



THE CORPORATION OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF KINCARDINE

Subject: Return to In-Person Meetings

Report Number: Clerk's-2020-13

Meeting Date: Monday, September 21, 2020

Recommendation: THAT Council direct Staff to proceed with Option 3 for return to in-person meetings and continue with electronic meetings for the remainder of 2020;

AND FURTHER THAT upgrades to the audio and visual equipment in the Council Chambers to accommodate hybrid meeting be considered in the 2021 budget;

AND FURTHER THAT Committee meetings continue to be held electronically to continue to support social distancing.

Date to be considered by Council: Monday, September 21, 2020

Report Summary:

On March 30, 2020, the Procedure By-law was amended to allow Council and Committee meetings to be held electronically during a declared emergency. Since that time, meetings have been held by teleconference or by video conference through Zoom. Although, this process has been successful and effective in moving the business of the Municipality forward, Staff have investigated moving back to in person meetings. Staff are providing an overview of what in-person meetings would entail, the need to continue hybrid in-person/electronic participation meetings to ensure all participants continue to have the opportunity to be involved, procedures and costs.

Origin: Council request

Existing Policy: Municipality of Kincardine Procedure By-law

Background/Analysis: On March 30, 2020 the Procedure By-law was amended to allow Council and Committee meetings to be held electronically during a declared emergency. Since that time, we have held 51 Council and Committee

meetings electronically by teleconference or video conference through Zoom. This process has been successful and effective in moving the business of the Municipality forward. Procedures have been developed to allow Council, Staff, and the public to participate effectively at these meetings.

In a recent Ontario Municipal Administrators Association survey of 107 municipalities, when asked "Has your municipality returned to in person Council Meetings" only 15% replied yes with 85% replying no. There are number of reasons for this overwhelming number of Municipalities continuing to meet electronically.

- Difficulty in finding the appropriate technological solutions to host hybrid meetings;
- Size of Council Chambers not being able to accommodate the numbers of people required/requesting to attend live meetings;
- Lack of appropriate audio, visual and internet capabilities at existing Municipal facilities;
- Difficulty in continuing to broadcast the meetings through traditional methods;
- Efficiency and cost of the current method of electronic meeting has been effective in meeting councils needs and the needs of the public.

Staff, in investigating the various options for returning to in-person meetings, have encountered the same issues as our colleagues around the Province. No best practices have been developed for the return to in person meetings. In Bruce County, the majority of Municipalities have no date for a return or have decided to hold off for the remainder of the year.

At this time, Staff are providing three options for Council meetings moving forward. All three options provide accountability and transparency to the public.

Option 1 – Council Chambers with Plexiglass Barriers

Council Chamber desks would be left as is and plexiglass barriers would be installed between the desks (attached). Two additional desks would be purchased to allow for the CAO and Clerk to attend and ensure they are maintaining a 6ft distance from the Mayor. Barriers are required because if the desk were moved sufficiently apart to socially distance, there would be no capacity for any additional attendees – public or staff.

Procedures would be developed for entering and exiting the Chambers to ensure appropriate flow around the room and to utilize a separate entrance and exit door. There would still be a need to wear a mask to the meeting and at any time during the meeting when a distance of 6ft cannot be maintained or there is a not a barrier between attendees.

The meeting will be broadcast live through Rogers Cable and on the Municipal website. A member of Rogers Cable will need to be in the Council Chambers for the broadcast.

The capacity of the room would only allow for Council members, the CAO and the Clerk and approximately four others to attend in person. Members of the public who wish to attend will be required to register in advance to limit numbers. Priority will be given to those that are appearing as delegations. The microphone on the podium will be shared by the public and acceptable procedures and precautions will be implemented.

If the number of public in attendance allows, staff will be able to appear in person or they will be able to phone in using the conference phone. If members of Council wish to attend electronically, they will also join by conference phone. At this time, with the current technology, we are unable to provide the means for a hybrid solution where Council members, staff or the public can utilize the Zoom platform to join a meeting.

It is not recommended that the public be permitted to come in by conference call because there is no ability to mute, admit or remove the members once they have joined.

The cost for this option would be approximately \$10,000 for the additional desks, cabling and other safety measure. The cost for the conference call for a meeting is \$0.10 per minute.

The advantage to this option is that Council will be able to meet in person in a similar fashion to before the Covid-19 Pandemic.

There are a few disadvantages to this option. There would be no ability to see those joining electronically and the audio quality of the electronic connection may be inferior. There would be limited public participation and the barriers may make it difficult for Council to be seen on the broadcasted feed.

Option 2 – Council Chambers with Physical Distancing and Electronic Participation

Existing Council Chamber desks would be moved to ensure 6ft distance between members. Procedures would be provided for entering and exiting the Chambers to ensure appropriate flow around the room and utilize a separate entrance and exit door. Two additional desks would be purchased to allow for the CAO and Clerk to attend and ensure they are maintaining a 6ft distance from the Mayor.

In this option, the capacity of the room would only allow for Council members, the CAO and the Clerk to attend in person. All other Staff and members of the public would need to continue to participate electronically. Rogers will continue to broadcast the Zoom feed.

In order to accommodate the hybrid meeting, each desk in the Chambers would be equipped with a laptop with a camera to allow the audience to see each member when they are speaking. The members will need to wear in-ear noise cancelling headphones with a microphone to hear the proceedings and to speak. The view for the public would be essentially what they are seeing now and

Council would still be required to mute and unmute themselves when they speak. This would allow interaction between the live and electronic participants.

The cost for this option would be \$21,000 for the additional desks, camera, cabling and computer. There would also be \$195.49 per month for the Zoom subscription

The advantages to this option are that Council will be able to meet in person in but continue to allow Staff and members of the public to participate through our current electronic process. In addition, each Council member would be visible to the public on the electronic feed in a similar fashion if they are in the Chambers or another location.

The main disadvantage to this option is that Council is essentially participating by Zoom although they are in the same room. The noise cancelling headphones may still allow member to hear other members or noises in the Council Chambers.

Option 3 – Status Quo

Council would continue to meet electronically through Zoom until the end of the year. This would allow best practices to be developed around the Province. It would also allow for upgrades to the audio and visual equipment in the Council Chambers to accommodate hybrid meeting to be considered in the 2021 budget.

The cost for this option would be \$195.49 per month for the Zoom subscription.

The advantages to this option are that Council, Staff and members of the public could continue to participate through our current electronic process.

The main disadvantage to this option is that Council would not be meeting in person.

Other Municipal Facilities

Staff investigated using other Municipal facilities including the Underwood Community Centre and the Davidson Centre Hall. Although these venues would allow for more in person participation by the public, the additional costs and uncertainty of internet connections was considered. In addition, the cost for set up, tear down and sanitization of the venues was considered, as was the loss of programming space and revenue.

At these locations, Rogers Cable would not be able to broadcast the meeting live and Council members would be required to share microphones.

For these reasons, these Municipal facilities were not included in the options above.

Committee Meetings

At this time, Staff are recommending the Committees continue to meet electronically to continue to support social distancing and to limit the costs of sanitizing the Public Hall and Council Chambers after each use. However, if they were to meet in person, it is recommended that they meet in the Council Chambers so that they can continue to have participants who wish to, participate by electronically using the conference phone.

Recommendation

Staff are recommending Option 3 at this time for two reasons. First, with the rising case count over the last week in Ontario, it may be premature to make this decision, incur the various expenses, and subsequently abandon it if restrictions are put back in place. We are at a crossroads and the effects of students going back to school and increased social gatherings are still an unknown.

Secondly, this will allow Staff more time to see whether there are other innovative solutions available to allow hybrid meetings and to coordinate with other municipalities on best practices.

Corporate Strategic Plan 2020-2025: Explore best practices for both internal and external communications tools and protocols.

Financial Implications: The cost for the recommended option would be \$195.49 per month. Option 1 would come at a cost of approximately \$10,000 plus \$0.10 per minute for the conference phone and Option 2 would be \$21,000 plus \$195.49 per month.

Attachments: Image of Plexi glass barriers