

MEMORANDUM

November 26, 2019

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Sadhu Johnston, City Manager
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk

FROM: Vancouver City Planning Commission

SUBJECT: Changes to Procedures Bylaw #9756

As part of its mandate to advise Mayor and Council on issues relevant to the future of the city, the Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC) wishes to take this opportunity to provide input and comment regarding the proposed changes to Procedures Bylaw 9756. We have discussed these changes at two Commission meetings on September 25 and October 9, 2019 and have identified five concerns about the changes that we respectfully draw to your attention

1. The reduction in speaking time for public input to Council from five to three minutes across the board strikes us as overly rigid and counterproductive. While some issues that come before Council lend themselves to focused and succinct public input that could be accommodated within three minutes per speaker, others require more time because of their broader scope and long term consequences. Just as the Vancouver City Planning Commission bylaw recognizes two mandates for our focus – i) the current planning challenges with immediate impact on the City, and ii) the long term issues and challenges that will shape the City's future – we suggest that two categories of agenda item be designated in advance of meetings, with different time allocations for each presentation.

“Long-term” agenda items would continue with the five minute public input period, while “Current” agenda items would be designated for three minute presentations. Examples of long-term agenda items would be matters relating to the Climate Emergency, or the Opioid crisis, or the Citywide Plan. Examples of Current agenda items would be proposed zoning changes for specific parcels, or changes to licensing rules and regulations, such as the rezoning of townhomes on South Granville Street.

2. We are concerned about the proposed reduction in time for introducing agenda items on the Council agenda. In order for Advisory Committees, and other representative bodies (e.g., neighbourhood associations, social services agencies, or other community groups) the opportunity to provide meaningful input on behalf of the organization, a two to three week minimum time period is needed for feedback to be developed, refined and collectively ratified. Obtaining public input on proposals that were placed on the Council's agenda less

than two weeks ahead of a public meeting would short circuit the capacity for effective input from all but a subset of citizens representing only themselves before Council. As long as there is a procedure to introduce special items to Council's agenda on an emergency basis, we support a three week advance notice for "normal" business items on Council's agenda.

3. As we discovered through our input on the Citywide Plan, city staff make undisclosed written responses to Council communication by Advisory Councils, and perhaps other public communications to Council regarding items on the agenda. While such input from city staff is proper and can add valuable insight to the issues under consideration, we believe that it should be disclosed to the Advisory Council, or other source of input around the same time that it is communicated to Council. This advances the opportunity for dialogue, and could lead to Advisory Committee or other input to Council to be modified and improved upon in response to staff input. The current information asymmetry abets misunderstanding and hard feelings by those providing public input to Council.
4. For the civic Advisory Committees in particular, we suggest that agenda items going before Council be flagged as within the purview of the appropriate Advisory Committee(s) at the time they are placed on the agenda. That way each Advisory Committee would be activated and engaged regarding relevant agenda items, and Council would obtain the benefit of their input, in addition to the other public voices that are raised about the matter. Advisory Committees would not necessarily speak to every item on the agenda that was identified as in their purview, but would be alerted to specific items or proposals that they could offer input on or engage their constituents in, if they felt they had something of value to contribute.
5. The liaison staff for each Advisory Committee should be responsible for monitoring the Council agenda and alerting Committee members (perhaps designated members) when Council receives an agenda item within their purview. This would avoid agenda items proceeding to Council with Advisory Committees unaware of the opportunity for engagement on that item.

We are pleased that Council is seeking to adjust its practices and procedures to improve the public's engagement with, and respect for, local government. We hope that our input will contribute to making the Vancouver City Council a recognized leader in public engagement on municipal governance.

Respectfully submitted,

Nola Kate Seymoar, Chair,
on behalf of the Vancouver City Planning Commission