

Subject: Monday, Sep 13/2004 Agenda Item #6 - Electronic Meetings

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Your Worship & Members of Council,

Before adopting the proposed bylaw allowing for Electronic Meetings I urge council to define the scope/provisions for such meetings. This is well outlined at the Provincial Governments web site at

http://www.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/charter/advisory_materials/electronic_meetings.htm

To quote....

Before adopting provisions for electronic meetings, each council will want to consider the implications and whether such provisions are appropriate for their community. If the decision is made to proceed, council will need to define the scope of the provisions, by considering the following:

- the situations where electronic special council meetings will, and will not, be permitted;
- the extent of an individual council member's authority to participate electronically in non-special meetings;
- logistical issues related to using electronic technology; and the costs associated with electronic meetings.

Below are considerations to assist municipalities in determining the value of electronic meeting provisions. This list is not exhaustive.

Conducting Special Council Meetings Electronically

Should provisions allow for all special council meetings to be conducted electronically or should there be defined circumstances where the public can expect council members to be physically present?

Should the decision to designate a special council meeting as an electronic meeting be left to the discretion of the mayor, acting mayor or council members who actually call the meeting?

Should other individuals (e.g., consultants to the municipality, staff members, etc.) be permitted to participate electronically? Or should they be required to be present in person at the specified venue?

Electronic Participation by a Council or Committee Member

What types of meetings (regular, special or committee) should council consider allowing members to participate electronically?

What constitutes a valid reason for being unable to attend? Should each member be given the discretion to judge validity?

Should the chair of the meeting be allowed to participate electronically (as chair)? Or should the chair be assumed

by an individual who is physically present?

How many members of council should be allowed to participate electronically in the same meeting (e.g. should council or council committees require a quorum of members physically present)? If there is a limit, how are participants chosen?

How many times should an individual member be permitted to participate electronically?

Should a member who is participating electronically be allowed to join a meeting that is underway - i.e., arrive late?

Should a member who is participating electronically be entitled to receive an agenda package electronically or by courier?

Should there be provisions to amend agendas with controversial items to defer the issues when members are participating by electronic means? What would those circumstances be (e.g. certain number of members participating electronically or certain type of issue to be dealt with by council)?

Should presenters to council be required to tailor their presentations to accommodate members who are participating electronically?

If a member, participating electronically, cannot view a presentation or read a report which is the subject of debate, should the member be allowed to participate in the debate?

Should council have a policy about providing information received at the council or committee meeting to members participating electronically before voting on the matter?

Should the same rules apply to council members and non-councillor committee members?

Logistics

What type of electronic means should be permitted? Audio? Visual? Both?

Should cell phone and satellite connections be permitted in addition to land-line connections?

Does the municipality have a conference phone system and an audio system that allow for clear projection of voices throughout council chambers (or the designated meeting place), and for continuous two-way communication?

Are there facilities available at other nearby locations that are acceptable to council (e.g., university)?

Are the video links in place capable of providing an uninterrupted video stream, similar to a conventional television broadcast?

Are video monitors in place to project images to all members of council and to the public?

What happens if a communications link is lost during a meeting? Should the meeting temporarily adjourn until the link is re-established? What if the lost link is with the chair of the meeting?

Does the specific meeting place provide adequate facilities for municipal staff and the public?

Costs

Should the municipality be responsible, in every case, for the cost to a member of participating electronically in a meeting?

Are cost limits necessary?

If council pays per diem costs for attendance at meetings should electronic meetings be reimbursed at the same rate?

Do the benefits of electronic meetings justify the capital expenditures on new telephone and video equipment?

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In addition, should the public be able to participate electronically (from their homes)? If so, what are the rules and procedures that would govern such input?

I look forward to council deliberation on these matters BEFORE they adopt the bylaw. Now is the time to debate these important issues - not when the first of such meetings are held.

Yours truly,

Corrie Kost

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