

Report to Council

Report Title:	Broadcasting Council Meetings – Additional Information and Quotes		
Prepared By:	Fiona Hamilton, Clerk		
Department:	Clerk's		
Date:	August 11, 2020		
Report Number:	CLK2020-27	File Number:	C11CL
Attachments:	Balaklava Audio Proposal, Budget Summary and Fixed Price Payment Schedule Updated E-scribe Lite Webcasting Quote		

Recommendation:

That the Council of the Municipality of Brockton hereby accepts Report Number CLK2020-27, Broadcasting Council Meetings – Additional Information and Quotes for information purposes and approves moving ahead with accepting the e-scribe quote of \$9,450 total for broadcasting meetings and an upgraded Zoom license for a maximum of \$3,500.00 to be funded and transferred from the Council reserve fund, with the decision of the permanent location for Council meetings to be considered later in the year.

Report:

Background:

On May 12, 2020, Council tabled Report CLK-2020-15 – Broadcasting Council Meeting Update until such time as Fiona Hamilton, Clerk could provide more information about each of the options. Since that time, the *Municipal Act, 2001* was amended to allow for electronic participation in both open and closed session council meetings on a permanent basis, not just in an emergency situation. Many municipalities are beginning to consider how to facilitate Council meetings in light of the uncertainties related to the Covid-19 pandemic (should in-person meetings resume, if so, when is it safe to do so, will meetings need to be held remotely if the rates of infection begin to increase again, etc.).

The proposals in the May 12, 2020 report have been reconsidered in light of the amended legislation and the on-going Covid-19 pandemic.

Analysis:

Location

On May 12, 2020, the location options recommended to Council were to meet at the Bruce County Administration Building or the Cargill Community Centre. There is now also a third option, which is to continue meeting remotely for the foreseeable future, or potentially even permanently.

At this time, the County of Bruce is planning to resume their Bruce County Council meetings in November. It has not yet been confirmed whether Brockton Council would be permitted to use the Bruce County Administration Building at that time, or even in the future. There may also be some discussion about improving that facility in the next few years to improve accessibility and upgrade the audio equipment. If Council still wished to hold in-person meetings at this facility, the recommendation would be to continue meeting remotely until at least November when the use of the facility can be confirmed. Staff have also confirmed that the only option available for broadcasting the Council meetings and continuing to meet at the Bruce County Administration Building would be to use the e-scribe software as outlined below.

The second option outlined in the May 12, 2020 was to begin using the Cargill Community Centre. This option is readily available for Council, but would involve additional staff time and cost associated with increased cleaning and disinfecting. For reasons discussed below, if Council decided to plan for in-person meetings at the Cargill Community Centre, staff would recommend using the e-scribe webcasting lite solution for that purpose as well.

The third option available to Council at this time that was not available in May is to continue meeting remotely using the Zoom video-conferencing for the foreseeable future or permanently. While the Zoom video-conferencing has been adequate, there are occasions where Council have experienced technical difficulties, and it can be easier to facilitate discussion and voting when in person.

Broadcasting

Option 1 outlined in the May 12, 2020 report suggested that Council continue using Zoom, even to facilitate in-person meetings. Council expressed concern with the possibility of feedback issues if all members were present in the same room. Fiona Hamilton, Clerk, has confirmed that this option would not be available if Council continued to meet in the Bruce County Council Chambers. However, Council now has the option of continuing to use Zoom to meet remotely on a permanent basis. Fiona Hamilton, Clerk has also requested additional information from Zoom about facilitating a “hybrid meeting” where some members could meet in person and others could connect remotely and still be displayed on a screen. The “hybrid meeting” approach would be ideal as it would allow members of council to participate even if they had symptoms of Covid-19 (or even a minor cold or flu), if the weather conditions were poor, or if they were travelling to a conference or vacation spot. The “hybrid meeting” would also reduce costs associated with staff time, as staff could attend remotely to speak to reports, and log-off once that agenda item was decided. The “hybrid meeting” is possible using a combination of Option 1 and Option 3.

Option 3 from the May 12, 2020 report was to consider using e-scribe webcasting lite to broadcast the Council meeting. E-scribe has committed to working with the Municipality of Brockton to find a professional and permanent solution, and meetings could be broadcast using this software whether Council continued to use Zoom or met in-person. E-scribe has provided an updated quote that is reflective of the financial challenges faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The updated quote also includes the “Vote Manager” module. This module allows members of Council to vote using the software, and the results are displayed graphically on the

screen along with the text of the actual motion. This module would allow for in-time voting whether a member was physically in the room or participating remotely, and make voting much more accessible and transparent for the public. The E-scribe quote also includes \$2,000.00 for the camera to record in-person meetings, but this cost would not need to be incurred until time as those meetings resumed and the camera had to be installed.

There are other advantages to the using the E-scribe software as well. All content would be stored on Canadian servers for greater security and therefore subject to the privacy laws of Canada, noting that some municipalities relying solely on YouTube have lost all of their recordings. The biggest advantage, however, may be that the recordings are divided into each Agenda topic for ease of use by the general public. When Council first started discussing the possibility of broadcasting Council meetings, it was difficult to justify the expense as it was unknown how many residents would access the information. Since Council began meeting remotely, the YouTube recordings of Council meetings have been viewed from between 75-161 views per meeting. These views demonstrate that the general public is interested in viewing Council meetings when it is easy to do so within their own schedules. The E-scribe software is also simple and easy to use and would already be integrated with the other agenda package documents in a manner that would allow the meetings to be broadcast without requiring an additional staff person or increased set-up time for the senior management team.

Option 2

The second Option outlined in the report was to consider hardwiring a municipal facility with a camera and system to broadcast the meeting permanently. Balaklava audio viewed both the Walkerton Community Centre and the Cargill and District Community Centre to determine which could be used for this purpose. The sound system and physical set up (location of fire doors, etc.) would have made the Walkerton Community Centre extremely expensive to use as a Council Chambers. The quote from Balaklava Audio for hardwiring the Cargill and District Community Centre as a Council Chambers has been attached for Council's information. The total amount quoted was \$58,225.27, although this cost could be reduced by approximately \$15,000 if a wired mic system was used rather than the quoted wireless system.

Committees-of-Council

At this time, Committees-of-Council have been meeting via Zoom. As Council is aware, the Municipal Office no longer has the meeting space to accommodate most Committees-of-Council and now bringing people in and out of the Municipal Office into the working space of staff brings added concern. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, staff have been in discussion with Victoria Jubilee Hall, but there was some concern of the number of meetings, the hours when the meetings would occur, accessibility issues, etc. With the Covid-19 pandemic, safety and increased cleaning/disinfection are considerations if Committees-of-Council met at municipal facilities. As a result, the recommendation is that Committees-of-Council continue to meet via Zoom unless the majority of the members are not technically able to do so, in which case alternate arrangements will be made. This also helps limits the amount of time staff for those staff travelling to and attending meetings. Zoom provided a quote of \$5,800.00 for a yearly fee for 10 licenses all with "webinar" capabilities (which is how the meetings are arranged to ensure they remain as open meetings). Staff are working with Zoom to reduce the pricing as the webinar licenses could likely be reduced to 5 with a 6 month contract. The

recommendation is to proceed with pricing of \$3,500.00 or less to be funded from the Council reserve fund and then a yearly subscription included in the 2021 municipal budget for Council's consideration at that time. The Municipality of Brockton is currently paying for zoom on a month to month basis. Zoom provides discounts of between 15-30% when the licenses are moved to a longer term contract.

Conclusion

The recommendation at this time is to move forward with accepting the e-scribe quote of \$9,450 for an accessible, transparent and organized manner of broadcasting meetings.

We also propose to upgrade Zoom license for the remaining months of 2020 to safely accommodate meetings of Committees-of-Council in the amount of \$3500 for 2020 and to provide the most flexible, cost-effective and safe solution at this time while ensuring accessibility. The decision about the permanent location of meetings could then be delayed until later in the year.

Sustainability Checklist:

What aspect of the Brockton Sustainable Strategic Plan does the content/recommendations in this report help advance?

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Do the recommendations help move the Municipality closer to its Vision? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to achieving Cultural Vibrancy? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to achieving Economic Prosperity? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to Environmental Integrity? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to the Social Equity? | Yes |

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding:

- Do the recommendations represent a sound financial investment from a sustainability perspective? Yes

The 2020 Municipal Budget included \$5,000.00 to broadcast Council meetings. It is recommended that the additional \$7,950.00 (for estimated Zoom license and e-scribe quote exceeding \$5,000) be funded from the Council reserve fund.

Reviewed By:



Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer

Respectfully Submitted by:



Fiona Hamilton, Clerk

Reviewed By:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sonya Watson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer