

***VICTORIA COUNTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL***

***August 24, 2020***

A meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held on Monday, August 24, 2020, beginning at 5:00 p.m. via Zoom teleconferencing 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 #6 – Larry Dauphinee, Deputy Warden  
District #7 – Wayne Budge  
District #8 – Norman MacDonald

Also present were:

Leanne MacEachen, CAO  
Heather MacLean, Recorder

Absent was:

District #5 – Fraser Patterson (Medical Issue)

***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 meeting agenda be approved as presented.  
Motion carried.**

***SMART METER PROJECT PRESENTATION – NOVA SCOTIA POWER***

Warden Morrison extended the courtesy of Council to representatives from Nova Scotia Power who were in attendance to present on the Smart Meter Project. They included:

Mary Black, Government Relations  
Stephen Pothier, Director of Smart Meter Implementation Project

Amie Woodford, Manager of Field Support

Mary Black thanked Council for allowing them the opportunity to present on the Smart Meter Project.

Ms. Black indicated that the Nova Scotia Power Government Relations Team provides elected officials with a dedicated contact to support in serving constituents. Ms. Black outlined the communication and key messages for projects and initiatives, weather events and power outages, and updates on service delivery.

Stephen Pothier indicated that customers want stable rates, reliability and clean energy. Smart meters are key to achieving these objectives. Smart meters incorporate technology that communicates electricity usage via a safe, secure connection to Nova Scotia Power. In excess of 70% of Canadian homes and businesses already have smart meters.

Mr. Pothier outlined the smart meter network and the benefits of smart meter technology. He indicated that nothing is more important than the health and safety of customers, employees, contractors and the communities in which they operate.

Council was advised that to date more than 164,000 (32%) of meters have been safely upgraded since October, 2019. Upgrades began in the Strait Area, including Victoria County on July 27, 2020. In September this area will be extended further and customers in the CBRM will receive smart meters in early 2021.

Approximately 9,900 customers (1.95%) are confirmed as opting out of receiving a smart meter. Smart meters are safe, accurate and highly regulated by Health Canada, Measurement Canada and Underwriters Laboratories. They enable faster, more effective services and help keep rates stable. There is no charge for smart meters and the data is encrypted.

Mr. Pothier outlined the communications aspect of smart meter installation. The upgrade takes about 15 minutes to complete. There are multiple benefits for customers. There is control over energy usage and costs; quicker time in the event of an outage; remote service and no estimated bills. Modernizing the power grid, will enable NSPI to maintain stable electricity rates and also provide faster and more effective service.

Whether smart meters have more of a chance of fire issues was questioned and Mr. Pothier indicated that there is less chance of fire with smart meters.

It was indicated that there is a fee for opting out of the smart meter program. There is a \$4.00 fee per month for residential customers and a \$22.00 per month for businesses.

Mr. Pothier was questioned as to whether the smart meter technology is safe and he indicated that this technology is regulated by Health Canada guidelines, the same as any wireless technology. The wireless connection has security built in and encrypted from the meter to NSPI in Halifax.

The total cost of the Smart Meter program is a \$133M project and is no different than their regular capital programs.

The possibility of NSPI and Bell using the same poles in future was discussed. In many areas there is a duplication of poles and this creates more danger. The co-habitation of single poles for both uses will be investigated.

A concern was the ability to disconnect and reconnect and whether there will be any human interaction was questioned. Their policy to not shut customers off in the winter months will remain.

When the installation will begin in northern Victoria was questioned and it was indicated that the project should be active now in that area. Installation is dependent on the meter reading cycle and should be completed by the end of the year in the County.

The loss of jobs due to the smart meter project was questioned and it was indicated that staff will be offered other opportunities within the business. Job loss will not be a major issue.

The contractor completing the smart meter installation is Tribus Services Ltd. They have 100 installers across the province working on behalf of Nova Scotia Power. Council confirmed sightings of Tribus vehicles in the County this past week.

Warden Morrison thanked the NSPI representatives for the timely and informative presentation and they were excused at this time.

**APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES – AUGUST 10, 2020**

The minutes of the August 10, 2020, meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council were presented for approval.

**It was moved and seconded that the August 10, 2020, minutes of Victoria County Municipal Council were approved as presented. Motion carried.**

**OLD BUSINESS**

The status of the Caution Children Playing sign installation was discussed.

Councillor MacNeil indicated that he found two dog signs and would bring them to the Court House for Deputy Warden Dauphinee's use.

The messaging on Victoria County Transit has been completed and an FAQ on recycling and sorting has also been done.

The CAO will be meeting with Alix Redden, CFO, tomorrow to discuss her maternity leave and replacement.

The water bill issue has been resolved and the increase in solid waste rejection numbers was discussed. More compost material is being seen in the recyclables and other items that shouldn't be in blue bags are evident.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Leanne MacEachen met with Department Heads earlier today and updated on what is happenings in the Tourism, Recreation/Active Living, Economic Development, Finance and Public Works.

The initial meeting of the Fire Services Committee was held earlier today.

It is anticipated that the Heavy Garbage Collection will take place the third week of September.

The training on the Voyent alert messaging system has been completed and the program will be rolled out sometime in September also.

The CAO indicated that Councillor MacLeod and Jocelyn Bethune were successful in applying for a Zero Plastic Waste funding grant in the amount of \$25,000.00. This funding is to look for new ways to deal with plastic products.

Warden Morrison congratulated Councillor MacLeod and Jocelyn Bethune on a job well done.

Councillor MacInnis questioned if a County employee within the districts, would be interesting in maintaining the public washrooms. The CAO indicated that a location for the public washroom in District #4 must be identified first.

Council was advised that Keith Bain, MLA, and Brian Dauphinee are watching on Facebook Live and extend greetings to Council.

The current status of the Seawall Trail project was questioned and the CAO will investigate and report back at the next Council.

### **TAXATION UPDATE**

As expected, the tax update is not positive. Today there is \$6,876,738 outstanding, compared to \$3,382,710 this time last year for a difference of \$2,494,028 behind.

This is continuing to be almost entirely in part to current - \$6,049,836 outstanding in current compared to \$2,543,107 in current this time last year, for a difference of \$3,506,729 behind.

Arrears have slipped in this update with \$826,903 vs. \$839,603, for a difference of \$12,701 ahead.

It is hoped that payments will pick up as the September 30, 2020, due date approaches.

The date has been selected for the first Tax Sale by tender – November 24, 2020. Thirty day letters have already been sent for properties that were to have been on the March Tax Sale. Focus will then be placed on identifying and sending letters for additional properties for further Tax Sales by tender prior to the fiscal year-end.

Urgent letters will be sent to those who have 2020 and or 2019, outstanding to encourage payment prior to the due date.

Two new commercial applications have been received for the Installment Program since the last update, for a total of three. The due date for this program is also September 30, 2020.

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL CONCERNS/ISSUES**

**District #8**

Councillor MacDonald indicated that there has been no signage placed to date at the shoulder erosion location in Dingwall. The erosion issue is getting worse.

The lack of directional signage at the Y intersection at Cape North/Dingwall is a concern. Councillor MacDonald received a call from a resident who was in a near fatal situation due to the lack of direction at this intersection. TIR was requested for a resolution in this area last year, but to date nothing has been done.

Councillor MacDonald indicated that turning from the Co-op Store down to St. Margaret's Village is a concern. Pavement is missing and there is a 1 ½ foot drop that is causing damage to vehicles and requires attention. Further up towards St. Margaret's Village just this side of Capstick, there is a total washout of the road shoulder and guardrail is hanging to a drop of 200 or more feet straight to the ocean. He indicated that all guardrail in this area is mangled, twisted and laying down and immediate attention is required and at the very least, signage placed.

The status of TIR jobs in the North of Smokey area was questioned as it is anticipated that five Department of TIR workers will retire within the next year. Councillor MacDonald requested an update on the status of these jobs.

The line painting truck came to District #8 but stopped at Cape North/Dingwall. All areas further north have yet to be completed and he questioned on when this work will be undertaken.

**It was moved and seconded that a letter be sent to the Minister of TIR listing the District #8 concerns and the neglect and deplorable conditions of the roadways in the northern area. Motion carried.**

Councillor MacDonald requested that MLA Keith Bain and Steve MacDonald, Area Manager, Department of TIR, be requested to come to District #8 to see the issues first hand.

**District #6**

Deputy Warden Dauphinee indicated that he concurred with Councillor MacDonald's concern with regard to the status of jobs and staffing in the North of Smokey area.

He requested a follow up with Minister Hines on the equipment to be in place in the North of Smokey area for snow removal. A list of equipment, age, makes and models are to be requested.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee also requested that a copy of the salt budget be requested and it be compared with other municipalities in the Province.

**District #4**

Councillor MacInnis again brought up the lack of maintenance to our roads and the possibility of hiring private contractors to complete some of the road maintenance work.

He expressed concern that rural roads are substandard and should be done to the same specifications as the TCH 105.

It was recommended that the Minister be requested to consider using the same standards for rural roads as they do for the TCH 105 and express that the dangerous conditions throughout the County are the result of lack of maintenance.

**District #2**

Councillor MacLeod indicated that another fatal accident took place in the area of the MacLeod Brook Bridge, Middle River. The speed in the area is 50 km and although posted as such, she felt the signage should be larger and more noticeable to inform the traveling public.

Councillor MacLeod indicated that her TIR issues since the July 6, 2020, Council meeting still remain and haven't been addressed.

It was felt it may be an opportune time to hold another quarterly meeting with Department of TIR officials. The CAO will investigate this meeting request.

**District #1**

Councillor MacNeil indicated that the patching that was done in Jamesville gypsum outcrop needs to be looked at again.

The Washabuck Road has not been patched but Steve MacDonald indicated they will be at it this week.

There was a pothole missed on Hector's Point and a couple also in Grass Cove on the north end of the beach that requires attention. The Grass Cove Road has a number of areas where guardrails are hanging in the air.

Gillis Point Road at the bridge needs to be looked at as soon as possible and the Birch Point Road/South Cove Road has to be built up.

**District #3**

Warden Morrison indicated that Exits 8, 9 and 10 are overgrown with foliage, making visibility difficult and he requested these areas be cut.

**DISTRICT CONCERNS**

**District #1**

**It was moved and seconded that a street light be ordered for location in the South Cove Road Beach area near the intersection (civic address to be provided). Motion carried.**

**District #2**

Councillor MacLeod indicated that the County streetlight at the eastern entrance to the Beverly's Hill Road is not working again and is to be addressed.

An increased presence of the RCMP in the Middle River area is to be requested, especially in the area of MacLeod's Brook and Midway Motors.

**It was moved and seconded that the RCMP be contacted requesting additional presence and visibility in the Middle River area. Motion carried.**

**District #4**



Councillor MacInnis indicated it has been some time since the RCMP presented to Council.

The CAO is to contact the RCMP to request they meet with Council at a future Council meeting to provide an update and discuss issues with Council.

Councillor MacInnis brought up a concern with regard to the inadequate internet service in his district. The residents are paying for, but not receiving, adequate internet service.

**It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to Develop Nova Scotia requesting that they provide an update on improvements to rural internet service in Victoria County. Motion carried.**

Councillor MacInnis advised that the PC party elected a new leader last night, Erin O'Toole.

**It was moved and seconded that a letter of congratulations be forwarded to the new Federal Conservative Leader, Erin O'Toole. Motion carried.**

**District #6**

Deputy Warden Dauphinee requested that he be provided with an inventory of the lots that remain in the New Haven Subdivision.

He also indicated that an inventory of County lands was conducted for each district and he questioned if there was any land that could be used for housing in relation to the Housing Strategy.

**District #7**

Councillor Budge indicated that the condition of Highland Manor is a concern of the Board. The home is inadequate, with four residents sharing one bathroom. He indicated this concern needs to be addressed.

**It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to the Department of Health requesting that they look into the condition of Highland Manor, Neil's Harbour, and request they consider a new facility to replace the existing building. Motion carried.**

**It was moved and seconded that \$1,000.00 be approved for the St. John's Hall, Ingonish, and \$1,000.00 be approved for the St. Andrew's Hall, Neil's Harbour, from the District #7 budget. Motion carried.**

**District #8**

Councillor MacDonald expressed concern that there is no affordable or emergency housing in the area.

**It was moved and seconded that a letter be forwarded to the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority requesting their plan for affordable and emergency housing in the North of Smokey area. Motion carried.**

\$500.00 is to be provided to the Bay St. Lawrence Community Centre to assist with the Danny MacKinnon Basketball Court and \$250.00 be provide to the North Victoria Community Centre to assist with road signage, both from the District #8 budget.

**District #3**

Warden Morrison indicated that Google Maps have not been updated in the Victoria County area for a number of years and he requested the CAO to contact John Bain, Director, EDPC, to determine the process used last time and the possibility of an upgrade within the next year.

Warden Morrison indicated that he and Councillor MacLeod attended the first meeting of the Fire Services Committee today. Lyle Donovan, Fire Services Coordinator, is to work with the departments on an inventory of equipment and needs and it be followed up with a presentation to Council.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Councillor MacLeod indicated that 125 people attended the School for Women on Saturday past. It was very successful.

**It was moved and seconded that a letter be sent to Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton and Karen Bernard, Co-Coordinator of the School for Women, congratulating them on a job well done. Motion carried.**

Warden Morrison extended a thank you to Councillor MacLeod for serving on the organizing committee for this event.

**BY-LAW/POLICY REVIEW**

The CAO advised that the Draft CDD (Commercial District Developments Improvement) By-Law was sent to the Province for feedback and the legal department have indicated it looks fine.

**It was moved and seconded to approve first reading of the Commercial Development District Improvements (CDD) By-Law. Motion carried.**

**CORRESPONDENCE**

An email was received from Aaron Schneider with regard to the disposal of florescent tubes with mercury (Hg). He indicated that until these tubes are banned from sale and all existing tubes with Hg are disposed of, a convenient way of safely disposing of them is required.

This issue will be discussed with Public Works and Mr. Schneider is to be advised that his correspondence was tabled at Council.

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**It was moved and seconded that congratulations be forwarded to Raymond Lillington and Gaye MacNeil on their recent \$17.4 million lottery win. Motion carried.**

**NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is currently scheduled for Tuesday, September 8, 2020, and whether it is required was questioned. This will be discussed and Council will be advised of the next Council date.

Council questioned when they could resume meeting in person and the best way to accomplish this is currently being investigated. In the meantime, virtual meetings will continue.

Warden Morrison thanked staff present for their assistance with conducting, attending and recording the Zoom Council meeting.

**ADJOURN**

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

**Bruce Morrison, Warden**

**Leanne MacEachen, CAO**