

Mayor Deb Higgins Column, July 26, 2013

As elected officials, City Council receives comments or input from citizens in a variety of ways. Conversations are often held one-on-one or with groups of citizens when we are attending community events, at meetings, or going about our daily business. Individuals or groups may attend a Council meeting to make a more formal proposal or address an issue that is a concern, but more often than not, it is either by phone, email or letter that we receive a majority of our feedback and input from the community.

Often, this input or feedback will be focused on a particular complaint or situation that is of concern to an individual. We all too seldom have an opportunity to discuss or receive input from citizens on a broad range of city initiatives or proposals for the future of our community.

Currently, we will see City Administration put forward priorities to address issues and plan for future development followed by input by City Council. These priorities often fall into categories of making good sense, saving money, meet the need, save time, or fulfill certain community standards - yet public decisions are not always based on that straightforward of a discussion. While Council brings public and personal opinions to the table, the piece missing from this process is citizen engagement - your input into the decision-making process and the broader understanding of what residents want and expect.

The question is, how best to engage a broad range of citizens in planning a vision for our City?

Citizen engagement, or involving citizens in planning decisions, is recognized as an opportunity to build trust, value and in the long run, build a better municipal government. Previous instances of public consultations and engagement in Moose Jaw have proven successful, with good response to previous meetings to discuss the City's Strategic Plan, or more recent local area planning sessions on the future of South Hill, or the information meeting on the proposed 3rd avenue dam replacement.

These events have clearly shown Moose Jaw citizens are interested, willing to devote their time, sharing ideas and contributing to the future of our community.

There are many options, but to begin citizen engagement, City Council approved a citizen survey to be completed by the end of August. This survey is a chance for a broader cross section of residents to provide input on a variety of different topics. While many problem areas are evident to each of us, this input will ultimately provide a measure of citizen interests and priorities in a number of areas, along with an assessment of city services.

The survey results will be used to assist City Council and City Administration with the renewal of the City's Strategic Plan, our working guideline for future development, activities, services and projects across the City. The survey will be conducted by phone and begin within the next two weeks.

I would encourage you to participate if contacted. After all, it's your community and you have a right to be part of the discussion.

Deb Higgins
Mayor