

Early Agenda Distribution

Pilot Project Results

Motion on the Floor

Moved S. Hamilton (Made at the April 29, 2019, Council Services Committee meeting):

That Administration return to City Council with amendments to Bylaw 18155, Council Procedures Bylaw, to provide for:

- a. Agenda distribution of City Council and Standing Committee agendas at least ten clear days prior to the meeting.
- b. Agenda distribution at a set time (noon), unless exigent circumstances exist.

Recommendation

1. That the Motion on the Floor be amended by adding a Part C, as follows:

- c. Committee or Council reports, minutes for approval and motions pending not distributed with the agenda to be added to the agenda without requiring a motion to do so.

2. That Council Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That Administration return to City Council with amendments to Bylaw 18155, Council Procedures Bylaw, to provide for:

- a. Agenda distribution of City Council and Standing Committee agendas at least ten clear days prior to the meeting.
- b. Agenda distribution at a set time (noon), unless exigent circumstances exist.
- c. Committee or Council reports, minutes for approval and motions pending not distributed with the agenda to be added to the agenda without requiring a motion to do so.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the July 15, 2019, Council Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That the motion on the floor be referred to Administration with a report back, including a survey of Council and Administration on the pilot, in the first quarter of 2020.

At the August 27, 2019, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That the City Clerk provide a report to Committee at the same time as the report on “Early Agenda Distribution - Pilot Project Results”, with the following data from the early agenda distribution pilot project:

1. The percentage of Council reports that are completed by the Agenda Review Committee (ARC) deadline.
2. The general reasons why reports are not completed by the ARC deadline.
3. Any information regarding policy or bylaw changes that Council could make to improve the rate of completion of reports by the ARC deadline.

At the October 4, 2018, Council Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration study options for noting absences on individual items and possibilities for reporting absences in Open Data, and return to Committee.

Executive Summary

This report provides the results of the early agenda distribution pilot project and recommends approval of the motion on the floor which would direct Administration to prepare amendments to Bylaw 18155, Council Procedures Bylaw, to permanently change agenda distribution from 3 to 10 clear days before the meeting.

Report

Early Agenda Distribution Pilot

Background Information

Bylaw 18155, Council Procedures Bylaw, reads:

21. The City Manager must distribute the agenda for a meeting to all members and post the agenda on the City’s website at least 3 clear days prior to the meeting date.

At the April 29, 2019, Council Services Committee meeting, a motion was put on the floor directing Administration to return with amendments to Bylaw 18155 to change agenda distribution from at least 3 clear days to at least 10 clear days prior to the

meeting date. The motion also provided for agenda distribution to occur at a set time (noon). The Council Procedures Bylaw is silent as to the time of day at which agendas must be released. Established practice has been to release agendas at noon, although agendas are at times distributed later in the day to accommodate reports that are in the final approval stages. The motion on the floor was referred to Administration to return with a report on the implications of early agenda distribution and options for a pilot program.

On July 16, 2019, City Council directed Administration to proceed with a pilot project for the early release of agendas. The pilot called for agenda distribution to occur at least 10 clear days before a meeting, and provided for the distribution of agendas at a set time (noon). The pilot was implemented in August 2019 and suspended on March 20, 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides the results of this pilot project and responds to related Council motions regarding the data collected during that period.

A complete timeline of the above, with motions passed, is provided in Attachment 1.

Public Survey

A public survey to solicit feedback on the pilot project was conducted through the February 2020 Edmonton Insight Mixed Topic Survey, which included questions on Council and Committee agenda distribution. The survey ran from February 11 to 18, 2020. A total of 2,636 participants responded to the questions. Full results are available on the City's Open Data Portal. Highlights from the responses include:

- Four percent of Insight Community respondents were aware that Council and Committee agendas were being released earlier during the pilot. The majority of these respondents said it was a positive change (69%), and that it made it easier to engage in the Council and Committee decision-making process (65%).
- Those who were not aware of the pilot project were informed of the change. After being informed of the pilot project, 62% of these respondents indicated that the early release of Council and Committee agendas was a positive change.

The survey included an opportunity for open-ended responses. The following themes emerged:

- Results in additional time to read, research and prepare for meetings
- Better able to plan and schedule attendance at meetings (travel, childcare, etc.)
- Enhances transparency
- May lead to materials being out of date by the time the meeting takes place
- May lead to an inability to deal with urgent or emerging items

- Allows for additional time for speculation about issues prior to a formal discussion

Stakeholder Survey

Also in February 2020, a survey was sent to members of Council and their staff, senior Administration (Branch Managers and Deputy City Managers) and eight City Hall reporters. A total of 42 participants (seven members of Council, 33 members of Administration and three media respondents) responded to the questions. The results were as follows:

		<i>Has the earlier release of Council and Committee agendas been a positive change?</i>		
	# of Respondents	Yes	No	Unsure
Councillors	7	5 (71%)	0	2 (29%)
Staff in Councillors' Offices	3	2 (67%)	0	1 (33%)
Administration	30	12 (40%)	6 (20%)	12 (40%)
Media	3	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	0
TOTAL	43	20 (48%)	7 (17%)	15 (36%)

The survey included an opportunity for open-ended responses. The following themes emerged from the comments:

- Provides additional time to read, research and prepare
- More opportunity for residents to learn of upcoming items
- Increased need to add reports and change the agenda after it is released
- Increased need to monitor agendas for changes
- Responding to media can become problematic because of the length of time between the information being release and the meeting

Respondents of the stakeholder survey were also asked to provide suggestions for alternatives, which included the following:

- Having all reports on the agenda available at least three clear days before the meeting
- Tiered approach for reports that should be released early
- Release agendas one week prior to the meeting

- Release agendas two weeks prior to the meeting
- Utilize alternative forms of communication with Council, such as memos, to cut down on the number of reports on an agenda.

Data on Late Reports and Options to Manage

In accordance with the Council Procedures Bylaw, when a motion is passed directing a report, this report is due back to Council or Committee in 12 weeks, unless otherwise directed. The following provides a sample timeline based on the standard 12-week turnaround period:

Motion directing a report is passed	ARC deadline (finalized report is due and ready for publication)	ARC agenda is published	ARC meeting is held	Agenda publication date	Meeting date
November 16, 2020	January 28, 2021	January 29, 2021	February 2, 2021	February 4, 2021	February 9, 2021

As shown above, the report must be finalized in approximately 10 weeks in order to be available for discussion at Agenda Review Committee (ARC). During both the pre-pilot and pilot periods, approximately two-thirds of reports were not completed in time for ARC.

The deadline with the greatest impact on stakeholders and the public is the agenda publication date. During the early agenda distribution pilot, 24% of reports were published after agenda release. In comparison, during the same time period the year prior, 8% of reports were published late.

The following statistics are based on regular meetings of City Council, Executive Committee, Urban Planning Committee, Community and Public Services Committee, Utility Committee and Audit Committee.

	Total number of reports	Number of late reports (not including Committee report addenda)	Percentage of reports published late
Pre-Pilot (August 2018 - February 2019)	503	39	8%

Pilot Period (August 2019 - February 2020)	504	119	24%
---	-----	-----	-----

Feedback from Administration indicates that the greatest challenge to meeting report deadlines is the time required for the review and incorporation of feedback from diverse subject matter experts.

Options for Noting Absences in Open Data

In 2018, Administration was directed to study options for noting Councillor absences from meetings in Open Data. Options were examined as part of the Meeting Management Technology Integration initiative.

Absence data is manually extracted from the current meeting management software for use in Open Data. There is no differentiation made to record if the absence is with or without notice, or to indicate the reason for the absence. The results of each vote indicate any members absent at that point, but do not indicate if they were absent for any of the discussion. At this point, there is no automated function available to capture this information. If directed, Administration could manually collect additional detailed data on absences, which would be resource-intensive.

Next Steps

Administration recommends approval of the motion on the floor (with a proposed amendment) in order to initiate an amending bylaw to make the release of agendas at least 10 clear days before a meeting a requirement under the Council Procedures Bylaw. The results of the public survey indicate that earlier release of agendas is seen as an improvement that facilitates engagement and transparency. The majority of Councillors who responded to the survey also view early release as a positive change. The concerns that were communicated through the open-ended responses, such as the number of late reports and material being out of date, can be mitigated by stronger enforcement of report deadlines and the use of existing provisions to add items to agendas to respond to emergent issues.

Administration also recommends bylaw amendments to require agendas to be distributed at noon, unless exigent circumstances such as technology issues exist, and to adjust the default due date for reports to 13 weeks (as was done during the pilot to provide Administration with the same amount of time to finalize reports in time for an earlier ARC). This will create predictability for Councillors, the public and media and maintains a report deadline that is consistent with existing timelines and processes.

An unintended consequence of the early agenda distribution was the need to add a large volume of late Committee reports, previous meeting minutes and motions pending reports to the Council meeting agendas, as Council agendas were released before the Committee meetings took place. During the pilot period, 80 Committee reports had to be added by motion to meeting agendas. To address this issue, Administration recommends including necessary bylaw amendments to allow these items to be added automatically to an agenda.

If direction is given to proceed with earlier agenda distribution, Administration would return to City Council with a draft bylaw for approval in March. To allow for an adjustment period to align internal deadlines, implementation would take place for the April 6, 2021, City Council agenda, which would be released on March 25. Administration would also bring forward any required changes to the Council Calendar to accommodate potential impacts to the Agenda Review Committee meeting schedule.

Public Engagement

Public engagement was completed through the use of the Edmonton Insight Community mixed topic survey. A targeted stakeholder survey was used to engage with Council, Administration and the media.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Agendas and reports are available to Council, the public, media and Administration in a timely manner.	Number of agendas released 10 clear days before the meeting	TBD	100% of agendas are released on time

Attachments

1. Early Agenda Distribution Pilot Timeline
2. Council and Committee Meetings Statistics - October 1, 2020, Memo to Council