

THE CORPORATION OF THE
CITY OF WHITE ROCK
CORPORATE REPORT



DATE: May 30, 2022

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Tracey Arthur, Director, Corporate Administration

SUBJECT: Advisory Committee Meeting Method Considerations – Virtual, In-Person or Hybrid

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to continue with virtual advisory committee meetings until the end of the current committee term.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this corporate report is to provide Council with feedback regarding methods of delivery with future advisory committee (Committee) meetings (virtually, in-person or utilizing a hybrid model). Following a number of considerations, staff recommend that Committee meetings continue in virtual format until the end of the current Committee term.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The City's Committee meetings have been held virtually through Microsoft Teams since fall, 2020. With COVID-19 restrictions lifting staff have received inquiries as to when meetings can resume in-person. The topic of "Future Meeting Methods" was placed on each Committee agenda in March and April of this year. Members were asked to provide feedback on their preferences for meetings moving forward. Attached to this report as Appendix A is a table summarizing the feedback received from Committee members.

In reviewing this information there is not full agreement on a preferred meeting method from Committee members. The Economic Development Advisory Committee and the Housing Advisory Committee had all voting members requesting to meet in-person, while the Environmental Advisory Committee had all voting members preferring meetings to continue virtually. The Arts and Culture Advisory Committee, History and Heritage Advisory Committee and Public Art Advisory Committee were split on preferences for in-person and virtual meeting.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meetings have become a new meeting format that has become well accepted. Committee Members applied for the current Committee term with the understanding that meetings would be taking place fully virtually. The City has been able to utilize Microsoft Teams technology and has found that virtual meetings provide for good quality sound and visual. This is much different from committee meeting recordings started during this Council term.

In working with the City IT staff it is noted that the audio/video technology in the Council Chambers was not designed to accommodate in-person committee meetings, and while an ad-hoc solution was put in place during this Council term, it did not provide for an effective and seamless solution. To properly accommodate in-person committee meetings a dedicated microphone for each speaker would be required. This will pose a significant investment in equipment, furniture, and the associated logistics (room set up for each meeting type and take down and, etc.). Continuing to deliver virtual Committee meetings will allow for a more predictable, accessible and cost-effective approach to conducting these meetings.

Due to current limitations in regard to Committee meetings, staff do not feel confident that reverting to the previous way for live streaming these in person meetings would be sufficient (issues arose related to sound and camera angles (visibility) and were not adequate for many of the Committee meetings).

To keep the current and expected quality of sound and visual capture, full in-person attendance could be considered if Committee members were to sit at the Council horseshoe and use Council's microphones. This would allow for clearer sound and full visual for the meeting. However, it is noted that for some Committees, there would still be too many members to sit in Council's chairs. Closer seating could be considered by adding more chairs around the current Council horseshoe; however, this would require close proximity seating and the sharing of microphones between Committee members. In consideration of space, the Chairperson for the meeting could sit at the presentation desk (facing the Committee); however, it is noted that they could then at times have their back to the camera and staff. Staff and non-voting liaisons would be able to be accommodated in the staff seating area.

If meetings were to move forward to an "in-person" format, it must be anticipated that it is likely there would be many instances the Committee members would still seek to have the option to participate virtually when needed (due to illness, travel / travel time etc.). Hybrid meetings, where some members are to participate in-person and others virtually, can be challenging for staff to manage. Hybrid meetings for committees are a concern, the Committee Clerks need to be available to assist members at the meeting in-person and would also need to be providing technical support at times for those joining remotely. Technical issues can delay meeting start times which could be compounded when also assisting members attending in-person (requesting agendas, asking questions relating to the meeting, etc.). While Council meetings currently have the ability to follow a hybrid-meeting format relatively smoothly when required, this does require two (2) staff members to facilitate this (one to take meeting minutes and ensure meeting process, and a second staff person to manage in-person and virtual participants).

Due to these considerations, staff recommend that to be more manageable, effective and efficient, that Committee meetings be held fully virtual or fully in-person.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The purchase of additional equipment would be required to deliver hybrid (in person and virtual) Committee meetings efficiently and effectively.

OPTIONS / RISKS / ALTERNATIVES

The following options are available for Council's consideration:

1. Continue with virtual Committee meetings (through Microsoft Teams) for the remainder of the Committee term;

2. Hold Committee meetings again in-person utilizing the Council horseshoe and existing microphones (to be shared for larger sized committees);
3. Hold Committee meetings in-person as they were held previously (around a Committee table with the same previous technology whereby consideration for budget to update equipment in future will be understood); or,
4. Direct that hybrid meetings take place, providing members with an option to participate virtually or in-person (recognizing there will be additional cost incurred in order to have an additional staff person work the hybrid meeting).

Staff recommend Option 1.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the options, staff recommend that Committee meetings continue to be held virtually for the remainder of the Committee term (October 2022). At this time, virtual meetings provide the best sound and visual coverage for members and would not limit (or crowd) the number of participants included in the meeting. This would address the current concerns regarding being seated in close proximity and allows for a predictable and cost effective means to continue to conduct Committee meetings.

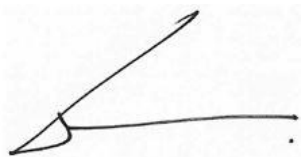
Respectfully submitted,



Tracey Arthur
Director of Corporate Administration

Comments from the Chief Administrative Officer

I concur with the recommendation of this corporate report.



Guillermo Ferrero
Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A: Future Meeting Methods - Feedback from Committee Members