

1975  
MARCH

EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

Based on the work of the Commission on Participatory Democracy, the Edmonton Social Planning Council proposes that the development of strong community councils of some kind would do much to improve the quality and quantity of citizen participation in Edmonton.

The actual design of a community council structure proposed in this submission is predicated on the following assumptions:

1. the community council structure should to the fullest extent possible make use of existing structures,
2. the community councils should be concerned with the complete development of their communities in terms of physical and social aspects,
3. different kinds of concern or activities are best dealt with, or organized by, different sized communities.

It is proposed that the community league (and related area council) structure which presently is served by Edmonton Parks and Recreation be strengthened by placing responsibility for it with a new Community Development Agency which reports directly to the Commissioner of Public Affairs. The District Recreation Consultants would remain as recreation consultants, the planners as planning consultants to these new community leagues (and would remain within their own departments), but the community workers of the Social Services Department would be replaced by (or would move over to) 17 community workers (or more, depending on the growth of area councils) within the Community Development Agency. Each community worker would be responsible to the Superintendent of community development and would be charged with the development of broadly based and broadly oriented community leagues within their respective areas, and with the development of an active area council. The community league membership would include all residents of the community which the league represents. Some leagues currently operate this way, but others have a very high membership fee in order to pay for various facilities or programs. The establishment of a membership based on residency would mean that either the leagues would have to have the power to require contributions of members, which in effect would be a tax (like the local improvement tax), or they would have to rely on contributions for programs or facilities over and

above those funded by City grants. While the former is theoretically feasible, it would seem that the problem of requiring homeowners to pay for all community league activities (even though renters would probably be paying indirectly) and the problem of the tax being unfair in some cases because of lack of use by the taxpayer or inability to afford it, would lead to the decision to abolish community league membership fees. (It is assumed that a poll tax would be too great a departure from present taxation practice to be acceptable.) This will be unfortunate in terms of the effect on sense of responsibility that membership fees presumably instill in the members. On the other hand, the complaint of many leagues regarding the difficulty of getting people to accept officer positions suggests that in many cases there will not be an appreciable loss of feeling of responsibility for the league by the members. (Memberships could be retained for certain programs within the community such as the recreational programs presently conducted by most community leagues.)

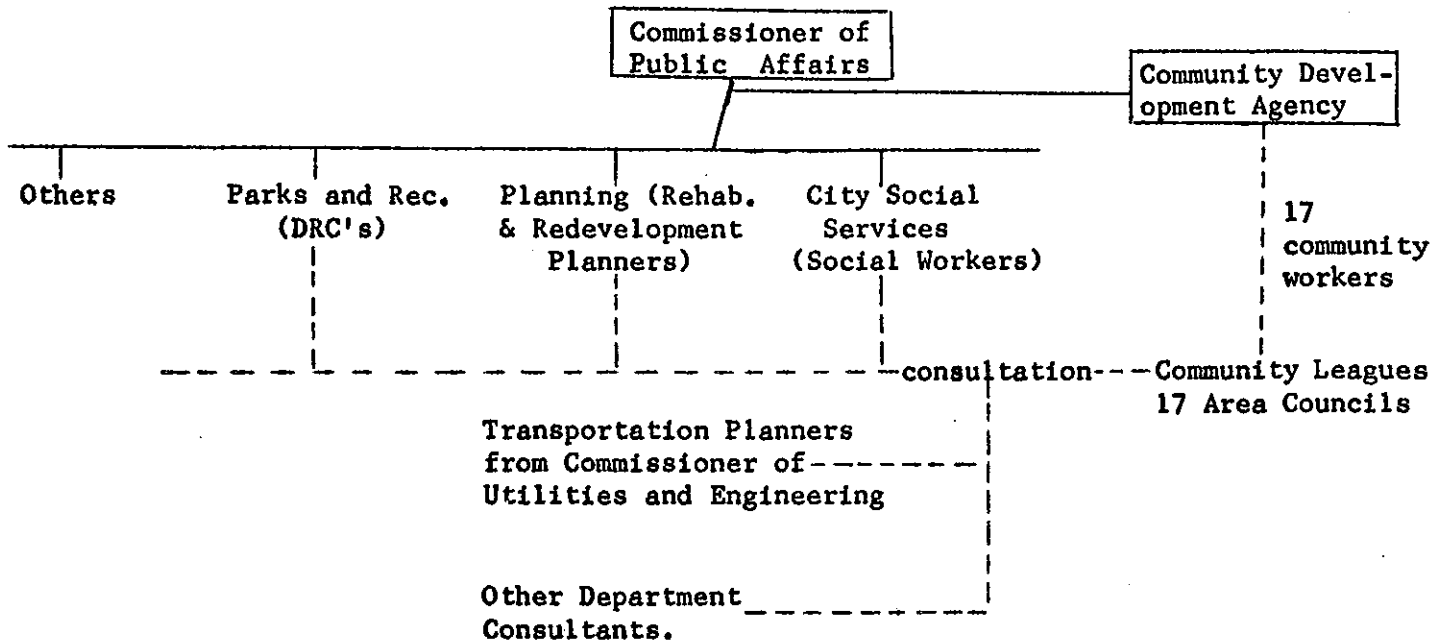
The area councils could either be directly elected or composed of representatives from the community leagues. The problem with the former is one of whether people identify adequately with the large area to participate effectively in the election process. The West 10 elections indicate a problem here, though the area is quite a bit larger than the average area council, and it may not have had adequate development, in part because of its removal from the community league structure. A direct election of area council representatives may also lead to complaints of too many elections. On the other hand, direct elections could increase identification with the larger area. On the whole, it is the recommendation of the Edmonton Social Planning Council that for the moment, area councils should be composed of community league representatives as at present.

It is proposed that after allowing a suitable time for development, say three years, the area councils be given funds to hire their own community development officers (in the fashion of the West 10 staff). These officers would largely replace those in the community development agency of the City, though this Agency would retain some staff to continue development work in those areas where extra help is needed, or where the area council is not strong enough to direct its own worker, or in newly developing areas of the City.

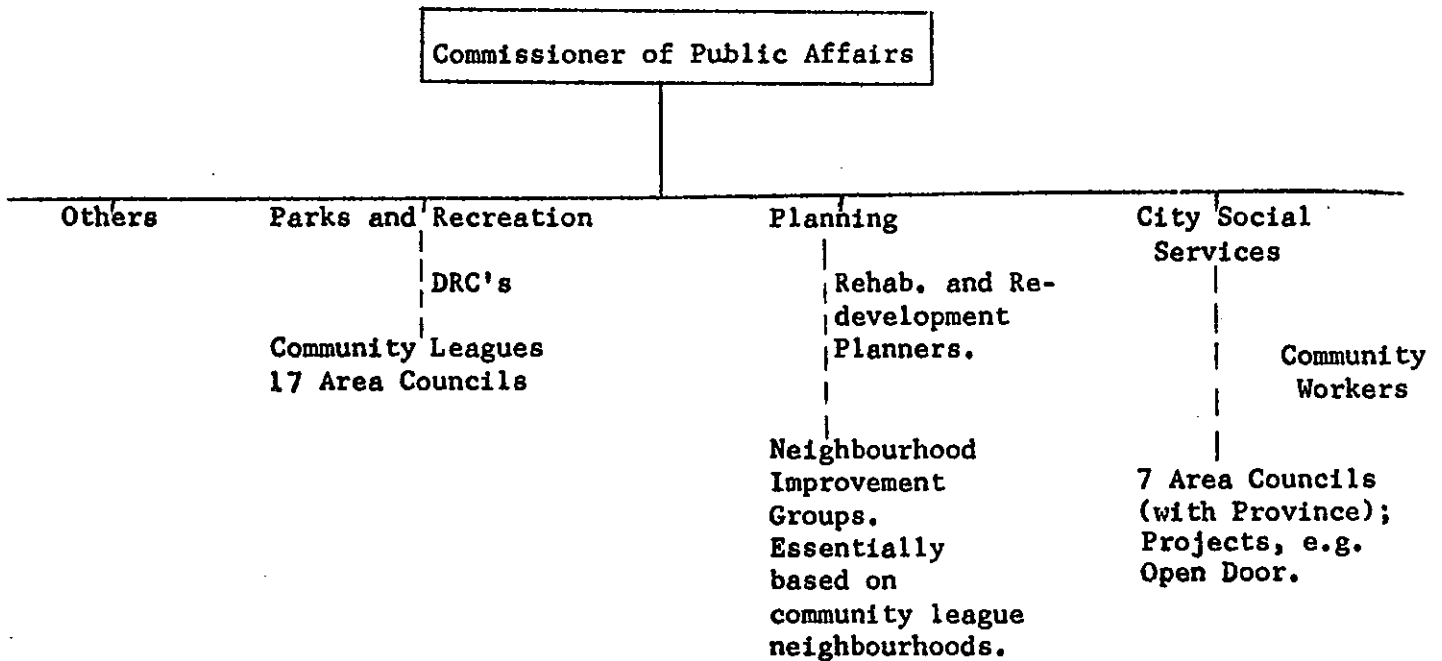
Initially, the community leagues would be charged with carrying on their present recreation programs, but also for being the consultative body for neighbourhood-improvement and other programs conducted through the Planning Department. It would also be the body to be consulted by transportation planning, parks planning, and other agencies affecting the quality of life in neighbourhoods. The area councils would be charged with being the consultative body to City Social Services and on all matters in other departments affecting more than one neighbourhood.

Decentralization of city offices (such as Social Services) would follow area council boundaries. Where 17 (or more) decentralized units are too many for a given service, area councils could be grouped together, so long as these larger areas followed area council lines (excepting the present catch - all Area 18). A larger blocking would also serve the purpose of defining ward boundaries.

PROPOSED



PRESENT RELATIONSHIPS OF CITIZENS' GROUPS (OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED BY CITY) WITH VARIOUS CIVIC DEPARTMENTS:



April 8, 1975

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION  
REPORT NO. 3

MEMBERSHIP

Mrs. Sheila McKay, Chairman  
Chief Commissioner G. S. Hughes  
W. K. Hooson  
C. J. McGonigle  
Mrs. Arlene Meldrum  
S. C. Rodgers  
Dr. Earle Snider  
S. Walz  
H. F. Wilson

ALSO PRESENT

R. Block

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TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

YOUR COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT COUNCIL:

1. Provide more convenient access and timely distribution of relevant information to the public (See page 6)
2. Improve the structures and increase the opportunities for constructive citizen participation. The committee rejected proposals for creating or imposing a new structure for citizen participation. The committee considers that the existing structures have the potential to serve this purpose. (See page 7)
3. Provide assistance to citizen and community groups. (See page 9).
4. Authorize sufficient funding and authority to the administration to implement the recommendations of this committee. (See page 9).

ESTABLISHMENT OF AD HOC COMMITTEE

At its meeting held on February 26, 1973, a City Council concurred in the following recommendation of its Public Affairs Committee:

"That permission be given to establish an ad hoc committee comprised of representatives from the Commission Board, Municipal Planning Commission, City Clerk's Office, Solicitor's Department, Edmonton Urban Study Committee of the International Association for Metropolitan Research and Development, and from other groups such as the Federation of Community Leagues, and the Social Planning Committee, together with representatives from the Public Affairs Committee, to bring in recommendations on the establishment of procedures to facilitate citizens' participation in decisions affecting the citizens of Edmonton."

The Ad Hoc Committee was established on February 11, 1974. The membership of the Committee upon completion of its work was:

Mrs. Sheila McKay, Chairperson  
W. K. Hooson, Commissioners Department  
Chief Commissioner G. S. Hughes  
C. J. McGonigle, City Clerk  
Mrs. A. Meldrum, Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues  
S. C. Rodgers, Municipal Planning Commission  
Dr. E. Snider, Edmonton Urban Study Committee  
S. Walz, Edmonton Social Planning Council  
H. F. Wilson, City Solicitor.

The Committee was assisted in its work by Mr. R. Block, Edmonton Parks and Recreation.

The committee held twenty meetings during the course of its work.

CONCERNS IDENTIFIED

Four key issue areas were identified by the Committee:

1. Access

Citizens do not have convenient access to relevant information. This may be partly caused by citizens' lack of knowledge of what to request.

2. Mechanisms

There appears to be a lack of adequate, meaningful, legally-structured mechanisms for citizen participation. There is no systematic approach to involving the public in the planning process and decision-making.

3. Resources

There are inadequate financial and technical resources available to the community to enable constructive citizen participation. In addition the time limitations impose severe constraints on community groups.

4. Fragmented Communities

There are fragmented definitions (physical, social, etc.) of communities for the purposes of representative citizen participation. There appear to be:

- a) insufficient interdisciplinary approaches and inter-jurisdictional boundaries for effective community development;
- b) too many unco-ordinated boundaries, e.g. Wards, Social Services, Schools, Parks and Recreation, etc.; and
- c) no co-ordinated effort eg. Planning Advisory Committees.

COMMITTEE PROCESS

Having identified these four major problem areas the Committee then compiled existing departmental policies and experiences regarding citizen participation. At the same time, the Committee solicited the opinions, criticisms and suggestions of members of the public. After developing a set of principles for citizen participation, the Committee consulted (interviewed) individual members of Council as to their views. Finally the Committee developed the recommendations of this report.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION DEFINED

The Committee agreed to the following definition:

"Citizen participation is a democratic systematic process which provides opportunities for communication between individual members of the public, their elected representatives, planners, interest groups and members of relevant agencies or departments, in order to arrive at informed decisions, responsive to the needs of citizens."

PRINCIPLES FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The Committee agreed to the following set of principles:

The plans, policies and programs for citizen participation should:

- 1) create more opportunities for participation and not restrict or limit them to a few selected citizens or citizen groups,



- 2) include process and flexibility as well as structure and uniformity involving the public in the planning and decision making process,
- 3) emphasize mutual learning, involvement and co-operation of the public, professionals, elected representatives and interest groups (e.g. developers) rather than confrontation between these groups,
- 4) increase the flow of communication and information,
- 5) increase clear and direct access to all stages of decision making in such a way that strengthens the political process,
- 6) the degree of decentralization in decision-making should be related to the significance of the decision.

PUBLIC COMMENT

In general, the interviews and correspondence from aldermen, city departments and members of the public corroborated the significance of the concerns identified by the Committee.

Observations made in the public comments included the following:

- 1) several persons and/or groups indicated the need for some kind of structure to facilitate citizen participation (e.g. community councils); some of these indicated that they should be funded, have a staff and an office; however, their responsibility should be political, administrative or advisory but not a mixture of these three,
- 2) several mentioned the need for a common definition of the geographical boundaries for the purposes of representative citizen participation (e.g. community league, area committee, parks and recreation district, ward, etc.)

- 3) several observed that a large amount of present day citizen participation is reactive, more confrontation or of the simple complaint nature,
- 4) several expressed the value of having understandable technical information and expertise available to the public before and not after the fact so that knowledgeable, rational input could come from the citizenry; citizens needed to be involved in the early stages of planning, where viable alternatives to situations can be considered,
- 5) several suggested that citizen participation had very little to do with the existence of structure, boundaries, smaller wards or any other mechanisms,
- 6) several mentioned that structures already exist for citizen involvement which have the potential for broader and more meaningful types of participation,
- 7) several suggested specific techniques that could be used to improve communication and the flow of information (e.g. T.V.- telephone ins, telephone surveys, public forums, utility bills, etc.),
- 8) several expressed frustration in their efforts to present ideas, views, concerns to council and the city administration.

RECOMMENDATION 1.

PROVIDE MORE CONVENIENT ACCESS AND TIMELY DISTRIBUTION OF RELEVANT INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

Mechanisms

- a. Adopt a policy of providing relevant public information to affected citizens and citizen groups at reasonable cost to them, and provide them adequate time to give constructive "feedback".
- b. Prepare "popularized" versions of technical reports and studies for public distribution in an easily understandable form. This information should include relevant factors involved in preparing the technical report or studies and the recommendations contained therein, as well as the flow of the decision making process. The Terms of Reference for the technical studies and reports should include social, economic and environmental factors, where applicable.
- c. Publish a weekly calendar of Council, Committee and other public meetings in the Edmonton Journal, "Weekender" edition.
- d. That the purpose and functions of the Public Relations Department be re-assessed in consultation with the other city departments. The review should include the provision of adequate citizen participation expertise to advise departments on how citizen participation may be encouraged and improved and to provide all relevant public information.
- e. That the Government Information Division of the Public Library be re-assessed with the objective of establishing its relevance as a vehicle for disseminating public information.

Justification

If citizen participation is to be meaningful it must be informed participation. Citizens need to receive the relevant information, in

in a readily understandable form in time that it can be digested, analyzed and a reasonable and reasoned comment prepared prior to the first Council meeting at which the subject matter is to be discussed. The Committee suggests that such a process could be facilitated by the preparation of "popularized" versions of technical reports and by greater use of the newspaper to publicize various meetings. The Committee suggests that this is a function which could be handled by the Public Relations Department. In addition, the Committee realizes the value of the function performed by the Public Information Division of the Public Library and suggests that the public should be made aware of this service. The branch libraries could be used for this purpose.

RECOMMENDATION 2.

IMPROVE THE STRUCTURES AND INCREASE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION. THE COMMITTEE REJECTED PROPOSALS FOR CREATING OR IMPOSING A NEW STRUCTURE FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION. THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERS THAT THE EXISTING STRUCTURES HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO SERVE THIS PURPOSE.

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Mechanisms

- a. That City Council minimize the number of special purpose boards and citizen advisory committees. This should not preclude Council from establishing limited purpose, ad hoc (fixed duration) task forces composed of interested citizens and professionals that could give intensive study to major issues facing the community. The Terms of Reference of these committees should include an opportunity for broader citizen participation, in addition to utilizing the individual views of the citizen members of the Boards.

- b. That citizen input be encouraged in the events leading up to the setting of the long range capital programming.
- c. That City Council review the inter-relationship between the community leagues - area council structures; the Parks and Recreation, Social Service, Health and Library service systems, be re-examined with a view of providing:
  - 1. rational combined service delivery and service delivery areas.
  - 2. a more effective utilization of staff on a service delivery area basis.
  - 3. citizen participation in the service delivery planning process and a feed back mechanism in assessing the quality and quantity of services delivered.
- d. The committee further recommends that efforts should be made to develop uniform boundary systems.

Justification

The general purpose of this recommendation is to simplify the processes by which citizen participation may be undertaken, especially since most participation is issue - specific. While some submissions suggested the creation of further structures for citizen participation, the committee suggests that the goal may be accomplished by the rationalization and strengthening of existing structures. In addition, citizen participation in the development of health, social and recreational policies would be greatly facilitated if there were co-ordinated delivery of these services and uniform service area boundaries. Provision should be made for citizen input in the long range capital budget planning, since the physical facilities provided have significant effects on the delivery of services.

RECOMMENDATION 3.

PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO CITIZEN AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Mechanisms

- a. That City Council expand its practice of providing grants, at its discretion, to citizen and community groups, that are considered to be providing a valuable service to the city and their community.
- b. In addition to encouraging activities through grants, Council should ensure that appropriate staff resources are available to provide professional or technical advice to the groups.

Justification

Citizen groups are often of an ad hoc nature with no necessary relationship to any existing organization. They are organized informally of representatives of a particular community of interest. Such groups require limited financing for administrative expenses and to provide information on the concern (mailings, newsletter, etc.). Council should provide grants for such purposes to groups that are providing a valuable service to the city and their community.

RECOMMENDATION 4.

AUTHORIZE SUFFICIENT FUNDING AND AUTHORITY TO THE ADMINISTRATION TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS COMMITTEE

Justification

The Committee realizes that the full implementation of its recommendations carries with it budget implications. The preparation of popularized versions of technical reports at reasonable cost, various staff commitments and other mechanisms recommended will require increased financial commitment where available resources cannot be diverted. The Administration must have both the authority,

through policy direction from Council, and the resources to implement the Committee's recommendations.

Respectfully submitted

Mrs. Sheila McKay, Chairman  
Ad Hoc Committee on Citizen Participation  
March 12, 1975