



MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: Amherst town council briefs from the March 26 regular council session

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – Alison Lair, of the Cumberland YMCA, provided council with details on the Homelessness Prevention and Outreach Program that helps individuals - 19 years and older - and families who are homeless, insecurely housed or at risk of homelessness find and maintain safe, suitable, affordable and sustainable housing.

The program is based on a housing first perspective, which started in New York in the 1990s and places people directly from the streets into housing without conditions. It is aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing direct support and funding, Lair said.

Currently, the program is funded through the federal governments Homelessness Partnering Strategy until to March 31, 2019.

It is considered the only viable approach for rural Nova Scotia because there are no shelters available, therefore housing has to be the first response, Lair said.

The program Homelessness Prevention and Outreach Program provides housing placement, referrals to other community agencies and intensive case management, where services are directed towards helping individuals and families secure benefits and also checks on their wellbeing, she said. The program also provides life skills training and assists with basic needs such as emergency bed nights, food and clothing.

It also provides referrals to other services such as Mental Health and Addiction Services, Housing Nova Scotia, the Department of Community Services and many other agencies.

The local program has helped 31 registered clients since Oct. 30, Lair said. Twelve were homeless, four were couch surfing, eight were assisted with eviction prevention and seven were provided with other assistance including liaising with their landlord and helping to find alternative housing.

The program has also helped several others who did not register, she added.



Barriers to the service include the lack of affordable housing in the area, landlords who have a list of people they won't rent to, prejudice and stigma, and the lack of an emergency shelter, Lair said.

In 2018, the program is looking to expand the community kitchen it started last year and is working towards establishing an emergency shelter and creating a community garden.

Alternative voting bylaw

Amherst residents will get the opportunity to use the internet or a phone to cast their ballot during the next municipal election.

Council, at its March regular council session, passed the second reading of the Alternative Voting Bylaw, which enables citizens to vote through the internet or via the phone during an extended advanced polling period during the 2020 municipal election. Traditional paper ballots will still be used on Election Day.

The bylaw was given its first reading on Feb. 26.

Flag protocol adopted

Amherst town council approved a new flag protocol policy during its March 26 regular council session.

The policy outlines how flags will be flown when displayed at town events or on flag poles owned by the town. As an example, it says when a Canadian flag is displayed on a speaker's platform, it should be placed on a flag pole to the left from the point of view of the audience. It also notes that when flying with two other flags, the Canadian flag shall be displayed in the centre.

In addition, the policy indicates when flags will be flown at half-mast and for how long. It also includes a list of those for whom the flag will be flown at half-mast. It further notes the flag will be flown at half-mast yearly on April 28 in recognition of the Day of Mourning for Persons Killed or Injured in the Workplace, Nov. 11 for Remembrance Day and Dec. 6 for the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

The policy, which is in line with established flag etiquette as defined by the Government of Canada, also indicates the requirements for maintaining flags.

Inter-municipal Emergency Services Agreement

Amherst town council approved amendments to the Inter-municipal Emergency Services Agreement it has with other municipalities in Cumberland County.

The original agreement to provide mutual aid and emergency management services was established in 2013, when the towns of Springhill and Parrsboro existed. The amendments take the dissolution of those towns, which are now part of Cumberland County, into account and establishes a new governance model that gives Cumberland County three voting members, Amherst two and Oxford one.



Another amendment changes the costs sharing formula for the Regional Emergency Management Organization, which would see Cumberland County increase its share of operational costs due to the fact Springhill and Parrsboro are now part of the county.

The amendments were recommended by the Regional Emergency Management Organization Advisory Committee and would go into effect on June 1 if they are approved by Amherst, Oxford and Cumberland County councils.

The amendments have no financial implications for the Town of Amherst.

Tax Sale by Tender

Amherst town council accepted the bids for three properties that were part of a tax sale by tender that closed on March 6. The properties were located at 3 Fullerton St., 26 Park St. and 23½ West Pleasant Street.

Council also authorized staff to write off the difference between the selling price and the outstanding taxes.

Appointments to the Amherst Board of Police Commissioners

Amherst town council reappointed community volunteers Robin Latta and Holly MacDonald to the Amherst Board of Police Commissioners for another one-year term that ends of March 31, 2019. Their previous terms were scheduled to expire on March 31.

Application to amend the land use bylaw

Amherst town council approved the use of electronic signs in the Downtown Core Area District when it passed the second reading of an amendment to the town's land use bylaw during its March regular council session.

The amendment will allow the installation of free-standing electronic signs, with conditions that are aimed at mitigating potential negative impacts such as flashing, pulsating images and bright lights that might cause distraction to drivers and the public.

Other conditions limit the maximum sign size to 32 square feet and prevent signs from being used to advertise businesses and/or products that are not offered on the property where the sign is located.

The town's Planning Advisory Committee held two public participation sessions prior to recommending council's acceptance of the amendment.

Council gave first reading to the amendment at the Feb. 26 regular council session.



April and May council meeting dates

Amherst town council approved changes to meeting dates in April and May.

Their April committee of the whole meeting will be held on April 23 instead of April 16, their regular April session will be held on April 30 instead of April 23 and their May committee of the whole meeting will be held on May 22 instead of May 21.

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