



Report to: General Committee

Meeting Date: November 21, 2023

SUBJECT:	Proposed Review of the Race Relations Committee Meeting Schedule
PREPARED BY:	Jamaal Kossy, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Specialist

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the report entitled, Proposed Review of the Race Relations Committee Meeting Schedule be received;
- 2) That the current quarterly meeting schedule be maintained;
- 3) That the Race Relations Committee Terms of Reference be updated at the earliest opportunity to provide direction and clarity of the role and responsibilities of the Committee;
- 4) That the Race Relations Committee convene informal meetings as needed, outside the prescribed meeting schedule, to review time sensitive matters; issues or events that may arise from time to time and communicate the outcome to the staff liaison for further action as may be required;
- 5) That the minutes of the March 6, 2023 Race Relations Committee meeting be received; and further,
- 6) That staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this recommendation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On February 22, 2023, Markham City Council approved a revised structure and meeting schedule for the City's Advisory Committees. Several Committees had their meeting frequency decreased and some Committees were dissolved entirely.

At the March 6, 2023 Race Relations Committee Meeting, members expressed their concerns with the decrease in meeting frequency and formed a recommendation for consideration by Council to request that the monthly meeting frequency be reinstated. The March 6, 2023 Race Relations Committee Meeting Minutes, which included the recommendation in support of monthly meetings, were placed on the October 10, 2023 General Committee Meeting Agenda for consideration.

On October 10, 2023, Danielle Russell, Chair of the Race Relations Committee, attended General Committee. Ms. Russell made a deputation to express support on behalf of Race Relations Committee members to increase the meeting frequency from quarterly to monthly to avoid delay in action of emerging and timely issues and to strengthen community partnerships. There was a brief discussion by General Committee Members on the matter and views were expressed both in favour of increasing meetings frequency as well as maintaining the quarterly schedule. The matter was referred back to staff to bring forward a report to General Committee in November 2023 providing some analysis of benefits and drawbacks to monthly and quarterly meeting frequency.

Staff have thoroughly examined meeting frequency options, taking into account current Committee objectives, the need for timely responses, and resourcing requirements. The recommendation is to maintain the current quarterly meeting frequency structure, but prioritize the revision of the Committee Terms of Reference, to provide the Committee with the necessary direction and structure needed to continue its valuable work as an advisory body. Additionally, it is suggested that the meeting frequency be reviewed one year after the updated terms of reference has been put in place.

PURPOSE:

To review the benefits and drawbacks of monthly and quarterly meetings of the Race Relations Committee. This review will assist to define and prioritize initiatives to optimize the time of Race Relations Committee members and necessary staff resources to successfully achieve outlined objectives.

BACKGROUND:

The Race Relations Committee's purpose is to serve as an advisory body to Markham City Council to assist in promoting harmonious race and ethno-cultural relationships within the City of Markham. The Race Relations Committee has promoted diversity and inclusivity and sponsored initiatives such as Many Faces of Markham, in which all residents (children, students and adults) are invited to participate to express their understanding of the annual community inclusive theme. The City is in support of maintaining the Race Relations Committee, recognizing the significant impact it can have to assist Council in promoting inclusiveness in our community and advancing the elimination of racism and hate.

On February 22, 2023, Markham City Council approved a revised structure and meeting schedule of the City's Advisory Committees. Several Committees had their meeting frequency decreased and others were dissolved. The Race Relations Committee met on a monthly basis until March 2023, when the quarterly meeting schedule commenced. The recent shift from monthly to quarterly meetings has raised concerns among Committee members.

Since 2019, the Race Relations Committee has held a total of 34 meetings with an average attendance rate of 65%. Meetings were held in-person until Covid-19 restrictions took effect, at which time the Committee began electronic meetings via Zoom. The Committee meetings continue to be conducted electronically, via Zoom.

Meeting Year	Number of Meetings in the Schedule	Average Attendance %	Number of Official Meetings (Where there was quorum)	Number of Meetings without Quorum
2019	10	49%	5	5

2020 (Covid-19 restrictions)	10	62%	7	3
2021	10	77%	10	
2022	10	60%	8	2
2023 (to date)	5	75%	4	

Projects undertaken in 2022-2023

- Many Faces of Markham - cancelled 2022, resumed 2023
- Elimination of Anti-Black Racism Action Plan - provided input
- Diversity Equity and Inclusion Action Plan - provided input

Proclamations and Observances

- Proclamation International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – March 21, 2021
- 100 Year Anniversary of the 1923 Williams Treaties on the Williams Treaties First Nations – 2022
- Truth and Reconciliation events in 2022 and 2023

Initiatives

- Supported increased DEI messaging on social media by the City
- Motion against xenophobia towards identifiable racial and cultural groups in Markham
- Increased Meeting Frequency Motion
- Recommended City action items regarding racial slur incident

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

In light of the changing dynamics in the community and the pivotal role played by the Committee, it is imperative to revisit and update its Terms of Reference.

Clarity in roles and responsibilities are the cornerstones of an effective and functioning committee. A well-defined set of guidelines will provide the Committee with a clear sense of purpose, allowing members to focus their energy on tasks directly related to its goals, and provide some guidance regarding optimal meeting frequency.

Furthermore, these updated terms will facilitate the establishment of measurable and achievable objectives. Incorporating these updates will enhance the Committee's efficiency, enabling the group to effectively support Council in responding effectively to emerging challenges and opportunities within the community. It will provide Committee members with a clear sense of direction, fostering a more cohesive and productive working Committee.

Below is an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages associated with both meeting monthly and quarterly meeting frequencies.

Meeting Monthly

Advantages:

- I. **Timely Response & Effective Feedback:** Monthly meetings offer a quick and proactive response mechanism to address emerging issues, enabling the Committee to provide prompt advice and support to the City when troubling incidents occur. Monthly meetings also create opportunities for the Committee to endorse and reinforce positive initiatives in a timely manner within the community. Additionally, the monthly frequency proves advantageous when gathering feedback, such as conducting surveys or seeking opinions from community members.
- II. **Active Engagement:** Regular meetings may foster a higher level of engagement among Committee members, ensuring ongoing commitment to the mission and objectives of the Committee.
- III. **Consistent Progress:** Monthly meetings allow for more frequent updates and maintain momentum on Committee initiatives. Frequent discussions facilitate consistent progress towards the Committee's goals, enabling a sense of continuous momentum.

Disadvantages:

- I. **Resource Allocation:** Monthly meetings demand a greater allocation of resources from City Staff, Council and Committee members. This heightened commitment encompasses not only the duration of the meetings, but also the necessary preparation and follow-up tasks. As a result, sustaining a monthly meeting schedule requires a significant investment of capacity in terms of time, effort, and focus.
- II. **Fatigue Risk:** Committee members and staff could experience fatigue due to the demanding meeting schedule and subject matter, impacting their effectiveness and enthusiasm in the long run.

Meeting Quarterly

Advantages:

- I. **Resource Allocation:** Quarterly meetings reduce the demand on resources and capacity from staff, Council and Committee members. With formal meetings held once every three months, Committee members can manage their time and energy

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- more effectively, distributing their focus across a range of tasks and responsibilities arising from the meetings. This also maintains consistency and fairness with resources allocated to other Advisory Committees.
- II. **Meeting Focus:** By spacing out the meetings, participants can dedicate more concentrated efforts during the scheduled quarterly sessions, potentially leading to higher quality discussions and outcomes. This also may better optimize Committee member time.
 - III. **More time to complete action items:** Formal quarterly meetings allow for extended planning periods and allows Committee members more time to thoroughly complete action items between meetings, enabling well-thought-out plans and strategic implementation. It also allows for the possible introduction of informal sub-committees or meetings that can occur during the interim periods. This approach can lead to more impactful and sustainable outcomes for the committee's initiatives.
 - IV. **Availability of multiple communication mechanisms:** The availability of various digital tools enables more effective ongoing communication among Committee members. The variety of communication tools (email, texts, group chats, video chats) allows for timely dialogue among Committee members and may extend to communications with City staff as needed, between formally scheduled meetings. This applies whether meetings are monthly or quarterly

Disadvantages:

- I. **Delayed Responses & Process Delays:** Quarterly meetings create a significant time gap between discussions, leading to delayed responses when troubling issues arise. This prolonged period can hinder the committee's ability to consider and provide advice on pressing matters promptly.
- II. **Process Delays:** Delays in processes, such as crucial agenda items being presented to Council, could hinder the committee's ability to provide time-sensitive advice, potentially leading to missed opportunities for impactful resolutions.
- III. **Reduced Engagement:** Longer gaps between meetings may lead to decreased engagement and enthusiasm among Committee members, affecting the overall effectiveness of the Committee.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Staff resourcing may be impacted by this decision.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

There are no Human Resources Considerations.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

This recommendation aligns with Building Markham's Future Together, Strategic Goal 1, Exceptional Services by Exceptional People, and Goal 2, Engaged Diverse, Thriving and Vibrant City to better dedicate staff resources to purposeful objectives defined for the Race Relations Committee and to achieve their goals in support of an inclusive City for all residents. This also aligns with the Diversity Action Plan and Eliminating Anti-Black Racism Action Plan.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

CAO's Office, People Services, Legislative Services

RECOMMENDED BY:

Jamaal Kossy

Jamaal Kossy
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist

Andy Taylor
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS: N/A