

COMPARATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY
STRUCTURES IN CANADIAN
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS



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Modern day executive committees and their near equivalents can trace their roots back to a political institution – the Board of Control at the beginning of the last century and to the then lingering effects of the American Reform Movement on the politics and administration of local governments.

The Reform Movement emphasized efficiency in local government by promoting non-partisanship, at large elections and especially administrative professionalism, which in turn meant a large reliance on professional expertise in the provision of services. This strengthening of the municipal bureaucracy raised the questions of political control and accountability. Council members felt inadequate in developing policy in the face of the expertise of the administrators.

To counterbalance the latter, the reformers proposed the creation of a political body – the Board of Control. It was meant to be a political collective mechanism and had specific legislative and executive functions. These included the following:

- ❑ Coordinating and supervising departments
- ❑ Nominating individuals to administering positions (staffing)
- ❑ Drafting budgets
- ❑ Negotiating contracts
- ❑ Creating specifications for tenders
- ❑ Recommend policies to council

Given these functions, the Board of Control became a powerful policy-making body and its recommendations usually carried the day since its recommendations could only be overturned by a vote of 2/3 of the council. Another point is worth mentioning – under a Council-Board of Control system municipal departments were directly responsible to a member of the Board of Control. There was nothing in place such as the present-day Chief Administrative Officer or City Manager.

“This strengthening of the municipal bureaucracy raised the questions of political control and accountability.”

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One finds mention of a Board of Control prototype in the City of Toronto as far back as 1896. A number of other cities across Canada followed suit (albeit of short duration) including Winnipeg 1906, Calgary (referred to as a Commission) in 1908 and Montreal in 1910. The Province of Ontario strongly supported the idea of a Board of Control and enacted legislation, which dictated that cities over 100,000 population had to have a Board of Control in place.

For all intents and purposes the Board of Control was to be the municipal equivalent of a federal or provincial Cabinet but a number of things militated against this. There was no party system in place to develop this nor was the power of a mayor the equivalent to that of a Prime Minister or Premier. Since members of the Board of Control were elected individually, there was a lack of political cohesion and more importantly they lacked the means to ensure that their recommendations were really carried out by the administration.

On the policy front, a number of problems emerged. Given their status and powers, members of the Board of Control spent more time competing with each other than working with each other. In effect what you had in place was a system of “wannabe mayors.” Not only that but their relationship with their council colleagues was not the best. Council members felt that they were second class political citizens in the scheme of things. In effect they were saying – what is our mandate? These problems caused Western Canadian cities like Edmonton and Calgary to move to a Council-appointed Commissioners form of government.

Nonetheless the Board of Control system continued in place in Ontario amongst the larger cities but dissatisfaction with this model was growing. Over the years, at the municipal level, there was a movement towards a corporate management style of administration with its emphasis on strategic planning, centralized

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

policy-making and the consequent need for a strong administrative head (like a Chief Administrative Officer). To use an old cliché, it was “déjà vu all over again.” Once more with the strength of administration there arose a need for a balancing mechanism on the political side but the Board of Control model with all its inherent problems was not the answer. The prevailing wisdom favoured a new approach, one, which built on the basic premise of an inner or core executive group but this time without the separate at large elections for those positions. The result was the establishment of a body of council called the executive committee whose membership comes from amongst the elected councillors.

Montreal has had an executive committee in place since 1921. One also finds that Metropolitan Toronto had an executive committee as far back as 1954 but its membership consisted of the heads of the various component local governments in Metro Toronto and who were members of Metro Toronto Council by virtue of their positions. The City of Toronto created an executive committee in 1969, Winnipeg Unicity in 1971, Ottawa 1980, Hamilton 1981 and Edmonton in 1984.

Some important points should be made here. Of the above-mentioned cities, only three have maintained the pure form of an executive committee: Montreal, Winnipeg and Edmonton. Toronto, in its various stages of development towards Megacity Toronto, did have an executive committee but at the present time, there is no executive committee but a Policy and Finance Committee, which for all intents and purposes functions as an executive committee. Part of the problem with the original Megacity executive committee was its unwieldy membership composition. In the cases of Ottawa and Hamilton, the Ontario provincial government created larger governments by amalgamating a number of municipal units and the transition teams implementing the changes favoured different standing committee models.

“Montreal has had an executive committee in place since 1921.”

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There is one other important point to be noted here and that is the relationship between the executive committee and the administration. One academic observer (Trevor Price) has stated that the reason for the creation of the City of Toronto executive committee in 1969 was to act as a political counterpart to the Chief Administrative Officer's office of that city. As well, Jim Lightbody in an unpublished paper, indicates that Edmonton moved towards the executive committee model because of a lack of confidence in the managerial style of government by council and commission in the late 1970s, so much so that the city hired a consultant who recommended that the city institute an executive committee system albeit with its members appointed by the mayor. This part of the proposal was never accepted. Criticisms of the council-commissioner form of government focused on matters such as the perception of complexity by citizens (who does what); vague lines of authority; diffusion of power; distribution of administrative responsibility and the aura of secrecy around Board of Commissioner's deliberations. With the election of Lawrence Decore as mayor and a strong supporter of the executive committee system, Edmonton instituted the system in 1984 and continues to this day.

"There is one other important point to be noted here and that is the relationship between the executive committee and the administration."

Three Categories:

- 1) Those within an executive committee
 - A. Montreal
 - B. Winnipeg
 - C. Edmonton
 - D. London, Ontario (although the Nomenclature is Board of Control, it is regarded as an executive committee)
- 2) Those with a standing committee which approximates an executive committee in varying degrees (in descending order).
 - E. Toronto
 - F. Vancouver
 - G. Ottawa
- 3) Those without an executive committee
 - H. Halifax (no committees)
 - I. Hamilton (committee of the whole)

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

A. MONTREAL, Quebec

Number of Members

- ❑ Membership can vary between 7 and 11
- ❑ Mayor is a member
- ❑ Appointed by Mayor – President and Vice-President as well (party influence; approved by council)
- ❑ Present membership – 11 + mayor (total council 73 + mayor)
- ❑ Mayor can replace any members

Mandate

- ❑ Prepares city budget
- ❑ Drafts and submits by-law to council for approval
- ❑ Requests to adopt, amend or replace city master plan
- ❑ Management of financial resources (job classifications, salaries)
- ❑ Building management (leases longer than a year of movable and fixed assets)
- ❑ Reports recommending the granting of exemptions and privileges
- ❑ Reports on taxes, permits or licenses to be introduced
- ❑ Enter into contracts (limit of \$100,000)

Notes

- ❑ Executive committee decisions not binding on Council
- ❑ Each executive committee member has a specific responsibility (department); i.e. economic development, transports, human resources etc.
- ❑ No extra remuneration



*McGill University,
St. Lawrence River
and distant hills
in Montreal.*

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

B. WINNIPEG, Manitoba

Members

- ❑ To a total of 7 (cannot be more than half of council (15 + mayor)
- ❑ Mayor + Chairperson of Standing Committee
- ❑ Others – Mayor is Chair

Appointment/Selection

- ❑ They are appointed by Mayor
- ❑ As above chairs of standing committees (4)
- ❑ Others appointed by Mayor
- ❑ Mayor determines number

Mandate

- ❑ Formulate and present recommendations re: policies, plans, budgets, by-laws, etc.
- ❑ Ensure implementation of policies
- ❑ Recommend appointments
- ❑ Supervise the CAO
- ❑ Co-ordinate the work of committees
- ❑ Receive reports from other committees and make recommendations to council
- ❑ Jurisdiction re: Audit, Business Liaison, Economic Development, Financial Management, Formulation of Policy, Property Assessment, Labour Contract Negotiations, Legal Services, Human Resources Policy, Intergovernmental Affairs, Information Technology



*Winnipeg's
City Hall in the
downtown area.*

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

C. EDMONTON, Alberta

Members

- Mayor + 4 Councillors (Mayor + 12)

Appointment/Selection

- Appointed by council
- Membership will rotate so that every councillor will serve at least one year on the executive committee

Mandate

- Reviews and makes recommendations about:
 - Corporate structure
 - Corporate finance
 - Corporate personnel issues
 - Intergovernmental issues
 - Corporate policy
- Approves collective bargaining agreements
- Settlement of actions/claims against the city
- Performance review of City Manager
- Audit matters
- Prepares the annual budget and monitors its implementation
- Acts as a policy coordinator between the City Manager and Council's standing committee
- Sets council agenda
- Coordinates flow of information and business between council, committees and administration
- Direct responsibility for
 - City Manager's Office, Corporate Services Department
 - Parts of Planning and Development Department



*Fireworks explode
in the foreground
of Edmonton's
downtown skyline.*

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

D. LONDON, Ontario

Nomenclature

- Board of Control* but considered for all intents and purpose an executive committee

Members

- Mayor + 4 council members (Total council: 14 Councillors + Board of Control + Mayor)

Appointment/Selection

- 4 Elected at large

Mandate

- Prepares and submits to council the operating and capital budgets responsible for
 - City Manager's Department
 - Legal Services
 - Corporate Services
 - Appointments to Boards/Committees
 - Utilities and Communication
 - Annexation Matters
 - Financial Planning
 - Audit and Management support services
- Presents reports and recommendations to Council



*The forks of
the Thames in
downtown London.*

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

E. TORONTO, Ontario

Nomenclature

- Policy and Finance Committee
- Also a Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) to the above to assist it in preparing capital and operating estimates

Membership Appointment/Selection

- Mayor + 10 members including Deputy Mayor (Mayor + 44)
- Striking Committee of Council

Mandate

- Sets the priorities and recommends annual budget
- Monitors budget performance and recommends in year changes to budget
- BAC – also reviews other matters having a significant impact on a future budget
- Corporate strategic plan
- Corporate intergovernmental and international activities
- Annual budgets of agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs)
- Tax policies
- Matters cutting across different departments and ABCs (Coordinator)



Toronto's City Hall with its two curved office towers over Osgoode Hall in the foreground.

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

F. VANCOUVER, British Columbia

Nomenclature

- City Services and Budget Committee

Membership

- Mayor ex-officio
- 10+ Mayor
- +all members of council automatically

Mandate

- Deals with city's revenues and their allocation including financial planning, budgets, taxation, capital works and municipal infrastructure.
- Grants
- Economic development including tourism
- Pacific Rim initiatives
- Industrial zoning
- Matters pertaining to Civil workforce including service expansions, computerization, worker health and safety, equal employment opportunity



*Vancouver skyline
seen from Granville
Bridge over
Granville Market.*

CASE STUDIES FOR ANALYSIS

G. OTTAWA, Ontario

Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee

Number of Members

- ❑ Mayor as Chair
- ❑ 9 council members
- ❑ (total council 21 + mayor)

Appointment/Selection

- ❑ Appointed by Council Nominating Committee
- ❑ Approved by Council
- ❑ Mayor – Chair

Mandate

- ❑ Provides direction to the administration
- ❑ Provides policy guidance on financial and administrative matters
- ❑ Corporate strategic planning
- ❑ Developing recommendations on issues relating to economic/business development
- ❑ Direct responsibility for City Manager Department, Corporate Services, Human Resources
- ❑ Supervise the implementing or orders of Council and gives such direction as may be necessary
- ❑ Review and recommend to Council approval of and adjustments to all annual budgets of departments
- ❑ Award contracts or purchase orders
- ❑ Submit proposed by-laws to council
- ❑ Recommend appointments of all general managers
- ❑ Recommend amalgamation, creation and elimination of city departments
- ❑ Consider, report and recommend to Council on the acquisition or purchase of lands and buildings required for any purpose
- ❑ Authorize the sale or disposition of other land
- ❑ Legal services
- ❑ Approve City of Ottawa participation in federal or provincial cost-sharing programs or employment incentive programs
- ❑ Council as a whole directly involved in the budget process – preliminary and final stages – each standing committee has a say in the budget process concerning departments and matters in its area of jurisdiction.



*Modern City Hall
Building in Ottawa.*

Numbers/Membership

There doesn't seem to be any set number or percentage of council for inclusion on the executive committee. The numbers for pure executive committee membership vary from 12 (16% of council in Montreal) to 5 (38% of council) in Edmonton to roughly 45% in Winnipeg. Of the quasi-executive committees, Toronto has 25% of council while Vancouver is a special case where all members of council are on the City Services and Budget (100%).

Appointment/Selection

The typical approach here is for committee of council (a Nominating or Striking Committee) to nominate an individual and the whole council ratifies the nominations. There are some exceptions:

- Montreal – the mayor (head of a civic party) nominates the individuals and council ratifies the nominations
- Winnipeg – Mayor plus the head of the other standing committees (3 in total) then the mayor can select the remaining members
- London – elected at large

“The typical approach here is for committee of council to nominate an individual and the whole council ratifies the nominations.”

ANALYSIS

Mandates

There is a huge list of responsibilities for the executive committees found in either provincial legislation (Charters, i.e. Montreal, Winnipeg) or in the by-laws of the city (i.e. Edmonton, Toronto). The dominating responsibility found in all the pure executive committee cities and most of the others is the preparation of the budget followed closely by a category called financial which pretty well covers all other matters of financial considerations. Financial responsibility is therefore the core of the existence of executive committees.

While not as prevalent as the financial aspect, there are a number of other responsibilities, which define the existence of executive committees. That is they appear on the list of executive committees for the most but not all studied cities.

They include:

- Coordinator
- Human Resources Policy (including appointments)
- Drafting By-Laws
- Directing Administration
- Intergovernmental Relations

“There is a huge list of responsibilities for the executive committees found in either provincial legislation or in the by-laws of the city.”

ANALYSIS

City	Executive Committee (EC) or Quasi-Executive Committee (QEC)	Other Standing Committees
Calgary	None	Finance and Budget Operations and Environment Transportation, Transit and Parking Community and Protective Services
Halifax	None	No Committees
Montreal	EC	Cultural Committee Ward Councils
Ottawa	QEC	Audit Planning and Development Health, Recreation and Social Services Transportation and Transit Emergency and Protective Services Environmental Services Agriculture and Rural Affairs Corporate Services and Economic Development (QEC)
Toronto	QEC	Administration Planning and Transportation Economic Development and Parks Works Community Services (QEC) Policy and Finance Committee
Hamilton	None	Committee of the Whole
London	EC (Board of Control)	Community and Protective Services Environment and Transportation Planning
Winnipeg	EC	Fiscal Issues Policy Committee on Public Works Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services Policy Committee on Property and Development
Edmonton	EC	Agenda Review Community Services Council Services Transportation and Public Works
Vancouver	QEC	Transportation and Traffic Planning and Environment (QEC) City Services and Budgets

ANALYSIS

Listed Responsibilities	Specific Mention in Cities						
	O	L	W	V	T	E	M
Budget		L	W	V	T	E	M
Finance	O	L	W	V	T	E	M
Co-ordination			W		T	E	M
Personnel/HR Policy		L	W	V		E	M
Master Plan							M
Contracts	O						M
Drafts By-Laws	O	L	W	V		E	M
Building Management							M
Directs Administration	O		W			E	
Economic and Business Development	O			V			
Appointments	O	L	W				
Purchasing	O	L					
Legal	O	L					
Intergovernmental Affairs	O		W		T	E	
Strategic and Corporate Planning	O	L			T	E	
Audit		L	W			E	
Assessment		L	W				
Labour Contract Negotiations			W			E	

Notes:

1. Compiled from City Web sites, relevant by-laws and City Charters

2. Legend Key:

- M** – Montreal, Executive Committee
- O** – Ottawa, Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee
- L** – London, ON, Board of Control
- W** – Winnipeg, Executive Committee
- T** – Toronto, Policy and Finance Committee
- E** – Edmonton, Executive Committee
- V** – Vancouver, City Services and Budget Committee