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CORPORATE REPORT

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**   DATE: **February 1, 2011**

FROM: **City Clerk**   FILE: **Council Agenda**

SUBJECT: **Council Meeting Agenda Process Review**

RECOMMENDATION

The Legislative Services Division recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;

2. Approve the distribution to Council of the Council agenda package on Thursday of the week prior to the Council meeting and the posting of the agenda package information on the City's website on the Friday of the week prior to the Council meeting; and

3. Authorize staff to work with Council toward the implementation of an electronic agenda process for the City of Surrey following the work stages as outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

At the Regular Council Public Hearing meeting on January 10, 2011, Council adopted the following resolution:

> *"That staff be requested to review the current Council agenda process, specifically the timing of the receipt of agenda packages, timing of posting Corporate Reports to the City's website, and the feasibility of conversion to an electronic agenda process; and that as part of the review, staff contact other municipalities to determine their respective agenda management processes and report back on options to improve the availability of Council meeting information."*

This report responds to this resolution of Council.

BACKGROUND

Current Agenda Process:

Currently, agenda packages for each Regular meeting of Council are distributed to members of Council and Senior Management staff on the Friday evening of the week prior to the Monday on which the Council meetings are to take place. The compilation, printing and assembly of Council agenda packages all takes place on Friday. In addition to generating a paper-copy version for

distribution, Legislative Services staff has the responsibility of compiling the agenda package in a digital format for uploading to the City's website.

The current agenda-related deadlines are as follows:

- **Thursday at 4:30 p.m. of the week prior to the Council meeting:** Planning and Development to submit the Planning reports related to Land Use Applications to Legislative Services;

- **End of the Business Day on the Friday of the week prior to the Council meeting:** Legislative Services staff to post all required meeting notices and agendas on the Notice Board and the Corporate Website;

- **Friday of the week prior to the Council meeting:** Legislative Services staff to ensure all meeting agenda packages (Closed and Regular Council) are couriered to Council members and distributed to Senior Management staff, including additional information and addendums and that Corporate reports are posted on the City's website; and

- **Monday, being the day of the Council meetings:** Legislative Services staff provides uploads other agenda materials to the website for access by the public.

The majority of the work related to finalizing and distributing the agenda package takes place on the Friday before the Monday on which the related meetings are being held resulting in a very tight time-frame for staff to compile, print and assemble the package. The current schedule regularly requires the use of overtime, particularly, when unforeseen circumstances arise in relation to the production of the agenda package.

The current schedule was developed with a view to ensuring that decisions by City Council related to any particular matter were not unduly delayed by process and that the interests of those relying on decisions from City Council were respected. The process also was structured to allow Council members an opportunity to review the agenda package before they received calls from the public regarding any specific item on the agenda or in the package.

The current schedule provides Council with only two days to review the Council agenda package, as Council members are not in receipt of their packages until late Friday evening.

DISCUSSION

Practices of other Municipalities:

Staff contacted a number of municipalities to gather information in relation to their Council agenda preparation and distribution processes (i.e., internal and external time-lines, preparation of hard-copy packages, whether electronic agenda processes are in place or are being contemplated, etc.).

Detailed comments were received from Edmonton, Mississauga, Calgary, Delta, Coquitlam, Vancouver and Richmond. Each of the noted municipalities has recently undertaken or is undertaking a review of their agenda-related processes with a view to implementing improvements and gaining efficiencies. A summary of the comments from these municipalities is contained in the table attached as Appendix "A".

Only the City of Richmond has similar time-lines relative to the distribution of Council agenda packages as Surrey. Richmond staff has advised that their agenda preparation and distribution process is currently under review.

All of the other noted municipalities distribute the agenda packages for Council meetings with more lead time in comparison to the current Surrey process. Although the deadline for reports to be delivered to the Office of the City Manager varies, the majority have a time-line that is quite tight for review of agenda items before the close of the agenda package. All surveyed municipalities post their agenda information on their respective websites. Only Richmond and Delta post information to their respective website as soon as the agenda package is ready for distribution to Council (see Attachment A). Municipalities such as Vancouver and Calgary post agenda information on the day of distribution; however, not until the agenda package has been delivered and received by Council members.

Distribution of Council Agendas - Potential Immediate Changes:

In view of the information received from other municipalities, staff is proposing to amend the current council agenda distribution schedule to allow for Council meeting packages to be delivered to Council and staff on the Thursday in the week prior to the Monday Council meeting at which the agenda will be considered. The Cities of Edmonton and Coquitlam currently distribute their packages on a Thursday for a Monday meeting and have received favourable feedback relative to this schedule.

With a Thursday distribution of the agenda package, staff would post the agenda information on the City's website on the Friday before the related Council meeting, which would allow interested individuals three days (i.e., over the weekend and on Monday) to review the information on the website for the Council meetings to be held on the Monday afternoon and evening.

Any late items for the agenda would be distributed to Council and senior staff as an addendum agenda on Friday and would be posted to the City website at the same time.

If Council approves the recommendation related to Thursday agenda package distribution, the new timeline will be implemented for the February 28, 2011 Regular Council meetings.

Council Information - Public Access to Corporate Reports:

As of January 21, 2011, Corporate Reports are being made available to the public on the City's website on the Friday prior to the Monday Council meeting at which they will be considered by Council.

If the proposed Thursday distribution schedule is approved, Council members would continue to have the opportunity to review the agenda package in advance of the public having access to the information. A Thursday distribution would also provide Council with an extra day to review the agenda package, which at times can be quite voluminous and therefore time-consuming to review.

If Council approves the recommendation related to Thursday agenda package distribution, this process will be implemented for the February 28th, 2011 Regular Council meetings.

Electronic Agenda Process - Review of Other Municipalities:

Of the seven (7) municipalities that responded to staff's inquiries, Calgary, Delta, Vancouver and Coquitlam have recently introduced electronic agenda packages as an option to Council members. In these municipalities, hard-copy agenda packages are still being produced, as not all members of Council have expressed an interest in transitioning to electronic agendas. The Cities of Edmonton, Mississauga and Richmond presently only produce hard-copy agendas; however, they are beginning to explore electronic agenda options as well. In terms of Closed Meeting packages, only the Corporation of Delta provides the Closed Meeting packages in electronic format with hard-copy packages also available.

At this point staff has not located any municipality in Canada that prepares a truly paperless agenda package; all surveyed municipalities prepare hard-copy packages and in some instances, when requested, provide electronic versions. The City of Calgary is reviewing the role of their document management system with a view to using this system to include reports automatically on an agenda; however, this review has just been initiated and will require substantial time to determine the potential role of a document management system in agenda management and preparation.

Staff has not found hardware and software that would allow a smooth one step transition to an electronic Council agenda process.

Electronic Agenda Process - Options for Surrey:

In view of the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter and Council's more recent direction, Legislative Services staff and Information Technology staff have undertaken a brief pilot project relative to the feasibility of producing and using electronic Council agenda packages. The pilot project involved the conversion of the full Council agenda package into an electronic format to be viewed on an iPad with the capability for users to annotate, simulating the hard-copy experience. The pilot project involved two senior management staff testing the electronic agenda packages during a Council meeting. The pilot project identified the following as issues in need of further exploration and development:

- A review of existing Council agenda preparation processes;
- A review of agenda content and options for reducing the current size of the agenda packages (i.e., primary vs. supplementary information);
- Identification, review and testing of the most appropriate hardware and corresponding software for electronic agenda packages;
- Assembly of electronic information in a format that enables users to move through the information efficiently (i.e. simulate the hard-copy experience); and,
- A review of the feasibility of the City of Surrey's Electronic Content Management system to facilitate a full-scale electronic agenda process and identification of the related workflow processes.

In developing an electronic agenda process, the primary consideration for staff is to ensure the electronic Council agenda package serves the needs of Council members and to ensure that Council meetings remain orderly and efficient. The electronic package should simulate the hard-copy experience enabling Council members to move efficiently through the package and annotate as required. In addition, the process by which Council accesses the electronic packages must be simple and secure.

Based on the pilot test, staff does not recommend implementing electronic agendas on iPads at this time, as further review is required of this technology and its available software. However, work on transitioning Council members from hard-copy to electronic agenda information has been initiated. Based on the above noted issues related to the pilot project, staff is continuing with an approach that will involve three stages.

Stage 1 - Introduction of Electronic Agendas:

- Electronic agenda packages will be available for downloading on existing/familiar technology, being personal laptop computers, for those Council members who are interested in being "test" users;
- Hard-copy agenda packages will continue to be provided to Council members in parallel with the electronic packages; and,
- Training sessions will be arranged with those Council members who are interested in receiving electronic packages to ensure that they are familiar with both downloading and using the electronic agenda packages.

Stage 2 - Feedback from "Test" Users and Testing of Alternative Technology:

- After each Council meeting, over the course of 2 or 3 months, staff will meet with those Council members who are using the electronic agendas to obtain feedback that will assist in the development of a "move forward" strategy, which may include the testing of other technology such as iPads.

Stage 3 - Determination of Optimal Electronic Agenda Process:

- Subsequent to the Stage 2 process and further feedback, a decision will be made relative to a preferred approach to making electronic agenda packages the standard approach for all meetings of Council.

The review stages are critical to ensure that the electronic agenda process and the related technology will meet the needs of Council members and will work efficiently and effectively in the context of Council meetings.

Timeline:

It is expected that Stage 1 could be implemented within a month and that the full process could be completed within 4 to 6 months.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that Council:

- Approve the distribution to Council of the Council agenda package on Thursday of the week prior to the Council meeting and the posting of the agenda package information on the City's website on the Friday of the week prior to the Council Meeting; and

- Authorize staff to work with Council toward the implementation of an electronic agenda process for the City of Surrey following the work stages as outlined in this report.

Jane Sullivan
City Clerk

Appendix "A" – Information from Other Municipalities - Summary Table

ATTACHMENT A

SUMMARY OF OTHER MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AGENDA PROCESSES

City	Council Day	Distribution Day	CAO Deadline	Reports Posted to Web	E-Agenda
Edmonton	Monday	Thursday	Friday (4 days to review)	Friday	No
Mississauga	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday (4 days)	Friday	No
Calgary	Monday	Wednesday	Tuesday (1 day)	Wednesday	Yes*
Delta	Monday	Wednesday	Friday (3 days)	Wednesday	Yes*
Coquitlam	Monday	Thursday	Tuesday (2 days)	Friday	Yes*
Richmond	Monday	Friday	Tuesday (3 days)	Friday	No
Vancouver	Tuesday	Thursday	Tuesday (8 days)	Thursday	Yes*
Surrey	Monday	Friday	Friday (3 days)	Friday	No

*The electronic format used is not immediately adaptable to Surrey's electronic/digital infrastructure