

BYLAW 20915 - AMENDMENTS TO BYLAW 18155 - COUNCIL PROCEDURES BYLAW

Recommendation

That Bylaw 20915 be given the appropriate readings.

Purpose

As directed by Council, Bylaw 20915 amends Council Procedures Bylaw, 18155, to require members of Council participating virtually to be visible on the livestream when engaging in the meeting or when quorum or confidentiality must be verified, and to change the agenda release date for regular Council and Committee meetings to the Thursday prior to the meeting.

Readings

Bylaw 20915 is ready for three readings.

A majority vote of City Council on all three readings is required for passage.

If Council wishes to give three readings during a single meeting, then prior to moving to third reading, Council must unanimously agree “That Bylaw 20915 be considered for third reading.”

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the July 3/4, 2024, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

1. That Administration prepare amendments to Bylaw 18155, Council Procedures Bylaw, to require members of Council participating by video conference to have their cameras on without a virtual background when speaking to an item, voting or asking questions.
2. That Administration prepare amendments to Bylaw 18155, Council Procedures Bylaw, to change the distribution date for agendas from 10 clear days prior to the meeting to the Thursday prior to the meeting.

REPORT

Bylaw 20915 proposes amendments to the Council Procedures Bylaw, 18155, based on the direction provided by Council at the July 3/4, 2024, City Council meeting, regarding use of

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cameras and virtual backgrounds by members of Council when participating by video conference, and the timing of agenda release for regular Council and Committee meetings.

Virtual Participation

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, members of Council were only permitted to participate in Council or Committee meetings via telephone or other approved communication facility if they were located outside of the City or if medical reasons prevented them from attending in person. In response to the pandemic and public health orders, Council's procedures were varied to permit attendance via video conference, and the Council Procedures Bylaw was updated to allow participation in-person, or via telephone or video conference, on an ongoing basis at the discretion of members of Council.

Virtual participation provides flexibility to members of Council to participate in meetings. However, it also adds complexity to verifying quorum and confidentiality, and reduces the opportunity for members of the public to visually observe elected officials while meetings are in public.

Bylaw 20915 proposes further refinements to the requirements for virtual participation by requiring members of Council to keep their cameras on and refrain from using virtual backgrounds when engaging in the Council or Committee meeting specifically while speaking or asking questions, and when directed to do so by the Chair for the purpose of verifying quorum or confidentiality. These amendments will ensure that members of Council are visually present when performing their official roles during a meeting, while maintaining flexibility for members to participate in their preferred format.

For comparison, the City of Calgary's meeting procedures permit remote attendance only on an occasional basis, with cameras on and no background used throughout the meeting. All members of Council must use best efforts to attend Council and Committee meetings in person.

Council and Committee Agenda Release

In 2021, following the Early Agenda Distribution pilot¹, the Council Procedures Bylaw was amended to change the timing of agenda release for regular Council and Committee meetings from at least three clear days in advance of the meeting to 10 clear days in advance. While the intent of the change was to allow more time for members of Council and the public to review reports in advance of the meeting date, in practice, and in particular for City Council agendas containing reports recommended or requisitioned by the Standing Committees, agendas released on this earlier timeline are frequently incomplete, with reports being added shortly before the meeting date as addenda. Changing the agenda release date without changing Administration's internal deadlines, will allow for more complete agendas to be released no later than noon on the Thursday of each week prior to a meeting and provides greater transparency to the public on the items being dealt with on the agenda.

Administration recognizes that releasing agendas on the Thursday prior to a meeting limits the time available for the public, Council's advisory committees to review as well as the Mayor and

¹ see February 9, 2021, Office of the City Manager report CR_7446

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Councillors. For reports with anticipated significant general public interest and, where possible, Administration will release these reports in advance as part of the Reports to be Dealt with at a Different Meeting section of an earlier meeting. For reports of specific interest to one or more of Council's advisory committees, Administration will, where possible, provide an advance copy of the report to the committee for comment prior to formal release as part of the meeting agenda.

Pending Council's decision, this change will take effect beginning with the agenda for the City Council meeting on October 22/23, 2024.

Community Insight

Bylaw 20915 proposes amendments to Council's meeting procedures in response to direction from Council. No community engagement was completed for this report.

Attachments

1. Bylaw 20915 - Council Procedures Bylaw Amendment No. 9
2. Bylaw 18155 - REDLINE Excerpts

Others Reviewing the Report

- M. Plouffe, City Solicitor