

SUBJECT: Review of the Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy

TO: Committee of the Whole

FROM: Legal and Legislative Services

Legislative Services

Report Number: LLS-28-25

Wards Affected: n/a

Date to Committee: April 7, 2025

Date to Council: April 15, 2025

Recommendation

Approve the updated Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy substantially in the form attached as Appendix A to legislative services report LLS-28-25; and

Approve the proposed pier lightings listed in Appendix B to legislative services report LLS-28-25 as annual events in the City of Burlington.

Executive Summary

Purpose of report:

- The purpose of the report is to seek the approval of the updated Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting policy, following the one-year pilot initiative approved on April 16, 2024.

Key findings:

- To date, the pilot policy guided the approval of over 35 flag raising requests, 103 proclamations, and 124 pier lighting requests.
- Based on the pilot, research and best practices from the Protocols community, staff have recommended a number of administrative and process amendments to ensure requests continue to be reviewed in a consistent, fair and inclusive manner.

Implications:

- A Council approved policy will ensure that the process to recognize individuals, events and community groups is executed in a consistent, respectful and inclusive manner, minimizing reputational risk to the City.

Recommendation Report

Background

The City of Burlington offers many opportunities of recognition of its residents, community activities and significant events. This includes flag raisings, proclamations and pier lightings. Over the last few years, the requests for such tributes have steadily increased. In April 2024, staff brought forward the Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy for Council approval. Until then the process was loosely guided by the Protocol Guidelines document last reviewed in 2018, and not a previously Council approved formal policy. The purpose of the policy was to provide a standard, consistent and fair approach for which flag raising, proclamations, and pier lighting requests were received and processed by the City. Policy was approved as a pilot and staff were directed to report back in Q1 of 2025.

Analysis

The Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy pilot and its associated Protocols and Tributes program was operationalized over the past year. During this time, staff have collaborated and developed professional relationships with the Protocols community throughout Canada and municipally. This provided an opportunity to learn, share information, streamline and enhance standard operating procedures including how flags are displayed at City facilities, to ensure alignment to established practices and federal guidelines. Furthermore, as part of the Protocols program, staff are working to finalize the ceremonial protocols for the City, adapted from practices developed by the federal and provincial governments, and municipal partners. These guidelines are to be used alongside the Flag Raising, Proclamations, and Pier Lighting Policy with the goal of creating an environment for successful diplomacy and engagement.

To date, the policy approved in April 2024, guided the approval of over 35 flag raising requests, 103 proclamations, and 124 pier lighting requests. Two requests required special consideration and were ultimately approved. In March of 2025, staff reviewed the pilot policy, and based on lived experience, municipal scans and effective practices from the Protocols community, have proposed amendments to further improve the Tributes processes.

Flags and Community Flag Raisings

Section 3.4 Foreign National Flags at City Recreation Facilities

As standard practice, the City of Burlington displays flags of other nations alongside the Canadian flag at its recreational facilities during sports events, international tournaments, and throughout the year for teams regularly playing in Burlington's divisions.

The purpose of the flags is to promote collaboration, sportsmanship and community engagement. Section 3.4 titled Foreign National Flags at City Recreation Facilities was added to the policy to formalize existing process and clarify the purpose of the displayed foreign flags.

Section 5. Flags at Half-Mast

Section 5 of the policy speaks to flags at half-mast. A flag at half-mast is one of the most universally recognizable symbols of collective sorrow and respect. In addition to federally and provincially established protocols and days of significance for half-masting, the City of Burlington also observes mandatory half-masting of flags at Civic Square. This includes the first Monday in June, in honour of former City employees who have passed away in the last year. In subsections (k) and (l), reference to “former or retired” individuals has been removed to ensure that all former and retired employees are honoured in a consistent and dignified manner on the In Memoriam Day in June and no one is inadvertently missed.

Additionally in section 5, a provision has been added that in instances where arrangements for a funeral or visitation have not been made or are unknown, flags will be flown at half-mast for no more than five (5) days. These proposed updates are operational and consistent with provisions of other municipal flag policies.

Section 7. Flag retirement/disposal

A provision has been added recommending that all flags at City facilities be inspected on a regular basis, ensuring that they are a fitting emblem for display, specifically prior to National Flag of Canada Day (February 15), Canada Day (July 1), and Remembrance Day (November 11). This new provision ensures that flag protocols and etiquette commonly accepted are respected.

Proclamations

Section 8(a) of the policy was amended to include submissions from recognized charities and not-for-profit organizations that may not necessarily have offices located in Burlington but have ties to the Burlington community. This ensures that national charities or not-for-profit organizations that provide services and may be important to the Burlington community are not excluded based on the location of their offices or headquarters.

Additionally, the clause identifying restrictions for proclamations has been adjusted to allow the recognition of cultural or religious commemorative dates through proclamations. This will allow for the consideration of requests for the recognition of dates that may be important to the residents of Burlington such as Sikh Heritage Month, Christian Heritage Month, Jewish Heritage Month and others.

Pier Lightings

Section 9 of the policy has been amended by removing the clause that the Brant Street Pier will not be lit in celebration of religious events. Removing this clause will allow for the recognition and pier lightings for major holidays that Burlington has traditionally recognized such as Christmas, Kwanzaa and Hannukah. This will also allow for the approval of requests recognizing other major holidays that may be of importance to members of the community. Staff have provided a list of proposed annual pier lightings for Council Approval attached as Appendix B. These are significant events in Burlington or City initiatives that have traditionally been recognized but may not have had specific requests submitted for annually. To ensure compliance with the policy, staff are seeking approval of these events in perpetuity.

Recommendation Details

The Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy was approved as a pilot initiative in April of 2024. Staff recommend that Council approve the policy with the proposed amendments to ensure that all requests for community flag raisings, proclamations and pier lightings honouring Burlington's significant events and organizations continue to be processed in a fair, inclusive and equitable manner. Furthermore, the approval of the proposed annual pier lightings attached as Appendix B will ensure that significant events that are important to the community and have been traditionally recognized continue in an efficient and transparent manner.

Key Dates & Milestones

Next review of the policy is scheduled for March 2028.

Implications

Legislative services staff conducted a municipal scan of other flag and proclamation policies and engaged with protocol staff from other municipalities to gain an understanding of best practices. Additionally, relevant City staff had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the policy and operational improvements. A Council approved policy will ensure that the process to recognize individuals, events and community groups is executed in a consistent, respectful and inclusive manner, minimizing reputational risk to the City.

References

- [CL-09-24](#) Flag raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy
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Strategic Alignment

- Designing and delivering complete communities
 - Providing the best services and experiences
 - Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
 - Driving organizational performance
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Appendices:

- A. Flag Raising, Proclamations and Pier Lighting Policy
- B. Proposed Annual Pier Lightings Schedule

Notifications:

None

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and approved by the Commissioner, Head of Corporate Affairs, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Legal and Legislative Services/City Solicitor.