

Planning & Development Services Report to  
Regular Meeting of Council  
2024 July 30

ISC: UNRESTRICTED  
C2024-0803

## **Future of Biodiversity Advisory**

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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations regarding changes on how the mandate of biodiversity is addressed through Council advisory bodies.

### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION**

During the closed session of the 2023 July 4 meeting with respect to report C2023-0762, Council directed Administration to return with a proposed bylaw to merge the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee and the Climate Advisory Committee.

### **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Council:

1. Direct Administration to authorize the continuation of the existing and expiring terms of public member appointments to the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee until 2025 Q2 and refrain from appointing new members to the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee in the 2024 annual recruitment for Boards, Commissions and Committees;
2. Direct Administration to return to Council by 2025 Q2 with an update to the Climate Advisory Committee Terms of Reference to explicitly include the mandate of biodiversity and update the member composition to include biodiversity expertise;
3. Effective 2025 Q2, disband the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee.

### **GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS**

General Manager Debra Hamilton concurs with this report. The proposed recommendations will ensure Council, Administration and Calgarians continue to benefit from strategic advice on both biodiversity and climate action, while simplifying our committee structures.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The BiodiverCity Advisory Committee (BiodiverCity Committee) provides Council and Administration with strategic advice on matters affecting urban biodiversity in Calgary in alignment with The City's 10-year Biodiversity Strategy.
- The Climate Advisory Committee (Climate Committee) provides Council and Administration with strategic advice on policies and initiatives that relate to climate mitigation and adaptation, of which natural infrastructure is a component.
- To address overlap between the BiodiverCity Committee and Climate Committee, Administration has identified ways to align the work and goals of these committees.
- In response to Council's direction to merge the committees, Administration is recommending more explicitly acknowledging biodiversity in the mandate and composition of the Climate Committee, and disbanding the BiodiverCity committee.
- This approach serves the public interest by streamlining advice to Council to align with the structure of the more recently approved *Climate Strategy: Pathways to 2050* and *2023-2026 Climate Implementation Plan*.

## **Future of Biodiversity Advisory**

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### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Background**

The BiodiverCity Committee advances the commitments and procedures identified within Our BiodiverCity, Calgary's 10-year Biodiversity Strategic plan (2015-2025) and The Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity. It consists of 10 public members and five Administration members. Although the BiodiverCity Committee frequently receives presentations on biodiversity initiatives from Administration and participates in public events to encourage eco-literacy, the BiodiverCity Committee had not been as active as a direct advisory body to Council.

The Climate Committee consists of 15 public members and one non-voting Administration member. This committee met for the first time in December of 2022 and works to advance Calgary's Climate Strategy: Pathways to 2050 (Climate Strategy). The Climate Committee has developed subcommittees that align to the Climate Implementation Plan thematic areas of Communities, Buildings, Energy Supply, Mobility, Natural Infrastructure, Accountability & Reporting and Human Health. Biodiversity is an important consideration in both climate mitigation and adaptation.

With the emergence of a Climate Committee whose mandate includes natural infrastructure, Council expressed a desire to streamline these advisory services. The original strategy which the Biodiversity Committee was meant to support is also approaching its 10-year timeline, which presents an appropriate timeframe to refresh the approach for an advisory body to Council on biodiversity matters. As such, in 2023, Council directed Administration to propose a bylaw to merge the BiodiverCity Committee and Climate Committee.

#### **Merger and Disbandment Implications**

To further understand the implications of Council's direction, staff met with the Municipal Boards & Governance Administrators (BCC), who clarified that a bylaw to 'merge' the committees would effectively disband and dissolve both committees, and then reconstitute a new committee.

Administration also engaged with both committees on the direction from Council. The public members of the BiodiverCity Committee expressed concern that the topic of biodiversity would be diluted within a merged advisory committee and that disbandment would represent de-prioritization of biodiversity.

The Climate Committee was concerned that the dissolution and reconstitution of their committee associated with an outright merger would severely disrupt their momentum in advancing climate action. However, the Climate Committee indicated that they are supportive of expanding their natural infrastructure mandate to explicitly include biodiversity, and have renamed their Natural Infrastructure subcommittee to become Natural Infrastructure/Biodiversity, as well as recommended that Council consider biodiversity expertise when selecting future members

#### **The Path Forward**

Based on the advice from BCC Administration and the discussion with both committees, Administration recommends incorporating biodiversity expertise and priorities into the work of the Climate Committee, and disbanding the Biodiversity Committee.

## Future of Biodiversity Advisory

As the driver of the motion was to maximize the efficacy of advisory services, the recommended approach will leverage the Climate Committee's structure and momentum to embed biodiversity more firmly in their work. This solution also better parallels The City's administrative service delivery structure, with both climate and biodiversity mandates residing with the Climate and Environment business unit.

Administration's recommendations respond to Council's direction in a way that enables more efficient integration of biodiversity into climate work than would result by completely dissolving both committees and reconstituting a new one.

Irrespective of the advisory body composition, Calgary remains a signatory to the Durban Commitment and the work of the BiodiverCity strategy would also continue under the relevant portfolios within Climate & Environment, Urban Forestry, and Parks and Open Spaces service committees. Furthermore, the current workplan of the BiodiverCity Committee, through to Q2 2025, is to prepare a report on the progress achieved in the 10-year timeframe outline in *Our BiodiverCity*. This analysis is intended to be used by Administration to inform the successor strategy to *Our BiodiverCity* in 2026.

### EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required |

Administration engaged with members of both affected committees. In addition to the concerns noted above from both committees, the BiodiverCity Committee and Climate Committee provided letters for Council's consideration as Attachments 3 and 2 respectively.

### IMPLICATIONS

#### Social

This approach serves the public interest by streamlining advice to Council in a way that maximises the benefit and impact of these committees. However, it is important to recognize that current members of the BiodiverCity Committee may feel that the organizations they represent would no longer have the same degree of direct access to Council.

#### Environmental

Although the disbandment of the BiodiverCity Committee may be perceived to signal a de-prioritization of biodiversity, the actual work to advance *Our BiodiverCity* continues irrespective of the advisory body composition. The recommendation proposed provides the opportunity to strengthen The City's commitment to climate action and biodiversity protection by streamlining and aligning the associated advisory committees in a way that helps support the implementation of both the Climate Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy.

#### Economic

No economic implications have been identified with the proposed changes.

## Future of Biodiversity Advisory

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### Service and Financial Implications

No anticipated financial impact has been identified with the proposed changes.

### RISK

There are some reputational risks associated with this report as it relates to Council's environmental priorities. The public members of the BiodiverCity Committee are concerned that the mandate of biodiversity will be diluted within the broader Climate Committee mandate and have expressed their desire to continue as a distinct committee. In response to those concerns, the recommendations include the direction to explicitly update the member composition for the Climate Committee to specifically target biodiversity expertise, and ensure biodiversity is formally recognized in the committee's terms of reference. The timing of the recommendations would also allow currently serving members of the Biodiversity Committee to carry their expertise into the Climate Committee.

There is also a possibility that the public may perceive this as an indication that biodiversity is not a priority for Council or Administration. However this can be mitigated by clear communication of commitments that work to preserve biodiversity through the protection of Environmentally Significant Areas, the restoration of natural areas, and eco-literacy initiatives in current and future service plans.

### ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Climate Advisory Committee letter to Council
3. BiodiverCity Advisory Committee letter to Council
4. Presentation
5. **Public Submissions**

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Debra Hamilton	Planning and Development Services	Approve
Kyle Ripley	Parks	Inform

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