

COVID-19 COMMITTEE
Meeting Notes

DATE: April 28, 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; Wendy Watts, Community and Business Engagement Manager; and Mary McAskill, Recording Clerk

REGRETS: Nil

CHAIR: Mayor Steve Ogden

Mayor Ogden called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

1. Operating Update

a. Staff meeting

Robert noted that we had a Zoom staff meeting last week and it was the first staff meeting since staff started working at home. Everyone seems to be doing well and we brought everyone up to speed on how we are operating. The staff was most appreciative of Council paying the casual staff until they could get help from other levels of government. They also appreciate the fact that they are still working and drawing a paycheque when a lot of others are not and he felt morale was in a good place.

b. Fire Company Lease

Robert noted that he spoke with Dave Swan last week and Mr. Swan indicated that the fire company's legal Counsel has combed through the original incorporation document and they believe that the fire company is already exempt from paying tax. They are preparing a letter to send to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) with the hope of getting something back from CRA to confirm they are tax exempt.

When speaking with Dave Swan – Robert asked if they couldn't get a quick turn-around, would he be willing to sign the lease for at least one year to allow time to get the issues resolved, and Mr. Swan seemed to be on board with the idea.

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

Mayor Ogden asked Robert to check with our liability insurance provider to make sure we are covered while in this limbo period without a signed lease. Robert noted that there potentially could be a problem if there were some issues with the building because we do own the building.

Councillor Smith asked if we sign a long term lease will Council have a say in it before it is signed off, and Robert replied that it does have to have Council approval. Councillor Smith's would be more comfortable with a one year lease at this time.

c. Financial Report Improvement

Robert noted that every month in the Council package there is a financial report. However, it is not as accurate as it should be and he has asked Kim to go back and do a monthly allocation so that the revenues and expenses are broken down by month and can be compared to the actuals. He explained that the problem is the program we use does not do this automatically. You have to manually go in and manipulate the program. Now that there is some extra help in the finance department Kim will be able to get this done. Mayor Ogden and Councillor Burrridge felt this would be a great improvement.

d. COVID-19 Ease Back

Last week we said we were going to send some questions to the Chief Health Officer for the Town. We expect they will be releasing the Renewing PEI Plan sometime next week. Robert noted that what we have been doing at staff level is trying to figure out what to carry on with, what to defer, or not do at all based on the Chief Health Officer requirements. We will have a list next week of what we are gearing up to do for the spring and summer season. We did decide last week to go ahead with the utility billing because water and sewer is an essential service.

Jeremy added that we will have to start prepping the Town Centre for visitors and that would include putting markings on the floor and barriers so they can't just walk right through. We will also be putting some plexiglass on the front desks so there is a barrier between staff and residents who are coming in.

Councillor Gallant asked if FCM is doing anything for municipalities and Robert replied that FCM has submitted a proposal to the federal government for eight or nine billion dollars of extra funding (operating shortfall funding) to be distributed to municipalities. He added that he will be attending a conference call on Thursday, April 30 with Mayor Ogden, Minister Fox and Deputy Minister Bob Creed (Minister

Fox asked for the conference call). They want to know what financial issues municipalities are facing due to Covid-19 and it is difficult to say, but we do know that it is affecting us, so we will have to think about what our answer will be to the Minister and Deputy Minister. We also sent a series of questions to John Dewey, Federation of PEI Municipalities (FPEIM) and Samantha Murphy, Manager of Municipal Affairs and asked them if they could get some of the questions about the ease back to Dr. Morrison, so that when she is developing her plan we will get some of the answers to the questions we have. Robert will send a copy of the email with the list of questions to Council. We asked the question of who is going to enforce the rules during the ease back when people can start gathering again. He used the community garden as an example – only five people can be there at one time on alternate days.

e. Staffing

It was noted that there were a few positions in the budget and Kevin Reynolds has advertised for the summer planning technician. He is not planning to bring them in right away, but he has started the process. It is a permanent position for six months of the year. In regards to the environmental coordinator position, Robert would like to do something similar, so when we do go back we will have a person ready to start. However, he is going to wait until we get the ease back plan and see where this would fit.

2. Waterfront Park - Conceptual Design Approach

Robert felt there was no reason not to start on the design of the waterfront park. We did have a design done in front of the land that CADC owns; we had a linear park with a board walk designed for that the land but it didn't include the 30,000 sq. feet that the Town purchased in front of Tim's building. On the treatment plant site there is money in our budget to restore the site and that could be designed as well. Robert noted that we have three or four plans in various states. We thought the best way to deal with that would be to hire someone to do a conceptual design on the overall parcel. We will also ask in the RFP to develop a digital engagement strategy so we can engage residents as much as possible. Once the conceptual design is done, we may have to go out for detailed engineering design, or we may be able to take some of the pieces like the treatment plant and do as much of it as we can within the project. We may also be able to take the design that has already been done for the waterfront linear park – if it still fits within the overall picture. We would then put out an RFP for engineering design for anything that may be missing. Robert noted that he wanted to make sure that Council was okay with moving ahead on the conceptual design before we issue the RFP.

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

Councillor Burrridge asked if there was a company that could do both a conceptual design and an engagement strategy and Robert replied that it is actually very common for landscape architects and professional planners to have a team combination.

Deputy Mayor Clow asked how much a conceptual design approach costs and Robert replied that he would have to guess at this point, but would suggest \$20,000 to \$30,000 range. He added that we do have one million dollars in the budget for this project.

It was noted that it is not realistic to think our core area plan that was laid out by Ekistics will work now. There was some discussion on the apartment building that was built on the site. Councillor Burrridge stated that we have to be sure that the zoning in that area is tightened up and Mayor Ogden agreed that it needs to be looked at right away. Robert suggested that when we do the review of the Official Plan, we should look at the core area plan because we need to do a redesign and Councillor Burrridge agreed.

Mayor Ogden asked when the resident consultation will take place in regards to the conceptual plan and Robert replied that it will be similar to what John Horreld did with the sustainable subdivision. There will be a blank slate and people will be invited to give their input. The consultant will gather ideas and go back and do some work and then present it.

Councillor Smith asked should we be doing the study now because things can change in five or ten years and the study would be no good. Robert asked what Council felt about rolling in the Southport Motel property and the treatment site property as part of the conceptual design. We could have it as a planning and architect exercise to look at how we can lay out the rest of that land given the road network that we currently have. Make it one exercise instead of two.

Mayor Ogden polled everyone for their thoughts on Robert's suggestion of having one exercise instead of two. Councillor Gallant agreed we should include all the properties. Councillor MacDougall is also in agreement to include everything. He added that we are in a great position to have Councillor Burrridge with her knowledge on planning issues. Deputy Mayor Clow stated that we have to do something there and he is all for going ahead with the Southport Motel property and the treatment site property. He asked Councillor Burrridge if she was okay with it and Councillor Burrridge replied that this is the entrance to the community so it is important as it is the 'jewel' piece of property and this is where we need to spend our time and do a good job. She agreed to put it all into one and include the entrance. Councillor MacDonald also agreed with doing it all as one project. Councillor Smith asked if public input would be part of the project and Robert replied that there will be public input. Councillor Smith also noted that we should put something in place so that if a developer comes in, he will be aware of our plan.

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

Councillor Burrridge noted that she was looking into what the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) had to offer and they have a community development fund for strategic infrastructure and she felt that the waterfront development may fit in. Having a conversation with ACOA throughout this process we may be able to identify some funding. Robert noted that we would include the waterfront as part of the work. Councillor Burrridge would like to see a connection over to Cotton Park and connect your two waterfronts and Robert suggested that ACOA might fund some branding work for the entrance to the Town.

3. COVID 19 Operational Status Report

a. Status report

Jeremy noted that these reports have been going out for five weeks and he felt that it was important that they continue to be sent out, but he would like some feedback. Councillor Burrridge felt the report was great, if wave two hits you can refer back to this information. She wondered if we should be sending the report to James Aylward and Jeremy replied that it is meant for EMO and Municipal Affairs because there is some sensitive information included in the report from time to time. He added that Wendy sends out information to our residents on a regular basis. Councillor Gallant liked receiving the reports as he found them very informative. He added when we start opening things up that will be the hard part and Jeremy agreed it will be a challenge.

Jeremy noted that the Provincial Department of Highways is bringing back their summer staff on May 11, 2020 and a lot of them will be using their own vehicles and we might want to do something similar and pay them mileage.

Mayor Ogden felt that we should be starting to prioritize what we think is important for the Town to open up first. We also have to think about the mental health needs of residents. He would like to see us, if we can do it safely, open things back up for the benefit of residents. Robert agreed that is our goal, but it depends on what rules the Chief Health Officer puts in place, otherwise we would just be guessing. He added that he hopes to have something to bring forward from the Chief Health Officer at the next Zoom meeting and it will make it a lot easier for us to develop the ease back plan.

Councillor Smith noted that no one knows what will happen when things re-open. Georgia in the US has re-opened during the peak of their pandemic and we will watch and find out what happens with them. He felt that everyone was waiting for someone to act to see what would happen.

b. Dog tag collection

Robert noted that the next three items are things we would normally be carrying out this time of year. We would have someone go door to door for the dog tags, but since

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

we can't do this, we have asked the staff to come up with different ways to license the dogs in the Town. Jeremy added that he is having a Zoom meeting with Audra and Joe later today to try and come up with a solution. Deputy Mayor Clow suggested emailing those who have bought tags in the past.

Councillor Smith asked if it is necessary to license dogs in Stratford and Jeremy replied that it is a service we do for the residents. If a dog is lost and someone finds it they can refer to the tag to find the owner.

c. Water school

The water school has been cancelled for this year.

d. Tree Planting Program

We had planned to unveil a tree planting program for residents for the spring. However, we can't do it now, but we could look at it again in the fall.

4. Cornwall Budget Review

Mayor Ogden stated that Kim did a good analysis of what he was looking for regarding Cornwall's budget. Robert stated that there are requirements in the Municipal Government Act (MGA) but they are mostly around audited statements. He noted that we were advised by our auditors to do the budget in the way you have the audit done and that way you are fully transparent. When do our budget, we use a depreciation basis and include depreciation charges and interest payments which is what the audited statements are for. There is a funding provision in the MGA that says if you have a surplus or deficit from the previous year, it has to be carried over to the following year, or put in a reserve. Our policy is to put any surplus we have in a reserve for capital expenses.

Cornwall and Charlottetown carry forward the surplus or deficit from the previous year. Robert opened a spreadsheet to show that Cornwall would actually have \$125,000 deficit if they didn't carry over the surpluses.

5. Re-Zoning Public Meetings

It was noted that Councillor Burridge has been getting some pressure from some developers. We had to cancel the public meeting that was to be held on two rezonings. Robert noted that we got some advice from Municipal Affairs that public meetings are not essential and shouldn't be going ahead. Last week Charlottetown advertised for a public meeting and this week Summerside advertised for some public meetings. Robert stated that the meeting Charlottetown is having is considered essential because it is in regards to facilities for the Canada Games and he felt that is why they would be going ahead. When

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

we asked Summerside about their public meeting they sent a copy of the email they received from Municipal Affairs and in the email they didn't encourage Summerside to have public meetings. What they said was if you think it is essential. However, Robert noted that he has seen correspondence from them to say that the Minister is not approving any requests under the Planning Act.

Robert noted that he is not saying don't go to a public meeting, but the direction right now from the Chief Health Officer is not to do that. He suggested that we wait at least one more week because we are going to get an ease back plan sometime this week, and we can discuss it on next week's call. Deputy Mayor Clow agreed that we can wait at least another week or two.

Councillor Burrridge stated that when she put the request in to look at this - rezoning was just one item and public meetings was another other item. However, she felt that moving forward public meetings will likely be one of the last things on the list to be re-opened. She noted that we should be getting designs done to have projects ready, but in order to get to the design stage we need to have public consultation. So we have to figure out how we are going to do that because it will be a long time before meeting are allowed to be held again, so it might be a broader discussion on digital engagement for our consultation strategy.

Robert stated that we don't have to stop consulting with the public. It is the Planning Act related issues that we are concerned about because we have been advised that 'digital only' meetings are not good enough for public meetings. He knows that Dr. Morrison is not going to say this week go ahead and have public meetings. However, Robert hopes that in her ease back plan she will give us some guidelines about certain things that can happen regarding gatherings.

Mayor Ogden noted that the first concern would be the legality of digital meetings. We need clarification from IRAC so let's ask the question, and if it is not legal to have virtual meetings we will have to find another way. The second thing is the element of risk we are willing to take on. The third thing is we really need to be pro-active in prioritizing the things in the Town to keep things going and development is a key to moving Stratford forward. We need to look at those three areas and be as proactive and aggressive as possible to get an answer so we can let the projects move forward as much as they can.

Councillor Burrridge noted that when we first went into this pandemic, she asked the Director of Planning to call the province to ask about virtual meetings. They came back with a long list of explanations, and we were told virtual meetings are not recommended because they do not cover off everything. Councillor Burrridge noted that you might actually

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

get better feedback by virtual meetings, as some people can be intimidated at a regular meeting.

Wendy attended a national webinar recently and it was focused around public consultation during Covid-19, but the discussion also included public meetings. Wendy noted that a lot of other cities are also dealing with the same problem as Stratford, and the legal opinion they are being given is that if you go exclusively digital, it is not going to stand up because you are leaving out people who can't attend that way. We have people in our community who can't access a Zoom meeting – even if they have the technology they may not know how to use it. And she would caution that we ensure people are not left out. Councillor Gallant agreed that we have to do things right or it can be thrown out by IRAC.

Mayor Ogden stated that he doesn't think we will have an answer today and will leave it with Robert, Councillor Burrige and the planning department to try and think of some creative ways to allow these projects to go ahead.

Deputy Mayor Clow asked if the onus is on the developer to advise residents of his new plan and Councillor Burrige replied that the letter was sent out and it included the new plan. Everything was ready to go to the public meeting and then the pandemic happened and we were shut down.

Councillor Burrige suggested that it would be nice if the four larger municipalities could get together with John Dewey and Samantha Murphy to discuss the issue and figure out in this unprecedented time how we can hold a public meeting. Robert will go back to seek direction and will work with planning staff to try and meet the legal requirement.

6. CAO Redundancy

Robert noted that next week Jeremy is going to take on the role of CAO on the weekly call with Council, as well as the management team call. Jeremy will put together the agenda and send it out, and he will lead the discussion. Jeremy agreed that is a good idea to get more experience, so he is more prepared when Robert is not available.

7. COVID-19 Contingency Fund

Nothing to report this week.

8. Communications to Residents

Mayor Ogden addressed Wendy noting that she is doing a great job of getting information out to the residents. Councillor MacDougall agreed that Wendy is doing a fantastic job. Councillor Smith stated that everyone is looking for information and sending out

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

information from the Town is not a bad thing. Councillor Gallant also felt Wendy was doing a great job getting the information out. Jeremy noted that residents are aware that we are still taking calls and that our essential services people are working in the field.

Wendy stated that some people are showing up to the Town Centre to pay their bills. There is a lock box that mail can be dropped into and Robert asked Jeremy to place a sign on the mail box so people will know they can drop their payments in the box.

9. Council Inquiries

Councillor Burrridge felt this would be the time of year to dredge the ponds in conjunction with the province. She didn't know if there was any uptake on the provincial side, but she would really like to have them done. Robert will ask Kevin to contact the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Energy (TIE) to see where they are with regards to the ponds. He added that we did get a draft set of rules from the consultant and Kevin has been trying to get the group together virtually to review them. However, he sent the request to five or six people, but only one has responded to date. Kevin will try again to get them together for a virtual meeting.

Robert noted that Councillor Burrridge is talking about getting TIE to accept responsibility for maintenance of the storm water retention ponds that they now own in the Town. We did make some headway before the pandemic came upon us, and they did acknowledge that they do own the retention ponds. They have agreed to add them to their work list and have someone go out and look at them every year to see what needs to be done. Robert doesn't think we have spoken with them about it recently and he will make a note to ask Kevin to follow up on the issue.

There was some discussion regarding the community caring calls and Councillor Burrridge noted that she will follow-up with the people she called to let them know there was not a large uptake. She asked Wendy what she thought, and Wendy replied that we haven't had anyone come forward who wants to be paired with someone. Deputy Mayor Clow felt it was important to leave your phone number with the people you call in case they do require something in the future, so he left his number with the two people he spoke to and told them not to hesitate to contact him.

Mayor Ogden noted that when he made some calls, he got the sense that they appreciated the call, but they weren't socially isolated. When asked they both said no they didn't want to be connected to other people.

April 28, 2020 Covid-19 Zoom Meeting

Jeremy noted that the speed limit on the bridge is now 50 kph while the lanes are down to one lane each way and this will last for about six weeks.

10. Other Business

Mayor Ogden noted that we doing something for the the RCMP in the form of gift cards and Robert replied that it will be done this week.

It was noted that the flag is still have half-mast for the Nova Scotia tragedy and Jeremy will check to see when it can go back to normal.

11. Adjournment

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