

# Stratford Civic Improvement Initiative

## Background

Recent controversy over the proposed Xinyi development has highlighted the challenges facing Stratford's City Council in balancing the public interest with the needs of a robust municipal development process. More specifically, this experience has brought into stark relief the necessity for an improved public engagement process and the strengthening of internal council policies and protocols.

This proposal aims to take the lessons learned and apply them towards repairing and strengthening Stratford's municipal governance procedures to ensure that future projects considered by council will be better positioned to yield more harmonious, reliable and predictable results. Through the use of best practices and highest standards wherever and whenever possible, an improved process will also better meet both the needs and expectations of the citizenry and provide greater clarity for any developers/investors that may be invited into the community.

## Focal Points

Itemized below are some of the key issues identified thus far through consultation with various community stakeholders and the general public. Some of these items may be more easily or best addressed internally by Council and there undoubtedly some that may require the assistance of external experts. However, given that the City is again headed into a revision cycle for the Official Plan, perhaps some of this consultation could be incorporated into that review in some way to better streamline the process and reduce the burden on Council. We would respectfully propose the following focal points which we have divided into three constituencies for clarity: Council; Citizens and City Corporations.

### 1. Council

We would suggest that initial focal points for reconsideration of Council processes include:

1. Improved training for Councillors upon orientation and the provision for coaching thereafter as may be appropriate. A mentorship program may also be desirable in assisting councillors with challenging or complex situations.
2. Reviewing the use of in-camera meetings such that they are utilized only as far as necessary to protect confidential information. Furthermore, ensuring that there are adequate checks and balances built into the system to ensure that Council may audit the decision to invoke in-camera meetings.
3. Review the use and reasonability of non-disclosure agreements with an aim to constrain their use to a minimum necessary to conduct Council business.
4. Review conflict of interest guidelines to maximize transparency
5. Explore/consider appointing an internal or external individual who is responsible to be the advocate for First Nations communications and the constitutional Duty to Consult
6. Explore/consider appointing an internal individual who is responsible for ensuring diversity concerns are addressed;
7. Review and make recommendation term limits for mayor and councillors;
8. Develop a refreshed long term vision for the City in consultation with its citizens.

## **2. Citizens**

We would suggest considering inviting a consultant to help Council in determining a strengthened approach to citizen engagement and public consultation processes relating to development in the city. A consultant could assist in developing further recommendations for action by Council on such issues as:

1. New developments and urban design;
2. Use of lands and annexations of new lands;
3. Protection of heritage properties;
4. Timeline formulas responsible to both city needs and its citizens;
5. Climate change and the protection of our natural environment including trees;
6. Reliable, timely and thorough communication protocols/systems.

## **3. City Corporations / City Planning**

We would suggest Council consider improved methodologies for providing adequate oversight of activities of the various subsidiary Corporations of the City. Areas of concern have been indicated as:

1. Reviewing the intake parameters for new development proposals to ensure they fit with the long term vision of the City;
2. Review implications of City's Climate Change Emergency declaration with regards to proposed developments;
3. Compatibility of incoming development/investment with Official Plan;

Some of these recommendations may attract consensus within Council and some may require further investigation. We would suggest that any areas of consensus be acted upon in the interim to continue moving the process forward and demonstrating progress to the community. Outside support from a body such as the Ontario Ombudsman or expert consultants may also be desirable to help identify remedies to some of the more involved concerns.