



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

Report To:	Council
From:	Meaghen Reid, Director, Legislative & Legal Services/Deputy Clerk
Date:	September 21, 2020
Report No:	CORS-050-20
Subject:	Continued Remote Council Meetings for 2020
Recommendation:	THAT Council meetings be held remotely until the end of 2020; and THAT staff be directed to bring forward a staff report by December 2020 with recommendations for Council meetings in 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Since March 2020, Council meetings have been held remotely (or electronically) to obtain necessary approvals during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- At this time, remote meetings are the safest option to gather for Council decision-making and it provides flexibility to quickly adapt to the changing circumstances of the current pandemic.
- The recommendation for Council meetings to be held remotely until the end of 2020 has been made with considerations for Council Chambers, Ontario's Framework for Recovery - Stage 3, public health advice, health and safety and technology. Staff have also considered a scan of municipal practices in Halton and neighbouring regions.

REPORT

Background

On July 9, 2020, Council approved the Town of Milton Recovery Program Strategy and Framework with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated within the Recovery Program Strategy, the following guiding principles continue to be applied to decision making:

- Safety of staff and the public is of paramount importance;
- Continuation in the delivery of essential public services;
- Responding to the needs of the community as the pandemic evolves;
- Fair and equitable treatment of the Town's workforce;

- Fiscal responsibility and appropriate use of taxpayers funding.

Since March 2020, Council meetings have been held remotely (or electronically) to obtain necessary approvals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Council amended the Town's Procedural By-law on March 30, 2020, May 11, 2020 and June 22, 2020 to allow for remote meetings of Council and set out provisions for remote meetings. The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020 amended the Municipal Act to allow municipal councils to continue to meet remotely indefinitely after an emergency is declared. On August 24, 2020, Council amended the Town's Procedure By-law to include provisions that would allow Council to meet remotely indefinitely in accordance with the Municipal Act. Staff have continued to implement more functionality to remote meetings for efficiency and to create more opportunities for remote participation at Council meetings.

Discussion

It is the recommendation of staff that Council meetings continue to be held remotely for the remainder of 2020 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote meetings are the safest option to gather for decision-making and it provides flexibility to quickly adapt to the changing circumstances of the current pandemic.

This recommendation to continue with remote meetings has been made with considerations for Council Chambers, in light of public health advice, Ontario's Framework for Recovery - Stage 3, health and safety and technology. Staff have also considered a scan of municipal practices in Halton and neighbouring regions.

In communications regarding COVID-19, Halton Public Health advises to work from home, if possible, and to use technology to keep in touch. When outside your home, Halton Public Health advises that you should practice physical distancing to stop or slow down the spread of COVID-19 in the community by limiting close contact with others. This means staying at least 2 metres (or 6 feet) away from other people whenever possible.

Due to the need for the live streaming of meetings for open meetings and the technology that currently exists to support live streaming, Council Chambers is presently the only room option available for currently holding in-person recorded or live-streamed Council meetings. Another venue, such as a larger meeting room, for Council meetings would require adequate physical distancing (at least 2 metres or 6 feet away) for all members of Council and staff, as well as the public. Public attendance for open meetings would be needed for meetings without livestreaming options and it would not be recommended that public attendance at a meeting be restricted due to room capacity resulting from physical distancing requirements. Any other venue that is chosen to host meetings would require technology provision/installation in order to accommodate the same level of recording/streaming functionality that is currently offered with the remote option.

On July 24, 2020, the Region of Halton entered Stage 3 of Ontario's Framework for Recovery indoor gathering is limited to 50 persons. However, based on the square footage requirements for distancing, the maximum capacity for Council Chambers would be 20 persons.

As part of the Town's Recovery Program Strategy and Framework, risk assessments are conducted to help Town of Milton workplaces identify potential COVID-19 risks to employees while at work, identify ways to reduce worker exposures, and to provide a tool for Town of Milton workplaces with developing an exposure control plan based on the results of performing a risk assessment. For in-person Council meetings in Council Chambers, a risk assessment will take into consideration the entrance/exist of the room and building, plexi-glass partitions and other personal protective equipment, cleaning and disinfection practices and workspace layout. It is expected that physical modifications would also be needed to be made to the set-up in Council Chambers for in-person meetings. Safety protocols and procedures, including screening, would be required to address risks related to COVID-19 but, ultimately, remote meetings alleviate all risk associated with in-person meetings.

Effective July 22, 2020, wearing a non-medical mask or face covering is mandatory in certain enclosed indoor public places in Halton Region. Some individuals are exempt. The by-law is in effect until November 30, 2020, unless extended by Regional Council. Policies and procedures would need to be considered for the transition to in-person Council meetings for all non-staff, as non-medical masks or face coverings are mandatory for all staff working in circumstances where physical distancing cannot be adequately maintained.

In-person Council meetings in Council Chambers would not fully replace the need for electronic participation. For Council members, staff and the public require to connect to the meeting electronically due to meeting room restrictions or any other reason (ie. self-isolation), an electronic meeting platform would need to be integrated with the current AV system and the current live stream recording within Council Chambers. This would be required for members of the public (both at home and in Council Chambers), staff and Council are able to clearly identify, see and hear all participating members who are present physically and electronically. In-person meetings, with forms of electronic participation, would result in a hybrid meeting structure, which would require increased logistical processes to ensure a seamless end-to-end experience for all individuals, whether participating in-person or remotely. A hybrid structure could also require more in-person staffing to assist with meeting logistics, such as managing room capacity. Currently, the Town of Milton has a strong staff team that can continue to support remote meetings for the remainder of 2020 and adapt when necessary.

Municipalities across the province are adapting their Council meeting procedures and logistics in light of the current pandemic and the recent legislative changes, likely taking into consideration their respective: Council Chambers size and features, technology,



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access to broadband and recovery plans. Currently, Halton region municipalities (Halton Region, Oakville, Burlington and Halton Hills) are continuing with remote Council meetings at this time. Through a scan of municipalities, similar-sized and larger municipalities continue to conduct remote Council meetings for the time-being and up to the end of 2020.

In light of this recommendation, staff are also looking at opportunities to better support remote statutory public meetings.

Staff recommend continued remote Council meetings for the remainder of 2020 due to the considerations discussed above. Council direction on this matter will allow staff the ability to plan ahead for the remainder of this year throughout any changing circumstances of this pandemic.

Financial Impact

No financial impacts as a result of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Troy McHarg
Commissioner, Corporate Services / Town Clerk

For questions, please contact: Name: Phone: Ext.

Attachments

n/a

CAO Approval
Andrew M. Siltala
Chief Administrative Officer