

# Staff Report



Financial Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Committee of the Whole

**DATE OF MEETING:** November 6, 2023

**SUBMITTED BY:** LeBrun, Roger, Manager of Accounting & Payroll, 519-741-2200 ext.7339

**PREPARED BY:** LeBrun, Roger, Manager of Accounting & Payroll, 519-741-2200 ext.7339  
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**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All Wards

**DATE OF REPORT:** October 6, 2023

**REPORT NO.:** FIN-2023-270

**SUBJECT:** Council's Home Office, Technology, Conference and Community Engagement Budget Options

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## RECOMMENDATION:

That Council approve the amended Council spending funding envelopes as follows:

1. Home Office & Technology with a term limit budget of \$14,000;
2. Conferences, Training & Learning with a term limit budget of \$12,000 per Councillor and \$16,000 for the Mayor;
3. Community Engagement & Meetings with a term limit budget of \$4,000; and,

That the policy 'GOV-COU-025 Council Expense Reimbursement and Reporting' be amended as attached in Appendix B; and further,

That the policy 'GOV-COU-047 Technology & Home Office Expenses – Mayor & Council' be repealed.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide an alternative budget structure for members of Council to access funds for home office, technology, conference, training and community engagement expenditures.
- There is a minimal increase of less than 1% to the existing budgets.
- This report supports the delivery of core services.

## BACKGROUND:

\*\*\* This information is available in accessible formats upon request. \*\*\*  
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

During the 2023 Budget deliberations, Council directed that the current funding envelopes for Home Office and Technology budgets be reviewed with a view to expanding the eligible uses to allow certain constituent communications and engagement activities, while simplifying the administration of funds.

**REPORT:**

Both capital and operating budgets were analyzed for home office, technology, and conferences for the last two terms of Council (2014-2017 & 2018-2021). Patterns were reviewed and taken into consideration to develop an amended approach to allow for greater flexibility within the existing funding envelopes and to provide for a new funding envelope for community engagement.

The existing budget structure is shown below with budget terms (either annual or per council term) for each category. The total term budget for all members for all items is \$331,811. The actual spend (details in Appendix A) are less than budget allotment in all categories.

Existing Category	Fund	Budget	Budget Duration	Actual Spend 2014-2017 (Avg)	Actual Spend 2018-2021 (Avg)
Home Office & Technology	Operating	\$2,500	Per Year	\$1,714	\$1,374
Home Office & Technology	Capital	\$5,301	Per Term	\$3,862	\$2,733
Conferences <i>(Note: Mayor's budget is \$18,500)</i>	Operating	\$14,500	Per Term	\$5,389	\$4,385

The proposed option recommends three (3) funding envelopes all with 'term' maximum limits rather than annual limits and is as follows:

Proposed Category	Budget	Budget Duration
Home Office & Technology (operating and capital)	\$14,000	Per Term
Conferences, Training & Learning <i>(Note: Mayor's budget is \$16,000)</i>	\$12,000	Per Term
Community Engagement & Meetings	\$4,000	Per Term
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>	<b>Per Term</b>

### Home Office & Technology

Combining operating and capital budgets for the term allows flexibility to carry forward unused technology spend over the term of council. The average four-year expenditure for the combination of operating and capital over the last two terms was \$9,474 per member. A budget of \$14,000 per Councillor for the 4-year term is recommended for this category.

### Conferences/Training/Learning

The average four-year total term expenditure per member during the last two terms for conferences, training and learning was \$4,887 per term. The most recent term had a slight reduction due to less travel during the pandemic. This budget is proposed to fund an average of one conference per year per member with a budget of \$12,000 per Councillor for the 4-year term (\$16,000 for the Mayor). This budget also takes into consideration more recent types of learning beyond traditional conferences, such as online courses, webinars, and the purchase of books. Additional roaming charges for cell phone use as a result of travel will also be charged to the conference/travel budget.

### Community Engagement and Meetings

The newly proposed category of 'Community Engagement and Meetings' creates a distinct funding envelope for this purpose of connecting and communicating with ward constituents.

In addition to the budget recommendation, there is also an amended policy being proposed which is included as Appendix B, to ensure that there are appropriate rules and parameters which govern all expense eligibility in this category. This policy provides guidance to Members of Council on expenditures that support the Member in fulfilling their statutory duties as an elected official to ensure proper compliance at all times, and especially in an election year.

This amended policy incorporates the components of the existing policy 'GOV-COU-047 Technology & Home Office Expenses – Mayor & Council' allowing that policy to be repealed.

The three funding envelopes with 'term' caps are intended to provide greater flexibility for members of Council access to budget that will allow responsibilities to be carried out as a municipal elected official. All expenditures in these categories will be reported to the public on an annual basis in the statement of remuneration and expenses.

Staff explored the potential to combine all budgets into a single fund without category limits but did not develop recommendations along these lines since members of Council had previously requested a program that provided more flexibility but still with category caps in order to ensure transparency and accountability within categories.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports the delivery of core services.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Capital Budget – The recommendation would move the existing capital budget for home office and technology into the operating budget.

Operating Budget – The effect of the recommendations outlined above will result in a total term budget for all items of \$30,000 for each Councillor (\$34,000 for the Mayor), which compares to

an average spend of \$14,230 per Councillor in each of the past two terms. The total term spend is \$334,000 which is a marginal increase over the current budget of \$331,811 (0.66%).

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

**PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

None.

**APPROVED BY:** Jonathan Lautenbach, Chief Financial Officer, Financial Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A – Summary of Council Expenditures for Last Two Terms of Council
- Attachment B – GOV-COU-025 - Council Expense Reimbursement & Reporting  
(revised)