

Committee of the Whole
March 4th, 2025
Town Council Chambers

Present

Mayor S. Cameron
Deputy Mayor D. Roberts
Councillor P. McKenna
Councillor A. Murray
Councillor J. Pelly
Councillor J. Sullivan

Also in Attendance

R. Delorey, CAO
L. Roy, Strategic Initiatives Coordinator
M. Barkhouse, Director of Corporate Services
Bethany Collier, Manager of Accounting
Mary Oxner, Audit Committee Member

Absent with Regrets

Councillor L. MacLellan
M. Fougere, Deputy Clerk

1. Call to Order & Land Acknowledgement

Mayor S. Cameron called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM and acknowledged that the meeting took place in the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, and that we are all treaty people.

2. Approval of Agenda

It was Moved and Seconded "to approve the agenda as amended."

Motion Carried

3. Presentations

3.1 Antigonish Culture Alive

Fenn Martin took to the podium to provide an overview to council on Antigonish Culture Alive (ACA) outlining the services provided and partnerships with other local organizations since 2010 to support ACA's Community Grant application. He introduced Cassie MacDonald as the new Executive Director who proceeded with the presentation. Partnerships under the ACA banner include The Performing Arts Series, The Arts House, Artist in Residency Program, Atlantic Art at Night Festival Alliance, and StFX Art Gallery. Annual programs include Antigonight, an Art After Dark Festival and the Mural Program. It was noted that the financial needs are growing to continue to support positive programming and that their application will be seeking more funds.

3.2 Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia

Hugh McKay presented to council on the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia outlining their development and delivery of grant programs over the last 20 years. He provided highlights on fundraising and the community-based initiatives completed in rural Nova Scotia including the Ukrainian Nova Scotia Resettlement Fund, Joan Feynman Climate Change Fund, Housing for Health, Soaring Eagle Fine Arts Grants, and Community Impact Conferences. He emphasized the success of the Dave Gunning Zero Hunger Fund which provides “free Stores” to rural Nova Scotia schools which contributed a \$3,500 grant to the Dr. John Hugh Gillis Regional High School. The 2025 goal is to double contributions from \$100,000 to \$200,000 which will be reflected in their Community Grants application.

3.3 Financial Update with Year-End Projections

M. Barkhouse took to the podium to provide Council with a PowerPoint presentation of financial updates with Year-end projections. The presentation included a current overview of the budget and how it is structured with year-to-date performance up to January 2025 including a projected year-end surplus of approximately \$170,800.00. Total revenue to date is about \$10M with approximately \$9.3M in expenses. A key variant in revenue is the \$1M payment from the Province in Grants in Lieu which should be received within the next week or two.

The budget overview outlined the main revenue groupings to keep in compliance with the annual provincial Financial Information Report (FIR) so that financial comparisons can be made easily between different municipalities. The main revenue source is Property Taxes followed by Grants in Lieu and Sales of Services. Other Transfers include Capital and Operating account movements and dividends from AREA and the Electric Utility.

Expenses grouping includes Mayor & Council, Corporate Services and the Office of the CAO, Engineering and Public Works, Environmental Health Services, Community Development, Partnerships & Initiatives, Protective Services, Recreation and Cultural Services and Provincial Responsibilities. A large portion of protective Services includes both the Fire Department and the RCMP Contract. Part of the Provincial Responsibilities includes mandatory payment to the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library. Capital Projects lie in the grouping of Corporate Services and Office of the CAO which varies from year to year.

M. Barkhouse provided details on the year-to date revenue and expense highlights including \$63K in additional revenue from the Marketing Levy recently implemented for “fixed roof” accommodations to support the tourism industry. Details on the year-end

transfers from Capital and Operating reserves are dependent of expenses incurred. For example, only \$156K of the \$400K budget for the College St. bridge was transferred from Capital Reserves.

Expense highlights included wages and several retirements. There were significant challenges with filling positions which led to more overtime wages for current staff. M. Oxner asked why there was such a variance in Corporate Services and Office of the CAO. M. Barkhouse replied that it will be reallocated at year-end but also stated challenges in accessing payroll information with the current software system. Other highlights included a change in the budgeted utility rates versus approved rates from the general rate application to the Utility and Review Board, increases in the RCMP contract and equipment purchase for the arena.

M. Barkhouse provided details on the year-end true ups related to capital projects completed and in progress through the fiscal year emphasizing the lack of proper accounting software in place to track items like inventory. CAO Delorey provided some details on the issues of the existing Chart of Accounts. Changes will allow for reporting to become more streamlined and easier to report to Council.

The Capital budget represents items that had expenses paid for prior to yearend. Some items include Town Hall heat pump, Hawthorne St. paving, Bay St. design, College St. bridge, the STP, Arbor Drive playground and the Active Transportation Trail. M. Barkhouse noted that money is only one part of the equation when it comes to capital projects. Internal capacity and available resources also pose challenges to complete required infrastructure upgrades.

Discussion ensued on the news that the current software program is being retired and a new system will need to be sourced and implemented. M. Oxner provided her assessment on the challenges of the current system and its inability to include data analytic in a timely manner.

Other year-end projections include Capital and Operating Reserves. Two projects are being transferred from Operating to Capital Reserves, the Collage St. bridge and Creighton St. parking lot. The Scotiabank Mini Pitch was originally approved out of capital projects but was moved to operating as the asset belongs to the county. The only revenue growth in Capital Reserves was interest as draws from the reserve fund exceed inputs.

M Barkhouse provided a slide with a Financial Condition Indicator on combined reserves showing a moderate risk based on the value of funds held in reserves compared to a single year's operation expenses including amortization expenses.

Two motions were put forward for recommendation at the next Regular council meeting scheduled for March 17th, 2025.

Motion 1:

Whereas the purchase of the Mini Pitch does not meet the eligibility criteria for a capital purchase;

Be it resolved that the amount of \$398,800 be transferred from the operating reserves to cover the cost of the Mini Pitch

Motion 2:

Whereas the following projects were previously earmarked under operating funds;

Be it resolved that the following amounts be transferred from operating funds and earmarked under capital reserves:

- College Street Bridge: \$135,000 (bringing the total in capital reserves to \$279,000)
- Main Street Parking Lot: \$256,00

At 8:24 PM the presentation concluded.

4. Social Media

Councillor McKenna requested that social media be added to the agenda. He referred to a post on Ask Antigonish in which Mayor Cameron responded in the comment section referring to himself and council. Councillor McKenna requested that if the mayor and/or council is replying to comments to refrain from speaking for council and only refer to themselves.

5. Councillor Reports

Councillor McKenna provided an update on the meetings he attended since the last report:

Feb 18 RK Steering Committee
Feb 19 Joint Council Meeting
Feb 20 Library Board Executive Meeting
Feb 21 Farmers Market Accessibility Drop in
Feb 22 Coldest night of the year fundraiser
Feb 25 Special Council Meeting
Feb 26 Pucks for Purpose Banquet
Feb 27 Accessibility Drop in at Library
Feb 27 RK MacDonald Board Meeting
Feb 28 Accessibility committee meeting
March 04 Police and Licensing Committee

No other Councillor reports were provided.

6. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 PM.

