

### 2020 Civic Service Surveys

#### ISSUE

Two civic surveys (Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey and Civic Services Survey: Performance, Priorities & Preferences) are scheduled to be conducted in 2020. These surveys take place every other year to measure residents' perceived quality of life in Saskatoon, satisfaction with civic services, areas for improvement, and future priorities. Data collection typically takes place in May for the Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey and then in July for the Civic Services Survey Performance, Priorities & Preferences Survey. However, as a result of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption of City operations and the community, how is the Administration planning to obtain such feedback?

#### BACKGROUND

The Administration has been conducting versions of satisfaction surveys for several years. However, in transitioning to a more strategic approach to business planning and budgeting, the Administration revised its approach and methodology. This approach was communicated to the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC), at its meeting held on April 23, 2018, where they considered a report titled, [Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget: Communications and Engagement Approach](#), and resolved:

- “1. That the communications and engagement approach for the Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget be approved.”

The report proposed an engagement approach that included two civic services surveys to replace the previous annual Civic Services Survey. These new surveys were the Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey and Civic Services Survey: Performance, Priorities & Preferences, which would be conducted bi-annually.

The results from this reformed approach were communicated to GPC at its meeting held on March 18, 2019, where they received a report titled, [Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget – 2018 Communications and Public Engagement Results](#). The report indicated that the next engagement was planned to take place in May 2020 to gather input for the City's investment and service priorities for the 2022-2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget.

City Council, at its meeting held on July 29, 2019, approved the [City's Public Engagement Policy](#). The policy adopted key foundational principles that underlie the City's approach to public engagement, which are: Inclusivity; Early Involvement; Decision-Making; Transparency and Accountability; Open and Timely Communication; Relationship Building; and Evaluation. All public engagement activities are to be guided by these foundational principles.

On March 18, 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan officially declared a provincial State of Emergency as a response to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. On the

following day, the City of Saskatoon responded by closing public access to City Hall and all City buildings, including fire stations, leisure facilities and Saskatoon Public Library locations. It also indefinitely suspended the City's public engagement activities to comply with provincial orders. Subsequently, several community restrictions have been enacted and many other City service adjustments have been made to ensure the City safely deliver services to residents while practicing safe physical distancing protocols.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

Due to the City's suspension of several operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and out of sensitivity to the stresses being felt in our community, Administration intends to postpone the civic service surveys until City services return to more normalized operations. Moreover, the City's public engagement principle of inclusivity would be especially difficult to achieve at this time since various vulnerable populations are being particularly impacted by the pandemic.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

Prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the City's response to it, Administration was planning to conduct two civic surveys similar to the surveys conducted in 2018 for the purposes of multi-year budgeting. More specifically, Administration was working with Forum Research, Inc. to administer the Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey in May 2020 and the Civic Services Survey: Performance, Priorities & Preferences in mid-June to mid-July 2020. The timing of the surveys were scheduled to avoid conflict with the November 2020 Civic Election.

Refer to Appendix 1 for Content Descriptions for Civic Surveys.

Considering all factors, the Administration believes the best course of action is to postpone the two civic surveys until City services return to more normalized operations and/or many of the pandemic restrictions are relaxed.

Conditions are so fluid at this time that a point-in-time survey of traditional civic services would be irrelevant. Not only would the information not be comparable to other years, it would not be relevant in the coming weeks as circumstances are changing very quickly. A more appropriate approach would be to engage citizens in a way that is focused specifically on the City's COVID-19 response, which is outlined later in this report. More specifically, some of the considerations for the Administration's intended approach are as follows:

1. The City is responding to following provincial and federal guidelines as they evolve, which impacted many City services and our ability to provide the expected levels of service. The primary focus has been on the delivery of core services and there was significant disruption to services such as transit, leisure centres, playgrounds, etc. Due to these significantly affected services that are integral to the survey, the Administration believes the survey in its entirety would be rendered irrelevant.

2. Contacting citizens and asking questions that would likely seem irrelevant to their current situation could be frustrating to those contacted.
3. One benefit of the existing survey is to allow for a time series comparison to previous years. That is, comparisons to previous years' help to determine if the City's long-term investments, programs and services are having the intended impact. It is the view of the Administration that the data collected during the containment phase of COVID-19 has the potential to generate unusual responses that may result in the lack of reliable data to undertake comparative data analysis.
4. Building off the previous point, many residents have been impacted by COVID-19 (employment, working from home, child care, school closures, etc.). This may result in responses to survey questions based on the most readily available information as it is impacting the respondent. This recency effect may impact the ability for a respondent to evaluate the performance of City of Saskatoon services over a full year.
5. Participation in civic services surveys would likely be low for the foreseeable future due to challenges related to promoting the surveys, as well as residents preoccupied with other more pressing matters. This would be especially true for more vulnerable populations, which would result in a less representative sample than if the surveys were conducted during more normal times.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The 2020 operating budget includes \$30,000 to be used towards the costs associated with the civic services survey. A portion of the budget may be used for assessing the City's response to the pandemic as identified under next steps.

### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

The Administration's intention to postpone the survey is in accordance with Council Policy C01-046 Public Engagement Policy.

There are no privacy or environmental implications identified.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Administration recognizes the value in evaluating the City's performance particularly as it relates to our response to COVID19. As a result, Administration proposes to conduct a survey to assess the City's response to the pandemic, as well as public perceptions during the pandemic, tentatively scheduled for late summer or early fall 2020. This survey would be in addition to the delayed Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey and the Civic Services Survey: Performance, Priorities & Preferences Survey.

The COVID-19 survey has not been developed, but the purpose of the survey would include, but not limited to, gathering the following:

- Satisfaction with performance regarding core service delivery;
- Satisfaction to modifications made to other civic services to maintain operations (i.e. permit applications);

- Satisfaction with financial relief plans (i.e. transit fare suspension, 2020 Property tax grace period, etc.);
- Perceptions regarding changes providing 2 metre distancing and safety enhancements (i.e. walkways and pedestrian overpasses, pedestrian crossing signal push buttons, etc.);
- Satisfaction with customer service levels;
- Satisfaction with communications and information;
- Perceptions of safety and wellbeing during the pandemic; and
- Identifying best public engagement approaches during the continued implementation of pandemic measures.

The input received from this survey would help determine public priorities and expectations during various phases of the pandemic, as well as contribute to informing future emergency planning.

Administration will continue to monitor the situation and will report back when a new implementation timeline for the civic service surveys is in place. We estimate the timing will be Spring 2021.

The Communications & Public Engagement Division is also developing a strategy for a phased approach to restoring public engagement activities as the pandemic situation evolves.

## APPENDIX

### 1. Content Descriptions for Civic Surveys

#### Report Approval

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