

The Death and Life of Public Engagement: Successful Methods in Meaningful Rural Engagement

In 2016 Lacombe County began the process of reviewing their Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB). Lacombe County residents had been through a significant amount of input and public engagement for the preceding 10 years, due to a large agenda of statutory plan development, rezoning and subdivision applications. There was participation burnout among County residents; a key challenge to developing a successful MDP and LUB for the County. To overcome this challenge, the County developed a re-energized public engagement strategy, as the previous methods had become stagnant and repetitive. Consequently, the process to develop a MDP and LUB became just as important, if not more important, than the content of the plans themselves.

- Anita O' Driscoll
 - o is a Senior Planner at Lacombe County, whose passion lies in rural planning and agricultural conservation – a natural fit for her role at the County.
 - o Her areas of expertise include long-range planning, transparency in governance, industrial/commercial developments, economic growth, naturalized stormwater management, and current development activities.
 - o Originally from Ireland, Anita joined the County as a planning intern through the Municipal Affairs Internship Program.
 - o While attending University College Cork Ireland, Anita earned a Bachelor of Arts (major in geography, minor in sociology) and a Masters in Planning and Sustainability, both with first class honours.
- Cajun Paradis
 - o Born and raised on a family farm, Cajun Paradis' passion for agriculture, environment, and rural land use planning shines through her work. While working as a Planner/Development Officer, Cajun has also previously taken on the role of Lacombe County's Environmental Coordinator. Her portfolio encompasses recreation/residential developments, natural environment, natural resources and extraction, and current development activities.
 - o Cajun received a Land and Water Resources Diploma with distinction from Olds College and a Bachelor of Science (Environmental Science) from the University of Lethbridge.
 - o Cajun's passion for community development spans the globe through her work as a humanitarian photographer for non-profit organizations that ensure everyone's right to education, food, water and care

CPAA Outline

10:15 am – 12:15 pm

(Allow 20 minutes for questions too)

Take:

- Any printed materials we have
- Copies of booklets
- Banners

Introduce ourselves: The team (1:45 minutes)

Anita O' Driscoll

- Senior Planner at Lacombe County

Cajun Paradis

- Planner/Development Officer yes Cajun like the spice
- We would also like to give a shout out to our entourage – Manager of Planning Dale, fellow comrades Peter, and Allison, all of our Council members _____.

Now that the formalities are over, we'd firstly like to say we are very proud of our participation process we developed for our MDP review, and are very excited to share it with you this morning.

Over the years Cajun and I have been to our fair share of conferences and while we really enjoy them, as rural planners, we always feel a bit left out. We know urban planning is our sexy older sister so urban planning trends and perspectives usually dominate the seminars. That's why we jumped at the chance to be able to speak here today about a local, rural project and give rural planning a chance to take the stage!

This year we heard the theme of CPAA conference was *The Intersection of Planning and Politics* which is highlighting how politicians, planners and the public can work together. Four years ago the County's public participation strategy for the MDP review was refreshed, and is a perfect example of how these groups worked together to successfully develop a usable MDP and LUB.

So today we are going to talk about: What we were doing before for public participation, what we changed, how we did it and what we learned and maybe you'll be able to take some or all of it away and use it in your own public engagement. At least that's our hope.

The presentation is just over an hour long and we will take plenty of questions at the end.

Our Community (CAJUN) (4:30 minutes)

- Welcome to Lacombe County!
- We are located right here in Central Alberta, just up the road from Red Deer County and down the road from Ponoka County!
- If you travelled here from the north you drove through the centre of our County
- We think we have a pretty great place to live, work and play!
- There are many unique things in our County
- Our small business sector is strong, many of these are a diversification of our primary economic driver - agriculture.
- We are home to multiple world class industrial facilities
- And we also have great urban + rural neighbours, of whom we work very well together with (even before being mandated by the Province to play nice together in the sandbox)

ABOUT US

We have a 'Boomer' population

- In the 2016 census we had a population of 10,343
- This was just a slight increase from the previous census
- The largest age group that lives in the County is between 55-59 years old
- This represents a strong rural community, but also an aging population, which has implications for planning
- This also has major implications to take into consideration for public engagement, as our largest demographic does not rely on Twitter for their morning news!

We have a strong ag community

- 98% of our lands are zoned agricultural – a statistic that community members really resonate with, they have memorized the 98%, and they are very proud of it. I've actually had somebody recite the number back to me at another unrelated community event
- Overall, Agriculture is the primary economic driver of the County, we have a lot of farms within our borders (1,045 farms in 2011 census, out of the 43,000 farms in the province)

We have a beautiful environment

- We also have a beautiful backyard in our County
 - Some of you have probably enjoyed our recreation areas, on Sylvan Lake, on Gull Lake, or on Buffalo Lake,
 - We also have a unique area north of the City of Lacombe called JJ Collett Natural Area. It is very unique as it is a full section of preserved aspen parkland, full of walking trails and passive recreation areas. This is one of my favorite places to escape to in the County.

Soper Pictures

- We also have a number of County parks added within the last few years thanks to very generous landowners in our area! To date, we've had 490 acres of land donated to the County, to remain in a natural state for parks and trails

We have large industry

- Besides agriculture and our beautiful backyard, our County is known for our industrial and commercial development
 - The tax base for commercial and industrial development in 2017 was about 60%

Nova Pictures

- We do have major industries,
- We have the NOVA Chemicals Joffre location just east of Red Deer (which is one of the largest ethylene and polyethylene production complexes in the world),
- and MEGlobal has two ethylene glycol plants at Prentiss, which is also home to The Dow Chemical Company's world-scale polyethylene plant

Aspelund Pictures

- We have a set of clustered Industrial parks near Blackfalds (which you may notice as you drive along the QEII corridor, those are collectively known as the Aspelund Industrial Parks),
 - Sometimes (or more often than not) we hear from those that travel along the QEII Corridor that it's a shame that high quality agricultural land has been taken up along the QEII Corridor for industrial parks, but this clustering policy in our County is strategic to protect other agricultural lands within our borders and ensure continued prosperity and opportunities for the agriculture sector. Instead of spacing those industrial businesses across our entire County on isolated agricultural parcels, they are clustered into designated industrial parks to protect outside agricultural land, an effort to balance different sectors of our economy
- Now that you know a little bit about our County, Anita is going to introduce you to how we used to do things for public engagement

Traditional Engagement Methods (ANITA) (4:30 minutes)

In order for you to see what we have done differently you have to know what we did before.

What do you think of when I say traditional engagement?

Audience answers hopefully but if not outline

If they do respondExactly.

That was also the County's formula.

Traditional Advertising is boring

Meetings were advertised in local papers and by 2012 we managed to develop a County dedicated website so we put our ads on there too.....but..... the language we used was really technocratic and the format and style was well dull. Now don't get me wrong this is exactly what everyone did we were not the exception in this regard. So for example I'm sure you've all seen stylish ads like this. We decided to use one of our own and shame ourselves but guaranteed I could find one in every municipalities archives. Not only are the visuals appealing but the writing was also very enticing and usually said things like.....

"This is a Notice of Public Meeting

The purpose of the public meeting will be to discuss the bylaw amendments which have been made to conform to the statutory changes, blah, blah blah"

As they said in that Ted talkNike would not sell shoes like that because they want to sell shoes! That ad isn't giving me anything that I would leave the couch for. Our advertising was a barrier to engagement and it was reflected our poor attendance rates.

I once did a public meeting for a recreation plan, some of my Councillors will remember, for Sylvan Lake which is a popular lake where you would expect interest. I did such a good job getting people interested 4 of them showed and my poor Council were the ones colouring in the map during the workshop.

For those 4 people who did come to the meetings we used the same formula. A presentation filled with lot of planning jargon and expertise. I'm pretty sure I put more than a few people to sleep over the years. Then you chase that up with a question and answer period and it usually reveals what kind of community member that did decide to show up.....and that reason usually has nothing to do with that exciting ad you put in the local paper.

I'm sure you all recognize these community members

A diverse crowd tends to come out

The passionate one....usually turns up to save a wetland, get garbage pickup or start a community garden or museum;

The NIMBY What ever it is you talking about is not going to happen in their area.

The attention seeker ...the loudest one in the room, likes to be heard and dominates the conversation with their opinion

The sleepercame out for the food or to meet their neighbour generally has no interest and falls asleep during your presentation

And these are the same 4 people that showed up to all our meetings over the last few years.

These are exactly the scenarios we did not want for this project. We wanted to gather valuable feedback(not that everyone's opinion isn't valuable. Our goal was to create the environment where everybody felt confident to speak and what they were discussing was high level planning concepts like the future development of their area NOT how they didn't get that first parcel out subdivision.

The public was busy since the previous MDP!

We also had another problem...we had total participation burnout

The MDP at the time was adopted in 2007 and it set out a very aggressive long range planning program. Since 2007, 21 Intermunicipal Development Plans (which you are all getting far too familiar with) and Area Structure Plans were completed. These 21 plans each required at least 3 public meetings, and didn't even take into consideration rezonings, subdivisions, bylaw amendments OR any other department in the County who also had meetings.

Needless to say, this large agenda overwhelmed the community they had no interest in planning and we had poor attendance except for Mrs. Passion, Mr. NIMBY, Mr.

Attention seeker and Mr. Sleeper. So the information or feedback we were getting was also anecdotal, irrelevant or people were generally dissatisfied.

We also started getting unsolicited feedback that there was a sense the County did not listen to the community

So what did we do????? Cajun

Revitalized Engagement Methods (CAJUN) (30 seconds)

- In order to revive our communities interest in planning, we needed to change how we engaged with people to make sure our community was actively involved and gave valuable information
- The days were over of borrrring snoozefest meetings, and texty – no not sexy - advertisements hidden in the back corners of our local newspapers. We needed to spice things up! (pause)
- We accomplished this by doing 4 main things: 1) we built capacity in our organization – because we did not have it before, 2) we creating momentum and interest – as nobody was coming to our meetings, 3) we made creative branding and advertising – to get people engaged and 4) we educated our community so they knew what they were talking about.

Building Capacity (CAJUN) (4:00 minutes)

We have a large, diverse County

- Building capacity was our starting point
- Our Council had decided that we could do this project in house, but we couldn't do it without just the planning department
-
- Engagement of a small area for an Area Structure Plan is one thing, but engaging an entire community as large and diverse as ours for an MDP is another thing

Our planning department is small

- The planning department consists of 1 manager, 4 planners, and 2 administrative assistants. And that wasn't enough people to complete our project
- We were fortunate in that our review happened during the economic downturn, our current development was not as busy. That said we still needed more trained people in order to properly facilitate the process.
- The County carries out public consultation frequently in different departments, so we did recognize we were able to completing this large project, but we needed some help.

But we found many special talents

- But through the process we discovered that many staff had unique skills that weren't necessarily planning skills. Those ranged from graphic design, photography, music, video and website design. All of these roles are not traditional planning roles, but we made sure to

incorporate these special talents and help the County complete the entire project in-house.

Still, we needed more facilitators

- Still, we needed more help from our internal staff to complete this big project. Namely we needed more facilitators.
- We trained a total of 10 staff to be facilitators, through the International Association of Facilitators (IAF). If you are ever interested in this, we hired a company called ICA Associates Inc. from Ontario to provide this training. They regularly host sessions in Edmonton and Calgary, but we hired them to specifically provide a session for us
- This training was great to develop skills required for this project, but also for future public engagement projects.

- So what did we learn from the training?
- We were trained on two main methods of facilitation, the facilitated conversation and group consensus method
- The first topic, facilitated conversations, taught us “How to” engage a group of people in a discussion so that everyone gets involved
- The second topic, Group Facilitation Methods taught us how to better be able to interact with the public or diverse groups of people to build consensus

- Before the course we had put some thought into what we wanted to ask our community. We had a general baseline of questions figured out
- But after the course, we were able to fine tune how we asked these questions to gather valuable feedback
- By using what we learned, we were able to hold the public’s attention, keep the conversation on point, and ensure our discussions did not deviate into rants about the County or rants about each other’s neighbors.

We became a diverse project team

- Overall the staff trained really varied, from roles, we had our Planning staff training, and we had people like our HR Coordinator, our Assistant Public Works Supervisor, our IT Coordinator and our Agricultural Fieldman, all trained to help us
- On here, we also have to give huge kudos to our catering company, we hired (we consider them one of the team!). We are positive it was not Anita’s and I’s wit that gathered the crowds, but rather the wonderful food that HT Catering provided.

Creating Interest (ANITA) (3 minutes)

We needed to create interest in planning

Now that we had capacity in the organization we needed people to use it

We needed to create momentum and interest, we had to get people talking about the project. The first step to getting the public interested wasby using children!!!!

I do mean using children (see slides)

Any of you who has kids, knows kids, likes kids

You know they have a far superior perspective on the world and how it works

They aren't cynical like most of us in this room. One exception would be any recent new planning graduates in the room - shout out to any new planning grads – these people still have that magical perspective of possibility.

So we decided to hit the elementary schools under the guise of their local government module and do a planning education session

We got out to the schools and we taught them some planning basics.... getting them to think about where their food in the store comes from, what happens when they flush a toilet, how you get from school to their house, where do they play

As planners we like to make what we do complicated but really the job has three main things we deal with poop, water, access. Everything else is just about making places better and steering the market but really our job is to protect people from themselves and their poop.

So we bribed school kids with candy!

So once we had the basic principles of zoning down, we fed them candy to get them hopped up on sugar and to like us

And turned them into planners

And we let them loose on coloring their own land use concept for the County which they then had to present back to us, and explain their reasoning

Their perspective was funny

And boy did they come up with some interesting stuff

We used this material to lighten the policy at the public meetings. The feedback provided from the kids was the raw truth of planning and definitely wise beyond their years, they definitely did not sugar coat it!

Read two on the slide

And while most of it this was cute, there was also some strong political views that came up or should anti-political party views (of our former political party) which was basically mimicking their parent views.

This also goes the other way so we bribed them with more candy and told them to go home and tell their parent, their aunts and uncles whoever all about the planning they had done and that their parent could do it at the County's MDP meetings. We shamelessly gave them advertising goodies like book marks and pens in the hope they would get talking and people would come out.

Branding (CAJUN) (1:30 minutes)

We needed a creative project brand

- The third step was designing creative branding and advertising
- Beyond being a planner, I'm also a photographer and a graphic designer, and I absolutely refuse to make that poster Anita showed you earlier, a black and white, ALL TEXT, maybe throw a County logo in there for some color advertisement! Instead we came up with this bold and colorful design scheme
- Once we had the brand set up, it gave us a project identity to grab people's interest, and we ended up creating something that allowed an immediate association with this project.
- Using this brand we were able to create a range of marketing materials, and did a full advertising campaign at multiple steps of the project. This media blitz included everything from bookmarks, to banners, to signage, to our traditional newspapers and posters, to the more social media advertisements on Facebook and Twitter. You can see examples of this brand throughout our presentation today, as well there are some examples around the room from the project.

Your Vision, Your Plan

- The language we used throughout all advertising very much promoted the community ownership of the plan. The entire project had the catchphrase 'Your Vision, Your Plan', and each stage had additional catchy phrases used, to empower the community to make decisions and own the plan.
- [And a dedicated project website \(3 slides\)](#)
 - We also made a dedicated website to allow people to quickly check in and see if anything new was happening, the home page had the latest news
- [Next Slide](#)
 - There were also additional pages for document downloads, including booklets and survey results
- [Next Slide](#)
 - And pages to contact us or fill out the survey, when the surveys were live.
- [I am interested in this!](#)
 - By creating this brand and visual identity, it allowed anyone to immediately upon seeing something to say "oh hey I know what project this is for, and I'm interested in it because I know it affects my community".

Education (ANITA) (2:45 minutes + 1:45 video)

Education was key

So this was the important one. How do you get people to make good planning choices. How do you get rid of the NIMBY, which is in all of us, how do you get rid of the small world view, thinking about your own back yard and get people to think 'outside the box' about the long term future development of their community. What they want to leave for the kids. And if you can get people to tell you that, you can make a good plan and good policies.

Educating the public about planning was identified as fundamental to a success of the project. It was especially critical at the start because those meetings were the ones that gauged the pulse of the community, what they thought about their community and the County and where they wanted it to go.

We as planners often take for granted that everybody else gets the concepts we deal with on a daily basis - but the truth is we are both smarter and dumber than we think. We should consider using my poop, water, access explanation.

So how did we educate themwe made them read!

Part of our plan on how to do this was through prepping the community with enough information to educate them but not overwhelm them. We developed a series of three information/education booklets for each public engagement round which could be inserted into the County news. The County News is newspaper that all tax payers get posted and during our surveys was identified as the way people heard about the meetings. Many people also brought these booklets to the meeting to help with the discussion. We have copies of the booklets on the tables if you want to take a look.

Not only did we make them read we also made them watch. We developed an online video to explain the project and encourage people to attend the public meetings, or to fill out the survey online if they were unable to attend. Play video

- Video 1 – 1:40 time

The secret formula

In our dreamy planning world we hoped that the booklet and video were something that might spark conversation between neighbors and create more momentum and interest as well as educate and focus the conversation prior to the meetings.

And that was our secret formula: building capacity, creating interest and momentum, branding and education. Next was to see if it worked through the engagement rounds themselves. Cajun is going to talk about round 1.

Project Engagement Strategy (CAJUN) (30 seconds)

- Based on our strategy, the engagement process we developed had four rounds of consultation, all using different techniques to get people out and talking and provide feedback

Foundations & Directions - Round 1 (CAJUN) (7 minutes)

- Round 1 was coined “Turn Talk into Action and Join the Conversation”
- Which was a witty play on instead of sitting at home BSing with your neighbours about how you don’t like something the County is doing, come out and directly tell us what you think
- This was the most important round of consultation, as it established how the community felt about County development right now and how they wanted to see County to develop in the future.

Dinner Table Facilitated Conversation

- So what better way to entice people out to meetings than food! We provided dinner to convince those shy of planning out from the woodworks! We had to cover a lot of topics through this first meeting, everything from economic development through housing and the environment which took four hours of peoples evenings, so we designed it as a round table dinner discussion. The aim of that was to make a relaxed evening with neighbours casually chatting over dinner, unfortunately minus the vino or beer, while we shamelessly plugged them for information
- We limited the number of people to 8 at a table, and we had a staff member assigned to each table to keep things moving, to take notes on what the discussions were, and to generally interact with the crowd and make them feel relaxed

2 - Dinner Table Facilitated Conversation

- We also wanted to make sure the participants were the ones who did the majority of the talking through the evening. Anita and I as presenters only gave short 10 minute presentations on the main topics to keep everybody on their toes
- It was a sweet spot of providing enough information to educate them, to spur discussion, but not so much information that we put them to sleep after our fabulous dinner. And we let the conversations go for 15-20 minutes per topic, which may sound like a long time, but once the tables got talking it was hard to stop them!

- The use of staff from the other departments also helped keep the neutrality of the discussion. In theory a good facilitator does not need to know the topic to keep everyone on point and to keep the discussion going. Council was not permitted to participate at these meetings, they were only there to observe, and we had a number of managers on standby if questions came up that we couldn't answer

Vision Building Exercise

- The second part of the meeting was a vision building exercise. So this got everybody up out of their chairs for an interactive session to identify together what the objectives for development in the Lacombe County should be – which we used to build the objectives within the final MDP. Officially it is called a consensus building exercise (any planning nerds may Google that now).
- Each person that sat at the tables was asked to choose three (3) objectives - either from the existing plan or to choose three totally new ones. Based on everyone's objectives at the table, we got together at each table to group them, and build a cohesive vision for each table.

Summarized Vision Building Exercise

- In this picture you can see that all of these white cards were the ones individuals wrote at the table, and they were able to group them into 5 areas (columns), and at the end of grouping the similar cards, each table got to identify an overhead objective that paraphrased the objective that everybody at the table thought (the colored cards). So for this one example, the objective at this table in column 1 was "enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities" and column 2 overall was "supporting agricultural viability"
- When all the meetings were done, it got really planning nerdy, we planners locked ourselves in a room and did our own consensus building exercise. We took all of these header 'objective' cards, from every meeting and every table, and built an overall consensus using them, making sure we didn't have duplication in our objectives.
- When us planners did the exercise, we quite literally covered four walls of a meeting room with the cards gathered from the meetings

Our final objectives in the MDP

- At the end, once we built group consensus using all objectives provided, the outcome was six objectives within the new plan

Round 1

- Based on the numbers, this changed engagement strategy worked! We had 256 people come out to the first rounds of meetings, in a total of 7 meetings.

- This attendance blew us away, compared to our typical 10-30 people who used to show up!
- We originally only scheduled 5 meetings, but we had so many RSVPs and requests that we ended up adding meetings, to the point on two days we did an afternoon session, and then an evening session back to back just to accommodate all these people that wanted to come out!
- Of course this high attendance could also be because rumor swept through the community that we provided FREE food
- Again, kudos to our catering company for being our biggest support staff through this round
- It was great to see sooo many people come out and attend.
- We had a total 287 surveys completed either online or at the meetings. The online survey was identical to the topic areas and questions that we held in person, but it allowed people who couldn't spend 4 hours of their life with us to give feedback. This also allowed shy people at the meetings to write responses into the survey if they chose not to talk
- At the end of all that, we had a really fun job of taking that information from in person and online and collating it into one document

Issue Analysis & Growth Strategy - Round 2 (ANITA) (7 minutes + 1:00 video)

This led to Round 2 of meetings. The collated information from the first round was used to develop policy options. The different policy options addressed the different concerns people had under that specific theme. We called this round “Share Your Vision and Choose Your Plan” because that’s exactly what we wanted people to do choose their own preferred policy option which all grouped together would make a plan.

True democracy in planning.

Another booklet in the County News!

Again we educated and prepped the community. Another education booklet was written essentially telling the communitythis is what we heard ;we think these policy options address what you said;and now we want you to come out and vote. This is the red book on the table

We didn’t go back out to the schools this time, we felt the momentum and brand had been established at this stage from the first round of meetings. So in addition to the booklet and advertising we also developed another video for social media and the website letting people know in a quick snap shot what to expect at the second round of meetings.

Video 2

So like you saw from the video, the format for round two of meetings was different from the first.

Choose your preferred policy option

We wanted to keep people interested, we didn’t want to take up a lot of their time and we wanted to give them the power of decision.....But we also wanted to give them the opportunity to see their neighbors perspective.

To do this we used Audience Instant Response Technology. Everybody in attendance got a clicker like a remote. Planning staff provided a brief presentation on what was heard at the last meetings and outlined policy options that could address the concerns raised.Then everybody was allowed vote.

At first there was a bit apprehension about the technology, keep in mind our crowd is generally 50-65 year old members of the farming community.

But to be honest we were also hesitant in case it didn’t work. Once we got going through the meetings though everyone valued the real time response and seeing live how others in the room felt. We also started with some ice breaker questions like.....

The real question is...

Once voting concluded for that section everybody could see the combined response. Also the whole process was totally anonymous also so nobody knew who voted for what.

This was a really interesting process because people did come up after the meetings and say how much they enjoyed it and how they hadn't realized that their neighbors had a different view from them.

Fool proof technology

For us utilizing the voting method also allowed us to present the community's views in a short/concise manner, without allowing conversation and dialogue of a few people to overpower or control the meetings...no Mr. Attention Seeker. Take the question on the slide (outline the question) Mr. Attention Seeker may have shouted that there was not enough development land we need more (he may or may not be a developer) and he's the only one who would have been heard. This way the majority vote shows up without any talk.

Also just to note the technology was more or less fool proof and incredibly easy to use just in case you ever think about using it in the future.

Comparing different perspectives

From a planning and Council perspective, it was also interesting. Not only did people in the meetings have different perspectives but people from different parts of the County did too, so for example one side being more pro-development than the other. This is the same question asked across the County and the results show the west side of the County far more pro-development than the east.

Black and White Evidence

Also interesting was providing Council with such black and white evidence on what policies people wanted. Often when we present findings from surveys it's qualitative and has our own planning biases in that information. Similarly, Council in making their decisions have bias when using information that is qualitative.

This method gives you an undisputable percentage which is hard to make policy against. Planning is hardwe learn best practice but our profession is to serve the people. What if 80% of people in Red Deer voted for no more park space or no more commercial development. What if 80% of people in Lacombe County felt ag land was not worth protecting from development. What if 80% of people want to vote Trudeau back in power as Prime Minister? Now that we know we are all UCP supporters

I had many nightmares about the outcome. What if people wanted unlimited subdivision I can say this didn't happen

In the end People chose to protect the environment and ag landthey saw that economic diversification was necessary. There wasn't a hint of Mr. NIMBY or Mr. Attention Seeker. People were choosing policy that was best for their community.

Round 2

For these meetings we weren't limited by numbers because everybody could sit in rows. Therefore we only held three (3) meetings across the County and because we used voting instead of conversation the meetings were only two (2) hours in length. The total attendance was 97 people with 130 people also voting via survey while lower than our first round still significantly higher than our usual 10 to 30 people.

The survey was also made available online. The surveys and meetings presented the same policy options to vote on to ensure consistency. Then based on what people voted a draft plan was created to be presented for round 3 of the engagement process.
...Cajun

Draft Growth Strategy - Round 3 (CAJUN) (2:30 minutes + 8:40 video)

- Round 3 was coined “Review the Draft, Your Vision – Your Plan”
- Which was based on now that the community had voted on policies, we had a solid direction to develop draft plans

Video 3

- All advertising was repeated as before, we developed a new video and a new booklet based on “this is what you as a community voted during the last round, these are your draft plans based on that vote”.
- This video is a bit longer than the other ones at 8 ½ minutes (sorry we forgot the popcorn)
 - o Video 3 – 8:40 time

Did we get it right? Tell us!

- So as you saw in the video, in Round 3 our focus was this is what we heard in Round 1, this is what you voted in Round 2, now did we get it right?
- Because we had asked people for 4 hours of their lives in the 1st round and 2 hours in the 2nd round, we made these meetings completely drop in style
- By using our brand we created a tradeshow design open house, with 5 booths each with a staff member, a central coffee area, and we used that video presentation you just watched to introduce people to the topic areas around the room

Did we get it right? Tell us!

- When they entered the open house we actually asked that they sit down and watch the video before proceeding to the booths, after they watched the video they then had a better idea of what actual topic areas interested them, and they could go to one or all of the booths.
- This really allowed for flexible attendance, and a self directed style.
- If you came in and you only wanted to talk about Agriculture, you could come to my booth and chat. Alternatively if you wanted to talk about Residential and Economic Development you could go to Anita’s booth and chat with her, and so on...

Next Slide

- Because of this set up, we only held 3 meetings, but we made sure they were open for long time periods. We had 2 meetings from 4-8:30 pm, and 1 long meeting from 12-8:30 pm
- In total 87 people came out to attend these meetings, and we had 53 surveys completed either online or at the meetings.
- We also held 1 Government/Industry specific meeting, where we invited a list of stakeholders, municipal neighbors, provincial agencies, etc to come listen to a presentation and attend a mini tradeshow.

Public Hearing – Round 4 (ANITA) (1:00 minute)

Aaaaah The legally mandated engagement tool....the Public Hearing. This was our last round of engagement.

I'm not talking about this because of some new strategy or method we used to carry out the public hearing so I'm not going to speak about it for long.

The reason I wanted to mention it was because we felt like it was a success. Only four people showed up to the hearing and there was only one objection to the plans and one other person came to say that they really enjoyed the process (when does that ever happen).

This objection came from a developer who had a specific grievance which personally affected them. The plans were proposing to close a loop hole that this developer was benefitting from. Otherwise the plans the policies and regulations were accepted without controversy. In the planning world that is a rare thing, I think you would agree.

Not only that, but the feedback from the last round of meetings was overwhelmingly positive. People commented that they felt heard and how much they enjoyed the process.

Project Outcomes (CAJUN) 1:30 minutes

- So at the end of this two year process, what did we spend and how did we do in the community's eyes?

Timeline

- This project began in October 2015, with adopting the Terms of Reference, and our main goal was to get it successfully done before Municipal Elections in the Fall 2017!
- The timing of our public meetings is always very important because of our agriculture community, and if we have any farmers in the room you know busy season is ALL YEAR for farmers.
- We had to structure our engagement to intentionally avoid times like spring seeding and fall harvest. Based on this ideal scheduling, Round 1 was done in Feb/March 2016
- And we got right back out to the community for Round 2 in June, right after spring seeding
- Then we did have a larger break between round 2 and 3, almost 10 months.
- Our original plan was to go back to the community in November 2016, but when we presented to council that August they were not comfortable with the policy options and needed more time to discuss them before going out to the public
- Which meant by the time we discussed at CoW in December 2016, and did our full advertising campaign, we didn't get back to the public for Round 3 until April 2017
- Because the community was so satisfied with the documents, First reading and the public Hearing were smooth sailing! And we were able to adopt the final documents in July 2017.
- Even though we had that delay between round 2-3, we had our timeline well planned out with some wiggle room, and this didn't derail our goal of adoption before Municipal Elections!
- Yayyy!

Budget

- Many of you would consider this highly engaging process to be a massive drain of internal resources, nevermind the expense. Afterall we did pay for a full sit down catered meal for 250 people, 15,000 fabulous glossy information booklets, and a number of 6 foot tradeshow booths.
- Does anyone have any guesses or estimation for how much we spent?
 - o Ask Audience

TOTAL

- Sooooo Drumrolllllllll.....the total cost was \$66,243.48

- Which the majority of this budget was spent on advertising and printing the products. The other 2 big ticket items were \$10,000 for facilitation training and \$5,000 for the dinner for 250 people in Round 1.
- Overall it cost a fraction of what a consultant would charge for the same product. Mainly because of the capacity we built within our own organization so we didn't have to pay for outside experts.
- Now keep in mind this total cost does not include our staff salaries, as we essentially 'fit' the project within our existing work schedule
- Dale – we are still waiting for those bonus checks to arrive!

MDP (ANITA) (5 minutes)

Now, what was our final document like, and what did the community think of it?

(Cover)

We wanted to extend the idea that this MDP was a document created by the community and should be used by the community.

(Purpose)

Too often, we as planners create plans written in our language.... but often they are unusable by the public because of it, they feel too daunting and technocratic.

(Map)

The MDP itself is the final educational tool which informs the public about what kind of development they can expect in their community and the policies that will make that happen and why they make that happen.

(Policy Section)

The idea behind this plan was to create a document that used as much plain language as possible and explained the purpose of each of the policies and the reasons behind them. Pat on the back this was written well before the provincially mandated public participation policy.

And is user friendly

It is a user friendly document so like you see every policy in the document. The text at the top explains the policy and the policy is always contained in a colour coded box and each section has its own identifiable colour.

The layout was also changed to landscape so that the document could be easily navigated online but secretly it was because Cajun found it easier to read on her computerso landscape it is....

Seriously though people have come in with a printed page from the book and now only have some questions of clarification. We are being consistently told how easy it is to use.

We received great feedback

So was the process a success?

We figure yes. The evaluation data gathered provided us with both quantitative and qualitative data to suggest it was.

The primary objective of the process was to develop a plan that was driven and created by the public and to re-energize the community about the importance of planning for the future development of their area.

The community bought into the process and bought into the plan.

There was also lots of praise which we very rarely get as planners unless it's a developer looking for something.

Some of the comments from the surveys included

Comments Included

'the staff and Councillors really made me feel welcome and did an excellent job in guiding me at the open house', '

'We appreciate the County being proactive and are aware that one must be vigilant in all areas of development',

'Excellent work was done by the County team! Thank you'

Our strategy worked

Quantitativelythe success of the process was also literally spelt out in the attendance, survey and engagement rates. The County standard for meeting attendance and engagement usually ranges from 10 to 30 people, however the stats for the MDP process far exceeded expectations. This also included our survey rates which were boosted specifically from Facebook where we paid for location based advertising. This greatly increased traffic and engagement to our site.

Not only that but attendance and engagement for our new projects has held high and we are still getting excellent feedback.

Final Survey results

In the surveys indicated that overall the community gave a thumbs up to the final plan and the process that we used to create it.

Specifically, 70.73% of the respondents gave a thumbs up on the vision created for the future of our County. This level of satisfaction with the proposed policies was overwhelming. That for us was the greatest success.

Your Vision, Your Plan

Lastly we learned the impact a thorough and genuine engagement can have on the public.

The community really valued the opportunity to provide comments, and see exactly how their comments contributed to the plan through the different stages of consultation.

It was apparent by the end from the feedback that the community felt empowered or at the very least heard.

We consistently heard that while people may not have gotten everything they wanted in the final plans, they felt their views were listened to and they understood that the rest of the community did not have the same views.

This has genuinely led to a better and transparent decision making which has created public confidence and trust in Council and administrative staff.