

**Open Government Report and Recommendations  
Citizens' Representative Working Group  
Maple Ridge  
October 8, 2015**

## Introduction from the chair.

On behalf of the Citizen's Representative Working Group, I'd like to thank Mayor Read and Council for making open government a priority during their mandate.

The Mayors Open Government Task Force (MOGTF) was established January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 by Maple Ridge Council, and the Citizens' Representative Working Group role was defined: *to operate as an independent body that will gather citizen feedback and prepare recommendations to bring forward to the MOGTF on how the City can increase accountability, transparency, and citizen's understanding of and contribution to decision-making.* (GRWG Terms of Reference)

It has been my privilege to work with a group of informed and enthusiastic volunteers in gathering and analyzing feedback from our fellow citizens and preparing this report. Many thanks to committee members Ivan Chow, Matt Ellis, Harvey Gigun, Rasam Hafezi, Jean Hincks, Dennis Kinsey, Alex Miyahara, Graham Mowatt, Sean Orcutt and Bob Roy.

The committee did not have the time, resources or mandate to produce a definitive study on the subject of open government at the municipal level. Instead, we gathered opinion and information through a number of methods including written and oral submissions, conversations with community members, and a review of practices in other communities. As well, committee members brought considerable knowledge and varied backgrounds to the table.

The fifty-eight recommendations contained in this report were written with the goal of improving open government practices in the City of Maple Ridge. We believe this report is a starting point for change and further communication.

~ Katherine Wagner

## Budget

One of the main functions of municipal government is the management of financial resources, which are largely collected through property taxes paid by local business and the electorate. Thus, most members of the public expect a very high standard of transparency and accountability surrounding the collection and allocation of their tax dollars.

Given the obvious sensitivity of the budget and allocation of finances by council and the municipality, the budget process must be as transparent as possible (within practical limitations) from beginning to end.

In Maple Ridge, it appears significant strides have been made in this direction such as the inclusion of information from community surveys in the planning process, live-streaming of budget meetings and expanded Q & A sessions. However additional opportunities for public understanding and input are available to the municipality.

With respect to delivery of budgetary information, financial statements/summaries and general accessibility of related information the municipality and its staff should be commended for making strides in recent years in the access to, reporting of and delivery of visual aids and written commentary. All of these tools help the public understand often confusing financial information.

The numerous reports on the website—though often lengthy and difficult to navigate—provide a wealth of information and the Community Report includes an easy-to-read summary.

The need for further clarity, simplicity, access to information and opportunities for input were recurring themes in the input to the Committee.

What follows is a list of issues and recommendations aimed at increasing community involvement, transparency and accountability related to the budgetary process and financial management of the community's resources.

*Addressing:* Budget as a collaborative process with opportunities for community influence/inquiry.

**Recommendation 1:** Continuation of the scheduled open forum where the public is invited to make presentations for additions or deletions to the budget parameters early in the annual budgeting process, including better advance communication of this opportunity.

**Recommendation 2:** Expansion of the current Community Survey, perhaps through the municipal website, to allow for more input around community priorities re: allocation of financial resources

**Recommendation 3:** Continuation of the Q&A format around the budget, followed by all questions and the answers being posted on the website.

**Recommendation 4:** Improved information in a local context about the provincial regulatory environment which must be adhered to when creating the 5 year plan and an effort to improve public understanding of the process for developing the plan within the requirements of the province

**Recommendation 5:** A web-based forum to allow for public input into areas of concern as they relate to the use of public funds. This would provide an additional channel for input to council and senior staff.

**Recommendation 6:** A process which allows for additional input after initial and second reading of the final draft budget. The current process of holding all three readings in one meeting has been viewed by some as making a bit of a mockery of the reading process.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide better communication of the budget process and timelines on the website. Much of this information is currently present in the multiple reports on the website but requires a great deal of effort to track it down – a more thorough summary on the website including anticipated dates for input in the coming year would add transparency.

**Recommendation 8:** Currently, the municipality and Mr. Gill provide an “Any-Time Input” section on the city website but it is easy to overlook and should be better advertised on the site. It would be helpful to include a “Frequently Asked – and

Answered” question section both to minimize staff time and provide a community resource.

*Addressing:* Concerns were expressed about whether there is an adequate level of transparency and accountability with respect to in-process projects, in particular large capital items, the processes in place to insure best practices in contracting and budgetary outcomes vs. projected outcomes (i.e. what was the goal and did the funds spent achieve the goal?).

**Recommendation 9:** Include better summation of variances in line items, and clarity (in particular around capital projects) about whether projects came in on time, on budget and achieved the desired outcome? If not, why not?

**Recommendation 10:** Provide a list of all revenue/expenses exceeding \$10,000 in an easily accessed format.

**Recommendation 11:** Include information on the source of funding for projects including those funded in-part by developers, other levels of government, individuals, associations etc.

**Recommendation 12:** Provide additional information with respect to the desired outcomes of current and planned capital projects on the website in an easier to find location

**Recommendation 13:** Institute an annual review of budgetary outcomes through a public forum, again better communication of the dates and times

**Recommendation 14:** Simplify the language in all documentation using plain English principles. (<http://garbl.home.comcast.net/~garbl/plainlanguage/>)

*Addressing:* Concerns about the complexity of accessing municipal financial information online given the size and number of reports which contain information.

**Recommendation 15:** Improve the accessibility of the Citizen’s Report. It is a high-level and visually appealing summary of the financial information and the roles of the various departments. It is a good example of what can be done. This report should be easier to access/discover – on the homepage perhaps – and consideration given to alternate methods of delivering it to citizens. One idea is to include a link to the report

in the tax notice and an opportunity to phone and/or snail mail to order a free report for those not comfortable with technology.

**Recommendation 16:** Provide better descriptions of documents and reports available on the website. Many of them are not well described or searchable (for instance, the annual statement of financial information, SOFI, report) and they should be.

**Recommendation 17: (see also recommendation #50)** Improve the availability of summary information for key budget parameters, variances between budget and actuals for previous years, and more thorough breakdowns of “catch-all” categories, etc. outside the larger reports.

*Addressing:* Ultimately council is elected to provide direction and oversight to the operations of the city, and, in turn, the citizens provide oversight to council. Thus there is an even higher onus placed on council with respect to transparency and accountability around their role in the budgetary process, accountability for individual and collective actions/decisions, real or perceived conflicts, and compensation matters. Straightforward access to this information plays a major role in ensuring council is seen to be transparent in its business practices and that it embraces the concept of open and transparent government – it starts at the top.

**Recommendation 18:** That the following information be added to the Mayor and Council pages of the website:

- A full and current (to within a couple of months) accounting of all council remuneration and cost-item benefits (such as medical/dental coverage) including, but not limited to, indemnity, additional stipends for Metro committees, Acting Mayor duties and anything else for which councillors and/or the mayor receive pay or expense reimbursement, as well as an explanation of the formulas used to determine these amounts and any increases over time (year-to-year charts of increases or decreases to budget lines directly spent on council remuneration and expenses).

- An explanation of the one-third-tax-free status of councillor and mayor salaries (on the consideration that one third of the indemnity is considered expenses for tax purposes, even when there are additional expense monies paid).
- Ensuring that accounting for the use of expense monies, which includes expenses broken out individually, be kept up to date and that a listing of allowable expenses be provided to the public.
- An on-going tally of declared conflicts as they relate to councillors and to individual items discussed at the Board table.
- A searchable archive of campaign contribution records.
- A clear explanation of when and where Council has input formal into the budgetary process.

## Public Notification, Input on Development, and Other Significant Issues

The rezoning and development application process is of great interest to Maple Ridge residents, and many people are particularly interested in proposals taking place within their own neighbourhoods.

The committee repeatedly heard residents are frustrated by a lack of easily understood and accessible information regarding the development process. At the same time, we also heard that some residents were not fully satisfied with the service they received when obtaining building permits etc.

If a person, neighbourhood association or special interest group wishes to follow a particular application through the rezoning, development permit, development variance and subdivision application phases it can be difficult to do so.

Although residents within the immediate proximity of a proposed redevelopment site receive written letters and development application signs are placed near the actual sites, not all interested parties may become aware of some proposals unless they live nearby or frequently visit that particular street.

It appears the general public lacks an understanding of land use legislation, the development process, and related municipal policies and procedures. Although information is available apparently many people have difficulty accessing it and wish for a simpler system.

The public should have access to current, correct, concise and relevant information. There should be standardized wording and a definition of terms used reference available.

### *Concerns Raised*

- Some Whonnock residents were upset there was no advance notification of an industrial medical marijuana facility being built and when they inquired they said the city provided them with insufficient information.
- They say there was no public consultation regarding that facility prior to building permits being issued so they were denied an opportunity to present their concerns

- Interested parties are not able to track a Development Application throughout its lifecycle using the Development Application Number.
- Development Application Signs are difficult for residents to interpret and understand the actual benefits or consequences to their property, neighbourhood and community.
- During the application process changes may be made, such as to existing roads and traffic patterns that had not been anticipated at the beginning of the process. Reasons may be to provide for increased safety of pedestrians, cyclists or automobile operators. Some residents say they were not notified or consulted prior to the approval of such changes and they were not provided with an appropriate explanation afterward.
- There was also some concern regarding an apparent inconsistent use of terms used to describe the various types of roadways (arterial, collector, etc.).
- Development application signs are not being placed in locations that would best inform the majority of the local residents most likely to be impacted the most. Two specific examples cited were the signs placed at 24070-132nd Avenue and 24024 Fern Crescent (notification of a proposal to build 166 Modular Homes along the South Alouette River). The sign at 24070 132nd Avenue may conform to the Development Sign Policy (Policy No. 6.21) but some residents were not satisfied, and the one at 24024 Fern Crescent does not, because it was placed on the East side of 240<sup>th</sup> Street whereas the proposed development would be on the West side.
- Maple Ridge Development notification is via newspaper advertising and local area signs only. Groups—such as cycling advocates, the horsemen association, and the fish habitat conversation group—and others may not see the posted notices and may miss the opportunity to comment before a decision is made. Local newspapers often only report on the outcome of decisions and many residents don't read newspapers.

- Sign placement is left up to the applicant (whose primary interest is not necessarily to encourage feedback from local residents). ref. Maple Ridge “Development Sign Policy” Policy No: 6.21
- Decisions relating to development proposals are not explained to the public in an easily understood manner.

**Recommendation 19:** Provide an online link to a plain-language explanation of the purpose of the OCP and development process and include details around how and when the public can let their concerns be known. Also explain why changes to the OCP may sometimes be necessary and how public input is utilized in the decision-making process.

**Recommendation 20: (see also recommendation #54)** Notify residents of new development applications via the Notification service on [themapleridge.ca](http://themapleridge.ca) website.

**Recommendation 21:** Expand the radius used for mail-out notifications.

**Recommendation 22:** Have staff and council openly and clearly answer questions relating to development proposals and provide explanations for decisions when requested. Also, require frontline city staff to respond to enquiries about proposed development applications in an open and transparent manner by encouraging them to provide as much or more information than is being requested in order to facilitate better understanding.

**Recommendation 23: (see also recommendation #54)** Provide a means of tracking redevelopment applications throughout their lifecycle and maintain a historical record of completed projects. Perhaps use the development Application Number or create some other tagging identifier. Incorporate “key word” and “key phrase” search ability into the [mapleridge.ca](http://mapleridge.ca) website. All council meeting notes where a particular development application is mentioned should be linked to the tracking system so the public can follow and understand the process better.

**Recommendation 24:** Amend the Development Application Sign policy to make these signs more informative and easily understood by residents. Use plain English and ensure maps are appropriately orientated so that residents can clearly understand what they are looking at and what is being proposed for the site. For example, the municipalities of Pemberton and Nanaimo have moved in this direction. Pemberton redesigned its signs to

include bold and visually graphic elements to catch attention and convey information more effectively. (Ref. National Post, July 31, 2012 “How one BC Municipality is getting people to actually read public notices.”) Nanaimo has been experimenting with incorporating QR Codes onto its development application signs and other public notifications which link to websites providing more detailed information. Ref. Nanaimo City website.

<http://www.nanaimo.ca/EN/main/departments/information-technology/qrcodes.html>

**Recommendation 25:** Verify that development notification signs are placed in the most appropriate locations to inform as many residents and neighbours as possible.

**Recommendation 26:** Colour coding signs for clarity from a distance would also be helpful. For instance, all residential development application signs could be in varying shades of red, depending on the type of residential development. All commercial development application signs could be in shades of blue and industrial development application signs could be in shades of yellow.

**Recommendation 27:** Potential timelines, for things like road improvements, and service installations, as well as the reasoning behind new decisions like no more right turns at an existing red light, or the need for new traffic calming measures, should be provided whenever possible.

**Recommendation 28:** Web links to detailed information and a tracking process should be clearly marked on all development application signs. Layers of information could be made available: Basic, for those that want to get in and out quickly (most likely developers and realtors, that already understand the ins and outs of the Maple Ridge system), more in depth for the inquisitive member of the public who likely lives nearby, or will be affected somehow by the change, and in great depth, for the member of the public that wants to eat, drink and sleep the potential change (most likely living right next door to the affected property).

### *Other Notifications*

The mapleridge.ca website has a “Notify Me” service to which users can subscribe to receive a wide variety of city information including coming events etc. via either email or text messaging. In addition, the city regularly posts notifications to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

**Recommendation 29:** Continue to expand the variety of information it provides on the mapleridge.ca website and through its social media.

**Recommendation 30: (see also recommendations #47 and #54)** City work items could be tagged with an identifier. All records associated with a work item could be tagged with the same identifier. With the right online infrastructure, it would allow the public to access all relevant information on a work item with one click. The tagging system would also allow the public to register against interested work items and get notified via email.

Some residents do not use computers or electronic mobile devices and don't read newspapers either. This population is difficult to reach in the electronic age.

**Recommendation 31:** Consider posting a small number of selected notices on a variety of community bulletin boards to reach these residents.

**Recommendation 32:** Consider the use of electronics signs to convey messages to people without access to the Internet.

## Citizen Access to Elected Officials

Maple Ridge residents are interested in getting to know their elected representatives and having easily accessed lines of communication to them. This includes informal and formal channels.

### *Input and Questions to Council:*

Currently, there are several ways for members of the public to provide input and/or ask questions at council meetings and workshops. A request to present for ten minutes as a delegation before a meeting of Council, Advisory Committee or Advisory Commission can be made up to one week before the meeting. The public council meeting agenda allows time-limited questions from those in the gallery at the end of the meeting. Also, there are the options to mail, fax or email input.

**Recommendation 33:** Move the question period to the beginning of the meeting to allow for questions of clarification etc. before the meeting takes place, or add an additional question period at the beginning of the meeting.

**Recommendation 34:** Provide an auto-response to emails with an estimated current response time to help lessen frustration and concern that emails have not been received.

### *Location of Council Meetings:*

Currently all council meetings take place at Municipal Hall.

**Recommendation 35:** A number of people suggested holding meetings in different parts of the community on a regular basis with some emphasis on the issues of that area during the meeting, perhaps inviting delegations such as neighbourhood associations to present. This could be formal council meetings and/or informal meetings with council.

### *Number of Council Members*

A long time ago, Maple Ridge surpassed the minimum threshold required to expand Council, from Mayor and six Councillors to Mayor and eight Councillors.

Local bylaw has maintained council at two councilors less than the minimum called for under the community charter. As the population grows and the complexity of the issues facing Maple Ridge increases, it is prudent to consider increasing the size of council during the 2018 municipal election.

Currently, we have one elected council member for 11,837 residents. If we expand to eight councillors and a mayor, that ratio would drop to one council member per 9,207 residents, based on a population of 82,861 (Source: Maple Ridge Community Profile Sept 2014 <http://www.mapleridge.ca/DocumentCenter/View/4218>).

An increase of two council members should reduce the overall workload for each council member and, in turn, should translate into better representation for all.

A ward system of electing councillors would require the city to be divided up into more or less equal population areas, with each electing one councillor. Everyone would still vote for the mayor. This alternate method of electing councillors helps ensure each area of the city is adequately represented at the council table. The pros and cons are too many to adequately address in this report, but the committee feels that in the context of open and transparent government this system is worth further examination by council and the public to determine if, on balance, it has merit as a system for Maple Ridge (please note that the committee is divided on the issue of wards).

*Community Charter reference:*

Size of Council

**118** (1) Unless otherwise provided by letters patent or by a bylaw under this section, the council size for municipalities must be as follows:

- (a) for a city or district having a population of more than 50 000, the council is to consist of a mayor and 8 councillors;
- (b) for a city or district having a population of 50 000 or less, the council is to consist of a mayor and 6 councillors;
- (c) for a town or village, the council is to consist of a mayor and 4 councillors.

**Recommendation 36:** Initiate a public consultation process well before the 2018 municipal election to explore the possibility of increasing the size of council by two members.

## Customer Service at City Hall

### Background

Though no formal survey is available, much of the feedback obtained through discussion with local residents was that Maple Ridge city staff are not as focused on customer service as they could and should be. We heard from residents who are concerned about raising service-related questions as they fear possible retribution and others who have experienced aggressive and rude service at the hands of city employees.

We begin this discussion with a question: *Does the quality of customer service really matter in a government setting?*

The answer is simple: Research indicates overwhelmingly that senior government agencies are isolating customer service as a major priority. We have seen this in Canada through the establishment of Service Canada and Service BC centres in communities across the country. The idea is to bring government services to Canadians in an integrated fashion to enable clients to access a variety of programs in one convenient location.

One of the most striking client service transformations over the last few decades occurred at the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), an organization charged with collecting taxes and enforcing several less-than-popular government-related functions. In spite of this mandate the CRA have become a leader in customer service. They have accomplished this through a variety of culture changing policies addressing all areas of the organization. A quick review of their website indicates an emphasis on hiring strategies which focus on placing employees with the appropriate mindset and character in order to ensure a client-based focus. Promotions and progression through the organization requires a demonstrated sensitivity to effective interaction with the public.

One of our committee members was personally involved in the transition and attests to the time, effort and commitment made by this government agency. If a behemoth like CRA can achieve this kind of result, it is possible for the city of Maple Ridge to make a demonstrable and striking transition as well.

The Oracle sponsored white paper, Eight Steps to Great Customer Experiences for Government Agencies (March 2012), supports the notion that great customer service in government is critical to effective interaction with the population and in turn to the

government's ability to achieve its objectives and mandate. Quoting the report: "*Customer experience is more than a buzzword. It refers to real everyday interaction between agencies and their constituencies. Agencies that deliver superior customer service are fulfilling a key aspect to their mission; agencies which deliver a substandard customer experience are not. This is one of the reasons why, for example, the General Services Administration of Citizen Services and Communications launched its USA services initiative. There is a growing awareness among government agencies of just how key customer service is to fulfilling their missions*".

Richard Petree, a consultant and chief Tax Assessor with Taylor County, USA, wrote an article for Fair and Equitable Magazine (March 2011) in which he addressed customer service in government: "*Why should assessment agencies consider private- sector customer service? The answer is simple: enhancing relationships with taxpayers and other stakeholders' results in less stress, more productivity, a better working environment, and a win win for all.*"

Government is beginning to recognize what many large corporations have known for a long time. The average person will formulate an opinion about the entire company as a result of their daily interaction with the front-line personnel. The client may not be familiar with the leadership of the company and their primary questions often are: How does this organization affect me? Am I able to have my questions answered? Am I treated with respect when I have a need?

This also applies to public organizations. The tax payer will, in many ways, determine the quality of the city leadership (Mayor and Councillors) based on the quality of their interactions with the city's front line staff. Most citizens will not attend council meetings, read in-depth briefs or be able to describe the objectives and priorities of individual politicians. However, they will clearly remember and share stories of unproductive interactions, mistreatment and/or rudeness when dealing directly with city hall.

An analogy mentioned to the committee: "Who cares who the cook is when the waitress is throwing the food at you?" Similarly, who cares who the mayor and council are when you can't get anyone to help you with basic queries or challenges?

If we believe that fairness and transparency are critical to local government perception and success then the ideal situation is to reach a point where the staff at city

hall fully understand and support the priorities and initiatives of the Mayor and Council and recognize the need to provide support to the public as a critical requirement of their job.

### **Characteristics of Great Customer Service**

Customer service can be defined in a number of ways however in general terms it is as follows: Customer service is the act of taking care of the customer's needs by providing and delivering professional, helpful, high-quality service and assistance before, during, and after the customer's needs are met. It is the process of meeting the needs and desires of the customer. Some of the characteristics of good customer service include:

- Promptness
- Politeness
- Professionalism
- Personalization

Developing a culture of excellent customer service is not easy as it often requires employees to significantly alter their perception of priorities and expectations relative to the client. This objective requires the development of a mindset and culture which ensures the critical duty and expectation of all employees is to serve the needs of the client.

### **Approach**

In his article, Richard Petree poses the question: Is it possible to get a government agency to focus on excellence in customer service? In response, he claims it is indeed possible, but leadership must come via commitment from the top. This means ensuring department managers and supervisors are fully on side and priorities are well-defined and understood. The process of change can be lengthy and challenging, and therefore a clear implementation plan is necessary.

The city does not have to reinvent the wheel as there are many reports and papers dealing with this subject. It is helpful to review best practices of previous government programs in order to have a guide to work with. A quote from the Oracle report:

*Fortunately for government agencies, there are proven best practices they can adapt to optimize the customer experience across all channels despite limited resources. A great*

*customer experience, after all is primarily about delivering the right knowledge to the right place at the right time. By getting better at delivering the knowledge, agencies can significantly improve services while driving down costs.*

The best practices can be summed up in eight steps (Oracle Cloud report)...

### **Step 1: Establish a knowledge foundation.**

Clients often complain about ad lib, inaccurate or misleading information answers they receive from public servants. Studies show that incoming client questions tend to repeat and therefore answers can easily be consistently communicated by staff when a current data base of common questions (often referred to as FAQ's) is provided. Staff must understand that inaccurate or dismissive responses will never result in a positive experience for the client. Ongoing training of staff to ensure knowledge standards is important. Management must be committed to investing in systems and processes which will enable information to be accessed in a quick and efficient manner.

### **Step 2: Empower the Customer.**

Give the customer the ability to self-serve via internet-based options. Effective self-service delivers is cost effective for government agencies. Advantages include: immediate service, around-the-clock availability, relief for other channels (i.e. less one-on-one staff time required), greater effectiveness as clients source exactly what they are looking for, and scalability (the ability to add resources as required).

### **Step 3: Empower Frontline Employees**

With training and an effective well-organized data base, even relatively inexperienced frontline staff are able to effectively assist clients.

#### **Step 4: Offer Multichannel Choice**

Customers today expect to be able to source service via whichever communication channel is most convenient for them, including effective personal service, telephone service, mobile app, web based, or email. Information and responses must be consistent across all channels.

#### **Step 5: Listen to the Client**

Customer needs must be monitored and service offerings modified as required. This is also an opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of the department as a whole. This can be done by periodic surveys in addition to ongoing customer experience questionnaires available on-line or at points of personal interaction.

#### **Step 6: Design Seamless experience**

One of the most frustrating experiences for a client is dealing with one part of an agency that doesn't know what another part is doing. One way to achieve consistency is to maintain one on-line customer file which is accessible by all departments (within privacy parameters) and ensuring communication between departments.

#### **Step 7: Engage Customers Proactively**

To deliver a truly exceptional customer experience government agencies must respond well when customers contact them. However, they also have to take the initiative and contact clients on a proactive basis. This type of communication can answer questions and anticipate and avoid problems. This proactive interaction can be done by a supervisory level individual who can choose to draw names from a number of sources including tax rolls and client files. Imagine getting a call from the city to inquire as to your level of satisfaction.

#### **Step 8: Measure and Improve Continuously**

A superlative customer experience isn't just a matter of putting superior service mechanisms in place. It's also achieved by continuously measuring and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of those mechanisms. There are various ways to track customer

service. One is to use traditional objective metrics such as first-contact resolution rates, average call times etc. Much of this data is easily tracked using current telephone and call centre systems. A process of monitoring telephone inquiries and recording in office interaction is also extremely effective. Report cards can be made available to the public.

This approach not only allows the organization to correct deficient service levels but also provides the opportunity to recognize and reward outstanding client service.

Obtaining the buy in from the staff may be challenging, particularly when long term staff are involved as it does mean change and a certain amount of uncertainty. It is important that the rollout be well thought out and development should include interaction with staff, unions and /or associations. Inclusion and transparency with staff will smooth the process. This should include the following:

- Clearly communicated performance goals
- Visible metrics
- Reward achievement (public recognition for superior performance)
- Continuously set new goals

### **Tangible Benefits for Tangible Improvements (Oracle report)**

These eight steps provide a powerful, proven model for improving customer experience. They can be approached incrementally. Agencies don't have to overhaul all of the policies and processes overnight. Instead they can solve the biggest problems first, then building on that foundation they can continue to improve overtime.

The results achieved by government agencies who have adopted this 8 step approach provide demonstrable proof that results can be quickly and cost effectively achieved. These results include:

- Significantly improved customer satisfaction
- Better allocation of limited budget dollars
- More effective fulfillment of the agency mission
- Compliance with open government mandates
- Improved staff morale
- Deeper insight into customer needs

AND

## **A much improved perception of Maple Ridge local government**

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that any attempt to provide for a transparent and accountable organization must begin by ensuring people are provided with exceptional service at the point of contact, the front line staff. In any organization, the client rarely has personal contact with the most senior decision-makers and therefore their opinion of the organization is primarily based on interactions with those on the front line. It is critical that these individuals represent the city in a positive and complimentary manner.

We acknowledge that Maple Ridge has some significant challenges, such as a union environment that must be respected and an entrenched organizational culture.

These challenges are not unique to Maple Ridge and government organizations around the world have embraced the opportunity to connect meaningfully with their electorate.

**Recommendation 37: (see also recommendation #37)** Implement a customer service program within City Hall to address this need.

## Community Engagement

Currently, the majority of the general public do not actively engage with municipal government. Citizens who do engage, often only participate if the issue at stake has a direct impact on their daily lives, and/or their overall dissatisfaction reaches a critical level and compels them to act or react.

A small minority of citizens are active participants who work to overcome barriers to their participation and make their voices heard. These groups and individuals are potentially excellent leaders in supporting the implementation of open government reforms. At the same time, some groups and individuals may be concerned their voices will be diluted and this concern should be proactively addressed.

It is likely a greater percentage of the majority will increase their participation if they believe their engagement actually makes a difference.

Identifying preferred methods of participation, and providing information and communication channels in a complete and accessible manner are critical components of successful engagement strategies.

### *General deterrents to community engagement*

Whether these are perceived or a reflection of reality, the following are deterrents to community involvement.

1) There is a feeling common among citizens that their participation won't make a difference and the city will do whatever it has already decided to do, with or without input. Engagement improves when citizens trust they will be listened to and their concerns considered, even if the end result isn't what they wanted.

2) It can be difficult for even the most motivated to gain access to relevant information at the level of detail required to fully understand the situation, and with enough lead time to both stay informed and influence the decision or outcome.

3) Citizens may not know the most appropriate and/or effective time/place to provide input. For example, many comment on social media in lieu of formal channels and expect to be heard.

4) The current methods of engagement are not effectively reaching—or encouraging the participation of—large segments of the population.

*Types of engagement and issues identified:*

- Public consultation events
  - Issue: often happen too late in the cycle after key choices affecting the final decision are already made.
  - Issue: the time allowed for public hearing does not take into account the number of issues raised by residents.
- Post-consultation events
  - Issue: citizen participants often left out of the loop beyond the consultation phase.
- Decision-making
  - Issue: many citizens only learn of the issue when the final decision is reported by the media.

*Youth Engagement:*

Lack of interest is the main underlying factor limiting participation and engagement with local government among youth. This lack of interest is largely due to the fact that current Canadian governance and politics—specifically municipal government—are not prominently discussed in core curriculum (required) secondary school classes.

Although local government has the most direct influence on citizens' daily lives, the lack of education around the responsibilities of local government has contributed to a 'not caring' stigma amongst youth. Addressing the low levels of participation/engagement from this particular demographic is challenging due to lack of interest, combined with the high opportunity-cost youth place on their free time.

Making information more easily accessible for youth will not make a difference if they do not attempt to access it. Instead, expanded education and more opportunity for youth to initiate engagement and participation in an environment where it is essentially required (the classroom) will make a difference.

Committee member Alex Miyahara had the opportunity to take part in a special project at Thomas Haney Secondary when he was a student there and he feels strongly that it made a big difference in his level of engagement with local politics.

**Recommendation 38:** Pursue collaboration with the SD #42 Board of Education in regards to working more local government material into required high school curriculum.

Specifically prioritize education on the responsibilities of local government and how it most directly affects day-to-day life.

Offer optional “work-with-the-city” projects including discussions with council members.

Encourage student participation through social media by offering minor accreditation for “following” or “liking” the city’s Twitter and Facebook.

**Recommendation 39:** Consider allotting a section of newsletters/city updates to changes in areas most relevant to youth (for example, schools, busses, parks, malls, etc.) and distributing/posting these newsletters at high schools and other places youth congregate.

**Recommendation 40:** Assist in the formation of youth leadership groups to allow the already engaged youth to draw in the interest of other individuals around the same age.

**Recommendation 41:** Create the opportunity for youth-led sub-committees and/or youth-led sub-projects with larger-scale groups and projects that are already implemented in the city

For example, Greg Moore Youth Centre, Parks and Leisure or the Public Art Steering Committee could create local youth oriented projects and invite some young people to sit on the planning committees.

**Recommendation 42:**

Create an environment better suited to promoting a higher level of engagement/participation in local government amongst youth, by:

- a) Improving engagement and participation amongst all public in hopes of a trickle-down effect in homes (parents to children).
- b) Attempting to increase the overall level of general interest in regards to local government.

- c) Improving exposure to and education around the processes and responsibilities of local government.
- d) Developing resolutions around the theme of *youth prefer to do, than to be told* to yield more effective results.
- e) Ensuring the implementation of other recommendations include youth.
- f) Having as an explicit goal of council, that youth in our community are appropriately equipped and prepared to engage with local government.

#### *Methods of Engagement*

Problem: How do we engage residents whose preferred method of engagement is not the traditional in-person, public input meeting (formal hearing or open house)?

**Recommendations 43: (see also recommendation #48)** Employ a variety of engagement methods and tools to target specific population segments.

A number of ideas were suggested. Note that some are also mentioned under other recommendations, and some are already in place.

- a) Online survey: A regular tool used to collect opinions and perspectives about issues. Include an open-ended section for comments and suggestions.
- b) Mail-in survey: Use to collect opinions and perspectives about issues. Given the cost compared to online surveys, localized and focused mail surveys may be used to more completely gauge opinions on specific issues or in specific regions (capturing those who are not on-line).
- c) The city's website: Many citizens use it as their go-to resource for information and to locate and contact the right person at City Hall. The website should be a comprehensive resource for the public. Information should be easy to find and easy to understand. The committee heard complaints that it can be hard to find what you are looking for on the city's website, and when the information is found, it can be difficult to understand and/or put into context. It is paramount that the website be streamlined, intuitive, up-to-date and user friendly.
- d) Ask "The Beast": Alaska Airlines has "Ask Jenn"—real people waiting to respond to your questions in a chat-like forum. "She" is customer service representatives with great knowledge at their fingertips. If she can't get back to

you immediately with the answer you're looking for, she'll refer you to the right person or place. It's a nice touch that makes the customer feel valued. A similar service at City Hall would be a much faster, friendlier and more fun than waiting for someone to respond to a text, a voicemail message, a letter or an email.

e) Social media: Interaction on social media should inform, respond to feedback, and encourage more engagement. The city's social media persona should be completely integrated with the city website and other city services.

f) Digital sign boards: Located on high traffic commuter routes. This method was used in Mission during the last municipal election. It catches your attention, but must be short and sweet. They must be safe and secure, so they are less likely to be tampered with (eg. Caution! Zombies ahead! ☺).

g) Banners: Located over the road along high traffic commuter routes, these are eye-catching, but costly, as they are not easy to reuse.

h) Community bulletin boards: They catch citizens who don't read the local newspaper, own a computer, have email access or a smartphone. They could be located in specific locations around the city, such as the senior's centre, the legion, the library, the Leisure Centre, Hammond community centre, Haney Place mall, Valley Fair mall, Thornhill Hall and Whonnock Lake Centre.

i) Town hall style meetings in neighbourhoods: Our mayor, councillors and staff could hold meet-and-greet events at community centres, halls etc., out in the community. It would provide an opportunity for local residents to share in person their hopes, dreams and concerns, as well as offer positive moral support for all the good things our staff and public servants do for us.

j) A display at special events including the Farmer's Market: Council members, volunteers and/or staff could run a booth to promote community engagement. Citizens sign up for email updates, or subscribe to newsletters or 'follow' certain issues or individuals on social media or the city's website. They learn about the wide range of community groups we have in our city.

k) A float in parades: Used to raise awareness, highlight council's interest in citizen participation and encourage greater community participation.

Information hand-outs could be distributed along the parade route.

- l) A speaker's box, such as Speakers' Corner (reference: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speakers'\\_Corner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speakers'_Corner)) at Hyde Park in London, United Kingdom: Dedicated to free speech, a speaker's box is an established location where speakers can give a speech on any topic they choose within the confines of the law. Speakers book a time slot with the city and provide a basic idea of the topic they intend to address. The city, in turn, helps promote the speeches by listing the speaker's name, the time and topic on the city website.
- m) Encourage groups and individuals to share: Petitions, experiences and information could be announced, displayed or presented for public scrutiny. Perhaps at the bandstand after the Farmer's Market.
- n) Advertisements in the local newspapers: Standard advertisements are effective, but can be missed by a portion of the public. Future meetings/events could be in a paid section, similar to a Community Calendar or What's On section of a newspaper, or perhaps as a circular placed in a local newspaper.
- o) Canada Post letter mail: Residents without access to email or the internet could subscribe to a print version of a bi-annual or quarterly newsletter.
- p) Community forums: They are a great way to get people together to share information and stories. Guest speakers, local celebrities and specialists can help attract attention to local issues and increase community engagement. It would be important for the city to provide representation and public support for these events, so the public will feel heard.

#### *Availability of information*

Problem: Documents in draft stage are not always publicly available

##### Description

- Policy documents in draft stage are sometimes not publicly available. Whether such documents are available seem to vary from department to department and appears to be somewhat arbitrary. Without access to such documents, it is difficult for the public to understand what is being discussed at council.

**Recommendation 44:**

- Clarify and enforce policy to prevent documents from being arbitrarily withheld.

*Timing of information*

Problem: Inadequate time to go through information prior to council meetings

Description

- Documents are made available to the public typically on Fridays prior to the council meeting on the following Monday during which the subject work item is discussed. These documents/staff reports can be very large and take considerable time to read through.
- Summaries and abstracts of reports, and agendas would help members of the public stay informed and find what they are interested in.

**Recommendation 45:**

- Make agendas and documents available to the public earlier, and provide abstracts and summaries of reports and agendas.

*Timing of open houses*

Problem: public input too late in the cycle

Description: It often appears that by the time a proposal is put in front of the public for input (e.g. open houses), the decision has already been made. Minor tweaks to the proposal might be possible but major changes seem to be out of the question. The consultation seems tokenistic at best and it often appears the city is going through the required motions.

**Recommendation 46:** Hold open houses early in the consultation cycle.

*Continued engagement beyond public input events*

There is no mechanism for the city to provide feedback to those who provided input, and the concerned parties often only find out through the media about the final decision.

The lack of follow-up beyond the public input events amplified the feeling of some residents that the city ignored their opinions.

**Recommendation 47: (see also recommendation #30)** Develop a system for the public to register for notification against a work item so that they can follow it beyond the public input events. Implement a tracking system for easy access and tracking of information

- Assign a unique identifier to council work items
- All associated public records (staff reports, council 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> reading minutes, public inputs, staff follow-on discussion minutes, final decision, individual councillor voting decisions, etc.) tagged by the same identifier.
- Ability for the public to go online, input the identifier and see all associated records.
- Ability for interested individuals and organizations to register against a work item and get notified throughout the process.

## **Technology**

Technology is a significant tool for achieving open government, particularly as the technological savvy of the general public increases. Technology has the potential to remove many traditional barriers to public engagement such as time, location and access. The public now expects government to effectively use technology to ease interactions, to provide searchable information and to communicate.

Based on committee and citizen feedback, we suggest there are a number of areas where technology can improve the openness of local government.

A statistic to consider: A 2013 report by Insights West indicates that 79% of British Columbians expect a good mobile experience from the brands they trust, and this should include the municipality. (<http://www.insightswest.com/smartphone-insights-report/>)

### *Areas of Implementation*

#### *Engagement*

Issue:

With the diverse population of Maple Ridge we need to ensure that important information is accessible to everyone

**Recommendation 48: (see also recommendation #43)** Implement a multi-channel communication plan including:

- Social media
- Community billboards
- Digital road signs at one or two major roads
- Full web and mobile access to data and applications (more users access the internet through their phones than desktops or laptops and the development of a city mobile app would particularly reach younger residents)
- Telephone Access to staff who can assist citizens
- Web/Mobile chat based access to staff that can assist citizens

- Email Systems allowing citizens to sign up to neighbourhood lists and stay up-to-date on the latest events affecting them

### *Meeting Minutes*

#### Issue:

Council minutes are being used by citizens to cross-reference various sources of information to ensure what was stated is being acted upon.

**Recommendation 49:** Facilitate easy access to meeting minutes by storing them in a format that allows indexing, searching and categorizing.

- Create a centralized repository for public minutes
- Allow for cross-referencing into other open government systems such as project portal pages
- Fully Archived

### *Budget*

#### Issue:

Citizen concerns about lack of visibility to the budget and budget process

**Recommendation 50: (see also recommendation #17)** Create a portal to view current and past budgets including projected and actual numbers

- Interactive charts allowing drill down into various areas of the budget.
- Areas where direct projects or initiatives are highlighted and link back to the main page for those projects.

### *Policies and procedures*

#### Issue:

Unclear and sometimes seemingly contradictory policies and procedures.

**Recommendation 51:** Include a page on the official website that clearly outlines the procedures and policies of various departments. This could serve as the master database of policies and procedures and be referenced on all other pages and documents.

### *How Government Works*

#### Issue:

Some public feedback suggested a lack of clarity on how government works and which levels of government are responsible for different areas of our community.

**Recommendation 52:** Develop an interactive web page describing the inner workings of our local government and the responsibilities of various departments. There could also be information to differentiate between local, provincial and federal responsibilities in key areas.

### *Phone System*

Issue:

- Report of calls not being answered or returned
- Feedback regarding phone etiquette issues by both staff and citizens

**Recommendation 53: (see also recommendation #37)**

- Establish a modern customer-service oriented phone system similar to those used by corporate customer service hotlines.
- Record and archive interactions through the phone system for quality control purposes
- Conduct surveys to rate service received on the most recent phone interaction
- Customer oriented work flow, with tiered customer service
  - Calls are received and transferred in a manner where customer does not simply get transferred to a voice mail
  - In case the correct staff is not available for a soft handoff, record customer information and ensure follow up
- Have call/interaction notes with unique IDs that customers can reference when calling for a follow up

### *Project and Initiatives (Development Applications) and status of applications*

Issue:

Received feedback on lack of access to information regarding developments and development applications. Complaints ranged from lack of information, obscure presentation, lack of notification, lack of opportunity for input, not being identified as a

potentially impacted citizen, not having continuity on latest status and connection between feedback and city hall presentations.

**Recommendation 54: (see also recommendations #20, #23 and #30)** Develop public/internal facing web portals allowing seamless access to various information related to projects and initiatives in Maple Ridge including development activities.

- Ability to look up past, current and future projects
  - By Map: being able to zoom in on interested area and viewing past, current or future initiatives and projects
  - By ID: Allowing look up by ID, this will enable looking up projects by mapping ID to QR codes or similar technology. QR codes on Development Signage, brochures and documentations would link you directly to the specific project page
  - By Keyword
- All projects having a specific page where all related information can be accessed including
  - Map
  - Proposal
  - Current status
  - Meeting Minutes from council discussions/presentations
  - Project documentation including plans and studies
  - Proposed and Actual completion Dates
- Ability to sign up for updates on specific project or projects in a km radius from a specific location.
- Ability to give feedback on project at any time during the process
- Clearly visible check points, comments and history on application. Average completion times visible so citizens can gauge the estimated wait time of their application and can inquire if it is taking longer than anticipated.

*Documentation:*

Issue:

Although some information is available online, it is not always in a format that is easy to use/search etc. Many documents are static image-based PDFs that have been scanned it. This limits citizen's ability to search and retrieve information readily.

**Recommendation 55:** Develop a web portal allowing search of digital records, access to information request summaries, and contracts.

Allowing search through Quarterly Financial Reports and other information government proactively discloses to ensure that citizens are better able to hold government to account.

*Open Data:*

Issue:

Access to the data cited in city reports and data used in council decision-making.

**Recommendation 56:** Provide an open data system to allow citizens' access to raw data that is not protected privacy laws or other legislation:

Open data increases access to government data and information, provides the public with greater insight into government activities, service delivery, and use of tax dollars.

Proactively providing municipal data that is relevant to Maple Ridge citizens reduces the amount of access to information requests, e-mail campaigns and media inquiries. This reduces the administrative cost and burden associated with responding to such inquiries.

## Ombudsperson

### **Recommendation 57:**

Establish a Maple Ridge Ombudsperson whose role would be (adapted from the BC Ombudsperson's Office)

- To uphold the democratic principles of openness, transparency and accountability
- To ensure that every person in Maple Ridge is treated fairly in the provision of municipal services
- To promote and foster fairness in public administration

An ombudsperson position must be arms-length to council and city staff, and have full ombudsperson powers and status.

There are many existing models to look to when establishing this position—first and foremost, the Ombudsperson's Office of British Columbia.

Once new systems and practices are implemented, the principals of open government still require continual vigilance and oversight. As attention turns to other pressing matters of government, focus on open government can slip. An ombudsperson helps ensure this does not happen.

### **Recommendation 58:**

In lieu of, or in addition to, a paid ombudsperson strike a standing committee of volunteers to act as open government watchpersons.

## Resources

### *Best practices for open government*

Maple Ridge is not alone on the quest for more open and transparent government. There is a federal initiative ([open.gc.ca](http://open.gc.ca)) and other cities have taken leading roles in making their data accessible to the public. Two Canadian cities leading in open government practices are Edmonton, Alberta and Guelph, Ontario. Both won Public Sector Leadership Awards (Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2014). Maple Ridge can adopt many of their best practices.

Edmonton's city website has been configured so that each city department and their performance is visible on an online dashboard. For the public, departmental expectations and realities are posted in real time in the form of red, yellow and green lights. Edmonton puts a strong emphasis on placing data where it is relevant; their website's mayor and council section is a prime example (City of Edmonton, 2014). Not only are the mayor and council directly linked to their expenses, but also their decisions, initiatives and affiliations (Office of the City Clerk, 2015). Edmonton posts a schedule of the important dates relating to the budget, as well as their master community plan (Sustainable Development Department, 2015). Posting important dates far in advance, in an easy to read schedule linked to the content being discussed, allows interested parties the ability react to the information. These are simple, practical ideas that could be implemented here in Maple Ridge.

Guelph Ontario is an example of a suburban community similar in size to Maple Ridge. They decided to implement a framework for open government throughout all city functions. Their goal is, *"to create a fully transparent and accountable City which leverages technology and empowers the community to generate added value as well as participate in the development of innovative and meaningful solutions"* (Labelle, 2012). The principles of participation, innovation, transparency and accountability direct the open government initiative. City employees are trained and take workshops on the open government principle. Some results to date are linked to innovation in the delivery of policing and social service delivery. Guelph ranked as the second safest city in Canada in 2013 (Statistics Canada, 2014), with a province-leading 16% reduction since 2012 when the open government initiative led to addressing policing as a *"marginalized people problem"*.

Adopting leading practices has provided both liveability and economic benefits to both cities. An engaged, informed public has proven to be beneficial in guiding city policy. Although there isn't an official best-policy guide, themes of best practices emerge, including the use of technology to foster effective two-way public communication.

Efforts must be made to make policy and procedure available to the public in clear language. Councillors and departments should be publicly linked to their decisions, performance metrics and results. A comprehensive approach, including framework and guiding principles of open government supplemented with training is superior to individual resolutions. (Labelle, 2012)

*Documents cited above:*

City of Edmonton. (2014). Mayor and City Council. Retrieved 06 10, 2015, from The City of Edmonton: [http://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/city\\_organization/mayor-city-councillors.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/mayor-city-councillors.aspx)

Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2014). Public Sector Leadership Award WInners. Retrieved 06 06, 2015, from Deloitte Public Sector Leadership Awards: <http://www.leadershipawards.ca/en/winners/Pages/default.aspx>

Labelle, B. (2012). Open Government Framework. City of Guelph, Corporate and Human Resource Department, Guelph.

Office of the City Clerk. (2015). Council Expense Reports. Retrieved 06 08, 2015, from City of Edmonton: [http://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/city\\_organization/council-expense-reports.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/council-expense-reports.aspx)

Statistics Canada. (2014, 07 23). Table 3 Police-Reported Crime Serverity Indexes, by Census Metropolitan Area, 2013. Retrieved 06 10, 2015, from Statistics Canada: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14040/tbl/tbl03-eng.htm>

Sustainable Development Department. (2015). Urban Planning and Design.  
Retrieved 06 08, 2015, from City of Edmonton:  
[http://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/urban-planning-and-design.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban-planning-and-design.aspx)

*Further resources:*

Mayor's Open Government Task Force  
<http://www.mapleridge.ca/953/Mayors-Open-Government-Task-Force>

Citizens' Representatives Working Group  
<http://www.mapleridge.ca/1013/Citizens-Representatives-Working-Group>

Citizens' Representatives Working Group  
Terms of Reference  
<http://www.mapleridge.ca/DocumentCenter/View/5323>

Citizens' Representatives Working Group  
Biographies  
<http://www.mapleridge.ca/999/Biographies>

Open Government Task Force, Maple Ridge. Public Input Session June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 (video)  
<http://media.mapleridge.ca/Mediasite/Play/c7853c98334e4254a15ad34ba8114cbc1d?catalog=5edbe186-9ec4-4ad9-ab81-cdcfe0767b63>

The Oracle White Paper (March 2012) Eight Steps to Great Customer Experiences for Government Agencies  
<http://www.oracle.com/us/products/applications/8-steps-cust-exp-gov-wp-1560471.pdf>

BC Community Charter  
[http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/03026\\_00](http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/03026_00)

Open Meetings: Best Practices Guide for Local Government, BC

<https://www.bcombudsperson.ca/sites/default/files/Special%20Report%20No%20-%2034%20Open%20Meetings-%20Best%20Practices%20Guide%20for%20Local%20Governments.pdf>

Citizens Committee on Open Government, Pitt Meadows, BC

<http://www.pittmeadows.bc.ca/EN/main/cityhall/committees-and-commissions/citizens-committee-on-open-government.html>

British Columbia Office of the Ombudsperson

<https://www.bcombudsperson.ca/>

Garbl's Plain English Writing Guide

<http://garbl.home.comcast.net/~garbl/plainlanguage/>