



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

Date: February 20, 2014 **From:** Don Schaffer, Manager, Legislative Services
Subject: Minute Taking Standards

Executive Summary

At its meeting of September 30, 2013, Council resolved to direct Staff to provide new minute taking standards that reflect the addition of video webcasts of the meetings of Council and its committees. On October 3, 2013, the first meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee was webcast and archived for future reference. Archived webcasts of meetings of Council and its committees give the public and City staff an opportunity to view the proceedings of those meetings and listen to the debates, even if those people were not able to attend the meeting in question.

As a result, there is no longer a need to provide the level of detail in the minutes that has been provided in the past few years. Therefore, a set of minute taking standards is proposed which will provide for the inclusion of content required by statute as well as that deemed necessary for the purpose of historical reference. This approach strikes a balance between a verbatim recording of discussions and an action-minutes approach to minute taking, and is consistent with best practices followed in other municipalities and recommended by parliamentarians.

Recommendation:

That Committee recommend that Council adopt the minute-taking standards appended to this report as Schedule A.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DS' with a large flourish.

Don Schaffer
Manager, Legislative Services

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. G. Woodland' with a large flourish.

Robert G. Woodland
Director of Legislative and Regulatory Services

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____

Date: _____

Feb. 20, 2014

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Council changes to the City of Victoria's minute taking standards as a consequence of the implementation of the webcasting initiative.

Background

Minutes of meetings of Council and its committees are kept as required by Section 148 of the Community Charter, which places a duty upon the corporate officer to prepare and make available accurate minutes of the proceedings of Council and its committees.

As required by the Charter, the Legislative Services Division will continue to produce written minutes of meetings. Those minutes will constitute the permanent record of the meetings. The record formed by the archived webcasts will be retained for as long as possible; however, the relatively short lifespan of recording media and corresponding playback hardware will place time limits on archived storage. While the City's service provider is able to make the webcasts available indefinitely, advances in technology will mean the webcasting records will become obsolete at an unknown point in the future.

Written records of the proceeds of meetings varies widely, between the verbatim, Hansard-style approach utilized by the provincial and federal governments and a bare-bones recording of motions and voting results, with no discussion recorded and, in some cases, no movers or seconders recorded as in Sooke and Central Saanich.

Issues & Analysis

Since the webcast will be retained as an additional record of meetings, there is no longer the need to record the same level of detail in the minutes. The proposed approach attempts to strike a reasonable balance in minute taking style between the extremes noted above. This will allow the Legislative Services Division to balance the time required for preparing minutes from meetings with that required to work with the new systems in place which enable web casting.

The minutes will provide summaries of discussion after a motion is put to the Council or committee, noting the points raised by members of Council and staff responses to questions from Council. This practice will allow the minutes to focus on the actions of Council by:

- recording decisions of Council and its committees;
- summarize the discussions of those bodies; and
- record the votes.

This practice will reflect current practice in the recording of minutes of Governance and Priorities meetings. It also reflects best practices adhered to by other municipalities, where the emphasis of the minutes is on the decisions of the Council and not the discussions leading up to the motions enacting those decisions. Eli Mina, a registered professional parliamentarian and consultant to local governments in BC, recommends such an approach in his book *Mina's Guide to Minute Taking*, in which he notes that preserving enough of the discussion leading to a vote on a motion is a desirable approach, given that future users of the minutes might wish to understand the rationale behind the voting that took place. The minutes need to stand on their own as a permanent record of the decision, but staff feels that over time there will be less need to refer to the webcasts for a verbatim recording of the conversations at the Council or Committee table.

Different situations will, however, require slight variations in approach as outlined in Schedule A.

Options & Impacts

Council can either:

- Approve the changes; or
- Suggest alternatives; or
- Require the minutes to remain as they are.

Staff resources will be put to better use constructing minutes that are less comprehensive and more focused on Council directions and decisions. Several considerations weigh into this recommendation:

- addition of the Planning and Land Use Committee of the Whole;
- restructuring of the two standing committees with broader scope and membership; and
- anticipated use of task forces (project-specific committees struck with a particular task and time frame in mind) and public advisory committees.

The impact of the changes will be to free time for staff to provide more focused minutes, spend more time working with and improving the webcasting function and associated adjustments to work flow, and working to improve the delivery of agenda materials to Council, for instance, by means of alternatives to paper agenda packages.

Recommendation

That Committee recommend that Council adopt the minute-taking standards appended to this report as Schedule A.

Schedule A

Proposed Minute Taking Standards

Committee meeting minutes

- Minutes will focus on the recommendations of the Committee
- Minutes will acknowledge that motions once made are the responsibility of the Committee and not the member making the motion; for instance, when outlining discussions, minutes read "Committee discussed the following points"
- Minutes summarize key points of discussion
- Minutes will contain synopses of presentations made by City staff or groups making representation to Committees. Audio-visual presentations will be recorded and form part of the webcasts; reports and other documents will remain part of the agenda records.

Regular meetings of Council

Minutes of regular open meetings of Council will follow the general principles of committee meetings, with the following distinctions:

- minutes will focus on the motion and debate of the motion, rather than discussions preceding the motions;
- prior to a motion being made, key points will be identified;
- the motion will be recorded; and
- debates after the motion will be recorded in a similar fashion (i.e., Council discussed the following issues) with somewhat more detail provided than is provided in Committee minutes.

It is important that the rationales for decisions be summarized, since recent court decisions tend to impose a requirement for Council to explain its decisions. Minutes will be constructed to maintain compliance with these requirements.

Public hearings

During public hearings, there is a statutory requirement to maintain a fair and accurate summary report of all presentations made at a hearing. Minutes of public hearings must record:

- the name of each presenter;
- the general area in which the presenter resides; and
- a brief synopsis of the presentation made.

Closed minutes

There will be no webcasting of closed meetings. Therefore, no video recording will take place. Minutes will be focused on decisions made by Council and the discussion leading to the vote on a motion after a motion is made.