

Grey County looking to extend weekend bus service through Town

Written By Peter Richardson

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Shelburne Council have been instructed to investigate the feasibility and implementation of a proposed expansion of the Grey County Transit to include weekend bus service.

The direction came after a report was presented to Council from CAO Denyse Morrissey regarding the extension.

The possibility does exist to implement the service, from Southgate through Dundalk to Orangeville and the cost would be \$60,000. It was noted that the project could be done on a month to month basis.

Currently, in the 2021 Budget, there are two expenditures for Transit which could be realigned to pay for a five month pilot project to see weekend bus service from Dundalk to Orangeville, via Shelburne.

The two items are \$25,000 for two proposed bus shelters and another \$8,000 for the winter maintenance of these shelters.

The proposed realignment would see the \$25,000 used to fund the service and the \$8,000 spend on marketing the extended service. The times for the weekend routes has yet to be determined, but would be later than the weekly runs due to a different ridership.

Two potential issues are that there is no GO service from Orangeville on weekends and Orangeville's transit does not operate on Sundays. In addition, with the current COVID shutdown, the two stops currently in Orangeville are not really useful, as the services at those stops are currently closed. Added to this, the expected increased COVID restrictions from the Province, will further hamper the service.

CAO Morrissey proposed that the service not be implemented until the current lockdown is lifted, which could possibly occur in March or April of this year.

The pilot project's five month duration would then see it run for the majority of the functioning year and give a better picture of the usefulness of the idea, under regular conditions.

Mayor Mills supports the idea of the weekend service and agreed with the financing of it. He did however suggest that waiting until the lockdown is lifted makes the most sense, both from a financial and ridership perspective. That way, they would not be paying for an ineffective service that would not be beneficial to the residents or the transit authority.

Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson complimented Morrissey on her report before asking how the rest of the service could be paid for as it was a total cost for the year of \$60,000.

The CAO responded that at the moment the plan was to meet with Grey County Transit after two months to evaluate if the service was being successful. Assuming that it was indeed a success, she would come back to Council to see how to proceed.

They could investigate if any grants were available, since rider fees do not even cover the costs of the normal weekly transit runs.

Should further COVID 19 funding be available, potentially it could be used for transit, as it currently is in other communities.

Staff could also look at other potential procurement of funds in the 2021 Budget or barring that, search for other alternative sources of funding.

With that, Council voted to accept the report as presented and to realign the two proposed amounts in the 2021 Budget to the transit services and marketing.

In other news, Council approved the new Borrowing By-law presented by the Treasurer, for \$8,897,020 in 2021.

This is a mandatory annual by-law which authorizes Council to borrow up to the approved amount in the By-law.

This does not mean Council will borrow the nearly \$9 million, but instead, it sets their limit for the fiscal year of 2021.