Managing Community Questions

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Community members often have questions as a municipal project moves from an idea to a public vote. Some questions can be answered right away. Others may need more research or may not have an answer yet.

Keeping track of these questions helps municipalities respond to residents, understand common concerns, and improve how they share project information.

The Community Questions Responses Log is a simple tool to help municipal staff, officials, and project committees organize questions and follow up with the community.

When to Use the Log

Start using the log early in project planning and continue as the project moves forward. Questions may come from public meetings, surveys, emails, phone calls, or informal conversations.

The log can be especially helpful when:

- Several people are involved in answering questions.
- The same questions come up often.
- Answers require more research or input from project partners.
- Project details, costs, or schedules are changing.
- The municipality is preparing information for a public vote.

How to Use the Log

1. Record questions as they come in.

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Write down the question, when it was received, and where it came from. Try to use the person's own words. Similar questions can be grouped together.

2. Assign someone to prepare an answer.

Identify who will respond. This may be a municipal staff member, board member, consultant, or project partner. Record the status so everyone knows whether the question is being reviewed or has been answered.

3. Prepare a clear response.

Use plain language and check that the information is correct. Explain what is known and what is still being studied. If an answer is not available, explain why and when more information may be shared.

4. Track when and how the answer was shared.

Record the response and when it was provided. This helps prevent questions from being missed and keeps answers consistent.

5. Look for questions to share with everyone.

Review the log for questions that come up often or may interest the wider community. Add these questions and answers to the town's project webpage, frequently asked questions (FAQ), fact sheets, or public presentations.

6. Review the log regularly.

Look for unanswered questions, common concerns, and information that may need to be explained more clearly. Update answers when project plans change.

Tips for Getting the Most from the Log

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- **Keep it simple.** You do not need to record every conversation. Focus on questions that need an answer, follow-up, or wider public attention.
- **Choose a log manager.** Have one person keep the log current, even if several people help prepare answers.
- **Listen for common concerns.** Repeated questions may show where the community needs more information.
- **Be open about uncertainty.** It is okay not to have every answer right away.
- **Protect personal information.** Avoid including names and contact information unless needed for follow-up. Remember that municipal records may be subject to Vermont's Public Records Act.
- **Close the loop.** Let people know when answers are available and how their questions or comments are being considered.

Download the Public Questions and Responses Log

Use the Word document under the Documents section to record public questions, coordinate responses, identify common concerns, and plan follow-up activities. The log can be updated throughout the project. Municipalities may adapt it to fit their needs and do not need to complete every section.

Keep the Conversation Going

A question log is more than a place to record answers. It helps municipalities learn what matters to their community and make project information easier to understand. By listening, responding, and sharing what they learn, municipal officials can help build trust throughout the project.

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