

Date: March 4, 2022	Originator's files:
To: Chair and Members of General Committee	
From: Paul Mitcham, P.Eng, MBA, City Manager and Chief Administrative Officer	Meeting date: March 9, 2022

Subject

Communications and Advocacy Plan in Response to Provincial Housing Affordability Task Force Report

Recommendation

That the Corporate Report entitled "Communications and Advocacy Plan in Response to Provincial Housing Affordability Task Force Report" dated March 4, 2022 from the City Manager and Chief Administrative Officer, be approved.

Executive Summary

- On February 8, 2022, the Housing Affordability Task Force (HATF) provided its recommendations on how to increase housing supply in Ontario to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- On March 2, 2022, City staff provided a detailed response to HATF report, including a report card on the areas of agreement and opposition. This report has been presented to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Premier, the HATF Chair, all local MPPs, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.
- Subsequent to this report, Council requested staff develop a communications and engagement strategy to raise public awareness about the housing crisis and the HATF report, as well as Mississauga's response, in advance of any legislation being introduced by the province.
- Staff recommend a three phased advocacy, communications, and engagement campaign based on the following objectives: informing, educating, and engaging residents. The campaign will culminate with the provincial election scheduled for June 2, 2022.
- Staff have already begun to execute this campaign, beginning on March 2, 2022, following the presentation of the corporate report.

Background

On February 8, 2022, the provincial government released the report of its Housing Affordability Task Force. Contained in this report are recommendations to increase the supply of housing in Ontario. Many of these recommendations focus on making changes to the municipal planning process. City staff responded to the Task Force report with a corporate report to General Committee on March 2, 2022 outlining Mississauga's position on each of the recommendations.

During the General Committee meeting, the committee requested staff develop a communications plan to inform the public about Mississauga's response to the Task Force recommendations and educate and engage residents about the actions Mississauga is taking to build affordable housing.

Comments

Staff recommend amalgamating communications, engagement, and advocacy activities into a single campaign, broken into three phases. Planning and development is a complex topic. The recommendations in the HATF are equally complex and difficult to understand.

As such, the recommended objectives of the campaign are as follows:

1. **Inform** residents about pertinent recommendations in the HATF and what they could mean to the City of Mississauga and existing neighbourhoods, before any legislation is introduced.
2. **Educate** residents on Mississauga's response to the HATF report and the actions the City has taken to date and is planning to take in the near future, to address housing affordability.
3. **Engage** residents to advocate to the provincial government and local MPPs their opposition to some of the recommendations of the HATF.

Phase 1 – Inform and Educate (March)

This phase has already begun. The March 2, 2022 corporate report from staff in response to the HATF recommendations has been released publicly, along with a press release and a visual report card. Councillors have been provided with an initial article and key messages they can use to inform their residents about the HATF and Mississauga's response. And, the Mayor, on behalf of Council, has sent a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Premier, local MPPs, the HATF Chair, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Chair of the Ontario Big City Mayor's Caucus with the City's corporate report attached.

While the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has not set out a formal process for responding to the HATF recommendations, the City has registered its position on the record. It is likely the Minister will use the feedback from the report, including from the municipal sector and cities like Mississauga, to draft legislation.

To disseminate the message to both government decision makers and the public, staff may engage in the following activities:

- An open letter to the Minister and Premier from the Mayor on behalf of the City (copying Mississauga MPPs);
- Media relations;
- Social media outreach through corporate channels, including promoted posts;
- Targeted digital advertisements
- Housing affordability website featuring:
 - Background on the housing crisis
 - Mississauga's actions to date
 - The City's response to the HATF report including the report card
 - Previous corporate reports in response to BILD reports
 - Contact information for MPPs and a draft letter to the province and MPPs to voice concerns
 - Renderings and images that can be downloaded for use by residents in their advocacy
- Information materials for use in Mayor and Councillor communications including, but not limited to:
 - Newsletter articles
 - Promotional toolkit for resident and ratepayer groups
 - Draft social media messages
 - Renderings of what proposed density could look like in existing neighbourhoods
 - The housing report card on the HATF recommendations

As part of this phase, we will also encourage residents to provide their feedback to the provincial government by providing them with contact information for their MPP and the Ontario government. At this time our high level key messages will be as follows:

- We have concerns about Ontario's housing plan and you should too
- While the plan may help build more homes, it will not make housing more affordable
- The province's housing taskforce recommendations could change our neighbourhoods, limit public consultation on future developments, and erase heritage
- Tell your MPP that one-size-fits-all planning doesn't work. Neighbourhoods matter and more public input is needed before final decisions are made
- Mississauga has a plan to create more housing supply and make housing more affordable. Learn more.
- You shouldn't have to choose between affordability and a well-planned community.

Phase 2 – Engage (March/April)

During this phase, the City will continue to inform and engage residents on this issue, as well as solidify Mississauga's advocacy position on the provisions of legislation – should it be introduced.

In addition to ongoing awareness of this important issue, there will be a call to action for residents to support the City's position and voice their support to their local MPP and the government. This will again be done through a variety of actions, which may include:

- Virtual education and engagement session(s) for residents and stakeholders (led by the Mayor and Council and senior City staff) livestreamed on the City's website and social media channels;
- Outreach to Mississauga's MPPs, opposition parties and local candidates
- Ongoing resident engagement through social media and other corporate channels
- If legislation is introduced:
 - Open letter to Minister and MPPs about Mississauga's position on the proposed legislation; and
 - Possible appearance by Mayor and Council or senior staff before the Standing Committee at the Ontario Legislature considering the government's legislation.

At this time, it is unclear if legislation will be introduced to action any of the recommendations in the HATF report. The Ontario Legislature may sit up to April 28, 2022. It is likely the provincial election campaign will begin on May 2nd. The province could introduce legislation, or they could include changes in the Spring Budget. Through recent changes in legislation, the province has extended the timeframe to deliver the provincial budget to April 30, 2022.

If there are no formal legislative proposals to respond to, the focus at this stage will be to continue informing residents and stakeholders about the HATF recommendations, and their potential implications for Mississauga. However, if legislation is introduced, staff will prepare materials based on the March 2, 2022 corporate report to respond in short order.

Phase 3 – Provincial Election

The City is planning to engage in another Mississauga Matters campaign during the upcoming provincial election. A separate report will be submitted to Council in March that outlines the proposed areas of focus and approach that will be used. As in the City's 2022 pre-budget submissions to the provincial and federal governments, staff are planning to focus on the need for increased housing affordability. Depending on the direction from the province, staff will modify the Mississauga Matters campaign to include advocacy on housing and the City's response to the government's legislation.

Strategic Plan

The recommendations in this report support the strategic pillar of Belong.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact to this report. Sufficient funding is available in the 2022 non-departmental budget to accommodate this program currently estimated at (\$25k). Any funding required for subsequent years will be subject to budget approval for that year.

Conclusion

The province has received a report from their Housing Affordability Taskforce that makes over 55 recommendations to increase the supply of housing in Ontario. Mississauga staff and Council are concerned that the recommendations will not increase the affordability of housing and may limit public consultation and the ability to plan communities at the local level. At the request of Council, staff have prepared a communications plan to raise awareness about the HATF report and recommendations, the potential consequences to local communities if the recommendations are enacted, and to engage residents to provide input and feedback to the Ontario government.



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