

NOTL NEWS

A NEWS UPDATE FROM THE COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF *Niagara-On-The-Lake*

Issue # 169 – March 24, 2009

SHUTTLE RECOMMENDED

The Corporate Services Advisory Committee modified a staff recommendation in order to engage 5-0 Transportation to supply the heritage district shuttle service for a one year period commencing April 1, 2009. Staff had initially recommended 5-0 for a three year period. The staff recommendation is the result of a request for proposals (RFP) from interested companies to operate the shuttle commencing in 2009 for a three year period. An Evaluation Committee was established consisting of Town and Regional staff as well as Chamber of Commerce representation. A detailed criteria was established to evaluate submissions and the RFPs were individually and collectively examined by the Evaluation Committee. After a thorough examination of the two proposals, including receiving responses for additional information and clarification on certain matters, the submissions were rated equal. Given the equal rating of the two proposals, 5-0 Transportation was recommended for the contract given they had operated the service successfully since its inception, have demonstrated responsiveness to Town requests, and possess a robust infrastructure to support the service.

Prior to reviewing the staff report, the Corporate Services Advisory Committee received two deputations. Mr. David Mole of Niagara Classic Cars appeared on behalf of the company's RFP and provided Committee with an overview of his submission, reviewed the requirements of the RFP request issued by the Town, and stressed his company's concepts for using innovative concepts to enhance the service. Mr. Michael Maroney of 5-0 Transportation appeared and advised Committee of their historical involvement with the Town and the community, including their working relationship with local businesses.

In recommending a one year contract with 5-0 Transportation, Committee wanted the flexibility to identify and implement enhancements in the service provided and directed discussions to be undertaken on the subject. New concepts identified in each of the RFPs may be discussed.

CURRENT BUDGET PRESENTATION

The Director of Corporate Services provided a 2009 Current Budget Overview to the Corporate Services Advisory Committee. The Director reviewed the typical current services provided by the municipality to ratepayers and provided Committee with background for shifting away from comparisons using 'average' assessment value and moving to a 'median' value of \$291,000 which is more representative for the community. In response to Committee's questions, he indicated a more user friendly and understandable method of comparison is to express change 'per \$100,000 of assessment'. The Director provided Committee with background to the budget process, including the budget philosophy of maintaining existing service levels, the evaluation of various budget and service requests. An overview was provided to explain Business Cases which introduced new funding requests. The overview also highlighted potential options to reduce the overall impact of the budget. It was noted the proposed 2009 budget has been a very difficult process to this point as the Town is dealing with a number of issues, including the increase of a number of fixed cost items, a reduction of revenues and the issue of each year's budget building on the

previous year's budget. In summary the base budget is projected to see an increase of \$777,192 over 2008 representing a 12.6% increase. This translates for a 'typical' house, with an assessed value of \$291,000, the property tax impact is \$79.97. The impact per \$100,000 of assessment is \$27.48 and the percentage change in the overall tax bill is 2.24%. In response to Committee's questions, staff advised at this time the overall impact on the local budget is estimated to be 17.2%.

A number of options to reduce the budget's increase were offered for Committee's consideration and a financial analysis of their individual impact was provided. Committee was presented with a current budget summary which included the base budget, the business cases and the options for reductions with the result being a 2.11% change to the overall property tax bill. It should be noted, however, approving some of the options to reduce a 2009 tax increase are one-time and therefore would result in an offsetting increase in the 2010 budget.

Committee asked a number of questions regarding the process employed to arrive at this point and questioned the eventual impact of the Regional budget. The disposition of the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund was briefly discussed, and it was noted there are ongoing discussions at the Regional level at this time. Committee reviewed the process and noted that individual members with questions and/or suggestions should discuss these items with staff prior to budget discussions continuing on April 6, 2009. Committee further directed the budget meeting on April 6 to commence at 4:00 p.m. It was noted the overview presentation is a staff proposed budget. Committee will undertake a detailed review of the budget material on April 6 and amend the budget as they find necessary.

RATES AND FEES – 2009

Committee of the Whole reviewed three individual departmental submissions for rates and fee adjustments for services provided by each department. Some committee members expressed concern with respect to the increases suggested for the Corporate Services Department and defeated the recommendation to endorse the fees. Council members were directed to discuss concerns with staff, and staff was directed to bring back a revised report for approval during budget deliberations on April 6.

The Public Works Advisory Committee discussed the proposed fees for services with the department and endorsed the staff recommendation to adopt the report.

The Planning Advisory Committee reviewed the fees for Planning and Building Services and deferred action on the staff recommendation to adopt the rates pending an invitation being extended to the Niagara Home Builders Association to make a presentation to Committee if they wish.

DRINKING WATER OPERATIONAL PLANS

The Public Works Advisory Committee endorsed a staff recommendation to receive and approve the 'Drinking Water Quality Management System Operational Plans' for the Niagara-on-the-Lake and Bevan Heights Drinking Water Systems and to forward the plans to the Ministry of Environment and Canadian General Standards Board. The purpose for developing the plans is they are a step in the process of the Town being licensed to operate and manage its drinking water systems. Prior to approving the plans, Committee received a presentation from Urban Environmental Management Inc. (UEM) consultants retained by the Town to assist in preparing the plans. The consultants reviewed the legislative requirements put in place since the events of Walkerton to ensure staff are properly trained and systems are appropriately maintained to provide safe drinking water. UEM noted the Town currently complies in large part with the regulations and this is a matter of formalizing the requirements and ensuring proper procedures are in place to comply with the legislation. It was also noted there are required audits for the Town and the fees for the audits will be included in current and future operating budgets. A financial plan for the water systems is to be developed for submission by July 1, 2010.

EMERGENCY ROAD REPAIRS

The Public Works Committee endorsed a staff recommendation to refer the matter of additional capital spending for emergency road repairs above the 'approved in principle' 2009 Capital Budget as an amendment and subject to finalization of the proposed 2009 Capital Budget. The Executive Budget Committee will review the submission, assess possible funding options, and report back.

The staff report is the result of direction from the March 9 Committee meeting where staff was asked about a break-up of Concession 6 Road. Staff reported they have noted a number of similar break-ups of various rural roads due to winter climate as well as other contributing factors. Public Work's staff have done some remedial work, however, it is only considered temporary. The staff report provided information respecting various roadway sections which are currently suffering similar degradation to Concession 6 and further provided alternative methods for repairs with associated estimated costs. The recommended treatment includes specific work to Line 4 Road between Concession 2 and Four Mile Creek Road, work on Concession 6 Road between Lines 6 and 7, and spot repairs to a number of other rural roads. Estimated cost for the work is \$265,000.

COUNCIL SUMMARY – MARCH 16, 2009

Lord Mayor Burroughs opened the meeting and commented on the recently held Mardi Gras fundraising event. He noted the community continues to support these types of events through donations to both the silent and live auctions, attendance, and by volunteering to assist in preparations for the event. He also noted the proceeds totaled approximately \$20,000 and will be directed to support the International Baccalaureate program for NDSS.

The Lord Mayor advised there are a number of critical financial issues being discussed at the Niagara Region, including the reduction of partnership funding from the province, which may directly affect the Town's partnership funding by approximately \$900,000 if eliminated. Region wide there will be a loss of approximately \$8.5 million, although the Region will realize \$10 million from the province in uploading. Discussions currently involve how to best allocate those funds, and the Lord Mayor noted if there is good news from the current situation, it is having the 12 local municipalities coming together to discuss the issue and thereby working together.

Lord Mayor Burroughs advised meetings have been initiated by his office with the Chair and Director of DSBN; however, communication has been coming through the media. The Lord Mayor noted his desire to discuss challenges directly with DSBN in an effort to jointly work through the problems and seek answers in a cooperative environment. He would welcome a call from DSBN to set up a meeting.

Council received a presentation from the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Classic Committee outlining the 2008 event and noting the excellent cooperation and support from a number of local volunteers and businesses who contributed to the success of the event. Mr. Ken Jensen from Meridian Credit Union, the tournament's major sponsor for 2008, was in attendance and presented a cheque for the proceeds from the event in the amount of \$19,076.26 to the Lord Mayor and Mr. Rob Weier of the Community Centre Fundraising Committee. The 2009 tournament is scheduled for October 1, 2009, at Whirlpool Golf Course with proceeds earmarked for the International Baccalaureate program. Hummel Properties will be the major sponsor of the event.

In review of the Planning Advisory Committee minutes, Council modified the recommendation regarding comments on the Regional Policy Plan amendment and directed the Agricultural Sub-Committee's comments to be held back until there is a response to the information provided at the public meeting held last week. It was also noted a delay would provide time for local stakeholder groups to comment on the content of the proposed policy amendment.

In review of the Corporate Services Committee recommendations, the tabled report regarding the new hospital funding (NOTL News, Issue # 167 & 168) was brought back to Council for discussion and debate. During discussion Council reviewed the history of the Niagara Hospital System presentations and the legal restrictions in place respecting the ability of the Town to levy charges for such services. Council noted the Town's levy for funding the hospital is equal to or less than other municipal partners and may in effect be less as their funding is stretched over a longer term. Council adopted the recommendations in staff report CS-09-005. Council also raised the matter of the inequities of assessment based costs for services being levied on the Town and warned of future challenges related to water/waste water costs, transit costs, etc. Under Notice of Motion a notice was presented for Council to consider the formation of an Unfair Taxation Committee to include individuals with knowledge of assessment and finance.

Also in consideration of the recommendations of the Corporate Services Committee Council modified the direction related to meeting with stakeholders regarding potential actions in tough economic times to ensure the inclusion of all local businesses in the discussions.

Council endorsed two previous Notice of Motion submissions. Firstly, a motion requesting the province to remove the mandatory Home Energy Audit requirement from the proposed Green Energy Act due to its potential negative impacts on residents and homeowners of heritage properties in these difficult economic times. Secondly, to forward a request to DSBN asking for an explanation why, out of the \$94 million which was allocated to the Places to Learn Fund, Niagara-on-the-Lake schools received zero funding.

Council directed correspondence from the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce regarding busing and the shuttle bus service to be referred to the Senior Management Team for review and consideration.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for March 30, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. Additional information on meeting schedules and deputation procedures may be obtained by contacting the Clerk's Department or by visiting the Town's web site at www.notl.org.

**Lord Mayor Gary Burroughs, Councillors: Jim Collard, Dennis Dick, Terry Flynn,
Andrea Kaiser, Jack Lowrey, Martin Mazza, Art Viola, Gary Zalepa**