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Mayor Wade Mills vows ?to do more? to combat racism

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Monday night's Council meeting heard two proclamations from Mayor Wade Mills, one proclaiming June as Pride Month in Shelburne and the second, proclaiming June 21st as National Indigenous Peoples Day in the Town. Following these, the Mayor expressed his thoughts on an issue that would become almost the theme of this meeting, racism and the reactions to it.

Mayor Mills said that the he personally felt that he could and should do more about confronting this issue, so recently amplified by the murder of George Floyd, a black man, by a police officer, in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25.

The mayor said that the ?silence of friends, not the words of enemies, allows racism to flourish and exist.?

He appealed to all to take part in the abolition of racism, both in Shelburne and throughout the world. He expressed his personal conviction to deal with the issue. The mayor also mentioned the upcoming, peaceful demonstration being organized by two CDSS graduates, on June 14th, which both he and Deputy Mayor Anderson will be attending.

BDO report

Following the proclamations, Council got down to the business at hand and first up was the auditors report from BDO, for the year 2019.

Presented by, Traci Smith and Angela Nichols, the report gave Shelburne a ? Clean Opinion?, meaning no irregularities were found in the Town's bookkeeping. The Consolidated Audit included all municipal enterprises, either owned or controlled by Council, The Shelburne Public Library Board, Town of Shelburne Business Improvement Area, Center Dufferin Recreation Complex and The Shelburne and District Fire Department.

The Town's net financial assets amounted to $5.6 million and the non-financial assets amounted to $66 million. These included things such as buildings and equipment. Town revenue was pegged at $15 million, with expenses of some $12.6 million, which left the Town with an annual surplus of $2.4 million. In 2019, the Town saw an increase in it's net financial assets of $3 million, bringing the net financial assets at year end to $5.6 million. Over the past five years, the Town reserves have been increasing, long term debt has decreased and capital assets have remained the same. Since capital assets have a life expectancy, this indicates that not sufficient upgrades are being made to these assets.

The Treasurer, Carey Holmes explained that this was partially due to the Town not receiving the grant funding required to accomplish some of these upgrades. She noted that with the receipt of the connecting link grants this year, the next audit would show an uptick in capital assets enhancements.

Overall, the Town was shown to be in good financial health, with available capital of $10.2 million, a net debt of $5.6 million, capital assets of $66 million and reserves of $11.5 million going into 2020.

Reopening of Town Hall

CAO Denyse Morrissey followed the audit presentation with a report on the re-opening of Town Hall, stating that current plans are set for this to occur on July 6th, due to the recent announcements from the Province concerning the COVID 19 response.

She also stated that, at present, the earliest return to in-person Council meetings, would be mid to late July, or early August. However, should the Council decide to continue it's State of Emergency Declaration, beyond that of the Province, this date could be pushed into fall or even 2021.

OPP timelines

In a second report, the CAO outlined the time lines for the OPP costing and the subsequent public meeting. Both of these, will be virtual, not in-person meetings.

The costing will be presented to Council on June 22nd, at 6:30 pm and the public meeting will be held July 7th, also at 6:30. Both meetings, as stated, will be a virtual format. Because of this, any public questions must be submitted prior to the meeting and the public wishing to participate in the meeting must register prior to the meeting date. This requirement is to protect their privacy and to prevent any unauthorized participation.

There will also be a survey conducted on the Town website. The survey should run from June 8th until early July. All final dates will be made available in the near future.

Racism task force

A Notice of Motion was presented by Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson concerning the formation of a Task Force, to deal with anti-black racism, racism and discrimination in Shelburne. The task force would be given two months to study the issues and present recommendations to Council.

All of this is in light of the recent events in both Canada and the United States. The Deputy Mayor presented nine names to be appointed to the task force. These are, Alethia O'Hara Stephenson, as chairperson, Geer Harvey, Chief Moore, Ken Topping, Althea Casamento, Bella Carter, Shyanne Ricci, Soha Soloman and Simran Bhamu. The last three, being younger members of the community, to present a wider range of opinion and experiences.

In addition, Mayor Mills and Deputy Mayor Anderson would sit on the committee as observers, but without a vote.

The overall response from Council was highly supportive of this initiative, with Coun. Walter Benotto heartily endorsing it, stating that the timing was excellent in view of current events and the fact that racism still exists in Shelburne.

To back up that statement, he recalled campaigning with the Deputy Mayor and having one homeowner they canvassed, agreeing to take Walter's campaign literature, but refusing to accept Mr. Anderson's. Council agreed to waive the procedural bylaw in this case and the motion was heard and passed immediately.

Other business

In other business , Town Clerk Jennifer Willoughby was appointed the Town's Community Emergency Management Coordinator and Patti Hossie are alternate. This was predicated by the Town entering into an agreement with the County, for the delivery of emergency management services. Subsequently Jennifer and Patti received the required training and were certified just prior to the lockdown.

In Council Inquiries, deputy Mayor Anderson asked the CAO for a status update on 420 Victoria St. and was told that due to the COVID-19 outbreak, things were set back at the moment, but that an update should come forth in late July or early August.

The Deputy Mayor then presented a photo, that had been on Facebook, of an artwork created by local resident Brooklyn Higgins. The painting depicts two arms outstretched across a background of world flags. One is black and the other a translucent white and both are reaching for each other. He requested, that the piece be shown in the Town Hall Lobby.

As the Town Hall is not yet open, CAO Morrissey suggested that perhaps it could be hung at the Library first and then moved to Town Hall, while Jennifer Willoughby added that perhaps displaying it on an easel would give it greater presence. In addition, CAO

Denyse Morrissey said that the Library might be able to advertise it on their educational presentations and give some of it's background story as well.

The idea was strongly accepted and an outreach will be made to facilitate this. The deputy mayor finished by asking if the Town could reach out to a speaker to present a dialogue on the effects of racism and discrimination. He proposed that any fees could be paid from the funds currently set aside for attending conferences , by Council members.

And finally, Coun. Kyle Fegan presented an update on the construction of the Canadian Flag, which is to coloured by hand prints before being hung in Jack Downing Park and finally in the pavilion at Fiddle Park.

He suggested that it be painted in the Town Hall parking lot on Saturday, June 20th and that both Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seeback and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones be asked to participate. The discussion was held as to the use of the lot, as it has cars that use it daily, as well as the police vehicles and a suggestion was made to do it in Jack Downing Park, as there are two walkways there and it would allow for proper social distancing. Both the Town's website and it's digital signboards would be used to advertise the project.

In the end, the venue was left open but the painting will definitely take place June 20th,