



Sturgeon County – Agribusiness and Agritourism Review Public Engagement and Communication Plan (PECP)

Introduction

This Public Engagement and Communications Plan (PECP) describes the engagement and communication process for the Agribusiness and Agritourism Review. This PECP outlines the approach to engagement, engagement tactics, as well as the approach to communications, tools, and tactics to inform, encourage and enable public and stakeholder participation in this project. Engagement will occur throughout the duration of the project, and stakeholders, ratepayers and the public will be invited to learn about the project, provide input on potential issues and opportunities as well as validate and confirm the direction and recommendations of the final report. This PECP is meant to be a living document and will continue to be updated, as needed, throughout the project.

Project Overview

Blessed with good growing conditions including abundant class 1 soils, Sturgeon County (the County) has a long history hosting agricultural production. A key player in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region (EMR) regarding both agriculture and industrial development, the County is seeing interest grow beyond primary production to include agricultural processing and value-add facilities. It is also seeing interest in agritourism, linked to its natural assets and proximity to Edmonton.

In 2018, the County released its Agricultural Engagement Strategy, intended to provide input in the EMRB's Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) as well as identifying opportunities and issues regarding master planning and strategic direction related to agriculture production and operations in the County. This robust analysis engaged up to 100 respondents and was complemented by detailed analysis and mapping of secondary source data to provide a synthesis of the County's state of agriculture at the time. While much of this analysis focused on primary production, it also covered agricultural and food processing businesses, and much of the What We Heard summary has relevance to agribusiness.

The County is now conducting a specific study focusing on agribusiness and agritourism elements. The identified objectives are to maintain the County's position at the forefront of agricultural-related practices and to strengthen agribusiness and agritourism through:

- benchmarking best practices,
- engaging stakeholders, and
- generating recommendations for municipal support.

Project Purpose

The primary purposes of the Agribusiness and Agritourism review are to:

- Conduct a review of local, provincial, and national agribusiness and agritourism regulatory best practices.
- Identify the needs and expectations of Sturgeon County's businesses and landowners.
- Provide recommendations on how to support and implement potential regulations and policy.

A Task Force has been formed to provide advice and feedback to the consultant team as they undertake the key tasks for the review.

Public Engagement Guiding Principles

This PECP will adhere to the following guiding principles as per Sturgeon County's Public Engagement Policy (PLY_GOV_Public_Engagement_2016):

1. Public Engagement is **ACCOUNTABLE** and **TRANSPARENT**: public engagement outcomes are measured, evaluated, and reported in a timely manner.
2. Public Engagement is **PROACTIVE**: it is initiated early enough for participants to make informed decisions and impact the outcomes.
3. Public Engagement is **CLEAR** and **FOCUSED**: Sturgeon County and the public understand their respective roles in a public engagement process, including the level of involvement and how input will be used to inform decisions.

Project Team Roles and Responsibilities

The following details the commitment of the Project Team and Sturgeon County to stakeholders and the public:

- To inform, consult, and engage stakeholders and the public about decisions that affect them.
- To provide engagement opportunities that are open and transparent.
- To gather input from stakeholders and the public to strengthen decision-making.
- To ensure a balanced, representative, and relevant range of values and perspectives from stakeholders and the public are considered in the decision-making process.
- To consider to stakeholders' and public input gathered in engagement processes as per the identified level of engagement.

The following table describes the relevant project staff as they relate to the engagement process:

| Role | Associated | Role in relation to engagement |
|---|--|--|
| Project Manager (County) | Planning and Development Economic Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and communicate the County's expectations of the project and act as quality control and advisor for engagement activities and materials. • Support and advise the engagement strategy, implementation and reporting back to the community. |
| Senior Communications Officer (County) | Communications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and advise the project communications to ensure adherence with County protocols and brand standards. • Coordinate distribution of advertising materials and notices to landowners as needed. |
| Subject Matter Experts (Consulting Team and County) | Various | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical information required to share with the public and stakeholders. • Answer technical questions at engagement events and meetings. |

| Role | Associated | Role in relation to engagement |
|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| Engagement Lead | ISL Engineering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide strategic advice on engagement process and materials. • QA/QC of communications and engagement materials • Facilitation at engagement events and meetings. |
| Engagement Support | ISL Engineering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the engagement and communications plan, and plan and implement the engagement approach. • Develop engagement and communications content and what we heard summaries. • Facilitation at public events, as required. |

Stakeholder Groups

It is important to engage with a range of relevant stakeholder groups throughout the engagement process who are interested and affected by the project. The following details the identified stakeholders who will be targeted for participation in engagement activities throughout the project. Specific engagement tactics are described further in the document. Stakeholders will be notified of project updates, information, and engagement opportunities available to the public in each phase of the project.

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

- County Council
- Relevant Committees of Council
- County Administration
- Agricultural Services Board
- Task Force Committee Members

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

- Landowners
- Farm and Acreage owners
- Business owner and operators (both within the County and from other jurisdictions)
- Chamber of Commerce
- External organizations (RCMP, AT, AGLC, AHS)
- Agricultural Societies, 4H Clubs and Equestrian Facilities
- Tourism Organizations
- Secondary and Post-Secondary Education Institutions
- Local First Nation communities and Indigenous Organizations

GENERAL PUBLIC

- Ratepayers
- County Residents

Risks and Mitigation

The following engagement and communications risks have been identified and new risks and mitigation strategies will be added should they emerge through the project.

| Risk | Mitigation |
|---|--|
| Competing stakeholder interests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure stakeholders can access the same information and have an equitable opportunity to provide input is important. • Make available all feedback shared (in aggregate form) from all stakeholder and community sessions and online to create transparency and build understanding of the project and feedback received. • Ensure transparency of how decisions are made as well as to clearly indicate the level of influence throughout each phase to share how and if input was used, and if not, why not. |
| Confusion between roles of Task Force and Agricultural Services Board (ASB) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a project overview to the ASB and share updates throughout the project so that members are clear on the main purpose and objectives of the Task Force and Agribusiness and Agritourism Review. • Invite ASB members to participate through the public engagement opportunities. |
| Low engagement participation with hard-to-reach groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that participants of varied backgrounds and resources have unique needs. A variety of communication and engagement tactics will need to be implemented to ensure that barriers are minimized, and participation is convenient and suitable for the population to engage. Communication and engagement opportunities need to be easily available to participants and reflective of how participants may want or be able to participate. |
| Low engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop online engagement process to simulate in-person engagement opportunities and low-tech/no-tech alternatives (e.g., paper copies of displays, surveys, etc.) will be provided upon request. In-person public engagement in Phase 2, will be paired with an online component as some may not feel comfortable or safe engaging in-person even as restrictions relax. |
| Reputational risk for the County and project team if project and engagement process does not gain community support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust in the County and project team by embedding the engagement process and the decision-making process in meaningful and effective engagement processes. Sharing how decisions are made, and the 'if not, why not', is critical to gaining community trust. By planning engagement following the IAP2 best practices, we can ensure that although there may not be consensus on the final report, stakeholders and the public can support the |

| Risk | Mitigation |
|--------------------------------|--|
| | engagement process and understand how and why decisions were made. |
| Participants do not feel heard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be open and honest about how input is being used and manage expectations by communicating what input is being sought, when, and how, as well as report back on the diversity of perspectives heard through the What We Heard report. |

Engagement Approach & Scope

In alignment with the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Core Values and the County's Public Engagement Policy, the PECP was developed with the understanding that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. This section of the PECP details the anticipated level of engagement on the IAP2 Engagement Spectrum for the project.

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The level of engagement for this project will be at the **Collaborate** and **Consult** level of the IAP2 spectrum as detailed in the County's Public Engagement Policy.

| | Stakeholder Engagement | Public Engagement Phase 1 | Public Engagement Phase 2 |
|--|---|--|--|
| Audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Administration Task Force Select stakeholders¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members of the public All stakeholder groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members of the public All stakeholder groups |
| Timeline | June 2021– April 2022 | October – November 2021 | January – February 2022 |
| Level of Engagement | COLLABORATE | CONSULT | CONSULT |
| General Communications Approaches² | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project updates at Council and Committee Meetings Task Force meetings Individual email/phone communication to identified stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media, newspaper, public advertising, etc. Email notices to County stakeholder contact list Task Force member dissemination to their networks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media, newspaper, public advertising, etc. Email notices to County stakeholder contact list Task Force member dissemination to their networks |

¹ Stakeholders selected for one-on-one interviews will be identified through Task Force input and jurisdictional research.

² For additional information on communication related to public engagement opportunities see Communication Approach and Communication Tactics sections later in this document.

| | Stakeholder Engagement | Public Engagement Phase 1 | Public Engagement Phase 2 |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| Objective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work directly with Council, Administration, and the Task Force for advice and guidance on project directions and decisions being made | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather feedback on potential issues and opportunities related to agribusiness and agritourism development in the County | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather feedback to validate findings, identify gaps, and confirm direction of the final report |
| Information shared | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project and ongoing relevant technical information as the project progresses • Project scope, purpose, timeline and intended outcome • Relevant research, best practices, and examples • What input is needed throughout the project and how it will be used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project and relevant technical information • Project scope, purpose, timeline and intended outcome • Relevant research, best practices, and examples • What input is needed and how it will be used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project and relevant technical information • Project scope, purpose, timeline and intended outcome • Share what was heard in Phase 1 • Draft findings/ recommendations • What input is needed and how it will be used |
| Decisions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input will be used to inform research approach, including identification of comparable jurisdictions, development of engagement and communications approaches and materials, development of definitions, and development of recommendations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input will be used to identify current and potential future community concerns, issues, impacts, and potential solutions related to agribusiness and agritourism development in the County | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input will be used to validate findings, identify gaps, and key considerations to inform the development and direction of the final report |

Engagement Tactics

COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES

The project team will meet with Council and Administration throughout the project at key milestones to provide updates and present information as the project progresses. Updates will also be provided to appropriate Committees of Council.

Key Deliverables to be shared with Council and Administration³

- Public Engagement and Communications Plan
- Engagement Summaries
- Final What We Heard Report
- Draft and Final Recommendations Report

TASK FORCE

Council directed the formation of a Task Force to support the Sturgeon County Agribusiness and Agritourism Review. It consists of 7 members of the public and 2 elected officials. The Task Force will meet on a regular basis (10 meetings, approximately one/month) over the project, providing direction and advice at key milestones during the review. Task Force members will be invited to participate in the public engagement opportunities and to share information about upcoming engagement with their networks.

Key Deliverables to be shared with the Task Force

- Draft Agribusiness and Agritourism Definitions
- Draft Public Engagement and Communications Plan
- Draft Engagement Materials
- Key Engagement Themes and Findings
- Key Research Findings
- Draft Regulations
- Draft and Final Recommendations Report

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Throughout the project, one-on-one meetings will be scheduled with stakeholders as needed and as relevant to ensure stakeholders are aware of the project progression and input is gathered on the views, opinions, and ideas to inform the key deliverables. Stakeholders will be identified through conversations with the Task Force and the jurisdictional comparison review. All stakeholders interviewed will also be invited to participate in the public engagement opportunities.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Phase 1 – Issues, Opportunities, and Ideas (October to November 2021)

In the first phase of public engagement, we will be building the awareness of the project, promoting engagement opportunities, and gathering input on the issues, opportunities, and ideas stakeholders and the public have related to agribusiness and agritourism practices. We will specifically be asking participants to reflect on concerns they have related to land use compatibility, nuisance issues such as noise, odour, traffic, environmental concerns, and obstacles to implementation, and invite ideas on solutions needed to mitigate concerns and overcome obstacles.

In this phase of engagement, we will engage and communicate with the public through the project webpage, which will function as a hub for important project information as well as host the survey to gather feedback. Paper copies of the survey will be provided to those who request a low-tech option.

³ Administration will be provided all materials in advance to review and comment prior to Task Force and public distribution.

Important to this phase will be communicating and sharing important project and technical information in an easy to understand manner, such as draft definitions for agribusiness and agritourism and preliminary findings of the current state analysis and jurisdictional comparisons, to ensure meaningful and informed feedback is gathered.

| Public Engagement Tactics - Phase 1 | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Tactic 1 | Online Survey A short survey will be developed to provide an opportunity for participants to provide feedback on community values, and issues and opportunities to support the development of the draft report. Hard copies of the survey as well as project materials will be prepared and provided upon request for participants who prefer to provide written submissions. | October – November 2021 |

Public Engagement Phase 2 – Confirming the Direction (January to February 2022)

In the second phase of public engagement, we will continue to build project awareness and engage on and validate the project directions of the draft recommendations report. In this phase, we will be asking participants to validate the initial findings and identify gaps to strengthen the findings and recommendations prior to finalizing the report.

| Public Engagement Tactics – Phase 2 | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Tactic 1 | In-Person Open Houses (2) In-person open houses (held in two different locations) will provide the opportunity for participants to learn more about the project and key findings of the research and draft report, ask questions of the project team, and share their feedback on the key research findings, draft recommendations, potential gaps, and direction of the draft report. | January – February 2022 |
| Tactic 2 | Online Survey A short survey will also be made available to provide an additional opportunity for participants unable to attend an in-person open house to review project information and share their feedback. | January – February 2022 |

Reporting

ISL's engagement team will review, code, analyze and theme all the verbatim feedback received through the engagement opportunities. After each phase of engagement, an engagement summary will be developed which will outline the engagement process implemented, as well as provide a high-level overview of the themes synthesized through the feedback gathered. Themes developed in these summaries will reflect both the diversity and frequency of input received. The draft engagement summary will be provided to Administration for review two weeks following the completion of each phase of public engagement.

The engagement summaries will be used by the project team to understand, consider, and validate their findings as the project develops. These high-level engagement summaries will then be consolidated into a final What We Heard report which will detail the engagement process, tactics, and what we heard throughout the engagement process and will be included in the final report. Following review and approval of the engagement summaries by Administration, they will be made available to the public on the project website.

Public Engagement Communication Approach

The communications approach has been developed to support broad public awareness and understanding of the project process to gather varied, representative, and informed views and perspectives through the engagement opportunities offered.

Communication Objectives

- The public is aware and informed of the project and understands the technical information as it relates to the review.
- The public is aware of the engagement opportunities and barriers are minimized for those who wish to participate.
- The public has the information it needs to provide valuable input.
- The public understands how input is collected, used and how project decisions are made.

Public Engagement Communication Tactics

The following describes the communication tactics which will be implemented during each phase of public engagement. The communication tactics will focus on advertising to the public and stakeholders about the public engagement opportunities in each phase. In addition to the tactics described below, the project team will also distribute the public engagement materials to stakeholder contact lists and Task Force members to share project information with their networks to harness existing relationships and networks and further promote public engagement.

Key messages will be developed on an on-going basis and shared during each phase of engagement to ensure all staff are informed on the key topic areas specific to that phase of the project.

Communication engagement metrics, such as page visits, clicks, and views will be captured and shared with the project team. In addition, questions will be asked during the public engagement opportunities such as “How did you learn about this project” as well as demographic questions such as “Are you a... landowner, business owner, etc.” to gather more detail on those who participated. These metrics will help inform the subsequent phase to ensure effective communication and broad reach.

| Engagement Tactics – Both Phases | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Tool / Tactic | Purpose | Timing |
| Project Webpage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be the primary source of current and accurate project information • To be updated as the project progresses • Will include information about project overview, process timeline, FAQs, and details of engagement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer launch • Continual updates |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| County Social Media Posts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To generate awareness of the project and public engagement opportunities • Will include information about website updates and upcoming engagement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted (x4)⁴ during the active engagement periods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X1 during the week prior to engagement being live • X1 during the first week that engagement is active • X1 day of engagement event (in the case of the in-person open houses) • X1 after engagement event as a reminder that the survey is still open and when it closes |
| Newspaper ad / media releases ⁵ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To generate awareness for and deliver current information about the project and engagement opportunities • Will include information about project milestones and upcoming engagement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted nearest published date to active engagement dates and during weeks of active engagement |
| Radio Ads | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To generate awareness of the project and public engagement opportunities • Will include information about study milestones and upcoming engagement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted during the active engagement periods. Form of Ads to be confirmed with Sturgeon County Communication Department. |
| Road Signs, Digital Billboards and Posters at Key Community Gathering Places | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To generate awareness of the project and public engagement opportunities • Will include information about project website and upcoming engagement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted during the weeks of active engagement |

Evaluation and Monitoring

The engagement and communications tactics, as well as public reception and feedback will be monitored to help the consultant team identify emerging issues and concerns, what is working and/or what needs to be improved. This information will help the consultant team learn if any modifications to key messages and communications approaches are required, as well as inform the design and implementation of future public engagement approaches undertaken for this project. Below is a

⁴ Survey participation will be monitored on a regular basis to identify if additional social media promotion may be required (e.g., paid posts, direct posting of opportunities in local community Facebook pages).

⁵ One media release per each phase of public engagement

preliminary list of items that will be monitored throughout the project to better understand support for the project process and outcomes.

- Website traffic
- Comments on social media
- Emergence of petitions, organized groups, social media accounts
- Media scans – positive, negative, or neutral stories in local papers
- Attendance and participation at public engagement events
- Comments from events/online – favourable, unfavourable, or neutral
- Specific questions or concerns related to engagement and communications approaches
- Demographic questions on surveys and comment forms to understand project research to various stakeholder groups