

Municipality of Grey Highlands Policy

Policy Name: Electronic Participation Policy

Policy Number: A09-C-11

Department: Council and Legislative Services

Authority: By-law 2020-086

Effective Date: October 7, 2020

Supersedes: None

Last Modified: April 20, 2022 via amending by-law 2022-032

1) Purpose

To provide guidance and rules around electronic participation for meetings.

2) Scope

This policy shall apply to electronic participation in all meetings of Council, Committees, Task Forces and the Police Services Board.

3) Definitions

- a) **Electronic Participation** - the use of communication technologies including, but not limited to, video, audio or telephone to permit participants to be involved in meetings as defined and in accordance with the Procedure By-law currently in effect.
- b) **Extenuating Circumstances** - Means special circumstances in which a member may require the use of audio only to participate electronically, or the maximum attendance limits to be exceeded. Said circumstances may include, but are not limited to, medical emergencies, family emergencies, technology issues and transportation impediments.
- c) **Participants** – members of Council, staff, the public or anyone who is presenting or otherwise participating in a meeting.

4) Policy

a) Electronic Participation

- i. A Member of a Council, of a local board or of a committee of either of them who is participating electronically in a meeting may be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of Members is present at any point in time in accordance with Section 238 (3.3) of the Municipal Act, 2001, as amended.
- ii. Any Member intending to participate electronically in a hybrid meeting shall send a request to do so by email to the Clerk or Secretary at least 2 days in advance of the meeting whenever possible and no later than 2 hours in advance of the meeting time., except in extenuating circumstances.

- iii.** The method of participation may be via video or tele-conference (if video participation is unavailable), depending upon available technology to facilitate electronic participation.
- iv.** Video participation is recommended for members whenever possible if electronic participation is to be utilized. Telephone participation of members is available in extenuating circumstances.
- v.** In any meeting where electronic participation is being used, all members shall connect to the conference or be present in Chambers no later than 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting.
- vi.** When participating via video conference, webcams shall be enabled, unless otherwise restricted by internet connectivity limitations.
- vii.** All microphones shall be muted unless the participant is speaking.
- viii.** Any member participating via video conference should indicate they wish to speak by raising their physical and/or virtual hand and keeping them raised until the Chair acknowledges their request.
- ix.** Any member participating via telephone, shall be called upon by the chair to speak after all members participating in-person or via video conference have spoken, if virtual hand raising is not an option.
- x.** Any member of Council participating via video conference or telephone shall announce if they wish to leave the meeting prior to adjournment prior to leaving the meeting.
- xi.** Participants shall not share any electronic meeting access information unless directed to do so by the Clerk, secretary or their delegate.
- xii.** Participants shall be provided with a phone number to join the meeting in the event of a disruption of the video conference. This number can generally be found within the meeting reminder sent to members 1 hour before the meeting.

b) Attendance Requirements

- i.** Members shall be permitted to participate via electronic means for any meeting with advance notice subject to the limits below.
- ii.** The Chair and the Clerk or Secretary of the meeting shall make every attempt to attend in person whenever possible.
- iii.** Members shall attempt, to the best of their abilities, to provide at least 2 days' notice to the Clerk, to facilitate their electronic participation in hybrid meetings. Members are encouraged to schedule any known electronic participation with the Clerk at the commencement of each year.
- iv.** Members attending via electronic participation shall treat the electronic participation in the same manner as they would if they were in person.

c) Public Participation

- i. Members of the public who wish to make an electronic submission at meetings shall be required to register with the Clerk or Secretary in accordance with the timelines set in the procedure by-law.
- ii. The CLS Department will assist those wishing to participate electronically to help facilitate their request.
- iii. Members of the public may connect via virtual means for open forum at Council.
- iv. Members of the public who are attending by virtual means are requested to connect via video for delegations whenever possible.

d) Discussion and Voting

- i. All members participating via video conference will vote by a show of hands or through digital voting methods provided.
- ii. All members participating via telephone will be asked by the Chair to vote verbally if digital voting is not available.
- iii. The Chair shall ensure that members participating electronically are given the same opportunity to speak to each question as they would have been given if participating in person.
- iv. A member who is participating in a meeting electronically shall declare a conflict of interest in the same manner as those in physical attendance.

e) Closed Session

- i. An electronic meeting may include a Closed Session, which shall be conducted in the absence of the public and in accordance with Section 239 of the Municipal Act, 2001.
- ii. The Clerk/Secretary or their delegate will be responsible for facilitating the switch to the closed meeting prior to the commencement of a closed meeting. A break may be requested by the Chair, Clerk/Secretary or their delegate to ensure closed meeting confidentiality.
- iii. Participants shall take and employ all necessary precautions to ensure confidentiality of closed electronic meetings while attending virtually.

f) Technical Matters

- i. If there is a question as to the performance of the meeting technology impacting the proceedings of a meeting, the meeting may be recessed at the direction of the Chair to confirm that the electronic format is performing effectively before proceeding further with the agenda.

- ii. Members are responsible for having the technology they require in order to facilitate electronic participation. Additional technology, beyond what normally supplied to Council members, will not be provided.
- iii. In the event of connection or service disruption of a single member where quorum is not affected by their attendance, the Chair may recess the meeting to allow for attempts to reconnect. It is the members' duty to ensure that their equipment and technology are set in advance of the meeting and to have the alternate telephone connection information ready to be utilized, if needed. After 15 minutes of not connecting, the meeting shall resume and no further efforts shall be taken to reconnect the member.
- iv. In the event of connection or service disruption of a single member where quorum of Council would be lost should the connection not be resumed, the Chair shall recess the meeting to allow for attempts to reconnect. It is the members' duty to ensure that their equipment and technology are set in advance of the meeting and to have the alternate telephone connection information ready to be utilized, if needed. After 15 minutes of not reconnecting, the member shall make arrangements to attend physically. If physical attendance is not possible, the meeting shall stand adjourned with all items not disposed added to the next meeting agenda or to a subsequently called meeting where quorum can be obtained.
- v. Members are responsible for ensuring there is no background noise at their location that would interfere with the meeting and for muting their device when they are not speaking.
- vi. Attendance for both virtual and/or hybrid meeting participants is required at least 15 minutes before the commencement of the meeting to verify technical requirements.

g) Open Form

- i. The open forum register will be available electronically through the Council meeting agenda when published.
- ii. In addition to the time allowed for in-person open forum, there shall be the same time allotment set aside for individuals to speak electronically.

5) Brief Overview

This section is provided for guidance only and is not deemed to form part of the policy.

- a) Chair and Clerk should be present in-person whenever possible at Hybrid meetings.
- b) Members are responsible for having the technology required to connect and participate in meetings electronically should they wish to do so.
- c) Members shall connect via video whenever possible and treat the electronic participation as if they were in office.
- d) Members are responsible for ensuring they have adequate connectivity for the meeting.