

June 2015

## Advisory Committee Review

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Outcomes, Recommendations, and Next Steps

ST. JOHN'S

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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

On Oct. 20, 2014, St. John's City Council adopted the Engage! St. John's Task Force Report with recommendations, one of which related to the role of advisory committees as effective engagement tools. The Task Force noted that the role of advisory committees generally, and the role they play in decision-making and as engagement tools, was unclear. There were also questions about the terms of reference for the work and the appointment process and it was suggested that these elements needed clarity.

Additionally, during the internal review period for the engagement framework, City staff also noted a lack of clarity around the role of advisory committees including the roles and responsibilities of staff, Council members and members of the public and the reporting processes. A Council directive was issued identifying a need to review the terms of reference for advisory committees and to make recommendations on how they should function.

The review considered both governance issues (e.g., roles and responsibilities) as well as operational matters (e.g., selection of members, tenure) of Committees.

Specifically the review was designed to:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of members of Advisory Committees including staff and Council representatives;
- consider the role of the Advisory Committees and as public engagement tools in the continuum of decision making;
- clarify the reporting **relationships** of Advisory Committees to Standing Committees, Council and/or departments;
- review practices for soliciting Advisory Committee membership, terms of membership and the link to the community and;
- consider alternative options such as citizen panels, neighbourhood groups, surveys or other types of mechanisms, for gathering expert and community advice on policy and program matters.

As per Council direction, (Council Directive R2014-07-15/27), and coincident with the work of the Engage! Task Force, this document outlines the recommendations resulting from the City's Advisory Committee review. It also presents a brief outline of the implementation process for committee restructuring.

## RESEARCH

Research for the advisory committee review included: an online survey to current public advisory committee members; meetings with each member of Council; two focus group sessions with staff who are involved with one or more Advisory Committees; meetings with the City Clerk's Office to "map" the Advisory Committee process; a review of sample agendas, minutes, reports to Council, current terms of reference and Council's role; and meetings with staff from Legal and Planning, Development and Engineering regarding legislative requirements. Additionally, other municipalities were reviewed for their processes.

The research resulted in some key themes being identified:

- **Purpose and process**
  - The mandates and terms of reference are not always clear – the role of Advisory Committees in policy needs to be articulated
  - There is frustration with process – agenda, outcomes, actions, tie in to decision making – what is the committee supposed to be doing?
  - Committees are not operational committees nor are they advocacy groups – however sometimes they veer into these areas
- **Decision-making**
  - Level of engagement must be clear – engagement spectrum
  - Committees do not make decisions – Council makes decisions – Committees help inform, provide advice and perspective
- **Reporting**
  - Lack of reporting is a challenge and approach to reporting is challenging which results in Councillors being out of the loop about Committee work in general
  - Need to have different types of reporting depending on the situation – budget, policy etc.
  - Need to have built-in systems for reporting that are regular and create opportunities to share information across committees, departments and with the public
  - Need defined terms of reference with clear roles and responsibilities and process
- **Rules for engagement**
  - Need meeting and agenda protocols, rules for engagement – this ties back to roles and responsibilities
- **Recruitment and selection**
  - Recruitment and selection needs to be streamlined with oversight – role for Office of Strategy and Engagement and Office of City Clerk
  - Right staff, right councilors, right public members
  - Select chair from within the committee
  - Committees need to be transparent

- **Other ways to engage**

- Need to consider other tools as well – neighbourhood groups, task forces, expert panels, citizen panels, forums, topic/issue specific groups

### **Key Findings from Other Municipalities**

Comparative research involved a review of best practices in Canadian cities including interviews with Halifax, Ottawa, and Edmonton as well as a review of websites and current advisory committee protocols in Kelowna, Victoria, Fort Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Guelph, London, Calgary and Waterloo. Research into other municipalities suggested the following:

- Cities are moving toward developing “public appointment policies,” with the general trend being to reduce the number of advisory committees and use other engagement tools.
- Advisory committees report to Standing Committees of Council and not directly to Council.
- It is typical for public members to chair committees, in some instances sometimes no Council participation is involved (i.e., citizens take the lead with staff support).
- Governance reviews are in place with term limits, standardized recruitment and reporting processes.
- There tends to be a level of “tension” between advisory committees and Council.
- The organization of information presented to the public (i.e. website, forms and resources) plays an important role in role clarification, recruiting and general awareness.
- Social media is starting to become a “game changer” in the advisory committee engagement process.
- Once an advisory committee is established they tend to not have an end point.
- Utilization of other engagement processes, e.g., task forces and neighbourhood associations is popular.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations have been divided into sections reflective of research findings and key structural components. Recommendations include specific details pertaining to general governance; committee configuration of organizational members and the general public; roles and responsibilities as defined through terms of reference documents; and a breakdown of new committee structures, including the reporting processes. *The overarching goal of the following recommendations is to improve the function of City advisory mechanisms; ensuring that they are well positioned to function effectively as engagement tools as per their mandates and terms of reference.*

#### **Recommended Advisory Structure**

The following new committee structure is recommended. This structure adjusts some of the functions and responsibilities of existing committees; effectively improving overall functionality through the implementation of a more streamlined and consolidated approach. As displayed below, this new approach includes six advisory committees, two expert panels, two working groups and one task force.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Structure of any new committees or other forms of engagement will be determined based on the nature of the project/issue.

<p><b>Advisory Committees</b> These report to Standing committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older Adults Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Advisory Committee on Youth*</li> <li>• Inclusion and Accessibility Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Environmental Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Downtown Advisory Committee**</li> <li>• Arts, Culture, and Heritage Advisory Committee</li> </ul>
<p><b>Experts Panels</b> These report to standing committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Built Heritage Experts Panel</li> <li>• Animal Control Experts Panel</li> </ul>
<p><b>Working groups</b> Council "Champion"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Para transit</li> </ul>
<p><b>Task Force</b> Reporting to Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime - working groups</li> </ul>

*\*It is recommended that the City develop a younger adult strategy as well and involve the Advisory Committee on Youth in its development. This strategy would consider recommendations from Roadmap 2021, the City's economic development strategy and link to the City's new Corporate Strategic Plan.*

*\*\*This committee will report to Council as it is more of a strategy committee*

### **Roles and Principles of Advisory Structures**

Each of the advisory tools recommended (i.e. expert panels, working groups, task forces and advisory committees) have distinct roles and principles. The following table clarifies these roles and mentions key principles associated with each. It is important to note that advisory committees are intended to play a more focused policy role (i.e. long term).

Type	Roles	Principles
<b>Advisory Committee</b> (more policy focused)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide citizen and organization expertise on matters relevant to the Committee's mandate</li> <li>• To provide information, receive or provide feedback</li> <li>• Involved in the development of solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to Standing Committee</li> <li>• Chaired by public</li> <li>• Designated Council member as spokesperson</li> <li>• Terms of reference</li> <li>• Minutes</li> <li>• Reporting</li> <li>• Staff Liaison</li> </ul>
<b>Task Force</b> (or Ad Hoc Committee) (recommend solutions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide citizen and organizational expertise on specific set of defined topics/issues</li> <li>• To consider information, receive and provide feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined timeline</li> <li>• May recommend series of items for implementation</li> <li>• Chaired by public member or Council</li> <li>• Council rep. as spokesperson</li> </ul>
<b>Working Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide citizen or organization expertise or oversight on the development/delivery of project/program delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assists in the delivery of an approved plan or strategy</li> <li>• Chaired by staff</li> <li>• Council Champion</li> </ul>
<b>Experts Panel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide expert opinion of topics or issues within defined mandate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May or may not have a defined timeline</li> <li>• Report to Standing Committee</li> <li>• Chaired by expert or staff</li> </ul>

### **Advisory Committees as Public Engagement Tools**

Advisory committees are one tool the city uses to engage with the public. As public engagement tools, and as noted through the concerns raised in the Engage! Task Force report, the role of advisory committees as public engagement tools must be clear. The following recommendations are made:

- Membership and minutes of committee meetings to be posted online
- Organization members (defined by Committees' terms of reference) to be conduits to/from their respective organizations

- Role of committees in the spectrum of engagement should fall within the realm of “consultation”
- Advisory Committees are not advocacy committees
- Advisory Committees are not decision-makers but help inform decision-making process
- Use other engagement tools to complement Advisory Committees where appropriate

### **Recommended General Governance for Advisory Committees**

- Remove “Mayor” from all titles of Advisory Committees
- Standardize processes from Terms of Reference, to recruitment/selection process for public members
- Staff lead/liaison assigned to each committee
  - Role to link across departments on issues addressed by committees
- May be more than one staff representative - one **Lead** staff who has authority and responsibility
- Office of City Clerk’s role enhanced - oversight and content i.e., identify across committee issues/opportunities
- Committee agendas require focus, clear parameters for content, alignment with terms of reference/mandate. Agendas will be developed by lead staff in association with committee chair.
- Committees to follow their role in the engagement spectrum
- City will report on committees’ activities
- Host an annual “all committee” Forum – Committee members, Council, staff

### **Terms of Reference**

Offices of City Clerk and Strategy and Engagement will be responsible for drafting terms of reference documents with input from relevant departments and the City Solicitor. It is recommended that all terms of reference documents include at least the following:

- a “cooling off” period for former members of council;
- term limits;
- membership and committee composition information;
- a clearly defined role for the committee Chair;
- a clear definition of committee purpose;
- committee mandate and deliverables;
- the roles and responsibilities of members organized by type including council, staff, public, public members representing organizations;
- reporting relationship and frequency;
- meeting frequency defined by the number of meetings to be scheduled per year;
- term of committee (ongoing, project/program specific, etc.) and;
- information and guidelines pertaining to conflicts of interest and rules of engagement

There may be other components specific to a particular committee which will be determined as terms of reference are being developed.

### **Recommended Committee Composition and Resources**

As noted above the terms of reference will define committee composition. A process for recruitment will be developed which will essentially outline the process of creating “calls for interest” including the creation of standardized application forms, online recruitment processes and frequently asked question sheets.

It is also recommended that a membership selection committee be struck that would see the Office of City Clerk and the Office of Strategy and Engagement oversee selection with input from relevant departments in adherence with the terms of reference. The development of an orientation handbook is also recommended that will act as a cohesive source of information to committees, orient them to their role and support governance. This guidebook will include references to the roles of all members, defined terms of reference, governance issues, and rules of engagement. Communications strategies will also need to be developed to guide reporting of committee work to Council and the public.

Each of the recommendations presented above will adhere directly to aforementioned terms of reference, and will play an important role in overall standardization of process.

### **Chairs of Advisory Committees**

It is recommended that advisory committees be chaired by members of the public. Public members chairing these committees will express the intent of the committee and be integral in the “advisory role” of the Advisory Committee. The Terms of Reference will define the role and expectations of the Chair.

## NEXT STEPS

### Implementation Process

The graphic below depicts the implementation process, each major action, and relevant information pertaining to each.

