

**DELEGATIONS WILL NO LONGER BE HEARD AT CITY COUNCIL
(THE) PUBLIC MATTERS
REGINA CITY COUNCIL
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When I first heard that City Council had voted unanimously to ban members of the public from speaking at City Council meetings, I was shocked. What could have prompted Council to take such a decision?

Then I felt hurt—so hurt that, to my surprise, I actually shed a few tears. Why would our city council do this to us? Why would you show such contempt for members of the public? Doesn't the public matter to you?

I see you have made an exception of budget meetings. Thanks a lot! But we just might wish to speak to City Council on other matters.

You say we can have our say at Executive Committee meetings. But it is at City Council that decisions on public matters, matters that matter to the public, are made. That is where we want and need to speak!

The Executive Committee is a lower level body—a committee of City Council. You are demoting us, the public who you were elected to serve. You are treating us as if we don't very much matter.

I recall times in the past—the stadium or the waste water treatment plant debates, for example—when 20 delegations presented at a particular meeting. Members of Council didn't think then of banishing us from Council meetings.

Here are some of the reasons for the decision that members of Council have given in interviews, conversation, or emails:

First, the Conversion Therapy Debate: It was difficult enough following this debate online or in the media. It must have been agonizing to have had to sit through it all. You have my sympathy.

However, the conversion therapy debate was likely a one-off. But even if something like it were to come your way again, I assume it would be better managed.

Surely, for example, it could be mandated that only those with a Regina address be allowed to speak. And now that presentations have, once again, to be submitted beforehand, those containing discriminatory language or hate speech could be excluded.

Another reason Council members have given for the decision has to do with repeat speakers. Some people present on an issue at the Executive Committee and then again at City Council. Realtors and developers were specifically mentioned. This is, indeed, a waste of your time.

But rather than banning us all from speaking at Council, why not pass a motion that an individual can speak on a particular issue either at City Council or at Executive Committee, but not both? That would allow us, the public, to decide where we want to speak. It would grant us agency.

A third and related reason given for the banning has to do with what one member of council called “an efficient use of time.” It was not too long ago that Council met only once a month. Now it is meeting twice a month and meetings still keep getting longer and longer.

But is this the fault of the public? After all, we each only get five minutes to speak. Aside from repeat speakers, I don’t think it is members of the public speaking at council meetings that is the problem. Perhaps council members should look elsewhere for inefficient uses of time.

And even if it is our fault, you are just shifting the problem from one committee to another—from City Council to the Executive Committee.

Another possibility would be to de-establish the Executive Committee and incorporate its responsibilities into a revised mandate for City Council. That would mean one less meeting for members of City Council.

Members of Council have also suggested that banning the public from speaking at City Council is a common practice in Canadian cities. I did a bit of research on the question, asking friends who live in various Canadian cities what the practice is in their city, as well as doing google searches.

The results of my research are as follows: North Vancouver, Saskatoon, Windsor, Kingston, London, St. John, and Charlottetown all allow the public to speak at council meetings. These are cities of a similar size to Regina.

And while some bigger Canadian cities—Vancouver and Toronto, for example—have banned the public from speaking at their council meetings, Regina is definitely not a bigger city.

Banning the public from speaking at City Council meetings not only shows contempt for the public. It undermines democracy. As I said earlier, City Council meetings are where decisions are made. In a truly democratic society, the public must be allowed to speak at these meetings.

I therefore call on Regina City Council to reverse your decision to ban the public from speaking at Council. In so doing, you will restore democracy. You will also begin to repair the relationship between the public and City Council by showing that the public does matter to you.