

Guidelines for Reviewing Requests for Resolutions

ISSUE

City Council is frequently asked by individuals and organizations to provide resolutions to support various causes or policy advocacy positions. Similarly, the City receives requests for letters of support from external organizations, typically related to their application for federal and provincial grants or other funding. What sort of framework or guidelines can or should be established to assist members of Council with reviewing and making decisions respecting requests for resolutions? Can or should a similar or separate process be created to assist in providing letters of support to organizations applying for grants or other funding?

BACKGROUND

At the [May 17, 2021 meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee](#), Councillor Loewen gave the following Notice of Motion:

TAKE NOTICE that at the next regular meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee, I will move the following motion:

'That the Administration report back regarding possible options or frameworks to consider requests for resolutions of support from GPC/Council.'

At the [August 23, 2021 meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee](#), the Committee considered an email dated August 3, 2021, from Mirko Petricevic, ink-stainedwretches.org, and resolved "that the information be received; and that the matter be included with the report back from the Administration regarding requests for resolutions of support."

CURRENT STATUS

No written framework or guidelines exist to assist City Council with reviewing and making decisions respecting requests for resolutions. Neither is there a process to consider requests for letters of support from organizations when applying for grants from third parties. Currently, some requests for letters of support go to City Council for consideration before a letter is provided, but in other cases, these requests are handled administratively.

For clarity, in this report, "requests for resolutions" is used to refer to any type of request for a Council resolution, whereas "requests for letters of support" is used to refer specifically to requests for letters of support to assist persons in applying for grants or other funding from third parties.

APPROACHES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

We could find no Canadian cities that have published guidelines or policies respecting their process for reviewing requests for resolutions. Some municipalities do have policies for requests for letters of support. Examples of municipalities that have policies on this issue are summarized below:

- City of Lethbridge, Alberta – Request for Letter of Support Policy (see Appendix 1)
 - The request must be for a “worthwhile cause” and made by a community organization.
 - Requests with commercial or political overtones or requests to recognize a cause or event that is contentious or divisive will not be considered.
 - Different procedures are set out for funding requests versus requests that are not for funding. Requests for letters of support may be submitted online.
 - The Policy allows the Mayor to provide letters of support. Only requests that may be considered contentious, divisive or inappropriate, or requests for funding from the City of Lethbridge, are sent to Committee for consideration.
- County of Grande Prairie, Alberta – Letter of Support Policy (see Appendix 2)
 - The request must be from a community-recognized non-profit organization or “other organization”, as defined.
 - Requests considered to be contentious, divisive or inappropriate will not be considered.
 - The Policy includes a Request for Letter of Support Form.
 - All requests for letters of support are sent to Council for consideration.
- Fort St. John, British Columbia – Requests for Letters of Support Policy (see Appendix 3)
 - This Policy specifically deals with requests for letters of support to assist applicants in obtaining funding or grants from third parties.
 - The Policy authorizes staff to provide letters of support where the request meets the Policy’s eligibility criteria. All letters of support must be signed by the Mayor and included on the agenda as part of the Information Package.
- Tablelands, British Columbia – Letters of Support Policy (see Appendix 4)
 - This Policy requires applications to be in line with Council’s strategic direction and requires an identified need for the project as well as evidence of community support.
 - All requests for letters of support must be considered by Council.

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- Nelson, British Columbia – Letters of Support Policy (see Appendix 5)
 - This Policy authorizes staff to provide letters of support to local non-profit organizations and other local governments if:
 - No financial contribution is requested from the City of Nelson;
 - There is no in-kind contribution requested from the City of Nelson; and
 - The letter is not sought in connection with a grant or other opportunity that is also being applied for by the City of Nelson.
 - Letters of support that satisfy the required criteria are signed by the Mayor or City Manager and copies are placed on Council's agenda for information purposes.

In preparing this report, the City Solicitor's Office also reached out to other municipalities in Canada for information on how they handle these requests. Most suggest that they simply handle them on a case by case basis similar to the approach currently used at the City.

OPTIONS

Option 1: Status quo

This option recommends taking no action and continuing with the status quo, being having no formal or written framework in place respecting review of requests for letters of support or resolutions from members of the public. There are no legal, financial or implementation challenges associated with this option.

Advantages:

- This option allows for the greatest flexibility as City Council's ability to review and make decisions respecting resolution requests will not be hindered or restricted by written guidelines specific to this issue.
- This option allows the City to decide on a case by case basis whether they want to support a request for a resolution or a request for a letter of support from another organization with respect to a funding or grant support request.
- This option does not necessitate the drafting of a formal written process.
- This option is likely in line with common practice across Canada, as it appears uncommon for municipalities to have written policies respecting general requests for resolutions (policies specifically relating to requests for flag raisings or proclamations are more common).

Disadvantages:

- City Council members and the Administration would continue to have no formal guidance to assist them in making decisions.
- No formal process may result in inefficient, inconsistent or inequitable decision-making.

- Does not create an expedited process for dealing with requests for letters of support from other organizations making an application for a grant or other funding.

Option 2: Status quo for handling requests for resolutions generally, but adopt an expedited process to review and respond to requests for letters of support

This option recommends taking no action and continuing with the status quo with respect to requests for resolutions, generally. However, this option recommends adopting an expedited process to review and respond to requests for letters of support.

The City frequently receives requests for letters of support from various entities and some are handled administratively. Often, little notice is given as the organization requesting the letter of support is on a tight timeline. Failure to receive a letter of support from the City may, in some cases, be detrimental to an organization's application for funding.

In many cases, providing a letter of support may be clearly within the interests of the City to the point that the request does not warrant or require consideration of the entirety of City Council.

This option proposes that where requests for letters of support satisfy established minimum criteria, the Mayor be enabled to provide the requested letter of support.

Minimum criteria for letters of support could be as follows:

- The request must come from a non-profit or charitable organization, or other local government located in Saskatoon or with a clear connection to the City.
- The request must sufficiently describe the project or initiative that requires City support and the need for and anticipated benefits of the project or initiative.
- There should be a clear community benefit to residents or to the City.
- The request must include a draft letter of support or be in a form acceptable to the City.
- The request must include information respecting the funding being sought, such as the name of the grant and amount of the grant.
- If the request relates to federal or provincial funding support programs, consideration would be given to whether the City is intending to apply for funding, has been awarded funding, or is ineligible for funding under the program.
- Issuing the letter would not put the City in a conflict of interest position.
- The request must align with the City's strategic priorities or values and not conflict with City policy or bylaws or with other applicable laws.

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- The request does not have the potential to be considered contentious, divisive, politically sensitive, or inappropriate.

Requests for letters of support could be initially reviewed by the City Clerk to determine completeness and compliance with the minimum criteria. Requests that do not meet or do not appear to meet the minimum criteria, as determined by the Mayor or the City Clerk, could either be rejected or forwarded to City Council for consideration.

Advantages:

- Allowing the Mayor to issue letters of support where minimum criteria is met provides an efficient, expedited process for handling requests for letters of support.
- An efficient, expedited and simplified process provides the public with improved access to letters of support.
- Signals that the City supports its community in applying for funding.
- Reduces City Council's workload by eliminating the need for City Council debate and discussion on matters of a routine nature.
- Provides clarity to the Administration on how to handle these requests.
- Establishing minimum criteria would:
 - Guide and assist the City in making decisions respecting requests for letters of support;
 - Improve the efficiency and consistency of decision-making;
 - Promote fairness; and
 - Clarify expectations respecting requests for letters of support, which contributes to transparency and may assist persons in preparing their requests, which would in turn improve the quality of requests received.

Disadvantages:

- Minimum criteria would need to be agreed upon by members of Council.
- This option relates specifically to letters of support and offers City Council no guidance for considering other types of requests for resolutions.

Option 3: Draft a written policy to address requests for resolutions, with no expedited process to address requests for letters of support

This option recommends drafting a policy that provides guidelines to assist City Council in reviewing and responding to requests for resolutions.

The policy could:

- Identify the types of requests to which the policy applies:
 - For example, the policy could apply solely to requests from members of the public or external parties; and to certain types of requests such as:
 - Requests to support federal or provincial matters, such as a request to support proposed legislation;

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- Requests for Council member representation on a committee or other body; and
- Requests for endorsement of a cause.
- Identify the types of requests that should or must be refused:
 - For example, the policy could recommend or require that City Council not issue a resolution where the resolution:
 - Would put the City or City Council in a conflict of interest position;
 - Would be inconsistent with City policy or bylaws or with other applicable laws;
 - Would not align with the City's strategic priorities or values; and
 - Does not clearly relate to City matters or to a matter within the jurisdiction of City Council.
- Identify the factors to consider in evaluating requests:
 - For example, factors to consider could include:
 - Whether the request is being made primarily to advance public rather than private or commercial interests;
 - Whether the request is being made by an individual, a non-profit corporation, a First Nation or a business or other type of organization;
 - Consideration of the person making the request, including consideration of their reputation, character and contributions to the City and its residents;
 - Whether the requested resolution has potential to be considered contentious, divisive, politically sensitive or inappropriate;
 - Whether enough information has been provided for City Council to make an informed decision respecting the request;
 - The anticipated effect of the resolution on residents of the City, including whether the resolution would have a clear community or economic benefit for residents or how the resolution would contribute to the quality of life of residents or otherwise promote the welfare or interests of the City;
 - Whether there is a clearly identified and compelling need for the resolution;
 - Whether there is evidence that the issue is important to persons in the local community;
 - Whether there is evidence of widespread community support;
 - Whether the resolution would, or could, result in any current or future costs to the City;
 - Whether the City offers a program that is similar to, or the same as, the program to which the resolution relates;
 - Whether the resolution would build and inspire the public's trust and confidence in City Council;
 - Whether the resolution would clearly be in the best interests of the City;

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- Whether the resolution is consistent with recent past resolutions of City Council; and
 - Any additional factor that City Council considers relevant.
- Identify the responsibilities of the City Clerk, the Mayor and City Council, for example:
 - The City Clerk could be responsible for initially reviewing requests for resolutions, rejecting incomplete requests or requests that clearly do not meet minimum requirements, flagging any concerns with requests for City Council's consideration and recommending amendments to the policy; and
 - City Council could be responsible for reviewing and approving or declining requests for resolutions and approving updates to the policy.
 - Set out general expectations respecting requests for resolutions:
 - For example, the policy could include guidelines to assist persons in preparing requests, such as recommendations that:
 - Requests for resolutions clearly articulate how the resolution would benefit the City or residents of the City; and
 - Requests for resolutions include enough detail to enable City Council to make an informed decision respecting the request.

Advantages:

- Having a formal written policy respecting requests for resolutions may:
 - Guide and assist members of Council in making decisions respecting requests for resolutions;
 - Improve the efficiency and consistency of decision-making;
 - Promote fairness; and
 - Clarify Council members' expectations respecting requests for resolutions, which contributes to transparency and may assist persons in preparing their requests, which would in turn improve the quality of requests received.

Disadvantages:

- A policy would need to be drafted and agreed upon by City Council.
- The policy may restrict Council members' ability to review requests, though to avoid this concern the policy could be drafted flexibly in a way that guides decision-making rather than controls how decisions may or may not be made.
- This option does not provide an expedited process for handling requests for letters of support.

Option 4: Draft a written policy to address requests for resolutions, with an expedited process to address requests for letters of support

This option recommends combining option 2's recommendation to create an expedited process to address requests for letters of support with option 3's recommendation to create a policy that applies to requests for resolutions more generally. The recommended policy would therefore set out general guidance respecting requests for resolutions, with specific provisions respecting the handling of requests for letters of support.

Advantages:

- Same as advantages for options 2 and 3.

Disadvantages

- A policy would need to be drafted and agreed upon by City Council.
- The policy may restrict Council members' ability to review requests, though to avoid this concern the policy could be drafted flexibly in a way that guides decision-making rather than controls how decisions may or may not be made.

IMPLEMENTATION OF OPTIONS

Options 2, 3 and 4 can be implemented in two main ways:

1. Creating a new standalone policy; or
2. Expanding Council Policy C01-028, *The Flag and Proclamations Policy*.

Option 2 could additionally be implemented through a resolution establishing an expedited process.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to City Council that Council Policy C01-028, *The Flag and Proclamations Policy*, be renamed the *Protocol Policy* and expanded in accordance with Option 4.

RATIONALE

Option 4 is recommended as it provides City Council both with guidance respecting requests for resolutions, generally, and establishes an expedited process for dealing with requests for letters of support that satisfy minimum criteria. At least some other jurisdictions (e.g., Lethbridge and Fort St. John) have adopted expedited processes for responding to requests for letters of support.

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Expanding and renaming Council Policy C01-028, *The Flag and Proclamations Policy*, is recommended because this Policy already addresses two types of requests for resolutions: requests for flag raisings and requests for proclamations. It makes sense to expand this Policy to apply to requests for resolutions more generally. Amending an existing policy does not create additional and unnecessary Council policies, ensures related matters are housed in one place, and may have the additional benefit of avoiding some repetition. Once expanded and renamed, the new “Protocol Policy” could be expanded to include other matters, such as provisions respecting the use of civic square which is addressed in a separate policy.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

There are no identified additional implications or considerations.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Information will be posted to the City’s website regarding the new process to request resolutions of support or letters of support

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public Notice pursuant to Section 3 of Policy No. C01-021, Public Notice Policy, is not required.

APPENDICES

1. City of Lethbridge, Alberta – Request for Letter of Support Policy
2. County of Grande Prairie, Alberta – Letter of Support policy
3. Fort St. John, British Columbia – Requests for Letters of Support Policy
4. Tablelands, British Columbia – Letters of Support Policy
5. Nelson, British Columbia – Letters of Support policy

Report Approval

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