

## Admin Report - Advisory Committee Discretionary Funding – Governance Options

### ISSUE

What governance framework should be established for the expenditure of discretionary funds allocated to City Council Advisory Committees to ensure alignment with committee mandates, consistency with Council-approved programs, and appropriate oversight?

### BACKGROUND

The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its public meeting held on February 11, 2026, considered the Councillor K. MacDonald - Advisory Committee Budget Review motion and, resolved that:

**"WHEREAS** City Council has established five Advisory Committees pursuant to The Procedures and Committees Bylaw No. 9170, being:

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC)

Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC)

Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC)

Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee (SAAC)

Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC)

each of which has a defined mandate and terms of reference, reporting through Council's Standing Policy Committees;

**WHEREAS** Advisory Committees have budgeted funds available for use at their discretion to support initiatives within their mandate, with limited consistent or clearly defined parameters or limitations regarding eligible expenditures; and

**WHEREAS** in certain cases, the Administration already maintains existing budgets for work related to committee mandates, which may result in overlapping or duplicative funding unless clearer governance is established.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that Administration report back to the Governance and Priorities Committee on all funds spent by each Advisory Committee from 2023 through 2025, including:

1. Total annual expenditures;

2. Categories and descriptions of spending, including resulting reports or summaries of resulting reports;
3. Alignment of expenditures with the committees' terms of reference and Council-approved mandates.
4. Administration provide options for Council's consideration to strengthen oversight and provide direction on expenditure of Advisory Committee discretionary funds, including but not limited to:
  - a. Establishing clearer parameters or eligibility criteria for expenditures;
  - b. Introducing approval requirements for certain categories of spending by the appropriate Standing Policy Committee;
  - c. Developing standardized reporting or accountability processes for committees.; and
5. That the report also include options to eliminate discretionary funds for any Advisory Committee where an administrative budget already exists to support activities within that Committee's mandate, in order to avoid duplicative or unnecessary funding."

### **Current Status**

Advisory Committees are allocated discretionary funding annually as part of the City's budget process, intended to support activities within their Council-approved mandates. These allocations, however, form part of the broader Legislative Services service line and are not individually reviewed by Council. Advisory Committees are not currently required to submit annual budgetary requests aligned with their approved mandates and work plans, that would identify in advance the specific activities or initiatives for which funding is being requested.

Currently, Advisory Committees may approve expenditures directly, within their approved budget allocation, with no requirement for Council to approve. There are limited parameters governing eligible expenditures across committees, and oversight is primarily retrospective, through financial reporting in annual reports rather than advance approval. Where an Advisory Committee wishes to undertake activities that exceed its approved budget, fall outside of its mandate, or require additional resources, the Committee must submit a request through the appropriate Standing Policy Committee for Council's consideration. Any increases to Advisory Committee budgets or requests for funding beyond approved allocations require Council approval through established budget and/or reporting processes.

Advisory Committees have considered and approved a range of expenditures, including support for community-led initiatives, event-related activities, professional development, travel, and project-specific work. In some cases, these requests intersect with existing

administrative grant programs or approved departmental budgets, which are governed by formal intake processes, evaluation criteria, and reporting requirements. This has resulted in instances where Committees have deferred or tabled funding requests pending clarification from Administration, where Administration has identified potential overlap with existing contracts or grants, where external organizations have expressed uncertainty about the appropriate funding pathway, and where questions exist as to the appropriateness of funding allocations approved by the Committees.

A summary of budgeted expenditures by category by committee for 2026 is included below:

<b>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee</b>	<b>\$15,100</b>
Member Development/Travel, Conferences, Meetings (Planning Session/Retreat)	\$1,100
Cultural Diversity and Race Relations Month	\$0
Education and Awareness (Sponsorships)	\$14,000
<b>Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee</b>	<b>\$17,900</b>
Conferences, Education and Research	\$5,700
Annual Event Planning	\$12,000
Memberships	\$200
<b>Public Art Advisory Committee</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
Public Education	\$5,000
Professional Development	\$5,000
<b>Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>
Conferences and Education	\$3,000
<b>Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee</b>	<b>\$7,800</b>
Education	\$7,000
Training	\$800

Appendix 2 provides a committee-by-committee detailed listing of discretionary expenditures for the 2023 to 2025 period.

Expenditures generally align with broad committee mandates and terms of reference as contained within The Procedures and Committees Bylaw. In some cases, sponsorships for events or agency programs are being considered, which, while within the subject mandates of committees, are not expressly considered as a function of the Committee in their Terms of Reference. Expenditures have not resulted in formal follow-up reporting, notwithstanding any verbal updates that may be provided at meetings.

## Approaches in Other Jurisdictions

A high-level review of other Canadian municipalities shows that advisory committees are most commonly structured as advisory bodies without independent discretionary spending authority.

In Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver, advisory committees primarily provide advice and recommendations to Council and Administration, while financial authority is retained by Council, standing committees, or statutory boards operating under separate governance frameworks. Where funding decisions intersect with advisory work, these are typically governed through Council-approved budgets, formal grant programs, or clearly defined policies and terms of reference.

These approaches emphasize clarity of mandate, separation of advisory and decision-making roles, and centralized oversight of public expenditures.

## OPTIONS

### Option 1 (Status Quo)

Under this option, Advisory Committees would continue to receive discretionary budgets approved annually by City Council as part of the City's budget process. Advisory Committees would retain authority to approve expenditures within their approved budgets at their discretion, provided expenditures align generally with their mandates. Oversight would continue to occur primarily on a retrospective basis through financial reporting and annual committee reports.

#### Advantages

- Maintains current committee autonomy and efficiency;
- No change to existing processes or relationships;
- Minimal administrative impact.

#### Disadvantages

- Limited Council oversight of discretionary spending decisions;
- Ongoing ambiguity regarding appropriate expenditures and overlap with administrative programs;
- Does not address issues identified in the Notice of Motion.

### Option 2 (No Discretionary Spending Authority)

Under this option, Advisory Committees would no longer have authority to approve any discretionary expenditures. Committees would instead make recommendations on proposed expenditures, with approval authority resting with the appropriate Standing

Policy Committee. All discretionary spending decisions would be subject to Standing Policy Committee review and approval, regardless of amount or purpose.

Advantages

- Increases accountability and transparency;
- Ensures consistent application of Council priorities and mandate alignment;
- Eliminates risk of duplicative or inappropriate discretionary spending.

Disadvantages

- Less efficient and slower to act;
- Increased administrative and Standing Policy Committee workload;
- May negatively affect Advisory Committee engagement and perceived autonomy.

**Option 3 (Spending Thresholds Within Approved Budget and Mandate)**

Under this option, Advisory Committees would retain authority to approve expenditures that are within their Council approved budget and clearly align with their mandate. However, such expenditures would be subject to an established threshold, spending above which would require Standing Policy Committee Review and approval. Requests that overlap with existing administrative programs or budgets, unclear or questionable expenditures that are not expressly included as part of their mandate or function under their Terms of Reference, or requests for reallocation of funds between approved activities would not be permitted without additional approval from the applicable Standing Policy Committee.

Advantages

- Balances efficiency with accountability;
- Provides clear limits and escalation pathways for higher-risk or non-routine expenditures;
- Reduces duplication while preserving committee discretion for routine matters.

Disadvantages

- Requires development and administration of thresholds and criteria;
- May introduce some inefficiency for escalated items;
- Requires clear communication to maintain committee understanding and trust.

Based on a review of the expenditures found in Appendix 2, should this option be chosen, Administration recommends a single per-expenditure approval threshold of **\$2,000** for Advisory Committee discretionary spending, within the total Council approved budget. Expenditures at or above this threshold, or if the total expenditures in the year would be over the total Committee annual budget would require approval by the appropriate Standing Policy Committee.

While committee budgets differ due to differing mandates and approved allocations, a uniform threshold supports fairness, predictability, and administrative efficiency, and ensures that higher-value individual expenditures receive consistent oversight regardless of committee. The threshold is intended to trigger review based on the materiality of a single commitment and potential overlap with existing programs, rather than to equalize budgets between committees.

### **Budget Approval Process**

As an additional consideration under any of the proposed options, Council may continue with the current high-level budget approval approach or may introduce an enhanced budget approval process whereby Advisory Committees submit higher-level budget breakdowns aligned with their work plans for information at budget time. This would not change the application of the options, however, provides an additional engagement opportunity between Council and the Advisory Committees through the budget approval process.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to Council:

1. To implement Option 3 (Spending Thresholds Within Approved Budget and Mandate), whereby Advisory Committees retain authority to approve expenditures under the amount of \$2,000 that are clearly within their Council-approved mandate. Where expenditures exceed the established threshold, require a re-allocation of budget funds, fall outside or are not clearly within a committee's mandate, relate to or overlap with existing administrative budgets, contracts, or grant programs, or are otherwise unclear in purpose or appropriateness they shall be referred to the appropriate Standing Policy Committee for review and approval;
2. That an enhanced budget process where Advisory Committees submit budget breakdowns aligned with their work plans for information at budget time be adopted;
3. That Administration develop standardized parameters, thresholds, and referral criteria to support consistent application across all Advisory Committees; and
4. That the City Solicitor be instructed to bring required resulting changes to Advisory Committee Terms of References and Standing Policy Committee Delegated Authorities under The Procedures and Committees Bylaw.

#### **RATIONALE**

The recommended hybrid approach addresses the issue of use of discretionary funds by Advisory Committees, particularly lack of consistent direction and escalation

mechanisms for expenditures that are higher-risk, outside mandate, or potentially duplicative of existing administrative programs.

A hybrid model provides clarity by:

- Preserving Advisory Committee efficiency and autonomy for routine, clearly aligned expenditures;
- Establishing a defined escalation pathway for non-routine or ambiguous requests; and
- Ensuring that Standing Policy Committees, as delegated bodies of Council, exercise oversight where policy alignment, duplication risk, or broader budget considerations are present.

This approach will require administrative coordination and oversight across multiple departments where proposed expenditures intersect with existing City programs, budgets, or areas of subject-matter responsibility. Advisory Committee initiatives may relate to areas such as sustainability, accessibility, heritage, public art, or community development, each of which is supported by different divisions within the Administration. Under the recommended hybrid model, Administration would play a facilitative role in assessing proposed expenditures to determine whether they fall clearly within a committee's mandate and approved budget, or whether they overlap with existing administrative responsibilities, contracts, or grant programs. This may involve consultation between the City Clerk's Office, Finance, and the relevant service divisions to provide clarity on funding pathways, duplication risk, and alignment with Council-approved programs. Where approval is required, the City Clerk's Office will then work with the Advisory Committee to bring forward a request to the applicable Standing Policy Committee.

This approach also aligns Saskatoon more closely with practices observed in other large Canadian municipalities, where advisory bodies primarily provide advice and financial authority is retained by Council or exercised through structured delegation and escalation mechanisms.

### **ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS**

This report was not shared with Advisory Committees in advance of presentation to City Council. Should GPC wish to engage with the Advisory Committees it could be referred for comment.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The City Clerk's Office will communicate the approved approach to Advisory Committees and will proceed with implementing the approved governance model, including the development or update of any required processes, guidelines, or internal procedures to support consistent and transparent administration of discretionary funding. Further, the City Clerk's Office will monitor the application of the approved governance model and may report back to Committee/Council, as appropriate, on implementation outcomes and any recommended adjustments. Based on the option

chosen, the City Solicitors' Office will determine and bring back amendments to The Procedures and Committees Bylaw as may be required. Timing changes related to Advisory Committee budget and workplans as may result from chosen direction will be arranged.

**APPENDICES**

1. Advisory Committee Mandates
2. Full Advisory Committee Expenditures, 2023 - 2025

Report Approval

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