

## Understanding Municipal Decision makers and Influencers Webinar Questions and Answers

Approximately 135 participants from across Canada joined the Understanding Municipal Decision makers and Influencers webinar held on January 23, 2014 from 10:30 to 11:30 EST. The webinar was presented by Kim Bergeron, a Health Promotion Field Support Specialist with the Health Promotion Capacity Building Services team at PHO and Nicole Niedra, a Policy Analyst in the Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention Department of the Niagara Region. During the webinar, participants were invited to submit questions via the chat feature in Adobe Connect. Below are the questions submitted and answers provided by Kim Bergeron and Nicole Niedra.

### **Q1: Must there be a municipal policy in place before implementing a by-law?**

**A1:** By-law development is one way to model overarching municipal policies; however, it is not required that a municipal policy be in place prior to implementing a by-law.

Alignment between municipal policies and by-laws is key. If you can demonstrate that a potential by-law is clearly linked to a municipal policy (e.g., Official Plan), the probability of it being considered can increase. Therefore, it is important to have an understanding of the current municipal policies related to your topic of interest and/or by-law focus.

### **Q2: Can you share a bit more information about the role of the municipal clerk in relation to by-laws?**

**A2:** The municipal clerk is the secretary of the municipal council and the municipality as a whole. The municipal clerk is responsible for record-keeping related to municipal administration (e.g., policy and procedure manuals, statutory documents such as by-laws, subdivision agreements, local improvement agreements, etc.). Examples of duties of the clerk include:<sup>1</sup>

- Recording, without note or comment all resolutions, decisions, and other proceedings of council;
- Recording the name and vote of every member voting on any matter or question;
- Keeping the originals or copies of all by-laws and all minutes of the proceedings of the council; and
- Performing the other duties required under the Municipal Act.

In short, the municipal clerk keeps records of all by-laws and related policies. He/she has a comprehensive understanding of the procedural requirements for the municipality.

**Q3: With respect to social determinants of health and health equity, there are by-law options that are outside traditional public health focus (e.g., transit, taxi, and housing). In what ways can public health professionals be involved in this work and how can they build support within their public health unit?**

**A3:** One way to become involved in work being done to address social determinants of health and health equity is to develop partnerships with organizations that provide services to those living on low-income (e.g., United Way, Social Planning Councils, Community Health Centres). In addition, there are a number of health units in Ontario that are directly working in this area (e.g., Sudbury, Peterborough, Ottawa, and Hamilton). Consider learning how they built support within their health unit.

**Q4: What is the best way to determine whether an issue is best addressed at the provincial or municipal level?**

**A4:** The best way to determine where to focus your efforts is to develop an understanding of the existing provincial and municipal legislation and policies related to your topic of interest. The first step is to determine the provincial ministry or municipal department that could be responsible for your topic of interest. One way to do this is to review the mandates of individual ministries and departments. The next step is to review existing legislation, strategic plans, policies and/or other publicly available material (e.g., performance measures, result-based reports) related to your topic of interest within the ministries/departments that have a relevant mandate. This is best accomplished by using the search feature on their website and typing in your topic of interest. Armed with this information you will be better equipped to determine where to focus your efforts. For example, if there is provincial policy but you are unable to find how the municipality is modeling the policy, you may want to focus your efforts at the municipal level. If you find that there is no provincial policy but municipal efforts are evident (e.g., review of Council minutes reveal that they are discussing your topic of interest), you may want to explore further at the municipal level. If you find that there are no efforts addressing your topic of interest then you may want to expand your search to see if other organizations and/or partnerships are encouraging a governmental response for your topic of interest and if so, at what level of government. This can be accomplished by using Google. For example, recent efforts by public health professionals and other interested stakeholders such as the Canadian Cancer Society involved advocating for provincial legislation to limit under-age access to tanning beds.

**Q5: Has Niagara Region Public Health evaluated the success (i.e., policy change observed) as a result of the policy analyst position that was created?**

**A5:** The policy analyst position was created in late 2011 to fill a gap in expertise. The role has not been formally evaluated, however we developed processes and tools to document and track the policy work that is being done. In that way we are able to show progress (see “Tracking Policy Progression Template” below for an example).

**Q6: Can Niagara Region Public Health share the tools described during the webinar?**

**A6:** The tools developed by Niagara Region Public Health are described below and can be found at <http://healthylivingniagara.com/>

**Municipal Strategic Plan Matrix:** The purpose of this matrix is to develop a better understanding of local priorities outlined in the municipal strategic plans and to identify potential opportunities for alignment and collaboration.

**Media Tracking Template:** This template is used to populate information related to the work of public health - monitoring the local context for emerging or ongoing issues.

**Tracking Policy Progression Template:** This template is used to track policy development progress from one year to the next. It is important to keep in mind that policy change often happens over long periods of time.

**Council Meeting Minute Review Template:** This template is used to review council meeting minutes to develop a better understanding of local decision makers and their competing interests or priorities.

**Q7: What is the best way to get a topic of interest on Council's radar?**

**A7:** Consider following the eight steps for developing a municipal by-law.<sup>3</sup>

As you work through the first five steps you will learn about the issue and the knowledge and actions of Council. In step one you will clearly define the public health problem that needs to be addressed. Then you will work to identify by-law options to be considered (step two) and assess municipal readiness for by-law development (step three). Through steps four and five you will begin to understand municipal decision makers and influencers and be able to generate ideas for how to build support for the by-law (step five).

One way to apply this information is to write a briefing note. You may also use the briefing note to request time to make a deputation (presentation) during a Council meeting. Most municipalities have a formal deputation process that often includes filing information about your deputation with the municipal clerk prior to the presentation.

**Q8: When encouraging a municipal by-law, does it matter whether the person or the group of people live within the municipality?**

**A8:** By-laws are designed to meet the needs of and solve problems for citizens.<sup>4</sup> This means that it is advantageous for by-law proponents to live within the municipality. As local residents have the opportunity to vote in municipal elections, municipal council members are generally interested in addressing their concerns.

When an organization that provides services within the municipality wants to support a by-law, it is not as important that those who work within the organization actually live within the municipality. In this situation, it is more important that the organization can demonstrate an understanding of the community and how a specific by-law could be a solution.

The following information was shared using the chat feature:

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities will host the 2014 Annual Conference and Trade Show May 30, 2014 to June 2014 in Niagara Falls, Ontario ([www.fcm.ca](http://www.fcm.ca)); and
- The Association of Road Superintendents ([www.aors.on.ca](http://www.aors.on.ca)) and the Ontario Good Roads Association ([www.ogra.org](http://www.ogra.org)) were identified as relevant resources related to increasing active transportation infrastructure and opportunities.

## References

1. Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario. Municipal administration program unit 2: The municipal administrative structure. 2012.
2. Public Health Ontario, Health Promotion Capacity Building. Roadmap for by-law development: Eight steps for developing a municipal by-law [document on the Internet]. 2013 [last accessed 2014 February 7]. Available from: <http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/LearningAndDevelopment/Events/Documents/Bylaw%20development%20at%20a%20glance%20w%20disclaimer.pdf>
3. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, Health Promotion Capacity Building Services. Roadmap for By-Law Development. Toronto. 2013.
4. MacLean MV, Tomlinson JR. A user's guide to municipal by-laws. 2nd ed. Markham, ON: LexisNexis Canada Inc.; 2008.

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