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Building Community Support: From Project Idea to Public Vote

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Vermont League of Cities and Towns



Today's Topics

- Planning outreach
- Explaining goals, costs, and benefits
- Coordinating clear, accessible information
- Reaching residents through multiple channels
- Responding to questions, concerns, and misinformation
- Q&A
- CHIP IN VT resources and assistance

Today's Panelists

Charlie Hancock

Selectboard Chair, Town of Montgomery

Mike Strait

Town Manager, Town of Brighton

Brent Raymont

Town Manager, Town of Morristown

Jim Ryan

Wastewater Committee Chair, Town of Wolcott



The Fictional Project

Maple Falls is considering a major community project that will require voter approval. Municipal officials believe the project will provide important long-term benefits, but residents have questions about associated costs, tax impact to residents, timing, risks, and value to the community.

The Town must decide how to inform and engage residents while preparing for a possible town-wide vote.

We have intentionally left the project type open so you can think about how these questions might apply to not only a CHIP project but any other type of major initiative: water, wastewater, a public safety facility, a municipal building, adopting a local option tax, or another community project.



Planning the Outreach

Maple Falls town officials agree that the proposed project may benefit the community, but many details are still being developed.

When should the Town begin its public outreach?

A. Now, while the project is still taking shape
B. After the project scope and cost are settled
C. When community input or a decision is needed
D. When the bond vote is warned
E. It depends on the project
F. It depends on the community



Explaining the Project

In the Maple Falls town newsletter, the Town posts the following information about its project:

> *The Town of Maple Falls is proposing a major capital project that would provide lasting benefits to the community. The project would require a significant investment, potentially funded through a combination of taxpayer dollars and long-term borrowing.*

What information would residents need to better understand this proposal?

A. What the Town plans to build
B. Why the project is needed
C. What it will cost residents
D. How it will be financed
E. What benefits and risks are expected
F. What the timeline for the project is
G. All of the above



Coordinating Communications

Residents are starting to receive different answers about the Maple Falls project from municipal staff, elected officials, and community supporters.

What should the municipality do first?

A. Designate one spokesperson
B. Develop a communication plan with facts and key messages
C. Ask everyone to stop discussing the project
D. Publish each person's individual explanation
E. Review what caused the conflicting information



Reaching the Broader Community

Maple Falls has held two public meetings. Attendance has been low and has consisted mostly of people who regularly participate in Town government.

Which additional outreach methods should the Town consider?

A. Direct mail
B. Municipal website and email notices
C. Social media
D. Local news outlets
E. Community organizations and trusted messengers
F. Events or meetings in different locations
G. Printed information in public places
H. Enclosures in bills (tax & utility)
I. School newsletters
J. Signs in general store/café
K. Town spokesperson
L. Community influencers
M. Town report article
N. All of the above
O. Whoa! We don't have time to do all that!



Listening and Responding

A resident posts the following statement about the Maple Falls project on social media:

> The Town has already made up its mind! Officials are hiding the project's real cost, and taxpayers will be responsible if everything goes wrong!

What should municipal officials do first?

A. Respond to correct every part of the post immediately
B. Take a pause - listen and identify the underlying concerns
C. Remove the comment
D. Ignore the comment
E. Defend the project and its supporters
F. It depends on the circumstances
G. Note sure



Bond Counsel Introduction

Elijah Emerson

Attorney at Law, Primmer Piper Eggleston & Cramer, PC.



VLCT's CHIP IN VT Assistance

Available Assistance

- Multi-year webinar series
- Drop-in office hours
- Online resource library
- Targeted assistance for applications
- Peer learning opportunities & small group support

Online Resource Library

- Best practices & case studies
- Checklists, guides & toolkits
- Grants and funding options
- Templates & models
- Study outlines & examples
- FAQs

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Have Questions?

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