

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, October 6, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

**TITLE: REGISTERED RATEPAYER ASSOCIATION POLICY REVIEW
UPDATE**

FROM:

Wendy Law, Deputy City Manager, Administrative Services and City Solicitor

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Committee's direction regarding a revised Registered Ratepayer Association Policy for the City of Vaughan.

Report Highlights

- Council adopted a resolution on October 21, 2020 to defer the Registered Ratepayer/Community Association Policy to a future Committee of the Whole (Working Session) meeting.
- Staff is seeking Committee's direction on options to proceed with this policy:
 - Option 1 – Status Quo
 - Option 2 – Less restrictive policy
 - Option 3 – More streamlined version of the existing policy

Recommendations

1. That Committee provide direction regarding options to proceed with a revised Registered Ratepayer Association Policy.

Background

At the October 21, 2020 Council Meeting, staff submitted a report titled "Registered Ratepayer Association Policy Review". In the report, staff provided an overview of public engagement activities facilitated by LURA Consulting, which included a public survey, interviews with Members of Council, Stakeholder Roundtable with existing Registered

Ratepayer Associations (RRA), and Public Forum with the general public who are not part of any Registered Ratepayer Associations. In addition to obtaining feedback, staff also researched municipal best practices to explore options for changes to the policy. A proposed draft Registered Ratepayer Association Policy (Policy No. 06.C.02) was provided for Council's consideration.

Subsequently, Council passed a resolution to defer this matter to a future Committee of the Whole (Working Session) meeting.

Previous Reports/Authority

[REGISTERED RATEPAYER ASSOCIATION POLICY REVIEW - Item 11, Report No. 47, adopted by on October 21, 2020.](#)

Analysis and Options

Below are the key elements of the current policy:

Eligibility Requirements

- a) A completed Ratepayer/Community Associations Registration Form;
- b) A list of the Association's membership showing a minimum of 25 members in an urban area and 10 in a rural area and that the list include names, addresses and signatures;
- c) A statement of purpose and a copy of the Association's Constitution and/or By-laws; and
- d) The boundaries of the area that the Association represents.

Renewal Requirements

- One (1) General Meeting must be held no less than once every three (3) years.
- Minutes of the General Meeting at which the Executive Officers have been elected be filed with the City Clerk.
- Annual renewal date is not specified.

Geographic Exclusivity

- The City will not recognize groups wishing to form a new Registered Association within the boundaries of an existing Association that is in good standing.

Rights

- One (1) free meeting space to hold an annual general meeting at City/ Library facility, based on availability.
- Consultation and Notices of various issues within the boundaries.

- Qualify as Community Service Organization (C.S.O.) with service-in-kind opportunities.
- Recognized Status as an Association at Committee Meetings.
- Hard copies of Agendas and Minutes provided free of charge for pick up, upon written request.

Based on the feedback from public consultation and municipal best practices, staff identified three (3) policy options regarding key elements on eligibility requirements, renewal requirements, geographic exclusivity and rights for Committee's consideration.

Option 1: Status Quo pending outcome of the CSO policy review

Under the City's current Community Service Organization (CSO) Policy, Registered Ratepayer Associations are recognized as a category of Community Service Organization. The CSO policy will undergo a comprehensive review this year to be completed by early 2022. The Registered Ratepayers Association policy review can be paused until the completion of the CSO policy review to ensure any proposed changes are in line with the outcome of the CSO policy review.

If Committee would like to proceed with Option 1, it is recommended that the existing policy remains status quo.

Option 2: Less restrictive policy

According to the public online survey conducted by staff, 62% of 84 respondents have never been a member of a ratepayer group or community association, registered or otherwise. Survey results show that the number of participants who were interested or very interested in establishing a ratepayer association dropped from 39% to 26% after being presented with the existing registration requirements. The total number of participants that were not interested or not at all interested increased from a total of 24% to 31%. Based on the decrease in interest from participants after learning about the registration requirements, the current registration process may be a deterrent for beginning an RRA.

In addition, municipal best practices research show that only four (4) other Ontario municipalities have a similar policy, namely Aurora, Markham, Oakville and Toronto. In comparison, Vaughan's existing policy is more restrictive in comparison, including additional requirements not found in other municipalities, such as:

- Submission of a statement of purpose and a copy of the Association's Constitution and/or By-laws upon initial registration;

- Minutes of the General Meeting at which the Executive Officers have been elected be filed with the City Clerk; and
- Geographic exclusivity.

Ratepayer associations, as do other associations, play an important role in the process of civic engagement. These associations advocate for the community, help keep residents informed and provide a community perspective on a wide range of issues. While associations may be formed on a geographic basis, they may also be formed to represent a specific interest or issue that impacts larger areas and the whole municipality, such as transit and environmental issues.

The advancement of digital tools and social media have changed the operation and interaction of many community associations and advocacy groups. New organizations may focus on mobilizing and facilitating participation of their supporters through online platforms, which may not be limited to a defined geographic area in a traditional sense.

Based on the diverse needs of the residents, a less restrictive policy will likely remove barriers and encourage more ratepayer or community associations to form in the City. The proposed revisions are also in line with policies from our municipal counterparts.

Proposed policy framework

Eligibility Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed Registration Form with name of association, executive list and contact information, and boundary lines, if applicable • A list of a minimum of 25 members, include names, addresses and signatures.
Renewal Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renew their registration annually by submitting a completed renewal form no later than March 31 of each year.
Geographic exclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing on the City's website, publication, and any other corporate communication channels • Recognition of Ratepayer Association Status at Council/ Committee meetings • Two (2) free meeting spaces to hold meetings at City/ Library facility each year, based on availability. • Consultation and Notices of various issues within the boundaries, if applicable • Qualify as Community Service Organization (C.S.O.) with service-in-kind opportunities

This option focuses on the City’s role in providing a platform to help the exchange of information and facilitate these groups to reach out to larger audiences for input on civic matters. The Office of the City Clerk will focus efforts on maintaining the public listing of Registered Ratepayer Associations and investigate ways to improve the listing and website functionalities to help promote these associations in the City.

Option 3: More streamlined version of the existing policy

If Committee feels that the current policy works well overall, Option 3 recommends maintaining the existing policy framework with some revisions for a more streamlined approach based on public feedback.

1. Eligibility Requirements

Feedback from Public Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participants (76% total) indicated that the registration process is ineffective or very ineffective. • Review or limit association boundaries to ensure effective representation. • Interest from the general public to start a ratepayer association dropped from 31% to 24% after being presented with existing registration requirements.
Staff Recommendations	<p>To address concerns regarding representation and association boundaries, it is recommended that the eligibility requirements include a minimum of 25 members within each Concession Block covered by the Association’s boundaries, regardless of urban or rural area.</p> <p>Revised Eligibility Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A completed Ratepayer/Community Associations Registration Form; b) A list of the Association’s membership showing a minimum of 25 members within each Concession Block covered by the Association’s boundaries, and that the list include names, addresses and signatures; c) A statement of purpose; and d) The boundaries of the area that the Association represents.

2. Renewal Requirements

Feedback from Public Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The registration/ renewal process should be stricter (i.e. require more frequent general meetings) to discourage groups from forming for the wrong reasons, and to encourage more effective engagement. • Single-issue groups that become inactive once the issue is resolved. Concern that some associations are not active.
Staff Recommendation	<p>In line with other municipalities, it is recommended that RRAs be required to meet at least once within a 12-month period.</p> <p>Revised renewal requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have held one (1) meeting in the preceding 12-month period; and • Renew their registration annually by submitting a completed renewal form no later than March 31 of each year, confirming all requirements have been met.

3. Geographic Exclusivity

Feedback from Public Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey results show majority of existing RRA members support geographic exclusivity. Former RRA members and the general public were neither strongly against nor supportive. • Key themes from participants' comments regarding geographic exclusivity at stakeholder roundtable and public forum were largely against allowing more than one group to represent a geographic area, warning that it would be confusing for residents to choose between groups, and could create challenges for dealing with common issues within the boundaries (i.e. developments). One participant was largely against geographic exclusivity, stating that their RRA did not represent their views or that of their neighbours.
Staff Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a unique requirement not found in any ratepayer policies in other municipalities. • Geographic exclusivity distinguishes between registered and non-registered groups, which creates perceived differences in the formal interaction between the City and these groups.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the same time, geographic exclusivity will establish a defined number of groups for administrative purposes and establish certainty on allocation of limited City resources. • In addition, geographic exclusivity does not in any way limit individuals from organizing informal or formal (incorporated) neighborhood associates, nor does it limit the ability of individuals or associations from delegating to Committee regarding matters of interest. • An appeal mechanism which may involve Council as the final decision-maker could be required if more than one ratepayer groups want to form within the same geographical boundaries and want to obtain status under the policy. • Committee's direction is required.
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4. Rights

Staff Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing on the City's website, publication, and any other corporate communication channels • Recognition of Ratepayer Association Status at Council/ Committee meetings • Two (2) free meeting spaces to hold meetings at City/ Library facility each year, based on availability. • Consultation and Notices of various issues within the boundaries, if applicable • Qualify as Community Service Organization (C.S.O.) with service-in-kind opportunities
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The majority of participants (86%) during the public consultation indicated that the City should continue to provide subsidized meeting spaces for RRAs. Some existing RRAs also expressed the need for more free meeting spaces. In consultation with the Director of Community Services and the Vaughan Public Library CEO, the City can provide one additional meeting space per year free of charge, in addition to discounted rental rates with a C.S.O. status. Therefore, both Option 2 and 3 recommend the provision of two (2) free meeting spaces at a City/ Library facility each year, based on availability, to all RRAs. Both options also recommend removing the requirement of a constitution or by-law if a statement of purpose is provided upon initial registration. Hard copies of the Agendas and Minutes will also no longer be provided as meeting documents are posted online.

Comparison Chart for Options 1, 2 and 3

	Option 1 Status Quo	Option 2 Less Restrictive	Option 3 Streamlined Version
Eligibility Requirements (Initial Registration)	a) A completed Ratepayer/Community Associations Registration Form;	Yes	Yes
	b) A list of the Association's membership showing a minimum of 25 members in an urban area and 10 in a rural area and that the list include names, addresses and signatures;	A list of a minimum of 25 members, including names, addresses and signatures.	A list of the Association's membership showing a minimum of 25 members within each Concession Block covered by the Association's boundaries, including names, addresses and signatures.
	c) A statement of purpose and a copy of the Association's Constitution and/or By-laws; and	A statement of purpose only	A statement of purpose only
	d) The boundaries of the area that the Association represents.	Not mandatory	Yes
Renewal Requirements	One (1) General Meeting must be held no less than once every three (3) years.	No	One (1) General Meeting must be held in the preceding 12-month period.
	Minutes of the General Meeting at which the Executive Officers have been elected be filed with the City Clerk.	No	No, but a confirmation of the meeting date is required.
	Annual renewal date is not specified.	No later than March 31	No later than March 31
Geographic Exclusivity	Yes – The City will not recognize groups wishing to form a new Registered Association within the boundaries of an existing Association that is in good standing.	No	<i>Committee's direction required.</i>
Rights	One (1) free meeting space to hold an annual general meeting at City/ Library facility, based on availability.	Two (2) free meeting spaces at City/ Library facility each year, based on availability.	Two (2) free meeting spaces at City/ Library facility each year, based on availability.
	Consultation and Notices of various issues within the boundaries.	Yes	Yes
	Qualify as Community Service Organization (C.S.O.) with service-in-kind opportunities.	Yes	Yes
	Recognized Status as an Association at Committee Meetings.	Yes	Yes
	Hard copies of Agendas and Minutes provided free of charge for pick up, upon written request.	No	No

Next Steps

If Option 1 is selected, there will be no changes to the existing policy. Office of the City Clerk will coordinate with Community Services to ensure any proposed changes to the Registered Ratepayer Association policy aligns with the outcome of the upcoming CSO policy review. Staff will report back to Committee after the new CSO policy is approved by Council.

If Option 2 or 3 is selected, staff will bring back a revised RRA policy to the next Committee of the Whole meeting for approval based on Council's direction on key policy elements regarding eligibility requirements, renewal requirements, geographic exclusivity, and rights.

Financial Impact

None.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

None.

Conclusion

Based on the feedback from public consultation and municipal best practices, staff identified three (3) policy options for Committee's consideration for a revised Registered Ratepayer Association Policy: Option 1 – Status Quo; Option 2 – Less restrictive policy; and Option 3 – More streamlined version of the existing policy.

If Option 1 is selected, the policy will remain status quo until the completion of Community Services CSO policy review. If Option 2 or 3 is preferred, Staff will report back with a revised policy at the next Committee of the Whole meeting and implementation plan, based on Council's direction on several key policy elements.

For more information, please contact Todd Coles, City Clerk x 8281

Attachments

None.

Prepared by

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Approved by

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Reviewed by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Spensieri".

Nick Spensieri, City Manager