

MEA Clarification Updated March 2023

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL and the MCEA Process

Over the years MEA has noted that a number of municipal project managers of MCEA projects complain that individual members of their Council get involved in an MCEA project at the wrong time or inappropriately (for example supporting a minority group's agenda rather than supporting the position of the majority) and causing delays and/or increased cost. This can certainly happen in the municipal setting. Individual members of the Council represent their constituents, but staff work for the community as represented by the entire Council. Input from individual members of Council should certainly be part of the EA process but input from individuals should not be allowed to overrule input from the majority. All inputs need to be considered in the evaluation of alternatives. The decision process needs to show these considerations to ensure all understand their points of view were part of this process. To keep the project focused on finding the best solution for the community, project managers should:

- Early in the EA process, seek widespread acceptance that the stated problem is legitimate, and a solution is needed.
- Involve Council as much as feasible throughout the Class EA process so the entire Council (that is ultimately the proponent) will be supportive of the final conclusion and preferred solution. The organization of each municipality is unique. Ideally, Council, as a group, is involved in the EA process so that the municipality's MCEA project manager, who is representing the proponent, has a clear understanding of Council's position. However, particularly in larger municipalities, this may not be practical. In this case, establishing a steering committee, including interested members of Council, could be considered.
- Remind stakeholders regularly that the stated problem needs to be addressed. This may encourage productive discussion on finding a solution rather than negative input focused on ensuring that a specific solution does not proceed.
- In complex projects, one solution is to involve Council at the initial stages, such as approving the Problem/Opportunity statement, but then allowing the planning process to proceed within the confines of the Statement, with Council only providing final approval.

The MCEA process includes an evaluation of various alternatives and selection of the preferred solution. Council is ultimately the proponent and must support the selected preferred solution. What happens if Council disagrees with the preferred solution selected by the process? If there is disagreement, the project manager should review the selection process with Council and determine why Council disagrees with the preferred solution. Is Council considering different evaluation criteria? Is Council scoring the criteria differently? Is Council weighting the criteria differently? For

example, perhaps Council would have assigned a higher weighting to the criteria that considers the cost of the project. Once the difference is understood, then alternatives need to be re-evaluated so that the preferred solution is acceptable to Council. This work should all be recorded in the EA documents