



SUBJECT: Hybrid Council Meetings
TO: Mayor and Members of Council
FROM: Office of the City Clerk

Report Number: CL-11-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers:

Date to Committee: N/A

Date to Council: March 22, 2022

Recommendation:

Approve the hybrid City Council and standing committee plan as outlined in office of the city clerk report CL-11-22.

PURPOSE:

This report provides a plan for Council to return to the Council Chambers for its Council and standing committee meetings.

Background and Discussion:

This report pertains to City Council and standing committee meetings. Internal staff meetings are dependent on the internal health and safety guidelines. Advisory committee meetings will be reviewed at a later date, and their meeting rules will build upon learnings gained from City Council and standing committee meetings and internal guidelines and policies. This is the third report to Council regarding hybrid meetings and it builds on the learnings provided through CL-25-21 and CL-39-21. As this report is supplemental in nature, report CL-39-21 has been attached as Appendix A.

Truncated Timeline

October 25, 2021 – Province moves into Phase 3 and lifts capacity limits and physical distancing requirements if they choose to require proof of vaccination on certain nonessential uses.

November/December 2021

Report CL-39-21 was presented to CSSRA November 10, 2021. It was deferred, and considered at the December 14, 2021 Council meeting, where it was referred as follows:

“Refer office of the city clerk report CL-39-21 regarding hybrid council and standing committee meeting strategy to the March 22, 2022 or April 19, 2022 regular meeting of council.”

February/March 2021

On March 21, 2022 the provincial mask mandate has been removed. Report CM-12-22 provides a detailed account of the removal of restrictions by the Province.

Strategy/process

The following timeline is built on a best-case scenario. The timeline is iterative and deliberate to allow for staff to review how meetings occur, learn from experience, and adjust. We are constantly learning about the virus and prevention; therefore, practices or procedures may be amended throughout the timeline. Should there be a spike in cases or another lockdown the timeline may be paused or rolled back to the previous stage.

As learnings will help to inform future meetings, the remote meeting guide will be amended accordingly. The City of Burlington remote meeting guidelines will be updated by the City Clerk. and provided to members of Council and posted to the City’s website. At this time there will be no additional reports due to the evolving situation, and workload capacity issues.

Action	Anticipated Completion Date
Plan Approved	March 22, 2022 Council
Test Additional Equipment and Create amendments to Remote meeting Procedures.	March 2022 – April 2022
Hybrid EICS (Committee and select staff only)	April 7, 2022
Hybrid Council Meeting (Council, select staff and delegations)	April 19, 2022 Council
Return to Chambers open to the public with Remote/Hybrid options for all types of participants	May 2022

The hybrid pilot includes the Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services Committee (EICS) which is customarily the shortest standing committee meeting. Council meetings will also be part of the phased in strategy as they are relatively short, on average about one hour. In contrast, the balance of the standing committee meetings has extended throughout the workday into the evening.

Throughout the period, a hybrid model will be adopted wherein members of Council or members of the public can choose to participate remotely. It is the goal of the Office of the City Clerk to ensure that those who choose to participate remotely are treated equitably in the process. Further, remote delegations will become a permanent option for residents to communicate to Committee or Council.

Construction Concerns and Potential Disruption

Through April and May, the City Hall renovation project will be in its major demolition stage. This demolition will produce loud noise which will disrupt an in-person meeting. In preparing this report staff have worked with the Manager of Facility Assets, and the City Hall Renovation project team to coordinate meetings and the demolition. Staff have secured the days for listed in this report as non-demolition/light demolition days. Any changes to the schedule will be put forward to the project management team.

To mitigate noise, hording has been erected through the building, and an insulated wall will be built near the Council Chamber reception area. In the summer of 2022, the Tower Elevator project will commence, which will mean that general access to the Council Chambers will only be from the addition elevator.

Moving offsite is not supported by staff, as it will present a number of technical and legislative challenges. The test of an open hybrid meeting is the live stream, going offsite will compromise the City's ability to produce and maintain the live stream. If the live stream goes down, then the meeting must be recessed until the stream is functional. These downtimes may delay approval of crucial city business or effect the outcome of time sensitive issues.

In terms of Burlington there is a lack of spaces to host committee and Council meetings, which is the primary reason why Council relocated to room 247 in 2019 during the Council Chambers renovation. If there is a desire to move to expedite the hybrid in person meetings, beyond what has been proposed staff will communicate this to the City Hall team and secure the necessary dates. This may result in the City Hall construction projects being delayed and may incur more costs. In terms of Office of the City Clerk, there is limited capacity and there are several election related processes that take priority.

Should Council approve the timeline in this report, it is also recommended by Facilities Assets and supported by the City Clerk that the remote meetings in April be fully remote wherein the Chair and the Committee Clerk also work remotely. Fully remote participation will ensure that these meetings are not subject to disruptive noise in the background.

Health and Safety Measures – Update

Report CL-39-21 provides a detailed account of how the Council Chambers has been fine tuned to be a safe space for Council to convene. Plexiglass has been installed to help mitigation of COVID-19. For the Council Chambers masking will be passively encouraged with those wishing to use a mask may do so. Throughout the return to Chambers period staff will be monitoring other municipalities to determine common practices this may help shape our plan as it progresses.

Decision Matrix

At the December Council meeting a member of Council asked that a future report provide include a decision matrix on potential closures in the future. Provided is a table that identifies how the meetings may be affected if the following scenarios occur. The underlying principle is the hierarchy of controls, and how it is applied to each situation. The decision to alter the meeting path is made by the City Manager and the City Clerk with information from Health and Safety.

Situation	What will Occur
Return of Mask Mandate	Chambers participants follow our mask By-law, this may mean masks will be required throughout the meeting if members of the public are in attendance.
Gathering size reduction by the Province	Will stay within any established gathering size cap, this may limit the number of residents or staff allowed in the Council Chambers.
Stay at Home Order issued by the Province	Remote meetings with all members remote, Chair and Clerk encouraged to participate remotely as well.
Potential COVID exposure at a meeting	Will work with Health and Safety on next steps, Council may have to be fully remote for a period.
Outbreak amongst Council Members	This may mean a postponement of Council meetings. If there are meetings they will be done remotely until determined by public health clearances.

Financial Matters:

There are no financial impacts with this decision. The physical asset work as outlined in CL-39-21 was approved by Council. The work was completed, and all work was covered by the Safe Restart Funding provided by the Province. There may be a need for passive signage for public attendees in the Council Chambers, however this will be nominal in nature.

Total Financial Impact

Minimal

Source of Funding

Applicable costs would be absorbed through existing operating budgets

Other Resource Impacts

Not applicable

Climate Implications

With hybrid meetings, remote participation will help to keep the carbon footprint of a meeting low, through reduced travel.

Engagement Matters:

In preparation of this report the Office of the City Clerk has worked with internal work teams to coordinate aspects of the return to Council Chambers plan. Throughout the period staff will be monitoring incoming feedback from the public about their experience, in particular through the delegation feedback form.

Conclusion:

During the pandemic, to meet the needs of Council and to keep the business of the Corporation moving, meetings have moved remotely. With lower COVID-19 case counts, staff have created a plan to get Council back into their Council Chambers safely.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Arjoon

City Clerk

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Appendices

Appendix A – Report CL-39-21 Hybrid Council and Standing Committee meeting strategy

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.