

Return to the Workplace Plan and Resumption of In-Person Meetings

ISSUE

Administration is providing an update on the timeline and procedures for City of Saskatoon staff working from home during the pandemic to return to the workplace and requesting feedback on a date for City Council and Committee meetings, currently being held remotely, to return to an in-person setting.

BACKGROUND

Since March of 2020, COVID-19 has resulted in many adjustments to the City of Saskatoon's Occupational Health and Safety and Business Continuity Plans. These adjustments followed the public health orders and directions from the Government of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Health Authority local medical health officers. One of the recommendations was that staff who can effectively work from home should work from home. City of Saskatoon staff who can effectively work from home have been working from home. Staff who remained in the workplace have followed COVID-19 Exposure Control Plans to mitigate the risk of workplace transmission.

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 Procedural Bylaw to do so. All meetings are currently being held remotely, via the Microsoft Teams platform.

In July of 2021 a return to the workplace for City staff was planned for September 1, 2021, along with in-person Council/Committee meetings to resume on the same timeline. As that date approached, however, an increase in Covid-19 cases in the Saskatoon region occurred, and a decision was made to defer the return to the workplace plan and in-person meetings, with consideration to occur again prior to January 2022.

In November of 2021 a return to the workplace for City staff was again planned, with a transition period beginning December 15 where staff were encouraged to return either full-time, for partial days, or for in-person meetings, subject to following appropriate exposure control plans. Full return to the workplace was to occur prior to February 1, 2022. In conjunction with this planned return to the workplace the Governance and Priorities Committee resolved to return to in-person Committee/Council meetings beginning in February of 2022.

CURRENT STATUS

With the emergency of the Omicron variant and the increased transmission rates of COVID-19 in Saskatoon starting in January 2022 the return to the workplace plan for staff has been paused until April 1, 2022. A transition period where staff, who are currently working from home, are encouraged to return to the workplace either full-time, for partial days or for in-person meetings, following appropriate exposure control plans, is now planned to occur beginning in March. This will be re-evaluated as that date approaches. Based on the current increased transmission of COVID-19 in Saskatoon, as well as the updated return to the workplace plan for staff, a delay in return to in-person meetings for Council is also being recommended.

The City continues to follow the direction of the Public Health Orders and recommendations from the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officers. In keeping with our values of “people matter” and “safety in all we do” there continues to be COVID-19 safety protocols in place for all staff and public attending civic facilities. There will also continue to be task-based hazard assessments completed to ensure staff and public safety and exposure control plans based on the hazard assessment. It is acknowledged that this is an evolving situation, and the City must be prepared to adjust as required. Exposure Control plans include: Employee Mandatory Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination or Proof of Negative COVID-19 test, fit for duty forms, masking, physical distancing, enhanced cleaning, and physical barriers.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

It is proposed that in-person Council and Committee meetings resume April 1, 2022 to align with the new date of full return of staff, however support will be in place for meetings to resume as early as the March 7, 2022 Standing Policy Committee meetings should Council so choose. The City is well positioned to react quickly to changes in meeting format, so should Council preference be to make decisions on meeting venue/format monthly at the preceding month’s Governance and Priority Committee meeting Administration is able to accommodate this approach as well. In this scenario Administration would recommend deferring in-person meetings to at least March 7, 2022, with a re-evaluation and decision to be made again at the February 22, 2022 Governance and Priority Committee meeting.

At such time that in-person meetings resume the intent is for full public attendance to be allowed, in-person, in the Council Chamber, subject to guidelines below:

- Masks are required to be worn by all attendees, including Council, at all times.
- Members of City Council must follow the City of Saskatoon’s Employee Mandatory Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination or Proof of Negative test procedure
- All attendees, must show proof of full COVID-19 vaccination, or COVID-19 negative test, from the list of approved Government of Saskatchewan providers, within 72 hours of attendance at the meeting

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- This is the same standard for public access to all Leisure Centres and at the City's indoor rinks.
- All attendees must attest prior to entering the Council Chamber that they are not currently showing any signs of Covid-19, and have not been ordered to quarantine or self-isolate for any reason.
 - This will be managed by security prior to entering the Chamber for members of the public, and by fit-for-duty form for staff and members of Council.

To ensure full accessibility for all, the City will continue to livestream all meetings and provide options for staff, Council, and the public to attend and participate remotely in a way that does not hamper effective operation of meetings. Covid-19 safety protocols will be evaluated on an ongoing basis by health and safety staff.

Feedback on the proposed return to in-person Council/Committee meetings is requested from Council to ensure that the plan proposed by Administration is acceptable and any additional considerations can be taken.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Limited costs related to upgrades to the Council Chamber and meeting rooms to support hybrid meetings have been absorbed through existing project budgets.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Administration will continue to monitor operations for safety and effectiveness as it relates to Covid-19 and adjust as needed.

Report Approval

Written and Approved by: Adam Tittlemore, City Clerk

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