

Operation of Remotely Piloted Aircrafts in Saskatoon – Changes to Process for Permission - Commercial Operators

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon (City) currently has a Bylaw regulating the use of drones, within Saskatoon city limits, and an approved process for receiving applications and granting permission to fly a remotely piloted aircraft, in Saskatoon, over public property. There has been a request to streamline the review and approval process for Commercial Operators, with an Advanced Drone Pilot Certificate.

RECOMMENDATION

That Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to City Council that the request by Administration to modify the process for permission, for Commercial Operators only, to operate remotely piloted aircraft in Saskatoon, as outlined in this report, be approved.

BACKGROUND

A May 7, 2018 report entitled, [Operation of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Model Aircraft within Saskatoon City Limits](#), was considered by City Council on May 28, 2018. The recommendations accepted included that the process of permission, as outlined in the report, be approved. The process described in the 2018 report is the one currently in place, and the report included a sample of the application form which is in use today. The process requires an application for every flight and Administration confirms the operator's status and vets the application through the various City departments to confirm there are no conflicts. The 2018 report also requested Solicitor's Office prepare the Bylaw that would prohibit drones from operating except as permitted.

A report entitled, [Operation of Remotely Piloted Aircraft within Saskatoon City Limits - Proposed Bylaws](#), was considered by City Council on January 27, 2020. This report amended Bylaws No. 7767, The Recreation Facilities and Parks Usage Bylaw, 1998 and Bylaw No. 5729, Municipal Property Amendment Bylaw, 2020 to address the necessary drone regulations requested in 2018 report. Initially the Bylaw No. 7767 was to limit the use of drone and model aircraft in parks, the new Bylaw provisions in Bylaw No. 5729 was to restrict the use of drones and model aircraft from all public places owned, controlled or occupied by the City. In brief, Bylaw 5729 states:

“2.1 No person shall fly a remotely piloted aircraft in, on or above property owned by the city, or leased by the city, or under the jurisdiction and control of the city, except as permitted by the city.”

Transport Canada regulates and provides restrictions to safely and legally fly drones and model aircraft. The City Bylaw helps regulate where and how drones can be operated in Saskatoon. To help protect the privacy and safety of the residents of

Saskatoon, the City developed an online formal application process for granting permission to fly drones within Saskatoon.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Current Process for Drone Flight Permission

The process for receiving, reviewing and approving drone flight requests, for flights over public property in Saskatoon has been in place since 2018. Over the past five years there have been numerous drone flight request and the vast majority of requests are from companies and/or media outlets undertaking the drone flight for business related purposes.

With the currently approved process, with each new drone flight request, the applicant is required to submit: a copy of their pilot certificate issued by Transport Canada; certificate of registration for the remotely piloted aircraft system; a copy of their insurance certificate; and the details of the planned flight path. Currently this information is requested to be submitted with two weeks advanced notice of the flight date and time and is required for all drone flight requests.

For the frequent drone fliers, which are all currently Commercial Drone Pilots, this process is repetitive, somewhat onerous for the operators and time consuming for both the applicants and Administration. The two-week advanced notice for approval creates limitations for responses to business requests and/or emerging news stories. Weather also significantly impacts pilots' ability to launch their drones, often requiring them to reapply for City permission, which can result in lost revenue and missed broadcast opportunities.

Proposed Commercial Drone Permit Process

Administration recently met with a group representing the Commercial Drone operators, with the most frequent flight requests, to review a proposal from them regarding a more streamlined approach. The letter in Appendix 1 outlines their proposal.

To address challenges noted above, the proposal is to establish a streamlined Commercial Drone Permit Program, applicable for Commercial Drone operators only, with an Advanced Drone Pilot Certificate, issued by Transport Canada. This proposed program aims to simplify the application process, maintain compliance with Federal Regulations and the City Bylaw and foster a more positive and efficient use of drone technology within Saskatoon. For all non-commercial drone flight requests, the existing application and approval process would remain the same.

The Commercial Drone Permit Program will require a one-time application that includes the following documents:

1. Advanced Drone Pilot Certificate, issued by Transport Canada;
2. Drone Certificate of Registration, issued by Transport Canada;
3. Drone Insurance Policy; and
4. Additional Insured City of Saskatoon Endorsement.

Upon approval, Commercial pilots, with an Advanced Drone Pilot Certificate, will be granted a permit allowing them to fly drones at any time, provided they adhere to Transport Canada laws and regulations (*Canadian Aviation Regulations*) and the other Saskatoon specific operational guidelines below which will be further detailed in the Administrative Standard Operating Procedure.

Operational Guidelines

1. Flight Path Notification:

Pilots in all cases are first required to get approval from NAVCAN for their flight path details. Except for news coverage, Pilots must email the City their flight path at least two hours in advance of flying and will include a copy of any approval received from NAVCAN. In the case of news coverage event for a breaking story, the operator will email the City their flight details no less than 24 hours after the event.

2. Restricted Areas:

Pilots are prohibited from flying over events, construction sites or other City identified no fly zones. Violation of any drone regulation set forth by Transport Canada will result in the revocation of the permit to operate within the City of Saskatoon's jurisdiction.

3. Annual Permit Application:

The program itself will be a onetime formal application for permit under this program. On an annual basis, the City will collect updated documentation from Commercial Pilots to maintain their permit status.

Administration will also undertake to develop a formalized Standard Operating Procedure for all Drone Flight applications and approvals and if approved, will now include the specific administrative details related to the proposed Commercial Drone Permit Process described in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications of the recommendations in this report. There is, however; an opportunity to save staff time in the process of reviewing multiple individual drone flight requests from the same Commercial Operator. In the proposal from the stakeholders, there was a suggestion for potentially establishing an annual permit fee for the eligible Commercial Operators. At this time, Administration is not recommending an annual permit fee, as we too recognize the benefits of reduced administrative workload with this new proposed approach. As the program rolls out, Administration will continue working with the group and will monitor the potential need to establish a new fee and will report further if there is a recommendation to establish a new permit fee.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

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

NEXT STEPS

Should Committee and ultimately City Council approve the plan to update the process for permission for Commercial Drone Pilot operators of the remotely piloted aircrafts, Administration would then work with the stakeholders to finalize the planned approach, complete the Administrative Standard Operating procedure for Drone flight permissions, and aim to target this new process by later this fall.

Administration will also update the information on the City's website.

APPENDICES

1. Letter – Commercial Drone Permit Process Proposal

REPORT APPROVAL

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