

Mid-Term Governance Review Overview

Ottawa City Council is doing a review of how the city structure works. Since amalgamation in 2001, the City has done a Governance Review both at the beginning of each term of Council and halfway through the term. So it is normal for them to be doing a Review now, although 'mid-term' technically was last December.

The Review at the beginning of Council's term is usually the more substantial one. It happens just after elections and there are usually new priorities and some new people on Council. The Mid-Term Review is traditionally a tweaking around the edges to reflect changes during the term or minor adjustments to make things run better.

This time things are a bit different and there are some substantial changes being proposed. There are two main reasons for this. In 2007, Council spent several months developing a Strategic Plan for 2007-2010 and one part of the Plan was a series of 6 objectives related to governance. When the Plan was adopted by Council in July 2007, staff was directed to come back with recommendations on implementing the objectives. Around the same time, the provincial government passed Bill 130 which was an Act to amend the Ontario Municipal Act. The Municipal Act sets the rules for what cities and towns can and cannot do. It gives municipalities certain powers and Bill 130 changed some of those rules, giving communities more control. It gives new powers to municipalities, some of which they have to choose to use, and also further defines the role of the mayor in relation to Council.

The Review process is as follows:

- The Strategic Plan was adopted by Council in July 2007 with 6 objectives related to governance issues.
- The City Clerk's Office met with councillors to identify based on the 6 objectives.
- The Clerk's Office wrote 9 White Papers including a summary of the area of the Review, the issues where there was general agreement and questions to guide discussion on outstanding issues.
- On April 24th, councillors met at Pineview to hold a facilitated discussion of the questions and generally respond to the White Papers. Most councillors were present for all or part of the day.
- The Clerk's Office is now integrating what they heard at the facilitated session with the White Paper material to create a draft Mid-Term Governance Review Report.
- The draft report will be tabled at Council, likely on June 10th, and referred to the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee (CSEDC) for public input.
- CSEDC will put the draft report on their agenda, likely at their meeting on June 16th, and will have a presentation by staff to explain the report. Councillors will have an opportunity to ask questions and then members of the public will have 5 minutes each to give their point of view. Committee members will then discuss the report, potentially make some changes to it and then approve it.
- The draft report then goes back to Council, likely on June 24th, where Council will debate it, possibly make changes to it and then adopt it.
- Any changes would then be put in place – probably by the fall.

Members of People for a Better Ottawa (PBO) attended the facilitated session at Pineview and, as observers, had the opportunity to hear the discussions. Although the 9 White Papers have not been publicly released, we were able to obtain copies there. Based on the discussions by councillors and our reading of the White Papers, PBO has identified six priority issues that we feel will affect the community. These issues are: Finance & Audit Committee, Budget process, Advisory Committees, Public engagement, Ward councils and Transit Commission. Issue Papers have been prepared on each area along with one which briefly touches on some of the other areas of the Review.

The Review could affect how Council and Committees function as well as how the community is consulted by the City. PBO is holding a Community Forum on May 23rd to inform people about these issues and have public discussions.