

Shelburne Council participates in first virtual meeting

Written By PETER RICHARDSON

Town Council gathered for its very first virtual meeting on Monday (April 6), passing a motion to adopt this protocol indefinitely so as to facilitate conducting important municipal business during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Chaired by Mayor Wade Mills, the meeting was attended by all members of council, with the exception of Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson. Town Clerk Jennifer Willoughby, CAO Denyse Morrissey and Treasurer Carey Holmes and Jim Moss, Director of Development and Operations were also in attendance.

The first order of business was to adopt the new protocol, which was done by unanimous consent. The new law, under Bill 187 was passed by the Ontario government on March 19, to enable municipalities to conduct essential business, including virtual sessions, during the COVID-19 crisis. The meeting was conducted using the Zoom program, which has an annual cost to the Town of \$400, which will be taken from the General Government Services Administration category of the 2020 Budget under the IP Section.

During the discussions prior to the vote, Coun. Walter Benotto voiced concerns over security provisions of the software, noting that two states in the United States are currently investigating the company for security issues. Ms. Willoughby noted that if the required privacy settings are employed and the access link to the program is controlled, there should be no security issues for the meetings. She also noted that this is purely a temporary situation as in the future, the Town will be installing its own video conferencing equipment and uploading files to the Town website.

CAO Denyse Morrissey added that other service providers are available should Zoom prove unsatisfactory and Mayor Mills stated that for the moment the discussions were open to the public and so security was not a major concern.

The virtual meetings, may only be used during a declared state of emergency and not as a substitute for conventional public Council sessions.

Community Relief Plan

Moving on, Council voted to review the Community Relief Plan and to continue using it in its present form for the time being.

The plan is designed to be flexible and can be changed to accommodate changing situations, but is working well for the time being.

Sidewalk cleaning

Next up, was Council inquiries. Coun. Benotto asked as to whether or not street and sidewalk cleaning was to be implemented during the pandemic. It was noted that it will be in the near future, as the public works department cleans up after the winter dirt accumulation.

Coun. Kyle Fegan asked for clarification as to whether or not the local rail trail was part of the closures announced by the County. Specifically, the County Forest trails had been closed, but no direct mention had been made concerning the rail trail. Coun. Fegan was asking on behalf of ATV users. Mayor Mills stated that a request for information would be made to the County.

Development charges review

Treasurer Carey Holmes then presented a report on the ongoing development charges review and, in particular, the Town's response to the impending expiration of their current development charge bylaw.

The Town is not allowed to collect development charges without a current bylaw in place. The current one is set to expire on May 25.

However, in order to enact a new one, a public meeting must be held on or before April 20. The Town has decided to hold a virtual public meeting on April 20. Unfortunately, at this time, such a meeting is not permitted under provincial legislation and would therefore leave the Town's new bylaw open to appeal in the courts. Nevertheless, legal counsel and staff deliberations have recommended to proceed with the meeting, as not having a bylaw in place, presents worse consequences than having one that may be open to appeal.

The CAO stated that, currently, the Province is purportedly considering suspending all development charges and the annual indexing of them. If done, this would solve the Town's problem and the April 20 meeting would not be necessary.

It was noted by the Mayor, that the problem of a virtual meeting was probably an oversight on the part of the Province. Electronic meetings were authorized under the Municipal Act, while development charges are governed by the Planning Act. Town staff have reached out to Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for further information and assistance.

As development applications are still being accepted by the Town, it is extremely important that a bylaw regulating development charges exists. Also, under the newly amended essential services list from the Province, for any building where the footings have been poured prior to the enactment, construction may be completed at the site. Without a current bylaw in effect, the Town could not charge development charges. Beyond that, any building permits issued prior to April 4 are allowed to proceed.

Other business

In other business, CAO Morrissey noted that most services at Town Hall are still being conducted, with the majority of staff working from home and only attending Town Hall by necessity. Staff is currently planning to close all rental facilities, following the lead of other municipalities, until further notice.