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Item No. Info Item 2
Executive Standing Committee
June 26, 2023

TO: Mayor and Members of the Executive Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY:



Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 5, 2023

SUBJECT: Council Chamber Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

December 17, 2018 Executive Standing Committee motion (item 12.2.1):

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Zurawski

THAT the Executive Standing Committee (ESC) request a staff report on the following:

...

2. The use of professional sign language interpretation of televised HRM City Hall meetings where interpreters will be shown in split screen as opposed to PIP ("picture in picture").

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39

11(2) In the general exercise of its powers, the Council shall take into account the principle of accessibility for its citizens with disabilities.

BACKGROUND

On October 15, 2018, the Deafness Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia presented to the HRM Accessibility Advisory Committee regarding access to interpreters for HRM Recreation programs and the absence of professional sign language interpreters at televised HRM Council meetings. As a result, the Executive Standing Committee on December 17, 2018 requested a staff report as follows:

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Zurawski

THAT the Executive Standing Committee (ESC) request a staff report on the following:

1. The development and implementation of a municipal wide policy providing HRM residents of all ages with appropriate support services (sign language interpreters, notetakers, and / or CART) when accessing any HRM recreational programs including day camps.
2. The use of professional sign language interpretation of televised HRM City Hall meetings where interpreters will be shown in split screen as opposed to PIP ("picture in picture").

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

This report provides information on part 2 of the above motion. The Council approved strategies, [Diversity and Inclusion Framework](#) and [Accessibility Strategy Halifax](#) were considered when responding as well as a review of the existing accessible means of communication (CART and Hearing Hotspot) being provided currently in the Council Chamber.

DISCUSSION

Prior to 2013, the Eastlink TV broadcast of Regional Council meetings provided translation services in American Sign Language (ASL) in a picture in picture format. Due to challenges with scheduling translators and the length and frequency of meetings, the provider was unable to ensure regular support and the service ended.

On January 14, 2015, the provision of Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for Regional Council meetings was introduced as part of the 2015/16 Budget, under the priority outcome of Inclusive and Accessible Community. CART was identified as a new service which would provide remote live speech to text translation to allow the Deaf, hard of hearing and deafened public access to all Regional Council proceedings. On September 22, 2015, the Municipal Clerk's Office initiated the first Regional Council webcast with CART services. This service has been integrated into the existing live webcast on YouTube and provides users with two different views: 1) video and text and 2) text only via a public website. CART is not currently displayed on the Eastlink TV Regional Council broadcast on the gallery displays in the Council Chamber; however, staff are currently exploring options to add this service to the broadcast as well as to displays in the meeting room.

Originally, the intention was to use CART for all meetings of Committee of the Whole and Regional Council. Following the launch in 2015, there were three requests to extend this service which have all been accommodated. The first was for the annual Accessibility Town Hall meeting hosted by the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The second was a request by motion at the December 2, 2015, Committee of the Whole Budget meeting to include CART at all future budget committee meetings. Finally, in 2020 it was determined that CART would be used for all Community Council meetings held in the Council Chamber or Zoom, that also have a public hearing scheduled.

For individuals who are hard of hearing, the Council Chamber and Halifax Hall in City Hall also have a Hearing Hotspot which allows users to get a direct audio feed through a free app on their smartphone or

through Bluetooth hearing aids. City Hall provides free access to smart devices with the app installed, neck loops to connect with Bluetooth hearing aids and headphones.

ASL service, as a standard offering, is not available for meetings of Regional Council. In person translators are not available to facilitate meetings due to meeting frequency, scheduling and length. The Clerk's Office continues to arrange for ASL translation services for the Accessibility Town Hall and for meetings when a member of the public requires and requests this service. This approach is consistent with other Canadian municipalities as outlined in the attached jurisdictional scan (Attachment 1). For most meetings, two ASL translators are required at the cost of \$234.32 for a two-hour meeting. As ASL requests are for a limited amount of meetings, this cost has historically been accommodated through the existing budget for the Clerk's Office.

As part of the consideration of this request, the Clerk's Office contacted known in-person vendors in HRM to assess the current availability of in-person ASL interpretation services. There remains only one local vendor that would be able to provide this service and scheduling remains a concern due to the frequency, volume and length of meetings.

If Regional Council directs staff to look at using ASL translation services as a standard offering for televised HRM City Hall meetings, staff will need to be directed to conduct a business case analysis to see if there is a vendor available, assess any technology improvements that may be required, as well as their cost, and identify a funding source as any needed technical upgrades and ongoing operating costs are not currently budgeted for. Finally, consultation with community and work with HRM's Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO is recommended prior to procurement or implementation of a technical solution.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report that can't be accommodated within existing operating budgets.

If the requests to organize ASL for specific meeting types increased beyond the current offering, costing for the service and resourcing for organizing the service which is currently done by Clerk's Office staff would need to be reviewed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff provided a presentation to the Accessibility Advisory Committee on June 12, 2023 and sought feedback from the committee on current and future initiatives to increase accessibility for public meetings.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Jurisdictional Scan

A copy of this report can be obtained online at or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Laura Lewis, Council Coordinator, 902.490.6525

	City	Province	ASL services Offered
1	Toronto	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/accessibility-at-the-city-of-toronto/meeting-accessibility-standards-aoda/
2	Montreal	Quebec	No Information Listed
3	Vancouver	British Columbia	Available On Request. https://vancouver.ca/your-government/contact-the-city-of-vancouver.aspx#interpreter
4	Calgary	Alberta	Available On Request https://www.calgary.ca/events/request-accessibility-accommodation.html
5	Edmonton	Alberta	Available On Request https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/for_people_with_special_needs/services-hard-of-hearing-or-deaf
6	Ottawa–Gatineau	Ontario / Quebec	Available Upon Request https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/creating-equal-inclusive-and-diverse-city/accessibility-city/commitment-policies-plans-and-supports/accessible-format-or-communication-support-request#section-394e3337-ad87-40d7-b780-02ef9b4aac07
			Available Upon Request (LSQ) https://www.gatineau.ca/portail/default.aspx?p=guichet_municipal/accessibilite_universelle&ref=pastilles

	City	Province	ASL services Offered
7	Winnipeg	Manitoba	Available Upon Request https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/interhom/accessibility/default.stm
8	Quebec City	Quebec	Available Upon Request (LSQ) https://www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/citoyens/accessibilite/realisations_municipales.aspx
9	Hamilton	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/equity-diversity-inclusion/accessibility-services/accessibility-guidelines-policies#policies-procedures
10	Kitchener	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://www.kitchener.ca/en/contact-us.aspx
11	London	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://london.ca/accessibility
12	Victoria	British Columbia	Available Upon Request https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/about/accessibility.html
13	Oshawa	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://www.oshawa.ca/en/fire-services-community-support/accessible-customer-service.aspx?_mid_=4043

	City	Province	ASL services Offered
14	Windsor	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://www.citywindsor.ca/cityhall/Accessibility/accessibility-policy-and-accessibility-procedures/Pages/Accessibility-Feedback-and-Requests-for-Alternate-Formats-and-Communication-Supports.aspx
15	Saskatoon	Saskatchewan	Available Upon Request https://www.saskatoon.ca/moving-around/accessibility/accessibility-action-plan
16	St. Catharines - Niagara Falls	Ontario	Available Upon Request https://www.stcatharines.ca/en/council-and-administration/city-hall.aspx
			Available Upon Request https://niagarafalls.ca/city-hall/committees/mdac/customer-service.aspx
17	Regina	Saskatchewan	Not Available for General Public.
18	St. John's	Newfoundland and Labrador	No Information Listed
19	Kelowna	British Columbia	Not Available.