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Shelburne Council comes up with plan to reopen Town Hall

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Council convened Monday afternoon at f a special council meeting, to discuss Town business and re-opening plans.

Starting the evening's proceedings, was a report from town planner Steve Wever, regarding the requested zoning bylaw amendment from the developers of 600 Main Street East, Muskoka D&M Corporation.

The amendment, would change the zoning from R5 to R5-9, to allow for the installation of a sales centre at the entrance to the development. This is a welcome sign for the Town, as the development has been on hold, pending the finding of a builder to work with the developer. Centreville Homes has filled that role and with the building of a sales pavilion, progress can now begin.

Realistically, this will indicate the selling of proposed units, which in turn obligates the builder to provide said structures. This development will be a welcome addition to the Town's coffers.

Mr. Wever explained that the proposed sales office will be rather unique to Shelburne's landscape, as it will be built from modular shipping containers. This is fast becoming a go-to form of temporary buildings and even some permanent ones, both in Ontario and elsewhere. Some photographs of existing sales offices, built this way, presented a dynamic and modern look to Council members. The amendment was passed unanimously.

Re-opening Town Hall

Next up, was a report from CAO Denyse Morrissey concerning a blueprint plan to re-open Town Hall.

Since March 17, Town Hall has been closed and municipal staff have been primarily working from home. The Town's digital service options have been expanded and the public is encouraged to utilize the digital processes. In addition, meetings, conferences and training are all being carried out via phone or in a virtual format. Despite these initiatives, working from home has and does present numerous challenges, not the least of which being the quality and connectivity of rural internet service.

Under the Town's COVID-19 Blueprint for Recovery, outlined on May 13, the first phase, Restart, outlined the gradual re-opening of public facilities and amenities, consistent with provincial and public health guidelines, while considering local needs and realities. The re-opening of Town Hall, would fall under this phase.

The report noted that things will not return to the old normal for quite some time, if ever, and to that reality, the report outlines the ?new normal' at Town Hall and the projected costs associated with that.

Due to the limited space inside Town Hall, changes will be required to observe realistic social distancing rules. Also, the second floor Council Chambers are totally incompatible with social distancing and meetings will need to be relocated elsewhere in Town. At this time, it is expected that ,when in-person meetings are again allowed, Council will likely meet at the CDRC.

Everything from office layout, to entry protocols, to further work from home structures are under consideration in the comprehensive report. The report sets a re-opening date of June 15th, for Town Hall, however many factors could see this date further extended.

The total projected cost of all of the issues outlined in the report, amounts to some $16,500, but could escalate as further issues turn up and are dealt with. Although Grace Tipling Hall had been suggested as a possible council meeting venue, staff determined that of the 185 seats in the theatre, only 25 would be available for use once social distancing was instituted. Consequently, the use of the CDRC seemed to be the logical answer, despite the need for a sound system and the cost of renting the space.

In response to the report, councillors had some questions. Coun. Kyle Fegan wondered if the existing portable sound system, used for various festivals and such, could not be implemented for council meetings at the CDRC. Town Clerk Jennifer Willoughby stated that what was required was a simpler and more efficient system.

Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson expressed some concerns with meeting at the CDRC, particularly with the ventilation system for the hall. The CDRC staff had been asked if the air was simply recirculated, or if fresh air was brought in from outside, as the old air was expelled. As of the Monday meeting, no response had been received, but the deputy mayor stated that he would not feel comfortable returning to public meetings in June, and would not attend meetings if they were scheduled. In his opinion, June 15 was too soon in light of the recent reports of rising COVID-19 infections in Ontario, recently. CAO Denyse Morrissey noted that this was only a tentative date and that the report was formulated prior to the observed uptick in cases. The date could certainly be pushed ahead if circumstances warranted.

At this time, in person meetings are not possible with the existing five person limit on gatherings, imposed by the province .

Mayor Wade Mills opined that with the last few days of steady increases, the Province may well push back lifting the State of Emergency measures concerning re-opening. CAO Morrissey then proposed that, as a compromise, which would still allow staff to be ready for re-opening, that the motion to accept the report be changed to read that preparations be made to re-open within two weeks following the Province lifting it's Emergency Declaration.

Mayor Mills suggested leaving the June 15 date, should the Declaration be lifted tomorrow (May 29) as previously suggested by the Province. The next council meeting will be June 8th and the decision could be made at that time. The motion was passed following this.

Sports field rental relief

CAO Denyse Morrissey then brought up the report on the potential costs of the municipality's 2020 Sports Field Rental Relief program, as requested at the previous council meeting.

The report included input from the affected organizations, as well an appraisal of what might actually be expected during the 2020 season, if in fact one happens. The overall feedback was that some form of relief would indeed be beneficial and could be used to lower registration fees, or offset lost revenue from sponsorship cancellations.

At this time, rentals are suspended until June 30 and the Province is not allowing groups of more than 5 people from gathering, effectively preventing any team sports fro being played.

Coun. Fegan said that he had contacted several users and they all agreed that any relief would be appreciated and beneficial. Although the maximum loss to the Town for forgiving 100 percent of the fees, would be $10,000, Mayor Mills stated that this is by no means a guaranteed sum, as some organizations may simply cancel their 2020 season and thus not rent at all. In fact, the Town could see no rentals and thus zero dollars in 2020, wether or not they forgive rental fees. Coun. Lynda Buffet proposed a verbal motion to waive 100 percent of the fees for existing users for 2020. This was supported by the Mayor and Coun. Fegen, who stated that he was told that regardless of the relief amount, the users expected the season to be a financial struggle. Council then voted unanimously to waive the 2020 rental fees for existing Shelburne users.

Treasurer motions

In other business, Treasurer Carey Holmes presented two motions for consideration, first to apply for a grant to obtain Asset Management Systems Implementation in Shelburne, from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The program would advance the Town's asset management program. The funds going toward City Wide Maintenance Managers License, City Wide Maintenance Manager Implementation and Data Analysis and Systems Training. Should the Town receive the Grant, the further costs to the Town

amount to $9,480, which was budgeted for in the 2020 Budget. The project going forward is dependent upon receipt of the Grant funding.

The second motion concerned the rates of taxation for the 2020 year. Due to a lowering of both Provincial, School and County rates, the average homeowner will see a total increase in the tax levy of 3.65 percent rather than the original 5.75 percent shown in the 2020 budget.

Canada Day initiative

Finally, Coun. Fegan announced an initiative, which he is a part of, to help celebrate Canada Day, during the COVID 19 precautions.

There is going to be a 10 foot by 20 foot Canadian Flag built from barn boards, which residents will be encouraged to paint using hand prints. Following completion, the flag will be hung in Jack Downing Park, before being taken to Fiddle Park to be hung in it's permanent home in the pavilion there.