

April 27, 2020

The Committee of Council as a Whole for the Municipality of the County of Pictou met by teleconference on Monday, April 27, 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

MINUTES

It was moved by Clr. Boyles 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 that the past week focused on maintenance of on-going matters and communication. There is nothing new to report from a provincial perspective. Locally a shipment of hand sanitizers was received from Northern Pulp for distribution and we are still waiting on PPE from the province. The REMO Coordinator has been in contact with the local Food Bank and has been told that the number of users is lower than normal. Municipal units continue to provide business as usual, although remotely. The Minister of Environment has granted the requested variance to allow the burying of recyclable materials but is requiring communication to the public explaining the need for this change. The COVID-19 numbers are still growing and there has not been any discussion on the recovery stage. The next 2 weeks are going to be critical for Nova Scotia but there are now more people who have recovered from the virus than people who have tested positive.

Warden R. Parker reported that he was concerned about burying the recycling and he was happy to hear the residents will be informed. He asked if the Valley View Villa and the Riverview Home have any virus concerns and both Clrs. Dewar and D. Parker advised that these facilities have no concerns to this point in time.

Clr. Boyles reported that he received a request from a resident who wanted to know the Pictou County numbers for the COVID-19.

The CAO replied the province is not breaking the numbers down that way and they are only reporting by zone. Dr. Strang had indicated that all restrictions would be uniform across the province so when orders change it will be for all Nova Scotia so the spread must be down in all areas.

Clr. Boyles reported that when a person from the Northern Region tests in Halifax it would be added as a positive in Halifax not the Northern Region.

RURAL INTERNET – UPDATE

The CAO reported that there were a few conference calls in the last week and they are now fine-tuning the contract wording for Phase 1 which he expected to complete tomorrow. Information has been received from the Canada Infrastructure Bank on how the project could fit into their scope. They are willing to come in at 50¢ dollars for funding and the other 50% they would be looking for 1/3 private funding so the municipal contribution would drop. Discussions have begun on the configuration of a Network Operations Center upstairs in the administration building.

Assuming some of the pandemic restrictions are lifted by summer, Clr. D. Parker asked if there a timeline for some hook-ups to residences.

The CAO replied that we are still targeting for completion of Phase I by October or November and there has been no indication that supplies are unavailable.

Warden R. Parker asked the CAO to comment on the best design option for the Municipality moving forward if we are successful in getting funding from the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

The CAO explained that the Canada Infrastructure Bank considers a “small project” to be in the \$200 million range, with the Bank’s contribution at the \$100 million mark. The Bank has a \$35 billion portfolio and out of that amount they have \$1 billion is earmarked for broadband initiatives. The minimum check the Bank can write for any single project is \$20 million so if we are doing fiber rich at \$75 million, so for government grants \$15 million would be the maximum grant allowance for the Canada Infrastructure Bank to be involved. The CAO pointed out the best deal we could get is fiber max at \$100 million. The Canada Infrastructure Bank is going to go out and find that third party to invest so you would give your residents fiber and future proof your network for the next 50 years.

Clr. Palmer reported that he received a call from someone who was concerned about all the money we are going to invest in this infrastructure.

The CAO replied the Canada Infrastructure Bank is comfortable with our projections and the more government grants we can get the better off we are. Our first priority is to go after the government funding.

Clr. Palmer asked about the cost, plus change orders and the CAO replied that the “make ready” costs are the variable amount, but we should know more after Phase 1 about what those costs will be generally look like.

Clr. Palmer asked how the entire project will move forward and the CAO responded that in all likelihood it will be done in several phases until it is completed.

Clr. Palmer asked if each phase will be approved by budget and the CAO responded the \$11 million for Phase 1 was approved and the cost of equipment is a fixed price and future phases need budget approvals.

Clr. Palmer pointed out the cost of fiber to all homes is \$100 million so we have to be very careful moving forward.

The CAO explained Phase 1 was an anomaly with financial viability of \$11 million in costs and 40% to support future phases and benefit of all future phases. He referred to the pick-up rate in Phase 1 where some areas will already have competition so the numbers may not be as high.

Clr. Thompson noted that there is competition of ISPs and they are providing really cheap rates to residents.

The CAO advised that we could be in that business and he pointed out that we have Eastlink services in our building. They provide 100-megabit service, but it is not fiber. There are a lot of ISPs re-selling over Bell or Eastlink infrastructure.

Warden R. Parker pointed out that we want our internet service for rural residents to have superior quality compared to other offerings.

The CAO reported fiber is better than the infrastructure that is already out there and Eastlink has limitations on what it can provide. They may sell the service to 150 residents but that just makes the service slower but you do not have that problem with fiber. You have to have existing infrastructure in place such as Bell and Eastlink.

Clr. Palmer commented that if you have an open access network then other providers would offer services to residents.

The CAO pointed out that it would be highly unlikely Bell would do that but Eastlink may want to buy additional strands of fiber.

Clr. D. Parker pointed out we want businesses to offer services to our residents so we can shop around and get the best offer.

The CAO indicated that you want to attract whoever can offer services on your network but it will be building cellular capabilities that will attract Bell.

COVID-19 POLICY AMENDMENT

The CAO reviewed a proposed amendment to the COVID-19 Policy that temporarily alters the due date for interim taxes to July 22, 2020 with no interest on the interim bill.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. MacKeil and seconded by Clr. Palmer that a recommendation be forwarded to Council to approve the COVID-19 Policy amendment.

Motion carried.

INTEREST RATE POLICY AMENDMENT

The CAO reviewed a proposed amendment to the Interest Rate Policy to delete Section 2 with respect to the interest rate on capital charges. This is considered a housekeeping matter since that practice

has not been followed since the implementation of our new financial platform that bills capital charges as an area rate.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. D. Parker and seconded by Clr. Butler that a recommendation be forwarded to Council to approve the Interest Rate Policy Amendment.

Motion carried.

INTERIM TAX BILLING POLICY AMENDMENT

The CAO reported the interim tax bill due date is June 15th annually. That date could fall on a Saturday or Sunday therefore staff is recommending some discretionary powers to the Treasurer under those circumstances. This is considered a housekeeping matter for future years and does not impact the previously recommended changes to the Covid-19 policy amendments.

MOTION

It was moved by Clr. Baillie and seconded by Warden Parker that the amendment to the Interim Tax Billing Policy be recommended to Council for approval.

Motion carried.

STIMULUS FUNDING

Clr. Baillie reported there was a general consensus that stimulus money may be available from the Federal Government this fiscal period and recommended that we consider potential shovel-ready projects in order to take advantage of those funds.

The CAO reported that he met with Sean Fraser, MP several weeks ago and this is certainly being discussed. If you have an organization looking to do a project it will be broad enough that it will capture a lot of different projects.

Warden R. Parker recommended that if any member of Council has a potential project, then they should make that known to the CAO.

Clr. Dewar pointed out that more money should be available for unsightly properties because there are a lot of properties in the County that should be cleaned up.

The CAO advised that it is unlikely that stimulus funding would be available for that purpose.

Clr. Dewar reported that we are not getting enough properties cleaned up and the CAO pointed out that he received a report last week from the By-Law Officer on the status of unsightly properties files which he will share with Council.

FORMER EAST PICTOU SCHOOL

Clr. Butler asked if there was any communication with the Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education on the disposition of the East Pictou School.

The CAO replied that he had received a call in March from an official at the CCRCE indicating that they were done with the property but there has been no formal letter on the divestiture of that facility.

SPRINGVILLE BRIDGE

Clr. Dewar reported a lot of work was done in the last 2 weeks on the Springville Bridge. The original structure has been removed and work has begun on the construction of a new 2 lane bridge. He thanked Council for all of the efforts supporting this accomplishment.

FIRE STUDY & STREET LIGHTS UPDATES

Clr. Wadden asked if there were updates on the fire study and installation of outstanding streetlights.

The CAO responded he has an update on streetlights from the GIS Technician and he will forward it to Councillors.

Phase 1 of the Fire Study (the risk assessment) is in and will be shared with the Fire Chiefs shortly. Phase II is due this week from the consultants.

ADJOURN

It was moved by Clr. Dewar and seconded by Clr. MacKeil that the meeting adjourn.

Motion carried. (8:20 p.m.)

CHAIR



MUNICIPAL CLERK