

COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

From: Corporate Services

Date: June 20, 2023

Subject: Committee of the Whole Research Report

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receives this report for information.

BACKGROUND:

At the Regular Council Meeting on February 27, 2023, a member of the public asked when questions could be asked about Committee of the Whole (COTW) meetings as there was no question period included in the COTW agenda. Council requested that Administration bring back a report looking at how other municipalities used COTW meetings for, why or when question periods were introduced to COTW meetings, if they were not always included, and any effects that resulted from including question periods in COTW meetings. COTW agendas of other municipalities were reviewed, and emails were sent to staff from other municipalities to ask questions.

LEGAL NOTES:

The *Community Charter* allows Council to determine the format of their COTW meetings. The only requirement is that according to Section 124 (3) of the *Community Charter* public notice must be given describing the proposed changes in general terms. The District of Mackenzie Council Procedure Bylaw No. 1379 establishes the format of the agenda for Regular Council Meetings in Part 4 Section 16, but does not establish a format for COTW meetings. Council may choose to amend Part 7 of Bylaw 1379 to introduce an Order of Proceedings and Business for COTW meetings, which would outline matters of the agenda such as question periods and administrative reports.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETINGS

In COTW meetings, items are discussed, but no decisions are made. As a committee of the whole, recommendations can be made to Council for consideration during a regular meeting. This is an important difference between the procedures of a COTW meeting and a Regular Council Meeting. COTW meetings are presented by various municipalities as an opportunity for

valuable discussion of issues where public delegations, expert speakers, Council, and staff can all participate in a discussion on an item without the pressure of needing to come to a decision with a motion at the end.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Research extended to 14 other municipalities, including those much smaller, much larger, or in another province than Mackenzie. Chosen municipalities are listed in **Table 1**. The following information was gathered from the chosen municipalities.

- 5 out of 14 municipalities included a question period in their COTW agenda.
- 3 municipalities (Kitimat, Lantzville, and the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality) included the question period at the beginning of the COTW meeting.
- 2 municipalities (Lake Cowichan and Hudson’s Hope) included the question period at the end of the meeting.
- The question period item often has a maximum time limit, and people who speak also have a limited time to ask their question or make their comment.
- Municipalities that do not include question periods in COTW meetings direct members of the public to appear as delegations, submit letters to Council, or attend the public question period during the Regular Council Meeting.

Table 1

Municipality	Population Size	Question or Comment Period present in COTW Agenda
Fort St. John	21,465	No
Kitimat	8,236	Yes
Northern Rockies Regional Municipality	4,478	Yes
Lantzville	3,817	Yes*
Pemberton	3,407	No
Invermere	3,391	No
Lake Cowichan	3,325	Yes
Mackenzie	3,281	No
Gibbons AB	3,218	No**
Houston	3,052	No
Three Hills AB	3,042	No
Tumbler Ridge	2,399	No**
Chetwynd	2,302	No
Valemount	1,052	No
Hudson’s Hope	841	Yes

*Lantzville has not held a Committee of the Whole meeting for the past 3 years, instead holding Special Meetings to discuss items at length.

**Gibbons AB and Tumbler Ridge do not conduct Committee of the Whole Meetings. Tumbler Ridge holds "Policies and Priorities Committee Meetings" which are functionally identical.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PROCEEDINGS

Research was also done on the content of COTW meetings in other municipalities beyond the public question period. Information about which municipalities include which items can be found in **Table 2**.

- 9 out of 14 municipalities receive administrative reports at these meetings.
- 7 out of 14 municipalities include a delegation and presentation period.
- 3 out of 14 municipalities include bylaw discussion.
- 5 out of 14 municipalities discuss the capital budget.

When discussing COTW meeting procedure and history, staff from other municipalities shared that the public does not often participate in public comment periods. For other municipalities, the choice to include a question period was prompted by residents.

Table 2

Item	Municipalities
Administration Reports	Fort St. John, Kitimat, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, Pemberton, Invermere, Lake Cowichan, Houston, Tumbler Ridge, Valemount, and Hudson's Hope
Delegations and Presentations	Fort St. John, Kitimat, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, Lantzville, Pemberton, Invermere, Tumbler Ridge, and Valemount
Bylaw Discussion	Kitimat, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, and Three Hills AB
Capital Budget Discussion	Fort St. John, Kitimat, Pemberton, Houston, and Three Hills AB.

SUMMARY

While the question period is more relevant to COTW meetings if they include more items for discussion, the COTW meeting format supports preliminary discussion and introduction to issues and gives items more time to be thought over before they are included in a Regular Council Meeting agenda for decision.

Of the 14 municipalities researched, only five include the public question period or similar item in their COTW meetings. Municipalities that had included the public question period have not expressed any issues or problems resulting from the choice.

Two reasons were given for why a municipality had not included the public question period. First, public participation in Regular Council Meeting question periods was so low that participation in a COTW question period was expected to be rarely used if at all. Second, because the decisions are only made at Regular Council Meetings, the public will have the opportunity to ask questions then. In addition to question periods at Regular Council Meetings, municipalities offer other opportunities for public input during meetings such as delegation appearances and letters.

Including a question or comment period in COTW meetings has no immediate or predicted drawbacks; if allotting time for a question period is an issue because it could extend the length of a COTW meeting, Council can amend the bylaw to set the question period to a reasonable maximum time limit. If the COTW meeting items were expanded to include delegations or discussions of additional items, there would be more reason for members of the public to participate. A question period at a COTW which includes items other than administrative reports would provide a lower barrier to participate in an open discussion without the pressure of an immediate decision.

DECISION OPTIONS

- a) Receive the report for information and maintain current COTW agenda format;
- b) Move to begin the process of amending Council Procedure Bylaw No. 1379 to allow public comment and question period and/or make other amendments to the COTW agenda format and schedule; and/or
- c) Request staff bring back further information.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

Strong Governance and Finances

- As the municipality's elected governing body, we serve all residents and businesses in the community. We engage residents and stakeholders on important issues and make our decisions through open and transparent processes. We are careful in our use of resources, mindful of the need to maintain programs and services, while also meeting the community's infrastructure needs.

Respectfully Submitted,



Rowan Paulsen
Local Government Intern



Approved for Submission to Council