



**Subject: Civil Marriage Ceremony Policy**

**To: Council**

**From: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer**

Report Number: 2025-65

Meeting Date: March 25, 2025

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**Recommendation:**

That the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer Report 2025-65 be received; and

That Council approve making Marriage Solemnizations a permanent service offering at the City of Port Colborne; and

That the City Clerk be delegated authority to add additional City locations for offering Civil Ceremonies to the policy, as needed; and

That the Civil Marriage Ceremony policy attached as Appendix A hereto, be approved.

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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to bring forward a Civil Marriage Ceremony policy to Council for approval; this policy will establish guidelines to standardize the City of Port Colborne's (the City) performance of civil ceremonies and solidify this a service offering from the Clerk's Division.

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**Background:**

At the Council meeting on October 24, 2023, Council approved Report 2023-189, Civil Marriage Solemnization Services, authorizing a 1-year pilot program for civil marriage ceremonies. At the same meeting, Council also passed By-law No. 7158/100/23, *Being a by-law to Authorize Civil Marriage Solemnization Services and to Appoint Marriage Officiants for the Corporation of the City of Port Colborne*. Prior to offering civil marriage ceremonies, the Clerk's Division received numerous inquiries about the service. The purpose of the pilot program was to determine if there was a need for the civil marriage ceremony service in the City.

**Discussion:**

After launching the pilot program in January 2024, the Clerk's Division officiated 33 civil marriage ceremonies in 2024. Of the couples who were married at City Hall, 30 couples received their marriage license from the City, and three (3) received their marriage license from another municipality. This has resulted in a revenue of \$2,460.00 from the marriage licenses, and \$8,250.00 from the civil marriage ceremonies, for a total generated revenue of \$10,710.00. There is a demonstrated need for this service in the City. At the time of writing this report, the Clerk's Division has already performed 4 civil marriage ceremonies in 2025.

The proposed Civil Marriage Ceremony policy will help to improve this service offering, if made permanent, and formalize the process so applicants can know what to expect when choosing the City for their ceremony. Improvements have already been made since the introduction to the pilot program, including music offering upon request and a communications protocol between the applicants and the Deputy Clerk regarding vows. Staff are also reviewing more civil ceremony script options to be offered to applicants, beginning in the spring. This was cited as an avenue for improvement in the feedback survey questionnaire, so inclusion of more options will further improve the service offering. Staff are recommending this service be made permanent, and that the corresponding Civil Marriage Ceremony Policy be approved.

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**Internal Consultations:**

The Clerk's Division met with staff from the Marina and Museum/Roselawn regarding the use of Roselawn and the Pavilion at the Sugarloaf Harbour Marina as location offerings for civil marriage ceremonies. After meeting with staff from both locations, it was agreed that both spaces will be offered as civil marriage ceremony locations. This has been incorporated into the proposed policy, attached as Appendix A.

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**Financial Implications:**

The results of the pilot program generated \$8,250.00 of new revenue in 2024 for the City. During the 2025 Budget process, the following civil marriage ceremony fees were passed:

Service	2025 Fee
Civil Ceremony at City Hall for Port Colborne Resident	\$325.00
Civil Ceremony at City Hall for Non-Resident	\$650.00
Civil Ceremony held at Location other than City Hall for Port Colborne Resident	\$425.00
Civil Ceremony held at Location other than City Hall for Non-Resident	\$850.00
After Hours Ceremony Requests	* To be considered on a case-by-case basis and subject to additional fees*

If the applicants require a translator, the translator will be required to fill out an affidavit which is subject to the Commissioner of Oath fee as outlined in the User Fees and Charges By-law.

The civil marriage ceremony service fees, as outlined above, are fully cost recovery as they incorporate staff's time spent preparing for the ceremony and the ceremony itself. Additionally, they generate a positive revenue for the City. Staff have identified that civil marriage ceremony fees vary across the Niagara Region with the average being \$325.00. This demonstrates that the fees noted above are exactly in line with the average in the Niagara Region; the municipalities of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Wainfleet, and West Lincoln do not offer this service.

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## Public Engagement:

On February 21, 2025, the Clerk's Division sent out a Civil Marriage Ceremony feedback survey to the 33 couples married at City Hall in 2024, attached as Appendix B. On February 28, 2025, the Clerk's Division emailed a reminder to the couples to fill out the survey. The survey closed on March 7, 2025, and had 11 responses; this is a 33% response rate. The survey was optional, and it was optional for the survey respondents to remain anonymous. The overall response of the survey was positive. Below is a summary of the survey results:

- All respondents noted the service coordination from staff was done well, and was a positive, helpful experience.
- Most of the respondents found the event was done well, and that there was good communication from staff.
- Some respondents thought the civil marriage ceremony script was good and simple, and they enjoyed that they had the option to include their own personal vows. Others found it to be a bit short and basic.
- Most respondents were happy with the script option, but some noted they would have preferred to have more options.

- 72% of respondents were very satisfied with the experience, while the remaining 28% were satisfied.
- 72% of respondents rated their intake service for the civil ceremony request as excellent, while the remaining 28% rated it as good.
- 81% of respondents rated the organization of the event as excellent, and the remaining 19% rated it as good.
- 55% of respondents rated the script as excellent, 18% of respondents rated it as good, and 27% of respondents rated it as average.
- 100% of respondents rated the performance of the officiant as excellent.
- Final thoughts and feedback included requests for decorations and the option to attend the venue the day before to do a walk through. Others noted it was a professional service they would recommend to others.

Staff have used this feedback to start implementing improvements to the service, should this be approved as a permanent service offering, such as more options for scripts and decorations.

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### **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
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### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, staff are recommending the Civil Marriage Ceremony Policy, attached as Appendix A, be passed by Council and that Council approve this as a permanent service offering from the Clerk's Division. This is a service accessible to residents and non-residents alike. There is a need for the civil marriage ceremony service in the City, and with the inclusion of new location offerings, it not only showcases the beauty of the City but also provides couples with more options when choosing to get married in Port Colborne.

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### **Appendices:**

- a. Civil Marriage Ceremony Policy
- b. Civil Marriage Ceremony Feedback Survey

Respectfully submitted,

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**Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.