

Public Petitions at the City of Toronto

Date: January 24, 2022
To: Executive Committee
From: City Clerk
Wards: All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to outline acceptable paper and electronic petitions, as described in Council Procedures (Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 27) and provide considerations for establishing an e-petition platform.

The City Clerk, as directed by Council Procedures currently accepts petitions submitted in electronic or paper formats.

If City Council wishes to pursue the implementation of an e-petition program, it should direct the City Clerk to prepare the necessary budget submissions for Council consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Clerk recommends that the Executive Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications from the adoption of this recommendation.

DECISION HISTORY

In 2016, the City Clerk reported to the Executive Committee at its December 1, 2016 meeting on the feasibility of an e-petition program.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-98580.pdf>

At its September 23, 2021 meeting the Executive Committee deferred consideration of the letter from Councillor Paul W. Ainslie, Scarborough-Guildwood (Ward 24),

requesting support for legal and acceptable methods to collect resident petitions electronically, to its January 2022 meeting.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EX26.17>

COMMENTS

The Council Procedures already allow the acceptance of electronic petitions in addition to paper formats.

There are several third-party e-petition websites that organizers can use. Petition organizers can, and do, submit e-petitions from these sites; the Clerk accepts all petitions containing information that meet requirements of Council's Procedures. The use of these established e-petition sites:

- Offers choice to petition organizers;
- Avoids development and sustainment costs by the City; and
- Avoids management of another personal information bank.

Requirements for submitting petitions

There is no requirement for hand-written or hard copy petitions; there is no need to collect signatures in-person.

A petition organizer may deliver their petition by e-mail, mail, or fax to the City Clerk or Member of Council. Prior to the COVID-19 emergency, petition organizers also had the option to deliver their petition in-person.

The public may submit petitions to the Clerk on a current agenda item. For petitions that are not related to a current agenda item, the public must submit their petition to a Member of Council. Members of Council may introduce any public petition without written notice or permission.

The Council Procedures set out the following requirements for the submission. Public petitions can be in handwritten, printed, or printable (i.e. electronic) form and must:

- contain contact information for the organizer for confirmation;
- contain the signature, unless delivered electronically, and the name and address of at least one signatory and, if possible, the name and address of all signatories;
- contain an explanation of the petitioners' cause or position;
- not contain any improper matter; and
- be appropriate, respectful and temperate in its language.

The City Clerk's Office will improve public experience organizing petitions

The City Clerk's Office will make improvements to the information we make available to residents interested in organizing petitions. These improvements do not require amendments to Council Procedures. We will:

- make the rules clearer on the City's website;
- make information available through civic outreach programs like "My Local Government";
- provide petition templates and samples (printable or electronic) to assist organizers that include required elements for a petition.

An in-house e-petition platform would require new resources to procure and sustain.

We believe the use of third party petition sites together with improvements to the information available to petition organizers is preferable to procuring and sustaining an in-house petition application.

However, if City Council wishes to pursue an in-house e-petition platform like the House of Commons, it should establish and fund a new capital project. Any resolution to do this should take into account the following considerations:

- The time to develop and implement would be approximately 12-24 months;
- A new capital project of approximately \$300,000 would be required;
- There would be an estimated annual operating budget impact of \$120,000 for annual license fees, and to fund staff to manage and sustain the application.

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SIGNATURE

John D. Elvidge
City Clerk

ATTACHMENTS
