

March 24, 2020

For Immediate Release

## Bluewater conducts first virtual Council meeting

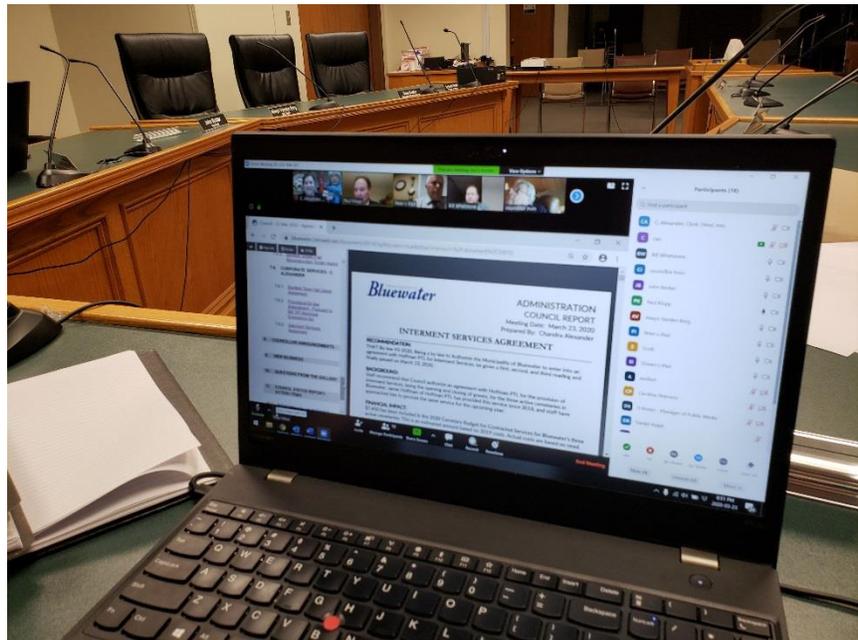
The Municipality of Bluewater conducted its first virtual Council meeting on March 23<sup>rd</sup> as a result of provincial social distancing and emergency measures in place for the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Instead of an in-person meeting at the Council Chamber, each of the nine members of Council and management staff remained in their homes and joined the meeting online using Zoom. Citizens were invited to watch from their homes if they did not feel comfortable attending in person. The Chambers were physically set up to maintain a 2-metre (6-foot) separation from another person in compliance with advice from public health officials. Chief Administrative Officer (*Interim*) Laurie Spence Bannerman and Clerk Chandra Alexander attended in person to facilitate the meeting.

Clerk Chandra Alexander stated, "Members of Council did not hesitate to set a good example for residents by attending the Council meeting from home. The new legislation allowed Council the flexibility to conduct business, in an accessible and transparent manner, while abiding by public health guidelines."

A number of Ontario municipalities conducted virtual Council meetings using a variety of software. However, some, decided to postpone Council meetings. It was appropriate to hold a virtual meeting in Bluewater to protect Council, staff and citizens and lead the "flatten the curve" movement locally to slow the spread of COVID-19 virus.

Municipal Clerks had mere days to investigate and establish an electronic forum to ensure business continuity following amendment of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, by the *Municipal Emergency Act, 2020*, on Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> to permit such electronic meetings during emergencies declared locally or provincially. The Province of Ontario declared an emergency on March 17<sup>th</sup>. The Municipality of Bluewater has not declared an emergency. Under normal circumstances, physical



**The Municipality of Bluewater's first virtual Council meeting was conducted using Zoom and existing iCompass agenda management software.**

attendance at a meeting by a majority of Council, board or committee members is necessary to conduct business.

The Municipality of Bluewater recognizes that the situation with COVID-19 is rapidly changing, as are the challenges it presents for business continuity and citizen engagement. Conducting meetings on screen versus in person is one way the Municipality aims to be flexible and responsive.



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Clerk Chandra Alexander facilitated the Municipality of Bluewater’s first virtual Council meeting March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Citizens could watch online.