

From: Susan Watson

Subject: Council meetings and delegations at "special meetings"

Mayor Guthrie and Members of Council:

Provincial legislation now allows for remote meetings of City Council to take place.

Regularly scheduled meetings of Council should be reinstated, not simply called at the discretion of the mayor. While it may be appropriate to sideline much of the normal business of the City, regularly scheduled meetings will allow our democratically elected representatives to exercise oversight of what is happening at City Hall during the pandemic and provide transparency for citizens.

Especially in a context where much is being asked of citizens, trust, openness and transparency are paramount to maintaining the kind of social contracts between citizens and government that underpin self-isolation, physical distancing and remittance of taxes (where possible).

While obtaining a \$100 million loan under the current circumstances may be prudent, citizens have a right to demand oversight by Council as to how this money is spent.

Regarding amendments to the procedural by-law, proposed "section r" needs to be eliminated. This is a completely inappropriate transfer of power to the Mayor. There is no justification provided in the report to support this undemocratic transfer of power to the Mayor and the City Clerk beyond the normal powers of a meeting chair currently exercised by the Mayor. Delegations should be allowed for any item on a Council agenda as permitted under the existing Procedural By-law. If wording is required to make this explicit, that should be included.

(r) For Special Council meetings called under Section 8.1 (d), delegations may be permitted at the discretion of the Mayor or Chair in consultation with the City Clerk. If delegations are not permitted, a note to that effect will be posted on the City's website and/or included on the meeting agenda.

In voting to support changes to how Municipal Council meetings would be held across the Province, our MPP Mike Schreiner made it crystal clear that preserving the public's right to participate in meetings was paramount. This should not be compromised by a local amendment to our Procedural By-law.

I think this Globe and Mail editorial from three days sums up the key principles at stake:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-you-dont-stop-a-virus-by-bleeding-democracy/>

It is utterly wrong for democratic governments to seek unilateral powers under the cover of an emergency. It is also unnecessary. There is no justification for it – especially not the one that says governments need to move quickly in a crisis.....

Under no circumstances should any government see this emergency as an excuse to sideline the elected representatives of the people.

.....Canadians must not come out the other end of this only to discover that their institutions and rights have been compromised by governments that grabbed for powers they were not entitled to.

Sincerely,
Susan Watson