**Implemented:** September 16, 2020  
**Review Date:** September 2021

**References and Related Documents:**

- *Municipal Act, 2001*
- Bill 197, *COVID Economic Recovery Act, 2020*
- Procedure By-law 2019-125
- Council Code of Conduct – COU-01-2019
- Closed Session Policy – COU-01-2020

**Policy Statement**

The Township of Georgian Bluffs, in coordination with the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, more specifically, goals one and five, is committed to improving communications with the community, and further ensuring all meetings are accessible, open and transparent.

**Purpose and Scope**

This policy and procedures therein have been created to establish guidelines for electronic participation in Township Council and Committees of Council meetings, in accordance with Township Procedure By-law 2019-125, *Municipal Act, 2001* and other governing regulations.

This policy shall apply to electronic participation, either by Township staff or Township Council or Committees of Council members, in all meetings of Council, Committees and Boards.

**Definitions**

**Electronic Participation:** Means the use of communication technologies including, but not limited to, video, audio or telephone to permit participants to be involved in meetings as defined and in accordance with Township Procedure By-law 2019-125.
**Extenuating Circumstance:** Means special circumstances in which a member may require an extension of the 25% annual allotment of meetings in which they may participate electronically. Said circumstances may include, but are not limited to, medical emergencies, family emergencies, and transportation impediments. Extenuating circumstances shall be provided via a motion of Council. Said motion shall determine the number of meetings that the member may participate electronically, beyond the allotted 25%.

**Participants:** Means members of Council, staff, the public or anyone who is presenting or otherwise participating in a meeting.

### Policy Requirements

#### Section 1 – Electronic Meeting Procedures – Beyond an Emergency Period

1. **Electronic Participation**

   1.1 A Member of a Council, of a local board or of a committee of either of them who is participating electronically in a meeting may be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of Members is present at any point in time in accordance with Section 238 (3.3) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, as amended.

   1.2 Any Member intending to participate electronically in a meeting shall send a request to do so by email to the Clerk prior to the meeting.

   See subsection 2 for electronic attendance procedures.

   1.3 The method of participation may be via video or tele-conference, depending upon available technology to facilitate electronic participation.

   1.4 Participants shall connect to the conference via online video or telephone no later than 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting.

   1.5 When participating via video conference, webcams shall be enabled, unless otherwise restricted by internet connectivity limitations.

   1.6 When participating via video or telephone conference, all microphones should be muted unless the participant is speaking.

   1.7 Any member participating via video conference should indicate they wish to speak by raising their physical and virtual hand and keeping them raised until the Chair acknowledges their request.
1.8 Any member or staff participating via telephone, shall be called upon by the chair to speak after all members participating in-person or via video conference have spoken.

1.9 Any member of Council participating via video conference or telephone shall announce if they wish to leave the meeting prior to adjournment or prior to leaving the meeting.

1.10 Participants shall not share an electronic meetings access information unless directed to do so by the Clerk or their delegate.

1.11 Participants shall provide to the Clerk’s Office, prior to the commencement of the meeting, a phone number to join the conference in the event of a disruption of the video conference.

2. Attendance Requirements

2.1 Members shall be permitted to participate via electronic means for a total of 25% of annual meetings, including Council, Committee of the Whole, Committee of Adjustment and local boards or a committee of any of them. This 25% shall be determined from a total of all annual meetings, and is not specific to each meeting type. Totals will be tallied and recorded by the Clerk’s Office.

E.g. Out of a 100 meeting annual total, a member may attend the following electronically:

- 10 Council meetings
- 10 Committee of the Whole meetings
- 5 Committee of Adjustment meetings

Total of 25% electronic attendance.

Note – this example is provided solely for comprehension and should not be interpreted as forming part of this policy.

2.2 Notification of electronic participation shall be provided, in writing, to the Clerk, prior to commencement of the meeting. Members should attempt, to the best of their abilities, to provide at least 5 days’ notice to the Clerk, to facilitate their electronic participation. Members are encouraged to schedule electronic participation with the Clerk at the commencement of each year.

2.3 Notwithstanding subsections 2.1 and 2.2 as outlined above, in the event that extenuating circumstances apply, the member may participate electronically. Extenuating circumstances, as defined in this policy, shall
be determined by a motion of Council. Said motion shall determine the number of meetings that the member may participate electronically, beyond the allotted 25%.

2.4 Members shall not participate electronically in more than three (3) consecutive meetings, of the same meeting type, unless otherwise determined by Council, via an extenuating circumstance.

E.g. A member may attend three consecutive Council meetings virtually, however must attend the fourth meeting in-person, unless otherwise determined by Council, via an extenuating circumstance.

Note – this example is provided solely for comprehension and should not be interpreted as forming part of this policy.

2.5 A maximum of four (4) members may participate electronically in any meeting, unless otherwise determined by Council, via an extenuating circumstance. Electronic participation will be provided on a first come, first served basis.

3. Public Participation

3.1 Members of the public who wish to make an electronic submission to Council, Committee of the Whole, Committee of Adjustment, local boards or a committee of any of them, shall be required to register with the Clerk prior to commencement of the meeting.

3.2 The Clerk’s Office will ensure that those wishing to participate electronically are able to do so.

4. Discussion and Voting

4.1 All members participating via video conference will vote by a show of hands.

4.2 All members participating via telephone will be asked by the Chair to vote verbally.

4.3 The Chair shall ensure that members participating electronically are given the same opportunity to speak to each question as they would have been given if participating in person.

4.4 A member who is participating in a meeting electronically may declare a conflict of interest by emailing the declaration form to the Clerk in advance of the meeting and shall verbally state their conflict when the Chair calls for declarations.
5. Closed Session

5.1 An electronic meeting may include a Closed Session, which shall be conducted in the absence of the public and in accordance with Section 239 of the Municipal Act, 2001.

5.2 The Clerk will be responsible for stopping the recording, broadcasting, and/or distribution of audio and/or video prior to the commencement of a closed meeting. A break may be requested by the Chair, Clerk or their delegate to ensure closed meeting confidentiality.

5.3 Participants shall take and employ all necessary precautions to ensure confidentiality of closed electronic meetings, further to Township Closed Session Policy COU-01-2020.

Section 2 – Electronic Meeting Procedures – During an Emergency Period

All of the same as defined in Section 1 of this policy shall apply in electronic meetings during an emergency period, with the following exceptions:

1. All members may participate in any meeting electronically, via video or teleconference.

2. There shall be no restriction on how often each member shall be allowed to participate electronically.

3. There shall be no limit on the number of consecutive meetings that a member can participate electronically.

4. All votes will be considered recorded votes, and conducted manually by the Clerk or their designate.

Section 3 – Technical Matters

1. If there is a question as to the performance of the meeting technology impacting the proceedings of a meeting, the meeting may be recessed at the direction of the Chair to confirm that the electronic format is performing effectively before proceeding further with the agenda.

2. In the event of connection or service disruption, the Chair may recess the meeting to allow for attempts to reconnect. It is the members’ duty to ensure that their equipment and technology are set in advance of the meeting. After 15 minutes of not connecting, the meeting shall resume and no further efforts shall be taken to reconnect the member.
3. Members are responsible for ensuring there is no background noise at their location that would interfere with the meeting and for muting their device when they are not speaking.

**Monitoring and Review**

The Clerk’s Department is responsible for the administration and maintenance of this policy, including a detailed review at the commencement of each Council term. This policy shall be reviewed following the first year of implementation.