STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE

GOVERNANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Revised Recommendations for Priorities Committee Bylaw 19-2015

Report Purpose
To provide Council with the Governance Advisory Committee's recommendations on revising the mandate and structure of the Priorities Committee.

Recommendations:
1. That the Priorities Committee mandate be expanded to include debate on reports and the ability to make recommendations to Council that specify proposed actions.
2. That the Priorities Committee Chair duties be rotated according to the Deputy Mayor schedule.
3. That in addition to the current Open House, all other public presentations (i.e. those by industry, community groups, etc.) appear at a Priorities Committee meeting, unless the Mayor's Executive Committee determines that a presentation should be included as part of a Council meeting agenda.
4. That Administration prepare an amendment to the Priorities Committee bylaw that includes both the housekeeping changes identified by the Governance Advisory Committee and the substantive changes approved by Council at the February 21, 2017 meeting; and that the updated bylaw be presented to Council for consideration by the third quarter of 2017.

Background and Council History
At the June 21, 2016 Council meeting, Council approved a motion to have Administration prepare, in consultation with the Governance Advisory Committee, a revised Priorities Committee Bylaw (19-2015) for Council's consideration. This revised bylaw was due back to Council in October 2016.

Following this direction, Administration worked with the Governance Advisory Committee to look at some potential revisions and updates to the committee. The Governance Advisory Committee presented six recommendations to Council for consideration at the October 25, 2016 meeting. The recommendations addressed a number of matters: mandate of the committee, chairing of the committee, degree of formality, and location of committee meetings.

While there was fairly strong support for some of the recommendations, Council was not receptive to the idea of changing the location of the Priorities Committee meetings especially if doing so would result in costs for outfitting one of the current Community Centre meeting rooms with audio and visual technology. Ultimately, Council directed that the report be referred back to the Governance Advisory Committee for further study. Council also directed the Governance Advisory Committee to report back to a Council meeting by the end of the first quarter of 2017, taking into account the discussion and information requested at the October 25, 2016, Council meeting.

Report
Municipal Councils often rely on standing committees and/or committees of the whole as a means of holding policy governance discussions. Some larger municipalities such as the City of Edmonton leverage multiple standing committees (e.g. Community and Public Services Committee, Urban Planning Committee, Utility Committee, etc.) to accomplish certain tasks or make recommendations to Council on the range of issues identified in the committee's terms of reference. The membership of standing committees is a subset of the municipal Council, but all members of Council may "attend any meeting of any Standing Committee and participate in debate, but may not make motions or vote" (City of Edmonton, Bylaw 12300, Procedures and Committees, section 149). For example, the City of Edmonton's Utility Committee consist of four members of Council and the committee "reviews and makes recommendations to Council about reports on the governance, policy, budget, and rate regulation of the City Regulated Utilities" (City of Edmonton, Bylaw 12300, Procedures and Committees, section 168.3). It is important to note that standing committees are established by Council and, except where authority has been specifically delegated, are expected to have their actions approved by Council. One of the key purposes for these standing committees is to receive input from the public prior to making a recommendation to Council.

Other municipalities use a Committee of the Whole which includes all members of Council. As with standing committees, the matters addressed by a committee of the whole will be tailored to the needs of the municipality and outlined in the committee's terms of reference and mandate. There is a fair amount of variety in the mandates of this type of committee especially since some municipalities use both standing committees as well as a committee of the whole, while others may only leverage one or the other. Typically, procedures in committee of the whole are less formal; however, there are still procedural rules and expectations which apply. In general, the Committee of the Whole device is used for deliberation and for formulating recommendations that are then considered by Council. The main purpose of such a committee is to act as an "advisory, thinking process" that supports the Council by making recommendations which are in turn debated and decided by Council (Cuff, Executive Policy Governance, 113).

There are a number of advantages in having a committee of the whole: all of council is concurrently informed and can participate in policy debates, greater flexibility allows for more time and focus on key policy questions and provides an opportunity to have issues surface earlier in the decision making process, and the less formal setting may be conducive to fulsome debate which results in a focussed decision-making discussion at Council. One of the concerns associated with the use of a committee of the whole is that the importance of actual council meetings are diminished since the council may feel like they are simply ratifying the recommendations made by the committee. However, ideally committee of the whole meetings are intended to flesh out key issues, discuss options, hear from the public or experts if required, and move the matter forward to the next council meeting. In other words, a committee of the whole is not intended to be a decision-making meeting (Cuff, Executive Governance, 115).

The Governance Advisory Committee's review of the current Priorities Committee Bylaw has resulted in a number of recommendations. One of the key recommendations is to amend

the Priorities Committee bylaw so that the committee is able to engage in debate and make recommendations to Council (currently the Priorities Committee is limited to asking questions for clarification and simply referring items to Council for decision, or referring pending items to Administration, a council committee or a person). This change is not intended to dilute Council's role since there is a key difference between debating policy issues and having debate about a refined and specific resolution. Further, such a change would mean that matters requiring Council's direction could be presented and debated as part of the Priorities Committee agenda at an earlier stage of the decision-making process.

The second recommendation deals with chairing responsibilities for Priorities Committee. Currently, it is the Mayor's role to chair these meetings; however, the Governance Advisory Committee recommends having the chair rotate according to the deputy mayor's schedule so that the Mayor has more ability to participate in debate at Priorities Committee and so that other members of Council have the opportunity to gain experience as chair.

The third recommendation deals with public presentations. Currently, the Priorities Committee includes an open house component where members of the public may present on most topics of relevance to the community (there are a few topics which are not allowed under the bylaw). No change is being suggested to the open house; however, the Governance Advisory Committee recommends amending the Priorities Committee bylaw so that it becomes the default venue to receive public presentations. The Governance Advisory Committee understands that there may be instances where Council may wish to have a particular presentation added specifically to a council meeting agenda and thus the Governance Advisory Committee is recommending that the Mayor's Executive Committee have the ability to make such a determination. The rationale for this recommendation is to ensure that Council meetings are reserved for decision making on Council's priority goals and required matters.

The Governance Advisory Committee is advocating these changes in order to better define the role and function of the Priorities Committee and to ensure that both committee and council meetings are leveraged as effectively as possible. A summary of examples on the use of committee of the whole in other Canadian jurisdictions is provided in Enclosure 1.

Next Steps:
If Council approves the recommendations in this report, Administration will continue to work with the Governance Advisory Committee to prepare proposed amendments to the Priorities Committee Bylaw. Further, should Council approve recommendation 3, then Administration will review the Mayor's Executive Committee terms of reference and prepare any required amendments to the Strathcona County Boards and Committees Bylaw. A separate report on those proposed changes will be prepared for Council's consideration for the fourth quarter of 2017.

Enclosure(s)
1. Summary of Examples of Committee of the Whole in other Canadian Jurisdictions