

MEMORANDUM



TO: Loryn Day, Solid Waste Coordinator
Peace River Regional District

FROM: Veronica Bartlett,
Morrison Hershfield

PROJECT No.: 190397600

RE: Memo: Options to Consider for Public Consultation on
the Draft Regional Solid Waste Management Plan

DATE: December 1, 2020

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Under the Environmental Management Act, regional districts are required to have a solid waste management plan (SWMP), which must be developed following the solid waste management planning guidelines provided by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (the Ministry) for content and process.

The Peace River Regional District (PRRD) is in the process of developing a new Regional Solid Waste Management Plan (RSWMP, or simply the Plan). The PRRD initiated the Plan review process on May 12, 2018, when the PRRD's Solid Waste Committee recommended a renewal of the RSWMP to the Board.

The new RSWMP must be supported by a Consultation Summary Report that must demonstrate that adequate consultation has occurred during the plan development. The report should include information on the consultation process and the SWMP development process. If there were challenges in gathering public comment (e.g., a lack of feedback), the report should document how due diligence was used to try to engage the public.

This memorandum (memo) summarizes the public engagement activities completed to date and presents a brief overview of the potential engagement techniques that can be used to replace or to add to the in-person open houses, which were initially planned as part of the public consultation strategy. Morrison Hershfield has issued this Memo to complement the approved Public Consultation Plan (presented to the COW in November 2019).

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

The PRRD established two separate committees, which have been involved in the planning process:

- A public and technical advisory committee referred to as the Public and Technical Advisory Committee (PTAC).
- An advisory committee referred to as the Committee of the Whole (COW) made up of PRRD directors.

PTAC was established early in October 2019. PTAC members were appointed to help identify issues and opportunities with the current solid waste management system, collaborate to discuss, develop and evaluate new potential strategies to improve the system, and ultimately advise on the review and renewal the RSWMP.

To encourage public engagement and provide an opportunity for feedback from the general public at the start of the planning process, the PRRD published a solid waste management survey. The survey was used to identify emerging issues and community priorities that should be considered in the Plan review and update. The survey was available during a 6 week period (September 13 to October 31) via the PRRD's website and in hard-copy at PRRD's solid waste facilities. A total of 318 qualified

responses were received and these were considered during the planning process when options for changes to the solid waste management system were developed.

The Public Consultation Plan was finalized in November 2019. It described the intended methods for informing the public of the planning process, consulting, involving and collaborating with interested parties (via the use of PTAC and COW) and strategies for consulting with the public at large. The Plan proposed that the objectives of public consultation include:

- Ensuring requirements under the Environmental Management Act are met.
- Ensuring the public consultation considerations outlined in the MOE's 2016 Guide to Solid Waste Management Planning are addressed.
- Providing interested parties with opportunity for input and feedback on the plan:
 - To obtain input from the general public to help identify emerging issues and community priorities for improvements to the current waste management system.
 - To inform the general public and potentially affected stakeholders about the content of the draft RSWMP.
 - To obtain input from affected stakeholders (including general taxpayers) on the proposed plan components.
- Ensuring the amended (updated) Plan aligns with information gathered during public consultation.

Morrison Hershfield (MH) has developed a series of three technical memos, each presenting potential management options on key solid waste topics. The contents of each memo were presented to PTAC and COW and potential strategies were discussed and prioritized by committee members during the meetings. PTAC and COW provided feedback in the fall of 2020 on the preferred strategies to include in the Draft RSWMP. The Draft RSWMP will be presented to the Board for approval at the Board meeting on December 11, 2020. Once approved, the Draft RSWMP will be taken out for broad public consultation.

Options for Public Consultation on the Draft RSWMP

As per the Public Consultation Plan, the PRRD with support from MH, intended to consult and seek public feedback on the draft RSWMP through a series of open houses. The intention was to, by fall 2020, consult residents, businesses, communities and interested parties on the draft RSWMP and proposed strategies to gather feedback and finalize the RSWMP for Ministry approval.

When the consultation plan was developed, the world had not been rocked by a global pandemic. The proposed engagement techniques included exclusively in-person meetings, which may not be suitable under current circumstances or in certain areas at this time.

As result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be challenging to launch the in-person engagement as initially planned. While the PRRD originally set out to focus on face-to-face engagement, social distancing measures may be in place and it is not clear if residents would be willing or permitted under Public Health Order to come to in-person meetings to comment on a draft RSWMP. Table 1 to 5 provide information on different engagement techniques that may be suitable. The best methods will depend on the community and the PRRD resources available.

Table 1 In-person Open Houses as Engagement Technique available for Public Consultation on the Draft RSWMP

Evaluation Criteria	Technique: In-person Open Houses (Original Plan)
What is this technique useful for?	Providing information via information boards and one-on-one conversations as visitors view the boards.
What are the limitations with the technique?	May not be seen as providing adequate consultation if only low number of participants attend the open houses. Requires people to travel to the event and to be available at a specific time.
What will it cost to use this technique?	\$32,000 has already been budgeted by the PRRD. The budget allowed MH to attend a total of 16 open houses. If open-houses are put on-hold, this budget (\$32,000) can be used to undertake consultation using alternative techniques.
Has the technique proven to be successful in similar situations?	Yes, common before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2 Virtual Open Houses/ Townhall as Engagement Technique available for Public Consultation on the Draft RSWMP

Evaluation Criteria	Technique: Virtual Open Houses/ Townhall (Webinar) with Q&A
What is this technique useful for?	Providing information online with opportunity for live polls on specific aspects and/or questions and answers during the meeting. The event can be recorded and accessed at any time.
What are the limitations with the technique?	Limited to people with good connectivity. The question and answer chat may not be available in the recorded sessions and only participants of the live event can be actively participate in the discussion. However, people watching a recorded session would be able to email in comments.
What will it cost to use this technique?	Estimate: \$15,000, including preparation, attendance at 16 events and feedback reporting. This assumes that an MH staff member presents and is available online for 3 hours per location. The cost includes 16 virtual events and the preparation of three different variations of the webinar presentation content for municipal, rural and First Nation communities.
Has the technique proven to be successful in similar situations?	Used by other jurisdictions, often in combination with in-person open houses, but during the pandemic, as stand-alone events to consult the public. Has recently been used by PRRD.

Table 3 Online Survey as Engagement Technique available for Public Consultation on the Draft RSWMP

Evaluation Criteria	Technique: Online Survey (with combination of hard-copy survey)
What is this technique useful for?	Providing a survey online that can be supported with suitable information and links to specific sections of the Draft RSWMP. The survey can be undertaken in combination with the mail survey and be made available in hard copy at PRRD's solid waste facilities, the PRRD offices, and suitable community spaces where the PRRD has a presence. Hard copy surveys can be returned to the same locations where they were obtained.

Evaluation Criteria	Technique: Online Survey (with combination of hard-copy survey)
What are the limitations with the technique?	<p>The online survey will be limited to people with good connectivity. However, the PRRD can address this limitation by providing the survey in hard copy (either at suitable locations, or via a mail-out).</p> <p>This survey will be self-selected and generally does not produce statistically valid results. Often vocal and dissatisfied residents will take the time to complete the survey. The geographic reach of the survey cannot be controlled and the results can be easily be skewed.</p>
What will it cost to use this technique?	<p>Estimate: \$5,000, including the survey development (online and hard copy), as well as data analysis. Excluded costs include the cost of the survey platform and of any data entry of hard-copy responses into electronic format.</p>
Has the technique proven to be successful in similar situations?	<p>Online surveys have become particularly common during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PRRD was successful in undertaking an online solid waste survey at the start of the planning process.</p>

Table 4 Mail Survey as Engagement Technique available for Public Consultation on the Draft RSWMP

Evaluation Criteria	Technique: Mail Survey (with online option)
What is this technique useful for?	<p>Providing a hard copy survey to all residents, via mail, that is clearly laid out and provides brief information about particular topics that helps to frame the questions.</p> <p>This is a good way to obtain input from individuals who would be less likely to attend an in- person/virtual open house. It can either be mailed randomly to some residents in Region or sent to a targeted community. The PRRD can also send the survey to all residents.</p> <p>With a random sample the final results can be presented to represent mix of age groups, gender and communities.</p> <p>A mail-out survey can be combined with an online survey.</p>
What are the limitations with the technique?	<p>The survey needs to be written with a variety of reading levels in mind and should not exceed a 16 page double sided booklet. The survey needs to focus on the main strategies as there are too many to cover all.</p>
What will it cost to use this technique?	<p>Estimate: \$16,500 to mail to 1,600 households (this could represent a random sample of the region or a targeted community).</p> <p>For a Region-wide survey, the cost estimate is \$50,000 (assuming mail-outs to 25,000 regional addresses).</p> <p>The cost includes survey development, printing, mail-out costs, return mail postage, data collection and reporting. Costs assume the use of MH staff and a sub-consultant. A survey package is assumed to include cover letter, survey, postage paid return envelope. The costs include providing the survey online via a survey platform provided by the sub-consultant.</p>
Has the technique proven to be successful in similar situations?	<p>Mail survey is a common technique to reach out to rural communities, especially where there is limited access to internet.</p> <p>Mail-out surveys with return postage included typically achieve a response rate between 10% -20%, compared to 5% without return postage.</p>

Table 5 Phone Survey as Engagement Technique available for Public Consultation on the Draft RSWMP

Evaluation Criteria	Technique: Targeted phone survey (with online option)
What is this technique useful for?	<p>Providing a structured list of questions to gather information about the proposed strategies by phone. This technique is best suited when targeting a random sample of residents in Region. With this technique it is easy to obtain the target sample size, i.e. to obtain the exact response rate in various regions that matches the population characteristics. It is quicker to undertake than the mail-out survey.</p> <p>Results will be weighted to match population age and gender proportions.</p>
What are the limitations with the technique?	<p>May be suitable for only some strategies as there are too many to cover on the phone. The person undertaking the survey would need to provide brief information about the Plan content.</p> <p>Resulting sample will be skewed toward older age groups amongst which landlines are more common. This can be overcome by also targeting cell phone numbers. The final dataset will be weighted to ensure a representative sample.</p> <p>A phone survey of a sample of the population can potentially be combined with an online survey.</p>
What will it cost to use this technique?	<p>Estimate: \$15,500 to a representative sample (a sample of size of 400 was assumed). The cost includes survey prep, interview questionnaire, data collection and reporting. Costs assumed the use of MH staff and a sub-consultant.</p> <p>The costs include providing the survey online via a survey platform provided by the sub-consultant.</p>
Has the technique proven to be successful in similar situations?	<p>Has worked well for other regional districts, also in cases with a higher level of controversy when residents are consulted on specific strategies.</p>

For both surveys (mail-out and phone), there is an option to also provide an equivalent online version of the survey to post on the PRRD's website, which would allow for all residents to provide feedback. In case there are any overlapping responses, the online survey results would not be merged with the mail/phone survey results.

For all techniques, participant rates are likely to be higher if participants can enter a prize draw, e.g. 3 prizes of different gift cards of local shops/ experiences for example. \$500 can be assumed as an additional cost to each technique.

DISCUSSION

Approval of the new RSWMP by the Minister of Environment requires the draft Plan to have undergone adequate consultation with the public and affected stakeholders.

As result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may not be recommended to conduct in-person engagement as initially planned. Anticipated restrictions on gathering sizes and public hesitation to attend in-person events due to the pandemic is now making the PRRD look for alternative non-contact engagement techniques.

A suitable option may be to undertake public consultation using a combination of engagement techniques; the PRRD may want to initially undertake a mail-out survey and organize virtual open houses/ town halls at the locations where in-person events were initially planned. The distribution of the survey can help to raise awareness of any upcoming virtual events and ask respondents to indicate their interest in attending an event.

Lastly, if deemed necessary, the PRRD may want to organize in-person open houses once COVID-19 restrictions in the Province allow for it.

Phone surveying is not recommended since there are too many questions to cover in a phone call together with supporting information for framing the questions. The PRRD will need to decide on the most suitable approach to the survey. The main options are:

- Online survey with hard copies available at PRRD facilities (in the same way as the PRRD undertook the online solid waste survey at the start of the planning process),
- Mail-out survey with online version provided:
 - Random sample of residents,
 - Targeted communities, and
 - All residents.

During the Board meeting on December 11, 2020, Board members will be informed of the engagement techniques highlighted in this Memo. There will be an opportunity to provide feedback to ensure that the engagement techniques chosen are most suited to the PRRD and its residents. The selected options will be implemented by PRRD staff with support from MH staff.