



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MR# 2019010

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RE: Council approves second reading of a development agreement for 150 Victoria St. E.

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – A development agreement that will allow changes to a business at 150 Victoria St. E. was given second reading by Amherst town council when it met on Feb. 25.

The development agreement will allow the property owner to convert the current 15-unit motel with one dwelling unit to a 10-unit motel with six dwelling units.

Council's approval came after staff indicated the proposal conforms to the town's municipal planning strategy and land-use bylaws and was recommended by the Planning Advisory Committee.

The development agreement was also the subject of a public participation opportunity on Dec. 3, 2018, and a public hearing on Feb. 20. Council passed the first reading on Jan. 28.

Demolition order upheld

A Planning Advisory Committee order to demolish the buildings at 196 Victoria St. E. was upheld by Amherst town council.

The decision follows an appeal hearing held during a special sitting of council on Feb. 20. As a result of the decision, the property owner has 30 days from Feb. 25 to remove the contents from the property, demolish the buildings on site and backfill the foundations. Failure to do so will result in the town doing the work and billing the cost to the owner's tax account.



A staff report noted the town has received various complaints about the property since 2013 and further noted several orders requiring the owner to address the failing structural integrity of the buildings were ignored.

Some of the deficiencies noted in the report included front columns, a porch, side columns, the roof and front steps that are in imminent threat of failure, a compromised electrical system, structural rot in the basement and structural failure of attic floor and roof.

Appeal of Demolition order rejected

Amherst town council has rejected an appeal of a Jan. 18 Planning Advisory Committee order to demolish the building located at 59 Church St. The decision follows an appeal hearing that was held on Feb. 20.

The decision gives the owner of 59 Church St. 45 days from Feb. 25 to remove the contents, demolish the building and backfill the foundation. Failure to do so will result in the town completing the work and adding the cost to the owner's tax bill.

A staff report noted the town has received various complaints about the property since 2011, one that led to a vacate order that was issued in 2016 due to the condition of the building.

The report indicated the owner of 59 Church St. has not made any progress towards remedying the deficiencies that include the collapse of part of the foundation, a compromised façade and structural failure in various parts of the building.

Municipal Auditor

The accounting firm Jorgensen & Bickerton has been appointed the town's municipal auditor for the April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019, fiscal year. The firm has been the town's auditor for several years.

Mandatory provincial contribution area rate set

Council set the mandatory provincial contribution area rate for the 2019-20 fiscal year at 40.5 cents per \$100 of assessment, an increase of 1.5 cents from the previous year.

The increase reflects the town's share of the costs for the regional library, education, corrections, housing and the Property Valuation Service. These costs are determined by the province and must be paid by the town.

Temporary borrowing resolution

Council approved a temporary borrowing resolution in an amount not to exceed \$366,485 to help cover the financing of capital projects from the 2018-19 fiscal year.

The temporary borrowing resolution, which must be approved by the province, gives the town the authority to borrow the money if the funds are required. It does not mean the town will borrow the money, nor does it commit the town to long-term financing.



Council approves salary increase

Council approved a salary increase for members of council that will see a councillor's pay increase to \$25,050 from \$21,542, the deputy-mayor's increase to \$27,723 from \$24,375 and the mayor's increase to \$41,178 from \$36,447.

Prior to this year, one-third of a council members' compensation was exempt from taxes, however, the exemption was eliminated by the federal government starting in the 2019 tax year.

As a result, council members would have taken home less pay this year than in previous years.

The increase means council members will take home the same amount of pay as they did in previous years.

The town isn't alone in increasing council members' salaries to make up for the impact of the federal government's decision to eliminate the one-third exemption. Sixteen other Nova Scotia municipalities have done the same. The increase was also recommended by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.

Prior to making the decision, council learned that only two municipalities in the Maritimes have or are using independent committees to set council remuneration. They also learned that many municipalities have bylaws that see council remuneration increased annually based on the increases to the Consumer Price Index, while other councils set new remuneration for incoming councils.

After the motion passed, Deputy-Mayor Sheila Christie, who voted against the increase, gave notice that at next month's meeting she will bring forward a motion to have staff prepare a report on options that could lead to a reduction in the number of seats on council to five from seven including a mayor.

Recreation Department restructuring

A review of the Recreation Department by the chief administrative officer has led to a restructuring of the department that will result in all the town's recreation staff located in offices at the Amherst Stadium, the elimination of an administrative assistant position and the creation of an operator's position.

Prior to the restructuring, some recreation staff were located at the stadium while others had offices in town hall. It is expected the housing of all recreation staff at the stadium will result in improved customer service and co-ordination of effort.

As part of the restructuring, council approved a motion to amend the town's salary administration policy by removing the administrative assistant position from the policy.

Terms of reference approved for joint council meetings

Council approved the terms of reference for joint council meetings involving the towns of Amherst, Oxford and the Municipality of Cumberland.



The approval comes after council received a staff report that noted the three municipalities have been meeting informally since early 2017 and indicated the terms of reference would provide more structure to the joint meeting and ensure they were taking place in accordance of the Municipal Government Act.

Under the terms, each council will establish a joint council standing committee and any recommendations made at the joint council sessions would be brought back to the individual councils for final decisions and commitments.

The report noted the purpose of holding joint council sessions was to facilitate communication between the councils and provide a forum for the exchange of information on issues of mutual interest.

In addition, the joint council sessions would act as a single platform for presentations or reports that would have previously been presented to each council individually and be able to propose policy changes that would encourage or enable the committee's approved goals.

The joint council meetings will be open to the public, with some exceptions as detailed in the Municipal Government Act.

Meetings rescheduled

Due to the Easter and Victoria Day holidays, council has opted to change some of its meeting dates in April and May.

In April, council's committee of the whole meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 23, and its regular council session will be held on Monday, April 29. In May, the committee of the whole meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 21.

Council opposes relocation of RCMP communications centre

Council is sending a letter to the RCMP asking it to reconsider its decision to move its communication centre to Dartmouth from Truro.

Council is concerned that following the move the province's two main communication centres will be located near one another, something that contravenes many studies that indicate such centres should be kept well apart so they cannot be impacted by a single event.

In addition, council is concerned the move is another centralizing of resources in the Halifax area and is taking away economic opportunities from the more distant areas of the province, which places a burden on rural Nova Scotia's economy.

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