A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF

SASKATOON CITY COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

2019/20 AND 2020/21 EDITION

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1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2014, Saskatoon City Council implemented comprehensive reforms to its governance framework. The main objective of these reforms was to create a more modern, efficient, transparent, and accountable system that would improve confidence in the policy and decision-making process for City Council. The primary driver of the reforms was to reduce the amount of time spent in private, or "In-Camera" meetings.

Since then, City Council has adopted and implemented some notable modifications to its governance system to further improve upon the original objectives, such as:
- reforming the City's practices regarding the consideration of In-Camera matters;
- explicitly listing matters considered during an In-Camera session on the Public Meeting Agenda;
- renaming the Executive Committee to the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) of Council and refocusing the committee's mandate;
- expanding the mandate of the Standing Policy Committee (SPC) on Finance and the SPC on Environment, Utilities & Corporate Services (EUCS); and
- rising and reporting when an In-Camera session of City Council or Committee concludes.

As a result of this new framework, City Council requested that Administration develop a year-over-year comparison and/or an evaluation process with respect to City Council and committee meetings. In response to that request, the Administration tabled a report in January 2018, providing a comprehensive review and analysis of meetings of City Council and its committees, on an annual basis, over the period beginning August 1, 2014, and ending July 31, 2017[1].

Following that foundational report, Administration produced individual reports for the 2017/18 and 2018/19 years.[2] Overall, the analysis in these previous reports revealed that the governance reforms were largely accomplishing their intended objectives, despite the small sample size.

This report builds on the previous analysis and conducts a review for two additional years of data: 2019/20 and 2020/21. It is important to note that most of the meetings over this two-year period were conducted in a new, untested, virtual setting because of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Did the change to virtual Council and committee meetings produce any notable differences relative to years in which meetings were held in a face-to-face setting? Did private meeting hours increase, decrease, or stay consistent in this new format? What observations can be made about public interaction in these meetings?

An analysis of the data reveals that for the 2019/2020 and 2020-21 periods, City Council and its main committees:
- met a total of approximately 249 hours in each year, slightly below the six-year average of 251.9 hours.
- met in public for almost 205 hours in 2019/20 and 210 hours in the 2020/21 period. This is above the six-year average of 201 hours and an increase of 28 percent relative to the base year of 2014/15.

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[1] For a review of the findings of that report, please consult section 8.1.1 at: https://pub-saskatoon.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=7a7e8f33-f126-4a0c-ad82-ce8c1307059d&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=35

[2] For a review of the findings in that report, please consult section 8.1.2 at: https://pub-saskatoon.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=1a6de365-57ce-4dc7-803f-b36eeecfef6f&Agenda=Merged&lang=English

- in private (or In-Camera) for 43.5 hours (17.5 percent of total meeting hours) in 2019/20 and 40 hours (16 percent of total meeting hours) in 2020/21. For the 2020/21 year, In-Camera meeting hours have fallen by 72 hours or by 64.4 percent relative to the base year.
- in GPC for a total of 76 hours in 2020/21 a decrease of 52.5 hours from the base year. In 2020/21, GPC accounted for a total 30.5 percent of meeting hours a reduction of 16.6 percentage points since the base year.
- in the SPCs for a total of 94.8 hours in 2020/21, a 17.8 hour increase from the base year and sitting at the six-year average.

Like the last two reports on this topic, this report includes an analysis on the level of public interaction with City Council and its committees for the two meeting periods. Specifically, it analyzes data on the number of direct speaking opportunities or written correspondence that City Council and its committees received throughout the meeting period. In the 2019/20 and 2020/21 periods City Council and its committees:
- engaged 180 and 203 speakers respectively.
- considered 417 and 937 separate pieces of written correspondence respectively.
- the bulk of this interaction over the two periods centered on social policy issues such as conversion therapy and reconciliation (e.g., renaming of John A. MacDonald Road).

New for this version is data on the different report types considered at council committees. The City reformed the report system in 2019 categorizing them as information, decision, and approval (see section 5 for more details). The City collects data on the number and types of reports that are considered at each committees and the results reveal that:
- over half the reports presented to committee are information reports.
- about one-tenth of all reports are decisions reports.
- about one-third of all reports are approval reports.

To elaborate on these findings, the remainder of this document is organized as follows:
- Section 2 explains and clarifies the methodology, assumptions, scope, and limitations of this review and analysis.
- Section 3 provides a quantitative analysis of the data for the aggregate hours of City Council and committee meetings. This section includes several tables and charts to display the data. It offers an analysis of the individual City Council and committee meetings to show how many hours have been devoted to each, including both public and private sessions.
- Section 4 provides statistics on how the public is interacting with City Council through the meeting process. This section reviews data on the number of speakers and the written correspondence at Council and committee meetings.
- Section 5 is new for this report and offers statistics on the different types of reports (information, decision, and approval) presented to the main committees of City Council.
- Section 6 concludes by providing a summary and some observations about the research.

2. METHODOLOGY, ASSUMPTIONS, SCOPE, & LIMITATIONS

The City Administration has compiled data on meeting times for all City Council meetings, GPC meetings, and SPC meetings on an annual basis, starting from August 1, 2014, through to July 31, 2019. The starting point of August 1, 2014, was chosen because it represents the first month of meetings under City Council's new governance framework. As such, the data and analysis are based on 12-month periods structured as follows:
- 2014/15 covers all meetings from August 1, 2014, through July 31, 2015. This will also be known as the "base year".
- 2015/16 covers all meetings from August 1, 2015, through July 31, 2016;
- 2016/17 covers all meetings from August 1, 2016, through July 31, 2017;
- 2017/18 covers all meetings from August 1, 2017, through July 31, 2018;
- 2018/19 covers all meetings from August 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019;
- 2019/20 covers all meetings from August 1, 2019 through July 31, 2020; and
- 2020/21 covers all meetings from August 1, 2020 through July 31, 2021.

In preparing the analysis, the Administration has compiled data from the Office of the City Clerk for each month in which there were various City Council and committee meetings. The data was then summed to obtain the total number of hours that City Council and committee met during the defined period. Descriptive data analysis was undertaken to determine any important trends. No causal inference analysis was undertaken due to the small number of observations and the inability to draw similar data from several cities.

For the purposes of clarity, the following terms are used in this document to refer to the various sub-types of City Council and committee meetings that form the analysis:
- City Council Meeting refers to any Regular Business Meeting, Public Hearing Meeting, Business Plan & Budget Deliberation Meeting, and Special Meeting;
- GPC Meeting refers to a regular meeting of the GPC, including Public and In-Camera[3] (or private) sessions, Strategic Planning Meeting, Council Orientation, and any Special Meetings; and
- SPC Meeting refers to any regular or special meeting, including Public and In-Camera sessions, for the following committees:
  - SPC on Planning, Development & Community Services (PDCS);
  - SPC on Finance (FIN);
  - SPC on Environment, Utilities & Corporate Services (EUCS); and
  - SPC on Transportation (TSPT).

The scope of this analysis is limited to these meetings, simply because this is where City Council policy and decision-making functions occur.

In addition to its formal policy and decision-making structure, City Council members also serve on other committees, boards, and commissions. For example, members can serve on Advisory Committees, the boards of the City's controlled corporations (e.g. SaskTel Centre and the Remai Modern), statutory boards (i.e., Saskatoon Public Library and Board of Police Commissioners), and represent the City on the board of provincial or national advocacy bodies (e.g. the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association). These meetings are excluded from the analysis because they are not part of City Council's policy and decision-making functions, and their membership is not limited exclusively to City Council members.

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[3] This document uses the terms In-Camera and private interchangeably. "In-Camera" is legacy, legal term that means meeting in private.

The data in this report provides an analysis of only a portion of the work that a member of City Council undertakes in a year. It does not include other important functions, such as constituency work, stakeholder meetings, community events, and meeting preparation time. Thus, the findings of this document should not be taken to represent the amount of work that a member of City Council undertakes in any given year. Rather, it should be used to monitor trends about how transparent the City's policy and decision-making processes are.

Another limitation of this review is that it lacks benchmarking or comparative data from other municipalities. In other words, this document does not use a framework to determine whether Saskatoon's results are better or worse than any other city. In fact, such results are very difficult to compare because the primary policy issues being debated in one city may not necessarily be the same in another city. Moreover, municipal governance structures are inherently local and largely the result of a mix of provincial enabling legislation, political culture, and organizational traditions.

That said, more recently some cities have placed more attention on the time that Council's spend in private or closed meetings. For example, in 2018 the City of Calgary looked at one year of data and reported that its Council spent about 14 percent of its time in a private session.[4] A one year snapshot does indicate a trend so that number could be higher or lower than a typical year.

In St. Albert, Alberta, the local newspaper conducted a review of private meeting hours for that City Council and found that it spent almost 33 percent of total meeting hours in a private session.[5] This review looked at four years of data and found some limitations to it implying that private meeting hours could be even greater.

Finally, City Councillors from the City of Regina were seeking reforms to their governance system with the aim to improve transparency. One councillor proposed a motion "to commit to more transparent decision-making, including fewer secret meetings at council and executive committee."[6] While no data was shared, the implication is that Regina's system overly uses private meetings to manage their policy agenda.

Nonetheless, the preceding explanation of the methodology, assumptions, scope, and limitations of the research provides important context for which to consider the analysis in the subsequent sections of this document. The next section dives into the data and provides a largely quantitative review and analysis of Saskatoon City Council and committee meetings.

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[4] See item 6.1 from this source: https://pub-calgary.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=a9e26758-db7c-4264-9feb-3d4fa0dacc90&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=23&Tab=attachments
[5] For more on this review, please consult https://www.stalberttoday.ca/local-news/st-albert-council-spent-a-third-of-its-time-meeting-in-private-4310189
[6] For details, please consult https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/city-of-regina-transparency-1.6352741

3. ANAYLSIS OF CITY COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

This section provides primarily a quantitative review and analysis of City Council and committee meetings for the period beginning August 1, 2014, through to July 31, 2021. It will address total meeting hours, City Council meeting hours, public and private meeting hours, GPC meeting hours, and SPC meeting hours.

3.1 Total Meeting Hours

Table 3.1 compiles the total meeting hours for all City Council and committee meetings. As the table shows, total meeting hours decreased by a cumulative total of 9.5 percent (or 26.3 hours) from the base year. This reduction in total meeting hours is largely due to large reductions in GPC meeting hours (more on this later).

TABLE 3.1
City Council and Committee Total Meeting Hours

Meeting Type	2014/15 (Base)	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Change from Base Year to Recent Year (%)
City Council	70.3	62	79.7	82.75	95.75	95	78.75	12.0
GPC	128.5	64.6	83.1	69.25	72.5	81.5	76	-40.9
SPC PDCS	28.9	27.1	26.8	32.75	23.75	25.25	26.25	-9.2
SPC FIN	15.8	23.1	32.9	32.75	20.25	12.5	25.75	63.0
SPC EUCS	11.8	18.1	17.8	21.5	17	14.2	20.5	73.7
SPC TSPT	20.5	24.9	21.1	39	25	20	22.25	8.5
Total	**275.8**	**219.8**	**261.4**	**278**	**254.25**	**248.45**	**249.5**	**-9.5**

Also noteworthy from the table, is the growing use of the SPCs, especially SPC FIN and SPC EUCS. The hours for these two SPCs have grown by 63 percent and 73.7 percent respectively, relative to the base year. This means that there is much greater reliance on the SPCs to help City Council in its policy making functions.

Chart 3.1.1 displays the data in a different way. It shows the total meeting hours per year relative to the six-year average. The base year is excluded, and the dotted line is the average of total hours for the years 2015/16 through 2020/21[7].
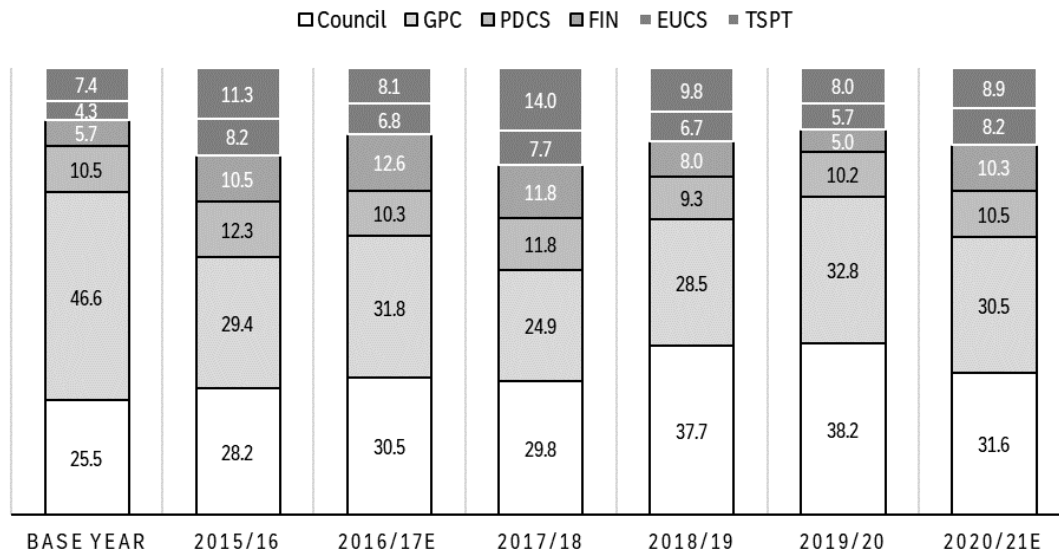

Chart 3.1.1
Saskatoon Council & Committee Total Meeting Hours

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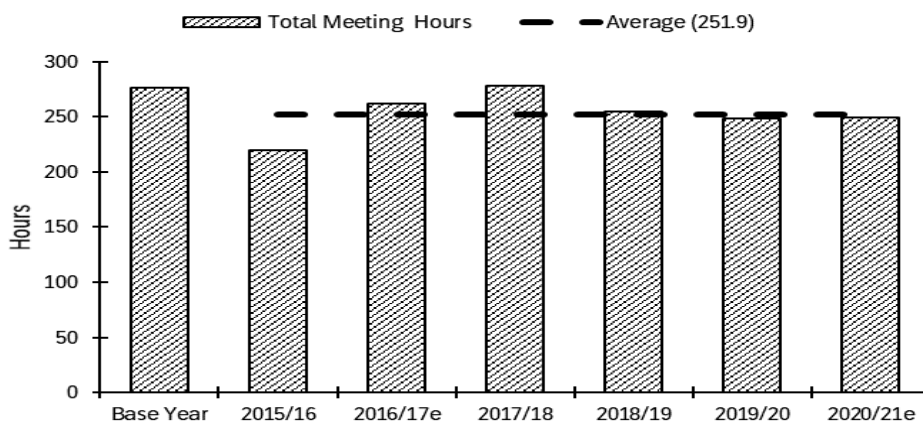
[7] Years that have "e" beside then indicate election years. Election years will result in fewer meeting hours due to months for which there are no Council and committee meetings. The 2016/17 period and the 2020/21 period have elections in them.

Chart 3.1.2 builds on the data in Table 3.1 and shows how total meeting hours are distributed by each meeting type. This chart illustrates the relative, or percent, share of total meeting hours for City Council and each committee meeting and how the distribution of meeting hours has changed (or not) over time.

CHART 3.1.2
COMPOSTION OF COUNCIL & COMMITTEE MEETING HOURS -
PERCENT SHARE (%) OF TOTAL HOURS

□ Council ▫ GPC ▫ PDCS ▫ FIN ▪ EUCS ▪ TSPT

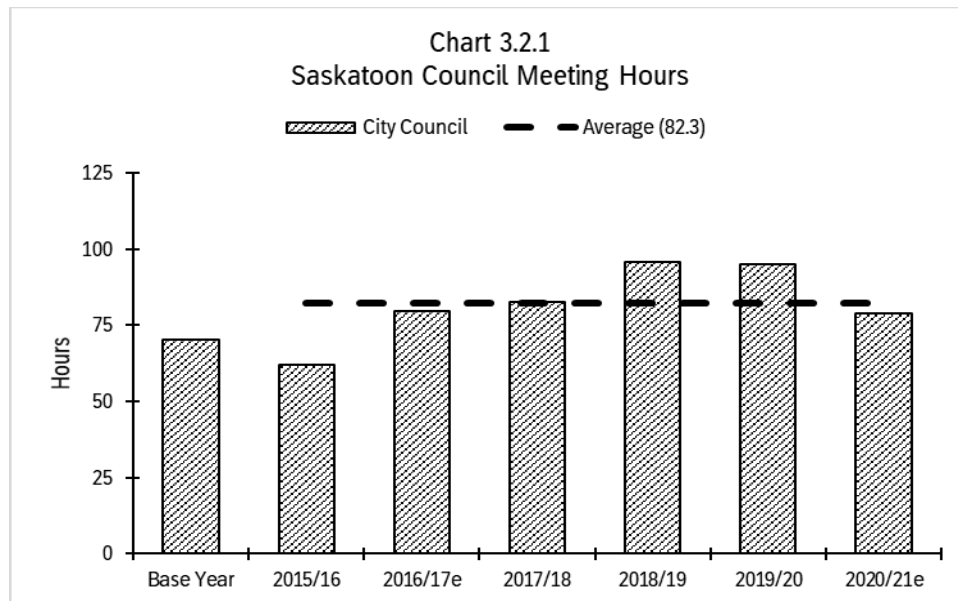|	BASE YEAR	2015/16	2016/17E	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21E
TSPT	7.4	11.3	8.1	14.0	9.8	8.0	8.9
EUCS	4.3		6.8		6.7	5.7	
FIN	5.7	8.2		7.7		5.0	8.2
PDCS	10.5	10.5	12.6	11.8	8.0	10.2	10.3
GPC		12.3	10.3	11.8	9.3		10.5
GPC	46.6	29.4	31.8	24.9	28.5	32.8	30.5
Council	25.5	28.2	30.5	29.8	37.7	38.2	31.6

As the chart reveals, City Council meeting hours have been relatively consistent in the two election years but shows larger fluctuations in non-election years. The two election years show that City Council meetings are about 31 percent of total meeting hours.

The most noteworthy changes in the distribution of meeting hours can be found in GPC. In 2014/15 GPC meeting hours were almost 47 percent of all meeting hours. In 2020/21 it has fallen to less than 31 percent, a reduction of 16 percentage points. This is largely due to a more restricted mandate and a concerted effort to reduce private meeting discussions.

3.2 City Council Meetings

Chart 3.2.1 shows the meeting hours for City Council meetings only. These are primarily public meeting hours although City Council, at times, has met in private to address a matter on its agenda. This is a rare occurrence, and the number of hours is minimal relative to the total. For example, in 2019/20 City Council met In-Camera for two total hours.

Chart 3.2.1
Saskatoon Council Meeting Hours

City Council · · · Average (82.3)

(bar chart showing Hours on vertical axis from 0 to 125; bars for Base Year, 2015/16, 2016/17e, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21e with a dashed average line at approximately 82.3)

3.3 Public and Private (In-Camera) Meetings

While legislation requires City Council and its committees to conduct their business in public, they are permitted to meet in private, meaning they can close all or part of a meeting to the public (that is, move In-Camera). They may do so if the matter to be discussed is within one of the exemptions in Part III of _The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act_ (LAFOIPP). The default is that reports are submitted to a public meeting unless there is a clear and identifiable harm to the City.

Moreover, City Council and its committees may hold meetings closed to the public for the purpose of long-range or strategic planning, but no business may be transacted at those meetings. Despite these rules, the items considered and the time that City Council and its committees spends meeting in private will vary from year to year.

To measure this, the City records the length of time that City Council and its committees meet in both public and private (or In-Camera) sessions of a meeting. Table 3.3.1 breaks down the split of public and private hours. It shows that public meeting hours haven risen by about 46 hours since 2014/15, an increase of 28.2 percent.

Table 3.3.1
City Council and Committee Public & Private Meeting Hours

Year	Public Meeting Hours	Private Meeting Hours	Total Hours
2014/15	163.4	112.4	275.8
2015/16	172.95	46.85	219.8
2016/17e	194.3	67.1	261.4
2017/18	227.25	50.75	278
2018/19	197.75	56.5	254.25
2019/20	204.95	43.5	248.45
2020/21e	209.5	40	249.5

Charts 3.3.1(a) and 3.3.1(b) breaks down this data and shows it relative to the six-year average, excluding the base year. Over the period, public meeting hours averaged 201, while private meeting hours averaged 50.8.
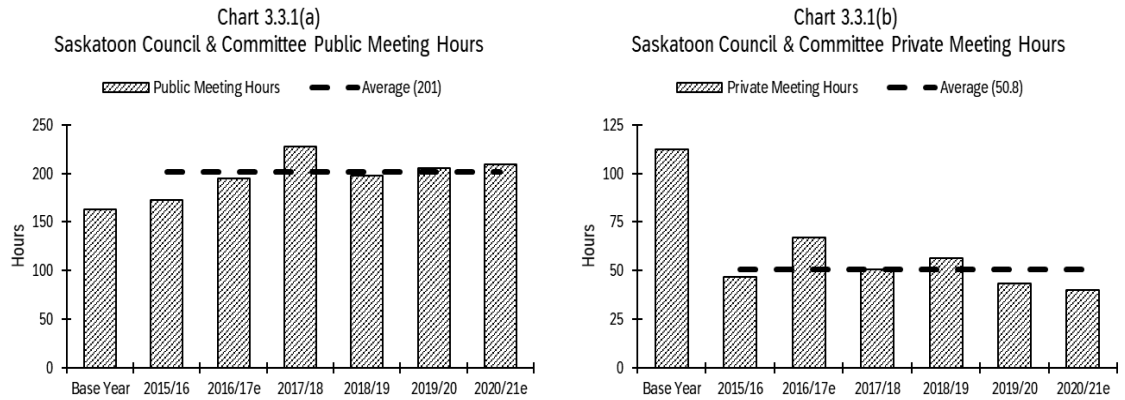

Chart 3.3.1(a)
Saskatoon Council & Committee Public Meeting Hours

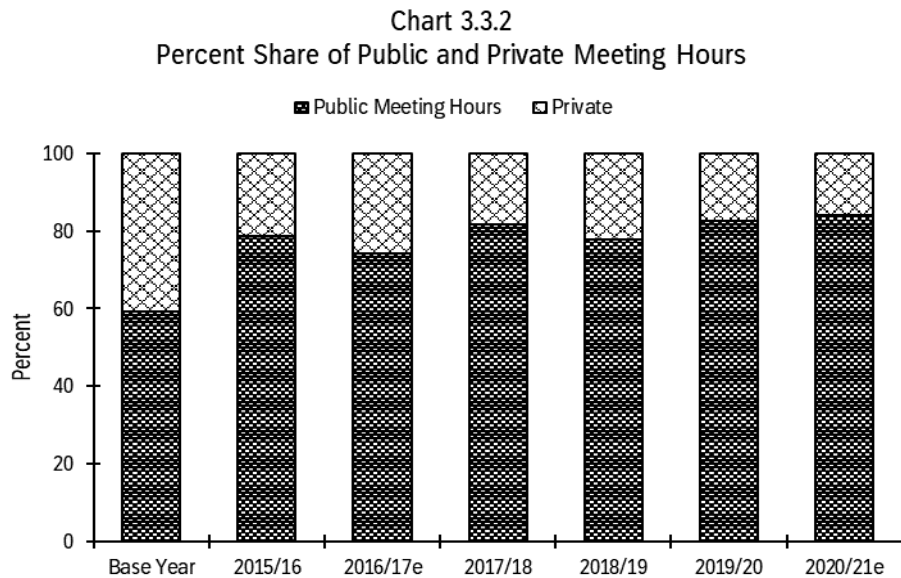Chart 3.3.1(b)
Saskatoon Council & Committee Private Meeting Hours

Chart 3.3.2 shows the percent share of public and private meeting hours relative to total meeting hours. The data shows that public meeting hours (black) are over 80 percent of total hours, especially in recent years. In the 2014/15 (the base year) public meeting hours accounted for only 59 percent of total hours. Alternatively, private meeting hours have fallen from 40 percent of total meeting hours in the base year to 16 percent in 2020/21, a 24-percentage point reduction.

Chart 3.3.2
Percent Share of Public and Private Meeting Hours

Charts 3.3.2(a) and 3.3.2(b) breaks down this public/private mix and shows individually the percent share of public and private meeting relative to the six-year average, excluding the base year. Note that in these two charts the y-axis is on the same scale. The data shows that private meetings average 20 percent of meeting hours over the period and 20 percentage points less than the base year.

Chart 3.3.2(a)
Percent Share of Public Meeting Hours

Chart 3.3.2(b)
Percent Share of Private Meeting Hours
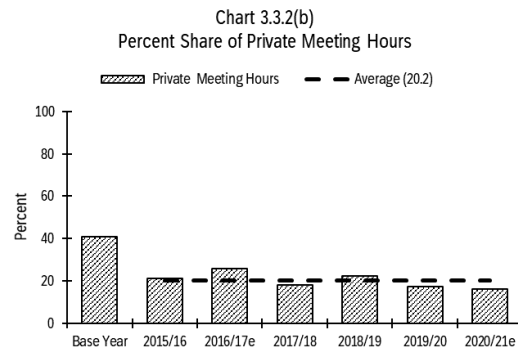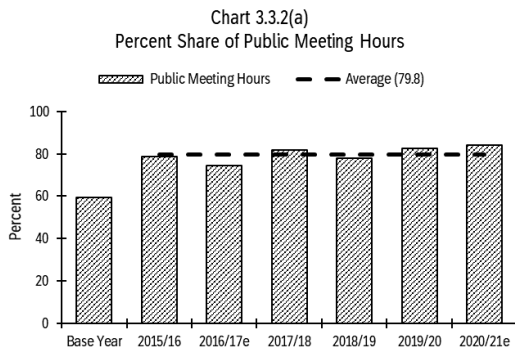
To illustrate the longer-term trend between public and private meeting hours Chart 3.3.3 indexes the values to a common starting point. Here, the chart coverts that data to 100 for the base year and then shows the relative change in public and private hours over the period. Chart 3.3.3. shows that public meeting hours have increased by 28 percent relative to the base year, while private meeting hours have fallen by 64.4 percent relative to the base year. This chart clearly shows the effects the governance reforms.

Chart 3.3.3
Index of Public and Private Meeting Hours (2014/15 = 100)
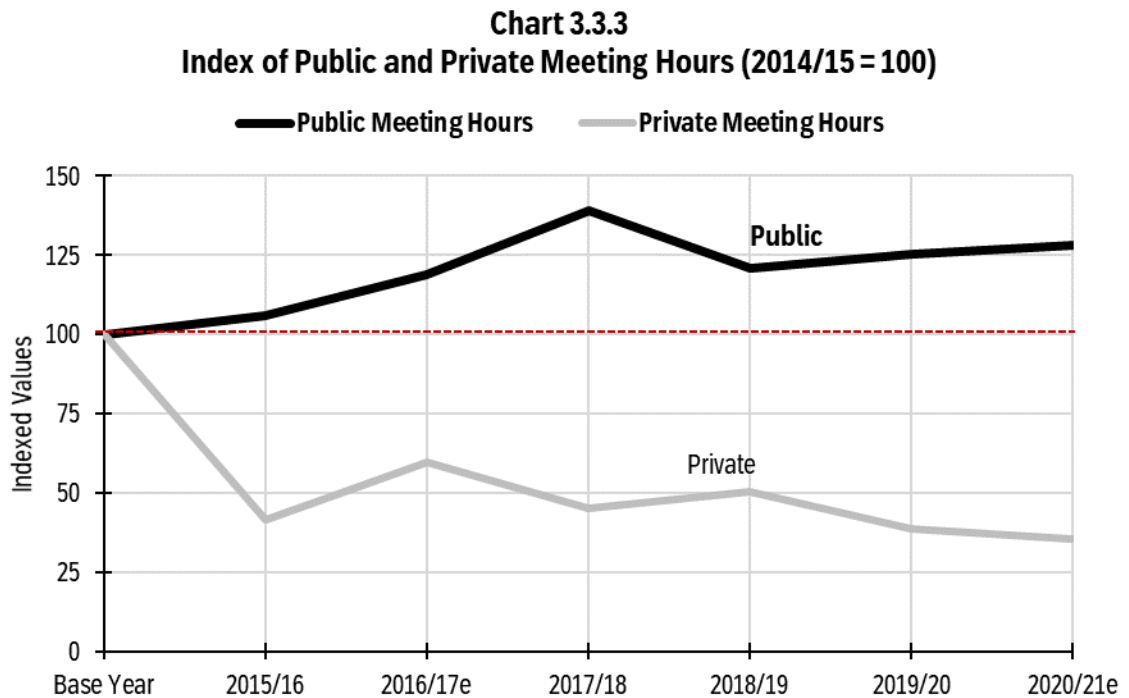
When City Council and/or its committees meet in a private session, these hours are almost entirely made up from two types of meetings. First, the bulk of In-Camera sessions are conducted during the GPC meetings, which is made up of all members of City Council. Second, the SPC FIN considers some land and audit matters In-Camera. The following subsections elaborate on these topics.

3.4 GPC Meetings

As noted in Section 3.1, GPC meeting hours account for almost 30 percent of all City Council and committee meeting hours, some of which are conducted in a private session. How many hours are in public? How many are in private? Charts 3.4.1(a) and 3.4.1(b) show the total public and In-Camera meeting hours of GPC, including their six-year averages.

In 2020/21, GPC private meeting hours have fallen to their lowest number since the data has been collected, and about nine hours less than the six-year average. Although the 2020/21 period includes an election so meeting hours will be less than a non-election year, the private meeting hours are over 26 hours less than those in the 2016/17 period. Another important observation is that the base year data in chart 3.4.1(b) shows over 100 private meeting hours, 2.5 time above the average of 39 hours.

Chart 3.4.1(a)
GPC Public Meeting Hours

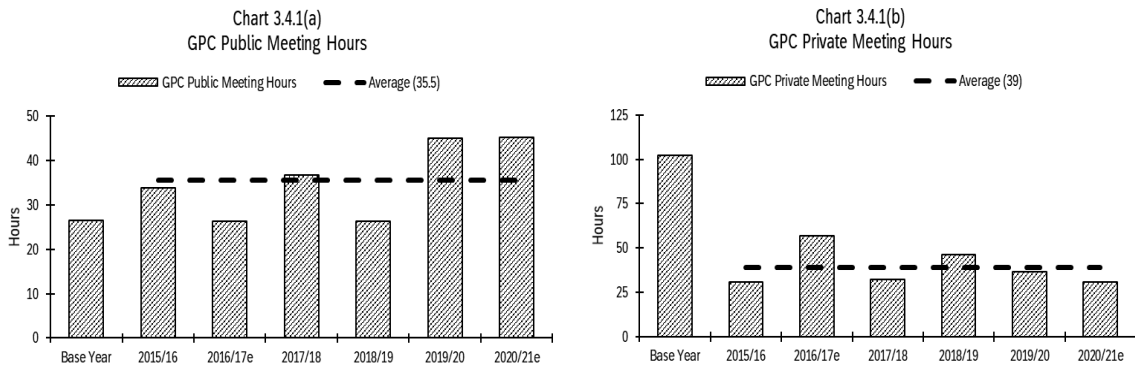Chart 3.4.1(b)
GPC Private Meeting Hours

Chart 3.4.2 shows the percent share, or distribution, of total meeting hours for private and public sessions for GPC. The change from the base year is substantial. In that year, almost 80 percent of GPC hours were In-Camera (or private). Contrast that to 2020/21 where In-Camera GPC meeting hours accounted for 41 percent of total GPC meeting hours, about 12 percentage points less than the six-year average.

Moreover, the chart clearly shows annual fluctuations in the share of public and private meeting hours for GPC. The data does not show any linear trend as the share of private hours goes up and down from year to year. The main reason for this is that the meeting hours are largely dependent on the nature of the agenda items and the ensuing debate/discussion.
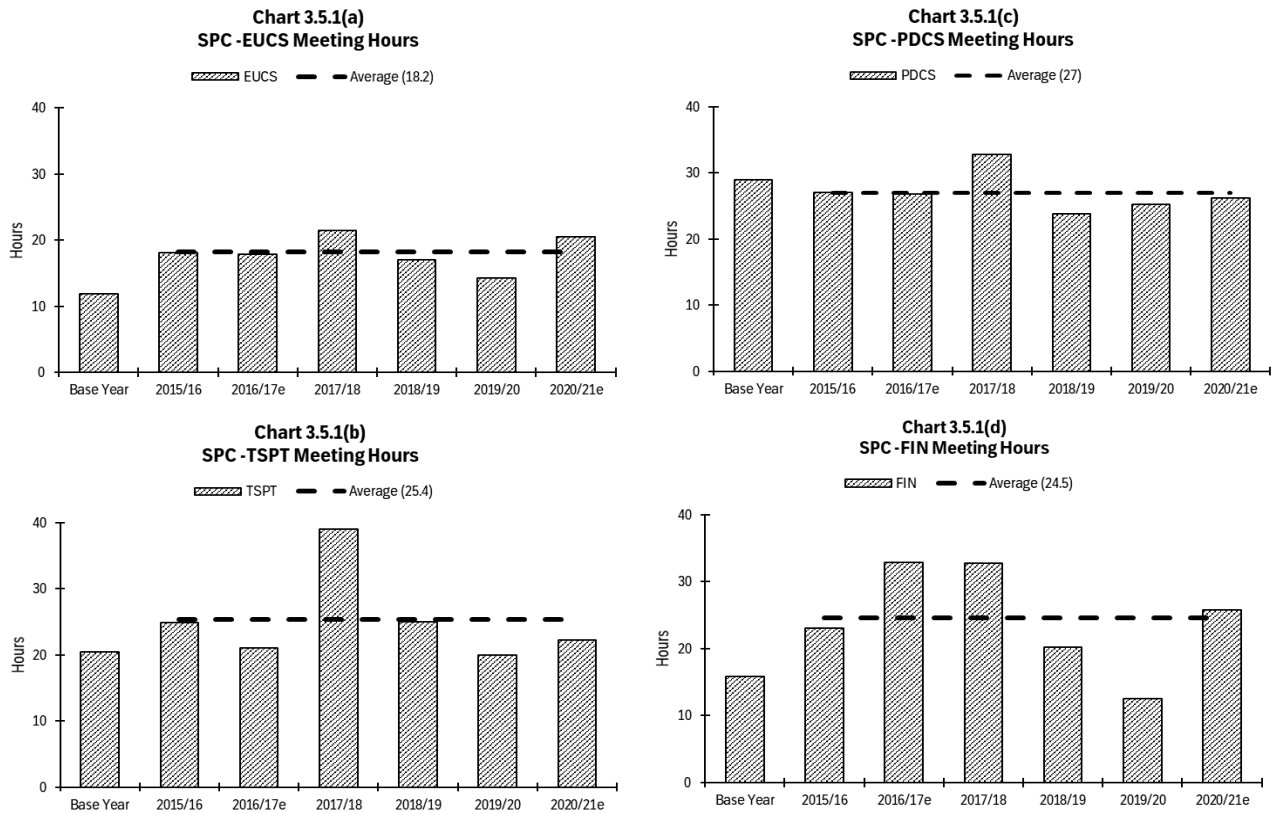

Chart 3.4.2
Percent Distribution of GPC Meeting Hours

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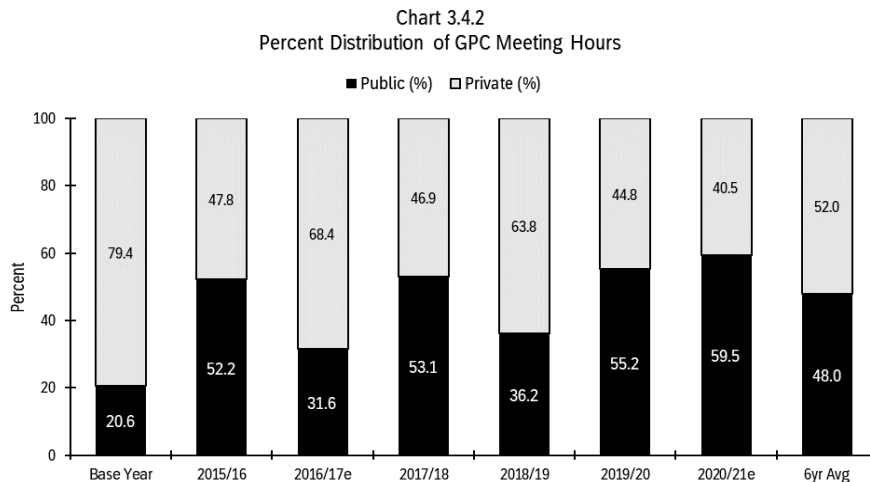
3.5 SPC Meetings

SPCs serve an important role in the City's governance system as they permit focused discussion on policy areas that fall within its mandate. They are where the detailed policy discussion occurs and gives opportunities for individuals and stakeholders to offer input on the policy direction of the City.

Since 2014/15 the SPCs have played a larger role in the policy making process. The data in Chart 3.1.2 earlier in this report clearly shows the growing reliance on SPCs. In 2014/15, for example, SPCs together accounted for 27.4 percent of all meeting Council and committee meeting hours. In 2020/21, they accounted for 39.8 percent of them, a 12.4 percentage point increase.

Meeting hours are distributed relatively evenly, with the SPC EUCS being the exception. SPC PDCS, TSPT and FIN have average meeting hours between 25 and 27 hours per year. SPC EUCS meeting hours over the six years average 18.2 per year. Obviously, some SPCs, like PDCS, generate more interest than others. This is largely issue dependent, but also on the different policy mandates individual SPCs have.[8] Naturally, SPCs like PDCS and TSPT will typically have longer meeting hours given that their policy mandates typically deal with matters that have broad community interest.

Charts 3.5.1 (a) through (d) show cluster bar charts of the meeting hours for each SPC, including their six-year average (the dotted line). All charts have the same scale on the y-axis.

Chart 3.5.1(a)
SPC - EUCS Meeting Hours

Chart 3.5.1(c)
SPC - PDCS Meeting Hours

Chart 3.5.1(b)
SPC - TSPT Meeting Hours

Chart 3.5.1(d)
SPC - FIN Meeting Hours

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[8] For more on these mandates, consult *Bylaw 9170, the Committee and Procedures Bylaw* at https://www.saskatoon.ca/content/bylaw-9170-procedures-and-committees-bylaw-2014

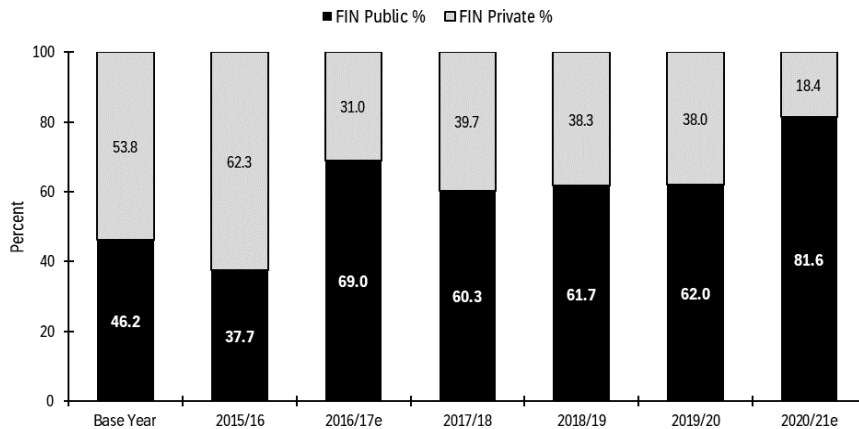Some key observations emerging from these charts include:

- Despite lower average meeting hours, SPC EUCS meeting hours—Chart 3.5.1(a)—have been very consistent over the time series with only the 2019/20 period falling significantly below the average; that is, greater than one standard deviation from the mean.
- Similarly, the SPC PDCS meeting hours—Chart 3.5.1(b)—have been very consistent over the time series, averaging 27 hours per year. The 2017/18 period appears to be an outlier relative to other years in that meeting hours were greater than one standard deviation from the average (over five hours above the mean).
- SPC TSPT and SPC FIN show greater fluctuations in meeting hours. Clearly, 2017/18 is an outlier for the SPC TSPT—Chart 3.5.1.(c)—with that year showing about 14 hours above the average. This was largely due to the debate and discussion on transportation network companies, the taxi industry, and street closures.
- SPC FIN meeting hours have more of a "peak and valley" pattern relative to other SPCs. After two years of lower than the average hours, meeting hours climbed back to the six-year average in 2020/21.

The SPC FIN is unique among the SPCs because it has items within its mandate – specifically land development and audit issues – that requires it to deliberate in a private session. Thus, meeting hours and their fluctuations can be partly driven by the private sessions. To illustrate this dynamic, Charts 3.5.2(a) and 3.5.2(b) breaks up the SPC FIN public and private hours relative to their six-year averages. Private meeting hours for this SPC have fallen well below the six-year average in the last three periods. The rise in 2020/21 public meeting hours were primarily due to the extra sessions to deliberate the City's financial challenges.

Chart 3.5.2(a)
SPC FIN Public Meeting Hours

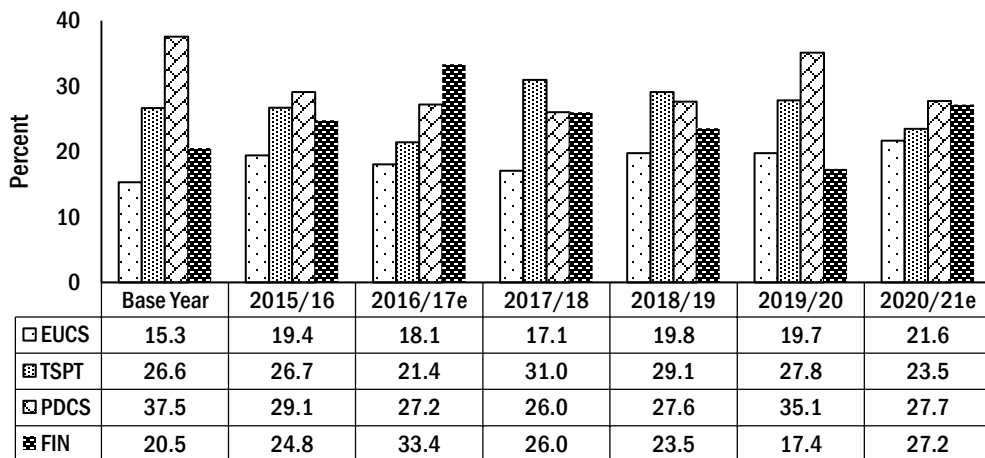Chart 3.5.2(b)
SPC FIN Private Meeting Hours
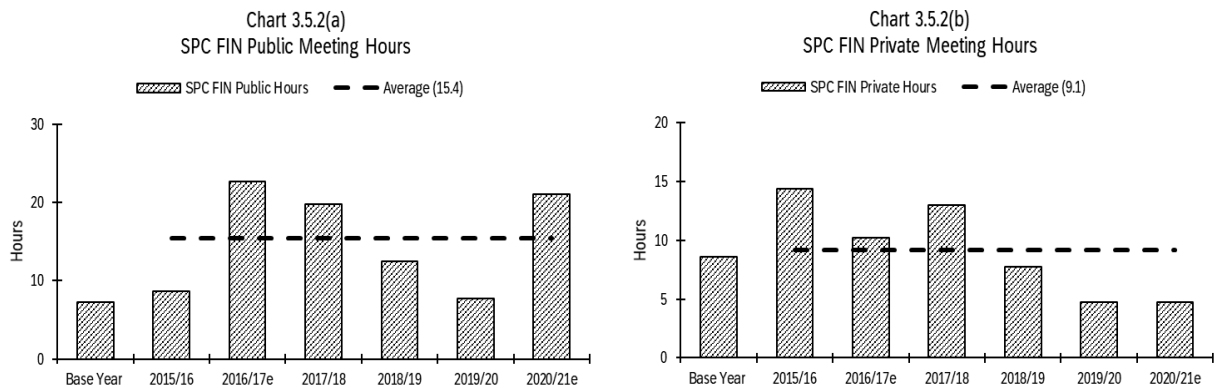
To show this data in a different way Chart 3.5.3 breaks out the public and private mix by showing the respective percent share distribution of meeting hours relative to total SPC FIN meeting hours. The main observation from this chart is the consistency in the distribution of public meeting hours since the 2016/17 period.

Chart 3.5.3
Percent Distribution of SPC FIN Meeting Hours

■ FIN Public %   □ FIN Private %

	Base Year	2015/16	2016/17e	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21e
FIN Private %	53.8	62.3	31.0	39.7	38.3	38.0	18.4
FIN Public %	46.2	37.7	69.0	60.3	61.7	62.0	81.6

To wrap up this section, Chart 3.5.4 uses a clustered column chart to show the share of each SPC hours relative to total SPC meeting hours. It reveals that after 2014/15, the distribution of meeting hours for SPCs has been very consistent. The outliers in the data are 2016/17, where the SPC FIN saw its SPC meeting share rise above 33% while SPC TSPT saw its share fall to about 21%.

Chart 3.5.4
Percent Distribution of SPC Meeting Hours

	Base Year	2015/16	2016/17e	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21e
□ EUCS	15.3	19.4	18.1	17.1	19.8	19.7	21.6
▦ TSPT	26.6	26.7	21.4	31.0	29.1	27.8	23.5
▨ PDCS	37.5	29.1	27.2	26.0	27.6	35.1	27.7
▨ FIN	20.5	24.8	33.4	26.0	23.5	17.4	27.2

The preceding analysis shares data on the number and distribution of hours spent by City Council and committees deliberating on policy and performing its governance functions. Meeting hours can be influenced by the level of public and stakeholder interaction at Council and committees. The following section of this document explores the data on public interaction with City Council and its committees.

4. PUBLIC INTERACTION WITH CITY COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

One factor that can influence the number of hours that City Council and/or committee deliberates and discusses issues is the level, or degree, of public interaction. Bylaw No. 9170 *The Procedures and Committees Bylaw, 2014*, allows members of the public to address City Council on items that are on the meeting agenda. Speakers are given five minutes each to argue their points, not including the time for City Councillors to ask questions. This a common practice among major municipalities in Canada.

However, the bylaw allows for more latitude at the committee level. Here, individuals and stakeholders can ask to address a committee on items that are not on the meeting agenda, provided that the items fall within the jurisdiction (or powers) of the City and is within the mandate of the committee. The same five-minute speaking rule applies at committee meetings. This is also a common practice.

The Administration has compiled data on the level and nature of public interaction at City Council, GPC, and SPC meetings. There are two fundamental ways for the public to interact with Council and its committees: (1) by speaking directly at a meeting (as described above) or (2) by submitting written correspondence. The Administration first reported these types of interactions in the 2017/18 analysis and did so again in the 2018/19 analysis. This section adds to that and offers new data for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 periods.

Specifically, Table 4.1 shows the numbers of speakers who engaged City Council (both meeting types) and its committees from 2017/18 to 2020/21. Table 4.2 shows the number of written correspondence received by City Council and committees over the same period. While the number of speakers addressing Council and committee in 2020/21 was slightly lower than the 2018/19 period, the amount of written correspondence received in 2020/21 was almost equivalent to that received in the three previous years combined.

Table 4.1
Number of Speakers Addressing City Council and Committee Meetings

Number of Speakers				
Meeting Type	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
City Council*	123	115	88	84
GPC	28	16	20	34
SPC PDCS	28	30	45	55
SPC FIN	10	13	3	14
SPC EUCS	20	16	10	8
SPC TSPT	42	26	14	8
Total	251	216	180	203
*includes Regular Business and Public Hearing				

Table 4.2
Written Correspondence to City Council and Committee Meetings

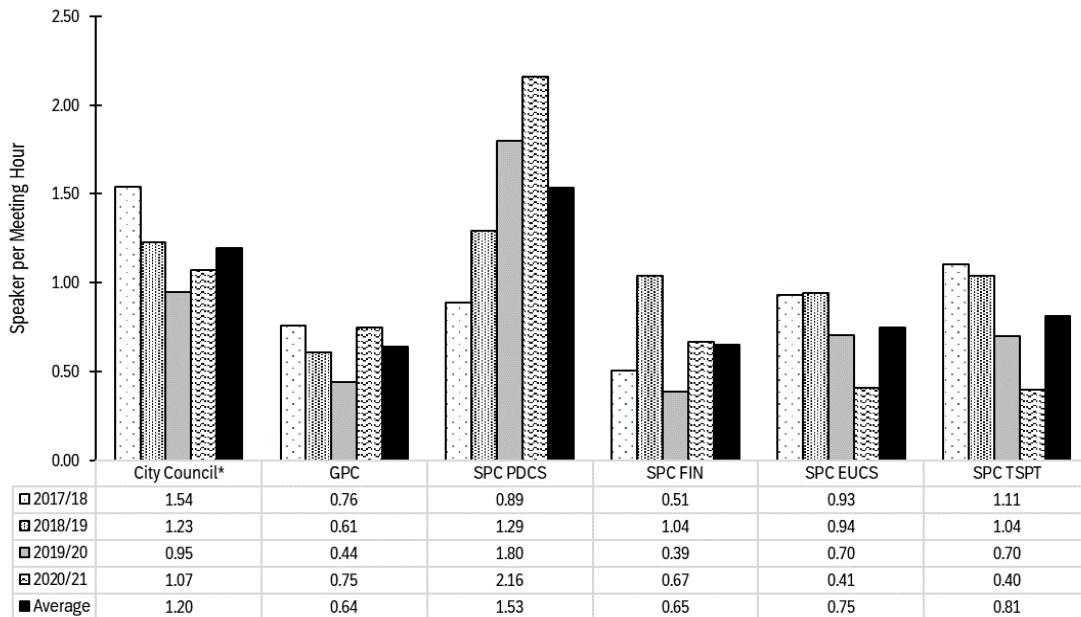| Number of Written Correspondence				
Meeting Type	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
City Council*	150	362	224	754
GPC	20	9	79	114
SPC PDCS	13	21	18	30
SPC FIN	3	14	6	4
SPC EUCS	6	23	9	11
SPC TSPT	7	30	81	24
Total	192	429	336	913
*includes Regular Business and Public Hearing				

The number of speakers interacting with City Council and/or its committees is largely issue dependent. The more contentious an issue there is a stronger likelihood of individuals and organizations actively participating in the policy process. However, written correspondence is also a tool that the public can use to participate in the process, advocate for or against a particular position, and get on the record.

Regardless of the method, issues that invoke substantial policy change, as opposed to incremental change relative tend to generate more public interest. This is especially true when it comes to social/cultural policy issues. In 2020/21, for example, one City Council meeting alone received 533 letters/emails about Conversion Therapy. Moreover, the June 2021 GPC meeting received 62 letters/emails on the potential renaming of John A. Macdonald Road.

The data presented in this section is complementary to that in the previous section. There are not enough observations in the data to draw any inference or even correlation to show the influence that public interaction has committee meeting hours. Intuitively, however, this makes some sense and can be observed in a couple of the periods, such as 2017/18, when the relationship between taxicabs and transportation network companies (e.g., Uber) was deliberated at the SPC TSPT.

Despite those caveats, data from meeting hours can be combined with some of the data in this section to attempt to show where speakers have greater influences on Council and committee meetings. Chart 4.1 shows the ratio of the number of speakers per public meeting hour. Public meeting hours are used instead of total meeting hours because there is no public interaction on for In-Camera meetings or sessions. The higher the ratio the greater the influence speakers can have on a meeting agenda, all things equal. The chart shows that, on average (black bar), SPC PDCS meetings have a stronger speaker presence, while GPC and SPC FIN have the lowest.

Chart 4.1
Speakers Per Public Meeting Hour

	City Council*	GPC	SPC PDCS	SPC FIN	SPC EUCS	SPC TSPT
☐ 2017/18	1.54	0.76	0.89	0.51	0.93	1.11
⊞ 2018/19	1.23	0.61	1.29	1.04	0.94	1.04
☐ 2019/20	0.95	0.44	1.80	0.39	0.70	0.70
⊠ 2020/21	1.07	0.75	2.16	0.67	0.41	0.40
■ Average	1.20	0.64	1.53	0.65	0.75	0.81

It should be explained that the data and information in this section does not necessarily reflect the level of public engagement that the City undertakes with the community on key issues. A robust engagement process is typically done prior to the issue's consideration at City Council or committee, suggesting that, occasionally, public and stakeholder concerns are addressed in an alternative forum. Nonetheless, interaction with policy and decision makers on civic policies, programs, and services ensures input is considered at various stages of the process.

However, what tends to generate interest at meetings are the written reports that the Administration takes to a committee (and occasionally City Council) meeting. These reports lay out the issue and implications on City business. But what how many and what types of reports does a committee receive and consider? The next section analyzes this data.

5. REPORTS TO COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

In 2019, the City reformed the types of reports that it would present to Council committees. The objective was to draw distinctions between the types of information and decisions that Council and its committees make. Rather than one broad template, the City developed three different report styles to distinguish whether Council committees were receiving information, making a policy decision, or approving routine matters**.** To that end, the Administration now prepares the following reports for Council and committees' consideration:

- Information Report - designed to provide briefings and updates on an issue. These reports can be used to get new topics and issues on Council and committees' agenda or simply used to update on Council on previous decisions. These reports contain no recommendations, and they are received simply by way of being on the agenda.
- Decision Report - designed to provide a "policy analysis" of various approaches to address a public policy problem that may confront City Council. These reports are lengthy and extensive and should ideally contain an evaluation and implications of all options. This report makes recommendations based on the options analyzed in the report.
- Approval Report – designed specifically for Council and committee to exercise its governance powers. These reports are used to implement a policy decision made via a decision report by approving a bylaw or policy, for example. They are also used to obtain Council or committee approval outlined in a previously enacted bylaw or policy. Approval reports contain recommendations, but do not contain an options analysis. This is because that analysis should have occurred, if necessary, in a decision report.

With that context in mind, the Administration has compiled data on the volume and types of reports that go directly to Council committees. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the number of reports to each committee for the years 2019/20 and 2020/21 respectively. Reports to City Council meetings are excluded because, except for Public Hearing meetings, almost all reports go through an SPC or GPC prior to ending up on City Council's Regular Business meeting agenda.
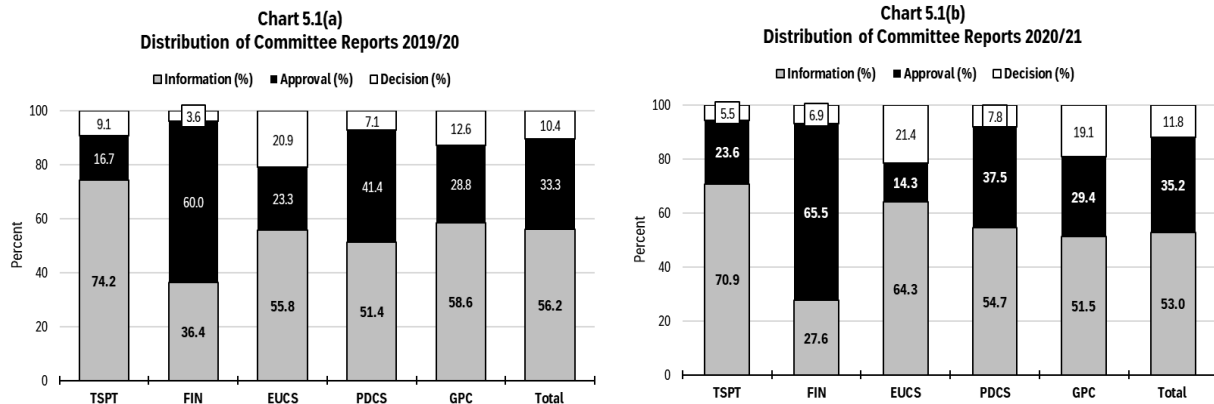
Table 5.1
Number of Reports 2019/20

NUMBER OF REPORTS BY COMMITTEE 2019/20						
Report Type	SPC TSPT	SPC FIN	SPC EUCS	SPC PDCS	GPC	Total
Information	49	20	24	36	65	194
Approval	11	33	10	29	32	115
Decision	6	2	9	5	14	36
Total	66	55	43	70	111	345

Table 5.2
Number of Reports 2020/21

NUMBER OF REPORTS BY COMMITTEE 2020/21						
Report Type	TPST	FIN	EUCS	PDCS	GPC	Total
Information	39	16	27	35	35	152
Approval	13	38	6	24	20	101
Decision	3	4	9	5	13	34
Total	55	58	42	64	68	287

The tables indicate that the committees considered over 345 reports in 2019/20 and 287 in 2020/21. The lower report volume in the 2020/21 period is partly due to the civic election. However, more observations are needed to determine any patterns or trend analysis.

The tables also reveal that the majority of reports taken to the committees are information reports. To complement this data, Charts 5.1(a) and 5.1(b) show the percent distribution of the different report types by committee for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 years, respectively. The patterns emerging in those charts show a high level of consistency. In both years, over half are information reports, about one third are approval reports, and just over ten percent are decision reports (see bar labelled "total").

Chart 5.1(a)
Distribution of Committee Reports 2019/20

☐ Information (%)   ■ Approval (%)   ☐ Decision (%)

Committee	Information (%)	Approval (%)	Decision (%)
TSPT	74.2	16.7	9.1
FIN	36.4	60.0	3.6
EUCS	55.8	23.3	20.9
PDCS	51.4	41.4	7.1
GPC	58.6	28.8	12.6
Total	56.2	33.3	10.4

Chart 5.1(b)
Distribution of Committee Reports 2020/21

☐ Information (%)   ■ Approval (%)   ☐ Decision (%)

Committee	Information (%)	Approval (%)	Decision (%)
TSPT	70.9	23.6	5.5
FIN	27.6	65.5	6.9
EUCS	64.3	14.3	21.4
PDCS	54.7	37.5	7.8
GPC	51.5	29.4	19.1
Total	53.0	35.2	11.8

For individual committees, some unique and interesting patterns emerge:
- In both years, over 70 percent of the reports considered at SPC TSPT are for information.
- By contrast, over 60 percent of the reports considered at SPC FIN in both years are for approval purposes. It has the lowest share of decision reports.
- SPC EUCS has the largest share of decision reports, above 20 percent in each year and the lowest share of approval reports.
- SPC PDCS and GPC have a better mix of report types relative to the other committees, although SPC PDCS has a smaller share of decision reports at less than eight percent each year.

Although the sample is very small, overall, the report data indicates that the bulk of reports considered at committees are briefings and updates on topics within the committee's mandate. This is especially the case at SPC TSPT. On the other hand, the reports considered at SPC FIN reflects the more administrative functions of that committee. The emergence and prominence of climate change and broader environmental issues have generated more discussion and debate at SPC EUCS in recent years.

6. SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

The main objective of this document is to provide a comprehensive review and analysis of City Council and its committee meetings. In doing so, this document analyzed six years of various City Council and committee meeting data to determine what changes have occurred, or trends have emerged, with respect to these meetings. The data is compared to a base year of 2014/15, the first year of the reformed governance system, and indicates that City Council spends far less time behind closed doors than in the past.

Before diving more deeply into the data, section two of this document set some appropriate context by explaining the methodology, assumptions, scope, and limitations of the analysis. This explanation was necessary to provide perspective on the analytical approach the document would take.

With that context in place, section three proceeded to analyze what the data says about City Council and its committee meetings over the last six years and relative to the base year. The research found some interesting trends worth noting, especially the point that private meeting hours make up the least amount of time since the City has been recording the data. In fact, relative to the base year of 2014/15, public meeting hours are up by 28 percent while private meeting hours have fallen by 64 percent.

Moreover, this document compiled data on the nature and level of public interaction with City Council and its committees. This section included data on the number of speakers at meetings and the number of written correspondence considered at them. While the sample size is relatively small, with only four periods of data, the section found that public interaction with Council and committee is issue dependent and yearly comparisons are largely meaningless because issues and topics that generate public interest change from year to year. That said, a key observation is that major policy change will generate a greater degree of interaction. More specifically, social and cultural change issues tend to generate the most interest.

Finally, section five offered new data on the types of reports considered at Council committees. Despite the very small sample size the data and analysis in this section indicates that over half of the reports considered at committees are information briefings. About one-third are for approving spending plans, policies, and bylaws, and one-tenth of the reports are decision reports, focusing on policy approaches to problems facing Saskatoon. This data is helpful to underscore the different governance roles the City Council has. These roles are public education (partly reflected by information reports) administrative (reflected by approval reports) and policy making (reflected by decision reports).

Based on these findings, several observations can be made:
- The data suggests that City Council and committee meetings are largely dependent on the nature of the items on the agenda and the discussion or debate that ensues. Yearly, issues may emerge that will require extra attention of City Council and or its committees. This may also result in more In-Camera deliberations. This can make it difficult to conduct year-over-year comparisons because the types of items that City Council and committees deliberate on can change significantly from year to year. As more observations are collected, the use of more sophisticated data analysis methods could be implemented to better explain correlations, trends, and outliers.

- The data suggests that election years tend to have different patterns relative to non-election years given that fewer Council and committee meetings occur in those years.

Now that the data set contains two election cycles, there is some consistency in meeting hours between the two cycles. Election cycles are also unique in that a new City Council typically spends extensive time in orientation and/or strategic planning meetings, when compared to non-election years. In such cases, more In-Camera sessions are likely required so that the newly elected City Council can set its priorities for the next term of its mandate.

- The data indicates that several of the reforms City Council and Administration have made to the governance structure, and more specifically, to public and In-Camera sessions, have had a positive impact on public accountability and transparency. A more stringent test has resulted in a reduced number of reasons as to why a matter may be deliberated in an In-Camera session. Moreover, City Council has adopted the best practice of rising and reporting in a public session to conclude an In-Camera session. This has added a degree of transparency because the public may know when an In-Camera session of a meeting concludes.

- Finally, the data suggests that reforms to any governance structure take time to fully realize their intended outcomes. No single year of data should be able to explain whether the intended reforms to a governance system have achieved the desired outcomes. Similarly, it does not mean that such changes will result in annual, linear reductions in the number of hours that Council and its committees debate issues in public or in private. The key is to observe what direction the trend cycle is heading and adjust to make progress towards a goal. Council's and Administration need to be patient to let the system work, but also be flexible enough to adjust along the path as new learning, feedback, and technology emerges.