

DATE: February 16, 2021
REPORT NO: C-02-2021
SUBJECT: **Cost and Options for Live-stream & Hybrid Council and Standing Committee Meetings**
CONTACT: Joanne Scime, Clerk

OVERVIEW:

This report is being provided for information to address the costs and options in order to live-stream our Standing Committee and Council meetings and allow for hybrid Standing Committee and Council meetings (in person and electronically).

RECOMMENDATION:

That, Report C-02-20219, dated February 19, 2021, regarding “Cost and Options for Live-stream & Hybrid Council and Standing Committee Meetings”, be received for information.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

As outlined in Strategic Objective # 3 under the Quality of Life category, we will increase civic engagement and provide better community involvement with enhanced access to Council and Committee agenda information which relates to Township business.

BACKGROUND:

At the September 21, 2020 Administration/Finance/Fire Committee meeting the following resolution was approved with respect to direction to staff as it relates to live streaming Standing Committee & Council Meetings and getting hybrid technology:

That, staff be and are hereby directed to prepare a report regarding the options and costs to livestream and provide for hybrid technology for all future Standing Committee and Council meetings and report to a future Administration/Finance/Fire Committee or Council meeting by no later than February 2021.

CURRENT SITUATION:

Due to the pandemic, the Township Administration Office closed to the public in mid-March 2020. Staff had to quickly address how to conduct virtual Standing Committee and Council meetings and settled on at first telephone meetings and finally a virtual platform (ZOOM).

In the summer, the Clerk surveyed Council Members regarding returning to the Council Chambers for in-person meetings. The majority of the responses received indicated that

Members of Council wanted to return to in-person Standing and Council meetings as early as it could be accommodated. At this time, it was noted that the opening of the Council Chambers for in-person meetings was part of Phase 4 of the Township's Internal Pandemic Recovery Plan. Unfortunately, with the number of COVID-19 cases increasing Phase 4 was never reached.

At the September 21, 2020 Administration /Finance/Fire Committee meeting, Council were advised that although staff understood their desire to return to in-person Council and Standing Committee meetings, the sound system in the Council Chambers would not allow for hybrid meetings due to technical issues (feedback, echo sounds, etc.). Additionally, it was noted that the Council Chambers were not large and it would be very tight to meet social distancing even with the installation of plexi-glass barriers between each desk and wearing of face coverings. The CAO stated at this meeting that under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Township is required to provide a safe and healthy working environment for our staff which includes Members of Council.

Subsequently at this meeting, direction was given to staff to research and report back regarding options and costs for live-streaming and hybrid technology.

Accordingly, staff contacted two providers/vendors that provide live-streaming services and a hybrid option, being Wee Stream and eSCRIBE. There are other vendors providing similar services, however, these two were contacted to get a sense of options and associated costs.

A summary of the cost from the two provider/vendors is provided below:

(1) WEE STREAM:

ESTIMATED YEARLY COST: Approximately \$15,150

Above is based on a per meeting cost of \$650/meeting (up to 3 hours) and ten hours of surcharge a year. (\$75 surcharge for each ½ hour (or part thereof))

There are 21 Council & Standing Committee meetings per year, which combines the Administration/Finance/Fire Committee and Public Works/Recreation/Arena Committee as one meeting.

In 2019, we had 1 Planning/Building/Environmental Committee Meetings and 4 Council meeting that went over 3 hours (total of 5 meetings in 2019).

In 2020, we had 1 Administration/Finance/Fire Committee Meeting, 3 Planning/Building/Environmental Committee meeting and 2 Council meetings that went over 3 hours (total of 6 meetings in 2020).

Live-stream option includes: live production, on-screen graphics, pre-meeting consultation, multiple platforms (if desired), closed captioning of video archives (meets AODA requirements). This option would not have closed captioning for live-streaming; this would be over and above being the same for any proposal.

This option allows for hybrid meetings. There would be no additional costs to configure the Council Chambers sound system or cameras as this solution is “all in one” proposal, meaning it includes their staff and equipment. A contract is not required; we can go on a meeting by meeting basis or have a contract. If Council wishes to proceed with this proposal, staff would suggest that we start on a meeting by meeting basis, and then go to a contract if it is Council’s desire to continue with live stream and hybrid meetings.

Three (3) styles of broadcast that meet the ever-changing needs due to COVID-19:

- (a) 100% Virtual, and
- (b) Hybrid (some virtual, some in-person), and,
- (c) 100% in Council Chambers.

STAFF COSTS:

Wee Stream provide their own personnel to provide this service. At the beginning, there will still be a requirement for IT staff involvement particularly through implementation and on-boarding the functionality and equipment, but it is not expected that this practice will need to continue.

(2) eSCRIBE:

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FEE/COST: \$22,350 per yr (Breakdown noted below)

PLUS ONE TIME COSTS: \$6,075 (Breakdown noted below)

PLUS ADDITIONAL ONE TIME COST – Approximately \$1,600 - 8 hours of time for Design Electronics to integrate Projector/Sound System with eSRIBE

ANNUAL FEES:

eSCRIBE Webcasting Plus	Annual	\$11,450
eSCRIBE Closed Captioning	Annual	\$10,900
Total - Annual Subscription Fees		\$22,350

ONE TIME COSTS: \$6,075

Training – Webcasting Plus Training	\$ 675
Implementation Fee – Webcasting Plus Setup	\$ 2,700
Implementation Fee – Closed Captioning Setup	\$ 2,700

STAFF COSTS:

For the above noted option, we expect a minimum of one (1) staff Member from the IT Department will need to attend each Council and Standing Committee Meeting to manage the functionality and equipment, which will mean additional costs depending on the number of hours in attendance.

It should be noted that the eSCRIBE option requires a larger internal IT effort and may result in other IT projects being delayed or deferred.

(3) CONTINUE STATUS QUO:

It should be noted that although members of the public cannot attend in-person Standing Committee and/or Council meeting at this time and it is unknown when we will be able to return to in-person meetings, members of the public can attend a Standing Committee and/or Council meeting virtually (Zoom) using the internet or by telephone by contacting the Clerk or a member of her staff by 4:30 p.m. on the day of the meeting. When a request is received, the IT Manager is advised and an invitation is provided to the individual with the connection link/information to attend the meeting virtually or by telephone.

Continuing with status quo, does provide for members of the public to attend meetings virtually, as long as they contact staff prior to 4:30 p.m. on the day of the meeting, however, this does not address hybrid meetings, which would allow for Members of Council and staff to attend the meeting in-person or virtually.

Further to the proposals being presented above, the following further considerations should be taken into consideration should Council wish to proceed with hybrid and/or live-streaming of meetings:

The following statistics with respect to the total number of unique viewers (different people that watched the video over a given time period) of our Standing Committee and Council Meetings online videos from November 2020 to January 2021 are as follows:

Admin/Finance/Fire	Nov. 16/2020	19 unique viewers
Council	Nov. 23/2020	18 unique viewers
All Committees	Dec. 7/2020	22 unique viewers
Council	Dec. 14/2020	27 unique viewers
Public Meeting/Planning	Jan 11/2021	18 unique viewers
Admin/Finance/Fire	Jan 18/2021	22 unique viewers
Council	Jan 25/2021	35 unique viewers

****On average we would have 23 unique viewers at any given meeting.****

Our current practice of posting the recording allows residents and businesses to watch at a time that is convenient to them and not necessarily concurrently with the actual time of the Council or Committee meeting. Staff have generally been able to post this recording within 24 hours of the meeting.

Additionally, it should be noted that live-streaming of Standing Committee and Council meetings will be dependent upon the ability for people to connect to their private internet equipment for their homes, which can be challenging for people depending on their provider and their internet plan, this is especially challenging in the rural area where internet service is expensive and can provide an unstable/weak signal.

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMENTS:

The 2021 Draft Operating Budget does not include any costs for the services discussed above. At a minimum, an additional cost of approximately \$15,150 annually would be required to be added to the budget.

CONCLUSION:

This report is being provided for information purposes in order for Council to decide if they wish to proceed with having the capability for hybrid meetings and/or live-streaming of Standing Committee and Council meetings. If Council wishes to proceed with hybrid and/or live-streaming of Standing Committee and Council meetings direction from Council would be required to include an appropriate amount in the 2021 budget.

Prepared & Submitted by:



Joanne Scime, Clerk

Approved by:



Bev Hendry, CAO