

A More Effective City Council

The megacity is so large it functions badly. Agendas for council meetings are 3500 - 4000 pages long, and few council members have the time or interest to read all items. Meetings stretch on for four or more days. The city budget is \$7.5 billion a year, far larger than the council structure can reasonably manage. More than 60,000 individuals work for the megacity, and with common city-wide policies it's not possible to shape services to local needs. Community groups find it difficult to get a serious hearing from council, particularly since few councillors are familiar with anything more than their own area. Those who try to do business with the city find they must hire a lobbyist to be effective.

There are many issues to address to make the needed change. The following are the four most immediate changes needed:

1. Immediately schedule city council to meet every second week rather than once a month. More frequent meetings will ensure more attention can be given to city business in a timely fashion.
2. Immediately schedule community councils to meet every second week rather than once a month. More effective meetings will ensure more attention can be given to local business in a timely fashion.
3. Request legislation from the provincial government permitting council to delegate to community councils powers to: make planning decisions in conformity with the city's official plan; create detailed neighbourhood land use plans; control the local budget, policy, and staffing decisions for planning, parks and recreation, heritage, and roads, within a megacity framework. Decentralizing these decisions will improve decisions made.
4. Establish a commission of acknowledged community leaders to review the city's government structure and to recommend new structures of a more manageable size for the existing city. The commission should receive adequate funding from council for a review of the existing materials on governance and for arranging public consultation and communication. The commission should report by March 2008 with a view to putting new structures in place to become effective by the next municipal election. .

These are not the only governance issues that need to be addressed to create a more effective City Council, just the most immediate. Other governance changes that need to be addressed are:

- a) Allowing all residents of the city to vote, not just citizens.
- b) Increasing the number of women on Council.
- c) Creating strategies to increase the participation on city agencies bodies and commissions by people of colour, youth and recent immigrants;

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