



Committee Report

To:	Warden McQueen and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	September 10, 2020
Subject / Report No:	CCR-CW-09-20
Title:	Considerations for Returning to In Person Meetings
Prepared by:	Kim Wingrove and Heather Morrison
Reviewed by:	
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	None
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW156-20; Endorsed by County Council September 24, 2020 per Resolution CC75-20;

Recommendation

1. **That Report CCR-CW-09-20 regarding Return to In Person Meetings be received; and**
2. **That starting on October 8, 2020, Grey County Council/Committee of the Whole resume in person meetings with appropriate protocols in place; and**
3. **That the option for some councillors and staff to continue to attend virtually remain in place in accordance with the updated Procedural By-law.**

Executive Summary

Grey County Council/Committee of the Whole and a few sub-committees have been meeting electronically during the COVID-19 pandemic. With Ontario now in Stage 3 of reopening and many more businesses and facilities opening, consideration related to the return to in person meetings needs to take place to ensure meetings continue to happen in an effective and efficient manner while still respecting physical distancing and public health protocols.

Background and Discussion

On March 31st, Grey County's Procedural Bylaw was amended to allow electronic participation in meetings during any period when an emergency has been declared. The

province declared a state of emergency on March 17, 2020. This expired on July 24th, 2020 and was replaced by the Reopening Ontario Act. Grey County declared a state of emergency on March 26, 2020 and this continues to remain in place at this time.

Grey County Council, Committee of the Whole and some sub-committees have been meeting virtually since March 31st in order to continue to carry on the business of the County while also following the guidance provided by the province and the Medical Officer of Health. In order to limit the spread of COVID-19 infection in the community, people were asked to avoid unnecessary travel, limit the size of face-to-face gatherings, and maintain physical distance from others. The use of the online meeting platforms Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business have allowed County business to continue and meetings to take place with remote participation of Council and staff.

Many businesses and municipal offices have reopened to serve the public while adhering to public health requirements to wear masks and physically distance. It is time to look at restarting in person Council/Committee of the Whole meetings.

Considerations

Meeting Space

Staff have reviewed options related to holding in person meetings in Council Chambers or other meeting rooms as required. With some changes to seating spacing, it is possible for all of Council along with the Senior Management Team (SMT) to attend in person meetings in Council Chambers. Desk spacing and the use of SMT and media tables for Council members would permit full physical attendance by Council while still adhering to physical distancing requirements. SMT would sit in the gallery or in their offices, again spaced appropriately as required in order to present reports or answer questions from Council. If staff were in their office, they could view the livestream of the meeting and attend as required. A diagram is attached for information on the proposed room set up.

The availability of hand sanitizer and masks and thorough cleaning of Council Chambers and other required rooms both prior to and after the meetings would be in place. Councillors and staff would need to screen themselves prior to each meeting using the COVID screening tool located on the Grey's vine. Members or staff using the podium to speak would need to clean that area before the next speaker. Appropriate materials would be provided. Directional signage on the floor may be required in order to ensure one-way traffic through Council Chambers. Rooms for Council to use for breaks would be booked with limited capacity in each room (i.e. Bay Room could accommodate 10 people at one time).

Report CCR-CW-08-20 recommending changes to the County's Procedural By-law to permit electronic attendance by Councillors outside of emergency declarations would allow those that may not be comfortable participating in in-person meetings at this time to still participate via Zoom. This would allow them to participate in the meeting discussions, votes and hear any delegations presenting to Committee of the Whole.

Open Meeting Requirements

The Administration Building, at this time, is only open to the public on an appointment basis and for service at the Provincial Offenses Court counter. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the use of our recording system allows meetings to be livestreamed to the public, satisfying the open meeting provisions within the Municipal Act. As always, after the meeting the video is posted to the County's YouTube page for viewing by the public. It is recommended that delegations continue to use Zoom as a platform to address Committee of the Whole at this time.

In the future, should the building reopen to the public but pandemic restrictions continue to exist, further consideration of in-person public participation will be required. A maximum, physically distanced occupancy of the space will be determined. Spaces allocated for the senior management team could be freed up for the public while staff participate in the meeting virtually. As is current practice, staff will make every endeavor to anticipate and make arrangements for members of the public who wish to be physically present for a meeting.

Technology

The use of technology for meetings, while providing the option to meet virtually in order to carry on the business of the County, presents its own unique challenges. Currently Grey County uses services from CTRE for its livestreaming and recordings completed in Council Chambers. Staff would need to look at the compatibility of this system and Zoom in order to ensure that those wishing to participate virtually would have no logistical issues when the two systems are combined and both systems can be livestreamed and recorded simultaneously.

With staff gradually returning to work, more staff using the County's internet to connect virtually to a meeting has been putting a strain on our internet capacity causing interruptions or loss of video or audio during meetings. Returning to in-person meetings would alleviate much of this concern.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legislative or legal requirements related to this report. Grey County will still operate under the open meeting rules as provided for in the Municipal Act.

Financial and Resource Implications

There may be some small costs from a technology standpoint to have CTRE staff perform compatibility testing on our current Council audio system to ensure it works seamlessly with members wishing to continue to use Zoom. This could be absorbed within the current Communications Operating budget.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal-Communications, Health and Safety Manager, Housing staff
- External-

Appendices and Attachments

Council Chambers Proposed Set Up

