November 2019

SEAC Terms of Reference Review

Members of the Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC) have consistently received feedback from members of City Council on the value and effectiveness of the committee, and that we are a model committee for others within the City advisory structure.

Revised Terms of Reference for SEAC have been in place since January 1, 2019. Overall, we believe that the revisions include constructive modifications, particularly the addition of the Youth Member and Indigenous Member. The communication channels and mandate are also much clearer, which has led to more effective meetings and a clearer sense of how SEAC can effect change in Saskatoon. We continue to appreciate the support we receive from Council, the City Clerk’s Office, and Administration to adopt these new Terms of Reference.

In an effort to ensure we remain as effective as possible, SEAC would like to highlight the following specific issues that we have noted since adoption of the new Terms of Reference. We would like the opportunity to work collaboratively with the City Clerk’s Office in order seek solutions.

1. **Quorum** - Through 2019, achieving quorum has been challenging for the committee. In one case, quorum was not met and in many other cases, quorum was achieved by only one member at the last minute. Experienced members of the committee do not recall quorum being challenging prior to the revision of the Terms of Reference, and we note that the following changes may be leading to challenges, but other factors may also be at play - increase in committee size and increase in agency representation (where members have competing priorities).

   **Recommendation:** change agency members to non-voting and reduce quorum to 50% (instead of above majority, not including agency representatives.

2. **City Councillor Representation** - We would like to sincerely thank Councillor Gersher for her immense support to SEAC. The City Councillor representative to SEAC is a critical role to ensure that SEAC achieves its mandate to Council, particularly given we are volunteers with limited capacity and that navigating municipal governance can be complex. We are concerned that the change of the Councillor’s role to a resource rather than a member understates the value of this role. If Councillor representation shifts in the future, the impact of this may become significantly more apparent.

   **Recommendation:** make the City Council representative a non-voting member of committee.

3. **Administration Communication** - We would also like thank Administration representatives for their support to SEAC in meetings. As noted above the distinction of our communication via Standing Policy Committee versus directly with Administration has clarified how SEAC is best to achieve its mandate. However, we note that having positive and open relationships with Administration has also benefited SEAC in the past. As volunteers with limited time, having good relationships with Administration where questions can be openly asked (both in meetings and outside) and issues discussed transparently is beneficial to committee members to fully understand the policies, strategies, and work that Administration does. We have noted that communication has become limited with a variety of departments, and that in many cases departments responsible for specific reports or areas of interest to SEAC have not been at meetings to support agenda topics.
Recommendation: ensure that there are open lines of communication available to Administration, as long as not overly burdensome and is in regards to questions or clarifications on ongoing work relevant to SEAC's goals and objectives.

4. Agency Representatives - As noted in the recent Triple Bottom Line policy, “sustainability is the simultaneous pursuit of environmental health and integrity, social equity, and cultural wellbeing, and economic prosperity and fiscal responsibility.” SEAC’s role is to advise on environmental issues, but within a context of holistic sustainability. There are many community organizations and agencies working on sustainability issues in Saskatoon; however, SEAC has historically been a citizen’s body with minimal agency representation. The Terms of Reference change to increase agency representation puts SEAC in a quasi-state where agency members who engage on a variety of fronts with the City are also now given preferential voice over other non-represented groups through this committee. SEAC is concerned about the effectiveness of this, and would like to understand the rationale better. We also want to ensure that the relationships with agencies are as productive as possible.

Recommendation: make Agency Representatives non-voting and review representation to ensure both appropriate organizations are identified, and appropriate representatives from organizations are appointed.

5. Youth Representatives - As noted above, SEAC strongly supports the addition of a specific Youth Representative. However, we believe special consideration needs to be made for youth due to their likely, more changing schedules. As an example, our current Youth Representative will be on exchange next year, hence will need to resign from SEAC. Given location and schedules can change on a term-by-term basis, we believe special concessions may need to be considered for Youth representatives to allow for a level of continuity.

Recommendations: reduce the renewal term of the Youth Representative to 1 year; however, give those that can not continue on the committee due to schedule changes, preferential reinstatement in the event they reapply, up to a maximum of 6 years total.

As noted above, we would like to discuss these issues in full with the City Clerk’s office and collaborate on potential solutions. Therefore, we request that EUCS ask the City Clerk’s office to schedule a meeting with key SEAC members to discuss and move forward.