

From Review to Renewal: What Kingston Learned About Advisory Governance

AMCTO Zone 6 Spring Meeting

April 17, 2026



Part 1: Project Background & Overview



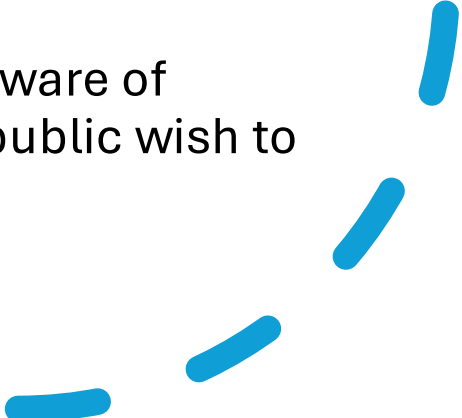
Council Direction

December 17, 2024

Therefore Be It Resolved That staff be directed to undertake a review of the mandates of all committees and working groups included in the Committee By-Law through a lens of ensuring these groups are undertaking meaningful, results focused work and are conducting business in a manner that respects the time commitment of all participants; and

That staff report back to Council with recommendations based on review of the mandates of all committees and working groups, including any amendments to the Committee By-Law and a proposed timeline for standard future reviews of the By-Law, no later than the end of 2025.

Project Goals

- **Overall Goal:** Determine the adequacy of the current committee structure.
 - **Secondary Goal:** Determine the best timeframe for scheduled review of the Committee By-Law.
 - **Engagement Goals:**
 - **City Staff:** Are current committee mandates accurate to the work staff is completing? What is the alignment with the strategic plan?
 - **Council and Committee members:** Are current committees completing worthwhile work? Do committee members feel their time and contributions are valued?
 - **Members of the Public:** Is the public aware of committees and their roles? Does the public wish to participate in this way?
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Background Research

Internal

- Review of City of Kingston committees and working groups:
 - How often do committees meet?
 - How long are meetings?

External

- Comparator research at other municipalities:
 - What committees do they have?
 - How often do they meet?
 - When is the last time their committees were reviewed?
 - Do they have a standard review timeline for by-law(s)?
 - If so, what is the scope of the review?

Engagement Groups

City Staff

Clerk's Office staff conducted **one-on-one meetings** with staff liaisons for feedback.

Deputy Clerk and Clerk conducted **presentations** to senior management for feedback.

Committee Members

Clerk's Office staff reached out to current and previous committee members with a **survey** to elicit feedback.

An option was provided to participate in **one-on-one meetings** with Clerk's Office staff.

An **incentive** was provided for those who participated.

Council Members

Clerk's Office staff reached out to members of Council with a **survey** to elicit feedback.

An option was provided to participate in **one-on-one meetings** with Clerk's Office staff.

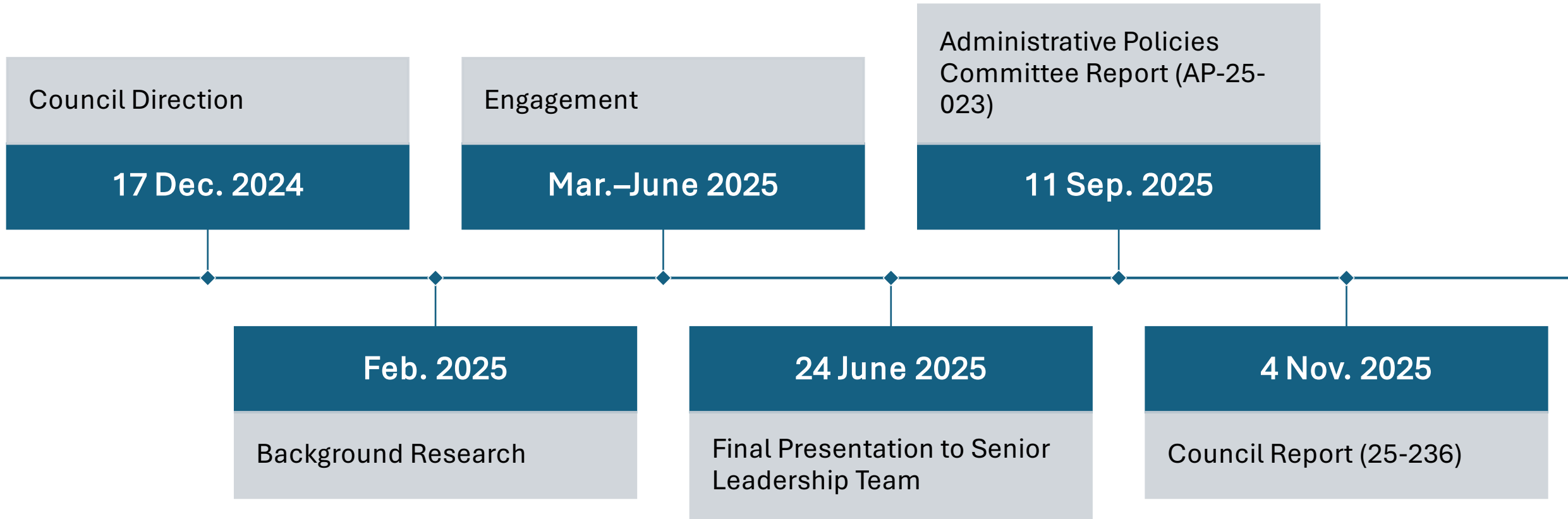
Members of the Public

A public **survey** was launched on the Get Involved Kingston website.

The survey included several open-ended questions to gather a wide range of views and opinions.

An **incentive** was provided for those who participated.

Project Timeline



Part 2: Results



Municipal Comparator Research

Municipalities reviewed:

Chatham-Kent, Guelph, Barrie, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, St. Catharines, Milton, Ajax, Cambridge, Waterloo, Whitby, Belleville, Quinte West, and London.

Key trends identified:

- The number of committees varied widely across municipalities, ranging from 5 to 22.
- Most municipalities had advisory committees related to heritage, arts and culture, transportation, environment/sustainability, and economic development.
- Many municipalities also had specialized committees focused on specific topics, such as awards programs, facility boards of management, or time-limited projects.



Advisory Committees of Council Framework

City of Guelph, University of
Guelph, and University of
Waterloo

1. **Is an advisory committee required by legislation?**
2. **Is the topic appropriate for an advisory committee?**
 - Is there a link to the Strategic Plan?
 - Is it important to Council?
 - Is it not addressed through other engagement tools?
 - Is there a benefit from lived and professional experience?
3. **Is an advisory committee an appropriate engagement tool?**
 - Can the problem be easily understood?
 - Is lived and professional experience useful?
 - Is Council prepared to receive advice on the topic?
4. **Are there adequate resources to support an advisory committee on this topic?**
 - Administrative support from the Clerk's Office.
 - Associated departmental staff to provide strategic guidance, bring work to the committee, and participate in meetings.

Engagement Results



City Staff

Concerns that the current meeting format may limit open discussion due to its formality.

Need for increased training and support for staff liaisons and committee chairs.



Council Members

Standing committees perceived as more effective than advisory committees.

Sentiment that committees may not be the most effective forum for public engagement.

Engagement Results



Committee Members

Perception that some committees serve limited purpose beyond endorsing staff recommendations.

Concerns that the current meeting format may limit open discussion due to its formality.

Limited connection between committee members and staff due to fully virtual meetings.



Members of the Public

Low level of public awareness regarding advisory committees and their roles.

Higher awareness of standing committees, especially Planning Committee.

Many indicated direct outreach to a Councillor or online tools were preferred over attending a committee meeting.

Final Outcomes and Changes

- Amended the Committee By-Law to include a review of the by-law once per term of Council, to occur following approval of Council's strategic plan;
- Dissolved the Kingston Environmental Advisory Committee;
- Subcommittee reporting made more formal;
- Prompted a review of nominations process (now in-progress);
- Adjusted and streamlined the agenda structure for the Committee of Adjustment;
- Adjusted the mandates of the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Committee, the Housing & Homelessness Advisory Committee, and the Rural Community & Economic Development Working Group.

Part 3: Insights from the Review Process



Key Lessons Learned

Limited public understanding of the role and authority of committees.

Member engagement increases when committees are assigned meaningful and impactful work.

Active staff engagement and clear work assignments are essential to committee effectiveness.

Implement governance changes gradually to allow for adaptation and reduce potential resistance.

Regular reviews of committees and working groups are important to ensure alignment with Council priorities and the Strategic Plan.

Staff recommendations informed by research and engagement may not always be adopted by senior staff or Council.

Questions?