

October 21, 2024

The Financial Services Committee for the Municipality of the County of Pictou met in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Administration Building by videoconference and teleconference on Monday, October 21, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT

- 1 Clr. Don Butler
- 2 Clr. Deborah Wadden
- 3 Clr. Darla MacKeil
- 4 Clr. Mary Elliott
- 5 Deputy Warden Wayne Murray
- 6 Warden Robert Parker
- 7 Clr. David Parker
- 8 Clr. Larry Turner
- 9 Clr. Peter Boyles
- 10 Clr. Randy Palmer
- 11 Clr. Andy Thompson
- 12 Clr. Chester Dewar

IN ATTENDANCE

Brian Cullen, CAO, Municipal Clerk-Treasurer
Sueann Musick, Director of Corporate Services/Deputy Clerk
Karen Cornish, Deputy Municipal Treasurer
Evan Hale, Director of Emergency Services
Logan McDowell, Director of Public Works & Development
Rhiannon McNair, Director of Business Operations, Broadband Initiative
Adam MacInnis, Communications Officer

ABSENT

Shellie Pettipas, Administrative Assistant

CALL TO ORDER & LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Clr. MacKeil, Chair of the Financial Services Committee, called the meeting to order and acknowledged that we are on the ancestral territorial lands of the Mikmaq people.

Clr. MacKeil thanked Council members and said it had been an honour and a pleasure to serve as the Chair of the Financial Services Committee over the past four years.

AGENDA

It was moved by Clr. Elliott and seconded by Clr. Turner that the agenda be approved as presented. **Motion Carried**

EMERGENCY RESOLUTIONS

There were no emergency resolutions.

MINUTES

Clr. MacKeil asked if there were any errors, omissions, or corrections in the minutes for September 16, 2024. The members of the Committee entered no errors, omissions, or corrections. The Chair proclaimed the minutes of the meeting on September 16, 2024, as the official record of the meeting. **Motion Carried**

REPORTS

COMMUNICATION REPORT

The Communication Report for the month of August 2024 was received as presented.

Clr. Turner said that Mr. MacInnis has been working on presentations for the Climate Change Committee's community engagement meetings, which are scheduled for each Tuesday and Thursday during November. Clr. Turner encouraged Councillors to participate in these meetings and said they focus on critical climate change issues.

Clr. Parker said that this will be a presentation on the possible impacts of climate change on the county. One concern is that the land use planning meetings are also scheduled for November, which could cause confusion and conflict in communities.

RECREATION REPORT

The Recreation Report for the month of September 2024 was received as presented.

WARDEN'S REPORT

The Warden's Report for the month of September 2024 was received as presented.

Warden Parker said there was a meeting with the Wellness Centre Governance Board. The bill continues to come in and is on the backs of the municipal units' taxpayers, and hopefully, the lawyers and Wellness Centre staff can figure this out. It is currently costing considerably more for energy. The Wellness Centre is inefficient when it comes to power, and it continues to increase despite all the work that has been done.

Clr. Butler said cell service throughout the county was questioned at a previous meeting. The provincial government announced it would assist with cell service in Eastern Nova Scotia. Clr Butler asked if any effect from the 16-million-dollar project the government is working on will be seen in Pictou County. Warden Parker said that the discussion had with NSP did not involve cell service; the meetings had nothing to do with the provincial government's attempt to improve cell service.

INTERNET REPORT

CAO Cullen said that there are 2245 serviceable homes currently. The active fibre to home is 403, and 38 are now awaiting installation. One hundred and fifty five kilometres of the 950 km of the overall project have been completed. Areas currently under construction are Toney River, River John, Scotsburn, Meadowville, and West Branch, and those segments represent 140 km of fibre.

NSP currently has deficiencies on 30 km of construction that have been released, holding up installation. 84 km will be released to VistaCare for construction by the end of 2024. The 2024 year-end goals for construction are Toney River, River John, Scotsburn, Meadowville, and West Branch. The early work plan for 2025 is Caribou, Union Centre, Little Harbour, and Sutherlands River.

VistaCare has four crews, and the production rate is about 1.5 kms per day, approximately double where the previous contractor was. All the crews are Nova Scotia-based. Nova Scotia Power has one line crew and one contractor crew dedicated to the project.

The sites currently in full production are the West River Fire Hall, Town of New Glasgow, Municipal Administration Building, Toney River Community Centre, and the River John Esso, which houses all the electronic equipment necessary for the fibre to function. The sites currently under construction are the Scotsburn Fire Department, Caribou Fire Department, West Branch Community Centre, and the Meadowville Tower Site. These sites have changed from the original design.

CAO Cullen said that Nova Scotia Power remains the most significant hold-up on the project. The speed of the detailing work and make-ready continues to be of concern, and the quality of the make-ready work continues to be inconsistent.

CAO Cullen said the plan is to be completed in the second half of 2026, and it is doable if the make-ready work is completed within the first half of 2025. Clr. MacKeil requested that a copy of the details be sent out to Council.

Clr. Boyles asked if District 9 would be getting internet. CAO Cullen said there is some in District 9, but the overbuild is not shown in the currently serviced areas. Warden Parker said this should be looked into to get an answer for Clr. Boyles regarding District 9 and how much will be serviced in that area.

Clr. Wadden asked if Council could get a running total of increased services to see the growth from the work being done.

Warden Parker said it has taken a long time to find the right companies and experience; if Nova Scotia Power comes through, the work should ramp up. Warden Parker said Nova Scotia Power will continue to be pushed to do the job.

Clr. Parker asked CAO Cullen about a proposal to Nova Scotia Power regarding becoming a partner and if that has gone anywhere. CAO Cullen said that it did go to Nova Scotia Power, and it was said that it would be evaluated within. Clr. Parker requested that it be followed up on. Mr. Cullen said this is followed up weekly.

Clr. Palmer said the concern is that if the service is not provided in the already serviced areas, how will the project be paid for in the end? Twenty five percent uptake for fibre and eight percent for wireless is very low, and Clr. Palmer is concerned that this project may end up costing taxpayers' money.

AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

Clr. Wadden said the Audit Committee met on October 2, 2024. The committee was advised of the audit status as of September 16, 2024, and the financials should be submitted to the province by the end of September to avoid penalty. Clr. Wadden said this has not happened for the past few years, and the committee emphasized getting this reporting under control.

Clr. Wadden said that John Rawding has been working with Karen, and the financials will likely be returned to the Audit Committee sometime in December, followed by submission to Council for final approval.

Clr. Wadden said the collection of overdue taxes and plans for an upcoming tax sale are moving forward. Legalities must be followed to ensure this is done correctly. The economy is making many suffer, but residents must realize that property taxes must be paid, as this is the primary source of income. Residents must be made aware that there will be repercussions for not paying back taxes. Payment arrangements should be made to help alleviate this burden.

The MOPC Project was discussed, and there was concern over Nova Scotia Power's charging amount. CAO Cullen, Warden Parker, and Deputy Warden Murray have met and plan to continue to meet to see if some of these charges could be reimbursed to the project.

TAXES RECEIVABLE REPORT

The Taxes Receivable Report for the month of September 2024 was received for information purposes.

DEED TRANSFER TAX

The Deed Transfer Tax for the month of September was received as presented.

REPORTS REQUIRING A MOTION

ACCOUNTS PAID – SEPTEMBER 2024

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Parker and seconded by Clr. Elliott that the Accounts Paid Report for the month of September 2024 be received as presented. **Motion Carried**

Clr. Wadden said there are payments for internet operations that do not have cheque numbers listed and asked how these amounts are being paid. Ms. McNair noted that most of the payments are paid electronically. Ms. McNair said that those can be included going forward and that more details on the payment can be provided.

BUSINESS ITEMS REQUIRING ACTION

STREETLIGHT APPROVAL

Mr. McDowell said that regarding safety, there is justification for a streetlight at that location.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Dewar and seconded by Clr. Parker to approve a streetlight installation at Falconer Road. **Motion Carried**

APPOINTMENTS TO ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Turner and seconded by Warden Parker to recommend the following citizen appointments to the Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion Carried**

1. Antonia Phillips
2. Joy Polley
3. Sarah Fraser

RECREATION SPONSORSHIP GRANT APPROVAL

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Elliott and seconded by Clr. Palmer to recommend Blake Ferguson as the non-elected member for the position on the Hector Arena Commission.

Motion Carried

RECREATION SPONSORSHIP GRANT APPROVAL

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Parker and seconded by Clr. Elliott to approve a Recreation Sponsorship Grant of \$1,000.00 for the Pictou Academy Education Foundation's Aspire Series.

Motion Carried

Nay Vote: Clr. Peter Boyles

RECREATION START-UP GRANT APPROVAL

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Butler and seconded by Clr. Dewar to approve the Recreation Start-Up Grant for \$350.00 to the Old School Cooperatives Merchants Ltd.

Motion Carried

RECREATION OPERATING GRANT

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Palmer and seconded by Deputy Warden Murray to approve a Recreation Operating Grant for \$1,500.00 to the U.C. Friends in Thorburn.

Motion Carried

MUNICIPAL SERVICE GRANT

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Parker and seconded by Clr. Turner to approve a Municipal Service Grant of \$5,000.00 to St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Gairloch for a heat pump installation .

Motion Carried

CELL PHONE COVERAGE

Clr. MacKeil said that the number one call from residents in District 3 was regarding cell phone service. The number of calls skyrocketed in the summer when cottage residents moved in. Clr. MacKeil said that it is important to receive a phone call especially with older parents and children in school. Clr. MacKeil said this is a safety issue, and following Fiona, again in the spring, the coverage has changed, and changes need to be made to the cell phone network in the province.

MOTION

It was moved by Warden Parker and seconded by Clr. Boyles to ask the province if any money being put forward for cell phone coverage is being allotted to Pictou County.

Motion Carried

DEFERRED BUSINESS

PICTOU LIBRARY FUNDING – OPERATIONS

The August 26, 2019, minutes were presented from the discussion regarding the Pictou Library Funding.

Warden Parker said that the following day, Clr. Wadden and Warden Parker will be attending a meeting at the Pictou Library to discuss this issue and what is the estimated cost.

Clr. Palmer said if this is done for one library it would have to be done for each one and caution should be used. Warden Parker said that five years the understanding from the presentation was that it was not opposed and it would be hard to go back now and not help with the operating costs. The library has a 45% rate of rural residents who use it.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Parker and seconded by Clr. Turner to defer this discussion pending further information.

Motion Carried

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Clr. Mary Elliott said it has been a pleasure to serve District 4 and work with fellow Councillors and staff. Warden Parker thanked Clr. Elliott for doing a great job.

Warden Parker said that on November 2, 2024, the Durham Men's Club at the Church Hall sells apple pies. The money is used to help community members in need and to provide local schools with winter boots and clothing.

Clr. Dewar said Riverview Residential Centre, the tree planting event, helping the community halls and churches, Clr. Parker always looked out for and listened to the residents of District 7. Clr. Dewar said that Clr. Butler has represented the residents of District 1 for the last eight years. Clr. Elliott talked from her heart about the residents of District 4 and has done many great things in the community. Clr. Dewar said many people appreciate the work the Councillors have done.

Clr. Parker appreciated the kind words and wanted to end positively regarding the world's first river carbon dioxide reduction site, beside the West River. and said about 100 people attended the Carbon Run Grand Opening, a for-profit company that expects the facility to take about 1,000 tons of carbon dioxide out of the air annually. Warden Parker said that Watervale community made the front page of the New York Times with the Carbon Run project.

Clr. Parker expressed condolences to Clr. Butler after losing both a sister and a brother in the past three months. Warden Parker said that Clr. Butler is admired and respected for attending the final Council meeting after losing his brother and wanted to be here feeling allegiance to this Council and residents.

Clr. Palmer said that on October 27, 2024, the Trunk or Treat will be held at the Ivor MacDonald Memorial Rink beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Clr. Palmer said that November 23, 2024, will be the 50th anniversary of the Ivor MacDonald Memorial Rink. Plans are on the way, and more details will follow.

Clr. Wadden said the Grand Opening of the Pictou Library on November 1, 2024, from 2:00-3:00 p.m. and urged all to attend and said it is a phenomenal facility the county should be proud of.

Clr. Thompson said the Net Zero project is very active throughout the county. Many community centres are participating in upgrades, which are being funded through a joint effort from the community centres. This is being funded through a community effort of 21 community non-profit buildings throughout Pictou County and it is a joint effort. The funding comes from the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund that received \$600,000 in that fund and efficiency rebates through efficiency Nova Scotia. Clr. Thompson said this is an testament to the community centres that they want to be that example in their communities to reduce energy costs.

MOTIONS OF RECONSIDERATION

There were no motions of reconsideration.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business before the meeting, so the Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

CHAIRPERSON

MUNICIPAL CLERK