



MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK

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City of Winnipeg – Governance Review

Comments from the Manitoba Eco-Network

February 22, 2021

The Manitoba Eco-Network (MbEN) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the City of Winnipeg’s Governance Review. Since 1988, MbEN has promoted positive environmental action by supporting people and groups in our community. MbEN has recently transitioned our programming to focus more on policy advocacy, engagement in consultation processes and developing capacity building tools that benefit the environmental non-profit sector and our member groups. We welcome more opportunities in the future to work with the City of Winnipeg in the development of new policies, plans and programs.

In the past few years, MbEN has engaged with the City of Winnipeg in a range of different ways including meetings with Councillors, presentations to Council and the EPC, and extensive engagement with the public service in connection to our *Building Community Climate Resiliency* project. In the past, MbEN also received a small yearly grant for our Organic Lawn Care Program. Unfortunately, the City no longer provides us with such funding. MbEN has managed to continue operating, thanks to our many dedicated volunteers, and participates in a number of consultation processes to provide input and suggestions for strengthening environmental governance at the municipal level.

As an environmental organization, MbEN’s main priority in relation to governance processes in Manitoba is the need to implement meaningful policy and regulatory changes that will push Manitoba and Winnipeg, in a more sustainable direction. There are many dedicated grassroots community groups and environmental organizations that should be given a stronger role in the development and implementation of new programs and policies that goes beyond the participatory opportunities currently in place.

Scope of the Review:

MbEN sees this Governance Review as an opportunity for the City of Winnipeg to acknowledge the role of municipal governments in creating a more sustainable Manitoba and make policy and regulatory improvements that will establish Winnipeg as a leader of environmental sustainability. In this regard we recommend that the Principles of Good Governance that set the context of this review include “sustainability” or “sustainable development”. As we highlighted in our recent submissions for the *OurWinnipeg* plan, there is a need for the City of Winnipeg to recognize sustainability as a main component of good governance that influences the development and implementation of all policies and programs.



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Other principles of good governance that we recommend include “effective enforcement”, “collaboration”, and “meaningful participation”. Some of these elements were captured within the identified Principles of Good Governance, however, it is important to explicitly recognize these principles and analyze the City’s governance approach based on these categories in order to provide better insight into the effectiveness of current processes and policies.

MbEN feels that the scope of review should also include the municipal election process, an important process which directly impacts who leads the City of Winnipeg and has the power to implement new policies and programs. How we elect our municipal leaders and the rules we develop for the electoral process is a cornerstone of good governance and should be included in the review.

Environmental Governance:

MbEN recognizes that there have been improvements in the City of Winnipeg’s approach to implementing the regulatory and policy changes needed to move Winnipeg in a more sustainable direction. We feel that the City of Winnipeg can go further in the development of new environmental policies and programs and “environmental governance” must be reflected more prominently in the operations of the City of Winnipeg.

A strong environmental governance approach means more funding for environmental programs, more staff to implement existing and new environmental policies and programs, and increased opportunity for members of the environmental community and public to provide advice and support for improvements. MbEN has had great experiences interacting with the public service, however, there has been a lack of support from those individuals with the power to make final decisions. As one of the main stated purposes of the City of Winnipeg is to develop and maintain “sustainable communities” and promote and maintain the “health, safety, and welfare” of its citizens (s 5(1), *The City of Winnipeg Charter Act*) the City of Winnipeg should take the opportunity to move in a more sustainable direction and meet the standards necessary to join important environmental initiatives like Low Carbon Cities Canada (LC3) and the 1000 Cities Adapt Now program.

Other environmental governance approaches which we recommended in our past *OurWinnipeg* submissions continue to apply to this review. For example, MbEN would like to see the City of Winnipeg:

- Recognize environmental rights: It is important for the City of Winnipeg to join the growing number of Canadian municipalities, including the Manitoba communities of The Pas, Whitemouth, Dunnottar, Thompson, Stonewall, Shamattawa and Selkirk, that have



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recognized the “right to a healthy environment”. Recognition of environmental rights would demonstrate environmental leadership and long-term planning in the intergenerational public interest.

- Implement stronger environmental enforcement mechanisms: Many Winnipeg citizens have faced situations where environmental policies and the decisions of elected officials or hearing bodies have not been effectively enforced. MbEN strongly supports the development and implementation of stronger enforcement mechanisms. For example, we would like to see commitments to the use of more enforcement mechanisms like financial penalties for non-compliance violators. The funds from such penalties could then be used to provide community organizations with funding for collaborative environmental projects.
- Better assessment of new developments and construction projects: MbEN feels strongly that in order for the City to truly take on a role of environmental leadership, there is a pressing need for better assessment of new developments and construction projects through the use of environmental impact assessment and life cycle assessments that considers environmental impacts cradle to grave. MbEN would strongly recommend the inclusion of policy commitments to improve the City’s assessment approach.

Public Participation:

MbEN acknowledges the improvements that have been implemented by the City of Winnipeg to better facilitate meaningful public participation. The creation of the Office of Public Engagement and adoption of the Public Engagement Policy were important steps in the creation of opportunities for meaningful public participation. The development of the Engage Winnipeg site has also made it much easier to identify opportunities for engagement and access relevant information. MbEN has found the information included on the City of Winnipeg website about engaging in Committee and Council meetings to be helpful.

However, we feel there are still opportunities for improving the resources and approaches utilized by the City to engage with its citizens and have seen these concerns echoed by other community and environmental groups in Winnipeg. For instance,

- Types of engagement: MbEN would like to see more opportunities to engage that move beyond the “Consult” level of the IAP2 spectrum of public participation that was adopted by the City in the *Engage Winnipeg Policy*. There are many dedicated community groups and environmental organizations that could play a valuable role in the development and implementation of new policies and programs if given engagement opportunities that better align with the “Collaborate” and “Empower” end of the IAP2 spectrum.



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- Timing of engagement opportunities: Having multiple engagement opportunities occur simultaneously restricts the ability of the public to meaningfully engage in all processes.
- Availability of background information: There have been improvements in the type of information available to the public, but we continue to hear from members of the community who have found it difficult to engage in certain consultation processes due to a lack of background information. For example, more information about how the existing policies were consolidated in the development of the new *OurWinnipeg* plan would have increased the capacity of the public to provide informed input and added more transparency to the City's policy development process. MbEN agrees that "[i]nforming the public is a critical component of any engagement process" (*Engage Winnipeg Policy*).
- Summary of public input: There is a need for public engagement reports summarizing the public feedback received during consultation opportunities in order to improve the transparency and accountability of City decision-making processes. It has often been unclear what scope of public feedback was received, how this information was considered and how it was incorporated into final approval and implementation processes. Engaging in consultation opportunities takes a lot of time and effort and it is often not clear if the input provided by the public has been meaningfully considered.
- Lack of funding for additional community consultation: There is rarely any funding available to environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS) and community organizations to undertake additional consultation activities within their respective communities. MbEN feels it would be a better use of public funds if some of the money currently being directed to consultants was redistributed within the Winnipeg community to allow community organizations and ENGOS to more meaningfully contribute to consultation processes and take on more community engagement activities. For example, in Phase 1 of our *Building Community Climate Resiliency* project, MbEN surveyed a broad range of environmental and community organizations about climate resiliency knowledge and action in Winnipeg, and produced a comprehensive report summarizing their feedback. While city staff provided in-kind support, this project received no municipal funding.

Access to Information:

MbEN recognizes the improvements that have been made in terms of public access to information. This includes the ability of the public to access information about Council proceedings and municipal operations through the Decision Making Information System and the Open Data Portal. However, there is a need for more publicly available information about the implementation and effectiveness of municipal policies, enforcement activities, and the development of better sustainability goal indicators. For example, dashboards like PEG



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(www.mypeg.ca) could be incorporated into the Decision Making Information System to make the city's open data more accessible to a broader audience.

MbEN feels that transparency and access to information could be further improved by commitments to Open Government and Open Data Principles. There is a need for more policies that ensure data is open by default and access is facilitated under the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable).

Governance Structure:

The current division of environmental responsibilities between various Standing Committees can cause significant confusion in terms of how members of the public and community organizations can best engage with the City of Winnipeg when facing environmental issues or advocating for sustainable change. There is a need for a more coordinated approach to environmental governance where the same individuals with oversight of planning and approvals are also evaluating implementation, development of programs, enforcement, and the effectiveness of the City's framework of environmental regulatory requirements.

Although the EPC may be said to play a coordinating role by recommending the implementation of policies and practices that support environmental leadership, the existence of the EPC has unintentionally created an unequal division of power between Council members due to the unprecedented level of power held by the Mayor and the EPC. As noted in the Preliminary Report, the discretionary power granted to the Mayor to appoint the chairpersons of Standing Committees and members of the EPC, along with the vetting of public service reports by the Mayor and select members of Council prior to their distribution to Council has resulted in a concentration of power that does not exist within other Canadian municipal governments. This has resulted in the perception that members of Council not included in the Mayor's inner circle are at a disadvantage in comparison with their EPC counterparts, which impacts the legitimacy and effectiveness of Council decision-making processes.

MbEN supports the dismantling and/or restructuring of the EPC and the reduction of discretionary power currently afforded to the Mayor so that all elected members of Council are able to effectively represent the interests of their constituents and contribute to the implementation of more effective environmental governance processes.

Conclusion:

MbEN appreciates this opportunity to provide input into the City of Winnipeg's Governance Review. It is time for the City of Winnipeg to implement better environmental governance



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approaches and take on a stronger environmental leadership role in Manitoba. This review is an opportunity to set a real example for Manitobans and move beyond the minimum environmental governance standards set by the Government of Manitoba.

Moving forward, there are many ways the City of Winnipeg can do more to ensure “environmental governance” becomes a prominent element of municipal operations. This includes more funding for environmental programs, more municipal staff to implement existing and new environmental policies and programs, and increased opportunity for members of the environmental community and public to meaningfully engage.

There are also many opportunities for the City to strengthen the legitimacy, transparency and accountability of municipal governance processes by improving public access to municipal data and addressing the power imbalance between City Councillors due to the discretionary powers of the Mayor and the existence of the EPC.

MbEN looks forward to seeing how the City will use the input received during this review process to create a more sustainable and collaborative municipal governance process. We welcome future opportunities to collaborate with the City of Winnipeg and contribute to the development and implementation of environmental policies and programs.

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