



## Township of Centre Wellington

### Hybrid Electronic Meeting Policy

Council Policy	Hybrid Electronic Meeting Policy
Approved by Council	October 30, 2023 Amended October 28, 2024

In accordance with *The Municipal Act*, 2001 and Procedure By-law 2021-31, as amended, the Municipal Clerk, in consultation with the Chief Administrative Officer, shall establish practices and procedures for Hybrid Electronic meeting participation.

Centre Wellington recognizes the ability for Members of Council, Committee Members, the public and staff to participate electronically in meetings enhances the decision-making process, improves community involvement, and provides an alternative means of attending meetings for those unable to attend in person.

Hybrid meetings are intended to provide effective and flexible access by the public, consultants and staff to Council and Committee meetings. Members of Council recognize in-person meetings is preferred as it builds comradery among Councillors and staff, provides for impromptu conversations, and for open and transparent meetings with the public in attendance. Hybrid meetings should only be used by Members of Council when circumstances warrant it, such as illness, out of town, etc.

#### **Purpose**

To outline the rules, policies and procedures with respect to participating in meetings of Council, Committee of the Whole, Advisory Committees and local boards when electronic participation is available.

To ensure as many aspects as possible for electronic participation mimic those for in-person participation, including the enforcement of the rules and consequences of in-person participation.

To ensure the transparency of Council and Committee deliberations during meetings in which participants may be attending electronically.

#### **Definitions:**

**“Council Chamber”** means the Council Chamber meeting room located at the Township of Centre Wellington municipal office.

**“Device”** means the technology used to access the electronic meeting platform. These may include, but are not limited to, mobile devices, tablets, laptops or desktop computers.

**“Electronic Meeting Platform”** means an application or digital platform used to allow participants to attend a meeting via the internet, examples include, but are not limited to, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

**“Electronic Participation”** means attending a meeting through an electronic meeting platform.

**“Hybrid Meeting”** means a meeting conducted as an in-person meeting and an electronic meeting, where some members participate in-person and some members participate electronically.

**“In-person”** means attending a meeting by being physically present in the designated meeting room.

**“Participant”** means a Member of Council, Committee or local board; or a member of the public, a consultant, or staff attending a meeting either electronically or in-person.

**“Township”** means the Township of Centre Wellington.

**“Livestreaming”** means broadcasting the meeting in real-time via the Township’s website and/or YouTube.

### **General**

These procedures may be amended from time to time by the Municipal Clerk, in consultation with the Chief Administrative Officer, and will be made available on the Township website.

These procedures may be amended to coincide with the electronic meeting platform and technology available. Currently, the Township uses ZOOM and/or Microsoft TEAMS.

Separate procedures explaining how to navigate the hybrid electronic meeting platform may be developed and distributed to Members.

This document is intended to provide clarity on electronic meeting procedures only and should be considered as a companion document to Procedure By-law 2021-31, as amended. Should there be a discrepancy between these procedures and the Procedure By-law, the Procedure By-law shall take precedence.

### **Declared Emergencies**

These procedures may be amended if an emergency has been declared, for example during a pandemic emergency, members of the public may not be allowed to attend the meeting in-person and delegates may have to participate electronically.

If a hybrid meeting is held during a pandemic, those attending in-person may be required to conform with Public Health Orders.

### **Hybrid Meetings/Technology Integration**

The microphones in the Council Chamber have been configured to work with electronic meetings. Members participating in person will use the microphones in the Council Chamber to participate in the meeting and they will hear the meeting audio over the speakers. Members participating remotely will use the cameras on their devices to enable the video feature. The meeting experience should be comparable for those participating in-person and those participating remotely.

If the Hybrid meeting is experiencing technical difficulties and cannot proceed, the meeting shall be recessed, for up to 15 minutes, or until the Hybrid meeting is resumed. If the Hybrid meeting cannot be resumed within 15 minutes, the meeting will be considered adjourned. The Council/Committee will meet at the next regularly scheduled meeting date or rescheduled.

If the meeting is interrupted and the Hybrid meeting cannot be resumed, the names of the Members present and any decisions of the Council/Committee up to the point in time of the interruption will be recorded in the minutes and the meeting will be considered adjourned. All remaining agenda items will be carried forward to the next regular meeting. In the event the meeting is a statutory public meeting, the meeting will be rescheduled.

If a Member is experiencing technical difficulties, the Chair may recess the meeting for up to 15 minutes. The Chair shall establish a definitive return time.

If technical difficulties result in a loss of Quorum, the meeting shall stand recessed and reconvene when Quorum is regained. In the event Quorum is not regained within thirty (30) minutes, the Municipal Clerk shall record in the minutes the time Quorum was lost and the names of those Members present, and the meeting shall be considered adjourned.

The Chair may recess the meeting if the livestream is disabled or experiencing technical difficulties. If the livestream does not resume within 15 minutes, the meeting may proceed and the failure of the livestream shall not affect the validity of the meeting.

## **Responsibilities**

### **Members of Council and Advisory Committees**

The Chair of the meeting shall:

- attend all meetings in-person and if unable to attend shall ensure the Deputy or Vice Chair is attending in-person;
- at an appropriate time, identify a Member that has electronically joined the meeting, if they were not present during roll call;

Members participating electronically shall:

- register to electronically participate in a meeting in writing with the Municipal Clerk no later than 12:00 p.m. (noon) on the Wednesday preceding the meeting. *Staff will endeavor to respond to any requests to participate received following the deadline. However, a response prior to the meeting is not guaranteed;*
- connect to the meeting no later than 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting;
- turn cameras on and blur the background,
- mute microphone unless speaking,
- indicate desire to speak by either using the “Raise Hand” function virtually or physically raising their hand and keeping it raised until the Chair acknowledges the request,
- vote by a show of hands,
- in the event a Member is required to leave the meeting, without interrupting a Member when speaking, advise the Chair and Municipal Clerk of their desire to leave the meeting.
- not engage use of any chat functions available.

## **Staff**

Staff participating electronically:

- shall ensure at least one staff liaison per responsible department is participating in-person;
- shall register to electronically participate in a meeting no later than noon on the Wednesday preceding the meeting. *Staff will endeavor to respond to any requests to participate received following the deadline. However, a response prior to the meeting is not guaranteed;*
- may be admitted to the meeting 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting;
- shall turn off/mute their camera and microphone, unless speaking;
- to indicate a desire to speak, shall turn on their camera, blur the background and by either using the “Raise Hand” function or by physically raising their hand and keeping it raised until the Chair acknowledges the request,
- not engage in the use of any chat functions available.

## **Members of the Public**

Members of the Public participating electronically shall:

- register to electronically participate in a meeting no later than 1 business day prior to the meeting. If the meeting falls on a Monday, registration prior to noon on the Friday preceding the meeting. *Staff will endeavor to respond to any requests to participate received following the deadline. However, a response prior to the meeting is not guaranteed;*
- be admitted to the meeting 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting;
- turn off their camera and mute microphone until advised by the Chair they may address the Members;
- blur background while camera is on and participating in the meeting;
- not engage in the use of any chat functions available.

## **Procedures**

Convening and Reconvening Meetings:

Members of Council or Committee participating in the meeting virtually will turn their cameras on to use the video function on their device to be visible at all times and encouraged to blur their background view to ensure privacy and avoid unnecessary distractions.

Others participating in the meeting will turn off their camera and mute the microphone until advised they may speak. Those participating remotely are encouraged to blur their background view.

Members will audibly declare pecuniary interests as defined in the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* at the meeting and will submit a written copy of their declaration to the Municipal Clerk by the last business day before the meeting of Council/Committee.

If participating electronically, it is the responsibility of each participant to ensure their equipment and technology is functioning properly prior to the commencement of the meeting. In the case there is a connection issue with a Member, the Chair may recess the meeting for up to 15 minutes to allow the member to attempt to reconnect to the meeting.

The chat feature in the electronic meeting platform will be disabled.

## **Authority of the Chair**

- a) The Chair will proceed through the agenda as they would during an in-person Council Meeting
- b) For technical issues or any other reason, the Chair may choose to:
  - a. Have members request to speak by show of hands,
  - b. Provide members the opportunity to speak by order of Ward,
  - c. If a member participating electronically cannot connect, loses their connection, or has any other issues limiting their ability to participate in the meeting, the Chair may, at their discretion, recess for up to 15 minutes or hold the meeting without the Member's participation, provided quorum is maintained.
  - d. If quorum is lost, the meeting shall stand recessed and reconvene when quorum is regained. In the event quorum is not regained within thirty (30) minutes, the meeting shall end without formal adjournment and resume at a later date and time as determined by the Mayor and/or Municipal Clerk.

## **Discussion and Voting Method**

- a) When moving and seconding motions, after the mover and seconder are identified by the Chair, discussion on the item may begin, Members participating electronically will use the "raise hand" function or physically raise their hand on-screen, and the Chair will call on the Member to speak.
- b) To speak, the Member shall either turn on their microphone if participating in person or unmute if participating electronically. Once the member has finished speaking, they shall turn off their microphone if participating in person or mute if participating electronically. Members must leave the video function on.
- c) When discussion has concluded, the Chair will read the proposed motion and call the vote. The Chair shall ask for a show of hands in favour and opposed to a motion.
- d) In the event of a technical malfunction or other technical issue preventing the Chair from seeing Members of Council, microphones will be muted and unmuted by the Municipal Clerk or designate and activated in a sequential order by Ward number, for both discussion and for voting.

## **Public Delegations/Presentations**

### **General**

Delegates and presenters may be permitted to participate electronically in a manner approved by the Municipal Clerk and Chair, or in-person. Legislative Services staff will operate any electronic presentation material or permissions may be granted for delegates and presenters to share their screen, provided the presentation material has been approved and/or circulated with the meeting agenda. Delegates and presenters participating in-person will use the podium in the Council Chamber to speak. All rules relating to delegations/public presentations outlined in the Township's Procedure By-law apply.

### **Speaking at a Meeting**

All those delegations/presenters wishing to speak at a meeting shall register with Legislative Services by submitting a Delegation Request Form ([www.centrewellington.ca](http://www.centrewellington.ca)) no later than 1 one business day prior to the meeting. If the meeting is on a Monday, the request must be submitted by noon on the Friday before the meeting. If participating electronically, delegates will receive an

email from the Municipal Clerk or Municipal Deputy Clerk with confirmation and instructions for electronic participation. A unique link with access to the electronic meeting is not to be shared with other individuals unless directed to do so by the Municipal Clerk or Municipal Deputy Clerk.

Community Delegations (Public Presentations) wishing to speak at a meeting shall register with Legislative Services by submitting a Community Delegation Form ([www.centrewellington.ca](http://www.centrewellington.ca)) no later than noon on the Wednesday preceding the desired meeting. If participating electronically, delegates/presenters will receive an e-mail from the Municipal Clerk or the Municipal Deputy Clerk with confirmation and instructions for electronic participation. A unique link with access to the electronic meeting is not to be shared with other individuals unless directed to do so by the Municipal Clerk or Municipal Deputy Clerk.

### **Presenters/Delegates Participating Electronically:**

- a) On the day of the meeting, all registered delegates/presenters shall log into the meeting a minimum of 15 minutes in advance of the start time to check-in with the Municipal Clerk and to ensure their equipment is in working order.
- b) All delegates/presenters will be placed in the meeting, able to hear and view but are to be muted and cameras turned off. If the technology permits, staff will assist in ensuring the camera and microphone is disabled until they are called upon by the Chair.
- c) The Chair shall call each delegate/presenter in the order as they appear on the agenda.
- d) The delegate/presenter shall be advised once their delegation time has expired.
- e) Once the delegate/presenter has concluded and been thanked by the Chair, they will mute their microphone and turn off their camera. If the technology permits, staff will assist in ensuring the camera and microphone is disabled. At this point, the delegates/presenters may choose to leave the meeting.
- f) Delegates/Presenter(s) reserve the right to decline to speak when called upon by the Chair, registering as a Delegate/Presenter gives the individual(s) the right to speak, but they are not required to do so.
- g) Delegates/Presenter(s) must either provide the supporting materials and a visual presentation when submitting their request to the Municipal Clerk, or delegates/presenter(s) may be given the ability to share their screens, provided the materials have been approved and/or circulated with the meeting agenda.

### **Closed Meetings**

Should a meeting be convened in Closed Session and a Member who is participating electronically, has made a declaration of pecuniary interest, that Member will be required to electronically leave the meeting and join again once the closed session is completed. The Municipal Clerk must be satisfied the Member has left the meeting.

Those members participating in the closed session remotely will be reminded they are to be alone in a room and responsible to ensure no one else is privy to the information discussed in closed session. The wearing of a headset is encouraged. Members must ensure the confidentiality of the meeting and the deliberations are private.