

## **Engagement and Communications in Land Use Matters: Proposed Strategy**

### **ISSUE**

City Council requested a review of existing practices related to communicating and engaging with residents about land use changes as well as recommendations for future improvements. This report provides an overview of the proposed strategy to undertake this process, as well as resource implications.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services forward this report to the Governance and Priorities Committee for information related to the 2022/2023 Business Plan and Budget options under consideration.

### **BACKGROUND**

At its October 22, 2018 meeting, during consideration of a rezoning application for an undeveloped site in Willowgrove, City Council resolved:

“That Administration report back about how vacant sites in new developments can be appropriately signed to better communicate future land uses identified in neighbourhood concept plans.”

As a result of various development activity in Saskatoon, at their January 28, 2019 Public Hearing Meeting, City Council adopted the following motion:

“That the Administration report back following a review of the community engagement approach for Land Use change requests.”

In May 2020, Administration presented a report to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services related to current processes for notification and community consultation for development applications. The report outlined current practices and a number of planned improvements which have now been implemented, including use of the Engage Page for development applications and enhanced on-site signage.

City Council, at its meeting held on January 25, 2021, resolved:

“Whereas City Council is regularly presented with land use issues where residents have concerns about the adequacy of our public engagement and information sharing practices; and whereas challenges persist in communicating clearly about land matters, re-zonings, etc.;

That the Administration report back about:

1. Work currently underway in this area, including any recent/related changes, and potential options for future improvements in public engagement practices on land use matters, including but not limited to the application of plain language principles, increasing the scope of potential public engagement practices, an assessment of best practices from other communities; and
2. Options for partnering with stakeholders to ensure prospective homeowners and/or residents understand the potential for changes in Saskatoon neighbourhoods.”

During the March 8, 2021 Standing Policy Committee on Finance, a resident, living adjacent to a current construction site, spoke to negative impacts being experienced; as a result, Committee resolved:

“that the matter be referred to the Administration to provide a report on what best practices are available in other jurisdictions to reduce neighbour frustration as it relates to development.”

The *Planning and Development Act, 2007* sets out requirements for public notification for planning and development matters. As the City of Saskatoon (City) has been designated an Approving Authority under the *Act*, the City adopted Policy No. C01-021, Public Notice (Public Notice Policy), to give notice for any matters required under the *Planning and Development Act, 2007*. Under the Public Notice Policy, the City must provide notification for public hearing matters prior to City Council considering the application.

The Planning and Development Department is responsible for a variety of land use planning and policy matters. There are different legal processes depending on the type of work being considered.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

#### Land Use and the Engagement Spectrum

Land use policy development can include a wide variety of topics. In recent years, this has included much of the work on the Growth Plan to Half a Million (Growth Plan), the City Centre Plan and Local Area Planning. Projects conducted by the Community Standards Department, such as the Short-Term Rental Regulations, would also be this type of work. On projects like these, the community is involved in the projects at the “involve” level on the spectrum of engagement. The input received from the community directly impacts the way the project and its outcomes are determined.

Zoning, Discretionary Uses and Development Applications are based on an applicant-driven approach and grounded in legal property rights. A property owner has the right to develop their property in line with the Official Community Plan policies and Zoning Bylaw regulations in place on that property. A property owner also has the right to apply to change the land use or zoning designations on their property. When the proper procedures have been followed, City Council has the authority to consider requests for

changes and to decide if the change is appropriate. Given these legal conditions, the approach to these files is different and is in the “inform” and “consult” areas of the engagement spectrum.

Planning and Development facilitates these applications, which involves receiving them, completing policy and technical reviews, providing professional recommendations to the applicants and, if the application proceeds to the approval phase, providing the professional recommendation of Administration to City Council for their consideration. In addition to working with the applicant, Administration is also responsible for communicating the application to the public. Details of the current process are provided in Appendix 1.

### Limitations of the Current Approach

Additional communications and engagement activities, such as additional meetings or information mail-outs are undertaken on a case-by-case basis only. This approach is not proactive and does not provide a consistent level of service to all applications. The other drawback of this approach is it no longer meets the expectations of residents, who are looking for additional information, quicker turn around times, and more opportunities to have input into projects which affect them and their neighbourhoods. The current services provided are not able to meet these various expectations, which is contributing to frustration in the community. At this time, the current staff resources for each type of work are fully allocated providing the current level of service.

The limitations of the current approach have become evident and affect a range of projects, policies and development applications. There are no simple solutions which will solve the areas of concern immediately. A range of new approaches and tools are needed to expand beyond the current services, and to effectively communicate and engage with residents in a more meaningful way, while still respecting the legal requirements associated with development applications.

Development of an overall Communications and Engagement Strategy for Planning and Land Use Matters is recommended. The proposed scope for this project will address requests from Committee and Council and will also look for opportunities to respond to requests from other stakeholders and members of the public that have been received. At a minimum, it will involve the following elements:

### Assess Current State and Review Best Practices

- This will document the standard practices currently in place and identify gaps or areas of weakness which have been identified by Administration, City Council or stakeholders.
- A review and analysis of Municipal Best Practices will be conducted to identify potential program improvements and other options.

### Develop a Communication and Engagement Strategy

- This will be focused on sharing information about the project, identifying stakeholders interested in providing input to the project, providing information and opportunities to help shape recommended options.

- Efforts will be made to ensure this approach reaches a diverse audience, including those who have been directly impacted by past applications or projects.

Create an Action Plan for Program Enhancements

- Recommended program enhancements will be identified. Input from stakeholders, analysis of best practices and a review of current gaps will be used to identify options.
- Reporting to Committee and City Council will identify recommended options, potential cost impacts and funding approaches.
- A further report will be required for consideration as part of the Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget process to address the funding approaches recommended and required to implement the recommended options.

Due to the proposed nature of this project and the activities involved, additional resources are required to support this work. A Business Plan Option has been created for the 2022/2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations. Should it not be funded, it is not anticipated this work will be completed to the high standard residents of Saskatoon deserve or within the timelines which are deemed acceptable. Other current priorities in the workplan of Planning and Development will take precedence, with changes being made over a longer time period and potentially smaller in scale.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

A Business Plan Option for the Growth and Infill Communications and Engagement Strategy Project has been created and will be included in the 2022/2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations. Funding will support the timely delivery of this project.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

A Communication and Engagement Strategy will be created as part of the project.

**NEXT STEPS**

Administration has prepared a Capital Project Budget Submission for the 2022/2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

**APPENDICES**

1. Notification and Consultation Process Overview

**REPORT APPROVAL**

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