

The Procedures and Committees Bylaw, 2014 - Proposed Amendments for Hybrid Meetings

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon will be returning to in-person Council and Committee meetings beginning September 1, 2021. To accommodate hybrid in-person/remote meetings for those that may be unable to attend in person for any reason, in particular on short notice, changes to [The Procedures and Committees Bylaw, 2014](#) (the “Bylaw”) are proposed.

BACKGROUND

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, effective March 16, 2020 a resolution was passed at the Governance and Priorities Committee for City Council and Committee meetings to be held remotely, suspending provisions of the Bylaw to do so. All meetings are currently being held remotely via the Microsoft Teams platform. At the July 19, 2021 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting Administration presented an information report outlining plans for staff to return to the workplace, and for in-person meetings to resume September 1, 2021. In that report it was indicated that proposed changes to the Bylaw would be brought forward for consideration in August to better facilitate hybrid meetings.

2.2 Current Status

The existing provisions of the Bylaw allow for remote attendance in certain situations, however, are restrictive regarding quorum and for remote attendance on short notice. With attendance at in-person events with any symptoms of sickness now being discouraged, and Covid still being a potential risk in the community, the ability to quickly make changes to method of attendance is important. Proposed changes are predicated on changes that have been made to the Council Chambers to better facilitate hybrid meetings than in the past. Technology has been installed that will always allow any remote attendees to be seen by attendees in chambers, effectively interact in the meeting, and to be included in livestreams of meetings for public transparency.

2.3 Public Engagement

Public notice is required prior to any changes to The Procedures and Committees Bylaw, 2014 being made. In anticipation of potential changes to the bylaw, notice has been published on the City website on August 20, 2021, and in the Star Phoenix on August 21, 2021. Notice being provided does not require Council to make changes but must be provided for any consideration of bylaw changes to occur.

OPTIONS

Sections 18, 18.1, 91, and 91.1 of the Bylaw allow for Council to meet electronically in an emergency, and for remote participation to occur at meetings, regardless of whether it is in an emergency or not. No changes are being proposed to these sections.

Schedule 'O' of the Bylaw contains parameters for remote attendance at meetings.

Option 1 - Make bylaw changes in the suggested sections of Schedule 'O' below to better accommodate hybrid in person/remote meetings

There are several provisions within Schedule 'O' that may become problematic for effective hybrid attendance in the current climate.

Section 3

This section currently requires at least one week's notice of remote participation and publication of the remote participation in the agenda. If a request for remote participation is because of isolation due to Covid or other illness it could occur very suddenly, and not provide the opportunity to provide one week of notice or be included in the published meeting agenda. As technology is such that advance notice of one week is not required logistically, it is suggested that this section be amended to 24 hours' notice, or less at the discretion of the City Clerk, to provide additional flexibility. Notice to the Council/Committee and the public would continue to be given as appropriate in the circumstances, however the ability for seamless participation and public viewing will make this notice less important.

Section 5 and 6

The current language of these sections prohibits remote attendance at Standing Policy Committees and Public Hearings. It is suggested that these provisions be eliminated, so that any meeting can be attended remotely. In particular, SPCs could be subject to quorum issues based on their smaller membership if remote participation is not permitted.

Section 7

It is proposed that language be added that requires remote attendees to be visible on video, except as permitted by the Chair and/or City Clerk.

Section 8

The current language of section 8 provides for a remotely attending member to be considered in attendance, however not counted for the purpose of determining quorum. It is proposed that this section be eliminated. With the improvements to Council chamber, a remote member will be able to fully participate in the meeting and there is no reason they should not be included in quorum. Existing language in section 4 provides discretion by the meeting Chair and City Clerk to manage the number of remote attendees so, if it is necessary to have a certain number of members appear in person, that can be achieved.

Other

It is proposed that language be added to Schedule “O” restricting meetings from being chaired by a remote attendee, except in circumstances where the meeting is fully electronic with no in-person attendance.

There are no restrictions within *The Cities Act* that would prohibit any of the proposed changes.

Remote presentations by the public or contractors do not require changes to the Bylaw and can be allowed for at the discretion of Council.

Advantages

- Provides more flexibility for attendance virtually

Disadvantages

- May mean public meetings have less members of Council physically present

Option 2 – Maintain the status quo

This option would continue with the *status quo* and no changes to the Bylaw would be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Governance & Priorities Committee recommend to City Council:

1. That the amendments to *The Procedures and Committees Bylaw, 2014* to better accommodate hybrid meetings, as outlined in this report, be approved, and
2. That the City Solicitor be instructed to make the necessary amendments to *The Procedures and Committees Bylaw, 2014* for consideration by City Council on August 30, 2021.

RATIONALE

The City has adjusted to a virtual meeting format and it has been demonstrated that it can work effectively from a public accountability and transparency perspective. With the technological changes planned for the Council Chamber to enhance the virtual experience, the suggested changes are feasible.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Upgrades to the Council Chamber were completed as part of a previously approved capital project in 2021, and additional measures for hybrid meetings have been completed in August of 2021 as part of overall IT upgrades to all city facilities.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

It is expected that increased flexibility with the Bylaw to accommodate hybrid meetings on short notice will make the City more able to maintain governance in the event of any disruption of ability of members of Council to attend and will have long term cost savings related to travel costs of member of Council and consultants.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Transparency and public communication are key in all Council activities, so with that in mind all proposed changes are supported in such a way as to ensure that proper notice of meeting format and attendance are publicized and all meeting attendees, whether in person or remote, are able to be seen and interacted with effectively.

Report Approval

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