

Report CCR-CS-08-14

To: Chair Pringle and Members of the Corporate Services Committee
From: Sharon Vokes
Meeting Date: February 11, 2014
Subject: **Seeking Direction on Potential Amendments to Council Conference Policy**
Status: Committee directed that no action be taken at this time to revamp the conference and seminar attendance policy for council. Directed that staff review and report to incoming council within first two years of term of office per Resolution CS28-14 February 11, 2014; Direction endorsed by County Council March 4, 2014 per Resolution CC34-14;

Recommendation(s)

For direction from the Committee

Background

At the February 12, 2013 Corporate Services Committee meeting staff was directed to prepare a report for the Committee's consideration that would explore the option of providing for a dollar allowance for attending conferences rather than a limit by number.

The Committee's request for a review of the conference policy developed out of a request by a county councillor to attend the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' conference (FCM).

The current policy, ADM-04-07, [Conference and Seminar Attendance for County Council Members Procedure](#) provides a list of approved conferences and a maximum number to be attended in any given calendar year.

The current approved conferences are limited to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and its sections, organizations in which the County maintains a membership, including the Southwest Economic Alliance (SWEA) and the Ontario West Municipal Conference. The conferences which are specific to AMO are the actual AMO conference itself, the combined AMO/OGRA (Ontario Good Roads Association), Ontario Small Urban (OSUM) and Counties, Regions and Single Tier Municipalities.

Councillors may attend two of the approved conferences in any given calendar year. The Warden may attend all of the approved conferences with the addition of FCM. Conferences outside the policy require the prior approval of the Corporate Services Committee.

Practices of Other Counties

A survey completed by 12 counties revealed that policy is evenly split between those managing using a maximum number of conferences compared to a maximum dollar level. It was also fairly equally split between those municipalities that provided for attendance at out of province conferences and those that didn't.

Direction from Committee

The report before the Committee today does not include a recommendation on whether to move towards a dollar allowance or not. Before doing so, staff would like to seek some direction on whether a new policy should be structured to ensure more even county representation at the various approved conferences.

As staff began research of the policy it was noted that county councillors predominantly attend OGRA/ROMA and AMO. While both these conferences are valuable, the restriction of two conferences means that these two larger provincial conferences use up the allotment of two conferences per year.

All conferences have significant value not only to the individual, but also to the County, and depending on the conference, there is benefit to the lower tier municipality as well. The County is well served by the knowledge gained through attendance at conferences.

Municipal conferences can generally be broken down into three broad categories of national, provincial and subject/function specific. National conferences such as FCM look more that the 50,000 foot level and provide opportunities to learn emerging trends on a national level and learn of municipal efforts aimed at influencing the federal government.

Provincial conferences such as AMO and OGRA/ROMA look at issues from the 20,000 foot level and include many generalized sessions. These provincial conferences provide great networking opportunities as well as meeting with provincial ministers and making the necessary staff contacts to move issues forward through the provincial government.

At the 10,000 foot level there are subject or function specific conferences such as Counties, Regions and Single Tier Municipalities and SWEA which are directed at specific, county mandated responsibilities. These conferences offer great networking

opportunities on specific issues and provide enhanced opportunities for joint advocacy to the province.

If deemed appropriate by the Committee, staff will review the current policy and bring forward options for the Committee's consideration that will include mechanisms to encourage attendance by councillors of all the approved conferences within the policy.

Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

Considerations

At this time there are no financial, staffing, legal or information technology considerations related to this report. Should the Committee recommend looking at a policy change that encourages attendance at a broader range of conferences, there is a possibility of a budget increase dependent upon the methodology that is applied in the policy.

Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

While council's conference policy isn't specifically tied to goals within the corporate strategic plan, the knowledge gained from attending the various conferences assists in moving the various priorities forward.

Attachments

None

Respectfully submitted by,

Sharon Vokes
Clerk/Director of Council Services