

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BIODIVERSITY – TERMS OF REFERENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the 2015 March 30 meeting, Council adopted the Biodiversity Policy contained within *Our BiodiverCity*, Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan. This plan contains principles for the protection and management of biodiversity in Calgary parks and neighbourhoods and sets out targets to measure The City's success. At the 2015 March 30 Council meeting, Administration was directed by Council to form a biodiversity advisory committee. This report proposes a terms of reference for this committee and a review of best practices of similar committees at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. The Terms of Reference (Attachment) will guide the establishment of the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee at the 2015 October 19 Organizational Meeting of Council.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Community and Protective Services recommends that Council approve the proposed BiodiverCity Advisory Committee Terms of Reference.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

On 2015 March 30, Council adopted the Biodiversity Policy and received for information *Our BiodiverCity*, Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan (CPS2015-0260) and directed Administration to "research the appropriate Terms of Reference and framework of a Biodiversity Advisory Committee [involving] broad representation across Calgary and return to the Standing Policy Committee on Community and Protective Services with a proposed plan no later than 2015 November".

BACKGROUND

This report provides the context and direction for a committee to be established by Council to oversee strategic direction on matters effecting biodiversity in Calgary and to advance the Commitments and Procedures identified within *Our BiodiverCity*, and *The Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity*, of which The City has been directed to be a signatory of. This report also contains a review of best practices from a sampling of three conservation advisory agencies operating at the municipal, provincial, and federal scales. This review informed general operating procedures for a biodiversity advisory committee of Council as well as the proposed Terms of Reference (Attachment). The Terms of Reference is aligned with The City of Calgary Council Policy "Appointment of Members of Council, Administration and Citizens to Agencies and Establishment of Council".

Our BiodiverCity, provides a local context strategy for the conservation of biodiversity in Calgary. The strategic plan is one of the milestones in The City of Calgary Council approved biodiversity work program and was created with input from a wide variety of experts, citizens and City staff. The plan contains principles, commitments and procedures for the protection and management of biodiversity in Calgary and establishes targets to measure The City's success. The strategic plan aims to help foster more resilient, biologically diverse open space and neighbourhoods for the benefit of Calgarians.

Following the principles established in *Our BiodiverCity* one of the procedures states:

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- Instill biodiversity values across The City of Calgary; collaborate to establish conservation values and practices into planning, managing and operating at The City of Calgary and in Calgary neighbourhoods.

A practice that supports this procedure is:

- Initiate a biodiversity advisory committee with representatives from The City, Council, local businesses, environmental nongovernmental organizations, academia and citizens at large to advance the commitments of *Our BiodiverCity*.

In alignment with the above mentioned practice and direction of Committee to research and propose a plan for a biodiversity advisory committee, the following section reviews the analysis that derived the proposed Terms of Reference for a biodiversity advisory committee of Council.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Administration researched best practices and selected three case studies that provide a high level overview of three biodiversity oriented conservation advisory committees operating at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. This review helped illuminate the breadth, resourcing, structure, mandate and roles that should be considered when forming a biodiversity advisory committee of Council.

Scottish Biodiversity Committee (Scotland)

Operating at the federal level, the Scottish Biodiversity Committee sets the overall strategic direction for biodiversity conservation in Scotland, and connects it with other related policy themes such as climate change adaptation. The committee promotes the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and monitors established biodiversity targets. There are several subgroups tasked with specific activities including:

- Delivery and Monitoring Group
- Habitats and Species Group
- Natural Capital Group
- Strategic Marine Issues Group
- Biodiversity and Land Use Communications Group
- Protected Areas Group
- Invasive Non-Native Species Group
- Science and Technical Group

The subgroups allow the committee to deal with specific issues and ensure appropriate staff and resources are allocated to specific areas of conservation concern. As a central body, the committee as a whole works with other levels of government or agencies.

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act Advisory Council (Newfoundland and Labrador)

Operating at the provincial level, the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act Advisory Council advises the provincial government on the creation and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in the province.

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The formation of the Council stems from the Newfoundland and Labrador Government passing the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, which was designed to guide the creation of a system of protected areas in the province that would “preserve wilderness, representative or unique ecosystems, species, or natural phenomena.”

The Council is composed of citizens from a variety of specialist backgrounds who are appointed by the provincial government for a three-year term, which can be renewed. The Council’s work is informed by scientific research and public input into priorities. It operates external to the government; its recommendations on conservation actions are proposed and the provincial government itself makes the final decisions. The Province’s Parks and Natural Areas Division oversees the Council. Members meet over two days, four times a year.

Biodiversity Committee, Town of Hanover (New Hampshire, US)

The Town of Hampshire Biodiversity Committee operates as a subcommittee to the Conservation Commission. It promotes biodiversity and ecosystem protection within the town, with a focus on indigenous flora and fauna conservation. The Committee is composed of members of the Commission, horticulturalists, sustainability experts, school boards and the Department of Public Works.

The Committee meets annually with subcommittees meeting as needed. Funding for the committee is through private donations and the Commission’s operating budget, along with grants from various organizations.

Findings and conclusions

General themes emerge from the preceding sample of biodiversity oriented conservation committees:

- The committee’s direct access to government decision makers;
- A membership composed of specialists in their relevant field working across sectors including researchers, educators and practitioners to act on and direct legislation;
- Regularly scheduled meetings;
- Capacity to develop subcommittees for additional work program focus; and
- Collaboration with affected industry.

The proposed BiodiverCity Advisory Committee Terms of Reference (Attachment) reflects these themes. With the mandate to advance and report on the Commitments and Procedures in *Our BiodiverCity* and *The Durban Commitment*, the Committee will need to outline how to balance and provide proper decision making context to environmental, social and economic issues.

Forming an advisory committee on biodiversity can provide additional human resources and capacity to address the complex realm of urban conservation and provide critical representative input to government decision making. Clear reporting structure, unambiguous objectives, diverse expertise, and political commitment and buy-in are consistent themes of a well functioning advisory committee. By being tasked with implementing the vision of *Our BiodiverCity* and *The Durban Commitment*, the Committee should be formalized through a Council approved Terms of Reference. This will both organize the group and ensure commitment to Council’s vision of biodiversity. Notably, conserving biodiversity in Calgary is an

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ongoing task of Administration and incorporated into its normal operations. Therefore, the Committee's work must complement Administration's work and Council policy, rather than compete with it. This point is further addressed in the Risks section of this report.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

External and internal stakeholders were actively involved in planning, developing and finalizing *Our BiodiverCity*, which gives direction for establishing the proposed committee and structure.

The proposed BiodiverCity Advisory Committee Terms of Reference was circulated to internal City business units and external stakeholders including but not limited to educators, biologists, consultants, and local environmental groups with an opportunity to provide feedback. Comments were positive, insightful and incorporated as appropriate into the Terms of Reference. Administration also worked closely with City Clerks in writing the Terms of Reference.

Strategic Alignment

The Terms of Reference is directed by, and therefore aligned with, the Council approved Biodiversity Strategic Plan policy and *Our BiodiverCity*, Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan. This report also aligns with the 2015-2018 Action Plan and supports Council Outcomes:

- H5 (*protect and enhance our urban forest and natural landscape throughout Calgary*);
- H6 (*continue to build public awareness and understanding of our shared responsibility to conserve and protect the environment*); and
- H9 (*optimize the existing parks network to ensure Calgarians have access to nature and healthy and active lifestyles*).

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

Social

A proposed responsibility of the Committee is to support programs that encourage Calgarians to understand and protect biodiversity. Increasing the understanding of nature encourages Calgarians to feel comfortable and safe in natural outdoor spaces, which can have an overall impact on decreasing social isolation.

Environmental

A proposed responsibility of the Committee is to support appropriate land stewardship, protection of water resources and reduction of Calgary's environmental footprint.

Economic (external)

A proposed responsibility of the Committee is to recognize the financial, social and environmental cost of removing or modifying ecological systems in developing Calgary, and include consideration of these costs in municipal decision making.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

It is expected a modest operating budget would be required for administrative costs. Should additional funding be needed by the Parks business unit, a budget request would be brought forward to Council following Committee establishment.

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Current and Future Capital Budget:

Capital projects that arise from the advice of the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee will be requested through the capital budget process.

Risk Assessment

The following risks have been identified:

1. Philosophical conflicts amongst members; and
2. Lack of member commitment.

The risks have been mitigated by a properly established and vetted Terms of Reference for the Committee. The Terms of Reference proposes a membership of multiple perspectives – both internal to and external to The City – to ensure informed discussions, buy-in, and action for the biodiversity conservation program. Additionally, the Committee is positioned and mandated to ensure its work compliments City work rather than competes with it.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Council has adopted broad policy and legislation to conserve Calgary's biodiversity. The SPC on Community and Protective Services directed Administration to review the appropriate Terms of Reference for a biodiversity advisory committee and provide a plan of action. The proposed Terms of Reference for the BiodiverCity Advisory Committee adheres to these directions.

ATTACHMENT(S)

BiodiverCity Advisory Committee Proposed Terms of Reference