

To: Chief Administrative Officer
From: Jennifer Russell, Corporate Officer
Subject: Freedom of the City Award Policy

Date: March 20, 2023

Recommendation(s)

That Freeman Award Policy AWA.2 be amended by:

- a) changing the name to “Freedom of the City Award Policy”;
- b) replacing the word “Freemen” in section 8 with the words “persons who have received a Freedom of the City award”; and
- c) replacing all instances of the word “District” with the word “City”.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend gender neutral language for the current policy regarding the Freedom of the City award.

Background

Freedom of the City is the highest award that Council can confer and is given for conspicuously exceptional and distinguished community service. It grants a recipient the privilege of voting in any Mission municipal election regardless of where the person may currently be living.

The authority to bestow this privilege comes from section 158 of the *Community Charter*, which states:

- (1) *A council may, by unanimous vote, confer freedom of the municipality on*
 - (a) *a distinguished person, or*
 - (b) *a distinguished unit of the armed forces of Canada or another nation.*
- (2) *Unless the council revokes the honour, a person given freedom of the municipality or the commander of the armed forces unit, as applicable,*
 - (a) *is deemed to be an elector of the municipality and is eligible to be registered as such and to vote in an election for mayor or councillor, and*
 - (b) *despite any other enactment, if the person is a Canadian citizen, is deemed to be qualified to be nominated, be elected and hold office on the council.*

Staff were directed in late 2021 to explore the viability of changing the “Freeman of the City” award title to a more gender-neutral alternative. At that point in time, the preparations for the bi-annual community awards ceremony were well underway, and accordingly any policy review that could potentially affect that event was put on hold.

Discussion and Analysis

Most of the language in the existing policy avoids specifying gender; it is the title itself that causes the issue. Many gender-specific terms can be fixed by simply replacing “man” with “person” (example: the *Ombudsman Act* was changed to the *Ombudsperson Act*) however this is not the best option in this case as the term Freeperson already has historical meaning. The easiest and best course of action is to follow the lead of the *Community Charter* and avoid gender references altogether.

Despite the language in the policy, City staff have already made adjustments regarding how the Freedom of the City award process is done. The medals given to award recipients used to read “Freeman Award”, and as of 2022 they read “Freedom of the City”. Official correspondence and invitations to persons who have received a Freedom of the City Award will be addressed to “Dear Honoured Citizen”, rather than “Dear Freeman”. A person may also, of course, specify how they wish to be formally addressed and City staff will follow their lead.

As an aside to this report, the Government of Canada – Culture, history and sport website contains resources for anyone wishing to learn about inclusive writing: <https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inclusive-writing-guidelines-resources#guidelines>

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Communication

No communication action is required.

Report Prepared by: Jennifer Russell, Corporate Officer
Reviewed by: Christine Brough, Executive Assistant
Approved for Inclusion: Mike Younie, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment(s)

Attachment A: Freeman Award Policy AWA.2