

VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

April 6, 2020

A meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held via Zoom teleconferencing on Monday, April 6, 2020, beginning at 5:00 p.m. with Warden Bruce Morrison in the Chair.

Present were:

District #1 – Paul MacNeil
District #2 – Perla MacLeod
District #3 – Bruce Morrison, Warden
District #4 – Merrill MacInnis
District #5 – Fraser Patterson
District #6 – Larry Dauphinee, Deputy Warden
District #8 – Norman MacDonald

Also present were:

Leanne MacEachen, CAO
Heather MacLean, Recorder

Absent was:

District #7 – Wayne Budge

CALL TO ORDER/APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Warden Morrison called the meeting to order and presented the draft agenda for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the agenda for the April 6, 2020, Council meeting be approved as presented. Motion carried.

BILL MARCHANT, WATERFRONT BADDECK COMMITTEE

Bill Marchant, Waterfront Baddeck, entered the meeting virtually from Vancouver to outline plans for upgrading the Baddeck Wharf and the waterfront area.

Mr. Marchant indicated that he was in attendance to ask the Municipality to partner with the Village, Waterfront Baddeck, and two other funding agencies to undertake Phase I of a three Phase project to rejuvenate the Village wharf and revitalize the Baddeck waterfront.

The estimate to complete Phase I is \$150,000.00 and the other two agencies have tentatively agreed to contribute \$50,000.00 each and the Village will be asked to contribute \$15,000.00 from their wharf account. Waterfront Baddeck will commit to raising \$10,000.00 from the community.

His request from the Municipality is \$25,000.00, contingent on funding being received from the other funding partners.

The three phases of the project were outlined, and in particular the Phase I work they hope to complete this fiscal year.

Mr. Marchant answered questions of Council. Develop Nova Scotia have earmarked the wharf as a Port of Interest.

Whether the Municipality have money in the budget for such a request was questioned and the CAO indicated that there is community project funding included in the budget.

It was moved and seconded that the Municipality approve \$25,000.00 for Phase I of the Baddeck Wharf and waterfront upgrade, contingent on other funding partners support. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 9, 2020 AND MARCH 25, 2020

The minutes of the March 9, 2020 and the March 25, 2020, meetings of Victoria Municipal Council were presented for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the March 9, 2020, meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council be approved as presented. Motion carried.

It was moved and seconded that the Victoria County Municipal Council minutes of March 25, 2020, be approved as presented. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

The Jim Bradley sign is up at the Baddeck Recycling Facility and is covered until such time as an unveiling ceremony can be held.

Blair Gallop has been hired as the Returning Officer for the October Municipal Election. It is unknown as yet if the election will be delayed.

Only one application was received from the call for interest to serve on the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The CAO advised that the Town of Port Hawkesbury recruited their committee and the possibility of having a joint committee was discussed.

Council are to look within their districts to see if there is anyone interested and qualified to serve on this Committee and let the CAO know by April 17, 2020.

NEW BUSINESS

CAO REPORT

Leanne MacEachen provided her report and advised that the department heads are doing a fabulous job and are settling into the new normal.

She outlined the initiatives that are taking place within each department.

Dan Coffin is contacting local businesses by phone. A slow tourism year is predicted and businesses are already feeling the pressure.

Lydia Kerr is assisting the Seniors Safety Officer in developing food sources, etc. and is sending mental health messages and updates on the Active Living parameters.

Patrick Austin is working with several small businesses and if Council is aware of others, they are to refer them to Patrick. He is also working on a Mountain Bike Strategy for across the island. The Housing Strategy is almost completed.

Alix Redden is requesting a Zoom meeting of the Budget Committee in the near future. The Audit will go ahead virtually in May. The Province/AMANS/NSFM is working on a province-wide tax/water deferral and repayment plan.

An update on Public Works was provided. Collections are still happening but may be scaled back in the near future to bi-weekly and they are looking at postponing heavy garbage pickup until the fall. Blue bags are piling up and may be sent to CBRM to process. An inter-municipal agreement is being worked on with adjacent municipalities with regard to water services operating procedures.

DCBA and ACOA are delaying their calls for Festival and Events Funding.

The CAO advised that the Seniors' without Walls funding in the amount of \$24,000.00 can be used for anything senior related and does not have to follow the usual criteria.

The Groundwater/Wastewater monitoring has been awarded to EXP.

Signs have been printed for residents' homes to indicate if they are safe, are self-isolating, etc. and have been distributed in the northern area of the County through Lyle Donovan, EMC. Other areas will be distributed also and the CAO questioned the best way to get these signs distributed in District #1 and #5. Councillor MacNeil and Patterson will investigate and let the CAO know.

TAXATION UPDATE

An update on taxation to the year ended March 31, 2020, was received. As of this date there is \$1,148,930 outstanding compared to \$1,272,500 at last year end. This is an improvement of \$123,569. This means that we ended the year ahead in both current and arrears.

As of today, there is \$1,143,494 outstanding with \$670,155 in current and \$561,016 in arrears. This is a difference of \$170k total - \$82k better in current and \$88k better in arrears. Since last Council, \$31,356 has been collected toward current and arrears.

With the current state things are going to get worse and there could potentially be a financial crisis. The state of tourism and the fishery is up in the air and it is unknown what will happen.

The province requested an estimate of what municipalities think their at risk taxes may be. The CFO calculated \$3.5 million of an approximate \$11 million dollar budget, roughly 30%.

This will be a tough summer for everyone and the message should be if you can pay your bills, please pay your bills as deferrals are hard to overcome.

OPERATIONS UPDATE

The CAO advised Councillor MacNeil and Patterson that she was contacted by Lyle Donovan, EMC, and the fire departments will distribute the signage in Districts #1 and #5.

The Public Works Department is operating with a skeleton staff, with much of the staff taking a temporary layoff. Staff members in taxation, administration and heritage are taking sick time and department heads are working and hold daily meetings. One staff member is in the Tax Department daily to process payments and answer the phone.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL CONCERNS

District #1

Councillor MacNeil outlined his Department of TIR concerns which included:

- A full spring grading of gravel roads in District #1
- Repairs to signage throughout the District
- Investigate the road in Grass Cove for erosion as the guardrail is hanging in the air and the road will soon be undermined
- Request a meeting with TIR officials to discuss issues via Zoom

District #2

Councillor MacLeod requested that full spring maintenance of gravel roads in District #2 be completed and she also questioned on what TIR work action can be expected during and after COVID-19.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis indicated that with the melting snow, extensive damage is visible in his district. Many guardrail posts require repair and road signs are down throughout the district.

The status of the Englishtown Ferry was questioned and Councillor MacInnis indicated that he will be contacting John Majchrowicz, TIR Ferry Operations, to check on the status of the return of the Englishtown Ferry.

District #5

Councillor Patterson indicated that the tender has been awarded for the Kempt Head Road and he looks forward to that being completed this season.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee requested that the manholes be checked in his district and in particular in the area adjacent to the Ingonish Beach Post Office.

The condition of the Beach Crossing Road has been brought up at previous meetings and is becoming impassable. The status of the grading of this road is to be questioned.

District #8

Councillor MacDonald brought forward the concerns with regard to his district.

- The shoulders of the road in the Bay Road Valley are eroding and the road is deteriorating. This is the main access to Bay St. Lawrence and St. Margaret's Village.
- Investigate the status of the provincial mapping for the Gaelic Road signage for District #8
- The shoulders of the road in Cape North in that area of the Cabot Fire Hall are washed out and require immediate repair as residents access their driveways in this area

District #3

Warden Morrison indicated that there is a major pothole at the four way intersection of Chebucto Street/Shore Road/Old Margaree Road and Twining Street that requires permanent and immediate repair.

There is a huge section of pavement that has been detached in the Water Street area in the area of John Langley's that requires immediate repair.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to the Department of TIR outlining the Council concerns. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Councillor MacLeod forwarded correspondence to Council earlier indicating the NSUARB decision to remove Victoria County Transit services until further notice.

A meeting of the Victoria County Transit Committee is required as there are issues to discuss. Councillor MacLeod will contact Jessie MacDonald and Jim Mustard, Chair, Strait Area Transit, and will advise the Committee of a possible meeting date.

Councillor Patterson indicated that Cassandra Yonder, Seniors Safety Officer, is developing an excellent program with regard to seniors at this uncertain time and commended her for the job she is doing.

Councillor MacNeil requested that Bell be contacted to determine the areas in Dingwall and Boularderie their Broadband coverage will include with the recent announcement of their approved contract under the provincial broadband program.

CORRESPONDENCE

The CAO advised that a letter was received this morning from Honourable Chuck Porter, Minister of Municipal Affairs, indicating his willingness to discuss the seasonal adjustment.

Athol Grant, Victoria County Trails Federation, is requesting that the Municipality either make application or provide a letter of support for their funding application.

Council indicated that there are a number of trail organizations throughout the County and it would be best to not become directly involved in making application, but a letter of support could be provided to the VCTF and other organizations in the same position.

It was moved and seconded that a letter of support be provided for the Victoria County Trails Federation's application for funding. Motion carried.

Discussion took place on a concern with regard to reusable bags during COVID-19. Customers must pack their own groceries if using these bags and Council indicated they do not want to lose the momentum already in place with regard to this matter. Jocelyn Bethune is to develop some messaging in this regard and upload same to the County website.

DISTRICT CONCERNS

District #8

Councillor MacDonald indicated that residents of his district are very concerned about COVID-19. The area fishermen are deemed essential to start the season for halibut/crab on April 13 and following that, the lobster season. Physical distancing cannot be maintained on fishing boats. Approximately 1/3 of the population north of Smokey is fishers and their concern is real.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be sent to the Honourable Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, with copies to our MP and MLA, with respect to advice and clarification as to how essential services, as is the case of fishermen, can be properly implemented and maintained regarding physical distancing in the workplace (boats, wharves, fish plant) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Motion carried.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee indicated that gas retailers in his area require assistance. The UARB indicate that they can decide not to go with the interrupters clause if they wish to keep gas/diesel prices higher but this does not assist residents who will pay more. There must be a rebate on taxes paid or other direct assistance.

He also expressed concern with regard to seasonal business, as they are not assisted in any of the provincial/federal funding programs to date as they have no revenue in the months required. These businesses will need assistance as summer comes.

The Cape Breton Partnership and our MP and MLA are to be contacted with regard to seasonal business.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee also expressed concern with regard to the fishery.

Warden Morrison commended Deputy Warden Dauphinee for his weekend news interview.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis provided additional information on the fishery from his experience and outlined what can happen. LFA 27 covers the area from Port Morien to Bay St. Lawrence and a major portion of this area is Victoria County. This crisis will have major impacts in Victoria County ports from Big Bras d'Or through to Bay St. Lawrence.

He indicated that Minister Jordan's comments that all fishing seasons in the province would proceed is a poorly thought statement. The seasons should be postponed and loan payments and interest fees should be forgone for this year and next. He indicated that serious consequences will be the result.

As of now, the fishery is to open on April 13, 2020. This is a serious, concerning issue.

District #1

Councillor MacNeil was contacted by a few residents about the possibility of a provincial park in the District #1 area. They are wondering if there will be any restrictions on the possible use of area trails and are questioning who to contact.

Provincial Parks are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Lands and Forestry.

Councillor MacNeil advised that residents are concerned with the shortage of hand sanitizers in stores and he questioned whether the Municipality could order hand sanitizers, especially for the elderly.

This matter can be referred to Lyle Donovan, EMC. The best approach is still proper and regular handwashing.

Councillor MacNeil also offered his appreciation to health care workers and all essential workers for their service during this trying time.

District #3

Warden Morrison also acknowledged the front line works across the Municipality and thanked the residents who are complying with physical distancing which is evident in his and all districts of the Municipality.

The Warden indicated that CBC does weekly updates from municipalities and he does a quick interview every Thursday at 2:00 p.m. If there is anything Council members wish the Warden to address, they may contact him.

NEXT MEETING

Warden Morrison indicated that he felt this virtual Council session went quite well and the next meeting will be scheduled for April 20, 2020, at 5:00 p.m.

The CAO advised that Lyle Donovan has a supply of hand sanitizer earmarked for local businesses and Councillor MacNeil was advised to contact him with regard to his request.

WATER PAYMENT DEFERRAL

It was moved and seconded that application be made to the NSUARB for relief from the following collection requirements in the Victoria County Water Utility, namely the Little Narrows, Ingonish, Neil's Harbour/New Haven and Dingwall Water systems, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for the purpose of allowing customers the option to defer payment of their bills until July 31, 2020, and also for the purpose of allowing the Victoria County Water Utility to defer the calculation of interest from March 13, 2020 to July 31, 2020. Motion carried.

APPRECIATION

Council again indicated that the tourism industry and the fishing industry are both at risk for this year and it is the hope that both will survive and again thrive and continue to do business in Victoria County.

Appreciation was also extended to the CAO and the municipal workers for the great job being done during this crisis.

Councillor MacInnis advised that he would like to see gift cards purchased for truckers, health care workers and other essential workers. Each Councillor agreed to provide \$50.00 from

each of their district budgets for a total of \$400 for this use. Errol MacInnis, Tim Horton's franchisee has agreed to look after the distribution of same.

BUDGET MEETING

A Zoom Budget Meeting will be arranged before the next Council session and Council will be advised of the date.

ADJOURN

It was moved to adjourn.

Bruce Morrison, Warden

Leanne MacEachen, CAO