

# Town of Whitby

## Staff Report

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### Report Title: Ward Town Hall Meetings Policy

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**Report to:** Committee of the Whole

**Date of meeting:** January 15, 2024

**Report Number:** CLK 01-24

**Department(s) Responsible:**

Office of the Town Clerk

**Submitted by:**

Christopher Harris, Town Clerk

<b>Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief Administrative Officer</b>
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**For additional information, contact:**

Christopher Harris, Town Clerk, x4302

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#### 1. Recommendation:

**That Council approve the Ward Town Hall Meetings Policy appended to Report CLK 01-24 as Attachment 1.**

#### 2. Highlights:

- Council has made community engagement a priority and in 2023 started hosting town hall style meetings in each of the four wards.
- Ward town hall meetings are led by the respective Ward Councillor, and where applicable, a paired Regional Councillor.
- The proposed policy for ward town halls is intended to identify the type of support provided to Members of Council to facilitate these meetings.

#### 3. Background:

The Mayor and Council have recently identified community engagement as a priority through the Community Strategic Plan. The opportunity to engage constituents directly through annual town hall style meetings in each of the four wards is a key initiative as part of this commitment. Approval of a policy is necessary to ensure that adequate supports for Members of Council are in place to facilitate these events and to identify event planning responsibilities.

A corporate budget for ward town hall meetings was previously established through an amendment to the [Council Expense Policy](#) in 2023 to add the following as Section 3.2:

“A corporate budget will be established for one Ward Town Hall meeting per ward per year in the amount of \$300 (or \$75 per Ward Town Hall meeting x 4 meetings hosted by a Ward and Regional Councillor team) for refreshments. Expenditures beyond the \$75 per Ward Town Hall meeting or in addition the Corporate support to be provided by staff will be allocated evenly to each Ward and Regional Councillor’s Annual Budget, in accordance with this Policy, following each event. For clarity, for an expenditure of \$85 at a Ward Town Hall meeting, the \$10 in excess of the corporate budget will be allocated \$5 to the Ward Councillor and \$5 to the Regional Councillor hosting the Ward Town Hall meeting.”

#### **4. Discussion:**

When drafting the proposed Ward Town Hall Meeting Policy, Staff reviewed documentation and incorporated best practices from the Town of Ajax which has been hosting ward town hall meetings for a number of years. Practical considerations from the ward town hall meetings held in 2023 were also reviewed.

The proposed Policy provides that the Ward Councillor, and if applicable their assigned Regional Councillor team member, will have overall responsibility for running the ward town hall meeting, including identifying content in advance and facilitating the meeting while it is occurring. The paired Regional Councillor is noted as “if applicable” in the draft policy to provide flexibility should Council identify a different arrangement other than the current Ward Councillor and Regional Councillor pairing structure in the future.

The Executive Advisor and Public Relations Coordinator in the Mayor and Councillors’ Office will work with Town Staff and outside organizations to arrange meeting content as requested by the applicable Councillors. The Administrative Assistant and Customer Service Specialists assigned to support to Members of Council will provide logistical support for the meeting such as the room booking, coordinating refreshments, arranging for audio visual technology, expense management, and note taking during the meeting.

Ward town hall meetings will be corporately supported with department Staff available to attend to provide presentations or assist with answering questions, subject to approval of the CAO. Further, Corporate Communications will leverage corporate channels to promote the meetings.

#### **5. Financial Considerations:**

The draft Ward Town Hall Meeting Policy aligns with 2023 amendments to the Council Expense Policy. On an annual basis, one ward town hall meeting will be corporately supported financially with the use of a municipal facility to host the meeting and by providing light refreshments. In the event that Members of Council wish to undertake additional advertising beyond that provided through the Town’s Corporate Communications and Creative Services division and their social media, they may request reimbursement for additional advertising in accordance with the Council Expense Policy. Additional ward town hall meetings (beyond the one per ward per year) will be allocated to the annual business expense budgets for the Members of Council organizing the meeting in accordance with the Council Expense Policy, unless a Council resolution directing corporate support is passed.

**6. Communication and Public Engagement:**

Ward town hall meetings are one of the key initiatives Council is undertaking to promote community engagement further to action item 4.3.4 in [Whitby's Community Strategic Plan](#). Corporate Communications and Creative Services will support annual ward town hall meetings through corporate communication channels to promote awareness and attendance.

**7. Input from Departments/Sources:**

The Senior Leadership Team has reviewed and provided comments on the draft Policy, and Financial Services has ensured alignment with the Council Expense Policy.

**8. Strategic Priorities:**

Creating Ward Teams and hosting ward town hall meetings are key priorities identified by the 2022-2026 Council to support enhanced community engagement and the handling of constituent inquiries.

**9. Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Draft Ward Town Hall Meeting Policy