



NAMING COMMITTEE: MOVING POLICY TO ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION

That the October 11, 2023, Naming Committee report EXT01996, be received for information.

Report Purpose

Information only.

Note: City of Edmonton Naming Committee Chair, Erin McDonald and Vice Chair, Matthew Dance will be attending to present this report, if selected.

Executive Summary

The Committee's intent with this document is to align the 2021 Naming Policy with an appropriate and robust process that supports the policy outcome. This will be achieved by describing the issues and gaps in the current process. Solutions and a path forward are also proposed.

REPORT

The City of Edmonton's Naming Committee is comprised of up to seven volunteers appointed to the committee by City Council. The mandate of the Naming Committee (the 'Committee') is to approve names of the City's development areas, parks, municipal facilities, roads, honorary roads and wards, in accordance with, and subject to any exemptions or restrictions imposed by Bylaw 17138 - Naming Committee Bylaw and Council Policy C509C - Naming Municipal Assets.

Naming applications are presented to the Committee through three main streams: community, developer and City Administration applications. The Committee strives for consistency between the three streams by applying a consistent approval process. The Committee reviews each application to ensure that it meets the criteria laid out in Policy C509C.

In August 2021, City Council approved a new Naming Policy for the City of Edmonton. The updated policy demonstrates a significant shift from previous naming policies: Indigenous naming, fostering relationships with Indigenous communities as well as diversity and inclusion are now centred in naming practice. Since the approval of the Naming Policy in 2021, the Naming

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Committee has had more than a year to work with the policy. It has identified some place-naming process gaps and several substantive operational and implementation issues.

Current Status

The importance of place naming cannot be understated. On the one hand, place names preserve cultural heritage by publicly memorializing important people, places and events. On the other hand, place naming "...should not be seen in isolation from broader questions of social and spatial justice, especially in relation to ... racism, racial segregation, and the ongoing legacies of white supremacy."¹ Indeed, as Berg and Kerns² argue, colonial settler place naming strategies play a role in asserting dominant cultural authority on the physical landscape.

These notions of power, class, race and gender play out in the Edmonton context. Specifically, past naming policies in Edmonton have reflected historic settler ties to Europe, erasing Indigenous place names and limiting or excluding non-European place names from the map of Edmonton. Furthermore, historic naming practices have also engendered patriarchal values across Edmonton. For instance, an initial analysis³ of Edmonton place names memorializing people from the 1950s to the 2000s found that male place names such as Churchill and Hawrelak represented 57% of place names compared to female names at 7%. In addition, there are no non-binary names on record. For completeness, the remaining 36% of Edmonton places named in this time period represent flora, fauna or some other non-human representation.

Place names are metaphors for representation. When citizens look at the geography of Edmonton, they should see themselves reflected in the mosaic of places that comprise this city. Who is represented, and who has the power to influence and decide on place names sends powerful signals of community values. Given that most of Edmonton's place names have origins in the United Kingdom and Europe, and places named for people are most frequently named for men, this documents a substantial underrepresentation of Edmonton's diversity in place names.

In short, the City of Edmonton's Naming Committee has an obligation to evaluate the naming process within systems of colonialism and through the lens of the new, and more inclusive, naming policy. The 2021 Naming Policy represents a substantive shift from the past naming policies in prioritizing Indigenous naming, fostering relationships with Indigenous communities as well as diversity and inclusion. As the Naming Policy has shifted, the naming process should follow and also shift to address issues to diversity and inclusion.

Substantive and Process Issues

The following represents the substantive and process issues that the Naming Committee grapples with when trying to align a new Naming Policy with an evolving naming process. This

¹ Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman, D., & Azaryahu, M. (Eds.). (2017). *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place* (1st ed.). Routledge.

² Berg, L., and Kerns, R. (1996). "Naming as Norming: 'Race', Gender, and the Identity Politics of Naming Places in Aotearoa/New Zealand." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14(1): 99–122.

³ Matthew Dance conducted this analysis with the Naming Edmonton Open Dataset, based on Naming Edmonton from Ada to Zoe. The dataset can be found here:

<https://data.edmonton.ca/Externally-Sourced-Datasets/Naming-Edmonton/8e7n-6xm5/data>

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section will outline the issues, and the next section Next Steps will outline recommendations and a timeline.

Substantive Issues

Data

The City of Edmonton possesses two datasets of place names:

1. The 'Naming Edmonton' open dataset of place names resides on the City of Edmonton's open data portal.
 - a. This dataset is based on the book Naming Edmonton from Ada to Zoe and includes place names from 1795, when Edmonton was incorporated, to 2004, when the book was published.
2. A closed dataset of place names maintained by City of Edmonton administration. This dataset is based on the Naming Edmonton open data and is currently being brought up to date with those place names approved by the naming committee after 2004.

Data Completeness

As previously stated, the Naming Edmonton open dataset is only current to 2004. The closed data, currently maintained by City Administration, is being brought up to date, with the vision that it will be maintained as current on an ongoing basis.

Issue: Having a dataset two decades out of date underpins the Committee's challenge in making evidence-based recommendations.

Data Accuracy

It is not certain that the metadata associated with each place name is accurate. Data elements, such as the description of the place name, location and year assigned, may not be precise. For instance, many place names representing diversity were approved in the 20th Century.

Issue: These names may not have been properly vetted with native language speakers and may be geographically or factually inaccurate.

Appropriateness of Names

Assessing the appropriateness of Edmonton's place names should be considered a risk assessment exercise. As documented by place names such as Oliver, there is a risk that Edmonton place names may be deemed problematic when viewed through the lenses of the new naming policy, Indigenous Framework, or Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).

The Commemorative Policy review process has indicated a desire to review existing names, however with no progress from that committee in over a year, it is critical to establish a plan and pathway, and show intentional action to audit the names already applied in Edmonton.

Names Reserve List

A Names Reserve List is maintained by the Naming Committee. Its purpose is to act as a database of place names that have been pre-approved by the Naming Committee. It was established shortly after the Names Advisory Committee was formed in 1956. It provides the opportunity for

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names to be added by the Naming Committee in reserve until they are needed and then applied to a civic asset.

Issues: The Names Reserve List:

- Is not governed by a policy that defines how and when a reserve name may be added to the list or used.
- Many names have remained on the list for several decades and no longer meet the criteria established within the current Naming Policy.
- Many names have limited, erroneous or unsubstantiated information from historical submissions that should be carefully reviewed before being applied to any municipal infrastructure and may no longer be appropriate.

Process Issues

The Naming Committee has identified several areas, described below, that represent barriers to citizens accessing the naming process.

Recruitment to the Naming Committee

Even the most robust process will be undermined if the decision-makers don't represent the diversity of Edmonton in the 21st century. Within this context, the Naming Committee and the City of Edmonton should consider a long-term recruitment strategy to target a slate of qualified candidates with diverse skill sets, professional and educational backgrounds, and lived experiences.

Community Engagement and Outreach

A foundational element of recruitment is to build community awareness that is aware of the context, roles and responsibilities of the Naming Committee. More community-level engagement is necessary to build this awareness and engender enthusiasm for community-driven naming applications. For instance, a standard presentation or video could be developed and made available to Edmonton communities through the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

Indigenous Namings

Policy C509C states that the "...primary function of naming municipal assets is to recognize and commemorate: Municipal partnerships with Indigenous communities; and Local Indigenous histories..."

While there has been engagement with the Indigenous community on recent namings of civic assets, there is a lack of a robust Indigenous naming process to help future applicants and Administrative groups when considering the use of an Indigenous name. An Indigenous Naming Process ought to outline a consistent practice and answer the following questions:

- Is it appropriate to consider an Indigenous name for this civic asset?
- How will the naming strengthen the partnership with Indigenous communities and help share local Indigenous histories?
- Who are the Elders and leaders from the Indigenous communities that should be involved?

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- Who are considered the linguistic and cultural experts that can verify the spelling, pronunciation, meaning and correct use of the Indigenous syllabics?

Once Indigenous names are approved, there should be a standard process to create audio and video recordings to share, educate, and promote the new Indigenous name.

Process Assessment

To identify existing accessibility issues, the naming process should be evaluated to determine if there are any unknown obstacles preventing citizens from participating fully. This evaluation should focus on identifying any issues that make it difficult for citizens to engage with the naming process, and propose potential solutions in the form of policies or programs.

Facility Name Sale Policy

The municipal process to create mutually beneficial business arrangements between the City of Edmonton and external third parties to naming rights can conflict with the spirit and intent of Policy C509C.

Names Reserve List

The Names Reserve List should go through an overall review of its purpose, in addition to a review of the many names on the list. The Names Reserve List structure is at odds with the current Naming Policy and with the emerging direction of the Naming Committee. The Names Reserve List creates barriers for current and more appropriate names to be considered.

Next Steps - Recommendations

The following represent the next steps that can be undertaken relative to each of the gaps outlined above.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the City of Edmonton Place Name Dataset be made complete and current. Furthermore, it is recommended that once current, those data be published on the City of Edmonton's Open Data Portal and maintained regularly (quarterly or annually) through a standard operating procedure.

Recommendation 2

Once the place name dataset is complete and current, it is recommended that the complete dataset be assessed and audited for the following elements:

- Metadata accuracy: The names reflected in the place name data set should have accurate metadata, including but not limited to name description, origin, year assigned.
- Appropriateness. Each place name should be assessed by a committee reflective of Edmonton's diversity and considering the new Naming Policy. Those names determined to be potentially harmful be flagged for further discussion.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the Naming Committee be supported in developing a culturally-sensitive, community-involved re-naming process. When a City of Edmonton place name is assessed as

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inappropriate, a process ought to be in place to reconsider and potentially rename the municipal asset.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the City of Edmonton assign resources to support the Committee in developing a mechanism to offer ongoing community engagement tied to outreach and education.

Recommendation 5

The naming process should undergo an assessment to formally identify barriers to citizens' access to the naming process at every stage and to identify possible solutions.

Recommendation 6

As third-party naming of municipal facilities is a business exercise, the Committee recommends severing the relationship between the Committee and the facility name sale policy unless policy C509C can be reasonably accommodated within the naming process. The Committee cannot respond meaningfully to administration requests for naming rights approval when the Committee is consulted after a sponsorship agreement has been signed. The Committee does not wish to interfere with civic business interests or third-party relationships.

Recommendation 7

In alignment with the Indigenous Framework Seven Commitments, it is recommended that the Naming Committee be supported in developing an Indigenous naming process. This process will help future applicants understand the parameters and process that should be involved when considering and submitting a future Indigenous name.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the Naming Committee:

1. Review the structure of the Names Reserve List,
2. Review the current names on the Names Reserve List, and;
3. Develop a Names Reserve List Policy that will stipulate the name requirements, and who may access the names on the Names Reserve List.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Recommendations: Outcomes and Timelines
2. Bylaw 17138 - Naming Committee Bylaw
3. Council Policy C509C - Naming Municipal Assets