



August 26, 2020

To: City Council

Re: Urban League of London Statement on Advisory Committees

A report from the Governance Working Group is looking to review and potentially restructure City Advisory Committees. The Urban League of London believes that citizens and residents are the building blocks of London and that the input they provide to Council is vital. Advisory Committees provide guidance and recommendations to Council in a number of areas including the environment and urban forests, diversity, cycling, accessibility and more. Advisory Committee members volunteer considerable time and expertise to make our city better and provide value that the City would otherwise often have to pay for in expensive consulting fees.

Advisory Committees have a different function than public engagement in that they have a specific focus to provide advice to Council and they are made up of citizen experts. Committees review plans, policies and make recommendations to Council on areas related to their specific mandate. Members of these committees do so as volunteers without compensation, providing countless hours of expertise and input.

A representative from the Urban League of London typically sits on the Striking Committee, which makes recommendations to Council on appointments to the Advisory Committee every four years. Through this process, we've seen the quality of applicants that come forward and the valuable expertise and experience they have, both in terms of formal qualifications but also lived experience. Professors, seniors, students, consultants, business owners, teachers, parents, farmers, citizens from across London apply to these advisory committees with a desire to help improve the city we live in.

The Urban League of London Board is not opposed to a review of advisory committees; in fact, we agree with a review towards making them more effective. We believe this should happen not by consolidating, streamlining and cutting advisory committees, but instead by finding ways to help them function better. This would go a long way to better valuing the time residents of London dedicate to these committees and the valuable recommendations they put forward. The largest issue we see and hear about is that advisory committee recommendations are often

ignored and the whole process of having the committee reports can be akin to checking a “civic input box” for Council.

Many of the suggested ideas to replace Advisory Committees such as surveys, panels and citizen lotteries should be considered as much needed additions to enhance the City’s engagement processes, rather than as a replacement for Committees that serve a different function than simply engagement.

In addition, any review of Advisory Committees should include an anti-racism, equity and gender analysis. This would help ensure that advisory committees not only represent the make-up of our community but also reflect anti-oppressive frameworks in their structure and work.

Advisory Committees are an important component of citizen engagement that provide valuable ways for residents to engage with the City and bolster transparency and accountability to City and Council decisions. Any efforts to review their role should be focused on how to make them the most effective and equitable they can be, with the aim to strengthen the voice and role of citizens in City decision making processes.

Respectfully,
Shawna Lewkowitz,
President Urban League of London on behalf of the
ULL Board