

VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

July 27, 2020

A meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held via Zoom on Monday, July 27, 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 #7 – Wayne Budge
District #8 – Norman MacDonald

Also present were:

Leanne MacEachen, CAO
Heather MacLean, Recorder

CALL TO ORDER

Warden Morrison called the meeting to order and read the following statement regarding the German national magazine, *Der Spiegel* 's article that says German right-wing Nazi sympathizers are setting up in Cape Breton

“This was a disturbing article recently that discussed radical views on Cape Breton Island. Let us be clear. We are a welcoming community, but these views are not welcome, nor will they be entertained or accepted in Victoria County. We are fortunate to have people from all over the world who live and contribute to life here. They are honest, hard-working people who believe in the goodness of mankind and like us, abhor anything less.”

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The draft agenda was presented for approval.

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

CAPE BRETON PARTNERSHIP

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to Carla Arsenault, President and CEO, and Patrick Austin, EDO, with the Cape Breton Partnership.

Ms. Arsenault thanked Council for the opportunity to appear and update on the Cape Breton Partnership's activities. She indicated that a lot has changed since her last meeting with Council with the affects COVID-19 has had on the Cape Breton economy.

Ms. Arsenault provided Council with an update on the Cape Breton Partnership's role in population and economic growth through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) Program, Cape Breton Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) and the Welcoming Communities Initiative.

The statistics with regard to these programs were provided and she indicated the launch of the Cape Breton Welcome Network in 2020-21.

Program updates were received on:

- Business Planning Services
- Export Growth Service
- Welcome to Cape Breton Website
- Dream Business Program
- Rural Housing Study
- Cape Breton Job Board
- Creative Island Innovation Space
- Virtual Advisor Program
- Creative Economy Job Creation

The COVID-19 supports available for businesses were outlined.

- COVID-19 Resources for Business webpage
- Helping Business Respond During COVID-19 webinar series
- Island wide business survey
- Local leadership Stay at Home video
- Business discussions with Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health

- Creative Economy support
- Nova Scotia Business Labour Economic Coalition
- Re-opening of Cape Breton Economy toolkit
- Island-wide economic recover discussions

The Cape Breton First Campaign around local business as to being a champion for this project was discussed.

Patrick Austin, EDO, presented an update on Victoria County. He indicated that the last quarter has been an extremely interesting one and it has been a pleasure to work with Council and businesses throughout Victoria County.

Patrick Austin updated on the COVID Relief Liaison. With federal and provincial assistance, COVID plan counselling was conducted with 30 businesses and regular updates were provided to 100 businesses.

The Ingonish Development is proceeding. This is a \$100m project and Mr. Austin works with Cape Smokey Holding and Provincial and Federal Agencies to assist businesses in the area.

Mr. Austin indicated that he has 39 ongoing business advisory services, 18 outside action plans and 22 files on new business and 17 business expansion plans.

Broadband webinars were held on July 15 and 22, 2020. These webinars were well attended and well received.

The Mountain Bike Strategy and Action Plan are ongoing. This is a family friendly activity in Adventure Tourism. We must capitalize our assets and create new opportunities to extend the tourism season and open doors for new business.

Patrick indicated that Whistler, BC, the most popular ski resort in Canada, sells 600,000 lift tickets, but sell 900,000 mountain biking passes. This shows the impact of mountain biking can have in our area in extending the season.

An update was provided on municipal relations. The unique concerns of business owners are brought to the County.

The Tourism Seasonality Project has seen great success in the past year.

The floor was then opened for questions. Council as a whole thanked Carla and Patrick for their updates.

Councillor MacNeil also extended thanks to Shannon MacNeil, CBP, on the assistance provided to the Central Cape Breton Communities Ventures in his district.

Councillor MacLeod indicated that the Broadband webinars were excellent and indicated the Victoria County is not the only County with internet service issues.

Councillor MacInnis indicated that he can see the construction work being done in northern Victoria County by the number of truckloads of material that pass his area on a daily basis.

Carla indicated that CBP staff are working from home two days per week and are rotating the days each are in the office since mid-June. She expects this trend to continue for some time.

It was indicated that retail sales are down while online sales are through the roof. Businesses are still adapting to the new reality.

Whether businesses qualified for the wage subsidy was questioned and it was indicated that programs are evolving on a regular basis and contact is maintained with individual businesses. There is a TIANS wage subsidy program that has been extended to December, 2020.

The federal government has made adjustments to their programs to be brought to Parliament but there are no guarantees these changes will be passed by Parliament.

The CAO advised that she and Patrick connect every week to discuss Victoria County issues.

Warden Morrison indicated that Council appreciates the work of the CBP and are pleased to be seeing results that they have never seen before. This economic development process works for the County and they look forward to this relationship continuing into the future. Victoria County is 100% behind the Cape Breton First Campaign.

The Warden extended a thank you to Carla Arsenault and Patrick Austin for the updates and information provided. They left the meeting at this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JULY 6, 2020

The minutes of the July 6, 2020, meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council were presented for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the July 6, 2020, minutes of Victoria County Municipal Council be approved as presented. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Leanne MacEachen advised that all letters were done and sent out from the July 6, 2020 Council.

The teleconference with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 29, 2020. The meeting is only one hour, so Council is to review the list and remove items that can be dealt with through the local TIR officials.

The Temporary Borrowing Resolutions has been approved and the County will be receiving a deposit from the Province in the near future.

The Low Income Tax Exemption form is now online and residents who qualify are encouraged to apply.

The possible chipping of construction and demolition materials currently hauled to Baddeck from Dingwall was discussed. The CAO advised that it is extremely costly to chip and the end product would have paint and toxins that are not good for use, so this is not a viable option. The truck company hauling these materials has been contacted with regard to concern over transporting these materials.

The CAO indicated that she contacted the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing about their involvement in the CDDI By-Law and they informed their role is to review it. The document has been forwarded for review.

Copies of the *Love Lives Here* books have been received and will be distributed to schools across the County.

The increase in the number of rejected solid waste has increased from June to present. It appears that numbers increase when seasonal residents come to the County. Investigation is to be done on getting the message out to the public.

NEW BUSINESS

Tourism/Development

Dan Coffin, Tourism and Development Officer, is currently on vacation.

Recreation/Active Living

An update was provided on the Recreation/Active Living Department. The Active Living survey closes this week and so far 131 residents have responded. The Recreation Kits have been obtained and are being used by residents. There is a waiting list for items at present.

Lydia Kerr is part of a Special Events Task Force and the Cabot Trail Relay Race is being used as a pilot project for this area.

The assistance grants closed today and several applications were received in excess of the funding available. Providing each applicant with some assistance will be considered.

Work is also being undertaken on a Hiking Etiquette poster.

Economic Development

Patrick Austin, EDO, provided an update earlier in the meeting.

Finance

Five applications were received to date for the Property Tax Financing Program. Pre-approved payments are being encouraged for water and taxes.

The CAO advised that there will be changes to processes in the Tax Office to make work more efficient.

The Municipality's banking has been transferred to the Royal Bank and credit cards are being distributed to department heads. There will be several internal controls in place for the use of the credit cards.

Public Works

Two Requests for Proposals were issued today for the Neil's Harbour Water Treatment Plant technologies and one related to metals.

Wastewater project meetings are being held and water arrears are becoming an issue. Letters will be forwarded to delinquent accounts.

Surplus materials were sold and \$52,000.00 was realized from the sale.

The Municipality is engaging with Parks Canada to get our Water Agreement signed, as well as discussion on wastewater.

Municipal Election

A meeting was held with Blair Gallop, Returning Officer, on the October 17, 2020, Municipal Election. Nomination Day is September 8, 2020, and the Returning Officer will be available by appointment the week prior to accept nominations. There will be a ten day electronic voting period for the election.

Other

Mobi-Mats and Mobi-Chairs have been obtained and will be placed on a couple of beaches. Parks Canada has agreed to look after these mats and store them at their facilities.

The Gaelic College public washroom is now in operation.

A Cape Breton island-wide project to standardize Municipal By-Laws has commenced.

The CAO updated on meetings she has attended since the last Council session.

Councillor Patterson questioned on the location of rejected garbage. Both adjoining Municipalities accept black bags, where Victoria County does not. This will be investigated.

TAXATION UPDATE

The CAO presented the Taxation Update indicating that this could be the first update where the impact of COVID-19 is being felt.

As of today, \$8,451,909 is outstanding, compared to \$8,070,462 this time last year – a difference of \$381,447 behind last year. The due date for taxes has been moved to September 30, 2020, so people are likely taking time to pay.

The entire difference is within current and presently we are at \$7,564,968 outstanding compared to \$7,126,906 last year, a difference of \$438k behind. This is offset by arrears being ahead by \$56,616.

Since the last Council, \$1.332m has been collected and only 6 applications (5 residential/1 commercial) have been received for the Tax Installment Program which will remain open until September 30, 2020.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL ITEMS/CONCERNS

District #8

Councillor MacDonald indicated that residents are requesting an update on when the trimmer will be coming to District #8 as foliage in all areas is causing a concern.

The status of the Gaelic signage for District #8 is to be investigated.

The shoreline erosion in the Dingwall area, just up from the Markland Inn, is causing concern and is at a dangerous level at present. The location of this signage is to be requested immediately.

Councillor MacDonald requested that TIR be contacted for the approximate date that RIM work being undertaken on the Fraser Road, Bay St. Lawrence.

The pavement collapse at the bottom of the Cape North Hill is a concern. Traffic is moving into the opposite lane to drive around this section. This is a traffic hazard.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee brought up the issue of dust from the construction on Smokey. The Department of TIR is to be requested for more dust control.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee brought up a District #7 concern with regard to the increased usage of the North Bay Wharf beach. Cars are blocking the Wharf Road and it is down to one lane. Fishermen and residents of the road are concerned over the amount of cars and are requesting that No Parking signs be placed in this area.

District #5

Councillor Patterson indicated that one resident in his district has been waiting four years to have a culvert replaced and another has been requesting a hidden driveway sign for five years. Neither has been done.

The approach being used is not working and more money is required for road maintenance.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis indicated that the present system for repairs is not working and he felt that some work should be tendered to private contractors to complete. This would ensure the work is done.

District #2

Councillor MacLeod indicated that her concerns are the same as mentioned at the last Council session.

District #1

Councillor MacNeil indicated that a pothole on Route 223 at the entrance of the Dunn road is very deep and the traffic is moving to the opposite side of the road to avoid the hole.

The road at the Gypsum area in Jamesville has to be investigated. It is very dangerous and cars are travelling on the opposite side of the road to avoid potholes.

The issues addressed at the last meeting still remain. More money is necessary for road maintenance.

DISTRICT CONCERNS

District #1

Councillor MacNeil brought up a water bill issue in Little Narrows. Robert Dauphinee is to investigate this matter.

District #2

Councillor MacLeod brought up a concern with regard to potholes in the drive through lane and parking area at the Irving/Tim Hortons.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to Irving requesting that the potholes in their parking lot area be repaired. Motion carried.

It was moved and seconded that \$1,400.00 be approved for the Middle River Community Hall and \$1,000.00 to the Baddeck Valley Community Hall to assist with operations from the District #2 budget. Motion carried.

District #5

Councillor Patterson questioned on the length of time the 911 system was down last week. This is a concern for our residents.

It was a short duration and Lyle Donovan, EMC, along with Jocelyn Bethune, Communications Officer, were proactive in this situation, getting messaging and contact number notifications out.

The CAO advised that the Municipality is looking into a Voyant messaging system as one way of getting messaging out. Residents email addresses or text information will be required. More information will be received as known.

District #6

It was moved and seconded that \$1,000.00 be approved from the District #6 budget for the Ingonish Baseball Association (Attention of Adam Sams). Motion carried.

District #8

Councillor MacDonald had calls from residents who were unaware of the water shutoff in Dingwall on Sunday. Those who are not on social media are wondering how they can be informed.

The Yoyant system presently being investigated may be able to address some issues. This matter will be investigated further.

It was moved and seconded that \$2,000.00 be approved for the Cape North Masonic Hall, Cape North, to assist with well installation and hall maintenance and \$1,000.00 for the Bay St. Lawrence Fishnet Society to assist with promoting green space area, from the District #8 budget. Motion carried.

Councillor MacDonald made mention of the Maple Ridge Cabins, a new business in his district, that is receiving great reviews. He welcomed this new business to his district and Victoria County.

District #7

It was moved and seconded that \$1,000.00 be approved from the District #7 budget for the Neil's Harbour/New Haven Development Association. Motion carried.

Councillor Budge received a call earlier today about a dead seal on the beach in the area of the Lighthouse and Chowder House. He will organize the removal of the seal and pay for same from his district budget. He will submit the cost to the Municipality when completed.

BY-LAW/POLICY REVIEW

There are no by-laws or policies for consideration this evening.

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Letter from Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing approving Norman Matheson's reappointment to the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority Board.
2. Letter from Minister Lloyd Hines, Minister of TIR, in reply to Council's letter of May 2, 2020, advising that ferry fees have been waived to ensure safety for their crews and

travelers and an extension will be made to Ferry passes for the time since fees have not been collected.

3. A letter was received from the Village of Baddeck that was addressed to Mark Peck, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Warden Bruce Morrison concerning the Village governance issue.

Warden Morrison indicated that approximately one month ago a Zoom meeting was held to discuss Village issues and at that time the Village was to draft a letter to start the process. This is that letter. They were also to notify their Village residents which they did today.

The options are in the Village's hands and they are to address what their options are. It is their decision, not ours. More clarification is to be requested.

It was moved and seconded that this matter be referred to the CAO to obtain a clear definition of what the Village is looking for and indicating that Council is open to meeting with them once they provide the Municipality with the options. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Councillor MacLeod, Chair of the Victoria County Transit, indicated that Victoria County Transit will be re-commencing service on a limited basis on August 4, 2020, with COVID-19 requirements in place. A new Manager, Amber Carrigan, has been hired by Strait Area Transit.

Councillor MacLeod requested that Jocelyn Bethune get the messaging out about what is required and what to expect with the re-opening of Victoria County Transit.

Warden Morrison also expressed thanks to Jocelyn Bethune who was the administrator of tonight's Zoom meeting for the first time.

QUESTIONS

Adam MacNamara, CBC, indicated that Victoria County has a large geographic area and he questioned if the Department of TIR budget is disbursed according to area served.

It was indicated it does not appear to be that way. Department of TIR concerns was made an agenda item of its own as over 70% of the district concerns were Department of TIR related. This speaks to our frustration and hence the request to meet with the Minister.

The Baddeck TIR budget also includes areas of Inverness County and this area is underfunded.

Department of TIR concerns are an issue with every Councillor. These concerns are ongoing at each meeting.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council will be held on Monday, August 10, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Council will remain meeting virtually until the *Provincial State of Emergency* is lifted.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, it was moved to adjourn at 6:45 p.m.

Leanne MacEachen, CAO

Bruce Morrison, Warden