



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

Report To:	Council
From:	Meaghen Reid, Director, Legislative & Legal Services / Town Clerk
Date:	December 14, 2020
Report No:	CORS-065-20
Subject:	Hybrid Format for Council Meetings
Recommendation:	THAT Council meetings continue to be held remotely until the required modifications are made to Council Chambers, which will allow for a hybrid meeting format for Council meetings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On August 24, 2020, Council amended the Procedure By-law to allow for continued remote Council meetings, including electronic participation for members of Council outside of a declared emergency. On September 21, 2020, Council approved the recommendation to hold Council meetings remotely until the end of 2020.
- Staff are recommending a phased-in, hybrid approach whereby modifications to Council Chambers would allow for hybrid meeting format, with some members and the public able to connect remotely and some members returning in-person to Council Chambers.
- It is recommended that Council meetings be held remotely until such time as the required technology, audio visual, and facility modifications are completed, to facilitate hybrid Council meetings with both remote and in-person participation. It is estimated that this work would be completed by mid-2021, if Council approves the recommendation in this report.
- Implementation of a hybrid approach would require approximately \$65,000 in capital costs (accommodated within existing capital projects) related to AV and physical changes to Council Chambers, as well as an annual operating cost of \$1,700 associated with the addition of a staff person during Council meetings. Due to the changes to legislation allowing more flexibility for electronic participation and to expectations resulting from COVID-19, there will be a longer-term need for electronic participation at Council meetings for Council members and the public. Therefore, staff recommend that these modifications be implemented in Council Chambers.



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

REPORT

Background

Review of Procedure By-law changes

Since March of 2020, Council has amended the Procedure By-law several times in order to adapt to the legislative changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to accommodate remote meeting participation. Furthermore, there have been a number of additional changes and enhancements implemented with respect to Council meetings:

- Procedure amendments have been presented and passed specifically related to holding Council meetings remotely and provisions for delegations to participate electronically;
- Specific electronic processes and enhancements have been implemented to support public meetings held under the *Planning Act* and to assist members of public wishing to speak to these items;
- The delegations section has been moved earlier in the meeting agenda and so that delegations do not have to wait to speak to a specific item listed later in the agenda;
- A “Statements by Members” section has been added to the Council meeting agenda. This section was added to allow Members to have an opportunity to make a two-minute statement ie. to make note of a community initiative. (Note: While this section is not intended as a question period for items not advertised on the published agenda, Members of Council are always welcome to call or email staff with questions at any time).

Remote Council meetings

Since March of 2020, all Council meetings have been held remotely (or electronically). These meetings continue to be broadcast live on the Town’s YouTube account, with a link to the Town website, along with regular reminders on the Town’s social media platforms. Council meetings continue to be accessible to members of the public, and staff continue to receive positive feedback on the many ways the Town makes it possible for the public to participate and access Council proceedings.

On August 24, 2020, Council approved updates to the Town’s Procedure By-law to allow members of Council and Committees to participate remotely in meetings (in open and closed session) and to be counted towards quorum outside of a declared emergency, in accordance with the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act (Bill 197).

On September 21, 2020, Council approved the recommendation for Council meetings to be held remotely until the end of 2020. Furthermore, Council directed staff to bring forward a staff report by December 2020 with recommendations for Council meetings in 2021. The recommendation at the time was made with considerations for Council Chambers, Ontario’s Framework for Recovery - Stage 3, public health advice, health and safety and



Background

technology. Staff have also considered a scan of municipal practices in Halton and neighbouring regions.

Discussion

Given the evolving measures put in place with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff recommend remote Council meetings continue and that in-person attendance by members in Council Chambers be a hybrid meeting format. This phased-in hybrid format would consist of some Members of Council, staff and public connecting remotely with some Members of Council attending in-person in Council Chambers.

Staff have canvassed all the Halton Region municipalities, along with other neighboring municipalities (Guelph, Cambridge, Hamilton, Mississauga) and have confirmed that they will be continuing with remote Council meetings for the foreseeable future and are exploring hybrid meeting options.

The recommended approach to continue with remote meetings, until such time that the necessary upgrades are completed. This approach would not only provide the safest option at this time, but it would also allow staff to proceed with the necessary technical and physical modifications to Council Chambers, to allow for an integrated hybrid Council meeting format in the future.

Council Chambers Upgrades

Since September 2020, staff from Legislative and Legal Services, Information Technology and Facilities have conducted the necessary testing and analysis of Council Chambers, including in-person limits, AV integration, security and safety considerations.

It has been determined that Council Chambers will require technical and physical modifications, which will take approximately four to six months to complete (pending vendor and resource availability). These include:

- Physical modifications: Including the installation of plexi-glass.
- AV modifications: The current technology in Council Chambers does not allow for interactive, two-way meetings, which is a necessary component for any hybrid method. This means that, currently, any member of Council or the public wishing to participate remotely cannot be accommodated within the AV structure (as the screens are meant to display content only). These AV changes are a necessary component in order to facilitate the ability for Councillors to participate remotely and be counted towards quorum, as per Bill 197.
- Staffing considerations: In order to monitor the flow of traffic and to execute all COVID protocol, there is a need for an extra staff person at each meeting.



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

Discussion

The one-time cost of the physical and AV upgrades to Council Chambers is expected to be approximately \$65,000. Approximately \$1,700 would be required annually which would be managed within the 2021 operating budget.

Due to the changes to legislation, as well as the changes to expectations (longer-term impacts) as a result of COVID-19, it is anticipated that there will be a long-term need for electronic participation at Council meetings for Council members, delegations and staff. Therefore, staff recommend that these modifications be implemented in Council Chambers.

Without the necessary modifications to Council Chambers, a hybrid format for meetings could not be implemented and electronic participation could not be integrated into Council meetings. Should modifications not be approved, staff would bring forward Procedure By-law amendments to repeal and/or amend provisions with respect to electronic participation at meetings outside of a declared emergency. Full, in-person attendance by all Members of Council would not be recommended to commence until COVID-19 restrictions related to gathering have been eased and/or at a level that is recommended by public health officials.

Rotating Chair schedule

In future, the proposed hybrid approach could also allow for staff to resume the rotating chair schedule, upon the safe return to Council Chambers.

Financial Impact

In 2020, the Town received \$2,348,400 of federal/provincial funding through a Safe Restart Agreement - Municipal Operating Funding Phase. These funds are intended to support the COVID-19 operating costs and pressures. As referenced in staff report CORS-053-20, any funding not utilized in 2020 will be held in reserve for eligible COVID-19 pressures through March 31, 2021.

One-time capital costs associated with the conversion of Council Chambers are expected to be \$65,000 and are not eligible for Safe Restart funding. Staff are proposing to fund this work from existing capital jobs through a combination of savings and deferral of previously planned work.

Modifications	Funds Required	Capital Project	Comments
AV	\$55,000	C241100 - Department Specific Initiatives	Work can be accommodated within existing approved IT capital budgets through savings on other initiatives and deferral of AV upgrades to Milton Room.



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

CORS-065-20
Report #:
CORS-065-20
Page 5 of 5

Financial Impact

Physical	\$10,000	C581127 - Civic Facilities Improvements	Funds can be reallocated from within existing approved capital budgets for civic facility improvements to accommodate the physical modifications required in Council Chambers.
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Ongoing operating costs associated with staffing will be approximately \$1,700 annually. Since costs will not be incurred until mid-way through 2021, they will not be eligible for Safe Restart funding and will be managed within the 2021 operating budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Troy McHarg
Commissioner, Corporate Services

For questions, please contact: Nina Lecic, Manager, Legislative and Legal Services / Deputy Clerk Phone: Ext. 2131

CAO Approval
Andrew M. Siltala
Chief Administrative Officer