

March 30, 2020

The Municipal Council for the Municipality of the County of Pictou met by teleconference on Monday, March 30, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Dist.	1	Clr. Don Butler
	2	Clr. Deborah Wadden
	3	Clr. Darla MacKeil
	4	Clr. Ronald Baillie
	5	Deputy Warden Wayne Murray
	6	Warden Robert Parker
	7	Clr. David Parker
	8	Clr. Larry Turner
	9	Clr. Peter Boyles
	10	Clr. Randy Palmer
	11	Clr. Andy Thompson
	12	Clr. Chester Dewar

IN ATTENDANCE

Brian Cullen, CAO/Municipal Clerk Treasurer
Karen Cornish, Deputy Municipal Treasurer
Carolyn MacIntosh, Deputy Municipal Clerk
Sueann Musick, Communications Officer
Jane Johnson, Recording Secretary

COVID-19 – RESPONSE/PLANNING UPDATE

The CAO informed Council that the Incident Management Team continues to plan and execute our Emergency Response Plan. The Province has declared a State of Emergency for the entire province, consequently municipalities do not need to declare states of local emergencies. Local issues are addressed by by-law powers or through a direct request to Provincial Coordination Centre which are then addressed by directives from the Chief Medical Officer or the appropriate Minister. There has been a change in the Provincial tone in the past 24 hours based on local concerns that have been raised (i.e. groups of shoppers in stores, family groups out in the community) Several of the major retail stores have put restrictions in place to limit the number of people in the space at any one time. The education period around social distancing is over the police have been given the directive to start enforcing the Chief Medical Officer's Orders.

The Incident Management Team is in place and has been meeting daily. Those meetings are going to slow to Monday, Wednesday and Friday in order to avoid burnout. The team has been having virtual meetings and responding to phone calls and emails as they are received. Daily briefings are provided to the Team and where necessary issues are pushed to the EMO Zone Coordinator.

Protocols have been developed for groups such as fire departments who wish to deliver groceries to homes. This has been an issue because we have to protect the resource by having a protocol in place. A daily situation report is sent out to Councillors and there are daily updates to Mayors and Warden. Gaps in the communication system have been identified because not everyone is on social media. Public Service Announcements are being planned that will run on the radio stations in New Glasgow and Antigonish that has fairly standard messaging. Retail outlets that are still operating have agreed to accept flyers for access by their customers. The flyers will provide standard and concise messaging and direction for information. Additionally, a newsletter is being developed by the Communication Team that will be directly delivered to all homes in Pictou County

There was some discussion around the handling of flyers by multiple customers in the stores which could endanger the community. The CAO agreed to raise that concern with the Incident Command Team. At the moment the priority has been the newsletter.

Volunteer coordination is being done through Seniors Outreach and safety protocols are expected to be followed to protect the volunteers.

Several members of Council acknowledged and thanked the CAO and his staff for all of their efforts in managing the COVID-19 Pandemic and in maintaining basic services to our residents. It was noted that the work of our Communications Officer has been invaluable in keeping our residents up-to-date on a daily basis.

Clr. Wadden asked if there was any information regarding the blockade at PLFN.

The CAO replied that issue was discussed today and that the blockade is in effect. First Nations are the only people who can enter except for essential services for residents. There is now a curfew in effect from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. that does not allow traffic in or out of the community. They will make requests to Indigenous Services Canada and Public Safety Canada and there are federal bodies sitting at the Provincial Coordination Centre that will funnel information back through to the local level.

COVID-19 EMERGENCY FUNDING - \$25,000 BUDGET REQUEST

The CAO advised that on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) assessed COVID-19 as a pandemic. On March 22nd, the Province of Nova Scotia declared a State of Emergency to help contain the spread of COVID-19. The State of Emergency will be in effect for 14 days and may be renewed. The emergency order is valid until April 5, 2020. With the declaration, the Regional Emergency Measures Organization formed its Incident Management Team. The Incident Management Team, in consultation with the municipalities, is planning communication to the public to aid in the education and messaging around the response to COVID-19. This includes mail distribution and radio advertisements and messaging. In order to meet the initial response and virtualization of our office, we were also required to purchase a number of mobile devices (laptops and phones). In order to address related expenses, he recommended that Council provides a \$25,000 budget to the Chief Administrative Officer for the fiscal year 2020/21 to use towards the Emergency Response for COVID-19. Additional funds may be requested by the Chief Administrative Officer as operational requirements dictate. These funds will be used for expenses relating to the newsletter and PSA's, as well as other potential expenses.

Clr. Butler asked if there will be funding available from the provincial and federal governments and the CAO replied that no federal funding has been identified at this time as the focus of Government has been on the financial impact to individuals. The Province has not identified any funding but has taken measures to defer loan payments. At some future point there could be funding available from the Federal Disaster Relief Fund once expenditures for response exceed \$1million. The Municipality will be documenting its expenses and submitting them to the Province if asked to do so in support of a provincial claim to the federal program.

Warden R. Parker reported the property tax deferral is being dealt with at the provincial level and he asked how soon we will have an answer.

The CAO replied the NSF and AMA is petitioning the province for a uniform property tax deferral program. The request was made last week to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. At some point this Council will need to have a discussion on how we tax this year, and in particular if there is to be an interim bill or only one bill for the fiscal period. He pointed out that cash flow will become an issue for all municipalities.

MOTION

It was moved by Deputy Warden Murray and seconded by Clr. Dewar that Council provides a \$25,000 budget to the Chief Administrative Officer for the fiscal year 2020/21 to use towards the Emergency Response for COVID-19.

Motion carried.

COVID-19 POLICY AMENDMENTS

The CAO identified policy amendments that require changes as follows:

1. The municipal vehicles that are used by Public Works are not to be taken home by Public Works employees. The CAO informed Council that he has suspended that policy so the Public Works employees can take the vehicles home because they are now working from home.

2. The start date for the landfill vouchers is May 1st and he would like to change that date to June 1st.
3. Tax Exemptions are due on March 31st and the CAO reported that he would like to extend the deadline until April 30th.

The CAO recommended that Councillors not enter private homes to witness signatures on exemption forms and that all information on applications be directed to the Deputy Municipal Treasurer.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. D. Parker and seconded by Deputy Warden Murray that a recommendation be forwarded to the April 6th Council meeting to approve the COVID-19 policy amendments requested by the CAO.

Motion carried.

The CAO explained there was a Ministerial Order that minutes from virtual council meetings have to be posted 24 hours after the meeting. In order to meet that time constraint, the minutes will not be as detailed as they typically are and they will be posted in draft form.

RURAL BROADBAND PROJECT UP-DATE

The CAO informed Council that we have received our Non-Dominant Carrier Approval from the CRTC. We have also received and are reviewing an agreement from NSP for connection to their utility poles. We are still waiting on receipt of a similar agreement from Bell. Phase 1 project contract language and modifications have been sent to Joe Hickey and he sent a few changes back that have to be reviewed.

There has been a very positive conference call with the Canada Infrastructure Bank. The Bank is very interested in the project and will go to market for third party lending and use their program for leveraging of more favorable rates. The bank also agreed that the fiber rich model with fiber to every home at 91% coverage was the way to go. There would be change to our overall bottom line despite the additional capital costs to construct.

The CRTC Broadband Fund application deadline has been extended to April 30th. The CAO pointed out that he plans to apply for \$20 million in federal funding. The Universal Broadband Fund will probably be used for stimulus funding for municipalities to move forward after the Pandemic.

The CAO pointed out that he received no indication from Nova Communications that the supply chain has been disrupted because telecommunications are classified as an essential service.

Warden R. Parker reported that students are now doing online learning and it is a disadvantage for some who have no access or poor internet service.

Clr. MacKeil pointed out this crisis has shown there is a real need for high speed internet because there are a lot of people working from home who have no access or the internet is very slow. This really cements our project as this crisis has shown it is very crucial that high speed internet is an essential service.

Clr. Dewar asked if there was update on the land for the tower and the issue of hiring a project supervisor.

The CAO advised that we have not moved forward on purchasing the land in the Hardwood Hills area. Recent testing indicated a level of interference with the antenna so they were going to bring in different equipment to make sure we are positioning the tower in the right spot so that will eliminate any interference. With regard to project management, he reported having spoken with i-Valley who agreed that we need someone independent of the consortium as it moves forward. Discussions have also taken place another firm who is very knowledgeable and interested in partnering with i-Valley on the project supervision piece.

Warden R. Parker reported that we do not want to buy land that does not have any service.

The CAO reported that he would like to have something in place by April 1st on project management. Warden R. Parker informed Council that we need to hire the right people to make this happen. Both Mr. Dalton and Mr. Winkler have shown they can make this happen.

Clr. Palmer referred to the March 2nd article about the project where it quotes costs of \$25 million but it has been changed to \$69 million and he pointed out that factual figures should be available to the public.

The CAO pointed out the focus is on Phase 1 which is \$11 million.

Clr. Palmer asked if the network was going to be open access and the CAO confirmed that it is an open access network but it is now called "carrier neutral" so any carrier can come onto the network providing the tariffs are paid.

Clr. Palmer asked if there is only going to be a hardwire fee to use the fiber and the CAO responded every user will be charged a tariff so which will go towards our debt payment. The CAO explained that everyone pays for data to be moved and we will pass that on. The CAO pointed out that we need a fee structure so we can repay our debt. We have modelled it on 50 percent of the end user charge; however, we are now refining the model to reflect the charges that an internet service provider will pay us. There will also be an agreement with the Halifax Internet Exchange and we have also discussed a fiber swap with a company to get us from Truro to Halifax. Additionally, there are carriers with a presence in Pictou County that have reached out to us for access because there is a demand for fiber in the area.

Clr. Wadden thanked the CAO for all the work he has been doing with the EMO and internet services. She received a call from a resident in the Three Brooks area that is looking for fiber and if it was going to be available soon.

The CAO replied they might be able to provide wireless but we are not servicing Three Brooks in Phase 1.

Clr. Butler pointed out we only approved Phase 1 and we are going to consider the rest of the project so that should be clarified on the website.

Clr. Palmer asked who will be doing the maintenance on the network after it is up and running and the CAO replied that Nova Communications will be looking after the physical infrastructure and maintenance.

Warden R. Parker reported that the CAO and Communications Officer will work on messaging to make sure it is transparent. He pointed out that we have the opportunity to build these rural communities by providing internet.

DNS FUNDING UPDATE

Warden R. Parker gave a brief update on DNS's funding and pointed out that for some reason they wanted us to downsize our project. We appealed to the Minister about why we did not receive the funding but they only indicated they did not give any money to a telco for this area. Earlier today he wrote a letter to the Minister of Business asking that the Municipality be treated fairly. Warden R. Parker read part of the letter to Council and he also asked for letters of support from the other 5 municipal units, the Chamber of Commerce and the REN. He asked Council if they know of anyone who would send a letter of support to the Minister.

The CAO reported when they met with DNS they were advised that the decision not to fund the Municipality's application was, in part, based on the fact that because we were no longer scored as the primary proponent, other proponents had the ability to file legal suit against the Province for damages. The solicitor has pointed out that this logic does not mean that there is any merit to such a suit and also that those same legal remedies are available to this Municipality.

Clr. Boyles suggested that the fire departments could write letters of support, particularly the more rural departments (i.e. Blue Mountain) who have little or no service.

Clr. Wadden pointed out we talked about transparency in this Council and yet a letter is sent to be Minister on Council's behalf without the benefit of individual Councillors having seen the letter and perhaps having the opportunity to comment on it.

OTHER BUSINESS – VALLEY VIEW VILLA BD.

Clr. Boyles reported that the Valley View Villa Board has not been meeting and he is concerned about what is going on with the Board, and with a recent communication approving expenditures.

Clr. Butler reported information was sent out this morning and Earle Cameron made a motion which he had seconded to pay the payables. Included in that information was the listing for the month.

The CAO indicated that Clr. Boyles emails from the Villa are going to his Hotmail account and not his County email which might contribute to the problem at hand.

Clr. Boyles pointed out that he already went through this problem before with the Villa. His instructions have consistently been that information is to go to both addresses, thus giving him the option of printing documents that arrive through his Hotmail account, a feature he does not have with his i-pad.

Warden Parker advised that he has asked Clr. Dewar to contact the Chair of the Board and attempt to resolve this particular issue and any issues going forward with regard to decisions that need to be made during the Pandemic period.

SPRINGVILLE BRIDGE

Clr. Dewar informed Council that the tender for the Springville Bridge has been awarded to Balodis Construction which is very good news for the residents in that area.

BURNING PERMITS

Clr. D. Parker reported that he contacted Lands & Forests about burning permits. He was informed they have a blanket ban on the entire province so it appears they have made some unreasonable decisions as many areas are still experience snow conditions but are not permitted to burn brush.

Clr. Wadden thanked the CAO and staff for all the work they have done and to stay safe.

ADJOURN

It was moved by Clr. Boyles and seconded by Clr. MacKeil that the meeting adjourn.
Motion carried. (9:25 p.m.)

Robert Parker
Warden

Brian Cullen
Municipal Clerk