

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

A Special Session of the Municipal Council of the Municipality of the County of Colchester was conducted virtually via Zoom Meetings, on Thursday, April 16, 2020, at 6:00 pm

Roll Call

The roll was called with the following Councillors in attendance:

Mayor Christine Blair, Chair	
Councillor Eric Boutilier	District 1
Councillor Bill Masters	District 2
Deputy Mayor Geoff Stewart	District 3
Councillor Mike Cooper	District 4
Councillor Lloyd Gibbs	District 5
Councillor Michael Gregory	District 7
Councillor Ron Cavanaugh	District 8
Councillor Bob Pash	District 9
Councillor Tom Taggart	District 10
Councillor Wade Parker	District 11

Regrets

Councillor Karen MacKenzie	District 6
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Staff Present

Rob Simonds, Chief Administrative Officer
 Scott Fraser, Director of Corp. Services/Acting Director of Solid Waste
 Crawford Macpherson, Director of Community Development
 Michelle Newell, Director of Public Works
 Dennis James, Municipal Solicitor
 Tracey Veno, Recording Secretary
 Devin Trefry, Research, Policy and Community Engagement Officer
 Tim Smith, Manager of Information Services
 Mark Austin, Economic Development Officer
 Craig Burgess, Recreation Manager
 Dave Westlake, Emergency Management/Protective Services Coordinator

Approval of Agenda

Moved by Councillor Gregory
 Seconded by Councillor Gibbs

“That the agenda be approved as presented.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Report and Recommendation from April 9, 2020 Council Committee Meeting

It should be noted that only recommendations that are time sensitive are being presented for approval this evening. All other recommendations from the April 9th Council Committee meeting will be brought forward at the Regular Council Session on April 30th.

Spring Clean-up

Moved by Deputy Mayor Stewart
 Seconded by Councillor Gregory

“That Council approves that Spring Clean-up be replaced with allowing an additional item per collection cycle for the next year.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Future Meeting Platforms

Moved by Deputy Mayor Stewart
Seconded by Councillor Cooper

“That Council approves that Option 2 and Option 4, as outlined in the Action Item, be the preferred meeting platforms, depending on the level of participation that is required for the meeting.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Budget – High Level Overview

Scott Fraser, Director of Corporate Services, advised that the first draft of the budget was circulated earlier this week. The Maintenance Budget meeting will be held on April 20th and the Additions and Deletions meeting on April 27th. Mr. Fraser advised that if any Council members have questions prior to the budget meeting, he is available by phone or email.

Brief discussion was held regarding the contingency amount built into the budget for expected loss of revenues due to Covid-19; permissible uses for this contingency; reserve funds; and, reductions in net budget expenditures impacted by Covid-19.

Elections

Councillor Boutilier inquired about the upcoming Municipal Election and whether there was an update from NSFM or the Province regarding a possible extension. Mayor Blair advised that this was a topic of discussion at the NSFM/AMA weekly virtual meeting last evening and advised that currently, everything remains status quo. There was a suggestion of an extension of six months if a decision is made to postpone, however, at this time, there has been no decision to that effect.

Newsletter

With the next regular newsletter scheduled to go out around May 19th, Councillor Boutilier inquired about the possibility of having a special edition newsletter about what is happening in Colchester County relative to Covid-19 and potential impacts it could have on us. He indicated that most residents find out about what we are doing through our quarterly newsletters, and a special edition newsletter might be helpful for residents.

Discussion was held on costs for newsletters and preparation lead time as well as what type of information could be in a special edition of the newsletter. Some suggested articles included updates on status of blue bag/recycling, clarification on park and trail closures, current process for building permits, and activities of Council during this time.

The CAO suggested that we would be looking at about a one week turnaround for a maximum four page special edition newsletter. Staff could identify some of the key messages that are time sensitive and will vet through the Executive Committee.

There was additional discussion on concerns with other organizations not following proper physical distancing measurements as well as rumours regarding the availability of seeds for farm crops. Staff will look into the issue of crop seeds and advise Council of findings.

Moved by Councillor Boutilier

Seconded by Councillor Cooper

“That Colchester County Council put out a special edition newsletter to inform residents of Covid-19 affected issues and activities of County Council.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Low Income Municipal Tax Assistance Program

Councillor Taggart raised the issue of the Low Income Municipal Tax Assistance Program and that he would like to see a review of the program with consideration being given to adjusting the income thresholds and/or the exemption amounts. He provided a brief recap of the current thresholds and exemptions noting the amounts were not a lot for those most vulnerable. Mr. Fraser indicated that staff intended to do a review to recommended changes for the administration of the Policy so a complete review could be carried out if Council so wishes.

Brief discussion was held on when the Policy was last reviewed and updated, the current process for annual adjustments, and whether the review and possible changes to the Policy is intended to be permanent or for this year due to Covid-19.

Moved by Councillor Taggart
Seconded by Councillor Gregory

“That staff carry out a review of the Low Income Municipal Tax Assistance Program bringing forward to a future meeting information including adjustments to the income thresholds, increased exemption amounts, and potential impacts on the budget.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Closed Session

Moved by Councillor Gregory
Seconded by Councillor Cavanaugh

“That the meeting go into closed session at 7:13 pm.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Moved by Councillor Gibbs
Seconded by Councillor Boutilier

“That the meeting reconvene in open session at 8:15 pm”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Funding Programs

Councillor Cooper made an inquiry about whether there are any financial programs, federally or provincially, for municipalities. Mr. Fraser advised that the programs currently in place for small businesses do not apply to municipalities but he would look into whether there are programs available for municipalities and report back accordingly.

Discussion was held on a recent HRM announcement that would assist tax payers to June 1st. Councillor Boutilier stated that it is interesting to see other municipal units looking ahead for ways to assist residents and he looks forward to Colchester County doing the same. The CAO advised that he

believes the announcement relates to interim property tax billing and Colchester only does one bill annually rather than interim billing. Staff will confirm this and get back to Council.

Brief discussion was held on a future update on the Policing review as well as any potential pension fund shortfalls.

Adjournment

Moved by Councillor Gregory
Seconded by Councillor Gibbs

“That the meeting adjourn at 8:26 pm.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Tracey Veno
Recording Secretary