

DATE OF MEETING December 13, 2021

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SUBJECT NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION – GOVERNANCE OPTIONS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Governance and Priorities Committee with governance options to consider for neighbourhood associations.

Recommendation

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to:

1. Continue to support active neighbourhood associations that meet and maintain the following organizational criteria:
 - Have an elected executive that meets on a regular basis (at least once a year);
 - Have a membership structure (not necessarily fee paying);
 - Hold an annual general meeting, and provide a copy of the minutes to the City with updated membership numbers;
 - Keep minutes for executive and general membership meetings;
 - Engage with its membership for input prior to responding to City development referrals, such as rezoning and Official Community Plan amendments; and
 - Provide periodic updates to members related to the activities of the group.
2. Prepare a policy for Council consideration on neighbourhood association recognition and supports as identified in the report “Neighbourhood Association – Governance Options” received on 2021-DEC-13.

BACKGROUND

At its regular meeting held 2020-FEB-10, the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) received a Report for Information on the status of neighbourhood associations in Nanaimo and the nature of the City’s relationship and engagement with these groups.

In response to the discussion at the 2020-FEB-10 GPC meeting, Staff invited 20 active neighbourhood associations to respond to a questionnaire to gather their perspectives on:

- Organizational capacity;
- Most positive neighbourhood change(s) observed over the last ten years;
- Top priorities for change within their neighbourhood;
- Role they think they should play for their neighbourhood; and
- What organizational criteria (if any) should be used by the City in order to formally recognize and support a neighbourhood association.

On 2021-APR-15, Staff provided the neighbourhood associations with an opportunity to respond to the proposed governance options prior to consideration by the GPC. While a few neighbourhoods did not see the need for criteria in order to be recognized, the majority who attended were in favour of having criteria, noting that they were already meeting the proposed criteria. However, clarity was requested on their roles in giving feedback to Council on development applications and other processes.

During that meeting, comments about outstanding neighbourhood plan development and updating and implementing existing neighbourhood plans were shared. There was also discussion on establishing neighbourhood priorities, neighbourhood plan implementation, projects through capital planning, and an expanded Partner in Parks program (Partners in Community). Staff noted there would be continued engagement with neighbourhood associations through the REIMAGINE NANAIMO Phase 2 and 3 process.

Based on the feedback from the neighbourhood associations and a best practices review, at the 2021-APR-26 meeting, the GPC received a Staff report recommending the City establish criteria for associations that want to formally represent their neighbourhoods on planning and development matters, and be eligible for funding opportunities. These criteria included:

- Have an elected executive that meets on a regular basis;
- Have a membership structure (not necessarily fee paying);
- Hold an annual general meeting (AGM);
- Keep minutes for executive and general membership meetings;
- Engage with its neighbourhood for input prior to responding to City development referrals, such as rezoning, Official Community Plan amendments, and development permits; and
- Provide periodic updates to members related to the activities of the group. |

It was proposed that neighbourhood associations that do not satisfy the above organizational criteria would still receive access to information and support, but not at the same levels as those that meet the criteria. As well, only associations that meet the proposed criteria would be recognized by Council as providing representative viewpoints on behalf of their neighbourhoods.

After additional discussion and input from a number of neighbourhood associations through delegation to Council and written submissions, the GPC passed the following two recommendations to Council on 2021-APR-26, which were subsequently endorsed by Council on 2021-MAY-03:

1. *“That Council refer the Neighbourhood Association Organizational Review, Support and Engagement topic to Staff to provide the minutes and a summary report to share with the neighbourhood associations, asking them to provide further comment, and return to a Governance and Priorities Committee meeting at least two months following the April 26, 2021 meeting, potentially in September.”*
2. *“That Council direct Staff to develop a detailed Partners in Community program and annual budget for consideration.”*

This report follows up on the first portion of the above Council motion; the second portion related to the Partners in Community (PIC) Program will be addressed in a separate report.

DISCUSSION

Additional Engagement with Neighbourhood Associations

Based on Council's direction on 2021-MAY-03, Staff provided additional information to the associations, including a short summary of the process to date and a request to provide any additional input with respect to the proposed recommendations contained in the 2021-APR-26 report. The additional input provided can be found in Attachment A (Neighbourhood Association Organizational Capacity Review, Support and Engagement Process – Additional Input Summary, 2021-JUN-23).

In addition, Staff organized a series of four discussion meetings between May and September of 2021 (three in person and one zoom) with the neighbourhood associations to provide further clarity and opportunity for feedback around the proposed recommendations. Notes and materials from these discussions can be found in Attachment B (Neighbourhood Association Organizational Capacity Review, Support and Engagement Process – Continuing the Conversation Notes, 2021-JUL/AUG).

Information presented at these meetings included a draft diagram of proposed support levels for neighbourhood associations based on their organizational status. This outline was further refined in discussion with the associations, and an updated version is found in Attachment C (Neighbourhood Association Organizational Status and Proposed City Support Level). The chart outlines two groups and the varied levels of support they would receive from the City, depending on their level of organization. Note that it is proposed that even organizations that do not meet the criteria would still continue to have Staff liaison and informational support, as well as be eligible for Partners in Community /Partners in Park funding.

It was observed at these meetings that the City has maintained an informal relationship with neighbourhood associations for years, and that the relationship between associations and the City should be a two-way street with a clear understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. To this end, it was suggested the City formalize its role by confirming the support it already offers to associations, including some additional ones. Potential additional supports include creating a dedicated Neighbourhood Grants Program with an annual budget of \$10,000 to support the operation of neighbourhood associations. Depending on Council direction, a policy may be prepared for Council consideration based on Attachment D (Proposed Neighbourhood Association Supports).

Online Survey Results

In order to try to give the wider community an opportunity to give feedback on neighbourhood association governance, the City received 220 responses to a neighbourhood associations' online survey that was open for four weeks from mid-October to mid-November 2021. The results did not represent the general population, as the majority of those who responded (70%) indicated they are currently a member of their neighbourhood association, but it did provide another opportunity for input on the issue for those who did not attend the earlier meetings.

Out of the 220 people who responded to the survey, 127 (58%) supported the use of criteria, while 56 (25%) opposed their use, and 37 (17%) were unsure. An additional question on how people prefer to engage with the City on issues and opportunities in their neighbourhood indicated a clear preference for direct engagement via email, mail, and phone, as well as

through a neighbourhood association. The highest preference for engaging with the City was “directly as an individual or household” (157 responses), followed by “through a neighbourhood association” (125 responses). The next highest preferences were for the Get Involved Nanaimo online platform (65 responses), and use of online groups like Facebook (56 responses). It is notable that even though the majority of the survey respondents belonged to a neighbourhood association, direct engagement with the City was still the most popular means of communication.

For full survey results, see Appendix E (Nanaimo Neighbourhood Association Survey Summary, 2021-Nov-16).

Municipal Best Practices

Staff completed a review of how other municipalities support and engage with neighbourhood associations. A key finding is that most of the cities either recognize neighbourhood associations based on a range of organizational criteria (including non-profit status), or at least have standards they encourage neighbourhood associations to meet. In the City of Victoria, for example, to be involved in the referral process, a community association is required to have a land use committee that is endorsed by City Council and that abides by the City’s terms of reference, which includes information on best practices and conflict of interest (Attachment F).

The full review summary is included as Attachment G (Comparison of Neighbourhood Support and Engagement in Other Municipalities).

While beyond the scope of this review, it is worth noting, in addition to working with neighbourhood associations, several of the municipalities (including Victoria and Vancouver) considered also have renters’ advisory committees. The purpose of these committees is to advise Council on strategic City priorities relating to renters, to monitor and respond to the impacts of government legislation affecting tenants, and to advise Council on enhancing access and inclusion for renters in developing City policy and civic life. This type of committee provides a different perspective in contrast to geography-specific associations, who are more likely to be homeowners than renters (two-thirds of Nanaimo residents own their homes).

Neighbourhood/Citizen Engagement Preferences

Neighbourhood associations are one way for neighbourhood residents to connect and share information, but they are not the only mechanism. Over the past few years and especially since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the way the City of Nanaimo and its residents engage has changed dramatically. There is increasing reliance and preference for use of social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok), as well as online meeting tools, such as Zoom and Teams, to reach diverse digital audiences. Through the City’s www.getinvolvednanaimo.ca site, there is opportunity to engage citizens directly, as well as through the neighbourhood associations. The use of this online platform for the REIMAGINE NANAIMO project has contributed to the highest level of citizen engagement in any City planning process involving several thousand community members. Having an online engagement platform is consistent with recommendations in the Community Engagement Task Force report received for information by the Committee of the Whole on 2019-JAN-28.

Many informal neighbourhood groups exist on Facebook and social media. Some of these groups started around specific issues (such as park development, crime watch, or traffic

calming) and then evolved into neighbourhood conversation forums. These informal groups sometimes integrate online neighbourhood polling tools and petitions to reach wider audiences. While these groups would not satisfy the formal neighbourhood association criteria, they do exist online, and when appropriate, Staff can engage these groups through social media and direct communication with their Facebook group administrative contact person.]

OPTIONS

1. That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to:
 1. Continue to support active neighbourhood associations that meet and maintain the following organizational criteria:
 - Have an elected executive that meets on a regular basis (at least once a year);
 - Have a membership structure (not necessarily fee paying);
 - Hold an annual general meeting, and provide a copy of the minutes to the City with updated membership numbers;
 - Keep minutes for executive and general membership meetings;
 - Engage with its membership for input prior to responding to City development referrals, such as rezoning and Official Community Plan amendments; and
 - Provide periodic updates to members related to the activities of the group.
 2. Prepare a policy for Council consideration on neighbourhood association recognition and City supports as identified in the report “Neighbourhood Association – Governance Options” received on 2021-DEC-13
 - Advantages: The existing neighbourhood association engagement approach would be retained fundamentally intact, and will also ensure that those groups that wish to be supported by the City at a higher service level (e.g., development referrals, printing support, etc.) have a reasonable organizational structure that is responsive to the neighbourhood in which they are located. The informal support the City has provided to neighbourhood associations in the past, plus additional supports, would be formalized through Council Policy. In addition, those associations with registered society status would be eligible to apply for potential operational funding assistance under the proposed Neighbourhood Grants Program.
 - Disadvantages: Not all neighbourhood associations support this approach. Six neighbourhood associations that do not meet the above-noted organizational criteria will still receive information and support from the City, but at a lesser level than those who satisfy the criteria. This may encourage the groups to revise their organizational structure, disband, or simply continue to function regardless of the City requirements. Despite having established organizational criteria, it is hard to ensure that neighbourhood associations are representative of the general population, or even the area that they serve. Having criteria does not resolve potential conflicts with having one or more overlapping associations that would receive City recognition while covering the same geographic areas and providing Council with differing perspectives on development referrals.
 - Financial Implications: Staff time will be required for ongoing engagement and implementation related to ensuring that associations that wish to be recognized provide details to support that recognition. Additional Staff time will also be required to maintain the support levels identified in the Neighbourhood

Association Recognition and Supports Council Policy. A dedicated Neighbourhood Grants Program with an annual budget of \$10,000 would be created and managed to support neighbourhood associations. It is anticipated this program could become operational in 2023, pending Council funding approval.

2. That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to maintain the status quo and continue to support active neighbourhood associations in the City regardless of organizational capacity.
 - Advantages: This will retain the existing neighbourhood association engagement approach and support that is preferred by a smaller portion of less organized associations.
 - Disadvantages: Without providing neighbourhood associations with the opportunity to meet organizational criteria, Council would continue to struggle to evaluate the merit of feedback of a neighbourhood association in terms of their ability to fairly represent and be accountable to their defined neighbourhood.
 - Financial Implications: None beyond Staff time required for ongoing engagement and time required to maintain existing supports.
3. That the Governance and Priorities Committee provide alternative direction.]

SUMMARY POINTS

- At its regular meeting held 2020-FEB-10, the City's Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) received an information report from Staff on the status of neighbourhood associations in Nanaimo and the nature of the City's relationship and engagement with these groups.
- Based on direction from Council, Staff further engaged with the City's active neighbourhood associations on matters related to organizational capacity and what criteria (if any) should be used by the City in order to formally recognize and support a neighbourhood association.
- Based on feedback from the neighbourhood associations and Staff review/research of how other municipalities recognize, support, and engage with associations, it was recommended in a Staff report to the GPC on 2021-APR-26 that the City establish clear organizational criteria for associations that wish to be formally recognized.
- A number of concerns were raised by neighbourhood associations, both before and at the 2021-APR-26 meeting, regarding the Staff report, leading to Council direction to engage further with the neighbourhood associations on their concerns.
- Staff engaged further with the associations between May and September of 2021, and specifically organized a series of four discussion meetings entitled "Continuing the Conversation" to dialogue and provide further clarity around the City's proposal. Staff also conducted an online survey during October and November 2021.
- Based on Staff's additional review and neighbourhood association input, Staff are recommending that the GPC recommend that Council formally support neighbourhood associations that meet and maintain the organizational criteria outlined in the report and formally adopt a Neighbourhood Association Recognition and Support Council Policy as proposed in the report.

ATTACHMENTS:

- ATTACHMENT A: Neighbourhood Association Organizational Capacity Review, Support and Engagement Process - Additional Input Summary (2021-JUN-23)
- ATTACHMENT B: Neighbourhood Association Organizational Capacity Review, Support and Engagement Process – Continuing the Conversation Meeting Notes (Jul/Aug, 2021)
- ATTACHMENT C: Neighbourhood Association Organizational Status & Proposed City Support Level
- ATTACHMENT D: Proposed Neighbourhood Association Supports
- ATTACHMENT E: Nanaimo Neighbourhood Association Survey Summary (2021-NOV-16)
- ATTACHMENT F: Link to “Community Association Land Use Committee (CALUC) Terms of Reference”
- ATTACHMENT G: Comparison of Neighbourhood Support and Engagement in Other Municipalities

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