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Records and Information Management Policy

Presented by: David Leflar, Director, Legal & Legislative Services

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Community Growth & Infrastructure Committee recommends to Council that the Records and Information Management Policy attached to the Administrative Report to the Committee on this topic dated December 9, 2019, be adopted as a Council Policy.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present to the Committee a proposed new Council Policy entitled "Records and Information Management Policy" and to explain Administration's rationale for recommending that this Policy be adopted.

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES IN COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Records and Information Management ("RIM") is a key foundation for improving efficiency in all departments and functions of the City. As such, an RIM Policy supports all Council priorities, directly or indirectly. There is a particularly strong linkage between RIM and Council Strategic Priority #1 (Growth Policy Framework) through one of the key elements of the Corporate Business Plan in support of this Strategic Priority: the Smart Cities initiative. Many of the specific goals of Smart Cities will be achievable only with the support of a fully functioning and efficient RIM system.

DISCUSSION

The current state of RIM in the City too often does not adequately respond to the need for business information that is essential to sound decision making and effective execution of Council priorities. Recognizing this, Administration has been working diligently over the past 12-18 months to establish a foundation for implementation of a RIM Program. The time has now come to seek the support and direction of Council at the governance level, hence the RIM Policy attached to this report is being recommended for adoption.

A well-crafted policy, providing governance direction from the top, is the cornerstone for effective management of records and information in any organization. The policy provides the foundation for the creation, capture, control, use, maintenance and disposition of records in the custody and control of the organization. The policy being recommended for adoption by Council here in St. Albert also provides a clear statement of the value Council places on corporate information as one of our most important assets, and Council's commitment (and expectation that Administration will be committed) to timely and accurate access to information, protection of residents' personal information, and preservation of corporate memory.

In 2011 a comprehensive review of the City's RIM practices was conducted by a third-party consultant, resulting in recommendations to move the City along the path to a fully functioning RIM Program. The consultant's findings at that time indicated that the City's RIM practices were not at the standard of most organizations of comparable size. While some efforts have been made over the last 8 years, the City has not kept pace with developments in records management and must now move with a greater sense of urgency to avoid greater risks in the areas of accessibility and accountability.

A key finding of the 2011 review was the requirement for a Records and Information Management Policy in support of the RIM program.

A plan to design, implement and maintain a RIM program is nearing completion and will be set out in administrative directives upon adoption of the recommended RIM Policy. The plan will address core systems such as: RIM governance documentation, records classification and retention, electronic records software implementation, digitization and preservation. The recommended RIM Policy will drive implementation of the plan while also allowing Council to exercise an appropriate level of governance oversight. Without delving into the granular details of RIM, Administration wishes to draw the attention of the Committee and Council to two very important considerations:

1. At some point soon, driven by ever-increasing volumes of records and demands for timely and accurate access to those records and the information they contain, the City will have to acquire and implement electronic records management software ("ERMS"). This will come with a cost, but the return will be substantial and will greatly outweigh the cost of not adopting EMRS:
 - (a) the City's records will be managed in near real-time and allow for on-demand access: users will find the information they need in seconds or minutes, as opposed to the hours or days that too often are required now;
 - (b) electronic records will be stored, accessed, used and preserved in their native format, thereby leveraging built-in functionalities that allow for accurate business decision making;
 - (c) privacy requirements mandated by legislation will become much easier to comply with under an

ERMS that is safeguarded by proven technologies -- and the risk of inadvertent non-compliance will therefore drop significantly;

(d) public access to City records can be significantly expanded and made more timely and transparent, thereby fostering greater public trust in City government;

(e) Transitioning to electronic records will reduce the City's carbon footprint.

2. Corporate memory preservation has become a huge issue in many in organizations with aging workforces, and the City of St. Albert is no exception. Workforces are seeing a rise in retirement rates which can result in a high degree of corporate information loss if not captured, stored, disseminated and preserved. With strong RIM support, a corporate memory preservation program will ensure that valuable information remains accessible to those who follow in the footsteps of retiring "baby boomers".

In the absence of the clear commitment and direction that a Council Policy provides, a RIM program cannot support key business processes and provide timely and accurate management of City records. Managing the City's records to an acceptable standard is essential to allow records to be accessible and used in a confident and reliable manner in the future. With a RIM Policy in place and under the governance oversight of Council, the City will be well positioned to respond to the ever-greater information demands that we know will be forthcoming from many stakeholders both internal and external. This policy provides the foundation to transition and maintain the City's RIM practices at an acceptable standard well into the future.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

Although the general public will eventually see direct benefit from an improved City RIM program, at this stage the initiative is primarily internally focused, so the public has not yet been engaged. Internally, there is a cross-functional team examining and planning for a future data governance program, which is a natural extension and value-add to records management. That team has been engaged in the process leading to the present recommendation for adoption of a Council Policy on records and information management.

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial:

No immediate implications, although Policy implementation will have cost implications and associated benefits as set out in this report.

Legal / Risk:

Adoption of a RIM Policy, and the consequential progress toward an acceptable RIM program, will materially decrease the risk of legal non-compliance in the discovery process of litigation, and in the process of gathering and disclosing relevant records in response to request for disclosure under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

The RIM Program will also materially decrease the risk of Council and senior leadership making decisions based on incomplete, inaccurate or outdated information.

Program or Service:

The improvement in RIM practices that would be triggered by the signal Council would send in adopting an RIM Policy, will have positive domino effects in improving efficiencies across the whole range of programs and services offered by the City.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

If the Committee does not wish to support the recommendation to Council, the Committee could either make no recommendation at all or choose to recommend that an RIM Policy not be adopted.

This course of action would risk sending a message that Council does not place a high value on City records and information as key corporate assets. This in turn could make it more difficult to bring about needed improvements to current RIM practices.

Report Date: December 9, 2019

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