



District of Oak Bay

# Community Engagement Framework





## Territorial Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Coast and Straits Salish Peoples. Specifically, we recognize the Lekwungen peoples known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and that their historic connections to these lands continue to this day.

The District of Oak Bay adopted in principle the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People in February 2022. The District of Oak Bay is working to advance this principle with a government-to-government relationship with the Songhees Nation and Esquimalt Nation. As a result, this Community Engagement framework does not apply to the work the District undertakes with the Nations because of the unique and special relationship the District is working to build with the Nations who have been on this land since time immemorial.

## Who was Involved in Creating this Framework

Community engagement played a key role in shaping this framework. We started this process with a series of interviews with engaged community members, which informed the community-wide questionnaire which received over 600 responses. From this, we learned that people in Oak Bay care about data integrity, clear communication, and being engaged early in the process. Residents also highlighted the importance of inclusive and representative engagement, and being transparent about timelines, trade-offs and how decisions are made.

This engagement framework is designed for District-led projects where the main group engaged is the Oak Bay community. We understand that when projects are led by residents, community organizations, or other groups, the roles may shift, and the way engagement happens might look different.

Thank you to all who shared their thoughts and feedback. Community insights, along with input from Council, staff and best practices from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) informed the development of this framework.



# How the Framework will be Used

The Community Engagement Framework provides Council, the community and staff a clear guide for when and how to engage. It reflects our commitment to meaningful, transparent engagement and helps ensure community needs, interests, values, and preferences are considered early in the process. Council can use the framework to help shape direction and make decisions, while staff can use it to plan, carry out, and report on engagement activities. The framework will serve as the foundation for planning, implementing and reporting on engagement programs that are inclusive, consistent, and follow our guiding principles.

# Why we Engage

We ask the community for input before we make decisions so community ideas can help shape outcomes. This helps us understand different interests and needs and helps Council make informed, community-centred decisions.

When we engage early, we can:

- Make informed decisions**  
Engaging with the community helps us better understand community, social, environmental, financial, and other factors before deciding.
- Build stronger relationships**  
Sharing information and listening enhances community belonging and pride, and helps build a sense of community.
- Invite new ideas**  
Working with individuals, local groups, and other partners helps find solutions and improve our community.

# Timing of Community Engagement

We will plan and carry out community engagement when a project, change, or new idea is likely to impact the community or spark community interest.

- We aim to engage early and often so that community input can help shape the outcome of the project, decision or change.
- We engage the community **before** decisions are made, so people’s ideas, concerns and insight can help shape the outcome.
- If a decision is already made or mandated by law, we will communicate the outcome, but we will not engage if we can’t reasonably use the input.



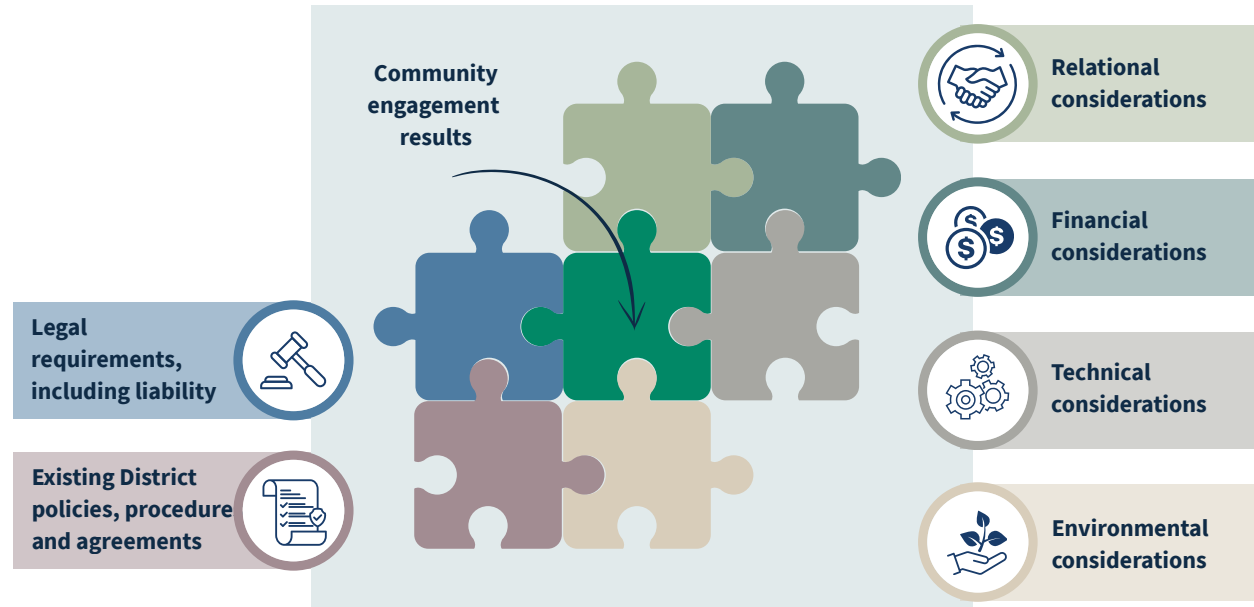
There are times when we will not engage. These times can include when an action is mandated, or there are no viable or technically feasible alternatives.

*Examples could include during public emergencies, when there are directives/mandates from the provincial government, when impacts of a decision have been assessed as minor, or when a Council decision has legislative requirements that do not include community engagement.*



# Impact of Engagement on Decisions

In addition to considering **community input** prior to arriving at a decision, Council must also weigh a variety of factors or considerations.



In some cases, there are decisions where community engagement may have greater influence, while in others they may have less influence.

Community engagement can have **greater influence** when:

- The decision is about community amenities (like parks, playgrounds and community spaces)
- There are several options to choose from
- The focus is on improving programs, services or amenities for the community

Examples of these include:

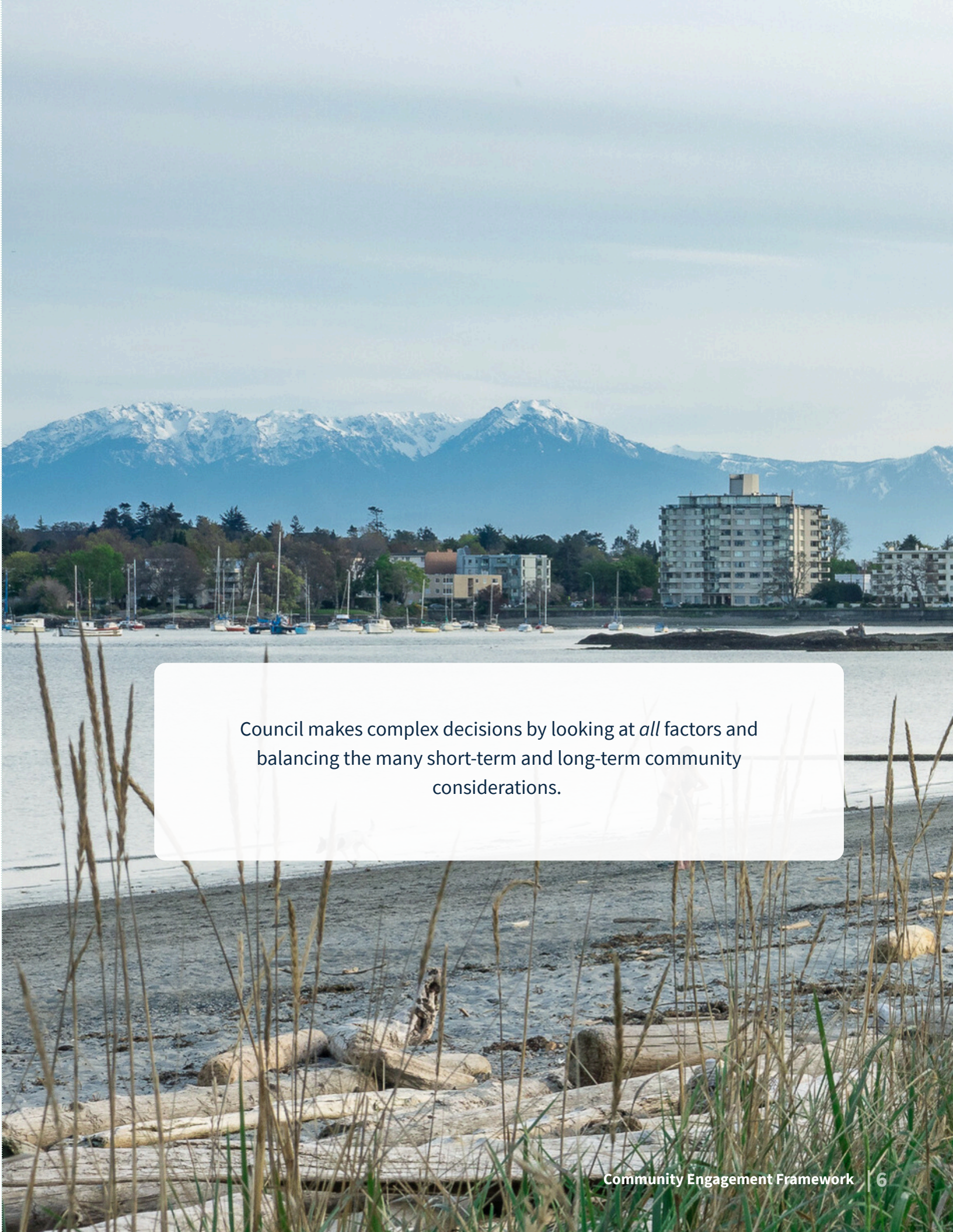
- Designing a new park or public space
- Choosing priorities based on what the community needs or uses most
- Changing services that affect daily life, like garbage collection schedules

Community engagement can have **less influence** when:

- The decision involves multiple municipalities, agencies or levels of government
- The decision is operational, highly technical or regulated
- The decision involves public safety or emergency management

Examples of these include:

- Upgrading a water treatment system to meet provincial standards
- Adjusting property taxes based on provincial laws
- Buying software for District operations



Council makes complex decisions by looking at *all* factors and balancing the many short-term and long-term community considerations.





# Community Engagement & Decision Making

Decision-making is often complex. Below is a simplified decision-making process. It’s important to consider “how” a decision is made so we can meaningfully integrate engagement into our decision making. This is critical for engaging early and often.



Please note: An engagement toolkit will be developed to support staff with the implementation of the framework, specifically sub-steps within this high-level decision-making process.



# Our Guiding Principles for Community Engagement

In the community questionnaire, over 600 respondents shared their values and ideas about what makes engagement meaningful. Key requests of the District are as follows:

## Input Shared



### Transparency

Be open about decisions and how engagement findings are used in decision-making.



### Respect

Acknowledge all input, even when it can't be adopted.



### Inclusion

Make space for everyone, especially underrepresented community members.



### Clarity

Use plain language, clear communication, and visuals where possible.



### Accessibility

Offer flexible, simple ways to participate with a mix of in-person and online.



### Local Voices

Prioritize the perspectives of Oak Bay residents.

This community input has been used to inform our engagement principles. These principles guide how we engage and connect with the community.

## 1. Be Clear and Open

We use plain language so everyone can understand what's happening, why it matters, and how input helped shape the outcome. We follow up to share what we learned and explain how input influenced the decision—or why it didn't.

### Put into practice:

We explain the purpose of engagement (or the “*why*”), share background information, and make sure everything we communicate is accurate and easy-to-understand.

## 2. Engage Based on Impact and Interest

We tailor each engagement process based on how much a project impacts and interests community members. The more a potential change impacts the community, the more we need to engage. This means each engagement process will require a tailored approach.

### Put into practice:

We look at both the positive and negative impacts of a project to assess how much engagement is needed and what approach to take. It is important to understand that the more people are impacted by a change, the more they will want to engage.

## 3. Include Everyone

Oak Bay is diverse and our engagement efforts must reflect our changing community. We commit to identifying engagement barriers and will work with the community to remove those barriers to be as inclusive as possible for all community members. This includes being inclusive of those who may not engage as often including families, youth, seniors, renters, local businesses, equity-denied groups, and those with limited internet access.

### Put into practice:

We think about “*who*” we’re engaging and “*how*” we’re doing it. We work proactively to reduce or remove barriers.

## 4. Focus on Quality, Data, and Learning

We’re committed to continuously improving how we plan, implement and report on community engagement. That means planning intentional processes, checking our data to ensure we are engaging with Oak Bay residents, learning from each experience, and making changes to build trust, integrity and inclusion in our engagement processes.

### Put into practice:

We build in time to verify data, and practice reflection and evaluation so we can keep getting better.

## 5. Create Safe and Respectful Spaces

Everyone should feel safe and respected when they participate. We welcome different views and make sure no one is bullied or harassed. For sensitive or polarizing topics, we may bring in neutral, expert facilitators to help guide the conversation.

### Put into practice:

We don't tolerate disrespectful behavior. All participants in community engagement (community members, staff or Council) can expect respect and safety. If needed, we'll include expert facilitators to support a safe and respectful process for everyone involved.





## Types of Engagement

A Spectrum of Community Engagement					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
	Communicate	Feedback	Input	Work together	Delegate
Description	To share fact-based, accessible and meaningful information about a project or decision; to promote an engagement process; to report back to the community on what was learned.	To receive feedback on one or many options or alternatives; to better understand the pros and cons of a draft recommendation, proposal, design or approach.	To welcome input and insights from the community on their needs, values, preferences, concerns and/or aspirations for a project or decision before a draft or options have been developed.	To partner with community members by working together to develop a recommendation, option, or solution.	To hand-over, or delegate, the decision or part of a larger decision, to the community.
Sample Methods	Newsletters, open houses, ads, signage, website, social media, direct mailers, education campaigns.	Questionnaires & surveys, focus groups, townhalls, interviews, neighbourhood meetings, community event pop-ups, online methods.	Questionnaires & surveys, neighbourhood meetings, workshops, interviews, online methods.	Task force or working groups.	Binding referendums, citizen jury, or citizen panel

*The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is internationally recognized for its contribution to the practice of community engagement. We have clarified and refined the spectrum to make sure it is clear to the community, staff and Council. As IAP2 updates the spectrum, we may update the spectrum in this framework.*

Here are a few key considerations for the spectrum.

- 1) Before we decide “how” to engage, we need to understand “why” we’re engaging. That means setting clear communication and engagement goals and objectives before choosing the engagement method.
- 2) To figure out where a project or initiative fits on the IAP2 spectrum, we need input from technical staff, direction from Council, and insights from the community. Early, informal conversations with the community can help us understand where they think engagement should land on the spectrum.
- 3) No matter where we are on the spectrum, we always need to “Inform” the community. The community needs information to participate, but just sharing information isn’t the same as engagement.
- 4) There is no “better” place to be on the spectrum. What matters is being clear about where we are on the spectrum and why that level of engagement makes sense for the project.
- 5) We engage people based on their interests or how they are impacted by the project. That means that for some projects we might “collaborate” with highly impacted or interested groups and “consult” with others who want to provide feedback later in the process.

## Communications and Engagement Objectives

Below are some sample communications and engagement objectives based on where a project is located on the IAP2 Spectrum.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To share information about the engagement process.</li> <li>• To provide fact-based information about the project.</li> <li>• To report back on what we learned in the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To better understand the pros and cons of each option.</li> <li>• To receive feedback on the draft strategy, policy, program or design.</li> <li>• To invite feedback on the priority order of the options, scaling, or trade-offs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To listen and learn to community lived experience.</li> <li>• To understand concerns and aspirations for a program, amenity, policy or the overall initiative.</li> <li>• To welcome and consider needs, values, aspirations, concerns, or preferences early in the project plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To partner with the community in developing options, alternatives or a draft for Council consideration.</li> <li>• To co-design project criteria, evaluation measures, or guidelines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To delegate decision-making to the community.</li> <li>• To identify one element of a project and place the final decision for that one element in the hands of the community.</li> </ul>



# Roles and Responsibilities

We all have a role to play in community engagement.



Group	Roles and Responsibilities
Community Members and Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The community learns about District projects or initiatives, contributes openly and respectfully based on their interests and values, and encourages others to participate in the engagement process.</li></ul>
District Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Communications team provides advice and guidance to engagement activities. They help ensure that engagement is planned thoughtfully, aligns with District values, and is communicated clearly.</li><li>• Department project leads define what input is needed and how it will be used to inform decisions and undertake engagement activities. Project leads may bring in consultants to provide capacity or expertise as needed. In these cases, consultants may be the 'doers' who carry out engagement activities such as surveys, open houses, or reporting.</li><li>• The Director leading the project, initiative, or change is responsible for making sure the engagement process is carried out properly.</li></ul>
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council attends engagement opportunities, listens to diverse perspectives and asks clarifying questions.</li><li>• Council considers community input when making decisions and helps set the tone for respectful, inclusive engagement.</li></ul>

# Reporting and Accountability

We share what we learned from each community engagement process to stay open, respectful and true to the principles of this framework. After every engagement, we will produce a “What We Learned” report. As recommendations come before Council for consideration, staff will work to demonstrate how community engagement helped to inform the recommendation and if it was not possible, they will share why not.

# Continuous Improvement

We see community engagement as a journey we take together, not a final destination.

We are committed to making engagement simple, respectful, and worthwhile and we will keep listening, learning, and improving—together. We know we can always do better and learn from past experiences. After each engagement, we will look at how the process went and determine how we can do better next time.





## Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
<b>Engagement</b>	An intentional process of working with the community to share information, listen to perspectives, and shape decisions together. Engagement is about building relationships, trust, and understanding so that the community help guide actions and outcomes.
<b>Communication</b>	The clear and consistent sharing of information so that people understand an issue, a project, relevant background information, or a decision. Communications makes sure people know what is happening, why it matters, and how they can get involved.
<b>Marketing</b>	Activities that promote awareness and encourage participation. Marketing helps people notice opportunities to engage, whether through posters, social media, newsletters, or other outreach efforts.
<b>Public Opinion Research (POR)</b>	A research approach that uses random sampling to gather opinions from a broad and representative group of people, whether they are directly affected by an issue or not. Participants are randomly selected, which means that results can be applied to the larger population (for example: “X% of Oak Bay residents believe...”). POR is designed to measure general attitudes and opinions, rather than to build relationships or gather input only from those most directly impacted.
<b>Community Engagement Findings</b>	A summary of what was learned from the community during engagement activities. These findings are often shared in a “What We Learned” report that highlights key themes, ideas, and concerns raised by participants.
<b>Community</b>	All the people, associations, groups, and local businesses who live, work, or have a stake in Oak Bay.
<b>Community Member</b>	An individual who lives in Oak Bay.
<b><i>IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation</i></b>	
<b>Inform</b>	Sharing clear and balanced information so people understand the issue, options, and possible solutions.
<b>Consult</b>	Asking the community for feedback on options, analysis, or decisions.
<b>Involve</b>	Working directly with the community throughout the process so their ideas and concerns are understood and considered.
<b>Collaborate</b>	Partnering with the community in each step of the process, including developing solutions and choosing the preferred option.
<b>Empower</b>	Giving the community the final say in the decision or a component of a decision.



If you have any questions on this Framework, please reach out to  
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*Fall 2025*