

Document 3 – Supplemental ESAC Comments on Governance

Background

During the 2019-2022 Environmental Stewardship Advisory Committee (ESAC) term, Committee members found that there were certain elements of the structure that worked well and other aspects that could be improved. Many of the issues that were previously identified as areas for improvement still have not been sufficiently addressed (e.g., rescheduling of meeting times, insufficient advance receipt of presentation decks, insufficient ability of ESAC members to set agenda, receiving presentations too late in the process to make a difference – including on budgetary items).

The members of ESAC appreciate this opportunity to provide feedback.

Positive aspects included:

- the secretariat support for ESAC provided by the City was professional and provided assistance in moving items forward (though there was a delay in getting minutes of ESAC meetings out to Committee members). Chris Zwierzchowski was pleasant and easy to deal with. The attendance and support of Councillor Menard (liaison to the Standing Committee on Environmental Protection, Water and Waste Management) or his staff as much as possible was appreciated.
- having the opportunity to hear from and question senior city officials and leads on environmental and water/waste programs and policies was valued.
- setting out the terms of the workplan early in the Committee's term was initially beneficial and aided in planning purposes, though frequent rescheduling and cancelling of meetings was frustrating to members.
- the choice of Ottawans from various parts of the city and with different skill sets and reflecting the diversity of the city, should continue to be a consideration (i.e., demographically, ages, cultural background, experience, language).
- flexibility with remote meetings during pandemic was appreciated, to ensure that the Committee's function could continue in the absence of in-person meetings. (Though hopefully in-person meetings can be resumed during the next term of Council.)

What could be improved:

- The Committee should be given greater leeway to seek items for the agenda and to hear presentations on certain issues from staff and the general public, so long as the items are within the overall mandate of ESAC. Members frequently expressed concern that these restrictions on influencing the agenda undermined the benefits they could provide to the City and they felt underutilized. Some members expressed concern that ESAC was more of a PR/bureaucratic exercise and that meaningful input was not really welcomed and that substantive decisions had already been made on items.

- A more proactive approach by the Chair of the Standing Committee on Environmental Protection, Water and Waste Management toward ESAC would be beneficial. We encourage the Chair of the next Standing Committee to fully utilize the first meeting with ESAC to establish a strong rapport with its members to reiterate the role of the committee and then to maintain a connection with ESAC and its chair. On the other hand, having a liaison like Councillor Menard who has a strong and demonstrative support for environmental issues was beneficial.

- Greater certainty regarding meeting dates, as meetings were often rescheduled from the agreed upon date which made it difficult for some volunteer members who had already planned their schedules around original ESAC dates. At times, the rescheduled date was provided with little notice.

- The frequency and length of meetings was very variable. At times, agendas were relatively light and items were postponed, or too many items were on an agenda which resulted in very long meetings that could feel exhausting at times.

- There was a perceived hesitancy in City staff to use the committee to provide advice early on in the process of developing policies/strategies/programs. Standing Committees of Council and staff should be encouraged to ask for the advisory committee's advice WELL IN ADVANCE of actually tabling draft budgets or other major documents. Instead of sharing a summary document of the budget after the fact, City staff should consult ESAC and other advisory committee at the beginning of the process to ask for specific recommendations (e.g., ESAC could recommend budgeting for a specific number of people to implement Energy Evolution and other aspects of the climate change program or invasive species removal). This timeline avoids the need to be concerned about confidentiality of a draft budget – rather it informs the process of preparing the budget (not commenting on what is essentially a fait accompli).

- Faster responses to informational inquiries submitted by ESAC members. On numerous occasions the delays in getting responses from staff seem to indicate that ESAC was not a priority. For example, in May 2022, ESAC Committee members made request for latest data on breakdown of percentage of trips by transit, cycling, or on foot (data which has already been collected in previous years); on Queensway widening, and on the number of tree removal permits for protected trees. Yet as of the final ESAC meeting on October 20, a response has yet to be received (nor any acknowledgement by staff) despite repeated follow-ups from the Coordinator for the committee. This delay and lack of response is unacceptable.

- Advice from ESAC should be conveyed to City staff before their initial reports are completed (whenever possible) and this information should be conveyed to the appropriate Standing Committee before it considers the matter. Too often, the Standing Committee only heard of ESAC's advice at its meetings. To get full value from ESAC member expertise, presentations should be scheduled so ESAC input feeds into a product that is being prepared, rather than final tweaks (which often come too late to be meaningful). The schedule of ESAC meetings should be structured accordingly.

- As the Advisory Committee process moves to the next step, consideration should be given to staggering terms so that there is greater continuity of ESAC membership throughout council's term.
- Flexibility in terms of the number of meetings per year. More meetings with fewer agenda items rather than fewer meetings with more agenda items. On several occasions, ESAC members expressed a desire for an additional (5th meeting) so that the existing meetings could be shorter. The agendas should be structured so that meetings would normally last only two (2) hours to allow ESAC members sufficient time to ask questions. There should normally be only two or maximum of three substantive presentation per meeting (two is preferable, unless additional presentations concern an item that already was passed).
- The mayor should reinstate having annual or biannual meetings with Chairs and Co-Chairs of advisory committees (realizing that COVID had an effect on in-person meetings; however, virtual meetings still could have been held).
- Have an initial meeting between members of the Standing Committee and ESAC members to assist with transition of new members and develop rapport. There should be a follow-up meeting at least once during the council term. (Members should be encouraged to meet with one another informally too.)
- Identify opportunities where multiple advisory committees may be able to provide input on a topic (e.g., Planning Advisory Committee and Accessibility Advisory Committee).
- Conduct follow-ups of goals and action items on the advisory committee's workplan, to identify new opportunities to act on goals, and to ensure that progress is being made.

Overall, ESAC commends the City of Ottawa for establishing citizen-based advisory committees and urges the City to better refine the role of ESAC, and consider how council and City staff can fully use the committee in developing various initiatives. *Striking a new Environmental Stewardship Advisory Committee early in the 2022-2026 term is essential, particularly given the threats to the well-being of present and future generations of Ottawa residents due to climate change and other pressing environmental issues. Transparency on the process for any revisions to ESAC is imperative (The wording in italics was added on March 9, 2023 as there has been no word about future ESAC for the 2022-26 term – ESAC was not included in the list the City released early in this term of other advisory committees that were seeking applicants. No explanation for this delay or the current status of ESAC or its successor has been provided by the City.)*

Suggested Term of Council Priorities for Ottawa City Council for 2022-2026

The Environmental Stewardship Advisory Committee would like to offer the following suggestions to City Council for its 2022-2026 Term of Council Priorities. While the present Term of Council Priorities represent admirable goals, given the well-documented effects of climate change that Ottawa residents and Canadians in general are facing, we

believe that primacy should be given to responding to environmental challenges in conjunction with the other priorities facing the City in both the long and short-term. Accordingly, we have submitted suggestions for a revised Environmental Stewardship Priority plus additional language (in italics) for priorities for Transportation and Mobility, Governance Planning and Decision-making, and Financial Responsibility.

Environmental Stewardship and Climate Change: Promote long-term sustainability and setting aside sufficient funds to implement actions necessary to reduce our environmental footprint (*including a more ambitious target for greenhouse gas emissions*) *and to embrace adaptation measures to mitigate the effects of climate change.* These means include using green technology, promoting energy efficiency, and protecting our natural resources and land to enhance the quality of the environment for Ottawa residents. *Specific actions include combatting the presence of invasive species and encouraging the protection of habitat to support endangered flora and fauna. A volunteer-based program to target and remove invasive species, would be one way of implementing this idea. (The Habitat Heroes program in Reston Virginia is a good model to follow).*

Transportation and Mobility: Meet the current and future transportation needs of residents and visitors *by adopting measures to ensure that the City's transit services are reliable, accessible, and financially sustainable. Use of alternative methods of transportation like transit, cycling and walking is encouraged through budgetary commitments to infrastructure improvements, enhanced urban design and minimized construction of additional roads.*

Governance Planning and Decision-Making: Achieve measurable improvement in residents' level of trust in how the City is governed and managed, apply a sustainability lens to decision-making and *creating and implementing an open governance model that compares well to best-in-class cities around the world.*

Financial Responsibility: Be financially responsible to the residents of Ottawa by practicing prudent fiscal management of existing resources, and by *using a sustainability lens to make sound-long-term choices that allow core City programs and services to be economically, environmentally and socially sustainable now and into the future.*