

COUNCIL COMMITTEE

The Regular Session of the Council Committee of the Municipality of the County of Colchester was conducted virtually, via Zoom Webinars on Thursday, April 15, 2021, beginning at 6:00 pm.

Roll Call

The roll was called with the following Councillors in attendance:

Mayor Christine Blair	
Councillor Eric Boutilier	District 1
Councillor Laurie Sandeson	District 2
Deputy Mayor Geoff Stewart, Chair	District 3
Councillor Mike Cooper	District 4
Councillor Tim Johnson	District 5
Councillor Karen MacKenzie	District 6
Councillor Michael Gregory	District 7
Councillor Lisa Patton	District 8
Councillor Marie Benoit	District 9
Councillor Tom Taggart	District 10
Councillor Wade Parker	District 11

Staff Present

Rob Simonds, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)
 Crawford Macpherson, Director of Community Development
 Scott Fraser, Director of Corp. Services/Acting Director of Solid Waste
 Michelle Boudreau, Director of Public Works
 Dennis James, Municipal Solicitor
 Tracey Veno, Recording Secretary
 Devin Trefry, Research, Policy and Community Engagement Officer
 Craig Burgess, Recreation Manager
 Jeanette Himmelman, Systems Analyst
 Joanna Burris, Sustainability Planner

Due to a directive by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing pursuant to the provincial State of Emergency related to COVID-19, all Colchester Council meetings being held remotely by teleconference or on a virtual platform must have draft minutes posted within twenty-four hours of the meeting. This is to ensure transparency and honour the commitment for Colchester Council to conduct its business in public. These minutes will not be reviewed and approved until the next regularly scheduled meeting of Colchester Council Committee on May 13, 2021. Until formally approved by Council Committee, these minutes cannot be relied on as an official record of the April 15, 2021 meeting.

Approval of Agenda

Moved by Councillor Benoit
 Seconded by Councillor Johnson

“That the agenda be approved with the following additions:

- Item #7b, Housing Crisis;
- Item #7c, Internet Update.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Moved by Councillor Boutilier
Seconded by Councillor Cooper

“That the minutes of the meetings held on March 4 & 8 and March 11, 2021, be approved as presented.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Business Arising from Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes of the meetings held on March 4 & 8 and March 11, 2021.

ACTION ITEMS**Mentoring Plus Strategy Initiative**

Devin Trefry, Research, Policy and Community Engagement Officer, advised that previously a letter from Mayor Mills inviting the Municipality to participate in the Mentoring Plus Strategy was referred to staff to bring back information about the program. Mr. Trefry provided a brief overview of the initiative indicating it is a four year federally funded project led by Dalhousie University in collaboration with the Towns of Truro, New Glasgow and Kentville. The Strategy identifies and engages volunteer retirees in the community, matching them as mentors with youth, unemployed persons, those interested in changing careers, or organizations that may benefit from their expertise. It is beneficial to seniors by keeping them active and involved in their communities.

The Mentoring Plus Strategy has three Coordinators, one in each of the areas with the Truro office being located in the Marigold Centre. There is no financial commitment to be involved. Rather the role of the Municipality would be to share and promote the program in their communities. In discussions with the Executive Director of the program, it was indicated that a local Coordinator could make a presentation to Council to offer more details and information about the program.

Brief discussion was held on the Mentoring Plus Strategy working in conjunction with the Truro and Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity; whether there are screening processes in place for the program; what partnering would entail; and future funding. It was suggested that a presentation to receive more information on the Strategy would be beneficial prior to Council making a decision on this.

Moved by Councillor Benoit
Seconded by Councillor Sandeson

“That Council Committee recommends to Council that the Municipality become a supporting partner of the Mentoring Plus Strategy.”

Motion Carried. *(Councillors Cooper and Johnson opposed)*

Tax Exemption Request – Truro Horsemen’s Club

Councillor Patton recused herself from the discussion and voting on any motions regarding this matter.

Scott Fraser, Director of Corporate Services, advised that this item deals with the request for a tax exemption from the Truro Horsemen’s Club and indicated that a request was also received from the Club approximately two

years ago. At that time, staff reviewed the Article of Incorporation, what the Club's purpose was at the time of incorporation, and the different activities they partake in. The Municipal Government Act (MGA) speaks to what municipalities can do for granting tax exemptions. It clearly specifies that the exemption can be granted if the organization provides services that Council might otherwise have to provide. The decision of two years ago was based on Council determining that the services would not be otherwise provided by the Municipality and therefore did not grant the exemption. For information purposes, Mr. Fraser indicated that the value of the exemption would be in the range of \$6,000 annually should the exemption be granted.

Discussion was held on the organization providing confirmation of not-for-profit status; services provided by the organization and if the Municipality would be required to provide the services; the value of the organization to the community; what the Village of Bible Hill does for the Club; whether memberships are required in order to access the Club's facility; and that the Club is similar to other Community Halls throughout the County and should be treated as such. Further discussion was held regarding whether Legions are tax exempt. Dennis James, Municipal Solicitor, advised that Legions are treated slightly different and are exempted under the Assessment Act.

Moved by Councillor Boutilier
Seconded by Mayor Blair

"That Council Committee recommends to Council that the Truro Horsemen's Club be granted the tax exemption, the same as all other Community Halls in Colchester County."

Clarification was sought on the exemption being for the current year or if it would be applicable to back taxes. Councillor Boutilier, as mover of the motion, indicated that the motion did not make reference to back taxes. The Municipal Solicitor advised that the way the motion is currently before Council, the exemption would be effective when approved by Council at the end of the month. Council would have to add to the motion to deal with back taxes.

Motion Carried. *(Councillors MacKenzie and Gregory opposed)*

Funding for J Class Roads

Michelle Boudreau, Director of Public Works, provided a brief introduction of this item noting that funding for J Class Roads has been before Council on a number of occasions. J Class Roads are subdivision roads owned by the province which require a 50 percent contribution from the Municipality for repaving. At their February meeting, Council directed staff to report back with additional funding options for the 50% municipal portion. Staff were also directed to investigate other funding opportunities available to assist with these costs.

Included in the Action Item in the package for this evening's meeting was detailed information on various options based on 15 and 20 year rotations. Additionally, staff reported that there are no other funding sources available for the repaving of J Class Roads other than Gas Tax Funding.

Lengthy debate was held on the options presented with the following points being noted during discussion:

- Roads being one of the main issues amongst residents;
- J Class Roads have been an issue for a long time and it is time that a decision is made;
- J Class Roads not being a municipal responsibility;
- Difficulties in asking the residents to pay as they feel that it is not their responsibility nor do they want to pay;
- It being difficult to ask residents not on J Class Roads to pay;
- Suggestion to put funds in the capital budget for the paving of J Class Roads;
- Whether the petition process would still be required being dependent on the option chosen;
- Other funding options such as the Municipality contributing 25 percent through the general rate and residents contributing 25 percent by way of area rate; and,
- Municipal contributions through the general rate would still fall to the residents.

Moved by Councillor Boutilier
Seconded by Councillor Patton

“That the staff report on funding for J Class Roads be accepted for information.”

Motion DEFEATED. (*Mayor Blair, Councillors Sandeson, Johnson, MacKenzie, Gregory, Benoit, and Parker opposed*)

Moved by Councillor Johnson
Seconded by Councillor Gregory

“That Council Committee recommends to Council that enough funds be included in the budget for a 20 year rotation for the paving of J Class Roads with 25 percent of the funds from the Municipality through the general rate, 25 percent contribution from the residents through an area rate by district; and the remaining 50% from the province.”

Motion DEFEATED. (*Mayor Blair, Deputy Mayor Stewart, Councillors Boutilier, Sandeson, Cooper, Benoit and Taggart opposed*)

During debate on this motion, Councillor Cooper, Alternate Chair of Council Committee, assumed the role of Chair temporarily to allow opportunity for the Deputy Mayor to speak on this matter.

Deputy Mayor Stewart expressed that he has an issue with focusing on the entire district for paying for J Class Roads when there are some residents that will never use these roads. Charges for other services such as sidewalks, streetlights and sewer are paid for by those in certain areas and not by the whole district.

At this point, the Deputy Mayor resumed the role of Chair.

Moved by Councillor Sandeson
Seconded by Mayor Blair

“That Council Committee recommends that Council entertain paying for the paving of J Class Roads with 50 percent being provincially funded, 25 percent funded by residents through the general rate, and 25 percent funded by residents fronting on the J Class Roads through an area rate.”

Motion DEFEATED. *(Councillors Boutilier, Cooper, Johnson, MacKenzie, Gregory, Benoit, Taggart and Parker opposed)*

Further discussion was held on the possibility of having the 50-25-25 funding contribution with the 25 percent portion from residents being from only those districts wanting to participate. Given the uncertainties of how this could be captured effectively, it was suggested that options to fit this formula be brought forward at the end of the month for Council consideration. Noting that no J Class Roads are being put forth for paving this fiscal year and there would be no impact on the current budget, it was suggested that the options be brought back to May Committee.

Moved by Councillor Parker
Seconded by Councillor Johnson

“That staff bring back funding options for only those districts wishing to participate in the paving of J Class Roads.”

Motion Carried. *(Councillor Taggart opposed)*

Clarification was sought on the area rates as presented in the table contained in the Action Item and the duration for the area rates, Ms. Boudreau indicated that with the 50-25-25 option being contemplated, the area rates would be reduced by half, and these area rates would be perpetual in order to sustain the 20 year rotation.

Housing Crisis

Councillor Taggart brought this issue forward indicating that there is a housing crisis in Colchester County. There is not enough affordable housing, either rentals or single family owned houses, and that the Municipality has to take steps to help address this. There is a tremendous amount of federal money available, however, this funding is not available to municipalities and has to come through the province and we have to find ways to work around this. He indicated that this issue was raised at the recent Debert Business Park Advisory Committee meeting but was advised that housing does not play a role in economic development. Councillor Taggart expressed that he strongly disagrees with this. Other jurisdictions have found innovative ways to deal with the housing issue and we must start discussions regarding types of programs to work with the federal and provincial governments, developers and businesses to develop affordable housing options. Debert is an excellent location as it can provide housing at relatively competitive pricing. Councillor Taggart suggested that he would like to see Community Development or Economic Development look into the housing issue and come back with a plan on what we can do as a Municipality to encourage developers to develop single family affordable housing in Colchester County.

Council discussed the potential expansion in Debert warranting the need to address affordable housing and suggested the possibility of writing a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Moved by Councillor Taggart
Seconded by Councillor Sandeson

“That the issue of the housing crisis and affordable housing in Colchester County be referred to staff and that it be considered urgent.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

The CAO recognized the importance of the issue and noted that an update on the provincial analysis on affordable housing will be provided at the next meeting of Mayors, Wardens and CAOs on April 28th. Also, from a staffing perspective and managing expectations of a very complex matter, he reminded Council of a couple of upcoming key vacancies, however, staff will work hard to advance this issue. Councillor Taggart suggested that perhaps this could be farmed out to the Truro and Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

Internet Update

Referring to the Rural Internet Project, Councillor Taggart indicated that he would like to have an update on the progress of the Xplornet Rural Internet Project.

Moved by Councillor Taggart
Seconded by Councillor Benoit

“That staff provide a report on the Rural Internet Project at the next Council meeting.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

The CAO advised that Xplornet and Develop Nova Scotia provides monthly updates and the next is scheduled to be received tomorrow. Mark Austin, Economic Development Officer, advised that there is a lot happening and he will be better informed to provide an update to Council at the end of the month. The update will need to be provided in closed session due to proprietary information. He did however indicate that the project was originally expected to be three to five years but has now been condensed to two years, with full delivery of agreed service levels in approximately 16 to 18 months.

INFORMATION ITEMS

Community Park Funding Program, Winter 2021 Applications – Update

At the March Council Committee meeting, staff provided a report on the Community Park Funding Program Winter 2021 Applications. At that time, additional information was requested on the application from Big Brothers Big Sisters, specifically a balance sheet. This report provides the additional information as requested, as well as detailed information about the organization and park plans.

Director’s Report

A report from the Director of Corporate Services was circulated in the package for tonight’s meeting.

CLOSED SESSION

Moved by Councillor Gregory

Seconded by Councillor Patton

“That the meeting go into closed session at 9:02 pm.”

Motion Carried Unanimously

Moved by Councillor Gregory
Seconded by Councillor Patton

“That the meeting reconvene in open session at 10:20 pm.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

**FCM Community Efficiency
Financing**

Moved by Councillor Johnson
Seconded by Councillor Boutilier

“That Council Committee recommends to Council that the Municipality’s contribution to the Solar Colchester program expansion, including the addition of a home energy efficiency retrofit PACE program be approved; and,

That the following Borrowing Resolution, be approved:

**FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES
PROPERTY ASSESSED CLEAN ENERGY FUND
FINANCING RESOLUTION**

WHEREAS the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is offering financing to municipalities participating in the Property Assessed Clean Energy program;

WHEREAS in accordance with the program requirements of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Council of the County of Colchester has deemed it appropriate to seek approval from the Minister of Municipal Affairs to take part in the financing offered through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities;

WHEREAS pursuant to Section 81A of the *Municipal Government Act*, the Municipality has adopted a bylaw fixing and providing for methods of payment of charges consistent with the Property Assessed Clean Energy program;

WHEREAS pursuant to Section 84 of the *Municipal Government Act*, a Municipality may borrow to cover the annual current expenditures to an amount not to exceed fifty per cent of the combined total of the taxes levied by the Municipality for the previous year and the amounts to be received by the provincial and federal governments.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED

THAT subject to the approval of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Council of the County of Colchester borrow a sum or sums not exceeding \$5,565,400.00 for the purpose set out above; and,

THAT the borrowing of funds will be used to offer a financing program for property owners in Colchester for home energy projects ; and,

THAT the borrowing will be under the terms and conditions of the agreement as determined by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Councillor Gregory
Seconded by Councillor Patton

“That the meeting adjourn at 10:22 pm.”

Motion Carried Unanimously.

Tracey Veno
Recording Secretary