

A large, stylized sun with many rays, rendered in a light yellow color, positioned behind the main title text.

FLOURISH UNDER THE SUN

Official Community Plan Review

A stylized landscape at the bottom of the page featuring three mountain peaks in shades of yellow, orange, and green, rising from a light beige ground line.

Merritt

**OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

**City of Merritt
Project No, 201-04167-00
July 2020**

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1

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

1.1

HISTORY AND OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

This document outlines the public engagement strategy to be utilized in support of the City of Merritt Official Community Plan (OCP) review and refresh (the “Project”). The Project can be defined as the development of an Official Community Plan in consultation with project stakeholders, to guide future growth over the next 20 years in the City of Merritt. WSP will work closely with the City of Merritt and its project stakeholders to seek input and feedback in all stages of the Project.

The Project opportunity statement is as follows:

The current Official Community Plan was adopted by City Council in 2011. Nearing a decade in force, the City has shifted and grown under the direction of this plan. In reviewing and refreshing the Official Community Plan, the project team in coordination with the City of Merritt, can identify the achievements of the past 9 years, while developing a vision for growth over the next 20. Through this exercise, key themes will be engaged upon and supportive direction provided to the community.

City of Merritt has requested that a qualified consultant review and update the Official Community Plan through a robust community engagement program that is intended to develop a community vision for growth and development in Merritt for the next 20 years. With a diverse community and the unique knowledge possessed by each stakeholder group, the OCP will be influenced by the rich community history, shaping the Merritt that we know today.

1.2

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

This Public Engagement Strategy (the “Plan”) is designed to engage with stakeholders and community members, to create a collective vision for the future development of the plan area. The Plan demonstrates the Project Team’s willingness to regularly and frequently communicate with and respond to public and client needs for information relative to the Project. More specifically, implementation of the Plan is intended to achieve the following objectives.

- **BUILD AND ENHANCE AWARENESS AND INFORMATION:**
 - Enhance awareness of the Project’s engagement process and clearly communicate the opportunities to become involved.
 - Educate the community on the technical information presented during the design process to enhance their understanding of the issues and opportunities.
 - Establish meaningful communication between the City of Merritt, the WSP Project Team and project stakeholders to facilitate informative discussions on issues and opportunities.
 - Provide meaningful opportunities for stakeholders and the public to provide comments

and feedback that may be used to inform the development of the Official Community Plan.

- Utilize web-based, electronic and print materials to ensure that stakeholders have full access to information and documentation, while respecting social distancing protocols.

- **ROADMAP FOR THE PROJECT TEAM:**

- Serve as a roadmap for the WSP Project Team to articulate roles and responsibilities and primary points of contact within the Project Team.
- Serve as a link to the project schedule and execution.

- **PROVIDE MULTIPLE ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Engage through various means, including:
 - City Steering Committee Review and Involvement throughout project
 - Council involvement throughout the project
 - Stakeholder meetings and workshops
 - Meetings and workshops with local First Nations
 - Sector-Specific Workshops
 - Poverty reduction and food security one-on-one interviews and workshops
 - Open houses x2 (in-person, or virtual if required)
 - Online survey (1 or more)
 - Hardcopy comments from all events
 - Bi-weekly online polls
 - Email submissions and social media feedback (to be tracked in Customer Service Matrix – see **Section 3.3**)

1.3 KEY MESSAGES

The following key messages will be communicated over the course of the Project:

- **WHAT ARE WE AIMING FOR?**

- The purpose of the plan preparation process is to develop a community vision and supportive policy to guide development in the City of Merritt. This process will involve a review and update of the current OCP to ensure that the new plan reflects the Merritt of 2020 and provides direction for years to come.
- To develop a common “brand” that accurately represents Merritt.
- To integrate key theme areas shaped through engagement feedback.
- To consider the unique aspects of Merritt that define the community identity.
- To address and foster the City of Merritt and region’s unique Indigenous culture.
- To consider long-term sustainability and innovation within the City of Merritt.
- To recognize Merritt as a winter city, where people can ‘play’ and enjoy the outdoors throughout all four seasons.
- To ensure that Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is considered throughout all aspects of the development of the OCP.

- To involve and value the feedback collected from all stakeholder groups in the City of Merritt, including employing innovative engagement techniques to “dig deep” and understand the areas of importance for a diverse group of project contributors.
- To communicate the OCP process as a holistic process that can only be achieved through wide-spread involvement, engagement and communication.
- To communicate the above consistently with a common set of graphic standards throughout the duration of the Project.

• WHY IS THE PROJECT HAPPENING?

- Official Community Plans require updates every 10 or so years to ensure that a municipality’s highest-level guiding planning document actively reflects the intent of the City of Merritt. Several aspects of an older OCP are achieved over the years, and through a review and update, these directions and objectives can be removed and replaced with policies and objectives that accurately reflect the collective City direction for the coming years. Common themes that are typically explored and included in an Official Community Plan may address, but are not limited to the following:
 - Land Use
 - Transportation and Infrastructure
 - Poverty Reduction
 - Food Security
 - Arts, Culture and Community Identity
 - Parks
 - Community Services
 - Sustainability (development, green initiatives, alternate energy sources)
 - Environmental Protection
 - Economic Development
 - An implementation plan for themes listed above
- In reviewing and updating the OCP, the City of Merritt will be provided with a unique opportunity to “rebrand” Merritt, developing a new collective vision and theme that can be used to strengthen community identity.

WHO WILL BE IMPACTED BY THE PROJECT?

- As both the update process and the final OCP are intended to be impactful for all those involved, we anticipate that any resident of Merritt can choose to participate and have a meaningful stake in the Project
- The Project process will provide a unique opportunity for the public and a number of stakeholder and focus groups, to become involved and share their thoughts on the shaping of the City of Merritt.
- The final deliverable will impact the entire community of Merritt as it will set the stage for growth and development well into the future.

WHERE, WHEN AND HOW WILL THE PROJECT TAKE PLACE?

- The OCP update is scheduled to take place over the next 12 months beginning in June 2020 and ending in June 2021. This timeline assumes there will be no further interruptions due to events beyond the City of Merritt's control. If an event may take place that would directly impact the Project timeline, notifications will be provided on the City of Merritt's webpage and through other forms of communication.
- Based on the provincial guidelines and community feedback, engagement related to the Project will be conducted through a combination of in-person and online events and campaigns.

2 COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

2.1 PURPOSE

Consistent consultation and engagement early in and throughout the Project is a key feature of successful planning. For this reason, it is important to establish the roles and responsibilities of the Project Team members in communications development and approval.

2.2 COMMUNICATIONS/ ENGAGEMENT PLAN MEETING (COMPLETED ON JUNE 9, 2020)

The Communications Kick-Off Meeting will be held within the first month of project initiation. Meeting attendees will include:

- Project Manager (City of Merritt) – Don McArthur
- City Steering Committee
- WSP Project Manager – Chen Peng
- WSP Engagement Leads – Lauren Gagatek
- WSP Engagement Support – Bob Evans

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Inform and confirm the Project and proposed schedule with the City of Merritt
- Provide information to the Project Team about City of Merritt communications standards for public facing content
- Confirm City steering committee members
- Confirm schedule
- Introduce available project communications channels
- Establish roles and responsibilities
- Establish key messages
- Discuss stakeholder list
- Discuss preliminary expectations and current OCP document
- Confirm next steps

2.3 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

In all published communications, this project will be identified as follows:

ITEM	DESCRIPTION
The Project Name	Official Community Plan

The Project Number	WSP Project #20M-00813-00
City of Merritt Address	2185 Voght Street, Merritt, B.C.
The main contact person for the Project	Don McArthur, City of Merritt

2.4 COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

The team responsible for communications development, approval, and distribution for this project consists of members of WSP and the City of Merritt as identified in the table below:

TITLE	ORGANIZATION	NAME	ROLE
Project Manager & Engagement	City of Merritt	Don McArthur	Reviewer / Approver of all project communications materials and assistance with engagement activities / events.
Communication & Graphics	City of Merritt	Will George	Reviewer of communications and engagement materials.
Recreation	City of Merritt	Sky McKeown	Reviewer of recreation related policies within OCP.
Project Manager	WSP	Chen Peng	Reviewer of all project communications materials.
Communications and Consultation Specialists / Facilitator	WSP	Lauren Gagatsek / Brittany Shewchuk	Responsible for the development and review of all project communications and consultation materials. Can also act as a facilitator if required.

Official Community Plan Public Engagement Strategy

Specialized Engagement Strategists <i>Food Security and Poverty Reduction</i>	WSP, Urban Food Strategies	Janine de la Salle Erin Prelypchan	Producers and reviewers of specialized engagement materials for provision to City.
Senior Review / QA/QC	WSP	Bob Evans	Final review before any documents or deliverables are submitted to the City

3 STAKEHOLDERS

3.1 PURPOSE

Consultation is a two-way communications process between the Project Team and impacted or interested parties. The WSP team has worked with the City of Merritt to identify those individuals or groups whose cooperation, expertise, or influence would be beneficial to the success of the Project. This section briefly highlights the groups of parties that may be interested in this Project.

3.2 TARGET AUDIENCES

This section identifies key audiences/parties who may influence the Project.

3.2.1 INTERNAL

Internal stakeholders are comprised of City of Merritt staff involved in the Official Community Plan review and update process. This group is referred to as the “City Steering Committee” or “SC”.

This group will provide valuable technical input and will be involved in public-facing communications.

The internal stakeholders include the following group:

GROUP	ROLE / INTEREST
City Steering Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don McArthur, Planning and Development Services Manager• Charlie Henderson, Public Works and Engineering Manager• Will George, Economic Development, Tourism, and Communications Manager• Wayne Anderson, Director of Finance and IT• Sean Smith, Director of Corporate Services• Dave Tomkinson, Fire Chief	Project managers, team members and technical experts who have a day-to-day involvement in project decision making and who intimately understand the OCP and its use / implications on current and long-range planning decisions.

3.2.2 COUNCIL

Recognizing the importance of Council in the plan preparation process, the project team will ensure that Council is informed throughout all stages of the project. This involvement and communication will include a monthly summary report of engagement efforts prepared by City staff, to ensure that Council is abreast of each stakeholder group engaged and preliminary feedback received.

Five formal Council-specific events have been planned to engage directly with the Mayor and members of Council. These events include:

- Introductory presentation to Council – review engagement plan and answer outstanding questions;
- Council and stakeholder visioning workshop – meet with Council to undertake a visioning session to confirm the goals, objectives and vision of the Official Community Plan Update;
- What We Heard presentation to Council – review of all engagement events to date and how this information will be used to shape policy direction;
- Collect draft OCP feedback – the project team will present the draft OCP to Council, and Council will undertake a detailed review of the draft OCP and discuss areas for improvement or any identified gaps; and
- Public hearing – the project team along with the City's PM will present the final OCP document to Council for adoption.

3.2.3 PUBLIC

Members of the public and public groups located within the City of Merritt who will be impacted by the Project. Generally, this group may consist of the following groups:

- Property owners, residents and community associations

3.2.4 STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Please see stakeholder matrix in **Appendix B**. These stakeholders will be contacted and involved in a stakeholder visioning session and individual stakeholder meetings.

- Regional District
- City Departments (in addition to representatives on City Steering Committee)
- Community Groups
- Business Groups (Chamber of Commerce, local developers/builders and business owners)

3.2.5 INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

In consultation with the City of Merritt, we will integrate the information and feedback gathered from City-lead engagement with Indigenous communities. The importance of the City of Merritt's relationship with its local Indigenous communities is recognized as a crucial component of the plan update process.

The following Indigenous communities that will be engaged are as follows:

- Coldwater
- Cook's Ferry
- Lower Nicola
- Nooaitch
- Shackan
- Upper Nicola

3.2.6 *POVERTY REDUCTION*

Please see stakeholder matrix in **Appendix B**. These stakeholders will be contacted and involved in stakeholder interviews, with select groups included in a focused workshop.

These stakeholders will also be invited to participate in the public open houses, and to provide feedback on the public survey.

- Conayt Friendship Society
- United Way Thompson Nicola Cariboo
- WorkBC
- Nicola Valley Food Bank
- ServiceBC Centre Merritt
- Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
- City of Merritt (Economic Development & Tourism – included in steering committee membership)

3.2.7 *FOOD SECURITY*

Please see stakeholder matrix in **Appendix B**. These stakeholders will be contacted and involved in stakeholder interviews, with select groups included a focused workshop.

These stakeholders will also be invited to participate in the public open houses, and to provide feedback on the public survey.

- Community Support Programs
- Family Services Programs
- Community Garden Representatives
- Nicola Valley Food Bank
- Nicola Valley Farmer's Market
- Food Producers / Grocery Stores / Food Businesses

3.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE TRACKING

Throughout the Project's process, all public and other engagements will be documented for inclusion in the What We Heard Report (WWHR). The proposed protocol for managing these communications is as follows:

- The Project Team will log all comments, concerns, and questions received from external parties via written correspondence, e-mails, phone calls, etc. in a Project Communications Log.
- All responses will be recorded, including the dates on incoming/outgoing communications by the City of Merritt and will be forwarded to WSP for tracking purposes and incorporation into the Project File/WWHR.'

4

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

4.1

PROJECT ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS ASSUMPTIONS

As per WSP's proposal submitted for the Official Community Plan update project, the following assumptions have been applied to the details of this Engagement and Communications Plan:

- The City of Merritt will provide staff to assist with the Project's engagement events.
- WSP will look to the City of Merritt to help with booking venues for all engagement activities, as well as distributing advertising / communication materials, collecting RSVPs, and providing refreshments at all engagement events.
- WSP will look to the City of Merritt to post all online engagement materials on Merritt's OCP landing page.
- WSP will rely on the City of Merritt to advertise through certain means such as the Merritt Herald, local radio station(s), Google Ads, or YouTube Ads and cover these costs.
- Proposed project fees exclude all costs related to public engagement events and communication (e.g. facility rentals, refreshments, advertising costs, mailing costs, etc.).
- WSP will be responsible for the design, printing and provision of materials to support engagement events, including display panels, printed surveys, sign-in sheets, workbooks for workshops.
- WSP will not be required to provide any additional translation or facilitate accessibility protocols when providing communication materials / hosting engagement events.

4.2

DETAILED ENGAGEMENT EVENT SUMMARY

The Deliverables identified within the proposed work plan have been explored in **Appendix A** in a tabular format. This table will form the working document, and will be updated as the Project progresses. Each engagement event has been identified in this table with the following items explored:

- Engagement Technique
- Event/Meeting Type
- Communication Format
- Deliverables
- Responsibilities
- Expected Timing

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) identifies five levels of public participation to help clarify the role of the public in planning and decision-making, and how much influence the community has over planning or decision-making processes.

This project falls under the Inform, Consult, and Involve levels of the spectrum. All engagement activities will be designed around the principles of the following levels of the spectrum:

- Inform – Convey clear information about the OCP project process, and provide details as to how the OCP impacts day to day living, community decisions, and land-use patterns.
- Consult – Obtain feedback to develop goals and objectives and understands impacts of draft OCP policy on residents, landowners, local governments, and other stakeholders.
- Involve – To work directly with the public throughout the OCP preparation process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered, and incorporated into preparation of the OCP document and its policies.

4.3 COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

WSP acknowledges that the City of Merritt, as the proponent, is ultimately responsible for all decisions on the nature, format, style and content of communication materials / forums, in addition to scheduling any communication or public consultation beyond what has been agreed upon within this Plan.

The method of project communications / advertisements for the public engagement components of the Project will be determined collectively by the City of Merritt and WSP. Once determined, WSP will draft these communications, and the City of Merritt will facilitate their distribution, i.e. posting on a website, sending out direct mailers, posting print ads, etc.

Please see Communications Plan for specific information relating to project communications protocols.

4.4 PROJECT SPECIFIC WEB CONTENT

The City of Merritt will establish a project web page on the City of Merritt website. This webpage will be updated by the City of Merritt to provide further information on the Official Community Plan as the Project proceeds (e.g. notices, project updates, photos, reports, etc.).

The project webpage will include a “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) section that will provide fundamental information regarding the Project’s purpose and how to get involved. These pages will be shared on the City of Merritt’s Social Media platforms to advise the community of ways to become engaged (dates of workshops). Project specific web content will be developed for use during this project to provide clear, accurate and up-to-date information. WSP will provide the City of Merritt with appropriate content, beginning with project kick off notice.

4.5 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Individual stakeholder groups are listed below and the format of engagement noted:

General Stakeholders

- City Steering Committee Workshop
- Stakeholder Visioning Workshop

Sector Workshops

- Up to 8 sector-specific workshops to discuss the nuances that represent each sector in Merritt

Poverty Reduction

- One on one phone call interviews x 7
- Kick-off Engagement Stakeholder Workshop (on-site or online, if required)
- Poverty Reduction Stakeholder Feedback Session on Draft Report (online)
- Theme-specific inclusion at both open house events
- Theme-specific section within Online Survey
- Workshop(s)

Food Security

- One on one phone call interviews x 5
- Kick-off Engagement Stakeholder Workshop (on-site or online, if required)
- Theme-specific inclusion at both open house events
- Theme-specific section within Online Survey

Minutes of all stakeholder meetings and workshops will be documented and included in the Project File/WWHR (summarized).

4.6 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

Two Public Open Houses (POH) will be held in support of the Official Community Plan. Materials prepared for the POHs will make use of pictures, diagrams and infographics, where possible, to communicate complex ideas. For this project, the following describes the approach to the communications materials to be used during each of the POHs:

- Introduce the Project
- Describe the Project rationale and process
- Discuss community vision
- Share work conducted to-date

- Present theme specific information and gather feedback
- Gather feedback on the Project to-date and understand community concerns / expectations moving forward

The Public Open Houses will have a drop-in format with display boards for public viewing. Members of the Project Team will be available to speak with the public. If an alternative timeline is not discussed between the City of Merritt and the WSP project team, all POH material drafted by WSP will be provided to the City of Merritt five business days in advance of the event.

WSP, in coordination with the City of Merritt, will also endeavor to provide all POH information to inform the Project webpage a maximum of five-days following the event.

Should the City of Merritt and the community support in-person engagement, social distancing tactics will be employed to ensure the safety of City staff, the Project Team and all attendees.

4.6.1 *NOTICE OF ENGAGEMENT EVENTS*

The Project's engagement events will be advertised through a formal notice at least two weeks prior to the event being held, advertised in the Merritt Herald. The notification will be added to City of Merritt website (events and news) as well as promoted on social media.

The formal notice will provide:

- A project description (including a study area map)
- Date
- Time
- Event format
- Location for the event
- Information on how to provide comments
- Contact information for the City of Merritt Project Manager and Communications and Graphics Representative

4.6.2 *WHAT WE'VE HEARD EVENT DISPLAY BOARDS*

WSP will develop the display boards for review and approval by the City of Merritt Project Manager and the Communications and Community Engagement Specialist.

Display boards will follow the guidelines below:

- Maximum 10 boards
- Written in plain language
- Include easy to understand pictures, diagrams, maps, graphs and infographics

4.6.3 INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

To increase engagement and feedback the following iterative activities will be considered for the incorporation into the Project's engagement events:

- Ideas fair: A highly participatory, drop-in style event. Participants will be invited to come together to share past and current experiences, issues, concerns, and needs. Discussion stations may be included that provide both information and education while also gathering varying perspectives, ideas and suggestions to be used for the development of the OCP.
- Roundtable sessions: The session will present the scope and intent of the Project, and select project team members will provide a forum for discussion on select topics highlighting their expertise and past project experience.
- Interactive gameshow: An interactive gameshow type of event will allow participants to provide feedback in a 'family feud' game style format, with questions focus around the main themes of the OCP update.
- Interactive mapping: Table maps will be provided at the events for participants to sketch or draw locations of certain land-use types they would like to see in the city.

4.6.4 ENGAGEMENT EVENT PRINTED MATERIALS

The following additional materials will be developed for use at the engagement events:

- Sign-in sheets
- Hard copy surveys *if* public survey is active
- Mapping
- Display boards
- Posters
- Handout cards that include project information / details
- Exit Survey

4.7 OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

4.7.1 SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATES

The City of Merritt will use social media to advertise project engagement events, or disseminate information regarding the Project, content will be provided to the City of Merritt's Media and Corporate Communications Specialist in advance of an event, including the formal notice and additional key messaging, as required. Content for these social media updates will be provided by WSP.

4.7.2 *OTHER MEDIA UPDATES*

In addition to social media, website, and print media communications, The City of Merritt will also advertise the Project and its associated engagement events using local radio advertisements.