

Delegation notes from Lawson Hunter regarding Advisory Committee Review (CL-17-20)

Delegation Statement Re: CL-17-20 Lawson Hunter

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Advisory Committee Review.

As Council knows, public engagement is near and dear to my heart. I've spoken about community education, a wider approach to give citizens the opportunity to comment on policies and plans, and various methods of having community voices heard – everything from protests to citizens' assemblies.

Fortunately, I have the time to attend Standing Committee and Council meetings being held during the day. Many in our community cannot afford to take time off to participate.

I attended one of the Citizen Action Labs, have spoken to several ex-members of Citizen Advisory Committees, attended a few of those committee meetings as a silent observer, and read the various documents, staff reports, committee minutes and the recommendations from the Citizens Advisory Committee Review Team. As you know, I go in for the deep dive.

At the Citizens Lab I attended, I'd say about a third of the attendees knew nothing about what Citizens Advisory Committees were or how they operated. Which made it curious as to how valuable their contributions would be. (source – Citizen Action Lab: Making the Most of Citizen Input Appendix B 385 contributors 45.3% Don't Know/Unsure)

Another third were people who used to be on Advisory Committees and wanted to make changes. Most seemed to advocate for a thorough systemic change and a clear avenue to gain Council's ear.

The final third were people who sat on Committees and liked the way things were and the prestige that came along with being able to say, "I'm on an Advisory Committee".

Of the people who sat on various Advisory Committees, while I commend their dedication, I often wondered whether they were there to listen, learn and reflect their life experience or did they have a personal agenda – to push for a pre-conceived solution? I'm glad to see that any steps forward propose that there would be training sessions involved for newer members. But that raises the question, were there not training sessions in previous years? Or were applicants just accepted on a first come first served basis? What criteria were people selected to sit on these committees that needs to be reformed, other than a lack of diversity, as we move forward?

That there needs to be a greater awareness campaign – there is no doubt. But what good is an enhanced recruitment program when the Clerk's Report itemizes three phases of Action – Just Do It; Part of the Review; and Parking Lot?

Why rush into a new recruitment program when many of the particulars have not been addressed such as length of participation, terms of reference, reporting mechanism, an improved awareness program, a civic education program, and alternative formats for engagement? In short, just about everything that's in Phase 2 of this staff report. Why recruit citizens, I mean residents, participants... to sit on committees when the whole structure is going to change in the sometime future. Will that not cause confusion? Will that not just reinforce the frustration that the community has complained about for years? Will that not provoke a further backlash from the people that want to help you make Burlington better?

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I appreciate that there is some urgency to get this done but Burlington has survived without the input of Advisory Committees for more than six months now. What's the harm in waiting a few more months until the Clerk's department, in its own words will "return with a Committee Policy and a revised Public Appointment Policy? At that time, an update on the rest of the review will be conducted and a workplan will be presented establishing a review timeline. In addition, a high-level workplan will (also) be developed and provided. "?

I am asking Council to hit the pause button for a little while longer. We've got one chance to get this right, finally.

If this report is correct that "other deliverables (will be) phased through 2020 and a significant portion of 2021." I can assure you that the public will hit the roof, start pointing fingers at this Council for its tepid reaction to a long standing irritant, and demand to see what version of recommendations is being planned. Most of us have not touched this issue for over a year. This report is suggesting that a Council Workshop may have to be conducted. How do you expect the public to understand what's being proposed? There's a lot to digest here.

Give us the opportunity to work, one more time, on a shared resolution to the thorny issue of Advisory Committees.