CITY OF VICTORIA

Governance and Priorities Committee Report
For the Meeting of September 17, 2015

To:	Governance and Priorities Committee	**Date:**	September 10, 2015
From:	Katie Hamilton, Director of Citizen Engagement and Strategic Planning		
Subject:	Update on Open Government Initiatives		

RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to:

1. Create a policy on the use of City Hall, consistent with the Guiding Principles for the Use of Public Space.
2. Adopt a policy for allowing weddings in City Hall, with potential for revenue generated.
3. Create a program for local school groups
4. Endorse changes to transparency in Council business including posting Council documents as searchable PDFs, and linking between Council documents and webcasting; displaying motions being debated on screens in Council Chamber; exploring additional functionality to webcasting including vote counts and display of motions
5. Introduce new apps for residents, including request for service, and emergency notification subscriptions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Victoria strives to be open and transparent in all areas, whether it be providing services and information to citizens, to use of public facilities. And citizens, in return, continue to expect higher levels of transparency and engagement opportunities from their local government. Open Government encompasses several areas, including access to data, access to physical facilities, and easy access to information and programs.

Openness and transparency are woven through every aspect of City business, whether that is the routine release of City data, to using technologies to ensure citizens have easy access to services and information. Adopting Open Government principles and practices encourage an engaged and well-informed citizenry, and provides for higher quality services.

In 2011, Council adopted an *Open Government Through Open Data* policy. Since then, the City has made significant progress in the area of Open Government, and is continually working to improve in this area.

In the area of Open Data, the City continues to look for new ways to advance this area. Some upcoming initiatives include:

- Additions to the Open Data Catalogue on the City's website and routine release of information; target of 30 new data sets in 2016, with a specific focus on releasing data related to land use and development, budgets, and bylaws
- Focus on releasing data related to land use and development, budgets, and bylaws
- Introduce an open data platform, allowing for data visualizations and exploration of City data by those citizens who are less "digitally literate"
- Continue to use mapping technologies to demonstrate and display City data, including neighbourhood Census data
- Implement a budget simulator online this fall
- Partnering with the University of Victoria, using City data to create apps that address municipal opportunities and challenges
- Exploring the possibility of creating and sharing municipal bylaws in open and searchable format with the Provincial government
- Expanding the use of the Development Tracker, and identifying additional opportunities to continue partnering with PlaceSpeak, and promote PlaceSpeak land-use notifications system in Victoria.

The City works to provide citizens with a better connection to their local government by providing them with more physical connections to their City Hall. The City's current policy is outdated and requires updating to encourage increased public access.

This can potentially include a number of programs and policies that formalize the public's use of City Hall, both during business hours and after hours, including:

- Community and neighbourhood group meetings
- Non-profit meetings, seminars and events
- Arts and culture events
- Private weddings
- Local school group programs

In terms of access to services and information, open government includes not only access to raw data and public facilities, but access to information and services. Social media and online technologies have increased the City's ability to quickly and effectively communicate with residents.

Staff continue to investigate and implement enhancements to the City's website, as well as simple ways to make the business of local government more accessible online. This includes creating documents that are more digitally accessible, better communicating of City information on the website and through social media, and the introduction of a new subscription based e-newsletter.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on Open Government initiatives, seek direction for future improvements, and seek approval on a proposed policy on the use of City Hall, including non-profit events, weddings and local school groups.

BACKGROUND
In 2011, Council adopted an *Open Government through Open Data* policy which moved:

Motion One
To lay the foundation for the practical steps needed to facilitate open government operations and open data accessibility, the City of Victoria will adopt these Open Data Principles, which, when applicable, will guide future actions taken in our efforts to operate the most open and transparent civic government possible:

1. *Complete: All public data should be made available. Public data is data that is not subject to legal or otherwise valid privacy, security, or privilege limitations.*
2. *Primary: Data is collected at the source, with the highest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified forms.*
3. *Timely: Data is made available to the widest range of users for the widest range of purposes.*
4. *Machine-processable: Data is reasonably structured to allow automated processing.*
5. *Non-discriminatory: Data is available to anyone, with no requirement of registration.*
6. *Non-proprietary: Data is available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control.*
7. *License-free: Data is not subject to any copyright, patent, trademark or trade secret regulation. Reasonable privacy, security and privilege restrictions may be allowed.*

Motion Two
Working towards the practical application of these principles, the City of Victoria will take these steps:

1. *Identify immediate opportunities to distribute more of its data*
2. *Record the votes cast by ach Councillor at each Council and Committee meeting, whether in support or opposition to any Motion*
3. *Ask staff to report back on the cost associated with taking the actions identified in (a) through (j) below, including an analysis of how these Open Government/Open Data initiatives complement and can be applied in concert with the City of Victoria's Official Community Plan, Economic Development Strategy and Civic Engagement Strategy.*
   a. *Build a searchable database of: existing bylaws, policies, permits, procedures, schedules and feeds, such as child care spaces, garbage collection, health inspections, election results, council meetings, open houses, public hearings, road closures, Police and Fire incidents, etc.*
   b. *Post, as searchable text (not scanned images) Agendas, minutes and other (out of camera) documents related to Council meetings*
   c. *Post searchable archived Council agendas, minutes and reports*
   d. *Begin broadcasting live video streaming (and archiving) of Council meetings*
   e. *Continue to enhance interactive online services*
   f. *Identify and appropriate data licence*
   g. *Index, publish and syndicate its data to the internet using prevailing open standards, interfaces and formats*
   h. *Ensure that data supplied to the City by third parties (developers, contractors, consultants) are unlicensed, in a prevailing open standard form, and not copyrighted except if otherwise prevented by legal considerations*
   i. *Release automatically all reports submitted to Council that do not require confidentiality – if it could be subject to an FOI request, release it and let people know that it is available*
   j. *Inventory existing data, including background research where available, BC Transit data, GIS data sets, such as locations of bike lanes, parking, parking boundaries, zoning maps, air quality, seismic risk areas, community mapping projects, budget data, grant recipients, festival permits, etc.*

Since adoption of these motions, much of this work has occurred and the City has made significant strides in the area of Open Government through Open Data, including:

- the creation of an Open Data Catalogue on the City website
- routine release of varied information in open format including financial, mapping/GIS, and other data
- addition of various online services including a garbage collection reminder service that uses open data
- webcasting (live and archived) of Council and Committee meetings
- introduction of VicMap, a multi-layered and interactive GIS-based mapping system that provides users with a wide range of data and uses, including bike lanes, parking, parks, and other capital asset information
- staffing increases to fulfill FOI requests
- introduction of a new City blog and increased use of social media to connect citizens to services and information.

An Open Meetings policy was created and implemented in 2014, a principle statement by Council that they will conduct business in the open to the greatest extent possible, This also includes a provision to release information from closed sessions as soon as those items can be discussed in public without harming the interests of the City or third parties. Staff are working to ensure that this information is now routinely release on the City's website via the Document Library.

Also in 2014, an Open Data Licence was adopted by Council. This Licence, and the entire open data offering, is available to view at www.victoria.ca/opendata.

The City has Guiding Principles for the Use of Public Space which were adopted in 2011.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS
The City has made significant progress in the area of Open Government, and is continually working to improve in this area. There is still much opportunity for improvement, in particular to the identification of more complex data sets that can be released, portals for improved access and visualization of City data, and improved agendas and reports.

Open Data
There are approximately 130 data sets currently in the online Open Data Catalogue. A number of areas for improvement have been identified, including more routine release of all information, and a focus on land use and development data, traffic bylaws, and budget data. These are the datasets identified by open data groups as the most desirable additions to a municipal open data catalogue. Staff continue to add data sets to the Open Data Catalogue, and are working to educate staff across the organization on the importance of creating data in an open format, and routine release of this data. A target of 30 new data sets each year has been identified, focusing on highest interest data.
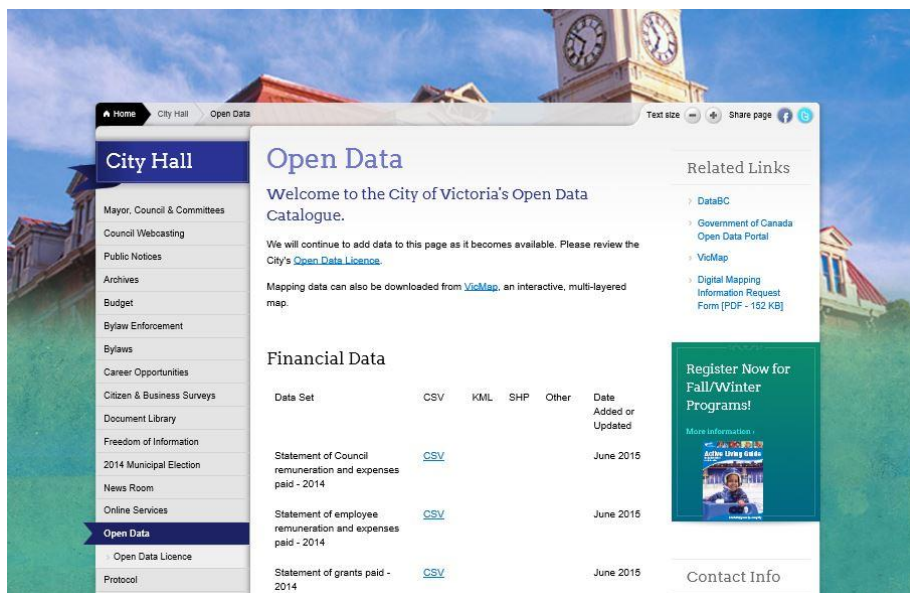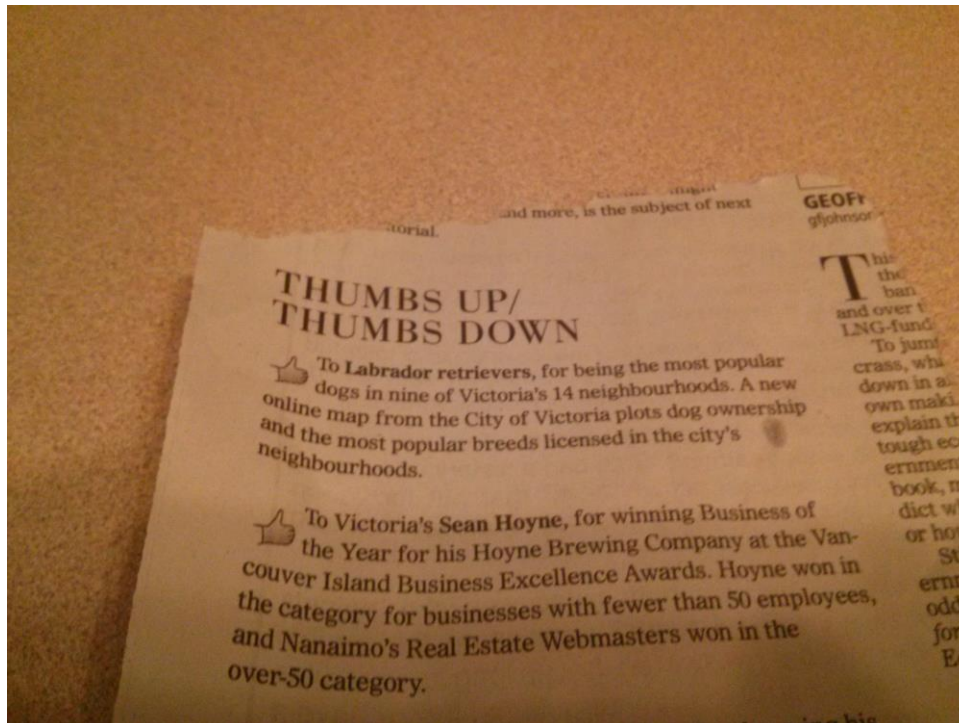
While this approach has worked to date, most of the "low hanging fruit" has already been claimed. In order to advance Open Data, staff are looking to establish formalize and enhance how data is presented and are preparing an RFP for an open data platform. This type of tool would allow the City to display and visualize data in a way that is currently unavailable using the current web page approach. Data visualizations allow citizens without great knowledge of data and app development to utilize and understand City information and data. It can benefit resident and business decision-making.

One example of a data visualization is the recent "Dog Licence/Breed Map" produced by the City. Timed with the renewal of dog licences, the City utilized information collected by its contractor to create and identify which dog breeds are most popular by neighbourhood. The resulting map was extremely popular, and caught media attention local and across the country, resulting in attention to the topic of the need for dog licences. In addition, this data can now be used for Council and staff decision-making, for example when determining where to locate amenities for dog owners, we now have data that visually demonstrates where the majority of licensed dog owners reside. There was no cost to this map as the City already had the information and the mapping capability.

Which Dogs Reign Supreme in Victoria Neighbourhoods?

In 2014 there were over 6,500 dogs licensed in Victoria. The top 5 dog breeds were: Lab or Lab cross, Chihuahua, Golden Retriever, Shih Tzu and Jack Russell Terrier.

Labrador Retrievers are the favourite canine in most neighbourhoods, with Chihuauas topping the popularity list in Victoria West, Hillside/Quadra, North Park and Harris Green. The top dog in Downtown? Pugs rein supreme.

THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

👍 To **Labrador retrievers**, for being the most popular dogs in nine of Victoria's 14 neighbourhoods. A new online map from the City of Victoria plots dog ownership and the most popular breeds licensed in the city's neighbourhoods.

👍 To **Victoria's Sean Hoyne**, for winning Business of the Year for his Hoyne Brewing Company at the Vancouver Island Business Excellence Awards. Hoyne won in the category for businesses with fewer than 50 employees, and Nanaimo's Real Estate Webmasters won in the over-50 category.

A budget simulator will be launched this fall, timed with the upcoming 2016 budget engagement. The simulator, which is in development, will allow citizens to provide feedback on service areas by adjusting the funding levels for each service. Each adjustment will come with impact information, whether it be lowering or increasing service levels.

The City is exploring a potential partnership with the University of Victoria in the area of app development. A new program this fall aimed at would-be app developers will potentially be using City data to solve real-world problems and opportunities, based on feedback from City staff on what apps might be useful, and where there is data to support them. Some potential examples might be road work mapping apps, or a parks amenities app. The City is also planning to host a hack-a-thon in the winter/spring of 2016 and will be exploring opportunities to present these as business cases to participants.

Options for a new service request app are currently being explored. This type of app allows residents to take a picture of note the location of a service request need – i.e. overflowing garbage can, pothole, broken streetlight – and submit it directly to the City via a mobile app. This service will be implemented by the third quarter of 2016.

Staff are involved with a provincial initiative called the BC DevExchange, which aims to bring public service together with technology entrepreneurs and figure out how government can release data to support local tech developers, and serve as built in clients.

Staff will also be meeting this fall with representatives from the Provincial government to explore the possibility of using technology created by the Province that allows legislation, including municipal bylaws, to be created in an open and searchable format.

Building on the success of the VicMap, new neighbourhood maps using Census data will be created to provide tools for neighbourhoods to understand their community better. Family composition, age, mobility and transportation nodes can be mapped by geographic area. This also helps the City better understand needs, demographic shifts and opportunities in long-term planning.
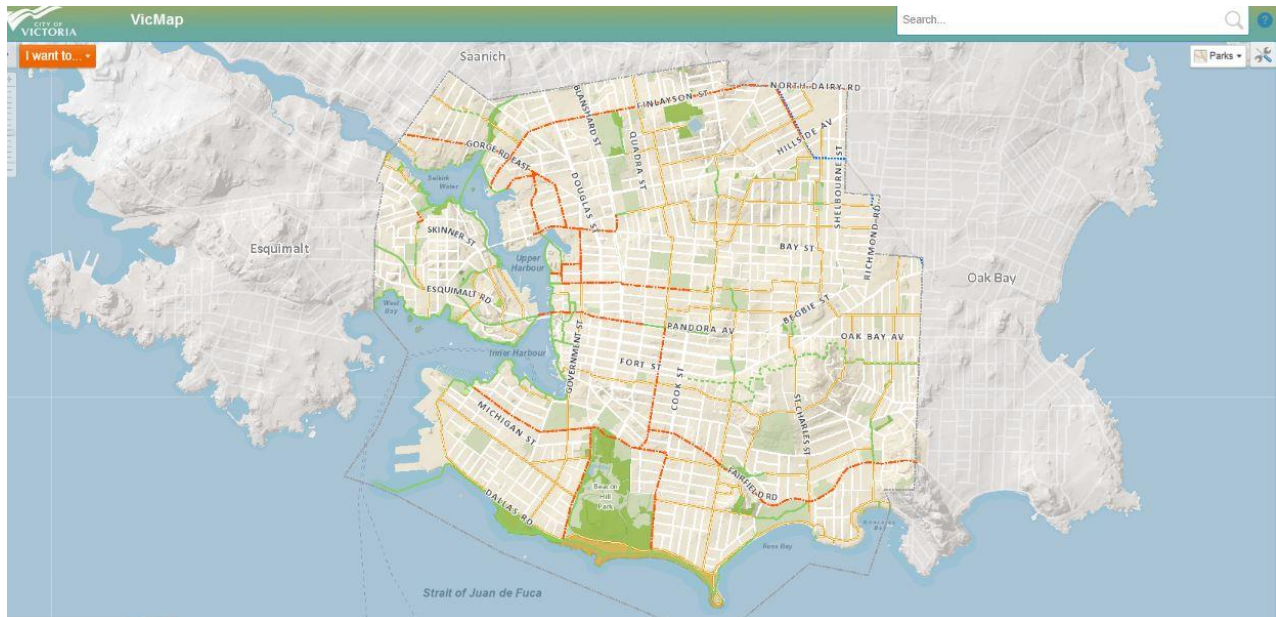
Building on the success of the Recollect garbage notification app, staff are currently exploring the potential to use open data to provide an emergency notification subscription service for residents.

The City has also been participating in GeoThink, a research project out of McGill University. A geo-think tank, the partnership brings academics, government agencies, and students together to share and collaborate on open data and open government.

Other examples of success in this area include using data to create the new Development Tracker, as well as release that same data in the Open Data Catalogue, and a new partnership with PlaceSpeak to utilize this data through a geographic-based consultation notification system.
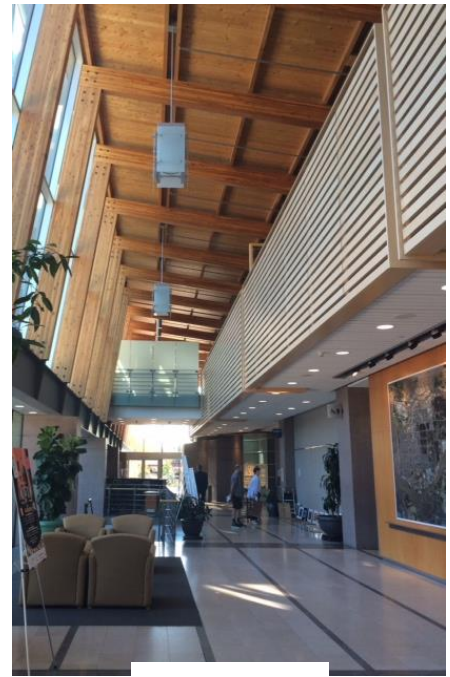

Access to City Hall

Victoria City Hall is a resource for citizens, paid for by tax dollars. And yet, many residents do not ever visit City Hall except to pay taxes, and may not be aware it is a public building, open to the public.

In order to get a sense of best practices in openness and customer service for municipal hall facilities, staff recently visited five Lower Mainland City Halls – Delta, Richmond, Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey. Each of the locations offered opportunities to learn from best practices, as well as provided some validation of improvements the City has made over the last few years.
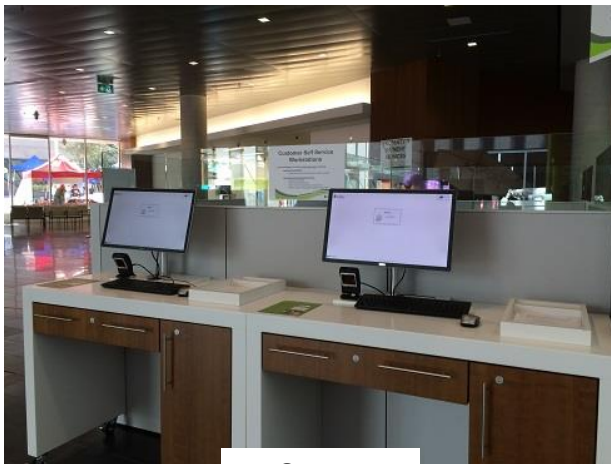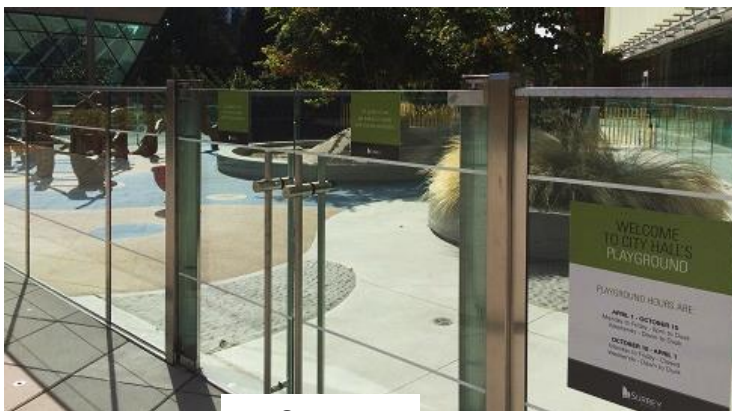
Photos from other municipal halls:
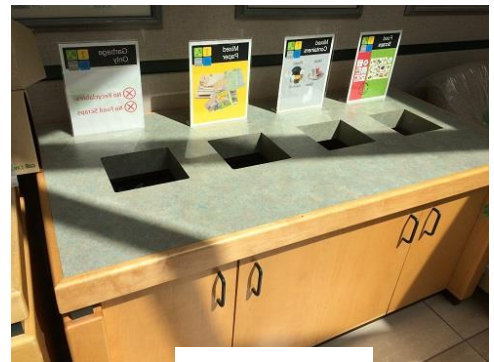

Delta

Richmond

Surrey

Vancouver

Surrey

Burnaby

Customer service improvements over the last few years aimed at making City Hall more accessible to citizens include:

- Addition of a Customer Service Ambassador in the foyer of City Hall
- Communal seating in City Hall foyer to facilitate informal meeting space for staff and citizens, and act as a resting place for citizens who have come to do business at City Hall
- 15 minute free parking on Pandora Avenue, as well as increased bike parking
- More inviting and accessible space in the Mayor and City Manager's Office for visitors and those attending Mayor's Community Drop-In
- Improved public spaces in Human Resources, including computer terminals for online applications and seating for applicants waiting for meetings and interviews
- Free WiFi in City Hall
- More public washrooms, including new baby change tables
- Gender-free washrooms
- Broadcasting Council meetings in City Hall foyer for overflow

In order to continue to provide citizens with a better connection to their local government, and responsive to community requests, staff recommend more physical connections to their City Hall. Staff are recommending that Council adopt a policy that would allow for a greater use of City Hall by community groups, based on the Guiding Principles for the Use of Public Space. These requests would be facilitated through Citizen Engagement and Strategic Planning, with assistance from the Mayor's office and respective departments when needed.

Anticipated events could include community group meetings, non-profit events/workshops/ seminars, arts and culture related events, and weddings. Commercial uses are not contemplated.

Anticipated users would be neighbourhood and community groups, non-profit organizations, arts and culture groups, and private individuals for weddings.

Potential spaces could include Council Chambers, Antechamber, Songhees and Esquimalt Nation Meetings Rooms, City Hall foyer, and Douglas Street entrance.

The recent Blood Donor Clinic with Canadian Blood Services is an example of how City Hall can be used by organizations for community-building purposes.

Additionally the Councillor Lounge is being updated and is nearly complete. This space is under-used asset in City Hall, and when completed will be suitable for Council to book for meetings with the public.

Another under-utilized space in City Hall is the Douglas Street entrance. Staff are currently exploring opportunities to use this space, including possible display and function space, or informal meeting and work space.

Some policy considerations will be ensuring that day-to-day business of City Hall is not impacted by external use, frequency and timing of events, insurance requirements, staffing requirements, a clear process for booking the space, equipment availability, room availability, ensuring meeting room availability for internal purposes, and associated fees if applicable.

1) Weddings

Staff are approached routinely by citizens who wish to get married in City Hall. Currently, we have no policy in place that would allow this.

Options for weddings could range from:

- providing space in Council Chambers during business hours (minimal impacts, provided there is availability. Staff may need to provide set up and take down)
- providing space in Council Chambers during and after business hours (would require additional security and staff fees, as well as ensuring availability)
- providing space at another location in City Hall i.e. front steps, Antechamber (minimal impact, provided the space is available)
- selling marriage licences at the Public Service Centre

Considerations for creating a policy for weddings in City Hall would include: which level of service to provide; rental costs (in other municipalities, costs range from $100-300, depending on the level of service, times etc); staffing needs; time availabilities; catering options; equipment provided; number of guests/participants; and length of rental allowed. A pilot program for a set period of time, would be contemplated to allow for appropriate evaluation.

Staff would begin implementation in the fourth quarter of 2015 with a start date of the program in first quarter of 2016.

2) Meetings by Community Groups

Many community groups have expressed concerns with a lack of meeting space in the City, and a lack of funds to rent spaces where they are available. Meeting space could be provided free of charge during regular business hours, and at a cost-recovery only basis after hours. Cost-recovery would include any building security needed after hours, labour costs for set up and take down (if applicable), staffing requirements, and other hard costs as needed. Eligible groups would include community and neighbourhood groups, non-profit organizations, and other levels of government.

Staff would begin implementation in the fourth quarter of 2015 with a start date of the program in first quarter of 2016.

3) Art shows and other events

The success of the Witness Blanket exhibit in 2014 has inspired a number of other groups and organizations to approach staff with requests to use City Hall for similar installations. This use is consistent with the intent of the proposed policy, and staff recommend using the facility for more of these events. In the spring of 2015 the City of Victoria Youth Council held a successful art show at the Douglas Street entrance to City Hall as well.

A comprehensive policy would need to be developed should Council wish to proceed with this idea. Some considerations would include: using an arms-length organization to jury any art shows; coordinating shows through the City's Culture division; ensuring the use remains non-commercial and groups are affiliated with a non-profit organization; location for installations would need to be consistent with the daily functioning of City Hall; fair access to all groups who meet the criteria; cost recovery for any after-hours staffing or security costs, as well as an maintenance costs incurred by the City.

Other events uses might include documentary screenings in the Antechamber, festival opening night events in the foyer, TED-X Victoria, community seminars, and youth engagement events.

Staff would begin implementation in the fourth quarter of 2015 with a start date of the program in first quarter of 2016.

4) Local School Groups

While the City often hosts international and visiting school groups, a sustained effort to reach out to and engage local school children has not been made. The annual Christmas caroling week and recent "Mayor for a Day" demonstrate the opportunities for connecting children with civic consciousness at an early age.

In Victoria, all grade six students participate in a social studies unit on government and elections. This would be the perfect opportunity to connect with students and provide some insight into how local government functions, the variety of services local government provides, and the role of elected officials.

Staff recommend creating a local school outreach program by contacting schools within the City of Victoria to invite Grade six classes to the City. This "City Campus" program could involve a variation on the Mayor for a Day program, where all students (public school, independent school and home-schoolers) come on the same day for a tour of City Hall, and finish off with a "mock Town Hall" in Council Chambers. Classes could hold their own mock election prior to the event, and offer one representative from each class to sit on "Council." Classes could also be given a topic in advance (i.e. parks in my neighbourhood) so that students could research and form opinions prior to a Town Hall, where their "elected official" will be presiding.

Alternately, classes could be invited in smaller groups at intervals throughout the year.

Staff would begin implementation in the fourth quarter of 2015 with a start date of the program in first quarter of 2016.

Access to Services and Information

Open government includes not only access to raw data and public facilities, but access to information and services.

Staff have been implementing simple ways to make City government business more accessible:

- Better use of social media to ensure citizens are aware of the business of Council, including posting agendas on social media, and tweeting meeting progression and items of interest
- Improved placement of agendas and meeting details on the City's website
- Inclusion of Council updates and upcoming meetings in e-newsletter (upcoming)
- Use of City foyer screens to promote upcoming meetings each week
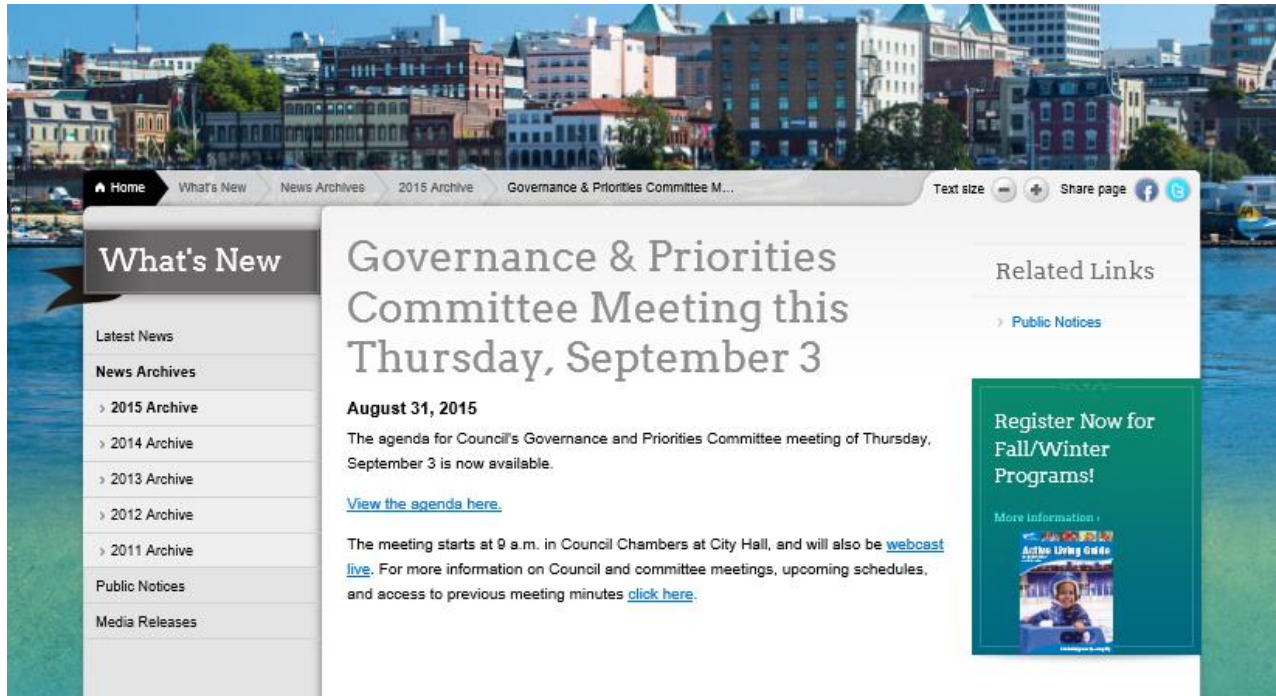
Other recommendations to add transparency to Council business include:
- Display of motions being debated on screens in Council Chambers
- Explore adding functionality to webcasting option, including vote counts and display of motions, indexed to the time-stamp on the video
- Ensuring all Council and Committee meeting agendas and minutes no longer be posted as scanned PDFs, but rather are posted as searchable PDFs. In addition, these documents should be indexed, and links between minutes, agendas, webcasting archives and other documents should be utilized to the greatest extent possible. There are some technological and process limitations to overcome, however, simple reports could be posted to begin with.

Last fall, for the first time webcast election results were broadcast live. It was the largest viewership to any City webcast event by a significant margin, and demonstrates the appetite for increased access to local government information.

Website enhancements

- Posting all jobs, internal and external, to the City's website to allow for transparency and ease of application for all applicants (internal and external).

- Staff are investigating the possibility of search-through capability to iCompass. Currently, visitors to the City's website can only search items on the actual site, which does not include archived and upcoming agendas and minutes. This enhancement would allow users to search through to iCompass and allow minutes and agendas to be returned as search results.
- Staff are also investigating the option to include a subscription based emergency notification service on the website, similar to the garbage collection tool.
- A service request app
- The City has added an Instagram feed to its social media offerings, allowing a visual way to connect with the City. This feed has so far included attractive photos from around the city as well as images of heritage buildings, archival photos, and photos of City programs. Each photo is accompanied by information and "did you knows" to add additional value.

A new City e-newsletter will launch in September to complement the Connect newsletter. The e-newsletter will be a subscription service, and will included added-value information for citizens looking for City information on a more continuous, and immediate, basis.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS
Allowing for greater and varied use of City Hall is consistent with the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, specifically:
- Engage and Empower the Community
- Facilitate Social Inclusion and Community Wellness
- Nurture our Arts, Culture and Learning Capital
- Demonstrate Regional Leadership

Options include
1. Status quo on use of City Hall; available on an ad hoc basis, with larger requests involving hard costs requiring Council approval. Community requests without direct staff or Council involvement generally discouraged. No impacts to staffing or the Financial Plan.
2. Adopt a policy on the use of City Hall, consistent with the Guiding Principles for the Use of Public Space. Policy could waive user fees, or operate on a cost-recovery basis. Staffing

resources would be required for booking and liaising with groups. Impacts to the Financial Plan would be dependent on the volume of user requests. (Recommended)

3. Adopt a policy for allowing weddings in City Hall, with fees charged to the user. Potential for revenue generation. Staffing resources would be required for booking. (Recommended)

4. Create a program for local school groups. Staff resources would be required. (Recommended)

5. Endorse changes to transparency in Council business including posting Council documents as searchable PDFs, and linking between Council documents and webcasting; displaying motions being debated on screens in Council Chamber; exploring additional functionality to webcasting including vote counts and display of motions. (Recommended)

6. Introduce new apps for residents, including request for service, and emergency notification subscriptions. Technology requests would be identified in 2016 Financial Plan. (Recommended)

Financial Impacts

The draft 2016 financial plan includes IT budget requests for the costs associated with the service app ($10,000-$15,000), development tracker, and the open data portal ($30,000). Tours and programs offered during business hours can be accommodated through existing staff, and after hours requests will be managed on a cost-recovery basis.

CONCLUSIONS

Connecting citizens with municipal information and services is essential for an engaged and vibrant community. Staff will continue to seek new ways to provide additional transparency and openness in all we do.

Respectfully submitted,

per Heather Follis,
Customer Service Advisor
Citizen Engagement and
Strategic Planning

Katie Hamilton, Director
Citizen Engagement and
Strategic Planning

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____

Date: September 11, 2015
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