Civic Engagement Principles

At the January 29th Community Dialogue, community members worked together to develop civic engagement principle statements to guide public participation in Alexandria. Subsequent to the meeting, facilitators from the tables collaborated with staff to synthesize the 17 table statements into 8 single statements, listed below.

Process
- Some elements of some statements were better suited to other principles, and so those ideas were shifted;
- Principle statements will not include a high level of detail. A higher level of detail will be included in the "actions and outcomes table" that will accompany each principle;
- Three of the principles were renamed to make them easier to understand, and to avoid unnecessarily technical jargon;
- In order to capture a common theme that arose at many tables, the addition of a 4th principle was recommended: Evaluation. This principle highlights the critical step of evaluating any given decision-making process with regard to its public participation element and whether it successfully applied the established civic engagement principles.

Synthesized Principle Statements

- **Easy Participation** (Changed from Informed and Accessible Participation)
  Alexandria promotes open and readily accessible government. Communications and information are timely, easy to understand, and offered in a variety of formats, appropriate to a given process. The City will provide clarity about the public decision making process, including milestones and a defined endpoint. Participants will have the flexibility to participate in a variety of ways, including online and in person.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
  - *Alexandria should provide its citizens with data and flexibility to provide our perspective and input at any time any place. Promote informed participation through open, free and readily accessible government and partners in the community.*
  - *Community members need to have more options for becoming informed and participating in civic decisions including online, radio, in print, in many languages and in proximity to where they live and work.*

- **Respect** (Changed from Civility)
  Alexandria values a process of engagement where participants demonstrate respect in words and actions and approach decisions with open-mindedness so that everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinion regardless of differences.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
  - *Participants in public dialogue should demonstrate respect in words and actions regardless of differences.*
  - *We value a process of engagement where every participant feels respected, comfortable expressing their opinion, is treated with courtesy, and approaches decisions with open-mindedness.*

- **Early Involvement**
Alexandria identifies and involves stakeholders early in decision-making processes. Community members are involved in framing issues before any conclusions have been drawn, requiring early and ongoing communication with participants through each phase in the process.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
    - *Early and informed involvement is a mutual responsibility of the City and its citizens, ground in a transparent and consistent process supported by a clear and tailored communication throughout the whole process.*
    - *Identify and involve all stakeholders from the beginning, insure a democratic process to frame issues fairly and consider all input seriously.*

- **Inclusiveness and Equity**
Alexandria reaches out to and encourages the participation of all members of the community in dialogue and decision-making processes, including those who will be affected by the issue as well as those who have not historically been engaged. All members of the community are informed and empowered to participate; all views are equally heard and inform the outcome; and all impacts and benefits are fairly distributed.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
    - *All community members' views are equally heard and should inform the outcome. Those who haven't been engaged are informed, engaged, and empowered.*
    - *Include all community involvement from the very beginning. A transparent process where all stakeholders are equally heard and where the impacts are equally considered.*

- **Meaningful Engagement**
Alexandria provides opportunities for all community members to participate in an open and unbiased process, free of predetermined outcomes, to consider and deliberate feasible options. The City authentically solicits, acknowledges, incorporates, and responds to community input.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
    - *Provides opportunities for all citizens to participate in an open and unbiased process on matters that have not yet been resolved.*
    - *The City creates an open-loop system where it effectively solicits outside input. The City acknowledges, incorporates, and effectively and meaningfully responds to citizens. Staff should effectively advertise upcoming plan early on to solicit citizen inputs.*

- **Mutual Accountability**
The City and community are mutually accountable for honest and respectful participation, informed and fact-based discussion, and acceptance of the outcome of a fair process that reflects the input of participants. The conclusion of a process will result in meaningful follow-up, ongoing assessment to measure progress, and implementation of improvements as needed.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
    - *Measurable progress and outcomes that reflect the participation of the participants with impactful follow-up and communication.*
    - *With honesty and respect, team will establish measurements for all principles to allow for refinement of process and assessment of staff performance.*

- **Sustained Collaboration** (Changed from Sustained Cooperation)
  Alexandria promotes a culture of community engagement that enhances public decision making processes and invests in long-term working relationships, learning opportunities and ongoing, open collaboration between community members, community groups, City leaders and staff.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
    o *Insure ongoing, open, and respectful collaboration between citizens, community groups, City leaders and staff.*
    o *Establish a culture of community engagement starting in advance of set agendas, identifying stakeholder groups and how to effectively touch them and develop relationships that last beyond; must use all available tools and technology to communicate with the community.*

- **Transparency**
  City government will act with integrity in an open process, and will provide timely access to clear, trustworthy information, presented and employed by all parties from the beginning to the end of the process, including the reasoning that leads to and supports the policy conclusion.

  Created by participants on January 29th:
    o *To ensure transparency our representative City government must act with integrity in all processes to include all citizens throughout the process.*
    o *Clear, accessible, trustworthy, timely, and accountable access to the information that is collected, presented and employed by all parties, from the beginning to the end of the decision-making process, and to the reasoning that lends to and supports the policy conclusion.*

- **Evaluation** (Addition of a 9th principle)
  The City will work in partnership with the community to periodically assess the application of civic engagement principles. The evaluation will quantify participant feedback, document lessons learned, and identify strategies for refinement.