

## Report to Council

**Report Title:** Broadcasting Council Meetings 2021 Update

**Prepared By:** Fiona Hamilton, Clerk

**Department:** Clerk's

**Date:** January 12, 2021

**Report Number:** CLK2021-01                      **File Number:** C11CL

**Attachments:** N/A

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### Recommendation:

That the Council of the Municipality of Brockton hereby receives Report Number CLK2021-01 – Broadcasting Council Meetings 2021 Update, prepared by Fiona Hamilton, Clerk and in doing so approves proceeding with Option \_\_\_\_\_.

### Report:

#### Background:

Staff have brought forward several reports in 2020 with proposals for broadcasting Council and Committee Meetings in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

On November 10, 2020, the Council of the Municipality of Brockton approved continuing to broadcast Council and Committee Meetings electronically through Zoom Video Conferencing and livestreaming through YouTube until at least April 2021 in order to discuss the costs associated with broadcasting Council Meetings during 2021 budget deliberations.

On December 26, 2020 the Province of Ontario entered into a Province-wide lockdown which is estimated to last 28 days. In response to the lockdown, staff determined that the January 19, 2021 and January 20, 2021 Budget Meetings could be held electronically through Zoom Video Conferencing and livestreamed to the Municipality's YouTube Channel, just as regular Council Meetings have been broadcast throughout 2020. At this time, staff estimate that the February 9, 2021 Budget Meeting may also be held electronically.

This report is being brought to provide Council with the various options with costs included in the 2021 Budget and a decision required for budget purposes.

#### Analysis:

In response to the lockdown, both the Brockton Municipal Office and the County of Bruce Administrative Building are closed to the public. The Brockton Municipal Office is scheduled to reopen to the public on

January 25, 2021. As mentioned in previous reports, it was not confirmed whether Brockton Council would be permitted to use the Bruce County Administration Building in the future for Council Meetings. Staff 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 eScribe software.

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. As noted in the COVID-19 Municipal Response Reports, the broadcasted service has increased resident engagement with the Municipality, including increased views of our Council Meetings as compared to previous in-person meetings. 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.

Since the COVID-19 Pandemic continues, and additional changes may be brought forward from the Provincial Government, staff recommend that Council consider one of the following options to broadcast meetings for the entirety of 2021 and provide consistency for residents, staff, Council, and Committee members.

**Option 1 – Remote Only** - Council could choose to commit to remote meetings for the remainder of the year. Doing so would require only the Zoom licenses, which would likely be around \$6,000.00 (or possibly less as there may be savings for a yearly license rather than a shorter term). While this option would be the least expensive, it would not accommodate any in-person meetings.

**Option 2 – In-Person Capabilities** - The second option would be to obtain the eScribe webcasting plus software. In a nutshell, the eScribe software would allow Council to resume in-person at some point in 2021, whether at the Bruce County Administration building or at a specific Brockton municipal facility, and would also allow for meetings where some members were present and others participated remotely. The eScribe option would be approximately \$14,000.00. Escribe would also include the “Vote Manager” module which 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 County of Bruce uses this module for the County Council meetings.

Whichever option is chosen, the Zoom licenses would still be required to facilitate meetings with engineers, developers, lawyers, etc.; as well as to accommodate staff meetings and health and safety meetings across all departments. Zoom meetings overall have resulted in efficiencies related to staff time, consultant time etc travelling between departments for meetings.

Staff have also budgeted approximately an additional \$9,000.00 for closed captioning. Over the past year, staff have used the automatic closed captioning option on YouTube when broadcasting the meetings to ensure the content was accessible. However, these captions are not always accurate and can take many months to be available. YouTube is also cancelling some of its captioning options as they were more vulnerable to spamming, etc. Closed Captioning of videos and web content is **required** by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

If Council chooses to continue with Option 1, then staff may need to obtain a subscription to a third party closed captioning service that would integrate with Zoom. If Council chooses to continue with Option 2, then staff would recommend using e-scribes automatic real-time closed captioning service. Both options are approximately the same price.

Overall, the importance of offering meetings electronically for public participation has increased as a result of the pandemic. Council meetings are fundamentally at the heart of offering Municipal services to the public and bolster confidence in the decision-making process. For this reason we recommend proceeding with the eScribe software as it provides the most flexibility, accessibility and transparency for our residents and is efficient for staff. There are other advantages to the using the eScribe 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, maybe that the recordings are divided into each Agenda topic for ease of use by the general public when retrieving information on a particular agenda topic.

The eScribe 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 (and resulting in additional overtime costs) for the senior management team.

Staff request direction from Council on proceeding with Option 2 if resuming in-person meetings in 2021 using the escribe software to ensure our Council meetings are offered in the most professional and accessible manner.

### **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

If Council proceeded with Option 2 using eScribe, the approximate cost for broadcasting Council Meetings would be \$14,000.00 with \$9,000.00 for closed captioning (with \$6,000.00 for Zoom for other municipal purposes).

If Council proceeded with Option 1 using Zoom, the approximate cost for broadcasting Council Meetings would be \$6,000.00 with \$9,000.00 for closed captioning.

**Reviewed By:**



**Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer**

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**Respectfully Submitted by:**



**Fiona Hamilton, Clerk**

**Reviewed By:**



**Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer**