

Advisory Committees to the Council
Concept , Confusions & Conciliation



Importance of Citizens Participation in decision making process.

Preamble

The concept of citizen participation in the decision making process is not a new idea; rather its roots may be traced to ancient Greece and Colonial New England. In every civilization, there have been various forms of public/citizen participation in the decision making process such as, direct outreach to citizens, independent citizen action groups, direct citizen participation, public information sessions/meetings and information campaigns. etc.

In modern municipal government systems, although nobody knows better about social welfare/development, community pulse, public administration and Governance than the people (elected representatives and public servants) on the frontline, it is also a fact that every group working in a pre-set environment develops its own regimented paradigm. To ensure sustainability and continuous improvement, it is always very important to have some sort of perpetual mechanism to have the input from actual stakeholders (local communities) at the planning to implementation stages, who are not part of that paradigm. Projects rendered without active involvement from the local citizens often cause problems rather than benefits.

The decision-making process in the municipal setting is a very complex task. It requires scientific analytical recommendations from experts(staff), careful deliberation from the elected body and perspective from the citizens who will be affected by the decisions. The broad range of multi-dimensional complex issues being faced by modern cities has caused the trend in decision making process to be technology & technology expertise dependent rather upon wishes & wills of the local people. Although strong arguments may be made in favour of technocratic decision making approaches, we have seen that most of the time these strict scientific & technocratic decision making approaches not only failed to solve social problems on long term basis, but often contributed to them. Two examples of failed policy in this regard are traffic congestion and over-development in the downtowns of all major cities around the globe. In contrast, we observe that there are pockets in those cities where local residents, through their local organizations/societies, have put themselves in a position to keep their residential & commercial areas insulated from such technocratic approaches and thus remain free from many 'modern problems' (e.g traffic congestion, parking, lack of active transportation infrastructure, road user safety, disappearing green spaces, canopy cover, etc) in urban areas.



London is going through a very important transition period of its developmental growth. In the last few years many people/families from all over Canada have made London their new home because City offers unmatched attractions to the newcomers in terms of availability of social services, civic infrastructure, education, health facilities and housing for middle class (although which is also becoming out-of-reach from middle class due to ineffective control and rapid growth of the subdivisions without matching the required infrastructure to support additional population especially in terms of traffic flow at main arteries..the same side effect of technocratic decision making process without involving local communities who are/will be affected.).

The concept behind this non conventional short paper is to highlight the importance of citizen participation (to be more specific its 13 Advisory Committees) in the decision making process. During preparation of this ‘paper cum material’ efforts have been made to keep it simple, precise and to the point hence it is formatted in point form rather than a more conventional descriptive and lengthy paper.

If Governance Working Group or City council desire elaboration of any point(s), sample drafts of detailed terms of reference etc, that can always be done within the shortest possible time.

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Tariq Khan

London Jan 7,2022.





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Do Cities need Citizen Advisory Committees?

- Elected Council.
- Professional staff (with Broad range of expertise & Experience).
 - Consultants & Contractors at the disposal
 - Public Interface available (Conventional & Digital)
- Interest Groups, NGOs, Media, Activists, Academia.

Public participation contributes to better & sustainable decisions because **City Council & staff will have more complete information** i.e additional facts, local communities sentiments, values, and perspectives.



Constitution of multiple ACs in the Local councils, in addition to the legislatively mandated ACs, is a practice & convention rather requirement by the Act.

Do Citizen Advisory Committees Add Value?

- To support an Elected Council.... Yes!
- To support the Civic Administration.... Yes!
- To represent Interest Groups, NGOs, Media, Activists, Academia.... Yes and No!
- To represent the average Londoner.... No!
 - Community / Local Activists.
 - Representatives of Special Interest groups.
 - Active & Retired Professionals.
 - Resume needy.
 - Political supporters.



Role of ACs.

- **Resource for the Council**
 - Impartial and non-partisan advice & consultation on council initiatives.
 - A volunteer base 'working group' to advise and recommend solutions 'on demand' or on community concerns basis'.
 - Availability of enhanced-community-connection resource.
 - Being a creature of council, all advices / recommendations / proposals are purely advisory & non binding in all respects.
 - **No Advocacy**



Role of ACs.

- Resource and assistance to the Staff (with the council's approval)
 - Share information & collect feedback from the expertise available on the committees.
 - An 'on demand' volunteer-based 'working group' of experts and community activists & interest groups volunteers.
 - Availability of enhanced-community-connection.
 - No direct official relationship with ACs. Provide information to ACs only on the direction of Council.



The Quagmire



ACs gear, sometimes, moves Counter clockwise.

The Quagmire



Advisory Committees **ARE** to the Council

Why The Confusion?

Terms of Reference are too broadbased , not specific enough.

- AC's often **see themselves as 'Representatives' or 'Advocates' vs. "Advisors"**



- Members of ACs are “elected” by Council.
- The formal meeting protocol is same as that of Council.
- Regular official meetings are scheduled.
- Recommendations/proposals submitted by the ACs are subject to public scrutiny.

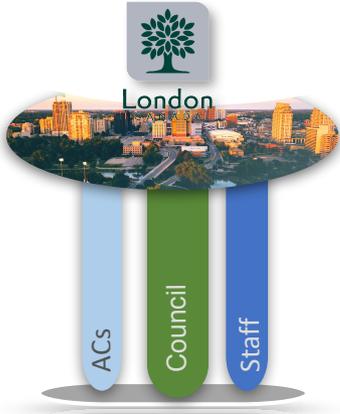
- **Confusion and Ambiguity** often leads to:

- Misinterpretation, misunderstanding, & overstepping.
- Misuse of outreach mandate in the media/community to further special interests.
- **Passionate contributors / volunteers to become passive / unresponsive / careful / confused - CSCP dilemma.**



Root Cause

Ground situation.



- ACs (certain) presume themselves as 'third pillar' of Municipal governance on account of TORs and Mandate.
- Staff is a little uneasy and sometimes view ACs as unwanted critic / detractor / disparager / adversary.

Council, as a whole, is not happy with the situation.

**Path forward....
Revamp, Relinquish or Reinvent?**



The Juncture.



- Go with Legislatively mandated ACs.
- Approve Clerks report - Reconstitute 9 ACs.
- Implement council's last decision - adding Climate Change AC..
- 2nd sober thought - Latest approach by Council & GWG.

Solutions are always invented.

Smart Fix

interim

2022

long term

2023 onwards



Diagnostics

Revamp, Relinquish or Reinvent?

- Abolishing one or multiple ACs will likely to become an election issue. Time is very short to adopt/test a totally new structure.
- The addition of new ACs, changes in structure, nomenclature or business protocol of ACs will add more confusion than clarity.
- Staff-based steering of Advisory Committees is against the spirit of independent opinion, discussion, deliberations and initiatives.
- Many retired professionals who want to contribute their experience & exposure to the City, will not be interested in serving under such a supervised environment.



Revamp or Reinvent

Revamping is the Solution.

Keep all ACs as they are; may be renamed, fine tune the TORs; bring clarity in mandate and extend the terms of current members to the end of Nov 2022.

- Reduce the frequency of AC meetings to quarterly.
- To meet with any quorum challenge (due to shortage of applicants) reduce minimum members to 5 in an AC.
- Council may call a special meeting of any AC. Work groups of ACs may meet as per their own convenience.
- Important public projects being planned by the staff should automatically become the items of the Work Plan of concerned AC as soon as these are approved by the council.



Revamping is the Solution.

- All existing members of the ACs must agree upon the amended TOR in order to be extended. Non acceptance of TORs should cause automatic disqualification of concerned member(s).
- There should be built-in mechanism within the TORs of respective AC that in case of violation it may be dealt with internally by the AC. In the case of Collective action by an AC, then the case must be referred to Council by the Clerk.



Revamping is the Solution.

- Restructuring is a continuous-improvement process but should be carried out on a piece-by-piece basis.
- Like Boards & Commissions, ACs term should also coincide with the Council term.
- Legislatively mandated ACs and other Institutional ACs should NOT be mixed with Citizen ACs/CEPs.
- Media interaction policy may be defined with more clarity.



Revamping is the Solution.

- Let's make ACs as part of the Solution rather regarding them as a part of the problem.
- Establish joint committee of GWG member(s) and willing members of different ACs who can evaluate the working of various ACs in this term and develop a diagnostic study (interviews & measurable performance matrix) which may be presented to the current council in its final sessions so that findings may be forwarded to new council.
- Introduce a benchmarking system to measure AC performance.
- Future Appointment criteria should be points based. (80% + 20%)
- Special Quota for new enthusiasts.
- Applications may remain open - process may be automated.



CSCP should be kept intact and further enhanced

- By design, for public interface and connections with the masses, institution-based committees rely upon other similar institutions, associations and organizations. Most of such community associations/organizations, NPOs/NGOs are generally membership-based, hence predominantly driven by certain interest groups. Moreover the motive of a majority of such associations is to look good from an optics point of view as well as on paper, specifically in annual reports, to satisfy their donors & sponsors.
- Whenever CSCP was given a task, the committee has delivered remarkable results in the shortest possible timeframe.
- A rep of London Police requested CSCP assistance for the Bicycle security program outreach. Within days, CSCP members connected with over 30 grassroots-level community organizations



If kept intact, the CSCP Top Priority programs for 2022

- Keeping in view rapidly developing new subdivisions, forming CNGs (Concerned Neighbour Groups) on the same lines like Neighbourhood Watch to fill in the gap due to NHW constraints. CSCP will facilitate newly created CNGs and help them through its platform to interact with the council. Members of ex-CSCP have already completed the ground work.
- Develop & deploy Community safety education plan with help of City & LPS.
- Interact with informal groups and NPO/NGOs working in the city to disseminate City's message related to CS & CP in the city



Questions & Comments



Importance of Citizens Participation in decision making process.