To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole – Operations and Administration

From Maria Visocchi, Director
Communications and Community Engagement

1.0 Type of Report
Consent Item [ ]
Item For Consideration [X]

2.0 Topic Feasibility of Live Streaming Council, Committee and High Profile Public Meetings [Financial Impact – Not currently budgeted]

3.0 Recommendation
THAT Report No. 2019-386 “Feasibility of Live Streaming Council, Committee and High Profile Public Meetings” BE RECEIVED.

4.0 Purpose and Overview
The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an analysis of the current and future processes, feasibility and resources required to live stream meetings of Council, Committees and high profile public meetings on the City’s digital platforms such as the City’s website, Facebook Live and YouTube channel. For the purpose of this report, “future processes” are the plans to be implemented as part of the new City Hall Council Chambers audio/visual equipment set up, and “high profile public meetings” are defined as meetings regarding a topic(s) that is garnering significant public interest.
5.0 Background

At its January 29, 2019 meeting, Brantford City Council approved a motion to request staff to examine the feasibility of live streaming meetings of Council that are not currently broadcasted, in addition to high profile public meetings held offsite of City Hall as follows:

“WHEREAS Public Information Centres and Ward Meetings are of interest to a significant number of citizens; and

WHEREAS not all interested citizens who want to provide feedback regarding matters that are important to them are able to attend public meetings for a range of reasons including – but not limited to – scheduling, transportation, and other commitments.

NOW THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED:

THAT Staff BE DIRECTED to prepare a report on the process, feasibility and resources required to live stream high profile public meetings on the City’s digital platforms.”

Current TV Broadcast and Webcasting Processes

The current broadcasting system in Brantford City Hall Council Chambers is owned and operated by Rogers Television Inc., and features a dedicated high-speed network installed to transmit the broadcast of meetings covered by Rogers to Roger’s Brantford Broadcast Centre.

As per the City’s current agreement with Rogers Inc., Rogers assigns their own employees to manually operate the console system consisting of 6 point, tilt zoom style cameras and a broadcast production console room. Audio from Council Chamber microphones is fed to the Rogers console from the City’s delegate system. The console is used to manually manage the cameras and transmit audio and video back to Rogers’ main broadcast center for display on Rogers Brantford Cable TV Channel 20. The same transmission is used to live stream/webcast the broadcast online to Rogers Brantford website. A link to the online feed on Rogers’ website is available on the City Council Calendar page on the City’s website and is routinely shared across the City’s social media networks.

The existing console also provides full meeting production capability such as manually adding meeting banners for title, name of person(s) speaking on
screen and meeting topic. Both live and recorded video is done through the same current 6 camera set up.

The City’s contractual agreement with Rogers Inc. stipulates that only trained Rogers staff can operate the equipment that is currently in Council Chambers. The agreement does however provide that the equipment can be operated by qualified, competent City staff in accordance with Rogers’ instructions and prudent practice. Any selected City staff would need to be trained by Rogers’ to operate the equipment to initiate any broadcast in the event that Rogers’ staff is delayed or unable to arrive at the location, and if so requested by the City, for City productions. To date, no City staff have been selected or trained to use this equipment, nor is there any capacity or budget for City staff to perform these added duties at meetings.

The current commitment from Rogers TV Brantford is to broadcast all Committee of the Whole and City Council meetings (3 Tuesday evening meetings a month) plus special events if/when Rogers’ schedule permits at the request of the City.

Not all City meetings are broadcast live on Rogers Cable TV channel 20, though when Rogers’ staff are present and operating the console at Council meetings, the broadcasts are consistently broadcast live online on the Rogers’ website with the recorded television broadcast typically airing within 48 hours of the original meeting date.

Public meetings or Committee of Council meetings that take place outside of Council Chambers are not currently broadcast on any medium.

6.0 Corporate Policy Context

This initiative is consistent with the City’s goal to ensure Brantford citizens will be engaged in, and informed about their community and their city government.

7.0 Input From Other Sources

Staff from I.T. Services, Clerks, Accessibility and Facilities and Asset Management contributed to the research and analysis outlined in this report.

8.0 Analysis
In the past four months, staff have investigated several approaches for broadcasting and live streaming/webcasting both meetings of Council and high profile public meetings held outside of Council Chambers. These include:

1. Procuring broadcast services from a third party audio/visual company for Council meetings held in house (not currently covered by Rogers’) and offsite meetings of Council and public meetings.

2. Implementing eScribe software option for online live streaming meetings of Committees and Council and external public meetings that are clerked by City staff.

3. Assessing fit with the “future process” that will be implemented in the new City Hall Council Chambers and what, if any, elements of the new system can be used currently.

8.1 **Procuring services from a third party audio/visual company for Council meetings held in house (not covered by Rogers) and meetings of Council and high profile public meetings held outside of Council Chambers**

Currently, Rogers Inc. staff are the only individuals who are trained to operate the existing camera set up in Council Chambers. There are no City staff that are currently trained to operate this equipment nor is there a dedicated Videographer or Technical Operator currently on staff at the City.

For live web broadcasting that would be independently conducted by the City (not using existing Rogers console/camera set up), the audio and visual feeds would have to come from an alternate source to be converted to a digital signal in real-time and pushed out to the City server by a dedicated computer in Council Chambers. Without staff currently in place, an outsourced media-streaming service would have to facilitate the actual live broadcast of the meetings over the Internet using their own equipment.

To replicate the current Rogers broadcasting standard using outside resources when Rogers is not recording the meeting and the Rogers console is not being used, the current Council Chambers would require the provisioning of recording and web-broadcasting equipment, webcasting/streaming services, one Technician to operate web broadcasting equipment, options for the operation of camera(s), and real
time and postproduction closed captioning of broadcasts to meet compliance with AODA legislation.

**AODA Compliance – Third Party Audio/Visual Company option**

To comply with AODA and meet the City’s accessibility standards, real-time closed captioning is recommended. This service can be provided remotely by a third party, and displayed in a separate box on a screen below the webcast (a person watches the broadcast live and provides closed captions in real time). The service is performed on a best-effort basis and supplied materials such as speaking notes, programs, etc. enhances the accuracy. For the recording and live web broadcasting of each meeting, at least one trained technician is required to support the switching and live web broadcasting, and two to three trained camera operators are required to support the filming of the meetings.

Options and costs using an external third party vendor using their own equipment are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource options for live webcasting and recording of meeting up to 4 hours</th>
<th>Labour and Rental Cost per meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 cameras, 1 Technician</td>
<td>$3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cameras, 1 Technician</td>
<td>$2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 camera, 1 Technician</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Technician</td>
<td>$600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live closed captioning</td>
<td>$200/hour*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-production closed captioning (within 2 days of meeting)</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The $200/hour live closed captioning fee is in addition to the camera operator and technician. Estimated live closed captioning fee for a 4 hour meeting is $800 per meeting.

Should permission be provided by Rogers to train an external Operator, only an outside Technician would be required to use the existing
console/six camera set up for meetings that are conducted in Council Chambers.

8.2 Implementing eScribe software option to live stream/webcast meetings of Council and external public meetings that are clerked by City Clerks staff

The eScribe software system that the City is now using as a report and meeting management tool for City meetings also has an online streaming/webcasting feature that can be implemented if the City chooses to purchase this option. The set up and annual costs to implement the eScribe webcasting tool are as follows:

1. eScribe Webcasting one time set up fee - $4,000
2. eScribe Webcasting Annual Fee - $11,450
3. eScribe Closed Captioning Annual Fee - $10,450

The eScribe webcasting feature also allows for past eScribe meeting video to be archived and made available online via the City’s website. Archived meeting agendas can be embedded on the City’s site with hyperlinks allowing viewers to skip to a particular topic in the video for meetings that are conducted using eScribe software. The topics/tags are consistent with the wording of the Agenda.

Sources/options for eScribe webcasting video feed

1. Video fed from the existing Rogers console can be linked to eScribe enabling the same video quality and six camera views that is currently broadcast on Rogers Brantford and on Rogers’ website when meetings covered by Rogers are broadcasted on cable or online. With Rogers’ permission, the City could procure the services of a Technical Operator to manually operate Rogers’ console in the current City Hall to feed to eScribe webcasting of any meetings that are currently held in the current Council Chambers.

2. A stationary one camera view (not requiring an Operator) could be installed in the existing Council Chambers to be used to feed eScribe webcasting when Rogers’ coverage is not available.
3. An external Videographer and Technical Operator could be procured by the City to produce a broadcast (with one or 2 cameras) that could be fed to eScribe for live webcasting/online streaming
Examples of eScribe webcasting views and broadcast sources:

Newmarket (eScribe based – 1 stationary camera view – no manual Operator)

Newmarket Video Example: 

Hamilton (eScribe based – 2 and 3 camera views – manually operated)

Figure 1 - One stationary view - no focus on speakers - no manual Operator

Figure 2 - Two-Three camera views - focus on speakers, manually operated
Hamilton Video Example:

Calgary (eScribe – multiple camera views with production value similar to our current set up – source is likely coming from a console that is being manually operated)


Figure 3 - Multiple Camera views - focus on speakers - manually operated

AODA Compliance – eScribe option

To comply with AODA legislation and to meet the City’s accessibility standards, real-time closed captioning as provided by the eScribe webcasting tool is recommended. The cost to have this service provided by eScribe is more cost efficient than having the service provided by an external third party.
8.3 Future process planned for the new City Hall

To ensure the City has independent control over the type of equipment and how it is operated as well as the capacity to live stream any City meeting held in the new City Hall Council Chambers at our own discretion, it has been established that Rogers’ Inc. will not supply or operate the broadcasting equipment at the new City Hall. Furthermore, because of significant advances in broadcast technology since this service was originally provided, Rogers’ no longer provides a permanent broadcasting equipment set up offsite of their studio for filming at remote locations.

The future process for the new City Hall calls for new high definition cameras, in addition to a delegate audio system combined with broadcast technology to be installed by the City in the new Council Chambers to live stream/webcast meetings of Council and public meetings online.

Staff is still in the process of assessing whether the cameras will be in a fixed position or if human operated cameras will be utilized instead. Fixed cameras are a set number of fixed views that remain stationary at all times (without focus on any one speaker). Select views (i.e. panning to close up of the person speaking) require a human operator to control the set up of cameras/views throughout the meeting (as per Hamilton and Calgary examples outlined above).

The new system will allow for the meeting broadcast to be fed to the eScribe webcast meeting platform (should Council choose to move forward with purchasing this feature).

Should this new system be implemented, past meeting videos will be archived and made available online via the City’s website. Archived meeting agendas could be embedded with hyperlinks allowing viewers to skip to a specific “tagged” topic within the video for meetings conducted using the eScribe software program.

The main boardroom (and other designated meeting rooms) in the new City Hall will also be equipped to provide live online broadcasts of meetings held in designated meeting spaces in the new City Hall. Cameras in these rooms will be fixed position only, thus do not require a human operator. These broadcasts can also be simulcast to the City’s social medial platforms such as Facebook Live and YouTube.
The public can view live streams outlined above on any type of computer, including smart TV or a mobile device. The new City Hall will also be equipped to broadcast meetings on City Hall TV displays throughout the building such as overflow spaces for public viewing, Council & Staff lounges etc.

Pre-Defined off premise locations

In order for the IT Services to support offsite live streaming/webcasting, the following pre-defined off premise classifications will be applied:

1. Locations classified as status 1 meet requirements for live streaming/webcasting. These networks are managed by the City IT department and recommended for off premise meetings

2. Locations classified as status 2 meet requirements for live streaming but the Internet service is not under City control and must be arranged / therefore may not always be possible for live streaming

3. Locations classified as status 3 do not meet live streaming requirements and are not recommended for broadcast use

Off Premise Meetings Live Streaming/Webcasting Costs – not clerked by City staff using eScribe

Equipment required to broadcast and produce off premise meetings is expensive to own and maintain, especially considering the need for this service is not anticipated to be weekly or even monthly. For this reason staff recommends the City consider contracting a video production company to provide this service as needed. The cost estimate per meeting based on procuring the services of a camera operator and live closed captioning is approximately $1,500 per meeting.

TV Broadcasting of offsite public meetings

Rogers’ TV and the City often collaborate on producing broadcasts regarding topics of significant public interest (i.e. Safe Brantford Community Forum). To gain profile for issues of vital importance to the community, the City can request that Rogers’ Inc. consider covering the meeting of Council or public meeting using their mobile broadcast service. Rogers’ can supply their own camera and audio equipment or connect to the City’s camera and audio system if the meeting is being held in Council
Chambers. Rogers’ will transmit to Rogers’ broadcast center and display the meeting on local Channel 20 live or at a later date based on their programming schedule.

9.0 Financial Implications

None of the costs outlined in conjunction with the options analyzed in this report are accounted for in the current 2019 operating budget. Paid communications and community engagement costs associated with capital projects or grant projects are funded within existing approved capital/grant budgets and vary by project. Costs related to Ward meetings would also need to be funded by individual Councillor budgets.

10.0 Conclusion

At present, the City does not employ any staff that is trained to conduct or provide video broadcasting services that would meet the City’s communications standards and/or AODA compliance. Currently, the City does not own any broadcasting equipment though there is a plan to invest in a City owned and controlled broadcast console system in the new City Hall in late 2020. The most economical option to provide streaming of meetings of Council conducted in Council Chambers at present is to implement the eScribe streaming option beginning as soon as possible. The most economical option to provide streaming of high profile public meetings conducted offsite of City Hall is to enlist the services of a video production company as budgets for each capital or grant project warrant.

Given the proximity of the move to the new City Hall in fall 2020, it is not recommended that the City invest any financial or human resources to replace or staff the current Rogers broadcast set up in Council Chambers or any other room at the current City Hall.
In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?

[ ] yes [X] no