

BRIEFING

Chief Financial Officer's Briefing to
Priorities and Finance Committee
2019 October 08

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
PFC2019-1146

Independent Review of Non-Residential Assessment and Appeal System

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

The purpose of this briefing note is to address the Priorities and Finance Committee's direction to Administration on 2018 October 30 to:

1. Assign a lead to monitor and report back on the implementation of the consultant's recommendations as well as their impact on the non-residential assessment and complaint system, no later than 2019 Q3.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In response to a 2017 September 11 Notice of Motion, Heuristic Consulting was engaged to conduct an independent review of the non-residential assessment and complaint process. On 2018 October 30, the final report PFC2018-1222 (the Report) was presented along with several recommendations. The recommendations in the Report strive to move the relationship between the Administration and non-residential property owners and agents from adversarial to informative and collaborative. Administration has directed a great deal of effort to address the recommendations in the Report. While there is much to be accomplished, work is progressing together with key stakeholders on many fronts. The recommendations and status updates can be found in Attachment 1. This briefing note will highlight some key issues and successes grouped into: service improvements, collaborative agreements and relationship building.

Service Improvements

In 2019 Administration created a new section within the Assessment Business Unit - Customer Strategy. This group provides a focal point for customer service and works to determine ways in which Administration can become more customer centric. Administration will review internal policies and practices, and will continue to focus on the goal of improving the overall customer experience.

To ensure that employees are equipped to provide exceptional customer experience, additional training on skills such as "De-escalating situations in the workplace" as well as "Effective communication with owners, agents and legal representatives," taught by industry experts, have been provided to frontline staff.

Administration has re-examined the previous program, the Advanced Consultation Period, and in 2018 launched the Pre-Roll Consultation. Administration invited owners and agents in the month of October and November to receive an overview of the observed market movements over the past year, and invited them to engage and collaborate to ensure that Administration had the best assessment values possible. Pre-Roll Consultation is now in its second year, and owners and agents have been invited again this fall, from 2019 October 3 to 2019 November 8, to engage with Administration and have productive and collaborative conversations.

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Collaborative Agreements

As a result of the collaborative discussions taking place during Pre-Roll Consultation, Administration has been successful in reaching agreed upon values for a large portion of the assessment base. As this trend continues, Administration will focus more time on reviewing and analyzing the next year's values instead of engaging in activities such as tribunal. This will result in values that not only continue to exceed legislative standards but are ready earlier than in previous years which will aid in the discussions with owners and agents during Pre-Roll Consultation. Administration will continue to focus on complaint resolution prior to a hearing to ensure that they are making optimal use of resources and time and maintain better relationships with customers

Relationship Building

A key recommendation of the Report was to engage in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with principle tax agencies to establish basic ground rules for a respectful working relationship. In collaboration with Altus Group and AEC Property Tax Inc. a MOU was drafted and finalized in 2019. Administration will continue to involve other agencies with the MOU.

In 2019 Administration embarked on creating a collaborative tribunal schedule with key agents. As it was the first year for this process there were many lessons to be learned and improvements to be made. Administration conducted a thorough debrief, which included feedback from all participating agents, and incorporated this input into recommendations for improvement for the 2020 process. Heuristic Consulting has been engaged to work with all the stakeholders to facilitate the creation of agreed on guiding principles and processes for the 2020 scheduling process.

Stakeholder Feedback

Administration engaged Heuristic Consulting to obtain stakeholder feedback. Overall, the feedback confirms that there has been a substantial improvement in relations between tax agents and assessors. Although some exceptions are noted, tax agents feel that Administration is on the right track and are confident that improvements will continue. In the words of one tax agent: "The City of Calgary presents itself as an organization whose people are actively trying to improve service."

One area which has shown improvement over the last year is the sharing of information. While collaborative work is still underway, this not only speaks to information shared through Pre-Roll Consultation and tribunal but also engagement with the property owner to facilitate better understanding of large changes in specific property values before finalizing the roll.

Summary

Administration will continue to work towards addressing the recommendations within the Report. As part of this work, stakeholders will be engaged to ensure that the work that is being done has a positive impact and continues to move Administration to be more customer centric and collaborative in our relationships with our non-residential customers.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Attachment 1 – Independent Review of Non-Residential Assessment and Complaint Systems Recommendations Status Report