

Council Policy on Public Engagement

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon established a Risk-Based Management (RBM) Program to provide a systematic, proactive and ongoing process to understand and manage risk and uncertainty. One of the high priority risks identified during that process was, “the City’s engagement and communications initiatives and opportunities may not be effectively reaching its citizens.” This report proposes the adoption of a Council Policy on Public Engagement to help mitigate this risk.

RECOMMENDATION

That City Council approve the Council Policy on Public Engagement as attached in Appendix 2.

BACKGROUND

In July 2004, Saskatoon City Council adopted a Public Participation Strategy for Community Initiatives and Land Use Development. The strategy document includes a definition, purpose, principles, outcomes, what the stakeholders and public can expect, and general guidelines and checklists for staff.

In 2006, City Council received a report outlining a Community Engagement Program and Resources. And in December 2009, City Council adopted a community engagement plan for the City of Saskatoon’s Community Visioning Initiative with a coordinated corporate approach to community engagement.

City Council, at its meeting held on September 25, 2017, considered a report called, An Overview of the Communications Division. As part of the follow-up, it was noted that a further report will be completed to provide a more comprehensive review of community engagement including best practices, expectation of City Council and the public, and the potential for a City Council Engagement Policy.

City Council, at its meeting held on June 25 & 26, 2018, considered a report called Motion – Councillor D. Hill (November 20, 2017) Development of a Community Engagement Policy for Saskatoon Light & Power . Administration outlined an overview of a new Community Engagement Procedure for Saskatoon Light & Power – Infrastructure Projects. The procedure was developed to allow Administration the flexibility to update it when necessary so that the procedure is reflective and up to date with the changing engagement needs of our community, and the narrow scope of the issue in question suggested that a Council policy was not necessary.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

As outlined in the background section, the City has taken a more informal approach to public engagement with a focus on tools and tactics, as opposed to strategies and outcomes. The growing complexity of municipal public policy issues, combined with the integration of new technologies and globalization of knowledge is changing how citizens interact with cities and provide input on those complex issues. These changing expectations strongly suggest that the City requires a more strategic approach to public engagement.

This was confirmed in late 2014, when the City established a Risk-Based Management (RBM) Program where one of the high priority risks identified was, “the City’s engagement and communications initiatives and opportunities may not be effectively reaching its citizens.” Simply, the Public Participation Strategy adopted by City Council almost two decades ago no longer reflects today’s realities.

To put this in a broader perspective, Appendix 1, Considerations for Modernizing Public Engagement at the City of Saskatoon, provides a discussion paper on public engagement. It explains what public engagement is and is not, and how it can be used effectively to obtain citizen and stakeholder inputs on public policy issues.

More importantly, it also highlights the various approaches that Canadian cities are using to establish a clear understanding of citizen and Council expectations about public engagement. The document shows that a common strategic approach is the adoption of a council policy on public engagement.

Given the perspective and the findings in Appendix 1, Administration is proposing that the City replace the dated Public Engagement Strategy with a more formal and strategic Council on Public Engagement that aims to more effectively:

- a) Recognize and affirm the City’s commitment to public engagement;
- b) Support and encourage community members and stakeholders to become more involved in municipal decisions;
- c) Encourage public engagement as a source for better understanding of the strength and diversity of public opinion and public value;
- d) Provide clear and consistent direction for public participation so Administration, Council, and the public know what to expect;
- e) Provide clear descriptions for the roles of Administration and Council and on the public engagement processes;
- f) Provide support to staff in the creation, execution, evaluation and reporting on engagement strategies;
- g) Promote open, transparent and participatory engagement that allows room for diverse perspectives and new solutions to improve the quality and sustainability of decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including the decision makers; and
- h) Positively benefit the substance, transparency, legitimacy, and fairness of policy development and the general view of government.

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A draft Council Policy on Public Engagement is found in Appendix 2. The policy has been drafted in such a way to support the preceding points. It is not meant to be a detailed implementation plan, but rather, a more strategic and outcomes based approach that proposes to establish City Council's general position on public engagement.

Despite the lack of a formal council policy on public engagement, the City's Communications & Public Engagement Division has implemented several initiatives: (a) greater support for active engagement projects, (b) developing a stakeholder management strategy, and (c) creating public engagement procedures.

Nonetheless, there is still a strong need to continue to improve engagement by the City. This is demonstrated by the results of the 2018 Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey and the Civic Services Survey: Performance, Priorities & Preferences.

Public Engagement	Performance Measure	2018 Performance
	City of Saskatoon does enough to get public input on decisions it makes. (Strategy)	53% Telephone 45% Online = 49%
	The City provides meaningful opportunities to participate in engagement activities (Engagement Plan/Execution)	87% Telephone 79% Online =83%
	The City communicates how it will use public input to help make its decisions (Reporting Out)	68% Telephone 55% Online =62%

There are no budgetary implications as a result of approving this policy. Any additional engagement resources will be addressed through future business plan and budgeting processes.

NEXT STEPS

Once a Council Policy on Public Engagement has been adopted by City Council, Administration will continue to evolve the Public Engagement Framework as it relates to Administrative Procedures. This will include:

1. Standardization of Public Engagement Internal Procedures
 - a. Project Intake Process;
 - b. Engagement Strategy, Plan and Execution;
 - c. Expanding Research & Analytics Capabilities;
 - d. Engagement Evaluation;
 - e. Engagement Reporting Process; and
 - f. Engagement Training Modules.

2. Developing Internal Engagement Strategies

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- a. Stakeholder Management;
 - b. Citizen Advisory Panels; and
 - c. Online Engagement.
3. Enhancing External Procedures for Public Engagement
 - a. Engagement notices;
 - b. Engage webpage; and
 - c. Support Divisions on active engagement projects.

APPENDICES

1. Considerations for Modernizing Public Engagement at the City of Saskatoon - Discussion Paper, July 17, 2019
2. Draft Council Policy on Public Engagement

Report Approval

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