



## INFORMATION AND LEGISLATIVE SERVICES *Staff Report*

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REPORT NO: ILS-2022-15

TO: Council

SUBMITTED BY: Dawn Mittelholtz, Director of Information and Legislative Services /  
Municipal Clerk

PREPARED BY: Dawn Mittelholtz, Director of Information and Legislative Services /  
Municipal Clerk

REVIEWED BY: Sharon Chambers, CAO

DATE: April 25, 2022

SUBJECT: Return to In-person Council Meetings

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### RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ILS-2022-15 be endorsed.

### SUMMARY:

As the response to the pandemic has lifted or loosened almost all restrictions, Council is being asked to endorse the return to in-person Council Meetings starting May 16, 2022.

### BACKGROUND:

On March 17, 2020, the doors to the Administration Complex for the Township of Wilmot were closed in response to the global pandemic. These were unprecedented times that called for flexibility from Council, staff, and the public. Wilmot rose to the challenge and began switching to virtual or other means of providing service that minimized or removed in-person contact as much as possible to lessen the spread of the virus. This change also included how Council Meetings were conducted.

On March 19, 2020, the Province of Ontario passed Bill 187 to amend the *Municipal Act, 2001* (the Act), to permit municipal Councils to participate electronically in open and closed meetings during an emergency and still count towards quorum, if their Procedural By-law was amended to allow it. Electronic participation counting towards quorum was not previously allowed under the Act. Council held its first virtual meeting on March 25, 2020 and adopted the above noted Procedural By-law Amendments.

On July 21, 2020, Bill 197 was given Royal Assent to permit ongoing electronic participation counting towards quorum for both open and closed Council Meetings, again, if the Procedural By-law was amended to allow this. On October 5, 2020, Council approved those amendments to the Procedural By-law but required that the Chair be physically present at the meeting. Council has been meeting virtually ever since.

### REPORT:

In the first quarter of 2022, the Province of Ontario has been steadily working towards lifting or loosening the provincial orders and recommendations that restricted Ontario businesses and the public in terms of gathering limits, physical distancing, facial mask requirements, and proof of vaccination requirements. The lifting of these restrictions is a welcome change for many while caution is continuing to be observed. Township staff have been monitoring and responding to the pandemic in coordination with municipal and other government agency partners across Waterloo Region under the guidance and advice of the Region of Waterloo Public Health Unit.

Returning to in-person Council Meetings was approached cautiously by staff to ensure the health, safety, and psychological comfort of all participants, that the technological solutions in place produced a high-quality product for viewers, and that accountability and transparency standards were upheld in concert with the Procedural By-law. The solution that staff have been implementing follows a two-phased approach.

### **Phase 1**

Council, staff, and the public will return to the Council Chambers on May 16, 2022. Members of Township staff will continue to wear masks during in-person meetings with the option to remove their masks when speaking.

Council and the Corporate Leadership Team will resume sitting in their pre-pandemic seating arrangement. Although seating in the Council Chambers for members of the public will not be limited, chairs will be arranged to allow for physical distancing as comfort levels in engaging with those outside of the household increases while remaining cognizant of the ongoing pandemic. Additional chairs will be set out if required. Any member of Council, staff, or the public who are experiencing COVID-19 like symptoms are asked to not attend in-person meetings.

Council Meetings will continue to be live streamed on YouTube with recorded versions accessible via the Township's Website. Staff have installed the necessary infrastructure to ensure quality audio and video is broadcasted to anyone viewing or listening to the meeting live or recorded. Electronic participation will not be combined with in-person participation (hybrid meetings) during this phase, meaning delegations will only have the option of addressing Council in-person or providing written submissions to the Clerk. Staff will be evaluating the live stream and recorded meetings to further refine the end product and ensure existing staff resources can accommodate both phases of this project.

## **Phase 2**

Once Phase 1 is complete, staff will move towards introducing hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings will allow for both two-way communication between electronic participants (via Zoom) and those attending in-person. It is important to note that this phase requires additional resources to manage various aspects such as delegation management, technological support for participants and overall monitoring of the production. Staff intend on having this capability introduced by the end of Q3 2022. Phase 2 will include recommendations for the conduct of Committee Meetings relative to electronic and in-person participation.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Returning to in-person Council Meetings, while planning for hybrid meetings meets the Strategic Plan goals of:

- Quality of Life – Accessibility and Inclusivity, Health and Wellbeing
- Community Engagement – Belonging, Support for Community Groups / Volunteers / Youth
- Responsible Governance – Active Communication, Fiscal Responsibility, Infrastructure Investments

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Costs associated with the implementation will be sourced from the existing IT Operating and Annual Hardware/Software Capital Budget. Any significant deviations to meet the aforementioned obligations will be noted in future quarterly financial reports.

Given the staffing resource pressures of live streaming, on-going impacts will be considered in the 2023 operating budget process.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

None