



Report to Council

Department: Office of the CAO
Division: Legal and Legislative Services
Date: March 2, 2020
Prepared by: Shelley Brown, Deputy Clerk
Report Number: Legal and Legislative Services-2020-01
Subject: Regular Council Meeting Live Streaming and Webcasting
Number of Pages: 14

Recommendation(s)

That Legal and Legislative Services Report 2020-01 entitled "Regular Council Meeting Live Streaming and Webcasting" prepared by "Shelley Brown, Deputy Clerk" dated "March 2, 2020" be received:

That Council direct Administration to enter into a 3-month trial with the existing service provider to conduct a 3-month trial of their livestream/webcasting services and after such trial period, assess and report back to Council; and

That Administration research the Closed Captioning requirements of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAB) 2.0 Level AA that must be complied with by January 1, 2021, and report back to Council on options together with the financial implications of ensuring compliance with those legislative requirements.

Purpose

To provide Council with a report on streaming and/or broadcast options with respect to its Town Council meetings.

Background and Discussion

Currently there is no legislative requirement to broadcast or record council meetings. However it is generally accepted that it is in the public's best interest to make recordings of Council meetings available to the general public in order to enhance the Town's communication with its residents, enhance citizen engagement in local government and demonstrate the town's commitment to open and transparent government. That being said it is important to note that these broadcasts or recordings do not replace the formal minutes that are generated during the course of the meeting. The meeting minutes that are prepared and circulated are and will continue to be the official permanent record of a council meeting as prescribed by the Municipal Act.

During the 2012 budget deliberations Council made communications with citizens and other stakeholders an enhanced priority by allotting \$5,600 for a pilot project relating to the videotaping of eight regular Council meetings that was envisioned to take place starting in the fall of 2012 and pending the hiring of a Manager of Communications. At its September 4, 2012 meeting Council received for information CAO Report Number CAO12-09 as prepared by the Manager of Communications which advised Council further on the various options and costs associated with livestreaming and/or delayed webcasting of regular council meetings.

A test taping in March 2012 was then conducted in Town Council chambers by CFTV (who was selected to carry out the pilot project videotaping) and it became apparent that Town Council chambers was not well suited for the videotaping of Council meetings especially from a audio perspective. As a result a decision was subsequently made to explore the use of the County of

Essex Council Chambers for the Regular meetings of Essex Town Council and to defer the video taping of the meetings by CFTV until the launch of a new Town website in June 2013.

Council in 2013, then gave temporary approval and then in 2014 gave continuing approval (by way of Corporate Services Reports 2013-33 and 2014-11 respectively) to hold and continue to hold Town of Essex regular council meetings at the County of Essex Council Chambers.

Starting with the September 3, 2013 meeting, Council moved to the County of Essex Chambers and commenced the aforementioned eight (8) meeting pilot project. At its November 18, 2013 regular meeting, Council then received Communications Report Number 2013-002 and gave approval for the Town to enter into an agreement with CFTV³⁴ to video tape approximately 22 regular meetings of Council a year at a cost of \$14,216. This agreement has been renewed in principle on an annual basis ever since that time.

Currently we are continuing to pay \$600 per meeting or \$13,800 per year (based on what is now approximately 23 meetings per calendar year) plus an additional \$35 per meeting or \$805 per year (based on 23 meetings) for a DVD copy of the recorded meeting. The total price per year based on 23 meetings is \$14,605.

The videotaping of the regular council meetings has enabled town staff to subsequently post the videos to YouTube and the Town website in order to make available to the public at large. As well the videos of the meetings are re-broadcast regularly on Cogeco digital cable channel 100, Gosfield North IPTV channel 34 and on Bell TV satellite channel 586 on a weekly basis.

Since September 2013 the video taping of the meetings has generally been satisfactory although at times the Town has experienced periodic issues such as connectivity issues, quality of video and sound issues relating to coordination with the County of Essex audio system. Further there have been a couple of incidents relating to technical issues experienced in which segments of meetings were lost or not captured fully.

While the current Council meetings are available post-meeting both on the internet and in limited broadcast forms, the Council meetings are not available to view in real time i.e. via live

webcasting. Several Essex County municipalities have been recently exploring options with respect to the live streaming of meetings and to that end at its regular council meeting of October 7, 2019 our Council similarly passed the following motion:

Moved by Councillor Vander Doelen
Seconded by Councillor Bjorkman

(R19-10-413) That Administration look at streaming, as well as broadcasting options with respect to Town Council meetings and that a report be brought back to Council listing the options, costs and resources required.

“Carried”

What follows below is our review of those options pursuant to Council resolution R19-10-413.

Closed Captioning Requirements

One thing to note is that in considering the various options contained in this Report Council also needs to be aware of the upcoming closed captioning requirements. Regulation 191/11 of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (the “AODA”) requires that municipal websites must meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A, and by January 1, 2021 must conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA (with the exception of success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live), and success criteria 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded)). What this means is that by January 1, 2021 video recordings of Council meetings that are published must have a closed captioning option in accordance with the requirements of the AODA.

Live Webcasting/ Video Streaming

Webcasting or live video streaming is the process of live (real time) video broadcasting over the internet. Video streaming or streaming is simply the replay of video or viewing it on demand where it can be watched at a different time.

The live Webcasting or live video streaming of Council meetings is increasingly being accepted as the preferred medium for enhancing citizen engagement and improving the transparency of meetings.

What are other Municipalities Doing?

There are many municipalities across the province that provide their residents the opportunity to live stream meetings, or to watch the meetings at a later date. The following outlines the recording format(s) currently used by the municipalities in Essex County.

Municipality	Recording Format	Closed Captioning	Service Provider
County of Essex	Video/Webcasting	Yes (National Captioning Canada)	Cogeco Cable (live broadcast)/eSCRIBE (live webcast)
Amherstburg	Webcasting	Yes	eSCRIBE
Kingsville	Webcasting	Yes	eSCRIBE
Lakeshore	Webcasting	No (Looking at in 2021)	Swagit
LaSalle	None	No	N/A
Leamington	Video/Webcasting	Yes	CFTV/Sliq
Tecumseh	Webcasting	Yes	eSCRIBE

When making the determination as to the best option to consider for the future broadcasting or recording of the Council meetings the following items should be considered when choosing both the option and the provider of these services:

- Does the provider cater to a certain sector or industry? The provider should have a good understand of the needs of municipal government.
- Is it easy to use and does it integrate smoothly into our current work environment? It should not be complicated and match the way our municipality operates.
- Does it enhance and work efficiently with our current and future workflows? It should grow with our needs and what Council envisions for the future.
- Where the data is stored and is it secure? Check with the provider to see how they deal with and will protect our data.
- How reliable and responsive is their customer support? Are knowledgeable support agents immediately available if we encounter any problems, especially if the meeting are live?

Option 1: Status Quo Method: Videotaping with posting to Web and CFTV Broadcast

Currently, the Town videotapes its regular Council meetings through a third-party provider (“CFTV”). Once the meeting has been videotaped, the provider delivers the finished recording on a USB along with a DVD recording of the meeting. The recordings are then posted to the website/YouTube usually within 2-3 days after the meeting was held. The videos of the meetings are also then re-broadcast by CFTV on Cogeco digital cable channel 100, Gosfield North IPTV channel 34 and on Bell TV satellite channel 586 on a weekly scheduled basis. While not in real time the videotaping of the regular council meetings per the status quo has enabled town staff to make the Council Meetings available to the public at large together with the capability to reach the public in different formats through CFTV’s re-broad casting capabilities as previously referenced above.

Since September 2013 the video taping of the meetings has generally been satisfactory although at times the Town has experienced periodic issues such as connectivity issues, quality of video issues and sound issues relating to coordination with the County of Essex Chambers audio system. Further there have been a few incidents relating to technical issues experienced in which segments of meetings were lost or not captured fully.

In further assessing this current method, one thing to note is that the recordings of the meetings are not indexed to the corresponding agenda items, which means that it is sometimes difficult for members of the public and/or town staff to find and identify particular segments of the meeting that they may need access to for review or other purposes etc. Other methods which will be discussed below have the capability to fully index the visual recording of the meeting so that it is linked to each particular item on the Agenda.

As well, with this current method closed captioning is not part of the service provided. A third-party provider would be required. The County of Essex uses a company called National Captioning Canada at a rate of \$120 per hour. Starting in 2021 in order to be in compliance with AODA arrangements will need to be made to ensure the visual recordings of the council meetings (in whatever form Council gives direction to) have the required closed captioning services.

Option 2: Live Webcasting and Video streaming using current Agenda Management Software Provider (eSCRIBE)

eSCRIBE, which is the owner of the agenda management software currently being used by Administration to build and distribute council agenda packages and minutes also offers webcasting and recorded video functionality for council meetings.

At this time, the County of Essex has contracted with eSCRIBE to live stream meetings however Cogeco continues to be their main provider for broadcasting recorded meetings.

The Town of Amherstburg has been approved for webcasting through eSCRIBE and are hoping to go live in February/March of this year.

The Town of Kingsville has entered into an agreement with eSCRIBE for both webcasting and closed captioning. They are in the testing phase and hope to go live in February.

Tecumseh has approved webcasting and closed captioning, using a multi-camera visual through eSCRIBE however they are delayed with the implementation due to the renovations of

their Town Hall. They are expected to be completed renovations in August and will have the webcasting and closed captioning ready for launch at that time.

Lakeshore has contracted with Swagit Productions for webcasting and have reported that it is working well. They are implementing eSCRIBE for agenda production only. They are looking at 2021 to implement closed captioning.

The Town of LaSalle is not planning to implement webcasting in 2020.

The Municipality of Leamington is moving to live streaming as well but have stated that they will not be using eSCRIBE for this service. They have contracted with a company called Sliq for web streaming and will be doing a trial run of the closed captioning through them in April.

Webcasting through eSCRIBE provides for unlimited storage and streaming of audio or video content from meetings. Due to the fact that eSCRIBE is the agenda preparation software used by the Town, webcasting with eSCRIBE allows for full integration (or indexing) to the meeting's agenda items and minutes so that users can view the entire meeting live or jump to specific agenda item sections with a single tap when viewing the recorded meeting.

The Town would have access to reporting and the metrics of viewership (number of viewers etc.) The video feed and equipment is already in place at the County Building as they are now using eSCRIBE. The Town would simply need to connect to the camera at the County of Essex with our own encoder that will be provided by eSCRIBE.

The encoder records the audio and video of the meeting and allows for streaming. A backup is saved to our server and once the video is published onto our website, eSCRIBE hosts the video. There is no limit of the number of videos eSCRIBE can host. The encoder allows for a clearer stream and reduced redundancy. If the connection is lost, the video continues to be recorded and the stream picks up when connection is recovered. The backup is used to post the entire meeting to our website.

eSCRIBE has also provided pricing for the service based on an add-on of the Closed Captioning Module that would meet the Town's upcoming legislated accessibility requirements. The automated closed captioning service is AI based (Artificial Intelligence with Deep Learning) to allow for live closed captioning during meetings. A recorded version will then be available for publishing. The closed captioning software is trained to pick up names and other phonetics correctly by running the software through previously recorded meetings and then adjusting the transcription and training it to pick it up correctly. The County of Essex did not currently purchase eSCRIBE's closed captioning add-on as the County currently utilizes National Captioning Canada at a rate of \$120 per hour for their closed captioning needs.

Other included features of the eSCRIBE service:

- Splash screens for breaks or closed sessions
- Unlimited storage, data and viewers
- Unlimited viewers from a single outgoing feed
- Simple publishing and integration with our website
- Resilience to lost connectivity
- Letting us keep control over our intellectual property
- Support for multiple video formats

Factors to consider in assessing the eSCRIBE service:

- The eSCRIBE basic service only provides for a fixed location camera. The camera provides for a panoramic view with the fixed camera situated above from behind the delegation table at County of Essex Chambers. The fixed camera does not provide viewers with additional angle views nor an up close view of the particular speaker during any given point in the meeting. However using a single fixed camera would have the advantage of minimal equipment and staff resources required. An example of some of the municipalities in the province that use that use eSCRIBE with the single fixed camera include Newmarket (with CC), City of Oshawa and Stratford (with CC). A review of those recordings would suggest that despite only using one camera, the

recordings are still providing the public with a good quality live stream/recording of the meeting.

- There is an option at additional expense to purchase a second or additional cameras from eSCRIBE at a cost of approximately \$1,000 per camera (not including installation and material) however IT staff would likely then be required at the meeting to support the camera feeds. However, at this time the County of Essex has stated that it would be difficult to run the cable through the ceiling and had experienced issues in the past so they are not open to allowing us to install a second camera in their Council Chambers.
- Staff training would be required. The video feed will appear on the agenda screen once logged into eSCRIBE and the individual taking minutes clicks on each item on the agenda as the meeting progresses to bookmark the video where each item of the video.

The County of Essex has implemented this webcasting and has worked through initial issues that have arisen with the new software/hardware which accordingly would make our transition much smoother. The Clerk for the County of Essex reports that they are thus far happy with the product and the service provided by the ecribe webcasting module.

The fees for implementing Webcasting and Closed Captioning are:

- **Webcasting Plus Module**
 - Annual Service and Support Fees \$10,080
 - Implementation Fees \$2,700
 - Training Fees \$675
 - Total Webcasting Fees \$14,175
- **Closed Captioning Module**
 - Annual Service and Support Fees \$9,810
 - Implementation Fee \$2,700
 - Total Closed Captioning Fees \$12,510
- **Total Annual Support Fees \$20,610**

support and usage. Presumably with this method the in-house webcast/videotape could be broadcast through a link on our website to YouTube however there would no capability for closed captioning and the broadcast cannot be indexed to agenda nor integrated to our eSCRIBE agenda management software.

The additional demand on IT and Communications staff may diminish current service levels provided. The capital purchase of all equipment would be quite costly and would require regular updates to software and hardware by our internal staff.

Further this method would require staff or a third-party to operate equipment and webcast the video.

Option 5: Other Broadcast Providers

Cogeco Cable currently provides video streaming services for the City of Windsor and the County of Essex. Many of the local municipalities conflict with these City and the County meetings and therefore Cogeco has stated that they would not do any meetings of local municipalities as they do not want to pick and choose which local municipalities they would broadcast.

Lakeshore currently uses a company called Swagit for their webcasting. They report that it is working well however this would not be a viable option for the Town of Essex with its current lease agreement with County of Essex Chambers as it would require the installation of additional wiring and storage area for the required equipment.

The Municipality of Leamington will be live streaming their regular council meetings through a provider called Sliq. Pricing was not available at the time this report was prepared.

Conclusion

Based on consideration of the options outlined above, it is recommended that the Town enter into an agreement with our current provider, CFTV, for a 3-month trial of their live

broadcasting. This option is offered at no additional cost to their existing agreement and will eliminate any operating and financial obligations associated with the other options provided in this report. After the 3-month trial, administration will conduct a review and prepare a report to council with recommendations going forward.

Financial Impact

For the proposed recommendations of remaining with the current provider, there will be no financial impact.

Consultations

Jack Barron, Manager, Information Technology

Alex Denonville, Manager, Strategic Communications

Link to Strategic Priorities

- Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure which meets current and future needs of the municipality and its citizens.
- Create a safe, friendly and inclusive community which encourages healthy, active living for people of all ages and abilities.
- Provide a fiscal stewardship and value for tax dollars to ensure long-term financial health to the municipality.
- Manage responsible and viable growth while preserving and enhancing the unique rural and small town character of the community.
- Improve the experiences of individuals, as both citizens and customers, in their interactions with the Town of Essex.