



Committee Report

To:	Warden McQueen and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	October 22, 2020
Subject / Report No:	CCR-CW-12-20
Title:	2021 Inaugural Considerations
Prepared by:	Heather Morrison, County Clerk
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove, CAO
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	None
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW186-20; Endorsed by County Council November 12, 2020 per Resolution CC87-20;

Recommendation

1. **That Report CCR-CW-12-20 regarding 2021 Inaugural considerations be received; and**
2. **That Council provide direction on their preferred process for the 2021 Inaugural session.**

Executive Summary

Currently Grey County Council is continuing to meet electronically due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the safety of Council members and staff. This report outlines considerations for Council relative to holding the 2021 Inaugural session electronically or in person.

Background and Discussion

Section 3.1 of the County's Procedural By-law states that "Council will, in accordance with this By-law, hold its first Meeting on the first Tuesday in December at 7:30 PM." As Council will know, a Warden is elected annually at this meeting. The 2021 Inaugural meeting is scheduled for December 1, 2020.

With COVID-19 continuing to impact in-person meetings, Staff thought it best to provide Council with some considerations related to holding the 2021 election of the Warden. Past practices have always had candidates nominated on the floor of Council during this meeting, duly moved and seconded and a request to the candidate on whether they wish to stand for election of the Warden for the following year. Officially, there was no nomination deadline for this.

Nominations were received by Council until, by motion, a Member closes nominations. Movers, seconders and candidates were entitled to speak in support of the candidate's election. Voting by secret ballot then followed.

The 2021 Inaugural session will be significantly different than past years due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the requirement to adhere to guidelines established by the Province and the Medical Officer of Health. At the least, no large gathering will be held in December 2020 related to the election of the Warden. The provincial numbers as well as local numbers are climbing, and the Province has confirmed that Ontario is in its second wave of COVID-19.

Some considerations for an in-person versus electronic Inaugural session are outlined below.

In Person Meeting

- Council Members plus CAO and Clerk only, socially distanced in Council Chambers. This puts 20 people within one room. Some Council members may not feel comfortable returning to an in-person meeting and therefore a potential for not all Council members to participate.
- Appropriate health protocols in place-masks, screening, room cleaning, sanitizer etc. These measures will assist in containment of the virus but are not 100% effective
- Ability to continue with secret ballot voting. This will allow the anonymity of secret ballot voting to continue
- Staff would livestream the meeting allowing families and the greater public to view the event through the livestream feed
- With no social gathering afterwards the evening meeting could be moved to earlier in the day with Council's support (i.e. 4:00pm)
- In Person meetings will be subject to current health protocols and provincial regulations and the climate of the day may impact the ability to hold an in-person meeting

Electronic Meeting

- Conducted using Zoom following the practices for Council and Committee meetings in place since April.
- This would allow all members to participate safely from their preferred location-home, office etc. There is a possibility of technical glitches with connectivity that could impact attendance.
- Nominations would need to be received and confirmed no later than 12:00 noon the last meeting of the 2020 Council term, Thursday November 26, 2020.
- Voting for the nominated candidates would be via an anonymous poll through Zoom instead of the paper secret ballot process.
- Poll results would be shown on screen, eliminating the need for scrutineers.
- Families and the greater public could view the event through the livestream feed
- Council could consider an earlier start time due to electronic participation (i.e. 4:00pm).
- Procedural By-law Sections 3.1 and parts of Section 5 would need to be waived (in order to adjust the time of the meeting, change to electronic voting from secret ballot and waiving the requirement for scrutineers) for the 2021 Inaugural session. This would require a motion to be passed by a two-thirds vote by the last Council meeting of 2020 term.

What Others Are Doing

Huron County had a report presented at the Wednesday October 7 meeting related to possible procedural by-law amendments to permit both electronic and paper ballots, a nomination deadline of the last meeting prior to the inaugural session and the use of a voting tool for the electronic election of the Warden should it be necessary. The procedural by-law amendments to allow for electronic participation for inaugural sessions was supported.

Simcoe County made some changes to its procedural by-law prior to the 2018 election including a nomination day in October, using an electronic meeting process and will use the Zoom voting tool if required.

Wellington County has returned to in-person meetings and no direction from Council, at this point, has been provided to staff on changes related to the 2021 inaugural session.

Dufferin County is currently reviewing options similar to those contained in this report.

Bruce County, through its use of eScribe has recently purchased Vote Manager which includes a secret ballot option should it be required for the inaugural session. Should the inaugural session be electronic further amendments to its procedural by-law may be required.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

The Inaugural session process follows the County's Procedural By-law 5003-18, as amended. Section 2.1 permits the suspension of any of the provisions of this by-law with a two-thirds vote of Council. Section 233 (5) of the Municipal Act, 2001, as amended, notes that the head of council may be appointed by secret ballot. Section 233 (1) requires that the head of Council be selected at the first meeting of its 2020/2021 term, which starts on December 1, 2020 pursuant to section 235(1.1).

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial considerations related to this request. If Council chooses to hold the 2020 Inaugural in person, the costs will be within the 2020 Council operating budget.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal Legal Services, CAO
- External various other Counties

Appendices and Attachments

None