City of Nanaimo

Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING   SEPTEMBER 21, 2020

AUTHORED BY   Sheila Gurrie, Director, Legislative Services

SUBJECT   **COUNCIL VOTING DASHBOARD**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with options for a Council Voting Dashboard that will display and track council members voting records for Council Meetings.

Recommendation

That Council direct staff to proceed with the Council Voting Dashboard that has been developed by our IT Department to track Council's voting record for Council Meetings retroactive to July 1, 2020.

BACKGROUND

At the 2020-JUN-15 Council Meeting, the following motion was made by Council:

That Council direct Staff to prepare a report for Council outlining alternative tracking methods available for capturing each Councillors vote on motions, other than the official meeting minutes, that allows for easy access of Council voting records by members of the public.

At this meeting, discussion took place on the different methods available for tracking Council's voting records with the City of Victoria, City of Vancouver, or a basic Excel spreadsheet being some of the methods discussed.

DISCUSSION

The City of Nanaimo's IT Department reached out to the City of Victoria regarding the software program that they use for tracking council voting records and determined it would be reasonable to implement here, using only staff time for programming the system as cost. Our IT Department, upon consultation with Legislative Services, proceeded with this method of delivery as ultimately, the time involved in the maintenance and upkeep of this program is much less burdensome than an Excel spreadsheet. As well, the user friendliness and searching capabilities using this program is a better experience for the user and provides a greater service to the public.

Members of the public will find the new dashboard makes it easier to see how members of Council voted on a particular motion and gives the public tools to access information about decisions without having to search Council meeting minutes individually to find voting and attendance records.

The dashboard will include voting records for Council meetings only, as these are the meetings where final decisions are made. There are various search methods that will be available to Dashboard users such as searching by keyword in the motion, date of meeting, etc. Links to the corresponding Council Meeting Agenda will be available when clicking on the vote, and the Staff Report and video for that item will be available for referencing how/why a councillor made the decision they made.

OPTIONS

1.   That Council direct staff to proceed with the Council Voting Dashboard that has been developed by our IT Department to track Council's voting record for Council Meetings retroactive to July 1, 2020.

- The advantages of this option: The costs associated with implementing this system consist of staff time only and the user friendliness; searching capabilities; and linking to original content, make this option the most beneficial to the user.
- The disadvantages of this option: There is staff time associated with any additional meeting follow-up required. The Legislative Services Department staff doing this work are already at maximum; however, there are some efficiencies we have noted to combine this work with similar meeting follow-up that is already being done.
- Financial Implications: Costs are minimal and related to in-house resources by the IT Department staff and their expertise.

2.   That Council direct staff to pursue another method of tracking voting records.

- The advantages of this option: There could be a better tracking system that exists; however, compared to an Excel spreadsheet or the City of Vancouver's method, staff have not seen one.
- The disadvantages of this option: The user friendliness and benefits to the public with the other system may not be captured in a different system (e.g. Excel spreadsheet) and customer service opportunities would be lost.
- Financial Implications: Unknown at this time. Depending on the solution/method chosen there could be little to none aside staff time.

3.   That Council direct staff to maintain status quo and have Council Meeting Minutes as the method of tracking voting records.

- The advantages of this option: Not having to learn a new system taking staff time away from other duties and projects is an advantage. Legislative Services staff would have more time to focus on the in-depth meeting follow-up that already occurs and is necessary in the meeting process. Status quo would dissolve the maintenance and accountability requirements to Council and the public that exists

when any new program is implemented. Time and resources would spent maintaining, following up with assistance/issues, would not exist.
- The disadvantages of this option: Council, members of the public and other users would have to continue to search minutes for Council's voting record.
- Financial Implications: There are no financial implication with maintaining status quo.

SUMMARY POINTS

- At the 2020-JUN-15 meeting of Council, Council directed Staff to prepare a report for Council outlining alternative tracking methods available for capturing each Councillors vote on motions.
- The City of Nanaimo's IT Department reached out to the City of Victoria regarding their Council Voting Dashboard software and determined it would be reasonable for them to implement at the City of Nanaimo.
- It is anticipated the user friendliness and searching capabilities using this Council Voting Dashboard will be a better experience for the user and provide a greater service to the public.

Submitted by:

Sheila Gurrie
Director, Legislative Services