

A Committee of the Whole meeting was held in Council Chambers at Baddeck, on February 12, 2024, at 9:30am with Deputy Warden Dauphinee in the Chair.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT

District #1- Paul MacNeil

District #2- Perla MacLeod

District #3- Bruce Morrison, Warden

District #4 – Barbara Longva

District #5 – Fraser Patterson

District #6 – Larry Dauphinee, Deputy Warden

District #7- Jackie Organ

District #8- Norman MacDonald

STAFF PRESENT

Leanne MacEachen, CAO

Alix Redden, CFO

Stephanie MacLeod, Recorder

Jennifer Dagsvik, Communications

Deputy Warden Dauphinee welcomed everyone and acknowledged that this meeting is being held in Unama'ki, one of seven traditional districts of Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw People.

CALL TO ORDER

Deputy Warden Dauphinee called the meeting to order.

On Motion of Councillor Longva seconded by Councillor MacLeod that the Agenda for February 12, 2024, be approved.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Warden Morrison seconded by Councillor Organ that the Minutes for January 10, 2024, be approved.

Motion Carried.

CZECH VISIT REPORT – PARKER HORTON

Mr. Horton provided a report from the October 2023 Czech visit and provided a written report for Council.

Highlights of the presentation:

Purpose: To explore and understand the potential for sustainable and year-round tourism in Ingonish and throughout Victoria County by examining successful models in regions with similar geography and demographics.

Team who went: CAO, Tourism Dept, EDO, EDPC

Context: Highlight the transformational investment underway with Destination Cape Smokey and its potential impact on regional development.

Lipno: Focused on the tree walk projects and the economic revitalization strategies.

They want to enable people to have their own opportunities there, this is similar to what Cape Smokey wants to do in Ingonish. They have 5,300 beds and 469,000 number of overnight stays a year, job creations in summer and winter. For every \$1 spent from a visitor, it brings in \$7-8 dollars back into the community. In comparison, in Cape Breton, every dollar spent, it returns \$2.30 back into the communities.

Mala Upa: Explored community engagement in tourism and environmental sustainability practices. A municipality of 126 people.

Contacts Engaged” Local authorities, project developers and community representatives.

Economic Impact and Job Creation: Significant economic contributions from tourism projects. Robust job creation enhancing local employment. Lipno’s economic revitalization through tourism.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
February 12, 2024

Community Engagement and Tourism: Increased community involvement in tourism projects. Enhanced socio-cultural environment and tourism influx in both regions. Potential for similar community-driven tourism in Ingonish. Seniors living.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee asked if it were locals or other people coming in that created these business and Mr. Horton said it was residents.

Councillor MacNeil asked if the municipality is just that immediate area and what did the residents think of this growth? The municipality is just that immediate area and it was similar resistant as to what we are seeing in areas in this County, but the County Councillors had a vision to what they wanted to see, and they stuck with that vision.

Warden Morrison asked what do they pay for taxes and what was invested from the Municipality? The mayor took out a major loan, \$350 million was invested and 8% was invested from the County. Mr. Horton didn't have the exact numbers for the taxes, but Mr. Coffin broke it down and its about \$850,000 in taxes.

Lipno developers put in a wastewater treatment plant and then the Municipality took it over.

CAO MacEachen said if the community is behind it, growth is possible.

Councillor MacLeod asked about housing and Mr. Horton said housing is very limited in Mala Lupa and they don't want a lot of growth and have very strict restrictions, but Lipno wants the growth and is investing in that growth, and they have the same housing challenges as Victoria County. Businesses there have built housing for their staff, the municipality didn't play a big role in housing in Lipno.

Lipno also have housing for seniors and Alzheimer's housing, it was private investment to build them and maintain them with some assistance from the Municipality.

Councillor MacNeil said that Victoria County is so large geographically, so he can see the challenges that this causes with investment in certain parts of the County. Mr. Horton said there is a risk if there is no development and no investment. Mr. Horton said we need to enable development across Victoria County as individual communities want it. Councillor MacLeod agreed but said we need to find out from the communities if they want it.

Warden Morrison mentioned Ingonish and Baddeck has a higher workforce and housing is a challenge. Mr. Horton said in Lipno, they put in incentives and subsidized housing for some workers and mentioned that hopefully we see something positive when we get the results back from the Housing Accelerator Fund.

CAO MacEachen emphasized that their Council discussed and agreed to set certain money asides for community projects and that gave investors and developers confidence and that allowed them to come into Lipno to develop and invest.

Councillor MacNeil asked what the impact of the development in Lipno had on the neighbouring municipalities and Mr. Horton and Mr. Coffin said many of the workers in Lipno came from the

other municipalities and benefited from the wastewater as all 5 municipalities around Lipno are now all on that system.

Environmental Sustainability: Integration of sustainable practises in tourism in development. Minimal environmental impact with a focus on biodiversity. Inspiration from Mala Upa's / Lipnos approach to sustainability.

Implications for Victoria County: leveraging economic growth through tourism. Fostering community engagement for a vibrant tourism industry. Embracing sustainability to protect and enhance natural resources.

Mr. Horton said, it is all about what the community wants, and Cape Smokey doesn't want to impose on the community, they want to help the community grow and have more opportunities.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee agreed and said all the conversations that he has had with the investors is all about community and he just thinks that they need to go out in the community and talk to them about what they want to do, CAO MacEachen agreed and said we have asked them to do that before, it should be them talking to the community about their plans, not the County.

Warden Morrison requested quotes from the Cape Breton Partnership and from Victoria County staff to say what the benefits were of the trip.

CAO MacEachen asked Council if they want this presentation online and Warden Morrison requested that included in the presentation be the benefits to Victoria County as a whole because I think that is lacking in the presentation.

Mr. Horton said he will get something drafted and provide it to Council.

CAO MacEachen thanked Council for supporting the staff to go on this trip.

Deputy Warden Dauphinee said the majority of the people supported the trip and asked how it came about, to go and CAO MacEachen reminded them it was Council who suggested staff go to Czech after Cape Smokey gave a presentation to Council.

RECREATION UPDATE – CHRISTOPHER WOODFORD

Mr. Woodford gave an overview of the Recreation department and some highlights included:

Programs:

- Jays Care partnership with Victoria County Schools. It provides free equipment, training, and curriculum. The goal is to offer this program year-round with help from Community Champions. 6 out of 8 schools in the County have signed up for this program.
- Victoria County Walking Series in partnership with NS Walks. The program runs twice a year (once in the fall and once in the spring). At least one walk per district and always looking for Community Champions to lead the walks.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
February 12, 2024

- Girls on Boards Pilot Initiative is in collaboration with Girls on Boards and Cape Smokey Ski Hill, North highlands/Cape Smokey Elementary and Cabot Education Centre. Program also includes a paddleboard and skateboard program in the summer months.
- Recreation Equipment Loan Program. Through feedback obtained from Spring 2023 recreation survey, a gap was identified by the residents. The gap identified there was a need to have recreation equipment available to residents. Program is designed to help eliminate that barrier for Victoria County residents by providing recreation equipment at little to no cost. Victoria County's recreation department's role for equipment is to provide a \$1,000.00 start up fund and then a \$500.00 yearly stipend.
- Multi-Activity Program offers residents the opportunity to participate in different activities. Three different categories; traditional sport, non-traditional sports and non-sporting activities. It will be a 12-week program, 4 weeks per activity. This program would be no cost or low cost for the participants. It will help showcase local instructors/organizations. The recreation department's role is to help facilitate/support program and help instruct certain programs for capacity building and long-term development.
- The REL and the Multi-Activity Programs do come with costs and during budget discussions, the recreation department will be requesting a larger budget to help with these programs.
- Other Initiatives; partnership with Basketball Cape Breton and Jr. NBA program. Core AT Network **add to this.
- Involved with a pilot program called Activate Your Neighbourhood in partnership with Wagmatcook as well collaborating on other programs.
- Creating, implementing, and delivering various programs throughout Victoria County such as: Community Champions Program, Recreation Activities Program and Family Fun Nights.

QUESTIONS

Councillor Longva asked about the Girls on Boards program and asked how Victoria County helps and Mr. Woodford said, the County helps financially.

Councillor MacLeod asked if there are any programs for seniors, other than the walk and Mr. Coffin said we still have the Leadership Program that helps with funding for other organizations/groups, and they should reach out to Mr. Woodford.

Councillor MacLeod also asked for more communications from the recreation department and Mr. Woodford is going to work with the Communications team on this.

Councillor Patterson thanked Mr. Woodford for his participation in the communities.

Councillor MacNeil commended Mr. Woodford on the work that he has done in the community thus far.

Warden Morrison thanked Mr. Woodford for the programming, in particular, pickle ball in the Baddeck area and added that he looks forward to having a conversation about e-bikes in the near future.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

February 12, 2024

Councillor Organ discussed a group in her district and asked Mr. Woodford if they can reach out to him for the loan program and he said absolutely and said they would be good candidates for the Multi-Activity Program.

Councillor Longva said she misses the moonlight snowshoe walks. Mr. Woodford thanked her for her feedback.

Deputy Warden called for a 5-minute recess.

MEALS PLUS PROGRAM – JENN RIPLEY

Ms. Ripley thanked Council for their support with the program and gave a brief presentation, some highlights included:

- The Meals Plus Program has grown significantly since 2021 and now there is permanent funding if the residents are a homecare client, and the program also reaches out to Community Meals Plus program.
- The Community Meals Plus program is not a long-term solution, it is a 6-month program, it is open to all residents of Victoria County over 55.
- There are 20 Community Meals Plus clients and 37 VCHSS Client Meals Plus.
- All funds go directly to buying food, if Council wanted to add additional seats, we will happily add to the program with Councils financial support.

Councillor MacLeod asked how long the wait list is and Ms. Ripley said we can probably fill another 20 seats for the 6-month program. If there were funding, there could be 40 more for the year.

Councillor Longva asked if this program can replace Meals on Wheels and Deputy Warden Dauphinee said it is an alternative but not a replacement as Meals on Wheels is a prepared meal vs. this program, which is a \$30 box of food that is delivered, with the option of homecare helping seniors cook the food.

Warden Morrison asked how much more can the program take on and Ms. Ripley said they could easily take on 20 more people and Warden Morrison encouraged Ms. Ripley to submit an application to the municipal grants program.

PVSC PRESENTATION – KEN MACKINNON and LAURA MACLEAN

PVSC representatives went over a presentation and some highlights of that presentation were:

- PVSC does not set tax rates they administer property assessments.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
February 12, 2024

- The NS Assessment act requires that we assess property at market value; “the amount which in the opinion of the assessor would be paid if it were sold on a date prescribed by the Director in the open market by a willing seller to a willing buyer”.
- Went over the approaches used to make the assessment.
- Discussed the capped assessment program. The program places a “cap” on the amount that the taxable assessment for eligible residential property can increase year over year based on the NS consumer price index in November.

Councillor MacNeil asked if a resident appeals their assessment, does it affect their CAP value and Mr. MacKinnon said, not necessarily, it depends on if their property changed. A lot of residents are worried about appealing in case the cap goes up, and Mr. MacKinnon said if any resident has concerns, they can go to the PVSC website, and it shows MLS and viewpoint so residents can see similar properties and what their values. It’s always a possibility that the cap could go up but lots of information is available on the website.

Councillor Patterson asked if PVSC looks at the sale price or the listed price and Mr. MacKinnon said we look at the final sale price, but we do take in consideration, the market prices of the area so when there is a sale that is way over asking, we look to see if it is an isolated incident compared to the market.

- 2023 Total Residential was \$981,193,100.
- 2024 Total Residential is \$1,189,092,300.
- 2023 Total Commercial was \$246,669,000.
- 2024 Total Commercial is \$288,199,800.
- 2023 Natural Disasters, 2024 assessments consider the impacts of the 2023 wildfires and flask floods. PVSC worked directly with impacted municipalities to share information and communicate with affected property owners. PVSC will monitor the impacted areas closely for market trends and rebuilding efforts.
- Appeal period is January 8, 2024, to February 8, 2024. Appeals can be emailed, mailed or faxed, the appeal period is over now but property owners can still appeal but it will be considered late, and that may affect the appeal process.
- Contact information: 1-800-380-7775 or inquiry@pvsc.ca

Councillor MacNeil said there were many complaints received about the assessments and there was a lack of consistency of assessments. Mr. MacKinnon said PVSC rely on the physical information captured on the property, year built, size, living area, etc. if those all remain consistent then you should see consistent adjustments to the values. If those consistencies aren’t there than maybe we aren’t capturing those details properly and if the property owner wants us to take another look at that then we will. Councillor MacNeil said lots of property owners are saying that they haven’t changed their properties at all, and their value went up and Mr. MacKinnon said we are seeing a bigger volume in the market, so we are getting more evidence of what the market value is for their property.

Councillor MacDonald asked how do you define your zones and Mr. MacKinnon said we look at the municipality as whole and then break it down by neighbourhoods and group them. Location

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

February 12, 2024

is one of the determinations on market value. If there is a lack of sales in one area, then we look at macro areas that are close by. If there are ample sales in one area, there wouldn't be as much weight on those areas to determine market value in other areas that are close by.

Warden Morrison asked if there were any new assessors that were hired for the Cape Breton area and Mr. MacKinnon said more assessors were hired, not sure how many were brought to Cape Breton but I can get those numbers to you but we do have boots on the ground and we fly over areas as well but those are in more densely populated areas. Warden Morrison said that the expectation is that if assessments are higher than there should be more assessors on the ground looking at these properties.

RECOMMENDATION REPORT – MUNICIPAL GRANTS

- CFO Redden asked for Council direction on the previously submitted recommendation report regarding the new process for Municipal Grants.
- There were some brief conversations, and some clarifying questions were asked.
- Council made the recommendation to accept the recommendation report for the new process for Municipal Grants.

FINANCIAL PROJECTION REPORT

- CFO Redden addressed some questions that Council previously submitted.
- There were some questions around travel expenses and CFO Redden said there are line by line items in our consolidated financial statements, which are available to the public but going forward, we can do a better job and showing these expenses and have that as part of the budget discussions for later today.
- There has been no communication about the RCMP retroactive pay. There is nothing budgeted or projected.
- There is a healthy reserve fund but that also means we aren't spending on big projects.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES UPDATE

- Moving this update to the Budget meeting later today.

FENCES ARBITRATION COMMITTEE

- Was recommended that Councillor MacLeod and Councillor Patterson take the next steps to form a committee and that a member of that committee needs to contact the Province, from the Department of Agriculture to have them appoint another committee member (possibly a farmer) to sit on the committee as well.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
February 12, 2024

No members of the public were present, except one from CBC and he had no questions.

NEXT MEETING

Next Committee of the Whole meeting is March 11, 2024.

ADJOURN

Councillor MacNeil called to adjourn at 1:10pm