

Centre Plan

Community Engagement Strategy

Progress Report

Step 2 – Learn Together

Step 3 – Check-In and Feedback

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About this document

The Centre Plan Engagement Strategy outlines the ways and means by which staff at the Halifax Regional Municipality will engage with the community through the Centre Plan project. The Engagement Strategy was adopted by Regional Council in January of 2015.

The Community Design Advisory Committee reviewed a Report on Step 1 of the Engagement Strategy in the Summer of 2015. This report will provide summary of Steps 2 and 3 of the strategy, and will provide the reader with an understanding of what progress has been made.

The report provides **measures** of the success of **actions** taken toward achieving the **goals** of the engagement plan.

This report is guided by the *Centre Plan Engagement Strategy*, the *HRM Regional Centre Plan Engagement Plan* by O2 Planning + Design (the lead consultant on the project), and the *Internal Communications Plan*. The Centre Plan Engagement Strategy sets the “what” and “why”, while other documents identified the “how”.

Within this document there are discussions of the successes and the lessons learned for engagement on the plan and identify the steps forward on community engagement as the project leads into Step 4. The intent of this document is not to focus on what was heard at the engagement sessions but rather, to focus on the tools used and implications for future consultation.

For an account of what was heard, please refer to the “What We Heard” documents that are available on the project website.

Background

Centre Plan Engagement Strategy (2014)

The Engagement Strategy provides high level direction for how the Centre Plan will engage with the public. This document outlines strategies for outreach and provides guidance that the consultants use to build the Engagement Plan.

The Centre Plan Engagement Strategy identified four goals for engagement:

1. Be consistent with and draw on the strength of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy;
2. Respect the work done by staff and the public in earlier engagement;
3. Build trust that will enable staff and the public to engage in effective city building; and
4. Provide clear framework for actions and allow all bodies to observe measured success.

Centre Plan Engagement Plan (2016)

In March 2016 the consultant team helped HRM staff launch the public consultation on the project. The Engagement Plan drafted by the consultants identified three phases: Phase 1 “Foundations”; Phase 2 “Thematic + Scenarios Engagement”; and Phase 3 “Draft Plan Review”.

Phases 1 and 2 of the Engagement Plan included actions aligning with Step 2 of the Engagement Strategy. Phase 3 of the Engagement Plan included actions aligning with Step 3 of the Engagement Strategy.

Internal Communications Plan (2016)

Staff also prepared an Internal Communications Plan to guide outreach with internal stakeholders. The work identified in this plan aligns with Step 3 of the Engagement Strategy.

The Internal Communications Plan:

- **Encouraged collaboration & optimize allocation of resources with outcomes:** Encourage Program Managers and Senior Management to discuss, and foster two way communications about the plan, how it will impact projects and services, and how feedback is encouraged so issues can be addressed.
- **Supported understanding:** To increase awareness and understanding of the draft plan and the process by which it was created. Assure colleagues that the project team can responsibly collaborate with internal stakeholders through project completion.

Summary of Public Events

Staff conducted a series of public outreach events, starting with the launch of an online platform, designed to garner input from a wide audience. The intent of the engagement was to extend the reach of the plan and to target hard to access groups and communities. The table below contains a list of all the public outreach, the tool or technique used as identified in the 2014 engagement plan and the phase and step that this occurred in.

Summary Of Public Events			
Date	Event	Step	Tool/ Technique
February, 2016	Online Portal: centreplan.ca and other social media platforms	1,2,3	Online Portal
March, 2016	Kick-off open house	2	Planning Workshops
Multiple dates	Interviews with key stakeholders	2	Stakeholder Outreach
May, 2016	Neighborhood Thematic Workshops	2	Planning Workshops
June, 2016	Urban Structure Scenario Workshops	2	Planning Workshops
Summer 2016	Community Pop-ups	2	Remote/ Open Work Spaces
Multiple dates	Stakeholder Update Meetings	2	Stakeholder Outreach
October, 2016	Open House	3	Planning Workshops
Multiple dates	Pop-up @ Open Houses	3	Remote/ Open Work Spaces
Additional Events			
Multiple dates	PLANifax Videos	2,3	Community Narratives
May- July, 2016	Community Workbooks	2	Planning Workbooks/ Local Event Planning Toolkit
October, 2016	Community Walks	3	Plain Language/ Planning Workbooks/ Local Event Planning Toolkit
Monthly	Pre- CDAC Staff Engagement	2,3	Staff Working Group/ Technical Committees
Monthly	CDAC	1,2,3	Staff Working Group/ Technical Committees
December 16, 2016	Internal Workshop	3	Staff Working Group/ Technical Committees

Review of Step 2 – Learn Together

Step 2 of the 2014 Centre Plan Engagement Strategy had a heavy focus on public engagement with a focus on sharing learnings that Staff could bring to the community, and receiving information back that would further inform the development of the plan.

The Centre Plan team conducted an array of public engagement sessions in a variety of formats in order to extend the reach of the engagement and to access different communities. The chart below goes into detail about the range of engagement used in this phase and uses the metrics identified in the 2014 Strategy to evaluate the success of each tool.



Actions

Events in Step 2 included the following items:

- Launch of centreplan.ca and other social media platforms
- Kick-off open house
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Neighborhood Thematic Workshops
- Urban Structure Scenario Workshops
- Community Pop-ups
- Stakeholder Update Meeting
- PLANifax Videos
- Community Workbooks
- Pre-CDAC Staff Engagement
- CDAC
- Pop-ups at Planning Events

Measures of Success



Measurement

Tools & Techniques	Objective	Measures
1. On-line Portal	Drive interest and traffic to the portal	<p>Shapeyourcity Website launched Feb 2016 (Analytics for March 1- October 18, 2016)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11.3K total visits • 716 total engagements (contributed in some way, participated in a survey) • 1447 document downloads <p>Top 10 Document Downloads:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 465 Density Bonusing Study • 329 "What We Heard at the Neighbourhood Workshops" Document • 271 Centre Plan Backgrounder • 183 "What We Heard at the Growth Scenarios Open House" Document • 86 Halifax Housing Needs Assessment • 76 Project Timeline • 73 "What We Heard Kick-off" Document • 71 Growth Scenarios Open House Boards • 70 Kick-off Open House Boards • 69 Individual Pages Workbook
3. Planning Workshops	Engage a broad group of citizens in meaningful workshops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 events • 1415 attendees signed in
4. Remote / Open Workspaces	Introduce planning staff in an accessible space to the public to facilitate communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 drop ins • 24 hours in public spaces
5. Community Narratives	Provide a forum for local narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 videos • 2300+ views

7. Planning Workbooks / Local Event Toolkit	Create a means for stakeholders to lead community work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 workbooks shared • 34 workbooks received back
8. Educational Engagement	Use the Centre Plan to help educate local students (G3-9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not used due to resourcing constraints. Planning staff are considering this for future outreach and education events.
9. Stakeholder Outreach	Build the stakeholder network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40+ developer stakeholder events held • 25+ community / public stakeholder events held
10. Staff Working Groups / Technical Committees	Working Group Definitions and Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 CDAC meetings • 10 pre-CDAC Staff Engagement Sessions

Lessons Learned

Staff had great success in meeting with a large number of people who were interested in the Centre Plan and our understanding of how to engage with the public evolved through doing this work.

Lessons carried forward in this project include:

- Meeting location is important to attract local residents;
- Workshop format can be intimidating to some who feel under represented in the audience;
- Public has a love/ hate relationship with post-it notes;
- A community engagement program needs a variety of approaches to reach a broader audience;
- Use existing community groups to gain access to hard to reach communities;
- Community champions are important to spread information to broader communities;
- Pop-up's useful for education outreach, but can be difficult to garner specific feedback;
- Pop-up's require specific material and branding to attract people to the table;
- Video's are a powerful tool to spread a message;
- Website best way to distribute information packages;
- Process for completing and returning workbooks is resource intensive;
- Presentations should be brief and to the point;
- Dedicated staff resources are needed for engagement; and

- Some members of the public still want the opportunity to speak in front of the collective group, but this can cause other members of the public to disengage from the conversation.

The Planning and Development department conducted public surveys at all planning events during April and May 2016, and included surveys at the neighbourhood workshops. These will be used to inform the department's processes, but were also useful to help guide the tools used during the Centre Plan processes. The surveys findings included:

- 28.5% prefer speaking with staff at a drop-in event, 23.5% would like to provide feedback via an online survey and 17% would like to make a written submission to staff
- Phoning the municipality (3.5%), posting information on a municipal social media account (7%), participating in an online discussions forum (7.5%) and speaking at a microphone at a public meeting (7.5%) were the least popular options
- Overall, respondents indicated that they were pleased with the structure of the events, with an average score of 4.47/5 for the event evaluation.

Staff will explore in Step 4 how to use online surveys to test regulations with the public, continue engaging at the neighbourhood level and use pop-up's, in concert with other departmental projects, to inform the public about the work of the department and to explain some of the tools and techniques that are being considered for the Centre Plan. As the work in Step 4 will be much more technical, a large part of the engagement process will need to focus on education.

Review of Step 3 – Check In and Feedback

The intent of Step 3 in the 2014 Engagement Strategy is to review the draft Centre Plan with stakeholders and the public, educate the public about planning and to check in with them to confirm that the proposed policy aligns with their expectations. Due to the complexity of the document, the release was phased over one month, to provide the public with adequate time to read the plan and to then engage with staff about the content.

Outside of the scheduled engagement, staff received over 1300 written comments on the Centre Plan. The chart below goes into detail about the range of engagement used in this phase and uses the metrics identified in the 2014 Strategy to evaluate the success of each tool.



Actions

Events in this phase included:

- Stakeholder Update Meeting
- Open House
- Pop-Up Open Houses
- Community Walks
- Internal Workshops
- CDAC meetings
- Pre-CDAC Staff Engagement

Measures of Success



Measurement

Tools & Techniques	Objective	Measures
1. On-line Portal	Drive interest and traffic to the portal	Website update October 19 (Analytics for October 19- Dec 31, 2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3917 Sessions (Visits) • 2292 Unique users • 4730 Pageviews (1.21 Pages per session) • 1:58 Avg. Session Duration • 50.3% Bounce Rate • 1554 PDF Downloads <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1257 Centre Plan Policies ○ 171 Urban Structure ○ 66 Primer Overview ○ 58 Policy Direction Draft Booklets • 526 Map Views • 114 KMZ (Map) Downloads
2. Plain Language Guides	Clearly articulate the changes to policy with plain language and illustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 guides developed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 66 downloads of Primer Overview ○ 58 downloads of Policy Direction ○ 26 downloads of Density Bonusing Study - One Pager ○ 16 downloads of Halifax Housing Needs Assessment - One Pager ○ 25 downloads of Quantifying Costs & Benefits of Alternate Growth Scenarios - One Pager ○ 11 downloads of On-going & Related Work - One Pager • PLANifax videos
3. Planning Workshops	Verify understanding and agreement with drafts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 events • 570 attendees

4. Remote / Open Workspaces	Introduce planning staff in an accessible space to the public to facilitate communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Pop-ups at Planning Events • 18 hours in public spaces
5. Citizen Survey	Reach those who may not traditionally attend public meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not utilised due to privacy concerns with the service provider
7. Planning Workbooks / Local Event Toolkit	Create a means for stakeholders to lead community work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20+ Community Walks • 131 participants
9. Stakeholder Outreach	Verify understanding and agreement with drafts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 meetings with internal stakeholders • 2 workshops with internal stakeholders • 2 workshops with Design community • 1 meeting with development stakeholders
10. Staff Working Groups / Technical Committees	Working Group Definitions and Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 CDAC meetings • 2 Pre-CDAC Staff Engagement Sessions • Created working group for LUB process • Staff survey distributed

Innovative Practices

In line with the intention of educating while informing, the Centre Plan team worked with other groups to build new, more inclusive, ways to engage with the planning process. One of the successes of the plan is that stakeholder groups created their own processes to engage on the draft policy. Staff received 180+ email submissions, which included detailed policy analysis and indicated a high level of engagement.

Other inputs included:

- Community walks— led by Walk ‘n Roll with support from the Centre Plan team, took place throughout the Regional Centre and created opportunities for the public to engage on neighbourhood level discussions about the draft policy;
- PLANifax Videos—worked with outside agency to create videos to explain the Centre Plan policy and process using plain language;
- Pop-ups—built on the pop-up engagement work done over the summer by the Centre Plan team. Centre Plan materials were made available at various Planning and Development engagement events and staff was present to discuss the relationship that the Centre Plan has with other projects; and
- Rapid Health Impact Assessment— completed by Capital Health with cooperation from the Centre Plan team. This work was done on a much shorter time frame than Health

Impact Assessment's generally use, in order to provide meaningful feedback into the Centre Plan process. Capital Health is considering this as a model to use when providing input on other policy projects.

These tools allowed outside agencies to disseminate the information in the draft plan without using staff resources. By growing the engagement in this manner, the consultation program was able to be extended to a much larger audience, improving the reach of the plan and provided opportunities to access a wider spectrum of the population.

Lessons Learned

One of the biggest challenges for consultation in Step 3 was how to have meaningful conversations about a draft plan that is complex. This was addressed partly through the format of the document—the document is intentionally graphic and bright to make it easy to read.

Another strategy was to use a phased release schedule, ending with a series of neighbourhood meetings, to give the public time to digest the information. The first phase of the release included a primer that detailed the objectives, the second phase released the themes and the third phase was the urban structure and implementation. This allowed the public 6 weeks to digest the information before engaging on the content.

Other challenges for this phase was how to create options for meaningful engagement with internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders will be responsible for implementation of the plan and getting buy-in from these groups is key to the long term success of the plan. A survey was released internally to allow for comments on the individual policies, workshops were held and a series of meetings with all departments was held to allow for feedback and comment on the plan. This multi faceted approach was used to provide opportunities for all internal groups to consult—from the individual who wants to review each policy line by line, to the person who is interested in the high level direction, to the group that is made aware of the project. This went a long way to strengthening the implementation section of the plan, as well as to increasing internal awareness and buy-in.

The online portal was successful in education and outreach and provided the best option for releasing information to the public. It was also useful in providing an avenue to showcase community narratives and provided the opportunity to inform the public about upcoming engagement and background studies. The portal could have been better utilised to educate and engage with the public about planning issues within the Centre Plan, but would require staff resources to keep the portal up to date and ensure that content doesn't "go stale".

Next Steps

As the Draft Centre Plan continues its review process, staff are preparing to move forward with Step 4 - Approvals Process. Work is presently under way to create the framework for approvals

and to determine an appropriate implementation strategy. Staff will continue to work with CDAC as the primary committee responsible for the Centre Plan and will report back at monthly intervals with updates.

The 2014 engagement plan did not consider further public engagement during this step, but through working with the public during this past year, it has become apparent that there is a need for further consultation. During Step 4 consultation will continue with the public on the regulations, and will utilize a range of engagement tools. Consultation will focus more on education outreach, explaining many of the new tools that are recommended for use in the Centre Plan, and will include neighbourhood outreach, development stakeholder engagement, and design stakeholder engagement. The engagement will be targeted and specific as many of the big questions have been addressed in the draft policy.

Conclusion

Staff successfully used a variety of tools to broaden the reach of the Centre Plan engagement. The project had great success in reaching out to a wide audience and had several participants in its workshops and open houses. Part of this success was based on understanding that an array of different tools is needed to reach a broader audience, and understanding that not all engagement options will work for all members of the public. By providing different options for engagement and allowing stakeholders to lead their own workshops, there was increased opportunity for the public to engage in a manner that was meaningful, but also comfortable for them.