

Council nixes review of meeting times

By Brock Weir

If you were hoping for something concrete for shorter municipal meetings, you might have to wait another day.

Council put the brakes on a recommendation last week which would have launched a study to look at shorter meeting times and meetings held during the workday.

The recommendations came forward from municipal staff to look at alternatives to the traditional start times of 7 p.m. and meetings often lasting three hours or beyond.

“These meetings often conclude between 10 p.m. and 11.30 p.m., depending on the number and types of matters to be discussed and/or considered,” said Town Clerk John Leach in his report to Council. “Staff is required to attend these meetings and are also expected to attend at work between 8 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. The frequency, time and duration of these meetings not only have an impact on the personal life of staff, but also on the personal [lives] of members of Council.

“If the meeting times were changed, the impact on staff and Council would likely be less as the work day would not be as long, which would help reduce fatigue. It would also reduce the amount of lieu time, flex time or overtime.”

According to Mr. Leach, it would allow agenda items to be given a more thorough consideration and possibly better direction “as members would not feel the same time constraints as they may currently.”

While Councillors have often discussed the desire for shorter meeting times, they voted to nix the report last week as they had not provided specific direction for a report like this to come forward. Meeting times, they said, are under their domain and they should make the first move “if there is any desire at all.

“I remember discussions at the beginning of the term regarding the role of the administration versus the role of Council and I believe that this report crosses that line,” said Councillor Michael Thompson making a motion to have the item removed from the agenda. “Any suggestion regarding the procedural bylaw or any part within should, in my opinion, come from a member of Council.

“The conduct of our meetings is our domain and I think we should initiate any discussions around changes to our procedural bylaw. It is a concern and it should be discussed, but I think the more appropriate venue would have been [for it to be brought to our attention and for] us to bring it forward.”

The majority of Council agreed, but some such as Councillors Evelyn Buck and Paul Pirri said they would have preferred more action being taken last week.

“We shouldn't just remove it from this agenda,” said Councillor Buck. “We should be giving some direction on how we're going to handle it and what we're going to do from now on.”

Added Councillor Pirri: “Although I agree wholeheartedly with [Councillor Thompson's] feelings on the matter, I am willing to vote in favour of it because I think staff around the table have heard us loud and clear [that we want shorter meetings] and that is the feeling around the table.”