

# STAFF REPORT

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG



<b>Report to:</b>	Mayor and Council Members	<b>Priority:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low
<b>Submitted by:</b>	Jamie Kramer, Accessibility Coordinator, Legislative Services, Corporate Services, <a href="mailto:jkramer@cobourg.ca">jkramer@cobourg.ca</a>	<b>Meeting Type:</b> Open Session <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed Session <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	October 25, 2021		
<b>Report No.:</b>	Corporate Services-128-21		
<a href="#">Submit comments to Council</a>			

**Subject/Title:** Encouraging Youths to Sit on Advisory Committees

## RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive the report from the Accessibility Coordinator for information purposes, and;

FURTHER THAT Council reduce the age of participation for all Town of Cobourg's Advisory Committees of Council to fifteen (15) to coincide with the age listed in the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee of Council for the next term of Council, and;

FURTHER THAT Council consider incorporating funding for further youth engagement in the 2022 Budget to raise awareness of opportunities for youth to participate.

## 1. STRATEGIC PLAN

**PEOPLE:** The Town of Cobourg supports and cares for the Social and Physical Well-Being of its Citizens.

## 2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

N/A

## 3. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide more information and a strategic direction regarding the ability to incorporate youth onto existing advisory committees rather than creating a specific youth advisory committee for the Town of Cobourg. Often youth are underserved and not heard, especially if topics are not

brought to a youth advisory committee. By lowering the age for advisory committees and doing more outreach targeted at encouraging youth to be involved, it will create more inclusion and equity.

#### **4. ORIGIN AND LEGISLATION**

In 2019, Town Council determined their Strategic Priorities through a planning session. The Strategic Plan consists of objectives, strategic actions and desired outcomes that will help guide the Municipality and set out its vision for the next term. The purpose of this plan is to provide strategic priorities and a road map for Council and Town staff as we determine how to best provide services and help our town thrive.

This included a variety of pillars and objectives, as well as specific actions. Under People, the Strategic Actions included implementing a municipal youth program to engage Cobourg's youth and have them participate in community activities and events.

During the Midterm Review, this was amalgamated into Action #2: Leverage Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy to promote inclusion in the community. One of the specific actions under this is "Create a Youth Advisory Committee."

#### **5. BACKGROUND**

As the Town of Cobourg is a member of the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities with the Canadian Commission of UNESCO, there is a toolkit provided to us to help with Youth Engagement, which has been attached. The hope is to create a model of meaningful youth engagement, intergenerational dialogue, and partnerships.

Young people aged 18 to 35 comprise over 32% of the world's population. In Canada, youth is defined as those aged 15 to 30 years old. Based on this definition, there are approximately 8,500,000 youth in Canada with approximately 3,100 youth in Cobourg. However, the Canadian Commission of UNESCO defines youth as a stage rather than an age – this allows for us to consider the common barriers, experiences, and capacities that everyone has that are influenced by cultural, political, economic, legal, and social factors.

For too long, young people have been marginalized from the spaces where decisions are made or are infantilized – treated as if their opinions, inputs, and experiences are somehow less because they have not reached a certain age. To be committed to inclusion, we will need to build bridges that foster meaningful relationships among communities of people. We must value each other enough to create spaces for each other and to celebrate the diversity of our experiences.

The main concern that many youth have is that they are not provided active roles in activities, committees, or boards, but rather sidelined or provided with a forum that can be easily ignored as they are deemed "youth" or underqualified because of their ages.

As such, it is important to engage youth specifically and meaningfully throughout all processes that involve governance, creation of programs, spreading information and awareness, and decisions that will impact beyond a generation.

In addition, this is one of the top recommendations from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to create more meaningful engagement with youth.

## 6. ANALYSIS

By creating a Youth Advisory Committee, the concern is that youth may feel marginalized and ostracized from all decisions. There becomes a distinct divide of what is a “youth” issue and what is not, when youth could and should be consulted on all issues that are presented to Advisory Committees and Council.

Currently, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee of Council has in its Terms of Reference that persons can participate from the age of fifteen (15) to be age inclusive. This has allowed for more flexibility and understanding from the youth perspective as we have seen a large range of dimensions of diversity on that Committee of Council.

The hope is that by lowering the age requirement, and determining the best times to work with people’s schedules that are in school, that there will be more engagement with our local youth population in Cobourg.

In doing so, Town Council will be provided with the youth perspective on all matters from Sustainability to Parks to Planning and Development, rather than having to take each report from staff to multiple Committees, there is the ability to have that perspective with each Committee itself.

While there is a fear of tokenizing the youth on Committees or having one person be the “voice” of an entire generation, this can be offset by encouraging more public participation that is targeted at youth. This can be done through specific and targeted outreach to schools and community centres, as well as utilizing consultants that specialize in youth engagement, where financially feasible.

By changing this age limit for the next term of Council, it provides Staff and Town Council with the opportunity to spend the next twelve (12) months engaging and encouraging youth participation in various aspects of the community.

There are many opportunities to do so, including by hosting virtual sessions for key Council or Committee meetings at schools or holding information and training sessions on how to participate and engage with Council.

This can be the first major step towards creating more inclusion and equity for youth in our community that goes beyond other aspects of inclusion on Boards and Committees that have been encouraged by the Canadian government and other local organizations. It will also work towards one of the actions in the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee of Council’s work plan to engage and encourage youth to participate in avenues of governance.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/BUDGET IMPACTS**

There are currently no known negative financial impacts by lowering the age range for participation on Advisory Committees and Boards. Should there be a financial impact, Staff will bring forward those costings to Council for approval.

However, there may be positive financial impacts through cost savings that we are currently unaware. By providing the youth perspective from the starting point rather than having to specifically seek it out or adjust approved or proposed plans after work has been completed.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Staff is recommending that rather than a specific Youth Advisory Committee be created, that the age for all Committees and Boards be lowered to fifteen (15) to be inclusive of the “youth” age range for Canada to mirror what is currently the age range for the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee of Council.

This will provide the Town of Cobourg with the youth voice and understanding for all decisions that are being made rather than only when Staff, Council, or other Committees deem it appropriate, which may marginalize or exclude the youth, which is not the intention of the creation of a Committee of Council.