

Date: April 1, 2022
To: Huron Perth Public Health Board of Health
From: Dr Miriam Klassen, MOH and CEO
Subject: HPPH Board of Health Meetings

PURPOSE

To provide the Board of Health with recommendations regarding the frequency and forum for Board meetings going forward.

ISSUE

The Board of Health for HPPH has been meeting virtually since June 2020. With the anticipated expiration of the *Reopening Ontario Act*, there is now opportunity to resume in-person meetings, which provides opportunity to strengthen relationships. On the other hand, there are reasons to continue virtual meetings, including that:

- COVID-19 is still circulating
- Board members may have to drive considerable distances to attend in-person meetings
- Board members may have to drive through poor weather conditions (particularly in November – March) to attend in-person meetings

RECOMMENDATION

- That the Board of Health continues with regular meetings on the 1st Friday of the month at 9:30 am
- That meetings be paused during July and August except for any time-sensitive matters that arise
- That meetings be held in person at least 2 times per year (May and October) aiming to start this May if possible (joint meetings will preferably be held in Mitchell and staff are exploring facility availability, and **will confirm location** in the next Board of Health agendas)
- That in-person meetings include an option to join electronically for those who would prefer that option; with special attention to operationalizing a hybrid model in an inclusive manner
- That active screening continue for in-person meetings while rates of COVID-19 transmission remain high
- That masks continue to be worn during in-person meetings while rates of COVID-19 transmission remain high
- That anyone attending in-person meetings attest to being up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination

- That physical distancing be maximized (and 2 metres apart where possible)
- That staff update By-Law NO 1 to allow for electronic participation in alignment with Bill 197

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

BACKGROUND

By-Law NO. 1 being the general by-law of the Board of Health of Huron Perth Health Unit was approved during the inaugural January 2, 2020 meeting of the newly formed Huron Perth Public Health.

In accordance with By-Law No 1 “Regular Meetings shall be held at dates, times and location as determined by the Board at the first regular Meeting of the year. The Board may by resolution, alter the time, day or place of any Meeting.”

The By-Law further states that,

- “A Member who participates in a Meeting through electronic means in accordance with Municipal Act shall be deemed to be present at the Meeting as permitted in accordance with the *Municipal Act*” AND
- In accordance with section 283(3.1) of the *Municipal Act*, a Member who participates in a Meeting through electronic means shall not be counted in determining whether a quorum of Members is present at any point in time” AND
- “A Member who is participating electronically in a Meeting shall not be able to vote on any matter that is before the Board”

On January 1, 2020, during its inaugural meeting, the Board of Health moved that “regular meeting of the Huron Perth Health Unit Board of Health be held on the 1st Friday of the month at 9:30, alternating between the Clinton and Stratford sites.”

Ontario declared its first COVID-19 related state of emergency on March 17, 2020 under s 7.0.1 (1) of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA), As a result of amendments made to the *Municipal Act* (MA) in March 2020, municipalities were granted the authority to quorum with electronic participation during a declared emergency. On July 21st, 2020, the Ontario government made further amendments to the MA to permanently allow quorum for electronic meetings outside of an emergency. Bill 197, *The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*, 2020, allows municipalities to update the procedure bylaws for meetings of municipal councils, committees and local boards under sections s. 238 and s. 239 of the MA. Additionally, Bill 197 allows municipalities the discretion to allow members of municipal council the authority to vote by proxy.

The June 5, 2020 HPPH Board meeting took place via zoom. At that time, the Board also discussed summer meetings and decided there would be no regularly scheduled meetings in July or August but that such meetings could be scheduled to deal with time sensitive issues as needed. There were 2 meetings held in the summer of 2020; one to deal with finalizing the Clinton facility purchase, and one to deal with pandemic-related issues. There was one summer meeting in 2021 to finalize the Physician Consultant position. All meetings have been held by zoom since June 2020.

There were no changes made to the meeting schedule at the January 7, 2022 meeting.

On March 9, 2022, given positive trends in public health indicators and Ontario's high vaccination rate, the province announced further loosening of public health measures, with the intent to end all provincial public health measures under the *Reopening Ontario Act* by April 27.

Huron Perth Public Health sent out a communication to municipal partners on March 16, with HPPH recommendations regarding in-person meetings, continuing to urge caution at this time in order to ensure that transmission and hospitalizations continue to decrease. This includes remaining aware that COVID-19 continues to circulate and is a potentially serious illness; the following groups are at higher risk of severe outcomes (long COVID, hospitalization or death) from COVID-19:

- People of advanced age
- People living in congregate settings
- People with underlying health conditions
- People who are unvaccinated

HPPH recommends the following be considered when resuming in person-meetings

- Provide options for virtual attendance for those who chose to not return to in-person at this time as a precaution against COVID-19 transmission.
- Aim to limit/reduce attendance to the number of people that can physically distance by 2 metres or more.
- Continue to screen participants to ensure that anyone entering council chambers is not symptomatic and/or has not been advised to self-isolate for COVID-19.
- Continue to recommend use of masks or face coverings for participants when not speaking.
- Continue to utilize your COVID-19 safety plan as a guide to assess risks and what measures would support a gradual and safe reopening.
- Ensure HVAC systems are maintained in accordance with manufacturer recommendations.

Other HPPH actions to mitigate against COVID-19

- Board policy 1.10.040 COVID Immunization Policy was approved October 1, 2021, requiring all staff, students, volunteers and Board of Health members to be vaccinated

with at least 2 doses. This policy is under review with consideration for updating recommendations to align with *Ontario's Publicly Funded Immunization Schedule*.

- HVAC assessment/maintenance was conducted at HPPH facilities with duct cleaning at West Gore and Clinton buildings in summer 2021 and air quality taken at all locations in September 2021.

Other considerations about in-person versus virtual meetings

- Our understanding about the advantages of virtual versus in-person meetings is still limited; there is a growing body of research.
- There are mixed results regarding the quality of information exchange using virtual or in-person meetings. Virtual meetings are more likely to result in multi-tasking. Virtual meetings may negatively impact some attendees more than others (new staff, women).
- Task-based goals (such as providing updates or planning events) can often be accomplished in a virtual meeting.
- Relationship-based goals may be accomplished most effectively in person. Challenging group conversations may be better facilitated by transparent in-person meetings, where harmful and distracting parallel side chats will not adversely impact the central discussion.
- Virtual meetings save time and mileage AND rely on high functioning IT infrastructure.
- Huron and Perth are often impacted by severe winter weather which may impact Board of Health meetings.
- Although internet capacity has been greatly improved in Huron Perth in the last 2 years, there are still areas with less functionality.

Reference:

When Do We Actually Need to Meet in Person? Harvard Business Review (July 26, 2021):
<https://hbr.org/2021/07/when-do-we-actually-need-to-meet-in-person>