

DATE OF MEETING NOVEMBER 20, 2023

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SUBJECT COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE POLICY & COUNCIL SUPPORT POLICY

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To establish protocols for handling electronic and paper correspondence addressed to the Mayor and/or Council as well as protocols for responding consistently to groups or organizations that request support from the City of Nanaimo in their endeavors.

Recommendation

1. That Council endorse COU-238 Council Correspondence Policy as attached to the November 20, 2023, report by the Deputy Corporate Officer.
2. That Council endorse COU-237 Council Support Policy as attached to the November 20, 2023, report by the Deputy Corporate Officer.

BACKGROUND

On 2023-OCT-16, Council passed a motion directing staff to draft a policy with respect to Council's response to correspondence received by Mayor and Council. Since then, Staff researched and compared Council Correspondence policies from other local governments to see what leading municipal practises are for how correspondence to Mayor and Council is processed and requests from groups and organizations seeking letters of support.

Based on the gathered information, and Nanaimo's current protocols, staff are bringing forward two policies for Council's consideration. If adopted they will establish formal guidelines for handling electronic and paper correspondence addressed to the Mayor and/or Council as well as protocols for responding consistently to groups or organizations that request support from the City of Nanaimo in their endeavours.

DISCUSSION

Council Correspondence Policy:

Similar to the City's current practice, other local governments surveyed place correspondence on the agenda that they think the public needs to be aware of or requires a decision by Council. Local governments vary in how and what correspondence that is not placed on an agenda is distributed to Council. Some municipalities have a paper "reading file" for Council and others circulate the information electronically.

The City and other local governments do not place copies of correspondence related to operations or complaints to Council on a Council agenda as local governments have a duty to protect personal information pursuant to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy*

Act (FOIPPA) unless the individual has consented to disclosure in the appropriate manner. The current practise is that Council members receive copies, the Mayor's office acknowledges receipt, and forwards any operational concerns or enquiries to the applicable staff for action.

The proposed comprehensive draft policy encompasses current City practices in circulating the various types of correspondence received from members of the public and other entities and incorporates leading practices of other local governments. It clarifies what correspondence will be made available to the public on the Council agenda and how correspondence is processed by the Mayor, by individual Members of Council, and Mayor and Council collectively. The policy does, however, include a proposed new process to streamline how correspondence not requiring action would be circulated to Mayor and Council, as well as ways for Council members to bring forward any information item that they wish to have added to a Meeting Agenda for consideration by Council. Highlights regarding the processes for dealing with correspondence within the policy are as follows:

1. Correspondence Addressed to Mayor and Council (for action)

- Correspondence related to operational matters, including letters of inquiry and/or complaints from the public will continue to be acknowledged by the Mayor's office and directed to the applicable staff for resolution and response.
- Correspondence related to matters awaiting a staff report for Council's consideration will be held until that matter is brought forward on a Meeting Agenda.
- Correspondence related to public hearings will be dealt with as per the Public Hearing Process policy.
- Requests for letters of support, in-kind contributions, support in principle, or funding would be addressed through a new Council Support policy (see Attachment B).
- Other correspondence addressed to Mayor and Council requiring action will be reviewed by the Corporate Officer and where applicable placed on a future Council or Committee agenda for consideration.

2. Correspondence to Mayor and Council (for information)

Correspondence for information will be circulated to Council in a weekly Council Information Package that is prepared in Escribe and distributed every Friday via an email with a link to the information package. The material within that package will be grouped into the following categories:

A. Correspondence

Examples include letters of thanks, appreciation or commendation, annual reports from other organizations, memos from senior staff, and general correspondence that is informational in nature.

B. Federal, Provincial and Local Governments

Examples might include letters or information to Mayor and Council from Federal and Provincial governments, or copies of letters written by the Mayor to various levels of government.

- C. FCM, UBCM, AVICC, MFA, and VIEA
Examples include UBCM and AVICC Bulletins, conference information, and updates.
- D. Newsletters and News Releases
Copies of City newsletters and current news releases.
- E. Mayor's Schedule
This will highlight the Mayor's weekly meetings and event schedule.
- F. Council Schedule
Council and Committee meetings, including RDN meetings, open houses, etc. for the upcoming two-week period will be highlighted in this section. While this is for Council's convenience, it is important for Council to continue to rely on their individual calendars for the most up to date information about meeting dates and times as they may change prior to distribution of the next Council Information Package.

3. Correspondence Addressed to the Mayor

All correspondence addressed to the Mayor will be dealt with at the Mayor's discretion and a copy, as appropriate, will be circulated to Council members for information.

4. Correspondence Received by a Member of Council

Should a Council member identify an item of correspondence from a Council Information Package that they wish to bring forward for consideration by Council, a copy should be provided to the Corporate Officer who will add it to a Meeting Agenda in accordance with the procedures outlined in the policy.

Council Support Policy

From time to time, Council receives requests from various organizations/groups seeking a letter of support to accompany their funding application for a specific project/initiative. In some instances, the requests come before Council at the last minute with not enough information or come with a simple covering note or letter with links to the provincial or federal grant-funding website. This puts the onus on staff or Council to do the research to ascertain the finer details of the grant qualifications making it challenging for Council and staff to evaluate the request.

Reviewing them at the last minute, or without enough detail, also makes it harder to determine whether the request might directly compete with the City or another organization applying for those same funds or whether there might be an expectation for staff to provide support or for the City to partner in the organization's initiative.

The attached policy, if approved, will require applicants to fill out a "Request for Support Application Form" and provide an accompanying executive summary that provides enough information so that Council can make an informed decision about the project/initiative. Some of the requirements to be contained within the executive summary would include:

- Whether the request is for a letter of support in principle, an in-kind contribution of staff time; or a partnership request;
- Background information on the organization requesting the support;
- Whether there is a cost to the City related to the specific request;
- The funding source of the proposed program, and total amount of funds being requested in the grant application;
- A proposed detailed budget;
- Target groups to be served, including the number of individuals to be served and where the services will be offered;
- Anticipated outcomes of the program;
- Indication of whether or not similar programs exist in the Regional District of Nanaimo area;
- Indication, if known, of other organization(s) applying for the same funds; and
- Coordination with other entities, including any grants from other governments.

In most cases, requests for letters of support to accompany a grant application for funding will require a formal Council resolution and therefore must be considered by Council. However, in some instances the Mayor may issue the letter of support on behalf of the City if the endeavour does not require a Council resolution, does not conflict with other City policies or initiatives, does not involve a financial contribution or in-kind contribution from the City, and would not be in competition with a grant application from the City or other non-profit community organization.

It is recognized that at times, funding timelines can be tight; however, Council and staff must be given enough time to review the request. To assist in that regard, the policy states that requests for letters of support should be submitted as far as possible ahead of the submission deadline but no later than seven (7) days prior the applicable Council meeting at which the request will go forward, and fourteen (14) days prior to the date the requestor requires the letter. Consideration of requests submitted after the deadline would be considered at the discretion of Council.

OPTIONS

Option 1:

1. That Council endorse COU-238 Council Correspondence Policy as attached to the November 20, 2023, report by the Deputy Corporate Officer.
2. That Council endorse COU-237 Council Support Policy as attached to the November 20, 2023, report by the Deputy Corporate Officer.

By supporting option 1, the protocols for incoming correspondence to Mayor and Council, as well protocols for responding consistently to groups or organizations requesting support from the City of Nanaimo in their endeavours, will be established and clear to Council, staff, and the public. The proposed policies encompass current City practices as well as leading practices of other local governments.

Option 2

Council direction is sought.

Should Council wish to amend either policy, a motion providing direction on the specific sections would be sought. Staff will then incorporate the revisions and bring forward the updated policies to a future meeting.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Council directed staff to draft a policy with respect to Council's response to correspondence received by Mayor and Council.
- Staff researched and compared Council Correspondence policies from other local governments to see what leading practices are for how correspondence to Mayor and Council is processed and requests from groups and organizations seeking letters of support.
- Based on the gathered information, and Nanaimo's current protocols, two policies are being presented. If adopted, they will establish formal guidelines for handling electronic and paper correspondence addressed to the Mayor and/or Council as well as protocols for responding consistently to groups or organizations that request support from the City of Nanaimo in their endeavors.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A - COU-238 – Council Correspondence Policy

Attachment B - COU-237 – Council Support Policy

Attachment C - Request for Support Application Form

Submitted by:

Karen Robertson,
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Concurrent by:

Sheila Gurrie,
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Dale Lindsay,
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