



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of July 25, 2024

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Curt Kingsley, City Clerk
Subject: Council Meetings Calendar

Date: July 4, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the March 14, 2024, Committee of the Whole meeting, Council passed a motion for staff to report back on how evening Council meeting time, when not used for statutory public hearings, could be repurposed for enhanced public engagement. At the June 20, 2024, Committee of the Whole meeting, Council gave staff additional direction to outline practices undertaken in other Capital Regional District (CRD) municipalities.

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on the frequency of public hearings in CRD municipalities and to outline their practices.

Staff conducted a jurisdictional scan of CRD municipalities, and all have had a reduction in public hearings. Most municipalities in the CRD conduct their business in the evening, have previously held few public hearings, and are utilizing their existing procedures for public input. Most are using the additional time savings for their existing business or are having fewer meetings. Only the District of Saanich is planning on using additional time to hold Town Halls.

Council has a range of options from formal to informal engagement on how it can repurpose its evening meeting time when not used for statutory public hearings. Formal options include standing items for delegations where individuals must sign up in advance of the meeting (like Requests to Address Council), 15–45-minute open forums where speakers do not need to sign up in advance but typically can only discuss agenda items, or town hall style meetings on topics determined by Council. Informal options include open houses where staff can set up booths outlining community initiatives and citizens can express their opinions to Council.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on the frequency of public hearings in CRD municipalities and to outline their practices.

BACKGROUND

At the March 14, 2024, Committee of the Whole, Council passed the following resolution:

“Motion to refer to staff, to report back by June 2024, on how evening Council meeting time, when not used for statutory public hearings, could be repurposed for enhanced public engagement. Request staff to consider options that may potentially include:

- 1) assessment of how often other municipalities hold public hearing opportunities, and how that relates to Victoria’s proposed time allocation;*
- 2) looking at how other municipalities around BC plan to use their public hearing time, in light of provincial changes that mean OCP-compliant buildings.”*

Staff reported back at the June 20, 2024, Committee of the Whole meeting and Council passed the following resolution:

“That this matter be referred back to staff for further investigation on the referenced policies and practices undertaken in other CRD municipalities, with an updated report to Council before July 25.”

Jurisdictional Scan

Staff conducted a jurisdictional scan of other CRD municipalities, and all have a reduction in public hearings since 2023. Additional information on other B.C. municipalities outside of the CRD is available in Appendix 1.

Table 1: CRD Municipalities Public Hearing Frequency

Municipality	Public Hearing Frequency Since 2023
Saanich	Average one public hearing every second month.
Oak Bay	Average one public hearing a year.
Esquimalt	Average one public hearing every second month.
View Royal	Average one to two public hearings a year.
Colwood	Average one to two public hearings a year.
Langford	Average one public hearing every second month.
Metchosin	As needed basis (less than one a year in some cases).
Highlands	As needed basis (less than one a year in some cases).
Sooke	Average one public hearing every four months.
Central Saanich	Average one public hearing every four months.
North Saanich	Average one to two public hearings a year.
Sidney	Average one to two public hearings a year.

While all CRD municipalities have had a reduction in public hearings due to changes in Provincial legislation, most municipalities held few public hearings before the Provincial changes came into effect. Most municipalities conduct their business in the evening and are using the additional time for business or are having less meetings. Only the District of Saanich is planning to hold biannual

Town Halls where members of the public can speak about assorted topics for up to five minutes per speaker.

Other CRD municipalities are still using their existing public input methods such as delegations to Committee of the Whole/Council (where speakers sign up in advance of the meeting), written correspondence, or public input standing items (where speakers do not need to sign up in advance of the meeting).

Table 2: CRD Municipalities Opportunities to Address Council

Municipality	Opportunities to Address Council	Speaking Time
Saanich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public input on items on a regular Council or COTW agenda Delegations during regularly scheduled COTW (maximum of two); Open Forum portion of COTW (before meeting – informal 15 minutes total); Saanich will be piloting a Town Hall twice a year (public hearing format). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 minutes (public input). 10 minutes (delegation) 3 minutes (open forum). 5 minutes (Town Hall)
Oak Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegation to Council at COTW (maximum of two). Public input period during Council and COTW. Public Comment and Question Period (30 minutes during COTW). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minutes (Delegation) 3 minutes (public input period) 3 minutes (public comment and question period)
Esquimalt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address Council at a Council or COTW meeting on agenda topics. Address Council during public comment period at Council or COTW on topics impacting the municipality. Delegation during Council meeting (maximum of two). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 minutes (public input) 2 minutes (public comment period) 5 minutes (delegation)
View Royal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegation to Council. Public participation period on agenda topics only (30 minutes). Question period to Council (15 minutes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 minutes (delegation) 5 minutes (public input period) 2 minutes (question period)
Colwood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address Council at Council or COTW on agenda topics only (20 minutes allotted). Delegation to Council (maximum of two). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 minutes (delegation)
Langford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegation to Council. Public participation period (30 minutes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minutes (delegation) 3 minutes (public participation)
Metchosin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegation to Council. Public participation period (45 minutes). If meeting ends before 9:30 PM, 20 minutes question period is held on agenda topics only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 minutes (delegation) 4 minutes (public participation)
Highlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegation to Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minutes (delegation)

Municipality	Opportunities to Address Council	Speaking Time
Sooke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation to Council. • Public Question and Comment Period (10 minutes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 minutes (delegation) • 2 minutes (public question period)
Central Saanich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation to Council (maximum of two). • Public question period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 minutes (delegation) • 2 minutes (public question period)
North Saanich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation to Council (maximum of two). • Public input period (20 minutes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 minutes (delegation) • 3 minutes (public input period)
Sidney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation to Council. • Public input period (20 minutes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 minutes (delegation) • 4 minutes (public input period)
CRD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation to Board on agenda topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 minutes (delegation)

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Citizens can become involved in local government decision-making through formal and informal processes. Formal public input processes are outlined in a Procedure Bylaw where meetings are recorded, standard Council procedural rules apply, and there may be minute taking from staff. While informal public input processes can include an open house or a public information session. Staff outlined to Council various options on how the City can implement different formal and informal processes in its June 20, 2024, Committee of the Whole Report, attached as Appendix 2.

Formal Engagement Processes

Delegations to Council

In the City's *Council Procedures Bylaw*, any individual or delegation can address Victoria Council when previous written application is made. Victoria's Requests to Address Council process is the equivalent of most municipalities' "Delegation to Council" process. This is because speakers must sign up in advance of the meeting and their topic is placed on the agenda. The *Requests to Address Council Policy* permits a maximum of six speakers with a speaking time of three minutes per Council meeting. The process is used by the public and staff often book speakers months in advance. While the average Capital Region municipality allows their delegations to speak between five and fifteen minutes, they also typically only allow two delegations per meeting compared to up to six allowed by Victoria.

Public Input Periods or Question Periods

Most Capital Region municipalities have a standing item in their Procedure Bylaws for a public input period or a question period. This either occurs at the beginning of the meeting or at the end of the meeting with a time limit ranging from fifteen to forty-five minutes for citizens to discuss their opinions on agenda items only. These speakers do not need to sign up in advance of the meeting and are limited to shorter speaking times than delegations. If Council wishes to align itself with the cumulative speaking times in other municipalities in the region without establishing a new similar public input/question period process, it could increase the number of Requests to Address Council speakers through a change to its Requests to Address Council Policy.

Special Meetings or Town Halls

Municipalities have the authority to conduct special meetings. A special meeting is a Council meeting other than a regular or statutory meeting. Special meetings may be used to address key matters of Council. Special meetings require public notice and may only be held in accordance with local government legislation. A special meeting may be called by:

- The mayor, or
- The mayor upon request by two or more Council members, or
- Two or more Council members under specified circumstances.

Any Council member can direct staff to hold a special meeting by way of an adopted Council Member Motion. A motion for a special meeting would need a specific purpose and rationale, which could be enhanced public engagement. Examples of special meetings for enhanced public engagement could be meetings dedicated to updates from Neighborhood Associations and Advisory Committees or a public hearing style of meeting on various topics (like the planned Town Halls in Saanich).

Consolidated Council Meetings

Victoria Council conducts three regularly scheduled meetings – Committee of the Whole at 9:00 a.m., Council to Follow (daytime Council meeting) and regular Council meetings at 6:30 p.m. (evening Council meeting). Daytime Council meetings for regular business were implemented to reduce the time commitment for members of the public interested in public hearings scheduled for evening meetings. Other Capital Region municipalities hold their Council meetings in the evening and do not hold many public hearings. Council could consolidate its two evening meetings into one meeting a month and increase the number of Requests to Address Council. This would result in long meetings when public hearings are scheduled but it would also eliminate short evening meetings when no public hearing is scheduled.

Informal Engagement Processes

Open Houses and Public Information Sessions

Open houses or public information sessions provide an opportunity for citizens to seek clarification on a proposed project, bylaw and to express their opinions for consideration by elected officials. Feedback received may assist the City to change a proposal, project or program. The feedback may also help the local government to identify where there are gaps in information that need to be filled. Examples of open houses include booths set up at City Hall where staff outline progress on programs or initiatives related to the Strategic Plan. Open houses typically also involve attendance and participation from members of Council where they can interact with the public directly and receive feedback.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Accessibility Impact Statement

Council proceedings will continue to incorporate and improve upon existing processes outlined in the City’s Accessibility Framework to ensure accessible participation at Council meetings.

2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan

As per “Economic Health and Community Vitality,” Council will explore governance reforms.

Impacts to Financial Plan

A reduction in evening Council meeting times would reduce unionized staff overtime costs while additional evening Council meeting times or open houses, public information sessions and Town Halls may increase unionized staff overtime costs.

CONCLUSIONS

Staff’s review of other CRD municipalities indicates most are not using additional meeting time from less public hearings for other purposes. Most previously held few public hearings and have existing processes for delegations and public input. Council could hold additional public engagement opportunities through expansion of its existing formal process of Requests to Address Council. Other informal processes could be utilized if desired by Council at any time by way of an adopted Council Member Motion, including Town Hall style meetings, open houses or public information sessions.

Respectfully submitted,

Barrie Nicholls
Legislation and Policy Analyst

Curt Kingsley
City Clerk

Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager and
Chief Financial Officer

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

Appendix 1_Additional B.C. Municipality Jurisdictional Scan
Appendix 2_June 20, 2024, Committee of the Whole Report