

Technology use blossoms

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Communication technology has been growing in leaps and bounds in recent years. While most people have long since mastered texts and emails, the current crisis is prompting many to venture into the world of such tools as Zoom, Google chat, Messenger Chat and various other online meeting platforms. Bancroft Council had its first Zoom meeting on the afternoon of April 14 and according to Mayor Paul Jenkins, "I was very pleased and we have received a lot of positive feedback. It took a few minutes to get the flow I wanted but overall, it was good. In reality it was no different than a 'normal' council meeting but proved to be more accessible to residents. I really liked that." Reeve Barb Shaw of Wollaston Township thinks things are going well with the Zoom meetings. "I appreciate that staff and council moved quickly through the learning curve," she said. Members of the public can join but the only issue has been that when people log in and out it causes a bit of disruption. "We are remaining transparent and accessible and some may feel more so with this technology. I also like that it can be recorded," Shaw added. Both the Community Emergency Management Team and Library Board in Wollaston have also been using Zoom. "People have really embraced it and all members of the staff and council are working hard to stay connected. I would be happy to use this going forward," said Shaw. While the protocols have not yet been established around holding a closed meeting, Shaw says, "we still need to wrap their heads around that." "This certainly is unprecedented times and the township is doing its best to keep our staff as safe as possible and the residents of the municipality well informed through social media," explains Reeve Libby Clarke of Tudor and Cashel Township. "We are conducting our council meetings via teleconferencing and have made it possible for the public to attend electronically as well. One of my concerns initially was connectivity in this area using a cell phone and the ability to keep quorum if a council member(s) became disconnected. Fortunately, this did not happen and the council meeting went very well. I realized that it was also possible for council members to call in to the teleconference using a landline. At the beginning of the meeting we discussed how to manage a motion with 'a mover and seconder' and how to get the motion carried. Council decided we would use a recorded vote if necessary. This worked very well," Clarke added. Next week Tudor and Cashel will be holding its budget meeting using teleconferencing and Clarke is hopeful that they will be successful in getting the budget completed and passed using this method. Hastings County council used teleconferencing for its last meeting according to Reeve Shaw. She thinks that you "do miss something however, when you cannot see the other participants." This may come she suggests, as staff get more comfortable with other communication platforms.