

# Municipality of Lakeshore - Report to Council

## Strategic & Legal Affairs

### Civic Affairs



**To:** Mayor & Members of Council

**From:** Brianna Coughlin, Division Leader – Civic Affairs

**Date:** August 3, 2021

**Subject:** Use of Council Chambers and Virtual Council Meetings

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### Recommendation

Direct Administration to prepare the necessary amendments to the Procedural By-law to allow for virtual Council meetings, as presented at the August 10, 2021 Council meeting.

### Background

The *Municipal Act, 2001* was amended in 2018 to include provisions that allow municipalities to allow Council members to participate in Council meetings through means allowing for electronic participation. However, Members attending by electronic means could not be counted toward the quorum for the meeting.

In March 2020, the Act was further amended to allow, during emergencies declared under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, for members participating through electronic means to be counted toward quorum. At the Special Council meeting held March 19, 2020, Council approved By-law 30-2020 (attached as Appendix A). This by-law amended the Procedural By-law to allow for electronic attendance by Council members:

- for Council meeting during a declared emergency;
- where the member's health or the health of others will be threatened by the attendance of the member at a meeting; or
- for Emergency Governance Committee meetings.

At the July 13, 2021 meeting, Council considered the Civic Centre Concept Design report which recommended that Council continue online meetings until such time as a new Council Chambers is built.

The following resolutions were approved at the July 13, 2021 Council meeting:

235-07-2021

Direct Administration to proceed with a Concept Design for a new Civic Centre to be located at 419 Notre Dame Street to be funded with \$65,000 from the Facilities – New Reserve.

239-07-2021

Defer consideration of the remaining recommendations in this report pending a report from Administration regarding adequate spacing of employees, the cost of implementation, and Council location.

## **Comment**

### **Council Chambers**

The Council Chambers are not compliant with COVID-19 safety protocols. The current furniture consists of one long curved table for all 8 Council members, the Chief Administrative Officer and the Clerk, as well as shared tables for members of Administration. The current furniture cannot be retrofitted to comply with safety protocols.

Should Council wish to return to in-person meetings, Administration would need to secure individual 6-foot modular stations with plexiglass guards on either side, extending 2 feet behind. This would allow Council members to participate in the meeting without personal protective equipment (masks) however these would need to be worn while moving to and from the desks.

With the above-noted furniture, the Council Chambers would be capable of accommodating all Council members, the Chief Administrative Officer, Clerk and IT support. The customized ordering, purchase and installation of the stations is estimated to take several months and cost approximately \$40,000. All other members of Administration and delegates would need to continue to participate in meetings virtually causing a hybrid system.

Conducting a hybrid model of meetings can be done, however additional resources are required. As noted above, a hybrid Council meeting would consist of Council, Chief Administrative Officer, Clerk and IT Technician in person in a setup that allows for COVID-compliant work space.

Corporate and Division Leaders as well as delegations would be required to attend via a Zoom meeting. The IT Technician would control cameras and audio in Council Chambers to broadcast the meeting to all participants.

The estimated IT costs for changing Council meetings to in-person/Zoom hybrid are as follows:

- Reconfiguration of audio/video system in Council Chambers - \$5,000 to \$10,000. The cost will be at the higher end of the estimate if the Council Chambers are designed to be moved to various municipal facilities, as the audio cart will require changes to allow for this.
- Lighting of participants in Council Chambers - \$5,000
- Additional pan/tilt/zoom camera for capturing all participants in-person in Council Chambers \$3,000
- Additional monitors for members of the meeting to see the virtual participants and presentation \$4,000

The total estimated cost of furniture and technology to hold in-person/Zoom hybrid meetings is \$62,000 which has not been included in the 2021 budget. Should Council wish to explore this option, Administration would recommend including the cost in the 2022 budget with a contingency budget of up to 15%.

### **Council Chambers – Office Space**

As noted in the Civic Centre report presented to Council July 13, 2021, staff accommodation pressures continue to grow as Lakeshore works to respond to demands for increased levels of service brought on by the urbanization and growth in the community. In 2020, the Belle River Arena was converted to a temporary operations centre (now known as the Lakeshore Operations Centre) as per recommendations in the Strategic Facilities Plan which has afforded the Municipality a few more years before a new Civic Centre is required. With the 2021 Budget contemplating further staff adjustments in order to keep up with demand for service this additional space will quickly be exhausted.

Staffing pressures continue to grow as Lakeshore works towards a full re-opening after the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to accommodate staffing requirements, some staff will need to continue to work remotely and make use of temporary hoteling space at municipal facilities when needed to be physically in the office.

Administration is recommending that Council Chambers be retrofitted to accommodate COVID-compliant office space for staff. It is anticipated that the space can fit 8 cubicles and 3 offices. The furniture and installation costs are estimated to be \$41,000.

If Council Chambers are not renovated for office space, accommodation will need to be made elsewhere. This may include the rental of portables and would still require the purchase of furniture.

## **Moving Council Chambers to Another Location**

Administration is recommending that Council meetings continue virtually as this is the easiest and most economical option. However, should Council wish to allow for in-person/virtual hybrid meetings in a location other than the current Council Chambers, these could be held at the Atlas Tube Recreation Centre (ATRC) or the Libro Community Centre.

While the Renaud Room at the ATRC is the largest space and could accommodate more in-person presence, it is also the least private. Closed sessions would need to be accommodated in another room, such as a Program Room 1, which will reduce the possibility of generating revenue from rentals for these spaces.

The Libro Community Centre would be a better location in terms of access and privacy. This would require the same technology upgrades as noted above for Council Chambers. While additional spacing can be achieved at this location and temporary tables could be used, Council may wish to purchase the modular furniture which can eventually be used in the new Council Chambers or for other public meetings. This will require additional storage as well as set up/take down costs.

In addition to the technology and furniture costs, using this facility would mean a loss of possible revenue when Council meetings are scheduled. Currently there are no programs scheduled on Tuesday evenings, however this may also prove challenging in scheduling special meetings if the need arises.

## **Procedural By-law**

As previously noted, Council approved By-law 30-2020 to allow for electronic participation in meetings during times of emergency. Administration recommends that the Procedural By-law be updated to allow for ongoing virtual participation beyond the current COVID-19 declared emergency.

Bill 197, enacted July 2020, further amended the *Municipal Act, 2001* to allow municipalities to allow a member of Council to appoint another member of Council to act as proxy in their place when they are absent from a Council Meeting, subject to the following rules:

- A member shall not appoint a proxy unless the proxyholder is a member of the same council as the appointing member.
- A member shall not act as a proxy for more than one member of council at any one time.

- The member appointing the proxy shall notify the clerk of the appointment in accordance with the process established by the clerk.
- For the purpose of determining whether or not a quorum of members is present at any point in time, a proxyholder shall be counted as one member and shall not be counted as both the appointing member and the proxyholder.
- A proxy shall be revoked if the appointing member or the proxyholder requests that the proxy be revoked and complies with the proxy revocation process established by the clerk.
- Where a recorded vote is requested under section 246, the clerk shall record the name of each proxyholder, the name of the member of council for whom the proxyholder is voting and the vote cast on behalf of that member; and
- A member who appoints a proxy for a meeting shall be considered absent from the meeting for the purposes of determining whether the office of the member is vacant under clause 259(1)(c).

Administration is not recommending proxy voting at this time, due to the ability to join the meeting remotely. However, should Council wish proxy voting to be established, it is recommended that this be included in the resolution providing direction.

### **Financial Impacts**

There are no financial impacts to continue the current practice of virtual Council meeting conducted by Zoom. However, for ease of use and accommodation for Council members, Administration would recommend the purchase of laptops with Wifi and hotspot technology to ensure continuous internet access from home or another location. The cost of this purchase is estimated to be \$8,000 and could be funded through the Safe Restart allocation funding.

The total estimated cost of furniture and technology to hold in-person/Zoom hybrid meetings in Council Chambers is \$62,000. This amount was not included in the 2021 budget. However, this cost could be funded through the Safe Restart allocation funding.

It should be noted that the loss of revenue for holding Council meetings at the ATRC or Libro Community Centre cannot be recovered through the Safe Restart allocation funding.

**Attachment:** By-law 30-2020

## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Virtual Council Meetings.docx
Attachments:	- By-law 30-2020 - Amendment to Procedural By-law - Emergency Measures.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Aug 5, 2021

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

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