

COVID-19 COMMITTEE
Meeting Notes

DATE: March 25, 2020
TIME: 10:14 a.m. - 11:35 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; Kim O'Connell, Director of Finance; Wendy Watts, Community and Business Engagement Manager; and Mary McAskill, Recording Clerk

REGRETS: Nil

CHAIR: Mayor Steve Ogden

1. Covid-19 Committee

a) Situation Report – Stratford EMO

Robert stated that he is monitoring the situation and yesterday there was a zoom meeting with the management team. He noted that the Town is at the point where almost everything is shut down and most employees are working from home. The essential services outside staff is still working, but reporting from different locations and keeping the social distancing required.

Jeremy stated that he spoke with the RCMP and they just have one person at a time in the building, but there is a full complement of officers working. There was a request from the Provincial EMO to see if anything is required. The RCMP is okay, but the Cross Roads Fire Department gave Jeremy a list of what they needed. He will be keeping in touch with both the RCMP and Cross Roads Fire Department on a regular basis.

Mayor Ogden asked about signing cheques and Kim replied that there are cheques to be signed at the office. Deputy Mayor Clow signed the cheques last week and Mayor Ogden stated that he will be in on Thursday to sign this week's cheque run.

Councillor Smith wanted to know if the Provincial EMO asked about using our gymnasium and Jeremy replied that they haven't. Robert doesn't think we need to stand up our EMO at this time because the province has the legislative authority and they have taken the lead.

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Councillor BurrIDGE asked about caution tape around the playground and Jeremy replied that it will be done today, along with some signage stating why the playgrounds are closed.

b) Development and Building Permits

Mayor Ogden asked about building permits, and Robert replied that our chief health officer Dr. Morrison said if you are not an essential business you do not need to be open. However, there are some construction sites that are currently active.

There was a lengthy discussion on the permits and the consensus was to have Robert check with the Town's lawyer, and check with the province regarding permits. Jeremy noted that the province is only issuing permits for emergency purposes (i.e. a problem with a roof).

Councillor BurrIDGE noted that there are some houses half built. Does our building inspector Carter Livingstone need to go on site, and Jeremy gave a brief update on Carter noting that he is still doing inspections. Councillor Smith felt that the permit issue should be looked at every week and Mayor Ogden agreed.

Councillor MacDougall stated that for full disclosure, he is actively speaking with Carter regarding a permit. There was a brief discussion on what happens if things stay the way they are and Carter doesn't have any work. Robert replied that at some point in time if this continues we would have to look at the possibility of temporarily laying staff off, but we are not at that point yet.

Jeremy stated that the pipe to Charlottetown is considered an essential service and the work is continuing. However, the subcontractor is having concerns regarding delivery of some of the supplies.

c) Committee of the Whole, Council, and COVID-19 Committee Meetings

Robert explained that he called this committee the COVID-19 Committee because to have an official meeting it has to be made public. However, Municipal Affairs has said do what you need to do and we have to meet electronically to respect the Chief Public Health Officer's direction. If we have to make decisions such as passing the budget (resolution) we will have to do it in a public way.

Deputy Mayor Clow asked about the form for meeting remuneration and Mary agreed to keep track of attendance of the electronic meetings during this time.

2. 2020/2021 Budget

Robert stated that he does plan to attend the budget meeting on Monday. It was noted that due to the number and location of our microphones only eight people will be able to participate in the budget meeting. He added that he and Wendy would be able to run the meeting and that anyone who didn't feel comfortable in attending could participate via Zoom from home.

Jeremy noted that we also need to pass a resolution for the mini busses application. It was noted that in terms of committee meetings, if this is going to go on for a while we may look at using zoom for our committee meetings. Councillor Burrridge suggested that the Accountability and Engagement Committee meeting would be a good one to start with as most of the members are used to electronic meetings.

Mayor Ogden asked if Council had any comments on the contingency fund suggested by himself and Councillor MacDonald.

Councillor MacDougall asked if the Town had any casual employees who have been laid off; he would like to see some of the funds going to them. Robert noted that the gym supervisors and youth supervisors – this week they will get paid and one more pay period after that. Robert suggested that Council not put any rules on the funds right now until we see what the needs are as they arise.

Mayor Ogden had asked Robert what other municipalities were doing and Charlottetown has laid off their non-union casual staff, and Cornwall is doing the same as Stratford.

Deputy Mayor Clow stated that he is still struggling with this budget. He knows that we have to do it, but the timing is not good. He is not sure what kind of an impact Covid-19 will have on it. Robert stated that the budget is a long term budget and is setting us up for success. Deputy Mayor Clow stated that he is concerned with the timing of the tax increase.

Mayor Ogden noted that some businesses will continue to do well, but it could be the final blow for others.

Councillor MacDonald stated that she is okay with the budget the way it stands. Mayor Ogden asked her how she felt about the contingency fund and she is going to think about it and discuss it with Kim and Wendy.

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Councillor Burrridge stated that in regards to the contingency fund she likes the idea of not putting rules on it. She added that she saw where the province has a phone line specific for people who can't meet their basic needs. She felt it was an idea we could also use, but still keep the fund open.

Councillor Burrridge agreed that the timing is absolutely the worst time for increases, but decisions have already been made that require these tax increases. She suggested we do a specific communication piece to each of the shareholders who will be affected. She asked about the start date for the new infrastructure technician and the environmental technician. Jeremy stated that the infrastructure technician is already working, so he doesn't think we will see any savings there. She asked Robert about the environmental technician and Robert stated that it won't start right away, but we will need the money in the budget for the position.

A question was asked about the FCM Conference and it was noted that we have not received a final decision on whether it will go ahead or not.

Councillor Burrridge would like to see a copy of the budget presentation this week if possible, and Wendy said that Mayor Ogden and Councillor MacDonald are currently reviewing it.

Councillor Gallant stated that he agrees that the timing is not great, but added that we don't want to be in a deficit this time next year.

Councillor Smith stated that he will be voting in favour of the budget. He felt that next year's budget will be heavy. He also asked if it is the responsibility of the town to look after vulnerable people in the population. Robert replied that not under normal circumstances, but during this critical time, the province has said it is the responsibility of the Town.

Councillor Burrridge asked if we are open to defer interest rates if people are unable to pay their utility bills. Robert stated that the management team needs to discuss whether or not we will delay sending out the next bill. He added that if we did, it would show some empathy on the Town's part. However, some felt that if the bill is delayed being sent out, it would only result in receiving two bills very close together. Robert asked for some time to think about what should be done regarding the bills and the interest.

3. Communications

We are continuing to communicate the best we can and Wendy is keeping our webpage up to date. Robert noted that the residents would probably like to see the mayor and council

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taking a leadership role and being active. Wendy added that a quick video would be great, and socially people want to see Council doing some fun things occasionally.

Mayor Ogden asked if we could put videos on our website and Wendy replied that we could. He noted that in cases such as this it is critical that people continue to communicate.

Jeremy asked the Mayor to emphasize that essential services are continuing when he does his video clip.

Robert noted that Wednesday, April 1 is the Town's 25th Anniversary. He had suggested that people could be invited to step outside of their houses and together sing happy 25th birthday to the Town. Mayor Ogden added that Wendy also has some good ideas to mark the occasion. Wendy will send the email to Council that she sent to the Mayor to help get Council thinking of some additional ideas. Councillor Burrridge noted that she would also like to plan something for Easter, as parents are already talking about what to do for Easter.

Mayor Ogden suggested that it looks like we are going to have a surplus so maybe we could back off the 17% tax increase and perhaps bring it down to 12%. However, Councillor MacDonald didn't feel there was a need to change it at this time.

Councillor MacDougall stated that he didn't get a big push back from anyone on the increase.

Councillor Smith stated that he is ready to go with the budget as is.

Mayor Ogden stated that although we set up the contingency fund, we need to have the support of businesses and residents if we want to get things done.

Councillor MacDonald stated that our role as a Town is to support local in a big way.

After further discussion it was agreed that the budget will go ahead on Monday, March 30, 2020.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.