

The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council
April 28, 2022

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Regional Clerk

Implementation of Hybrid Council and Committee of the Whole Meetings

1. Recommendations

1. Council amend Procedure Bylaw 2018-59 as shown in Attachment 1 to facilitate the implementation of the “blended” hybrid approach for Council and Committee of the Whole meetings and to permit all other meetings of Committees of Council to be held electronically.
2. Hybrid meetings of Committee of the Whole and Council begin no sooner than the Council meeting on May 26, 2022.
3. The boards of directors of the Region’s three corporations be encouraged to meet electronically on a permanent basis.
4. Council transition to fully paperless meetings as of the 2022-2026 Council Term.

2. Summary

This report responds to direction from Council on [March 24, 2022](#) to report back with options outlining amendments to Procedure Bylaw 2018-59 and process changes to facilitate the implementation of the “blended” hybrid option for Council and Committee of the Whole meetings.

Key Points:

- The “blended” hybrid option, where participants choose to attend either in-person or electronically, provides flexibility but presents logistical and resourcing challenges
- Procedure Bylaw amendments are needed to address outdated locational requirements identifying meetings as solely being held at the York Region Administrative Centre
- Updates are further required to clarify how a Member counts towards quorum when participating in-person versus electronically
- Changes are proposed to the closed meetings section to require electronic participants to be visible onscreen to safeguard the confidentiality of private session

- By fully transitioning to paperless meetings, Council can continue to realize the environmental benefits associated with electronic meetings
- Council's inaugural meeting, at which the Regional Chair is appointed, should be a fully in-person meeting due to its unique status and certain procedural requirements

3. Background

On December 16, 2021, Council considered a report examining the electronic meeting experience since 2020 and requested options regarding the format of future meetings upon the lifting of health and workplace restrictions

At its [December 16, 2021](#) meeting, Council determined the resumption of in-person Council and Committee of the Whole meetings would be aligned with the Provincial timetable for lifting the remaining public health and workplace safety measures. Additionally, the Region's advisory committees, task forces and the boards of directors of the three Corporations, would continue to meet electronically for the remainder of the 2018-2022 Council Term.

The Regional Clerk was directed to report back with options outlining the potential format of Council and Committee of the Whole meetings upon the lifting of the remaining public health and workplace safety measures.

On March 24, 2022, Council considered a report recommending that Council meetings be fully in-person and all other meeting types be conducted electronically

At the [March 24, 2022](#) meeting, Council considered a range of options for the future format of meetings, being:

1. Fully in-person
2. Fully electronic
3. "Blended" hybrid – participants choose when to attend in-person or electronically
4. "Structured" hybrid – some meetings are fully in-person and some are fully electronic

Council endorsed the "blended" hybrid option to potentially commence in May 2022. Staff were directed to report back to the April 28, 2022 Council meeting with amendments to Procedure Bylaw 2018-59 to facilitate this option.

4. Analysis

Existing technology can accommodate blended participation at meetings held in the Council Chambers, but the meeting experience will differ for in-person and electronic participants

The Council Chamber's existing audiovisual configuration can accommodate blended hybrid meetings. Using the existing setup, any electronic participants or attendees will be able to easily see other electronic participants on the livestream, but in-person participants would only be visible when they are speaking or during a wide shot of the Council meeting.

In-person participants or attendees would have the opposite experience – they would be able to easily see in-person participants, but electronic participants would only be visible on the big screen when speaking or between presentations.

Any Council direction requiring all members be seen at all times, whether participating in-person or electronically, will require additional hardware, depending on the proposed solution. This could include upgraded network connectivity or additional camera installations. The cost of such upgrades is currently unknown but could be explored further.

Amendments are required to clarify the location of meetings and how deputations address the Chair

Sections 5 and 22 of Procedure Bylaw 2018-59 currently indicate that Council and Committee of the Whole meetings are to be held at the York Region Administrative Centre, 17250 Yonge Street, Newmarket, Ontario. To accommodate the transition to hybrid meetings, staff recommend amending these sections to add a provision clarifying those meetings could also be conducted through electronic means and/or a combination of both.

Additionally, Section 14.6 currently stipulates deputations are to address the Chair from the lectern in the Council Chamber or the presenter's table in the Committee Room. Staff recommend removing the reference to "Committee Room" since Committee of the Whole meetings are conducted in the Council Chamber and all other committee meetings are proposed to be conducted electronically. A provision will be added to this Section to indicate that deputations can address the Chair through electronic means.

To ensure consistency between electronic and in-person participants, only those Members visible in-person or on the screen will count towards quorum

The meeting chair needs to accurately determine the number of Members in attendance at any given time to confirm whether the meeting can proceed and the outcome of votes.

This is straightforward for in-person participants who are either seated at their desk or not. However, electronic participants can turn off their cameras and then it becomes unclear whether they are still participating or have stepped away.

To ensure in-person and electronic participants are treated equally, staff recommend that electronic participants are required to keep their camera on at all times. If an electronic

participant is not visible on screen then they will not count towards quorum and will be marked absent during a recorded vote. This helps the meeting chair and any other participants or viewers understand whether a quorum is present, and provides certainty to the outcome of votes. Exceptions can be made when a Member notifies the meeting chair if they cannot use their camera due to technical reasons.

Further revisions to the quorum provisions are proposed to accommodate housekeeping amendments related to the increase in the size of Council which comes into effect following the 2022 Municipal Election. The proposed amendments remove the definitive requirement of 11 Members and sets quorum as a majority of Members representing a majority of local municipalities. Using this terminology better aligns with the *Municipal Act, 2001* and removes the need for further amendments to accommodate any future restructuring.

To ensure the confidentiality of a closed meeting, only those Members visible on screen can participate in private session

In accordance with Section D.5 of the Code of Conduct for Council Members, all Members have an obligation to protect the substance of closed meeting deliberations and a duty to hold the information receive at closed meetings in strict confidence. Members are not permitted in any way to divulge any such information or any confidential aspect of the closed deliberations to anyone, unless authorized by Council or as required by law.

To maintain the confidence of closed meeting deliberations, staff recommend requiring Members who are participating electronically to be visible during the closed portion of a meeting. Electronic participants must safeguard the confidentiality of private session by ensuring that no one can see or hear Council's discussion.

The Regional Chair may determine the extent to which any meeting is conducted electronically

At the [September 24, 2020](#) Council meeting, the Procedure Bylaw was amended to enable Members to participate electronically in meetings at any time and provided the following authority to the Regional Chair:

“The Regional Chair may determine the extent to which any meeting will be conducted electronically, including whether any meeting shall be fully in-person or fully electronic.”

Staff recommend retaining this authority as it may be desirable for certain meetings to be held fully in-person, such as the inaugural meetings of the Region's advisory committees and task forces.

To maintain some of the greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions achieved during the pandemic, the Region’s advisory committees, task forces and boards should continue to meet electronically, and all meetings should become paperless

At the December 16, 2021 meeting, Council determined that the Region’s advisory committees and task forces, as well as, the boards of directors of the three Corporations, would continue to meet electronically for the remainder of the 2018-2022 Council Term.

The Council Chamber is the only meeting room currently equipped to manage hybrid meetings. Technology and audiovisual upgrades to other rooms would be required to enable advisory committees and boards to meet in a hybrid format.

Advisory committee members seem supportive of continuing to meet electronically. Members have commented on the convenience of electronic meetings, noting the travel time-savings. Eliminating commutes also reduces GHG emissions in line with Council’s GHG reduction targets.

Council can achieve further GHG reductions by eliminating paper at all meetings. Staff estimate that 15 tonnes of GHG was avoided in the first 15 months of the pandemic by no longer printing and delivering agendas to Members. This is enabled by directing Members and staff to access an electronic version of the agenda either through the “Agendas, Minutes and Reports” page on the Region’s [website](#) or via the Region’s agenda management system, eSCRIBE. A PDF version of each agenda package will be available for those who prefer to print their own copy.

Based on these considerations, staff recommend continuing with fully electronic meetings for advisory committees and task forces and making all meetings paperless.

Due to the uniqueness of its format, Council’s inaugural meeting should continue to be held in-person

At Council’s inaugural meeting, the Members appoint the Regional Chair. Section 3 of the Procedural Bylaw sets out the appointment process and there are several elements that require in-person participation. For example, nominations must be in writing and signed by the mover, the seconder and the nominee and can be submitted right up to the start of the meeting.

Another example is the ability for Council to vote by secret ballot. The Region does not have the technology to provide a secure means of effectively conducting a secret ballot that protects the anonymity of the voting process.

For these reasons staff recommend the inaugural meeting take place fully in-person. However, no Procedure Bylaw amendment is required. Under Section 3.1 of the Bylaw, adopted on September 23, 2021, the Clerk has authority to fix the time and place of the inaugural meeting:

“3.1 The inaugural meeting of Council for each term of Council shall be held no later than twenty-one (21) days after the beginning of the new term of Council at a time and place to be fixed by the Clerk.”

Hybrid meetings could potentially start with the Council meeting in May 2022

The Region has the necessary hardware in place to immediately accommodate hybrid meetings at a functional level. However, staff recommend hybrid meetings start with the Council meeting currently scheduled for May 26, 2022.

This would provide some time to assess the COVID situation following the lifting of provincial regulations in April 2022. Also, Council meetings are usually shorter and somewhat easier to manage than Committee of the Whole meetings so it would provide a good pilot opportunity for Members and staff before getting into the full June schedule of meetings.

5. Financial

There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, depending on Council’s direction, funds may be required to upgrade the Council Chambers and/or additional meeting rooms to support blended hybrid participation. The upgrade costs are unknown and would vary based on the proposed solution.

6. Local Impact

There are no direct impacts on the local municipalities associated with this report.

7. Conclusion

Electronic meetings have been as successful as in-person meetings and have not adversely impacted participation. A review of the first 15 months of electronic meetings has shown that overall, more people watched, more people participated, and Council considered more items than was typically the case pre-pandemic.

Implementing hybrid meetings for Committee of the Whole and Council, provides a great deal of flexibility to Members and other attendees. Greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions can be achieved by conducting all other committees of Council electronically and encouraging the boards of directors of the Region’s three corporations to do the same. Further GHG reductions are achievable by making all meetings paperless.

Implementing the new hybrid approach at the May 26, 2022 meeting provides time to assess the public health situation and allows for a relatively easy test of the new format before moving into the full June schedule of meetings.

For more information on this report, please contact Christopher Raynor, Regional Clerk at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71300. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by:



Christopher Raynor
Regional Clerk



Dino Basso
Commissioner of Corporate Services

Approved for Submission:



Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

April 13, 2022
Attachment (1)
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