

VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

July 6, 2020

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

Also present were:

Leanne MacEachen, CAO
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 be approved as presented. Motion carried.

SECOND (FINAL) BY-LAW READINGS

Prior to Council, two Public Hearings were held on proposed by-laws.

The first Public Hearing was held on the *Water Supply or Septic Upgrade Lending Program By-Law*. No presentations were received and the by-law was recommended for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the *Water Supply or Septic Upgrade Lending Program By-Law* be approved for second (final) reading. Motion carried.

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The second Public Hearing was on the *By-Law to Authorize the Voting by Telephone/Internet for the 2020 Municipal Elections (Electronic Voting By-Law)*. No presentations were received from the public and the by-law was recommended to Council for approval.

It was moved and seconded that the *By-Law to Authorize the Voting by Telephone/Internet for the 2020 Municipal Elections (Electronic Voting By-Law)* be approved for second (final) reading. Motion carried.

DESTINATION CAPE BRETON ASSOCIATION

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to Terry Smith, CEO, Destination Cape Breton Association.

Mr. Smith thanked Council for the opportunity to appear and outlined some of Destination Cape Breton's pandemic initiatives. Sixty six food operators took part in the #Cape BretonTakeout; 33 participated in the Give the Gift of Tourism and 37 essential service providers received gift cards from 63 operators.

Mr. Smith outlined the recovery picture to Council. There is a pent-up demand with limited options and reluctance to travel for safety reasons. The supply is limited due to social distancing and gathering limits and events have been shut down and some operators are not opening. In terms of the economy, the impact on disposable income and savings has been impacted.

The Atlantic bubble came into effect on July 3, 2020, and it is anticipated that this will be extended to the rest of Canada on the third week in July. Nova Scotians spend \$990 M on travel inside the province and \$800 M outside the province.

The origin of visitors to Cape Breton was outlined. In a typical year, 77% of our visitors are from out of the region and it is anticipated that 22% will not be able to visit this year. We are a pleasure travel destination and this is a good position when there are limited vacation options.

Mr. Smith outlined their marketing strategy for this season. He outlined the experience focus and creative focus. A push has been made to get a message out to the Maritimes that we are open and to residents to start planning a staycation this year.

The Clean It Right training for the tourism, hospitality and retail industry was outlined. This program was recently released and offers online training for staff on cleaning for COVID-19. It is designed to provide confidence to visitors and community and this designation will be promoted to visitors and residents.

Mr. Smith outlined the path to purchase and the partnership in development with Tourism Nova Scotia that is complementary to the provincial strategy.

Out of 109 operators surveyed in Victoria County, 85% are planning to be open this season. Overall, Victoria County tourism operators indicated they are forecasting a 39% decline in employment levels this season.

The loss of the cruise ship industry this season was discussed and it will impact Victoria County as cruise ship passengers visited our County. Whether the cruise ship industry would return in the future was questioned and Mr. Smith indicated he fully expects it will return. DCBA is a member of the Atlantic Canada Cruise Association and there are avid cruisers, who will return when it is safe to do so.

The tour bus industry was also questioned and it was indicated that operators are still getting bookings from bus companies and this is a positive for the industry.

The 39% decrease in employment projected is a concern. Local operators who are just reopening are experiencing difficulties purchasing supplies and struggling to salvage something to sustain them but the fear is that funds will be low next winter and there will be difficulty covering expenses.

The closure of the border to Americans was discussed. Mr. Smith indicated that Ontario is our biggest market and the American border shouldn't open any time soon.

Warden Morrison extended appreciation to Mr. Smith and DCBA for the support and advice provided as we work through this difficult time.

Mr. Smith indicated that the final touches are currently being made to their 10 year strategy and he will come back in the fall to update Council on this and other items.

After further discussion, Warden Morrison extended a thank you to Terry Smith for his presentation.

VICTORIA COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Courtesy of Council was extended to Christine Hines, Facility Manager, Victoria County Memorial Hospital.

Christine Hines was in attendance to update on the “point of care” service that was introduced at the Victoria County Memorial Hospital in late June. She shared her excitement with regard to an extension of lab services at this facility.

The first phase of training, which was taking place when COVID-19 arrived, has been completed and the nursing staff can take over for lab staff after 10:00 p.m. for emergency blood work.

The range of lab services has been increased. The lab is open regular hours – 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The lab staff covers for emergencies in the evening hours and after 10:00 p.m. nursing staff can cover through point of care..

There will be no loss of services. The point of care system accentuates the service as there is the capability for more onsite blood work that does not have to be shipped out. Staffing remains the same at the Lab. Mora Nicholson retired but has agreed to provide some on-call and Brenda Cook has acquired a full-time position and advertisement was done for an additional lab tech.

People accessing blood work during regular hours, through the week, must call and make an appointment. Emergency blood work will be handled as it normally has and there will be no change.

Councillors congratulated Mora Nicholson on her retirement and Ms. Hines indicated that they are happy she has offered to return on occasion.

Ms. Hines thanked Council and the public for their support and indicated that any time there is a change in service she would like to return to provide an update.

Warden Morrison indicated that having a hospital in our community is an important resource and Council appreciated the update and indicated Council would look forward to having her back to update at any time she feels it is required. He thanked Ms. Hines for her presentation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JUNE 15, 2020

The minutes of the June 15, 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 15, 2020, be approved as presented. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

The beach walkway at Neil's Harbour has been replaced.

A Broadband meeting has been scheduled with Develop Nova Scotia on July 15, 2020, for Councillors and a meeting open to the public has been scheduled for July 22, 2020.

Lyle Donovan is investigating the number of volunteer firefighters with 25 years of services for each department in the County.

Quotes have been requested for firefighter service medals and children playing signs.

CAO REPORT

Leanne MacEachen provided the rejection statistics for solid waste for the period June 1 to July 3, 2020. Overall the numbers are good, especially with seasonal residences reopening.

The CAO updated on what is happening in the Tourism Department. Dan Coffin has held 25 meetings/connections with operators and is hearing their concerns and optimism. He is currently developing a survey on who is open and their hours of operations to distribute to operators on a regular basis.

The Recreation/Active Living Department is working on applications for mobi-mats for Victoria County beaches and getting craft kits distributed within the County. Work is also being done on bike/ski initiatives for the upcoming season. Sixty-two responses have been received to date on an Active Living survey. The survey will close on July 31, 2020. Investigation is being done on developing a Safe Hiking during COVID-19 pamphlet.

Patrick Austin, EDO, has been visiting businesses throughout the County and is working on a mountain bike strategy. An Adventure Tourism Strategy is also in development. He is currently working on 5 new business plans.

As of today Public Works is now back to normal operations. Water meter readings have started again. The Geotechnical RFQ closed today related to the waterline extension in Ingonish and a surplus equipment tender is open until July 9, 2020.

The Finance Department is encouraging residents to sign up for the PAP program and is currently waiting for the draft of the financial statements from Grant Thornton LLP.

Investigation is ongoing on Tax Sale options. Some property searches require access to the Probate Office and this office is currently closed.

The CFO distributed a copy of a Tax Exemption Policy and Form to Council for review. The new income threshold has been increased to \$25,000.00 for senior and low income residents and the rebate received will be increased from \$200.00 to \$225.00. Discussion took place.

It was moved and seconded that the Tax Exemption Policy and application form be accepted. Motion carried.

Alix Redden presented the 2020-2021 budget for the Victoria County Water Utility for Council's review. As of March 31, 2020, there is a deficit of \$1.3 Million.

It was moved and seconded that the 2020-2021 budget for the Victoria County Water Utility be approved. Motion carried.

Joan Sullivan, a seasonal visitor from Pennsylvania, USA, purchased a large quantity of flowers from the Fiddle Shed for her summer residence, but as she is unable to travel this year, she has provided the flowers to the Court House and Alderwood.

There are proposed amendments to the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations pertaining to restaurants. Any concerns are to be provided to the Nova Scotia Fire Marshal's Office by August 12, 2020.

A Temporary Borrowing Resolution in the amount of \$3,606,000 is required for temporary short term loan from the Province of Nova Scotia related to COVID-19.

It was moved and seconded to approve a Temporary Borrowing Resolution from the Province in the amount of \$3,606,000.00. Motion carried.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee requested that the Geotechnical Survey tender be enacted right away to get this work done as soon as possible.

TAXATION UPDATE

The CAO advised that the Tax Bills are now out and we are back into the millions for receivables.

As of today, we are at \$9,784,161 outstanding vs. \$9,727,318 at the same time last year, so we are \$56,843 behind last year.

Current now is \$8.855 Million outstanding compared to \$9.713 Million for a difference of \$142k behind.

\$184k more was billed this year as a result of increases in residential assessment of \$159k. If we take this increased billing into consideration and exclude it, \$928,827 is outstanding for arrears, compared to \$1,014,121 this time last year - \$85,293 to the positive.

Since the June 15, 2020, Council meeting \$45k has been collected towards taxes, excluding the new billing.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

District #1

Councillor MacNeil indicated that he forwarded an email to TIR and Keith Bain, MLA, on issues within his district which included:

- Beavers have the bridge on the John Neil George Road blocked again and the water is up to the road
- Old culverts along the John Neil George Road are to be replaced and a couple of loads of gravel are required on the Eastern end of this road
- Patching is required in the Washabuck area
- Patching of potholes is required through the Iona area

- A couple of loads of gravel is required on the Dunn Road on the curve at the bottom of the road
- Section of Gillis Point Road/Grass Cove at the Bridge looks to be undermined. This road was paved a couple of years ago and is now bumpy before getting to the bridge.
- Also, not in District #1, but potholes on the approach to the bridge on the Grand Narrows side require attention
- A couple of residents have complained of damage at the entrance of their driveways from the grading of the road shoulders – 476 Highway 223, Little Narrows and 425 Gillis Point Road at the intersection of New Glen Road

District #2

Councillor MacLeod provided the following TIR concerns:

- Church Cross Road, Middle River, is in need of maintenance
- West Side Middle River Road is on the 5 year plan and she is requesting an update on when progress will begin again
- When will work be starting on the Beverly's Hill Road
- Signage for MacCharles Cross from the Big Baddeck Road needs to be replaced
- The manse bridge in West Side Big Baddeck has boards missing and the turn needs some gravel in the area of a big pothole
- Check on the status of the request to have 80 km zone sign placed in the area of the TCH 105 before the Cabot Trail Motel

District #4

Councillor MacInnis thanked the Municipality for the gloves and garbage bags provided for the cleanup in North Shore. Over 40 participants took part in the cleanup.

In keeping with this, Councillor MacInnis indicated that there are not as many littering signs throughout the County which may prevent some of this garbage being thrown away. He requested that the Department of TIR be asked to erect more litter signs from the Gaelic College to Meat Cove.

District #5

Councillor Patterson questioned if evidence is found in garbage that would identify the litterer, would the RCMP have the ability to act on it. The CAO will discuss this issue with Robert Dauphinee, Director of Public Works.

Councillor Patterson requested the following concerns be provided to the Department of TIR.

- Stumps on TCH 105 in the vicinity of Patterson Road, Boularderie, be looked at and remediated
- Ditching be completed in the area of civic address 5123 Kempt Head Road, Southside Boularderie

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee expressed appreciation to the Department of TIR for brush cutting and ditching in the area of the clam flats in Ingonish Ferry.

He requested that the cutting of elephant ears/foilage in the area of the Whitty Shore Road be completed and also the end of this road is experiencing erosion into the Harbour. Brush cutting is also required in the MacKrous Subdivision, Ingonish.

District #7

Councillor Budge requested that the road to White Point has a number of potholes and other issues that require the attention of the Department of TIR.

District #8

Councillor MacDonald indicated that the following concerns be forwarded to the Department of TIR.

- The shoulders of the road in Cape North in the area of the Cabot Fire Hall throughout the Village starting at 26425 Cabot Trail are in dire need of repair. There are no shoulders at present
- The Department of TIR be requested to grade the Cabot Landing Provincial Park Road
- Requesting the brush cutter to come to the area to remove foliage out in full bloom that is causing visual hazards to traffic
- The intersection at Cape North/Dingwall (Y intersection) has no direct lanes and is causing confusion and hazards to traffic. It needs to be remediated as soon as possible

Councillor Macdonald also extended a thank you to Keith Bain, MLA, for his assistance on the Gaelic signage for District #8. The signage has been ordered and will be erected this season.

District #3

A resident's concern with regard to the Beinn Bhreagh/Red Head Road has been dealt with.

It was moved and seconded that all Department of TIR concerns be forwarded to Stephen MacDonald, Area Manager, Department of TIR. Motion carried.

DISTRICT CONCERNS

District #8

Councillor MacDonald advised that his concern with regard to washroom facilities in his district has been resolved.

It was moved and seconded that \$500.00 be provided to the North Highlands Orchard Program from the District #8 budget. Motion carried.

Councillor MacDonald wished to acknowledge three residents of his district who received Nova Scotia Support 4Sport Awards.

- Rejean Chamberlin was awarded a provincial sport organization award in Cross Country Skiing
- Eamonn Dudley Chubbs earned Junior Male Athlete of the Year in wrestling
- Tommy Chubbs was awarded the Coach of the Year in wrestling

Councillor MacDonald thanked the Department of Lands & Forestry for the ramp way installed at Cabot Landing. It is a nice addition to the Park and has received great feedback from the residents.

District #7

It was moved and seconded that \$200.00 be provided from the District #7 budget for the Cabot Trail Lions Club Fisher Hudson Golf Tournament. Motion carried.

District #6

Deputy Warden Dauphinee indicated that there are rumours circulating that the Department of TIR will be removing the six-wheel drive plows north of Smokey and as a result this will cut back on the salt used. This is one of the most dangerous sections of highway in the Province and should have the proper equipment to service the area. He felt that the Minister of TIR should be contacted to discuss this issue.

District #5

Councillor Patterson indicated that this past weekend a Farm Gate Market was held in his district. There were 9 different locations and 11 vendors and it proved to be quite successful.

District #4

Councillor MacInnis reiterated Deputy Warden Dauphinee's concern with regard to the snow removal equipment north of Smokey.

It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to the Honourable Lloyd Hines, Minister of TIR, requesting that he meet, in person or virtually, with Council to discuss the issue of snow removal equipment in the north of Smokey area and other concerns. Motion carried.

Councillor MacInnis attended the Jim Bradley Recycling Depot unveiling last week and notice the massive amount of trucks travelling to the Baddeck Solid Waste Facility with construction and demolition materials. He questioned if there was an easier, more cost effective way to deal with this materials.

The CAO will refer this matter to the Director of Public Works for investigation.

Councillor MacInnis questioned if a decision was made on increasing fire department funding in the 2020-21 budget.

Alix Redden indicated that a 10% increase was included for fire departments in the 2020-21 budget. Lyle Donovan will let the fire departments know about the increase in funding.

District #2

Councillor MacLeod also attended the Jim Bradley Recycling Depot unveiling and expressed concern on the speed at which the trucks were travelling transferring materials to the Solid Waste site. She felt the companies should be contacted requesting the drivers to slow down.

This matter will be passed on to the Department of Public Works for investigation.

The Indigenous Flag raising scheduled for this morning has been changed and the Mi'kmaq flag will be flown for Mi'kmaq History Month in October.

Councillor MacLeod indicated that she now sees tourists at the Victoria Farmers Co-op and the entire family is entering the grocery store. There is only to be one person per family shopping and social distancing is to be maintained.

She requested that the Co-op Board be contacted in this regard and better signage be posted outside the Co-op for the safety of our residents and employees.

District #1

Councillor MacNeil brought up two Nova Scotia Power Inc. issues that require attention. Cutting of trees is required along power poles from 3837 Highway 223, Iona, to 3782 Highway 223, Iona. Also a power pole at the Iona Port is to be moved to allow access to a boat launch.

It was moved and seconded that Nova Scotia Power Inc. be contacted to follow up regarding this matter. Motion carried.

District #3

Warden Morrison updated on the dedication of the Jim Bradley Recycling Depot and thanked Councillors for attending. This dedication was well received by the community and Mr. Bradley.

Warden Morrison advised that Council will be contacted with regard to the Mountain Bike Strategy. Victoria County is an ideal location for this sport and we should offer support for this eco-tourism venture.

CORRESPONDENCE

The CAO advised that Waterfront Baddeck is applying to ACOA for \$500,000.00 for repairs and renovations to the Baddeck Wharf and are requesting the Municipality to agree to be a joint applicant on this application.

It was moved and seconded that the Municipality agree to be a joint applicant for the Waterfront Baddeck application to ACOA. Motion carried.

BY-LAWS

A draft of the *Commercial Development District Improvements By-Law* was forwarded to Council for review and possible first reading at the July 27, 2020, Council session.

Councillor Patterson indicated that it is a lengthy document and he suggested that our Municipal Advisor be requested to meet with Council to provide Council with a better understanding of what it is all about and what it entails.

It was moved and seconded that Ross MacDonald, Municipal Advisor, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, be contacted to meet with Council to provide information on the proposed *Commercial Development District Improvements By-Law*. Motion carried.

District #8

It was moved and seconded that \$200.00 be approved for the Cabot Trail Lion's Club Fisher Hudson Golf Tournament from the District #8 budget. Motion carried.

District #3

It was moved and seconded that \$1,000.00 be approved from the District #3 budget for the beautification project at the Baddeck Wharf. Motion carried.

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

The next meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council will be held on Monday, July 27, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. As far as is known now, this meeting will be conducted via Zoom.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, it was moved to adjourn at 6:50 p.m.

Bruce Morrison, Warden

Leanne MacEachen, CAO