

The City of Guelph's Advisory Committees of Council

Review of Documents | June 2021

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Over the past few years, the City Clerk's Office has partnered with the [Guelph Lab](#), a joint initiative of the City of Guelph and the University of Guelph, on research projects related to the City's Advisory Committees of Council (ACOC).

The following is a summary of key points and questions that emerged through a systematic review – conducted in 2021 – of (a) ACOC's Terms of Reference, (b) the City of Guelph's Public Appointment Policy, (c) the City of Guelph's Procedural By-Law, and (d) any other relevant frameworks, policies and documents that may influence the systemic and structural inclusivity of the City's committees. Content is organized under the typical components of committees' Terms of Reference (TOR), providing both a quantitative and qualitative review of common themes and nuances across the committees to indicate opportunities for further exploration and design work. One of the purposes of this systematic review was to identify opportunities for creating more equitable participation opportunities for community members. However, the results are broadly useful for understanding the current form and function of Advisory Committees of Council (ACOCs).¹

Key Observations:

- There is no standard design for committees. There is considerable variation in: mandate and authority, overall purpose and objectives, composition of committee members, roles for the staff liaisons, reporting processes (and frequency), length of term for committee members, and frequency of meetings
- Two committees aim for membership that "reflects the diversity of Guelph residents." Two other committees recruit from specific communities / populations (e.g., membership of the Accessibility Advisory Committee should be made up of 50%+1 people with disabilities)

¹ As of the date of publication, there are 20 Advisory Committees in total. 17 of the 20 were included in this report. 3 were not. The 3 Advisory Committees excluded from the review were: Municipal Election Compliance Audit Committee (not specific to Guelph); Solid Waste Management Master Plan Public Advisory Committee (time limited – set to end 2020); Well Interference Committee (made up of Council members and only meets when complaints are filed).



Note: There are 20 Advisory Committees in total. 17 of the 20 were included in this report. 3 were not. The 3 Advisory Committees excluded from the review were: Municipal Election Compliance Audit Committee (not specific to Guelph); Solid Waste Management Master Plan Public Advisory Committee (time limited – set to end 2020); Well Interference Committee (made up of Council members and only meets when complaints are filed)

Summary of Findings

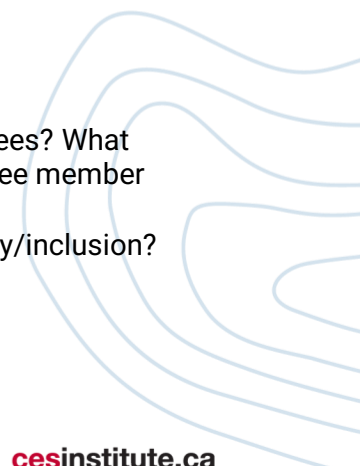
- Mandates vary, although most committees are advisory committees appointed by Council (page 3)
- The purpose and objectives vary and are not limited to providing advice (page 3)
- Some committees expand their Staff Liaison's role (page 4)
- ACOC policy prioritizes qualified applicants from equity seeking groups, qualifications vary between ACOCs (page 5)
- Most committees aim for consensus where possible, and report differences of opinion if not (page 6)
- Most ACOCs report to Council via staff reports (page 6)
- Committee members serve a minimum of one year, but maximums vary from 2 terms to 8 years or even 10 years (page 6)
- Committees vary in how often they meet and at what time of day. All commit to accommodating accessibility requests (page 7)
- In the TORs that have a line for budgets, there is no funding requested (page 7)

Potential questions for further exploration

About the purpose, objectives, and success of advisory committees:

- Is there agreement amongst Council, staff and committee members about the role/function of committees? Are they about expert advice or civic engagement? How does (or should) this affect their relationship to staff?
- What responsibility do committee members have to represent specific groups within the community? To engage with the broader community themselves? To share information about the activities of the committee with the community?
- How do advisory committees effectively influence / contribute to policy and decision-making? Through annual reports? Through staff? Through other forms of advocacy?
- What is the feedback loop between committees and staff and council? Is this well understood by committee members, staff and Council? Do all advisory committees feel that their reports and recommendations are duly considered?

About recruitment and participation:

- How is the City's Procedural By-Law usually applied in Advisory Committees? What decision-making processes are actually being used and is every committee member familiar with them?
 - Are decision-making processes facilitating or creating barriers to diversity/inclusion?
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- What training is or could be provided? To members? To staff?
- Does having well-defined staff and membership roles/responsibilities improve the experience of being on an advisory committee?
- Is there funding available for transportation, translation/transcription services, childcare, honoraria, or other barrier-removing funds to be accessed by committee members?

Findings

Mandates vary, although most committees are advisory committees appointed by Council

10 of the 17 (59%) committees relevant to this project are council-initiated advisory committees. 5 (30%) are legislated advisory or decision-making bodies, and two committees (12%) have council-delegated decision-making power. See the breakdown of committees below.

- Advisory (Council appointed): 10 committees. Council Remuneration Advisory Committee (note, this committee was disbanded in 2022); Downtown Advisory Committee; Municipal Property and Building Commemorative Naming Committee; Natural Heritage Advisory Committee; Public Art Advisory Committee; Tourism Advisory Committee; Transit Advisory Committee; Water Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee; Water Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee
- Advisory (Legislated): 2 committees. Heritage Guelph; Planning Advisory Committee
- Decision-Making (Legislated): 3 committees. Accessibility Advisory Committee; Committee of Adjustment; Guelph Museums Advisory Committee
- Decision-Making (Council appointed): 2 committees. Community Grant Allocation Panel; Property Standards Committee

The purpose and objectives of Advisory Committees vary, and they are not limited to providing advice

The TOR usually include a short paragraph about the overall aim or purpose of the committee, indicating the subject/area of focus for the committee, policies through which the committee may be mandated, and whether the committee provides “strategic input and advice”, engages the community, hears appeals, etc. This does not typically include background on when and why the committee was created, or whether the purpose of the committee has changed over time.

In addition to a summary of the purpose of the committee, TORs typically include a list of specific goals/objectives and responsibilities of the committee, which includes general or specific policies, plans, or processes in the purview of the committee and the level of input/decision-making for each item (e.g., “Advise in the preparation, maintenance and updating of the Downtown Implementation Strategy outlining key priority areas promoting city-wide economic development”). Goals and objectives that appear in the TOR include:

- Advise on specific City policies/plans/strategies/documents/decisions – 9 committees
- Review applications/submissions/appeals/proposals from the public – 7 committees
- Provide general recommendations to City Staff and Council – 6 committees
- Liaising with, hearing or communicating to the public - 5 committees
- Carry out specific policy/procedure - 2 committees
- Liaising with other organizations, business, or relevant third parties of interest - 2 committees
- Acting as “champions” in the community – 2 committees
- Form subcommittees with other interest groups/individuals – 1 committee
- Funding allocation – 1 committee
- Impact assessment – 1 committee
- Fundraising – 1

Some committees expand their Staff Liaison’s role

The [ACOC Meeting Procedures policy](#) outlines roles and responsibilities for all Staff Liaisons to ACOCs. Staff liaisons are defined in the policy as “the City staff member(s) who provide administrative and legislative assistance to an ACOC.” Their roles and responsibilities include:

- Administration e.g., posting meeting dates, times, locations, agendas and minutes; attending all meetings; logistics for invited guests
- Setting meeting agendas – in collaboration with ACOC Chairs and Members
- Reporting – “Incorporate all recommendations and advice from the ACOC into staff reports where appropriate”
- Coordinating ACOC members – e.g., providing orientation, with support of City Clerk’s Office; manage meeting attendance (with the ACOC Chair); notify the City Clerk’s Office of vacancies

The meeting procedures policy also states that Staff Liaisons should “refrain from intervening in the process of committee work, so long as the work undertaken is within the ACOC TOR.” Generally, appointed committee members are not allowed to give direction to City support staff. In committees such as the Committee of Adjustment, members can make requests for information to answer questions prior to meetings.

In addition to the Meeting Procedures, the TOR for some ACOCs include further descriptions of the Staff Liaison’s role. Three of the committees have well-defined City staff roles within their Terms of Reference (see Transit Advisory Committee, Water Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee; Water Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee). Three committees provide a brief description (Accessibility Advisory Committee, Committee of Adjustment, Community Grant Allocation Panel).

Of the committee TORs that outline staff roles, some roles included:

- Provide administrative/logistic support to the committee and/or chair – 6 committees



- Provide up-to-date, relevant information to committee members – 3 committees
- Fully consider/carefully listen to the advice, recommendations, and consensus/division of positions/opinions of committee members – 3 committees
- Appoint City staff liaison – 2 committees
- Provide timely responses and/or action as appropriate including follow-up on issues raised that could not be addressed at the meeting – 2 committees
- Ensure appropriate staff attend meetings – 1 committee
- Abide by the City's Principles of Public Involvement – 1 committee
- Liaise with Clerk's office and other relevant departments – 1 committee
- Support member recruitment – 1 committee

ACOC Policy prioritizes qualified applicants from equity seeking groups, qualifications vary between ACOCs

Since July 2021, the [Advisory Committees of Council Public Appointments Policy](#) has directed all Staff Liaisons to “give priority to qualified applicants from equity seeking groups” when they review and recommend new applicants. Qualifications are determined by each committee's TOR.

Some committees recruit for specific expertise or experience, others recruit representatives of a specific population, organization or sector, and some recruit residents that have a general interest in relevant topics. All TORs defined the number of members on each committee and a breakdown of either the composition of the committee or skills/interests required of committee members. The Community Grant Allocation Panel and Guelph Museums Advisory Committee noted that their membership should strive to reflect/represent the diversity of Guelph Residents. Two committees (Accessibility and Transit) specified quotas for people from specific demographics, in addition to members selected based on other criteria.

- 6 committees recruit members based on subject matter expertise/experience e.g., the Public Art Advisory Committee recruits members with professional experience in urban planning or development, architecture or landscape architecture, visual, literary or performing arts, art history, art administration or education, curation, visual arts consulting, civil engineering, art reviewing/writing, or heritage research and planning; also demonstrate significant knowledge of arts and culture
- 6 committees recruit members based on specific sector/industry representation e.g., the Tourism Advisory Committee includes 10 public appointees from specific relevant sectors
- 3 committees recruit members based on specific workplace/profession/position representation e.g., the Transit Advisory Committee membership should include representatives from University of Guelph (student and administration) and the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination
- 2 committees recruit members based on specific population/demographic characteristics



e.g., membership of the Accessibility Advisory Committee should be made up of 50%+1 persons with disabilities

- 9 committees recruit any residents with general interest in relevant topics e.g., the Guelph Museums Advisory Committee recruits 9 citizen appointees based on their interest in history/arts/culture

See Appendix A for further details on the composition of committees.

Note: The Economic Development Advisory Committee has representation of the Mayor and one other Council Member. Does this contribute to a better feedback loop between the committee and council or change the perception of the advisory committee members' impact/influence on decision-making? Does this representation have any influence on whether the feedback/suggestions are more likely to be taken up by Staff and/or Council?

Most committees aim for consensus where possible, and report differences of opinion if not.

ACOC meeting procedures and decision-making processes are governed by the City's Procedural By-Law and Code of Conduct and the ACOC Meeting Procedures policy. The Transit Advisory outlines its specific Rules of Order and Delegations in their TOR.


ACOCs make decisions by majority vote (in the case of the Committee of Adjustment, they must decide to approve, deny or defer – indecision is a deferral). Some TORs specify that decision-making is made through consensus where possible. When consensus cannot be reached, members will: take a vote and include the results of the vote in their report to Council for final decision-making, or simply make note of differing viewpoints and opinions in meeting reports to Council. The Accessibility Advisory Committee specifies that quorum can only be achieved if 50%+1 of the members in attendance are persons with disabilities.

Some committees make decisions based on criteria and rubrics e.g. the Municipal Property and Building Commemorative Naming Committee uses a Scoring Matrix, and the Community Grant Allocation Panel refers to the Wellbeing Grant Program eligibility and assessment criteria.

Most Advisory Committees report to Council via Staff Reports

The ACOC Administration Policy requires every ACOC to report to Council at least once per term of Council. These reports are to be prepared by Staff Liaisons, with assistance from ACOC Chairs and Vice-Chairs. The ACOC Administration Policy also provides the option for ACOCs to submit Annual reports to Council. Annual reports should be written by ACOC members (Chair, Vice Chair and a member selected by the Committee) and must be approved by the ACOC.

The TOR for advisory committees indicate that reports are typically expected at least on an annual basis, and are not directly to City Council, but received through the relevant department and then received by Council via the relevant Standing Committee / Committee of Whole meeting.



- 11 committees report at least annually to a Council Committee, mainly via staff and departments. (Note, some terms of reference were written before Council moved to Committee of the Whole, and so they refer to standing committees)
- 3 committees perform specific functions / policies, with no set reporting requirements. (e.g., Council required to consult with Heritage Guelph on specific decisions)
- 3 committees had no specific information on reporting within the TOR.

See Appendix B for details about how often each committee meets.

Committee members serve a minimum of one year, a maximum of two terms of Council

The ACOC Public Appointment Policy sets terms lengths for all ACOCs. The first appointment to an ACOC is for one year. If the appointment is renewed, it can be for the remainder of the current term of Council. Members can serve two consecutive terms of Council, but must take a one year absence after that before being reappointed. Exceptions to term limits are permitted if there are vacancies, a lack of qualified candidates, and/or significant turnover in members would limit the effectiveness of the ACOC.

Missing 3 consecutive meetings without explaining why is considered grounds for forfeiting membership on a committee, with opportunities to appeal/provide an explanation of absenteeism. The ACOC votes to either accept or deny appeals. Temporary leaves of absence are permitted for the birth and care of a baby, care for a sick family member, and/or illness. Other reasons for requesting a temporary leave of absence are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Committees vary in how often they meet and at what time of day. All commit to accommodating accessibility requests.

Committees range in the information they provide about meeting logistics. Most meetings are open to the public, and all have provisions to ensure meetings can accommodate accessibility requests with some notice to City staff. Committees range in the frequency of meetings, but annual meeting schedules tend to be set in advance. Often additional meetings can be called as needed. Some committees meet monthly, some at least 8 times a year, others less frequently (quarterly or only as required).

Timing and length of meetings is specified in a handful of TORs/committee webpages. Heritage Guelph and the Waste Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee note that meetings will be approximately 2 hours. Accessibility and Transit Advisories specify the date and time (3rd Tuesday from 3-2pm and 3rd Thursday @5:30pm, respectively). Natural Heritage and Planning committees meet in the evening.

Only the Accessibility and the Waste Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee specify the location of meetings (City Hall; Waste Resource Innovation Centre, respectively).



In the TORs that have a line for budgets, there is no funding requested.

None of the TOR included a funding request or commitment (some had a line for the budget, others made no reference to any budget). Some committees may access funds via the budgets of their staff liaisons or departments, for example the Committee of Adjustment pays members a stipend (this partially reflects the time commitment expected of members of that committee), however this is not reflected in the TOR.



Appendix A: Composition of Committee Members.

Subject Matter Expertise/Experience: 6 committees

- Accessibility (volunteer/work/personal experience in issues related to persons with disabilities)
- Heritage Guelph (9 members with expertise in built heritage, local history, architecture, landscape architecture, urban geography, cartography, planning, construction, law, archaeology, real estate or first-hand experience with building restoration”)
- Municipal Property and Building Commemorative Naming Committee (2 citizen appointees with expertise or strong interest in the historic, geographic and cultural significance of Guelph)
- Public Art Advisory Committee (7 members with professional experience in urban planning or development, architecture or landscape architecture, visual, literary or performing arts, art history, art administration or education, curation, visual arts consulting, civil engineering, art reviewing/writing, or heritage research and planning; also demonstrate significant knowledge of arts and culture)
- Water Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee (8 members - Knowledge of and experience with municipal water conservation and efficiency programming, municipal water and wastewater systems and water demand management practices)
- Adjustment (Preference is given to candidates who have a demonstrated commitment and interest in the community and who have experience in matters pertaining to Planning, Law, Engineering, Architecture or Construction. Consideration will also be given to including members of the community at large, who have an interest in the community and the issues relating to the Committee of Adjustment)

Specific Sector/Industry: (6)

- Downtown Advisory Committee (9 of 11 positions specify different sectors)
- Economic Development Advisory Committee (6 members from business, education and labour sectors)
- Natural Heritage Advisory Committee (balancing sector and non-sector experience)
- *Planning Advisory Committee (professional in the development industry)
- Tourism Advisory Committee (10 public appointees from specific relevant sectors, AND professional/volunteer experience)
- Water Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee (interested NGO’s)

Specific Workplace/Profession/Position: (3)

- Municipal Property and Building Commemorative Naming Committee (4 are specific positions from other committees or workplaces)
- *Planning Advisory Committee (Professional planner & professional architect)
- Transit Advisory Committee (University of Guelph student and administration; Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination)

General Public (general interest in relevant topics): (9)

- Downtown Advisory Committee (2 residents of downtown or surrounding community)

- Property Standards Committee (landowner or tenant; age 18+; list of specific employers/positions not eligible)
- Economic Development Advisory Committee (2 members from the "community-at-large")
- Natural Heritage Advisory Committee (geographic representation)
- *Planning Advisory Committee (geographic representation)
- Water Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee (7 members including 2 residents/property owners near the site and 3 other interested people/groups)
- Community Grant Allocation Panel (only committee to specify "Membership should strive to reflect the diversity of Guelph residents as defined by the City's Diversity Strategy.", but no targets/provisions)
- Guelph Museums Advisory Committee (9 citizen appointees should be interested in history/arts/culture; "Representative of the community – families, seniors, business, university, multicultural, etc.")
- Transit Advisory Committee (Environmental interests)

Specific Population/Demographic: (2)

- Accessibility (15 members with 50%+1 persons with disabilities);
- *Transit Advisory Committee (youth, seniors, transit users, mobility service users)

Appendix B: Reporting Requirements

11 committees report at least annually to a Council Committee, mainly via staff and departments

- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Community Grant Allocation Panel
- Council Remuneration Advisory Committee
- Downtown Advisory Committee
- Economic Development Advisory Committee
- Municipal Property and Building Commemorative Naming Committee
- Natural Heritage Advisory Committee
- Planning Advisory Committee
- Public Art Advisory Committee
- Transit Advisory Committee
- Water Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee

3 committees perform specific functions / policies, with no set reporting requirement

- Committee of Adjustment
- Property Standards Committee
- Heritage Guelph (Council required to consult with them on specific decisions)

3 committees have no specific information in TOR

- Guelph Museums Advisory Committee
- Tourism Advisory Committee
- Waste Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee



Appendix B: Frequency of Committee Meetings

- Monthly (with exceptions for summer and sometimes winter breaks) (Adjustment; Downtown Advisory; Guelph Museums; Heritage Guelph; Transit)
- Bi-monthly (Accessibility)
- Quarterly/4 times per year (Tourism; Waste Resource Innovation Centre Public Liaison Committee; Water Conservation and Efficiency Public Advisory Committee)
- 2-6 times per year in the evening (Natural Heritage; Planning; Public Art)
- At least 8 per year mostly Sept-Feb (Community Grant Allocation Panel)
- Only as required (e.g., Upon receipt of application/appeal) (Property Standards)
- Unknown (Naming Committee [not specified]; Council Remuneration Advisory Committee; Economic Development Advisory Committee)