REQUEST FOR DECISION
Transition to Digital Public Hearing Notifications
March 31, 2026

1.0 Recommendation

That the Planning Advisory Committee recommend that Council approve the proposed amendments to the Town of Yarmouth Public Participation Program Policy to formalize the use of digital Public Hearing notices for planning matters, in accordance with Section 206 of the Municipal Government Act.

2.0 Report

Executive Summary

Recent amendments to the Municipal Government Act allow municipalities to provide notice of required Public Hearings on planning matters & documents either through a newspaper circulating in the municipality, or by posting the notice on the municipality's website.

Historically, the Town of Yarmouth has relied on the local newspaper to advertise Public Hearings related to planning matters, including amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw. In recent years, however, the Town has also been posting these notices on its website in addition to the newspaper advertisements in order to improve accessibility and reach.

The proposed amendments to the Town's Public Participation Program Policy are intended to formalize this approach and allow the Town to leverage its Town website as the primary platform for statutory Public Hearing notices in accordance with the Municipal Government Act.

Proposed Amendments

The proposed amendments to the Public Participation Program Policy are primarily intended to formalize and clarify the Town's use of its official website as a means of providing notice for Public Hearings and other planning matters. While the Town has been utilizing its website and social media platforms for some time, these amendments ensure that this approach is clearly articulated within the policy framework and aligned with the provisions of the Municipal Government Act.

In addition, the amendments include a number of minor housekeeping changes to improve clarity, consistency, and implementation. These revisions do not alter the overall intent of the policy, but rather refine existing language, correct formatting, and standardize terminology throughout the document. Overall, the amendments are administrative in nature and are intended to modernize notification practices while maintaining transparency and opportunities for public participation.

Communication

Over the past six months, the Town has included language in its newspaper advertisements advising readers that the Town intends to transition Public Hearing notices to its website and

inviting public feedback on the proposed change (see Figure 1). No comments or concerns were received during this period.

Figure 1



Staff analysis of recent communications metrics indicates that digital communication channels, including the Town's website and social media platforms, provide significantly greater reach relative to cost compared to traditional newspaper advertising. In marketing terms, digital platforms generally offer a substantially lower 'cost-per-impression' than print media and achieving a wider reach at the same time.

While the Town's website would serve as the official platform for statutory Public Hearing notices, the Town intends to maintain a limited presence in the local newspaper through smaller "call-to-action" notices directing readers to the Town's website for full details (see Figure 2). Staff will also continue to promote individual Public Hearings through the Town's social media channels, as is currently the practice.

Figure 2 - For Illustration Purposes Only



Budget & Fees

The Town currently budgets approximately $15,000 annually for newspaper advertising related to statutory notices. Transitioning Public Hearing notices to the Town's website would allow the Town to redirect a portion of these funds toward other initiatives.

Some of this cost gets recovered through planning application fees. A portion of fees the Town charges for Development Agreements, rezonings, and Land Use By-law amendment applications offset the cost of newspaper advertising associated with statutory Public Hearing notices. Should Council approve the proposed amendments, staff will review and update the applicable planning application fee schedule to reflect the reduced reliance on newspaper advertising.

Alternatively, staff may recommend a different public notification mechanism (e.g., on-site signage) toward which respective portions of planning application fees may be applied.

3.0 Relevant Policy

The Town of Yarmouth Public Participation Program Policy outlines the procedures for public consultation and engagement in matters relating to Municipal Planning, including the adoption and amendment of the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law.

Section 206 of the Municipal Government Act requires that notice of a Public Hearing be provided at least fourteen days prior to the hearing either by publication in a newspaper circulating in the municipality for two successive weeks or by posting the notice on the municipality's website. The proposed amendments update the Public Participation Program Policy to reflect this legislative provision and clarify the Town's preferred approach to providing statutory notice.

4.0 Strategic Relevance

The proposed amendments support the Town's commitment to transparent and accessible public engagement while making greater use of modern communication tools. Leveraging the Town's website as the primary platform for statutory notices ensures that planning information is readily available to residents and stakeholders while improving the efficiency of municipal communication.

5.0 Desired Outcomes

The proposed policy amendments are intended to:

a) Align the Town's public participation procedures with current provisions of the Municipal Government Act
b) Improve accessibility and timeliness of Public Hearing information
c) Modernize the Town's approach to statutory public notice
d) Reduce reliance on traditional advertising while maintaining supplemental communication channels
e) Allow municipal resources currently used for newspaper advertising to be allocated toward other priorities

6.0 Response

a. Approve
b. Reject
c. Refer back to staff with direction for more information

7.0 General Implications of Recommendation

Overall, the proposed amendments formalize an approach that the Town has already begun implementing while aligning the Public Participation Program Policy with current legislative provisions and modern communication practices.

7.1 Organizational Implications

The proposed changes are expected to be accommodated within existing administrative processes.

7.2 Financial Implications

The Town currently budgets approximately $15,000 annually for newspaper advertising related to statutory notices. Transitioning Public Hearing notices to the Town's website is expected to reduce these costs and allow the Town to redirect a portion of these funds toward other communication or engagement initiatives.

Historically, application fees for Land Use By-law amendments ($300) and Development Agreements ($400) have included an amount intended to offset the cost of newspaper advertising for statutory Public Hearing notices. As reliance on newspaper advertising is reduced, staff will review the planning application fee schedule and may recommend adjustments to better reflect the actual cost of administering these applications. The Town may continue to place smaller notices in the local newspaper directing readers to the Town's website for full Public Hearing information.

7.3 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Posting notices on the Town's website ensures consistent and readily accessible public information related to planning matters. Maintaining supplemental communication methods, including limited newspaper notices and other outreach tools, will help ensure information continues to reach a broad segment of the community

8.0 Follow-Up Actions

If approved by Council, staff will update the Town of Yarmouth Public Participation Program Policy and implement the revised Public Hearing notice procedures for future planning matters.

9.0 Communication

Public Hearing notices will be posted on the Town's website in accordance with legislative requirements. To support public awareness, staff will continue to promote individual Public

Hearings through the Town's social media platforms and may place smaller "call-to-action" notices in the local newspaper directing readers to the Town's website for full details.

Submitted By:
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Attachments:
Attachment 1 – Amended Town of Yarmouth Public Participation Program Policy