

City of Port Moody

Report/Recommendation to Council

Date: April 1, 2016

File No. 04-1345-01-01

Submitted by: Corporate Services Department – Information Services Division

Subject: Electronic Participation at Council Meetings

Purpose / Introduction

To provide information on technology to support electronic participation at Council meetings.

Recommended Resolution

THAT the report dated April 1, 2016 from Corporate Services Department – Information Services Division regarding Electronic Participation at Council Meetings be received for information.

Background

At the November 17, 2015 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council passed the following resolution:

THAT staff report back with options regarding electronic participation at Council meetings.

At the February 9, 2016 Regular Council Meeting, Council passed the following resolutions:

THAT City of Port Moody Council Procedure Bylaw, 2016, No. 3013 be amended by removing sections 8(1)(b), 8(3), and 8(4) regarding electronic participation at meetings;

AND THAT electronic participation at meetings be deferred until such time as City staff can implement an electronic participation system that is effective, reliable, and does not distract or detract from the formal proceedings of Council meetings.

Discussion

In the past, if a member of Council was unable to attend a meeting in person, he/she had the opportunity to participate electronically. This participation was facilitated using consumer-level software, such as Skype, for video conferencing. This simple level of electronic participation required a staff member to manage the communication session at the meeting, to ensure the remote member of Council could speak within the context of the speaking order system.

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This consumer technology (consumer Skype as the example), is intended for personal use and provides basic functionality for electronic participation. Recently, Council and staff have expressed frustration using Skype as the audio and video feed is not reliable, and the audio and video streams are not integrated with the video streaming system used in Council chambers. In addition, the consumer video conferencing tools do not provide a reliable online voting mechanism. The process used was a raised hand as a signal to the Chair or to the staff representative managing the Councillor's participation. This was also problematic as an internet delay often resulted in a timing problem when visually understanding the way in which the Councillor was voting.

Staff Committee

In response to Council's request to report back with options regarding electronic participation, a committee was formed in November 2015. The Committee included representatives from Cultural Services, Legislative Services, and Information Services. The Committee first contacted neighbouring municipalities to see if a solution was already available. None of the respondents were using video conferencing for Council meetings. Municipalities contacted included Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Vancouver.

Four audiovisual technology suppliers were invited to visit Council Chambers and propose solutions to provide the technology for electronic meeting participation. Key requirements included:

- Ability to conference in up to two (2) remote participants;
- Integration (or replacement) of the existing speaking order system;
- Remote participant be able to vote and have the results seen by the Chair; and
- Ability to connect to the City's live webcast stream.

Responses

Two of the four suppliers responded with written quotes. The other two suppliers chose not to respond.

| | Quoted Cost |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Supplier A | \$42,269.83 |
| Supplier B | \$20,574.33 |

Both suppliers delivered on key requirements; however, only Supplier A delivered a solution that is easy to use for the remote participant, would work on a wide array of devices, uses professional grade hardware, and has future scalability for meetings to be held outside of Council Chambers. A summary of Supplier A's system includes:

- Dedicated professional-grade Skype hardware and software;
- A monitor located where the remote participant would normally sit for the public to view;
- A monitor setup on either side of the podium to allow Council and staff to see the remote participant;
- Seamless integration into the speaking order system for the meeting chair to control;

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- Ability for the remote Councillor to Skype in via numerous devices, including but not limited to: Windows, Mac OS, iOS, Android, and Linux;
- Audio and video from the existing stream would be sent back to the remote Councillor within the conferencing solution;
- Ability for the remote Councillor to request to speak and cast their vote;
- A monitor to allow the chair to see the results of the remote Councillor voting; and
- Potential for portable setup with additional equipment purchases.

Costs included \$30,349.83 for equipment and \$11,920.00 of contractor labour.

Staff time from Information Services and Cultural Services would also be required for implementation. The estimated staff time cost is \$1,500.

Risk

There is an uncontrollable risk to any solution, whether it be enterprise- or consumer-grade. The video and sound quality is 100% dependent on the strength of internet connection at the remote participant's end. Even with an enterprise solution provided by Supplier A, B, or otherwise, if the remote internet connection is poor, the end result will be poor. There is no way to mitigate this risk. Council should also consider procedures in the event the remote participant's connection is lost.

Other Options

1. If Council wishes to proceed with an enterprise solution, Information Services' recommendation is to proceed with Supplier A's solution with a total contractor, equipment, and staff time cost of \$44,000.
2. Council may opt to use the system as we have used in the past with a consumer level Skype program. The recommendation is to not use senior level staff as this detracts from their normal duties. Our recommendation is to use Auxiliary staff to control the speaker order system at a cost of approximately \$30.00 per hour.
3. Council may also choose to limit the remote participants to one, which would lower the equipment costs by approximately \$10,000.00.

Financial Implications

As discussed above. If Council chooses to proceed, a funding source would need to be determined by the Finance Committee.

Communications / Civic Engagement

Not applicable.

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Council Strategic Plan Objectives



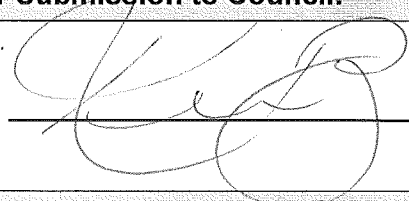
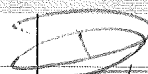

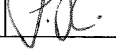
If Council wishes to facilitate members of Council who are unable to attend meetings in person and allow electronic participation, implementing this system is essential to meeting the Council Strategic Plan's objective of Service Excellence – Developing responsive and sustainable service excellence, community engagement, and a culture of transparency.

Electronic participation without suitable technology to support it would be detrimental to community engagement and transparency.

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| Reviewed for Form and Content / Approved for Submission to Council: | |
| City Manager's Comment/Concurrence  <hr/> City Manager | |
| Corporate Review | Initials |
| Community Services (Cultural Services) |    |
| Corporate Services (Legislative Services) | |
| Financial Services | |
| For Committee of the Whole Reports. To be completed by Legislative Services. <input type="checkbox"/> Refer to Regular Council as recommended. <input type="checkbox"/> Refer to Regular Council with amendments as discussed. <input type="checkbox"/> Direct staff to prepare new report for Committee of the Whole. <input type="checkbox"/> Receive for information. | |