

1980
APRIL

Brief Submitted to
The Task Force on City Government
Respecting the Interim Report
The Form of City Government - Edmonton

The enclosed brief was authored by
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Planning Council Board of Directors
at its April 9, 1980, meeting.

TASK FORCE ON CITY GOVERNMENT

We wish to congratulate the Task Force on City Government for the obvious hard work, thought and sensitivity that has been shown in the preparation of the Interim Report to City Council. The ideas and proposals contained in this Report have the potential to offer an exciting future for citizen participation in Edmonton.

As professionals and students concerned with ensuring effective citizen participation in urban affairs, we generally support the intent of your work. We do however wish to address some practical problems that we perceive may stem from some of the proposals presented for electoral and institutional changes. Our comments are not meant as criticisms, but rather as constructive input on the principles established in the Interim Report. We hope this will be useful in your endeavours to complete your Final Report for City Council.

Finally we apologize for our tardiness in responding to the Interim Report. Other obligations and demands have made it impossible for us to prepare a formal written response before this time. We hope nonetheless that it is not too late to have our comments considered by the Task Force group.

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

The principles which underly the proposed changes in the institutional and electoral structure of City Government are both sound and necessary -- we fully agree with them. We do however foresee potential problems in implementing the basic principles. For instance, there can be no denying that the aims of greater responsiveness and an integrated electoral system are desirable. However, we are not convinced that all proposals for electoral change will in fact help achieve these principles.

It is the intent of this brief then to first address the practical problems which we perceive may arise from some of the proposals made for electoral and institutional changes. In turn, we will offer constructive alternatives or remedies.

Secondly and most importantly, we wish to address the problem of transition; of moving from our present government form to that which is proposed in your report. There is no doubt that the manner and method of this transition period will be crucial to the overall success of implementing the proposed changes. Consequently, a portion of this brief will concentrate on the procedures for a successful transition.

II. PROPOSALS FOR ELECTORAL CHANGES

As stated before, although we agree with the basic principles of a more responsive government and an integrated electoral-policy planning system, we are not certain that some of the core proposals effectively contribute towards these aims. Many of the proposals are of the nature of electoral reform which relate only to the process of election and which do not ensure on-going political (i.e. policy development) responsiveness and accountability. We believe that the arguments favoring administrative (i.e. service delivery) decentralization are equally as valid for the need for political (i.e. policy making) decentralization. Electoral and administrative reform alone will not encourage political responsiveness and accountability. Communities must see they are able to affect decisions and influence policy favorable to community and district interests.

A. Primary and Secondary Elections

The proposal for primary and secondary elections is seen to offer little toward achieving the above principles. Instead, this proposal may create unnecessary costs in time and finances, and add further complexity to the electoral process. We do not feel it will even serve its intent of making the selection and choice of candidates less confusing to the voter. Consequently, we suggest this is one proposal which should be omitted as part of the proposed electoral changes.

B. At-Large and Ward Representation

We have reservations about the proposed electoral reforms of ward and at-large representatives for two reasons:

(1) Aldermen need to maintain their dual responsibility for city-wide affairs as well as for constituency affairs. To separate these responsibilities only serves to narrow an Alderman's perspective on issues and allows him to avoid his ultimate accountability to the public.

(2) The expenses of conducting an at-large campaign will be prohibitive (equivalent to the present mayoralty campaign, i.e. \$50,000 - \$100,000) and will restrict the possibilities of electing "grass roots politicians" to at-large seats.

We feel the goals of increased responsiveness, representativeness, and accountability can best be achieved in a system of ward representation in city-wide policy planning and decision making.

C. Co-terminous Boundaries

The need for coterminality of planning/service and political boundaries is critical to the ultimate success of providing integrated policy planning and service delivery, particularly in light of any future devolution-decentralization of municipal planning and decision making. We strongly support the Task Force endeavours to achieve this aim.

D. Residency Requirements

We are unclear as to the appropriateness or the practicableness of the proposed residency requirement, particularly in light of a minimum of six months residency. The purpose of the residency requirement is to facilitate on-going identification with and sensitivity to local planning problems and priorities. We question whether six months is an appropriate timeframe in which to develop such understanding. What of cases where an alderman moves during his term of office to another ward? We suggest the residency requirement as proposed is not a central issue to achieving the goals of increased responsiveness and representativeness.

E. Nomination Procedure

Waiving the nomination fee in favor of increased nomination signatures is good in that it attempts to eliminate one of the economic deterrents to candidacy, and concentrates rather on encouraging serious, issue oriented candidates. Although we support the overall principle, a number of problems can be foreseen:

(1) Increased signatures may work hardship against a serious candidate who decides to run at the "last minute", raising the problem of securing a sufficient number of minimum signatures required for nomination.

(2) A further procedural problem might arise where persons may "double nominate" a candidate, leading potentially to challenges and contests of the legitimacy of candidates' nominations.

Because of these foreseeable problems we wonder if this procedure is the most appropriate strategy for obtaining the desired aims.

The investment in electoral campaigns, rather than the nomination fee itself, is really the primary deterrent for many serious candidates. The high costs of running a campaign can be discouraging to candidates who are forced to spend campaign funds on boosting their public image at the expense of dealing with issues.

To ensure that electoral campaigns are not just "popularity contests" but are contested on issues of policy, we recommend that a maximum ceiling for Aldermanic (e.g. \$5,000) and Mayoralty (e.g. \$50,000) campaign expenditures be established. Thereby, all candidates will have equal opportunity to develop and present their "public images" and will have to establish their capability and capacity for representation on the basis of their stand on local and city-wide issues.

F. Aldermanic Assistance

We agree with the recommendation that each alderman must be provided with executive and clerical assistance, and research funds in order to adequately undertake an informed policy making role. We suggest the Task Force go one step further to recommend a research assistant for each alderman rather than one assistant per two aldermen as proposed. Potential difficulties would be eliminated where a researcher may be in the employ of two aldermen who hold opposing political viewpoints.

Aldermanic policy making responsibilities can further be enhanced through closer contact with their constituency. Researchers could also aid in this process by working for aldermen in the community. Thereby, aldermen would have better contact with the communities within the district, as well as contact through City Hall.

The proposals for electoral reform (i.e. reforms to the process of election) will not in themselves encourage greater political responsiveness and representativeness. Generally we hold that greater political responsiveness can best be achieved through mechanisms which ensure continual exchange and dialogue between representatives, community, district-community councils and other interest groups. Therefore, political reform must be undertaken with the view to establishing methods for regular, on-going communication and personal contact between aldermen and their constituents.

III. PROPOSALS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The core proposals for institutional changes offer interesting possibilities for citizen participation in Edmonton. We do however wish to bring to your attention concerns related to the proposals. In particular, we wish to comment on:

- A) the Community Development Office;
- B) the role and composition of Citizen Community Councils;
- C) the centralized Action Centre;
- D) the relationship of the Corporate Policy Planning Office to Citizen Community Councils; and
- E) the inter-relationship of the Community Development Office, Citizen Community Councils, Action Centre, City Administration, Aldermen, and community and private interests.

A. THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

- (1) The Relationship of the Community Development Office with Other City Departments

The concept of Community Development Office formation is a good one. However, what must be clear from the beginning is how the role and function

of the Community Development Office is to differ from those of the field staff in various human service departments such as Parks and Recreation, Social Services, and Planning. The field staff in these departments play an important role of implementing the policy of their particular services. We hope there is no intention that this function be taken over by the Community Development Office. If the Community Development Office was to take over this function, it would effectively split implementation from policy planning in these particular departments and seriously interfere with responsive service delivery. Departmental field staff are to assist in implementing and evaluating services of their respective departments. Community Development Office staff should assist in integrating and co-ordinating the work of various departments and their field staff for the purpose of achieving comprehensive, integrated planning and policy development. With clear definition of the respective roles and responsibilities there can be no fear that City Council will perceive of the Community Development Office replacing the function of departmental field staff. It should be clarified in your final report that the Community Development Office does not lead to a duplication of roles with departmental field staff nor encroach upon existing departmental service delivery programming.

(2) Function of the Community Development Office

The role of the Community Development Office as we perceive is as identified in the goal statements for Community Development Office formation (Page 41, Interim Report). However, the proposed roles and responsibilities raise a number of potential concerns.

We question the appropriateness and the practicality of the Community Development Office acting as a "neutral conduit" between the various actors in the urban planning and decision making process. The role of a "neutral conduit" implies that the Community Development Office will simply act as a courier or intermediary between the community and City Hall. Instead the role should be that of an enabler or catalyst, facilitating interaction and involvement between all actors in the policy making process.

Recognizing the spontaneous and ad hoc nature of community dynamics, it is also important that the Community Development Office have sufficient flexibility and latitude in its service delivery to assist the development of all potential client groups. The Community Development Office's involvements should not be restricted to only serving the Citizen Community Councils and formally recognized groups.

Further, we do not feel that the role of the Community Development Office should be regarded as one of relieving departmental technical personnel of their responsibilities for organizing and administering citizen participation in departmental policy and planning matters. Rather, the Community Development Office's function should be one of complimenting departmental planning and policy development; enhancing the technician's ability to relate to and incorporate community concerns and priorities in integrated planning and evaluation.

Neither should the Community Development Office's role be seen as one of relieving elected representatives of the responsibility to seek out informed reaction to proposed policies and plans. Instead it should be one of primarily facilitating intercourse between various interested and affected parties.

In summary if the Community Development Office is to be an effective change agency within the City its role must be one of encouraging and facilitating broad based community participation in policy planning and decision making. The Community Development Office must have the flexibility necessary to create and assist opportunities for a variety of interested and affected groups to engage in integrated planning. The Community Development Office must be able to provide support to and strengthen the role of existing as well as emerging new groups in representing their concerns and interests in the policy making process.

(3) Accountability of the Community Development Office

Many of the roles the Task Force has identified for the Community Development Office require a great deal of freedom and discretion on the part of the professional. In order for him to have this flexibility we seriously question whether the Community Development Office can be directly responsible to the Chief Commissioner. It would be very difficult, if not at times impossible, for a Community Development Officer to be responsible to the community, to the City Administration, and to the elected officials all at the same time.

We recommend the Community Development Office be an independent operation, directly responsible to a voluntary Board of citizens. This Board would in turn be directly responsible to City Council, but would allow the Community Development Office to be at least one step removed from the direct control of the Administration and/or City Council -- thus lending the credibility as well as freedom to function effectively in the community.

(4) Structure and Staffing of the Community Development Office

We recognize the need for some conception of organizational structure for the Community Development Office, but find the structure proposed too delimited. Until there is a clearer understanding of the demands and requirements which will be placed on this office, it is somewhat presumptuous to delineate staff roles and hierarchical responsibilities. The organizational structure proposed may not provide the most appropriate and effective deployment of staff given the nature of their work, and fails to consider the possibility of the Community Development Office being anything else but a municipal department (e.g. a City agency co-ordinated by a volunteer Board of Directors).

We contend that before the 'dye is cast' on the organizational structure of the Community Development Office, research of community, administrative and aldermanic needs and resources must be undertaken. Only then can the most practical and effective organizational structure for the Office be determined.

B. CITIZEN COMMUNITY COUNCILS

(1) Role of Citizen Community Councils

The functions proposed in the Interim Report for the Citizen Community Councils are far-ranging and will demand much of the time and energy of volunteer, part-time citizen/community representatives. We question whether many of the outlined functions are indeed the responsibility of Citizen Community Councils. For instance:

1. Citizen Community Councils are seen to "assist in developing a regular source of data on social trends". Is this not more appropriately the responsibility of the City Administration?

2. Citizen Community Councils are seen to "encourage citizens to undertake the informed responsibility for assisting in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of policy and planning decisions". This role would

more appropriately be that of the Community Development Office, various departmental field staff and the Corporate Policy Planning Office. Other examples may be cited which reflect a duplication of roles of the Citizen Community Councils with responsibilities of the Administration, the Community Development Office and City departments. We recommend the Final Report address with greater clarity the respective roles and responsibilities of the Citizen Community Councils and other institutional bodies.

We contend that the proposed roles and responsibilities for Citizen Community Councils formation must be developed in a way that will facilitate broad representation of interests in district-city wide planning, and not evolve as some "exclusive, elite, gatekeeper group". The Citizen Community Councils should evolve largely to facilitate and co-ordinate the many interests in the policy development process with regard to district/municipal priorities and constraints. Such a body would be consistent with the goals of instituting a citizen participation process as a "bottom up community based as opposed to a top down administratively or politically controlled program". In such a model, the Citizen Community Council will provide a forum for discussion of inter-intra community problems and priorities relative to district and city-wide priorities, and would establish a collective body to which Aldermen and the Administration could relate on an on-going basis in developing and evaluating urban municipal policy. The diversity of community interests must be recognized and represented in planning at the community-district level.

(2) Representation

A problem we foresee with the Citizen Community Councils is that of ensuring fair and equitable representation of various community and other interests on these bodies. The problem stems from the districts being so large in population and the maximum limit of representatives on the Citizen Community Councils being small in number (i.e., ten). Each district will contain approximately 25 community leagues or a population of 85,000. How will it be decided which four community league representatives should sit on these councils? With such a variety and number of other organizations within the City, how will it be decided what other representatives should fill the remaining vacancies on these bodies? The overall changes proposed in the Interim Report are intended to alleviate the problems of representativeness and responsiveness in light of the diversity of interests in the Edmonton

community. It is imperative not to institute potentially unresponsive and unrepresentative secondary structures (i.e. Citizen Community Councils).

We see potential for grave difficulties if the problem of representation is not dealt with and satisfactorily resolved. Although we do not ourselves have any specific answers to this problem, we do see possible solutions by persuing several possible avenues:

- open membership/representation on the Citizen Community Councils to include all interests (developers, community groups, business associations, etc.), thus ensuring the diversity of interests in any one district are adequately represented on the Council, or

- establish a system of "rotating" representatives sitting on the Council, or

- decrease the size of the districts, and thereby ensure all community and interests groups can be represented on the smaller district Councils.

Any vehicle established for co-ordinating community-district priorities in the corporate policy planning process must ensure fair and equal representation of the diversity of community and other interests found at the district level.

(3) Relationship to Non-formal Groups

Within the Interim Report all reference is made to the representation of formal groups within districts. Yet, citizen participation is often characterized by informal groups developing spontaneously to deal with immediate issues in their community. These groups have a vital role to play and will continue to emerge in spite of the institutional changes recommended in the Report. The question remains then as to how these groups will be accommodated within the proposed institutional changes, and what their relationship will be to Citizen Community Councils and to City Council? As proposed, such action groups will no longer be recognized or even receive a hearing unless they have the support of the district Citizen Community Councils. We therefore suggest that the Task Force address the issue of non-formal and emerging groups in the Final Report: giving some clear indication of their relationship to Citizen Community Councils, and the procedures for participation in policy planning and decision making at both the district and City level.

C. ACTION CENTRE

It seems somewhat ironical that amidst the proposals for decentralized services and planning, the Report is advocating a centralized Action Centre. There is no doubt that a Centre for the dissemination of information and the co-ordination of requests for information such as described in the Interim Report is badly needed. Certainly, centralization has its benefits in terms of costs in staffing and facilities. However the proposed processing of information requests may lead to delays and back-logs of responses. Critical to effective citizen and community participation is timely, accurate information. Consequently, for the convenience of residents as well as for the efficiency of time in obtaining information we feel that this service should be decentralized to district offices. Much of the information citizens will want is likely to pertain to their neighbourhood and area of the city. A decentralized district Information Centre/Ward/Planning Office would be more convenient and readily accessible than a City Hall Action Centre Office. Therefore, we ask the Task Force to consider the establishment of district Action Centres rather than a centralized Action Centre (see Point E., below).

D. RELATIONSHIP OF THE CORPORATE POLICY PLANNING OFFICE TO CITIZEN COMMUNITY COUNCILS

We agree with the principles of local area planning and citizen participation in the City's corporate policy planning process. To achieve the latter principle we feel there must be effective and regular communication between the Corporate Policy Planning Office and the citizenry. Thus there is the need for a clear relationship to be established between the Corporate Policy Planning Office and the Citizen Community Councils to ensure a continuous two-way flow of information. This relationship needs to be more clearly elaborated in the final Task Force Report. At the moment, there is only vague reference made to the Community Development Office ensuring this interaction. We suggest a relationship and process of interaction between the Corporate Policy Planning Office, the Citizen Community Councils and interested community groups and organizations be developed at the outset. This inter-

action process may involve such things for example as:

- 1) regular Corporate Policy Planning Office update reports to Citizen Community Councils,
- 2) information exchange meetings,
- 3) establishment of liaison representatives between the various organizations, and so forth.

This is an important area which still requires further examination in the final Task Force report.

E. THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, CITIZEN COMMUNITY COUNCILS, ACTION CENTRE, ADMINISTRATION, ELECTED OFFICIALS, AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

We find in the Interim Report that the relationship between the Community Development Office, Citizen Community Councils, Action Centre, City Administration and elected officials is not clearly established. It would seem that one step to ensuring a strong interrelationship among these bodies is to house them under the same roof. In other words, we suggest that local district centres should be established which would contain the offices and facilities for:

- ward Aldermen
- district Community Development Office staff
- Social Service field staff
- Parks and Recreation field staff
- Planning Department field staff
- Citizen Community Councils
- district Action/Information Centres.

Within this environment, it would be the responsibility of the Community Development Officer to ensure these parties meet on a regular basis and plan together in an integrated fashion.

IV. INSTITUTING THE PROPOSED CHANGES: THE NECESSITY OF A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

The changes proposed in the Task Force Report offer exciting possibilities for the future of citizen participation in Edmonton as they could ultimately lead to the institution of delegated decision making at the local level. However, if these changes are not implemented with preparation, thought, and sensitivity, they could easily become another layer of unnecessary bureaucracy blocking effective citizen participation and decision making. Therefore, in order for the Task Force proposals to be implemented in the manner in which they are intended, it is necessary to realize the importance of a well planned or well phased transition period to move from current government process to that which is proposed in the Report. The transition period cannot simply be the systematic implementation of structural changes. Structural changes alone will not guarantee achieving the goals of the Task Force. Any implementation strategy must also include a major development process.

A. Rationale for the Community Development Process

By simply focusing on the implementation of structural changes, two assumptions are implicitly being made. One is that people must fit the structure rather than the structure fitting the people, and the other is that all people will know how and be willing to use the new structures effectively. It is our opinion that both of these assumptions may be fallacious.

1) Structures to Fit People; Not People to Fit Structures

There must be a process to ensure that the proposed structural changes are sensitive, compatible and adaptable to the needs of the people within each district. At the moment, it is implied in the Interim Report that the structural changes will be standard or the same for every district. No account seems to be taken for possible differences in needs, resources, skills, and readiness within and between district populations. Consequently, a survey of the communities within each proposed district is needed to determine their characteristics and levels of readiness for such changes. This kind of research could provide vital information to determining how structural changes could be

best adapted to particular populations. It may mean, for instance, that not every Citizen Community Council be established in the same fashion. The structure, in other words, would be adapted to fit the needs of the community rather than the community being forced to fit into a preconceived structure.

2) Skills and Willingness to Use the Structure: The Need for An Educational Change Process

Simply establishing new institutional structures will not automatically ensure that they will be used effectively by either the citizen, the administrator or the politician. Each party must learn how and be willing to work within the reformed structure for maximum effectiveness. If this does not happen, the structural changes alone will serve no purpose. Consequently, it is essential that a re-education process for citizens, administration and politicians be developed to ensure all parties have the skills, and the willingness to utilize the new structures as intended. This process will require time but we contend that it is an absolutely essential step in the successful transition to change. Needless to say, there is bound to be some resistance to the proposals advocated in the Interim Report. For instance, some administrators may see these changes as leading to a loss in efficiency. Some politicians may fear a loss of control. Citizens may fear co-optation or feel insecure about the changes because of lack of skills and resources. Whatever the reasons for resistance, these human factors must be dealt with directly if the proposals in this Interim Report are to be successfully initiated.

B. PROPOSED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

For the above reasons we strongly recommend to the Task Force that they consider the necessity for a community development process to bring about required structural changes. This process would include three major phases and at least two years of intensive developmental work. Specifically, it would include:

1. Phase I - Research

The purpose of undertaking community research would be:

- (a) To discover the population characteristics of

communities and their readiness (skills, resources, etc.) to accommodate the proposed changes. This would also include such things as finding out how much responsibility communities are willing to accept and what roles or tasks they are willing to undertake,

(b) To discover the level of readiness and willingness on the part of administrators and politicians to accommodate the proposed changes.

From this research, it can better be determined for all parties:

- (i) what kind of education and skill training will be required,
- (ii) what resources are needed,
- (iii) how the institutional changes should best be implemented.

2. Phase II - Education/Training

This phase would include publicity campaigns as well as educational-training sessions for the general public, local communities, administrators and politicians. This is to ensure aptitudinal and attitudinal readiness of all parties for the implementation of structural changes proposed in the Task Force report.

3. Phase III - Implementing Institutional Changes

Implementation of the institutional changes should be carried out sensitively, providing the flexibility for structures to adapt to the particular needs of various districts. Information and experience gathered from the previous two phases (Research, and Education/Training) will provide strong guidance for this implementation process.

In conclusion, we reiterate that there is a major community development function required in the process of transition to the proposed changes. This function should be carried out by a qualified, independent body which has the required expertise as well as the necessary credibility with the three major parties (citizens, administration, politicians).