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CANADA

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To the Chair and Members of the Governance Working Group

Re: The Processing of Petitions

In my short time serving as a Member of Council I have seen petitions work in various ways. In a recent example on an issue in my Ward, a petition of 4,000 + names was presented to Council. Delving deeper into the petition, we learned that less than 25% of those who participated on the petition lived in London. I found this concerning that our policies could be affected by non-Londoners.

I spoke to the City Clerk to learn more about petitions. There are basically two types of petitions: those that come unsolicited like in the case above; and those that are requested by the City (for example when street calming is requested a petition of 10 names is required or in the case of a planning issue). If the unsolicited petition falls within the jurisdiction of the City it will be presented to Council or Standing Committee with privacy protections in place.

Originally participation on a petition was by means of having individuals personally sign their name to the issue, usually with a conversation taking place to explain the matter. In these days of social media, petitions have changed. It is easier and faster to click on an online petition than it is to sign. Petitions are no longer local as anyone around the world can click to add their name.

I believe it is time to look into how we as a Council deals with the consideration of petitions. I am requesting that the following recommendation be supported by the Governance Working Group:

That the City Clerk BE DIRECTED to report back to the Governance Working Group (GWG) providing an overview of other municipalities policies and processing with respect to the handling of unsolicited petitions and to provide draft policies and procedures for the consideration of the GWG with respect to this matter.

Petitions are an important tool for the public to provide input to legislators. With technology changing it is important that we provide the public and ourselves with guidance on how to use this tool effectively so we give petitions the attention they deserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Lehman,
Councillor, Ward 8