



PHASE 1 | NORTH BENCH NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

# Communications & Engagement Strategy

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## 1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Merritt is currently undertaking an initial phase of the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan. This initial phase will include a high-level plan that outlines the general infrastructure requirements, potential trail and transportation network and linkages, development strategy, and policy framework for land use and density. For the Plan to be successful, it will require engagement with the Merritt community. To facilitate this, the project will provide opportunities for community engagement, encourage participation in the development of the Neighbourhood Development Plan and ensure compatibility and alignment with surrounding neighbourhoods, infrastructure, and existing City Plans.

The project will be completed between August and November 2020 with consultation scheduled for September through November. The final Plan will be delivered to City staff, presented to City Council in November 2020 and will include a summary of all stakeholder/resident input.

This document outlines a process for involving community members and key stakeholders in the development of the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan. Because the City is concurrently engaging community members on its Official Community Plan (OCP) and Active Transportation Plan, the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan engagement process will tie into the processes of these other Plans as much as possible.

Given the current physical distancing policies and limits to large gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we anticipate that some community engagement events planned for this Plan and concurrent City Plans may be adjusted to virtual events. As such, we will work closely with the City to identify solutions to challenges as they arise and maintain alignment with concurrent planning processes.

## 2.0 ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The overarching purpose of this strategy is to enable a two-way dialogue with Merritt residents and stakeholders regarding the future of the North Bench Neighbourhood, and to ensure the final Plan reflects the needs, aspirations, and concerns of residents. The goals for community engagement include the following:

- Ensure that residents, local First Nations communities, Council and other stakeholders are meaningfully engaged, and their input sought
- Raise awareness for the Phase 1 North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Increase the familiarity of residents with the study area
- Seek input on existing and future use of the North Bench area
- Help to educate residents and stakeholders on the planning process in an effort to gather support for the Phase 1 North Bench Area Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Manage expectations on what the Plan can accomplish

### **USING COMMUNITY INPUT**

Managing expectations and implementing a transparent process are critical pieces of any consultation process. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) refers to five levels of public participation; inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. Engagement for the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan will largely be at the inform and consult levels. This means we will keep the public informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input is influencing decision-making.

## 3.0 COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

### CONTENT STRATEGY

Various tools will be used to seek feedback from residents and stakeholders. These can include:

- **Project Website** - A North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan website this is already set-up as a page on the City's main website. The website will be supplemented with informational/educational materials about the project.
- **Social Media** - the City's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts will be leveraged to communicate project details and key dates
- **Use of Graphics** - Visual content, maps and graphics are better for relaying key project information and obtaining feedback
- **Use of Polling Equipment** - Urban Systems has polling equipment that can be used to ask participants in a community meeting multiple choice questions and seek instant feedback
- **Visualizations** - Urban Systems mapping and GIS staff can use digital photos and visualizations to help illustrate existing conditions, a potential development scenarios or design guidelines
- **Newspaper ads** - through the Merritt Herald, including online publication
- **Internal communication** - clear lines of communication among City staff and Urban Systems is key to the delivery of a successful Plan
- **Survey** - a survey will be used to generate awareness on the project, as well as to seek input from the community on how they envision the lands being used in the future

### ONLINE STRATEGY

#### *North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan Project Site*

Information related to the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan process and opportunities for engagement both online and in-person will be shared on a project website, hosted on the City's website. This webpage will be the primary location for project-related updates and information. Information housed on the website will emphasize key messages and be updated throughout the planning process as required. The City's [planning@merritt.ca](mailto:planning@merritt.ca) email will be included on the project website for residents and stakeholders to submit inquiries.

#### *Social Media*

Social media will be used to share project updates, raise awareness for the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan, and communicate opportunities for engagement. This use should include postings and posting boosts, including content and imagery generated throughout the process to use at the City's discretion.

### BRANDING

The City of Merritt's Graphic Standards Manual will be used for all public-facing documents for the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan, including the City's logo, type-face and colours to ensure the project is recognizable and consistent.

## 4.0 ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Input will be collected using a range of methods to meet the needs of different audiences throughout the development of the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan. The table below outlines engagement activities, communication tools and timing that we recommend for seeking input and support from the Merritt community.

Tool/Activity	Timing	Description	Roles & Responsibilities
Communications & Engagement Strategy	Mid -August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include engagement objectives and communication and engagement tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban Systems Ltd. (USL) to craft content</li> </ul>
Reports to Council	August to November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek Council input at Council meetings throughout the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City to present reports at Council meetings</li> <li>USL to present Final Plan to Council</li> </ul>
Project website and online presence	August launch with ongoing updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop content for project website that communicates key project messaging (website will be continuously updated as the Plan is developed)</li> <li>During the summer, project updates will be posted to ensure the project remains visible and on the minds of community members between the formal engagement periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to provide initial website content (text, photos and/or map)</li> <li>City to develop project page, review content and upload</li> </ul>
Community Survey	August 28 <sup>th</sup> launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standalone survey designed to collect input on potential amenities, infrastructure, trail and transportation networks, and land use related to the North Bench neighbourhood</li> <li>Online survey will run from August 28<sup>th</sup> to September 14<sup>th</sup>. These dates were selected as to not overlap with surveys for other City initiatives</li> <li>Results will be used to inform the draft plan</li> <li>Although the online survey will be closed, paper copies of the survey will be available during the in-person event (described below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to design survey questions and upload to USL's Survey Monkey account</li> <li>City to review and provide final sign-off on survey</li> </ul>
Newspaper ad	Early September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newspaper ad in the Merritt Herald to promote community survey and raise awareness for the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City to work with local paper for publication using standing agreement</li> </ul>
Social media blitz	September to November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent posts to the City's social media channels promoting the North Bench Neighbourhood Development Plan</li> <li>Posts will include links to the project website/survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to provide content and images (text, photos and/or map)</li> <li>City to post to social channels</li> </ul>

Tool/Activity	Timing	Description	Roles & Responsibilities
First Nations outreach	September to November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce the project to local First Nations and provide opportunities for input on the North Bench area and Plan</li> <li>Seek feedback on how to best engage further on the proposed Plan, as well as the appropriate levels of engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City to facilitate and attend meetings</li> <li>USL to help facilitate discussions</li> </ul>
School District outreach	October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate discussions with School District representatives to discuss potential new school facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City will facilitate and attend meetings</li> <li>USL will attend meetings remotely</li> </ul>
Open House Launch Event	Late September - Early October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tie in North Bench open house launch event with OCP Engagement Launch event</li> <li>Information panels will present initial findings</li> <li>Will include interactive elements and have the online survey available in hardcopy format</li> <li>Feedback will be collected to inform the concept design</li> <li>Format of event (in-person or virtual) will be confirmed closer to September when more is known about potential COVID-19 restrictions.</li> <li>Detailed event planning will be undertaken by WSP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City to confirm with WSP regarding timing and format of event</li> <li>USL to design information panels</li> <li>City to review materials</li> <li>USL to present materials</li> </ul>
Bench Sector Engagement Session	Late October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tie into Bench Sector engagement as part of the OCP project.</li> <li>Intent is to obtain feedback from those living, working and playing directly adjacent to, and within, the study area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to design and present materials</li> </ul>
Engagement Summary Report	Late October - Early November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarize feedback to date for integration into technical work</li> <li>Published on the project website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to prepare summary report with input from City as required</li> <li>City to review</li> </ul>
Update website content	September to November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular updates on where we are in the process and results from community survey</li> <li>Publish engagement summary report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to provide content (text, photos and/or maps)</li> <li>City to review content and upload to project page</li> </ul>
Reporting back Summary	Early November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A summary of what we heard from the engagement process, including the survey and project open house and Bench Sector engagement events</li> <li>This summary will be hosted on the project website and will include a survey in order to obtain feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USL to draft report and feedback questionnaire</li> </ul>

## ADDITIONAL MEETINGS

- Project Start-up meeting (completed)
- North Bench Site Tour (completed)
- Working group meeting - September and October
- Council presentation - November 24<sup>th</sup>

## 5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

The following tools will be used to measure the success of engagement:

- **Survey(s):** Number of surveys completed and an evaluation of the diversity of respondents (based on demographic questions, such as age, gender, neighbourhood, among others)
- **Participant counters and/or sign-in sheets:** Number of attendees at public events (in-person or virtual)
- **Online analytics:** Website hits and interactions on social media

## REMAINING FLEXIBLE

Due to the on-going COVID 19 pandemic, the project team will remain flexible and adaptable as it relates to the community engagement activities employed. Urban Systems will remain in close communication with the City of Merritt to monitor the current recommendations from public health authorities regarding public gatherings and if required, will revise the approach to community engagement accordingly.