

Introduction

The Special Projects Division strives to operate in a professional and courteous manner. It is also focused on treating its clients and partners in an open, transparent and timely manner.

A complaints policy has been established to provide customers with a clear procedure to follow when making a complaint about the Special Projects Division. Equally, the policy provides the Special Projects Division and its staff with a clear process for handling and resolving complaints.

Complaint Definition and Form

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the Special Projects Division's policies, procedures, employees or quality of service. Examples of complaints include, but are not limited to, the perception of:
 - failure to do something agreed to do;
 - failure to observe policies or procedures;
 - unacceptable delay;
 - staff error;
 - discourteous actions/statements by staff.
- A complaint may be received verbally in person or by telephone, or in writing by hand delivery, mail, fax or email. The attached form may also be used to submit a complaint.
- **Please note:** A separate legislative procedure applies to complaints made under Section 20 of the *Development Charges Act, 1997*. Please refer to the *Development Charges Act, 1997* or contact staff for more information.

Receipt of Complaint

- Written complaints are date-stamped and immediately referred to the staff person involved, the complaint officer and the Director (see Notification Standards below).
- Verbal complaints may be dealt with by the staff person involved. The Director must be informed of the nature of the complaint and its resolution.
- Anonymous complaints are referred to the Director.
- Complaints not within the jurisdiction of the Special Projects Division are forwarded to the appropriate Division and the complainant is advised.

Procedure

The Special Projects Division uses a clear three-step process to handle complaints.

First Step:

- Customers are encouraged to first discuss their complaint with the staff person involved. Most complaints can be resolved informally and quickly this way.
- The staff member involved in the complaint should attempt to resolve it, with input from the Director if necessary.
- If the complainant asks to be referred to the Director, the staff person should immediately comply.
- If the complaint concerns the conduct of a staff person or if it cannot be resolved, staff should immediately refer it to the Director and inform the complainant of the Director's name and contact information.
- If the complaint is made directly to management, the staff member involved shall be notified.

Second Step:

- The Director reviews the complaint, and may attempt to resolve it immediately with the involvement of the staff member.
- If further investigation is required, the Director records the complaint and contact details, investigates the complaint to determine its validity and proposes a resolution (see Investigations below).
- The Director may request that a verbal complaint be put in writing, especially if it involves a serious or complex matter.
- For all verbal and written complaints requiring investigation, the Director indicates to the complainant when they will contact them with a resolution or update.

Third Step:

- If not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, at the Director's discretion or at the complainant's request, the complaint is referred to the Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer.
- Where a complainant is dissatisfied at the end of the third stage, they are advised of the opportunity for external review by the Ombudsman.

Investigations

Investigations may be conducted during the second and third step. The investigation may include:

- Discussion(s) with the complainant to clarify the complaint, confirm common understanding, clarify outcome sought, and explain complaint procedures.
- Discussion with staff involved (with union representative, if applicable).
- Review of background information such as policies and procedures, previous written communications and other documentation.
- Obtain and review other expert opinions or perspectives.

At each stage of escalation, it should be determined whether the previous investigation has been adequate.

Notification Standards

The Special Projects Division applies certain notification standards for responding to complaints.

a) Target Response Times

- Within two business days, receipt of the complaint is acknowledged by the Director in the same medium as the complaint (e.g. letter, e-mail).
- Within four business days, the complainant is provided with:
 - A complaint tracking number
 - Staff contact information
 - Steps that will be taken to settle the matter
 - An estimated investigation duration
- Within 15 business days, the complainant is provided with either a response or a report on progress with an explanation for the delay. At that time, the complainant is advised of when the next contact will be – either for a proposed resolution or for the next progress update.

b) Other Notifications

- The complainant is notified when their complaint is escalated.
- The complainant is notified if the complaint is terminated (e.g. it is determined that the complaint is a suggestion, feedback, a service request, a compliment, a

duplicate etc.) or if more details are required for the complaint handling procedure to continue.

- **Note:** From time to time, there may arise extraordinary circumstances where the Special Projects Division may not be in a position to guarantee that these standards can be satisfied (e.g. during labour disruptions).

c) Notice of Decision and Resolution

- The outcome of an investigation is explained and reasons are provided if the evidence presented by the complainant are not accepted as follows:
 - Written complaints receive a written notice of decision.
 - Verbal complaints receive written or verbal notice at the Director's discretion.
 - If investigation determines that the reasons for the complaint are not justified and no further action is required, the complainant is notified.
 - If investigation determines that the complaint is justified, the complainant is notified of corrective action to be taken and any remedy proposed.
 - If the proposed resolution is accepted by the complainant, the complaint is closed and the completed tracking form, along with any other relevant documentation, is filed. The complainant is given the opportunity to respond or to seek internal review if they are not satisfied with the decision made about their complaint.

Record of the Complaint

- During complaint escalation, staff maintain a record at all stages including:
 - name of the complainant
 - details of the complaint
 - communications with complainant and other parties
 - the decision and action taken, and
 - the complainant's response.
- The complaint officer is responsible for logging the complaint in the complaints registry and assigning a complaint number.

Guiding Principles

- Complaints are dealt with promptly and resolved as quickly as possible.
- Staff treat complaints as confidential and protect complainant's privacy.
- Complaint investigations are fair, impartial and respectful to parties involved.
- Complainants are advised of their options to escalate their complaint if they are dissatisfied with treatment or outcome.
- Complainants are provided clear and understandable reasons for how decisions on the complaint were made.
- Updates are provided to complainants during investigations.
- Complaints are used to assist in improving services, policies and procedures.

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