

COVID-19 COMMITTEE
Meeting Notes

DATE: April 21, 2020
TIME: 10:00 a.m. – 11:54 a.m.
PLACE: Zoom online platform

PRESENT: Deputy Mayor Gary Clow; Councillors Jill Burridge; Gail MacDonald; Steve Gallant; Derek Smith; Darren MacDougall; Robert Hughes, CAO; Jeremy Crosby, Deputy CAO and Director of Infrastructure; Jeremy Pierce, Director of Recreation; Wendy Watts, Community and Business Engagement Manager; and Mary McAskill, Recording Clerk

REGRETS: Nil

CHAIR: Mayor Steve Ogden

1. School Indigenous Instrument Program

Jeremy Pierce stated that the Arts and Culture recognized a gap in programming delivery of music and literature in the fall of 2019. Sandy McMillan was tasked to reach out to the school and she followed proper protocol. Unfortunately, there is no provincial funding available for the 30 handmade indigenous instruments that we would like to purchase. The cost is approximately \$3800 and it could be covered by the committee's operational budget.

Councillor Burridge was shocked that there was no funding for this program. Jeremy P. replied that Sandy did talk to the school board, and she talked to the school, and the school only has money for books and the very basics at this time. Councillor Gallant noted that Sandy was trying to get this going because there is not a lot of music in school these days.

Deputy Mayor Clow felt that we should seek out other funding, but he is in favour of it either way. Mayor Ogden asked Jeremy to check to see if there might be some federal programming funding from the Department of Aboriginal and Indigenous Affairs and Jeremy replied that he would check.

Councillor Burridge stated that she always goes back to our priorities, and we have strategic priorities that she felt we should be following. If we identify that this program falls under our strategic priorities then that would be fine. She knows the timing didn't work out but

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she felt this should have been a budget consideration and she sees it more of a collaboration.

Mayor Ogden would like to know if other municipalities are funding music programs in the schools. We have to look at what is the Town's responsibility and does it relate to our core mandate.

Robert stated that he doesn't know what other communities are doing, but we can look into it. However, we do have a plan, a strategy of how we want the Town to develop – celebrating culture and recognizing diversity are two key items of our plan. So, we do budget money every year for cultural programs. We have been bringing certain programs to our schools for a very long time, and collaboratively with the schools, so the students are exposed to more than just the basics. Robert felt that the program fits squarely within our core mandate.

Mayor Ogden stated that Cornwall has a 6.2 million dollar budget and a surplus of more than \$900,000. He knows they already have a lot of their infrastructure in place, and they have a school, but he would be interested to learn how they are able to have such a surplus and what we could learn from them on budgeting.

Deputy Mayor Clow added that we have been contributing to school programs for years, although he does understand Councillor Burrridge's point. For years we even put books in the library. If we want our kids to progress we shouldn't worry about what other schools are doing. It is \$3800 and he felt it would be money well spent. Councillor Burrridge asked if the administrator of the school was brought into the conversation and Jeremy replied that Sandy followed protocol from the school board to the administrator to the music teacher. Councillor Burrridge just wondered if there might be something more pressing that the school needs that is more 'nuts and bolts.' Jeremy noted that in talking with Sandy and Tanya Craig there was support for this initiative at all levels. He also noted that he will check for any funding opportunities that might be out there.

Councillor Gallant agreed that kids are not getting these things from the school and we are a diverse society. He felt that music was a great tool and he supports the initiative.

Councillor Smith felt that in the long run, we would benefit from providing the program and get more back than the \$3800.

Mayor Ogden noted that we will revisit this file when we get more information in regards to federal funding.

Jeremy Pierce left the meeting at this time.

2. Operating Update

a. Pipe to Charlottetown Project

Jeremy Crosby stated that the project is progressing, but slower than before due to the Covid-19 issues. We are having issues with delivery of products, and some of the manufacturers of the pipe and some of the fittings have actually shut down, but they are hopeful that they will be able to start back up. It was noted that the contractors are also trying to source some other suppliers.

The Expansion Joint Project that the province is doing will probably start next week. There will be a full two lane closure while they work on the expansion joint on one side and then they will switch and do the other side. Information will be provided to the residents and Jeremy will get an update on how long they expect the project to last. The traffic is down 50% so it is an opportune time to do it.

Mayor Ogden asked about large farm equipment and Jeremy stated that the same protocols will be in place. The only difference is that the province was in charge of traffic control the last time, and this time they gave that responsibility to the contractors. The project manager with the province will be there to make sure things go smoothly. Two lanes should be wide enough for farm equipment, but if not they will have to travel through Mount Stewart.

Jeremy stated that due to Covid-19, the Directional and Drilling Company from Quebec is not willing to bring their crews here to do our sludge removal. They indicated that it could be May before they are able to start the work which will put us behind a little bit. They are experiencing quite a problem with Covid-19 in Quebec and we actually can't reach anyone from the business at this time. We have notified the infrastructure secretariat that there could be some delays in the project because our funding does run out in December and if there are going to be problems associated with Covid-19; we wanted to make sure they were aware of it. They have the letter and will forward it to their counterparts in Ottawa so they are aware of the situation. The good thing is the project is progressing.

Birch Hill Construction and all their subcontractors have a letter from the Town saying they are essential services, so they can travel to the Island to do the work.

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They are following social distancing requirements, but there are some issues with deliveries and manufacturing.

It was noted that our sign board should be up sometime this week.

Deputy Mayor Clow asked if there would be odours at the plant again this year and Jeremy stated that we will have odours, but if we can get the sludge out it will help. When the turnover occurs there is always odour from the system, but this will be the last year for it. Deputy Mayor Clow suggested we get something out to the residents.

Councillor Gallant asked what we will do with the Blue frogs and Jeremy replied that the frogs have to stay in running order until the system is fully decommissioned, so it will probably be November before we are able to remove them. We will clean them up and get them ready for sale. We spoke with the developer of the system and they may be interested in purchasing them back, but we also wanted to talk to some municipalities in the Atlantic region to see if anyone else could use them.

b. Community Champions Program

Robert noted that he has given out 13 of the 30 grocery gift cards. He noted that some of the teachers called some residents who they felt could use a card. We will now leave it for a few days. It was suggested that Constable Glen Dudley may also be aware of residents who could use a gift card.

c. Committee Member Update/briefing

Robert noted that Jade tried to put the information on a one-pager, but that was not providing enough information. However, he has a briefing for committee members and sub-committee members, and it includes a memo, the strategic plan, and it will have a high level power point that talks about the big picture strategy. It also outlines the roles of Council members, Committee members, Sub-committee members, and staff members. Robert will forward a copy of the information to Mayor and Council.

Councillor Burridge asked about a timeframe on the strategic plan and Robert replied it is to the end of the Council term.

d. Prioritization Exercise

Robert noted that we are going through all our capital projects and all of our initiatives. We need to decide what we will prepare for the spring and summer and what are we not going to prepare because of Covid-19.

Robert is having a Zoom meeting with John Dewey and Samantha Murphy to see if there is a way we can coordinate among municipalities for the ease back so we are more on the same page as a group. He found that when we got in this, we were all doing things differently and we didn't have any kind of coordinated approach which is understandable because we are in an unprecedented situation. All communities did their own thing and that is somewhat confusing for residents.

Councillor Burrige stated that we should be prioritizing things and getting designs done now, because she believes there will be a lot of funding and if we don't have our designs done we won't be able to get any. Robert agreed and he said we will absolutely be looking at what we can get done now. He noted that he spoke to John Dewey a few days ago and they are advocating that the government double the gas tax like they did a few years ago. That gives municipalities a lot more freedom to determine their priorities and timelines etc.

Jeremy Crosby noted that Jeannie Gallant is working to get some RFP's ready to go and Councillor Burrige felt that was excellent. Jeremy noted that she has been working on the Active Transportation file and our sewer and water file - for any projects that are going to be moving forward.

e. Community Campus Land Acquisition

Mayor Ogden noted that he sent an email around after his conference call with Minister Trivers and Minister Myers to let Councillors know what took place during the meeting. Both Councillor Burrige and Robert also attended the conference call. Turner Drake has been given their instructions and they are preparing some talking points to go over with the land owners. We also reiterated in the call with the Ministers that we will build the outside facilities. We also asked for a small committee so we don't have to keep going back to the Ministers and Deputy Ministers, and Tyler Richardson and Chris DesRoches will be on the Committee.

3. Covid-19 Operational Status Report

a. Status Report

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Jeremy has been sending out the reports on a weekly basis and he asked if anyone had any questions. The report is also sent to EMO and Municipal Affairs.

Transit also gave an update and their ridership has reduced significantly, so they are encouraging essential workers (people who have to work during the pandemic) to use the transit service. Jeremy noted that they are doing a great job keeping everything clean and sanitized.

The RCMP also supplied a report and they noted that all their workers are healthy and working at this time and will let us know if they needed anything.

Jeremy noted that he called Constable Glen Dudley to pass on our sympathy to the RCMP members regarding the tragedy that occurred in Nova Scotia. He noted that the flags weren't up yet at the new emergency building, so Joe Driscoll got the flags up right away and flying at half-mast, and the RCMP members appreciated it.

Councillor Burridge asked if the report that is sent out each week is shared with Charlottetown and Jeremy replied that the reports are shared with Municipal Affairs and EMO and they are supposed to share that information within the EMO reporting if they think it is pertinent. Jeremy stated that once we start to reopen we should have a coordinated approach on how we are going to do it.

Councillor Smith stated that we should consider training for Town staff and Town Council due to the situation in Nova Scotia. He noted that Constable Glen Dudley has said that they do the training for the schools in case of an incident, and he could probably adapt that training to the Town. We should also look at panic alarms for the front desk and the gymnasium desk and Jeremy replied that just before the pandemic came on us we were in the process of looking at how we could protect staff. He added that the Work Alone Policy will help us address some of these issues.

Mayor Ogden also took a moment to acknowledge the devastating loss that the RCMP and the whole Province of Nova Scotia suffered. He added that he passed on condolences from Council and staff to Commanding Officer Jennifer Ebert and also to Corporal Glen Dudley.

b. Community Gardens Opening

Robert stated that we are allowed to open the community gardens, as the chief health officer stated that it is essential, but everyone can't go on the same day. Watershed coordinator Maddie Crowell has developed a process where we set days

for certain plots – only a certain number of people will be allowed on certain days and they must practice social distancing. Robert noted that it might require a little ‘policing,’ but because the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) has declared it essential – people can grow their own food; we recommend that we open it with the restrictions that are in place that are required to maintain social distancing and Council agreed.

4. Provincial Support for Municipalities

John Dewey asked if there is anything the Town needs that the Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities (FPEIM) could lobby the province for and the management team discussed it on their Zoom meeting. However, we felt it was too early to know what the financial impact will be due to the pandemic. The area we could ask for help is the acceleration of the infrastructure funding – if there are contractors able to do the work. Robert noted that he is just raising the issue today and if anyone has any thoughts or suggestions for the province, please let him know so it can be added to the list. It was also noted that Michele Beaton reached out to us as well.

Deputy Mayor Clow asked if Hon. Lawrence MacAulay or Hon. James Aylward contacted us and Mayor Ogden replied that he spoke with both of them several times, but it was mostly focused around the rink. However, Hon. Lawrence MacAulay did reach out early on to see what the Town would need from the federal government and there wasn’t anything he knew of at that time. He will also reach out to Michele Beaton.

Councillor MacDonald noted that we need to follow-up with Hon. Lawrence MacAulay regarding PTSD Clinic that they plan to build in Stratford because the last word on it was they hadn’t found a location to build on yet. Mayor Ogden will discuss it with Mr. MacAulay when they speak next and he will send an email to everyone.

Mayor Ogden noted that we need to be more self-sufficient. Right now our Procurement Policy is such that we have to open up to off Island firms. Is there any limit to changing the rules, as it would be great to get local firms to do the work. Councillor Burrridge noted that it will be a matter of manpower of local contractors and Jeremy agreed noting that there are a number of permits being processed in the planning department (but not approved) and he felt that contractors will be in high demand. He also noted that on our work plan we are going to look at our Procurement Policy for some of the smaller issues. However, on the larger projects, we will still need to rely on some off Island firms. Mayor Ogden noted that maybe the Procurement Policy is too big of an issue to tackle, but we have to look at every area where we can be self-sufficient without having to source things from outside. Robert

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noted that it may be an opportunity to keep pushing home that we have been looking for more of a share of the property tax so we can do the things that we need to do which also benefits the province. We will add 'more property tax' to the list.

Councillor Smith noted that Birch Hill Construction has done an outstanding job and we should reward someone who does a good job.

5. Seasonal Staffing/Essential Services for Spring/Summer Season

Robert stated that grass cutting– we don't know about flowers – are they essential – all we are doing on the call today is to bring these issues to Council to think about and we can discuss it further next week. It is likely that we won't be able to offer full service by summer. We may be able to ease back somewhat, but we are not going to be able to do everything we did before. Robert stated that he wanted Council to think about the spring and summer season. What they would like to see us do – such as landscaping.

Jeremy noted that he brought this issue up yesterday because a lot of our seasonal staff is asking when they will be coming back to work. Jeremy recommended that our two utility seasonal staff could come back immediately as they are considered essential services and they can work independent of each other and Council agreed. He noted that it was reported on the news that they are going to allow grass cutting contractors to proceed but they must practice social distancing. He added that he is hopeful that Robert is able to get some direction on his call with the Chief Health Officer on what services we can provide and how we can provide them safely. We want to see people come back but we want to keep them safe. Our grass cutting contractor has permission to cut the grass, but they haven't told us about what precautions they need to take.

Deputy Mayor Clow stated that he would like to see the work go ahead on the Petro Can intersection. We agreed to take out the flowers in the median and put the same stuff that is being used on the median going out the highway so it coordinates. Jeremy noted that we agreed we would take out the flowers and put some sod in for this year because we don't have any money in the budget this year for river run rock or concrete.

Jeremy will be in a conference call with the Active Transportation Committee with the province because they want to ask some questions regarding transit. He will bring up Ward 3, and he asked if there was anything else anyone wanted brought up at the meeting. Robert suggested more runs during the days and the evenings and a Sunday service as well – if they are going to pay for it.

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Councillor Burridge noted that she had emailed Jeremy Pierce about the tunnel under the highway. She would love to see it brightened up as a lot of people in the community use the tunnel. Jeremy replied that Jeremy Pierce did contact him regarding the tunnel and he will provide him with some information so he can contact the province's maintenance supervisor on this issue.

Mayor Ogden mentioned a concern that he received from a resident regarding the sidewalk from the Town Centre to Tim's Coffee Shop – they feel it needs to be widened. Jeremy noted that the resident may be indicating that people are cutting the shoulder a little bit on the turn, and the construction taking place would also have an effect on the sidewalk. He added that the pedestrian path on the other side of the road is quite wide and available and he felt that it would be difficult to get the road widened with all the active transportation we already have in place. However, he can see what type of shoulder material they may be able to put in.

Councillor Burridge asked if there was a drop off and pick up for the busses at the parking lot of the library, and Jeremy stated that that there is, but there is not a lot of uptake on it.

She asked if there were more plans at the roundabout for active transportation. She noted that it was not comfortable to walk through with kids, although she did note the traffic was very accommodating. Deputy Mayor Clow noted that there are flashing lights for pedestrians and they are working. Jeremy noted that he will also bring it up at one of his meetings once meetings start happening again.

6. Council Committee Meeting Remuneration

Mayor Ogden noted that he discussions with some of the Councillors who felt that Council should be paid automatically for meetings. Robert noted that there are a few ways we can deal with it. One is to have staff keep attendance and submit the form on your behalf. That wouldn't be too difficult right now, but on a regular basis it would take quite a bit of effort on behalf of staff and he didn't think it would be a great long term solution. The easiest solution is to roll the meeting stipend into the honorariums. If we amend the bylaw to eliminate the meeting stipend, we can then add the meetings to the remuneration. Then the only time Council would need to submit a claim would be for expenses for attending the FPEIM or FCM Conference.

The majority agreed to have the bylaw changed, and Robert added that you can justify that you are not taking any additional money from the budget – you are just processing it in a different way to save time for both Council and staff.

7. Covid-19 Contingency Fund

It was noted that Jeremy Pierce is still keeping track of provincial and federal programs. Something could come up from week to week and Robert recommended we leave it on the agenda as a regular item.

8. Communications to Residents

Mayor Ogden noted that the information going out is really appreciated by residents. Our social media is quite active and he thanked Wendy for all the work she is doing in that area. Deputy Mayor Clow noted that he made some calls to seniors and they really appreciated the calls which were very positive in nature.

Wendy stated that the good news so far is that we haven't reached anyone who indicated that they are in need or that they didn't have support around them.

9. Council Inquiries

Councillor Burridge noted that Marion Dowling is a Stratford resident and she is being touted as a bit of a provincial hero (she is the Chief of Nursing at Health PEI) and Councillor Burridge felt it might be a nice to send her a bouquet of flowers. She noted that Bernadette's Flowers is doing some deliveries and it would be nice to acknowledge her in some way. Mayor Ogden agreed that would be a great idea.

Mayor Ogden noted that when he last spoke with Constable Glen Dudley, the Constable informed him that a couple of wreaths had been delivered to the detachment and people were bringing them coffee. Mayor Ogden asked if there was something we could do as a Town and Jeremy replied that we could give them gift cards for Phinley's or Tim Horton's and Councillor Smith agreed and added that \$25 gift cards to each Stratford member and they can use them when they are on patrol. Robert stated that we will make a note to pick up the cards and deliver them to the detachment. Mayor Ogden would also like to have a card to send our condolences on the tragedy in Nova Scotia where many people were killed and the RCMP lost one of their members. Robert stated that rather than going into a store he will ask Wendy or Jade to do something up on the computer.

Councillor Smith stated that he realizes that we are not getting the rink and that is disappointing for some people. But we are going to get the high school and he is happy about that. He noted that once the high school gets built we can think about a rink.

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Deputy Mayor Clow asked for an update on the fire company lease and Robert noted that he sent the revised email to Dave Swan, and hopefully his committee is working on it.

10. Other Business

Nil

11. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:54 a.m.