To: Mayor & Council
From: Kerry Costello, Director of Corporate Services/Clerk
Date: April 15, 2020
Committee of the Whole Date: April 20, 2020
Title: Purchase of eSCRIBE Meeting Management Software

Recommendation: THAT Council authorize execution of an agreement with eSCRIBE Software Limited for the purchase and provision of a meeting management platform for a 3 year term (with an option to extend for an additional 3 year term).

Purpose: THAT the Clerk be authorized to enter into an agreement with eSCRIBE Software Limited for the provision of meeting management, livestreaming software and virtual meeting software.

Background: Council passed their 2020 budget via Bylaw 10108-2020 (on January 13, 2020) which provided for the purchase of meeting management software with live streaming capabilities. $25,000 was budgeted and approved.

After consultation with colleagues and research, it is staff’s opinion that the provision of Meeting Management Services with Live Streaming and virtual meeting capabilities are services that are in short supply.

Currently, the Town is using manual processes to prepare agendas, capture minutes and distribute information to Council and public stakeholders. Meetings can only be viewed by attending in person. Members of Council have expressed their desire to provide live streaming access to the public. The purchase of this software is the next step to achieving that goal.

Staff is proposing the signing of a subscription with eSCRIBE, a well-known and reputable provider of secure, cloud based meeting management and live streaming software. As a testament to the reputation of eSCRIBE, AMO has recently partnered with eSCRIBE and now endorses this company as their provider of meeting management software. Additionally, eSCRIBE is also integrable with Notarius (electronic signatures) which will be helpful should the Town choose to adopt this technology. The eSCRIBE meeting management software will help to improve efficiency and increase stakeholder engagement by boosting transparency and complying with evolving accessibility standards. Some of the ways that this will be achieved are through the modules of the eSCRIBE Transparency Bundle.
Meeting Manager
Meeting Manager, optimizes the creation of agendas, minutes and action lists while providing a flexible platform for adding further eSCRIBE functionality. Meeting Manager streamlines and automates tasks before, during, and after meetings, with customizable templates and user configurable workflows that allow for tailoring the system as needed.

Participant Portal
The Participant Portal provides elected officials with security-controlled access to meeting related information. Participants can browse upcoming meeting agendas and related reports; download materials for offline review; record comments, create follow-up notes and tasks; as well as search previous meetings.

Internet Publishing Plus
Helping drive greater transparency, the Internet Publishing Plus module will enable greater stakeholder engagement through the Town’s existing website. Its WCAG 2.1 compliant design fully supports evolving accessibility requirements (AODA), while allowing content to be viewed optimally on any device. Content can be published with as little as one click, while integration with the future webcasting will include automated indexing and linking of video.

Webcasting Plus
Bolstering transparency while simplifying web video workflows, Webcasting Plus provides a manageable solution for capturing archival video from council chambers and streaming it live online. Featuring unlimited storage and live streaming of audio and video, the module is combined with Internet Publishing Plus to automatically index media with the meeting’s agenda and minutes for both live and archived web viewing. Automated Closed Captioning is available for an extra fee.

or

Webcasting Lite
Webcasting Lite provides a simple and cost-effective web streaming experience to capture real-time and archival video from your council or boardrooms and streaming it live online through your website. Includes preconfigured IP camera to get you up and running quickly.

Virtual Meeting Capabilities
Recent amendments to the Municipal Act, 2001 and the City of Toronto Act, 2006 now permit members of councils, local boards and committees at quorum to participate in open and closed meetings electronically during either a municipal or a provincial emergency. This will ensure that the ongoing business of municipal governments can continue without the need to meet in person, particularly given the requirements of social distancing to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. eSCRIBE has a digital meeting management solution.
IMPACT

eSCRIBE will support the Town of Smiths Falls in managing its meeting lifecycle in the following ways:

- Unlimited users, unlimited storage of meeting artifacts, unlimited live streaming and storage of recorded meetings,
- Accessibility compliant meeting documents (agendas, minutes, videos... plus available AI closed captioning),
- Delegation requests can be streamlined and supported with an easy online process,
- Consolidation of tools associated with meeting prep/production, with a best-of-breed suite,
- Data is hosted securely in Canadian Microsoft Azure infrastructure, where Smiths Falls retains all privacy, digital rights, and access to its data,
- Integration points to other applications (Microsoft Word, Outlook, existing website, records management (Laserfiche or FileHold), A/V equipment in Council Chambers),
- Tools for elected officials to consume their agendas (apps for iPads and Windows 10 devices).
- Options for electronic vote capture,
- eSCRIBE manages the implementation project (6-8 weeks) and provides ongoing support, with no burden on Smiths Falls’ IT resources,
- Pre-populate agendas with details that can be automatically extracted from reports,
- Tools to approve reports remotely (for iPhones and Android devices),
- Minutes document will be 90% ready at meeting adjournment. Minimal proofreading/editing afterward to prepare for publishing.

Other Points of Consideration
- eSCRIBE provides better enablement for users by ensuring self-sufficiency in using the system.
- eSCRIBE is the only solution for Electronic Agendas, Meeting Management and Streaming Video that is endorsed by AMO.
- eSCRIBE has functionality dedicated to managing Bill 68 requirements – including conflict of interest requirements.
- eSCRIBE is 100% Canadian owned and operated.

Analysis / Options:
1. Pass a bylaw to authorize execution of an agreement with eSCRIBE Software Limited for the provision of the eSCRIBE Transparency Bundle with Webcasting Plus (Recommended)
2. Pass a bylaw to authorize execution of an agreement with eSCRIBE Software Limited for the provision of the eSCRIBE Transparency Bundle with Webcasting Lite (Not Recommended)
3. Staff to undertake a Request for Proposal process. (Not recommended)
Link to the Strategic Plan: N/A

Budget/Financial Implications: $25,000 was budgeted and approved in the 2020 budget.

eSCRIBE Transparency Bundle with Webcasting Plus: Estimated $24,000 (this includes the annual subscription fee as well as set up and training). Annual Subscription to be paid annually estimated at $20,000 for 2021.

eSCRIBE Transparency Bundle with Webcasting Lite: Estimated $17,000 (this includes the annual subscription fee as well as set up and training). Annual Subscription to be paid annually estimated at $15,000 for 2021.

Currently, the Town pay’s YourTV $500/meeting. This costs approximately $18,000 annually for livestream services only.

Once the software is fully operational, the remaining funds will be used to secure video camera equipment.

There are additional features the Town could purchase in the future:

Optional Modules
eSCRIBE Approval Manager (mobile app)
eSCRIBE Vote Manager & Request to Speak
eSCRIBE Public Comments Manager
eSCRIBE Notarius Connector
eSCRIBE Records Management Connector
eSCRIBE Board Manager
eSCRIBE Closed Captioning Lite
eSCRIBE Closed Captioning Plus

Existing Policy: The Town’s Procurement Policy provides direction as it relates to sole sourcing the purchase of professional services as follows:

1. GENERAL PROVISIONS
   d) The tendering process is not required where it is determined by Council that there is only one, or at most a very limited number, of specialized suppliers of a product.

6. POLICIES FOR PROCUREMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
   1) The procurement of professional services shall be at the discretion of Council.
   2) Professional Services may be procured for the following reasons:
      1. On-going pre-defined services.
      2. On-going non pre-defined services.
         One-time services.
3) On-going pre-defined services shall be procured for three-year periods under section 3 or 4, depending on the dollar value of the service. Council retains the right to extend the three-year period should they be satisfied with the price and quality of work.

4) On-going non pre-defined services shall be procured at the discretion of the Director based on the area of expertise and reputation of the various practitioners.

5) One-time services shall be procured at the discretion of Council based on the area of expertise and reputation of the various practitioners.

In 2019, the Town of Carleton Place issued an RFP for Meeting Management Services with Live Streaming capability. This RFP was advertised on their website, in newspapers, and was sent directly to vendors. The sole response to their RFP was from eSCRIBE. The lack of response to this RFP is evidence that provision of Meeting Management Services with Live Streaming Capabilities are services that are in short supply.

In speaking with other municipalities, staff encountered reports of dissatisfaction from municipalities that were using meeting management software from other providers.

Also of note is that eSCRIBE is the only solution for Electronic Agendas, Meeting Management and Streaming Video that is endorsed by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

Consultations: Nadine Bennett, Deputy Clerk  
Stacey Blair, Clerk of the Town of Carleton Place

Link to Strategic Plan: N/A

Attachments: Nil

Respectfully Submitted:

[Signature]
Kerry Costello  
Director of Corporate Services/Clerk

Approved for agenda by CAO:

[Signature]
Malcolm Morris, CMO  
Chief Administrative Officer