

Remote participation in council meetings to be recorded in meeting minutes

By Zachary Roman, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Minutes of meetings of Caledon Council will now note if a Councillor participated in a meeting virtually.

At Council's July 9 meeting, Councillors unanimously supported part of a motion from Regional Councillor Mario Russo to record remote participation of Councillors in meetings in meeting minutes.

The move came as part of a split vote ? Russo's original motion on the topic was split into two parts, with votes being held on each part.

Vote One was on whether remote participation in meetings by Councillors should be recorded in meeting minutes; as mentioned above all Councillors were in support of this.

Vote Two was on whether Caledon's Municipal Clerk should report back to Caledon's Governance Review Committee on options for implementing a remote participation registry that would require Councillors participating remotely to provide rationale for doing so from a list of Council-accepted reasons.

This part of Russo's motion was also passed, but Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan, Ward 2 Councillor Dave Sheen, Ward 4 Councillor Nick de Boer, and Regional Councillor Christina Early were in opposition to it.

In his motion, Russo said remote participation in meetings is a privilege and he's heard interest in respecting and preventing abuse of the privilege through implementing additional accountability and transparency measures.

Kiernan said the hybrid remote/in-person Council system has allowed her to serve the community while she recovered from two significant surgeries. She said when she was participating remotely at those times, she appreciated not having to divulge why as her health is a personal matter. She said she hasn't heard any concern from residents about remote participation.

Russo said he believes highlighting why a Councillor is not participating in a meeting in person is important.

Sheen also said he hasn't heard complaints about remote participation, and that Russo's motion makes it seem like participating remotely somehow makes Councillors less accountable.

Sheen said he attends the vast majority of meetings in person and that Councillors should be able to decide when they have a reason to not attend a meeting in person.

This sentiment was echoed by Kiernan, who said she feels very accountable to the community and that Councillors can decide if they have a valid reason to not be at a meeting in person.

Early said she hasn't seen any abuse of remote participation at the Caledon Council table. She said she doesn't see the need to see why Councillors aren't attending a meeting in person.

Mayor Annette Groves said she's heard from people who don't even want remote participation in meetings to be an option at all. While she disagrees with that sentiment, Groves said it's important for residents to know why a Councillor has not attended a meeting in person.

Russo said remote participation in meetings is sometimes abused and that Councillors should be able to say why they weren't at a meeting in person.