

To:	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	January 24, 2019
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-CW-02-19
Title:	Council Chambers Audio System and Video Recordings
Prepared by:	Rob Hatten
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	None
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee of the Whole as presented as per Resolution <i>CW37-19</i> ;

Recommendation

1. That staff include \$75,000 in the 2019 budget for the procurement of video and audio recording solutions for Council and Committee of the Whole meetings and audio system upgrades to the Grey County Council Chamber; and,
2. That the video recording of County Council and Committee of the Whole meetings becomes a standard procedure.

Executive Summary

Grey County has been recording County Council and Committee of the Whole meetings since April 2018. Viewership sits at about 0.13% of the population, with occasional spikes when topics of public interest are discussed by Council. Video analytics show viewers are only watching small portions of the videos posted online to the Grey County YouTube channel. Outside of large urban centres, few upper tier municipalities are providing video recordings of their proceedings. Overall, the recordings are of a low quality and significant improvements could be made by upgrading the camera and sound system in Council Chambers. Sound system improvements would be of benefit to everyone who utilizes Council Chambers. Improving the quality of our video recordings will support the County's commitment to excellence in governance and service and may help grow our online audience. Discontinuing recordings will free up staff time to dedicate to other activities.

Background and Discussion

County staff began recording Council and Committee of the Whole meetings in the Spring of 2018. Following Council's direction to test a proof of concept, little has been invested in the recordings which use a 1080p webcam and digital recording software.

A webcam mounted on the wall captures video while a USB cable connects the recording laptop to the Council Chamber sound system which records the microphones in the room.

Overall, quality of the videos is low. The webcam records in high definition but isn't designed to capture the large room effectively. Audio is inconsistent and varies based on each speaker's proximity to their microphone. This low quality comes at a very low cost but it likely has an impact on viewership.

In October of 2018, staff shared a report CAOR-CW-21-18 on viewership with recommendations for improving the quality of recordings. Council, sitting as committee of the whole, did not support the staff recommendation. No further direction was provided on the future of the pilot.

Our Current Process

The Grey County Communications Manager records the meetings. The recording is manually turned on and off and all of slides projected onto the main screens of the Council Chamber need to be manually imported into the video and transitioned along with the live presentation. Any videos played on the Council screens do not appear in the meeting recording.

Following the meeting, recordings are uploaded to the Grey County YouTube channel, typically the same day as the meeting. Ideally the Communications Manager manually time codes reports and discussions from the agenda and links them in the video description. This makes it easier for viewers to jump to specific points of interest instead of searching through a multi-hour video. This is a time consuming process and is not always achieved.

Within 24 hours YouTube will automatically captions videos if they are not too long. Captions are a requirement of Ontario's accessibility laws. The YouTube captions are passable, but risky. Spoken words can be misinterpreted by the artificial intelligence which could be inconsequential, embarrassing, offensive or confusing (Meaford = Me furred, etc.). If videos are too long or the audio is not clear other captioning methods must be used. These services range in price from \$1-\$3 per minute.

Pros of the current system

- Affordable
- Captures audio and video
- YouTube is a free, publicly accessible platform

Cons of the current system

- Poor video quality and subpar audio make videos difficult to watch
- Time consuming and distracting for staff to produce.
- Difficult to identify speakers could be considered poor transparency
- Insufficient equipment
- Errors in captions make them difficult to follow
- Recordings aren't tied to an agenda

Analytics from meeting recordings (April-October)

Council meeting

Average views per video: 20 (max 26 on May 10)
Average length of video: 42:00
Average length of view: 3:15

Committee of the Whole meeting

Average views per video: 122 (max 500 on June 28)
Average length of video: 128 minutes
Average length of view: 2:00 minutes

Engagement on post has been virtually non-existent, with no relevant comments and few “likes” or “dislikes” of videos. No one has complained about the video quality.

It is worth noting that due to the very low quality of the videos produced, very little has been done to promote meeting recordings.

Analytics from December 20, 2019 meeting

Council meeting

Total Views: 15
Video Length: 11 minutes
Average length of view: 4 minutes

Committee of the Whole meeting

Total Views: 98
Video Length: 80 minutes
Average length of view: 7 minutes

What this tells us

Some people are watching, but not many. We can't tell specifically who (public, staff, media), but it appears people are interested in viewing occasional discussions that are of greater public interest. Viewers are not watching the whole meeting, only tuning in for specific portions.

What are others doing?

Many Ontario municipalities are still not recording their meetings. Only 4 of the 18 members of the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus provide video recordings. Those that do tend to use services that integrate live streaming and recording with agenda management. There are multiple service providers who each offer a range of services. For example, Civic Web provides a complete web portal for managing agendas, minutes, videos and live streams. Other services, like Sliq, have the ability to timecode in detail every time an individual speaks making it is easy for viewers to sort by both agenda topics and by speakers.

There are multiple other services providers in the market, including other solutions that maybe found locally, and each have their individual pros and cons.

Recommended next steps

If Council wishes to continue recording meetings, staff recommends issuing an RFP in 2019 for a proper audio and video recording system or contracted services. Alternatively, if the decision is to discontinue video recordings, consideration should be given to upgrading the audio system in Council Chambers to optimize the ability for everyone who uses the room to hear the proceedings clearly.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There is no legal requirement to video record council meetings.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, Integrated Accessibility Standards does not require audio or video recordings of municipal council sessions. If recordings are posted, staff are required to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities for the currently recorded Council sessions.

Financial and Resource Implications

If Council chooses to invest in technology improvements, staff recommend including either up to \$75,000 in the 2019 budget for Council Chamber audio and video enhancements or up to \$55,000 for improvements to the audio system through an RFP process.

If Council chooses to continue the pilot as is, staff resources conservatively valued at \$10,000 annually, will continue to be spent on recordings.

If Council chooses not to continue the video recording pilot there are no financial and resource implications. The Communications Manager's time will be reallocated to other projects.

Relevant Consultation

Communication Staff, IT Staff

Multiple vendors (previously)

Appendices and Attachments

none