Motion – Councillor M. Loewen - Identifying and Addressing Systemic Barriers

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon (City) has adopted several strategies, policies, programs, and practices aimed at supporting reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion, both in its internal operations and its external activities. Recently, City Council passed three-motions aimed at investigating potential ways to address systemic barriers in employment, engagement, and governance. The Administration is seeking City Council's approval to develop a multi-phased, "One-City", strategic approach to addressing systemic barriers in these areas.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to City Council that it endorse the "One-City" strategic approach as outlined in the report of the Chief Strategy & Transformation Officer dated May 17, 2021.

BACKGROUND

At its September 28, 2020 meeting, City Council resolved:

> "1.   That the Administration report back on a process to collaboratively and cross-departmentally identify and address systemic barriers in the recruitment and retention of diverse employees. This should include processes and/or models that have been successfully deployed in other municipalities and other major employers in the public or private sector. This report should also comment on whether or not the existing process for self-identification represents best practices.
>
> 2.   That the Administration report back on a strategy to identify and address systemic barriers that prevent residents from accessing, taking part in, and providing feedback within public engagement conducted by the City, with a specific emphasis on underserved and underrepresented populations in the community. This strategy should be informed by best practices from other cities.
>
> 3.   That the City Clerk's Office seek out options to improve the reach and accessibility of efforts to invite residents to participate on Council-appointed advisory committees, boards, and commissions. These actions should have specific emphasis on underserved and underrepresented populations in the community and should be based on advice from community organizations with linkages to underrepresented populations."

CURRENT STATUS

The City has implemented several measures aimed at addressing reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Appendices 1 and 2 provides an overview of the City's efforts to date.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Systemic barriers are defined as "Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation in social, economic or political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but built into the way society works. Our assumptions and stereotypes, along with policies, practices and procedures reinforce them"[1]. Institutions such as the City, with long-standing, formal, and structured policies, procedures, work environments and governance may be particularly at risk for having embedded systemic barriers.

To date, the efforts outlined in Appendices 1 and 2 have played an important role in addressing reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, local and international events, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted the need to strengthen the City's efforts in this area. To address the roots of this, a more robust and coordinated approach is required to move the City forward and specifically address the systemic barriers and inequities which exist in municipal government. In the absence of a City-wide strategy, and coordinated approach, these individual efforts may be disjointed, engagement inconsistent, and may not be the most efficient or optimal use of resources.

To advance reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion, systemic barriers will need to be identified. This includes addressing obstacles faced by, but not limited to, members of visible minorities or racialized groups, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, people with lower-income, women, and members of LGBTQ2S+ communities. To lay the groundwork, it is important to establish common definitions. Appendix 3 outlines definitions for anti-racism, equity, equity-deserving groups, inclusion, racism, and systemic barriers as established in the City Equity Toolkit.

Administration proposes a seven-phase approach as shown in Table 1 to identifying systemic barriers within the City and formalizing a plan to begin to address them. This involves taking a "One-City" approach to these efforts that includes an integrated strategic direction providing clarity in organizational mandate and key priorities, capacity, resources, and knowledge will ensure this work will be effective, efficient and sustainable. Appendix 4 explains each phase of this approach in more detail.

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[1] City of Ottawa, Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook

Table 1: Proposed Phased Approach to Identifying Systemic Barriers within the City of Saskatoon and Formalizing a Plan (subject to modifications)			
Phase	**Description**	**Year**	
Phase 1	Form Internal Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Stewardship Committee to formalize the framework for the strategy. Work begins on identifying an appropriate governance structure including but not limited to internal working groups.	2021	At each phase, the Administration will continue to identify and implement immediate opportunities to address systemic barriers.
Phase 2	Pre-Engagement work to identify and select equity groups within the scope of the study.	2021	
Phase 3	Public and private sector review to identify leading practices and approaches in the areas of employment, public engagement and representation on boards, committees, and advisory committees.	2022	
Phase 4	Inventory City policies, procedures, programs, and practices through an equity lens beginning in the areas of employment, public engagement and representation on boards, committees and advisory committees.	2022	
	After Phases 1-4 and with the preparation of an engagement strategy, Administration anticipates the completion of an Information Report.		
Phase 5	Internal and public engagement strategy development and implementation to identify barriers or obstacles to participating in engagement and recruitment with the City and participation on boards and committees.	2022	
Phase 6	Gap analysis and assessment to identify where the City is doing well, where barriers may still exist and provide recommendations.	2023	
	After the completion of Phases 5-6, Administration anticipates the completion of a Decision Report with various potential approaches.		
Phase 7	Organizational Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Implementation Roadmap.	2023	
	After completion of Phase 7, Administration anticipates the completion of an Approval Report on the Strategic Plan and Roadmap.		

At each phase, the Administration will continue to identify and implement immediate opportunities to address systemic barriers. The plan includes use of both internal staff with subject matter expertise in addition to external consultants with specific expertise in this area for Phases 3 to 7. There are several advantages to this approach including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Maximizing the utilization of internal staff will ensure existing expertise is utilized and capacity is further improved, which will support long term continuance of the initiative.
2. An external consultant would have knowledge, experience, and comparisons with other business/organizations and a wider national lens of systemic barriers in Government.
3. An external consultant would be able to provide resources the City simply does not currently have internally, allowing the project to proceed more quickly.
4. An external assessment would provide an impartial audit based on best practice.

5.   To improve transparency and accountability, it would be beneficial for portions of this work to be completed by an external consultant to the City.

To maintain a coordinated approach, the REDI Stewardship Committee would facilitate this work while the overall administration of the process would be the responsibility of the Strategy and Transformation Division. Additional internal Taskforce teams would be established to support the work.

Given the magnitude of this undertaking, Administration confirms that Phases 1 and 2 can be completed this year within existing resources, and then further recommends that funding for Phases 3 through 7 of the plan be phased in over 2 years.

Administration conducted a preliminary review of two municipalities to identify various approaches used for similar or related City Council motions. It is difficult to provide a direct comparison since the goals and objectives from each City varies in nature. Appendix 5 provides a municipal review of related processes for two cities. The scope of each motion related to addressing systemic barriers along with the amount budgeted varies accordingly. Worth noting is both cities are:

- Investing approximately two or more years into the process established;
- Establishing a governance structure which includes an oversight group/committee;
- Incorporating internal and public engagement; and
- Completing a strategy and action plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
The estimated capital budget request is approximately $150,000 to complete Phases 3 through 7 within the proposed timeframe. This amount excludes any ongoing operating impacts which may result from an implementation roadmap, which will only be known once the project is complete. Any future operating impacts would be further reported on and brought forward during future Budget deliberations.

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

NEXT STEPS
Administration will be preparing a report as part of the 2022-2023 Budget for capital funding under the options for consideration.

APPENDICES
1.   Related Council Policies, Declarations & Commitments
2.   Related Administrative Programs and Initiatives
3.   Definitions
4.   Phased Approach to Identifying Systemic Barriers and Strategic Plan
5.   Municipal Review of Related Processes

Report Approval
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