

Report

Date February 27, 2024
Subject Removing Barriers to Committee Participation

File:

PURPOSE

To ensure public participation in Council Committees is inclusive of diverse perspectives and is accessible to any individual willing to contribute their time for the betterment of North Cowichan.

BACKGROUND

Public participation in Committees ensures that Council benefits from the perspective of subject matter experts who are passionate about the Committee topic and reflect the diversity of North Cowichan.

Members of the public volunteer as Committee Members on four different Council Committees: Accessibility Advisory Committee, Environmental Advisory Committee, Forestry Advisory Committee and Sports Wall of Fame Committee. Most of these Committees meet in person during the day at the Municipal Hall.

DISCUSSION

There can be many barriers to public participation in Committees. As the meetings are predominantly held during the week and during the regular work hours, some people:

- who are employed in a field unrelated to the Committee business may have to take time off work
- may need to arrange childcare
- may not have a vehicle or be unable to drive, so may require assistance with travel
- they will be less likely to volunteer their time and energy to a Committee if they incur a real cost.

The terms of reference for Committees generally include a provision for electronic participation in meetings. This is one way to foster accessibility in that participation can occur without leaving the house or workplace. However, this does require the participant to have a computer or cell phone and an internet connection. Additionally, it takes away from the camaraderie experienced from participating in person.

Although the terms of reference will establish the meeting frequency (e.g., monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly), Committees can set the dates and times that work best for the Committee members. This could enable people who work during the day to attend meetings if they were held in the evening. However, IT staff would not be available to support any technology challenges and requirements for staff to participate in meetings outside of regular work hours could result in additional costs.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend that Council amend the Council Advisory Body Policy to include an Honorarium of \$40 per meeting for persons who are not compensated by their employer to participate in Committee meetings.

- This option helps ensure that participants are not incurring costs to participate in Committee meetings without having to provide receipts or otherwise detail what those costs might be. This helps to remove the barrier of affordability while respecting privacy by not requiring people to ask for or specify the types and amounts of costs they might be incurring.
 - Currently, 21 members of the public on Committees meet, on average, four times per year. This could result in a cost of \$3,360.
2. THAT the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend that Council amend the Advisory Body Policy to include a reimbursement of actual expenses incurred to attend meetings upon submission of an expense claim form.
- This option helps ensure that participants are not incurring costs to participate in Committee meetings but does require the submission of expense claims, which could be a barrier for some people who may not want to share their personal circumstances or may have difficulty filling out forms.
 - As this would be a reimbursement of direct expenses, it is not possible to estimate an amount. However, it would likely be less than \$5,000 for the year.

IMPLICATIONS

Providing an honorarium or reimbursement of direct expenses would remove financial barriers to participation in Committees at minimal cost to the Municipality. It would also signal that Council values public participation and respects the time commitment people are making when they provide their knowledge and expertise.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend that Council amend the Advisory Body Policy to include an Honorarium of \$40 per meeting for persons who are not compensated by their employer to participate in Committee meetings.

Report prepared by:



Talitha Soldera, CPA, CGA
General Manager, Corporate Services

Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer