

CENSUS POLICY REVIEW

RECOMMENDATION

That Executive Committee recommend to City Council:

That Council Policy C520C - Census Policy, be repealed.

Requested Council Action		Decision required.	
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle		ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals	
CONNECTED This unifies our work as we work to achieve our strategic goals.		Urban Places	
City Plan Values	LIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A community of communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Conditions for service success
Corporate Business Plan	Managing the corporation		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	Council Policy C520C - Census Policy		
Related Council Discussions	CR_7483rev - Fall 2019 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment, City Council, December 11/12/13, 2019		

Executive Summary

- Administration has reviewed Council Policy C520C - Census Policy. A decision regarding the Census Policy is required. Options include updating the policy to reactivate the Census service, pause or repeal the policy. There is currently no planned municipal census.

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- Municipal census data has historically added value to the work of the organization but is limited in a number of ways.

REPORT

In 2022, the Office of the City Clerk conducted a review of Council Policy C520C Census Policy, which guides the administration of the municipal census service. The review had two principal drivers:

- The current state of the policy, which is specific to census projects scheduled for 2019 and 2020, and is therefore due for review.
- Potential changes to the provincial Municipal Census regulation, which may reinstate the Determination of Population regulation as part of the Province's per capita grant funding formula.

This report provides information regarding the historical uses, value add, and limitations of the municipal census service and recommends the Council Policy C520C Census Policy be repealed.

Municipal Census Service | Background

Edmonton's municipal census is an official count of dwellings and population and collects other demographic information such as age and gender. Since 1878, Edmonton has conducted 87 municipal census projects, the most recent occurring in 2019.

Alberta is the only province that permits municipalities to undertake a census project, providing discretionary authority via the *Municipal Government Act*. Data collection processes and reporting standards are provided in the Municipal Census Regulation. The regulation is currently under review by the Government of Alberta, with consultation with municipalities having taken place in Q2 2022. Prior to its repeal, which came into effect in 2020, the Determination of Population Regulation found within the Municipal Census Regulation was used by the provincial government to allocate per capita grant funding to municipalities.

In 2018, an analysis of the census service was conducted as part of the Program and Service Review (PSR). The PSR, which is summarized in Attachment 1, offered eight recommendations. The principle recommendation to continue with a municipal census service cited the link between municipal population counts and provincial grant funding, the use of municipal census data to project infrastructure and service needs and the long term application of municipal census data to develop land use planning and development strategies.

In 2019, Council discontinued the municipal census service as part of broader efforts to reduce the operating budget and due to changes made to the provincial government's grant allocation process that repealed the Determination of Population regulation.

Review Process

Administration's review of Council Policy C520C Census Policy encompassed a scan of the types of municipal census data used by internal and external service users, an analysis of corporate process adaptations and emergent gaps following the discontinuation of the municipal census and budget projections for project delivery scenarios.

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Internal service users were categorized in two different tiers. Primary Service Users are those who rely on municipal census data as part of their core business function. These include the Corporate Economist, sections of the Urban Planning and Economy (UPE) Department, and Branches in Community Services. Secondary Service Users apply municipal census data either circumstantially as part of their typical work or as part of ad-hoc projects. Branches from all departments of the organization were identified in this tier. A list of external partners was determined by an assessment of a group's level of involvement in past census projects and the requests received to access customized datasets. External partners include Edmonton School Division, Edmonton Catholic School District, the Edmonton Police Service, Edmonton Public Library, and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

Historical Uses and Value Add of a Municipal Census

Consultation with internal service users identified a number of corporate applications of municipal census data.

A municipal census service:

- supports forecasting and growth projections related to economic opportunities, housing demand, infrastructure development and transportation service needs;
- provides a population count necessary for per capita provincial grant funding, should the regulation be reintroduced;
- provides a valuable secondary input layer when conducted between federal census cycles, offering a means to validate projections and assumptions that are derived from federal census data; and
- strengthens operational planning for current and emergent legislative projects, including elections, byelections, ward boundary reviews.

Municipal census data is used broadly across the corporation. During the consultation process, every Department identified branches and sections who use the data circumstantially, at least. Many secondary service users indicate that, at minimum, they access census data annually. For the 2019 municipal census, the total view count for all reports is almost 60,000.

Limitations

While broadly accessed and applied, the municipal census service does have limitations. Typically speaking, the data from the federal census is thought to be more statistically valid and is used by Departments and Branches, including the Corporate Economist and sections of UPE, as a primary input source from growth forecasts and projections.

There can be discrepancies between municipal census population counts, the Government of Alberta's provincial population estimate and those found within federal census data. These discrepancies emerge due to the different data collection practices and reporting methodologies that are employed. At the municipal level, these are set by the Municipal Census Regulation and are often not aligned with federal practices. The discrepancies in reported population numbers can make it difficult to accurately assess the assumptions and projections derived from the federal census, when municipal census data is used as a secondary input layer.

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Furthermore, public participation in the municipal census is discretionary. Provincial regulations require a 95% completion rate for municipal census data to be considered sufficiently valid but limit the ways in which non-responses can be accounted for. This restricts the extent to which the municipal census can be considered a primary input source.

As of Q3 2022, the Government of Alberta has not made a decision on whether to reinstate the Determination of Population regulation. It is not known when one is expected. A comparison of Provincial Population Estimates and municipal census population counts is provided as Attachment 2.

Decision Points

Attachment 3 provides a summary of Council's decision points. Council may decide to update the policy, thereby reinstating the municipal census service, pause the policy or repeal it. Pausing or repealing the policy would mean that no municipal census project is planned.

If Council were to pause or repeal Council Policy C520C Census Policy, provincial population estimates would be used to determine the City's per capita grant allocation, regardless of whether the Determination of Population regulation is reinstated. Currently, the city population count constitutes 48 per cent of the funding formula for the Municipal Sustainability Initiative, \$95 million of which is estimated by the provincial government to be allocated to the City of Edmonton in 2023.

In the absence of municipal census data, federal census data is the primary source of demographic information. Federal data is the principal input source for many of the growth projections determined by the organization, given its greater statistical validity and certainty. There would be a reduced opportunity to validate and test these growth assumptions in between federal census projects, which only occur once every five years, should the municipal census service remain discontinued.

If Council chooses to update Council Policy C520C Census Policy, a Council decision is required regarding the frequency of the census project. There are two viable options in this regard: a biennial schedule that avoids overlap with a municipal general election and a federal census, and a municipal census that occurs once per budget cycle, in between the scheduled federal census. An illustration of these frequencies is shown in Attachment 4.

A biennial schedule offers a more regular supply of data to test growth projections and assumptions and a more frequent opportunity to submit a municipal population count for grant allocation purposes, should that option be reinstated. This frequency is the preference of primary service users within the organization and is recommended in the 2018 PSR report. A census project that occurs once every budget cycle offers those same opportunities, albeit less frequently, at a smaller operating cost.

Council may choose to pause Council Policy C520C Census Policy. This could coincide with the outcome of the Government of Alberta's review of the Municipal Census Regulation and the Determination of Population Regulation, which would provide clarity on the allocation of provincial per capita grants. Should Council direct a municipal census to be completed and

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approve funding, approximately 18-24 months would be required to put the necessary technology in place.

Budget/Financial Implications

If Council Policy C520C Census Policy was updated to reinstate a census service, a currently unfunded service package would be required. Each census project operates on a two year development and delivery model.

Funds would be required to:

- acquire project personnel, including data collection census workers;
- procure a data solution used to manage the data provided by residents. This cost would be incurred per project;
- support public facing engagement strategies. In 2019, a unique census code was mailed to each residential address to support the online participation, which contributes to a higher completion rate. As described above, a data solution unique to each project is required to facilitate this process; and
- purchase and maintain the hardware required to enable door to door collection of census data by census workers.

The projected cost of each census would be approximately \$4.7 million, including the required data management solution to enable online census options, and required tablets to enable more efficient door to door collection.

Should updates to Council Policy C520C Census Policy establish a biennial project frequency, the project cost of \$4.7 million would be incurred twice per budget cycle.

Given the limitations of the census project, primarily the typical use of municipal data as a secondary input layer, the associated delivery costs, the prevalence of other data sources and the uncertainty regarding the Government of Alberta's allocation of per capita grant finding, Administration recommends that Council Policy C520C Census Policy be repealed.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

A number of external partners were consulted during the review of Council Policy C520C Census Policy. The Edmonton School Division, Edmonton Catholic School Division, and the Edmonton Police Service confirmed their use of municipal census data to inform infrastructure planning and management, and service design and delivery. They did not provide comment on Council Policy C520C Census Policy. The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and the Edmonton Public Library did not provide feedback.

GBA+

GBA+ considerations and processes are embedded throughout the census service. Accessible participation opportunities, including the use of online data collection technology, as well as a call centre, and door to door collection are provided to all residents. The use of community recreation facilities and branches of the Edmonton Public Library as community data collection

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points reduce the number of direct visits to private residences. Staff in public facing roles, including all Census workers, were trained on the use of inclusive language. Finally, the 2019 Edmonton municipal census was the first to recognise genders other than man and woman within its question structure.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Program and Service Review - Census Service | Summary
2. Provincial Population Estimates and Municipal Census Population Counts | Comparison
3. Decision Points | Summary
4. Census Project Schedules
5. Council Policy C520C - Census Policy