
MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF
ANTIGONISH

Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 13, 2021, 6:00 pm
Council Chambers
Municipal Administration Building
285 Beech Hill Road
Beech Hill, NS B2G 0B4

Present were:

Warden Owen McCarron
Deputy Warden Hugh Stewart
Councillor Mary MacLellan
Councillor Donnie MacDonald
Councillor Remi Deveau
Councillor John Dunbar
Councillor Gary Mattie
Councillor Bill MacFarlane
Councillor Harris McNamara
Councillor Shawn Brophy

Staff:

Glenn Horne, CAO
Beth Schumacher, Deputy Clerk
Shirlyn Donovan, Strategic Initiatives Coordinator

Staff in Gallery:

Josh Chisholm
Darlene Thompson (by Zoom)
Daryl Myers (by Zoom)
Hayston Lam (by Zoom)
Jacqueline Cleary (by Zoom)
Meaghan MacNeil (by Zoom)
Tammy Feltmate (by Zoom)
Tracey MacEachern (by Zoom)

Media Present:

Matt Draper, XFM
Corey LeBlanc (by Zoom)

Also Present:

Kevin Latimer (by Zoom)

Call to Order – Chairman, Warden Owen McCarron

The meeting of the Committee of the Whole was called to order by the Chair, Warden McCarron, at 6:06pm.

Approval of Agenda

Warden McCarron called for any additions or deletions to the agenda.

That the agenda be approved.

Motion Carried

New Business

Consideration of Exploring Consolidation of the County and Town of Antigonish into One Municipal Government

Warden McCarron provided an introduction to the discussion regarding the consideration of consolidating the County and Town of Antigonish into one municipal government. Mr. Horne then provided an overview on the subject, referring to the staff memo included in the agenda package.

Warden McCarron provided some background on the background to the desire to continue to build on the momentum of collaboration between the communities, the example of Windsor-West Hants that recently went through a similar process and what their experiences have been to date, and what other models in the province can be looked at as examples.

A roundtable was then held to get input from each member of Council:

- Councillor MacLellan asked the question about who makes the final decision regarding consolidation, and whether there is the opportunity for residents to have a final say. Warden McCarron spoke to the example of the Windsor-West Hants example where a series of community meetings were held though out the process.
- Deputy Warden Stewart expressed his interest and support in the proposal.
- Councillor MacDonald supports looking at the idea, but hopes to look at the efficiencies and cost savings that would result if consolidation was pursued.
- Councillor Deveau referenced the sample timeline, and his interest in having any questions asked by the community during the consultation process to come back to Council, so that those concerns can be addressed. Warden McCarron shared the Windsor-West Hants example where a facilitator was utilized to assist with the consultation process, and the guiding principles that were developed to ensure that those participating felt that their concerns were heard during the process. The importance of communication was stressed.
- Councillor MacFarlane recounted Council's experience with the previous amalgamation application. Some feedback already received from residents in his district include recent infrastructure upgrades, and any infrastructure deficit between the two units would need

to be looked at. Other concerns raised included tax rates, planning document consolidation. He noted that the opportunity was interesting and exciting. Warden McCarron shared discussions with representatives from other consolidated units where the offer was made to have representatives come to speak about their experiences.

- Councillor Mattie has also spoken with constituents, and shared the concerns raised about taxes and service levels, but looks forward to learning more about the possibilities and hearing from any expertise brought in.
- Councillor Dunbar noted the importance of community engagement, and the different issues already raised (tax rate, difference in Council organization). Warden McCarron noted the importance of discussions about how Council representation is organized, and how public consultation will inform that process. Examples from other consolidated units was shared and discussion followed.
- Councillor McNamara noted that he supports the consolidation in principle but expressed some concerns with working through the details. He stressed the importance of community consultation, the focus on topics of interest in each district and the Town and recognizing that there is a lot to be worked out in the exploration process.
- Councillor Brophy expressed an interest in consolidation and the potential cost and process savings that can result. The importance of consultation, including the possibility of a plebiscite, was stressed. Warden McCarron stressed the importance of the residents and hearing their thoughts and concerns on the subject.

The floor was opened to further discussion.

Councillor MacLellan expressed a concern with the proposed timeline. Mr. Horne noted that was just to provide some context, but a timeline for this study would be developed. Councillor MacDonald asked whether there was any information that could be gathered from the previous amalgamation process that could be helpful to this proposed consolidation. Warden McCarron noted that there could be some information from the reports that could help, but that the tone of that process was very different from what is being contemplated now.

Councillor Deveau raised a concern about ensuring that the employees of the municipal units are looked after. Warden McCarron noted that it is not the intention to reduce staff, but the overall administrative structure would be something that would come through any possible study of a proposed consolidation. Councillor McNamara raised the proposed timeline and the volume of work needed, along with the importance of taking the time to work through the details.

Councillor Brophy asked about the potential costs of this step of the process if both Councils choose to move forward. Mr. Horne noted that a detailed budget and workplan would be developed if the decision was made to move forward in the process. Discussions have already taken place with the Department of Municipal Affairs. The Windsor-West Hants process through their transition after the decision to consolidate cost 1.5million, paid for through a grant from the Province.

Discussion about the wording of the motion proposed followed. Councillor Mattie clarified the ability of the Municipality to back out of the process if it chose to. Councillor MacDonald asked about the possible timing of public engagement efforts, and Mr. Horne spoke to the development of a community engagement plan. Councillor MacLellan anticipates being asked by the Town and County are considering this process now; Warden McCarron spoke to the opportunity of the two units working together to make this decision while relations between the units are good and being able to make the decision without having it dictated by another level of government.

Moved and Seconded

The Committee recommends that the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish work with the Department of Municipal Affairs to explore consolidation of the two municipal units.

Motion Carried

Additions to the Agenda

There were no additions to the agenda.

In Camera Items

Moved and Seconded

That the Committee of the Whole Meeting be adjourned to an In-Camera Session to discuss the Legal Advice at 6:59pm.

Motion Carried

Moved and Seconded

That the In-Camera Session be adjourned at 7:06pm.

Motion Carried

Adjournment

Moved

That the Committee of the Whole meeting be adjourned at 7:06pm.

Motion Carried



Warden Owen McCarron



Glenn Horne, CAO