

Trust, early involvement needed in public engagement

The City of Edmonton needs to demonstrate trust, openness and involve citizens early when developing a new public engagement process. It also needs to provide citizens influence over decisions. These are some of the key priorities for Edmontonians who provided input to the City on its public engagement process.



The findings were released at *Building the Momentum* at the Shaw Conference Centre on January 24. About 150 Edmontonians attended the event, part of the three-year City Council Initiative on Public Engagement led by Councillors Ben Henderson and Michael Walters.

"We heard it out on the campaign trail and we've heard it since: effective public engagement matters to citizens," says Councillor Ben Henderson. "Edmontonians from all walks of life expect more from their communication with municipal government. They expect to be involved in the decision-making process as early as possible and in a meaningful way. We want to create an effective, flexible public engagement process and the citizen input we've been receiving will help us do just that."

Feedback gathered by the City in 2014 identified 13 essential elements of effective public engagement. These include: engaging with citizens earlier and showing citizens have influence over decisions, striving for open and fair democratic processes, using diverse tools to communicate with the public and ensuring the results of public engagement are fair and transparent.

"Public engagement can't just be about politicians making all the decisions," says Councillor Michael Walters. "We need to give citizens the opportunity to step up and get involved. We need a public engagement process that harnesses the creativity and knowledge of our citizens."

At the January 24 workshop, participants discussed why public engagement is important and what steps are needed to ensure the City is meeting the engagement needs of citizens.

Edmontonians are welcome to continue providing their feedback to this process through the online discussion guide. Public input will also be sought in part two of the initiative.

For more information on the Council Initiative on Public Engagement and to provide feedback to the process, please visit edmonton.ca/OpenEngagement.

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