

Improving Council Decisions by Better Engaging Citizens across Toronto

Date:	July 4, 2012
To:	City Council
From:	Mayor Rob Ford
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

Summary

City Council on May 17, 18 and 19, 2011 adopted item EX 5.3 as amended and referred a number of motions to the Mayor for consideration and report back to Council. Subsequent consultation with Councillors suggested the City should take a broader approach and develop a *Citizen Engagement Strategy* to better inform decisions made by Council.

This report presents recommendations to Council with regard to some of the factors considered by the Mayor's review and presents those recommendations to Council in order to create a process, structure and tools to improve citizen engagement and better inform Council decisions.

Recommendations

1. Request the City Manager report to Executive Committee on definitions and categories of Council Advisory Bodies and minimum standards for their establishment, terms of reference, membership, governance and accountability.
2. Request the City Manager develop, and report to Government Management Committee, a plan to improve the City's ability to provide, coordinate, manage and apply statistically valid quantitative and qualitative research data to better inform City and Council decision-making.
3. Request the City Manager and City Clerk report to Government Management Committee on a process to better synthesize public input, research data and other pertinent information sources in order to facilitate more timely and informed City and Council decision-making.
4. Request the City Manager and City Clerk report to Government Management Committee on process to track Council and Committee decisions, and the resulting workflow involved in

implementing those decisions, so the current status of, and amount of hours and resources expended or assigned to, each initiative can be followed by Councillors.

5. Request the City Manager report to Government Management Committee on other measures that may be taken to improve Council's ability to make evidence-based, data-informed decisions.

Background

Role and Term of Council Advisory Bodies

Each term, City Council establishes Council Advisory Bodies to support its objectives for the term. These bodies are established with specific mandates and terms of reference, which should be determined in advance, for the term of Council and expire automatically at the end of the term. Some Council Advisory Bodies may be established for durations shorter than the length of the Council term, but none may continue beyond the end of the Council term.

Since the purpose of Council Advisory Bodies is to advise Council, each should include an appropriate number of Councillors who can ensure the Council Advisory Body remains focused on its Council-approved mandate and ensure that Council is kept informed of the body's progress against that mandate. To allow for holidays and schedule conflicts, there should normally be a minimum of two Councillors appointed to each Council Advisory Body.

As part of its quorum requirement established in its Terms of Reference, each Council Advisory Body should normally require at least half of the Councillors appointed to the body be present, in order for the body to conduct its business.

Councillors are appointed to Council Advisory Bodies by City Council, on recommendation of Striking Committee. Citizen appointments to Council Advisory Bodies should normally be appointed by Council on recommendation from the Civic Appointments Committee. The Committee will ensure nominees represent the mix of skills and experience necessary to achieve the body's mandate and to satisfy Council's diversity policies and objectives.

Some Council Advisory Bodies may be established with a view to providing a representative sample of citizens to provide insight and opinion on specific issues of interest to Council. When this is the case, the selection process for these citizen appointments should be managed in such a way to select a statistically valid representative sample of citizens.

Currently Established Bodies

Since December 1, 2010, a number of advisory bodies with mandates that are specific, time-limited, and reflect the priorities and objectives established by Council for this term. These bodies will serve the public well as they achieve their objectives and deliver on their mandates, and include the following:

- Disability Issues Committee
- Advisory Panel Regarding Transit on Sheppard Avenue East

- Film, Television and Commercial Production Industry Committee (Film Board)
- Independent Investment Advisory Committee
- Seniors Strategy Subcommittee
- Special Housing Working Group
- Task Force on the State of Hockey in Scarborough
- Toronto Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee
- Toronto Child Care Advisory Committee
- Toronto Prosperity Initiative
- Creative Capital Advisory Group
- CPIP Appeals Committee

In addition to these advisory bodies, a number of Mayor's Advisory Bodies have been established or are being established. The mandates of these bodies are also specific, time-limited, and reflect the priorities and objectives established by the Mayor's Administration. These bodies, too, will serve the public well as they achieve their objectives and deliver on their mandates, and include the following:

- Mayor's Task Force on Arts & Theatre
- Mayor's Task Force on Childcare
- Mayor's Pan-Am Games Secretariat
- Mayor's Economic Development Roundtable
- Mayor's Transportation Strategy Roundtable – Fall 2012
- Mayor's Small Business Roundtable – Fall 2012
- Mayor's Redtape Reduction Roundtable – Fall 2012
- Mayor's Customer Service Roundtable – Fall 2012

Better Engagement

During the conduct of this review, its scope was broadened significantly following input from Councillors who articulated a desire for a broader Citizen Engagement Strategy. That requirement was also part of the Mayor's campaign platform and formed a key piece of this Administration's mandate. The Chair of Government Management was asked to play a leading role in shaping this strategy and he has already introduced a number of initiatives designed to improve civic engagement in a way that will help inform Council decisions with more effective citizen input. More improvements will be introduced through Government Management Committee over the coming months.

Part of the Citizen Engagement Strategy is also finding ways to provide information to citizens in a way that is convenient, understandable, informative and evocative while remaining affordable. Better informed citizens can then play a more effective role in informing Council decisions.

One of the weaknesses of the current Council decision-making process is a lack of statistically valid research to inform decision makers at critical points in the decision process. While the City uses historic methods of gathering public input, many of these methods do not provide Councillors with information that is truly representative of the broader public or of specific stakeholder group(s) being engaged. The City should explore ways to improve the quality of public consultation by finding new approaches, technologies or methods that would make public input more statistically valid and representative.

Council currently receives input in a number of ways, including:

- Letters, emails and telephone calls.
- Constituent meetings.
- Public deputations at Committee meetings and Community Councils.
- Town Halls and Public Meetings.
- Traditional Surveys.
- Web Surveys.
- Focus Groups.
- External Public-Opinion Research.
- Program Advisory Committees.
- Council Advisory Bodies.
- Mayor's Task Forces.

These methods provide a largely inexpensive way to determine the breadth of public opinion, support or concern within a largely self-selected sample of stakeholders. The major limitation of these methods is that they do not normally provide statistically valid data to support informed decision making. Ways should be sought to encourage more representative participation from the general public, or from stakeholder groups.

Some new consultative and research methods the City should explore may include:

- Statistically valid public opinion research
- Telephone Town Halls
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Representative Stakeholder Panels – that would provide a statistically representative sample of the broader population, or of specific stakeholder groups, for consultation purposes.

These new tools may require new funding and, therefore, the City Manager should consider them within the 2013-15 operating budget development process.

This Administration has advanced work on a number of fronts to improve citizen engagement. These include:

- City Council requested on June 14 and 15, 2011 (GM4.13) the City Manager to report to Executive Committee in Fall 2011 with an update on Corporate Civic Engagement strategy with information on engagement and consultation activities, the City's engagement community of practice, inclusive of corporate and divisional engagement activities. The City Manager reported to Council in July 2011 on this matter.

- In June 2012, Council referred GM14.3 to the City Manager for further consideration and report to Government Management Committee in October, 2012 with a work plan and priorities for various Civic Engagement opportunities including the following:
 - EX15.15 (January 2012) – Executive Committee requested the City Manager and City Clerk to report to the Government Management Committee on opportunities to improve availability of information about governance and opportunities for citizen engagement in the rotunda of City Hall, including options to open a Civic Engagement Office in the rotunda; launch a dialogue to reconnect people with government; and to install better wayfinding and other signage in City Hall.
 - EX15.16 (January 2012) – Executive Committee requested the City Manager and City Clerk to report on recommendations for Enhancing the City of Toronto's Engagement with Citizens, Transforming City Hall to include ways to: improve the way notice is given for meetings, open houses and issues that affect citizens; improve public participation in the budget process; ways to improve the election process to improve participation of eligible voters; options to provide childcare at public meetings.

- Since this Administration took office, the City Clerk has significantly enhanced the Meeting Management Information System that allows members of the public to stay informed of Council and Committee business.

Moving Forward

Moving forward, it will be important to adopt new methods of engaging with citizens in a way that better informs future Council decisions. Ultimately, the City should transition from a report-driven decision culture to a data-driven decision culture. As a small step in that process, the City Manager should recommend a formalized template for various types of Council Advisory Bodies, including draft Terms of Reference and selection processes; and should implement new ways to produce statistically valid research in a form useful to Council as part of its decision making process.

To ensure Council Advisory Bodies are able to fulfill their mandates effectively, the City Manager should report on definitions and categories of advisory bodies and minimum standards for their establishment, terms of reference, membership, governance and accountability.

In addition to engaging the public through advisory bodies, the City also gathers important input through public surveys, polls and focus groups. This research plays an important role in all aspects of City business, from strategic planning to program development and delivery, to improving customer service and to supporting Council's decision-making.

To ensure these research activities are able to effectively represent public opinion, the City Manager should report to Government Management Committee with recommendations to improve the City's ability to provide, coordinate, manage and apply statistically valid quantitative and qualitative research data to better inform City and Council decision-making.

The City Manager and City Clerk should jointly report to Government Management Committee on a process to better synthesize public input, research data and other pertinent information sources in order to facilitate more timely and informed City and Council decision-making.

Council and Committees frequently request reports on matters that are similar to, or the same as, reports previously requested by Council – and for which work may already be underway by staff. Often,

these duplicate reports cause additional work on the same file, or delay the results of the initial report request while additional research is undertaken. On investigation, it was discovered that there is currently no City-wide practice of tracking Council requests and the work they generate. This leaves Councillors with no independent way of knowing what work is already in progress, what work is about to be reported to Council, or what work has been delayed. This also means City managers have no city-wide way to coordinate work or track the amount of time and resources required to meet Council's requests for reports or to implement Council decisions. This information could be used by Council to improve its decisions and by City staff to improve workload management and efficiency.

The City Manager and City Clerk should investigate a process that would track Council decisions and other City initiatives on a corporation-wide basis. This workflow tracking system should include, at least: the creation of "decision tickets" generated by Council and Committee decisions, or City Manager directives, tracking of tickets through staff workflow, accounting for staff time and resources allocated and expended on each ticket, and information required for accurate Council and Committee agenda forecasting. The system should be appropriately accessible to City managers, City Councillors, Committee Chairs and the Mayor's Office.

Finally, the City Manager should report to Government Management Committee on other measures that may be taken to improve Council's ability to make evidence-based, data-informed decisions.

Mayor Rob Ford
Toronto