Public Hearing Process

The City's Administration is developing a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process.

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

2022

Contents

Project overview

The City's Administration is developing a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process.

Public hearings are opportunities for any individual or organization impacted by a Council or Committee agenda item to provide their opinion directly to Council and have it included in the public record. The City will be reviewing many aspects of the public hearing process.

This engagement will explore how the system could be more user-friendly and inclusive by focusing on learning what works well, and what barriers members of the public may experience that prevent them from participating in a public hearing.

To see the Motion Arising, click here.

Engagement overview

In this engagement, we collected input on:

- Improving accessibility and inclusion around the Public Hearing Process, including and evaluation of current processes, and understanding barriers for participation and how The City could improve accessibly and inclusion in the process; and,
- Exploring opportunities around integrated and automated registration

This chart explains the approach we took to gather your input into this project.

Engagement Strategy	
Date	June 14 to July 9, 2021
Objective	To get input on: • Understanding the Public Hearings Process • Exploring Automated Registration for Public Hearings
Activities	• Online Engagement through www.engage.calgary.ca/publichearings
Participation	• 230 unique participants, 17 representing community groups • Many with high or higher familiarity of the Public Hearing Process

What we asked

To better understand barriers and address accessibility with underserved or hard to reach populations, we asked the following questions:

Understanding the Public Hearings Process

1. How familiar are you with the current public hearing process?
2. Have you participated in any public hearing processes in the past?
3. What has been your overall experience with public hearings that you had participated in?
4. What worked well when you participated in the public hearing process?
5. What challenges did you experience when you participated in the public hearing process?
6. If you haven't participated in a public hearing, what were the reasons for not participating?
7. What would make it easier or more likely for you to participate? Please be specific.
8. What would make public hearings more user-friendly or accessible? Tell us more.
9. What would make public hearings more inclusive? Tell us more.
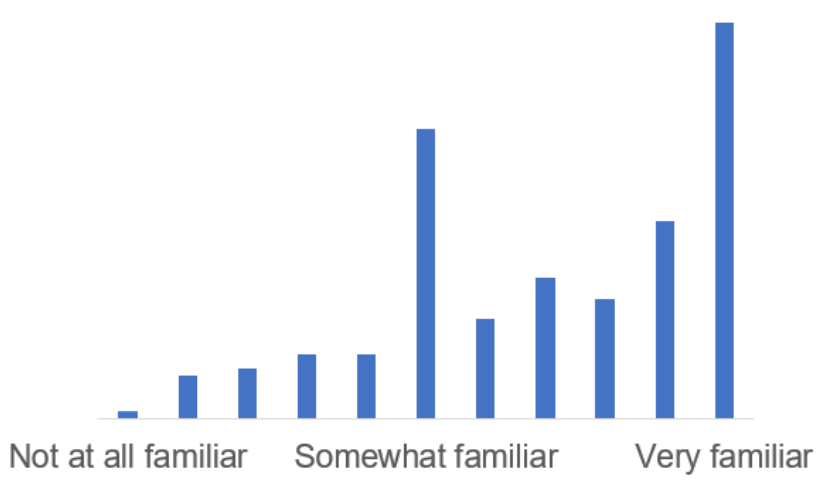10. Please share any additional ways in which we could improve the public hearing process?

Exploring Automated Registration for Public Hearings

1. In your opinion, what are the benefits of automated (online) registration system?
2. In your opinion, what are the drawbacks of an automated (online) registration system?
3. Would you use an automated (online) registration system to sign-up for public hearing opportunities?
4. What information would you need to use an online registration system?
5. What information about yourself would you not share as part of the registration system? (i.e. phone, email, address).
6. How would you like to be able to register for public hearing (i.e. 311, other number, email, website, etc.)?

What we heard

This section provides a short summary of what we heard from those of you that participated via online at engage.calgary.ca.
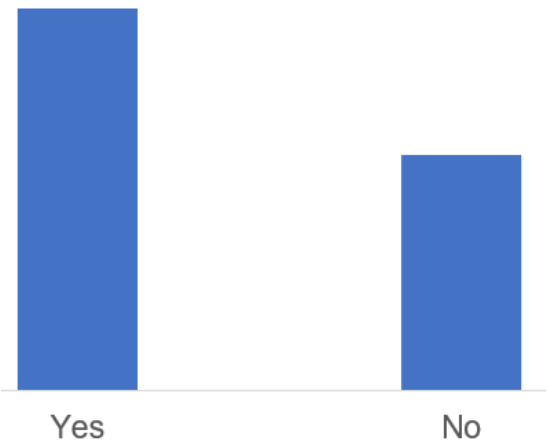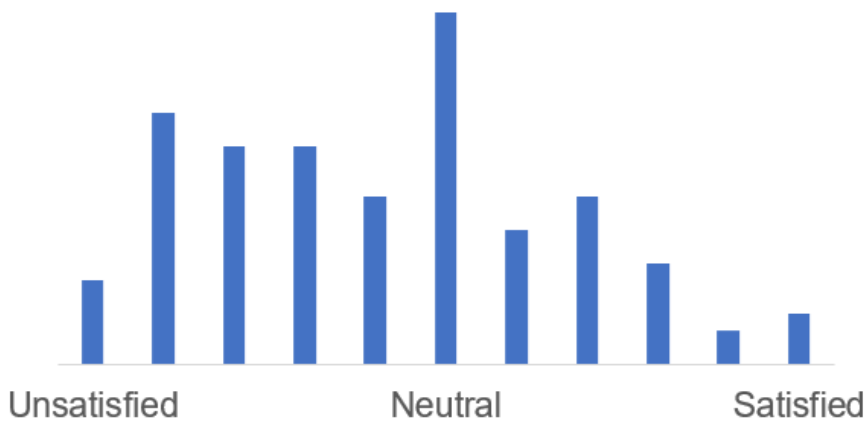
Understanding the Public Hearings Process

Question Asked	Summary of Themes
1. How familiar are you with the current public hearing process?	Many participants have high or higher familiarity of the public hearing process. Not at all familiar Somewhat familiar Very familiar
2. Have you participated in any public hearing processes in the past?	Two thirds of who answered this question have indicated that they have participated in a public hearing process in the past.

3. What has been your overall experience with public hearings that you had participated in?	Majority of participants answered that their experience with the public hearing process as neutral with many others sharing varying levels of unsatisfied experiences. 	
4. What worked well when you participated in the public hearing process?	There were several themes identified under this question. The following is a summary of the top themes identified: **Ability to Participate** Calgarians have opportunities to speak and present position on issues that are important to them. Anyone who wanted to be involved can participate in speaking directly to Council and voice their opinions. Verbatim Comments: o "Anyone can participate." o "I was able to address City Council with my concerns."	

o "Allowing Calgarians to present their opinions directly to council is very important."

Electronic Access/Virtual Participation

A number of participants noted that providing remote access and virtual participation have made it easier for them to follow the livestream and join the public hearing process by calling in.

Verbatim Comments:
- o "Speaking online has also greatly improved access and much it much easier to participate."
- o "Remote access (covid times) makes it more possible to monitor progress and join in without spending your whole day in Chambers."
- o "Being able to watch the public hearing via livestream and call in when the item is up."
- o "Being able to phone in is a major improvement considering meetings often run late (otherwise required speakers to take at least a half day of work off)."

Ease of Process

Simple registration process and dial-in information was easy to follow. The rules and process were explained clearly.

Verbatim Comments:
- o "Easy to register to speak (email registration)"
- o "In-person and call-in details were easy to follow."
- o "The rules around addressing the hearing are clear and objectively and fairly adhered to."

Scheduling & Organization

Each speaker is allotted equal time to speak. Structure and order of items are clear.

Verbatim Comments:
- o "The process for queueing up to speak was well managed by city administration"
- o "Each speaker is given 5 minutes. Time keeping is fair."
- o "The structure is solid, the order of the items being presented to Council, discussion, then presentations in favour and opposed, then debate works well."

	City Staff / Equipment Support	
	Clear communication from Clerks and good presentation from The City.	
	Verbatim Comments: ○ "Communications from clerks was very clear and easy to follow." ○ "The city is good at presenting information and answering questions." ○ "When the hearings were done in person, the staff was helpful in helping with the microphone, table height, putting up slides, etc."	
5. What challenges did you experience when you participated in the public hearing process?	The following is a summary of the top themes identified under this question: **Time Concerns/Time Uncertainty** Almost half of the participants who answered this question noted that waiting all day for their turn to speak without knowing a realistic time frame was a challenge they experienced when participating in the public hearing process. Verbatim Comments: ○ "Having to listen to the livestream all day to know when the time to speak comes is challenging. Speaking already takes time away from work, but not having a sense of when to speak requires a fair bit of attention throughout the day." ○ "There is no set time or even realistic timeframe for your opportunity to speak. You need to be able to potentially sacrifice an entire work day in order to be able to participate." ○ "Having to wait an entire day to speak on an agenda item, not everyone has the luxury of that time." **Not a Respectful/Welcoming Environment** Some participants expressed that they noticed or experienced disrespectful attitudes during public hearing process. Verbatim Comments: ○ "Some persons opinions were criticized before they were finished speaking. The moderator cut them off just because they did not have an opinion the moderator agreed with" ○ "I perceived that many of the councillors were not open to listening to the presentations of citizens who did not agree with their ideologically driven views." ○ "In person hearings are hard Becuase people are expected to wait all day for their turn to speak. Having a schedule is much better. I also thought that the councillors were not as kind to folks who may not	

have planning experience or language skills. Made people feel dumb."

Confusion About How to Get Involved & How the Process Works

Difficulty in knowing how to participate and finding information, such as the agenda for public hearing, were one of the major challenges identified. Sometimes, there was confusion caused by lack of information and conflicting messaging.

Verbatim Comments:
- o "The process was confusing with unclear and at times contradictory instructions. The excercise of signing up to speak for a 10 minute speaking slot resulted in hours or at times days of waiting to speak. This makes it inaccessible for the average employed Calgarian to participate."
- o "The biggest challenge I discovered was locating the agenda for the meeting where I intended to speak. If I had not been given a heads up on the agenda item by a colleague, I would not have been able to locate it in the agenda."
- o "Challenging to know the etiquette and how to participate. Also the inability to know when your item might come up is a challenge and I can see it turning a lot of folks away from participating."

Tech Issues

Not able to see councillors at online hearing, experiencing time delay, unable to view your own slides during the presentation were a few of the technology issues identified. Also, lack of knowledge about using technology for virtual meeting was a challenge for some participants.

Verbatim Comments:
- o "Time delay between call in and livestream video, not being able to see your slides as the presentation progresses, unmuted participants."
- o "Online meetings should have councillors on a video link, not just audio. There is no way of seeing if they are still present or have walked away from their computers for much of the meeting. Show them!!"
- o "I'm not a technical person so there was a learning curve for me especially with respect to using visuals during a presentation. Maybe you could have some online tutorials."
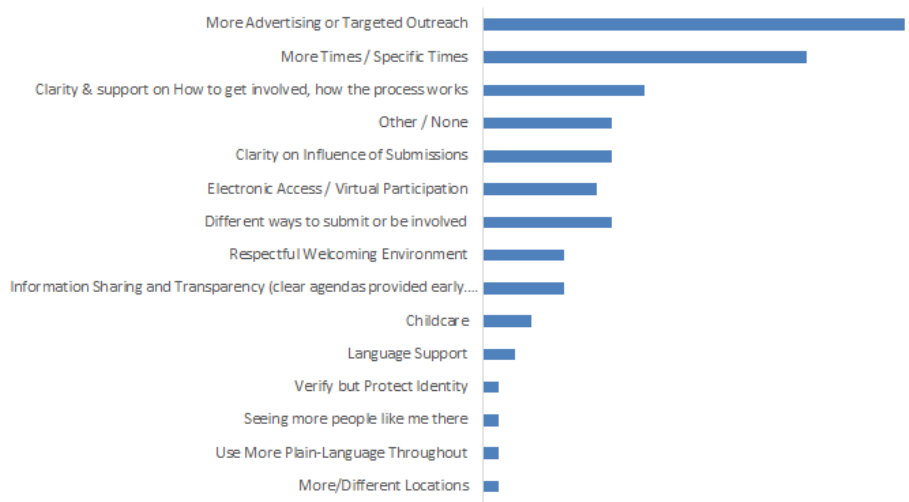
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Don't Feel That Input is Used

Several participants felt that Council did not really listen to public hearings and voices were discarded. Some of the participants perceived that the City already knew the outcomes.

Verbatim Comments:
- "Waiting hours and hours for the item to come up. Feeling like the city had already made up its mind."
- "Council couldn't care less what was presented"
- "For the public it isn't always clear what decision is made, it can be a very long day waiting to speak if you are coming in for one item and you don't know when it will be heard, from my perspective not all speakers were treated the same."

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6. If you haven't participated in a public hearing, what were the reasons for not participating?

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The top three reasons for not participating in a public hearing chosen by participants who answered this question include:
- I don't think my input will be used by decision-makers
- I haven't been aware of when they are
- The hearing times make it difficult for me to attend

For those who have said that they haven't been involved in a public hearing, their open text field responses mirrored closed-ended questions with responses highlighting:
- lack of awareness of opportunities
- lack of understanding

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		• lack of trust that public input will be used • time constraints • fear of being identified or targeted for participation
7.	What would make it easier or more likely for you to participate? Please be specific.	There were a number of themes identified under this question. The following is a summary of the top themes identified:

More Advertising or Targeted Outreach

Having more advertising or targeted outreach is the most identified theme that would make it easier for Calgarians to participate in public hearing. Posting information on social media and City website, sending email invitations, and having signs in neighbourhoods are some ways to raise awareness of upcoming opportunities to participate in public hearing.

Verbatim Comments:
- "More awareness of topics, meeting times, and how to participate."
- "Letting the public know with anticipation about the hearing. Facebook adds, public transit adds, radio adds, tv adds."
- "Identified times easily found on the website or social media outreach with hearing timelines please."

More Times/ Specific Times

Uncertainty of time to speak and long waiting time make it more difficult for Calgarians to participate in public hearing. Having scheduled speaking time, and providing options to participate after regular business hours and over multiple days could remove some barriers for participation.
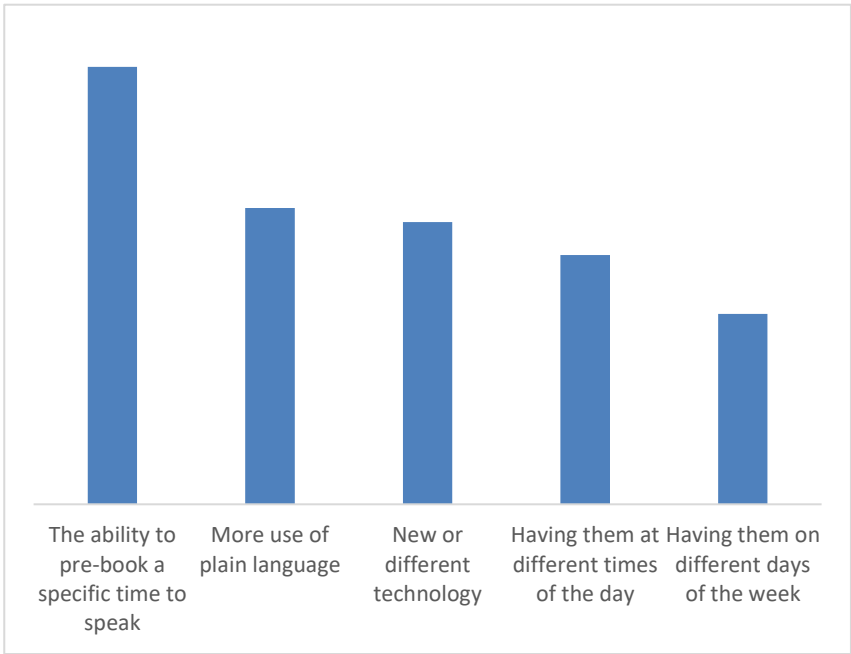
Verbatim Comments:
- "Knowing exactly (or at least within an hour or two) my time to speak will be. Right now I just have to go and…wait. And maybe come back another day."
- "Bookable time slots to participate, including outside of standard business hours of 9am to 5pm. Continue to provide other options that only in person when covid ends."
- "Having multiple meetings to discuss the same thing. Not everyone can go to one meeting because of the time."

Clarity & Support on How to Get Involved, How the Process Works

Providing clarity on how to get involved and explaining how the public hearing process works were ideas shared in this theme.

Verbatim Comments:
- "clear instructions on how to participate, the rules etc"
- "it is difficult for people with lesser means to attend these meetings and have their voice heard, and there needs to be clear and simple instructions and encouragement from people in leadership. It is also time consuming, so there needs to be a more efficient way to share opinions. Virtual spaces would be great if they would still have a significant impact."
- "Being aware of where/when the meeting is happening. Being aware of what the expected protocol is to communicate my ideas ie how informal or formal the process is. I don't want to be insulted or looked down upon for sharing my opinion."

Clarity on Influence of Submissions

Participants stated the importance of understanding how their input is being used in a meaningful way to impact decision-making.

Verbatim Comments:
- "Feedback to the community on how the collective thinking was used in the decision making process to ensure that stakeholder feedback actually does make a difference and has an impact on decisions."
- "To know that I will be provided with the information I need to become informed on the issue and provide input. Also, to know that the City will use my input in a meaningful way and make changes if necessary to their project based on my input. To know there is not a predetermined outcome and to be able to oppose or not approve a project outright would be democratic."
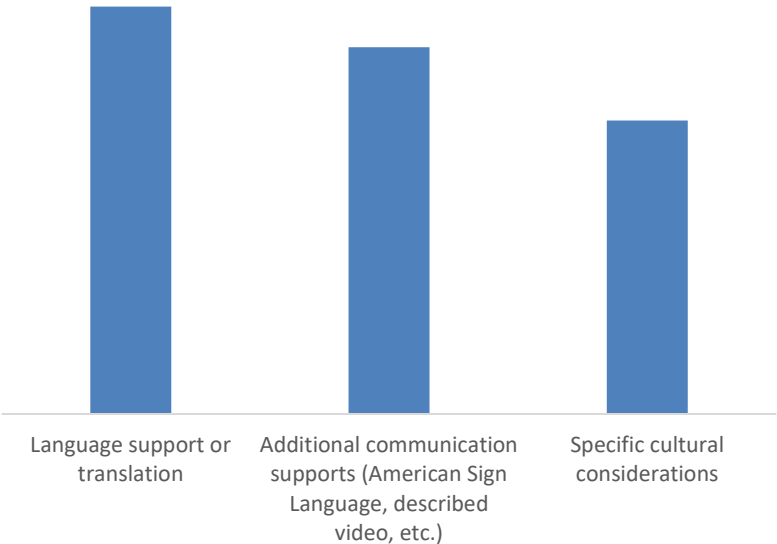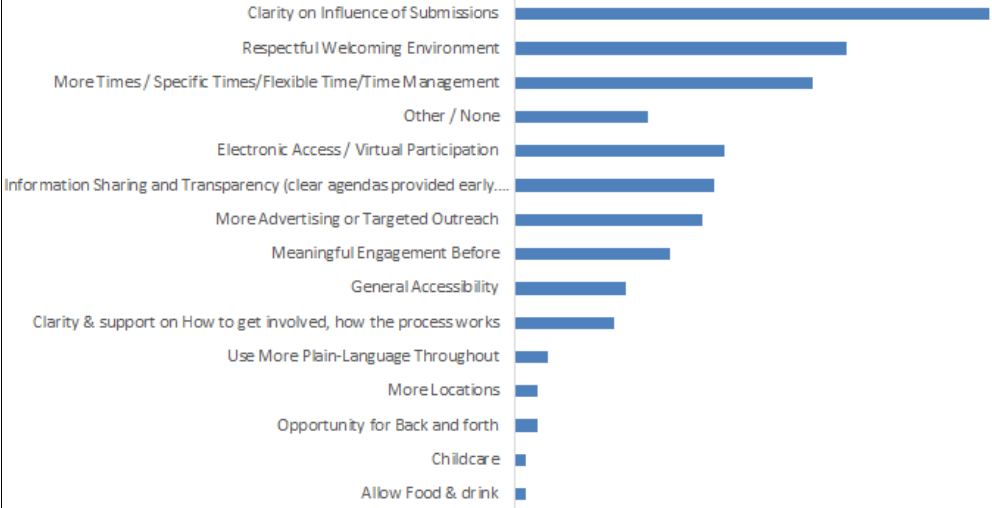

		Different Ways to Submit or Be Involved
		
		Offering different ways to provide submissions and be involved are some suggestions that would make it easier for Calgarians to participate in public hearing.
		
		Verbatim Comments:
		  o "I am not comfortable speaking in a public forum. My comfort zone is responding with thoughtful online responses."
		  o "Various ways of participating outside of preparing a talk. It seems not to be equitable, inclusive, or culturally responsive."

8.	What would make public hearings more user-friendly or accessible?	Examples of what all participants think would make public hearings more user-friendly and accessible are:
		  o Being able to pre-book a specific time
		  o More use of plain language
		  o New or different technology
		  o Having the public hearings at different times of the day or different days of the week

9.	What would make public hearings more inclusive? Tell us more.	To make the public hearings more inclusive, top examples of what to offer shared by participants are:
		  o Language support or translation,
		  o Additional communications support (American Sign Language, described video, etc.)
		  o Specific cultural considerations.

10. Please share any additional ways in which we could improve the public hearing process?	Participants gave many examples of how to improve the public hearing process. Among those, the top responses were: ○ Clarity on Influence of Submission ○ Respectful/Welcoming environment ○ More Times / Specific Times/Flexible Time/Time Management

Exploring Automated Registration for Public Hearings

Question Asked	Summary of Themes
1. In your opinion, what are the benefits of automated (online) registration system?	There were several themes identified under this question. The following is a summary of the top themes identified: **Better Use of Time** The majority of participants shared that an online system would be a better use time with public hearings. Many shared current concerns including long wait times, uncertainty when they would be speaking, a lack of a schedule, convenience as well as being more efficient. Verbatim Comments: ○ "This would encourage more participating because people would not have to book time off work or get babysitters. A person would know if they are speaking at 8am or 8pm and not have to sit at City Hall waiting for their 5 minutes." ○ "Knowing when you are to speak and not having to find a way to be physically onsite at City Hall." ○ "You're able to schedule around your time, and it keeps things running on schedule" **Access at Any Time/Convenience** The second most common response to this question spoke to access and convenience with many sharing how this would make it easier/faster, would encourage participation and could accommodate people's busy schedules and lives. Verbatim Comments: ○ "Don't have to wait all day for your spot - can take your break at your job at the right time." ○ "Speed and convenience" ○ "24/ 7 access: eg: im filliing this in sunday evening.." ○ "I can register from home, I can know precisely when I will be heard" ○ "Easy access and can book ahead of time." **User Friendly/Easy/Open to All** Participants also shared that an online system would be user easier and a more open system noting that many people have familiarity with online systems now along with comments about an online system being a friendlier or less intimidating option.

	Verbatim Comments: ○ "Easier to register, easier to schedule time." ○ "Less intimidating" ○ "It would make it feel more available and open" ○ "Its easy if it's online - everything is online these days." ○ "Everyone would be able to have a say and more people would be able to access it." **Pre-booking/Exact Booking Times/Schedule** Many participants saw a benefit of an online system being that they could book specific times and be part of a schedule which could create some predictability. Verbatim Comments: ○ "You're able to schedule around your time, and it keeps things running on schedule" ○ "Easy if it gives some certainty to the time slot or order. Would be great if registrant could specify a preference for a window of time (eg 9-noon)" ○ "Expectation of timing," ○ "Scheduling and respect for the public." **Accuracy/Efficiency** Participants found a benefit of an online system would be the accuracy and efficiency it could offer, it potentially could provide proof of registration and eliminate human error along with a faster and cost effective process. Verbatim Comments: ○ "Electronic snafus are eliminated, adds consistency to booking a time." ○ "Less time consuming, less open to influence through human intervention, no bending of the rules." ○ "No human interference, documented registration" ○ "Efficiency and cost reduction." ○ "quicker confirmation of registration, I imagine lesser workload of staff processing requests"
2. In your opinion, what are the drawbacks of an automated (online) registration system?	There were several themes identified under this question. The following is a summary of the top themes identified: **Tech/Internet Barriers** (access, time, ability to use or comfort) The most common drawback identified by participants was the inability to access technology or internet. Concerns centred on people who might not have the tools, income or ability to use an online system. Verbatim Comments: ○ "May be less inclusive for non-tech savvy Calgarians - including those without computers. It would be best to have other options for reaching the Clerk's office."
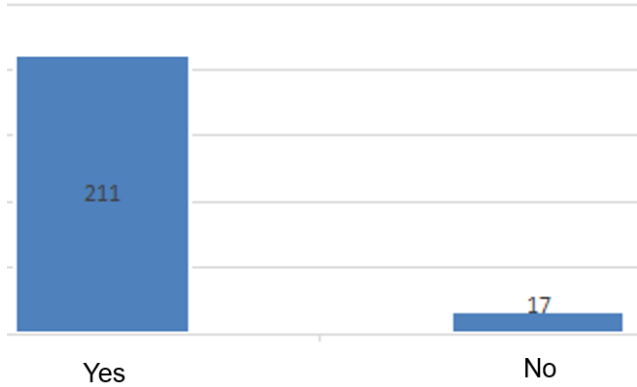
- "It could prevent those without online access from participating."
- "What if I don't have a computer or internet? What if I do but am not good at using it? Will there be a way to get help. Can I call to register?"
- "People need to have at least a basic technological knowledge and/or they will need assistance"
- "may be challenging for people less comfortable with technology, or those less comfortable with english (depending on how system is set up)"

No Concerns

In response to this question, a common response from participants was that they had no concerns or issues with an online system.

Verbatim Comments:
- "Very minimal. 15 months of pandemic have proven that everyone is capable of using technology when required."
- "none"
- "I do not think there will be any drawback. This is my opinion though."
- "No concerns"
- "Not much"

Shouldn't Be the Only Option to Register

Participants shared that a drawback would be limiting registration to only an online system. In this theme, concerns shared included worry for those not familiar with online systems or with disabilities along with potential tech issues or barriers.

Verbatim Comments:
- " Redundancies and memory crashes. There's an element about having another living being assist you that isn't available from an automatic, machinistic experience. Limited characters and obviously record keeping, we all know files corrupt."
- "There should be a hybrid of both online registration and real time registration. It may not be clear in advance if a member of public wishes to speak - might depend upon what administration presents OR public may need review time right to the start of the public hearing"
- "Some people may not be able to commit to a specific time and it could become a barrier to participation, unless there is an alternative."

Could Be Confusing to Use/Not User Friendly

Participants expressed concern with an online system as it could be confusing and not easy to use. Responses included worry about the design of the website being difficult to navigate as well as related tech access issues.

Verbatim Comments:
- "If it wasn't user friendly and easy to use that would be a drawback"
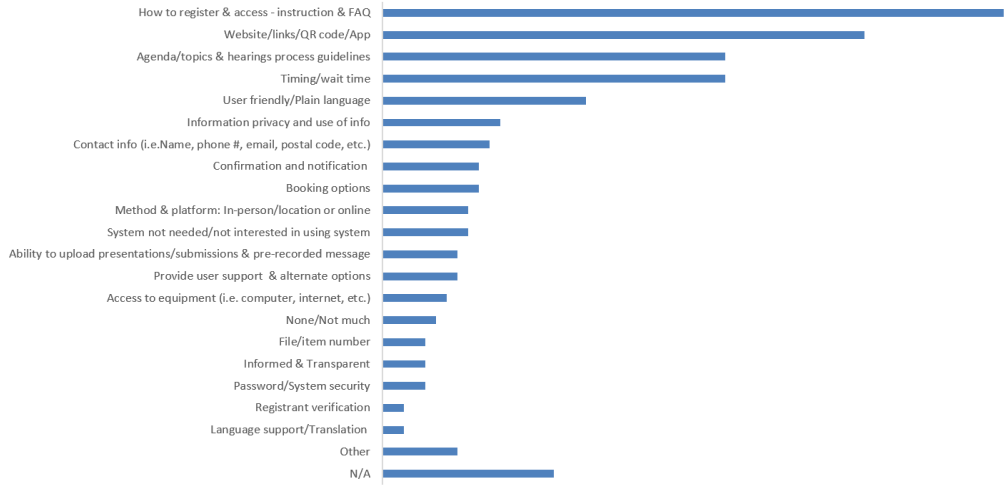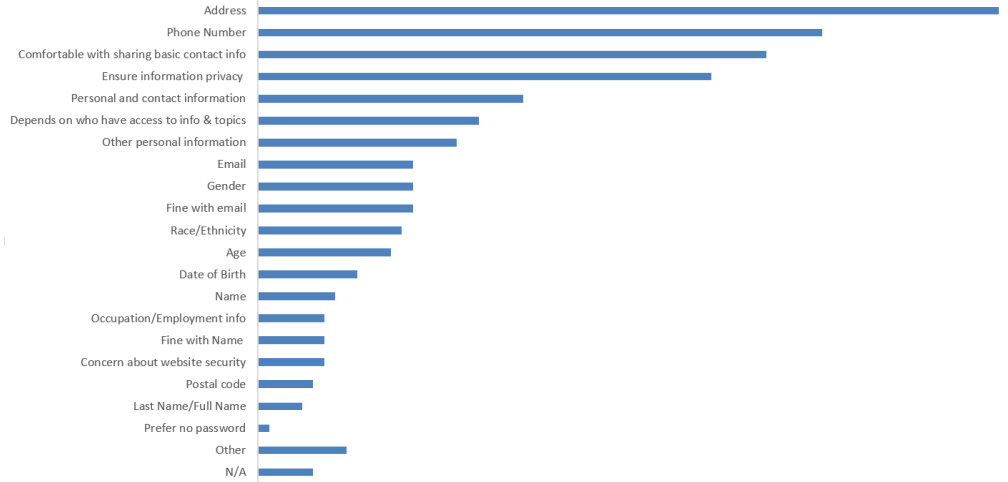
	o "Not everyone is capable of navigating online services. There are still many that are uncomfortable with technology so they would not experience the same benefit of an online registration system as others might." o "Website design cam hinder anything" o "Can be complicated to navigate. Not accesible to those who lack the technology or the expertise to use the technology." o "It could be user un-friendly, depending on the system used and instructions provided"
3. Would you use an automated (online) registration system to sign-up for public hearing opportunities?	Participants are in favour of using an online registration system with over 90% answering yes to this question.
4. What information would you need to use an online registration system?	The top needs for online registration as identified by participants were: 1. Information on how to register & access with simple instructions and frequently asked questions 2. Website/links/App 3. Agenda/topics & hearings process guidelines 4. Information on timing/wait time 5. Registration system needs to be user friendly with plain language Verbatim Comments: o "Simple instructions on how to sign up" o "Easy to find links. Clearly identified topics." o "Good, clear instructions with steps clearly outlined. No ambiguity. Accessible with options for people who don't have computers or smart phones."

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5. What information about yourself would you not share as part of the registration system? (i.e. phone, email, address).	Address and phone number were the top two themes identified in the responses. Many participants expressed that they were comfortable with sharing basic contact information such as address, phone number, and email, especially with protection of information privacy in place. The importance of ensuring information privacy were also emphasized.
	
	Verbatim Comments:
	  o "Address. Possibly phone and name. It would depend on the topic/ issue on the agenda and how my involvement impacts other aspects of my life."
	  o "I would share most commonly used information, subject to my being confident that it would be held securely and not shared with others outside the process"
	  o "Any information provided would need to be secure."

6. How would you like to be able to register for public hearing (i.e. 311, other number, email, website, etc.)?	The vast majority of those who answered this question would like to use a website or an online method to register for public hearing, followed by email and 311. Several participants also indicated that it is crucial to offer options for registration to make it accessible for all Calgarians.
	
	Verbatim Comments:
	  o "It would be good to offer alternative ways to register. I would try to register online but would use a back alternative way if that could not be accomplished easily."
	  o "The more options the better. I'm inclined to booking online with e-mail or text reminders."
	  o "I would prefer a website but all of the above need to be available for accessibility for all Calgarians. AND there needs to be two-way communication from each of these options so registrants have confirmation they have successfully registered."
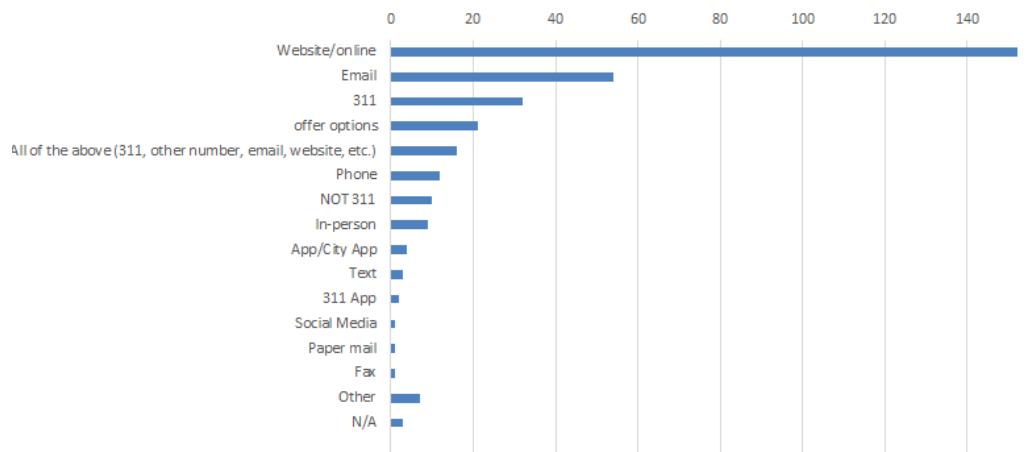
Next Steps

Your input has been shared with the project team to be used to develop further activities for implementation. This included using your feedback to inform stakeholders, Administration, and Council of the barriers identified and opportunities for improvement related to the Public Hearing process.

Council approved the recommendations to the *Public Hearing Process Improvements – Recommended Approaches* Report (EC2022-0328) and *Public Hearing Process 2022-2023 Workplan* (EC2022-0328) was created to support related deliverables. No further input is required from the public at this time but more information on this project can be found at www.engage.calgary.ca/publichearings.

Verbatim Comments

Verbatim comments include all feedback that was collected online through the engagement described in this report. All input has been reviewed and provided to the project team to be considered in decision making for the project. The verbatim report can be found at www.engage.calgary.ca/publichearings.

Appendix A – Motion Arising (PFC2021-0015)

MOTION ARISING

Direct Administration to develop a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process that includes but is not limited to:

1. Creating a collaboration between the City Clerk and the Chief Information Technology Officer to identify the best method to implement an integrated and automated registration system for Public Hearings;
2. Exploring the feasibility of holding Public Hearings at more accessible times; and
3. Developing an endorsement statement for members of the public to sign when they register for Public Hearings which outlines the City of Calgary's commitment to anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion,

returning to the Priorities and Finance Committee no later than end of Q4 2021 with the recommended approach.