

 COBOURG	THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG	
	STAFF REPORT COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE	
TO:	Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Council Members	
FROM:	Brent Larmer	
TITLE:	Municipal Clerk/Manager of Legislative Services	
DATE OF MEETING:	October 26, 2020	
TITLE / SUBJECT:	Continued Remote Council Meetings for 2020	
REPORT DATE:	October 19, 2020	File #:

1.0 STRATEGIC PLAN

Not Applicable

2.0 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Not Applicable

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council meetings be held remotely until the end of 2020; and

THAT Council direct the Municipal Clerk to bring forward a Staff Report by December 2020 with recommendations for Council meeting in 2021.

4.0 ORIGIN

- On March 19, 2020, Town of Cobourg Municipal Council Meetings begin to be held remotely (or electronically) via Zoom Video Conference in order to continue the continuity of Municipal Council approvals and the continuance of necessary decision making.
- On September 14, 2020, Municipal Council implemented the successful restart of in-person Council Meetings utilizing an alternative location of the Concert Hall, Victoria Hall with increased safety protocols and physical distancing of participants and by limiting the capacity of members of the public attending physically in the new meeting space. As a result of the increasing rise of COVID-19 cases within Ontario and throughout Canada, the decision was made to suspend the continuance of in-person

meetings until the effects of the potential second wave are fully realized by staff and provincial numbers return to a lower daily increase.

- At this time, remote/electronic 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 Municipal Council Meetings to be held remotely until the end of 2020 has been made through considerations of public participation, accessibility and inclusion for the current meeting space, Ontario's Framework for Recovery Phase 3, public health advice, health and safety and current technology. Municipal Staff have also scanned other lower-tier municipalities within Northumberland County and other neighbouring municipalities and regions close to Cobourg's proximity.

5.0 BACKGROUND

Since March 2020, Council meetings have been held remotely (or electronically) to continue to provide continuity of local government and decision making during the changing pandemic environment. Council amended the Town's Procedural By-law on March 16, 2020, under the temporary amendment to the *Municipal Act, 2001* to allow for remote meetings of Council. The *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020* further amended the *Municipal Act, 2001* to allow municipal councils to continue to meet remotely indefinitely after an emergency is declared. On July 27, 2020 Council amended the Town's Procedural By-law to include provisions to allow Council to meet remotely indefinitely in accordance with the *Municipal Act* amendment. Staff have continued to implement more functionality to remote meetings for efficiency and will continue to create more opportunities for remote participation at Council meetings in the future. This will start to become fully transparent once the final move to the new meeting management system eSCRIBE is completed.

6.0 ANALYSIS

It is the recommendation of staff that Council meetings return to being 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, and the unpredictability of a COVID-19 Second Wave.

This Staff recommendation to revert back to remote meetings has been made with considerations for the current meeting space, consistent public health advice, Ontario's Framework for Recovery – Stage 3, health and safety and meeting technology. Staff have also considered a scan of municipal practices in Northumberland County and other neighbouring regions/county.

In communications regarding COVID-19, HKPRDHU Public Health and the Government of Ontario advises to work from home, if possible, and to use technology to keep in touch. When outside your home, Health Officials 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 and also this includes the wearing of a face covering or mask.

On July 24, 2020, the HKPDHU Area entered Stage 3 of Ontario's Framework for Recovery, which included an indoor gathering limited to 50 persons. As part of the Town of Cobourg's ongoing Recovery Strategy, risk assessments were conducted and continue to be conducted to help Town of Cobourg workplaces identify potential COVID-19 risks to employees while at work, identify ways to reduce worker exposures, and to provide a tool for the Town of Cobourg workplaces with developing an exposure control plan based on the results of performing a risk assessment.

The Municipal Clerk considered the return of in-person Council meetings when the number of COVID cases were reporting numbers of cases at the 100 level. This review of the physical meeting space started with Council Chambers, and a risk assessment was conducted, which took into consideration the entrance/exist of the room and the third floor entrances, the potential introduction of plexi-glass partitions and other personal protective equipment, cleaning and disinfection practices and the workspace layout. When Staff accessed the area, there was a clear indication of the need for physical modifications to be made for the set-up in Council Chambers for in-person meetings in order to comply and follow the Public Health protocols. Once the determination was made that the Council Chambers would not be a viable option, Staff worked to create a secondary location to hold Council Meetings in person, that location was the Concert Hall located on the second floor of Victoria Hall. Municipal Staff did work through the same risk assessment that was conducted in the Council Chambers, which resulted in the capability to start and safely allow for Council meetings to return in-person with enhanced safety protocols and procedures, including screening of all attendees and the public to address risks related to COVID-19 and the mandatory wearing of masks.

Current Challenges:

Due to the necessity for the live streaming of meetings in order to adhere to the legislated requirement of holding open meetings for the public and utilizing the technology that currently exists to support live streaming, the new set up in the Concert Hall is presently the only room option available for currently holding in-person recorded or live-streamed Council meetings. Due to the recommended public health guidelines, the Concert Hall is limited on public attendance restrictions due to room capacity resulting from physical distancing requirements. Based on the square footage requirements for distancing, the maximum capacity for the Concert Hall is 20 members of the public in addition to the mandatory physical attendance of Staff and Councillors.

In addition to the room restrictions, technology has also become a barrier to transparency and efficiencies in Council Meetings. In-person Council meetings do not fully replace the need for electronic participation. For example, Council Members, staff and the public at times may need equipment to connect to the meeting electronically due to meeting room restrictions or any other reason (ie. self-isolation). If this is to be done successfully, an electronic meeting platform would need to be integrated with the current AV system and the current live stream recording within the Concert Hall. This would be required for members of the public (both at home and in Council Chambers), staff and Council in order to be able to clearly identify, see and hear all participating members who are present physically and electronically. In-person meetings, with forms of electronic participation, which would result in a hybrid meeting structure, that requires increased logistical processes to ensure a seamless end-to-end experience for all individuals, whether participating in-person or remotely.

In July, Municipal Council approved the new eSCRIBE Meeting Management System which includes a Hybrid Meeting function that will help integrate physical and electronic attendance into one steady stream to the public. This current technology is still in the works and the Municipal Clerk's Department hopes to have this hybrid model working by January 2021. The current model is still causing problems related to sound for some municipalities that are utilizing the system currently.

Currently, the Town of Cobourg 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, access to broadband and recovery plans. Currently, Northumberland County municipalities, other than the municipality of Brighton 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.

Below is the current remainder of the Council Meeting for 2020:

	Meeting Type	Date	Time
1.	Committee of the Whole	Monday, October 26, 2020	6:00 P.M
2.	Regular Council Meeting	Monday, November 2, 2020	6:00 P.M
3.	Statutory Public Planning Meeting	Monday, November 9, 2020	5:00 P.M
4.	Committee of the Whole	Monday November 16, 2020	6:00 P.M
5.	Divisional Budget Meeting	Tuesday November 17, 2020	3:00 P.M
6.	Divisional Budget Meeting	Thursday November 19, 2020	3:00 P.M
7.	Regular Council Meeting	Monday, November 23, 2020	6:00 P.M
8.	Divisional Budget Meeting	Tuesday November 24, 2020	3:00 P.M
9.	Divisional Budget Meeting	Thursday November 26, 2020	3:00 P.M
10	Statutory Public Planning Meeting	Monday, November 30, 2020	5:00 P.M
11	Committee of the Whole	Monday, December 7, 2020	6:00 P.M
12	Regular Council Meeting	Monday, December 14, 2020	6:00 P.M

Total Remaining Scheduled Meetings for 2020: 12 Meetings

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/BUDGET IMPACT

There are no financial implications or budget impacts related to this report.

8.0 CONCLUSION

THAT Council meetings be held remotely until the end of 2020; and

THAT Council direct the Municipal Clerk to bring forward a Staff Report by December 2020 with recommendations for Council meeting in 2021.

9.0 AUTHORIZATION/SIGNATURES



Brent Larmer
Municipal Clerk
Manager of Legislative Services



Tracey Vaughan,
Chief Administrative Office