



Report to Council

From the Office of Mayor Rob Vagramov

Date: April 28, 2020

Subject: Standards for Electronic Meetings

Purpose

To develop a policy framework for long terms of electronic meetings.

Recommendation

THAT members of Council be required to appear on video when participating in open or closed electronic meetings of Council that occur in place of Regular Meetings of Council and Committee of the Whole meetings;

AND THAT Staff be directed to create a policy framework that would differentiate two types of Electronic Meetings: one for short-term emerging and extenuating circumstances, and one as a long-term replacement for regularly-scheduled meetings of Council, as recommended in the report dated 2020-04-28 from Mayor Rob Vagramov regarding Standards for Electronic Meetings;

AND THAT the aforementioned policy include a requirement for members of Council to appear on video when participating in open or closed electronic meetings of Council that occur in place of Regular Meetings of Council and Committee of the Whole meetings.

Background

Electronic Meetings, as they are set out in city bylaws, were envisioned as a mechanism for allowing Council to convene remotely to address an emerging issue during a critical time. In my view, this provision allows for emergency meetings to respond quickly and effectively to extenuating circumstances.

After holding a number of electronic meetings, a number of issues have occurred which require a moment of thought to how we envision electronic meetings occurring going forward, especially when these electronic meetings serve less as an emergency convening of Council, and more of a replacement for regularly scheduled Council and Committee of the Whole (CoW) meetings.

Discussion

This report recommends delineating electronic meetings into two broad categories: Regular Electronic Meeting, and Special Electronic Meeting.

Special Electronic Meeting

These meetings are to convene Council as soon as possible, under circumstances that we may not be able to envision at this time. Provisions for this meeting should be as broad and unrestricted as possible, allowing for maximum flexibility in scheduling for the Chair, ease of organization by Staff, and accessibility by Council members during times where normal communications infrastructure may not be available.

The goal for Special Electronic Meetings is to prioritize timeliness, and effectiveness over professionalism and decorum.

Regular Electronic Meeting

These meetings are intended to replace Regular Meetings of Council on a prolonged period, such as during the occasional global pandemic. The same standards as normal, in-person meetings should be upheld including appearance, language, visual connection, and focus. For these meetings, appearing via video is a requirement. This allows other Council members, and the public, to see our democratic institution in practice, and allows for a similar level of public scrutiny as in-person meetings. Virtual backgrounds or similar features that alter the video feed's content are not to be used, so as to allow an accurate representation of the member's surroundings, and to allow all members of Council to visually confirm the sanctity of Closed meetings.

Similar to in-person meetings, Council members are expected to set time aside for these meetings, and not to attend them while attending other functions or engaging in other tasks. The provision for *electronic participation* wherein a member of Council can participate via telephone a certain number of times per year should be maintained, so that if member is unable or unwilling to appear by video, they may use their allowance for *electronic participation* to participate in the electronic video meeting by telephone if they so choose. A brief absence of video is to be expected and permitted, in cases where a member needs to adjust their settings, or otherwise excuse themselves for a brief period of time, not exceeding 3-minutes.

The goal for Regular Electronic Meetings is to maintain professionalism and decorum, matching as closely to normal in person meetings as possible.

Such a policy should ensure professionalism during electronic meetings that are intended to replace regularly scheduled, in-person meetings of Council for a prolonged period of time.

Other Option(s)

THAT the report dated 2020-04-28 from Mayor Rob Vagramov regarding Standards for Electronic Meetings be received for information.