



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: March 24, 2021

Report Number: SRCFS.21.14

Department: Corporate and Financial Services

Division: Office of the Clerk

Subject: **SRCFS.21.14 – Implementation of Hybrid Council and Committee Meetings**

Purpose:

To recommend a process to implement hybrid (in-person and electronic) Council and Committee meetings beginning in April 2021.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff report SRCFS.21.14, Implementation of Hybrid Council and Committee Meetings, be received;
- b) That the plan to implement hybrid Council and Committee meetings as generally described in staff report SRCFS.21.14, be approved;
- c) That in respect of hybrid Council Meetings, Special Council Meetings, Council Public Meetings, and any Committee whose membership does not include any citizen members:
 - (i) In-person participation or attendance at a meeting be limited to Members of Council and City staff for the months of April and May, 2021;
 - (ii) In-person delegations or Public Forum addresses begin no earlier than June 2021;
 - (iii) The Mayor (or Acting Mayor), in consultation with the City Manager and City Clerk, be delegated the authority to delay in-person participation by members of the public as a result of any COVID-19 public health restrictions;
 - (iv) Where less than four Members of Council, including the Chair, are able to participate in a meeting in-person, that meeting be conducted wholly as an electronic meeting; and
 - (v) The meeting Chair must participate in-person.

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- d) That where the Chair is not able to participate in-person in a hybrid meeting, in accordance with Clause (c)(v) of this resolution, the Chair shall have the discretion to designate an alternate Chair for that meeting while still being permitted to attend and vote at that meeting, or direct that the meeting be conducted wholly as an electronic meeting;
- e) That Council Meetings, Special Council Meetings, Council Public Meetings, and any committee whose membership does not include citizen members, be conducted wholly electronically at any time that York Region is placed in the Grey – Lockdown category of the Government of Ontario's COVID-19 Response Framework, or any other similar lockdown or stay-at-home order implemented by the Government of Ontario;
- f) That following the lifting of COVID-19 public health restrictions, Members of Council shall normally participate in Council Meetings, Special Council Meetings, Council Public Meeting, and any committee whose membership does not include citizen members, in-person with electronic participation for exceptional circumstances only as determined by the Chair and the Member.
- g) That meetings of Heritage Richmond Hill, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Committee of Adjustment, and any other committee that includes citizen members, continue as wholly electronic meetings until such time as COVID-19 public health restrictions limiting access to the municipal offices has ended after which they be conducted wholly as in-person meetings with no electronic participation;
- h) That the City Clerk be authorized to place on a future Council agenda any by-law required to amend Article 12 of the Procedure By-law to give effect to this resolution.

Contact Person:

Ryan Ban, Manager of Legislative Services/Deputy City Clerk, extension 5547

Stephen M.A. Huycke, Director, Legislative Services/ City Clerk, extension 2529

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Sherry Adams, Commissioner of Corporate and Financial Services

Approved by: Mary-Anne Dempster, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

Council and Committees have been meeting electronically since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. On September 9, 2020, Council adopted a resolution “That Council and Committee Meetings be conducted as hybrid meetings in the Council Chamber beginning with the first Council meeting in November 2020.” On October 28, 2020, Council passed a resolution to delay the implementation of hybrid meetings until January 21, 2021. This was due to York Region being placed in Stage 3, the most restrictive stage, of the Government of Ontario’s reopening plan. The Government of Ontario replaced the three stage reopening plan with a five level colour coded framework in the Fall of 2020 (“framework”). On December 9, 2020, Council delayed the implementation of hybrid meetings until April 2021. This was as a result of York Region being placed in Red Zone, or the second most restrictive zone, of the framework.

Council Chamber and Committee Room Upgrades and Capacities

Council approved funding to upgrade the audio and visual technology in Council Chambers and Committee Rooms to facilitate hybrid meetings. This technology was installed in January 2021, and includes the following benefits:

- Additional cameras have been installed in the Council Chamber which are able to zoom in on Members of Council and staff seats.
- The installation of a camera and microphones in each of the Committee Rooms which provide the ability to have audio and visual in-person participation from the respective Committee Room.
- The ability to livestream a combined Council Chamber and the Zoom electronic meeting platform (“Zoom”).

In addition to the technology upgrades, plastic dividers have been placed between all Council and staff seats in the Council Chamber. These provide a safety barrier when a 2 meter (6 feet) distance cannot be maintained. However, under current public health guidelines, the total number of people in the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms must be monitored and capacity limits adhered to. As these guidelines are constantly evolving, capacity limits will also evolve. Currently, the maximum capacity for members of the public is capped at 21 persons (16 in the Council Chamber and 5 in Committee Room 1).

Phased Approach to Implementing Hybrid Council Meetings

Due to the significant changes to the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms technology (including Zoom integration), as well as the ongoing public health restrictions, staff recommend a three phased approach to implementing hybrid Council and Committee meetings. This phased approach is only for Council meetings (including Special Council meetings), Council Public Meetings and meetings of any Committee whose members are all Members of Council (e.g. Budget Committee of the Whole, Official Plan Update Committee, etc.). As discussed below, it is recommended that

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advisory and other committees that have citizen members continue to meet electronically via Zoom while any COVID-19 restrictions are in-place.

Phase 1

In Phase 1, in-person participation in meetings will be limited to Members of Council, staff in the Office of the Clerk and other staff identified by the City Manager and Commissioners, subject to public health capacity limits. During this phase, all public participation in a meeting will be electronic only. During Phase 1, the processes to integrate Council Chambers, Committee Rooms and Zoom will be further tested and refined. Limiting in-person public participation to electronic only in Phase 1 recognizes that York Region is currently in the Ontario COVID-19 Red Zone. It is expected that this phase will run from April 2021 to at least the end of May 2021.

Phase 2

In Phase 2, the public will be able to begin participating in-person in hybrid meetings. Public in-person participation will be limited to delegations and Public Forum only (i.e. the public will not be able to attend a meeting in-person just to observe the meeting). It is anticipated that this phase will begin in June 2021 at the earliest. Phase 2 may be indefinitely delayed, however, if York Region remains in a highly restricted COVID-19 zone (such as the Orange Zone or higher).

Phase 3

Phase 3 of the plan will begin when most, if not all, COVID-19 public health restrictions have been lifted. At this point, there will be no restrictions on in-person attendance in meetings. During Phase 3, public participation will transition to in-person only. Under Section 12.4(e) of the Procedure By-law, when all health restrictions are lifted, electronic delegations will end. In this phase, it is recommended that Members of Council will normally participate in meeting in-person. Due to the technical challenges of conducting hybrid meetings, remote participation by Members of Council should be limited to exceptional circumstances.

Grey Zone – Stay-at-Home Orders

If at any point York Region is placed in the Grey – Lockdown Zone, or any similar stay-at-home order, it is recommended that all in-person meeting participation be suspended (i.e. meetings be conducted electronically only). In this scenario, Council meetings would return to the phase in effect immediately prior to the lockdown once York Region was returned to a less restricted zone.

Advisory Committee Meetings

It is recommended that all committees that include citizen members (e.g. Heritage Richmond Hill, Accessibility Advisory Committee, Committee of Adjustment, etc.) not be permitted to conduct hybrid meetings. Based on system tests, running hybrid meetings increases the number of staff required to be present during a meeting by at least one. As many advisory committee meetings take place in the evening, this creates additional

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staffing pressures for the Office of the Clerk. In addition to this, not permitting citizen members to meet in-person respects the general COVID-19 public health guidelines to limit contact with multiple different persons or social groups. Following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, it is recommended that advisory Committees be required to meet wholly in-person with no electronic participation.

Procedures for Hybrid Meetings

Article 12 of the Procedure By-law No. 74-12, as amended, (“Article 12”) establishes the rules for any meeting that is conducted wholly or partially (i.e. hybrid meeting) as an electronic meeting. Article 12, among other things, allows:

- Members of Council to participate either remotely or in-person in Council and Committee meetings and count towards quorum
- Permits a system for roll calls of Members of Council to establish their presence at a meeting if they are not able to be identified visually
- Establishes a speaking order for Members of Council, where required, based on the technology used for an electronic meeting and that a roll call and defined speaking order for Members of Council can be implemented to ensure that all Members of Council are able to be recognized
- Permits electronic delegations and participation by the public according to any processes established by the City Clerk at their authority while in-person attendance is restricted due to public health rules
- Delegates authority to the City Clerk to create specific processes for Council and Committee meetings as required

Based on system tests, in addition to the electronic meeting rules in Article 12, additional processes and procedures are required to effectively implement hybrid meetings, as described below.

Minimum Member of Council In-person Participation

Because of how Zoom and the Council Chamber are integrated for livestreaming, a minimum of four Members of Council, including the Chair, must attend a hybrid meeting in-person. As such, Members of Council will be required to inform the Office of the Clerk a set number of days prior to a meeting if they will be attending a meeting in-person or electronically. If an insufficient number of Members of Council will attend a meeting in-person, the meeting will be conducted electronically only.

Additionally, due to technology limits with integrating Council Chambers and Zoom, it is necessary that the Chair be physically present in the Chamber during any hybrid meeting. Where the Chair is not able to attend in-person, it is recommended that the Chair be given the authority to appoint an alternative chair (such as a Deputy Mayor or Vice-chair) for the meeting, or direct that the meeting be conducted entirely as an electronic meeting. If the Chair appoints an alternate chair, the Chair can still participate in the meeting electronically, including voting on any matter.

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Delegations and Public Forum during Phase 2

To effectively run hybrid meetings during Phase 2, the Public will still be required to continue to register for both Delegations and Public Forum by the date and time indicated by the City Clerk. In addition to registering, members of the public providing a Delegation or Public Forum address will be required to choose in-person or electronic participation. Once selected they will not be able to change from in-person to electronic or from electronic to in-person. To effectively administer the meeting, all delegations will be grouped by Agenda Item and then by type of participation (i.e. all electronic delegations for a specific agenda item will be grouped together, and all in-person delegations for that item will be grouped together). The order within each group will continue to be on a first-come first-serve basis. The ability to provide an in-person delegation will also be based on the capacity limits, on a first-come first-serve basis. Once all in-person spots have been filled, delegations will be required to give their delegation electronically and/or submit written correspondence. Due to the effort required to properly administer all these rules, the cut-off time to submit delegations (i.e. noon on the day before a regular Council meeting, or noon on the day of a Council Public meeting) will be strictly enforced.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

There are no financial implications from the implementation of Hybrid Council meetings, but an increase in staff effort is required to administer these meetings.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

This report relates to Council's Strategic Priority of a Strong Sense of Belonging. This provides the way forward for Members of Council, staff and the Public to continue to engage with Council and Committee meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Climate Change Considerations:

Climate change considerations are not applicable to this staff report.

Conclusion:

Staff are recommending Council approve the plan and processes to implement hybrid (electronic and in-person) meetings as described in staff report SRCFS.21.14.

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

None

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCFS.21.14 - Implementation of Hybrid Council and Committee Meetings.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 11, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Stephen Huycke - Mar 10, 2021 - 2:50 PM

Sherry Adams - Mar 10, 2021 - 5:31 PM

MaryAnne Dempster - Mar 11, 2021 - 2:38 PM