



Governance & Priorities Committee Report

For the meeting of May 22, 2014

Date:	May 14, 2014	From:	Katie Hamilton, Director of Communications & Civic Engagement Robert Woodland, Director of Legislative & Regulatory Services
Subject:	Council and Committee Meeting Agenda Publication on Fridays		

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide information requested by Council regarding the organizational considerations and impacts arising from the publication of meeting agendas on Friday afternoon, rather than Monday morning.

Committee and Council meeting agendas are currently prepared and provided to Council members on Friday afternoons with general publication of the agendas on Monday. This schedule allows time for Council and staff to review their agenda packages prior to receiving inquiries from the public or the media.

General publication of the agenda in electronic format on Fridays is feasible without additional cost. However, there are a number of issues that Council should weigh in considering any change to the agenda publication schedule, including:

- City staff availability to support Council and public inquiries;
- Service response times to public inquiries;
- The impact on media engagement in an issue;
- The ability of Council and staff to provide informed responses to inquiries.

Given the level of public and media interest about City business Council should maintain a publication schedule that enables timely customer service response and effective communications support for the Council. Once Council determines the appropriate agenda publication process then that process should be specified in the Council Bylaw to support governance transparency.

Recommendation

That Council receives this report for information.

Respectfully Submitted,


Katie Hamilton
Director of Communications & Civic Engagement


Robert Woodland
Director of Legislative & Regulatory Services

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:


Jason Johnson

Date:


May 16, 2014

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide information requested by Council regarding the organizational considerations and impacts arising from the publication of meeting agendas on Friday afternoon, rather than Monday morning.

Background

Committee and Council meeting agendas are currently prepared and provided to Council members on Friday afternoons. General publication of the agendas in both electronic and hard copies occurs on Monday. The delay in publishing the agenda for the public allows time for Council and staff to review their agenda packages prior to receiving inquiries from the public or the media. It also enables staff to prepare for the publication of the reports and the questions and queries that may result from them.

Prior to 2009, agendas were published for both Council and the public on Mondays. Flowing with the recommendations of the Governance Review in February 2009 Council directed staff to publish the agenda for Council members only on Fridays with public agenda release on Mondays. This practice is not currently reflected in the *Council Bylaw*.

Issues

There are a number of important issues to consider regarding the change to publishing agendas on Friday, instead of Monday. From an engagement and customer service perspective, sharing new information to the public and media is generally most effective during the beginning of the week versus the start of the weekend.

City staff availability

On Mondays, City staff are readily available, and often have planned to speak to the advice or recommendations within reports. They are also available for the next five days to speak to the issues, raise awareness of new issues, and correct misinformation where needed. City staff is also available to answer any questions Councillors may have prior to them speaking on the topic.

Customer response time

In terms of customer service, topics reported in the news media or reports available to the public commonly generate questions or concerns from the community and specific stakeholders. When issues or information are presented early in the week there is greater likelihood that staff can respond to those queries with no delay through the weekend. Staff are not generally scheduled on the weekend to answer public or media enquiries, respond to social media or email enquiries.

Media engagement

Media provide a timely, cost effective method of engaging the public in civic matters and are a preferred communications method noted by residents and businesses. Media is an important consideration in determining the best weekday to release agenda packages and reports. Ensuring the media have high quality information when they need it is a key factor to successful engagement with the community and the availability of staff and Council is critical to that.

When a topic of interest or concern is introduced in the media, it is helpful to have the issue discussed in multiple mediums at different times and over the course of a few days. This keeps an issue top of mind and increases the chances that people will learn about an important issue, form an opinion, engage in dialogue or participate in an opportunity should there be one. Lengthening the time period between issue introduction and the substantive deliberation of the

issue by Council can reduce the media cycle, and therefore opportunities to reach those interested or affected by an agenda item.

From a purely media relations perspective, a general consideration when wanting to share information of interest with the public and media is to avoid Friday releases where possible, as it is difficult for media outlets to cover the issues of interest. Friday sharing of information is often perceived as a strategic method for businesses and organizations to share information that they do not want the media to cover. Wherever possible, our approach is to avoid announcements on Fridays.

In addition, most media outlets have reduced staff on the weekends and in Victoria there is no daily newspaper on Monday. By the time staff, and in many cases Council, are available to provide commentary days later, the story might be considered 'old news' and may be a missed opportunity.

Fully informed staff/Council

Providing reports to staff and Council in advance of the public ensures adequate time to review and become acquainted with the material in preparation of media and public inquiries. Should there be information that is complex or misunderstood, staff and Council currently have the ability to seek clarification to promptly answer questions when asked, providing timely and high quality information to the public.

Technical production

From a technical standpoint, it is feasible for Legislative Services to publish electronic agendas on Fridays for the general public without incurring any additional costs. Hard copies of the agenda would still be produced for Monday as it takes more time to print and assemble the agendas.

Conclusion

It appears that many of the same objectives of complete and meaningful information sharing apply to both the intent of the Council inquiry and the considerations outlined in this report. Although from a technical standpoint the materials can be shared publicly on Friday there may be customer service and communications impacts as a result of changing the publication date from Monday to Friday. All aspects should be considered when contemplating a change to the timing.

Should Council wish to provide direction on a revised agenda publication process then that process will be specified in the *Council Bylaw* to support transparency in governance. A subsequent bylaw amendment will be prepared for Council's consideration, which includes public Notice and an opportunity for input as part of the required process.

Recommendation

That Council receives this report for information.