

Municipal Census Reinstatement

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations for reinstating a biennial municipal census for Calgary, starting in 2027, responding to direction from Council resulting from the approval of Rezoning for Housing (CPC2024-0213).

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

On 2024 May 14, as part of the Rezoning for Housing public hearing, Administration was directed to return to Council before the Mid-Cycle Adjustments to the 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budgets with recommendations, including budget and organizational accountability, to reinstate the municipal census with the intention of conducting a census in 2027 and biennially thereafter. Background and previous Council direction are provided in Attachment 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Executive Committee recommend that Council direct Administration to:

1. Reinstatement a biennial municipal census starting in 2027, based on the options analysis in Attachment 2, and;
2. Bring forward municipal census funding requirements for consideration in the 2027-2030 Service Plans and Budgets.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

General Manager Debra Hamilton concurs with this report. Reinstating a municipal census will provide timely and high-quality information that enables data-based decision making on a wide variety of City initiatives and services.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Conducting a municipal census provides valuable insights into population and demographic trends, enabling The City to better understand the needs of our growing and changing city.
- Data-based decision-making helps The City efficiently match municipal services with the needs of residents and businesses, respond to growth and change, and support monitoring and actions on housing supply for Calgarians. A biennial census will provide this data foundation.
- Calgary is experiencing rapid growth and the five-year interval between federal census collections is not frequent enough to provide the required information needed to inform delivering municipal services.
- Census data will benefit not only The City, but also support other public, private and institutional users with valuable data for research, planning and service delivery.

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DISCUSSION

Calgary is growing rapidly. The responsibility of delivering effective municipal services and responding to this growth is best supported through data-based decision making. Data is critical in growth forecasting, urban planning, infrastructure modelling and tracking the effectiveness of service delivery. Since the discontinuation of the civic census in 2020, Administration uses the Statistics Canada Census of Population (federal census) to inform decisions. However, that census is collected on a five-year cycle. The community data is also not available for two years after, which is insufficient to guide decisions in response to Calgary's rapid growth and change.

The Government of Alberta's Municipal Census Manual (2022 December) states "Municipalities experiencing high growth may qualify for additional funding through provincial grants based on population counts". A municipal census would enable The City to request appropriate funding in cases where Calgary's population experiences high growth between federal census collections, as is the case currently.

Options Analysis:

Administration identified three options for reinstating a municipal census, summarized here and described in more detail in Attachment 2:

1. **Internally developed census:** Administration develops custom software and conducts the census;
2. **Internally developed census with licensed software:** Administration uses existing commercial software and conducts the census;
3. **Contractor supported census (Preferred):** An external contractor uses existing licensed software and assists Administration in conducting the census.

All costs in this report are based on estimates completed in 2022 for an internal report, adjusted for inflation and population growth. The total funding estimates for 2025-2030 include startup costs plus conducting two censuses during that time.

A City administrative team (the team) will be needed to prepare and manage census delivery. This team will also manage data processing, analysis and distribution of census results.

Internally developed census (Option 1): The team would be responsible for all elements of conducting a municipal census. This includes developing new software, requiring design and testing. The startup cost of this option is estimated at \$4.5 million, required over 2025-2026. Due to potentially long software development and testing times, software may not be completed in time to conduct the 2027 census. The biennial cost of this option is estimated at \$4.2 million starting in 2027. Total funding needed between 2025 and 2030 would be \$12.9 million.

Internally developed census with licensed software (Option 2): Using licensed software substantially reduces the costs associated with preparing the census. Administration could be ready to conduct a census in 2027 with this option. The team would be responsible for all elements of conducting a municipal census, except developing software. Census data would be collected with the licensed software and stored temporarily with the software provider, then destroyed after it has been transferred to The City. The startup cost of this option is estimated at \$0.7 million in 2027 and the biennial cost is estimated at \$4.9 million starting in 2027. Total funding needed between 2025 and 2030 would be \$10.5 million.

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Contractor supported census (Option 3 – Preferred): Administration would contract commercial software and contract some or all of the process of conducting the census. The team would prepare the census, manage contracts and data, and participate in some aspects of conducting the census, with support from the contracted group. The team will need one less staff member as contractor support would reduce the workload on the team. Census data would be collected with the licensed software and stored temporarily with the software provider, then destroyed after it has been transferred to The City. The startup cost of this option is estimated at \$0.7 million in 2027 and the biennial cost is estimated at \$5.0 million starting in 2027. The team will need one less staff member as contractor support would reduce the workload on the team. Census data would be collected with the licensed software and stored temporarily with the software provider, then destroyed after it has been transferred to The City. Total funding needed between 2025 and 2030 would be \$10.7 million.

Rationale for Contractor Supported Census (Option 3):

Using a contractor and commercial software is the preferred option because it provides confidence that reliable software will be ready to conduct the census beginning in 2027. It leverages expertise from firms that have conducted other municipal censuses in Alberta. A reduced administrative team covers most of the contractor cost. There is also only a small initial setup cost for this option. The contractor supported census option allows Administration to take increasing ownership of the census process over time and prioritizes focus on managing and distributing the resulting data. Should this option prove infeasible as the work progresses, Administration will adjust and reconsider the other options.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken | <input 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 |

Engagement was not required as this report is an operational options analysis developed in response to Council direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

A municipal census provides important data to support communities. Having a census provides valuable demographic data, allowing planners and service providers to understand how the population is distributed across Calgary. This helps optimize municipal services and match them to the needs of Calgarians. Timely data would also be used by school boards to plan enrollment and gain awareness of trends that impact their ability to deliver educational services.

Environmental

Accurately knowing how Calgary is growing and changing, and how population is distributed across the city, will improve The City's ability to deliver services and investments that enable improved environmental sustainability. Examples include using this data to strengthen The City's ability to provide improved mobility options, including public transit service, where population growth has occurred. This in turn supports lower greenhouse gas emissions.

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Economic

Timely information about population growth can be used to calculate impacts on City services, such as utilities and emergency response, which can help make service delivery more efficient and cost-effective. Having higher frequency census data available publicly also helps businesses make investment and expansion decisions based on target markets.

Service and Financial Implications

There is no immediate budget requirement associated with these recommendations. Funding for preparation work and the initial team setup will be come from a \$0.5M grant in 2025 and another \$0.5M grant in 2026, provided through the Housing Accelerator Fund. If the recommendations are approved, there will be costs associated with census reinstatement and collection, requiring commitment through the 2027-2030 Service Plans and Budgets.

RISK

- 1. Cost-benefit of undertaking a municipal census** – Some members of the public may believe that the benefits of more detailed and more frequent population data is not worth the cost of delivering a municipal census. However, if a municipal census is not supported, Administration can only use federal census information, which is insufficient to help guide decisions in response to Calgary’s rapid growth and change. The City would also not have an accurate population total to use to request additional provincial funding based on higher-than-expected population growth.
- 2. Data privacy** – Some members of the public may not be supportive of personal data being collected, used and stored by local government or contractors. This can be mitigated by educating the public about the benefits of a municipal census and informing them about the steps taken to protect their personal information. Administration will complete a privacy review to ensure the appropriate privacy risk mitigations are in place, as well as to ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and other legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Options Analysis and Additional Information
3. Presentation

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Debra Hamilton	Planning & Development Services	Approve

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