



## Staff Report

**Report Title: Hybrid Meeting Proposal**

**Prepared By: Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk**

**Department: CLK**

**Date: Feb. 6, 2023**

**Report Number: CLK-2023-02-10**

**File Number: C11 CLK23**

### **Attachments:**

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### **Recommendation:**

That Huron-Kinloss Committee of the Whole hereby receives for information Report Number CLK-2023-02-10 prepared by Jennifer White, Clerk;

AND FURTHER direct Staff...

### **Background:**

During the provincially and locally declared emergency due to a viral pandemic, Ontario municipalities were first permitted to use electronic meetings for Council meetings. The Municipal Act previously did not permit this type of participation.

Municipalities adapted to this change in different ways. Some municipal Councils and Committees remained meeting electronically, some returned to traditional in-person meetings, and some have transitioned to various forms of hybrid meetings.

Council has received reports CLK-2021-02-8 Council Chambers – Modifications for Social Distancing and CLK- 2021-12-135 Council and Committee Meetings regarding the return to in-person meetings. Council's direction was to return to full in-person meetings unless circumstances require a fully electronic meeting (such as inclement weather). The procedural by-law was updated to reflect that Council members would either participate fully in person or fully electronic. Hybrid participation was not permitted.

At Council's request, Staff have prepared a report to outline the various constraints with hybrid participation, the factors affecting hybrid participation in meetings, and various other elements which would need to be addressed to permit hybrid participation of members of Council.

Staff will provide a demonstration to Council members at the February 6 Committee of the Whole meeting of hybrid participation using the existing setup and technology, so Council can note the limitations that would be experienced.

Staff provide this information at Council's request. Should Council wish to move forward with permitting a hybrid meeting format, Council will need to provide direction to Staff.

### **Discussion:**

Staff have been asked to provide information on the requirements for a member of Council to participate electronically while other members of Council attended in person.

While the current request for a report on hybrid participation may be limited to participation by members of Council, it should be noted that having hybrid meeting capabilities for members of Council, can be expected to open a larger discussion in the community regarding Staff and Public participation virtually at meetings, as well as the public viewing of Council meetings electronically. This report does not specifically address those aspects.

In every hybrid meeting setup noted below, there is the addition of an electronic meeting that will need to be facilitated by a Staff member.

Policies and protocols would need to be developed to assist the members of Council. Council may wish to consider the following within such policies;

- frequency of member participation electronically,
- the timeline of notification requirements for electronic participation,
- reasons a member may participate electronically,
- how many members may participate electronically at any time,
- virtual meeting etiquette, and
- how the taking of votes will occur,

among other considerations.

The most important consideration should be that members of Council within the Council Chambers and those participating electronically have the most unified experience possible. *Neither participant type should be disadvantaged from fully participating in the debate, discussion, and decisions of Council.*

### **Possible Hybrid setups**

Below are the common hybrid meeting setups and examples from neighboring municipalities for reference. This assumes members of Council are the only permitted users (aside from invited consultants reporting at Staff or Council request).

### **Current System**

#### Example

Staff will provide a demonstration of the current setup during the Feb 6 meeting.

## Benefits

- minimal setup costs
- minimal changes to the procedural by-law and only one additional policy developed regarding Council member electronic participation.

## Constraints

- Not a unified experience for all users (in-person users may more actively engage in debate)
- Online users will have a different experience and will not be able to see individual members of Council or Staff only an overall view from the east side of Council Chambers.
- Online users may not be able to see or hear all the debate, or have a good view of any delegations
- Council chamber users may have difficulties in seeing the virtual participant.
- The Mayor/Chair would have great difficulty in seeing the online participant to note when they wanted to participate in debate.

## **“Owl” type camera**

A single camera with a swivel and motion/sound detection would be positioned (sitting on a desk) in the middle of the council chambers with a laptop. The laptop would “host” the electronic meeting. The camera tracks movement and sound to focus on the speaker.

## Example - Arran Elderslie meeting with Councillor participation

<https://pub-arranelderslie.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISISStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=4c8d4a64-4794-4a88-b5ba-e4882e7aec7>

## Benefits

- Can be purchased with minimal costs compared to other types and is readily available
- Does not require a high level of technical expertise to operate or install
- Could be setup to permit viewing of delegations.

## Constraints

- Camera has difficulty determining speaker if more than one person speaks, or there is ambient noise (causes swiveling or split screen)
- Can be difficult to keep track of virtual participants if the screen moves too much as noted above
- Can be jarring or difficult to watch if there is ambient noise, or a lack of meeting etiquette
- Not a unified experience

- Mayor would still have difficulty seeing the online participant without additional measures

## **Fixed Camera(s)**

Example - **Ashfield Colborne Wawanosh meeting with Councillor participation**

<https://pub-awctownship.escribemeetings.com/Players/ISISStandAlonePlayer.aspx?Id=756e66aa-9dc4-4438-a5a3-e22b237bb92a>

### Benefits

- Improved user experience for online and in person participants
- Has a conventional view of the Council Chambers
- May have opportunities to install additional monitors or change the setup to assist the Chair.

### Constraints

- Increased infrastructure costs in terms of wiring, equipment, etc.
- Would require professional assessment and installation
- Would require cameras to be placed on the walls
- May take time to acquire due to pandemic related constraints on supply
- May not show the delegations

## **Staff Operated Cameras**

Example - Municipality of Kincardine – available on the Rogers Kincardine website - [Kincardine Municipal Council - Kincardine \(rogerstv.com\)](http://Kincardine Municipal Council - Kincardine (rogerstv.com))

### Benefits

- Improved experience for participants
- Has a conventional view of Council Chambers,
- Has camera which provides close up of speaker
- May have opportunities to install additional monitors or change the setup to assist the Chair.
- Can easily switch to a view of the delegations

### Constraints

- Requires an additional Staff member to operate
- High Infrastructure costs
- Requires professional assessment, and installation
- Would require cameras (3) to be placed on the walls
- May take time to acquire due to pandemic related constraints on supply

## **Changes required for any type of Hybrid Meeting**

- Updates to Procedural By-law
- Develop Policies for electronic participation at Council and Committee meetings for:
  - members of Council,
  - Staff, and
  - possibly Public.
- Upgrades suggested to existing infrastructure and technologies

## **Other Considerations**

The Mayor will have to monitor the virtual participant to include them in the discussions of Council. This is an added burden to the Chair who must also track speaking order, take votes, and ensure that open and fulsome discussion has taken place.

## **Technology disruptions**

If there is a disruption only in the online/ virtual participation of the meeting, and quorum is still met with those in-person, the meeting continues without virtual participation. As Council meetings take place after the regular workday of Township and Computer Support Staff, there is no help to resolve any technological issues during a meeting.

## **Updatable**

Any hybrid system should be updatable if municipal needs change.

Any hybrid system should be compatible with the eScribe agenda management software currently used by the Township. The “webcasting” feature of this software may be desired or required in the future. The hybrid system should be designed to be capable of live streaming a meeting to the internet and should support closed captioning services.

Each type of system would need to be investigated and trialed to determine whether it can be used with existing infrastructure. A review would determine the need for additional technology or solutions developed to address concerns specific to the building, room configuration or meeting format.

The pandemic and move to online meeting participation has greatly accelerated the advancement of technologies associated with Hybrid meetings. It has also created a high demand and a short supply of both equipment and expert system designers and installers.

If Council directs Staff to proceed with hybrid meetings, Staff will provide a report with updated and specific costs and implementation plans. As a reference point for members of Council, the previous quote received in April of 2022 for audio

equipment upgrades required to incorporate the in-chambers sound with the virtual meeting sound (effectively and without feedback) was \$35,000. This does not include the visual infrastructure of different types of camera configurations as noted above.

**Financial Impacts:**

Financial impacts to the Township would vary depending on the method and extent to which hybrid meetings were implemented. Council could expect financial impacts ranging from the Staff time to prepare updates and policies and manage electronic meetings, to Council Chamber upgrades of between \$3000 to \$60,000+.

**Strategic Alignment / Link:**

We are an accessible community that offers opportunities for everyone, by being open and transparent.

We are an environmentally conscious community that are good stewards of our natural environment by being using our resources wisely.

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services, Clerk

**Report Approved By:**

Mary Rose Walden, Chief Administrative Officer