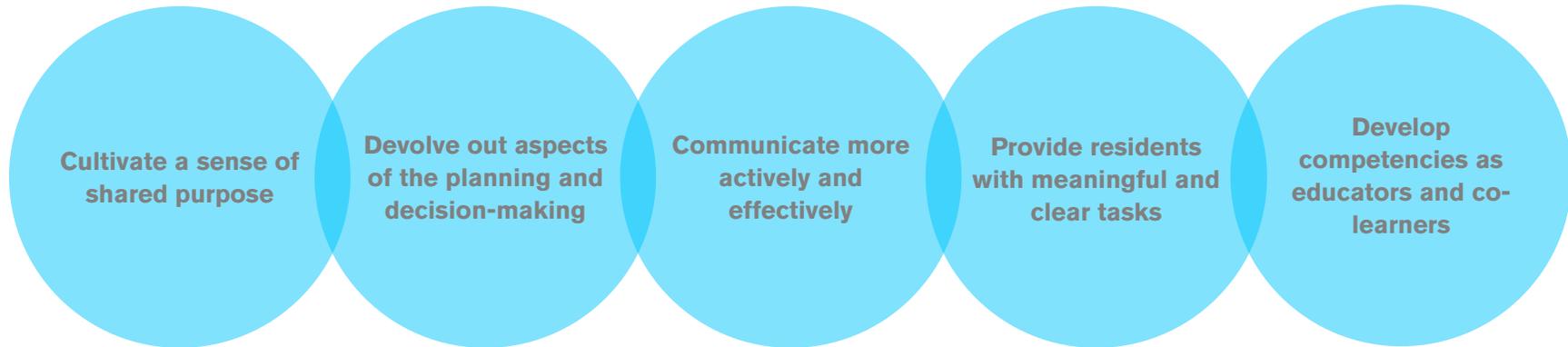
One of the first concepts public engagement practitioners learn is the IAP2 continuum of engagement which runs from simple communication activities to the outright empowerment of citizens.

James Svava and Janet Denhardt view it differently and have adapted the IAP2 continuum to make a firm distinction between information “exchange” and citizen “engagement”.

Svava and Denhardt criticize exchange activities as ‘thin’ consultation, which often fail to meet the public’s expectations for involvement or create a sense of shared ownership. Though exchange activities still have an important role to play — especially in supporting more robust engagement activities — government should avoid portraying routine ‘exchanges’ with citizens as instances of more substantial ‘engagement’.

*** Chart; Connected Communities: Local Governments as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building**, James Svava and Janet Denhardt eds., Arizona State University for the Alliance for Innovation.

Defining a culture of engagement



For example:

- ▶ Invest in prominent long-range planning exercises
- ▶ Create a 'community conversation' with a city lecture series, neighbourhood dialogues, and deliberate civic programming
- ▶ Create a narrative and brand for the city's development
- ▶ Demonstrate public accountability and responsiveness
- ▶ Look ahead at the legislative agenda and identify early on those opportunities to involve the public in planning and decision-making
- ▶ Invest in the professional skills and supportive measures necessary to facilitate good public processes
- ▶ Champion citizen involvement as a source of legitimacy and credibility
- ▶ Develop new communication channels to reach residents consistently and directly, increasing the city's communications footprint
- ▶ Develop a communication strategy that is about more than 'messaging'
- ▶ Actively compensate for the consequences of inadequate and declining local media
- ▶ Frame public conversations as problem-solving rather than preference-setting
- ▶ Develop a 'citizen service' strategy that identifies all of the ways Pickering residents can give back and serve their city
- ▶ Dismantle over-zealous liability and health and safety barriers to volunteerism and community initiative
- ▶ Use government as a platform for learning as well as social and personal development
- ▶ Promote staff with a natural facility for explaining and sharing what they know
- ▶ Create a civic curriculum to formalize opportunities for residents to become better informed and active

Our process

Our process began with general research of best practices in citizen engagement by municipalities and one-on-one and small group interviews with Council and senior staff. Our findings from this first phase were prepared in an interim report and formed the basis for the program taken up in the second phase of workshops with Council, City staff, Citizen Advisory Committee members and community leaders. Their guidance forms the basis for the recommendations contained in this report.

Research

Feb/Mar

Survey of innovative municipal engagement strategies and initiatives.

Interviews

April

24 individual or small-group interviews with elected officials and staff representing the departments/offices of:

- Mayor
- 5 councillors
- Sustainability
- Library
- Fire Services
- Customer & Admin Services
- Community Services
- Corporate Services
- Planning & Development
- City Clerk
- City Solicitor
- CAO

Preliminary Report

May

Preliminary findings:

- Interview results
- Best practices overview
- Workshop program

Workshops

May

Consultation sessions with:

- Senior staff/Council
- City staff
- Community leaders
- Citizen Advisory Committee members

Final Report

September

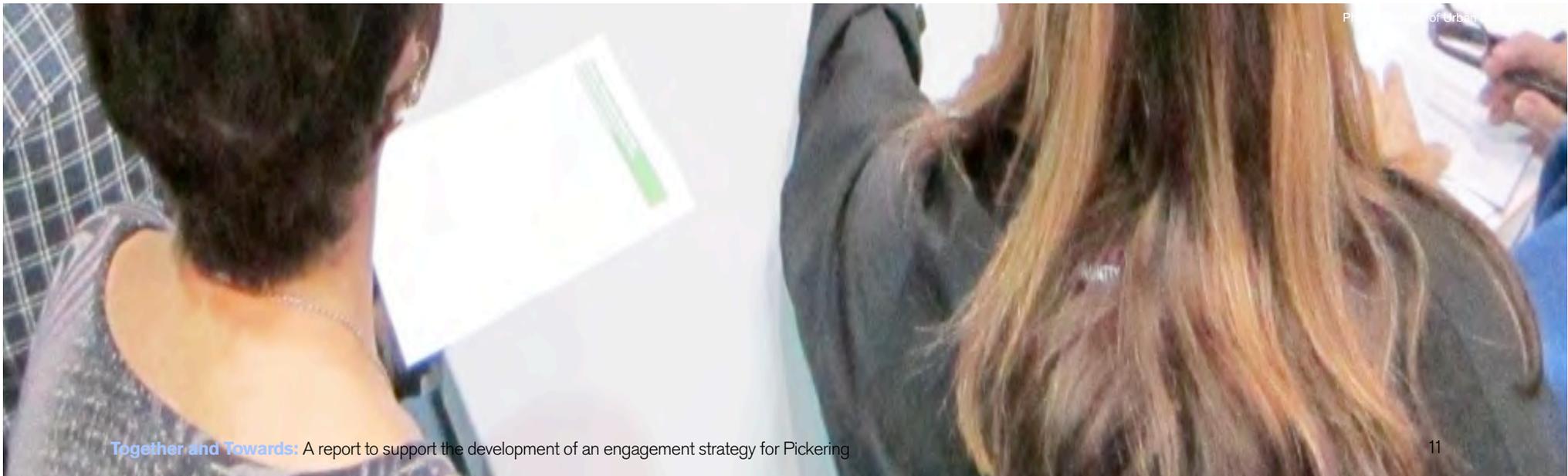
Final report and presentation including:

- Interview results
- Workshop results
- Framing engagement
- Proposed priorities



Interviews

Twenty-four members of Council and senior staff lent us their time and experience, and contributed their insights to this process. They gave us candid assessments of Pickering's internal and external engagement processes, and helped to identify ways that the engagement strategy will raise the bar in future.



Who we interviewed:

We requested an hour with city councillors and senior staff across all departments. Though we followed a similar list of questions, the conversations varied widely as each person described their efforts to engage the public, as well as their perceptions of the potential for improving the relationship between residents and local government.

Dave Ryan
Mayor

Peter Rodrigues
Regional Councillor Ward 3

Bill McLean
Regional Councillor Ward 2

Jennifer O'Connell
Regional Councillor Ward 1

Kevin Ashe
City Councillor Ward 1

David Pickles
City Councillor Ward 3

Everett Buntsma
Director, Community Services

Richard Holborn
Division Head, Engineering Services

Steve Reynolds
Division Head, Culture & Recreation

Bill Douglas
Fire Chief

Gord Ferguson
Deputy Chief, Training & Fire Prevention

Steve Fowlds
Fire Prevention Officer

Thomas Melymuk
Director, Office of Sustainability

Chantal Whitaker
Coordinator, Sustainability

Gil Paterson
Director, Corporate Services

Cathy Grant
CEO, Library

Neil Carroll
Director, Planning & Development

Catherine Rose
Manager, Policy

Grant McGregor
Principal Planner, Policy

Deborah Wylie
Senior Planner, Policy

Judy Hodgson
Manager, Customer & Admin. Services

Tony Prevedel
CAO

Debbie Shields
City Clerk

Paul Bigioni
City Solicitor

Highlights from what we heard:

“Pickering has to become something different. We’ve been mandated to become something different. We’ve got to put our density somewhere — how are we going to get people to help us decide where it’s going to go?”

“Can we make engagement enjoyable, as opposed to a threatening adversarial relationship?”

“If you’re going to invite people out to something, you’d better make it worth their while.”

“Something new needs to take place if we’re going to bring the city together as one.”

“Better engagement will, ultimately, be more successful than simply more engagement.”

“People want to be a part of something... And they want to bring their kids.”

“When it comes to engaging the public, we have no strategic vision. There’s no plan.”

“Inadvertently, we’ve created procedures that allow for a very antagonistic engagement process.”

“We want to see the balance shift so public leadership and involvement is more equal. It’s time the public stepped up, and we need to reach out and take the ideas of the community.”

“We don’t have so much ego and pride invested in these things that public input pisses us off. That’s a strength of ours. And we get the opportunity to say to people ‘we heard you, and we’re responding to what you had to say.’”

“The public can undermine your best endeavours by simply not showing up.”

“Sure, I want to send out more information to residents. As I have to do that myself, the price of a more informed voter is that I’m now the biggest spender on Council.”

“We’d like to see more structure not complexity, so we can be confident that what we are doing represents the public will.”

“We don’t engage early enough.”

“Staff is willing to learn. I think there’s a respect for the public, but we’ve never been trained. We don’t know what to do.”

“Council is not getting a balanced view from the public. A vocal minority tends to co-opt the public voice.”

“Everybody is living in double-income households and running around to fifty sporting events for their children. It’s a lifestyle practically designed to leave people with no time to think about their community.”

“Can we blame them? Unless there’s an issue at the end of their driveway, why would they decide to go through the city paper to see what community meetings are coming up?”

What we learned from the interviews

What works well:

Municipal government is closest to the people, and the most accessible

Council and staff are available and accessible to members of the public. City representatives are active in the community. Pickering welcomes inquiries or input from residents through formal and informal channels.

Structural changes within the corporation are working

Staff enjoy working in cross-disciplinary and multi-departmental teams. They appreciate greater discretion and responsibility for their work. They are keen to learn from each other and the public.

Pickering is a respectful and harmonious multicultural community

Newcomers are welcomed into the community and become involved in civic affairs. The level of anxiety around intercultural relations and newcomer integration is very low.

The City are keen to employ new technologies and practices

There is a great deal of excitement for new ways of communicating and interacting with the public. A revamped website, the customer care centre, telephone town halls, social media, “mayor for a day”, and sustainability events at the downtown mall were all mentioned as initiatives the City could expand and build upon.

Community building events are highly popular

When the City of Pickering throws a party, people turn up. Canada Day events, Ribfest, recreation and library membership, and Pickering Blooms enjoy a high degree of participation and support.

What needs work:

Pickering lacks a corporate approach to public engagement

Individual councillors and departments have their own approaches to public engagement, while some departments, such as Planning, must adhere to provincial standards for notification and consultation. This leaves the public with no sure sense of where the City stands and how it will reach out. Equally, it leaves staff and councillors feeling isolated and unsupported.

We aren't learning enough from our mistakes

Pickering lacks evaluation standards and debriefing practices for its engagement initiatives. Learning across the corporation is limited, and the City is not building institutional memory to replicate successes and correct failures.

A vocal minority has an outsized impact

A small group of highly active citizens plays an outsized role in influencing public policy. Less active residents only come out to a meeting if they are upset or unhappy with a situation. As a result, broad and inclusive representation of public opinion is hard to achieve, as only vocal individuals with a stake in the outcome attend.

The structure of public engagement discourages participation

Despite best intentions, the structure of current public engagement exercises exacerbates barriers to participation. The formal rules of Standing Committees and delegations to Council meetings prevent some citizens from communicating their views in their own words or through different avenues. Residents are often asked for their input too late in the policy process to make a real impact on the outcome.

Pickering does not demonstrate responsiveness to citizen input

The City asks residents for their input, but seldom demonstrates that it is listening. Perceived lack of responsiveness from the City alienates those who made the effort to contribute and discourages resident participation.

Priorities from the interviews

1. Develop Pickering's sense of community

Engagement should expand opportunities for residents to contribute to their city's development. The strategy should build a community that gives people more reason to move to Pickering and stay here. Participation should strengthen the connections between neighbours, and give the different communities in Pickering more chances to interact and share experiences.

2. Determine a corporate approach to engagement

Staff are keen for more opportunities to learn how to conduct public engagement. Some asked for a dedicated staffer who could liaise across departments and provide advice and support. Councillors want to see a more informed public and are frustrated that general information such as newsletters come out of their council budgets and are not part of dedicated City outreach.

3. Learn new techniques

There was significant interest in exploring the range of possibilities or different models for engagement. Both councillors and staff were curious and open to new ideas. They understood that engagement could take place in many forms, as opposed to fitting into just one area of politics.

4. Evaluate the value of different approaches to engagement

Time, money, and value were all prime considerations for staff and Council. Determining concrete goals and outcomes, including ways to assess the 'bang for the buck', are necessary to ensure that engagement processes are appropriate, effective, and cost-effective.

5. Work with the public to solve problems together

Both Council and staff are eager for new ways to overcome the antagonistic relationship between government and the public that can arise from current consultation methods.



Workshops

We held six workshops: two for Council and senior staff, two for staff, one for resident members of the Citizen Advisory Committees, and one for leaders of community organizations. Over one hundred people participated in the voluntary workshops. The workshops were an opportunity to think about the character and quality of interactions between the City, residents and community organizations, and to identify where Pickering is doing well and where — and how — we need to raise our game.

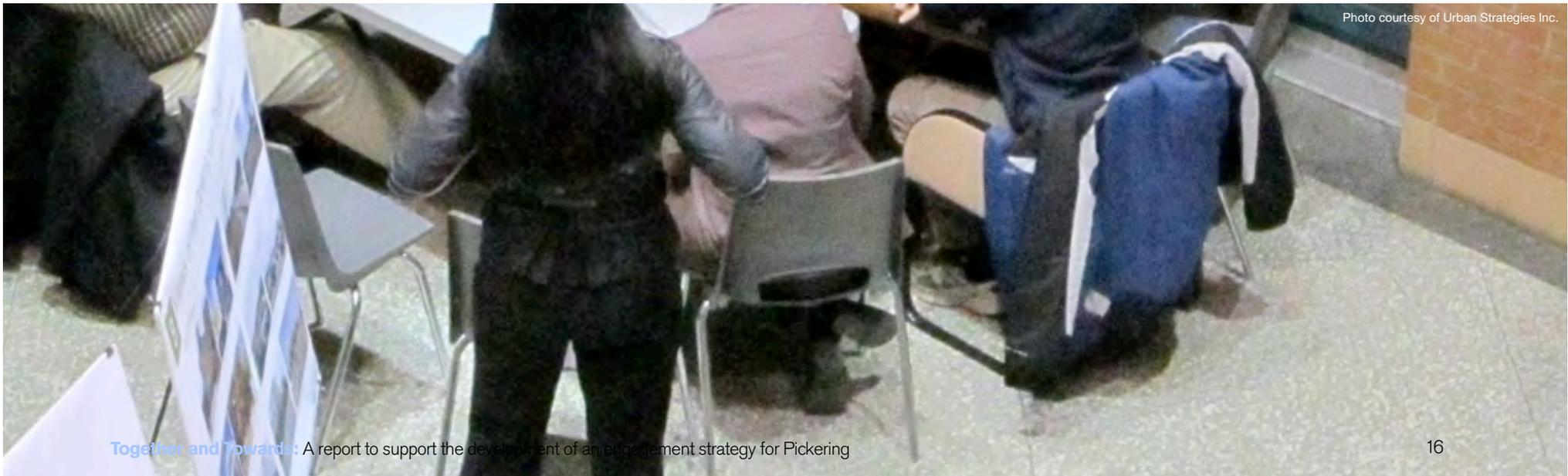


Photo courtesy of Urban Strategies Inc.

A vision for a more engaged community

Over a series of collaborative activities and discussions, the workshop participants reached a rough consensus concerning their vision for a more engaged community.

An informed community

“People call me and say their taxes are too high. Once they hear how their tax money is actually spent, they start to think they get a pretty good deal.” — Pickering councillor

Workshop participants, especially Council and City staff, are eager to raise public knowledge of municipal affairs. They want to increase the amount of accessible public information and see residents better informed, sooner, about issues that concern them. They are very interested in better equipping residents to contribute to the policy process, and seek to achieve more informed public input into City initiatives, particularly around planning. Community leaders and citizen advisors agreed that more can be done to educate residents, and want to see additional and ongoing training for councillors. All participants looked forward to a better and more constructive dialogue between the City and residents.

A vibrant community

“We could partner and do things together, but we’ve never met before today.” — Local community leader

Participants agreed that while many Pickering residents are highly involved in their community, greater interest from more residents is required to sustain and grow community organizations. They want to ensure all residents — including minorities, newcomers, and people of any age — can easily tap into and participate in civic life.

An engaged community — and corporation

“We’re taxpayers too! We don’t like the waste. Ask us how we can do things better.” — Frontline city staff

For most workshop participants, especially frontline staff, community leaders and citizen advisors, developing a culture of engagement was essential for the City’s success. Staff are keen for more opportunities to work together across departments and collaborate across the corporation to solve shared challenges. Staff are eager to play a greater role in reaching out to the public and increasing the City’s profile in the community. The majority of workshop participants want to see meaningful consultation become the norm for Pickering, on issues large and small.

A vision for a more engaged community

A responsive community

“We should be able to know — and show — that the City is doing what is best for the whole community.” — Senior city staff

Participants expressed their desire for council and staff to provide services in complete confidence that they are responding to community priorities. They want a process that allows the City to consult with residents who are broadly representative of the city’s population and collect advice that goes beyond individual or group interest. They hope to act with even greater legitimacy and publicize how the City has collected and acted on public input.

A Council committed to a better, more transparent and collaborative way of working

“People come to Council to see a motion passed, and half the time they can’t even tell when it’s happened” — Pickering councillor

Workshop participants stressed the need for the policy-making process to be ‘friendlier’ and more accessible for Pickering’s residents. More convivial public meetings and council/committee meetings were a priority. Participants also envisioned an expanded role for the City as a public educator. They felt the City could take an active role in helping residents to learn about municipal governance through introductory ‘Civics 101’ courses or workshops on how to run for municipal office. They also suggested the City expand or adopt best practices for plain language communication, and called for a ‘translation’ of council and committee procedures to make the policy-making process easier to understand.

Barriers to a culture of engagement

After they described their aspirations for Pickering, workshop participants identified barriers, real or perceived, to achieving municipal goals.

The City has limited modes of outreach to the public

Residents who do not or cannot access the City's website can only receive information about municipal initiatives through the New Advertiser or sporadic newsletters from councillors.

Councillors dominate citizen advisory committees and public meetings

Meetings are often overly formal, with councillor dominating the discussion. Committee members tend to defer to city councillors and need greater autonomy and clarity about their roles.

The City lacks a clear long-term plan for economic and physical development

There is no formal agreement or vision to guide Pickering's development. Without an accepted, integrated plan, each new initiative leads to a clash of competing visions and unnecessarily divisive decisions.

Voluntary organizations are in decline

An aging volunteer base is not being replenished. Residents are more motivated to advocate for single-issue campaigns, which tend to dissipate once the issue is no longer pressing. They are less likely to commit to joining standing organizations such as rate-payer associations.

Limited transportation options hinder participation from some groups

Limited or onerous transit options pose barriers for citizens without access to personal vehicles, particularly youth and seniors.

Councillors only hear from a segment of the public

Only a small segment of the population contributes to public meetings or contacts their councillor. Accessing a broad, representative sample of the population is a challenge.

Priorities from the workshops

1. Give residents a more productive role in decision-making

Workshop participants want the City to provide a more productive and meaningful role for residents to play in the policy process. Working together to reach a more representative, better informed, more publicly minded dialogue about city issues and involving residents in a meaningful way much earlier in the policy process were both regular themes at the workshops.

2. Increase quality and usage of public space

Participants suggested that improving the quality, availability and accessibility of public spaces would encourage residents to get out and get to know each other. Developing long-range neighbourhood and transit plans in collaboration with residents, expanding the practice of mixed-use public buildings and spaces, as well as working with developers and the region to increase the accessibility of City spaces were all cited as necessary initiatives.

3. Maximize convening power

Frontline staff and community leaders enjoyed the opportunity the workshops presented to get together and discuss common issues. Many community leaders met for the first time and, over the course of the conversation, identified opportunities for partnerships and collaboration between their organizations. They emphasized the tremendous value created for learning and cooperation, and strongly encouraged the City to convene staff and community groups more often.

4. Improve communication and raise the City's public profile

A common theme among the workshop recommendations was the need for the City to do more community outreach and shore up communications. Many participants proposed offering introductory classes to help residents learn about municipal affairs. Similarly, they suggested extending educational opportunities to staff and councillors by creating special courses on select city issues. Frontline staff and citizen advisors were keen to increase the number and range of Public Information Centres and locate them in high-traffic areas around the city. Many workshop participants also suggested reviewing the City's Municipal Performance Measures and using them to develop an accessible annual report / report card for residents.

5. Adopt culture of engagement — inside and out

Most workshop participants felt that adopting a culture of engagement would require an organizational change, not simply new tools or techniques. Many — especially frontline staff and citizen advisors — are keen to lead the change internally by doing more to share information and break down barriers between departments. They recommended placing a greater emphasis on learning and communications, and developing new ways of working with each other as well as with the public.



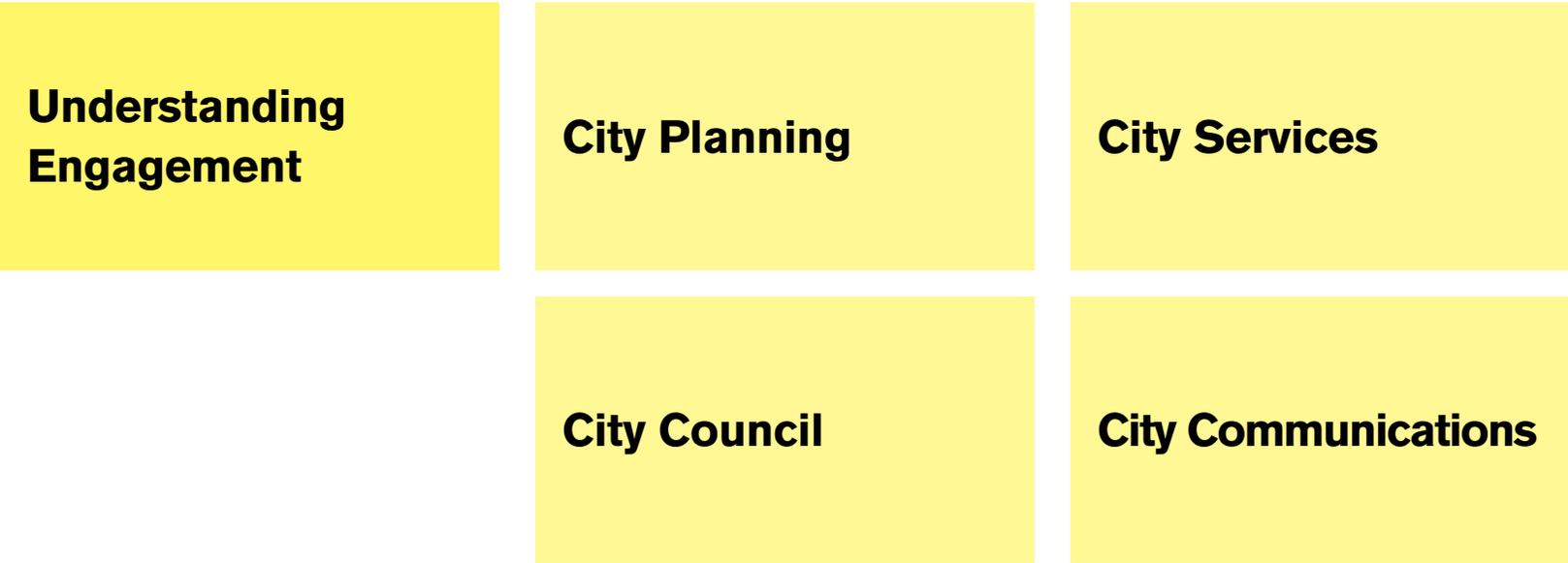
Are these residents a risk, an obligation, or a resource?



Photo courtesy of Urban Strategies Inc.

Five areas of focus

We've summarized our findings to describe the current reality and preferred future in five focus areas. We then lay out four priorities for each focus area for achieving this change and building a culture of engagement.



Describing cultural change

Understanding Engagement

Current State

The rationale for public engagement is unclear. A strong customer service ethos supersedes the idea of Pickering residents as constructive partners, and public engagement as a mechanism for city-building and social development.

There is no consistent corporate approach to public engagement; Current efforts are episodic and ad hoc.

City staff are interested in working more effectively with the public but lack techniques and resources.

The City struggles to reach residents and communicate effectively. Robust communications are essential for successful and sustained engagement.

Future State

Investments in public engagement complement and support perceptions of responsiveness and quality customer service. The City works with residents in new ways to solve problems, build trust and create value.

A public engagement strategy guides and unifies City efforts to respond to, involve and empower residents. The strategy seeks to strengthen the democratic fitness of residents as well as their knowledge of City programs, service and plans.

A growing culture of engagement and learning rewards staff innovation and collaboration.

Enhanced communication channels become a trusted and popular way for residents to access information and become better informed.

Describing cultural change

City Council

Current State

Councillors have mixed experiences working to engage local residents. They cite low turnout, the potential for conflict, poorly informed residents, and over-representation by vocal minorities and local advocates as dissuasive factors.

The feedback and direction the City receives during consultation processes are often inconclusive or of marginal value to Council.

There is little public interest in municipal affairs; voter turnout continues to decline and several wards have gone uncontested.

Citizen Advisory Committees are a valued supplementary mechanism for soliciting input to Council. More could be done to recruit new members and strengthen the focus and value of each committee's work.

Future State

A coordinated corporate strategy to engage residents improves the experience of residents and councillors alike, leading to higher overall levels of participation and greater confidence in the engagement process.

New, more robust engagement processes focussed on the big picture provide clarity concerning citizen priorities, and help to create a common agenda for councillors and staff.

Local government makes it a priority to reverse these trends, and deploys new communication strategies to raise public interest.

The Advisory Committees work with the City to devise new performance measurements concerning recruitment, turnover and achieving specific annual goals. Committee members share responsibility not only for representing but also for engaging the wider community, and are supported by City staff.

Describing cultural change

City Planning

Current State

Long-standing issues such as neighbourhood intensification, the airport lands and Seaton development remain highly divisive.

Development typologies remain predominantly suburban and do not foster a more convivial, 'downtown experience'.

Development decisions and notices appear sudden and perplexing to many residents.

Statutory requirements concerning land use and development are treated as sufficient specifications for public consultation, and rarely produce useful or constructive input.

Future State

High profile, long-term planning processes are used as a creative and essential communications, engagement and learning tool to build public consensus concerning major growth and new development.

Pickering adopts a long-term strategy to use new growth to knit together existing communities, creating a greater sense of place and destination, and begins to reduce car dependency within new developments.

City growth and development are recast from something that 'happens to you' to something that 'happens with you'. Planning communications become more intelligible and reinforce a positive narrative concerning city-building.

Statutory requirements are treated as minimum specifications, as the department pilots new mechanisms for engaging the public.

Describing cultural change

City Services

Current State

City staff enjoy strong morale and take pride in their work providing essential services and programs to Pickering residents. They also recognize ways they could provide services more efficiently or serve residents more effectively.

City services and programs are extensive but not altogether well-known by residents. Similarly, the cost of providing City services — or of local government as a whole — is not well understood by residents.

Services and programs have long legacies and are maintained according to demand.

Future State

City staff routinely collaborate across departments, sharing data, while identifying new ways to streamline services and create public value. 'Inside' entrepreneurialism is encouraged, and collaboration rewarded

Services and programs are well-known and used by residents; Greater public awareness of city finances encourages a more open discussion concerning revenue options, and investment, and greater mindfulness among all city staff to steward resources carefully

Services and programs are periodically reviewed and redesigned with residents and users to promote innovation and efficacy; Learnings are publicized and shared

Describing cultural change

City Communications

Current State

Pickering lacks a strong civic brand; City iconography is used inconsistently.

A new Pickering web site increases transparency and access to city information and services.

A heavy emphasis is placed on the promise of social media to the exclusion of more substantive, narrative-based communications.

Local media is weak and provides inconsistent coverage of local news and events to residents.

Future State

A strong civic brand and enhanced graphic standards across city properties and services provide the basis for a new way-finding system for the city, creating a stronger sense of place and local character.

The Pickering website continues to expand and add new features, becoming a single point-of-access for a majority of city services and city communications.

In addition to electronic media, new annual print publications mailed directly to homeowners dramatically increase the flow and quality of city information available to residents.

Pickering is noted as a leader in civic communications and becomes increasingly creative in its efforts to communicate with residents, projecting a confident and inclusive image of a dynamic, welcoming and growing city.

Twenty recommended engagement priorities

Understanding Engagement	Create a new learning and engagement unit to advise council and departments	Develop and offer an annual introductory civics course to Pickering residents	Develop a one-day public engagement training program for staff to improve skills and understanding	Set clear benchmarks and measures for increasing public engagement and report annually
City Council	Pass a motion concerning the city's commitment to engagement and adopt a strategy on public engagement and learning	Ask all departments to report on opportunities for resident engagement and learning	Adopt new, more deliberative techniques for involving residents in decision-making	Review citizen advisory committees with an aim to widen participation and revise their Terms of Reference
City Planning	Develop a 100 year vision for Pickering to guide planning and build public consensus	Continue to review statutory obligations concerning consultation with a view to exceeding minimum requirements	Involve engagement specialists in the design of public consultations to support major city planning exercises	Engage citizens to enhance current design principles concerning the conviviality of proposed developments
City Services	Pilot new public challenges competitions to improve service delivery and create public value	Create an inter-service frontline working group to share information and coordinate activities	Create a co-production task force to review opportunities to devolve, enhance or share city services with residents and local groups	Work with residents to periodically review and redesign city services and programs
City Communications	Develop a long-term strategy for providing information to residents, compensating for diminished local media	Develop a new civic brand strategy to better distinguish city geography, facilities, services and communications	Organize a single repository for opt-in contact information with the goal of being able to email 50% of Pickering residents within two years	Develop a comprehensive annual report to citizens that provides a detailed and informative account of city activities during the past year

Understanding Engagement

1. Create a new learning and engagement unit to advise council and departments

Establish a team of two city staff members to receive training and serve as in-house, part-time experts on public engagement. This 'engagement and learning unit' would act as internal champions and as resources for all staff and councillors seeking to consult with the public, while also assuming responsibility for recording and reporting on the City's efforts to engage the public more effectively. The unit would

not act as facilitators or conduct public meetings, but would instead consult and provide advice to different city business units. This approach will help the City learn from its experiences, and increase its internal capacity to undertake engagement activities.

2. Develop and offer an annual introductory civics course to Pickering residents

Municipalities across North America have developed introductory courses on local government that are proving to be surprisingly popular with residents. An inter-departmental staff group would determine the curriculum, and a member of each department's senior team would be responsible for developing and presenting their portion of the programs. Participants in the program would meet City staff, learn about City responsibilities and services, as well as current issues before Council. The

program would have the dual benefit of assisting staff to become more skilled at presenting technical information in lay terms and knowledge-sharing. Held annually, the four to six session course would increase residents' knowledge of City issues, and provide more residents with an on-ramp to to access City Hall and become more involved in local government.

3. Develop a one-day public engagement training program for staff to improve skills and understanding

Successful public engagement requires intentional design and skillful execution. With the assistance of engagement professionals, develop a training program for staff to better understand the models, methods, and rationale behind public engagement. A one-day course would orient staff to different techniques for responding to different

community needs, and provide basic principles for creating a more engaged community. Engagement professionals and City staff should develop the program jointly, adopting a 'train the trainer' model so staff will subsequently be equipped to repeat the program periodically and provide refresher courses.

4. Set clear benchmarks and measures for increasing public engagement and report annually

Include clear goals in the engagement strategy to benchmark the uptake of engagement techniques across City departments. Demonstrate the City's commitment to involving the public in City affairs by setting goals for quality and quantity of public engagement practices and publicizing the results. Anticipate gradual

expansion and improvement over the first few years of implementation. Evaluating how well the City is living up to its own goals and publicizing progress will signal to the public that the City is sincere in its efforts and ambitious in its intent, and will set Pickering apart as a City committed to excellence in public participation.

City Council

5. Pass a motion concerning the city's commitment to engagement and adopt a strategy on learning and engagement

"Statements of commitment" are routinely used by public bodies to define a common understanding and demonstrate willingness to uphold a set of values, practices, or a general code of conduct. As work begins to create a new engagement strategy for Pickering, develop a corresponding Council motion to publicly express the City's

commitment to effective public engagement and their desire to create a more engaged community. The commitment should be brief and straight-forward, and supply an easy rule-of-thumb for Council to use in living up to its commitment.

6. Ask all departments to report on opportunities for resident engagement and learning

Set practical goals for engagement by first consulting within each City department, working with senior and frontline staff to identify the major challenges they face and opportunities for public involvement. Identify opportunities for engagement by asking: what are the upcoming decisions we need to make? What are the greatest sources of conflict between our department and the public? What are the big projects we

want to take on? What is the need in the community we're not sure how to meet? A thorough evaluation by each department will help model good internal engagement, garner staff buy-in for engagement initiatives, and develop a culture of thinking of the public as an ally in solving shared problems.

7. Adopt new, more deliberative techniques for involving residents in decision-making

Public deliberation entails members of the community coming together to exchange views and experiences with one another and generating shared recommendations for use by government. As opposed to a situation where individual and groups present their opinion directly to government and where government is solely responsible for reconciling divergent views, deliberation shares this responsibility with all stakeholders and the public. There are many methods of deliberative public

consultation, and overall the practice has been shown to diminish tensions between elected officials, increase resident understanding and acceptance of government decisions, and result in better decisions informed by the community. Make the expansion of deliberative practice at regular intervals throughout each Council term a major goal of the engagement strategy, and aim to incorporate some element of deliberation and problem-solving in every public engagement initiative.

8. Review Citizen Advisory Committees with an aim to widen participation and revise their Terms of Reference

Citizen Advisory Committees have long played a constructive role in assisting Council and providing the City with expertise and insight from Pickering residents. They are the principal standing mechanism through which the City receives citizen input. On the occasion of developing a public engagement strategy for Pickering, it makes sense to examine the work and membership of these committees more closely. A review

should look to see how recruitment can be strengthened, the interface between Council and the committees improved, and whether an annual plan for each committee could be developed that would provide each committee with greater autonomy and a clearer sense of purpose.

City Planning

9. Develop a 100 year vision to guide planning and build public consensus

Establish the vision, principles, and goals for a 100 year vision plan for Pickering. Involve Council, staff, local groups and residents in a wide-ranging discussion that examines the implications of growth over a long time horizon, and lifts the conversation above the immediate political fray. A completed vision would detail the

community's aspirations for their city, affirm shared values, and provide a guideline as well as priorities for development. This initiative could learn from the recent experience of Calgary, which developed a 100 year plan in order to create public consensus on the shape and character of future growth.

10. Continue to review statutory obligations concerning consultation with a view to exceeding minimum requirements

Statutory requirements for public consultation cannot be avoided. However, provincial regulations are often treated as the maximum that can be done, as opposed to the minimum specification. Review Pickering's statutory obligations concerning public consultation with the goal of raising the bar and providing staff with guidelines to go beyond the statutory minimums in their efforts to consult the public on planning

matters. Treat statutory minimums as a baseline for more creative approaches to communicating and engaging with residents. City staff have a strong desire for the review, and have demonstrated strong instincts and aptitudes to build on the statutory framework.

11. Involve engagement specialists in the design of public consultations to support major city planning exercises

Dedicated budgets for substantive public consultations should be set aside as a percentage of overall project budgets. This would allow the city to retain engagement specialists to support major planning exercises, and develop processes that are comparable in scale and scope to the planning action being reviewed. Upfront

investment in substantive public engagement processes often reduces opposition leading to costly delays and can lead to better quality development decisions that enjoy greater public understanding and support.

12. Engage citizens to enhance current design principles concerning the conviviality of proposed developments

Pickering's zoning by-laws include regulations concerning height, setback, density and many other standards to which developers must adhere. Work with residents to develop standards for conviviality — regulations concerning physical attributes that improve the warmth, sociability and liveliness of neighbourhoods and new developments. The concept of development standards for conviviality stems from

the New Urbanism movement in the United States, and have helped to guide new development in neighbouring Markham and other mid-sized suburban municipalities. Establishing principles for conviviality will ensure new developments are consciously contributing to community-building in Pickering.

City Services

13. Pilot new 'public challenges' competitions to improve service delivery and create public value

Each year invite City Council to identify one major challenge they would like public assistance in solving. Promote this challenge as a competition to schools, businesses and residents and feature the submissions and proposed solutions. Challenges can be broad like improving early years literacy, or much narrower, like finding a speedier way to melt ice on sidewalks and public paths. Invite city staff and members of the public to suggest their own challenges, and participate in evaluating the submissions.

An effective public challenges program can create a low-cost source of innovation, and create a greater sense of public participation in meeting the challenges of local government. Similar competitions are now being piloted throughout the UK, and a new centre for public challenges has recently been created by their government's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts.

14. Create an inter-service frontline working group to share information and coordinate activities

Create an inter-departmental working group of frontline staff to share information about their interactions with the public and challenges in providing services. By meeting six times a year, this group will be able to assess the breadth of city services to identify high-cost service interactions, inefficient services and 'frequent fliers' — either individuals or events with high service demands. By comparing experiences

and taking a wider lens, this working group will be able to overcome silos and identify issues that may otherwise languish just beneath the radar in multiple departments. The working group will also be tasked with seeking opportunities to integrate services, increase efficiency and creatively overcome service challenges.

City Services

15. Create a co-production task force to review opportunities to devolve, enhance or share city services with residents and local groups

Co-production is an approach where government and citizens partner in the delivery of services. Simply put, it refers to local government accepting the contribution of volunteers — or even contracting out services to community non-profits — to deliver City services. Though it may sound radical, co-production is already practiced in Pickering in the form of the Eyes on the Street program, where instead of hiring additional bylaw officers the City looks to residents to assume responsibility for vigilance in their communities. In a tight fiscal environment, municipalities around the world are looking at co-production as a means of providing quality services to residents for less. Facing a shrinking budget and an affordable housing crisis the

town of Jacksonville, Florida, shifted their support from their own supportive housing and instead funded Habitat for Humanity, who they discovered could house more people faster and cheaper than their own service.

Create a task force with the mandate to review Pickering city services with an eye to identify opportunities to improve provision through partnership with residents or local groups, or to conserve resources or enhance service by devolving the service directly to the community.

16. Work with residents to periodically review and redesign city services and programs

Establish a schedule and an appropriate methodology for periodically reviewing, refreshing and redesigning city services and programs by involving residents and service users. These sessions can be sources for new innovation and also demonstrate accountability to Pickering residents. They are also useful for creating greater appreciation for the limits of certain services and programs where innovation and improvement proves challenging. Similar processes can also be used to evaluate

or gauge demand for new programs or service collaborations between, for instance, the library system and the local school board, or a retirement home and the Community Care Access Centre. Resulting documentation and lessons should be shared with other municipalities to urge broader efforts across the province at service innovation.

City Communications

17. Develop a long-term strategy for providing information to residents and compensating for diminished local media

The decline of local media has been detrimental to municipal communications. Without a strong local media presence Pickering must develop alternate means of raising its profile and communicating with the public. Create a long-term communication strategy to clarify the City's communication goals, and actions to achieve them. Determine the hierarchy of City communications methods (Website, in-

person interaction, facebook, newsletters, recreation guide, etc.) and develop outreach initiatives to drive residents to access each method. Developing the communications strategy will help staff understand how to best employ the communications tools at their disposal, and its implementation will help the City be more deliberate and effective in how it conveys information to residents.

18. Develop a new civic brand strategy to better distinguish city geography, facilities, services and communications

Create a strong civic identity and brand to help staff, Council and residents tell the Pickering story. Decide what is special about Pickering — what you want to emphasize to attract people and businesses to the city. Make this idea the core of the branding. Develop consistent imagery, colours, and typography to reinforce the City's identity. Consider commissioning an easily identifiable and replicable symbol for the City of Pickering. Deciding from among the shortlist is a great opportunity to

open the competition to public input. Clear, easily replicable symbols, consistently applied not only to City documents, but also to City property, delineates public space and evokes city pride. Rather than a flashy PR exercise, rethinking the City's branding can initiate a public conversation about what residents and the City want for their community, and how to put their best foot forward.

19. Organize a single repository for opt-in contact information; Set a goal of being able to email 50% of residents within two years

Online communication is integral to keeping the public informed and involved in City affairs. Making the City's website appealing and user-friendly is one way to encourage traffic, but relies on residents to regularly visit the site. Develop an opt-in repository for resident contact information to increase the City's ability to reach out directly to residents with important information. Initiate a kind of 'membership drive'

to collect residents' email addresses with the goal of being able to email 50% of Pickering residents within one year. Consider referral competitions, prizes for the 'enth' person registered in the form of special invitations to City events or access to City services, such as two hours of free, private ice time on a City rink for the block who gets every house on their street to sign up with the City.

20. Develop a comprehensive annual report to citizens that provides a detailed and informative account of city activities

Issue an annual report or City report card to residents each year. This can be a plain-language version of the municipal performance metrics already produced by the City. Include an evaluation of the City's performance in comparison with the previous year along with context explaining why this performance measurement is important. Don't be afraid to include areas where the City is not doing so well. Showcasing any

shortcomings as well as your successes demonstrates transparency and builds trust among the public. By providing a clear evaluation of how the City is responding in its areas of authority, the annual report will also help to clarify resident expectations and inform residents about City responsibilities.

Together and Towards: A report to support the development of an engagement strategy for Pickering

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