



## Staff Report

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**Report To:** Council

**Date of Meeting:** December 14, 2020

**Report Number:** CAO-023-20

**Submitted By:** Andrew C. Allison, CAO

**Resolution#:**

**File Number:**

**By-law Number:**

**Report Subject:** Department Liaisons

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### Recommendations:

1. That Report CAO-023-20 be received;
2. That Council either,
  - a. eliminate the role of Department Liaisons and direct staff to delete all references to Department Liaisons in Procedural By-law 2015-029; or
  - b. direct staff to prepare a by-law to amend the Procedural By-law 2015-029 in the manner described in section 2.4 of this Report in order to clarify the responsibilities of Department Liaisons.
3. That Council provide direction on whether they wish to have Department Heads continue to attend full meetings or just the portion of the meeting pertaining to their department.

## Report Overview

The following information is provided to assist Council in its deliberation of the role of Department Liaisons.

### 1. Background

- 1.1 Corporate records indicate that the concept of Department Liaisons was first introduced in Clarington in 1983 (although they were called Department Chairs until 2011 when the Procedural By-law was changed). There is no report, resolution or direction to indicate what the expectations of a Department Liaison could, or should, be other than the following reference in the current Procedural By-law:

Section 5.1.1 (b) – Each Member shall be appointed as a Department Liaison as soon as is practical after the first Meeting of Council or a vacancy occurs for which he has been appointed Department Liaison. The Department Liaison shall take the chair during that portion of the GG Committee or PD Committee meeting dealing with the matters pertaining to the Department for which he has been appointed Department Liaison.

- 1.2 In 2018, Council appointed Department Liaisons until December 31, 2019. In 2019, Council appointed Department Liaisons until December 31, 2020 – hence the reason that the matter is before Council.
- 1.3 As a result of the organizational changes that took effect in July 2020, staff suggested, in a memo that went to General Government Committee on September 14, 2020, that it would be appropriate to pass a resolution appointing Department Liaisons based on the new structure. Staff also suggested that because the first round of organizational changes eliminated one department, Council should have a Councillor appointed to the Financial Services Department rather than have that department remain as part of the Mayor's liaison portfolio, as has been tradition. On September 21, 2020, Council appointed liaisons and directed that the matter be reviewed at the November 30, 2020 General Government Committee (GGC) meeting.
- 1.4 At the November 30, 2020 GGC meeting, Resolution #GG-437-20 was moved to appoint liaisons for a one-year term ending December 31, 2021. That motion was referred to December 14, 2020 Council meeting. At Committee, there were concerns expressed regarding the need for an Emergency and Fire Services Department Liaison.

- 1.5 As a result of more recent organizational changes, the Clerk's Department is now a division within the Legislative Service Department and the Corporate Services Department will cease to exist effective January 1, 2021. Accordingly, effective January 1, 2021, there will be a total of seven departments: Community Services, Emergency and Fire Services, Financial Services, Legislative Services, Office of the CAO, Planning and Development Services, and Public Works. Resolution #GG-437-20 shows the Mayor as having been appointed liaison to "Administration", but consistent with all of the organizational changes that have been made, the proper reference for purposes of appointing Department Liaisons is "Office of the CAO".

## 2. Discussion

- 2.1 The practice of lower tier municipalities having Department Liaisons (or Chairs) was discussed in a recent report (November 2016) from Scugog. It included a summary of the practices across Durham Region. The following extract is from Scugog's report:

The practice of having Departmental Chairs adds questionable value in Scugog. While certain departments have benefitted from having a heightened level of attention and advocacy from their assigned member of Council, the majority of department heads feel that this is an outdated and counterproductive governance feature. Other municipalities have abandoned this practice for a variety of reasons; the presence of Departmental Chairs can serve to blur the line between the political and administrative realms, leading some to question where the line of the department head ends, and the role of the Department Chair begins. In addition, the practice of rotating Chairs within GPA meetings adds unnecessary administration and works against meeting efficiency. It is therefore recommended that this practice be eliminated in Scugog, The GPA model is proposed to continue with the Mayor (or in his absence, the Deputy Mayor) chairing GPA meetings in their entirety.

- 2.2 In December 2018, Whitby eliminated all but one of its Department Chairs. The following extract is from Whitby's report to Council:

Section 2.9 of the Procedure By-law stipulates that the Mayor shall appoint six Members of Council, excluding the Deputy Mayor, to serve as a Department Chair for a 16 month term, with the Mayor being the chair for the Office of the CAO and Economic Development. With the exception of the Chair of Finance/Budget, who is responsible for overseeing the presentation of the annual budget with the Treasurer, Department Chairs typically have not performed an active role. As Department Chairs do not play an active role, do not have any authority beyond that of Council, and given the few municipalities that continue to appoint Department Chairs, it is recommended that this practice be abandoned in Whitby, with the exception of the Chair of Finance/Budget.

- 2.3 In Durham Region, only Clarington and Uxbridge continue to appoint Department Chairs.
- 2.4 Whether to continue with the practice of having Department Liaisons (or Chairs) is a decision of Council. From staff's perspective, there can be a benefit in continuing with the practice. Department Liaisons can play a key role in reviewing and understanding a department's functions, business planning and budget. However, there should be a clearer articulation of what the role entails in our corporate documents. To this end, staff are recommending that, if Council's desire is to continue with Department Liaisons, the following clause should be added to Section 5.1.1 of Procedural By-law 2015-029 to clarify the role of a Department Liaison:
- (c) A Department Liaison's primary responsibility is to maintain good communication and relationships between Council and the Department to which the Liaison has been appointed in the following ways:
- The Department Liaison and Director shall maintain regular communication in areas of concern within the Department;
  - The Department Liaison shall obtain information from the Director to ensure an understanding of all reports coming from the Department for consideration by Council; and
  - The Department Liaison shall provide guidance or support to the Department if requested by the Director.
- 2.5 If the role of Department Liaisons is to be preserved, staff's recommendation is that each of the current seven Departments have a liaison. At both the GGC meetings on September 14, 2020 and on November 30, 2020, the need for a liaison for the Emergency and Fire Services Department was raised. There was a suggestion that, instead of having a liaison to this Department, Council should consider having a councillor appointed to oversee an economic development portfolio or perhaps a portfolio of environmental issues. In the opinion of staff, the role of a liaison to the Emergency and Fire Services Department should continue, if for no other reason than this Department, by comparison, has the second largest operating budget only behind Public Works.
- 2.6 A separate but related issue of whether there is a need for the Director of Emergency and Fire Services to be present (physically or virtually) at GGC and Council meetings was raised during the GGC meetings. In the opinion of staff, the issue of attendance at meetings extends to all departments; the issue is whether it is necessary for Department Heads (or their designates) to be in attendance for the entirety of our meetings. The Acting Director of Planning and Development (or her designate) does not attend GGC meetings unless there is an issue on the agenda that directly impacts the

Department, and even then, it is just for the portion of the meeting devoted to that issue. Similarly, Department Heads or their designates (other than Public Works) do not attend Planning & Development Committee meetings unless there is something on the agenda that directly impacts their departments. In the opinion of staff, this approach should be extended to all departments for all meetings – Department Heads (or their designates) should only be expected to be present (physically or virtually) during those portions of the meetings where their attendance would be required to provide input or answer questions from Committee/Council, but otherwise to be on call. This will result in a far more efficient utilization of senior staff time. Because this represents a fundamental change to how our Municipality has run its meetings, direction from Council is sought.

### **3. Concurrence**

Not Applicable.

### **4. Conclusion**

It is respectfully recommended that Council provide direction to staff on the role of Department Liaisons and the need for Department Heads to physically or virtually attend committee and Council meetings.

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