VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
June 15, 2020

A meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held via Zoom teleconferencing on Monday, June 15, 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:
#7 – Wayne Budge

CALL TO ORDER/APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Warden Morrison called the meeting to order and presented the agenda for approval. An In Camera meeting will be held at the end of the regular Council meeting.

It was moved and seconded that the agenda be approved with the noted addition. Motion carried.

CABOT TRAIL WRITERS FESTIVAL

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to Rebecca Silver Slayter, Executive Director of the Cabot Trail Writers Festival.

Rebecca Silver Slayter thanked Council for the opportunity to appear and indicated it was two years since she last appeared before Council. She outlined how the Festival began over 12 years ago through the vision of Gary Walsh and Jeanette MacDonald and the former Board.

In 2018, the 10th anniversary of the Festival, the transition was made to the new team and Board and that is when Rebecca took over as Director. The goal of the new Board is to increase the professionalism of the organization and having paid positions helped solidify the festival.

How the Festival has grown since its inception was outlined. They have a devoted audience with over 1,000 participants and book sales have grown tremendously. The anchors of the festival are the Gaelic, Mi'kmaq and French languages and heritage through storytelling and song. Stories shared by immigrants are also a part of the Festival.

The youth school workshops have been successful and have increased annually. Over the past couple of years, over 500 Victoria County students have come face to face with professional writers, who talk about their work.

Reading and writing is a solitary act and creating lovers of books builds community through the joy of reading. People can leave their own lives and are put into a world of someone else through books.

COVID-19 will make the plans for 2020 much different. The Board has met on a couple of occasions and has decided to proceed with the 2020 Festival. The designs for 2020 were outlined. The event will be a not in person event. It will be challenging and will take place in multi-forms – digital, radio events, author readings, podcasts, outdoor events, and book club events.

The Festival will expand to 8 days – September 22 to October 4, 2020. The workshops offered will be free and along with hosting national authors, will also host more local authors. This will allow participants to see where these authors live, work, and write.

The wide virtual world will allow for more talent and more individual experiences to occur. The Board has chosen to focus on what can be done. They have let their expectations go in this uncertain time and have connected to explore the possibilities that can occur and are uplifted by the shared energy.

Rebecca thanked Council for their past support of the Festival and indicated it has been a cornerstone in the success of the Festival. Going forward, she indicated they will be seeking support in 2020 as indicated in their Community Grants application.

Council individually thanked Rebecca for her presentation and for the great job she and the Board are doing to ensure the 2020 Festival will continue.

The possibility of school visits in 2020 was questioned and it was indicated that this depends on the situation but there are plans for innovative ways for schools to participate if schools are in session.

Whether outdoor events can occur was questioned. Rebecca indicated that they are working on a relationship with the National Park at present.

If events would occur at the Gaelic College this year was also questioned. Rebecca indicated she will have a conversation with the College to see what restrictions are in place and determine if there could be outdoor events that could occur and the possibility for weather cover in the event of inclement weather.

The CAO advised that the Community Grant applications have been reviewed and Council will formally approve the recommendations of the Budget Committee later in the meeting. Letters will be mailed tomorrow to the successful applicants.

After further discussion, Rebecca thanked Council for support over the years of the Festival and indicated that she and the Board are excited about this year's possibilities.

Warden Morrison, on behalf of Council, thanked Rebecca for her presentation and she left the meeting at this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JUNE 1, 2020

The minutes of the June 1, 2020, meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council were presented for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the Victoria County Municipal Council minutes of June 1, 2020, be approved as presented. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

The Electronic Voting By-Law was questioned as to whether both advanced and Election Day voting would be done via the internet and telephone. This is what is anticipated, but there will still be some form of polling station on Election Day where residents can get assistance with e-voting.

Whether the October 17, 2020, Municipal Election will occur as scheduled was questioned and it was indicated that as of now it is currently all systems go, but there will be re-evaluation in August/September.

The Pride Flag rising ceremony was held on June 4, 2020, at 1:00 p.m. It was livestreamed and available on Facebook.

The CAO advised that she sent Council's congratulations to Patrick Austin, EDO, for his work with Victoria County businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic and he responded that it was a privilege working on Victoria County projects.

Osborne Burke, Victoria Co-op Fisheries has been advised of the hours that shells will be accepted at the Dingwall Transfer Station site.

Lyle Donovan, EMC and Fire Services Coordinator, is looking into the number of volunteer firefighters who have 25 years of service and will provide this information to the County.

Leanne MacEachen advised that 300 pride signs were obtained by the Municipality and there are only 30 signs remaining. Warden Morrison thanked Councillor MacLeod, and the other Councillors who attended the Pride Flag raising.

Councillor MacInnis questioned on the status of the Enviro-Depots. The depots are currently open 3 days per week for pre-counts and next week they will be open 5 days per week for pre-counts. The following week they will be back to normal operations.

Complaints with regard to Broadband service throughout the County were discussed. Councillor MacNeil indicated that he received an email from Carla Arsenault, Cape Breton Partnership, with regard to a Develop Nova Scotia. The deadline for the second round of submission is June 5, 2020, and the approved projects will be announced in August, 2020.

Whether Council wished to meet with Develop Nova Scotia was questioned. Develop Nova Scotia did not consult with municipalities on where the internet problems area and the Internet Service Providers (ISP) are telling people they have service in the area, when in fact they do not.

The day to day frustration of businesses and residents with regard to the lack of internet was discussed. Whether a meeting should be held now or after August was questioned and discussed.

It was moved and seconded to request Carla Arsenault, CBP, to arrange a meeting with Develop Nova Scotia and the ISP's to discuss Broadband coverage in Victoria County. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

The CAO advised that she met with department heads earlier today and updated on what is happening within the departments.

Tourism

The first online course through Advanced Education is finishing up with 5 participants completing the course. Whether another course will be held is dependent on numbers.

Dan Coffin is working with DCBA on re-opening plans, surveys, and working with businesses. A DCBA re-opening survey had 111 Victoria County respondents and only 6 indicated they were not re-opening.

Ongoing discussions are being held with businesses with regard to washrooms.

Recreation/Active Living

Weekly Recreation Zoom meetings are ongoing and Lydia Kerr is working on a survey to help with the Active Living Strategy.

Recreation kits are in transit and will be distributed when received. There is one approved application to date for "COVID Re-opening Grants" available to not-for-profits.

Lydia Kerr is on a Cape Breton Island Taskforce Pilot for hosting of special events on Cape Breton Island.

Economic Development

Patrick Austin, EDO, is speaking with lots of businesses and is receiving mostly a positive reaction from the businesses. There have been 4 business start-ups in the last two weeks, 12 operational plans and 20 COVID planning applications received.

Finance

The CAO advised that the Tax Bills should be printed and mailed this week.

Alix Reddin, CFO, is working on a Purchasing Card Policy and is in the process of setting up several RBC initiatives.

The Community Grant Application requests will be approved later in the meeting.

Public Works

The Enviro-Depots will be opening 5 days per week next week for pre-count and then resuming normal services the following week.

Public Works is looking to establish a catch up system for organizations that lost out on recycling revenue during COVID.

Construction and demolition debris will be hauled from Dingwall to Baddeck over the next couple of weeks.

Public Notice System

The CAO advised that the County is going to test a public notice system for the County that could notify residents of a water break, detour, etc. More information will be provided in the near future.

Commercial Development District

The CAO advised that Council has been discussing a Charter, but in talking with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, this is extremely difficult to have passed. As a result, she is working on a by-law for rebates within a Commercial Development District. This will be provided for next Council.

Council Views

At the last council meeting on June 1, 2020, there were 41 live viewers and tonight there are currently 22 people watching and one of the viewers is Keith Bain, MLA.

TAXATION UPDATE

As of today, we are at $973,874 outstanding, with $537,899 in current and $435,975 in arrears. This means we are below the $1 Million mark prior to sending out the Tax Bills.

At June 25, 2019, we were still over $1 Million owing $1,072,760 outstanding with $589,814 in current and $483,946 in arrears.

We are $99,886 to the better – nearly $52k in current and $48k in arrears.

There is bad news though in that with each update with the gag shrinking. The CFO is recommending that we proceed with Tax Sale by alternative methods (tender process) so we don't lose momentum.

Since the last Council on June 1, 2020, $39,843 was collected toward arrears and current.

The Tax Bill due date has been extended to September 30, 2020, and the portal is now open for the Tax Repayment Program. If assistance is required, Alix Redden can be contacted to work through the process.

COMMUNITY HALL ADJUSTMENTS AND EXEMPT CHARITABLE PROPERTIES

The CFO presented the list of community halls that have their taxation reduced from the commercial to residential rate in keeping with the External Organizations Exemption By-Law. The amount of the adjustment for 2020-2021 is $11,568.76.

The remaining balance of this adjustment from commercial to residential is written off as a grant to the organizations. The amount of write-off f02 2020-2021 is $17,344.62.

The balance to be written-off for the fully exempt charitable properties for the fiscal year 2020-2021 year is $71,563.06.

It was moved and seconded to approve the commercial to residential adjustments for community halls in the amount of $11,568.76; provide the grant to write-off the

remaining balance owing by the community halls in the amount of $17,344.62; and write-off the fully exempt charitable properties in the amount of $71,563.06, all for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Motion carried.

2020/21 COMMUNITY GRANTS APPROVAL

Alix Redden, CFO, provided Draft #3 of the 2020-2021 Community Grant Applications list for approval. The total amount recommended for approval is $152,867.71.

Specific applicants were sent inquires for further information and information was received from Theatre Baddeck indicating funding was not required for the 2020 season, but they would be applying for 2021. The required information was also received from the Bay St. Lawrence Community Centre, Ingonish Volunteer Fire Department and the Cabot Trail Writers Festival. The status of the Farquharson Presbyterian Church request was discussed. A formal application has not been received from Festiville Baddeck and nothing has been received from the Ingonish Snowmobile Society with regard to the HST issue.

It was moved and seconded that the 2020-2021 Community Grants be approved in the amount of $152,867.71. Motion carried.

Council expressed appreciation to Alix Redden for developing the new grant policy and making the grant review process much easier this year.

Councillor Patterson questioned on the updating of the website. He was unable to find an up to date community grant application form on the website.

The revamping of the website is currently being worked on.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL CONCERNS/ITEMS

District #8

Councillor MacDonald indicated that grading was done throughout District #8, but the road leading to Cabot's Landing Provincial Park was not done and is in need of grading. Both TIR and Morley MacNeil, Department of Lands & Forestry are to be contacted in this regard.

The status of the Gaelic signage for District #8 was again brought up. This signage received approval from Minister Hines well over a year ago, but has not been ordered as yet. Steve MacDonald is to be contacted with regard to the long delay.

Councillor MacDonald also requested that the Department of TIR be requested for a list of the current inventory of equipment in the north of Smokey area and what equipment will be available for the 2020/21 winter season.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee indicated that all but one of the gravel roads in his district have been graded.

The lack of hazard marking at the erosion south of the Ingonish Marina still remains and also there is an eroded section south of Castle Rock Country Inn that requires marking.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee also brought up an annual complaint with regard to the lack of line painting throughout the County.

District #5

Councillor Patterson received an email with regard to the condition of the Southside Boularderie Road and plans for any upgrade to the Steel Cross Road from the south to the north side of Boularderie. Photos were attached and they are to be attached to the letter to TIR.

Councillor Patterson indicated that there is gravel, culverts and machinery on the Kempt Head Road and the work will commence and paving be completed in the future. This is good news.

The absence of the painted lines on the roadways throughout the County was also a concern expressed by Councillor Patterson.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis again brought up the sinkhole at the Englishtown Wharf and the erosion in the area of the former North Shore School.

On a positive note, Councillor MacInnis indicated that the Englishtown Ferry is in operation.

District #2

Councillor MacLeod indicated that residents have expressed concern with regard to speed on some road and streets throughout the County. The Department of TIR does not provide this service, but they are to be asked to do the required permit for each district.

District #1

Councillor MacNeil indicated that he and MLA Keith Bain, met with Steve MacDonald to discuss areas issues, but also want to note them in the minutes.

Grading has to be completed. At the middle of June, only a couple of roads in District #1 have been graded.

The potholes in Washabuck and Iona need to be patched and the signs that were downed in the winter, need to be replaced.

The John Neil George Road requires a couple of loads on gravel on the eastside of the road and there are old culverts on the left side of the road that should be removed.

Councillor MacNeil also wished to thank TIR for grading and leveling the shoulders of the road throughout the district.

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

DISTRICT CONCERNS

District #1

Councillor MacNeil advised that mowing is required at the pump station in Little Narrows.

Councillor MacNeil requested that it be indicated on the date when the water bills were estimated, so customers can expect an adjustment on their next bill.

The CAO concurred with this request and will investigate for the next meeting.

District #2

Community halls are in need of assistance with their operating costs due to COVID-19. Most of their operating revenue came from hosting events and fundraising and this was not permitted.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to our MP, Jaime Battiste, questioning if the federal government has any programs or funding available that could assist the community hall sector. Motion carried.

Councillor MacLeod again brought up the purchase of signage to indicate "Slow Down and Children Playing". She indicated that this signage is to be 14" diamond shape with reflective print and signage is to be provided to each district and the money come out of the Council special projects fund.

It was moved and seconded that the requested signs be purchased from the Council special projects fund and apply for the permits as required from the Department of TIR in each district if needed. Motion carried.

Councillor MacLeod extended a thank you to Jocelyn Bethune, Penny Chapman and Court House staff for the assistance with the Pride Flag raising.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis expressed concern over the internet access issue which was previously discussed.

District #5

Councillor Patterson concurred with Councillor MacLeod's concern with community halls. Halls have monthly bills to pay and no income. Prior to COVID-19, these halls were used an average of 4 nights per week generating revenue. This is a concern.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee expressed concern for the seasonal operators who are just re-opening and are not eligible for assistance because they did not have revenue in March or April.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to the federal and provincial governments advising that seasonal operators need assistance and are struggling to re-open currently and asking if there is any way the governments could help out this sector, it would be appreciated. Motion carried.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee expressed his thanks to the CAO for the preliminary work being undertaken and the information provided on possible water projects.

District #3

Warden Morrison brought up in person Council meetings which would meet all COVID-19 requirements.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, asking permission for Council to meet in person for future Council meetings as we are a small municipality and all COVID-19 requirements can be met. Motion carried.

District #8

Councillor MacDonald felt that a quote should be obtained for signage requested by Councillor MacLeod based on the requests per district and order signs based on that number.

Councillor MacDonald advised that residents of his district are questioning when a Re-Use Building will be located in the north of Smokey area.

The CAO indicated she realizes this is important in the northern area and will begin to pursue a possible location. If any of the northern Councillors has an idea as to location, way to run such a facility and an existing building that could be utilized; they are to contact the CAO.

It was moved and seconded that $500.00 be approved from the District #8 budget for the Bay St. Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department to assist with work being done on the Pioneer Cemetery in Bay St. Lawrence. Motion carried.

Councillor MacDonald indicated his great pride in wishing his aunt, Theresa MacDonald, a Happy 91st Birthday today.

BY-LAWS – PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing date is to be set for the 2nd reading of the Electronic Voting By-Law and the Water Supply or Septic Upgrade Lending By-Law.

The next meeting of Council is to be held on Monday, July 6, 2020.

It was moved and seconded that the Public Hearing for the Electronic Voting By-Law and the Water Supply or Septic Upgrade Lending Program By-Law be set for Monday, July 6, 2020, prior to Council at 4:00 and 4:30 p.m. Motion carried.

CAPE BRETON ISLAND HOUSING AUTHORITY BOARD

Correspondence was received from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing with regard to Victoria County membership on the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority Board.

At present Norman Matheson is Victoria County representative on this Board and his term will expire on July 19, 2020. Mr. Matheson is eligible for re-appointment for another 3 year term and has indicated his willingness to continue to serve.

It was moved and seconded that Norman Matheson be re-appointed as Victoria County's representative on the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority Board. Motion carried.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council will be held on Monday, July 6, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. The public hearings on the proposed by-laws will be held prior to Council.

Destination Cape Breton Association is to be requested to present at this meeting.

It is hoped that this meeting may be held in person respecting social distancing and all COVID-19 related protocols.

QUESTIONS

Adam MacNamara, CBC, questioned on the letter to be forwarded to Dr. Robert Strang at an earlier meeting.

The CAO advised that letter was forwarded to Dr. Strang.

Mr. MacNamara also questioned on the Gaelic signage for District #8 and was advised by Councillor MacDonald that the signage is for every community in District #8 from Cape North to this side of Meat Cove. There are 9 signs in total with the Gaelic name above and the English name below,

Mr. MacNamara questioned on the rebate requested for residents who have purchased their season ferry pass in both Englishtown and Little Narrows. Fees are not being charged due to COVID-19.

This request was sent to Minister Hines and to date a reply has not been received.

IN CAMERA

It was moved and seconded to move In Camera to deal with a real estate property matter. Motion carried.

The meeting returned to regular session.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, it was moved to adjourn.

Bruce Morrison, Warden

Leanne MacEachen, CAO