



## Council Report

Report Number CLK2020-006

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**Meeting Date:** November 17, 2020

**Title:** Electronic Petition Options

**Description:** Proposed Options for Amending the Procedural By-law to allow City Council to receive Electronic Petitions

**Author and Title:** Joel Watts, Deputy Clerk

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### Recommendation(s):

**That** Report CLK2020-006, **Electronic Petition Options**, be received;

**That** an amendment to the City's Procedural By-law be presented at the December 15, 2020 regular Council Meeting for approval, providing for electronic petitions using the City's existing public engagement tool "Jump In" website (Option 1); and

**That** implementation of the electronic petitions would be scheduled in Q1 of 2021.

**Department Head:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Financial/Legal/HR/Other:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chief Administrative Officer:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Background:**

At the Council Meeting of September 15, 2020, Council adopted the following resolution:

**CR2020-261** CW2020-119

**That** the Memorandum from Councillor Ashmore, **regarding an Online Petition Option**, be received;

**That** Staff create an online petition option, in addition to the current hard-copy process, for bringing petitions to Council; and

**That** Staff report back by Q4, 2020 with options for an online petition that meet the requirements of the Municipal Act.

This report addresses that direction.

## **Rationale:**

Currently the City's Procedural By-law 2020-001 defines a petition as the following:

**"Petition"** means a document requesting Council's consideration of a matter that contains more than ten (10) original signatures and does not include an electronic web-based document.

To permit electronic petitions, an amendment or an addition to the definitions in the Procedural By-law will be required to allow for electronic petitions.

The Procedural By-law also states the following:

Petitions shall contain the printed name, signature, and some contact information of the individuals signing it. Signatures without contact information shall be redacted by the individual or group submitting the Petition or it will not be accepted by the City Clerk nor presented to Council.

No petition shall be considered valid and accepted by the City Clerk without the Name and Contact Information of the Person(s) Responsible for the Contents and Submission of the Petition to the municipality.

Should Council proceed with an electronic petition option, the City Clerk's Office would subsequently draft the proposed amendments to the Procedural by-law specifically tailored to the option selected. While petitions are often mentioned in the Municipal Act, no obvious restriction prevents the City Clerk's Office to receive general petitions submitted electronically.

## Alternatives Considered:

Following preliminary research 3 options were considered.

### Option 1: Jump In Survey Tool for Petitions

The City's existing web-based Engagement Tool provider, 'BangTheTable', already has existing functionality for an electronic petition portal. This tool could be developed as an option on our 'Jump In' public engagement website: [www.jumpinkawarthalakes.ca](http://www.jumpinkawarthalakes.ca). Our Jump In website is already in use for other public engagement campaigns, and allows members of the public to participate in surveys, public consultation, points of interest mapping, and other forms of public brainstorming.

This petition tool is an extension and modification of their survey tool, and choosing this option would require staff time to create a petition portal, and use the existing tools available to us from BangTheTable. This tool could bring together all the necessary elements of a petition, including offering approval, sharing, signing, and submission. Essentially, each signatory to the petition completes a 'survey' that requires only contact information, thereby masking itself as a petition. A complete data sheet at the end of the petition period would act as the final petition to Council.

How a petition portal on our Jump In public engagement site could work:

1. A resident registers as a user on JumpInKawarthaLakes.ca
2. The resident creates a petition. Only residents can create a petition.
3. The resident is required to have 3 people to support the petition to get it to the approval stage.
4. Staff check the petition, approve it, and then publish it for public signing. Staff only reject petitions that don't meet the standards for petitions set out in the Procedural By-law.
5. Other residents can share the link to the petition and electronically sign the petition — and each person can only sign a petition once. Staff may establish a timeline for the length of time a petition can be open for electronic signing, before being removed from the website and/or forwarded to Council for consideration
6. Staff will independently verify the petition and its signatures.
7. At a 'set number' of electronic signatures the resident will get a response from department staff responsible for the matter
8. At another 'set number' of electronic signatures the petition will be considered at a Regular Council meeting and further community engagement activities may be initiated by Council.

This option will require the most staff time to create the electronic petition portal, and to set up all aspects according to our requirements. However, this option uses existing tools and infrastructure already in place for a "Made in Kawartha Lakes" solution. Communications, Advertising and Marketing staff have

confirmed no additional cost would be required from BangTheTable to proceed with this portal. With very little anticipated expense, other than staff time, this option is being recommended to Council.

### **Option 2: Custom Built Petition Tool**

The City's existing website provider, eSolutions, does not currently offer a service to host an electronic petition submission, creation, and sharing. However, they saw value in creating this service for all their customers. The following potential functions were identified that would seamlessly integrate into a customized tool on the City's website ([kawarthalakes.ca](http://kawarthalakes.ca)):

1. Public Portal for Petition Submission:
  - Develop public portal for citizens to view petitions, sign petition, create petitions
  - Create a petition feature that will allow the citizens to submit a petition that includes a petition title, description/details, dates and other fields as identified
  - Ability to enable approvals by the city prior to the petition being opened
  - Petition 'signature' will include contact information and agreement to terms and acknowledgements
2. Administration Portal for Petition Receipt and Review:
  - An administration portal that allows city staff to view petitions, signatures and status
  - Petition report making capability
  - Email notifications for functionality
  - Integration to Kawartha Lakes public site and administration portal

The benefit to this option, is the project could be completely customized to staff and/or council recommendations, instead of being constrained by the limitations of an 'out-of-the-box' tool.

To implement this option Clerk's Office and/or IT divisions would be responsible to pay an initial setup fee, and an annual maintenance fee that would be purchased through the City's sole-source procurement process. This option would be incorporated into future budgets, potentially as a special project for the initial setup. As the costs could be significant in proportion to the benefits of customization, this option is not recommended.

### **Option 3: Third Party Online Petition Acceptance**

The third option is to modify the City's Procedural By-law to allow for receipt of Third Party Electronic Petitions. Website [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) allows users to create petitions, and submit them to government and corporate decision making bodies. This would work in the following way:

1. Individuals and organizations from anywhere in the world start petitions on a designated third-party website, such as Change.org
2. Petition creators and signers share the petition with supporters

3. The petition is electronically signed on by anyone with access to Change.org
4. The petition creator takes the complete petition, and presents it either electronically, or by printed copy to City Clerk's Office Staff
5. Clerk's Office verifies the petition and the signatories are valid according to the electronic petition regulations, and presents it at the next Regular Council Meeting.

Currently, 26 petitions exist on Change.org relating to matters in and around Kawartha Lakes. The petitions range in the number of electronic signatures collected from 50 to 2500 people.

While it is clear there is a certain amount of community uptake on this model already, it is unclear how to regulate who can sign these petitions. If anyone from anywhere in the world can sign these petitions, there is a risk that the number of signatories to a Third-Party petition site have been inflated by people who are not residents or people who are not affected by the matter being petitioned for. While this option is no expense to the municipality, there is no flexibility for staff to control the regulation and submission of petitions, and as such, this option is not being recommended.

### **Alignment to Strategic Priorities**

Section 2 of the Good Government strategic priority is to Increase efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Offering a new method of service delivery for petitions submissions is innovative, and will assist residents in making their community needs known. It will also add a new level of accessibility and increase efficiency for residents creating and sharing petitions.

### **Financial/Operation Impacts:**

Option 2 requires the municipality to purchase a service/product. That option would require a sole-source procurement process to occur, and budgeting for a future implementation and integration into the City's website. Option 1 and 3 do not require any further expenditures.

### **Consultations:**

Manager of Communications Advertising and Marketing  
Strategy and Performance Specialist  
eSolutions (current website provider)  
City Clerk