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**Date:** March 29, 2019  
**To:** Mayor and Council  
**Author:** Jennifer Astrologo, Director of Corporate Services/Clerk  
**RE:** Broadcasting Council Meetings  
**Report No.:** CS-2019-09

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## **AIM**

To provide Council with information regarding the costs associated with broadcasting its Council Meetings.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the December 11, 2018 Regular Meeting of Council, motion 671-2018 was carried:

That Administration provide a report on options for recording Council meetings and having it made available for the public, including what other municipalities are doing.

In 2006, Bill 130, the *Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act*, was passed in response to a number of deficiencies identified by the Province with respect to the accountability and transparency regime of local government. That piece of legislation outlined a number of measures, both mandatory and voluntary, requiring municipalities to implement a better system of transparency and accountability. Almost a decade later and in 2014, the Province amended the *Municipal Act, 2001* by passing the *Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, 2014*. This legislation was aimed at further enhancing and building upon accountability and transparency in local government.

While there is no legislative requirement to broadcast or record council meetings, such initiative is further supported by the provincial Ombudsman who, in his 2015 Annual Report, called on municipalities to make audio or video recordings of all meetings.

Regulation 191/11 of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (the "AODA") requires that municipal websites must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A, and by January 1, 2021 must conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA (with the

exception of success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live), and success criteria 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded)). Therefore, video recordings of Council meetings that are published to the Town's website must have a closed captioning option in accordance with the AODA.

## DISCUSSION

As previously stated, there is no legal obligation for the Town to record, in an audio or video format, its council meetings. However, doing so would: i) demonstrate the Town's commitment to open and accountable government; ii) expand the availability of information to residents, allowing them to stay informed about decisions that affect them and their community without the need to be physically present at the meeting; and, iii) serve to advance Action Plan items that were identified by Council in the Town's Strategic Plan - Accessibility and Communication External.

There are many municipalities across the province and in Essex County that provide their residents the opportunity to live stream meetings, or to watch meetings at a later date. The below table outlines the recording format(s) used by the municipalities in Essex County.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Recording Format</b>	<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>Annual Cost</b>
County of Essex	Video	Cogeco	No Cost
Amherstburg	Audio	Unknown	Unknown
Essex	Video	CFTV	\$22,000
Kingsville	None	n/a	n/a
Lakeshore	Video and Audio	Swagit for video	\$8,000 for video recording
LaSalle	None	n/a	n/a
Leamington	Video	CFTV	\$22,000
Tecumseh	Audio	No provider – recording device	Initial cost of purchasing recording device. No annual cost

As can be seen above, LaSalle and Kingsville are the only municipalities that do not record council meetings in some audio or video format. In Tecumseh, the audio recordings are used primarily by administration to prepare meeting minutes. However, those recordings are available to the public on request.

Both Essex and Leamington contract with CFTV to video record their council meetings. CFTV provides Essex with a digital copy of the recording so they can upload the video to their YouTube account for public viewing. In Leamington, CFTV uploads to YouTube on behalf of the Municipality, but such uploading usually occurs a few weeks or months after the meeting. Lakeshore uses a company called swagit, which appears to offer similar web-streaming services similar to that offered by eSCRIBE. Several Essex County municipalities are exploring options with respect to broadcasting meetings. A quote was obtained from eSCRIBE, which is discussed more fully below under "Financial Considerations".

There are a number of different methods the Town can use to broadcast its meetings: Cable TV partnership, YouTube, and website video integration. Each method has its own considerations. If meetings are broadcast on cable TV, only members of the public that subscribe to that provider would be able to view the live broadcast. Additionally, there may be delays with posting the video, to the website or another public platform, subsequent to the meeting. If the Town is provided with a digital copy of the recording, there would be additional costs to increase server capacity in order to store that media format. Benefits of this method of broadcasting include the fact that the television company would be responsible to make the video recording and could pan to speakers as they speak throughout the council meeting, rather than the “bird’s eye” view that residents would likely see from a web-streaming company or self-streaming method.

Using YouTube poses different issues for consideration. If the Town opted to self-record and post council meetings on YouTube, the Town would be responsible for making the recording and subsequently posting that video for viewing. If there are issues linking or uploading that video, there is no “support team” to assist, and it would be the responsibility of the IT Department to troubleshoot technical issues. Recordings may be interrupted by commercials in the same fashion as regular television programming. Moreover, the Town may run into ownership issues if others make claims of ownership against any posting. YouTube uses speech recognition technology to automatically create captioning, however, it does not make any guarantees as to the quality of the captions.

Website integration is another means by which Council can broadcast its meetings. eSCRIBE, the owner of the agenda management software currently being used to build and distribute council agenda packages and minutes, offers webcasting and recorded video functionality for council meetings. The software allows for the recording and live-streaming of council meetings and is integrated with the agenda. Therefore, any member of the public can watch the meeting live as long as they have an internet connection and once the video is published to the website, members of the public can select the agenda item(s) of interest and watch the discussion on those particular items. If there are technical issues with the product, eSCRIBE has a support team which is available to troubleshoot those issues, freeing up municipal staff to concentrate on other tasks and responsibilities.

Regardless of the option selected, if Council elects to move forward with broadcasting council meetings, recordings published to the Town’s website or other media account must have a closed captioning option in accordance with the *AODA*. If Council elects to move forward with some form of web-streaming option, on its own or through an external provider, Administration would need to make arrangements to configure Council Chambers (i.e. purchasing and installing cameras, running camera connections).

These recordings are not intended to replace the formal minutes that are generated during the course of a meeting and will only be kept for a pre-determined period of time. The meeting minutes that are prepared and circulated will continue to be the official and permanent record of a council meeting in accordance with the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Rather, these recordings are intended to enhance the Town’s communication with its residents, to enhance citizen engagement and participation in local government and to demonstrate the Town’s commitment to open and transparent government.

If Council wishes to move forward with broadcasting its council meetings, Administration recommends that it engage eSCRIBE to provide that service. The video module is merely an enhancement of a product that the Town currently uses. The integration with the agenda is an additional benefit for members of the public who are interested in specific agenda items and will allow them to select which parts of a meeting they wish to watch. Moreover, the technical support team is excellent. Response and resolution for issues is always timely.

## **LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Strive to make the Town of Kingsville a more accessible community.

## **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are currently no amounts set aside in the budget to pursue any of the above initiatives. However, the Town received a one-time payment from the Province to improve local service delivery and efficiency. The CAO has advised that should Council wish to proceed with this project, the Town may be able to use a small portion of these funds to implement this initiative.

The IT Manager estimated the costs associated with configuring Council Chambers at about \$5,000 per camera. At this time, it is anticipated that only one camera would be installed give a bird's eye view of Council Chambers.

At the end of January eSCRIBE provided a quote with respect to the provision of services and include unlimited meetings and unlimited closed captioning. Please note that these costs are in addition to the costs described above to configure Council Chambers.

Year One	\$ 24,200
Annual Support (after year one)	\$ 20,150

## **CONSULTATIONS**

IT Manager  
Senior Management Team  
Deputy Clerk – Council Services  
CAO

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive this report regarding broadcasting council meetings for information;

And That if Council wishes to move forward at this time, that Council direct Administration to further investigate options with respect to web-streaming services (including closed captioning) for Council meetings, and to bring a report back to Council with estimated costs and timelines for implementation for Council's consideration and further direction.

*Jennifer Astrologo*

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Jennifer Astrologo, B.H.K. (hons), LL.B  
Director of Corporate Services/Clerk

*Peggy Van Mierlo-West*

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Peggy Van Mierlo-West, C.E.T.  
Chief Administrative Officer