

Public Hearing Process Improvements – Recommended Approaches

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Executive Committee recommend that Council:

1. Direct Administration to continue to develop strategies and tools for a user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process; and
2. Direct Administration to report to the Executive Committee with cost estimates for the implementation of an integrated and automated registration system no later than 2022 Q4.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, 2022 MARCH 15:

That Council:

1. Direct Administration to continue to develop strategies and tools for a user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process; and
2. Direct Administration to report to the Executive Committee with cost estimates for the implementation of an integrated and automated registration system no later than 2022 Q4.

HIGHLIGHTS

- On 2021 March 22, Council directed Administration to develop a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process, including a number of specific components such as an integrated and automated registration system, exploring more accessible times for Public Hearings, and developing an endorsement statement outlining The City's commitment to anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion. This report provides Administration's recommended approaches and proposed next steps.
- What does this mean to Calgarians? Public Hearings are an important part of Council's decision-making process to incorporate perspectives from the public. The City's commitment to implementing a more inclusive Public Hearing process seeks to improve accessibility, inclusion and system functionality to enhance the public's experience.
- Why does this matter? Public participation in City decision making is a fundamental principle of our democratic system. Investing in resources to improve the overall Public Hearing process will contribute to opportunities that support equitable decision making; improve services, transparency and public confidence; and encourage a more civically engaged population.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A well-run city.
- Previous Council Direction is included in Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

In 2021 March, Administration was directed to develop a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process (Attachment 1). Since then, Administration completed a series of stakeholder engagements and activities in order to develop an approach to address the various components of Council's direction from the Motion Arising:

- 1) *Develop a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process:*

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- a. Public engagements were held to understand barriers to participation and opportunities for improvement. The *What We Heard Report* (Attachment 3) and *Innovation Lab Key Findings Report* (Attachment 4) outline the methods taken to engage the public and the key findings and priorities identified through these public engagements. The results have informed the development of the *Public Hearing Process Opportunity Solution Tree* (Attachment 5) which provides a visual representation of proposed solutions and ongoing work to achieve the desired outcome of a more inclusive and user-friendly Public Hearing process.
 - b. The *Public Hearing Process 2022-2023 Workplan* (Attachment 6), outlines the ongoing work and proposed next steps to continue to develop, test, evaluate and implement these new and different approaches.
- 2) *Identify the best method to implement an integrated and automated registration system:*
- a. Requirements gathering has been conducted and assessed against several available technology solutions. The *Technology Summary* (Attachment 7) outlines the outcomes of these preliminary investigations into technology options and remaining steps to be taken.
 - b. In the meantime, the City Clerk's Office will continue to ensure all Public Hearing registrants have the appropriate tools to follow the meeting (live stream, live agenda tracker) and to participate both remotely and in person.
- 3) *Explore the feasibility of holding public hearings at more accessible times:*
- a. A municipal scan (Attachment 8) summarizes Public Hearing meeting times in several municipalities across Canada. In jurisdictions of a similar size, it appears that Public Hearing meetings take place during the day and may continue into the evening.
 - b. The *What We Heard Report* (Attachment 3) indicates a desire from the public to be more aware of when the item is to be considered by Council, regardless of the time of day. As such, there is no current recommendation to change the timing of Public Hearing items, but rather focus on ensuring the tools allow for easy public participation at any time, along with increased communication on when an item is about to be considered by Council.
- 4) *Developing an endorsement statement:*
- a. Attachment 9 provides Administration's recommendation related to an endorsement statement for the public, including a legal review summary of the MGA and Procedure Bylaw 35M2017.

Next steps

To advance the inclusivity and maturity of The City's Public Hearing process, as outlined in the *Public Hearing Process 2022-2023 Workplan* (Attachment 6), the focus and next steps for Administration in 2022 and beyond will be as follows:

- a. Enhance the manual notification/communication process with Public Hearing participants, and monitor the City Clerk's Office capacity to support this operational business improvement until an automated technology solution is implemented in 2023 Q4, if approved by Council in the 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budget;

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- b. Implement an integrated and automated technology solution for the Public Hearing registration process by 2023 Q4, if approved by Council in the 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budget;
- c. Enhance and expand the Public Hearing information, tools and resources available on calgary.ca throughout 2022 and complete by 2023 Q4;
- d. Collaborate with internal partners and leverage resources across The City to increase the awareness of and public participation in Public Hearings;
- e. Continue to promote The City's commitment to anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusivity during Council and Committee meetings through awareness and education; and
- f. Conduct further research and engagement with non-users, diverse populations and community organizations/committees to design possible solutions to support equitable and accessible participation.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

- Public Engagement was undertaken
- Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- Public/Stakeholders were informed
- Stakeholder dialogue/relations were undertaken

The Innovation Lab, in conjunction with the public, the City Clerk's Office, Information Technology, Customer Service & Communications, Calgary Neighbourhoods, Planning & Development, Green Line, Assessment and Corporate Initiatives, gathered and analyzed data to identify opportunities to improve the Public Hearing experience. The Innovation Lab conducted the following engagement sessions:

- a. Interviews with staff from internal City business units that are connected to the Public Hearing process; and
- b. Three internal Accelerator workshops with City staff to review and analyze data from the public and staff.

These engagement sessions provided an important initial step to understand how The City might take action to create a more user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process. Attachment 4 sets out the *Innovation Lab Key Findings Report*.

The Engage Resource Unit surveyed the public to identify what's working well, the barriers to participation, how The City could improve accessibility and inclusion and opportunities around an integrated and automated online registration system. Attachment 3 sets out the *What We Heard Report*.

Additionally, the Innovation Lab conducted a small sample of interviews with both users and non-users from around Calgary. Attachment 4 sets out the *Innovation Lab Key Findings Report*.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

This project provides an opportunity to evaluate the Public Hearing process from a service-based perspective using a citizen focused lens. Seeking input from the public and City

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employees was integral in order to understand the service needs and impacts of the Public Hearing process. Social considerations and feedback from the engagement were analyzed and incorporated to inform the recommended approaches and next steps to improve The City's Public Hearing process.

Environmental

Not applicable.

Economic

Not applicable.

Service and Financial Implications

New operating funding request

While this report does not contain specific recommendations to adjust the current operational budget, any additional investments would be identified and incorporated into the 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budget processes.

RISK

The City's Public Hearing process has challenges in its current form due to a lack of clarity and barriers to participation. The public engagement results highlight the need to improve current technologies and operations in order to encourage participation. Approval and endorsement of the proposed recommendations will reduce the gaps in the delivery of a user-friendly and inclusive Public Hearing process.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 - Previous Council Direction and Timeline
2. Attachment 2 – Acts, Bylaws, Policies
3. Attachment 3 – What We Heard Report
4. Attachment 4 – Innovation Lab Key Findings Report
5. Attachment 5 – Public Hearing Process Opportunity Solution Tree
6. Attachment 6 – Public Hearing Process 2022-2023 Workplan
7. Attachment 7 – Technology Summary
8. Attachment 8 – Municipal Scan of Scheduled Public Hearing Meetings
9. Attachment 9 – Endorsement Statement Recommendation

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
David Duckworth	City Manager's Office	
Jill Floen	City Solicitor and General Counsel	Approve
Carla Male	Chief Financial Officer	Approve