



City of
Peterborough

To: **Members of the General Committee**

From: **John Kennedy, City Clerk**

Meeting Date: **December 1, 2020**

Subject: **Report CLSCLK20-011**
Survey of Advisory Committee Meetings for Electronic Participation

Purpose

A report to advise Council on the results of the survey of Advisory Committees on attending meetings electronically.

Recommendation

That Council approve the recommendation outlined in Report CLSCLK20-011, dated December 1, 2020, of the City Clerk, as follows:

That Report CLSCLK20-011, Survey of Advisory Committee Meetings for Electronic Participation, be received for information.

Budget and Financial Implications

There are no direct budget and financial implications in receiving the report for information. If Council directs staff to proceed with electronic advisory committee meetings, it is estimated to cost between \$1,500 and \$4,000 for temporary tech-support and Teams licenses.

Background

In the spring, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic Council made a change to the Procedure By-law, as permitted by Bill 187, to permit Council to meet electronically. Council members and senior staff have corporate devices and training was provided by staff from Peterborough Technology Services (PTS) to enable meetings to occur using Microsoft Teams (Teams).

In late summer the Council Chambers were fitted with tempered glass to enable in person meetings starting in September. During this process Peterborough Public Health was consulted by staff regarding both the physical changes to the Council Chambers, as well as the introduction of new processes undertaken for health and safety reasons. With the installation of the glass in Council Chambers, advisory meetings were restarted in the fall in the Chambers.

Council at its meeting of September 28, 2020, in regards to report CLSCLK20-013, which recommended, as per Bill 197, that Council update its Procedure By-law to allow for a member of council, of a local board or of a committee of either of them, to participate in a meeting electronically. Council passed the following amendment:

- b) That advisory committees and boards be surveyed on attending electronic meetings and that staff report to Council on the feasibility to convene electronic meetings for advisory committees.**

This report is in response to this direction by Council.

Survey Results

Staff undertook a survey of advisory committee members from the following committees which are supported by Clerk's Office staff:

- Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)
- Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee (ACHAC)
- Arenas, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (APRAC)
- Museum and Archives Advisory Committee (MAAC)
- Peterborough Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (PACAC)
- Peterborough Environmental Advisory Committee (PEAC)
- Peterborough Public Library Board of Trustees (PPL)
- Planning Advisory Committee (PAC)

Responses were received from 46 of the 64 members and a summary is attached as Appendix A of this report. Only one respondent advised that they would not be willing to participate remotely. Advisory Committee members were clearly willing to participate in electronic meetings if required.

Advisory Committee members were asked to provide comments about what they liked and disliked about in-person and electronic meetings. While many of the comments received indicated a preference for in-person meetings, the majority of members advised, at this juncture, for health/personal reasons they would be willing to meet electronically.

Some members indicated that electronic meetings are easier/more convenient than attending in-person meetings. Some also stated that electronic meetings were less effective than in-person meetings. Individual's circumstances including work, health and homelife impact their preferences.

Not all committee members have the necessary equipment and/or experience using Teams. While the City is not in a position to provide hardware or software to individuals if the decision is made to undertake electronic meetings, if Teams is used, individuals may participate by phone using the Teams conference call-in number.

Options for Advisory Committee Meetings in 2021

- a) Advisory Committee meetings could commence electronically early in 2021 or mirror the advisory committee meetings to Council meetings. Meaning, if Council returns to electronic meetings at some point in the future, advisory committee meetings could be held electronically too. Currently Council is conducting in-person meetings as are the advisory committee meetings. If advisory committee meetings were to commence now or at a time in the future, staff recommend the Procedure By-law be amended to permit electronic meetings for advisory committees outside of a declared emergency.

Using Teams would allow any electronic presentations to be viewed by anyone attending the meeting. In the event anyone was attending the meeting by phone they would be limited in that they would not be able to view the presentation.

Like meetings of Council, advisory committee meetings are open to the public. If Teams is used, guests/individuals wishing to observe the proceedings would need to preregister and be admitted by staff into the meeting.

If advisory committee meetings were to be held electronically using Teams, staff recommend training be offered on the use of Teams to advisory committee members. Further, staff suggest, for the first two meetings of each advisory committee, PTS staff be available to assist any committee members in attending the meeting via Teams. After the first two meetings, staff in addition to the Clerk's Office, would be required to assist with the routine duties associated with Teams meetings. The estimated cost to have tech-support available for the first two meetings of each advisory committee

and to purchase any necessary Teams licenses with the teleconference option is between \$1,500 and \$4,000.

- b) Another option is to maintain the status quo. Meaning that advisory committees continue to meet in-person, in the retro-fitted Council Chambers. At any given-time there are always some individuals that are unable to attend meetings for various reasons, including medical/health. Members with a valid reason for not attending a meeting(s) are not in jeopardy of losing their seat on the Committee. Not attending a meeting for pandemic-related reasons would be a valid reason for missing a meeting. Committee members would still receive the agenda package and can provide comments to the staff member connected to the committee. While this option is possible, the majority of the respondents to the survey did not support in-person meetings at this time.

Another consideration during the pandemic, whether meetings are held in-person or electronic, is to convene advisory committee meetings on an as needed basis. This is what occurred from March to September this year. If this were considered, staff would determine, based on the respective work program, when it would be necessary for a committee to meet. General information updates could be forwarded to a committee by e-mail and when it is necessary for a committee to provide input on a matter, a meeting would be convened.

Staff do not recommend hybrid meetings with some in-person attendees and some attendees participating electronically. Attending an in-person meeting electronically would involve the use Teams or the call-in feature with Teams. One of the downsides of this approach is that individuals participating by phone would be unable to view presentations or displays. Convening a hybrid meeting would also involve additional procedural and technological considerations and staff resources. For these reasons staff recommend that committee meetings be held in-person or electronically but not a combination of both.

Next Steps

At present, advisory committees are meeting in-person in the retro-fitted Council Chambers, typically on an as needed basis. If Council would like to change how advisory committees meet during the pandemic, procedurally, a motion could be put forth to direct staff accordingly. Receiving the report for information would maintain the status quo of having committees meet in-person.

Summary

Council directed staff to survey advisory committees on attending electronic meetings. Most of the respondents to the survey were in support of attending meetings electronically at this time for health and personal reasons. Several options and any related costs are provided to Council for their consideration.

Submitted by,

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Attachment:

Appendix A: Results of Survey with Advisory Committee Members