
MEMORANDUM

CAO 16-2021

Subject: Planning for Return to the Workplace and Gradual Re-opening

Date: August 26, 2021

To: Regional Council

From: Ron Tripp, P.Eng., Acting Chief Administrative Officer

After more than a year and a half of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are starting to see a cautious and gradual re-opening of our communities. I'm proud of the work we've accomplished over the past 18 months and the resilience of Niagara Region staff to adapt to changing working conditions. While some of our staff are working virtually from home, the vast majority continue to deliver essential services at our various facilities with the support of enhanced cleaning, screening and other public health protocols.

As we monitor Provincial announcements, and in accordance with Stage 3 of the Province's Reopening Plan, the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) is planning for the eventual re-opening of our in-person public-facing services. We recognize that this will require us to return more staff to our facilities. We intend to do this gradually with the eventual transition of staff who have been working from home, and where still appropriate, to a hybrid working model of both in-person and virtual working arrangements.

Assessing the health and safety of our workspaces

The health and safety of staff continues to be our foremost concern. Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) plans are already in place for a number of work locations. For the balance of August and into September, managers and directors will be updating existing plans and preparing new plans to safely accommodate the phased return of more staff to the workplace. IPAC plans are developed with the assistance of Human Resources and Facilities, and in consultation with the Joint Health and Safety Committee and Public Health. These plans will help us prioritize the reopening of in-person public services and the number of staff that can safely return to in-person work while minimizing any risk of infection.

Transition Phase – September 20 to November 26

In accordance with a transition plan being prepared by CLT, staff working remotely may be requested to return to their work location, continue to work remotely, or a combination of both. Following this transition period, CLT will look to fully implement a new hybrid working model.

We need to be nimble given the uncertainty posed by the pandemic and possible future waves. We will continue to incorporate the advice and guidance from Public Health and the health and safety staff from Human Resources

Electronic Participation in Meetings

Staff are continuing to review both short and long-term solutions for the continued support of hybrid meetings and options for a gradual transition to in-person participation are under consideration. A hybrid meeting is a meeting where some individuals participate in person and others participate electronically from a remote location. This is the format that has been used since the start of the pandemic, with the Regional Chair and Standing Committee Chairs (and at time Vice Chairs) taking part in the meeting from the Council Chamber.

The size of the Council Chamber limits the number of attendees that can be present with the current requirement to maintain two metres between attendees. A cautious approach must be taken that considers the optics of allowing Councillors to meet in person and the public being unable to attend in the same format.

Any return to in-person meetings will be done in accordance with any applicable regulations or public health requirements. It is anticipated that these requirements will continue to evolve over the coming months and staff are closely monitoring this to ensure compliance. Health and safety measures will need to be put in place for meetings that will impact Councillors and eventually the public, entering Niagara Region facilities.

Staff will be considering a transition plan for Advisory Committees when there is greater certainty about how public health measures will affect meeting requirements long term.

Any return to in-person meetings will be considered in alignment with the re-opening of Niagara Region Headquarters and the return of staff to the workplace.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Ron Tripp, P. Eng
Acting, Chief Administrative Officer