

VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

April 20, 2020

A meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held via Zoom teleconference on Monday, April 20, 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
Jocelyn Bethune, Communications Officer
Heather MacLean, Recorder

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 for the April 20, 2020, meeting be approved as presented. Motion carried.

Warden Morrison advised that this Council session is being livestreamed on Facebook.

SYMPATHIES

Warden Morrison acknowledged this past weekend's catastrophic events and extended the sympathies of Council to the families of all the victims of this horrific tragedy. He also expressed sympathies to the Councils and residents of Colchester County where most of the heartbreak occurred and to East Hants where the tragedy ended.

Warden Morrison also advised that CBRM Councillor, Ray Paruch, succumbed to his battle with cancer on the weekend and he extended the sympathies of Council to Mr. Paruch's family and CBRM Council on his loss. He was a long standing member of CBRM Council and was a respected colleague and friend.

Warden Morrison then requested Council to observe a moment of silence in commemoration of these two sorrowful events.

PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT COMMITTEES UPDATE

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to David Parkinson, who was in attendance to update on the work undertaken by the Physician Recruitment Committees.

Mr. Parkinson thanked Council for the opportunity to appear to update on the steps taken in order to further the Municipality's efforts in physician recruitment. He outlined that there are three primary committees – the Recruitment and Welcoming Committee of which he is Chair; the Fundraising Committee chaired by Margot MacAulay; and the Advocacy and Communications Committee chaired by Cathi MacKenzie. There is a fourth committee that is a group of residents who have volunteered to assist in any way as required.

These committees have met individually many times since forming in November, 2019, and have also met collectively to chart the path forward. Three primary goals have been identified. They include the need to build a strong locum program; the need to hire at least two, preferably three doctors and the need for a facility expansion. He outlined that expansion does not necessarily mean expanding the hospital. It could mean acquiring another nearby space that is separate from, but linked to the existing hospital.

Mr. Parkinson outlined the current activities to Council. There was a physician locum planned for April 10-29, 2020, that was cancelled due to COVID-19. A "Clinic Crawl" has been planned by NSHA's Recruitment Specialist, Bill O'Brien, for May but it is on hold due to COVID-19. There are also two possible doctor visits to the area in later summer/early fall 2020. The Recruitment Committee will be responsible for accommodations, meals, and welcome activities.

A new webpage is currently under development. This webpage will provide a platform to sell the Victoria County Memorial Hospital and the area. A link to this webpage will be provided as a link to other websites.

In order to move forward, there are anticipated costs such as webpage development at a cost of \$2,500.00; branding development at a cost of \$500.00; printed materials at an approximate cost of \$1,000.00; and an allowance to pay all costs for visiting physicians. The Municipality was requested to assist with these costs to plan the path forward.

Councillors thanked Mr. Parkinson for his presentation and indicated that medical recruitment is a #1 initiative for Council, not only physicians, but other medical personnel as well. The area Councillors offered their assistance in any way they can.

The Councillors in the north of Smokey area indicated that they are fortunate to have a strong locum program and do not have the influx of people coming to their hospital from outside the County as does the Victoria County Memorial Hospital.

With the current circumstances, all initiatives are on hold, but funding will be required when time permits life to return to normal. The CAO indicated there is money remaining in last year's budget for this initiative. Mr. Parkinson is to contact the CAO on this matter.

Warden Morrison extended a thank you to Mr. Parkinson for his presentation and the work to be undertaken by all volunteer committees.

Mr. Parkinson, who is also Chair of the Cabot Trail Relay Association, advised that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cabot Trail Relay has been cancelled for this year and the Association will not require financial assistance from the Municipality.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – APRIL 6, 2020

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

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

OLD BUSINESS

The letter was forwarded to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board with regard to deferral of water payments and interest and a reply was received approving the request within a day of sending the letter.

Several kind messages were received related to the Tim Hortons gift gesture in southern Victoria County and the CAO indicated that an initiative for North of Smokey is being worked on with the local gas stations in the area.

NEW BUSINESS

Leanne MacEachen advised that she continues to have daily meetings with Department Heads and outlined the initiatives being undertaken.

The Municipality was contacted by Tom Taggart, FCM Representative, with regard to COVID-19 and the impact that is expected in tourism and he will bring forward the information received to the FCM.

250 responses were received for the Housing Survey and the information is currently being compiled.

A Budget Committee meeting was held last week and another meeting will be scheduled within the next couple of weeks.

The AMANS and NSFMS have been working collaboratively on a province-wide tax repayment program which should be available by the end of next week.

A second load of recyclables have been sent to Camden Recycling. The CAO indicated that the possibility of re-opening the solid waste facilities on a limited basis is being investigated.

The CAO advised that the April 6, 2020, Council session had 389 views as of this morning.

A motion is required for making a submission to the province for Provincial Capital Assistance Program (PCAP) funding for extension of the waterline in Ingonish to Ski Cape Smokey and beyond. An estimate for the proposed extension is \$570,000.00.

It was moved and seconded that application be made for PCAP funding for the extension of the Ingonish Water System. Motion carried.

The CAO indicated that the same consideration will be given to the Cape North waterline extension.

Council was advised that there are currently 28 people watching the livestreamed Council meeting.

TAXATION UPDATE

The CAO reported that as of today, \$1,132,660 is outstanding - \$663,156 in current and \$469,503 in arrears.

This is compared to \$1,306,428 outstanding at the same time last year with current at \$749,241 and arrears at \$557,187, a difference of \$173,768 total. Current is ahead by \$86k and arrears by \$88k. Total collections since April 6, 2020, are \$10,834k.

It is disheartening to see the momentum in tax collection being delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Warden Morrison commended the efforts of staff with regard to tax collection.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL ITEMS/CONCERNS

District #1

Councillor MacNeil indicated that there are areas in the Jamesville/Iona and Grass Cove areas where the shoulders of the road have subsided. These areas require immediate attention.

There are potholes through Iona and on to the Barra Strait Bridge that need to be filled as soon as possible.

Again, Councillor MacNeil requested that a grading of all gravel roads throughout District #1 be completed as soon as the area is dry enough for grading.

Councillor MacNeil questioned if a reply was received from Steve MacDonald, TIR, with regard to a virtual meeting to update on TIR issues. The CAO indicated that they are currently working on a date and time that works for this meeting.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis again brought up the issue of damaged guardrail posts throughout his District.

Councillor MacInnis indicated that he spoke with John Majchrowicz, Director of Marine Services, regarding the Englishtown Ferry about 10 days ago and he indicated at that time it would be in operation before too long. As of today, it is still out of service.

District #5

Councillor Patterson advised that the Department of TIR is currently patching potholes on the Kempt Head Road. He waits with anticipation, the new pavement for the Kempt Head Road this construction season.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee mentioned it was great to see Department of TIR replacing signs in his district.

He indicated there is a concern with regard to erosion along the road in Ingonish Harbour area in the area of the Knotty Pine Cottages. Deputy Warden Dauphinee also requested a complete grading of gravel roads throughout his district and completion of necessary work to the Beach Crossing Road.

DISTRICT CONCERNS

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee indicated that the food bank North of Smokey has seen a 25% increase in usage in the past two weeks. This food bank relies on donations and he indicated he would like to donate from his 2020-21 district budget in advance of budget approval.

It was moved and seconded that an advance of \$1,000.00 from the 2020-21 District #6 budget be approved for the North of Smokey Food Bank pending on the initiative currently being worked on by Lydia Kerr, Recreation and Physical Activity Director. Motion carried.

District #5

Councillor Patterson indicated that the food bank in District #5 is in the same position.

Councillor Patterson brought up a recent article in the *Cape Breton Post* by Councillors Clarence Prince and Earlene MacMullin, CBRM, concerning the COVID-19 crisis and what will happen and how it will permanently change the way we lived prior to this pandemic.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis advised that the crab fishery in Victoria County has started and they have seen a 50% drop in prices. He also indicated that a survey of the fishermen in LFA #27 was conducted last week on whether they want to lobster season to proceed or be cancelled. The votes will be tabulated tonight and it is anticipated that the majority will want to close the season for this year.

Unfortunately, to date, the federal government is not listening to the fishermen and the Minister has previously indicated that the fishery will continue this season.

Councillor MacInnis indicated that this will have a huge negative impact on our County.

Councillor MacInnis questioned on the amount of funding provided for the Cabot Trail Relay and now that it is cancelled for this year, if it could be divided for the food banks in Victoria County.

The amount of funding annually to the Cabot Trail Relay is \$8,000.00 and this matter can be discussed at the next Budget Committee meeting.

The CAO advised that a new COVID-19 line will be created in the 2020-21 budget.

District #2

Councillor MacLeod indicated that as the spring season is a time for home renovations, she has been requested to see if the solid waste facilities could be open to residents on at least a limited basis.

This matter is currently being discussed with the Director of Public Works.

District #1

Councillor MacNeil advised that he has copies of the COVID-19 posters in his possession and they will be available for residents to pick up at the Post Office and Little Dipper.

District #3

Warden Morrison echoed Councillor MacInnis' concern with regard to the fishery.

Warden Morrison indicated that he and the CAO will be meeting with BABTA with regard to the effect COVID-19 is and will have on the tourist industry.

The Warden also advised that he and the CAO meet weekly with NSFM/AMANS officials. The meetings are chaired by Mayor Pam Mood, NSFM President. He advised that if Councillors have any item they want brought before these meetings, to let him know.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Seniors' Safety

Councillor MacLeod, Chairman of the Seniors' Safety Advisory Committee advised that the Seniors' Safety Officer continues to hold party line discussions with seniors on Monday from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

A new virtual Seniors' Lunch Program will be launched this Wednesday from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

A Seniors' Safety Program page has been added to Facebook.

BY-LAWS/POLICY

The CAO advised that the County is part of a program with all Cape Breton municipalities with regard to an inventory of by-laws. Portside Law Office has been retained to conduct a review of all by-laws to determine whether they need updating, should be repealed or if new ones are required. The Province is involved in this review and all Victoria County by-laws have been provided to Portside Law.

An educational session on how to familiarize with the use of virtual meetings was held. Whether there should be a by-law/policy made related to this issue was discussed. The generic document received will be circulated for review at the next meeting.

NEXT MEETINGS

A Budget Committee meeting will be scheduled in the near future in conjunction with the CFO. Councillors will be advised of the date and time.

The next meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council will be held via Zoom on Monday, May 4, 2020, at 5:00 p.m.

GOOD NEWS

Councillor Patterson indicated that Terry Smith, CEO of Destination Cape Breton, introduced the initiative “Thirty Days of Thanks”. He advised that this initiative was the idea of Dan Coffin, our Tourism and Development Officer.

Warden Morrison thanked Council and staff for their attendance and indicated that with each meeting, Council is familiarizing themselves more and more with the use of the technology.

SYMPATHIES

Councillor MacInnis indicated that expressions of condolence should be forwarded to Colchester County on the tragic events of last weekend and to CBRM on the death of Councillor Ray Paruch. Proper condolences will be forwarded.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Bruce Morrison, Warden

Leanne MacEachen, CAO