



City of  
**Peterborough**

---

**To:** Members of the General Committee

**From:** John Kennedy, City Clerk

**Meeting Date:** June 14, 2021

**Subject:** Report CLSCLK21-009  
Voting at Council and Committee Meetings – Electronic and Recorded

---

## **Purpose**

A report to respond to Council motions regarding paperless agendas, recorded votes and electronic voting at Council and Committee meetings and to recommend a new staff position due to increased staffing requirements.

## **Recommendations**

That Council approve the recommendations outlined in Report CLSCLK21-009 dated June 14, 2021, of the City Clerk, as follows:

- a) That staff be directed to implement electronic agendas and recorded voting, as outlined in Report CLSCLK21-009, using eSCRIBE by November 2021; and,
- b) That, to support various meeting management responsibilities, including the attendance at meetings of Council and advisory committee meetings, a full-time staff position be hired effective August 30, 2021, with the 2021 portion of the cost in the amount of \$23,000 funded by a transfer from the 2021 General Contingency provision.

## Budget and Financial Implications

There are financial implications if Council chooses to move to an electronic recorded voting format including the cost of licencing software for electronic voting, the purchase of hardware, as well as staffing costs.

Costs depend on which solution is chosen and there are specific costs related to three aspects of the proposed changes:

- a) **Electronic agenda packages** – The use of eSCRIBE software for the agendas for Council members will require the purchase of up to 25 yearly licences and one time training costs. There will be a savings in terms of staff efficiency and the cost of supplies required for printing agendas.
- b) **Recorded voting** – Recorded votes can be taken orally/manually at meetings at no cost, but it will significantly slowdown proceedings in meetings with a large number of motions. If recorded voting is not done visually (by a show of hands) or verbally at meetings, the results must be made visible to the public via an electronic display.
- c) **Electronic recorded voting and display** – If voting is done electronically it will be necessary to purchase technologies to permit the voting (a one-time upgrade cost to software), and purchase of hardware and software for voting and display purposes. These costs vary based on the options selected.

### Chart 1: Estimated Annual Costs Related to Electronic Recorded Voting and Electronic Agendas

Option	Electronic Recorded Voting	Electronic Agendas Only
PTS Support (Annual)	\$5,750 per year (75% on-call, 25% assisting at a meeting)	\$5,750 per year (based on 75% on-call, 25% assisting at a meeting)
iPad eScribe Licence Fee	\$50 per licence (as required)	\$50 per licence (as required)
eSCRIBE Voting Module	\$7,500	
Savings related to printing	-\$5,800	-\$5,800
<b>Estimated Annual Costs</b>	<b>\$7,700</b>	<b>\$200</b>

## Chart 2: Estimated One-Time Costs Related to Electronic Recorded Voting and Electronic Agendas

Option	Electronic Recorded Voting	Electronic Agendas Only
iPads (one time purchase, up to ten devices)	\$500 per iPad (as required)	\$500 per iPad (as required)
eSCRIBE Voting Module Set-up	\$2,100	
Upgrades to Council Chambers	\$2000	
<b>Estimated One Time costs</b>	<b>\$8,600</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>

With respect to recommendation b), the annualized cost associated with the full-time staff position as outlined in the report is estimated to be \$68,000, inclusive of benefits. The 2021 portion of the cost in the amount of \$23,000 would be funded by a transfer from the 2021 General Contingency provision. The position would be included in the Draft 2022 Operating Budget.

## Background

Council, at its meeting of September 28, 2020 passed the following resolutions:

- a) That all votes held by meetings of Council be recorded votes no later than by the second quarter of 2021.
- b) That City Council request the Clerk's Office to report on the cost and feasibility of adopting a digital solution for the recording of Council votes.

This report is in response to the above motions.

In December 2016 Council asked staff to report on the feasibility to move to a paperless agenda format after 2018. This report is also in response to this request.

During the first lockdown phase of COVID-19 in 2020, the City Council meetings were conducted via Microsoft Teams and they were unable to show the videos of all Council members. For this reason, all votes during these meetings were recorded votes. Calling for a recorded vote each time added to the length of the meeting. Council in early fall 2020 began to meet in person in the Council Chambers after tempered glass was installed between the seating areas for Council members and staff. When we returned to electronic meetings in 2021 due to the second phase of COVID, the technology for

Teams had changed and it became possible to see the videos of all Council members and for the votes to return to being visual.

The decision to record votes for all motions passed at Council can be accomplished by various means including for the Clerk to simply return to calling each member in turn to learn if they support or oppose the motion. This will add time to the meetings as most Council meetings have numerous votes for both items of business (in particular when items are separated for vote) as well as for procedural matters.

A small working group was created of some staff from the Clerk's Office and Peterborough Technology Services (PTS) to examine options related to the feasibility of adopting a digital solution for the recording of Council votes and for moving to paperless agendas. In addition to the working group, meetings were held with vendors involved in supporting the technology in the chambers, livestreaming and additional staff from PTS and Facilities and Energy Management.

### **Electronic Voting – Use of an App**

Staff researched the feasibility of using an app to conduct the electronic voting and looked at numerous options including Slido, Meeting Pulse, Swift, Poll Everywhere, MyVote and VoteMeApp. To use an app, the motions associated with the meeting agenda would need to be pre-loaded by staff and made available to members of Council during the meeting. As a means to conduct an electronic vote, the various apps appear to be easy to use, however, once a vote is conducted, staff would need to manually input the vote information into the current meeting agenda and management software application to ensure the minutes were complete. The costs for the use of an app can range from \$1,068/year to \$10,000/year, some in US dollars, depending on the features and number of meetings per year. The use of an app would also require some additional form of technology to be used by Council members in order to conduct the vote, such as a phone. Concerns also relate to the app being off-line, the vendor ceasing to offer the service and potential issues with confidentiality. These votes when taken electronically will also have to be displayed across Teams and/or in through the Council Chamber monitors and live streamed.

Staff are not recommending the use of an app as it does not capture the voting history for the minutes, the potential cost and the connectivity requirements with current technology.

### **Electronic Voting - eSCRIBE Software**

In 2018, the Clerk's Office implemented a new agenda and meeting management software program called eSCRIBE, to create and post agendas, meeting video and minutes. The software is designed to enable other components to be added to enhance the product's capability, including recorded voting technology and paperless agenda meetings. The software is also used to track Council members declarations of

pecuniary interest. The eSCRIBE program will assist in the various steps involved in creating and conducting a meeting and the completion of post-meeting activities such as minutes, video archiving, etc.

The eSCRIBE process can be programmed to permit the votes to appear in the minutes as recorded votes. This feature makes the updating of the minutes more efficient than the option to use an app to vote, as the minutes would need to be manually updated if an app were used.

To ensure the electronic voting process is transparent, it is important that the vote results are displayed on the monitors in the Council Chambers, across Teams when the meetings are held electronically and streamed across the internet for those watching the meeting remotely.

The eSCRIBE technology will allow for remote voting by a member of Council who may be attending a meeting electronically. This is an important consideration as all members of Council, staff and the public presently attend meetings of Council electronically, from their respective location. When meetings of Council return to in-person meetings in the Chambers, it is still necessary to have a remote voting solution as the **Municipal Act** permits a member of Council to attend an in-person meeting electronically, be counted toward quorum and vote. While a voting app could facilitate remote voting, unlike the eSCRIBE voting module, an app would not be integrated into the system and therefore not as easy to accommodate remote voting.

Voting using the eSCRIBE technology requires members of council to use the electronic agenda package which can be accessed using a laptop or iPad. This would be required for members of Council whether attending a meeting in-person or remotely. If Council wished to proceed with electronic recorded voting using the eSCRIBE technology staff would provide access and training to facilitate the use of the electronic agendas.

The motions associated with the staff reports on an agenda would be pre-loaded into the electronic voting system prior to the meeting. In the event a member of Council brought forward a new motion at a meeting or requested a recommendation be separated for individual vote of its motions, the meeting would need to pause to add the new motions or amendments in the system, in real time. This would enable the motion(s) to be sent to members of Council to cast their vote. This change in process will likely result in a slight lengthening in the time of the meeting.

The voting module can be added for a one-time installation fee of approximately \$2,100 and an annual subscription fee of approximately \$7,500 per year. Additional licences would be purchased, as required, to enable members of Council and staff to access the software on a tablet. The annual subscription fee to enable mobile-device use of eSCRIBE is \$50 per user licence per year. Currently, ten licences are available for use. Estimated annual and one-time costs to implement electronic recorded voting are outlined in Charts 1 and 2 above.

Electronic recorded voting for meetings of Council using the eSCRIBE module is recommended over manual recorded voting or an app for the reasons cited above.

### **Upgrades to Council Chamber Technology**

As noted above, to ensure transparency during the electronic voting process, it is important to be able to view the results of a vote on the monitors in the Chambers, when using Teams and via live streaming. To assist in displaying this information across the various platforms in an efficient and effective manner, an upgrade to the technology in the Council Chambers is required. The estimated hardware cost for the upgrade is \$2,000. In the event it is necessary to host an off-site, in-person meeting at a larger venue in the future, not all public display features may be possible although electronic voting can still occur.

### **Paperless or Electronic Agendas**

Since the implementation of eSCRIBE in 2018 a number of key steps have occurred to enable Council to consider paperless agendas. Time was required for pre-2018 meeting information to be migrated into the new program and for staff to populate current meeting-related data to utilize more of the new software features. Another key step was the recent migration by the city to the Windows 10 platform, as the use of eSCRIBE electronic agendas on a laptop requires the Windows 10 software platform.

While Council still receives its agenda package in hard copy format, it is possible to move to an electronic agenda. In a similar process to paper agendas, members of Council would be provided access to eSCRIBE to open their agenda package in advance of each meeting. In preparation for the meeting members of Council can make electronic notes within their agenda for reference during the meeting. Agendas can be viewed on a laptop or iPad.

In order to use the electronic recorded voting suite, Council members must be in the meeting software to vote. Once the Chair calls the vote, a message is sent out to the users who then cast their votes. The result is then displayed on the screens in Council Chambers. Having a second device can assist in organizing and managing the various windows and applications that a member of Council may wish to have open during the meeting. Municipalities using this technology typically provide Council members with two pieces of hardware such as a laptop to view the agenda and an iPad in order to place a vote. The use of multiple devices is a personal choice and staff would canvass each member of Council on the preference if Council were to adopt electronic recorded voting.

In the event Council directed staff to move to electronic agendas, staff would provide training on how to use the eSCRIBE software, how to annotate and bookmark Council agendas and how to use the voting software, if this feature was also adopted.

Staff estimate the annual cost to print hard copy agendas for meetings of Council is about \$5800 per year based on an average of the various sized agendas. This would become a cost savings if agendas were provided in electronic format only. Additional licences, at \$50 per person, per year, would be purchased for any members of Council and senior staff who wish to use an iPad to access the eSCRIBE software. Staff recommend that support be available for members of Council and senior staff to ensure everyone can access their hardware device(s) and software applications during the meetings. As per Chart 1, it is estimated the annual cost for IT support is approximately \$5,750. This estimate is assuming support is not required for 75 per cent of the meetings and therefore the on-call costs to be available are minimal. This estimate may fluctuate up or down depending on the level of support required throughout the year.

### **Required Staff Resources**

Prior to the pandemic, for Peterborough's meetings of Council, one staff person from the Clerks Office would attend the meeting to perform the Clerk functions and another person was present to facilitate the streaming of the meeting. Most of the live streaming responsibilities were conducted by the Manager of Communication Services. The pandemic has changed how meetings are conducted and the technology that is employed. Microsoft Teams is used as the platform to facilitate the electronic meetings, delegations are managed by staff to ensure they are able to enter the meeting and speak to Council and connectivity is required between Teams and the live streaming equipment to ensure the public can view the electronic meeting.

At present, a typical meeting would include two staff from the Clerks Office: one to perform the Clerk functions and the other to assist with electronic minutes, presentations and communications between other staff supporting the meeting. Where a meeting permits the public to speak, a third person from the Clerk's Office is typically required to manage the delegations. A member of IT is available at the meetings to support the use of Teams as the meeting platform and related technology and another person manages and supports the technology to live stream the meeting proceedings. The complexity of hosting a meeting further increases when an in-person meeting is combined with either some members of Council or delegations attending electronically. In 2020, when recorded votes were taken manually, it was important to have additional staff present at the meeting to assist with the manual transcription duties and updates to the meeting minutes.

Staff from the Clerk's Office and PTS researched and interviewed various municipalities using the eSCRIBE voting technology. While each municipality may have varying technology in their Council Chambers or use different software programs to facilitate electronic meetings and to make the meeting proceedings available to the public, some common themes emerged. Multiple staff were required to attend and support the meetings to ensure that the technology functioned properly, motions were captured accurately, and the meeting proceedings were transparent and available to the public. A minimum of two staff attended a meeting and in some municipalities additional staff were necessary.

During the pandemic staff have pivoted to ensure sufficient resources are available to facilitate meetings of Council. However, the resource requirements for meetings of Council have strained staff's ability to complete other work in a timely fashion. Further, in addition to meetings of Council staff continue to facilitate and support the regular convening of advisory committee meetings. As per Council's direction, advisory committee meetings are being held electronically at this time. These meetings also require more staff involvement. Staff recognize that the pandemic is temporary, however, it has become evident that the current practices and associated resource requirements are not sustainable and that the "new normal" will not be the same as pre-pandemic conditions.

Post pandemic, when meetings return to a more typical scenario, there are staff resource requirements to consider. Unless the provisions in the **Municipal Act** are rescinded, a member of Council will be able to attend and fully participate in an in-person meeting of Council, by electronic means. This hybrid situation will require the use of Teams to enable the remote participation of the member of Council. Support by IT staff will be required at these meetings to ensure the technology is working properly and the member of Council can participate in the meeting. Depending on the level of IT support required, staff costs range from approximately \$25 up to \$230 per meeting or approximately \$5,750 per year, based on the concept that the level of required support for 75 percent of the meetings would be minimal, as per Chart 1.

Another example where additional staff resources are necessary is the implementation of paperless agendas or an electronic recorded voting solution for meetings of Council. A minimum of two staff from the Clerks Office will be required to attend meetings of Council to assist with electronic minute taking, the changing of display screens and to support the electronic recorded voting process.

In addition to assisting during meetings of Council, the additional new staff position will also be involved in pre and post meeting functions associated with the meeting management duties and related maintenance functions connected with eSCRIBE. Clerks Office staff support numerous other advisory committees in a similar manner to meetings of Council. This position would also provide support related to the meeting management functions for advisory committees and provide greater flexibility in supporting the range of meetings attended by the Clerks Office during times of staff absence. The estimated annual costs for the position, including benefits is \$68,000.

Staff recommend this additional staff position in the Clerk's Office for the reasons cited.

### **Procedure By-law**

To support recorded voting, whether electronic or manual, at all meetings of Council, Procedure By-law 19-029 requires amending to enable recorded votes for all matters at Standing Committees and meetings of Council. Unless directed otherwise by Council, staff will include a by-law on the June Council agenda to amend Procedure By-law 19-029 accordingly.



---

## **Staff Recommend Electronic Agendas and Electronic Voting Using eSCRIBE**

The application of recorded votes at meetings of Council will add to the length of a meeting regardless of the means employed to facilitate the vote. Electronic recorded voting can be faster and more efficient than a manual recorded voting process. Recorded voting has the ability to increase the level of transparency of Council's meeting proceedings. Staff believe the process warrants modernization to be efficient and effective, and for the reasons cited above, and therefore recommends electronic voting via eSCRIBE over a manual recorded vote method.

### **Next Steps**

If Council is supportive of the change to recorded electronic voting the additional software will be purchased along with any additional hardware required for Council members. Once any iPad licences are purchased, training will be provided to move to entirely electronic agendas. Once the software and equipment has been obtained for electronic voting any additional training will be provided.

## **Summary**

Staff recommend the implementation of paperless agendas and electronic recorded voting using eSCRIBE. COVID-19 has changed the way Council meetings are conducted as individuals are able to participate electronically. These changes provide an opportunity to move forward with electronic agenda packages. Additional staff resources are required to support meetings of Council, advisory committee meetings and related Clerk's Office duties.

Submitted by,

John Kennedy  
City Clerk

Contact Name:  
Natalie Garnett, Deputy City Clerk  
Phone: 705-742-7777 Ext. 1818  
Toll Free: 1-855-738-3755  
Fax: 705-742-4138  
E-Mail: [ngarnett@peterborough.ca](mailto:ngarnett@peterborough.ca)