

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JUNE 25, 2013

Item 3, Report No. 31, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), which was adopted, as amended, by the Council of the City of Vaughan on June 25, 2013, as follows:

By receiving Communication C3 from Mr. Frank Greco, dated June 17, 2013.

3 REGISTERED RATEPAYER/COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION POLICY REVIEW

The Committee of the Whole (Working Session) recommends:

- 1) That consideration of this matter be deferred to a meeting of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), prior to the end of the year, to allow for additional input from all interested parties;

That meeting space be provided to the deputants, as needed, for a maximum of 6 occasions for the purpose of facilitating the discussions of interested parties; and

That each Member of Council provide contact information to the City Clerk, by the week of July 2, 2013, respecting formerly functioning or currently non-registered community associations;

- 2) That the following report of the City Clerk, dated June 17, 2013, be received;

- 3) That the following deputations and Communication be received:

1. Mr. Anthony Francescucci, Weston Downs Ratepayers' Association, Blackburn Boulevard, Woodbridge and Communication C7;
2. Ms. Sonia Meucci, Weston Downs Ratepayers' Association;
3. Ms. Rose Savage on behalf of Ms. Gila Martow; and
4. Mr. Nick Pinto, Mapes Avenue, Woodbridge; and

- 4) That the following Communications be received;

- C4. Presentation material entitled, "*Registered Ratepayer/Community Association Policy Review*";
- C5. Ms. Gila Martow, dated June 17, 2013; and
- C6. Woodbridge Core Ratepayers' Association, dated June 15, 2013.

Recommendation

The City Clerk, in consultation with the Commissioner of Legal and Administrative Services/ City Solicitor and the Director, Recreation & Culture recommends:

- 1) That the attached report 'Registered Ratepayer/Community Association Policy Review, June 2013 be received; and
- 2) That the Ratepayer/Community Association Policy be revised to provide for:
 - a. a streamlined registration process;
 - b. removal of geographic exclusivity;
 - c. broadening of the definition of ratepayer/community association; and
 - d. a minimum membership of 10 households,

in accordance with Option 3 set out in the attached report.

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Contribution to Sustainability

The proposed registered ratepayer/community association policy will support active civic engagement by recognizing the role played by ratepayer and community groups.

Economic Impact

There will be minor impacts on the Recreation and Culture budget depending on the number of groups who choose to register under the policy and who wish to make use of City facilities for meeting space.

Communications Plan

Any revisions to the policy will be communicated to staff and ratepayer and community associations. The revised policy will also be posted on the City's website.

Background

The Registered Ratepayer/Community Association Policy has been in place since 1986. The original policy was limited in scope and focused on the requirement for groups to be registered with the City in order to receive hard copy agenda and minutes. Over the years, the policy has been amended to include additional registration requirements as part of an annual registration process. The last time the policy was amended was in 2004.

At the November 2012 Committee of the Whole meeting, Committee received a deputation from representatives of the Weston Downs Community Association regarding the Registered Ratepayer/Community Association policy. The deputation and committee's deliberations highlighted a number of concerns with the current policy.

Committee of the Whole recommended "that the City Clerk in consultation with interested parties, review and report on the City of Vaughan Registered Ratepayer/Community Association Policy." This recommendation was subsequently adopted by Council at its meeting held on December 11, 2012 (Committee of the Whole Report No. 48, Item 38).

Analysis and Options

As outlined in the attached report, staff undertook a public consultation process to obtain feedback on the policy and explore options for changes to the policy. The public consultation was comprised of a public survey and a public forum.

The public survey focused on three main elements of the current policy:

Geographic Exclusivity

The current policy of not allowing overlapping geographic boundaries has been a source of frustration for smaller communities and neighbourhoods wanting to form their own associations and be recognized by the City. One of the questions to be answered through the consultation process was whether geographic exclusivity is an essential component of recognizing ratepayer/community associations, or whether more than one association should be allowed to represent a geographic area.

Benefits of Registration

One of the benefits of registration stated in the current policy no longer applies - the provision of

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hard copy agendas and minutes to registered associations. Through the public consultation, staff sought feedback on whether to continue the benefit of providing one free meeting space per year to registered groups and on the broader topic of the perceived benefits of formal registration with the City.

City's Role

City staff have received complaints regarding the internal affairs of some ratepayer associations, and requests to become more actively involved in resolving these complaints. To explore this issue further, the consultation process included discussion of the City's role in registering associations, including the appropriate degree of involvement by the City.

The public forum, held on May 8, 2013, began with a presentation from the City Clerk that highlighted the main findings of the public survey. Forum participants were then divided into groups to discuss several questions designed to further explore some of the themes and issues identified from the public survey.

Based on the feedback obtained from the public survey, three policy options were identified. These policy options can be viewed as points on a continuum, with Option 1 being a more robust policy, Option 2 being the Status Quo, and Option 3 being a more streamlined version of the current policy.

The attached report includes a comparative analysis of these options, including the impact that each option would have on: perceived legitimacy and credibility of ratepayer/community associations; freedom of association/fostering civic engagement; access to city resources; and the City's Oversight Role.

Conclusion

It is clear that ratepayer and community associations, as do other associations, play an important role in the process of civic engagement. As heard through the public consultation process, these associations advocate for the community, build community capacity, help keep residents informed, and provide a community perspective on a wide range of issues. Also, while associations may be formed on a geographic basis, they may also be formed to represent a specific interest or issue.

A ratepayer/community association registration process may help facilitate the process of civic engagement by allowing the city to use the mechanisms of these groups to reach out to larger audiences for input on civic matters. A public listing of registered associations also increases public awareness of active groups within the community.

A key issue identified in the course of the review is the impact geographic exclusivity has on the ratepayer policy and indeed on the relationship the City has with its ratepayer groups. Geographic exclusivity necessarily distinguishes between registered and non-registered groups which creates either perceived or real differences in the formal interaction between the City and these groups. The preservation of geographic exclusivity will require:

- a more rigorous policy to administer the ongoing validity of an organization and its right to the exclusivity;
- greater engagement by staff to monitor and indeed adjudicate on internal association matters (e.g. compliance with its constitution, notice, quorum...);
- additional staff resources to carry out ratepayer monitoring; and
- an appeal mechanism which may involve Council as the final decision-maker.

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Though it was asserted by some that geographic exclusivity necessarily supports the credibility of ratepayer groups as they come before Council or participate on matters before the Ontario Municipal Board, there were no tangible indicators to support that view. The credibility of a ratepayer position before Council is based on a number of factors such as the level of engagement of the group and its leadership, and the contributions the association has made to

the debate either in written or oral form. Staff in reviewing the implications of removing geographic exclusivity from the ratepayer policy concluded that on balance the negative aspects arising from perceptions of bias in the administration of stringent rules by both staff and Council and the increased resources required to conduct that level of administration, did not outweigh any perceived advantages to the groups in terms of their credibility or authenticity.

Of the three options presented, staff recommend Option 3 – Public Register of Ratepayer and Community Associations. Option 3 provides:

- A strong framework for civic engagement, through broader registration criteria and the removal of geographic exclusivity;
- Transparency and recognition for associations, by maintaining a formal register which is publicly posted;
- An appropriate and sustainable level of staff oversight, by providing for administrative oversight and updating of the register, rather than enforcement and arbitration of disputes.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Registered Ratepayer/Community Association Policy Review, June 2013

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council as set out in Vaughan Vision 2020, particularly:

MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE –
Demonstrate Leadership and Promote Effective Governance

Regional Implications

Not applicable.

Report prepared by:

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(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing have been forwarded to each Member of Council and a copy thereof is also on file in the office of the City Clerk.)