



Report to Council

From the Office of Councillor Diana Dilworth

Date: January 29, 2021
Subject: Council Procedure Bylaw Consistency and Concerns

Purpose

To clarify, confirm and correct council procedures during an unprecedented time of holding meetings electronically, over the Zoom platform; and to confirm policies and practices related to council procedure.

Recommendations

THAT staff be directed to examine best practices utilized by other Lower Mainland municipalities to implement public input software procedures that are of utmost efficiency and effectiveness and contribute to confidence of users as recommended in the report dated January 29, 2021 from Councillor Diana Dilworth regarding Council Procedure Bylaw Consistency and Concerns;

AND THAT staff be directed to implement gallery Zoom views to the public, wherever possible, during all public meetings of Council, and specifically while votes of Council are being undertaken and counted;

AND THAT staff be directed to amend the Council Procedure Bylaw to note that Acting Mayors will preside over Committee of the Whole meetings, unless a majority vote of Council decides otherwise;

AND THAT the Mayor conduct meetings in a manner consistent with the Council Procedure Bylaw.

Background

While Port Moody City Hall and Legislative Services have managed to adapt to a new realm of public meetings, public hearings and public input, it has not been without hiccups. Recently, in light of long and slightly contentious agenda items, flaws within the electronic and procedural system have been identified by council members, members of the public, and of staff. This report proposes options for maximizing efficiency and effectiveness of council procedures and policies to facilitate effective, efficient and timely public meetings of Council.

Discussion

1. EFFICIENT PUBLIC INPUT

Currently public through live-streamed video and dial-in telephone calls is being routed through the Mayor's office. This has proven to be both ineffective and inefficient with a number of calls being dropped, limited capacity of calls, the Mayor repeatedly saying "hello, hello, hello" while residents calling in are listening to the livestream and anticipating when their call will go through, with the Mayor needing to clarify procedure with each and every call. Residents have attested to dropped calls, being on hold and then dropped and an overall inability to connect in a confident manner.

With meetings likely continuing on an electronic platform for the better part of 2021 it is worth the City investing in an appropriate platform to efficiently process public input calls.

Of all the municipalities in the lower mainland, Port Moody is the only municipality routing calls through the Mayor's Office. All municipalities are using software platforms including Zoom, Webex and Microsoft Teams, with calls and participation being vetted through Clerks Department or Legislative Services, with a mandatory registration prior to or during the meeting. This allows staff to register public input, provide process and clarity around muting other devices, etc. and allowing the meeting chair to efficiently process public input.

MOTION: That staff be directed to examine best practices utilized by other lower mainland municipalities to implement public input procedures that are of utmost efficiency and effectiveness and contribute to confidence of users.

2. ZOOM VIEWS FOR TRANSPARENCY

Resident viewers of livestream Council meetings, Committee of the Whole and Public Hearings have provided feedback on the lack of transparency using speaker view, host view or shared screen view of the Zoom platform.

Of particular concern is that during votes and debates, the Mayor is primarily profiled and while a vote is being counted, viewers are not seeing an actual vote taking place but the Mayor's verbal perspective of how individual members are voting. To ensure the utmost transparency during meetings of Council, gallery view should be utilized so that all members of council can be seen on the screen at all times, except during presentations and public input.

MOTION: That staff be directed to implement gallery Zoom views to the public, wherever possible, during all public meetings of Council, and specifically while votes of Council are being undertaken and counted.

3. CHAIRING OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETINGS

The City's Council Procedure Bylaw confirms that while the Mayor shall preside over the Committee of the Whole (COTW) meetings, they may also appoint the Acting Mayor to preside, so that the Mayor may be allowed to participate more fulsomely in the discussion and proceedings; City Council, has for the better part of decades, followed this process in an informal manner, in which Acting Mayors have chaired the COTW meetings, unfettered by the Mayor. In the past number of months, the Mayor has opted to chair the meetings himself, often without notice to the Acting Mayor.

MOTION: That staff be directed to amend the Council Procedure Bylaw to note that Acting Mayors will preside over COTW meetings, unless a majority vote of Council dictates otherwise.

4. TIME MANAGEMENT OF MEETINGS

For the past number of months, meetings of Council, Committee of the Whole and Public Hearings have extended past midnight and into the following day. While Public Hearings allow for extended meetings to ensure complete participation and unfettered commentary from the public, Council and Committee of the Whole meetings can be better managed. The presiding Chair can better control speaking times, including his own. The Council Procedure Bylaw allows for a member to speak more than once on a question, a) with the permission of Council, or b) if the member is explaining a material part of a previous speech without introducing a new matter.

While the Mayor is currently holding Council members to speaking once to an issue during a regular meeting of council, he is however, speaking numerous times, often to counter a speaking member's commentary or to explain his perspective of the issue.

MOTION: That the Mayor conduct meetings in a manner consistent with the Council Procedure Bylaw.

Other Option

That a portion of, or all, recommendations be received for information.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications to the City of Port Moody with endorsement of this motion.

Communications and Civic Engagement Initiatives

There are no communications and civic engagement initiatives to the City of Port Moody with endorsement of this motion.

Attachment

1. City of Port Moody Council Procedure Bylaw, 2016, No. 3013.