



## OMBUDSMAN SPECIAL REPORT

### A Commitment to Oversight: Five-Year Review 2009-2014

<b>Date:</b>	August 19, 2014
<b>To:</b>	City Council
<b>From:</b>	Ombudsman
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

#### SUMMARY

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The Office of the Ombudsman opened in April 2009. The attached document represents a progress report on the office's development, its contributions, as well as its opportunities and challenges. The report reviews the increase in both the number and complexity of complaints and compares them against the lag in staffing and resources. It concludes the work of the office is not sustainable without a significant increase in budget.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

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**The Ombudsman recommends that:**

1. City Council receive the attached report as an information item.

#### Financial Impact

There is no financial impact from the adoption of this report. Resources will be requested for consideration as part of the 2015 operating budget process. There will be pressures on the 2014 operating budget which may not be on target at year-end.

#### DECISION HISTORY

This report is tabled pursuant to section 173 of COTA and Chapter 3 of the Municipal Code.

#### COMMENTS

As the office becomes better known, the number of complaints is increasing and public is increasingly turning to the Ombudsman for dispute resolution, problem solving and education. Complaint volume in the first seven months of 2014 is up by almost 60% over the same period last year. In addition, public servants and elected representatives are using ombudsman services much more frequently to consult on thorny issues, mediate conflicts, and seek policy input.

The vast majority of complaints to the office are resolved without the need for a formal investigation. Thirty-two investigations have been conducted, of which 24 were systemic. Over 300 recommendations have been made to date and since 2010, Council and its committees have adopted over 60 motions related to ombudsman work. The key impacts of these recommendations may be summarized as:

- Improvements in existing or the creation of new legislation, policies and procedures;
- Improvements in the way the public service communicates, both internally between divisions and externally with the public;
- An increase in fairness, accountability and transparency.

The office's capacity and resources are insufficient for the task it faces. A backlog of complaints is emerging. The office is in a precarious position financially and resource-wise.

The lack of resources to match the actual workload is compounded by the recent expansion of jurisdiction adopted by Council without a commensurate increase in budget. Comparable jurisdictions continue to be far better resourced and as a consequence better equipped to serve their residents.

This report to Council and the public is to spell out the fact that the Ombudsman's ability to meet the office's statutory mandate is being compromised by a chronic lack of funding. The immediate need as part of the 2015 operating budget is to recruit six more staff with accompanying workstations and computer equipment. This will require a budget increase of \$800,000 spread over two years. The requirement for 2015 would be \$400,000.

Should Council not approve the budget requirements, the office will be setting up a backlog register of complaints. Residents will be informed of their complaint's priority and placement in the queue. They will be informed of the rationale for the assessment and the reasons for the delay.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

(Original signed)

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Ombudsman

## **ATTACHMENT**

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