

Environmental Advisory Committee 2011 Annual Report to St. Albert City Council

1. RECOMMENDATION

That the Environmental Advisory Committee's 2011 Annual Report be accepted as information and that the Environmental Advisory Committee continue to operate through 2012.

2. OVERVIEW

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) was established through Bylaw 29/2005 to advise Council on issues related to the environment. The purpose of the Committee is to assist City Administration and advise Council with respect to environmental policies, strategies and initiatives, especially where a public perspective is desirable. The Committee membership was adjusted through an amendment to Bylaw 29/2005 and currently includes six citizens at large and one member of council as voting members, and one representative each from Alberta Environment, Alberta Health Services and a post secondary institution as non-voting participants.

Direction and assistance to the EAC were obtained through involvement with the City's Office of the Environment (OE).

On March 7, Council provided the EAC with nine priorities for 2011:

- i. Sturgeon River Report – Watershed Study, Sediment Control
- ii. Greenhouse Gas Emissions Action Plan
- iii. Plastic Bag Use – Ban or Continue
- iv. Traffic Light Timing – Impact on idling.
- v. Solid Waste Management Implementation – Automation/Toters/Organics
- vi. Community Baseline Data
- vii. Green Community Policy – Plan/Direction
- viii. Former Public Works Yard – Remediation
- ix. Urban Agriculture – Gardening

3. MEMBERSHIP

Citizen Members - January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| • Edith Asselin | Citizen-at-large | First of two year term |
| • Brent Korobanik | Citizen-at-large | First of two year term |
| • Tom Mumby | Citizen-at-large | First of two year term |
| • Merv Rogan* | Citizen-at-large | Last of two year term |
| • Neill Thompson** | Citizen-at-large | Last of two year term |
| • Bryan Watson | Citizen-at-large | Last of two year term |

* served as Chair

** served as Vice-Chair

Non-Voting Participants - January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011

- Rasel Hossain Alberta Environment
- Ludmilla Rodriguez Alberta Health Services
- Wendy Vanderwel Post-Secondary

Council Representation

Cathy Heron was the Council representative with Malcolm Parker as the alternate through September, 2011. Beginning October 24, 2011, Malcolm Parker was selected the Council representative with Wes Brodhead serving as the alternate.

City Administration Representation

Committee assistance was obtained from Leah Jackson and Meghan Myers of the Office of the Environment. Rachel Vincent, Linda Kuprys and Betty Gaskarth of Legislative Services recorded the minutes of the meetings and provided advice on legislative matters and protocol.

4. ACTIVITIES DURING 2011

The Environmental Advisory Committee met nine times during 2011, meeting monthly except in July, August and December. Due to problems establishing quorum, the September 22 meeting was rescheduled to September 29, 2011. The EAC Chair met with Council at the City's annual board meetings on October 6, 2011. No other meetings of the full committee with Council or the Senior Leadership Team were deemed necessary. The Chair (M. Rogan) and Vice Chair (N. Thompson) met with the Mayor (Mayor N. Crouse), Council's EAC representative (Councillor C. Heron) and City Administration (G. Boston, General Manager, Planning & Engineering), to establish Council's priorities for the EAC in 2011.

Progress Made on Council's Nine Priorities for the EAC in 2011

i) Sturgeon River Report – State of the Watershed Study

This was intended to be the dominant priority for 2011 due to both the scope of the study and quantity and volume of available information. A presentation by Aquality Environmental Consulting (J. White) outlined the Terms of Reference and schedule for the report completion. A sub-committee of the EAC (B. Watson (chair), T Mumby and N. Thompson) reviewed the first draft. A number of gaps were noted and EAC provided their comments to OE. A second draft was produced but significant issues concerning the content remain outstanding. With about 1/3 of the report finished, it won't be complete this year with scheduled completion in the spring of 2012. No motion from the EAC was required.

In addition, two members of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's (NAIT) Biological Sciences Faculty, (L. Hunt, D. Webb, both Senior Faculty Researchers) provided an overview of the research being conducted by NAIT students on the Sturgeon River Watershed. It included an historical perspective of the natural history and biodiversity of the watershed, an assessment of the aquatic biodiversity including 49 sampling sites and an assessment of stream crossings (i.e. bridges and culverts) to prioritize them for future remediation.

ii) Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Action Plan

Goal #2, of the City's Environmental Master Plan (EMP), is, in part, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2010, the City completed the first two of five milestones under the Partners for Climate Protection program which is funded by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Green Municipal Fund. Due to a staffing shortage to review applications, the Fund was suspended for 2011. Therefore the City's application to pursue the third milestone, of developing a community and corporate greenhouse gas emissions reduction action plan, was put on hold until funding, intended for 2012, is reinstated. No action was required of the EAC.

iii) Plastic Bag Use – Ban or Continue

Information on this topic was provided by OE outlining Provincial initiatives with the Retail business community and activities of other municipalities to address the use and disposal of plastic bags. Through passive measures such as retailers charging a fee and the use of fabric re-usable bags, consumers have adapted and drastically reduced plastic bag use and the associated littering.

The sub-committee [M. Rogan (Chair), B. Korobanik, C. Heron (Councillor)] presented a statement that indicated a ban was unnecessary which was endorsed by the full committee at the EAC's April 22 meeting. The report, summarized in Appendix I, was included as an agenda item for Council with the recommendations adopted at their October 31 meeting.

Relevant Motions:

(EAC19-2011) Moved by M. Rogan

That the Environmental Advisory Committee forward a recommendation to Council as stated in the Plastic Bag Review Report.

CARRIED

iv) Traffic Light Timing – Impact on idling

In keeping with Goal #2 of the City's EMP, the EAC subcommittee [M. Rogan (Chair), N. Thompson, T. Mumby] met twice to discuss information from administration on how traffic light coordination impacts vehicle idling and the resulting greenhouse gas (GHG) generation. There is a direct relationship to the number of vehicles on the road, the amount of time idling at traffic signals and GHG emissions. The City evaluates and synchronizes traffic signals on main roads for maximum traffic movement, particularly during peak hours. During off-peak hours, there is less adaptation to maximize traffic movement, as implemented in other cities, and correcting this deficiency is one of the EAC's main recommendations of this review. The report was included as an agenda item for Council, at its November 21 meeting, and is summarized in Appendix II.

Relevant Motions:

(EAC23-2011) Moved by N. Thompson

That the report of the sub-committee on Traffic Light Timing be approved as presented for transmittal to Council.

CARRIED

v) Solid Waste Management Plan – Update

In early 2011, the City began communicating the upcoming changes to the Solid Waste management program, effective June 1, with the Council passing the Residential Solid Waste Bylaw on April 26. Because there was a public perception that households that produced little waste were being disproportionately charged for the service, EAC Council rep, (C. Heron) asked for suggestions regarding the subscription rate differentiation. The EAC sub-committee [M. Rogan (Chair), J Cooke (Past Chair)] met and suggested another option for Solid Waste rates, with the flat rate remaining the same but providing for a rate reduction in the lowest subscription level. This was accepted by Council. An option for future consideration is to establish dual rates for organics collection so those residents who mulch, do their own composting or practice xeriscaping aren't penalized for their personal initiative and proactive stance.

Effective Oct 1, St. Albert took another significant recycling step forward by implementing a Household Hazardous Waste Program to accept many household chemicals, paints and some combustibles. The EAC endorses this action as it exemplifies the City's progressive attitude to improving Solid Waste efficiency and recycling efforts. No relevant motions from the EAC were required or deemed necessary.

vi) Community Baseline Data – Collating

There was a need for a central repository for City related environmental information within the City of St. Albert. The Library has agreed to collect volunteer community environmental data such as the Christmas Bird Count, air quality information, water quality, wildlife activity and other data relevant to the City's environment. OE will forward additional information on this priority in the future. No action was required of the EAC.

vii) Green Community Policy – Plan/ Direction

OE provided a summary report of the Green Communities Workbook describing sustainable community initiatives and the corresponding City of St. Albert practices. A subcommittee of the EAC (E. Asselin, M. Rogan) reviewed the report and drafted a position statement supporting this priority and will provide assistance and input as required. EAC's recommendation is provided in Appendix III.

viii) Former Public Works Yard – Remediation

The risk assessment draft report was completed late this year with remedial alternatives, ranging from risk management to full contaminate removal, to be addressed in a report for completion in 2012. No action was required of the EAC.

ix) Urban Agriculture

The purpose of urban agriculture is to produce food in the community for local consumption and includes yard, raised and rooftop gardens as well as Farmer's Markets. Background information for this priority was provided by OE late in the year. An EAC sub-committee (T. Mumby) reviewed information as it became available and made suggestions to OE. No action was required of the EAC.

Environmental Initiatives Grant Program

In addition to the nine priorities identified by Council for 2011, the EAC continued with its other major function, namely reviewing applications submitted under the City's Environmental Initiatives Grant Program (EIGP) and providing funding recommendations to Council. A one time submission of 14 applications was received in October 2011 for the EIGP in accordance with existing Council policy. An EAC sub-committee [M. Rogan (Chair), L. Rodriguez, B. Watson] met for a preliminary review of applications and to ensure they met the eligibility criteria described in City Council Policy C390-2007. Following the full EAC Committee's assessment, 12 applications were funded in part or whole based on the subcommittee's recommendations.

Relevant Motions:

(EAC26-2011) Moved by B. Watson

That the Environmental Advisory Committee recommend to Council that the following Environmental Initiatives Grants be awarded:

St. Albert Catholic High School: to purchase 2 Pedal-A-Watt bicycle stands to generate electrical energy that can be stored in a power pack to power other devices, a first for both the City and Province.	\$3,600.00
SACHS Environmental Group: to purchase seedlings, commemorating the graduating class, for a REEP project along the Sturgeon River.	\$2,322.50
St. Albert Botanic Park: to accentuate other funding sources to purchase a more energy efficient tractor used for organic mixing, composting and soil conditioning.	\$2,500.00
Wild Rose Elementary School: To purchase native trees, perennials and greenhouse supplies for the expansion of an existing outdoor community classroom.	\$4,200.00
Girl Guides of Canada: To purchase native plants for the continued naturalization along Lacombe Lake Park walkway.	\$1,350.00
Bellerose Composite High School: a continuation of a naturalization project started in 2010 in Lacombe Lake Park walkway.	\$950.00
NAIT: to support a student lead project to assess the biodiversity and riparian health of Carrot Creek.	\$7,188.00
JJ Nearing Catholic Elementary School: to provide supplies to pilot a school organics collection & curbside composting program.	\$1,575.00
Societe des Parents de l'ecole Alexandre-Tache: to purchase native perennials and shrubs for a school naturalization project.	\$1,200.00
Christian Reformed Church: to support the expansion of an existing successful community garden on church property.	\$1,248.00
Albert Lacombe School: to implement the Seeds to Salad/Soup program, designed to educate grade 4 students on plant growth.	\$1,069.00
St. Albert Nature Study Group: to support the annual Christmas bird count.	\$350.00
AVAILABLE FUNDS: \$30,230.00	TOTAL APPROVED \$27,552.50

CARRIED

Other Issues Before the EAC in 2011

- Worked with the Office of the Environment to establish a work-plan to schedule and manage the committee's activities in 2011
- Received information on the City's progress towards achieving the goals set in the Council's priorities (2011);
- Received quarterly reports from the Office of the Environment on e-mail correspondence from residents on topics of environmental relevance;
- Received a presentation from OE on two Sturgeon River related reports; Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan Update and Water Quality Monitoring Programs;
- Received a presentation from Alan Murdock, Bruce Thompson and Paul Mouton, of the Arts & Heritage Foundation, with an overview for a proposed Heritage Nature Trail on the river lot lands west of the Meadowview Ball Diamonds;
- Received a presentation from Christian Benson, of Public Works, with a status report on the Solid Waste Program, including changes, upcoming communication and success to date;
- Discussed possible EAC priorities for 2012 with Council at the annual boards meeting on October 6, 2011.
- Initiated an informal relationship with SAEDAC regarding the Sturgeon River Watershed and its potential opportunities.

5. YEAR 2012 EAC ACTIVITIES

In 2012, it is anticipated that the Environmental Advisory Committee will continue to provide input and advice, as requested from Council, especially related to issues where public consultation is necessary. The EAC anticipates that it will continue to work closely with the Office of the Environment in evaluating the City's progress towards achieving the stated targets and goals for the Environmental Master Plan (2009).

Proposed 2012 EAC Priorities are:

- Continued involvement to finalize the report on the Sturgeon River Watershed study;
- Water Conservation & Efficiency Plan;
- Green House Gas Emissions Action Plan.

In addition to the above, issues, topics and other needs that may require specific involvement of the EAC could include, but are not limited to:

- Continued work on issues relating to the Sturgeon River Watershed and its general health including Sediment Control Projects;
- Assessment of grant applications on behalf of Council for the Environmental Initiatives Grants Program;
- Involvement in the remediation and environmental management of the former landfill and public works sites;
- Continued participation in enhancements and revisions made to the City's Solid Waste Management Plan;
- Natural Areas Inventory and Assessment
- In association with SAEDAC, consider opportunities where the Sturgeon River is used as a focal point for, and promotion of, community activities.

- Work on other priorities that are identified by Council;
- Liaison with City departments on matters of environmental importance.

These accessory topics are ongoing or in the early development stages and input from the EAC will be provided on request from OE or when selected as a Council priority.

6. EAC ENDORSEMENT OF CITY PROGRAMS

The Environmental Advisory Committee endorses the City's innovative programs that encourage citizen participation in environmental responsibility as exemplified through the creation of the EIGP and successful implementation of the Refuse, Organics & Recycling collection program. These programs show leadership by engaging the public to be active participants in a more efficient and productive community based lifestyle.

Appendix I – Written Advice Submitted to Council Plastic Bag Use – Ban or Continue

September 25, 2011

Recommendation

The EAC believes that **implementing a plastic bag ban is unnecessary for the City to pursue** as other measures involving a cooperative approach between retail associations and Government has been effective in reducing their use. The EAC further recommends that plastic bag recycling be considered in conjunction with other efforts such as an awareness campaign to inform the public of its progress and benefits.

Background

The plastic bag review was prompted by a motion from a previous Councillor in November, 2010 to “investigate other municipalities practices regarding the banning of plastic bags provided by retail operations...”. It was formally moved by Councillor Heron in February 2011 and, as a result, was placed as one of the priority items for the Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) to review.

The City of St. Albert’s Environmental Master Plan (EMP) contains a goal to reduce residential waste to 125 kg per person by 2020. In 2009, these numbers were 184 kg refuse per person and 41% waste diverted. While good progress is being made, each target requires continued action. Environmentally, the City and its residents have an obligation to reduce the amount of waste that reaches the landfill and to recycle or reuse as much material as possible.

Because of littering, plastic bags have become a nuisance and, in 2008, represented 2% of solid waste disposal. To address the growing concern, many municipalities adopted various measures to curtail their use, from outright bans, to encouraging retailers to charge consumers for each bag obtained with a purchase, to offering in-store recycling and providing fabric type re-useable bags as alternatives.

Recent information suggests that utilizing the more passive measures have achieved their intended results. Consumers have embraced the fabric re-usable bags and, in conjunction with a small bag levy charged by many retailers, have reduced plastic bag use with virtually none found as litter. Regardless of what other municipalities have done to curtail plastic bag litter, it is the EAC’s opinion that implementing other measures is not necessary in St. Albert.

Appendix II – Written Advice Submitted to Council Traffic Light Timing Project

October 24, 2011

Traffic Light Coordination – Impact on GHG's

Recommendation

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) recommends that **Council ask Administration to continue with improvements to traffic light sequencing during peak hours and assess more efficient traffic movement during off peak hours to reduce greenhouse gas generation from unnecessary idling when stopped at traffic lights.**

In addition, studies indicate a correlation exists between the number of traffic lights and the frustration people feel. There is the potential for increased accident frequency because drivers may speed or run a yellow light knowing they can make it through upcoming lights. While these and other transportation issues are pertinent to this topic, and require clarity, they are outside the scope of this priority and should be considered at a later date.

Background

Traffic lights are so ubiquitous in cities many have forgotten how many disadvantages they have. The majority of St. Albert residents commute to work outside of the City and encounter numerous traffic lights to reach their destination. Goal 2 of the City of St. Albert's Environmental Master Plan has an objective to reduce non-renewable energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by 6% from 1990 levels by 2020. As well, in 2008 St. Albert passed an Idling Bylaw with the purpose of both reducing greenhouse gas emissions and consuming less non-renewable resources with the benefits of improving air quality and energy efficiency. One of the mechanisms to achieve these objectives is through enhanced traffic movement through St. Albert.

Traffic light sequencing is complex and requires flexibility to meet the demands of safe vehicular and pedestrian movement while adhering to best practices for traffic signal operation. The EAC subcommittee met twice to identify areas for traffic flow refinement and mitigate the undesirable aspects of traffic idling. Questions were forwarded to the City of St. Albert Transportation Department for a better understanding of the methods and procedures of traffic light planning and clarification on traffic light optimization. The emphasis is skewed to peak hours when traffic volume is highest over off peak hours.

The EAC understands that the Transportation Department's focus involves coordinating high volume traffic movement on the main roads using conventional practices which don't often align with carbon emission controls. Efforts to further refine traffic light sequencing on main roads should continue as the vehicle numbers warrant ongoing refinement. Because less attention is given to arterials and feeder road traffic light coordination, it is the EAC's opinion those are also important locations to investigate for greater transportation effectiveness during off peak and evening hours. This will result in reduced energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, and although modest, is an extension to enhancing traffic efficiencies.

Appendix III – Recommendation to Council Green Community Policy

October 26, 2011

Green Communities Guide

Recommendation

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) reviewed and provided input to the Background Information for the Green Communities Guide – Summary of Sustainable Community Initiatives and City of St. Albert Practices.

Green communities recognize the value and promote and preserve environmental health for their residents. Some environmental initiatives to achieve this are to continue reducing water consumption for yard care, reduce the energy consumption to heat our houses, mitigate the negative environmental impacts of personal transportation, prevent air, soil, and ground and surface waters contamination and maximize biological diversity and ecological functions in a human-dominated environment. These would support existing programs such as the rain barrel distribution, pesticide free practice for lawns and solid waste management and collection.

The EAC supports the efforts of the Office of Environment and will continue to work closely with them to provide assistance and input as required

