

To: **COUNCIL**

Meeting Date: **07/27/2021**

Subject: **Council Chamber Audio and Video System Replacement**

Submitted By: **Danielle Manton, City Clerk**

Prepared By: **Mohammad Mamun, Chief Information Officer**

Report No.: **21-224(CRS)**

File No.: **C1101**

Recommendation(s)

THAT report 21-224(CRS) Council Chamber Audio and Video System replacement be received;

AND THAT staff be directed to acquire the technology and equipment to update the Cambridge Council Chambers to facilitate and conduct Hybrid meetings on an ongoing basis;

AND FURTHER THAT capital project A/00794-10 Council Chamber Audio and Video System be approved with a plan budget of \$264,000 to be funded from the Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund - Safe Restart Agreement funding received from the Province.

Executive Summary

Purpose

- In accordance with the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Procedure By-law 15-18 Members of Council have the ability to participate electronically at Council meetings and have their attendance count towards quorum, members of the public have also been able to participate electronically throughout the pandemic. This report requests a change in timing for the Council Chambers Audio Video replacement to facilitate any electronic participation needs in preparation for the return to in person meetings of Council.
- This project will modernize the audio and video (AV) system within Council Chambers. The current analog AV system has been in place since July 2010. The system is nearing end of life and replacement parts are increasingly difficult

to find, purchase, and support. Further the current system does not support electronic participation of Council and/or the public.

- Upgrading to newer digital technology will provide greater interoperability with devices such as microphones and video sources and will provide enhanced accessibility to meetings. This will also be an opportunity to address acoustic concerns brought forward from staff, Council, and the public and make functional improvements and provide the opportunity for electronic participation from Members of Council and the public, when required

Key Findings

- On August 11, 2020, Council amended Procedure By-law 18-15 as a result of the Province passing Bill 197 the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*. The bill came into effect on July 24, 2020 and provided Municipal Councils, Committees and Local Boards to amend their Procedure By-law's to permit electronic attendance of meetings beyond the scope of a declared emergency.
- As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Cambridge Council has been meeting electronically and have approved the 2021 Schedule of Special Council Meetings until the end of 2021 or until changes in the Public Health directives are received.
- Capital Project A/00794-10 Council Chamber Audio and Video System was approved through the 10-year capital forecast (2022-2031) for implementation in 2022, to provide improvement to the current analog AV system in place and provide for hybrid meetings in Council Chambers.
- The current analog AV system has been in use for over a decade and replacement parts are no longer readily available. This project will also replace existing cabling to meet current requirements.
- Implementing a digital solution will integrate with modern technology and provide additional affordable options and capabilities that will enhance accessibility and public participation. \

Financial Implications

- The project is estimated at \$264,000 to be funded from the Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund - Safe Restart Agreement funding. The Safe Restart Agreement provided funding to municipalities to address COVID-19 costs and pressures.
- With recent additions to meeting management software staff will be investigating further cost savings and efficiencies with this implementation.
- Scheduled hardware maintenance, on-site testing, support and software maintenance or licensing will be included in the operating budget.

Background

The Cambridge Council Chambers current AV system was implemented in July 2010. It has served the City well however prior to the pandemic the system was experiencing regular challenges. Audio Video concerns and voting challenges have been raised. The Chambers does not currently have sufficient acoustic quality. Should the City receive a request for live captioning of a meeting, or other accessibility requirements for meeting delivery the City would be looking to find quick fixes to the current system that would be able to be sustained over time. Recent changes to the delivery of Council meeting materials through an electronic agenda management solution have also illustrated opportunities for further enhancements to a system that provides options for accessible meetings such as closed captioning and improvement to voting technology.

Support for the existing hardware has long expired and sourcing replacement parts has been a challenge for the last couple of years at a premium cost. A failure of any of the major components could impact the system as a whole requiring emergency replacement.

Analysis

Strategic Alignment

PEOPLE To actively engage, inform and create opportunities for people to participate in community building – making Cambridge a better place to live, work, play and learn for all.

Goal #2 - Governance and Leadership

Objective 2.1 Provide a wide range of ways that people can become involved in city decision making.

Replacement of the Audio Video system will enable greater accessibility and inclusiveness of Council, staff, and the community. Improved acoustics, visual capabilities, expandability, and more opportunities for hybrid (virtual and in person) Council and Committee meetings will provide a robust experience for meeting attendees.

Comments

To minimize disturbance to activities in the Council Chambers, staff are recommending that Capital project A/00794-10 replacement of Council Chamber Audio and Video System which was previously approved through the 2022-2031- 10 year capital forecast be advanced to occur in the later half of 2021.

The initial forecasted upgrade to this Capital Project was scheduled for 2022 and prior to the Pandemic the intention was to relocate Council and Standing Committee meetings to an alternate location such as the Bowman Room.

With Council's adoption of a virtual meeting schedule for the remainder of 2021 or until further public health directives, the disruption of the upgrade on Council Chambers this request for earlier timing represents an opportunity to cause less disruption in 2022 to in person meetings.

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic Council has been meeting virtually. In accordance with Bill 197 Council approved an amendment to Procedure By-law 18-15 to permit electronic attendance beyond the scope of a municipal emergency period. This permits Council and the public to attend meetings virtually and to ensure Council's virtual participation counts towards the meetings quorum.

Given the status of in person meetings is undetermined at this time, advancing this project to occur prior to return of in person meetings would provide the ability to have access to the space without interruption as the space would not be able to function for meetings during the technology upgrade.

Staff have been tracking the public health directives and at the current time do not have an anticipated date for when public meetings will return to in person attendance. The current stage of the pandemic is promising and staff continue to follow public health directives and would look to return to in person meetings once all meeting spaces can accommodate necessary requirements for safety and once any policies are in place.

Preparation for the return to in person meetings to accommodate physical distancing requirements has begun and staff have arranged for all Members of Council and staff to be separated with barriers inside the Council Chambers. This will however create further challenges for sound between Members of Council so improvements to the acoustics of the room are encouraged and will assist.

Accessible public seating is another area that staff will be looking to accommodate for in person meetings and this may require limited seating or layout changes to the public gallery in Chambers.

When there is a return to in person meetings, staff recommend that the option to participate in meetings virtually still be offered to the public. In person delegations and presentations would be available however as another option virtual participation and presentations should be considered to enhance engagement and provide anyone who is not comfortable to be permitted to participate in Council meetings.

Virtual participation of the public or Members of Council is entirely depended on the upgrade in technology in the Council Chambers and without the upgrade, virtual

participation of a Member of Council or a Member of the Public is not available with the current technology in place.

Staff believe removing the barrier of in person only for the public will result in a further increase of opportunities for citizen engagement and promote more equitable participation for citizens.

The onset of the COVID Pandemic required a change to the delivery of meetings and a need to have additional staff in meetings to support the virtual technology, presentations, sound checks and delegates. Additional support for Clerks would be required from Technology Services to help with the expected increase in registration and participation for this service for in person meetings.

An integrated approach to upgrading the technology in the Council Chambers will allow for incorporation of new and upgraded systems in the technology design. This approach will also help the City realize some cost efficiencies by completing the work while the Chambers is not in use and with Council continuing virtually.

New investments would include the sound system to improve audio and media quality, projector and screen, microphones, speakers and cameras, and updated technology infrastructure. Staff will be looking to provide full remote meeting participation including audio, video and presentation abilities integrated with remote meeting software as well as integration with eScribe Meeting Management for live streaming video and recorded video. The voting system will be upgraded and integrated with the Meeting Management Software to allow for real-time posting of votes online.

Staff recommend that this project timing change be approved to address ongoing impacts related to COVID-19, prevent disruption in 2022 when it is expected that meetings will be returned to in person and to provide the opportunity for the upgrade to occur from September – December 2021 providing time for testing and training prior to the return to in person in January 2022.

Existing Policy/By-Law

The request for procurement requires approval from Council as the project is recommended to move from 2022 to 2021.

Should Council approve this project timeline, enhancements to equipment and technology may also represent the need for changes to the Procedure By-law 18-15 however given there is currently a Procedure By-law Review underway, revisions would be incorporated to the final proposed by-law for Council's consideration.

Financial Impact

The \$264,000 cost will be funded from the Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund - Safe Restart Agreement funding. The City received \$6.8 million from the Province to address

COVID-19 costs and pressures. As noted in report 21-106(CRS) 2021 Operating Financial Update – April Forecast, \$4.4 million has been allocated to COVID-19 financial pressures, leaving an unallocated balance of \$2.4 million.

Scheduled hardware maintenance, on-site testing, support and software maintenance or licensing will be part of the Technology Services operating budget.

Once implemented, Council Chambers will be equipped with a simple, reliable, and flexible media/presentation system, audio control system, video streaming and recording and remote meeting capabilities that can be updated as needed in the future.

Public Input

Request for Proposal documents for this project will be made available to the public for viewing and submission on the City's Bids and Tenders website.

Any recommended changes to the Procedure By-law as a result of this technology upgrade will be before Council and would welcome public feedback.

Internal/External Consultation

The proposed change to the Capital Project timeline has been reviewed with internal staff and once approved will be managed by Technology Services and the Clerk's division. Any necessary updates to by-laws or public facing information will be shared with Council and the public.

Conclusion

At this time given the uncertainty of the return to in person meetings, and Council's approval of the 2021 schedule to continue with virtual meetings the necessary upgrade of technology in Council Chambers represents an opportunity to ensure that when in person does return it returns with an updated system that supports accessibility and participation for the public and Council.

Council's approval of this change in timeline also ensures that when the return to in person meetings occurs the system supports the ability for Councillors and the public to also participate remotely when required.

The City Clerk supports the continuation of virtual delegations and presentation submissions to support greater accessibility to public meetings for citizens to ensure citizens that are unable to attend in person have the option to participate remotely.

Council approval of a capital project budget and funding from the Capital Works Reserve Fund is required to proceed with A/00794-10 Council Chamber Audio and Video System.

Signature

Division Approval



Name: Danielle Manton

Title: City Clerk

Reviewed by the CFO

Reviewed by Legal Services

Departmental Approval



Name: Dave Bush

Title: Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services

City Manager Approval



Name: David Calder

Title: City Manager

Attachments

- N/A