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Community Engagement Advisory Committee

Councillor Russell Thomas, seeking re-election in Monday's municipal election, is calling for the creation of a Community Engagement Advisory Committee.

"We have heard very clearly from citizens during the last four weeks that we need to do a better job of community engagement," said Thomas. "Out of many conversations and the questions posed on The Talking Stick, I will be advocating for the creation of a committee that would serve as an engagement think tank."

Thomas is suggesting a Council appointed committee get struck that directly addresses the need to re-think how citizen concerns, input and ideas get heard.

"If we empower a grassroots committee to create out-of-the-box ideas about how to engage our citizens, it will resonate much more strongly than initiatives that come from within the organization. Going above and beyond the legislated requirements for notification hasn't inspired the desired connectivity between regional council and our citizens. I believe we have amazing people who would come up with brilliant ideas that could make an immediate difference."

The formation of a new committee would require time to set-up, get council approval, and go through a selection process, but would immediately signal to the public a determination to improve in this area.

"I can think of 5 to 10 individuals who would be incredibly effective on a community engagement advisory committee," said Thomas. "Many of these people have expressed concern about what we have been doing and would be excellent candidates to apply for this voluntary appointment. Why not tap into the great ideas and energy of our citizens, so they can help us be better?"

Thomas is also interested in using this proposed engagement think tank to explore ways of engaging youth.

“I feel strongly that our young people need to help design the future of the community and region they will inherit,” said Thomas. “Bringing some passionate young people into this innovation process would go a long way to getting the invaluable input of this sector of our population.”

Inspired by a recent keynote by Dave Meslin during the Heart of Wood Buffalo Leadership Awards, Thomas is convinced that we need to fundamentally change how we do community engagement and how we communicate with our citizens.

“People want to be heard. They want the opportunity to share their concerns, ideas and passion. My suggestion is to ask some community volunteers to step forward and help us figure out better ways of making this happen. Based on initial feedback, this is an idea whose time has come.”

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