

Memo to Planning and Environment Committee

The transition for the Advisory Committee of the Environment (ACE) from reporting to the Civic Works Committee to that of the Planning and Environment Committee was significant during the last term for ACE members. Introducing planning issues to ACE's agenda required some evolution and clarification that ACE members had to work through. Overall, ACE was able to address a number of issues as follows:

- a) received information on:
 - i) the Great Lakes protection as well as Thames River monitoring;
 - ii) the proposed Kincardine geological repository for nuclear storage, electromagnetic radiation;
 - iii) the LTC new transit routes;
 - iv) the City Map 2 – New Waste Strategy;
 - v) the City Urban Forestry Strategy;
 - vi) the Old Victoria Hospital Lands secondary plan process; and,
 - vii) the Hydro's Smart Meter program;
- b) attended tours of the City Materials Recovery Facility and Western's Biotron;
- c) Provided input to:
 - i) the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority;
 - ii) two City budgets;
 - iii) ReThink London;
 - iv) the London Plan;
 - v) the City Community Energy Action Plan;
 - vi) the City Special Events policy;
 - vii) the City's partnership with Waterloo's Community Car Share initiative; and,
 - viii) the provincial public input process on neo-nic reduction;
- d) As well, ACE has:
 - i) addressed protocols on a website, flyer and social media;
 - ii) recommended a PACE program;
 - iii) shared minutes with the Agricultural Advisory Committee;
 - iv) received input for potential ACE presentations and updates based on 2 conferences attended;
 - v) identified a significant issue and instigated a community driven initiative "the Plight of the Pollinators"; it being noted that draft City policy is underway to protect bee health and examine a City Environmental Master Plan that supports natural heritage; and,
 - vi) facilitated a successful fall public education forum related to the Plight of the Pollinators on 'bee health' attended by 250 people.

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Advisory Committee on the Environment (ACE) Wrap up Survey

(2012-2015)

The aim of this survey is as follows:

1. Determine how members can better serve ACE.
2. Gauge member satisfaction with how ACE is run and its achievements.
3. Identify areas that need improving.

12 responses – 12 members

1. Were you able to:

* Attend meetings consistently to comply with attendance criteria Y(12)

Comments

- to the best of my ability given out of town work priorities had to take priority

* Contribute to working groups, policy and issues, recommendations Y(12)

Comments

- but not through the working groups

* Make a motion and understand the process to follow it through Y(12)

If yes, what motivated you?

Comments

- The municipal government level has the greatest opportunity for community input to affect change in city policy and action
- The knowledge that our contributions can make real change in our city through informing Council on worthwhile projects/programs to undertake.
- to make a contribution
- depended on the subject matter
- I like the idea of contributing to the bigger picture of a city's progression. I also enjoy the challenge of learning the procedures and looking for ways to be more productive.
- To learn, share and contribute to home-city my past experience and learnings from long service tenure with Municipal Governments outside Canada.
- Was of interest.
- I enjoyed and valued my experience as a member of ACE. I also enjoyed other members of the team and the input they provided from their own perspective.

2. Overall, is ACE running ok?

* Agendas are relevant to ACE's mandate Y(10) N(1) Somewhat (1)

Comments

- ACE's agenda uniquely is driven by issues members or community bring forward, and/or items Council may direct to ACE whereas, committees like EEPAC and TAC are driven by developer applications and the Transportation Master Plan. Overall, agendas this last two years generated fewer recommendations as many members of ACE were new and a learning curve was involved to bring ACE members current on civic issues first. Council did not seek ACE input on civic issues as possibly issues were researched sufficiently by staff. As well an earlier request to ACE to identify new sources of funding for the City for environmental issues was yet unanswered. Historically, ACE has generated Council's consideration with success stories from other cities, gaps in existing City initiatives or to give input to standing committee agenda items that ACE members have stayed on top of by reviewing agendas and observing their meetings.

The City's last assignment to ACE was as follows: Council resolution Jan 21, 2008 – that ACE give input to the City's environmental profile, regional recycling facility planning, financing environmental issues, promotion, and use of greywater. This was not ACE's only responsibility. Community and ACE member issues were still in addition to this.

An ACE strategy meeting on February 6, 2013 initiated by the ACE Chair for new term ACE members set priority actions to focus on over a 2 year period during this term. ACE working groups established including ReThink, Built Environment, Policy, Education and Finance to engage the whole membership. Not all subgroups were active. An additional short-term working group was established to respond to the City Community Energy Action Plan.

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This ACE term started late because of delays in an overhaul of the City standing committees. As ACE previously had focused on many infrastructure issues such as waste, water, energy, transportation and more recently climate change considerations, the transition of reporting to the Environment and Transportation Standing committee to that of Planning was significant. Introducing planning issues to ACE's agenda required some evolution and clarification that ACE members had to work through noting EEPAC's agenda, the fact that EEPAC also reports to Planning and how to work with issues outside of Planning's purview.

- There was a lot of confusion about the mandate at the start of the term that made a number of meetings unproductive; I think some of the confusion was caused by the change for ACE to report to the Planning Committee rather than its previous reporting structure; I recently learned that energy is part of ACE's mandate but there has never been any conversation about this.

*** Meetings start on time and are not longer than they need to be** Y(10) Somewhat (2)

Comments

- most of the time
- maybe

*** You are always given opportunity to contribute to discussion issues**
Y(11) Somewhat (1)

*** Other members seem prepared for meetings and able to contribute**
Y(8) N (2) Somewhat (2)

*** The committee works well as a team when resolution is needed** Y(8) Somewhat (4)

3. ACE is effective?

*** Our mandate is sufficient to protect the local environment/ecology**
Y(7) N(1) Somewhat (4)

Comments

- ACE addresses many issues not dealt with by other advisory committees. In 2012, ACE recommended a Sustainability Advisory Committee - the response was that sustainability fits within all advisory committees agendas. Over a number of years, Council has discussed a) that advisory committees be eliminated and task forces created as needed, ACE be merged with EEPAC, that committees generate policy advice on a wide range of issues to ensure their usefulness and so on. Conservation of natural resources, the raising of citizen consciousness through dissemination of information, transportation options, preservation, maintenance and improvement of the environment, comments on provincial legislation over time have all been removed from ACE's agenda by Council. Adding climate change to ACE's agenda (at ACE's request) has been helpful to ensure important issues are tabled and that ACE is still useful. EEPAC already has a heavy load.
- Yes I think so with the exception that Senior city staff indicate that energy is part of the mandate yet it has never been talked about.
- I appreciated that the City has given public citizens and local business/community groups a place to have input on environmental issues that affect decisions made by staff and Council.

*** We were effective in fulfilling our mandate over the last term**
Y(8) N(2) Somewhat (2)

Comments

- Efforts to protect bee health were important and very well done as were submissions to ReThink and The London Plan

*** Our recommendations are taken seriously and are acted upon**
Y(7) N(1) Somewhat (1) Not sure (2) Don't know (1)

Comments

- I don't know how to give an opinion as a number of recommendations towards ReThink and The London Plan will be accumulated with many other submissions and the outcome or impact is unknown.

*** We are kept informed on issues that pertain to our mandate**
Y(7) N(2) Not sure (1) Maybe (2)

Comments

- This comes up with other advisory committees as well as ACE. The onus is moreso to follow Council and standing committee agendas, media and other cities' accomplishments to stay current with issues in order to speak to them. The shift of ACE's agenda to report to Planning isn't totally resolved with early information consistently being forwarded to ACE's agendas environmental issues.

*** Most members make a regular contribution to the tasks of ACE**
Y(8) N(3) Somewhat (1)

*** ACE membership contains the skill sets required to execute our duties**
Y(10) Somewhat (1) Not sure (1)

(6)

Comments

- EEPAC has several specialists. ACE might benefit from having more expertise.

* I think ACE has sufficient visibility with members of the public

Y(6) N(5) Somewhat (1)

Comments

- I think ACE has sufficient visibility with members of the public - I think it is not well known by the public but I don't see that there is a need for it to be; if someone is looking to bring forward an idea, they will research the City's website; I didn't see the need for a brochure nor do I think that many people would have been impacted by it.

* ACE has good support from staff members that support the committee

Y(8) N(1) Somewhat (3)

Comments

- Jay Stanford and Tom Copeland attended ACE meetings regularly together and supplied their comments on ACE input to waste and water issues. ACE is not part of their mandate now which has been a challenge. Their involvement was valued by last term's ACE members. Planning staff are not able to attend as often but this is likely as a result of what is on the ACE agenda in that it may not impact them.
Jackie Martin, of course, is a great asset to the committee and much appreciated.
- Non voting resource members such as the Ministry of Environment were committed to being at most of ACE's meetings. The TVDSB apparently was not replaced midway. I have no understanding who the City's Community Services division representative is or what their relationship is with ACE. It would seem more progressive to have a representative from Environmental Services. The Catholic school board and London Hydro have never attended a meeting. More effort is needed to gain the student resource non voting member early on. Overall, all non voting resource members should be mandated to attend at least one meeting in the first quarter of ACE to describe their role so it can be built on.
- ACE has good support from staff members that support the committee - if they are aware of the issue being discussed. Noticeably over the last 2 years there has been less participation. In part, this may be attributed to the restructure of the standing committee ACE reports to.

4. What can ACE do differently?

* What aspect of ACE is the most rewarding for you?

Comments

- ACE is a voice for climate change and other big picture long-term issues locally being a part of improving environmental/climate matters in London.
- Seeing our proposals go to Council and being discussed and taken seriously as viable options for the City to adopt.
- Practical actions
- Connecting with like-minded and concerned citizens, and city staff.
- Like-minded people, safe guarding of the environment.
- Behind the scene look at City Hall and topics that come up and procedures to look into them to change them.
- Learning about potential issues and how other municipalities approach issues or their policies.
- Collective wisdom on environmental and public health issues effecting daily life directly/indirectly, from members coming with diversified educational and professional backgrounds.

* What aspect is the biggest turn-off for you?

Comments

- The process encountered with agenda deadlines and having to wait until the next meeting to get certain items addressed can spread an issue over several months.
- Not engaged in technical issues; too much policy talk.
- Over all, the committee seems to be hindered by a lack of clarity as to mandate and due process to fulfill that mandate. There seemed to be confusion for almost the entire term, at least for myself, as to what the expectations were in regards to process for making recommendations to our standing committee. A majority of the motions we passed and projects we initiated seemed to have little to nothing to do with making specific policy recommendations to our standing committee, which I had understood to be the primary role of our committee.
- What appears to be a lack of interest in the environment from the previous Council.
- Not really sure what the committee has changed/done/been a part of before.
- The lack of knowledge about what the role of an advisory committee is; what impact it can have; regulations that staff operate within on certain issues; the lack of orientation and explanation at the start of the term.
- It's very limited role and weak voice in front of City Council and Corporate. For city affairs, it's a one-way role. Technically ACE cannot question rather it can only give its comments to whatever is brought on its agenda from Corporate.
- Can't think of any

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*** What would you say ACE's strength is?**

Comments

- Tasks forces by their nature are not designed to performing long term issues identified by both citizens and committees that require attention but moreso one-off issues that require focused and prompt resolution. ACE has been that open door and provides Council with valued environmental feedback at nominal cost. ACE encourages critical thinking for members. ACE looks to the future.
- Great diversity of backgrounds on various aspects of the environment.
- Abundant opportunity.
- Keeping issues that are important to environment and citizens, in the background. This was done most effectively when Jay Stanford and Tom Copeland attended every meeting as committee resources in the previous term.
- Vast skill sets and community channels/connections
- Willingness of the volunteers to review data and desire to make a difference.
- It is a wonderful forum where the City may utilize services of professionals and experts without incurring any expenditure or financial commitment. The beauty is, members attend meetings, join work groups to contribute their time, past experience and exposure without any financial or any pecuniary interests, hence, their inputs are always free from influence of any kind.
- Presenting important environmental issues to Council that the City should be aware of or implement.
- I think ACE does well when it narrows the focus to particular issues or projects each year that it can accomplish. This also allows City staff and Council members to see ACE as a valuable and helpful body.
- As a whole, ACE with its varied backgrounds, works well together and discusses issues in a systematic way relying on the advice of experts for assistance.

*** What would you say ACE's weakness is?**

Comments

- When the new term started, the first year was largely orientation to the City's processes. The placement of advisory committee members should be staggered such that momentum is kept. New members need to be better informed by the City on ACE's mandate. It is difficult to understand everything provided in a long document as questions come up months after. Candidates for ACE should attend 2-3 meetings prior to applying to ensure they are qualified and support the focus of prior ACE recommendations. London not having an environmental plan makes it more of a challenge for ACE to generate integrated policy recommendations.
- To be more effective, working groups are needed outside the monthly meetings. ACE would then be more productive and results would be recognized by Council.
- Not enough disagreement.
- Restricted mandate.
- Perhaps we drifted more into an advocacy than an advisory role... I realize there is substantial overlap between the two, but we did not seem to do a lot of specific "advising" this term.
- Communications – need Council to use ACE as a resource moreso.
- Lack of structure and an understanding of process and a clear outline of what the committee can and can't do; where recommendations should be directed etc.
- Visibility in community.
- Possibly not enough direction on hard/semi-immediate changes that would impact community .
- Its decisions/recommendations in shaping resolutions are non-binding to the standing committee as well as Corporate. The fate of a well thought-out paper on energy retrofits is a classic example.

*** What would you like ACE to have accomplished that we/you didn't?**

Comments

- I would have liked to see more active participation by having working groups and more infrastructure recommendations.
- Seeing some proposals implemented as official City program (but we had a truncated mandate, so understand this may have hindered implementation timelines).
- Personally, I would have liked to be more engaged, which is nobody's fault other than my own. I felt like the committee was after an elusive target, and I just never quite found my traction in it.
- A higher budget for water wastewater to accomplish or catch up infrastructure needs.
- Increase accessibility to recycling/garbage/compost, possibly even electronic waste knowledge; look into (a Canadian) junk mail program (like a do-not-spam from businesses etc. – has to be some way to limit excessiveness).
- No specific tasks.
- Convince City for expeditious implementation of PACE/PAPER type programs for London.
- Not sure.

*** What keeps ACE from being as effective as it could be?**

Comments

- Uncertain.
- Lack of mandate/process clarity.
- Not sure.
- Not sure.

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- Lack of orientation and good direction; there were too many different issues and topics that were touched on; it should have been narrowed and focused on specific issues. The Bee Health was an excellent initiative but it didn't come until late in the term.
- As per general observations: its limited role and importance in decision making process by City.

*** To improve ACE we should introduce:**

Comments

- A way the City can do more to bring new members up to speed more quickly through a more in-depth orientation for advisory committees. Also to post agendas and minutes of all advisory committees on the City's website as well as mid-term vacancies to ensure advisory committees have full complement.
- Strict timing on agenda items, set beforehand so that items are held to their time limits
- A clearly delineated process of reporting/recommendations, and stick to it. It might be as simple as a simple little flowchart. Fundamentally, an advisory committee can do two things to affect policy change: 1) make recommendations to existing agenda items of the standing committee, and 2) recommend new agenda items to the standing committee. For both of these streams, it is (or should be) a relatively straightforward sequence, but for the most part, I felt like we were something like a rogue committee, off in our own little world for most of the past term.
- More input to Council based on their asking for ACE's opinion or support.
- Not sure.
- A thorough orientation of the mandate and explanation of the line between advisory members and staff's roles and restrictions. With such a short meeting time and limited meeting structure a lot of time was used up in trying to understand what the committee could or couldn't do or should be doing.
- ACE members of respective working groups should also be invited to the concerned standing committee meetings and from there ACE members should also be made part of various working groups under particular standing committees.
- Create a webpage, or improve the one that is on the city website, with details of what ACE does, including past projects.
- The only aspect that sometimes slow progress at meetings are when an invited speaker discusses unnecessary and lengthy details that are not pertinent and relevant at that time. This can not only eat up a large amount of valued meeting time but can also cause members to be less focused and lose interest. It may be helpful if speakers were provided with specific questions ahead of time that were of concern to ACE members and to briefly summarize background information.

*** Before I joined ACE, I wish someone had told me**

Comments

- More details about the inner workings of City Hall with a better description of the hierarchical structure that constitutes it.
- Not sure.
- I wish that we as a whole committee had more clarity as to our term objectives. How are going to define success over the next term? What are our targets? If it is advocacy, fine; if it is policy recommendation, fine; if it is some of both, fine. But I would have benefited by having a clearer picture of this at the outset. Again, to reiterate, the only person I have to blame for not having this clarity is myself. Finding this at the beginning would be what I would do differently.
- I did not know ACE existed.

*** Other comments:**

- Attendance is important. Council policy states committee members are deemed to have resigned if absent from 25% of their regular meetings without consent of Council or because of health reasons. Yearly, this means 3 meetings out of 11.
- We need more members who are doers. I am not sure how to get members more involved but that is a problem. ACE also needs to be allowed to report to whichever standing committee it deems most relevant. We deal with multi-disciplinary issues which are not all best dealt through Planning. We have enough wisdom to figure out where to send our reports.
- My greatest concern: If we were to weigh the time/energy we absorbed from city staff over the last term, against the helpful and constructive input we provided in turn, I fear that we were ultimately a net drain on municipal resources.
- All my comments are more loose than exact. I am still feeling out the impacts that are possible and the ways the committee runs and what is even in its mandate to impact, etc. Also, at this time I find it hard to give constructive answers because I do not know the full picture, or impacts – this could be an extremely effective committee in comparison. For those I answered, not sure.
- The group is very effective at getting things done amid some environmental agnosticism on the old council; but we seem to work rather independently from the City. We are not advising the City or any committee as much as we are setting our own agenda. I have served on city committees elsewhere and I was somewhat surprised to see no City manager as a regular attendee. In my experience the City managers ran the committee as chair. This is not a critique of the ACE Chair, ACE or the City, but it is something the City and ACE should think about moving forward with a new Council.
- ACE should be more empowered . Its resolutions should be given more importance.

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- Generally ACE is dealing with day to day affairs pertaining to the environment especially from a waste management point of view. City's waste management department should have a permanent member available to all ACE meetings like ACE has from the London-Middlesex Health Unit.
