

Community representation framework - Information brief for community stakeholders

April 2018

Background

City Council formed a Community Representation Framework Task Force to review options and advise Council on how community organizations can more effectively represent the diverse interests and perspectives within their communities.

The Community Representation Framework Task Force is composed of a broad range of stakeholders representing Council, the development and building sector, community associations and resident's associations, the University of Calgary and City Administration.

The goals of the Community Representation Framework are to:

- a. Enhance the effectiveness of community groups to contribute to the representation of the diverse interests and perspectives within their communities;
- b. Promote community representation best practices and help develop a more collaborative working relationship between community groups and The City;
- c. Revitalize City processes related to planning and development so they are more open, inclusive and welcoming to a broad range of community groups;
- d. Identify the necessary supports and resources required by community groups so they can be effective representatives of their communities in dialogue with The City.

The process – where we are

The Community Representation Framework Task Force formed in December 2016 and has been investigating options to improve Calgary's current approach to community representation. In February 2018, an update report was presented to City Council. The report included a new approach to community representation based on a process that focuses on collaborative dialogue between a broader base of community organizations and groups. Council approved recommendations to:

- a. Engage with community stakeholders to establish a new approach to community representation;
- b. Return to Council with a final report by the end of 2018.

Input will be gathered through a two-phase approach. Phase one is an online survey used to gain an understanding of the current state of community representation and gather input on a suggested new approach. Phase two will dig deeper into the responses gathered in the survey by using focus groups comprised of a cross-section of diverse community stakeholders.

Project timeline

- *February 2018:* Update report on community representation framework. Council approved recommendations to engage with community stakeholders and provide Council a final report by the end of 2018.
- *April 2018:* Phase 1 – engagement with community associations and a cross-section of other community stakeholders through an online survey.
- *May 2018:* Phase 1 - report back to participants.
- *May and June 2018:* Phase 2 – engagement with small groups representing a cross-section of community stakeholders to dig deeper into the issues and potential future scenarios.
- *July 2018:* report back to community stakeholders and the task force.
- *October / November 2018:* report to Committee and Council.
- *January 2019:* Pilot project phase and implementation of recommendations.

The pilot projects are intended to provide opportunity to test any new approach supported by Council, review lessons learned and consider further input from community stakeholders before any new approach is rolled out on a city-wide basis.

A suggested new approach to community representation

The Community Representation Framework Task Force has been investigating an approach of creating Council-authorized, City-supported groups of community stakeholders called ‘district forums’. At this stage in our process, the idea of district forums holds promise to achieve program goals, but we require community input to better understand the current state of community representation in Calgary and any opportunities or challenges this new approach may pose.

We are looking for specific input that will help us better define a community representation approach that we can propose to Council later in 2018 and test through pilot projects in 2019. The feedback will also help us identify other aspects of the community representation framework with respect to supports and resources that are necessary to achieve the program goals and ways to improve community involvement in The City’s planning and development processes.

What is a district?

A district is an area of the city composed of multiple communities based around significant features of the urban landscape that serve important functions for more than a single community such as main streets, transit station areas and other amenities like regional parks, schools and recreation centres.

What is a district forum?

Currently, a district forum is just an idea that the task force would like to receive feedback about. As suggested, it is:

- an assembly of representatives of organizations and groups from communities within the district. These can include community associations, resident’s associations, business improvement area groups, cultural groups, faith-based organizations, youth and senior’s groups and service organizations, to name just a few of the possibilities.
- intended to be Council authorized, through approved Terms of Reference that describe governance and operations of the forum, membership eligibility and roles and responsibilities of community organizations and of The City.
- supported by The City to help achieve the program goals. Resources might include funding, staff support to help facilitate and organize meetings and training programs to help members effectively represent community interests and perspectives.

Why a district forum?

Planning at a district scale allows communities to collaborate on local area plans that focus on common elements of interest, like main streets, transit station areas, regional parks, schools and recreation centres, while also providing the opportunity to contribute input on proposed development at the community scale.

District forums can provide opportunity to support inclusive, collaborative planning processes more effectively and efficiently. Currently, there are over 200 plans that provide guidance to local planning and more than 150 community areas. By shifting some of the planning processes to the district scale The City hopes to reduce the number of plans to about 50. This will simplify the review of land use and development applications and allow The City to provide appropriate resources to better support inclusive and collaborative planning processes. In recent discussions, the task force has considered the need to provide resources for a district forum such as:

- A 'convener' to provide services like meeting facilitation and conflict resolution, ensure compliance with terms of reference and City standards related to reporting, etc.
- Administrative support to prepare meeting agendas and minutes, manage records and oversee budget
- Other professional supports to recruit member organizations, communicate with forum members, leadership and process training and education, subject matter expertise (planners, for example) and mediation services.

What will the role of community associations and other community organizations be in relation to a district forum?

Terms of reference for a district forum will outline the roles and responsibilities of member organizations and groups as participants in a district forum as well as The City as a supporter. Specific terms of reference will be developed as part of preparation for a pilot project.

Will a district forum decide the outcomes of community engagement? Will the district forum write a community's recommendations on planning issues?

The district forum is not intended to make decisions on behalf of community, but rather to support an open, inclusive process that welcomes interested organizations and facilitates opportunities for them to more effectively collaborate with one another and with The City.

Community organizations will remain independent of The City and will be able to either develop their own independent positions on planning and development matters or develop positions in partnership with other organizations and groups, as they choose.

How will this change the way land use and development applications are reviewed? What input will communities have?

Once a new local area plan is established, land use and development review processes will be conducted at either the district or community level according to the significance of the proposal and its location in the district. For example, a land use application along a main street would likely be reviewed by a district forum because it is in an area of interest to more than just one community. A small redevelopment proposal on a residential street that does not have broad impacts in the district will likely be reviewed by stakeholders of the community. In either case, communities will continue to be represented in land use and development application reviews.

It sounds like a district forum is already decided as the new approach to community representation. Why bother to engage with community?

A district forum is only an idea at this point. Input from community stakeholders will be used by the task force to continue their discussions about the future of community representation and whether a district forum is the best way to achieve the goals of the community representation framework, what opportunities and challenges it might pose for community organizations and how membership might be defined. In addition, whatever approach is eventually adopted by Council, it will be introduced through pilot projects, giving additional opportunity for community stakeholders to provide input on its suitability.