

To:	Warden Halliday and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	July 12, 2018
Subject / Report No:	CCR-CW-09-18
Title:	Public Comment-Question Periods
Prepared by:	Heather Morrison
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	N/A
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee of the Whole as presented as per Resolution CW189-18; Endorsed by County Council on July 26, 2018.

Recommendation

1. That Report CCR-CW-09-18 be received and that a public comment/question period not be included as a standing item on the Committee of the Whole agenda at this time.

Executive Summary

A Notice of Motion was passed by County Council in April 2018 requesting staff bring back a report on the option of including public question periods during Committee of the Whole meetings. The County has a robust delegation procedure that provides for advance notice of items members of the public wish to bring forward for Council's attention.

Background and Discussion

At the April 26, 2018 Committee of the Whole meeting, a Notice of Motion was passed requesting staff bring back a report on regarding the inclusion of public question periods during Committee of the Whole meetings. In completing the research for this report, staff reached out to both the local municipalities in Grey County and several Counties across the region requesting input on the current practices of both the upper and lower tier governments.

It was clear from the responses received that the majority of the councils who include public question periods in their procedural by-laws are at the local level where the day to day services are provided to residents. Many of Grey County's member municipalities have implemented this process or are in the middle of a procedural by-law review which may include a public comment-question period. In conducting the research, it became very clear that this is not a common practice at the upper tier municipality. In fact, out of the upper-tier counties that responded, only Dufferin County currently has this practice currently in place.

Staff requested further information from the local municipalities on how this process was implemented and why. The local level of government is seen as the closest level to the people of a municipality. This level of government delivers most of the day to day services that residents use including water, roads, taxes and building services. While the County delivers some of those services, they are broader based and geographically spread out. Several local councils implemented this process to hear from local residents on local issues that affect their daily lives.

Some allow five minutes for speaking while others allow two minutes. Some indicate that the question must be related to something on the agenda while others have no boundaries for the comment/questions. Some allow for a response from Council or staff while others indicate they will hear the questions/comments and no response will be given or no questions asked at that time. If further direction is required, that will be provided to staff at a later time by resolution of Council.

Accountability and Transparency

There are several ways in which a resident can reach their elected official on an issue including phone, email, in-office visit and scheduled delegation. There is currently a very robust delegation process in Grey County where Council normally sees two to three delegations per meeting on a variety of topics. Scheduled delegations allow for notice to residents and council members by way of a formal agenda item of what topics are coming forward in case there is something of interest to them. It also allows following the meeting, the publishing of materials on the County website for the public to view and learn more about the topic as well as provide contact information should they wish to have a better understanding about a particular topic or organization. Scheduled delegations also permit Council to discuss an item, ask questions and request any appropriate follow up. Staff will know what delegations are scheduled and can be ready to answer questions related to specific County activities in relation to delegations in order to provide Council with a more fulsome understanding of a topic.

The inclusion of public comments/question periods, while allowing more impromptu questions, does little to promote the accountability and transparency process of municipal government. Items that residents may be interested in that come up through a public comment/question period do not allow for others to hear what is being said. While the minutes will reflect the comment/question topic, they will not provide any further information related to the topic for the knowledge of others. Questions also arise as to how Council will deal with certain items such as:

- Comments/questions outside of the County's purview
- Frivolous or vexatious comments/questions
- Public criticism of council or staff
- Repetitive questions/comments

Legal and Legislated Requirements

While there are no legal or legislative implications related to this report, should council approve the addition of public comment/question periods, the County's Procedural By-law will have to be amended to include this provision within it. Further information will need to be brought back to

Council regarding recommendations on how to implement the process including time allotment, agenda items etc.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no specific financial implications related to this request. However, should a number of questions/comments be brought forward that Council wishes additional information on, additional staff time will be required to research and prepare staff reports on these topics.

Relevant Consultation

- X Internal CAO
- X External-Grey County Municipalities, several upper-tier counties

Appendices and Attachments

None