



ENHANCING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE TOWN OF LUNENBURG, NOVA SCOTIA

By Kayla Byrne

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT in the School of Public Administration

© KAYLA BYRNE, 2025
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

All rights reserved. This project may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Defense Committee

Client: Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

Supervisor: Dr. Tamara Krawchenko, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Second Reader: Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Chair: Dr. Astrid V. Pérez Piñán, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Acknowledgements

I'd like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr. Tamara Krawchenko, for her support, guidance, and encouragement throughout this project. Her insights and feedback have been incredibly valuable, and I appreciate the time and effort she dedicated to helping me navigate this research.

A big thank you as well to my second reader, Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe, for her time and thoughtful suggestions.

I also want to acknowledge the staff, council, and focus group residents from the Town of Lunenburg – your time and contributions were essential to this project. I truly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and perspectives, which made this research possible.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This project examines public participation in the Town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, identifying challenges and opportunities to enhance engagement processes. The research addresses gaps in Lunenburg's current engagement practices and provides practical recommendations to embed public participation as a core principle of municipal operations. Drawing on local stakeholder perspectives and best practices as identified in the literature review, this study attempts to offer a roadmap for improving engagement and public participation in ways tailored to Lunenburg's needs and wants.

Methodology and Methods

This project employed a qualitative methodology to explore the dynamics of public participation in Lunenburg. Key methods included:

- **Interviews with Community & Organizational Representatives:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with councillors and municipal staff to capture their perspectives on public participation challenges and opportunities.
- **Focus Group:** A focus group discussion was held with residents to explore shared experiences and priorities, including concerns about trust in decision-making, barriers to participation, and the importance of inclusive outreach. Key themes, such as the need for transparent feedback loops and diverse engagement formats, were identified as community priorities.
- **Document Analysis:** The Town of Lunenburg's Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) and its associated five-year action plan were the primary documents reviewed in this research. This analysis focused on identifying actions conducive to public participation and evaluating whether the Town of Lunenburg had implemented these initiatives.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Data from interviews and the focus group were coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes, such as trust, inclusivity, and resource constraints.

Key Findings

The research identified five key themes that influence public participation in Lunenburg:

- **Trust and Transparency:** Feedback loops are inconsistent, and unclear communication has created trust deficits between the town and its residents. Proactive and transparent communication is necessary to rebuild this trust.
- **Inclusivity Challenges:** Traditional engagement practices often fail to reach younger residents, newcomers, and marginalized groups. Tailored strategies are needed to ensure that participation reflects the full diversity of the community.
- **Participation Practices:** Successful collaborative models, such as the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP), demonstrate the potential for meaningful engagement. However, many current methods remain transactional, limiting their impact.
- **Resource Constraints:** The town’s limited capacity necessitates scalable engagement methods that balance inclusivity and efficiency.
- **Innovation Opportunities:** Hybrid methods that combine digital tools with in-person events offer significant potential to modernize and expand participation efforts.

Options to Consider and Recommendations

The recommendations are organized into immediate, intermediate, and long-term strategies to provide a phased approach to improving public participation in Lunenburg:

- **Immediate Strategies (0–6 months):**
 - **Develop a Communication Strategy:** Launch a multi-channel approach to ensure clear, consistent, and accessible communication.
 - **Pilot Informal Engagements:** Introduce casual dialogue opportunities, such as “Coffee with Council” sessions, to foster open and approachable interactions.
 - **Introduce Feedback Mechanisms:** Publish public input summaries and develop a feedback tracker to close the loop between resident contributions and municipal decisions.
- **Intermediate Strategies (6 months–2 years):**
 - **Adopt a Tiered Participation Framework:** Tailor engagement methods to the complexity of each project, prioritizing intensive approaches for high-stakes

decisions.

- Enhance Advisory Committees: Provide clear mandates and training for committee members, ensuring their effectiveness as a bridge between residents and decision-makers.
- Expand Outreach: Design tailored initiatives to reach underrepresented groups and distribute accessible materials through community hubs.
- Long-Term Strategies (2+ years):
 - Integrate Participation into Governance Culture: Institutionalize public participation policies and establish metrics to evaluate their success.
 - Collaborate with Community Groups: Build formal partnerships with grassroots organizations to share resources and co-lead initiatives.
 - Evaluate and Iterate: Develop a feedback framework to refine engagement practices based on community input and evolving needs.

Table of contents

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Table of contents.....	7
List of Figures/Tables.....	9
1.0 Introduction	10
1.1 Defining the Problem.....	10
1.2 Background and Context	11
1.3 Project Client.....	12
1.3 Positionality Statement	12
1.4 Project Objectives & Research Questions.....	13
1.5 Scope and Delimitations	14
1.6 Organization of Report.....	15
2.0 Literature Review	16
2.1 The Essence and Impact of Public Participation in Governance	16
2.2 Dimensions of Participation: Navigating the Spectrum of Civic Engagement	18
2.3 Assessing Effective and Ineffective Public Participation	20
2.4 Benefits of Public Participation	23
2.5 Challenges in Public Participation	24
2.6 Planning for Public Participation.....	26
2.7 Conclusions and Collaborative Participatory Governance Framework	29
3.0 Methodology and Methods.....	31
3.1 Methodology.....	31
3.2 Methods	32
3.3 Data Analysis.....	33
3.4 Ethical Considerations	33
3.5 Strengths and Limitations	34
4.0 Findings	35

5.0 Findings 1: Document Review: The Comprehensive Community Plan	36
5.1 Developing the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP)	37
5.2 Challenges in Sustaining Effective Public Participation During Implementation	37
5.3 Sustained Public Engagement and Participation in the Comprehensive Community Plan	39
5.4 Detailed Analysis of the Five-Year Action Plan	45
5.5 Summary of Findings for Findings 1	56
6.0 Findings 2: Councillors' Perspectives on Public Participation	57
6.1 Researcher's Analysis: Council's Understanding of Public Participation.....	64
6.2 Summary of Councillors' Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices	70
7.0 Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives on Public Participation	72
7.1 Researcher's Analysis: Staff Perspectives on Public Participation	78
7.2 Summary of Staff Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices	81
8.0 Findings 4: Residents' Perspectives on Public Participation.....	83
8.1 Researcher's Analysis: Focus Group's Understanding of Public Participation	88
8.2 Summary of Findings on Public Participation in Lunenburg.....	92
9.0 Options to Consider and Recommendations.....	94
9.1 Key Themes from Findings	94
9.2 Immediate Strategies (0-6 months)	96
9.3 Intermediate Strategies (6 months–2 years)	99
9.4 Long-Term Strategies (2+ years).....	101
9.4 Action Table: Roadmap for Public Participation.....	104
Conclusion	106
References	108
Appendix A.....	118
Council Interview Questions	118
Staff Interview Questions	120
Resident Focus Group Questions	121

List of Figures/Tables

Table 1: Examples of Thick, Thin and Conventional Participation per Nabatchi & Leighninger’s (2015) categorization and examples.	19
Table 2: 26 Key Public Participation Actions in the Comprehensive Community Plan	40
Table 3: Summary of Five-Year Plan Actions Related to Public Participation	52
Table 4: Councillor Interviewee Table	57
Table 5: Summary of Councillors' Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices	70
Table 6: Staff Interviewee Table	73
Table 7: Summary of Staff Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices	81
Table 8: Summary of Findings on Public Participation in Lunenburg	93
Table 9: Phased Strategies for Enhancing Public Participation in Lunenburg	104
Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2018).	27
Figure 2: OECD’s 10-step path for planning and implementing a citizen participation process (2022)	28
Figure 3: Collaborative Participatory Governance Framework	31

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Defining the Problem

The Town of Lunenburg (TOL) faces a governance challenge: the lack of a comprehensive public participation strategy. This deficiency has created a persistent disconnect between residents and the town's decision-making processes, limiting meaningful involvement in shaping programs, budgets, policies, and bylaws. Currently, TOL relies heavily on reactive, legislatively mandated engagement mechanisms, such as public hearings and consultations on specific planning matters. While these methods fulfill procedural requirements, they often fail to foster continuous, proactive engagement, leaving many residents feeling excluded from decisions that directly impact their community. This exclusion has contributed to an erosion of public trust, making it increasingly difficult for the town to align its decisions with the broader community's needs and aspirations.

Recent instances have underscored the challenges of participatory governance in TOL. For example, during the July 11, 2023, council meeting, residents voiced dissatisfaction with the town's limited public engagement efforts, explicitly calling for more inclusive decision-making opportunities (YouTube, Town of Lunenburg, 2023). Similarly, the 2019/2020 Project Lunenburg initiative sought to foster a participatory approach in developing the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP). In the development of this plan, more than 400 residents contributed during its formative stages (Project Lunenburg, 2020), yet the town's subsequent actions have not reflected the level of community consultation initially envisioned. Many residents feel their input has been sidelined as the town moves forward with some of the plan's objectives without implementing the participatory strategies promised during the project's early phases (Ryan, 2023).

The introduction of a draft vending bylaw in April 2023 offers another example of the disconnect in TOL's current approach to public participation. Although the bylaw was scheduled for approval, residents and local business owners attended a public hearing for the proposed bylaw to express their frustration over the lack of consultation in its development. This feedback prompted the council to postpone the bylaw's approval. However, as of this writing, no further steps have been taken to revise the bylaw or engage the public in its development (YouTube, Town of Lunenburg, 2023). This situation illustrates the broader risks of limited engagement: opposition and delays undermine trust in council decisions and highlight the need for structured, inclusive participation strategies.

The absence of a public participation framework poses risks for TOL. Beyond legislative delays, it increases the likelihood that council decisions will fail to reflect the community's

actual needs, undermining the legitimacy of governance processes. For instance, while the CCP acknowledges the importance of expanding public participation, no clear strategy has been implemented to achieve this goal. Without action on a public participation strategy or policy, TOL risks perpetuating a governance model misaligned with community priorities, further eroding trust and weakening its ability to govern effectively.

In response to growing demands for more inclusive and transparent governance, TOL must prioritize the development of a comprehensive public participation strategy. Establishing such a framework will not only improve alignment between council decisions and community needs but also restore public trust and promote more efficient decision-making. Without these changes, the town risks deepening the disconnect between residents and decision-makers, exacerbating governance inefficiencies, and diminishing community engagement over the long term.

1.2 Background and Context

TOL's history of reactive public engagement is evident in several key initiatives. One prominent example is the development of the town's Climate Change Action Plan, which was driven by the Province of Nova Scotia's requirement for all municipalities to create such plans as a condition for receiving Gas Tax Funds (CBCL Consulting, 2015). Despite its importance, the plan was developed by a committee composed solely of town staff, with no public input, as public participation was not mandated for this initiative (CBCL Consulting, 2015). This omission represents a missed opportunity for community involvement in shaping local environmental policy, potentially limiting the plan's relevance and public buy-in.

The Municipal Government Act (MGA) of Nova Scotia establishes public participation requirements specifically for planning-related matters, such as land use and development (Municipal Government Act, 1998). TOL fulfills this obligation through its Planning Public Participation Program Policy (2022), ensuring that the public has a voice in planning decisions. However, this policy's scope is narrowly focused, leaving broader governance issues outside its mandate. This limited approach contrasts with practices in other Canadian municipalities, which have adopted more comprehensive and inclusive public engagement initiatives. For instance, Vancouver's Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly engaged residents directly in shaping the neighbourhood's plan, offering a model of inclusive policymaking that prioritized community voices (Magnusson, 2020). Similarly, the City of Lethbridge revised its Municipal Housing Strategy through surveys and idea-sharing platforms (City of Lethbridge, n.d.), while the City of Guelph used participatory budgeting to involve residents in financial decision-making (Pinnington et al., 2009). These initiatives illustrate the potential of structured participatory processes to go beyond basic

legal compliance, fostering a sense of shared ownership over municipal policies. In contrast, TOL's reliance on statutory requirements limits its ability to achieve these outcomes, highlighting the need for a more expansive public participation framework.

Integrating a comprehensive participation strategy into TOL's Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) is key for bridging this gap. The CCP explicitly acknowledges the importance of broadening public engagement and calls for a strategy that ensures citizens and business owners actively participate in decision-making and policy implementation (Project Lunenburg, 2020). This aligns with Levac and Wiebe's (2020) emphasis on fostering two-way dialogue to ensure diverse community voices are not just heard but actively shape governance outcomes. A well-structured public participation strategy would ultimately enable TOL to transition from reactive to proactive engagement, promoting a collaborative governance model.

1.3 Project Client

The client for this project is the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the Town of Lunenburg (TOL). The CAO is responsible for overseeing the town's day-to-day operations and ensuring that the directives of the Municipal Council are implemented. In this capacity, the CAO is a link between the Council and municipal staff, providing strategic policy development and governance advice.

The urgency of this project is underscored by growing calls from residents for more inclusive and participatory decision-making. By implementing the recommendations, the CAO can develop a strategy that aligns with the goals of the town's CCP. These recommendations could then be presented to the Council for consideration and potential adoption, striking a balance between administrative priorities and community expectations. If adopted, the strategy could transform how the town engages with its residents, fostering stronger, more trusting relationships and ensuring that municipal decisions better reflect the community's aspirations.

1.3 Positionality Statement

As the Legislative and Policy Advisor/ Municipal Clerk for the Town of Lunenburg, I provide strategic and procedural advice to the Council and play a main role in developing and amending bylaws and policies. My position within the municipal governance framework offers direct access to internal processes and community and organizational representatives, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the town's administrative and participatory practices. Hosting the February 20, 2024, by-law co-design workshop, which serves as a focal point of this study, further highlights my active engagement in Lunenburg's governance processes.

While my role as the Legislative and Policy Advisor/ Municipal Clerk may raise concerns about potential bias or conflict of interest, it is important to note that this research seeks to enhance the Town of Lunenburg’s public participation practices. These aims align with the town’s broader goals, as articulated in the CCP, and have the full endorsement of the CAO. While I do not claim neutrality or objectivity in the traditional sense, this project embraces transparency, reflexivity, and methodological integrity. The research process has incorporated feedback from residents, local elected officials, and staff. These efforts help ensure that the study remains credible, grounded, and responsive to the community it seeks to serve, reinforcing its value in advancing Lunenburg’s commitment to participatory governance.

1.4 Project Objectives & Research Questions

Project Objectives

This project aims to provide actionable recommendations for the Town of Lunenburg (TOL) to develop a comprehensive public participation strategy. Its primary goal is to enhance participatory governance by aligning these recommendations with the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) goals. Specifically, the project focuses on improving the facilitation of public involvement in decision-making processes and the execution of community initiatives. By thoroughly understanding current engagement practices and identifying opportunities for improvement, the project seeks to promote transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration. These findings will inform a participation strategy that strengthens the relationship between TOL’s residents, staff, and Council, fostering a more collaborative governance model. The CAO can use these recommendations to initiate discussions with Council, potentially leading to the adoption of a strategy that reflects both administrative needs and community aspirations.

Research Questions

The central research question driving this project is:

How can the Town of Lunenburg develop and implement an effective public participation strategies that align with the CCP and addresses the needs of its residents, Council, and municipal staff?

To explore this question, several secondary questions guide the research:

- Current Engagement Practices: What mechanisms currently exist for public participation in TOL, and how effectively are they engaging the community in decision-making?

- **Barriers to Participation:** What barriers hinder effective public participation in TOL, and how can these be addressed?
- **Community Aspirations:** What do residents, staff, and Council expect and aspire to achieve through public participation?
- **Community and Organizational Representative Needs:** How can TOL better incorporate the needs and preferences of residents, municipal staff, community-based organizations, and local business owners into its decision-making processes?
- **Impact of Enhanced Participation:** How would an improved public participation strategy affect municipal governance and community trust?
- **Sustainability of Initiatives:** What steps can TOL take to ensure its participation initiatives remain sustainable and adaptable over time?
- **Role of Elected Officials:** How can elected officials effectively support public participation and foster stronger community engagement?

These questions delve into the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for enhancing public engagement in TOL. The answers will inform practical recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and effective participatory governance model.

1.5 Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this project is defined by its qualitative methodology, focusing on interviews with members of the 2020-2024 TOL Council, TOL staff members involved in public participation and engagement, and a focus group of residents who participated in a February 2024 Town-organized workshop held with the intent of co-designing a bylaw. This approach is designed to provide targeted insights into public participation within Lunenburg rather than employing a broad quantitative analysis or comparing the town's practices with those of other municipalities.

The study offers a focused assessment within a limited timeframe, aiming to deliver immediate, actionable recommendations grounded in the literature on public participation and governance. This study intentionally narrows its focus by selecting qualitative interviews and a focus group as the primary means of data collection. Alternative approaches, such as larger-scale surveys or comparative analyses with other towns, were considered but ultimately rejected due to time constraints and the project's specific objectives. As such, the research does not aim to comprehensively review participation

strategies across broader municipal contexts. Instead, it concentrates solely on the Town of Lunenburg, seeking to offer specific recommendations that reflect the town's unique governance dynamics and public participation needs.

1.6 Organization of Report

This report is structured into several interconnected sections, each designed to build on the previous chapter to create an analysis and actionable recommendations for enhancing public participation in Lunenburg. The sections are outlined below:

1. **Introduction and Background:** This section establishes the context and significance of the research, outlining the central research problem, objectives, and methodological approach. This chapter further provides an overview of the Town of Lunenburg, including its governance structure and the historical context of public participation efforts. It identifies key challenges that necessitate the study and explains why these issues are important for the town's future development.
2. **Literature Review:** This section reviews existing academic and practical work related to participatory governance, public trust, and community engagement. It explores frameworks and best practices that inform the analysis and recommendations, connecting these insights to Lunenburg's context.
3. **Methodology and Methods:** Here, the research design is explained in detail, including the rationale for the chosen methodologies. This section describes the data collection process, including document analysis of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP), interviews with municipal staff and councillors, and a focus group with residents. It also addresses ethical considerations and limitations of the study.
4. **Findings:** The findings are presented across multiple chapters, each focusing on a specific theme:
 - **Findings 1:** An analysis of the CCP and its five-year action plan, assessing their alignment with participatory goals and identifying areas for improvement.
 - **Findings 2:** Insights from councillors about their perspectives on current engagement practices and barriers to effective participation.
 - **Findings 3:** Perspectives from municipal staff on resource constraints, communication challenges, and opportunities for innovation.

- Findings 4: Feedback from residents, highlighting trust deficits, inclusivity gaps, and suggestions for fostering meaningful engagement.
5. Options to Consider and Recommendations: This chapter synthesizes the findings into a structured set of strategies for enhancing public participation in Lunenburg. Organized into immediate, intermediate, and long-term actions, these recommendations are tied directly to the challenges and opportunities identified in the study.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Essence and Impact of Public Participation in Governance

Public participation is a nuanced and comprehensive concept that transcends the broader umbrella of public engagement, establishing itself as a cornerstone of effective governance. Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) define public participation as a process that integrates the public's concerns, needs, interests, and values into public decisions and actions, highlighting its role in fostering a deeply inclusive and interactive governance model. This definition underscores its essence: to actively involve citizens in contributing to problem-solving and decision-making processes, rather than merely engaging in less interactive activities such as voting or financial contributions (Quick & Bryson, 2022; Sjöberg et al., 2017; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). In this sense, public participation is not merely about collecting opinions; it is a deliberate process aimed at embedding diverse perspectives directly into governance structures (McKeown, 2019; Fung, 2015).

While often conflated, public participation and public engagement differ in scope and intent. McKeown (2019) characterizes public engagement as a broad concept encompassing methods to convene people for deliberation, whereas Quick and Feldman (2011) dissect engagement into two dimensions: participation and inclusion. Participation emphasizes soliciting input, whereas inclusion focuses on cultivating enduring relationships that support collaborative governance. These dimensions are indispensable in building a holistic framework that ensures the integration of varied community voices, thus moving beyond the superficial collection of feedback. Moreover, Quick and Feldman's (2011) emphasis on these dual dimensions aligns with broader frameworks like Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, which highlights the potential for participation to redistribute power and amplify the voices of marginalized groups. However, as Arnstein notes, not all participatory processes achieve genuine empowerment – an important caveat when evaluating the efficacy of participatory governance.

The transformative potential of public participation lies in its capacity to reshape governance into a model that prioritizes transparency, inclusivity, and community-driven decision-making. Meijer et al. (2012) explore how public participation bridges the gap between policy-making and the aspirations of the community by fostering transparency and shared ownership of decisions. This transparency not only legitimizes governmental actions but also promotes trust and sustained engagement. Moreover, Fung (2015) argues that participatory governance mechanisms, when designed thoughtfully, empower historically underrepresented groups, offering them a platform to influence decision-making processes significantly. In such settings, participation evolves into a vehicle for redistributing power and creating more equitable political and economic landscapes (Uittenbroek et al., 2019; Ife, 2016).

Empowerment through participation is not merely a theoretical construct. The works of Quick and Bryson (2022) and Rongerude (2020) demonstrate how participatory processes enhance collective intelligence and foster innovative solutions rooted in community knowledge. This dynamic engagement cultivates a sense of ownership, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy and acceptance of governmental decisions. When community members actively contribute to decisions that directly impact their lives, the resulting policies are more attuned to real-world challenges and more reflective of community priorities. Such processes exemplify the participatory ideals discussed by Nabatchi and Amsler (2014), who advocate for direct engagement in governance as a critical mechanism for building inclusive and adaptive systems.

Public participation also serves as a conduit for addressing systemic inequities. Drawing from Arnstein's (1969) foundational framework, scholars like Rongerude (2020) and Sjöberg et al. (2017) argue that participatory governance must consciously strive to engage marginalized communities. These efforts ensure that governance systems reflect the lived experiences of diverse populations, fostering inclusivity and enhancing social equity. Such an approach resonates with Ife's (2016) assertion that participation empowers communities to co-create solutions, leading to outcomes that are more impactful and enduring. This dynamic interplay of engagement and empowerment ultimately lays the groundwork for a governance model that embodies collective aspirations and prioritizes community values.

In summary, public participation signifies a paradigm shift in governance, moving away from traditional, hierarchical structures toward a collaborative, bottom-up approach. This transformation hinges on designing participatory mechanisms that are both inclusive and impactful, ensuring that diverse voices shape governance processes. By fostering collective intelligence and redistributing power, participatory governance not only

enhances transparency and legitimacy but also paves the way for a more equitable and empowered society. Ultimately, this model ensures that governance reflects the collective vision of its community members, driving a future that is inclusive, resilient, and aligned with shared aspirations.

2.2 Dimensions of Participation: Navigating the Spectrum of Civic Engagement

This section explores the models and theories that categorize the diverse forms of civic engagement, building on the fundamental concepts introduced by Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizen Participation" and the IAP2 Spectrum (2018). It highlights Nabatchi and Leighninger's (2015) detailed classification of public participation into "thick," "thin," and "conventional" forms, offering a view of the varied ways citizens engage with governance and democratic processes. This section aims to clarify the complex nature of civic engagement by categorizing it into these distinct forms, enhancing understanding of the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of public participation.

Arnstein's seminal work, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969), delineates levels of citizen involvement, ranging from nonparticipation (e.g., therapy, manipulation) to tokenism (e.g., informing, consultation) to genuine citizen power (e.g., partnership, delegated power, citizen control). This ladder captures the spectrum of influence citizens can wield in decision-making processes. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2018) builds upon Arnstein's framework, introducing five levels: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower. Each level reflects a distinct approach to citizen engagement, ranging from simply providing information to enabling full decision-making authority. This spectrum provides a practical guide for public participation initiatives, emphasizing adaptability to specific governance contexts and objectives.

While these models provide theoretical clarity, their practical application can be challenging. Scholars like Rongerude (2020), Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), and Fung (2006) emphasize the need for tailoring engagement strategies to the unique contexts and aspirations of communities. They advocate for moving beyond basic informational exchanges to fostering active collaboration and empowerment, which requires equitable and trust-based relationships between governments and citizens. Bryson et al. (2020) and Gaber (2019) further highlight the importance of collaborative governance models, which integrate these participatory principles into policy-making processes. By synthesizing these insights, a comprehensive and flexible framework for public participation emerges, capable of addressing diverse community needs and governance challenges.

Nabatchi and Leighninger's (2015) categorization into "thick," "thin," and "conventional" forms of public participation provides a nuanced lens for analyzing participatory practices. Thick participation involves intensive, small-group deliberations, such as citizen assemblies or participatory budgeting, fostering deep engagement and informed decision-making. Despite its potential for significant citizen empowerment, thick participation is often resource-intensive, requiring substantial time, effort, and facilitation. Thin participation, by contrast, prioritizes accessibility and scalability, leveraging digital platforms and tools like surveys, e-petitions, and online discussions. Although thin participation broadens civic involvement, it often lacks the depth of deliberative engagement inherent in thick participation. Conventional participation encompasses traditional formats like public hearings and council meetings, typically mandated by law. For instance, in the Town of Lunenburg, this form of participation often relies on legally required public hearings as a primary avenue for civic engagement. While these methods provide formal avenues for citizen input, they are often critiqued for their limited inclusivity and effectiveness in shaping policy outcomes (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Porter & Ashcraft, 2020; Bobbio, 2019; Scott, 2019; Sjöberg et al., 2017).

Table 1: Examples of Thick, Thin and Conventional Participation per Nabatchi & Leighninger's (2015) categorization and examples.

Thick Participation Examples	Thin Participation Examples	Conventional Participation Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen assemblies • Participatory Budgeting • Community Workshops • Planning Charrettes • Serious Games • Community Conversations/World Cafés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Petitions • Polls • Open houses • Booths at fairs/markets • Telephone hotlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council meetings • Public hearings • Audience-style meetings • Public input sessions at meetings (two or three minutes)

Source: Nabatchi and Leighninger, 2015.

Levac and Wiebe (2020) underscore the importance of embedding community perspectives within participatory processes to achieve equitable and meaningful outcomes. They, along with McKeown (2019), Ife (2016), and Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), argue for a transformative model of participation that values citizens' lived experiences and knowledge. This model prioritizes inclusivity, transparency, and the direct incorporation of public input into decision-making frameworks. McKeown (2019) further critiques the overemphasis on quantitative metrics, advocating for a focus on the substantive impact of engagement efforts. Jäntti et al. (2023) offer the Citizen Interface Layer as an innovative mechanism to bridge participatory initiatives with actionable policy outcomes, demonstrating the tangible benefits of aligning participatory tools with governance objectives. However, the efficacy of these tools hinges on fostering genuine

dialogue and partnership between community members and governmental entities, which requires overcoming traditional institutional constraints (Jäntti et al., 2023; de Soysa, 2023; Gaber, 2019).

In summary, the frameworks provided by Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation," the IAP2 Spectrum, and Nabatchi and Leighninger's classifications illuminate the diverse pathways through which governments and citizens interact. These models not only offer a theoretical foundation for understanding participatory governance but also provide practical guidance for designing inclusive and impactful civic engagement initiatives. By transitioning from merely informing to actively empowering citizens, governance processes can become more equitable, transparent, and responsive to community needs.

2.3 Assessing Effective and Ineffective Public Participation

This section analyzes different public participation methods and their initial evaluation by distinguishing between what makes them effective and ineffective. Drawing from academic research and practical case studies, this section outlines the traits of successful public participation strategies, emphasizing mutual respect, inclusivity, and the meaningful integration of citizen feedback into policy and decision-making. Additionally, it critiques practices that suppress productive dialogue and impede the achievement of community objectives.

As touched on in the last section, public participation initiatives frequently falter when they prioritize securing community buy-in over fostering authentic engagement, which results in implementation flaws and missed opportunities for impactful involvement (de Soysa, 2023; Wargent, 2021; Levac & Wiebe, 2020; Bherer et al., 2017). Levac and Wiebe (2020) critique performative consultations that prioritize optics over substance, while Wargent (2021) highlights how local planning often undermines genuine community agency. Factors contributing to ineffective participation include transactional interactions, viewing participation as occasional rather than continuous, lack of resources, constrained timelines, and vague goals, each of which obstructs genuine community engagement (Walker, 2014; Juarez & Brown, 2008). Rowe and Frewer (2000) emphasize the importance of systematic evaluation frameworks to assess participation effectiveness, which can help address the transactional nature of some interactions. Misaligned expectations regarding the public's role in decision-making further complicate these issues, perpetuating existing biases and marginalizing community input until after key decisions have been made (Fung, 2015; May, 2006; Yuille, 2023). Conventional methods like public meetings are standard practice for local governments but tend to be ineffective at deeply engaging citizens, as shown by poor attendance and limited influence on decisions, which alienates communities further (Olsen & Feeney, 2022; Nabatchi & Leighninger; Ianniello et al., 2019).

Yuille's (2023) critique of the UK planning system illustrates how formal mechanisms that seemingly encourage public input might hinder genuine engagement by favouring those with insider knowledge. Similarly, the Chinatown and BC Missing Women cases highlight how systemic barriers, such as language and cultural insensitivity, marginalize critical voices and limit participation, underscoring the need for participatory tools tailored to diverse community needs. This points to a broader systemic issue where participation is often treated more as a formality than an avenue for actual involvement (Yuille, 2023; Levac & Wiebe, 2020; Bryson et al., 2013; Hoppe, 2011).

The City of Vancouver's approach to involving the public in development proposals in Chinatown exemplifies the pitfalls of ineffective public participation. Journalistic accounts by Cheung (2023) and Zhai (2020) highlight how language barriers and inaccessible planning materials marginalized Chinese seniors at public hearings, limiting their ability to engage with development proposals in Chinatown. These challenges, coupled with the community's concerns over gentrification and systemic barriers, underscore the need for culturally sensitive and accessible engagement strategies. Cheung (2023) highlights the 105 Keefer controversy, where seniors protested against the proposed development's impact on Chinatown's heritage, while Zhai (2020) discusses how gentrification and systemic barriers marginalized residents. Both emphasize the necessity of tailoring engagement methods to community-specific needs, particularly for non-English-speaking populations. These accounts emphasize the need for culturally sensitive approaches that bridge linguistic and technological gaps. Mark (2019) underscores the necessity of culturally sensitive engagement methods that adapt to evolving communication mediums and cater to the community's specific physical and temporal needs.

Similarly, the BC Missing Women Commission of Inquiry serves as a stark example of systemic exclusion in public participation. Despite the inquiry's aim to address critical community issues, it failed to engage key groups in meaningful discussions, particularly Indigenous women and organizations. This exclusion highlights a significant flaw in public engagement processes, demonstrating how procedural shortcomings and cultural insensitivity can perpetuate existing inequities and undermine trust (Johnson, 2020; Mansbridge et al., 2012). These cases underscore a recurring trend: attempting to secure public approval without genuinely incorporating community input into decision-making. Contributing factors include inadequate planning, insufficient resources, and poorly timed events, all of which hinder proper community involvement and reinforce existing power disparities (Bobbio, 2019; Bae, 2020). Such examples stress the importance of creating participation initiatives that are well-planned, accessible, and inclusive to meet community needs without exacerbating power imbalances.

Reflecting on the insights from various researchers, it is evident that effective public participation requires a nuanced, strategic approach to governance and citizen engagement. Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) advocate for transforming the relationship between government and citizens into a partnership characterized by mutual respect, recognition, and shared responsibility. This transformation emphasizes the nature, quality, and impact of participation, ensuring that citizen feedback is translated into tangible outcomes through methods such as participatory budgeting and citizen councils, thereby making civic involvement a cornerstone of policy and community development (de Soysa, 2023; Jäntti et al., 2023; Magnusson, 2020).

Granting citizens substantive influence on decision-making is fundamental to meaningful public participation. Özden (2023) and Thorpe (2017) emphasize that this requires careful planning and thorough analysis to develop systems enabling genuine involvement. The clarity and openness of the participation process, coupled with effective management of participants' expectations, are essential for building trust and motivating continued engagement (Jamal & Newbold, 2023; OECD, 2022; Grewal, 2020). Additionally, embracing diversity and inclusivity enriches decision-making by integrating various perspectives, necessitating thoughtful deliberation to reconcile and incorporate these diverse viewpoints (Jones, 2023; OECD, 2022; Ianniello et al., 2019).

The efficacy of public participation is showcased in innovative models that meaningfully incorporate community input into governance. Magnusson (2020) highlights the City of Vancouver's Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly as an exemplar of effective community engagement in urban planning. This assembly fostered trust and inclusivity by ensuring a diverse group of residents participated, employing skilled facilitators, and dedicating sufficient time for deliberation. These strategies contributed to its high success rate, with 268 recommendations developed, 92% of which were adopted into the City's plan, achieving 91% participant satisfaction. This underscores the transformative impact of inclusive citizen participation in decision-making. Similarly, Kim and Nam's (2022) Policy Puzzle Game in Yuseong District, South Korea, achieved success by engaging participants in interactive, visual policy design. By encouraging equal dialogue and integrating diverse perspectives, the game not only fostered collaboration but also helped address existing power imbalances, demonstrating its potential to mitigate exclusion issues seen in other contexts like the BC Missing Women Commission. This method democratized policy-making, ensuring that resulting policies were deeply rooted in the community's experiences and needs. In another context, Jamal and Newbold (2023) explored co-design use in enhancing transit services for older immigrants in Hamilton, Ontario. Through interviews, observations, and workshops, they garnered a deep understanding of transit

needs, creating a targeted service improvement plan that reflected the community's lived experiences.

This review distinguishes between effective and ineffective public participation. Effective participation is grounded in respect, engagement, transparency, inclusivity, and diversity. It fosters dialogue and collaboration, promoting improved community development through joint governance efforts. Such methods ensure public input meaningfully influences policymaking, aiding in the creation of resilient and inclusive communities. Conversely, ineffective participation, marked by unclear goals, superficial efforts, and insufficient planning, restricts genuine community involvement and hinders progress. This distinction highlights the need for a balanced approach incorporating respect, inclusivity, diversity, and careful engagement to enable productive civic participation.

2.4 Benefits of Public Participation

Research underscores the pivotal role of genuine citizen engagement in enhancing public initiatives and reinforcing the democratic foundation, as evidenced by studies highlighting its benefits in terms of improved decision-making, increased transparency, enhanced accountability, and strengthened trust between citizens and governments. Edelenbos and Van Meerkerk (2022) discuss trust-building through participatory budgeting projects that foster open communication between citizens and officials. Šaparnienė et al. (2021) emphasize the role of accessible public forums and transparent decision-making in fostering both trust and transparency. Quick and Bryson (2022) highlight how involving citizens directly enhances accountability, creating a governance model rooted in shared responsibility (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2022; Šaparnienė et al., 2021; OECD, 2020; Quick & Bryson, 2022; Boedeltje & Cornips, 2004). This engagement, fostering dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, deepens understanding of local challenges and leverages community resources, thereby bolstering decision support, tapping into local knowledge, and fostering social learning (Sjoberg et al., 2017; Katsonis, 2019; Wargent, 2021; Uittenbroek et al., 2019; Blomkamp, 2018; Ife, 2016; Van Herzele, 2004). For instance, Katsonis (2019) highlights the success of Future Melbourne 2026, where public workshops enabled residents to co-create city planning initiatives, enhancing collective problem-solving. Blomkamp (2018) also demonstrates how co-design processes bring together diverse stakeholders to share experiences and insights, fostering social learning and promoting adaptive governance solutions. Jones (2023) argues that such participation renders governance more legitimate, effective, and attuned to the community's diverse needs, enriching public discourse and policymaking. Similarly, the OECD (2009) highlights specific strategies, such as participatory urban planning and multi-stakeholder dialogues, that address societal challenges and foster sustainable, equitable solutions.

Building on this foundation, public participation has been proven to shape equitable, inclusive policies and foster diversity, transforming citizens from passive observers to active stakeholders in decision-making processes. Grewal (2020), for instance, highlights inclusive city planning initiatives in the Greater Toronto Area that empowered marginalized communities by incorporating their perspectives into urban design (Hussey, 2023; Grewal, 2020; Rongerude, 2020; Ife, 2016; Fung, 2015; Eckerd & Heidelberg, 2020). This transformation is exemplified in cases where participatory budgeting and citizen councils have directly influenced policy development (Magnusson, 2020; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). By valuing community input, such strategies diversify solution pools and secure widespread support for initiatives, resulting in sustainable, equitable outcomes that embody the collective wisdom and contributions of the populace. Jäntti et al. (2023) describe how interactive governance models in Finland successfully integrated diverse community representative feedback, ensuring more inclusive policy outcomes. These models embed citizen participation in local governance to ensure that policies genuinely reflect community needs and aspirations (Yuille, 2023). This comprehensive integration of diverse voices in city planning and policy development underscores the importance of a governance model that promotes co-creation over top-down directives, making community governance more responsive, fair, and effective.

Overall, the extensive research and practical evidence highlight the indispensable value of citizen engagement in enhancing the democratic process, improving policy development, and fostering a more inclusive, equitable society. By actively involving citizens in decision-making, governance transforms into a more transparent, accountable, and responsive system that genuinely reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of the community it serves. This shift towards collaborative problem-solving and co-creation leverages local knowledge and resources and strengthens the social fabric, building trust and solidarity among citizens and between the public and governmental institutions. Ultimately, the collective wisdom gained through this participatory approach paves the way for more sustainable, just, and resilient communities, underscoring the critical role of public participation in achieving a governance model that is not only effective but also democratic and inclusive.

2.5 Challenges in Public Participation

While public participation has numerous benefits, as outlined above, its effectiveness often encounters obstacles. A significant hurdle is the ambiguity in what constitutes "effective" participation, which is complicated by the varying perspectives of stakeholders and the lack of universally agreed-upon success metrics (Bobbio, 2019; Zypchyn, 2016; Berner et al., 2011). Berner et al. (2011) illustrate these differing views in their study, which

revealed that while elected officials and local government staff may prefer less direct engagement, citizens often seek more interactive forms of participation. Bobbio (2019) elaborates on this challenge, highlighting the difficulty in defining success in participatory processes due to the diverse and sometimes conflicting motivations behind public involvement.

Adding to the complexity of public participation are barriers to informed engagement, such as limited access to information and the intricate dynamics of co-design models involving multiple community and organizational representatives. These challenges extend beyond logistical issues, touching on problems of inclusivity and accessibility, thereby emphasizing the nuanced nature of participatory processes (Abas et al., 2023; Jamal & Newbold, 2023; Mark, 2019; Blomkamp, 2018). For example, Jamal and Newbold (2023) highlight the challenges of co-design in transit planning, where community and organizational representatives' competing priorities and resource constraints often complicate achieving meaningful engagement. Furthermore, integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making remains a persistent challenge, particularly in balancing the insights of professionals with the lived experiences of the general public (Dahal & White, 2022; Quick & Bryson, 2022; Fung, 2006). Quick and Bryson (2022) point to resistance from officials who fear losing control or introducing unnecessary complexities, further complicating participatory processes.

Financial costs and required staff resources for facilitating these processes present another layer of difficulty. Organizations may resort to less effective methods to reduce costs, thereby limiting the depth of community engagement (Jamal & Newbold, 2023; Olsen & Feeney, 2022; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Transparency is another critical issue. De Soysa (2022) notes that opaque participation processes often lead to public frustration, diminishing trust in institutions and reducing the likelihood of future participation. Mark (2019) similarly emphasizes the importance of accessible and inclusive engagement methods to ensure participants feel their contributions are valued and impactful.

Challenges such as exclusion, tokenism, power imbalances, and negative group dynamics further complicate public participation. Arnstein's (1969) framework, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," highlights how tokenistic practices amplify certain voices while marginalizing others, particularly vulnerable and underrepresented communities. This results in superficial engagement that fails to capture the full spectrum of community opinions, exacerbating social inequalities (Quick & Bryson, 2022; Levac & Wiebe, 2020; Uittenbroek et al., 2019; Arnstein, 1969). Levac and Wiebe (2020) critique consultation processes that appear inclusive but often reinforce existing power structures, leading to

public dissatisfaction and protests, particularly when such efforts are perceived as manipulative (Johnson, 2020; Bobbio, 2019). Achieving genuinely inclusive participation remains a significant challenge, as engagement initiatives often involve a narrow group of participants, failing to represent the broader community (Quick & Bryson, 2022; Levac & Wiebe, 2020; Uittenbroek et al., 2019).

Moreover, widespread skepticism about the relevance and implementation of citizen-generated ideas creates a disconnect between public input and policy decisions, reducing participation to a performative exercise. Kim and Nam (2022) note that this disconnect often stems from a lack of clear communication about how public feedback influences decision-making. Jäntti et al. (2023) further emphasize the importance of embedding citizen feedback into governance systems to ensure its meaningful integration into policymaking.

Therefore, the effectiveness of public participation in decision-making processes is contingent upon overcoming these multifaceted challenges. From defining what constitutes effective engagement to ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all community representatives, the complexities of managing power dynamics, tokenism, and exclusion require deliberate and thoughtful approaches. Achieving truly effective participation demands a commitment to transparent and open processes, as well as a dedication to listening to and valuing the voices of all community members, especially those often marginalized or overlooked.


2.6 Planning for Public Participation

Effective public participation requires deliberate and strategic planning that aligns engagement processes with organizational goals and community needs. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2018) serves as a foundational tool for defining the level of public impact, ranging from informing stakeholders to fully empowering them in decision-making. Yuille (2023) and Wargent (2021) emphasize the importance of tailoring these levels to fit specific governance contexts, warning against rigid applications that can lead to tokenism. Instead, municipalities must adopt flexible strategies that foster trust and collaboration, particularly when addressing diverse and complex community needs. For instance, a municipality resolving routine matters may adopt the “Consult” level of engagement, while contentious issues, such as zoning reforms, may necessitate higher levels of involvement, like “Collaborate” or “Empower,” to gain broader public support.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

© IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1

Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2018).

The OECD's 10-step framework (2022) offers a systematic roadmap for planning and implementing participatory initiatives. It begins with defining the objectives of the engagement process and securing political support, followed by allocating resources, identifying stakeholders, and selecting suitable engagement methods. Each step aims to create a robust foundation for effective public participation. For example, stakeholder identification ensures the inclusion of underrepresented groups, while feedback loops demonstrate how public input informs decision-making, fostering transparency and trust (De Soysa, 2023). Jamal and Newbold (2023) illustrate the value of hybrid methods in transit planning, where a combination of digital and in-person engagement effectively bridged gaps between diverse participant groups. This framework's flexibility, particularly its emphasis on blending digital tools with traditional methods, ensures broad accessibility and inclusivity, even for those with limited technological access.



Figure 2: OECD's 10-step path for planning and implementing a citizen participation process (2022)

Bryson's frameworks, including the Participation Planning Matrix and the Power vs. Interest Grid, provide additional tools to refine public participation strategies. The Power vs. Interest Grid helps municipalities identify and categorize stakeholders based on their influence and interest levels. For instance, stakeholders with high power but low interest might require targeted outreach to secure their engagement, while those with high interest but limited power could benefit from empowerment initiatives (Bryson, 2018). Similarly, Bryson's Basic Analysis Technique ensures that stakeholders are not generalized but categorized into distinct groups, allowing planners to address specific needs and perspectives. These tools are invaluable for balancing community input with expert advice, promoting well-rounded

and inclusive decision-making. For example, integrating residents' lived experiences into urban planning, while ensuring the technical feasibility of projects, demonstrates how Bryson's methods foster participatory and practical governance.

While these frameworks offer effective solutions, implementing deep participatory processes remains resource-intensive. Though impactful, approaches like participatory budgeting or citizens' assemblies can strain municipal budgets and staff capacity (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Olsen & Feeney, 2022). Goodman (2020) critiques the overuse of digital platforms in such contexts, noting that excessive reliance on technology risks excluding participants with limited access or technical literacy. Hybrid approaches, which combine digital tools with in-person methods, mitigate these issues by offering scalability without sacrificing the depth of engagement. These strategies ensure that municipalities can maintain broad community involvement while addressing logistical and financial challenges.

Ultimately, the success of public participation depends on municipalities demonstrating how citizen input shapes decision-making. The OECD framework underscores the importance of feedback loops to show stakeholders that their contributions have a tangible impact. Combined with the transparency fostered by the IAP2 Spectrum and the stakeholder analysis tools provided by Bryson, municipalities can create participatory processes that are both inclusive and effective. By prioritizing careful planning, leveraging strong leadership, and amplifying marginalized voices, municipalities can ensure their decision-making reflects community aspirations and strengthens trust in democratic governance.

2.7 Conclusions and Collaborative Participatory Governance Framework

This literature review has examined the complexities of public participation in local governance, focusing on its benefits, the challenges that hinder its success, and the strategies required for thoughtful planning. By analyzing frameworks such as the IAP2 Spectrum (2018), OECD's 10-step process (2022), and Bryson's stakeholder analysis techniques (2018), the review establishes a solid foundation for developing tailored public participation strategies. These insights are especially relevant for the Town of Lunenburg, where a one-size-fits-all approach would fail to address the town's unique projects and community dynamics.

The conceptual framework guiding this research is rooted in a participatory governance approach with collaborative elements, connecting each section of the literature review to the broader goal of enhancing public participation. This framework emphasizes inclusive and transparent engagement practices led by the Town, while also recognizing the

importance of partnerships with community-based organizations to support shared problem-solving. These elements offer a clear rationale for adopting participatory practices, emphasizing how they strengthen democratic governance while addressing diverse community needs.

Addressing challenges, the review explores systemic barriers such as tokenism, power imbalances, and limited inclusivity. These challenges often undermine genuine engagement and risk alienating marginalized voices. Overcoming these obstacles requires municipalities to implement deliberate, transparent, and inclusive strategies to ensure that public participation processes are meaningful and equitable.

The section on planning for participation ties these insights together by providing practical guidance. Tools such as the IAP2 Spectrum, OECD's 10-step process, and Bryson's techniques offer structured approaches to designing adaptable and inclusive engagement processes. For instance, Bryson's *Participation Planning Matrix* and *Power vs. Interest Grid* help identify key stakeholders and balance their influence, while the IAP2 Spectrum ensures that engagement methods align with community expectations and project goals. These strategies are vital for creating participatory processes that reflect Lunenburg's aspirations and address the specific needs of its community.

Ultimately, this research aims to support Lunenburg's Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) by analyzing the current state of participation, identifying gaps, and offering practical recommendations for improvement. The conceptual framework (see Figure 3) illustrates how insights from the literature inform each step of this process, ensuring that the town's participatory practices are not only inclusive but also effective. By integrating theory with practice, this project seeks to build a governance model that fosters trust, transparency, and a shared sense of purpose between Lunenburg's residents and its municipal government.

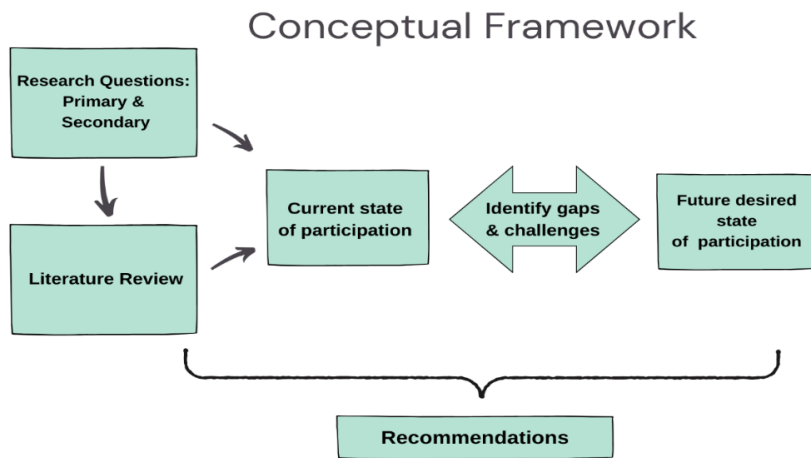


Figure 3: Collaborative Participatory Governance Framework

3.0 Methodology and Methods

This chapter outlines the methodological approach and data collection methods used to investigate public participation in the Town of Lunenburg. The study aims to understand how participatory processes are implemented, the challenges they face, and the factors contributing to their success or failure. A qualitative approach was adopted to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of stakeholders, aligning with the study’s focus on in-depth insights. Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), ensuring adherence to ethical research practices. Additionally, the methodology was reviewed and approved by the Town’s Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to align with municipal governance practices.

The methods selected were designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of public participation within the context of a small municipality, offering a replicable framework for similar studies. This chapter is structured into five sections: the overall methodological framework, specific data collection methods, research procedures, ethical considerations, and an assessment of the strengths and limitations of this approach.

3.1 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative case study methodology, which is well-suited for gaining an in-depth understanding of public participation within the real-life setting of the Town of Lunenburg. The case study approach is ideal for answering the "how" and "why" questions

central to this research. Specifically, the case study explores how the Town's public participation processes are implemented and why certain challenges or successes arise. By focusing on the Town of Lunenburg as a singular case, this methodology facilitates a thorough examination of the processes, nuances, and complexities involved in participatory governance. The qualitative approach allows for detailed insights into the perspectives of staff, Council, and residents, making it particularly effective for assessing the Town's public participation initiatives and identifying areas for improvement.

3.2 Methods

This research utilized three primary methods: semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a document review, each selected to provide a holistic understanding of public participation in TOL. These methods complement each other by offering perspectives from governance, operational, and community levels, creating a multidimensional analysis of public engagement.

Document Review

The first method employed was a review of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) and its five-year action plan (2020-2025). This review established a foundational understanding of the Town's strategic priorities, particularly its commitment to enhancing public participation. The CCP provided the context for exploring how the Town's participatory goals were being implemented and highlighted areas where gaps existed. This initial review framed subsequent data collection efforts, enabling more focused interviews and discussions during the focus group.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the document review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six of the seven Council members (2020-2024) and five key staff members. Council members were selected due to their governance role in approving the CCP and public participation initiatives, offering insights into strategic priorities and decision-making processes. Staff members provided an operational perspective, detailing the practical challenges and successes of implementing public participation strategies.

The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in exploring specific topics while maintaining a consistent framework for comparing responses. These interviews uncovered insights into the alignment – or misalignment – between the Town's strategic goals and its engagement practices, offering a nuanced understanding of governance-level and operational challenges.

Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with five residents who participated in the Town's February 2024 co-design workshop, which aimed to develop a lawn naturalization policy. This group was selected to gather community perspectives on collaborative governance and participatory practices. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had direct and relevant experiences, enriching the data with firsthand accounts of engagement successes and challenges.

The focus group offered rich qualitative data, highlighting residents' perceptions of the Town's participatory efforts and their suggestions for improvement. This method provided a valuable community perspective, complementing the governance and operational insights from the interviews.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews, the focus group, and the document review underwent a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights related to public participation in the Town of Lunenburg. I used Turboscribe, a transcription and summarization tool, to process the recorded interviews and focus group discussions. While Turboscribe provided detailed transcriptions, I did not rely solely on its outputs. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, I re-listened to the recordings and cross-checked them against my notes taken during the interviews and focus group. This process allowed me to verify key points and capture nuances that might have been missed during automated transcription.

By engaging directly with the data through this methodical review, I ensured that the analysis accurately reflected participants' perspectives. The thematic analysis was conducted manually to maintain a close connection with the data, allowing for deeper insights into the lived experiences of the Town's residents, staff, and Council members. This combined approach of using Turboscribe alongside personal verification methods ensured the reliability of the data and supported the identification of key themes central to the study's findings.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the nature of the research, which involved interviews and a focus group with community members, municipal staff, and elected officials, it was necessary to undergo an ethics review. Approval was obtained from the **University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), certificate number 24-0098**.

The primary ethical concern stemmed from the potential collection of sensitive information. In a small community like Lunenburg, the risk of inadvertently identifying individuals from anonymized data was heightened, which could discourage open

participation. To mitigate this risk, participants were fully informed of their rights, and strict measures were taken to protect their confidentiality and privacy.

Another important ethical consideration related to my dual role as a researcher and a member of the Town of Lunenburg's management team. Although I hold a management position, I do not have any staff members who report directly to me, which helps reduce potential power imbalances during the data collection process. However, my involvement in council meetings and the provision of procedural advice still introduced a potential for perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

3.5 Strengths and Limitations

Limitations

This research project encounters several limitations that could affect its scope and the reliability of its conclusions. One potential limitation is the perceived conflict of interest stemming from my dual role as both the researcher and the Legislative and Policy Advisor/ Municipal Clerk for the Town of Lunenburg. My direct involvement in policy creation and public participation efforts may raise concerns about the objectivity of my findings. Although I have taken steps to ensure impartiality, this dual role may influence how certain data are interpreted, particularly regarding the town's internal processes.

Additionally, the decision to focus on participants from a specific co-design workshop may not fully capture the broader community's perspectives. This choice potentially biases the results toward those more actively involved in public participation, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the newly elected council following the 2024 municipal election may have different priorities, potentially affecting the willingness to adopt the study's recommendations.

Lastly, the project's success in influencing certain objectives of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) could be constrained by the current policy environment and leadership's readiness to embrace change. Without strong commitment from town leadership, implementing long-term changes may be challenging, underscoring the importance of continued advocacy for participatory governance beyond the research phase.

Strengths

Despite the potential perception of a conflict of interest, one of the key strengths of this project is my unique position as the Legislative and Policy Advisor/ Municipal Clerk for the Town of Lunenburg. My deep understanding of the town's governance structure, resources, and staffing capacity enables me to offer practical and feasible recommendations.

Additionally, my firsthand experience with the town's public participation efforts, both successes and challenges, provides insights that an external researcher might not possess.

My pre-existing relationships with council members, staff, and residents likely facilitated more open and candid discussions during interviews and focus group sessions. Due to our established rapport, participants may have felt more comfortable sharing their honest perspectives. Furthermore, my role within the town may lend additional credibility to the findings and recommendations. Since I have a vested interest in the town's long-term success, there is a perception that my recommendations carry more weight compared to those of an external researcher with no direct ties to the community. This professional investment enhances the likelihood of the research being taken seriously and implemented effectively, fostering a more inclusive and transparent governance model in Lunenburg.

4.0 Findings

The following chapters present the findings of this research, organized around key themes related to public participation in the Town of Lunenburg. These findings are based on data collected through a document review, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group, as outlined in the methodology section. While the document review focuses on the Town's Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) as a foundational framework for understanding public engagement priorities, the interviews and focus group explore broader perspectives on the implementation, challenges, and opportunities for public participation at the Town of Lunenburg. Together, these chapters provide a multifaceted analysis of public engagement in Lunenburg, highlighting successes, barriers, and areas for growth.

The *Document Review* chapter draws on an analysis of the CCP and its associated five-year action plan to examine how these documents reflect the Town of Lunenburg's strategic priorities and commitments to public engagement. By evaluating the development process, implementation challenges, and progress on specific actions related to public participation, this chapter provides insights into the CCP's alignment with principles of participatory governance. While the CCP demonstrates strong engagement during its development phase, the analysis highlights significant gaps in sustaining public participation during implementation, particularly in translating strategic goals into actionable and inclusive practices.

The *Councillors' Perspectives* chapter is informed by semi-structured interviews conducted with six of the seven Town of Lunenburg councillors serving between 2020 and 2024. These interviews explored councillors' experiences and perceptions regarding the

Town's public participation initiatives. This method provided an understanding of the strategic intentions behind these initiatives and the systemic challenges faced in aligning public expectations with governance practices.

The *Staff Perspectives* chapter draws on semi-structured interviews with five staff members whose roles include responsibilities which may relate to or could relate to public participation. Their insights highlight the operational realities of implementing participatory governance, including challenges such as limited resources, communication gaps, and the complexities of incorporating public input into decision-making. This chapter highlights the contrast between the Town's strategic goals for public participation and the practical challenges staff face while balancing these initiatives with their broader responsibilities.

The *Residents' Perspectives* chapter is based on a focus group involving five residents who participated in a Town-organized co-design workshop to develop a policy allowing for naturalized lawns. These residents were selected for the focus group not because of their involvement in the lawn policy initiative but because they had experienced a "thick" level of public participation in a Town of Lunenburg initiative. Their reflections offer insights into the successes and shortcomings of the Town's public engagement efforts, particularly regarding inclusivity, trust, and effective communication. Thematic analysis of the focus group discussion identified recurring patterns and provided actionable recommendations for enhancing public participation in Lunenburg.

Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive understanding of public participation in Lunenburg, exploring it from multiple perspectives – strategic (councillors), operational (staff), and experiential (residents). By detailing these findings, this research highlights the integration of participatory governance into the Town's processes and identifies actionable areas for enhancing future public engagement.

5.0 Findings 1: Document Review: The Comprehensive Community Plan

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the Town of Lunenburg's Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) and its associated five-year action plan (2020-2025). The analysis focuses on three key areas: the development process of the CCP, the challenges encountered during its implementation, and the progress made on key actions related to public participation. By examining how the CCP was developed through Project Lunenburg, this review highlights the town's initial successes in fostering community involvement. However, the findings also reveal challenges in sustaining public engagement throughout the implementation phase. Finally, the chapter evaluates the current status of 26 specific

actions from the CCP, particularly those conducive to fostering public participation, offering insights into both the progress made and the gaps that remain in fulfilling the CCP's long-term goals.

5.1 Developing the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP)

The CCP, developed through Project Lunenburg, which was a dedicated initiative explicitly created for the development of the CCP, is an extensive policy document serving, at the time of this writing, as the Town of Lunenburg's only Strategic Plan and guiding document until 2060. Approved by the Town Council in 2020, the CCP encompasses 10 strategic directions, along with numerous goals, objectives, and more than 500 actions designed to achieve these directions. The plan covers a broad range of aspects of community life. Much of the CCP addresses specific urban and community planning priorities, including amendments to the Land-Use Bylaw, the built form of new developments, and placemaking opportunities in public spaces, all aimed at guiding the Town's physical and spatial development. Additionally, the plan focuses on enhancing the quality of life through initiatives related to environment and sustainability, as well as culture and recreation (Project Lunenburg, 2020).

The CCP was developed over an 18-month period, during which community members were called on to define their goals and aspirations. Guided by a Steering Team composed of public members, Town Council, and stakeholders, this collaborative process tackled eight major topics outlined in discussion papers. These papers served as the foundation for community workshops held between April 2019 and January 2020, followed by additional meetings focused on plan drafting and prioritization (Project Lunenburg, 2020). Over 400 people participated through surveys, stakeholder interviews, and workshops, with 'What We Heard' reports published after each session. This structured and iterative engagement process facilitated focused, actionable input while ensuring that diverse perspectives were systematically gathered and integrated into the planning process. By incorporating a broad spectrum of views, the CCP aimed to enhance decision-making quality and reflect a collective vision for the community (Project Lunenburg, 2020).

5.2 Challenges in Sustaining Effective Public Participation During Implementation

The development of the CCP exemplified effective public participation methods, aligning closely with the "thick" participation model described by Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015). This model fostered deep, meaningful community involvement during the planning phase, as evidenced by intensive community workshops and stakeholder engagement that aimed to incorporate a broad spectrum of perspectives into the decision-making process,

consistent with effective principles of public participation. However, the implementation phase of the CCP has not upheld this strong participatory approach. Despite the plan's emphasis on the necessity for continued public engagement, there has been a notable absence of specific guidelines for ongoing community involvement as the plan progresses (Project Lunenburg, 2020, p.186).

This oversight has led to calls from residents for the Town Council to sustain an active dialogue with the community, underscoring a disconnect between the plan's developmental aspirations and its execution (Ryan, 2023). This situation illustrates a critical challenge noted by scholars like Bryson et al. (2020) and Jäntti et al. (2023), who stress the importance of maintaining participatory mechanisms not just in planning but through policy implementation, to ensure that civic engagement remains a continuous and dynamic process reflecting and adapting to community needs and feedback.

Chapter 12 of the CCP, titled "Implementation and Monitoring," lays out a five-year Implementation Plan, which details steps to achieve 35 priority recommendations and establishes a framework for an annual review, including a scoring process for Town staff to evaluate potential projects and new initiatives (Project Lunenburg, 2020, Chapter 12 & Appendix A). Chapter 12 also asserts the important role of public involvement for successful implementation, stating, "the implementation of this CCP can not be achieved by the Town alone. In order to strengthen relationships and tackle complex issues, the public must continue to be involved in the participatory process of implementing these stated desires. A collective impact approach will be necessary to collaborate among all stakeholders on this common agenda, and consistent communication and shared evaluation is key to this process" (Town of Lunenburg, 2020, p. 186). However, except for a few actions that identify specific groups or communities to be consulted with, this chapter and the plan as a whole lack specific guidance on the practical aspects of such involvement, failing to detail the mechanics of engagement – how, when, and who should be engaged – and the extent of involvement required for different actions.

The literature suggests that public participation initiatives often falter when they shift from fostering genuine engagement to merely securing community buy-in, resulting in implementation flaws and missed opportunities for meaningful involvement (de Soysa, 2023; Wargent, 2021; Levac & Weibe, 2020; Bherer et al., 2017). This issue is exacerbated by transactional interactions, viewing participation as occasional rather than continuous, and vague goals – all of which obstruct genuine community engagement and perpetuate biases by marginalizing community input until after decisions are crucially made (Walker, 2014; Juarez & Brown, 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Fung, 2015; May, 2006; Yuille, 2023). The experience in Lunenburg underscores the need for detailed, strategic engagement plans

that outline specific, actionable steps for ongoing public involvement to ensure that the implementation of the CCP continues to reflect the community's desires.

5.3 Sustained Public Engagement and Participation in the Comprehensive Community Plan

While the CCP emphasizes the importance of public participation during implementation, it provides limited procedural guidance for achieving this goal. Nevertheless, its structure integrates various actions designed to promote sustained community engagement. These actions, ranging from educational programs to collaborative decision-making initiatives, embed opportunities for ongoing public input and foster an inclusive approach to governance.

Regular educational workshops and collaborative strategy sessions are key components of the plan, extending public involvement beyond the initial planning phases. The CCP employs both "thin" and "thick" participation techniques to address the diverse needs and preferences of the community. Thin participation methods, such as disseminating information on housing rights and resources, ensure broad accessibility and ease of engagement. Conversely, thick participation methods foster deeper, more meaningful engagement, as seen in initiatives like involving community members in developing a branding strategy or implementing conservation efforts.

Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969) offers a lens for analyzing the CCP's engagement strategies, ranging from non-participation to full citizen power. The CCP demonstrates a commitment to ascending this ladder, particularly in initiatives like guiding the development of a recapitalization strategy for recreation and community facilities. These efforts reflect higher rungs, such as "partnership" and "delegated power," signalling a shift from basic consultation to collaborative and empowering participation.

Similarly, the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2018) categorizes engagement levels from informing to empowering, a spectrum reflected across the CCP's actions. For example, the plan "informs" residents by educating them about tenant rights and resources, progresses to "consult" through biannual workshops on sea-level rise, and "involves" community groups in waste reduction initiatives. At the higher levels, the "collaborate" and "empower" stages are evident in joint decision-making efforts, such as rebranding Lunenburg and reforming municipal committees. These initiatives demonstrate how genuine decision-making authority is extended to community members, particularly underrepresented groups, reinforcing the plan's inclusive ethos.

A focused review of the CCP identified 26 specific actions out of the plan's 511 total, 10 of which are prioritized in the five-year implementation plan. These selected actions are

notable for their capacity to promote comprehensive public participation and can serve as a foundational guide for launching engagement efforts aligned with the CCP’s overall goals and objectives. For instance, actions like partnering with small businesses for knowledge sharing (6.4.b) and collaborating with the Lunenburg Harbour Authority to support the fishing industry (6.5.1) highlight the plan’s emphasis on building relationships and fostering collaboration (Project Lunenburg, 2020, p.113 & 115). These 26 actions, in particular, align with the principles of the IAP2 Spectrum, covering a range of engagement levels from informing to empowering. Most notably, they emphasize "thick" participation, as defined by Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), which involves extensive community interaction through collaborative decision-making and regular feedback.

The following table outlines the 26 CCP actions conducive to fostering public participation. These actions span various strategic directions and themes, underscoring the CCP’s commitment, as noted in Chapter 12, to integrating community involvement into its planning and development processes by offering diverse opportunities for participation (Project Lunenburg, 2020, Chapter 12).

Table 2: 26 Key Public Participation Actions in the Comprehensive Community Plan

Strategic Direction	Section	Action	Type of Participation
Housing	3.1 General (i) p. 43	Foster collaboration and data sharing among all housing stakeholders. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thick
Housing	3.6 Housing Programs (k) p. 54	Distribute information for tenants and homeowners to ensure they have access to information that could help meet their housing needs, including: i) Tenant rights ii) Accessing housing for new immigrants iii) Financial assistance for shelter costs iv) Alternative housing options v) Energy and barrier-free retrofits.	Thin
Servicing and Facilities	4.8 Community & Recreation Facilities (c)	Guide the community through a participatory process to develop a recapitalization strategy for recreation and community facilities.	Thick

	p. 78	<i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	
Servicing and Facilities	4.10 Solid Waste Management (c) p. 80	Work with community groups to support waste reduction in homes and businesses.	Thick
Economic Development	6.1 General (m) p. 108	Work with residents, community members, businesses, and other stakeholders to develop a renewed brand for Lunenburg that is focused on attracting full-time residents and visitors.	Thick
Economic Development	6.1 General (z) p. 109	Develop a circular economy storefront in partnership with residents, businesses and waste diversion experts aimed at collaborating to reduce waste in Lunenburg.	Thick
Heritage	7.2 Cultural Landscape Elements (c) p. 123	Undertake a study and public engagement of the associative landscape elements in Lunenburg, with particular focus on the inhabitation by Acadian and Mi'kmaq communities, as well as the pre-settlement natural environment.	Thick
Heritage	7.5 Historical Interpretation (a) p. 129	Build relationships with local Mi'kmaq community members and organizations and Black Nova Scotian community members and organizations, to inform how best to broaden the historic narrative and commemoration of Lunenburg through an anti-racism and decolonization lens.	Thick
Environment and Sustainability	9.1 Sea-level Rise (k) p.148	Consider hosting regular community workshops (e.g. biannual) updating the community of sea level rise and climate change projections.	Thick

		<i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	
Environment and Sustainability	9.1 Sea-level rise (j) p.148	Create an online documentation platform to upload images and stories of significant storm and sea level rise events. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thick
Environment and Sustainability	9.7 Coastal Water Quality (a) p. 156	Continue to explore and enhance relationships and cooperation with other levels of government, community groups, land owners and harbour users to monitor and improve water quality in Lunenburg Harbour.	Thick
Environment and Sustainability	9.8 Conservation (d) p.157	Work with local Indigenous communities to share knowledge about practices to improve conservation efforts and environmental health.	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.1 Identity (a) p.162	Create learning programs, workshops, or lectures that ensure the transfer of traditional crafts and skills to the next generation.	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.1 Identity (b) p. 162	Create learning programs, workshops, or lectures that illuminate the more recently arrived identities that are present in Lunenburg. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.1 Identity (c) p.162	Build relationships between the Town and Mi'kmaq residents and organizations, and the Town and Black residents and organizations in the area.	Thick

		<i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	
Culture and Recreation	10.1 Identity (d) p.162	Create or promote learning programs to deepen understanding of the histories of Mi'kmaq and Black people in Nova Scotia and Lunenburg.	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.1 Identity (e) p.162	Create a special committee or action group to promote anti-racism and decolonization, with particular emphasis on the lived experiences and aspirations of Black, Indigenous and people of colour in Lunenburg. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.4 Parks and Outdoor Public Spaces (b) p.167	Develop an outdoor skating rink during the winter months, in partnership with community.	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.6 Programming (k) p. 174	Carry out annual engagement with residents to co-create and implement new events and activities.	Thick
Culture and Recreation	10.7 Arts Management & Promotion (b) p. 176	Clarify and formalize a collaborative group of diverse stakeholders including Town representation, to lead advancement of arts and culture in Lunenburg and throughout the region, including designated positions for equity seeking groups. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thick
Governance	11.1 Internal Operations (h)	Create processes that empower all appropriate staff to take ownership of matters in their area of work, and undertake	Thick

	p. 180	collaboration with regional and community stakeholders.	
Governance	11.2 Local Engagement (a) p.181	Expand the Town’s communication plan to include a public participation strategy to guide protocols for involving the public in decision-making and implementation of relevant initiatives. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thin – thick
Governance	11.2 Local Engagement (c) p. 181	Enhance centralizing information and services to provide a 'one-stop-shop' service point that is integrated with a simplified online portal, to facilitate easy citizen interaction with the Town.	Thin
Governance	11.2 Local Engagement (e) p. 181	Reform municipal committees to build a culture of inclusion, with a particular focus on involvement of individuals from groups who are outside of mainstream power and influence. <i>*Included in the five-year implementation plan</i>	Thick
Governance	11.2 Local Engagement (f) p. 181	Pursue establishment of committees, task-forces, working groups or other participatory entities, including but not limited to the following issues: i) Youth Leadership ii) Anti-Racism and Decolonization iii) Accountability and Engagement iv) Housing.	Thick
Governance	11.3 Regional Cooperation (a) p. 182	Recommit to establishing frameworks and resources for ongoing relationship building between municipal and local leaders and	Thick

		regional stakeholders, even in the absence of specific projects.	
--	--	--	--

5.4 Detailed Analysis of the Five-Year Action Plan

This section provides a detailed analysis of the CCP’s five-year action plan (2020-2025), which outlines 35 key actions aimed at enhancing various facets of community life and prioritized for implementation (Town of Lunenburg, 2020). Of the 26 actions identified in Table 1 as conducive to public participation, 10 have been included in the five-year plan. These actions are described in more general terms compared to their detailed representation in the CCP. To ensure alignment with the broader goals of the CCP, the five-year plan includes a specific column titled "CCP section," which directly links each generalized action to specific sections of the CCP. This linkage provides context for the actions within the comprehensive framework of the plan and facilitates easier tracking and management of their implementation (Town of Lunenburg, 2020).

The most recent publicly available status update on the CCP, provided in March 2022 and published on the Town's website, indicates that several actions conducive to public participation are at various stages of implementation (Town of Lunenburg, 2022). However, the 2022 status update lists only the more generalized actions and does not reference certain specific actions explicitly designed for deeper community engagement. These omissions highlight a gap between the documented progress and the comprehensive scope of actions intended to be addressed within the first five years of the CCP. This discrepancy suggests that some detailed, action-oriented aspects of the plan may not be receiving full attention in the periodic updates, potentially impacting the overall progress and effectiveness of the CCP implementation.

To evaluate how the Town of Lunenburg has progressed on the actions identified as conducive to public participation since the last update in March 2022, publicly available Town documents were reviewed. This review included Council meeting recordings available on YouTube, the Town's official website featuring Council agenda packages and meeting minutes, Town-issued press releases, and updates posted on the Town's official social media pages on Facebook and Instagram. The aim was to assess the current status of these actions and the extent to which public participation has been integrated into their implementation.

The following analysis examines the 10 specific actions from the five-year plan that are most closely aligned with public participation, as identified in Table 1. Each action is evaluated based on its description, the relevant section of the CCP, the Town’s status

update in 2022, and information gathered from the review of publicly available documents and records. This analysis assesses the current implementation status and the extent of public involvement in these actions.

1. Action: Foster collaboration and data sharing among all housing stakeholders

CCP Section: 3.1 General (h,i)

2022 Status Update: Action 20 (as listed in the status update) – To move this action forward, the status update notes that the Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued an RFP for a Provincial Housing Needs Assessment for each of the province’s 49 municipalities in 2022/23, aiming to enhance collaboration and data sharing among housing stakeholders (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 4).

Researcher’s Review: The Province released the Town of Lunenburg Municipal Housing Needs Report in October 2023. As noted in the report, the Town of Lunenburg Municipal Housing Needs Report is intended to provide municipal governments with relevant, accurate data to better understand their current housing situation and anticipate future needs. It encourages municipalities to augment this data with local insights, fostering informed decision-making tailored to their contexts (Province of Nova Scotia, 2023, p. 1). However, the report does not outline specific strategies or detailed steps for continuing to foster collaboration and relationships with housing stakeholders. Despite being available on the Town's website, there is no record of this report being discussed on a Council agenda or one of its committee agendas.

2. Action: Guide the community through a participatory process to develop a recapitalization strategy for recreation and community facilities

CCP Section: 4.8 Community and Recreation Facilities (c)

2022 Status Update: This relates to Action 6 and Action 32 (as listed in the status update), noting that staff are preparing a report on the proposed drafting of a long-term Recreation and Culture Project Management Plan. However, there is no update specifically on the recapitalization strategy (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 5 & p.12).

Researcher’s Review: A review of all publicly available sources reveals no information suggesting that this action is being implemented, indicating a lack of progress on this strategy.

3. Action: Consider hosting regular community workshops (e.g. biannual) updating the community of sea level rise and climate change projections

CCP Section: 9.1 Sea Level Rise (j,k)

2022 Status Update: Action 15 (as listed in the status update) – the status update indicates an update on this action is “N/A” (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 10).

Researcher’s Review: A review of all publicly available sources reveals no evidence of progress on this action.

4. Action: Create an online documentation platform to upload images and stories of significant storm and sea level rise events

CCP Section: 9.1 Sea Level Rise (j,k)

2022 Status Update: Action 15 (as listed in the status update) – the status update indicates an update on this action is “N/A” (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 10).

Researcher’s Review: A review of all publicly available sources reveals no evidence of progress on this action.

5. Action: Create learning programs, workshops, or lectures that illuminate the more recently arrived identities that are present in Lunenburg

CCP Section: 10.1 Identity (b)

2022 Status Update: Action 11 (as listed in the status update) – TOL has progressed on this item by hosting annual events like African Heritage Month flag raisings and adopting a new Flag Raisings and Proclamations Policy. Additional efforts include a winter equipment loan program and the PRO Kids program, which align with broader inclusivity goals and are supported by anti-racism initiatives and town committee reforms (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 11).

Researcher’s Review: It is unclear how these programs are selected and whether there are opportunities for community input. Further clarification is needed to understand the process behind these initiatives, particularly in terms of how they engage community stakeholders in decision-making and program selection.

6. Action: Build relationships between the town and Mi'kmaq residents and organizations, and the town and Black residents and organizations in the area

CCP Section: 10.1 Identity (c)

2022 Status Update: Action 12 (as listed in the status update) – Status update points to Action 11 and Action 18 as the update, noting that hosting annual events such as African Heritage Month flag raisings and adopting a new Flag Raisings and Proclamations Policy, which standardizes special flag raisings, and the work of the Anti-Racism Special

Committee (ARSC) are steps in progressing this action to build relationships (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 12).

Researcher's Review:

Mi'kmaq Relationships: In December 2022, following a recommendation from TOL's Anti-Racism Committee, which has since been dissolved (Town of Lunenburg, 2023), Council voted to rename Cornwallis Street. In its recommendation, the anti-racism committee had proposed several Mi'kmaw names and recommended "Samqwan Street," noting that the street be renamed in alignment with the Committee's and the Town's objectives to support equity, diversity, inclusion, and dignity of all people. However, rather than adopting this recommendation, Council opened the decision to public input through a survey that included "Queen Street," a name previously discussed by the Committee. The survey presented nine options, seven of which were Mi'kmaw names, and asked respondents to rank their preferences (Town of Lunenburg, 2023).

In November 2023, survey results revealed that while 35% of respondents favoured "Queen Street," a majority of 51% preferred a Mi'kmaw name, though their votes were split among the seven options. Despite the preference for a Mi'kmaw name, Council chose "Queen Street," which drew criticism from some Anti-Racism Committee members, residents, and external observers. This criticism was documented through letters included in Council agenda packages and media articles. Subsequently, the Mayor expressed regret in a CTV news article, acknowledging the decision and the public engagement process as flawed. In that same article, a Wasoqopa'q (Acadia) First Nation band council member and a former member of TOL's anti-racism committee also expressed disappointment over the decision (Armstrong, 2023).

The Mayor has since stated that the decision will be revisited, and a new process will be considered for selecting a name (Armstrong, 2023). However, at the October 8, 2024 Council meeting, Council defeated a motion to rescind its original decision from November 28, 2023, which approved the renaming of Cornwallis Street to Queen Street. With this final direction, staff now have the necessary direction to begin the steps toward officially changing the street name from Cornwallis Street to Queen Street, as approved by Council (Town of Lunenburg, 2024). ¹

¹ Following the October 2024 Municipal Election, in December 2024, the newly elected Council for the Town of Lunenburg passed a motion to cease work on the renaming of Cornwallis Street subject to Council re-evaluation (Town of Lunenburg, 2025). As of June 2025, no publicly available updates have been provided on this item.

The situation surrounding the renaming of Cornwallis Street exemplifies poor public participation and could be perceived as a failed attempt to build constructive relationships with Mi'kmaq communities. This failure is evident in several key aspects:

- **Disregard for Committee Recommendations:** The Anti-Racism Committee recommended "Samqwan Street," a Mi'kmaw name. By opting for "Queen Street" despite this recommendation and the survey results favouring Mi'kmaw names, Council demonstrated a disregard for the Committee's insights. This action contradicts the principles of meaningful participation by failing to recognize the Committee's contributions, which could undermine trust in the Town and diminish the efficacy of future participation initiatives.
- **Perpetuation of Social Inequalities:** The choice to ignore the Mi'kmaw names, despite a clear preference expressed in the survey, reflects a perfunctory approach to public consultation. This approach can exacerbate social inequalities by giving the impression of inclusivity while fundamentally maintaining status quo decisions that do not reflect the diversity of community perspectives.
- **Skepticism and Dissatisfaction:** The public's response, including criticisms from Mi'kmaw community members and the Anti-Racism Committee, highlights dissatisfaction with the process. Such dissatisfaction aligns with literature suggesting that skepticism about the genuine impact of public consultations can lead to a disconnect between community input and decisions. This skepticism can also diminish trust in local government, undermining future engagement efforts and exacerbating community divisions.
- **Missed Opportunity for Relationship Building:** Effective relationship-building requires actions that recognize and respect community sentiments and cultural significance. Council's decision missed an opportunity to honour the Mi'kmaw community's heritage and contribute to reconciliation efforts, thereby failing to foster a sense of respect and inclusion.

Black Relationships: Other than the flag raising and the regional creation of an anti-racism committee, no publicly available documents suggest the Town is working towards building relationships between the Town and Black residents and organizations in the area.

7. Action: Create a special committee or action group to promote anti-racism and decolonization

CCP Section: 10.1 Identity (e)

2022 Status Update: Action 18 (as listed in the status update) – The Anti-Racism Committee filled two vacancies and initiated a regional approach with Lunenburg County municipalities and Acadia First Nation to combat racism collaboratively. Consultants were reassigned to draft terms of reference for a new county-wide anti-racism committee. This action also ties into enhancing inclusivity in town governance and cultural activities reforms (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 12).

Researcher’s Review: In 2023, TOL’s Anti-Racism Committee was dissolved to form a new Regional Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Committee with neighbouring communities. Although the terms of reference for this committee were approved in April 2023 (Town of Lunenburg, 2023), there has been no further information on the committee's formation or activities.

8. Action: Clarify and formalize a collaborative group of diverse stakeholders to lead advancement of arts and culture

CCP Section: 10.7 Arts Management and Promotion (b)

2022 Status Update: Action 11 (as listed in the status update) focuses on actions related to the overall action to “foster inclusivity in programming and leadership.” However, no specific mention or update exists on creating a collaborative group focused on advancing arts and culture in Lunenburg (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 11).

Researcher’s Review: To support this action, TOL made progress in June 2024 by approving the creation and terms of reference (TOR) for a Cultural Tourism Working Group. This group is tasked with completing the Cultural Tourism Economic Impact Study and Sustainable Cultural Tourism Plan as part of the Strategic Tourism Expansion Program. The working group comprises representatives from Lunenburg's public or non-profit culture sector, private or for-profit tourism sector, the Lunenburg Board of Trade, Lunenburg's maritime heritage and/or waterfront industries, Town of Lunenburg residents, and Council representatives (Town of Lunenburg, 2024). The formation of the Cultural Tourism Working Group is intended to align with effective public participation by fostering inclusivity and mutual respect through its diverse composition, which includes representatives from various sectors. This initiative aims to advance arts and culture in Lunenburg by ensuring diverse perspectives are included, potentially leading to well-rounded and comprehensive cultural development. Strategic planning through the proposed Cultural Tourism Economic Impact Study and Sustainable Cultural Tourism Plan is expected to provide a clear roadmap for growth, identifying economic benefits and sustainable practices. If successful, this improved collaboration among stakeholders could enhance the coordination of cultural projects and events, enriching the local cultural landscape.

9. Expand the town's communication plan to include a public participation strategy

CCP Section: 11.2 Local Engagement (a)

2022 Status Update: Action 9 (as listed in the status update): The status report notes that a Public Participation Program policy for Planning was expected to be presented to Council in April 2022 (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 13). A review of Council's policies shows that a Planning Public Participation Program Policy was approved by Council in April 2022, and then a revised version of this policy was approved by Council in June 2024 (Town of Lunenburg, 2024, p. 46-57).

Researcher's Review: Having a public participation program policy is a requirement of Nova Scotia's Municipal Government Act (S.204). As noted in the 2022 Planning Public Participation Program Policy, its purpose is to establish a planning public participation program for planning documents, which are defined by the MGA as a land-use bylaw, municipal planning strategy, and a subdivision bylaw for the Town of Lunenburg. While the policy provides for the use of public information meetings for the public to provide input on the adoption, revision, and/or amendment of planning documents, it does not provide any other mechanisms for the community to participate in any other municipal matters outside of planning documents (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p.1). In June 2024, the Town revised its Planning Public Participation Program Policy; however, revisions only focused on adding additional details to provide more clarity and details on the processes for hosting public participation meetings, also called public information meetings, once again specifically for planning documents, which is legislatively required by the Municipal Government Act (Town of Lunenburg, 2024). Due to being a legislative requirement, as it is currently written, the Planning Public Participation Program Policy is considered to be conventional participation. In contrast, a more comprehensive public participation policy could allow and set processes for think and thick engagement.

10. Reform municipal committees to build a culture of inclusion

CCP Section: 11.2 Local Engagement (e)

2022 Status Update: Action 3 (as listed in the status update): The status update suggests a proposed amendment to the Committees of Council Policy that includes Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) selection criteria (Town of Lunenburg, 2022, p. 13).

Researcher's Review: Council approved a new Committees Policy in October 2023 (Town of Lunenburg, 2023). There is no reference to EDI within the selection criteria. However, the revised Committees Policy partially aligns with the action to reform municipal committees to build a culture of inclusion, particularly focusing on involving individuals from groups outside mainstream power and influence. The policy demonstrates a commitment to

inclusivity through public advertising for committee vacancies, criteria that consider equitable and fair distribution of councillor appointments, and provisions for youth representation. However, it lacks explicit measures to prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented groups. There is no direct emphasis on recruiting individuals from marginalized communities, nor are there designated positions or targeted outreach efforts for these groups. Additionally, the policy could benefit from incorporating specific inclusivity training for committee members to foster a more inclusive culture. To fully align with the action, the policy would need to explicitly address these gaps and implement strategies to ensure the active participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds, thus strengthening its commitment to building an inclusive municipal committee culture.

The table below summarizes the 10 specific actions from the five-year plan that are most closely aligned with public participation. It includes columns for each action, the corresponding section of the CCP, the 2022 status update, and the researcher’s review.

Table 3: Summary of Five-Year Plan Actions Related to Public Participation

Action	CCP Section	2022 Status Update	Researcher’s Review
Foster collaboration and data sharing among all housing stakeholders	3.1 General (h,i)	Action 20 – Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued an RFP for a Provincial Housing Needs Assessment in 2022/23.	The report was released in October 2023. No specific strategies for fostering collaboration and relationships with housing stakeholders. No record of this report being discussed on a Council agenda.
Guide the community through a participatory process to develop a recapitalization strategy for	4.8 Community & Recreation Facilities (c)	Actions 6 and 32 – Staff are preparing a report on the proposed drafting of a long-term Recreation and	No evidence of progress on this strategy.

recreation and community facilities		Culture Project Management Plan.	
Consider hosting regular community workshops (e.g. biannual) updating the community of sea level rise and climate change projections	9.1 Sea Level Rise (j,k)	Action 15 – Update is “N/A”.	No evidence of progress on this action.
Create an online documentation platform to upload images and stories of significant storm and sea level rise events	9.1 Sea Level Rise (j,k)	Action 15 – Update is “N/A”.	No evidence of progress on this action.
Create learning programs, workshops, or lectures that illuminate the more recently arrived identities that are present in Lunenburg	10.1 Identity (b)	Action 11 – Hosting annual events like African Heritage Month flag raisings and adopting a new Flag Raisings and Proclamations Policy.	Unclear how these programs are selected and whether there are opportunities for community input. Further clarification is needed.
Build relationships between the town and Mi'kmaq residents and organizations, and the town and Black residents	10.1 Identity (c)	Action 12 – Hosting annual events and adopting a new Flag Raisings and Proclamations Policy, and the work of the Anti-	No significant progress on Mi'kmaq relationships. The decision on renaming Cornwallis Street highlighted poor public participation. No progress on building relationships

and organizations in the area		Racism Special Committee (ARSC).	with Black residents and organizations.
Create a special committee or action group to promote anti-racism and decolonization	10.1 Identity (e)	Action 18 – Formation of a Regional Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Committee with neighbouring communities.	The Anti-Racism Committee was dissolved, and a new Regional Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Committee was formed. No further information on the committee's formation or activities.
Clarify and formalize a collaborative group of diverse stakeholders to lead advancement of arts and culture	10.7 Arts Management and Promotion (b)	Action 11 – Focus on fostering inclusivity in programming and leadership.	Creation of a Cultural Tourism Working Group in June 2024 to complete the Cultural Tourism Economic Impact Study and Sustainable Cultural Tourism Plan.
Expand the town’s communication plan to include a public participation strategy	11.2 Local Engagement (a)	Action 9 – Public Participation Program policy for Planning was expected to be presented to Council in April 2022.	A Planning Public Participation Program Policy was approved in April 2022 and revised in June 2024. The policy focuses on planning documents and does not provide mechanisms for broader public participation in municipal matters.
Reform municipal committees to build a culture of inclusion	11.2 Local Engagement (e)	Action 3 – Proposed amendment to the Committees of Council Policy to include Equity,	A new Committees Policy was approved in October 2023. The policy demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity but lacks explicit

		Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) selection criteria.	measures to prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented groups. No direct emphasis on recruiting individuals from marginalized communities or designated positions for these groups.
--	--	--	---

Evaluating Public Participation in the Five-Year Action Plan

This detailed analysis of the five-year action plan reveals that while several actions conducive to public participation have been identified, their implementation often lacks the depth of engagement originally envisioned in the CCP. There is a clear need for the Town of Lunenburg to develop more robust and detailed public participation strategies to ensure that these actions are not only implemented but also effectively engage the community in meaningful ways. The CCP initially laid out an ambitious framework for public participation, aligning with thick participation models. However, as of this writing, this five-year plan from 2020-2025 shows significant gaps in execution. The actions included in the plan are often implemented without comprehensive public involvement, which diminishes the potential impact of these initiatives. For instance, the plan highlights the importance of fostering collaboration among housing stakeholders and guiding the community through participatory processes for recreational facilities. Yet, the actual progress on these fronts, as indicated by the status updates and the researcher's review, shows minimal engagement efforts.

The status updates from March 2022, along with subsequent reviews for this analysis, indicate that many of the actions have either not been initiated or are progressing without substantial public input. This suggests that the Town of Lunenburg is not meeting the priorities outlined in its five-year plan. To address this issue, the Town must prioritize the creation of detailed, actionable plans for ongoing public participation. This involves establishing mechanisms for regular community input and ensuring these mechanisms are well-publicized and accessible. Clear guidelines on the practical aspects of engagement – identifying who to involve, how, and when – are crucial. Without these measures, the Town risks missing valuable community insights and failing to align its actions with the broader goals of the CCP.

5.5 Summary of Findings for Findings 1

This chapter has provided a detailed review of the Town of Lunenburg's CCP and its implementation progress, specifically focusing on public participation. The findings highlight several important aspects of the plan's development and execution:

- **Successful Initial Public Engagement:** The development phase of the CCP, facilitated through Project Lunenburg, involved significant community input, with over 400 participants contributing to the plan's creation. This robust engagement aligns with best practices for meaningful participation, as evidenced by the inclusive workshops and stakeholder consultations.
- **Challenges in Sustaining Engagement:** Despite this strong foundation, there has been a clear gap in ongoing public participation during the implementation phase. While the CCP emphasizes the need for continued involvement, the findings reveal limited public input on key actions since the plan's approval in 2020. This has resulted in community calls for more active and transparent dialogue with the Town Council.
- **Lack of Detailed Guidelines for Engagement:** One of the main challenges identified is the absence of specific mechanisms or guidelines for how public participation should be sustained throughout the implementation of the CCP. The plan sets broad goals for community involvement but lacks the practical details necessary to ensure consistent engagement.
- **Mixed Progress on Public Participation Actions:** Of the 26 actions identified as critical for fostering public participation, only a few have shown tangible progress. The analysis found that several actions have either stalled or been implemented without meaningful public input, limiting their effectiveness and alignment with the community's needs.

These findings underscore the importance of developing a more structured and detailed public participation strategy as the Town of Lunenburg moves forward with its long-term goals. As the discussion section will explore, addressing these gaps is essential for fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and effective governance model in the future.

6.0 Findings 2: Councillors' Perspectives on Public Participation

For this project, six of the seven Town of Lunenburg Council members elected for the 2020-2024 term participated in one-on-one interviews, with all councillors invited to participate. This Council was responsible for approving the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) in 2020, which included an objective to develop a public participation strategy aimed at enhancing resident involvement in the town’s decision-making processes. The interviews, each approximately 1.5 hours long, were designed to gather insights into councillors’ views on public participation, its current state in Lunenburg, and their aspirations for improving community engagement.

The interviews examined councillors’ views on current public engagement practices, aspirations for expanding participation, and barriers to effective involvement. They also explored how stakeholder input influences decision-making, the impact of improved participation on governance and trust, and the sustainability of engagement initiatives. Councillors reflected on their roles in fostering public participation and offered recommendations for enhancing Lunenburg’s engagement efforts. A complete list of interview questions is provided in Appendix A.

Each participant has been assigned a number (Councillor 1-6) to maintain anonymity while attributing specific insights to councillors throughout this analysis. The table below outlines the councillors' roles and assigned numbers.

Table 4: Councillor Interviewee Table

Councillor Interviewee Number	Role
C.1	Councillor
C.2	Councillor
C.3	Councillor
C.4	Councillor
C.5	Councillor
C.6	Councillor

Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices

The councillors shared varied perspectives on the town’s current public engagement practices, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Formal engagement processes, particularly those mandated by legislation, such as public hearings and participation meetings, were generally viewed as effective in gathering public input on key issues like urban planning and development (C1-6). These structured processes provide clear guidelines for when and how public input should be collected, ensuring that residents' opinions are considered in important decisions. One example cited by councillors as a positive use of public participation was the proposed King’s Hotel development on Pelham Street (C2, C5).² The public participation meeting for this project, which the Municipal Government Act legislatively required, served as an opportunity for residents to voice concerns, and councillors felt it was a valuable demonstration of how mandated public participation can shape decision-making. The project was ultimately shelved in part due to the concerns raised by the community (C2, C5).

Additionally, councillors pointed to the three public input sessions held for the Blockhouse Hill development as a good example of how the town went beyond legislated requirements to engage the public (C1, C4, C6).³ These sessions allowed for more in-depth feedback before Council was scheduled to make any decisions. Despite these successes, councillors consistently identified gaps in the town's current approach to public engagement. One significant issue was the clarity of communication between the town and its residents (C1-6). In some instances, such as the contentious vending bylaw debate, councillors noted that the town’s objectives were not clearly communicated, leading to public confusion and misinformation (C1, C3, C5)⁴. According to councillors, this lack of

² The King’s Hotel development involved plans to demolish an adjacent building and construct an extension with 14 more units and a two-level parking garage. Despite claims that the project would boost the local economy, residents voiced strong opposition from residents (CBC, 2021).

³ In early 2023, the Town of Lunenburg announced plans to develop Blockhouse Hill, a significant Town-owned property in Old Town Lunenburg, with a focus on residential housing. The project aims to balance heritage preservation with new development. In February 2023, the Town issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to gather design proposals. On June 13, 2023, the contract for the Blockhouse Hill Design Project was awarded to MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects. The RFP outlined the need for at least three public engagements, culminating in a “What We Heard Report” and a final report presentation. Public workshops were held on September 14, October 19, and November 16, 2023, and the feedback from these sessions was presented to Council in December 2023. The final design options, refined based on public input, were presented to Council on January 23, 2024 (Town of Lunenburg, 2024). However, concerns about a perceived lack of community involvement and transparency led some residents to organize against the project, forming the advocacy group Friends of Blockhouse Hill (Friends of Blockhouse Hill, n.d.).

⁴ In April 2023, the Town of Lunenburg introduced a draft vending bylaw aimed at regulating street vendors. However, during a public hearing, local business owners and residents expressed concerns about the lack of prior consultation. These objections prompted the postponement of the bylaw's approval. As of this writing,

clarity resulted in reactive opposition based on misunderstandings rather than informed feedback (C3, C5).

Councillors also raised concerns about the inconsistency of feedback loops in the town's engagement process. Although the town collects public input on many projects through hearings, public participation meetings, and surveys, there was often little follow-up to show how this feedback influenced final decisions (C1-6). This leaves residents feeling uncertain about whether their contributions had any impact, fostering disengagement and skepticism about the value of participation (C2, C6). Councillors suggested that increasing transparency and communication, such as providing regular updates on how community input shaped decisions, could help rebuild trust between the town and its residents, reinforcing the importance of civic involvement (C1-6).

Aspirations for Public Participation

Councillors expressed a collective desire to shift Lunenburg's public participation model from a reactive, formalized system to a more inclusive, proactive approach that fosters continuous engagement (C1-6). They envisioned a model where residents are engaged earlier in the decision-making process, particularly for significant projects such as town planning, infrastructure changes, and development initiatives (C2, C5). Early engagement was seen as a way to pre-empt opposition, minimize resistance, and build stronger relationships with the community (C2, C3). One councillor noted that addressing concerns early in discussions could lead to smoother decision-making processes and greater public buy-in (C3).

In addition to advocating for earlier engagement, councillors supported the idea of more informal methods of gathering public input. While formal council meetings and public hearings are necessary, they acknowledged that these settings can be intimidating or inaccessible for many residents (C1-6). Councillors highlighted the need for alternative engagement opportunities that allow for more relaxed, conversational interactions. Ideas such as community drop-in sessions, casual "coffee with council" meetings, or town hall-style gatherings in more informal settings were widely supported as ways to encourage broader participation (C1, C4, C6).

They also recognized the importance of reaching underrepresented groups, particularly younger residents, newcomers, and racial minorities, who are often absent from traditional public participation processes (C2, C5, C6). To engage these populations, councillors suggested more creative outreach strategies, such as hosting meetings at varied times or

no further revisions or public engagement opportunities have been undertaken by the town (Town of Lunenburg, YouTube, 2023).

locations that are convenient for these demographics (C3, C5). Some councillors recommended leveraging digital tools and social media more effectively to reach younger, tech-savvy residents (C4, C6). By expanding the town's public participation efforts to include a wider range of voices, councillors believe Lunenburg could better reflect its residents' diverse needs and concerns in local decision-making (C1-6).

Barriers to Effective Participation

Despite their aspirations for more inclusive public engagement, councillors acknowledged several barriers that hinder meaningful participation (C1-6). One of the most persistent challenges discussed was the dominance of vocal minorities in public forums (C1, C3, C6). Councillors frequently mentioned that individuals with strong opinions on specific issues tend to dominate public meetings and hearings, making it difficult for the broader community's needs to be fully represented (C3, C6). This skewed representation results in decision-making disproportionately influenced by a few loud voices rather than reflecting the opinions of the wider population (C3, C6). Councillors expressed frustration with this dynamic, recognizing that it undermines the goal of truly inclusive public participation (C1, C3).

Social media has also contributed to this challenge by amplifying misinformation and creating an environment where rumours and inaccuracies can quickly spread (C1-6). Councillors recounted several instances where public opposition to projects, such as the Blockhouse Hill development, was fueled by misinformation circulating on social media platforms (C2, C4). One councillor noted that social media can create echo chambers where the loudest and most misinformed voices dominate the conversation, drowning out more reasoned perspectives (C2). This environment makes it difficult for the town to engage in productive dialogue with the community and build consensus on contentious issues (C2, C5). Councillors agreed that combatting misinformation requires a more proactive approach to communication, ensuring that accurate, clear, and accessible information is provided to residents early and consistently (C1-6).

Logistical barriers, such as the timing and accessibility of meetings, also hinder broader participation (C1, C3). Many residents, particularly those with work or family commitments, find it challenging to attend meetings in the evenings or during the workweek (C2, C4). Several councillors suggested that offering meetings at varied times or providing virtual participation options could help address this issue and make it easier for more people to engage with local government (C1, C2). Councillors noted that certain groups, such as seniors and younger residents, are often left out of the conversation (C4, C6). Simplifying messaging and using visual aids to explain complex policy issues were

recommended as ways to make public participation more accessible to a broader audience (C3, C6).

Integrating Community Needs into Decision-Making

According to some councillors, one of the central challenges in Lunenburg's public participation process is effectively integrating stakeholder needs into decision-making (C2, C5). While councillors acknowledged the importance of public feedback, they also noted the difficulty of balancing community desires with the practical realities of governance, such as budget constraints, legal requirements, and long-term strategic goals (C3, C4, C6). Several councillors emphasized the need to manage public expectations by clearly communicating that while public input is highly valued, it may not always align with the town's final decisions (C3, C6). The challenge lies in ensuring that the public feels heard and that their feedback is considered, even when it is not fully implemented (C1, C6).

Councillors agreed that the town would benefit from more structured engagement strategies that clarify how and when public feedback will be integrated into decision-making, particularly for large-scale projects like land use planning and development (C1-6). Early and ongoing engagement was seen as crucial to preventing opposition that often arises when the public feels excluded from the process (C3, C5). Additionally, councillors emphasized the need for ongoing engagement throughout the lifespan of a project, not just at the initial stages (C2, C5). They suggested that periodic updates, follow-up consultations, and continued communication would keep the community informed and involved, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings or surprise opposition as a project progresses (C3, C5).

Councillors recognized that not all decisions require the same level of public consultation (C1-6). They stressed the need for clear guidelines that differentiate between decisions requiring extensive public input and those that can be managed more efficiently by staff and council without lengthy engagement processes (C2, C6). Some councillors pointed out that certain operational or administrative decisions, such as minor zoning adjustments or routine town management, might not necessitate the same depth of public involvement as large development projects (C3, C5). By streamlining these smaller decisions and focusing extensive engagement efforts on more significant issues, the town could ensure more efficient governance while maintaining meaningful public involvement in decisions that matter most to the community (C1-6).

Impact of Enhanced Participation on Governance and Trust

Rebuilding trust in local governance emerged as a key theme, with councillors acknowledging the lasting impact of past leadership that appeared dismissive of public

input (C1-6). This legacy of mistrust has made it difficult for the town to fully engage its residents, as some view council decisions skeptically (C3, C4). Councillors agreed that addressing this mistrust requires more opportunities for public participation and a cultural shift within the council toward greater openness, transparency, and responsiveness (C1-6).

Transparency was frequently mentioned as a key factor in fostering trust (C1-6).

Councillors emphasized that even when public input cannot be fully implemented, it is essential to clearly explain the rationale behind decisions (C3, C4). This includes communicating why certain suggestions were not feasible or why a particular course of action was chosen (C3, C5). In projects like Blockhouse Hill, councillors recognized that public mistrust remains a significant obstacle despite their efforts to communicate all the project details (C3, C4). This highlights the need for consistent, clear communication to address concerns and manage expectations, particularly when projects are complex or contentious (C1, C3).

Councillors also stressed the importance of early engagement in building trust (C1, C5). By involving residents from the outset, the town can demonstrate that it values public input and is committed to making decisions that reflect the community's needs (C3, C5). Early and continuous engagement, rather than consultation at the final stages, was seen as key to reducing opposition and fostering a more collaborative relationship between the council and the community (C1, C6). Councillors expressed that this proactive approach would also address potential issues before they escalate, ensuring smoother decision-making and reinforcing the notion that residents' concerns are being heard and considered in a timely manner (C1-6).

Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives

Councillors recognized that for public participation to be sustainable, it must evolve beyond sporadic meetings or forums and become an integral part of governance (C1-6). Building a culture of open, continuous dialogue throughout the council's term was seen as essential for maintaining long-term engagement (C1-6). Councillors advocated for ongoing training for both council members and staff to improve their facilitation skills and help ensure that public meetings are run efficiently and effectively (C1, C3). Moreover, it was suggested that the town should look to other municipalities that have successfully implemented innovative public participation methods, with a view to adapting those strategies to suit Lunenburg's unique needs (C2, C4).

Flexibility in the town's approach to public participation was also emphasized as key to maintaining sustained engagement (C1-6). Councillors suggested that the town should be adaptable in its methods, recognizing that different projects or issues may require varying

levels of public involvement (C3, C5). Tailoring the approach to match the scope and significance of a decision would allow the town to allocate resources more effectively and ensure that participation efforts are proportionate to the matter at hand (C1-6). Councillors underscored the importance of creating a structured yet adaptable framework that encourages public participation while being realistic about what can be achieved (C3, C6).

Role and Influence of Elected Officials

The role and influence of elected officials in fostering meaningful public participation were also widely discussed (C1-6). Councillors emphasized their responsibility to create opportunities for engagement beyond formal meetings, recognizing that their visibility and approachability are crucial to encouraging residents to engage with local government (C2, C4). Several noted the importance of attending community events, holding informal meetings, and maintaining an ongoing dialogue with residents to bridge the gap between the public and town hall (C1, C4, C5). By being present and accessible, councillors believed they could build stronger relationships with residents and foster a sense of trust and collaboration (C1-6).

One councillor highlighted how attending local events allows for conversations that feel less intimidating than formal council sessions, helping councillors gain insight into the concerns of a wider range of residents (C4). Informal "coffee with council" sessions and drop-in meetings were seen as valuable opportunities to engage with residents who might not feel comfortable speaking in a formal setting (C1, C3). These informal interactions help to demystify local government and create a more approachable and relatable connection between councillors and the community (C1, C4). Councillors stressed the importance of maintaining this type of engagement throughout their term, not just during election periods, to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to listening and responding to residents' concerns (C1-6).

Reflections and Recommendations

Councillors offered several reflections and recommendations for improving public participation in Lunenburg. One of the most significant recommendations was the development of a formal public participation strategy that would provide clear guidelines for when and how public input is sought, tailored to the specific nature of the decision being considered (C1-6). Such a strategy would help manage public expectations by making the engagement process more predictable and transparent, ensuring that residents understand how their feedback is considered in the town's decision-making processes (C1-6).

Improved communication strategies were also widely supported (C1-6). Councillors pointed to the need for a more proactive approach to address misinformation and ensure that residents are receiving accurate, clear, and timely information (C3, C5). This would involve regular updates on ongoing projects and decisions, ensuring that residents are kept informed and understand how their input has influenced the outcome (C3, C6). By providing these updates, councillors believed that the town could create a more open and transparent environment, fostering trust and encouraging continued public participation (C1-6).

Inclusivity was another key theme in the councillors' recommendations (C1-6). They stressed the importance of engaging underrepresented groups, such as younger residents, minorities, and those with busy schedules, through more flexible outreach methods (C3, C5, C6). Councillors also emphasized the need to create safe and respectful environments for public participation, with firm guidelines to prevent hostile behaviours that might discourage broader engagement (C1, C3, C6). By creating spaces where all residents feel comfortable sharing their opinions, councillors hoped to build a more diverse and representative civic dialogue that better reflects the needs and aspirations of Lunenburg's entire population (C1-6).

In conclusion, councillors expressed a strong commitment to making public participation a meaningful part of the town's decision-making process (C1-6). They recognized that public engagement must go beyond formality and truly reflect the concerns and ideas of Lunenburg's diverse community (C1-6). Through early engagement, transparency, and sustained efforts to involve all residents, councillors were optimistic that the town's public participation processes could be strengthened to build a more inclusive, trusting, and engaged community (C1-6). These recommendations reflect a clear desire to not only enhance the mechanics of public participation but also to foster a cultural shift towards a more collaborative and responsive local government (C1-6).

6.1 Researcher's Analysis: Council's Understanding of Public Participation

The interviews with Lunenburg's councillors revealed a recognition of the importance of public participation, particularly in shaping significant town projects and strengthening relationships with residents. Councillors frequently expressed a desire to enhance public engagement through both formal mechanisms and informal outreach, acknowledging the need for early and ongoing involvement from residents (C1-6). However, while there is clear intent to improve participation, the councillors' understanding of what constitutes meaningful and sustained public engagement is somewhat limited. Their approach tends to emphasize gathering input at set points rather than fostering a continuous, collaborative

relationship with the public. This analysis explores how councillors view participation, aligns with their aspirations, and highlights gaps that need addressing for more inclusive and transformative engagement.

Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices

The interviews with Lunenburg's councillors revealed an understanding of public participation primarily as a means of shaping significant town projects and fostering connections with residents. Councillors emphasized the value of both formal mechanisms, such as public hearings, and informal methods, like community conversations, to encourage public input. However, their perspective on meaningful and sustained public engagement often leaned toward compliance with legislated requirements rather than adopting a collaborative, ongoing process of governance. This analysis evaluates councillors' perspectives on public participation through key themes, linking their insights to theoretical frameworks and identifying opportunities for transformative engagement.

Councillors described current public participation practices as essential but framed them within the constraints of traditional, compliance-driven approaches. Formal mechanisms such as public hearings were seen as critical for ensuring community input on significant decisions (C1-6). However, the reliance on these methods reflects a "conventional" participation model, where residents primarily react to pre-determined agendas rather than co-creating solutions, as described by Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015).

While councillors acknowledged the value of public input, their approach often emphasized managing dissent rather than fully integrating residents into decision-making from the outset. This aligns with critiques in the literature that highlight the limitations of conventional participation, which may meet legal requirements but fail to empower citizens as co-creators of policy (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2015). For example, councillors referred to the discussions around Blockhouse Hill, where no formal decisions had been made regarding the possible sale of the lands. However, the lack of clear and proactive communication about this possibility created a community perception that input was being sought reactively, after decisions were already informally set (C2, C5). To move beyond this perception, councillors could adopt iterative engagement strategies that incorporate resident feedback at multiple stages, ensuring transparency and demonstrating a commitment to collaborative governance. Such approaches align with Michels and Binnema's (2019) emphasis on relational and sustained participation, fostering trust and inclusion throughout the decision-making process.

Aspirations for Public Participation

Councillors expressed a desire to broaden public participation through informal methods, such as “coffee with council” sessions, drop-in meetings, and town hall-style gatherings (C1, C3, C4, C6). These ideas align with Quick and Feldman’s (2011) call for informal, trust-building interactions that reduce barriers to engagement, particularly for underrepresented groups. Councillors highlighted the importance of creating spaces where residents feel comfortable voicing concerns, recognizing that traditional settings often intimidate or exclude some participants (C1-6). However, while these aspirations demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, they lack a clear framework for linking informal engagement to formal decision-making processes. Without structured pathways to translate informal feedback into actionable policy, these initiatives risk being perceived as symbolic rather than substantive (Fung, 2015). For example, the Grandview-Woodland Citizens’ Assembly provides a model where informal discussions were systematically incorporated into municipal planning, ensuring that community input directly shaped policy outcomes (Magnusson, 2020). Councillors could adapt such approaches to align informal engagement methods with formal governance structures, reinforcing their aspirations for deeper community involvement.

Barriers to Effective Participation

Councillors identified significant barriers to effective participation, including the dominance of vocal minorities, misinformation on social media, and limited participation from marginalized groups (C1, C3, C5). They expressed frustration with the outsized influence of small, organized groups in public forums, which often skews the broader community’s perspective and marginalizes quieter voices. This critique reflects Arnstein’s (1969) observation that traditional engagement methods often exclude underrepresented groups, perpetuating systemic inequalities.

To address these barriers, councillors could adopt facilitation techniques that create equitable dialogue and ensure diverse participation, as recommended by Arnstein (1969) and Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015). Additionally, proactive communication strategies, such as countering misinformation with transparent and accessible updates, could help rebuild trust and encourage broader engagement. The literature suggests that addressing these barriers requires not only logistical fixes but also a cultural shift toward inclusive, relational governance (Jamal & Newbold, 2023).

Integrating Stakeholder Needs into Decision-Making

Councillors acknowledged that public input is valuable, but many framed it in terms of managing expectations rather than integrating stakeholder needs into final decisions (C1, C5). They frequently spoke about how, while public participation is important, the final decisions ultimately rest with elected officials and that not every suggestion can be acted upon due to budget constraints or legal requirements (C2, C4). This perspective suggests a more traditional approach to governance, where participation is advisory rather than collaborative.

In contrast, the literature advocates for public participation models that go beyond collecting input and instead actively involve residents in shaping decisions (Fung, 2015). Co-governance models, such as citizen advisory boards or participatory budgeting, provide residents with ongoing opportunities to contribute to town policies in a more direct and structured way. Councillors could bridge the gap by implementing such mechanisms, ensuring that public input is seen as feedback and a central part of decision-making (C3, C6). Closing the feedback loop is also critical – councillors should make it clear to residents how their input has influenced decisions, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability within the community (C1, C5).

Impact of Enhanced Participation on Governance and Trust

Councillors repeatedly mentioned that rebuilding trust between the council and the community is a priority (C1-6). Many recognized that involving residents earlier in the decision-making process could help mitigate opposition and foster stronger relationships (C2, C4, C5). This reflects an understanding that early engagement is crucial for building trust, a view that is supported by the literature (Meijer et al., 2012). However, while councillors emphasized the importance of early involvement, they often framed it as a way to manage opposition rather than as an opportunity to collaborate with residents throughout the process (C3, C6).

The literature suggests that trust is built through continuous involvement and shared decision-making, not just through early engagement before final decisions are made (Michels & Binnema, 2019). To fully address this issue, councillors could shift their approach from seeking early input to creating opportunities for residents to be involved in all project stages (C2, C5). This could include co-design workshops or establishing citizen panels that allow residents to play an active role in shaping town projects over time (C1, C3). Such strategies would demonstrate a commitment to transparency and partnership, helping to rebuild trust and foster a more collaborative governance model.

Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives

While councillors recognize the need for flexibility, their solutions tend to focus on short-term adjustments, such as varying meeting times or incorporating digital tools (C1, C3, C6). These are important steps, but the literature stresses that sustainable participation requires embedding public engagement into the fabric of governance (Head & Alford, 2015). Councillors could work toward institutionalizing participatory practices by advocating for empowered advisory boards to make meaningful participation or structured public engagement strategies that ensure continuous public involvement, not just during major projects (C4, C5).

Role and Influence of Elected Officials

Councillors clearly understand their role as facilitators of public participation (C1-6). Many spoke of the importance of being visible in the community, attending events, and engaging with residents in informal settings (C2, C5). These efforts are important for building relationships and maintaining a sense of approachability. However, the literature suggests that elected officials should also act as champions of systemic changes that institutionalize public participation (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Beyond facilitating conversations, councillors could advocate for reforms that embed participation into the town's governance model, ensuring that residents have a meaningful role in decision-making processes on an ongoing basis (C3, C6).

Conclusion: Aligning Council's Vision with Sustainable Participation

The councillors' perspectives on public participation reflect a sincere commitment to fostering stronger relationships with residents and ensuring community input is considered in municipal decision-making. Their focus on both formal mechanisms, such as public hearings, and informal methods, such as community drop-in sessions, demonstrates a recognition of the need for diverse engagement approaches. However, their understanding of participation remains largely procedural, emphasizing compliance with legislative requirements and reactionary engagement rather than adopting a transformative, collaborative governance model.

Councillors clearly value public input, yet their approach often frames participation as advisory rather than empowering. Projects like Blockhouse Hill illustrate this dynamic. While no formal decisions had been made, communication gaps created the perception of reactive participation, where input was sought after key decisions seemed predetermined. This dynamic aligns with Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation and Fung's (2015) call for

co-governance, both of which stress the importance of involving the public throughout the decision-making process.

Barriers to participation also emerged as a theme. Councillors highlighted the challenges posed by vocal minorities and the spread of misinformation, which often distort public discourse. While proposed solutions, such as proactive communication and varied meeting formats, address surface-level issues, they do not tackle deeper systemic challenges like equity and relational trust. The literature underscores that meaningful participation requires creating inclusive spaces where marginalized voices can contribute constructively (Arnstein, 1969; Jamal & Newbold, 2023). By fostering balanced discussions through diverse platforms, councillors could ensure more equitable and representative engagement. The councillors' aspirations to broaden participation through informal methods, such as "coffee with council," demonstrate a genuine desire to connect with residents in accessible ways. Yet, these efforts risk being perceived as symbolic without clear pathways to integrate informal feedback into formal decision-making. Fung's (2015) framework highlights the need for informal participation to produce actionable outcomes. Developing robust systems to link these casual interactions to policy decisions would enhance their credibility and ensure they contribute to meaningful change.

Rebuilding trust with the community remains a priority for councillors. Early engagement in project planning is viewed as a key step toward this goal, but councillors often equate trust with explaining decisions rather than creating opportunities for shared decision-making. As Michels and Binnema (2019) argue, trust is cultivated through continuous, transparent involvement, not one-way communication. By adopting co-governance models that enable residents to contribute throughout a project's lifecycle, councillors could demonstrate a stronger commitment to partnership and accountability.

Despite their efforts, councillors' strategies often focus on short-term adjustments, such as varying meeting times or leveraging digital tools, rather than embedding sustainable practices into governance. Institutionalizing participatory mechanisms, such as permanent advisory boards or iterative feedback systems, would ensure that public engagement becomes a foundational element of municipal operations. This aligns with Bryson's (2018) emphasis on integrating participation into the fabric of governance and the OECD's (2022) recommendation to adapt engagement strategies to evolving community needs.

Finally, councillors' roles as facilitators of public participation position them as potential champions of systemic reform. While their commitment to visibility and informal engagement is evident, there is a missed opportunity for councillors to advocate for institutional changes that sustain participatory practices beyond their terms. As Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) suggest, elected officials should leverage their influence to promote

structural reforms, ensuring public participation remains a core priority within governance frameworks.

In conclusion, the councillors’ perspectives reveal a desire to enhance public participation, but their current approach often prioritizes compliance and reactionary engagement over systemic reform and sustained collaboration. By addressing communication gaps, institutionalizing iterative feedback mechanisms, and championing structural changes, councillors could move toward a transformative model of participation. This would align with best practices in the literature while positioning Lunenburg as a leader in inclusive, collaborative governance that reflects its community’s diverse needs and aspirations.

6.2 Summary of Councillors' Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices

The following table summarizes the key themes identified from the councillors' interviews, alongside the recommendations and action items proposed by the councillors to enhance public participation in Lunenburg. Additionally, the table highlights gaps in the councillors’ understanding of public participation, as identified through the researcher’s analysis based on the literature review conducted for this project. These gaps reflect missed opportunities to foster more inclusive, continuous, and collaborative engagement, emphasizing the need to shift from procedural compliance to more meaningful, systemic participation practices.

Table 5: Summary of Councillors' Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices

General Themes	Recommendations	Action Items	Gaps Identified by Researcher
Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices	Improve communication clarity to avoid public confusion; implement consistent feedback loops to keep the public informed about decision outcomes.	Regular updates to the community; clear messaging on decisions.	Lack of continuous feedback to the public after consultations; communication gaps stem from insufficient two-way dialogue mechanisms.
Aspirations for Public Participation	Adopt more informal engagement strategies such as community drop-in sessions and 'coffee with council' meetings to make	Introduce regular informal public meetings; expand outreach to younger and underrepresented groups.	Limited focus on how informal strategies will integrate with formal decision-making; no structured pathways for

	participation less intimidating.		translating feedback from informal sessions into actionable policies.
Barriers to Effective Participation	Counter misinformation on social media; broaden participation by offering more accessible meeting times and virtual options.	Proactively communicate accurate information on major projects like Blockhouse Hill; schedule meetings at varied times.	Focuses on managing public perception rather than addressing deeper issues of empowerment, equity, and the barriers faced by marginalized groups in traditional engagement forums.
Integrating Stakeholder Needs into Decision-Making	Develop structured engagement strategies clarifying when and how public feedback is used in decision-making.	Early engagement in projects to gather feedback and adjust proposals as needed; regular updates to close the feedback loop.	Councillors often focus on managing expectations rather than redistributing decision-making power to the public or clearly communicating how feedback is incorporated at different project stages.
Impact of Enhanced Participation on Governance and Trust	Foster transparency by explaining decisions even when public input is not fully implemented; involve residents early in project planning.	Provide clear explanations for decision-making; initiate engagement at the beginning of large projects.	Councillors often equate trust-building with one-way communication (explaining decisions) rather than creating opportunities for continuous dialogue and shared decision-making with residents.
Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives	Institutionalize public participation practices to ensure long-term engagement; adapt strategies as community needs change.	Regular training for councillors and staff; use digital tools for broader reach.	Focuses on short-term logistical fixes (e.g., varied meeting times) rather than embedding sustainable participatory practices, such as

			permanent advisory boards or participatory budgeting, into governance structures.
Role and Influence of Elected Officials	Encourage councillors to take proactive roles in engaging with the public beyond formal meetings; increase visibility at community events.	Attend informal community gatherings; maintain ongoing dialogue with residents throughout their term.	Councillors focus on informal engagement but lack plans to leverage their influence to promote systemic changes in participation practices or to advocate for institutional reforms.
Reflections and Recommendations	Develop a formal public participation strategy with clear guidelines for how and when public input is integrated into decisions.	Create a public participation policy; improve communication to counter misinformation and enhance inclusivity.	Strategies for engaging marginalized groups remain surface-level and do not address deeper issues of social exclusion, power imbalances, or how to truly integrate diverse voices into decision-making.

7.0 Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives on Public Participation

For this project, five Town of Lunenburg staff members, whose roles can involve aspects of public engagement and participation, participated in one-on-one interviews. While public participation is not the primary focus of their positions, their responsibilities periodically require them to engage with the community or contribute to related initiatives. These staff members provided insights into the town's current practices and aspirations for fostering more effective public involvement.

The interviews, ranging from one to 1.5 hours in length, explored their perceptions of Lunenburg's public engagement framework, the barriers and challenges they face, and their recommendations for improving community participation. Staff reflected on key

themes, including current engagement practices, aspirations for public participation, barriers to effective engagement, and strategies for integrating stakeholder input into municipal decision-making. They also shared their perspectives on the potential impact of enhanced public participation on governance and trust, as well as the sustainability and adaptability of participation initiatives. A full list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Each participant has been assigned a number to maintain anonymity while attributing specific insights to councillors throughout this analysis (Staff 1-5). The table below outlines the staff's role and their assigned number.

Table 6: Staff Interviewee Table

Councillor Interviewee Number	Role
S1	Staff
S2	Staff
S3	Staff
S4	Staff
S5	Staff

Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices

Staff highlighted both strengths and limitations in Lunenburg’s public participation framework, reflecting on its evolution and effectiveness. They noted progress in transparency and accessibility through initiatives such as the increased use of social media and public input sections as a standing Council agenda item (S1-S5). While these tools have improved participation, some staff noted these processes often feel transactional, meeting legal obligations without fostering meaningful connections or trust (S2, S4). For instance, S4 emphasized that formal hearings frequently leave residents feeling unheard, even when their input is recorded, as outcomes rarely address broader community concerns.

Beyond legislated requirements, staff pointed to the success of initiatives like workshops for the heritage conservation district plan, which employed "thick participation" methods to facilitate in-depth dialogue and collaboration. These sessions, praised for capturing nuanced perspectives and strengthening trust between staff and residents, were resource-

intensive and difficult to replicate consistently in a small municipality (S3, S5). Staff also emphasized the need for follow-up communication to demonstrate how public input influences decisions. Without consistent feedback loops, participants often felt skeptical about engagement efforts and questioned the value of their contributions (S1, S4).

Social media emerged as both a tool and a challenge. Platforms like Facebook allow for rapid information dissemination but also amplify misinformation and foster negativity, particularly around contentious issues like the proposed development of Blockhouse Hill and the proposed lawn naturalization policy (S3, S5). Staff advocated for proactive communication through official channels, emphasizing regular updates and clear explanations of decisions as essential for countering misinformation and building trust (S1, S4).

Aspirations for Public Participation

Staff envisioned a more dynamic and adaptable approach to public participation, emphasizing accessibility, transparency, and flexibility to meet the diverse needs of the community (S1, S3, S5). Tailoring engagement methods to the complexity and significance of each project was seen as critical. For example, high-impact projects might require deeper engagement, such as workshops or focus groups, while routine matters could be addressed through informational updates (S1, S2, S5).

To broaden outreach, staff advocated for informal methods like drop-in sessions, community conversations at markets, and “meet the staff” events in accessible spaces. These settings were viewed as less intimidating than formal meetings and more likely to foster open dialogue (S3, S4, S5). Inclusivity was a central theme, with a focus on engaging underrepresented groups such as younger residents, newcomers, and those with accessibility needs. Staff proposed a hybrid approach integrating digital tools (e.g., online surveys, virtual meetings) with in-person methods to ensure equitable participation (S1, S4).

A tiered framework for public participation was recommended to align resources with the significance of projects. Notifications could suffice for routine updates, while comprehensive consultations would be reserved for significant initiatives (S1, S5). This system was seen as a way to balance inclusivity and efficiency within Lunenburg’s limited capacity.

Barriers to Effective Participation

Staff identified several barriers to meaningful public participation, including resource constraints, communication gaps, and systemic challenges. Formal meeting formats were described as intimidating and adversarial, often favouring vocal minorities who dominate

discussions and discourage broader engagement (S4). Staff noted that quieter residents or those unfamiliar with municipal processes may find these settings unapproachable (S3, S4).

Social media was highlighted as a significant challenge, with platforms like Facebook amplifying misinformation and fostering negativity. Misinformation on topics such as Blockhouse Hill and naturalized lawns created unnecessary opposition and eroded trust (S3, S5). Staff emphasized the importance of directing residents to accurate information through official channels and using proactive communication to counteract misconceptions (S1, S5).

Limited staff capacity in a small municipality like Lunenburg was another significant barrier. Staff noted that informal engagement methods, while effective, are resource-intensive and require substantial time and effort. Partnerships with local organizations or community volunteers were proposed as a way to extend the reach of public engagement initiatives without overburdening municipal staff (S1, S3).

Integrating Community and Organization Needs into Decision-Making

Staff emphasized the importance of effectively balancing public input with professional expertise when integrating stakeholder needs into decision-making processes. They highlighted the need to synthesize community feedback and contextualize it within municipal governance's technical and operational realities (S2, S4). Structured engagement mechanisms were seen as essential for ensuring that community and organizational contributions are considered while maintaining the integrity of professional judgment (S5).

A key challenge identified was managing conflicting community and organizational priorities. Staff noted that residents often hold diverging values, such as advocating for environmental sustainability, emphasizing economic development, or preserving Lunenburg's unique heritage. For example, debates around naturalized lawns revealed tensions between environmental benefits and concerns over aesthetics, while development proposals frequently underscored the conflict between fostering economic growth and maintaining historic character (S3, S4, S5). To address these conflicts, staff recommended providing structured opportunities for dialogue that ensure all voices are heard while keeping consultations focused and productive (S3, S5).

Transparency was consistently highlighted as a priority for resolving conflicts and building trust. Staff stressed the importance of clearly communicating the rationale behind decisions, particularly in cases where compromises must be made to address competing needs (S1, S4, S5). Feedback loops were cited as a critical area for improvement, with

residents often left uncertain about how their input influenced outcomes. Regular updates and summaries shared through official channels were suggested as ways to close this gap, fostering trust and demonstrating the value of public engagement (S1, S2, S4). Staff also recognized the necessity of setting boundaries for public involvement in technical or operational matters. Excessive input on highly specialized areas, such as bylaw enforcement or engineering projects, was seen as potentially counterproductive, delaying progress or detracting from strategic goals. Clear delineation of roles between public input and professional expertise was viewed as vital for maintaining focus and productivity (S2, S4, S5).

Ultimately, staff expressed a commitment to fostering a culture of participation that respects stakeholder contributions while leveraging professional expertise. By prioritizing transparency, managing expectations, and maintaining open communication, Lunenburg could ensure that public input enhances governance without compromising operational efficiency (S1-S5).

Impact of Enhanced Participation on Governance and Trust

Staff agreed that enhancing public participation could strengthen governance and rebuild trust in local government, but only if it goes beyond surface-level efforts. They cautioned against checkbox exercises that erode trust by failing to incorporate public input meaningfully into decision-making (S1, S4). Instead, they stressed the importance of transparent, well-structured processes to validate community contributions (S2, S5).

Clear and accessible communication emerged as a foundational element of trust-building. Staff highlighted the need to simplify municipal processes using plain language, visual aids, and concise summaries to make information more accessible and relatable (S2, S3). Early and proactive engagement was also seen as crucial, with staff noting that involving residents at the beginning of projects fosters collaboration and a shared sense of ownership (S1, S3, S5). Maintaining communication throughout project lifecycles was equally important for sustaining trust and keeping residents informed (S1, S4).

Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives

Staff emphasized creating a sustainable and adaptable framework for public participation tailored to Lunenburg's capacity and needs. They proposed a tiered system to match engagement methods to project significance, reserving resource-intensive methods for high-impact initiatives while relying on simpler approaches for routine updates (S1, S2, S5).

A hybrid approach was highlighted as essential for ensuring accessibility and equity. While digital tools like online surveys and virtual meetings reach tech-savvy groups, in-person opportunities remain crucial for engaging those less comfortable with technology (S1, S4).

Partnerships with community organizations were also recommended as a practical way to expand engagement capacity without overextending municipal staff (S1, S3).

Regular evaluations of engagement initiatives were seen as vital for maintaining relevance and effectiveness over time. Staff emphasized the need for feedback loops to refine methods and build long-term trust with residents through clear and transparent communication (S1, S5).

Reflections and Recommendations

Staff emphasized that effective public participation in Lunenburg requires a balance between structure and adaptability. Clear policies and procedures were highlighted as essential for fostering trust and inclusivity, ensuring consistency while accommodating the community's diverse needs (S1, S3, S5). A tiered framework was again recommended as a way to allocate resources efficiently while maintaining meaningful engagement, with distinct methods tailored to different project types and complexities (S2, S4, S5).

Transparency emerged as a key theme, with staff underscoring the importance of clear and accessible communication. Simplified messaging, such as visual aids or concise summaries, was suggested as a way to make municipal processes more approachable for residents (S2, S4, S5). Regular feedback loops, where residents are informed about how their input influenced decisions, were identified as critical for building trust and ensuring ongoing participation (S1, S5). Inclusivity was also highlighted as a foundational principle. Staff stressed the need to actively engage underrepresented groups, including younger residents, newcomers, and those with accessibility challenges. A hybrid approach, combining digital and traditional methods, was recommended to ensure equitable opportunities for all community members to participate (S3, S5). Creative engagement techniques, such as gamified workshops or interactive sessions, were proposed to encourage participation from individuals who might otherwise feel disengaged (S2, S5).

To address resource constraints, staff emphasized the potential value of leveraging partnerships with local organizations, community groups, and volunteers. These partnerships were viewed as a way to enhance the town's capacity for engagement while fostering a sense of shared ownership over municipal decisions (S1, S3). Staff suggested that community volunteers and organizations could play a role in practical tasks such as hosting events or facilitating discussions, allowing municipal staff to focus on strategic oversight and broader participation goals (S5). While no specific groups were identified, the emphasis was on building collaborative relationships to extend the reach and effectiveness of engagement efforts.

Finally, staff emphasized that public participation should not be viewed as a series of isolated initiatives but as an ongoing dialogue. Embedding participation practices into the town's governance framework was seen as essential for creating lasting trust and collaboration. Continuous improvement, guided by regular evaluations of participation methods, was recommended to adapt to evolving community needs while maintaining consistency in engagement efforts (S1, S3, S5). Staff acknowledged that building this culture of participation requires time, patience, and a strong commitment to inclusivity and transparency.

7.1 Researcher's Analysis: Staff Perspectives on Public Participation

The interviews with staff members from the Town of Lunenburg reveal a practical and operational understanding of public participation, grounded in their responsibilities and the town's unique context. Staff articulated both strengths and limitations in their current practices, demonstrating an awareness of opportunities for improvement. Their insights reflect a pragmatic approach to governance, shaped by resource constraints and the immediate demands of municipal operations. This analysis evaluates staff's perspectives on public participation through key themes, connecting their insights to theoretical frameworks and practical models from the literature, and contrasting their understanding with the broader challenges faced by councillors.

Practical Understanding of Inclusivity

Staff demonstrated a nuanced understanding of inclusivity, proposing informal engagement methods such as drop-in sessions and "meet the staff" events to create approachable and less intimidating spaces for residents. These suggestions align with Quick and Feldman's (2011) emphasis on fostering trust through relational and ongoing engagement. By focusing on informal interactions, staff are addressing the barriers associated with traditional formats like public hearings, which tend to marginalize less vocal participants (Arnstein, 1969).

However, while these methods encourage participation from groups that might typically avoid formal settings, they risk being viewed as symbolic rather than substantive unless integrated into structured decision-making processes. This echoes Fung's (2015) argument that participatory mechanisms must bridge informal inputs with formal governance processes to ensure citizen contributions lead to tangible outcomes. For example, the City of Vancouver's Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly demonstrated how informal conversations, when structured within a deliberative framework, can directly inform municipal plans (Magnusson, 2020). Staff could adapt such approaches by incorporating

feedback from drop-in sessions into iterative policy reviews, thereby operationalizing inclusivity as part of a broader participatory strategy.

Focus on Iterative Improvement

Staff's recognition of gaps in feedback loops reflects an operational awareness of the importance of iterative engagement. They acknowledged that failing to communicate how public input influences decisions can lead to disengagement and skepticism, a concern supported by Michels and Binnema (2019), who emphasize the critical role of feedback loops in validating contributions and maintaining trust. Staff proposed regular updates and transparent rationales for decisions, aligning with OECD's (2022) advocacy for systematic feedback as a foundational element of public participation.

To institutionalize these improvements, staff could adopt the OECD's 10-step path for planning citizen participation, which integrates feedback mechanisms at each engagement stage. Staff can ensure transparency and accountability while reinforcing trust by embedding iterative feedback into governance structures, such as through a public engagement dashboard or regular community updates. This would also address a key barrier Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) identified: the perception that public input has limited influence on final decisions.

Addressing Barriers to Participation

Staff identified several barriers to effective participation, including resource constraints, adversarial formal settings, and misinformation on social media. They described formal meetings as intimidating and often dominated by vocal minorities, which undermines balanced, inclusive dialogue (S1, S3, S4). This critique aligns with Arnstein's (1969) observation that traditional engagement methods often marginalize less vocal participants. Staff's concerns about misinformation echo findings by Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), who highlight the role of institutional mistrust in exacerbating the spread of inaccuracies.

To counter these barriers, staff proposed proactive communication strategies, such as directing residents to official platforms and providing consistent updates. However, these solutions primarily address logistical challenges rather than systemic issues. For instance, Jamal and Newbold (2023) emphasize the importance of relational trust and creating spaces for meaningful dialogue to combat misinformation effectively. Vancouver's Chinatown consultations demonstrate how cultural and linguistic barriers can compound exclusion, highlighting the need for adaptive engagement methods that reflect community contexts (Cheung, 2023). Staff could adopt facilitation techniques to balance discussions, ensuring marginalized voices are amplified and public forums are equitable and inclusive.

Commitment to Sustainability and Adaptability

Staff articulated a commitment to creating a sustainable and adaptable participation framework. They proposed a tiered approach to engagement, reserving “thin” methods like notifications for routine updates and employing “thick” methods like workshops for high-impact initiatives (S1, S3, S5). This aligns with Bryson’s (2018) Participation Planning Matrix, which emphasizes matching engagement strategies to project priorities and stakeholder needs. Hybrid methods, combining digital and in-person opportunities, were also highlighted as essential for ensuring equity and accessibility, particularly in a community with diverse demographic and technological access levels.

Staff’s focus on sustainability reflects Katsonis’ (2019) emphasis on leveraging community resources for participatory governance. Suggestions to partner with local organizations and volunteers align with the OECD’s (2022) recommendations for expanding capacity. However, staff could benefit from greater specificity in framing how these partnerships would be integrated into long-term governance practices. Models like the Yuseong District’s Policy Puzzle Game in South Korea demonstrate how creative, hybrid approaches can foster collaborative decision-making while ensuring scalability and adaptability (Kim & Nam, 2022).

Conclusion: Evaluating Staff’s Understanding of Public Participation

Staff demonstrated a pragmatic and operational understanding of public participation, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity, hybrid engagement methods, and iterative improvement to meet the diverse needs of Lunenburg’s residents. Their focus aligns with foundational principles in the literature, such as Nabatchi and Leighninger’s (2015) emphasis on balancing relational and transactional governance and Bryson’s (2018) guidance on aligning participation strategies with organizational goals.

Despite these strengths, the staff’s approach remains largely focused on addressing immediate logistical challenges, such as resource constraints and communication barriers, rather than pursuing systemic reforms. For instance, while their proposals for informal engagement methods reflect a commitment to accessibility, these initiatives lack clear pathways to integrate informal feedback into formal decision-making processes. As Fung (2015) and Arnstein (1969) emphasize, participatory practices must create tangible policy outcomes and ensure that diverse voices shape governance.

Staff’s strategies to mitigate barriers like misinformation and adversarial public forums demonstrate practical adaptability but do not fully address underlying issues of institutional mistrust and exclusion. The literature suggests that building relational trust and embedding co-creation practices into governance frameworks are critical to fostering

more inclusive and empowered participation (Jamal & Newbold, 2023; Arnstein, 1969). Addressing these deeper challenges would enhance the long-term effectiveness and legitimacy of Lunenburg’s public participation efforts.

Compared to councillors, staff provided a more detailed and pragmatic perspective on public participation, reflecting their operational responsibilities. However, their insights underscore the need for systemic collaboration between staff and elected officials. Aligning practical methods with strategic goals is crucial for institutionalizing participatory practices that balance resource constraints with meaningful engagement.

7.2 Summary of Staff Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices

The table below provides a summary of the key themes identified in staff interviews, alongside their recommendations and suggested action items for improving public participation in Lunenburg. Additionally, gaps in staff’s understanding of public participation are outlined based on the researcher's analysis, emphasizing areas for potential growth and alignment with transformative participation practices.

Table 7: Summary of Staff Perspectives, Recommendations, and Gaps in Public Participation Practices

General Themes	Recommendations	Action Items	Gaps Identified by Researcher
Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices	Improve communication clarity; implement consistent feedback loops to ensure public input is visibly integrated into decisions.	Provide regular updates; use clear messaging to explain how public contributions influence outcomes.	Focuses on logistical fixes rather than systemic transparency mechanisms; insufficient emphasis on building relational trust and fostering continuous dialogue.
Aspirations for Public Participation	Tailor engagement methods to project complexity; prioritize informal methods for accessibility.	Introduce informal drop-in sessions, “meet the staff” events, and community conversations.	Limited integration of informal engagement outcomes into formal decision-making processes; underdeveloped co-creation practices.
Barriers to Effective Participation	Address intimidation in formal settings;	Use facilitated discussions, anonymous	Focuses on managing symptoms (e.g.,

	combat misinformation on social media.	surveys, and proactive communication through official channels.	misinformation) rather than addressing systemic trust deficits; insufficient inclusion strategies for marginalized groups.
Integrating Stakeholder Needs into Decision-Making	Clarify roles between public input and professional expertise; close the feedback loop to enhance trust.	Provide transparent explanations for decisions; create structured opportunities for balanced dialogue.	Overemphasis on managing conflicting priorities rather than redistributing decision-making power or fostering co-governance.
Impact of Enhanced Participation on Governance and Trust	Build trust through early and proactive engagement; use plain language and visual aids for communication.	Provide visual summaries of decisions; engage residents early in the lifecycle of major projects.	Overlooks relational trust-building strategies; insufficient focus on collaborative governance models like participatory budgeting or citizen advisory panels.
Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives	Develop a tiered participation framework; leverage community partnerships to expand capacity.	Match engagement methods to project scope; involve local organizations in outreach and facilitation.	Need for institutionalizing participation practices; limited vision for embedding participation into long-term governance structures.
Reflections and Recommendations	Balance structure and adaptability in public participation; embed participation into governance frameworks.	Regularly evaluate and refine engagement strategies; establish formal policies for participation.	Practical recommendations lack focus on empowering residents as co-creators; insufficient mechanisms for iterative learning and systemic inclusivity.

8.0 Findings 4: Residents' Perspectives on Public Participation

In September 2023, the Town of Lunenburg's Council directed staff to draft a bylaw allowing and encouraging lawn naturalization after a property owner appealed an unsightly premises complaint to naturalize their lawn (Town of Lunenburg, 2023, p. 2 – 3). As a Town employee, I took the lead on this project. I organized a community conversation (referred to throughout this project as a “co-design workshop”) on February 20, 2024, to ensure residents were actively involved in shaping the bylaw. The event brought together 23 residents and three staff members, aiming to foster in-depth public participation. Participants were divided into small groups of about five to discuss what they felt should be included in the bylaw. Periodically, these groups would reconvene to share their ideas, and I, as the facilitator, would record all recommendations on a flip chart. This approach enabled participants to engage in the co-design process, integrating public input directly into the bylaw's development rather than collecting it as after-the-fact feedback.

Before the event, the Town provided background information and promoted the conversation via its website and social media, sharing examples of similar bylaws from other communities. Following the workshop, notes from the discussion were made available online, and the public was invited to submit further input (Town of Lunenburg, n.d.). This led to 27 additional email submissions, with most favouring lawn naturalization. The draft bylaw, shaped by these discussions, was circulated for further input before being presented to Council in May 2024 (Town of Lunenburg, 2024, p. 102 - 116). However, after receiving opposing letters late in the process, Council deferred a decision on the bylaw and directed staff to work on a more comprehensive dangerous and unsightly premises bylaw (Town of Lunenburg, 2024, p. 2 – 3).

For this research project, I conducted a focus group to gather insights from residents about the Town of Lunenburg's current public engagement practices and explore ways to enhance them. I specifically invited participants from the February 2024 community conversation, as they had already demonstrated interest in a thick public participation initiative hosted by the Town. All participants from the community conversation were invited, but my initial contact clearly stated that I was seeking seven people for the focus group. In the end, only five residents responded and participated, forming the focus group. These individuals had direct experience with a collaborative engagement process, making them well-positioned to provide valuable feedback and offer suggestions for improving future participation efforts. My goal was to collect reflections from individuals who had actively participated in the Town's engagement initiatives rather than from those who may not have had prior involvement.

The focus group, which lasted approximately three hours, allowed participants to reflect on the February community conversation and their broader interactions with the Town. Despite providing guiding questions in advance, keeping the group focused on these specific points was challenging. Instead, the conversation ebbed and flowed informally, often straying from the questions. This more free-form discussion, while less structured, ultimately led to a deeper exploration of various themes and offered more nuanced insights into how residents perceive public engagement in Lunenburg and where they see opportunities for improvement. The focus group questions are provided in Appendix A.

The focus group discussions revolved around several key themes related to the Town's public participation efforts. Participants began by reflecting on their experiences with the February 2024 Community Conversation, particularly the co-design process for the lawn naturalization bylaw. They highlighted both the successes and challenges of the event, noting the benefits of small group discussions while expressing concerns about the dynamics that limited diverse input. Additionally, frustrations emerged regarding communication and follow-up, as participants felt their contributions were overshadowed by unexpected late-stage opposition. The group also discussed broader experiences with the Town's engagement practices, emphasizing a need for earlier and more inclusive involvement in decision-making. Throughout, the focus was on finding ways to make public participation more accessible, proactive, and transparent, ensuring that residents have a meaningful role in shaping Lunenburg's future.

Reflecting on the Community Conversation

Participants responded positively to the Community Conversation event held on February 20, 2024, appreciating the Town's effort to involve the public in co-designing the lawn naturalization bylaw. The small group format was seen as an improvement over previous engagements, as it allowed for a wider range of voices. However, some felt that certain individuals dominated discussions, limiting broader participation. To address this, several participants suggested a more open, mediated format that could foster a balanced dialogue and prevent particular voices from overshadowing others. Many believed that mediation could have played a key role in the lawn naturalization debate, diffusing tensions early and ensuring a constructive exchange of ideas. Despite these challenges, the event was seen as a step toward more inclusive governance, encouraging greater public participation.

Frustration arose when Council chose not to approve the bylaw, leading some participants to feel that their contributions had been overshadowed by unexpected late-stage opposition. This mirrored a broader pattern in the Town's decision-making, where late dissent seemed to repeatedly disrupt initiatives. Focus group members emphasized that

this trend undermined the collaborative process they had invested in, diminishing their sense of ownership. They called for clearer follow-up and communication from the Town to ensure that public input is respected and consistently considered from start to finish. Providing accessible background information well before engagement events was also seen as essential. Participants suggested distributing comprehensive materials through multiple channels early, allowing residents to come prepared with informed questions and suggestions.

Experiences with Town Engagement

The focus group shared varied perspectives on the Town's engagement practices. Many felt that legislatively mandated consultations, such as public hearings, often occurred too late in the decision-making process, giving the impression that they were more formalities than genuine opportunities for influence⁵. However, the Blockhouse Hill development was highlighted as a positive example of early and inclusive engagement, where multiple public input sessions helped shape the project's direction. Participants hoped this proactive approach would become a consistent practice in future initiatives.

The discussion highlighted the need for clarity early in the decision-making process. Several participants noted that conflicts often arose because residents were unclear about a project's objectives from the start, leading to frustration and late-stage resistance. Early and transparent communication, with clear goals set from the beginning, was seen as key to avoiding such conflicts.

Improving Communication and Inclusivity

Participants expressed a strong desire for the Town to adopt a more comprehensive communication strategy. They observed that outreach for the February Community Conversation highlighted significant gaps, with many residents learning about public meetings too late to participate effectively. To address this, they advocated for a strategy that blends traditional communication methods, like mailouts and bulletin boards, with modern tools such as email newsletters, a user-friendly website, and a more structured social media presence. This multi-channel approach, they believed, would ensure that information reaches a broader audience in time for meaningful engagement.

Facebook, while debated, was recognized as a valuable communication tool if used in combination with other platforms. Its ability to quickly disseminate updates was

⁵ Based on an analysis of multiple Council agendas for the Town of Lunenburg, public hearings are often scheduled at the same meeting where Council is scheduled to make a decision on the item for which the hearing is being held.

acknowledged, even as participants expressed concerns about its tendency to amplify the loudest voices and spread misinformation.

Inclusivity was another key concern. Participants noted that public consultations often favoured vocal individuals or well-organized groups, leaving younger residents, newcomers, and working-class individuals feeling sidelined. They suggested employing structured engagement methods like World Cafés or talking circles, which could provide a more equitable space for diverse perspectives. Additionally, they recommended flexible participation options, such as virtual meetings, recorded sessions, and mailed notices for those less comfortable with digital platforms, to make engagement more accessible.

Effective and Sustainable Engagement

Focus group participants called for deeper and more inclusive engagement in Lunenburg's decision-making processes. They wanted public involvement to start earlier, during the planning and brainstorming phases, when input can influence outcomes. Engagement should not be confined to formal public hearings. Instead, they advocated for opportunities to be involved throughout a project's development, ensuring their voices are heard at every stage. Participants suggested various engagement options to accommodate varying levels of interest and expertise. They recommended workshops, focus groups, or co-design sessions for complex or high-stakes projects, allowing residents to collaborate directly with Town staff and council members. Simpler methods, like online surveys or brief comment periods, were seen as valuable for those who may not have the time or inclination to engage extensively but still want their opinions considered.

Empowering advisory committees emerged as a central theme⁶. Participants believed that if committees were given clear mandates and structured roles, they could play a significant part in public engagement. They expressed frustration that some current committees felt like rubber stamps rather than meaningful platforms for discussion. Strengthening these committees, with clearly defined responsibilities and regular engagement, could make participation a routine part of governance rather than relying on occasional events tied to specific projects.

Harnessing Untapped Community Potential

Participants emphasized the importance of harnessing Lunenburg's untapped potential. They observed that the Town had many skilled, resourceful residents eager to contribute to community initiatives, yet they often felt sidelined or unutilized. This was particularly true

⁶ The Town of Lunenburg has four advisory committees that provide input on various municipal matters. Town of Lunenburg. (n.d.). *Committees of council*. <https://townoflunenburg.ca/committees-of-council.html>

for grassroots efforts addressing key issues like food insecurity, housing, and energy poverty. Some participants shared personal experiences of organizing community projects independently, sometimes deliberately avoiding Town involvement due to previous bureaucratic obstacles. They felt that if the Town were more proactive in supporting grassroots movements by offering logistical assistance, providing resources, or simply acknowledging and validating these efforts, the community could make significant strides in tackling local challenges.

Participants believed that the Town could play a facilitative role in connecting residents with shared interests, serving as a “matchmaker” for community projects. They suggested that the Town could identify community needs, map available resources, and bring together relevant stakeholders. For example, providing vacant spaces for meetings or supporting collaborative efforts in the non-profit sector could unleash the energy of Lunenburg’s residents and create a more cohesive community. By shifting from a gatekeeping role to an enabling one, the Town could better tap into this energy and foster a more engaged, resilient community.

Building Trust Through Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability were recurring themes throughout the discussions. Participants emphasized the need for clear processes in gathering, reviewing, and utilizing public input. They called for formal feedback loops where the Town would update residents on consultation outcomes and explain how specific suggestions were considered. If certain ideas were not feasible, they wanted clear explanations to build trust and demonstrate that public input genuinely matters. This proactive communication approach would involve providing concise materials ahead of meetings and regular updates throughout a project’s life cycle, using multiple communication channels, such as newsletters, social media, and mailed notices.

Personal Reflections and Recommendations

Throughout the focus group, residents shared personal insights on how the Town could enhance public participation. A recurring theme was the need for clear feedback loops. Participants noted that while the Town does collect resident input, it often fails to communicate how that feedback is used, leading to frustration and confusion. They recommended straightforward communication about how suggestions are incorporated into decisions, with regular updates throughout the process.

Participants also emphasized the value of more informal engagement opportunities. Formal public meetings were seen as intimidating, especially for those uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups. Smaller, more relaxed events, like one-on-one

conversations or informal discussion sessions, were suggested as ways to make engagement more accessible and encourage broader participation.

Accessibility was raised as a concern. Younger residents and newcomers often felt disconnected from decision-making processes, either because they were unaware of opportunities or felt their concerns were undervalued. To address this, participants recommended broadening outreach efforts to engage underrepresented groups through digital platforms, social media, and other spaces where they are more likely to engage. By making engagement more inclusive and proactive, the Town could foster a sense of ownership and trust, creating a community where all voices are heard and valued.

8.1 Researcher's Analysis: Focus Group's Understanding of Public Participation

The focus group highlighted an understanding of public participation among Lunenburg residents, showcasing their desire for more meaningful engagement and their limited awareness of sustainable participation structures. Focus group participants articulated a need for early involvement in decision-making and emphasized a more inclusive, transparent process. However, their conceptualization of public participation frequently centred on the Town's actions, neglecting their potential roles in a truly participatory process. This analysis examines the residents' perceptions, their alignment with academic frameworks, and areas where more effective communication and deeper understanding could enhance public involvement in Lunenburg.

Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices

Residents predominantly viewed public participation through the lens of formal mechanisms, like public hearings and consultations, which they deemed inadequate for meaningful engagement. This sentiment echoes the literature's critique of conventional public participation methods, often described as compliance-driven rather than genuinely collaborative (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Fung, 2015). Many focus group participants expressed frustration, seeing these approaches as reactive responses rather than proactive efforts to include the community early in decision-making processes. This aligns with the literature's view that engagement is frequently treated as a checkbox exercise to fulfill legal obligations rather than a genuine opportunity for ongoing, relational participation (Quick & Feldman, 2011; McKeown, 2019).

Some residents acknowledged successful instances, particularly citing the Blockhouse Hill development as an example of "thick participation" where input was gathered early and felt meaningful. This example reflects best practices in participatory governance, where early and immersive engagement fosters a more collaborative decision-making process

(Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). However, this example was seen as an exception rather than the norm. Most participants described public participation in Lunenburg as a transactional process, focused on isolated moments of input rather than an integrated, continuous dialogue. The literature suggests that meaningful public participation should be relational, involving ongoing communication between residents and decision-makers (McKeown, 2019; Quick & Feldman, 2011). This gap between Lunenburg's practices and best practices underscores the need for a shift toward more consistent, inclusive engagement strategies.

Aspirations for Public Participation

The focus group voiced a clear aspiration for deeper and more proactive involvement in municipal decisions. Residents expressed a desire to engage at the earliest stages of decision-making, such as during initial brainstorming sessions, where their input could shape the direction of projects and policies. This interest aligns with the academic emphasis on early involvement, a critical component of empowered citizen participation (Fung, 2015). However, while participants were eager to be involved, they often framed their role as providing feedback on pre-existing proposals rather than co-creating policies with the Town.

This perspective reveals a limited understanding of transformative participation models like co-design or participatory budgeting, which encourage residents to collaborate with officials from the outset of decision-making (Ife, 2016; Quick & Feldman, 2011). In this context, public participation extends beyond feedback to a partnership model, where citizens are seen as co-creators rather than passive commentators (Fung, 2015). This gap suggests that residents might benefit from education on how participatory processes can empower them to actively shape municipal policies and programs, transforming their role from reactionary participants to collaborative stakeholders.

Barriers to Effective Participation

Participants identified several barriers hindering effective public participation in Lunenburg, including limited access to information, late-stage engagement, and the dominance of a few well-connected individuals often referred to as the "usual suspects" (Fung, 2015; Nabatchi, 2012). They expressed particular frustration with the Town's over-reliance on digital platforms like Facebook, which they felt excluded segments of the community who were less digitally active. This critique echoes academic concerns that over-reliance on specific communication channels can exacerbate inequalities and reinforce existing power dynamics, favouring those already familiar with the processes and networks (Sjöberg et al., 2017; Uittenbroek et al., 2019).

The challenge of achieving inclusive participation emerged as a significant concern, aligning with common critiques of public participation. Engagement processes can often favour individuals who are more familiar with the institutional frameworks and decision-making structures, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives. Hoppe (2010) explores how institutional pressures and a focus on efficiency can constrain meaningful deliberation. He highlights that policy analysts, under time constraints and the need to meet institutional expectations, may prioritize familiar voices and established solutions over more innovative or unconventional ideas. This can result in discussions that feel "closed" and lack the opportunity for genuine debate and creativity. The broader literature, including works by Fung (2015) and Quick & Bryson (2022), suggests that to counter these tendencies, employing structured engagement methods, such as community advisory boards or diverse focus groups, can help ensure a wider range of voices are included in the decision-making process.

Harnessing Community Potential for Empowered Governance

The focus group emphasized the presence of untapped potential within the Lunenburg community. Participants repeatedly highlighted the skills, knowledge, and willingness of residents to contribute to Town projects and initiatives. However, they felt that the current engagement processes were insufficient in recognizing or channelling this potential, often sidelining those who could offer valuable insights. This aligns with Ife's (2016) theoretical perspective on community development, which emphasizes the importance of drawing on the collective intelligence and resources within a community to foster empowerment and ownership.

Participants spoke about grassroots efforts already happening in Lunenburg, noting that these initiatives often operated independently of the Town due to previous bureaucratic challenges. Some residents expressed a desire for the Town to play a more facilitative role – acting as a supporter rather than a gatekeeper, by providing resources, logistical assistance, or even just validation for these community-driven efforts. This desire mirrors Ife's advocacy for a shift from traditional top-down governance to a model that prioritizes community empowerment and co-creation, where local knowledge and capabilities are central to decision-making.

The discussion revealed a tension between the community's enthusiasm for involvement and the perceived barriers created by conventional participation methods. Many residents felt their engagement was often confined to formal consultations or feedback sessions, which limited their ability to co-create and fully participate in the governance process. Ife's (2016) framework underscores the importance of moving beyond passive forms of participation, instead promoting active collaboration between citizens and local

government. This model of participatory governance seeks to empower residents as equal partners in shaping policies that directly impact their lives.

By adopting a more collaborative and inclusive approach, the Town of Lunenburg could better harness the potential of its residents, recognizing them not just as consultees but as co-creators in the policymaking process. This would involve identifying and engaging community stakeholders early on, leveraging their expertise and enthusiasm to co-design solutions that are more relevant and sustainable. Integrating Ife's (2016) principles of empowerment into the Town's approach could foster a stronger sense of ownership among residents, enhancing the legitimacy and acceptance of municipal decisions while building a more resilient and cohesive community.

Integrating Community Needs into Decision-Making

One of the most significant gaps identified by participants was the lack of a clear feedback loop. Residents felt their input often disappeared into a void, with little indication of whether or how it influenced final decisions. This absence of follow-up is a critical flaw that erodes trust, as emphasized in the literature (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Fung, 2015). Transparent feedback mechanisms are essential to effective public participation, demonstrating how citizen contributions are integrated into decision-making and fostering a sense of ownership and accountability.

Implementing formal feedback loops could address these frustrations, providing residents with regular updates on how their input has shaped policy outcomes. This approach aligns with the literature's emphasis on continuous engagement, where communication with residents persists throughout the decision-making lifecycle (Quick & Feldman, 2011). By institutionalizing this practice, Lunenburg could demonstrate its commitment to valuing public input, thereby enhancing trust and strengthening its governance.

Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives

The focus group expressed a desire for more sustainable and adaptive participation processes, suggesting regular community forums and ongoing roundtables to maintain continuous engagement. This reflects an understanding that engagement should be an ongoing dialogue rather than relying on isolated consultations. Some participants acknowledged that the Town of Lunenburg already has advisory boards, which provide a platform for resident input. However, they felt these boards often lack the structure and mandate necessary to ensure their recommendations are meaningfully integrated into decision-making. This perception indicates a desire for more frequent engagement and a more impactful and visible role for advisory boards in shaping Town policies.

The literature underscores the importance of embedding public involvement into the governance structure to create sustainable participation (Head & Alford, 2015; Jäntti et al., 2023). While Lunenburg’s existing advisory boards offer a foundation for this, participants suggested that the Town could enhance these boards by providing clearer mandates, better resources, and more consistent feedback on how their input is used. This would move participation beyond a formality to a substantive part of municipal operations.

Strategies such as participatory budgeting, which involves residents in direct decision-making about budget allocations, or strengthening the advisory boards with structured responsibilities, could serve as institutionalized models to foster sustainable engagement. These approaches provide consistent platforms for resident input and ensure that participation becomes a normalized and expected aspect of the decision-making process. For Lunenburg, refining the role of advisory boards and incorporating them more fully into governance could shift participation from an occasional event to a routine part of municipal life, fostering a deeper culture of collaboration and co-creation.

Conclusion: Aligning Resident Aspirations with Transformative Participation

The focus group revealed a strong desire among Lunenburg residents for earlier and more transparent engagement, yet their understanding of participation often emphasized traditional feedback mechanisms. To align these aspirations with transformative models of public participation, the Town of Lunenburg needs to prioritize structured, continuous engagement that goes beyond feedback to collaborative co-creation. This can be achieved by institutionalizing participatory practices, diversifying communication channels, and ensuring that resident input is consistently integrated and acknowledged.

By addressing the dominance of familiar voices, closing the feedback loop, and embedding sustainable participation models, Lunenburg can foster a more inclusive and empowered community. These adjustments would enable the Town’s governance to reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of its residents, ensuring that public participation is not just a formal requirement but a foundational element of decision-making.

8.2 Summary of Findings on Public Participation in Lunenburg

The following table provides a detailed overview of the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions on public participation in Lunenburg. It captures participants' concerns, their recommendations for improving community engagement, and actionable steps the Town could take to address these issues. Alongside these insights, the table identifies gaps in participants' understanding of public participation, as revealed through the researcher's analysis, highlighting areas where a shift towards more structured, inclusive, and

sustainable participation practices could bridge the divide between resident expectations and transformative engagement models.

Table 8: Summary of Findings on Public Participation in Lunenburg

General Themes	Recommendations	Action Items	Gaps Identified by Researcher
Desire for Early Involvement	Engage residents at the planning and brainstorming stages of projects.	Organize workshops, co-design sessions, and brainstorming meetings early in the decision-making process.	Participants viewed participation as feedback rather than co-creation, indicating a limited understanding of participatory governance models.
Improving Communication and Inclusivity	Adopt a comprehensive communication strategy blending traditional and modern methods.	Disseminate information via mailouts, bulletin boards, newsletters, social media, and a user-friendly website; provide educational resources on participation.	Over-reliance on traditional feedback mechanisms; a need for education on proactive and sustained participation.
Empowering Advisory Committees	Clarify the mandates of existing advisory boards and ensure their recommendations influence decision-making.	Provide clear guidelines, consistent feedback, and allocate resources to advisory committees; establish training for committee members.	Committees are perceived as rubber stamps; participants did not fully appreciate the role advisory boards could play in sustained engagement.
Harnessing Community Potential	Leverage local expertise and support grassroots efforts by removing bureaucratic barriers.	Create a centralized resource hub or community navigator system to connect residents with Town projects and opportunities for co-design.	The focus group did not fully explore how co-design methods can systematically harness community skills.
Building Trust Through Transparency	Implement formal feedback loops and update residents on the outcomes of their contributions.	Develop transparent feedback mechanisms with regular updates and explanations on	Lack of focus on relational participation that emphasizes

		how public input is used; foster continuous dialogue.	continuous dialogue and trust-building.
Effective and Sustainable Engagement	Institutionalize engagement by making it a routine part of municipal operations.	Integrate participatory budgeting and strengthen advisory boards as consistent platforms for input; formalize engagement strategies in Town policy.	Participants suggested communication improvements without a longer-term vision for structural changes in participation.
Institutionalizing Co-Creation Models	Foster collaborative governance by adopting co-creation models for policymaking.	Pilot participatory budgeting or co-design initiatives for significant projects; train residents and staff on participatory governance practices.	Limited awareness of transformative participation models and their potential for empowering residents as equal stakeholders.

9.0 Options to Consider and Recommendations

For the Town of Lunenburg, addressing gaps in engagement is essential to building trust, improving transparency, and ensuring decisions reflect the diverse needs of the community. This chapter draws on the analysis presented earlier to offer practical recommendations for enhancing public participation. By highlighting key themes and presenting organized strategies, it aims to guide meaningful engagement and strengthen the alignment between governance and community aspirations.

This begins by revisiting the core themes identified throughout the study. Next, it provides categorized recommendations, distinguishing between immediate, intermediate, and long-term actions. An action table links these recommendations to their corresponding themes and timelines. The chapter concludes with reflections on the potential impact of these strategies and a forward-looking vision for participatory governance in Lunenburg.

9.1 Key Themes from Findings

Trust and Transparency

Building trust in governance hinges on open, consistent, and transparent communication. This theme emerged as a critical concern across all stakeholder groups. Findings highlighted significant gaps in the feedback loops between the council and residents, leaving participants unclear about how their input influenced decisions. For instance, councillors noted specific cases where public input was gathered, such as during public hearings, but subsequent actions were not clearly communicated, creating a perception that the engagement was superficial (Findings 2: Councillors' Perspectives, 2024). Similarly, staff reflected on instances where residents voiced frustration over feeling unheard, even in cases where their input had, in fact, shaped decisions (Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives, 2024). These gaps in transparency have not only eroded trust but also discouraged long-term community involvement. To rebuild this trust, clear and visible mechanisms are needed to demonstrate how public contributions are integrated into decision-making processes.

Inclusivity Challenges

Despite the town's efforts to engage its population, systemic barriers continue to exclude certain groups from meaningful participation. Younger residents, newcomers, and marginalized communities are particularly underrepresented in current engagement practices. This exclusion was vividly expressed in staff interviews, where participants described the challenges of designing outreach strategies that resonate with diverse demographics (Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives, 2024). Residents echoed these concerns, citing limited accessibility to consultations as a recurring obstacle (Findings 4: Residents' Perspectives, 2024). Tailored outreach efforts, such as targeted youth programs or targeted communication strategies for specific projects, were proposed by both staff and residents as necessary steps toward creating a more inclusive participatory environment.

Participation Practices

Structured participation efforts, like the development of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP), showcased the town's potential to foster meaningful engagement. This process, characterized by intensive workshops and broad public input, exemplified a "thick" model of participation where citizens were deeply involved in shaping policy (Findings 4: Residents' Perspectives, 2024). However, many current engagement practices remain more transactional than transformative. Residents expressed dissatisfaction with legislatively mandated methods, such as public hearings, which they described as overly formal and often detached from real influence. These consultations, while fulfilling procedural requirements, frequently leave participants feeling their involvement is perfunctory rather than valued. Both residents and councillors emphasized the need to

move toward collaborative models of engagement that prioritize dialogue and co-creation, fostering a shared sense of responsibility in governance outcomes.

Resource Constraints

The limited capacity of municipal staff and council poses a persistent barrier to implementing robust public participation processes. Staff interviews highlighted the resource-intensive nature of thick engagement methods, such as community workshops, which require significant time and possible financial investments (Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives, 2024). These limitations are compounded in a small municipality like Lunenburg, where personnel are often stretched thin across competing priorities. Despite these challenges, staff proposed innovative strategies to balance resource constraints with meaningful engagement. For instance, adopting a tiered framework where more intensive methods are reserved for high-impact projects while lighter approaches, like surveys, are used for routine decisions, could help optimize resources without sacrificing engagement quality. Moreover, leveraging partnerships with community organizations was frequently cited as a way to enhance capacity and broaden the town's reach.

Innovation Opportunities

Embracing hybrid engagement methods offers a transformative opportunity for Lunenburg to modernize its participatory practices. The combination of digital tools and in-person events was widely recognized as a means to enhance accessibility and efficiency. For example, staff suggested expanding the use of virtual meetings to engage tech-savvy younger residents, while continuing to offer traditional, in-person consultations for broader inclusivity (Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives, 2024). Councillors also highlighted the potential for digital surveys and interactive platforms to gather quick feedback on specific initiatives (Findings 2: Councillors' Perspectives, 2024). Beyond technology, stakeholders identified partnerships with grassroots organizations as an untapped avenue for fostering engagement. Collaborating with established community groups not only expands the town's reach but also builds trust by working alongside entities residents already value.

9.2 Immediate Strategies (0-6 months)

Lunenburg's immediate focus should center on implementing foundational strategies that address communication gaps and rebuild trust with residents. These efforts are designed to create clear, accessible, and inclusive opportunities for dialogue and participation, fostering stronger connections between the town and its community.

1. Develop a Communication Strategy

In Lunenburg, a strong communication strategy should blend traditional and digital platforms to ensure all residents, regardless of their technological access or preferences, are well-informed and engaged. This need is especially evident in light of past challenges, such as the Blockhouse Hill development, where unclear or inconsistent messaging contributed to dissatisfaction and mistrust among residents (Findings 3: Staff's Perspectives, 2024).

- **Actions:**

- Conduct an audit of existing communication tools and identify gaps in outreach.
- Develop a multi-channel strategy that includes mailouts, bulletin boards, newsletters, social media, and email campaigns.
- Create templates for clear, visually appealing messages (e.g., infographics, project updates, FAQs).
- Implement a schedule for regular updates tied to municipal milestones (e.g., weekly social media posts or monthly newsletters).

- **Anticipated Impact:**

- Proactively address misinformation by providing accurate, fact-based updates before rumours take hold.
- Foster transparency and trust by showing residents that the town values and respects their need for clear, timely information.
- Increase engagement across diverse segments of the community, improving inclusivity and participation.

2. Pilot Informal Engagements

Informal spaces for dialogue offer a less intimidating, more approachable way for residents to connect with municipal leaders and contribute their perspectives. Building on the success of collaborative initiatives like the lawn naturalization bylaw workshop, these spaces can make participation feel more personal and meaningful (Findings 4: Residents' Perspectives, 2024).

- **Actions:**

- Host informal “Coffee with Council” sessions or pop-up town hall events in relaxed, accessible venues like cafes, the library, or the weekly farmers’ market.
 - Experiment with alternative engagement formats, such as World Cafés or talking circles, which are designed to encourage open dialogue in smaller, facilitated groups.
 - Identify key community spaces and events where informal engagement could naturally fit, making it easier for residents to participate.
- **Anticipated Impact:**
 - Reduce barriers for quieter or less-involved residents, making participation more accessible and inclusive.
 - Strengthen community relationships by providing a forum for candid, two-way conversations.
 - Surface valuable insights from residents who might not otherwise attend formal meetings or hearings.

3. Introduce Feedback Mechanisms

A critical step in rebuilding trust is demonstrating that resident input is valued and acted upon. Feedback mechanisms ensure that participants know their contributions are being considered and provide transparency around decision-making processes (Findings 2: Councillors’ Perspectives, 2024).

- **Actions:**
 - Publish summaries of public input following consultations, clearly outlining how resident contributions influenced decisions.
 - Develop an online feedback tracker where residents can monitor the status of their suggestions or the progress of major projects.
 - Incorporate follow-up communication into engagement workflows, such as email updates to participants after workshops or hearings.
- **Anticipated Impact:**
 - Increase resident confidence in the utility of public engagement by closing the loop between input and outcomes.

- Foster accountability and transparency by clearly demonstrating how decisions align with community priorities.
- Strengthen long-term participation by showing residents their voices have a tangible impact on governance.

9.3 Intermediate Strategies (6 months–2 years)

Building on the foundational work of the immediate strategies, intermediate efforts should focus on refining participation methods, empowering advisory structures, and expanding the town’s capacity for inclusive outreach. These strategies address systemic barriers and create frameworks that enable more efficient, equitable, and sustainable public participation.

1. Adopt a Tiered Participation Framework

Balancing inclusivity with resource efficiency is essential for small municipalities like Lunenburg, where capacity constraints often limit the scope of engagement initiatives. Building on the communication strategy introduced in the first round of actions, a tiered framework ensures that public participation methods are tailored to the complexity and significance of each project, allowing the town to allocate resources more effectively. While a communication strategy could establish clear and consistent channels to inform and invite residents to participate, the tiered framework determines how and to what extent they are engaged based on the project’s impact and importance.

This framework prioritizes deeper, collaborative methods, such as workshops or co-design sessions, for high-stakes initiatives like infrastructure planning, while reserving lighter, less resource-intensive methods, such as surveys or public notices, for routine decisions. The ongoing communication strategy plays a critical role in this system by ensuring residents understand why and how they should participate at each level of engagement, bridging the gap between the town’s structured approach and the community’s involvement.

Together, the communication strategy and tiered framework create a cohesive and scalable model for engagement.

- **Actions:**

- Develop detailed guidelines for selecting appropriate engagement methods (e.g., workshops for complex, high-stakes issues; surveys for routine matters).
- Identify key decision points in municipal processes where different levels of participation are most valuable.

- Integrate hybrid participation options, combining in-person and virtual formats to maximize accessibility and reach.
- **Anticipated Impact:**
 - Enhance the efficiency of engagement efforts by matching resources to project needs.
 - Improve inclusivity by offering residents flexible ways to participate based on their availability, preferences, and comfort levels.
 - Foster greater community input on high-impact initiatives while maintaining broad engagement on less resource-intensive issues.

2. Enhance Advisory Committees

Advisory committees have the potential to serve as bridges between residents and decision-makers, but their effectiveness depends on clear mandates and adequate support. Strengthening these committees can institutionalize public participation, creating a routine mechanism for collaboration and problem-solving.

- **Actions:**
 - Establish or update committee terms of reference to clearly define responsibilities, goals, and reporting structures.
 - Provide training to committee members, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to facilitate productive discussions and evaluate input.
 - Regularly review and adapt committee processes to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with community priorities.
- **Anticipated Impact:**
 - Create a more structured and reliable platform for resident engagement in specific policy areas.
 - Build institutional capacity for addressing ongoing community challenges, such as housing affordability or environmental sustainability.
 - Foster trust and collaboration by empowering residents to contribute meaningfully to municipal decision-making.

3. Expand Outreach

Ensuring that all segments of Lunenburg’s population feel represented in governance requires targeted and creative outreach strategies. This involves addressing barriers that prevent certain groups, such as younger residents, seasonal workers, and disengaged community members, from participating in traditional formats. These recommendations build on earlier findings, particularly those highlighting inclusivity challenges (Findings 3 and 4) and feedback from staff and residents about the need to tailor engagement methods.

- **Actions:**

- Create programs specifically aimed at underrepresented groups, such as youth-focused workshops or seasonal worker listening sessions. Tailoring engagement opportunities to the unique circumstances of these groups ensures their voices are heard.
- Simplify communications to ensure they are accessible to all residents, regardless of literacy level or familiarity with municipal processes.
- Partner with local businesses and community groups to share information and invite participation in municipal initiatives.

- **Anticipated Impact:**

- By making participation more accessible and relevant to underrepresented groups, the town can capture a wider range of perspectives in its decision-making processes.
- Enhanced outreach fosters stronger relationships between residents and municipal leadership, building trust and a sense of belonging.
- Proactively engaging groups that have been underrepresented helps to ensure more equitable governance.

9.4 Long-Term Strategies (2+ years)

To establish a lasting culture of engagement, public participation in Lunenburg needs to shift from being a collection of standalone initiatives to becoming a core principle embedded in how the town operates. These strategies build on the foundation laid by the communication strategy and tiered participation framework, aiming to institutionalize participatory practices and ensure they remain flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

1. Integrate Participation into Governance Culture

For public participation to become an enduring feature of governance in Lunenburg, it must be formally integrated into decision-making processes. Findings 3 and 4 highlighted the importance of creating structural mechanisms that embed participation into municipal workflows, addressing gaps identified in both staff and resident feedback.

- **Actions:**

- Adopt formal policies that require all major projects and decisions to incorporate engagement plans as a standard practice.
- Define clear metrics, such as participation rates, diversity of input, and alignment with community priorities, to measure the effectiveness of participation efforts.
- Schedule periodic assessments of participation practices to adapt to changing trends and community needs.

- **Anticipated Impact:**

- Residents will come to see participation as an integral part of governance, strengthening trust and transparency.
- Regular reviews and adaptive policies will keep participatory practices aligned with emerging trends and priorities.

2. Collaborate with Community Groups

Grassroots organizations are valuable partners in extending the reach and depth of public participation. These groups often have strong local networks and specialized knowledge, making them ideal collaborators in addressing key issues such as housing, environmental sustainability, and food security. This approach aligns with stakeholder feedback emphasizing the potential of partnerships to address resource constraints and amplify outreach (Findings 3 and 4).

- **Actions:**

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory to identify community organizations, their areas of expertise, and the populations they serve.
- Develop agreements that outline shared goals, responsibilities, and resource-sharing arrangements.

- Support initiatives where grassroots organizations take an active role in designing and implementing engagement efforts.
- **Anticipated Impact:**
 - Partnering with community groups demonstrates a commitment to valuing local expertise and shared leadership.
 - Collaboration allows the town to leverage existing networks and resources, extending its reach and impact.
 - Grassroots organizations can bring specialized knowledge and community buy-in to tackle multifaceted challenges.

3. Evaluate and Iterate

Building a lasting culture of engagement means continuously improving how the town involves its residents. Findings emphasized the importance of accountability and responsiveness in sustaining trust, particularly through regular feedback loops and iterative refinement of practices (Findings 2 and 3).

- **Actions:**
 - Create criteria to measure the success of engagement initiatives, incorporating both quantitative metrics (e.g., participation rates) and qualitative feedback (e.g., resident satisfaction).
 - Use surveys, focus groups, and informal discussions to collect input on the effectiveness of specific initiatives.
 - Regularly compile evaluation data into accessible reports to demonstrate transparency and accountability.
 - Incorporate lessons learned from evaluations to improve formats, timelines, and communication strategies.
 - Establish a routine for evaluations, such as annual reviews, and assign responsibility to a dedicated team or committee.
- **Anticipated Impact:**
 - Regular evaluations demonstrate that the town values resident input and is committed to continuous improvement.
 - By refining practices based on feedback, the town can adapt to changing needs and preferences.

- Systematic evaluation helps identify weaknesses and missed opportunities, enabling the town to respond before issues escalate.

Implementation Feasibility and Resource Considerations

While the proposed recommendations are comprehensive, their feasibility for a small municipality like Lunenburg must be carefully considered. With limited staff and resources, prioritization and incremental implementation are essential to success. Actions such as developing a communication strategy and piloting informal engagements can be achieved with modest adjustments to current workflows. Meanwhile, more resource-intensive initiatives, such as creating a tiered participation framework or expanding outreach, can be phased in over time. Collaborating with local community groups, leveraging existing networks, and seeking external funding or grants can further enhance the town’s capacity. By scaling efforts gradually and focusing on the most impactful actions, Lunenburg can effectively strengthen public participation within its means.

9.4 Action Table: Roadmap for Public Participation

The table below outlines the specific actions recommended to improve public participation in Lunenburg. These actions are organized into immediate, intermediate, and long-term strategies to provide a clear and phased approach to implementation.

Table 9: Phased Strategies for Enhancing Public Participation in Lunenburg

Recommendation	Key theme	Actions	Timeline
Develop a Communication Strategy	Trust and Transparency	Conduct communication audit Establish multi-channel approach (e.g., mailouts, social media, newsletters) Schedule regular updates	Immediate (0–6 months)
Pilot Informal Engagements	Inclusivity Challenges	Host informal “Coffee with Council” sessions Use alternative formats like World Cafés	Immediate (0–6 months)

		Hold events at varied times and locations	
Introduce Feedback Mechanisms	Trust and Transparency	Publish summaries of public input Develop online feedback tracker Provide follow-ups to participants	Immediate (0–6 months)
Adopt a Tiered Participation Framework	Resource Constraints	Create engagement guidelines tailored to project complexity Implement hybrid options for flexibility	Intermediate (6 months–2 years)
Enhance Advisory Committees	Participation Practices	Update committee charters- Provide training for committee members Conduct periodic reviews of effectiveness	Intermediate (6 months–2 years)
Expand Outreach	Inclusivity Challenges	Design tailored initiatives for underrepresented groups Use plain language in all materials- Leverage local community hubs	Intermediate (6 months–2 years)
Collaborate with Community Groups	Innovation Opportunities	Inventory local groups Formalize partnerships and co-lead initiatives Share resources and define clear partnership agreements	Long-term (2+ years)
Integrate Participation into Governance Culture	Governance Culture	Institutionalize public participation policies Establish success	Long-term (2+ years)

		metrics for engagement Conduct regular reviews	
Evaluate and Iterate	Innovation Opportunities	Develop evaluation framework Gather resident feedback after initiatives Use findings to refine engagement practices	Long-term (2+ years)

Conclusion

This research set out to answer the following question: *How can the Town of Lunenburg develop and implement effective public participation strategies that align with the CCP and address the needs of its residents, Council, and municipal staff?* Drawing from interviews with councillors and staff, a resident focus group, and a thorough review of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP), the findings show that while Lunenburg has demonstrated a capacity for meaningful engagement, particularly during the CCP's development, its overall participation strategy remains fragmented and largely reactive. Engagement is still too often tied to legislative requirements rather than being embedded as a continuous, collaborative process.

Across the three groups, there was widespread recognition of the value and necessity of more robust public participation. Councillors expressed a desire to move beyond formal hearings and toward more relational, informal approaches that build trust and improve early dialogue. Staff, while acknowledging capacity constraints, supported flexible and tiered approaches tailored to the scope and impact of decisions. Residents were vocal about the frustrations they have experienced with inaccessible formats, unclear communication, and the perceived sidelining of their contributions during later stages of policy and program development. These voices converge on a shared conclusion: the current system undervalues public input, and without reform, risks further alienating the very people it seeks to serve.

To address these challenges, this project proposes a multi-phased pathway toward more inclusive governance. In the short term, the town must focus on foundational improvements, starting with a communication strategy that blends digital and traditional

tools to keep residents consistently informed. Equally important is the introduction of visible feedback loops, such as publishing summaries of community input and explaining how it influenced outcomes. Immediate improvements should include piloting informal engagement formats that are less intimidating and more conversational. Events like “Coffee with Council” sessions, drop-in dialogues at the local farmers’ market, or small-group World Café-style meetings can draw in residents who are typically absent from formal settings. Such approaches also provide a better space for mutual learning and trust-building, which are often stifled in adversarial or rigid forums.

In the intermediate term, Lunenburg should adopt a flexible approach to public participation that matches the level of engagement to the importance of the issue. For example, simple matters could be addressed through quick online polls, while more complex or high-impact projects might require in-depth workshops or input from advisory committees. These committees, in particular, haven’t been used to their full potential. By giving them clearer roles and making sure they include a wide range of voices, the town can better reflect community perspectives in its decisions. This kind of approach would make participation fairer and more effective, while also sharing the responsibility for engagement more evenly across different parts of town governance.

Longer term, the vision must be more transformative. Lunenburg should aim to embed co-governance into its institutional DNA, building systems where residents are not simply invited to react to proposals but co-create them from the outset. This involves sustained partnerships with community groups, internal staff training in facilitation and equity-based engagement, and clear policies defining when and how public participation should occur across different project stages. Ultimately, by adopting co-governance models that empower residents to contribute throughout a project’s lifecycle, Lunenburg can move beyond reactive consultation toward a participatory culture of accountability and shared stewardship. Councillors and staff who lead this shift demonstrate a deeper commitment to democratic values, honouring not just the letter of public input laws but their spirit. In doing so, they foster a more responsive, resilient local government that truly reflects the aspirations of its community.

References

- Abas, A., Arifin, K., Ali, M. A. M., & Khairil, M. (2023). A systematic literature review on public participation in decision-making for local authority planning: A decade of progress and challenges. *Environmental Development*, 46, 100853-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2023.100853>
- Ansell, C., & Torfing, J. (2021). A new public governance based on co-creation. In *Public Governance as Co-creation: A Strategy for Revitalizing the Public Sector and Rejuvenating Democracy* (pp. 1–32). Cambridge University Press.
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Armstrong, L. (2023, December 5). 'We've got this wrong': Lunenburg mayor expects Queen Street name to be overturned. CTV News. Retrieved from <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/2023/12/5/n-s--town-that-changed-cornwallis-street-to-queen-now-considerin.html>
- Bae, H. H. (2020). An analysis of the community participation process in New York City - focusing on its effectiveness, representativeness, and inclusiveness. [PhD thesis, Columbia University]. <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-pp5m-yq26>
- Berner, M. M., Amos, J. M., & Morse, R. S. (2011). What constitutes effective citizen participation in local government? Views from city stakeholders. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 35(1), 128–163.
- Bherer, L., Gauthier, M., & Simard, L. (2017). *The professionalization of public participation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315637983>
- Blomkamp, E. (2018). The promise of co-design for public policy. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 77(4), 729–743. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12310>
- Bobbio, L. (2019). Designing effective public participation. *Policy & Society*, 38(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2018.1511193>
- Boedeltje, M., & Cornips, J. (2004). Input and output legitimacy in interactive governance. *Public Performance & Management Review*.
- Bowen, F., Newenham-Kahindi, A., & Herremans, I. (2010). When suits meet roots: The antecedents and consequences of community engagement strategy. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 95(2), 297–318. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0360-1>

Bryson, J. M. (2018). Resource A: Stakeholder identification and analysis techniques in strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement. 5th ed. Jossey Bass.

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Seo, D. (2020). Using a design approach to create collaborative governance. *Policy and Politics*, 48(1), 167–189.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/030557319X15613696433190>

Bryson, J. M., Quick, K. S., Slotterback, C. S., & Crosby, B. C. (2013). Designing public participation processes. *Public Administration Review*, 73(1), 23–34.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02678.x>

Cameron, J., Denker, M., Mailler, K., & Mills, J. (2021). What's the value of public participation? *National Civic Review*, 110(2), 9–17.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.32543/naticivirevi.110.2.0009>

CBC News. "Hotel Expansion Considered by Lunenburg Town Council." *CBC News*, 23 Nov. 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/hotel-expansion-considered-by-lunenburg-town-council-1.6268180>. Accessed 4 Oct. 2024.

CBCL Limited. (2015). Municipal Climate Change Action Plan for the Town of Lunenburg. <https://townoflunenburg.ca/town-services/planning-and-development/282-lunenburg-mccap-dated-february-2015/file.html>

Chatwin, M., Arku, G., & Cleave, E. (2019). Defining subnational open government: Does local context influence policy and practice? *Policy Sciences*, 52(3), 451–479.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48702535>

Cheung, C. (2023, June 1). Chinatown seniors return to City Hall to protest 105 Keefer. *The Tye*. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2023/06/01/Chinatown-Seniors-Protest-105-Keefer/>

Civic Square Public Engagement Session. (2023, November 28). Town of Lunenburg. <https://townoflunenburg.ca/civic-square-public-engagement-session.html>

Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (2014). Citizen participation. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* (Vol. 2, pp. 95-96). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406>

Current projects. (n.d.). Town of Lunenburg. <https://townoflunenburg.ca/current-projects.html>

- Dahal, B., & White, P. (2022). Actors of community development: Insider and outsider perspectives. *Forum for Development Studies*, 49(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2021.2015718>
- de Soysa, A. (2022). Participatory budgeting: Public participation in budget processes. *Transparency International*. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep40648>.
- Dreyer, M., Kosow, H., Bauer, A., Chonkova, B., Kozarev, V., & Timotijevic, L. (2021). Public engagement with research: Citizens' views on motivations, barriers and support. *Research for All*, 5(2), 302–319. <https://doi.org/10.14324/RFA.05.2.08>
- Eckerd, A., & Heidelberg, R. L. (2020). Administering public participation. *American Review of Public Administration*, 50(2), 133–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074019871368>
- Edelenbos, J., & Van Meerkerk, I. (2016). *Critical reflections on interactive governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781783479078>
- Edelenbos, J., & Van Meerkerk, I. (2022). Chapter 38: Normative considerations of interactive governance: Effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy and innovation. In *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800371972.00047>
- Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. *Public Administration Review*, 66(s1), 66–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667>
- Fung, A. (2015). Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future. *Public Administration Review*, 75(4), 513–522. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361>
- Friends of Blockhouse Hill | Lunenburg Nova Scotia. (n.d.). Blockhouse Hill. <https://www.blockhousehill.com/>
- Gaber, J. (2019). Building “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”: Sherry Arnstein, citizen participation, and Model Cities. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 85(3), 188–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2019.1612267>
- Goodman, N., Zwick, A., Spicer, Z., & Carlsen, N. (2020). Public engagement in smart city development: Lessons from communities in Canada's Smart City Challenge. *The Canadian Geographer*, 64(3), 416–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12607>
- Haikio, L. (2012). From innovation to convention: Legitimate citizen participation in local governance. *Local Government Studies*, 38(4), 415–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2012.698241>

- Head, B. W., & Alford, J. (2015). Wicked problems: Implications for public policy and management. *Administration & Society*, 47(6), 711–739.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399713481601>
- Hoppe, R. (2011). Institutional constraints and practical problems in deliberative and participatory policy making. *Policy and Politics*, 39(2), 163–186.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/030557310X519650>
- Hussey, S. (2023). Community influence in public decision-making. *The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Australasia*. <https://iap2.org.au/news/can-community-influence-political-decision-making-in-a-climate-of-falling-public-trust/>
- Ianniello, M., Iacuzzi, S., Fedele, P., & Brusati, L. (2019). Obstacles and solutions on the ladder of citizen participation: A systematic review. *Public Management Review*, 21(1), 21–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1438499>
- Ife, J. (2016). *Community Development in an Uncertain World: Vision, Analysis and Practice* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Jamal, S., & Newbold, K. B. (2023). The promise of co-design for improving transit service for older immigrants: Development of a co-design framework for Hamilton, Ontario. *Urban Governance*, 3(1), 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ugj.2023.01.002>
- Jäntti, A., Paananen, H., Kork, A.-A., & Kurkela, K. (2023). Towards interactive governance: Embedding citizen participation in local government. *Administration & Society*, 55(8), 1529–1554. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997231177220>
- Johnson, G. F. (2020). Revelatory protest, deliberative exclusion, and the BC Missing Women Commission of Inquiry: Bridging the micro/macro divide. In *Creating Spaces of Engagement* (pp. 25–46). University of Toronto Press.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487519889-003>
- Jones, K. (2023). Community engagement in local communities: Hearing the voices of the public. *The School of Public Policy Publications (Online)*, 16(1).
<https://doi.org/10.11575/sppp.v16i1.76642>
- Juarez, J. A., & Brown, K. D. (2008). Extracting or empowering?: A critique of participatory methods for marginalized populations. *Landscape Journal*, 27(2), 190–204.
<https://doi.org/10.3368/lj.27.2.190>
- Katsonis, M. (2019). Designing effective public engagement: The case study of Future Melbourne 2026. *Policy Design and Practice*, 2(2), 215–228.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2019.1621032>

- Kim, C., & Nam, K. Y. (2022). Policy puzzle game: Making policy ideas feasible and acceptable in policy co-design. *CoDesign*, 18(4), 448–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2021.1995440>
- Leino, H., & Puumala, E. (2021). What can co-creation do for the citizens? Applying co-creation for the promotion of participation in cities. *Environment and Planning C, Politics and Space*, 39(4), 781–799. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420957337>
- Levac, L. R., & Wiebe, S. M. (2020). *Creating Spaces of Engagement: Policy Justice and the Practical Craft of Deliberative*. University of Toronto Press.
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2018). *Understanding and Evaluating Research: A Critical Guide*, 1st edition. Sage Publications. Chapter 7.
- Magnusson, R. (2020). Unsettled democracy: The case of the Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly. In *Creating Spaces of Engagement* (pp. 117–138). <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487519889-007>
- Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., ... Warren, M. E. (2012). A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In J. Parkinson & J. Mansbridge (Eds.), *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale* (pp. 1–26). Cambridge University Press.
- Mark, T. T. T. (2019). Culturally appropriate community engagement in Vancouver's Chinatown (T). University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0388219>
- May, J. (2006). Ladders, Stars and Triangles: Old and New Theory for the Practice of Public Participation. *International Journal of Market Research*, 48(3), 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147078530604800305>
- McKeown, E. (2019). Planning for meaningful public participation in Red Deer.
- Meijer, A. J., Curtin, D., & Hillebrandt, M. (2012). Open government: Connecting vision and voice. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 78(1), 10–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852311429533>
- Michels, A., & Binnema, H. (2019). Assessing the impact of deliberative democratic initiatives at the local level: A framework for analysis. *Administration & Society*, 51(5), 749–769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399718760588>
- Municipal Government Act, SNS 1998, c 18. Retrieved from the Nova Scotia Legislature website: <https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/municipal%20government.pdf>

- Municipal Housing Strategy - community engagement. (n.d.). Get Involved Lethbridge. <https://getinvolvedlethbridge.ca/municipal-housing-strategy?tool=qanda>
- Murtin, F., et al. (2018). Trust and its determinants: Evidence from the Trustlab experiment. *OECD Statistics Working Papers, No. 2018/02*. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/869ef2ec-en>.
- Nabatchi, T., & Amsler, L. B. (2014). Direct public engagement in local government. *The American Review of Public Administration, 44*(4_suppl), 63S-88S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074013519702>
- Nabatchi, T., & Leighninger, M. (2015). *Public participation for 21st century democracy*. Jossey-Bass.
- OECD. (2009). *Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services*. OECD Studies on Public Engagement. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1787/9789264048874-en>.
- OECD. (2020). *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1787/339306da-en>.
- OECD. (2022). *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*. OECD Public Governance Reviews. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f765caf6-en>.
- Olsen, J., & Feeney, M. K. (2022). The influence of legal mandates on public participation. *American Review of Public Administration, 52*(7), 486–497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02750740221123105>
- Özden, M. (2023). Active participation or legal obligation? A qualitative study of the effectiveness of participatory methods designed for local participation. *Quality & Quantity, 58*(1), 559–580. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-023-01658-z>
- Patil, A. (2023, December 4). Cornwallis name gone from Lunenburg street, but new name draws criticism. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/lunenburg-cornwallis-street-replacement-misses-the-mark-1.7046549>
- Planning Public Participation Program Policy. (2022). Town of Lunenburg. <https://townoflunenburg.ca/771-public-participation/file.html>
- Pinnington, E., Lerner, J., & Schugurensky, D. (2009). Participatory budgeting in North America: the case of Guelph, Canada. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management, 21*(3), 454–483. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbafm-21-03-2009-b005>

Porter, C. A., & Ashcraft, C. M. (2020). New England food policy councils: An assessment of organizational structure, policy priorities and public participation. *Elementa (Washington, D.C.)*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.436>

Project Lunenburg. (2020). Comprehensive Community Plan. Town of Lunenburg. <https://townoflunenburg.ca/town-services/planning-and-development/628-ccp-final-2020-with-appendix-a/file.html>

Province of Nova Scotia. (2023). Municipal Housing Needs Report. Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/plans-and-studies/1490-town-of-lunenburg-municipal-housing-needs-report.html>

Quick, K., & Bryson, J. (2022). Public participation. In *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800371972.00022>

Quick, K. S., & Feldman, M. S. (2011). Distinguishing participation and inclusion. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 31(3), 272–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X11410979>

Rongerude, J. (2020). Participation, inclusion, and voice in neighborhood planning. In Book *Learning from Arnstein's Ladder: From Citizen Participation to Public Engagement* (pp. 255–270)

Rowe, G., & Frewer, L. J. (2000). Public participation methods: A framework for evaluation. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 25(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016224390002500101>

Ryan, H. (2023, March 1). Town of Lunenburg says world will be watching its new housing development. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/lunenburg-housing-development-1.6762942>

Šaparnienė, D., Reinholde, I., & Rinkevičienė, S. (2021). Relationship between citizens' trust in local government and participation in local governance. *Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice. Series D, Faculty of Economics and Administration*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.46585/sp29021210>

Scott, R. P. (2019). More than just complaints: Generating thick engagement through thin participatory programs. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 2(2), 155–165. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvz003>

Sjöberg, F. M., Mellon, J., & Peixoto, T. C. (2017). The effect of bureaucratic responsiveness on citizen participation. *Public Administration Review*, 77(3), 340–351.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12697>

Stout, M. (2010). Climbing the ladder of participation: Establishing local policies for participatory practice. *Public Administration & Management*, 15(1), 45–97.

Thorpe, A. (2017). Rethinking participation, rethinking planning. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 18(4), 566–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2017.1371788>

Town of Lunenburg. (2023, May 17). April 11, 2023 Council meeting [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLMxeGNimE>

Town of Lunenburg. (2023, July 12). July 11, 2023 Council meeting [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQx0NbHby7Q>

Town of Lunenburg. (2024, October 8). *Council highlights*. Town of Lunenburg.

<https://townoflunenburg.ca/council-highlights.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2025, December 10.) *Council Meeting Minutes*. Town of Lunenburg.

<https://townoflunenburg.ca/2024-council-meetings/2024-council-meeting-minutes/1773-12-10-2024-council-minutes/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2022). *Comprehensive Community Plan Status Update, March 2022*.

Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/town-services/planning-and-development/1116-ccp-quarterly-report-q4-2021-22-mar-2022.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2022, December 14). December 13, 2022 Council Meeting, includes council decision on Cornwallis Street renaming [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuYmUwS98e4>

Town of Lunenburg. (2022, December). December 13, 2022 Council Agenda Package, includes report on Cornwallis Street renaming. Retrieved from

<https://townoflunenburg.ca/council-meetings-2022/council-agendas-and-agenda-packages-2022/1235-12-13-22-dec-13-22-coun-ap/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2023, November). November 28, 2023 Council Agenda Package.

Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/council-2023/council-agenda-packages-2023/1513-11-28-2023-council-agenda-package/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2023, April 11). *April 11, 2023 Council agenda package*. Retrieved from

<https://townoflunenburg.ca/council-2023/council-agenda-packages-2023/1350-04-11-2023-council-agenda/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2024). *Cultural Tourism Working Group terms of reference*. Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/committees/1657-cultural-tourism-working-group-terms-of-reference.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2024, June 25). *Council agenda package* (pp. 46-57). Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/council-meetings/2024-council-meetings/2024-council-agendas/1664-2024-06-25-council-agenda/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2022). Planning Public Participation Policy.

Town of Lunenburg. (2024). Planning Public Participation Policy. Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/1665-planning-public-participation-policy/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. (2023, October 24). Committees Policy. Retrieved from <https://townoflunenburg.ca/1492-committees-policy/file.html>

Town of Lunenburg. "Current Projects." *Town of Lunenburg*, 2024, <https://townoflunenburg.ca/current-projects.html>.

Uittenbroek, C. J., Mees, H. L. P., Hegger, D. L. T., & Driessen, P. P. J. (2019). The design of public participation: Who participates, when and how? Insights in climate adaptation planning from the Netherlands. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 62(14), 2529–2547. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2019.1569503>

Van Herzele, A. (2004). Local knowledge in action: Valuing nonprofessional reasoning in the planning process. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 24(2), 197–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X04267723>

Ward, J. (2023, November 29). Lunenburg votes to replace colonial legacy of Cornwallis Street with Queen Street. Lunenburg Barnacle. <https://www.thebarnacle.ca/lunenburg-votes-to-replace-colonial-legacy-of-cornwallis-street-with-queen-street/>

Wargent, M. (2021). Localism, governmentality and failing technologies: The case of Neighbourhood Planning in England. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9(4), 571–591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2020.1737209>

Walker, E. T. (2014). Participatory and policy impacts. In *Grassroots for Hire: Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy* (pp. 155–191). Cambridge University Press.

Weymouth, R., & Hartz-Karp, J. (2019). Participation in planning and governance: Closing the gap between satisfaction and expectation. *Sustainable Earth*, 2(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42055-019-0012-y>

Young, I. M. (2000). Representation and social perspective. In *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Yuille, A. (2023). Planning, participation and democratisation. *Beyond Neighbourhood Planning Knowledge, Care, Legitimacy*, 28–60.

<https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447362869.003>

Zhai, W. (2020, December 4). It's in the community: How COVID and gentrification challenge Chinatown. *Capilano Courier*. <http://www.capilanocourier.com/2020/12/04/in-the-community/>

Zypchyn, K. (2016). A white paper on challenges and advancements in evaluating public participation. www.iap2canada.ca. International Association for Public Participation Canada.

Appendix A

This appendix contains the interview and focus group questions used in this study to explore public participation in the Town of Lunenburg. The included questions were designed for three key groups: Town Council members, municipal staff, and residents. These discussions aimed to gather insights into current engagement practices, barriers to participation, and opportunities for improvement, aligning with the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Community Plan and broader municipal governance strategies.

Council Interview Questions

Study: Enhancing Public Participation in the Town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

Researcher: Kayla Byrne, Graduate Student, School of Public Administration (Community Development)

Context: As the elected officials responsible for approving key policies and strategies, Town of Lunenburg councillors possess invaluable insights and authority. Their perspectives are crucial for understanding the legislative intent behind public participation goals, the current state of public engagement in Lunenburg, and aspirations for future governance. Through these one-on-one interviews, the research aims to gather actionable recommendations from those at the forefront of policy-making and governance, ensuring that the strategies developed are informed by the experiences and visions of those leading the town.

Perceptions of Current Engagement Practices

- How do you see public participation in Lunenburg right now? Are there any practices or initiatives you think have worked well to engage the community?
- During your time as a councillor, have there been any changes in how public engagement is done? If yes, what caused these changes?

Aspirations for Public Participation

- One of the CCP's objectives is to "expand the Town's communication plan to include a public participation strategy to guide protocols for involving the public in decision-making and implementation of relevant initiatives." As a member of the Council who approved the CCP, what does this public participation strategy look like to you?

- How much should residents be involved in town decisions? Which decisions should they be part of? Are there situations where extra engagement isn't needed?
- What do you think the ideal relationship between the council, town staff, and residents should look like regarding decision-making and policy development?

Barriers to Effective Participation

- What do you think are the biggest obstacles to effective public participation in Lunenburg? How do these obstacles affect decision-making and governance?
- Are there specific groups in Lunenburg that you feel are underrepresented or have more trouble participating? Why?

Integrating Stakeholder Needs into Decision-Making

- What strategies could help better include the needs and preferences of Lunenburg's stakeholders in decision-making processes?
- Can you share examples where community input significantly influenced council decisions? What made these instances successful?

Impact of Enhanced Participation on Governance and Trust

- How do you think improving public participation could affect the governance of Lunenburg?
- Are there any concerns or potential downsides to increased public participation that you think need to be managed?

Sustainability and Adaptability of Participation Initiatives

- What measures can be taken to ensure long-term sustainability and adaptability of public participation initiatives in Lunenburg?

Role and Influence of Elected Officials

- What role do you believe elected officials play in enhancing public participation in Lunenburg?
- How can councillors actively support and promote engagement initiatives?

Reflections and Recommendations

- Based on your experiences, what do you think are the critical factors for successful public participation in municipal governance?
- Do you have any specific recommendations or innovative ideas to enhance public participation in Lunenburg?

Staff Interview Questions

Study: Enhancing Public Participation in the Town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

Researcher: Kayla Byrne, Graduate Student, School of Public Administration (Community Development)

Context: These interviews with staff members of the Town of Lunenburg (TOL) aim to gather detailed insights on public participation practices. The goal is to understand the current methods, identify challenges, capture staff perspectives on community engagement, and explore opportunities for improvement.

Understanding Current Practices

- What public participation methods does TOL currently use?
- How effective are these methods in involving the community in decision-making? Can you share examples of successes or areas needing improvement?

Identifying Challenges and Barriers

- What are the main obstacles to effective public participation in TOL?
- Are certain community groups less engaged or face more challenges in participating? Why?
- How do limitations in time, budget, and staff affect TOL's ability to engage with the public?

Community Aspirations and Expectations

- Based on your interactions, what do you believe are the community's expectations for public participation in town governance?
- How do these expectations align with current strategies? Where are there gaps or opportunities to better align with the Comprehensive Community Plan?
- At what level should residents be involved in town decisions? What types of decisions should they be involved in? When is additional engagement unnecessary?

Incorporating Stakeholder Needs

- How could TOL better integrate the needs and preferences of different community stakeholders into decision-making?
- Can you recall any instances where the community's input was particularly well-incorporated or overlooked in decision-making? What did you learn from these experiences?

Impact of Enhanced Participation

- What impact do you think an improved public participation strategy would have on municipal governance and community trust in TOL?
- Are there examples from other municipalities that TOL could learn from or adapt to its context?

Sustainability and Adaptability of Initiatives

- How can TOL ensure that its public participation initiatives remain sustainable and adaptable over time?

Role of Elected Officials

- What role should elected officials play in promoting public participation in Lunenburg?

Personal Insights and Suggestions

- Based on your experience, what are the key factors for successful public participation in TOL?
- Do you have any specific recommendations for enhancing public participation that should be considered in this project?

Resident Focus Group Questions

Study: Enhancing Public Participation in the Town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

Researcher: Kayla Byrne, Graduate Student, School of Public Administration (Community Development)

Context: The focus group with residents who participated in the Town of Lunenburg's Feb. 20, 2024 Community Conversation for co-designing a by-law aims to delve into the community's experiences, perceptions, and suggestions for improving public participation and engagement. Through this discussion, we intend to explore various topics, including

the effectiveness of current engagement processes, communication strategies, barriers to participation, and the impact of community input on policy development.

Reflecting on the Community Conversation

- How was your overall experience at the February 20, 2024, Community Conversation for co-designing a by-law? What worked well and what could be improved?
- How did this experience compare to other public engagement events you've attended in Lunenburg?
- Are there other engagement opportunities with the Town of Lunenburg that stood out to you, either positively or negatively? Why?

Experiences with Town Engagement

- How well do you think the Town of Lunenburg involves its residents in decision-making and policy development?
- Have there been times when you felt especially heard or ignored by the town's decision-makers? What made those situations memorable?

CCP's Objectives and Public Participation Strategy

- The CCP aims to expand the town's communication plan to include a public participation strategy. What key elements should this strategy include to effectively involve the public in decision-making?
- How can the Town of Lunenburg better inform and engage residents about opportunities for participation in governance and community projects?

Barriers to Participation

- What would motivate you to engage with the Town on municipal matters? What would prevent you from engaging?
- What are the most significant barriers to effective public participation in Lunenburg? How can these barriers be addressed or removed?
- Are there specific groups in the community that you feel are underrepresented or face more significant challenges in participating? Why, and how can their involvement be enhanced?

Desired Levels and Forms of Participation

- How do you think residents should be involved in the Town's decisions? Are there particular decisions or initiatives where public input is especially needed?
- Considering the CCP's development involved various public engagement opportunities, how should future engagements be structured to ensure meaningful and effective participation?

Improving Communication and Engagement

- What methods or channels could enhance how the Town shares information and gathers feedback?
- What other methods could the Town use to engage with residents meaningfully? What changes could the Town make to strengthen public participation in policy-making and town governance?
- How do you see the role of digital platforms and social media in enhancing public participation in Lunenburg? Are there any specific tools or approaches you would recommend?
- What topics or issues would benefit from a participatory approach similar to the Community Conversation? How should the Town structure these future engagements to ensure broad and meaningful participation?
- What steps can the Town take to foster trust and encourage more robust community involvement in local governance and decision-making?

Sustainability of Public Participation Initiatives

- How can the Town of Lunenburg ensure its public participation initiatives' long-term sustainability and adaptability? What measures would make you more likely to participate regularly?
- What role should ongoing feedback and evaluation play in shaping and improving public participation strategies over time?

Personal Insights and Suggestions

- Based on your experiences, what do you believe are the critical factors for the success of public participation in municipal governance?
- Do you have any specific recommendations or innovative ideas to enhance public participation in the Town of Lunenburg?