

April 20, 2020

The Committee of Council as a Whole for the Municipality of the County of Pictou met by teleconference on Monday, April 20, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Wayne Murray, Deputy Warden

Robert Parker, Warden, Vice-Chair

Don Butler

Deborah Wadden

Darla MacKeil

Ronald Baillie

David Parker

Larry Turner

Peter Boyles

Randy Palmer

Andy Thompson

Chester Dewar

IN ATTENDANCE

Brian Cullen, CAO, Municipal Clerk-Treasurer

Karen Cornish, Deputy Municipal Treasurer

Carolyn MacIntosh, Deputy Municipal Clerk

Sueann Musick, Communications Officer

Jane Johnson, Recording Secretary

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Deputy Warden Murray called the meeting to order and requested that Councillors take a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the Nova Scotia mass shooting on the weekend.

MINUTES

It was moved by Clr. MacKeil and seconded by Clr. D. Parker that the minutes of April 20, 2020 be approved as presented.

Motion carried.

COVID-19 – UPDATE

The CAO reported in the last week there was maintenance of ongoing items, although not a lot of changes on the local level. The daily case numbers are increasing but that is primarily related to a long-term care facility in Halifax. There is minimal activity in the Northern, Valley and Eastern regions of the province with the epicenter in Halifax. There has been an order of hand sanitizers from EMO this week and Northern Pulp has donated 175 bottles of hand sanitizers which will be distributed to local long-term care facilities. The Mount William Transfer Station has been storing recyclable materials but is at capacity. Materials are now being transported directly to the Second-Generation Landfill in Guysborough awaiting approval of a Ministerial Variance Order so that the materials can be buried. For the residents, there is no change to curbside collection. The Colchester Recycling Facility has advised that once normal operations resume, they will not be able to process a backlog of stored materials as they operate at capacity under normal circumstances. Locally, municipal police forces have identified teams that can assist the RCMP in whatever capacity is required as they focus on investigations relating to the mass shooting.

Warden R. Parker asked if we need to send a message to the public about the recycling being stockpiled and the CAO replied that our plan is to be forthright with the residents and the message has consistently been no change to curbside collection.

Warden R. Parker indicated that other Councils are using the Microsoft Teams software to have meetings either by teleconference or videoconference. He suggested this could be one way for our meetings to be held and asked if the media should be invited to attend our meetings as well.

The CAO replied that staff and Council are set up on Microsoft Teams and they are going to test it this week. He informed the Committee the media has not made any request for access to our meetings, but it is possible to allow them to observe but not participate in the MS Teams meetings. The CAO recommended continuing with the present arrangement until the MS Teams software is set up and he would send the media an invitation to meetings.

RURAL INTERNET – UPDATE

The CAO reported that there were a number of conference calls last week, including a call with the Canada Infrastructure Bank on continuing a relationship with the Municipality. The Bank has provided a non-disclosure agreement for review and will be sending along other documents on how the Bank sees the contribution arrangement working. On Wednesday there was a call with the MP regarding funding opportunities. The CRTC funding application is due on April 30th and MP Sean Fraser provided good direction for the CRTC application, recommending that we temper our request appropriate to the amount of funds being allocated to the Province. There was also discussion with him on the Universal Broadband Fund. A conference call was also held with Mayor Dan Matheson from the, City of Stratford, Ontario which has completed a rural broadband project for 30,000 people. They have utilized an independent governance model to manage the internet project by establishing an independent corporation with a 9-member board comprised of 2 Councillors and non-elected members with a strong background in the communications industry. The CAO pointed out that he spoke with the Canada Infrastructure Bank on a separate corporation being established and it was viewed as municipally owned but not direct taxpayer dollars which the Bank finds attractive. Administratively there are advantages from a financial reporting perspective to forming a separate corporation (like the Wellness Center and Shared Services Authority). In Stratford, the ISP is doing the fiber to the home and the municipality owns the backbone. They have also created data center where companies can store all their data so this makes it very attractive to companies knowing their data is secure.

The CAO reported that he has been going through the final version of the contract with Nova Communications and he has a conference call with Terry Dalton of i-Valley tomorrow to discuss the latest version.

Clr. Turner pointed out that he thinks the projected uptake of 40% is going to be low and the CAO commented the City of Strathford had 50 – 60% uptake and they are competing well with Rogers and Bell but they can offer the service cheaper. The CAO reported that we have 5,000 homes that would have direct competition and i-Valley has been tracking the data that indicates the networks have slowed down

considerably because networks are not designed for a pandemic so this has shown the infrastructure is antiquated at best, given the number of people working from home, along with distance education in our school system.

Warden R. Parker commented that small businesses operating from home will need to have uptake and usage necessary for their businesses. We emphasized the need for a good governance model to make this effort successful.

Clr. Wadden reported that it was worth pursuing an independent governance board and asked if this was something we would need a study on.

The CAO responded we would need a Section 60 Municipal Government Act Corporation to deliver the internet so this is something we would bring back to Council.

AGREED

It was agreed that staff bring back recommendations for a governance model for the Broadband Internet Project.

J CLASS ROAD PAVING PROJECTS – ADDITIONAL FUNDING

The CAO reported that he received 1 request from District 10 for re-paving of the New Row in Thorburn under this program. The project would be cost-shared with the province and our cost estimate would be \$191,400.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Dewar and seconded by Clr. Palmer that the New Row in Thorburn be submitted to the Department of Transportation & Infrastructure Renewal for consideration of cost-shared re-paving in 2020/21.

Clr. MacKeil expressed concern about spending \$191,000 right now with so many unknown issues around our budget, potential tax rates, and the ability of taxpayers to pay their bills in a timely manner.

Warden R. Parker advised that he shared Clr. MacKeil's concerns given the uncertainty that the Municipality is facing.

Clr. D. Parker reported that New Row should be a priority and he asked what our budget process is going to look like.

Clr. Palmer commented that he was willing to postpone until next year as long as the New Row is identified as a priority next year.

Clr. Thompson questioned the wisdom of delaying the project if the money is available. He recommended submitting the road to the Province, with the possibility of withdrawing it if our budget process identifies fiscal challenges that make it necessary to reduce expenditures.

Clr. Dewar commented there may not be any money after this year and the circumstances related to COVID-19 so we he did felt we should pave the road this year.

The CAO pointed out the base program is available every year and there are only 20 municipalities that can apply for funding. This year, however, there is additional funding that may not be available in subsequent years.

Clr. Boyles asked giving this road top priority would carry forward with a new Council after the fall election and the Chair confirmed that the priority would continue.

Clr. MacKeil asked how much is committed to “J” Class roads this year and the CAO replied there is approximately \$185,000 committed to “J” Class roads.

WITHDRAWN

On the agreement of the mover and seconder, the motion was withdrawn.

MOTION – PAVING PRIORITY

It was moved by Clr. Palmer and seconded by Clr. Dewar that New Row will be a priority for “J” Class paving projects in 2021/22.

Motion carried.

HIGH SCHOOL BURSARIES

It was moved by Clr. MacKeil and seconded by Clr. Palmer that high school bursaries and graduation expenses be approved for the following schools:

North Nova Education Center	\$1,000 + \$1,000 graduation expenses
Northumberland Regional High School	\$1,000 + \$1,000 graduation expenses
Pictou Academy	\$200
Tatamagouche Regional Academy	\$200

Warden R. Parker reported that graduation expenses may not be necessary for this year and the Deputy Municipal Clerk pointed out they may not be having a traditional graduation but there may still be some graduation expenses for a “virtual” experience.

MOTION TO AMEND

It was moved by Warden R. Parker and seconded by Clr. D. Parker that the preceding motion be amended to add the following: “if the schools do not require the additional \$1,000 for graduation expenses, that they be permitted to keep the funds to support graduates in need.

On the agreement of the mover and seconder the motion to amend was withdrawn.

The original motion carried.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

The Committee discussed the up-coming municipal elections in the fall and asked for an update on this issue.

The CAO reported that a request has been made to the Minister to postpone the fall election; however, a decision on that request is not expected for several weeks.

DOG EXCREMENT

Clr. Boyles reported that he has received calls from residents who are out walking and are seeing bags with dog excrement littering the roadsides.

The CAO replied the REMO is working on some local stories and FAQ’s so he would bring that matter forward for consideration of an education piece.

SIGN ACKNOWLEDGING FRONTLINE WORKERS

Warden R. Parker asked if there was an update on the overlay for the highway sign between Colchester County and Pictou County and the Communications Officer advised that installation was weather dependent and should be completed shortly.

TAX COLLECTION

Clr. D. Parker asked if there was an estimate on the amount of taxation that will not be collected by due date, noting that we need to be thinking about our cash flow going forward.

The CAO responded that he sent that information out 2 weeks ago so he informed the Committee the amount is \$5.6 million that includes both 30% of residential taxes and 40% of commercial taxes.

Warden R. Parker asked if we are going to extend interest until the fall and will we have a policy change so that can be approved at the May meeting of Council.

The CAO replied that he intends to have something before this group at our next meeting so that it can be recommended to Council in May with the required 7-day notice.

FIRE DEPARTMENT STUDY

Clr. Butler asked if there was an update on the study being carried out on fire departments as it will have an impact on our budget.

The CAO replied that he received the report on Phase 1 last week and will be reviewing it to confirm that it meets the requirements of the Terms of Reference. The report on Phase II is expected to be complete within 2 – 3 weeks.

COMMUNITY GRANTS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Deputy Warden Murray asked if there was an update on the Community Grants meeting and the CAO responded that he hopes to circulate a survey document to assist committee members with the task of reviewing individual applications and streamline the process of preparing recommendations for Council's consideration. That document should go out tonight, following which a meeting will be scheduled.

ADJOURN

It was moved by Warden R. Parker and seconded by Clr. D. Parker that the meeting adjourn.

Motion carried. (8:28 p.m.)

CHAIR



MUNICIPAL CLERK