

A City Hall Built for Better Customer Service

City staff work for everyone, and they can't pick and choose their customers. City staff often find themselves facing conflicting directions from multiple sources of leadership – junior managers, the CAO, City Council – and departmental silos don't reward flexibility, initiative, or candor when it comes to solving problems. We need a system-wide cultural change to deliver better value and service to Winnipeg residents.

Fact: More than 80% of resident contacts with City Hall are through the phone

CHALLENGES TO FACE

- Based on the City of Winnipeg's own surveys, a declining number of residents believe they are receiving value for money from city services. This trend began shortly before the pandemic and accelerated during the pandemic.
- Significant service cuts were made during the pandemic to compensate for economic and fiscal disruption from lost transit revenue, higher paramedic costs and other challenges. Since the province did not match all available federal funds, Winnipeg has not received as much federal or provincial pandemic relief to compensate, leaving some gaps in service delivery.
- As in dozens of other cities in North America, the 311 system in Winnipeg is critical to how City Hall is supposed to manage service. Data from resident calls and complaints is meant to be used by Council and management to drive service changes. If people don't connect with 311, City Hall won't get a realistic picture of what needs fixing, and people who need service won't be getting it.
- Morale at 311 is low as poor pay, high turnover and other challenges came to the fore during the pandemic. In 2019, average call response times were less than three minutes. Now, average connections take far longer.
- City Hall isn't organized around service to residents, taxpayers, or customers. It's organized in silos. Too often, a nearby problem is "someone else's job."
- Managers are tasked with too many competing missions at once. For example, the Property Planning and Development department must be a regulator, an enforcer, a policy shop and a customer service unit all at the same time, creating conflicts in approvals priorities and service delivery.

Scott Gillingham's Solutions

NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION TEAMS FOR BETTER STREET SERVICE

- ✓ City services need to be more flexible on the ground. Scott believes we need more on-street maintenance staff – but that they must be cross-trained teams available to fix problems the way residents see those problems: "from the street up, not from the departmental silo down."
- ✓ As Mayor, Scott will introduce three "Neighborhood Action Teams" (total 30 workers) in 2023-24, with room to expand if the concept is successful. Teams will be dispatched from neighborhood to

neighborhood to plow, plant, patch, repair, replace, rehab, move, mend or mow whatever is necessary. They will work directly with existing community groups to address priority problems, and flag backlogged and unresolved issues for follow-up by specialists in other departments.

- ✓ Teams would report to the CAO, but coordinate with area councillors, MLAs and MPs, and consult with local businesses and community groups to identify backlogged issues. Each team would file public reports using 311-compatible data and other metrics to assess value for money. Team staff would also support city-wide efforts during major weather events. The CAO will have discretion to redeploy each team for city-wide work (for example, to help snow crews during a major snowstorm) whenever appropriate.

INVEST 25% MORE PER YEAR IN 311 UNTIL IT'S FIXED

- ✓ As Mayor, Scott will increase the 311 unit's budget by at least 25% of its current budget annually (+\$1.1m in 2023) until quarterly call connection averages drop below three minutes. Funds can be used for hiring, pay, retention pay or training as needed. To reduce pressure on the call centre, Scott's plan will also deliver a 311 chatbot with live and scripted contacts to handle basic fact inquiries. New policies will ensure 311 staff have clear permission to terminate abusive calls, and language diversity will be a priority for 311 hiring to improve responses for New Canadians. 311 service must improve to ensure all 311 contacts are updated on the status of their request.
- ✓ Scott will also ask the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks to review 311 to determine if it is appropriate for selected city offices to receive direct calls as a temporary measure until 311 call outcomes improve

REORGANIZE CITY HALL FOR BETTER CUSTOMER SERVICE

- ✓ Scott will lead a reorganization of City Hall over the next four years to unite customer-facing services like 311 and permits into a single customer service department. The new department will be led by a manager with experience in public or private sector customer fulfillment. By-law enforcement agencies will also be united into a single department. (Note: a likely result of these changes will also be the creation stand-alone City Planning unit, led by a Chief Planner).
- ✓ Scott supports adding at least six development case officers to the public service to help businesses and citizens secure faster permits and development approvals. Under Gillingham's proposal, development case officers would report to the new customer service department rather than the existing Property, Planning and Development department, giving the new case officers the freedom to independently flag problematic delays, practices or procedures to City Council and senior management.

MANAGING CITY SERVICES TO OBJECTIVES

- ✓ As Mayor, Scott will lead City Council to formally adopt key performance measures in its strategic plan and hold the CAO and senior managers accountable for delivering to those objectives. Too often in the last twenty years, City Hall has measured results by inputs or process rather than outcomes. A cultural change is needed to ensure talented City staff and managers have more room to act, be flexible and take risks if they can demonstrate delivery of positive, measurable results.