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Date: January 4, 2021
To: Mayor and Council
Author: Jennifer Astrologo, Director of Legislative Services
RE: Electronic Meetings – Procedure By-law Amendment
Report No.: LS-2021-01

AIM

To ask that Council adopt By-law 5-2021, being a by-law to amend the Procedure By-law to strike section 14.1(e), the provision mandating that the chair and clerk be in the same meeting room during a meeting conducted electronically.

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, the Mayor declared an emergency under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly thereafter, Council adopted By-law 36-2020, being a by-law amending the Town's Procedure By-law, which allows members of Council and Committees to participate in meetings electronically during a period of a declared emergency. The By-law established a number of requirements for electronic participation. One such requirement is the necessity of the meeting chair and the clerk (or, in the case of Committee meetings the administrative staff support) to be present in the same room during the meeting (s. 14.1(e)).

DISCUSSION

The Town is still operating under a municipally-declared emergency. For the health and safety of the residents, members of Council and staff, meetings continue to be conducted virtually.

Since October/November, the Province, and more particularly Windsor-Essex County, has seen an increase in the number of cases of COVID-19. Public health officials have expressed concerns about the transmissions of this virus and the increase in cases is putting a strain on hospital resources.

On or about December 14, 2020 Windsor-Essex County was moved into grey/lockdown status. In an effort to slow community transmission of the virus, the Premier ordered a province-wide shutdown, which took effect December 26, 2020. Southern Ontario will remain shut down at least until January 23, 2021.

To protect the public and keep staff safe, a number of measures have been adopted by the Town and all are currently in effect:

- Municipal Office and facility closures
- Appointment only public attendance at the Municipal Office
- Work from home initiatives for staff
- Cleaning and disinfecting procedures for equipment
- Mandatory masking
- Health screening

Public health is strongly recommending that employees work from home as much as possible so that in-person interactions are reduced. Given these recommendations, the CAO issued a directive to staff encouraging all staff to work from home as much as possible only attending the office when necessary. All staff meetings and interactions are to be conducted electronically. Staff are also expected to keep their doors closed when in the office and limit their in-person contact with others when in the office.

These measures have been implemented for the health and safety of the staff and to ensure that the public continues to receive the essential services the Town provides. It is only logical that such health and safety considerations be extended to Council and Committee meetings and that all members participating in these meetings be permitted to participate electronically from the location of their choice. Accordingly, Administration recommends that the Procedure By-law be amended to strike s.14.1(e) - the requirement that the chair and clerk (or administrative support for Committee meetings) be present in the meeting room scheduled for the meeting.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

To promote a safe community.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no financial considerations.

CONSULTATIONS

None.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts By-law 5-2021, being a by-law to amend the Procedure By-law, to strike section 14.1(e) thereby allowing all members and staff participating in a meeting electronically to do so from a location of their choice.

Jennifer Astrologo

Jennifer Astrologo, B.H.K. (hons), LL.B
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