STAFF REPORT

Title: Livestreaming Council Meetings

Meeting Date: September 15, 2020

Executive Summary:

To date, the City has not audio or video recorded any council meetings for either livestreaming or posting of the recordings after the Council meetings. However, most municipalities in Alberta are now livestreaming council meetings and posting full videos of their council meetings on their websites and/or YouTube/Vimeo Channels for later access by the public.

Administration has prepared this report for Council's discussion. Administration requests Council's feedback as to whether video recording and/or livestreaming of Council meetings should be pursued.

Background:

During Council's 2020 Budget Deliberations, Council articulated the priority of a new audio system and web casting infrastructure. Although livestreamed meetings were discussed, it was not a priority at the time.

The *Municipal Government Act* establishes requirements for public meetings:

> ***Public presence at meetings***
> ***197(1)*** *Councils and council committees must conduct their meetings in public unless subsection (2) or (2.1) applies.*
>
> ***(2)*** *Councils and council committees may close all or part of their meetings to the public if a matter to be discussed is within one of the exceptions to disclosure in Division 2 of Part 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.*
>
> ***(2.1)*** *A municipal planning commission, subdivision authority, development authority or subdivision and development appeal board established under Part 17 may deliberate and make its decisions in meetings closed to the public.*
> *....*
>
> ***Right of public to be present***
> ***198*** *Everyone has a right to be present at council meetings and council committee meetings conducted in public unless the person chairing the meeting expels a person for improper conduct.*

While Council meetings must be open to the public to attend, the legislation is silent as to whether this requirement can be achieved by in person attendance or virtual attendance through livestream. To date (and even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic), the City has permitted in person attendance by the public at all Regular Meetings of Council and Corporate Priorities Meetings. This satisfies the requirements for public meetings under the *Municipal Government Act* ensuring a transparent process and accountable government.

Further to the above, the City publishes its agenda "in full" inclusive of reports and background documentation on coldlake.com. The City also consistently publishes its meeting minutes.

Although there is no requirement that the public be able to virtually attend meetings, there has been a trend across Alberta that municipalities do livestream some or all of their Council meetings. In the spring of 2020, several municipalities that did not previously livestream Council meetings, started to livestream as a means of providing public access to meetings which were closed to in-person attendance due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We would like to confirm that the City of Cold Lake has not closed its doors at any point due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several municipalities still closed to the public.

The following municipalities were canvassed to see whether they were livestreaming Council meetings. The results can be summarized as follows:
- 35 of the 37 municipalities canvased livestream Council meetings (only High Prairie and Whitecourt do not livestream meetings);
- 33 of the 37 municipalities canvased post video recordings of their meetings after the meeting for the public to access (posted either on their City Website, YouTube or Vimeo).

	Livestream	Video Recording After Meeting	Recording Software	Where the public access the videos
Airdrie*	✓	✓	Skype/isiLive	City website (eSCRIBE)
Banff	✓	✓	Zoom	Vimeo
Beaumont	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Bonnyville	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Brooks	✓	✓	Zoom	Facebook
Calgary*	✓	✓	isiLive	City website (eSCRIBE)
Camrose	✓	✓	Unknown	City website
Canmore	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Chestermere	✓	✓	Cisco Webex meetings	City website (eSCRIBE)/ YouTube
Cochrane	✓	✓	iCompass	City website/ YouTube
Edmonton*	✓	✓	isiLive	City website (eSCRIBE)/ YouTube
Edson	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Fort Saskatchewan	✓	✓	Cisco Webex	YouTube

Grande Prairie (City)	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Grande Prairie (County)	✓	Unavailable	Microsoft Teams	Unavailable
High Prairie	Unavailable	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Jasper	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Lac La Biche County*	✓	✓	isiLive	City website (eSCRIBE)
Leduc	✓	✓	GoTo Meeting	Vimeo
Lethbridge	✓	✓	OnBase	City Website
Lloydminster	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
M.D. of Bonnyville	✓	✓	OBS	YouTube (previously Facebook)
Medicine Hat	✓	✓	OnBase	City website/ YouTube
Okotoks*	✓	✓	isiLive	City website (eSCRIBE)
Town of Peace River	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
Spruce Grove	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
St. Albert	✓	✓	Zoom	YouTube
St. Paul	✓	Unavailable	ITech Solution	City Website
Stony Plain	✓	✓	Unknown	YouTube
Strathcona County*	✓	✓	isiLive	City website (eSCRIBE)
Sturgeon County	✓	✓	Legistar-Granicas	City Website
Red Deer	✓	✓	OnBase	City Website
Rockyview County	✓	✓	GoTo Meeting/ eSCRIBE	City website
R.M. Wood Buffalo	✓	✓	MediaTraq	City Website
Westlock	✓	Unavailable	Zoom	Unavailable
Whitecourt	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable

If Council would like to pursue livestreaming and/or video recording of Council Meetings in the near future, there are no technological obstacles that would prevent the City from proceeding. The City is in the process of upgrading the web conferencing and audio system in Council Chambers. Within approximately a month, the IST technological infrastructure (ie. Bandwidth, cameras, audiosystem, etc) could be put into place.

There are significant variations in what type of features are available to the public depending on the recording software and livestream platform utilized. Potential features include:

✓ Allowing members of the public to "sign in" to attend the meeting with a link (viewing the meeting live as an 'anonymous participant' and/or a participant who can contribute to the discussion) from within the meeting software.
✓ Posting of video through a livestream platform like Facebook or YouTube which would allow members of the public to view the meeting live on Facebook or YouTube without having to sign into a meeting or download the meeting software.
✓ Timestamping of the video recording corresponding to specific items on the agenda which eliminates the need to watch the entire recording.
✓ In-camera features which can post a notice to the public that the meeting has gone "in-camera". This could be utilized versus shutting off the video recording. Software

designed to deal with municipal meetings specifically have customizable features for auto closed captioning services.

If Council would like to proceed with livestreaming of City Council meetings, administration requests Council's feedback on the following considerations and expectations:

1. **Would Council like to livestream the meetings (for real time viewing) and/or make the audio/video available to the public after the meetings have concluded for later publishing and/or reference?**

2. **Would Council like to see all Council meetings video recorded and/or livestreamed, only Regular Meetings of Council, Corporate Priority Meetings of Council, all Council Committee meetings** (ie. EDAC, LARB, CARB, SDAB, FCSS Advisory Committee, etc.)? If Council would like to see all Council Committee meetings recorded and/or livestreamed this would change the committee's procedures somewhat and potentially limit the location of meetings to Council Chambers or a room with technological capabilities. Generally, the municipalities canvased have been livestreaming all regular council meetings, most also livestream their corporate priority type meetings, and fewer municipalities livestream all council committee meetings (although this does still occur in a number of communities).

   It is administration's advice that, at the video recordings be initially limited Council Meeting and Council's Corporate Priorities Committee Meetings.

3. **How long should the video recordings be available to the public?** There is no legislative requirements for retention of the recordings or length of time required to have the recordings available to the public. Generally, the municipalities canvassed have posted videos of their meetings for long term reference (postings are available online for all meetings that have been recorded), although it would be possible to only have video available for shorter intervals (for example, 1 year following the meeting) or one municipality only keeps their recordings online for 24 hours. Whatever provisions that are put into place, the City's records bylaw will require amendment as the City's IT infrastructure needs to be considered do the fact that multimedia files inclusive of video are significant large.

   It is administration's advice that the video recordings have limited time access (e.g. 6 months).

4. **Would Council like to see a virtual participatory option for the public?** Some communities permit members of the public to sign up ahead of time to the meeting to ask a question via video conference (ie. Calling in to the meeting through zoom

for example). This would permit members of the public to present to Council remotely.

It is administration's advice that virtual participation not be permitted at the onset of the transition to livestream meetings. This could be consider in future step as administration monitors the required resources to operate the system.

If Council would like to proceed with livestreaming Council Meetings, Administration would recommend that Microsoft <u>Stream</u> (similar to a Microsoft Teams product) be utilized for the short term with the intention that live steaming through ESCRIBE would be set up and utilized in the future. ESCRIBE software, which is already used by the City for meeting management agenda and minute preparation, has a built in webcasting service with a variety of customizable features. That being said, depending on Council expectations, the City's software may not appropriate and migration to a new software may have to be considered.

The ownership and control of data, functionality and security are the top priorities for administration as the City does not have a great deal of staff to operate the system nor do we want to see unintentional release of information (e.g. In-Camera Briefings). This makes the system difficult to contract out to the private sector.

If Council would like to proceed with livestreaming, the first livestreamed meeting could take place in approximately one (1) to (2) months' time. It should be noted that administration is seeing challenges in regards to IT product availability during the pandemic.

Administration will also need to prepare amendments to the Council's procedural bylaw and the City's records bylaw.

Alternatives:
No alternatives are being proposed as this time.

Recommended Action:
This report is provided for discussion purposes.

Budget Implications (Yes or No):

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