

December 21, 2015

Chair and Members  
Corporate Services Committee

Re: Public Question Session/Period

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The City of London's Strategic Plan establishes a number of strategic areas of focus for 2015 to 2019 to move the City forward. One area of strategic focus is "Leading in Public Service", with the related strategy being to obtain a "collaborative, engaged leadership" by "maximizing openness and transparency in Council decision making". One method of achieving this goal is by providing the public with a greater voice at Council meetings through the introduction of a "Public Question Session/Period" during the meeting. There are a number of municipalities who provide for this within their procedural by-laws.

I would ask that the Governance Working Group be requested to review and recommend the necessary changes to procedural processes for including a Public Question Session/Period at Municipal Council meetings. This would include reviewing the best practices of those municipalities who currently provide for Public Question Sessions/Periods. Some preliminary research is attached for your information.

Respectfully submitted,

Josh Morgan  
Councillor Ward 7

## **Preliminary Background Research – Public Question Session/Period**

(with thanks to researchers: Chris Bantock & Bridgette Somers)

### **Ontario Municipalities**

#### **Ajax**

The Procedural By-law provides the opportunity for Public Question Periods at City Council meetings. Section 4.15 of this By-law states that: “An opportunity will be provided for any Member of Council or any member of the public to ask the Mayor a question pertaining to any matter appearing on the Council agenda. All questions will be answered by the Mayor, unless in the Mayor's opinion, the answer could be better provided by another Member of Council or a member of Town staff. In the interest of expediency, the Mayor/Chair may impose time limitations on the questions asked by Members of Council and the public.”

<http://www.ajax.ca/en/insidetownhall/resources/ProcedureBy-law101-2003.pdf>

#### **Brampton**

Brampton's Procedural By-law sets out Public Question Periods in section 4.8. This section states as follows:

- (1) The agenda for each meeting shall include a public question period during which any member of the public may ask a question related to any item on the agenda for that meeting, except a matter dealt with in a closed session;
- (2) The maximum time allocated for public questions shall be fifteen (15) minutes, unless, by unanimous consent of the members present, the council or committee agrees to extend that time limit.

<http://www.brampton.ca/EN/City-Hall/Bylaws/Archive/160-2004.pdf>

#### **Brighton**

The Town of Brighton's Procedural By-law, #097-2013, sets out a Public Question Period in section 6.8. This section states as follows:

- (1) Any member of the public or press present at the meeting may raise and submit a question to Council or Committee of the Whole on any item listed on the agenda without prior notice;
- (2) A maximum of ten (10) minute will be set aside for “Question Period” unless a decision is made by Council or Committee of the Whole to extend this time period;
- (3) Members of the public are to phrase their comments in the form of a question and not to use the opportunity for the sole purpose of expressing editorial commentary;
- (4) Council will hear the question and answer if appropriate;
- (5) Council or Committee of the Whole will not direct an undertaking by staff on any matter coming from Question Period;
- (6) Prior to the commencement of “Question Period” portion of the meeting the Chair of the Council or Committee of the Whole will outline the rules of procedure with respect to Question Period, in a form of substance that summarizes the points outlined in this section of the by-law;
- (7) No person speaking during Public Question Period shall: a) Speak disrespectfully of any person, b) Use offensive words or unparliamentarily language, c) Disobey that rules of order or a decision of the Chair.

#### **Caledon**

A 2009 amendment to Caledon's Procedural By-law introduced a Public Question Period during each Council meeting. Section 26 of this By-law states as follows:

- (1) The Agenda for each meeting shall include a public question period during which a member of the public may ask a question related to any item on the agenda for that meeting, except a matter dealt with in a closed session;
- (2) The maximum time allocated for each speaker shall be two (2) minutes, unless time permits to provide a second opportunity for the speaker to address Council;
- (3) Speakers who wish to express an opinion or provide comment shall register as a delegate;

(4) The maximum time allocated for Public Question Period is fifteen (15) minutes, unless, by unanimous consent of the members present, Council agrees to extend the time limit a maximum of 15 minutes.”

<http://www.caledon.ca/en/townhall/resources/BL-2012-XXX-005Procedural.pdf>

### **Deseronto**

According to the Town’s website, the Town of Deseronto provides for a question period at each Council meeting where the public will be given the opportunity to ask questions, and/or voice their concerns and suggestions regarding by-laws and other community issues. Members of the public are not required to make a formal deputation request to speak during the question period.

<http://deseronto.ca/town-hall/general-information/>

### **Elizabeth-Kitley**

The Township of Elizabeth-Kitley provides for everyone in attendance at a Regular Council Meeting to ask a question of Council. The Mayor will direct questions at the appropriate point in the proceedings.

<http://www.elizabethtown-kitley.on.ca/content/clerks-department>

### **Minto**

The Town of Minto’s Procedural By-law provides for a public question period. Section 7.2.4 (d) of the By-law states that: “Public Question Period provided for under 7.2.3(8) shall be an opportunity for persons in attendance at the meeting to ask a question of Council. The Head of Council shall ensure members of the public address Council with a question such that speeches or statements not in the form of a question shall be considered out of order and not allowed by the Head of Council. Persons in attendance shall be limited to no more than two questions and repeat questions shall not be permitted. The Head of Council may answer the question asked, may defer an answer to any member of Council or staff present at the meeting who may be in a position to answer, or may require an answer to be provided in writing at a subsequent meeting of Council.”

<http://town.minto.on.ca/content/departments/cao-clerk/policies/minto-procedural-by-law.pdf>

### **Trent Hills**

Trent Hills allots 10 minutes for a Public Question Period and another 10 minutes for Press Question Period.

<http://www.trenthills.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/20-05-14CouncilAgenda.pdf>

### **Outside Ontario**

#### **Banff**

The Town of Banff, Alberta, provides for Public Question Periods as per their Procedures By-law.

<http://www.banff.ca/DocumentCenter/View/255>

#### **Dawson’s Creek**

The Town of Dawson’s Creek, B.C., provides for Question and Answer Period to be held in Council Chambers during the fifteen (15) minutes prior to the start of the Media Question Period.. Dawson’s Creeks’ webpage outlines the following protocol:

- (1) A questioner must be a property owner, resident of the municipality and/or a person who is deemed to be directly affected by the matter to be addressed;
- (2) Persons wishing to ask a question must register to do so. Opportunity to register will be available at City Hall on the Friday before the meeting from 1:00 pm to 4:30 pm;
- (3) Registration will not be carried forward from meeting to meeting. Persons that have registered but have not addressed their question to Council at the end of Question and Answer Period, will be advised to return to the next Regular Meeting and re-register, or may submit their questions for subsequent written response.
- (4) Questioners must submit their questions in writing to the Director of Corporate Administration in advance of speaking.
- (5) Questioners must respect the need for Question Period to proceed in a timely fashion and must proceed according to these guidelines:

- Address the Mayor when speaking;
- State their name and residential address, prior to presenting their question to Council;
- Speak clearly and concisely into the microphone at the Delegation Table; when and where one is available;
- Agree to speak for not more than three minutes and to speak only once during the meeting (unless invited by the Mayor to extend the discussion).

(6) Questioners are required to ask a question and are not permitted to make a speech. A question will be ruled out of order if speaking to matters of current litigation or legal action against the Corporation of the City of Dawson Creek. A questioner making political statements, using rude and/or obscene language or defamatory comments or speaking about a bylaw from a closed public hearing will also be ruled out of order.

(7) Council reserves the right to defer responding to a question in order to obtain the information required to provide a comprehensive and accurate response.”

<http://www.dawsoncreek.ca/departments/corporate-administration/council/council-meeting-information/>

### **Penticton**

The City of Penticton, B.C., provides for a Public Question Period at the end of Council meetings. Section 69 of their Procedural By-law states that: “At the end of Council business, the media and public will be afforded an opportunity to address Council. The format must be restricted to questions with respect to items that are on the current agenda and each question must be limited to two (2) minutes.”

<http://www.penticton.ca/assets/City~Hall/Bylaws/Administration/Council%20Procedures%20Bylaw%202004-23.pdf>

### **Pontiac**

The Municipality of Pontiac, Quebec, provides for a Public Question Period at the end of each Council meeting.

<http://www.municipalitepontiac.com/files/1613/7668/1923/MN130709.pdf>

### **Tofino**

Tofino, B.C., provides for a public question period, according to their City website. The site states that “all Regular Council meetings are open to public attendance. While Council does not typically hear from the public during Regular Council Meetings, unless a request to appear before Council as a delegation has been approved, there is an opportunity for residents to ask questions on any matter that was on the agenda or any business discussed at the meeting by Council during the 15 Minute Question Period, which takes place immediately prior to adjournment of the Council Meeting. Prior to addressing Council at the 15 Minute Question Period you shall state your name to Council prior to asking your questions. You shall be allotted 2 minutes and the Mayor or a member of Council or a staff member may answer the questions. There will be no rebuttal or debate to the questions asked.”

<http://www.tofino.ca/content/how-participate>

### **Whistler**

The Procedural By-law in Whistler, B.C., provides for a Public Question and Answer Period at the beginning of each Council meeting, following the adoption of minutes. Every meeting will be conducted in this way unless the Council otherwise resolves.

[https://www.whistler.ca/sites/default/files/bylaws/1659\\_2004.pdf](https://www.whistler.ca/sites/default/files/bylaws/1659_2004.pdf)