

**Joint Councils Meeting
Cumberland – Amherst – Oxford
Tuesday, March 5, 2019 at 5:30 pm
Oxford Fire Hall**

Minutes

Present:

Municipality of Cumberland: Warden Gillis, Deputy Warden vanVulpen, Councillor Fletcher, Councillor Palmer, Councillor Porter, Councillor Gilbert, Councillor Jackson, Councillor Williams, Councillor Welton, CAO Rennie Bugley, Director of Engineering and Operations Justin Waugh-Cress, By-Law Enforcement Officer Ron Moore and Director of Finance Andrew MacDonald.

Town of Amherst: Mayor Kogon, Deputy Mayor Christie, Councillor Rhindress, Councillor Jones, Councillor Byrne, Councillor Blanch (arrived late), CAO Greg Herrett, Chief Financial Officer Shelley Rector and Town Clerk Kim Jones.

Town of Oxford: Mayor Stewart, Deputy Mayor Draper, Councillor Colborne, Councillor Thompson, Councillor Sweet-Kontuk, Councillor Clark, CAO Rachel Jones and Deputy Clerk Linda Cloney.

Guests: Stephen Rayworth, Solid Waste Manager at Cumberland Joint Services Management Authority; Connie Nolan, Chief Administrative Officer for the Municipality of East Hants; Kim Ramsey, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for the Municipality of East Hants and Denise Corey, Chief Librarian at Cumberland Public Libraries.

Introductions were made.

1. Call to Order - Mayor Stewart called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.
2. Joint Councils Committee Terms of Reference – CAO's
 - The CAO's met to discuss the changes that were discussed at the last Joint Councils Meeting, those changes have been implemented and the Terms of Reference was circulated in advance of this meeting.
 - The Town of Oxford will be reviewing the Terms of Reference on Wednesday night during their Committee of the Whole Meeting.
 - Once all three respective councils review the Terms of Reference it will be brought back to Joint Councils for any changes and then to the respective councils for approval.
 - Amherst Town Council has approved the Terms of Reference.
 - The Municipality of Cumberland will have this on their agenda for tomorrow night.
 - One of the functions of the Joint Councils Committee is to make recommendations back to the Councils.

Deputy Warden vanVulpen asked if votes here are binding. What if a Council changes its mind? Greg Herrett replied that decisions here are not binding, just intended to facilitate discussion and each Council will then review and discuss on their own. The Deputy Warden was also concerned that the Terms of Reference may make the meetings too formal.

- Discussion on the purpose of the Joint Councils Committee – paragraph two in the Joint Councils Terms of Reference – to facilitate communication and discussion.

3. Capped Assessment Program Presentation – Ms. Connie Nolan and Ms. Kim Ramsey from the Municipality of East Hants

Ms. Nolan presented on behalf of the NSFAM Committee. Presentation included as part of the agenda package.

- The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) has a priority to convince the Provincial Government to phase out the assessment cap.
- The Municipality of East Hants and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality have started the process to convince the Provincial Government.
- They did meet with the Minister Chuck Porter on January 3, 2019 and meeting with him again in April.
- They noted that Minister Porter does support the phasing out of the assessment cap.
- The Municipality of East Hants and Cape Breton Regional Municipality formed a committee. The Halifax Regional Municipality supports this and is assisting with the communication piece. Connie Nolan is the chair of this committee.
- Some municipalities want something in place to protect residents of a drastic increase in their assessment.
- There are a lot of unintended consequences with the assessment cap. Examples of the consequences are:
 - shifts the tax burden from long time owners to recent buyers
 - The municipalities' tax rates need to be higher to compensate for the assessment cap, causing the residents that are not capped to pay higher taxes.
 - A lot of the public misunderstand this as a method of controlled taxes.
 - discourages new construction.
 - the cap benefits disproportionately higher value homes
 - redistributes the tax burden among the tax base
- Across the Province the cap assessed homes and the non-capped assessed homes are split 50/50 in each of the municipalities, one of the exceptions is Oxford where 77% of the properties are not capped.
- The committee has offered to help the provincial government to write new legislation in the Municipal Government Act (MGA) that allows units to give a tax reduction based on sudden and dramatic increases in assessment.
- The committee would encourage units to look at assistance for low income taxpayers
- It has been suggested that there may be a requirement for every unit to demonstrate to their public that the units are bringing the tax rate down due to the phasing out of the cap.
- The committee had meetings with Property Valuation Services Corporation (PVSC) and it was discussed a seven year phase out and possibly a ten year phase out for mobile parks would be recommended. Those phase out time frames are not yet set.
- The committee had intended to provide municipalities with materials for public information and they are now re-evaluating this as they feel confident that the province is supportive.
- The public education piece of the phasing out is a challenge.
- The committee did meet with the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) – many of the high valued home owners were not supportive of the cap being phased out.

There were a few members that did change their views and recognize the points for the removal of the cap.

- an expressed concern that seven years seems like a long time for the phasing out of the cap.
- the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the committee is challenged to gain support of the political parties for the phasing out of the cap.

Following the presentation, Ms. Nolan and Ms. Ramsey left the meeting.

4. CJSMA Budget – Mr. Stephen Rayworth presented on behalf of the Cumberland Joint Services Management Authority (CJSMA). Presentation included as part of the agenda package.
 - CJSMA has switched to a capital and an operating budget for reporting purposes.
 - There are no tipping fee changes in this budget present.
 - The construction of a transfer station is included in the budget as presented
 - In the operating budget there is a Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase for wages and also a budget item for removing the sludge from the leachate treatment facility
 - CJSMA is not a legal entity and therefore cannot borrow money from the Nova Scotia Municipal Finance Corporation (MFC) or any other methods of borrowing. Each of the municipalities would be required to take out temporary borrowing resolutions on CJSMA's behalf and in turn issue debentures through MFC for the benefit of CJSMA
 - CJSMA expects a savings since the implementation of the dual stream recycling.
 - The CJSMA board has a policy whereby future cell development is paid for by an allocation per fund. Because of the increased costs due to the fire last year, the CJSMA board had made a decision to remove the cell development allocation. The CJSMA is allocating to cell closure currently at \$16.50 per tonne that is required by legislation.
 - With the recent governance changes, the CJSMA now has the authority to pass the budget and does not require a formal motion from the Councils.
 - The CJSMA will be asking the board for approval of the budget at the March 28, 2019 meeting.
 - The capital cost of the transfer station included in the budget as presented is \$1.25 million and there could be as many as 10 jobs created/maintained.
 - Councillor Byrne asked, what is the status of the Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA)? Currently there are two versions of the drafted IMA – a lengthy complex version drafted by David Read and then a simplified version drafted by the CAO's with the assistance of Ron Dauphinee of the Department of Municipal Affairs.
 - There was not consensus on which version of the IMA should eventually be approved by the Councils.

Greg Herrett noted that with the inclusion of the transfer station in the budget it appears unlikely the budget will pass. He suggested that we remove the transfer station for now, pass the budget and then deal with the transfer station separately.

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With a majority vote the Joint Council Committee members recommended that Mr. Rayworth revise the budget and remove the transfer station item from the CJSMA budget.

Following the presentation, Mr. Rayworth left the meeting.

5. Provincial Library Funding – Ms. Denise Corey presented on behalf of the Cumberland Public Libraries (CPL). Presentation is included as part of the agenda package.
- Ms. Corey is the Chief Librarian with Cumberland Public Libraries.
 - There are nine regional library systems in the Province.
 - The library staff are not government employees.
 - In Cumberland County there are seven locations.
 - Cumberland Public Libraries will be offering twenty-seven programs throughout the County during March Break.
 - The Cumberland Public Libraries has a wide variety of borrowing services and also offers a variety of public programs.
 - There are a variety of partners that help make this happen.
 - Last year the CPL loaned out over 118,000 items, approximately 24% of the population has an active library card, over 12,000 people attended programs that were offered last year and they had over 120 visits to the library branches last year.
 - The CPL is funded on a per capita basis.
 - Ms. Corey expressed she would like to have more staff to work with the citizens, and to be open for longer hours.
 - 2019/2020 the government has agreed to grant the libraries with the \$52,000.00 top up. The libraries are relying on this top up.
 - Deputy Mayor Draper asked if there are other ways the municipalities could support the CPL other than money.
 - The CPL needs financial support of the municipalities.
 - It was asked if there are opportunities to apply for grants over and above the current funding.
 - In addition to the funding the CPL receives from the Province, the CPL must fundraise 3% of their operating expenses as per the Libraries Act. Last year the CPL fundraised approximately \$81,000.00. Fines, book sales, donations, applying for grants are examples of the fundraising the CPL does.
 - It was asked how often the CPL reaches out to the public to learn what programs they want.
 - The CPL did a public survey last year some of the responses were to be open more and to offer more programs throughout the day times and weekends. The public compares the CPL to what the Halifax Public Libraries have.
 - It was asked if in the public survey that the CPL asked about offering a fee for the extra services the public are asking for.
 - The CPL sees this as a barrier. Public Libraries have changed a lot over the last twenty-five and thirty years. They have been working towards becoming community hubs. The CPL is a registered charity and they do encourage those that can to donate.
 - There was a comment that one of the problems is lack of consultation. How do we become partners to make the library successful but also makes the municipalities in the communities feel like they have some say in the services?
 - It was asked how are your current staffing costs as to what is in the proposal?
 - The Library Board did approve a staff pay rate increase of 2.2%. There are fifteen full time staff members. With the proposal budget there is a plan to hire more full time staff members.
 - There was a comment that it would be wise to vision where we would be fifteen to twenty years from now, with technology.

- She follows public libraries from all over to keep up with current and future trends for an example, Norway Libraries have technology to be able to stay open longer without staff.
- There was a comment that there was some kind of attempt to set up library funding from private sector donations.
 - The board chair is Dale Fawthrop and he wanted the library to see if they could get a foundation started. They found that they need a group of citizens to steer that.

It was agreed that the three respective councils would collectively write a letter and Ms. Corey would deliver this letter to the Nova Scotia Communities, Culture and Heritage (CCH).

Following the presentation, Ms. Corey stayed for the remainder of the meeting.

6. Adjournment

Mayor Stewart acknowledges it is Oxford's turn to host the next meeting. Tentative date set for Tuesday, May 7th at 5:30 pm at the Oxford Fire Hall for next meeting.