![York Region]

Clause 10 in Report No. 13 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on September 22, 2016.

10
Further Consideration of Broadcasting Regional Council and Committee Meetings to the Public

Committee of the Whole recommends:

1. Receipt of the report dated September 2, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services.

2. Council approve live public audio streaming, with technology to allow the public to view presentations, for Committee of the Whole meetings effective at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

3. Council endorse live public video streaming of Council and Committee meetings, as well as archiving, and that staff report back in three months with options for implementation.

Report dated September 2, 2016 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services now follows:

1.   Recommendation

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2.   Purpose

This report responds to a Regional Council request in February 2016 for staff to report back with options for live audio/video streaming and archiving of Regional Committee of the Whole and Council meetings.

Further Consideration of Broadcasting Regional Council and Committee Meetings to the Public

3. Background

Council and Committee meetings are required to be open to the public except in limited circumstances

Section 239 of the Municipal Act requires that Council and Committee meetings be open to the public except in very specific circumstances. The Region's meetings already comply with this requirement and agendas and minutes for all meetings are posted to the Region's website about one week prior to the meetings.

Regional Council meetings have been audio streamed over the internet to the public since May 2014

Regional Council and Committee meetings have been streamed internally to staff for several years. Council first considered external broadcasting of Council and Committee meetings at its meeting on October 17, 2013. Council resolved to begin audio streaming only Council meetings and this has been happening since May 2014.

The Region also uses traditional and social media to inform residents of Council decisions

Council decisions are shared through traditional media in the way of media releases and council highlights. These products are circulated to more than 215 reporters and media outlets following the completion of each monthly council meeting. Council highlights are among the highest viewed media products.

The Region has around 15,000 followers on Twitter and nearly 14,000 on Facebook. These channels are used to broadcast highlights of Council decisions and other important information and additional email blasts target over 200 media outlets.

The Region also updates Twitter followers by "live tweeting" during Council meetings. Analytics suggest an average of 1,000 followers see these updates.

4. Analysis and Options

Statistics suggest the audience for broadcasted municipal meetings is low

Broadcasting meetings over the internet provides further openness and transparency by allowing residents and other stakeholders to hear the debates without the need to attend meetings in person or rely on media coverage.

However, in the 2013 Environics Survey, 1029 Greater Toronto Area residents were asked how often they watch televised meetings of their own or other Council meetings. 87% of respondents indicated they never or rarely watch them.

Based on statistics from the past 12 months the Region has an average of around 80 listeners per Council meeting. This number includes staff as well as external listeners because the current technology cannot differentiate between internal and external connections. For comparison, over the same period, Committee of the Whole – which is only streamed to York Region staff – had an average listenership of 67. The highest number of listeners to the Council stream was 145 for the November 2015 meeting.

Staff were able to obtain statistics from most of the local municipalities and some of the regional municipalities. The municipalities have different capabilities for tracking the numbers of users but Tables 1 and 2 provide an approximation of the average number of users per meeting. The number of users is consistently low.

Seven of the local municipalities stream Council and Committee meetings to the public and six of them use video streaming

Most of the local municipalities broadcast their meetings to the public and most use video streaming. Table 1 illustrates the current status in each local municipality as well as the average number of viewers or listeners where available. Staff were unable to get viewership information from Rogers TV.

Further Consideration of Broadcasting Regional Council and Committee Meetings to the Public

Table 1
Broadcasting of meetings by local municipalities

Municipality	Broadcasting status	Archiving status	Average # of external users
Aurora	General Committee and Council are video-streamed over the internet. Council meetings are also broadcast by Rogers TV	Committee meetings from late 2014 onwards are available on YouTube (limited by YouTube's capacity limits). Council meetings are can be viewed on Rogers TV	<10[1]
East Gwillimbury	Investigating options	Not applicable	N/A
Georgina	Video-streaming over the internet	Meetings dating back to 2015 are available on the Town's website	5
King	Investigating options	Not applicable	N/A
Markham	Video-streaming over the internet	No archiving of meetings	14
Newmarket	Video-streaming over the internet. Council meetings are also broadcast by Rogers TV.	Various meetings are available back to 2013	13[1]
Richmond Hill	Video-streaming over the internet of all meetings held in the Council Chambers	All recorded meetings dating back to 2014 are available on the website but this is being considered further	20
Vaughan	Video-streaming over the internet of all Council and Standing Committee meetings	Recordings are available for approximately three months	Unavailable
Whitchurch-Stouffville	Audio-streaming of Council meetings over the internet began in March 2016	Recordings are available online	170*

*Statistics were only available for the first streamed meeting.

[1]Statistics are for streaming users only. Rogers TV numbers are unavailable.

All Regional municipalities video stream Council and Committee meetings to the public

Table 2 shows how each of the regional municipalities broadcasts its meetings to the public. It includes average usage statistics where available.

Table 2
Broadcasting of meetings by Regional municipalities

Municipality	Broadcasting status	Archiving status	Average # of external users
Durham	Video streaming over the internet	Meetings are available back to 2013 but the retention period is under review	Not available
Halton	Video streaming over the internet	Meetings dating back to mid-2009 are available	23
Niagara	Video streaming over the internet	Videos dating back to 2015 are available on YouTube	Not available
Peel	Audio-streaming over the internet supplemented with video streaming through Rogers TV	Council meeting recordings dating back one year are available through Rogers TV	3 for audio; Rogers TV viewing statistics are unavailable
Waterloo	Video streaming over the internet	Meetings dating back to 2012 are available online	Not available

Video streaming of Council and Committee meetings requires technical, financial and other considerations

The Region has some of the technical hardware required to permit video streaming. However, upgraded video cameras will be required to effectively capture meeting proceedings.

Camera placement and operation will also need consideration. At a minimum it could be possible to capture meeting proceedings using one camera placed in a central location. Installing additional cameras improves the viewing experience

by enabling viewers to more clearly see speakers, presentation material and other participants.

However, using multiple cameras requires specialized production equipment to permit switching of camera feeds. The production equipment and camera hardware could also allow for remote operation of the cameras so that they can be independently panned, tilted and zoomed. This will require analysis to determine the most effective placement and operation of the cameras and may require a dedicated camera operator to properly follow the meeting.

Video streaming also requires the use of a third-party streaming host

Video streaming is bandwidth-intensive and could affect the efficiency of the Region's network. This is particularly the case if the Region was to manage its own streaming. However it is possible to use an external host to manage the bandwidth requirements as in Georgina, Richmond Hill and Vaughan. Hosting services typically have an annual service fee.

The Region could more easily expand its existing audio streaming service to Committee of the Whole and other Board and Task Force meetings

The Region already has the necessary hardware and software in place to permit audio streaming of all meetings in the Council Chambers and Committee Room A. It is also possible to include images of the presentation material along with the audio stream.

Although unnecessary for bandwidth-management, a third party streaming host might provide benefits such as increased reliability of streams and better statistical analysis.

Archived meetings can be made available on the Region's website or through an external host

The meeting minutes are considered the official record for each of the Region's meetings and these are all made available on the Region's website. There is no legislated requirement that archived meeting recordings also be made available but most of the municipalities that stream meetings do make them available.

There is no common standard for how long these recordings are available. Each of the local and regional municipalities has different standards for how long archived recordings are made available online, ranging from three months to

indefinitely. There is no technical impediment that limits the number of archived meetings the Region could make available, especially if a third party host is used.

Link to key Council-approved plans

One of the eight goal areas in Vision 2051 is "Open and Responsive Governance" which anticipates setting high standards for transparency and accountability, responding to customer service needs and facilitating effective communication. Broadcasting Regional meetings to the public directly responds to this goal area.

5. Financial Implications

Audio and video streaming have financial implications which have not been included in the 2016 approved budget or the 2017-2018 outlook

There is very little cost associated with audio streaming because the Region already has most of the required infrastructure in place. Video streaming will require new hardware and production equipment. The cost of the cameras and their installation will vary depending on the preferred setup.

Video streaming will likely require a third party service to manage the bandwidth demands as well as archiving. An audio streaming solution could also make use of a third party provider.

Table 3 summarizes the estimated costs associated with audio and video streaming.

Table 3
Costs associated with streaming Regional meetings

Method	Hardware costs	Region-hosted bandwidth costs	Externally-hosted bandwidth costs
Audio	N/A	Minimal	Under $10,000 per year
Video	$125,000+ depending on setup	Not recommended	Under $10,000 per year

6.   Local Municipal Impact

There is no direct local municipal impact associated with this report. However, broadcasting all Council and Committee meetings may enable local municipalities to be more easily aware of Regional proceedings.

7.   Conclusion

Almost all the local municipalities broadcast meetings via the internet, with most using video. All the regional municipalities are using video streaming. Broadcasting Regional meetings increases transparency and helps stakeholders keep up to date with Regional activities and debates without having to be in attendance.

There is a small cost associated with audio streaming. Video streaming will require investment in hardware and its installation. This investment could be substantial depending on the setup. However, the annual streaming-related costs are relatively low.

Listenership for the live Council audio stream is relatively low and based on experiences in other municipalities it is unlikely to significantly increase if video is made available. The Region will continue to promote Council highlights through social and traditional media channels.

For more information on this report, please contact Christopher Raynor, Deputy Clerk at ext. 71302.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

September 2, 2016

6952174

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request