

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  **MR#** 2019002

**DATE: 25 January 2019**

**RE: Committee recommends adding Mi’kmaw territorial acknowledgment to meetings**

**AMHERST, Nova Scotia –** Amherst town council’s committee of the whole is recommending a Mi’kmaw territorial acknowledgement be read at the start of council sessions.

The committee made the decision to send the recommendation to council’s Jan. 28 session for approval after receiving a staff report on the matter during its Jan. 21 meeting. Adding the acknowledgement to the council session requires an amendment to the town’s proceeds of council policy.

The staff report provided a suggested acknowledgement. It read: We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional unceded territory of the Mi’kmaw Peoples. This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed by the British Crown in 1725.

Several committee members felt the greeting was too long and suggested the last sentence be dropped, but all agreed with the report, which indicated the acknowledgement supported inclusion while recognizing our heritage and the Indigenous Peoples from the area.

**Batting cage request sent referred to budget process**

The committee of the whole has sent a request to build a batting cage at the Robb’s complex to the town’s capital budget process, which is currently underway.

The request for a batting cage at the complex was made in December by the Amherst Intermediate Baseball Club and was supported by ARHS Baseball, Amherst Bantam Baseball, Amherst Midget Baseball and Amherst Little League.

At the time, the committee asked the Recreation Department to examine how much it would cost to build a batting cage. That report, presented during the Jan. 21 meeting, indicated it would cost about $20,000 to build one that met Baseball Canada standards.

The report indicated a batting cage at the Robb’s complex would be a “nice to have asset,” but wasn’t a must have item. It also indicated the batting cage, if built, would be available to anyone who uses the complex.

Committee members, in deciding to send it to the capital budget process, questioned if those requesting and supporting the project would be willing to contribute funding toward the project. Staff indicated an answer to that question could be sought during the budget process. They also pointed out that sending the request to the budget process doesn’t mean the construction of a batting cage will be approved.

**Poverty reduction advisory circle recommended**

The committee of the whole is recommending the town council approve the formation of a poverty reduction advisory council when it meets on January 28.

The recommendation came following a staff report that said forming the circle would provide an opportunity for a number of community engagement activities, give citizens a voice on the topic and assist council in developing a collaborative reduction strategy, the development of which is one of council’s strategic priorities.

The report further noted vulnerable populations would be positively affected by any effort to reduce poverty in this community.

In addition, the report indicated several individuals and organizations have said they are willing to join the circle and its first priority would be establishing a term of reference, which it hoped to present to council by March 31.

**Council remuneration adjustment**

The committee of the whole discussed an adjustment to the town’s salary administration policy that would result in an increase in council remuneration to replace the after tax amount lost due to a recent change in the Income Tax Act.

The discussion came following a staff report, which recommended increasing council remuneration.

The report noted the proposed increase is directly related to the federal government’s decision to discontinue the practice of exempting one-third of council honorariums from income tax, effective Jan. 1, 2019. As a result, council members will take home significantly less pay in 2019 than they did in 2018 if their remuneration isn’t increased.

As an example, the report indicated a councillor’s take home pay was $21,758 prior to the federally ordered change. As a result of the change, a councillor’s take home pay would drop to $19,085 if there was no increase in remuneration. With the proposed increase, a councillor’s take home pay would remain at $21,758.

The proposed increase in remuneration indicates councillors would receive $25,050, up from $21,542; the deputy-mayor would receive $27,723, up from $24,375, and the mayor would receive $41,178, up from $36,447.

The staff report indicated the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities supported increases in council remuneration because it would allow elected officials to maintain the same levels of post-tax compensation following the implementation of the federal government’s decision.

The report further indicated the majority of Nova Scotia municipalities have already increased the compensation to elected officials in order to compensate them for the federally ordered change, while a few jurisdictions deferred the matter to budget deliberations, but plan to make any adjustment retroactive to Jan. 1.

**Concerns raised about Bicycle Lanes**

The committee of the whole received concerns from citizens who say the use of sharrows on town streets are putting people at risk because they do not provide or identify actual bike lanes.

Those citizens have indicated they’d like to see dotted lines marking bike lanes placed on town streets as well as the sharrows.

The sharrows were placed on some town streets last summer as a way to remind motorists and cyclists that they shared the road and were equally responsible for safety.

The committee directed town staff to prepare a report outlining the feasibility of using dotted lines on some Amherst streets in summer 2019 to indicate actual bike lanes, with the possibility of adding more in the future.

**Physician recruitment spending**

Staff informed the committee of the whole that the physician recruitment committee has spent $8,784.96 of the $11,323 the towns of Amherst and Oxford committed to the Cumberland County Physician Recruitment Committee.

**Sidewalk to hospital**

The committee of the whole received a letter from Maggie’s Place urging the construction of a sidewalk from the town to the hospital be undertaken. The letter was also sent to Cumberland County Warden Allison Gillis and the provincial government.

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