



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

Report To: Council

From: Meaghen Reid, Director, Legislative & Legal Services/Town Clerk

Date: December 13, 2021

Report No: CORS-067-21

Subject: Council Chambers Upgrades and Integrated Format for Council Meetings

Recommendation: THAT Staff Report CORS-067-21 be received for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 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 and expectation for electronic participation at Council meetings for Council members, the public and other participants.
- Staff are working to implement a phased-in, integrated approach to allow for options for participants (Council members, presenters, staff, delegations, etc.) to either connect remotely or attend in-person at Council Chambers for Council meetings.
- Council meetings will need to continue to be held remotely until such time as the required technology, audio visual, and facility modifications are completed, to facilitate integrated Council meetings with both remote and in-person participation. It is estimated that this work would be completed by approximately April or May 2022, pending vendor and equipment availabilities that are impacted by global supply chain shortages.
- Implementation of an integrated approach would require approximately \$20,000 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 \$11,300 (provided for within the 2022 proposed budget) associated with the software licensing to permit delegation call in and addition of a remote production resource and a technical staff person to assist during Council meetings.

REPORT

Background

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 and/or Milton.ca, along with regular reminders on the Town's social media platforms. Council



Background

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 December 14, 2020, Council did not approve a recommendation to implement required modifications to Council Chambers and directed staff to bring forward this matter to Council for discussion in 2021. Since that time, Legislative and IT staff have worked with the existing Council Chambers AV vendor to further build out requirements and design a system that can be implemented at a reduced cost than was originally quoted.

Discussion

As the Province's reopening plan during the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, the Town of Milton has continued to respond and re-open its facilities to the public in accordance with provincial direction.

Based on feedback received by individual Members of Council and considerations to provincial and health guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff is recommending a phased-in, integrated meeting format that would allow for both remote connection and in-person attendance for participants at Council meetings. Participants at Council meetings could include: Members of Council, staff (senior staff, legislative staff and report authors), members of the public, consultants and applicants.

As noted, staff are developing a plan for a phased-in, integrated meeting solution. The first step before implementing this phased-in approach requires the successful completion of Council Chambers hardware and software upgrades and testing by April or May 2022. The implementation of necessary hardware/software upgrades will commence immediately. However, procurement delays caused by a global supply chain shortages will impact the vendor's ability to complete the hardware upgrades in a timely manner.

This phased-in, integrated format would allow for Members of Council, staff and public connecting remotely with some Members of Council attending in-person in Council Chambers. Following the Council Chambers technology updates, the first phase of this integrated approach would permit Members of Council and legislative staff to have the option of returning to Chambers. Once an established process for accommodating Members of Council and legislative staff has been put in place, future in-person and remote options would be made available to all participants such as members of the public, presenters, senior staff, etc



Discussion

Implementation of these phases of integrated meetings will be guided by provincial direction and public health guidelines at that time.

Throughout the implementation of the phased-in, integrated approach, staff will continue to facilitate electronic public participation to Council meetings. Staff continue to receive positive feedback on the many ways the Town makes it possible for the public to participate and access Council proceedings electronically. Staff will continue to provide assistance for residents prior to the meeting to ensure they would be able to participate successfully.

Staff have consulted with all the Halton Region municipalities, along with other neighboring municipalities. At the time of writing this report, staff have confirmed that, while neighboring municipalities continue to hold meetings electronically, most are in planning stages to return to some in-person participation through integrated meetings in 2022.

Council Chambers Upgrades

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 fully complete (pending vendor and resource availability and delivery delays).

- AV modifications: The current technology solution in Council Chambers does not allow for interactive, two-way meetings, which is a necessary component for any integrated 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 in-room feeds or content only).
- Staffing considerations: In order to assist with the additional technical complexities brought about by integrated meetings (connectivity troubleshooting, screen sharing, attendee management, livestream production, etc) there is a need for assistance from two additional resources at each meeting. A technical resource from the Information Technology division would assist with connectivity issues and attendee management while a dedicated vendor resource would be required to assist with the livestream feed and display during public meetings and/or in-camera sessions.

Financial Impact

One-time capital costs associated with the conversion of Council Chambers are expected to be \$20,000. Staff are proposing to fund this work from existing capital jobs through a combination of savings and deferral of previously planned work.



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Financial Impact

Modifications	Funds Required	Capital Project	Comments
AV	\$20,000	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.

Ongoing operating costs associated with staffing and software licensing for facilitating remote delegation call-ins will be approximately \$11,300 annually which has been provided for in the 2022 proposed budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Troy McHarg
Commissioner, Corporate Services

For questions, please contact: Meaghen Reid, Director, Legislative and Legal Services/Town Clerk, Greta Susa, Manager of Legislative and Legal Services/Deputy Clerk and Aaron Smit, Director IT Phone: Ext. 2132

Attachments

n/a

CAO Approval
Andrew M. Siltala
Chief Administrative Officer

Recognition of Traditional Lands

The Town of Milton resides on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We also recognize the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee people. The Town of Milton shares this land and the responsibility for the water, food and resources. We stand as allies with the First Nations as stewards of these lands.