



Date of Meeting January 27, 2022

Subject Census 2022

Submitted By Bonnie Hilford, City Clerk

Purpose

To determine if the City will be conducting a municipal census in 2022.

Recommendation(s)

That the Governance Standing Policy Committee recommend that Council cancel the 2022 municipal census.

Summary

City Council adopted a resolution that the City conduct a municipal census in 2022. Because of the current uncertainties with a census software program and COVID (difficulty in recruiting census takers and the health and safety of those workers), as well as the fact there is now no financial benefit (grants) to conducting the municipal census, it is recommended to cancel the 2022 census. In the interim, the data from the 2021 federal census will be released this year, which is much more comprehensive (more questions asked than the municipal census).

Previous Council Direction

At the January 27, 2020 Council Meeting, Council passed the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct Administration to:

- 1. Cancel the Municipal Census for 2020;*
- 2. Conduct the Municipal Census for 2021;*
- 3. Cancel the Municipal Census for 2022; and*
- 4. Prior to the next 4-year budget cycle, analyze and compare the 2021 Federal Census data to the 2021 Municipal Census data and engage with stakeholders who use the data to assess if a Municipal Census is required in 2023 or thereafter.*

At the December 14, 2020 Council Meeting, Council amended the 2019 – 2022 Operating Budget by adopting Reduction Initiative A-27 Municipal Census 2021 Census Reducing Taxation that postponed the 2021 Census to 2022 due to COVID.

Background and Prior Decisions

The City has conducted a census almost every year since 1954. For the last five years, the data has obtained average annual provincial and federal grant funding in the amount of \$423,900, with the average annual census cost being \$152,324, resulting in an average annual net gain of \$271,576.

The Province announced as part of the 2019 budget, that they will transition from using municipal census numbers to a system of provincially developed population estimates to allocate municipal grants. It was announced that Treasury Board and Finance will develop the municipal population estimates, which will come into effect in 2021 and be based on a widely accepted methodology used in other provinces. The methodology will be produced by the Government of Alberta in collaboration with Statistics Canada. It has been confirmed with Municipal Affairs that the 2019 Municipal Census (101,482) will be used as the basis for 2020 provincial and federal grants. Because of COVID, it was also used for 2021 grants. To date, the actual formula used by the provincial government to calculate the census numbers has not been shared with the municipalities.

The municipal census was deemed worthwhile to continue every few years because it provides population and dwelling information on a neighbourhood basis. The municipal census continues to be considered as feasible for the following reasons:

- it is responsive to a growing City;
- it captures a large portion of our community (students) that would otherwise be missed;
- it indicates, at a geographic scale, what is happening, demographically, within our neighborhoods;
- is used by many internal and external stakeholders; and
- it identifies community growth patterns and assists in planning for future services, programs, and development as well as assists decisions regarding future transportation networks, location of schools, parks, utilities, and fire protection facilities.

A federal census is conducted every five years, the last year being 2021. Results from the 2021 census will be released in 2022. More questions are asked on the Federal Census than the Municipal Census including marital status, family characteristics, household and dwelling characteristics, mother tongue, knowledge of official languages, income, citizenship, and ethnic origin.

Analysis and Options

Uncertainties with proceeding with the 2022 census stem from the following areas:

- COVID
 - No expected changes by spring with the new Omicron variant, which may lead to difficulties to obtain full and accurate data;

- Recruitment of census takers – it will be difficult to hire the 140–150 census takers, as was experienced with the election. The health and safety of the workers is a significant consideration.
 - Practices – The City historically generates most of the data from the census takers going repeatedly back to the residences. Only 40 – 45% of the data is provided online. The rest is through the efforts of the census takers. Alternative of mailing – at least 4,000 dwelling units do not have mailing addresses.
 - Unoccupied basement suites and residences - information is usually confirmed through the neighbours. This will be more difficult in the COVID environment.
 - Actual numbers - because of the number of students that are attending the University and the College virtually, the numbers will be lower.
- Census Software – We have been using census software from the City of Airdrie for the past number of years. Airdrie has advised they would not be offering the software in 2022 as they are upgrading their software this year.

Due to the above, as well as the fact there is now no financial benefit to conducting the municipal census, it is recommended to cancel the 2022 census. In the interim, we could use the data from the federal census which is much more comprehensive (more questions asked than the municipal census).

Implications

Community/Citizen

Health and Safety of the census takers and the community. Census takers will be difficult to recruit. Since there are many residences that are basement suites, apartments, condominiums, and the like, it will be difficult to go to each resident without adding to the health and safety of the census takers and the community.

Financial

The cost to conduct the census is \$200,000.

Risk

Health and safety of the census takers and the community.

Corporate

None

Engagement

The Executive Leadership Team endorsed cancelling the 2022 census at their meeting of December 13, 2021.

The City of Red Deer has confirmed that they are cancelling their 2022 Census due to COVID and health and safety reasons.

Implementation and Communication Plan

The City historically starts advertising for census takers at the end of January, hires in February, trains them in March, with census to start April 1st.

Attachment(s)

None.

Approvals

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| City Treasurer: | Darrell Mathews |
| City Solicitor: | Brian Loewen |
| Department Director: | Bonnie Hilford |
| City Manager: | Craig Dalton |