

VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
February 28, 2017

A meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held at the Court House, Baddeck, on Monday, February 28, 2017, 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 #7 – Wayne Budge
District #8 – Norman MacDonald

Also present were:

Sandy Hudson, CAO
Heather MacLean, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER/APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

BETH MACISAAC, SUPERINTENDENT, CBVRSB

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to Beth MacIsaac, Superintendent, Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board.

Ms. MacIsaac expressed her pleasure to be in attendance and the meeting was opened to questions from Council.

The community use of schools policy and the exorbitant cost for the use of the schools by community organizations was brought up. The issue of Boularderie School Celtic Colours concert was addressed. The rental cost was able to be negotiated.

Ms. MacIsaac indicated that the policy is in place. Custodial services are required to open, close and clean the buildings and this is a unionized environment. If any applicants have obstacles with this policy, they can get in touch with the School Board.

Ms. MacIsaac indicated that the School Board cannot absorb the custodial costs at the unionized wage. This is unionized work and it cannot be done by anyone other than unionized employees.

The status of the two P3 schools, Cape Smokey Elementary and North Highlands Elementary, was questioned. P3 or Public Private Partnership schools were built by private contractors and leased to the province under long term leases.

Ms. MacIsaac advised that the province has agreed to purchase the two P3 schools in Victoria County and the Board will maintain these schools for the P-5 population. Grades 6 from both schools go to Cabot High in the 6-8 middle school model.

Councillor Budge indicated he was surprised to read that the two P3 schools in northern Victoria County would be retained. He thought they would be returned to the owners and Cabot High would be a centralized school for all grade levels. The student population at both P3 schools is low.

When the Board decided on the middle school level, it was across the Board and not one area could be isolated for exception.

It was indicated by two northern Council members that they have family at the Grade 6 level that have relocated to Cabot High and they integrating well to the new school.

The use of school busses for the Celtic Colours Festival was discussed. This was done one year, but there were issues with the busses being used at night and not ready for use in the mornings the next day due to cleanliness. Whether volunteers could clean the busses was questioned and Ms. MacIsaac again reiterated that this is unionized work do be done by a unionized workforce.

Councillor MacLeod brought up the possibility of an afterhours program for children at Baddeck Academy. There are a number of ways this could be done, through community groups, parents or other different forms. Again it would be an application under community use of schools.

The possibility of a language immersion program (Gaelic) in the school was questioned. With the declining enrollment, it is difficult to rationalize such a program. There is a late immersion Gaelic program offered at Rankin that is funded by the Office of Gaelic Affairs. Ms. MacIsaac advised that programming is a dollars and cents issue.

The possibility of summer use of the school facilities was questioned. This would also be through community use of schools under the Operations Department of the School Board.

Whether a volunteer could assume responsibility for running the program and ensuring the building is secure after programs and having the cleaning staff come in the morning to clean was questioned. Paul Oldford, Operations Department, is the contact for use of schools.

Councillor MacNeil questioned on the status of the old Rankin School property. Ms. MacIsaac indicated she would investigate the status of this matter and advise on her findings.

Councillor MacNeil also questioned why a parent-teacher session for Rankin School of the Narrows was held in Eskasoni. He received some concerns.

Ms. MacIsaac advised that this would be a school based decision and the Principal will be contacted to find out the answer.

Councillor MacDonald questioned on the status of the old School Bus Garage at Bay St. Lawrence. This matter is in the hands of the lawyers and Ms. MacIsaac indicated she would obtain an update and provide her findings to Council.

Warden Morrison brought up the vacant schools within the Board that are being heated and secured. He felt that Victoria County is contributing to this upkeep through their contributions.

Ms. MacIsaac advised that most of the vacant schools in the Board are owned by CBRM and the three schools on the Northside that are currently vacant are owned by the School Board and will hopefully be sold.

Warden Morrison again brought up the community access to schools matter and the fact that schools should be the focal point of our communities. He questioned whether there was a way to work together. This is a discussion to be had with Paul Oldford, Operations Department.

Warden Morrison also questioned on Council's letter concerning the second set of bleachers for the soccer field at Baddeck Academy. Ms. MacIsaac indicated she was able to advise that the bleachers will be installed this summer.

Councillor Patterson questioned on the hub school concept. The government opened the door for under-utilized schools to share space during the school day as a way to keep the schools open. He felt that there could be a business case for Boularderie School to keep this school operating in the future.

To date the schools that have applied under the hub school criteria have not been accepted. Based on the business models submitted, the money was not there to allow this to happen.

The hub school concept is a provincial policy initiative and school boards have to follow it. There are guidelines to be followed.

The financial status of the CBVSB was outlined. Their 2016/17 operating budget was \$143 million. In terms of enrollment the decline over the past twenty years has been 50%. Decline is not as great as it once was, with 200 to 300 less students Board wise over the past couple of years.

Last April, 17 schools were identified for closure over the next five years. Ten were closed last year, another two this year and the remainder will be closed by 2020/21. These decisions are very difficult to make but the Board feels that student programming is more important.

Every year there are staff cuts – 16 teachers, 27 CUPE staff and 3 reductions at Regional office. Through retirements and other changes, these cuts have been minimal.

Ms. MacIsaac advised that all principals are now full-time principals and school secretarial support has been increased.

Collaboration with Native Schools was discussed. It was indicated that almost half of the Rankin School of the Narrows population are from Eskasoni.

Councillor Patterson mentioned storm days and recent activities with regard to classroom education, and he questioned whether they were looking at innovative ways of teaching and learning in today's environment. The use of technology across the province in school and access to same was discussed.

Ms. MacIsaac indicated that she would obtain answers to the issues she did not have answers for and with regard to the community use of schools, Paul Oldford would be the contact.

Warden Morrison extended a thank you to Beth MacIsaac for her attendance and the information provided.

CAPE BRETON FOOD HUB

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to Jim Mustard, Inverness County Councillor, and Alicia Lake, Coordinator of the PAN Cape Breton Food Hub, who were in attendance to make a presentation on the *PAN Cape Breton Food Hub – a Cape Breton Success Story* (copy attached).

The Food Hub began as a two year pilot project in 2015 in response to sector need. It was funded by the Municipal and Provincial government.

Ms. Lake explained how the Food Hub works. She presented both consumer and producer testimonials.

The results achieved during the pilot project were outlined, as were the monies paid to the producers as a result.

Jim Mustard presented the Business Development and Incubation information. He outlined the whole organizational structure of the PAN Cape Breton Food Hub.

Mr. Mustard provided information on agricultural land and protected land in Victoria County. He indicated that Councillor MacInnis sits on the committee with regard to land use policies for agricultural land. The development of a land bank was discussed.

The PAN Cape Breton Food Hub is a success and the future hope is for a sustainable piece that drives itself.

During the pilot project, each municipality provided \$4,900.00 and the request for the 2017/18 year is \$7,500.00.

Mr. Mustard indicated that this presentation was provided to Richmond County Council last night, and will be made to CBRM and Inverness County next week.

Discussion took place on restaurants that purchase through the Food Hub and more work will be done on this initiative this coming year. The Department of Agriculture have been requested to approve another position to assist Alicia.

The percentage difference in the cost of local foods as to those received from a major supplier was discussed. It was indicated that consumers are for the most part willing to pay for the organic/local product.

The concept to buy local is seen more and more in the media and there is a great deal of potential for this initiative.

How Victoria County's soil matches with other Cape Breton municipalities was questioned and it was indicated that the soil is similar to Inverness and CBRM.

Mr. Mustard indicated that 21% of Inverness County land is protected, but there is no percentage for agriculture. Victoria County's protected land percentage is 39%.

The Inverness-Victoria Federation of Agriculture is a strong organization, the most successful in the Province.

The fact that Victoria County has never used pesticide is a positive and makes it easier for producers to obtain organic certification.

Contacting business tourist associations throughout the County and getting word out about the Food Hub will assist in advising restaurants and may increase participation.

After further discussion, Warden Morrison extended a thank you to Alicia Lake and Jim Mustard for their presentation.

It was moved and seconded that the PAN Cape Breton Food Hub request for financial assistance in the amount of \$7,500.00 be referred to budget talks. Motion carried.

VICTORIA COUNTY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY

Deputy Warden Dauphinee referred to last night's presentation with regard to the Active Living Strategy and the fact that council did not renew the strategy at this meeting.

It was moved and seconded that the Victoria County Active Living Strategy be renewed. Motion carried.

PETITON – DINGWALL ROAD

Sandy Hudson advised as the original petition for the repaving of the Dingwall Road was submitted to Pam Eyking, MLA, she would be bringing it forward to the Legislature.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, it was moved to adjourn at 6:30 p.m.

Bruce Morrison, Warden

Sandy Hudson, CAO