



CITY OF HAMILTON
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE
Human Resources

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	June 15, 2020
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Our People Survey (HUR20008) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the rescheduling of the second Our People Survey, along with all associated communications and activities required, from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on the way City employees operate on a day to day basis, staff is recommending that the City reschedule the second cycle of the Our People Survey from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021. This change will allow the City time to return to a state of reopening, more conducive to facilitating an accurate baseline of engagement, as opposed to results that are likely to be impacted by the current circumstances. It will also ensure that the City's focus remains on reopening efforts.

Departments and divisions in the City have been affected in different ways by this pandemic, and staff have been operating under some uncertainty. Pausing the timeline will also allow City leaders the opportunity to focus on their respective teams as they navigate their unique recovery efforts.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 6

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FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (for recommendation(s) only)

Financial: There are no significant financial implications.
Staffing: There are no significant staffing implications.
Legal: There are no significant legal implications

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On November 23, 2015, Council approved report HUR15014 regarding the Our People Survey (OPS) and provided staff direction to proceed with a one survey approach for all City of Hamilton (City) employees. This was in follow up to Council’s request for a corporate methodology, incorporating a unified approach for employee surveying that would occur every three years. The intent of the survey was to measure five key areas including employee engagement, workplace culture, workplace ethics and integrity, health, safety and wellness, and workforce census and demographics.

In September 2017, the City launched the Our People Survey (OPS) to all employees. This voluntary and confidential employee survey was executed by a third-party vendor, Metrics@Work, an expert in municipal engagement surveys. The key objective for the survey was to collect meaningful feedback from our employees that would lead to thoughtful actions, enhance employee engagement, improve performance, and enable higher levels of trust and confidence in our City government. The survey was approved by Council as a nine-year project, with a plan to survey employees on a three-year cycle starting in 2017, and re-survey in 2020 and 2023, with a goal to measure improvement to the 2017 baseline over time.

To ensure the success of the OPS initiative, the City established a robust survey process complete with specific phases and timelines. The phases included:

- Phase 1 – Survey Launch (September – October 2017)
- Phase 2 – Sharing Results (February – May 2018)
- Phase 3 – Building Action Plans (June – September 2018)
- Phase 4 – Implementing Action Plans and Monitoring Progress (September 2018 – 2020)

Under the guidance and support of Human Resources, the 2017 OPS proved to be a success. Phases one to four were completed on time and under budget, and staff have been engaged throughout the process.

During phase one, the City achieved a 65% overall employee participation rate, which represented a 25% increase in participation rate over the previous employee survey in 2006. Achieving this level of participation required that a majority of our divisions reach a participation rate of 80% or higher.

In phase two of the survey, the City reached its goal of sharing the results of the survey with all employees using a cascading approach from senior leadership down to the front line. By July 2018, 100% of City employees received the results of the OPS.

In phase three of the survey process, every work group in the City who had received a survey result report, developed an action plan that built on a strength or addressed an opportunity related to one of the focus areas of the OPS. To monitor action planning and to drive accountability, City staff developed an online reporting tool where leaders could identify their action plans and report progress on a quarterly basis.

Phase Four: Action Planning Update

The City is currently in phase four of the 2017 OPS Survey process, which prior to COVID-19, was scheduled to end in June 2020 to allow sufficient time to launch the next OPS cycle. Throughout this phase, City workgroups have been tasked with implementing the action plans that they developed in phase three, celebrating and sharing their successes, and adding more actions as others are completed to continue to improve our workplaces. The City has made great progress in action planning, and leaders have been diligent in providing status updates on action plans through six full reporting cycles.

Since action planning began, a total of 844 individual action items have been recorded in the online action plan reporting tool, representing an average of three action items in place for every group in the City that received a survey result report. Action plans have been focused on making improvements or building on existing strengths in many areas, including improving communications, ensuring workload manageability, enhancing team morale, building job clarity, and ensuring consistency in policy and practices. The Our People Survey Steering Committee has gathered and communicated many action planning successes within the organization, and through sharing our successes, have inspired many areas to continue their work.

Some examples of action plans implemented within the corporation have seen positive outcomes in the areas of recognition, communication, and job clarity. Teams within every department of the City have implemented informal peer-to-peer recognition programs that have provided employees with an opportunity to recognize good work and have improved morale and pride in teams.

Action planning emphasis on communications has resulted in the creation of divisional newsletters to ensure that teams are informed, improved cascading of information from leaders to employees, and greater communication and collaboration across divisions and departments.

Similarly, a focus on job clarity in many of our areas has led to improved employee onboarding programs and enhanced job specific training. While these examples only showcase a small sub-section of action planning currently underway, they are reflective of the impact that action planning has had on the organization.

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Work groups have made excellent progress in completing their actions; as of May 13, 2020, 44% of the action items recorded in the reporting tool had been completed, 41% are on schedule to be completed on time, 10% are delayed, 4% are on hold and 1% are at risk of not being completed in the timeline originally specified by the work group.

With the COVID-19 crisis, staff anticipates that many action items may have been put on pause or will be delayed. Additionally, action plans may be altered or reframed in light of changes in our workplaces.

Our People Survey: Cycle Two

In early 2020, Human Resources began preparations for the next cycle of the Our People Survey, originally planned for roll out in the Fall of 2020. To ensure the overall success of the next cycle of the Our People Survey, many of the same approaches, processes and tactics used in 2017 were to be followed, with minor changes and improvements based on lessons learned.

In particular, the survey will continue to be supported by the Senior Leadership Team, along with a Corporate Steering Committee comprised of representatives from each department. Further support will continue to be provided by departmental leadership teams and working groups. In addition, the City will again reach out to front-line employees to act as Survey Ambassadors. The City will also employ a comprehensive communication strategy to generate excitement and to ensure that staff are well informed of the survey. And every leader in the organization will be given a goal on their Performance Accountability and Development (PAD) to hold them accountable for empowering staff to engage in the next cycle of the OPS.

The survey questionnaire for the next OPS cycle will remain largely the same as the 2017 OPS, as consistency in questions is important in order to benchmark the City's progress. Some minor adjustments and additions are being made to better assist the City in understanding the success of programs and initiatives. The next OPS cycle will include additional questions pertaining to psychological health and safety, and leadership. Additionally, questions pertaining to action planning efforts following the previous survey iteration will be added to understand employees' perceptions of the process and impact of action planning.

All permanent and temporary full and part time employees of the City of Hamilton will have an opportunity to participate in the survey, in addition to students and interns working at the City during the survey window. Contractors, City Council and Council Administrative Staff are excluded from participation in the Our People Survey. Staff will continue to provide Council with updates on the progress of the OPS, including survey results and action planning based on those survey results.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

None

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Staff consulted with our municipal partners, the Our People Survey vendor, Metrics@Work, as well as the Senior Leadership Team in developing this recommendation.

Many municipalities are considering or have opted to delay or cancel their plans to run employee engagement surveys in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. The Town of Oakville has made the decision to cancel their next engagement cycle, citing that the results would not be reflective of normal staff engagement. The City of Markham had planned to roll out their engagement survey in April and have put the project on hold until such time as service disruption has been minimized. York Region and the Region of Peel are both currently considering cancellation of their engagement survey in favour of a pulse survey focused on recovery, in light of the pandemic. The Town of Georgina, who were working towards launching their first cycle of an employee engagement survey in 2020 have now delayed their timelines to 2021. The Town of Vaughan rolled out their engagement survey in late 2019 and have made the decision to pause in sharing survey results as feedback collected last year would not be reflective of or relevant to their current and ever-changing operating environment.

The City's vendor, Metrics@Work, supports the recommendation to reschedule the second cycle of the OPS to the Fall of 2021. They advise that many of their other clients within the MASH sector (Municipal, Academic, School Boards and Health & Social Services) are currently considering a revision to their survey timelines due to the pandemic. They support the City's rationale as they have seen a significant skew with survey results in engagement surveys conducted in other organizations during this time.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented changes to the way City staff operate on a day-to-day basis. Front-line staff are operating under unprecedented levels of stress and in environments that pose greater risk to health and safety. Some staff have been redeployed to other teams and positions in an effort to keep the City running smoothly while supporting the ongoing fight against the virus. Many other staff have been asked to work remotely and interaction with their colleagues and leadership team have been limited to virtual channels.

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These changes have had a substantial impact on several of the key areas the OPS is intended to measure, including employee engagement, workplace culture, and health, safety and wellness. Surveying at this time would result in a significant deviation from the 2017 baseline due to factors not anticipated when the survey cycles were determined.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had different impacts to different City staff. Given the scope of these changes, this pause will also allow City leaders the time and space to focus on the individual needs of their teams as they navigate through recovery efforts and to sustaining City Operations during the COVID-19 crisis.

City staff has reviewed the relevant service contracts and has confirmed with the vendor that moving survey dates would not result in any additional costs or penalties to the City.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

City staff assessed two alternative options:

1. Continuing with the original OPS timeline, with survey roll out in September 2020.
2. Delaying the roll out of the OPS to January 2021 and tightening up timelines on phase 4 of the next cycle to ensure original timelines resume in 2023.

City staff is recommending that the City not move forward with either of these alternative options. The timelines to reopen the City are based on the Provincial plan which, at present, are more of a guideline as opposed to a definitive schedule. Neither of these options allow for either enough time or predictability to ensure that some normalcy has returned to City operations prior to the roll out of the next engagement survey cycle.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Our People and Performance

Hamiltonians have a high level of trust and confidence in their City government.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable