

Roadmap to Recovery: City Council Chambers

ISSUE

When the impact of COVID-19 hit Saskatoon, adjustments needed to be made to the delivery of services to ensure the health and safety of residents and staff. The vast majority of services were able to continue uninterrupted, although some services were more broadly impacted. One service that was impacted was City Council Chambers (Chambers) with the closure of City Hall to the public following Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19 Public Health Orders. Saskatoon City Council continued meeting, using on-line tools, making the meetings available for the public and media to watch and participate in.

BACKGROUND

Since COVID-19 began to impact Saskatoon in January 2020, the City of Saskatoon Administration (the Administration) has taken steps to prioritize the health and safety of residents and employees. The Administration has been following the Government of Saskatchewan's Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan (the Government's Re-Open Plan) and is continuing to adjust and resume customer-facing services in accordance with provincial guidelines and following internal safety procedures and priorities.

CURRENT STATUS

The City has prioritized the reopening of public-facing services that cannot be delivered through other processes. This includes the reopening of the:

- lobby at City Hall (June 15, 2020),
- playgrounds,
- paddling pools,
- spray pads,
- sports fields,
- summer play programs,
- George Ward and Riversdale outdoor pools,
- Saskatoon Forestry Farm Park and Zoo,
- ACT Arena and
- Shaw Centre and Lakewood Civic Centre

The current focus of the Administration is planning the reopening of facilities and programs at the:

- Harry Bailey Aquatic Center,
- Saskatoon Field House,
- Lawson Civic Center and,
- Cosmo Civic Center

Beginning in September, the City will begin the regular scheduled opening of the remaining indoor arenas for fall/winter rentals and programming.

Chambers have not been reopened for in-person meetings at this time. A review was conducted to determine what measures would be required to reopen Chambers for this purpose.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

In reviewing the plans for reopening Chambers, Administration considered the Government's Re-Open Plan and recommendations, the City of Saskatoon Return to Work Procedures, Hierarchy of Controls (safety strategy), COVID-19 Cleaning Standards, and the internal capacity to action the plans and procedures required for in-person meetings in Chambers. In addition, a survey of the current status of reopening of Chambers in other major cities was undertaken.

The Government's Re-Open Plan recommends that *"individuals should continue working from home if they can do so effectively"* through all five phases of the plan. The City has followed provincial guidance since early stages of the COVID response and the plan is to continue to follow provincial leadership.

It is important to note that while Saskatoon currently has low-diagnosed COVID-19 cases, it is imperative to stay prepared. There is the possibility of transmission of COVID-19 and a possible second wave or surge in cases. Until there is widespread vaccination for COVID-19, there will be risk for transmission in the workplace; particularly in worksites where there is close contact.

The risk of transmission cannot be eliminated, however, this hazard will be assessed and mitigated from a safety perspective using the standard Hierarchy of Controls as shown in Appendix 1. When reopening all Saskatoon City facilities and services, the Administration utilized this system largely based on guidelines issued by the Province of Saskatchewan for employee safety and wellbeing to mitigate the risk of transmission. The hierarchy is as follows:

- The most effective method of protecting employees in the workplace is eliminating the risk of exposure by not being in the workplace, working remotely, and meeting virtually. This aligns with the Government's Re-Open Plan recommendation that: *"Individuals should continue working from home if they can do so effectively."*
- The second most effective method is substituting elimination by achieving physical distancing of 2 metres at all times.
- The next strategy would be installing physical barriers between employees when physical distancing cannot be achieved.
- The final method of protection, when the above cannot be achieved, is to have everyone wear a non-medical mask and be trained in the safe work practice of use of masks. It is important to note that a non-surgical mask is not personal

protective equipment. It is a barrier to prevent COVID-19 transmission recommended by the Canadian Chief Medical Officer.

A review was conducted of Chambers by the Workplace Assessment Readiness Team. The following considerations would need to be addressed in order for in-person meetings to resume:

- Physical changes to Chambers could include: the addition of plastic/acrylic barriers, one-way direction traffic flow, enhanced cleaning protocols (work surfaces, washrooms, microphones and microphone covers, chairs), and a review of traffic flow in the lobby area. With the planned renovations to Chambers, these changes could be included as part of that work.
- Process adjustments would need to be implemented including the use of the City of Saskatoon COVID-19 Fit for Duty Form for Council members and an online booking system for speakers, or media, wishing to attend City Council Meetings in person.

Review of City Council Chambers Reopening in Other Municipalities

A survey of the current status of reopening of Chambers in the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, and Regina was undertaken.

City of Edmonton

The City of Edmonton's website for Council and Committee Meetings indicates:

- To adhere to physical distancing requirements,
- City Hall is closed to the public,
- The public is invited to view the video online,
- Recent online meeting video - only the Mayor and up to two Councillors are physically present (minimal administrative staff),
- Participants are physically distanced and plastic dividers, or physical barriers, have been installed separating each workspace.

City of Calgary

The City of Calgary's website for Council and Committee Meetings indicates:

- Members of the public wishing to speak are encouraged to do so remotely,
- Members of the public that wish to appear in person to speak can expect to follow COVID-19 protocols,
- Members of Council and Committee may participate remotely,
- The public is strongly encouraged to follow the meetings using the live stream,

- Recent online meeting video – speakers on agenda, including public hearing matters, were being accommodated via teleconference,
- Only the Mayor was in attendance for the meeting (minimal administrative staff with appropriate distancing),
- The meeting was observed with all members attending remotely. No physical barriers or dividers were observed.

City of Regina

The City of Regina continues to host Council Meetings virtually:

- the Mayor and typically the Deputy Mayor (responsible for Bylaw readings) in attendance,
- Committee meetings have operated similarly with only the chair of the Committee attending in person,
- At this time, the intent is for meetings to continue remotely with only the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in attendance,
- From a review of the meeting live stream, no physical barriers or dividers were observed,
- Administrative staff in attendance were physically distanced.

Timeline Considerations

There is a pre-existing plan to renovate Saskatoon's City Council Chambers commencing on or about September 29th until the week of November 9th. This was included in the 2020 Business Plan and Budget process.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, privacy, legal, social or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

Considering all factors, unless otherwise directed by Council the Administration will continue to schedule virtual/remote Committee and Council Meetings for the months of August and September. In November 2020, following the Civic Election and when renovations to Chambers are complete, an update report will be provided. The renovations being completed will include COVID-19 safety recommendations. At that time, Council will have a chance to inspect the freshened Chambers and proposed COVID-19 safety protocols and be prepared to consider the next steps on reopening Chambers for in-person meetings. This approach will allow Administration to continue to focus on public-facing services through to November 2020.

APPENDICES

1. Hierarchy of Controls

Report Approval

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