



Town of Newmarket
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Update on Electronic Meeting Participation and 2021 Schedule of Meetings Staff Report to Council

Report Number: 2021-26

Department(s): Legislative Services

Author(s): Andrew Walkom, Legislative Coordinator

Meeting Date: April 12, 2021

Recommendations

1. That the report entitled Update on Electronic Meeting Participation and 2021 Schedule of Meetings dated April 12, 2021 be received; and,
2. That the 2021 Council and Committee of the Whole Meeting Schedule updated with meeting start times from July to December be adopted with (**Attachment 1**); and,
3. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend that for the remainder of 2021, Council continue with the meeting start times currently established, and to provide Council with an update on the implementation of hybrid Council meetings.

Background

Staff provided a [report](#) to Council at the October 5, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting which outlined a phased approach to resume limited in-person participation through the use of hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings were intended to begin in December 2020, with limited in-person attendance by residents in January 2021. The report also recommended that Council and Committee of the Whole continue to meet at

1:00 PM for the first half of 2021, with the meeting time for the second half of the year to be determined.

Due to rising numbers of COVID-19 cases throughout the autumn of 2020, the Ontario government increased restrictions through the colour-coded zone system. This culminated with a stay-at-home order for the entire Province of Ontario at the end of December 2020. The stay-at-home order ended for York Region in February 2021. Due to these restrictions and the associated public health risk, Newmarket Council continued its practice of remote Council and Committee of the Whole meetings.

Discussion

2021 Meeting Schedule

In 2020, Council adopted the 2021 Meeting Schedule and amended the Procedure By-law to permit Council to meet electronically until December 31, 2021. For the months of July to December, Council set the dates of Council and Committee of the Whole meetings, but left the meeting times as to be determined. Council directed staff to report back in 2021, to review this schedule. At this time, staff recommend that Council and Committee of the Whole continue to meet at 1:00 PM for the remainder of 2021.

Staff recommend that the schedule remain consistent to reduce public confusion around changing meeting times. Staff note that Council and Committee of the Whole meetings during the pandemic have maintained a relatively high level of public engagement, both through remote deputations and submitted correspondence. Staff have not received any complaints from the public regarding the meeting start times or the methods in which the public can engage with Council during these meetings. Customer Service, Corporate Communications and the Clerks Division have all monitored different avenues for complaints to be received by the Town, and there have been no complaints to date.

Hybrid Meetings

Upgrades to the audiovisual system in Council Chambers were completed in November 2020 and hybrid meetings can now be facilitated through this technology. The seating area in Council Chambers has also been rearranged to allow for the required physical distancing between Council Members. Council directed staff to report back in April or May of 2021 with a policy to govern the use of hybrid meetings, using the experience from the phased approach.

As Council was not able to meet using hybrid meetings due to the pandemic, this phased approach was never implemented. Similarly, as the public health restrictions affected all Ontario municipalities, staff have no best practices or experiences to draw on from comparator municipalities. As such, staff recommend that the implementation of a phased hybrid meeting approach continue to be deferred until such time as public health measures allow for in-person meetings. After both Council and staff have been

able to gain experience with hybrid meetings, a hybrid meeting policy will be able to be developed. It is expected that staff will report on a policy framework in Q1 2022.

Conclusion

Next Steps

Staff will continue to monitor public health measures and the experience of neighbouring municipalities in the transition from fully electronic to hybrid meetings. A policy on hybrid meetings will be presented to Council in Q1 2022.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

This report aligns with all of Council's six Strategic Priorities for this term, as Council's decision points at meetings assists in fulfilling these Priorities for the Town.

Consultation

Staff consulted with York Region Public Health on the layout of Council Chambers for hybrid meetings.

Human Resource Considerations

None.

Budget Impact

None.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Updated 2021 Council and Committee of the Whole meeting schedule with times added for meetings between July and December

Approval

Kiran Saini, Deputy Town Clerk

Lisa Lyons, Director of Legislative Services/Town Clerk

Esther Armchuk, Commissioner of Corporate Services

Contact

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