



Administrative Report

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council
From: Katherine Hebert, County Clerk
Date: Wednesday, March 4, 2026
Subject: Public Petitions Policy
Report #: 2026-0304-LLS-R17-KH

Purpose

To present Council with, for its review and approval, a new Public Petitions Policy (the "**Policy**"), a copy of which is attached to this Report as Appendix A, and which Policy formally establishes a consistent and transparent process for receiving, validating, and publishing public petitions submitted to the County.

Background

Petitions are a long-standing tool for residents to express their views on matters of public concern and to request action from County Council. While the County's Procedure By-law outlines certain requirements for petitions, and the County's website further outlines how the public may submit a petition, Administration identified the need for a comprehensive policy that:

- Defines what constitutes a petition;
- Sets clear requirements for format, submission, and validation;
- Establishes consistent practices for including petitions on Council agendas; and
- Ensures compliance with the *Municipal Act, 2001* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* ("**MFIPPA**").

A draft of the Policy was reviewed by the County's Senior Leadership Team on September 20, 2025, and on their recommendation the Policy is now being brought to Council for formal approval.

Discussion

Purpose and Scope of the Policy

The Policy sets out the process by which members of the public may submit petitions to the County. It affirms Council's priorities for accountability and transparency, and recognizes that:

- Petitions are an important mechanism for residents and property owners to communicate concerns and advocate for action within the jurisdiction of the County;
- Administrative or operational matters should first be directed to the appropriate County Department; and
- Petitions should all be subject to a uniform policy.

Requirements for Form and Content

The Policy establishes minimum standards to ensure authenticity and clarity, including:

- Petitions must be legible, respectful, and free of defamatory or inappropriate language;
- Petitions must contain at least one original signature;
- Each page must include a clear statement of the Petition's purpose;
- Signatories must provide printed names, addresses, and original signatures;
- A designated Petition Organizer must be identified and must provide complete contact information.

The Clerk may refuse petitions that do not meet these standards.

Agenda Placement

The Policy distinguishes between:

1. Petitions Related to an Agenda Item

- Must be submitted by 10:00 AM on the Friday before the meeting;
- Will be included in the agenda package for the relevant item;
- The Clerk may defer the item to a later meeting if appropriate or schedule a Special Meeting if the matter is urgent (in consultation with the Warden).

2. Petitions Introducing New Business

- Will be placed under "Correspondence" on a future Council Agenda;

- The County's Procedure By-law will apply with regard to any call to action arising from a Petition;
- Petitions seeking the same or similar outcome on a topic as a Petition that has already been received by Council, will not be republished within the same Council term.

Authentication and Public Disclosure

To comply with MFIPPA and the *Municipal Act, 2001*:

- All Petitions must clearly disclose that names, signatures, and comments will form part of the public record;
- Personal information will be used solely to inform Council of the views of the public; and
- Petitions failing to meet Policy requirements will be returned to the Petition Organizer, with the Clerk advising the Petition Organizer on how to correct the deficiencies.

External Petition Websites

Petitions from third party electronic platforms will not be accepted as formal petitions unless:

- The site verifies the identity and civic address of signatories; and
- The petition still meets all other requirements outlined in the Policy.

Where these conditions are met, the petition may be accepted as correspondence.

Risks

In the Recommendation section of this Report, the recommendation is that Council approve the Policy. However, Administration notes that should Council not adopt a formal Policy the County will have to continue to rely solely on the Procedure By-law, and inconsistencies in petition submission and agenda placement will persist.

Policy Framework

In accordance with the County's Policy and Procedures Governance Framework, this new Policy shall be classified as a Corporate Policy. Corporate Policies require Council approval and regular review. Notwithstanding the above, minor changes may be made Administratively.

Financial Implications

There are no anticipated financial impacts associated with implementing the Public Petitions Policy. Administration will oversee implementation within existing budgeted resources.

Consultations

During the preparation of this Report, and the development of the Policy, consultations took place in accordance to the Policy and Procedures Governance Framework as follows:

- David Sundin, Director, Legislative and Legal Services/County Solicitor
- Sandra Zwiers, Chief Administrative Officer (and the Senior Leadership Team) – Reviewed and endorsed in September 2025

Strategic Plan Alignment

Working as Team Essex County	Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence	Building a Regional Powerhouse
<input type="checkbox"/> Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing “Team Essex County” for Results <input type="checkbox"/> Advocating for Essex County’s Fair Share	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Being an Employer with Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Government Working for the People <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Promoting Transparency and Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonizing Action for Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2026-0304-LLS-R17-KH, Public Petitions Policy as information, and approve the Public Petitions Policy, and corresponding By-law as presented.

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Katherine Hebert

Katherine Hebert, County Clerk

Concurred With,

David Sundin

David Sundin, BA (Hons), LL.B., Director, Legislative and Legal Services/County Solicitor

Concurred With,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix	Title
A	Public Petitions Policy – Final Draft for Council Consideration