

**Committee of the Whole Meeting
Video Conference Call
Thursday April 16th, 2020
9:30 am**

Council: Warden Betty Ann MacQuarrie
Deputy Warden Alfred Poirier
Councillor Jim Mustard
Councillor Laurie Cranton
Councillor John MacLennan
Councillor John Dowling

Staff: Keith MacDonald, CAO
Tanya Tibbo, Director of Finance
Dave Coulombe, Director of Infrastructure and Emergency Services
Donna MacDonald, Director of Tourism and Culture
Charlotte MacDonald, Manager of Recreation
Melanie Beaton, Special Projects Coordinator
Debbie Nicholson, Municipal Council Administrative Assistant
Erin Gillis, Manger of Operations & Occupational Health and Safety

CALL TO ORDER

Warden MacQuarrie called the meeting to order at 9:30 am and welcomed all in attendance. Roll call was taken.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOVED: Councillor Dowling
SECONDED: Councillor Cranton
MOTION: That the agenda be approved as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON TOURISM INDUSTRY: Terry Smith, Destination Cape Breton

Terry Smith, CEO of Destination Cape Breton spoke on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the tourism industry. Recently Destination Cape Breton has been focusing their efforts in four main areas: industry communications, industry advocacy, contingency planning, and short term projects. Gaps are still affecting small and newer tourism operators, as some only qualify for some of the programs being offered. Mr. Smith has weekly communication with MP Mike Kelloway to keep him apprised of the situation. Ninety five million dollars is the estimated loss to the tourism industry from March 2020 to June 2020. Visitation and events will be hugely impacted for 2020. There is still uncertainty as to how the Employment Insurance program will be impacted for next year. Hopefully next year will see a larger demand in this sector.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON BUSINESS: Lynne MacLennan, Cape Breton Partnership

Lynne MacLennan, the Economic Development Officer for Inverness County spoke to Council. She described the impacts faced by businesses since the pandemic began. She has been reaching out to County businesses over the past month, trying to help them find appropriate resources and supports in a case by case basis. The Partnership has delivered a survey to get a picture of how businesses are doing. Twenty five percent of all respondents are from Inverness County, with many indicating that their needs are not being met. Some of the key initiatives being offered include the Canada Employment Response Program, the Wage program, and Small Business Impact Grants. Updated information is being made available through the Cape Breton Partnership website, and social media channels.

UNITED WAY COVID-19 TEMPORARY INTERNET SERVICE PROGRAM: Charlotte MacDonald, Municipality of the County of Inverness

The United Way Cape Breton working with the Canadian Mental Health Association is collecting registrations for the temporary Free Internet Service currently being offered during COVID-19. Within Inverness, County residents can register through the Municipal Helpline (1-877-258-5550). Municipal staff operators will record and forward registration forms to United Way Sydney for processing. The purpose of this program is to reduce the feelings of isolation during COVID-19 and is open to residents that have low income and do not have Internet and have Internet available in their area.

COVID-19 NETWORK COMMUNITY GROUPS: Donna MacDonald, Municipality of the County of Inverness

The Municipal Pandemic Response Team (PRT) has received calls and feedback from community groups who are working on individual programs and projects to provide aid within their communities. The PRT will invite members to attend a united committee network where all groups can have a representative on the phone and discussion and information sharing can occur. A conference call was held earlier this week with Cheticamp organizations. Participants were enthusiastic to work together to assist the community. This meeting model will be utilized within the other communities to establish Networking Communities, working toward similar goals and objectives.

COVID-19 FOOD SECURITY

This is an effort to ensure that all residents have access to food during the COVID-19 pandemic. Processing and harvesting of food and food products will likely be affected in the coming months and even years. This initiative will support an overall plan for how we can produce more food locally.

Recommendation to Council that this draft document be advanced to staff.

COVID-19 IMPACTS: COUNCIL ROUNDTABLE

Each member of Council had the opportunity to comment on how the recent pandemic is affecting their local communities, residents, businesses.

Deputy Warden Alfred Poirier, District 1 – There are many concerns with residents that work in seasonal businesses, due to the uncertainty of what may lie ahead in the coming months. The Cheticamp hospital has a small capacity, and the nursing home facility is home to many vulnerable residents.

Councillor Laurie Cranton, District 2 – The Tourism industry is a large employer, and business presence in this district. Uncertainty with the future of this industry is concerning to many. The fishing industry is facing an unsure future also. A concerned resident who works in the fishing industry who brought their concerns forward will be directed to address the Federal Fisheries Representatives. Will road and highway maintenance be impacted also? Staff will reach out to the regional Department of Transportation leads to determine their availability for a meeting.

Councillor Jim Mustard, District 3 – Mental health concerns such as stress and anxiety in these uncertain times are inevitable. Adequate connectivity and cell service should be made a priority by service providers.

Councillor John MacLennan, District 4 – Lack of employment for seasonal workers, restaurant availability, and an overall downturn in the tourism sector are concerning.

Warden Betty Ann MacQuarrie, District 5 – Fishing, tourism, and other seasonal businesses were getting ready to resume business at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Municipality will continue to address the many challenges that this situation presents going forward. Adequate connectivity is a concern by many residents in this district.

Councillor John Dowling, District 6 – The lack of practicing social distancing is concerning to many in this district. Satisfactory connectivity and cell service is sought in many parts of this district also.

Consensus from Council that additional action is needed to address the need for adequate connectivity and cell service throughout the Municipality. An advocacy plan is needed going forward. Letters from constituents and/or petitions outlining our lack of reliable service, and the action required is an effective method of addressing our needs.

HEAVY GARBAGE NOTICE

A potential notice was recently issued by the Director of Infrastructure and Emergency Services stating that the Spring Heavy Garbage Pickup is postponed until the state of emergency is lifted. Recommendation to Council that the Spring 2020 Heavy Garbage Pickup be cancelled. The possibility of a Heavy Garbage Pickup will be reassessed in the Fall of 2020.

J CLASS ROADS

Each Councillor can submit three J Class roads per district that will be submitted to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to be considered for improvements.

NEXT MEETING DATES:

Regular Monthly Council: May 7th, 2020
Committee of the Whole: May 21st, 2020

Recess: 12:15 pm – 12:28 pm

MOVED: Deputy Warden Poirier

SECONDED: Councillor Dowling

MOTION: That Council move to “in camera” at 12:28 pm.

MOTION CARRIED

The meeting came out of “in camera” at 12:50 pm

MOVED: Councillor Mustard

SECONDED: Councillor Dowling

MOTION: That Council adjourn at 12:50 pm

MOTION CARRIED