

May 19, 2020

The Committee of Council as a Whole for the Municipality of the County of Pictou met by video/teleconference on Tuesday, May 19, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Wayne Murray, Deputy Warden Chair

Robert Parker, Warden, Vice-Chair

Don Butler

Deborah Wadden

Darla MacKeil

Ronald Baillie

David Parker

Larry Turner

Peter Boyles

Randy Palmer

Andy Thompson

Chester Dewar

IN ATTENDANCE

Brian Cullen, CAO, Municipal Clerk-Treasurer

Karen Cornish, Deputy Municipal Treasurer

Carolyn MacIntosh, Deputy Municipal Clerk

Sueann Musick, Communication Officer

Jane Johnson, Recording Secretary

MINUTES – SEPT. 30/19

It was moved by Clr. Boyles and seconded by Clr. MacKeil that the minutes of September 30, 2019 be approved as circulated.

Motion carried.

MINUTES – MAY 11/20

It was moved by Warden R. Parker and seconded by Clr. Butler that the minutes of May 11, 2020 be approved as circulated.

Motion carried.

COVID-19 - UPDATE

The CAO informed the Committee things have been relatively quiet on the provincial side and calls with provincial officials have been reduced to once a week. At a local level, the PPE was received and distributed to various agencies last week and the province is going to place another order within the next month for “hard-to-get” items. We continue to talk to various agencies such as Viola’s place and Roots for Youth and the Food Banks have started to see an uptake in requests. They had an issue around hand sanitizers and 20 liters was donated to them by the NS Spirit Company. The focus this week is the start-up of the next phase; an internal meeting is scheduled for tomorrow to discuss re-opening what that will look like. A protocol document is in the final stages of development to assist not-for-profits with their re-opening plans. The Health Authority has also reached out to see if they could help in any way. There has been some confusion around boating and social distancing with the Department of Natural Resources sharing different information than everyone else. Municipalities continue to maintain current operations without any significant issues. We are all working through the Tax Financing Plan Policy. The Shared

Services Authority is still trying to keep people away from site but they have started compost sales this week on a load-and-go basis. The provincial numbers continue to improve with almost 97% recovery which is encouraging and only 32 active cases outstanding across the province. The positive rate of testing is under 1% which is exceptional so the curve has been flattened significantly from where we were several weeks ago.

Clr. Boyles referred to the next phase in reopening and he pointed out they had a hard time in New Brunswick to get workers back to work.

The CAO pointed out there were no layoffs with the existing staff of the Municipality, although that could present issues with students because of the attractiveness of the federal program.

Clr. D. Parker advised that he has been hearing from more people who feel that the Northern Health Zone is being punished because of COVID activity in the Central Zone and, in particular, the number of cases at the Northwood Nursing Home. There is a growing concern about the slowness of getting to a more normal business environment.

The CAO reported that from a regional basis we started to do that next phase because the spread has not been great in this area.

Clr. Palmer asked if the landfill was open and the CAO replied that they are open for drop off but are trying to limit the number of people who are there. Once the State of Emergency is lifted, we should see some normality of operations returning at the site and across the province. There is the concern that once the borders are opened up, there is the risk that the number of cases will increase because there are still hot spots, particularly to our southern and western borders.

Warden R. Parker reported that he has experienced a number of difficulties sourcing employees for the retail side of his business which he attributes to the CERB program.

Warden R. Parker asked if there was any word on when the Aberdeen Hospital will return to normal services and the CAO replied that there is nothing to report on that issue.

RURAL INTERNET – UPDATE

The CAO reported that there was nothing significant to report but today he had notice from Bell on the set up of their internal filing system which will allow for quick turn-around on make ready applications. He has also had a discussion with Nova on the Plexus shutdown and has been assured that if work progresses to the point where we are ready to install infrastructure then the crew can be recalled to carry out that work. The Canada Infrastructure Bank continues to be interested in the project and at some point, we need to decide on the design they are being asked to fund.

Warden R. Parker commented that the pace of this project has slowed and asked what our major hold ups are at this point in time because there are a lot of people asking about the project and when improved service will be available to them.

The CAO reported that these issues are probably all inter-related; one of the issues on the contract side is the scope of the work around Ring 8 and what that means. It is important to have a firm understanding in terms of detail, tied to the make ready and now we hope to be in a position to start. The

biggest issue is moving forward and understanding what we are paying for. He had a call today with the Solicitor and Terry Dalton of i-Valley regarding the language and to educate the Solicitor on the technical side of the project.

Warden R. Parker acknowledged that we want to protect ourselves but we also want to move this project along. We need to decide what service is the best value for the Municipality financially before we move forward with the Canada Infrastructure Bank. He asked when we will be ready to have that discussion about the financial interest of our municipality.

The CAO indicated the Canada Infrastructure Bank's mandate is 50 megabits per second and he informed the Committee that the Bank is not looking to fund wireless technology. If you move to Fiber Max for the \$100 million they would fund the wireless piece but whether or not it is the Fiber Rich would depend if the speed was on the 50 megabits per ratio. If we are successful in getting Federal funding from CRTC or the Universal Broadband Fund, the project is \$68 million. If we get that level of funding then the Canada Infrastructure Bank would be off the table. If we get \$20 million from the Federal Government and attach it to the Canada Infrastructure Bank then you could provide fiber to every home. You can always move from Fiber Max to Fiber Rich because the backbone of the project is already in place. At this point Phase I is not dependent on external funding.

Clr. D. Parker asked if we could do Fiber Rich if we go with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and if we are waiting for Federal money then we have to have a discussion on the total costs and timelines. He recalled asking some time ago to sit down with NOVA on the route through his district because he has several suggestions and questions.

The CAO replied that can be done but the focus is on Ring 8 and the backbone at this point in time. There will be an opportunity to review the various routes and he agreed to pursue that with Mr. Dalton and report back to Council.

COVID-19 PROPERTY TAX FINANCING PLAN POLICY

The CAO reviewed with Council the text of a draft COVID-19 Property Tax Financing Plan Policy. This policy is the backstop to the \$380,000,000 the Province has put on the table through the Municipal Finance Corporation that justifies whether or not the Municipality would go to the MFC for funding. The objective of the policy is to establish a one-time property tax installment program for owners of residential and commercial properties who can demonstrate that they have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Clr. D. Parker reported that he a concern with owners of primary residence and if that also includes summer homes. He had another concern with residents who may have applied for CERB and do not want to pay taxes but he believes it should exclude secondary and summer homes.

The CAO reported the secondary cottage/summer home was included and it would be up to Council whether they want that in or out.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. D. Parker and seconded by Warden R. Parker that under 4.1 Residential, “secondary cottage/summer home” be removed.

Clr. Palmer asked are they delaying payment of taxes and the CAO replied it is over a 24 month period.

Clr. Wadden reported that she does not see a problem leaving that clause in there because there are people who will have a problem paying their taxes.

Clr. MacKeil referred to young families and this set back has put them out of work or changed their finances. There are going to be some who will have a problem paying their taxes so we have to keep in mind we have to try and help people.

Warden R. Parker reported that his concern is with having enough to help to homeowners with this program.

The CAO reported there is \$380 million available so whatever your municipality requires then that is the amount you can access but we can only go to the Municipal Finance Corporation once.

Motion defeated. (Nay Votes Clrs. Butler, Wadden, MacKeil, Baillie, Turner, Boyles, Palmer, Thompson, Dewar, Deputy Warden Murray & Warden R. Parker)

The CAO explained that the program would also include the owner of a residential property that was a registered Tourism Operator with Tourism Nova Scotia for the 2019 tourist season (excluding Airbnb's).

The CAO reported that the owner of taxable commercial with a \$500,000 limit captures 90% of properties. There are not a large number of properties above that threshold and only a couple have not been adversely effected.

Clr. Wadden asked is this is a temporary fix for taxes and the CAO replied not at this time. He explained we do market value and it is hard to know what next year's tax roll will look like.

The CAO referred to owners of taxable properties above \$500,000 who have not experienced any hardship do not qualify.

Warden R. Parker reported that farmers did not shut down so they do not qualify but they are suffering as much as everyone else. He asked if there was any mention of agriculture because they did not fit the CERB programs. He asked where a farmer would fit to apply for the tax financing because it includes their buildings and infrastructure.

The CAO commented that they would have to demonstrate they had a 30% loss of revenue due to COVID-19.

The Deputy Municipal Treasurer informed the Committee that there is a deadline on the program so they would have to prove they suffered a loss by that deadline so that we can meet our target date to submit to the Municipal Finance Corporation.

The CAO advised that we would attempt to help anyone who has suffered a loss and will treat all applications fairly.

Warden R. Parker reported that he agrees with the NSFM that the decision on eligibility should be up to administrators and not elected officials.

Clr. D. Parker reported that he took a strong exception to having “managed forests” included in Clause 4.3.4.

The CAO reported they had that category flagged for reconsideration so if Council finds it offensive it can be removed.

The CAO reported property owners can complete and submit to the Municipality an application, and the deadline is July 15, one week before due date on interim bill, at that point you should know if you can pay that bill.

The CAO explained program participants will pay tax installments of \$25 for the first 6 months commencing in October. Interest and administration fees following the 6 months will have a rate of interest. 1.35% per annum.

The CAO reported that other details of the program are being worked out and once you go to Municipal Finance Corporation for money you are locked into the borrowings. You can pay it off early if you can and payments under the program must remain in good standing.

Clr. Butler indicated there is a lot of information in the policy and he asked how it will be presented to the public.

The CAO advised that a very basic and easily understood communication piece will need to be done as we move forward.

Warden R. Parker reported this is a good news story for business and residents who are stressed out about paying their bills.

The CAO reported they will have discussions with the Communications Officer on the best way to get information out to the residents.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Thompson and seconded by Clr. MacKeil that a recommendation be forwarded to Council to adopt the COVID-19 Property Tax Financing Plan Policy.

Motion carried. (Nay Vote. Clr. D. Parker)

ROADSIDE LITTER COMPLAINTS

Clr. Boyles informed the Committee he is getting a lot of complaints of garbage on the side of the road. Residents in his district are walking more and taking note of roadside litter. He spoke to an employee at the Landfill and they are also having issues but they do not know what needs to be done to correct the problem. Clr. Boyles emphasized that we need to come up with ways of dealing with these complaints, with a focus on enforcement (possibly through a discussion between the Police Advisory Board and the RCMP).

Clr. D. Parker commented that a lot of the garbage is caused by the weekly flyers that are tossed out of the vehicle windows and end up in the ditch. We also suffer from dumping in ditches, wood roads,

public highways, but the biggest litter problems are the flyers. He asked that the issue of flyers be put on the next agenda.

Clr. Thompson reported he received a call from a resident about all the garbage in the ditches that is really bad and he does not know how to fix that problem.

Clr. MacKeil pointed out their community group organizes a clean-up every year because there is a lot of garbage around. A lot of people in our communities are actually going out and picking up garbage.

Clr. Boyles suggested the Landfill could give us some pointers but there a lot of problems around enforcement.

The CAO reported that last year the RCMP, Pictou County Solid Waste, and Vehicle Compliance did an education program around litter and uncovered loads on the approaches to the landfill. That is probably not a priority in the COVID climate. He recommended that if anyone has troublesome roads in their district that they bring them to Earle Cameron's attention and he will try to address them with his student resources. Mr. Cameron does have the capacity to clean up approximately 20 roads a year.

Clr. MacKeil suggested that when the Landfill Vouchers become available an insert should be included providing information about covering their loads before entering the Landfill.

MOTION – PICTOU COUNTY PIZZA DAY

It was moved by Warden R. Parker and seconded by Clr. Wadden that a recommendation be forwarded to Council to declare May 16th as Pictou County Pizza Day annually in the Municipality.

Motion carried.

2020 GRADUATES

Clr. Boyles asked if something could be done through our social media platforms to acknowledge individual graduates for 2020.

The Communication Officer comment on the volume of work involved (4 graduating classes) and the possibility that some graduates could be missed in the process. She reported that the Pictou County Wellness Center was doing something similar, using their electronic sign. The Communication Officer indicated that she would speak with the CAO and Deputy Municipal Clerk on doing something for the graduates, but it may be more general in nature.

NORTHUMBERLAND FISHERIES MUSEUM ACCREDITATION

Clr. MacKeil informed the Committee that since she was appointed to the Fisheries Board the Northumberland Fisheries Museum is 1 of 4 museums to receive an accreditation.

DANGEROUS &/OR UNSIGHTLY PREMISES

Warden R Parker reported that he would like to have an open discussion on Dangerous & Unsightly Properties if we are going to change the way we do things. It is important that all Councillors hear the same information so he would like to add this to the next agenda.

SWIMMING POOL BY-LAW

Clr. Boyles reported that last year the Municipality's Swimming Pool By-Law was not being enforced so he asked are still looking at repealing that by-law.

The CAO reported he will follow up with the Solicitor on that issue.

D2 MSG

Clr. Wadden reported that she had a request for a Municipal Services Grant for the next agenda.

The CAO informed Committee members to have agenda items emailed by noon on Friday. He also pointed out that meetings in person are still not allowed and State of Emergency is still in effect for 2 more weeks.

ADJOURN

It was moved by Clr. Thompson and seconded by Clr. Wadden that the meeting adjourn.

Motion carried. (9:05 p.m.)


CHAIR
MUNICIPAL CLERK