



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MR# 2020043

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RE: Amherst to have its first fully electronic municipal election

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – The Town of Amherst will have its first fully electronic municipal election in its history when voters go to the polls in October.

Council decided to go the electronic voting route during its June 22, 2020, council meeting.

In making the decision, council felt an electronic vote was the only way to ensure the safety of citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic as social distancing could not be guaranteed if traditional paper ballots and polling stations were used.

People will be able to use a computer, tablet, mobile device or telephone to cast their ballot between noon on Oct. 5, 2020, and the close of polls on Oct. 17, 2020.

A fully electronic election is estimated to save between \$20,000 and \$25,000, with the majority of savings coming from not having to pay poll workers' salaries and benefits or renting halls.

Staff also noted the town will not have to purchase about \$5,000 in protective equipment – gloves, masks and sanitizer – that would have been required if traditional polling stations were used.

Fire and Burning of Material Bylaw amendments

Council approved the first reading of amendments to the town's Fires and Burning of Materials Bylaw, which was initially adopted in 2002.



The amendments address current day needs. They detail fire prevention requirements such as defining the space required between the fire and buildings, limiting the size and height of the combustibles being used and fire control measures, such as having a water hose or fire extinguisher near the fire.

The amendments also require that a person be in charge of a fire. This person is to remain present at all times the fire is burning and must stay until the fire is completely extinguished.

In addition, the amendments allow the use of CSA and ULC approved outdoor propane/natural gas heaters, fireplaces and other types of approved outdoor appliance that are designed to contain a fire for recreation and entertainment purposes.

The appliances must be equipped with a spark arrester and include an outdoor fireplace, an outdoor dome fireplace or fire pit. It does not include appliances that are designed or used to provide heat to a building.

Lastly, it adds a progressive fine structure that will be used when enforcing the bylaw.

The amendments do not go into effect until the bylaw has passed a second reading. The full policy will be posted to the town's website following final approval.

Rotary Park lease

Council approved the signing of a 10-year lease agreement between the Town of Amherst and the Amherst Rotary Club that defines the roles the town and club have in relation to the operation of the club-owned Rotary Park.

The lease stipulates the park will be used for recreational, sport and leisure activities and the town will maintain and operate the property to the same standards, policies and procedures as town-owned parks.

In addition, it stipulates any significant alterations or additions to the park must be approved by both parties.

The lease, which can be extended for two, 10-year terms, replaces one that was originally put into place in 2004 and has expired.

Fluoridation plebiscite

Council approved the holding of a plebiscite during the Oct. 17, 2020, municipal election that asks voters, "Should the Amherst Water Utility fluoridate the municipal drinking water supply? Yes or No?"



In addition, council approved sending the same question to all water utility customers located in the Municipality of the County of Cumberland in the July 2020 water bills. The question will be accompanied by a stamped return envelope.

Councillors noted the non-binding plebiscite and survey will give Amherst residents and Cumberland County users of the water utility an opportunity to have their say on the fluoridation of the drinking supply.

They also urged citizens to become educated on the issue.

Tax Reduction Policy amendment

Council approved an amendment to the Tax Reduction Policy that increases the income threshold per household to \$28,000 from \$25,000.

User Fee Policy amendment

Council approved an amendment to the town's User Fee Policy that makes it clear HST is added to the ice-time rental rates listed in the policy.

Community Support Grants

Council approved \$64,300 in Community Support Grants that will be distributed among 15 community organizations. Details on the organizations receiving grants will be announced shortly.

In order to ensure the intentions of the Community Support Grants Policy not all applications received could be funded.

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