

NOTL NEWS

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

Issue # 168 – March 10, 2009

REGIONAL POLICY – WINE COUNTRY POLICIES

The Planning Advisory Committee revisited a staff report requesting comments on a proposed amendment to the Regional Policy Plan for Wine Country Policies (NOTL News, Issue # 167). Committee set aside the staff report, supported the Town's Agricultural Sub-Committee's recommended changes to the policy, and directed staff to facilitate a meeting with local wine industry representatives in order to gather their input. Prior to discussing the proposed policy, Committee received input from Austin Kirkby of the Agricultural Sub-Committee who explained the Sub-Committee's concerns with certain aspects of the proposed policy and suggested modifications to the wording. Concern was also expressed with the lack of consultation with affected stakeholders.

During discussions on the policy, Committee expressed concern about the potential impact to the local wine industry and noted a number of local representatives who participated in the initial stages of the study's development were not consulted on the final product.

MISSISSAUGA BEACH STREET LIGHTING

The Public Works Advisory Committee endorsed a staff recommendation to accept a quote from StressCrete for the supply of standard concrete street light poles for the Mississauga Beach Area. In response to Committee's questions, staff advised the pole is a standard concrete pole with a post top light fixture, approximately 20 feet above street level. The final design selection was based on public discussions and other design considerations. Staff advised there was not a consensus on an upgraded design, possibly due to the potential increase in costs, and the standard design was recommended.

MARY STREET SANITARY SEWER

The Public Works Advisory Committee endorsed staff recommendations to confirm the current policy provisions and applicable requirements of the Municipal Act relating to the installation of sanitary sewers for properties on Mary Street between King and Regent Streets. In order to proceed with the work, the Town must be in receipt of a valid petition signed by the majority of the benefiting owners who represent greater than 50 percent of the value of the assessed properties and who are willing to fully finance the project.

The subject lands are currently serviced with connections across private property and the report (PW-09-014) is in response to a letter from the affected property owners. Estimated costs for the sewer are \$60,000. The staff report advised the financing should come from benefitting owners due to changes to the Municipal Act. As there are proposed watermain works being considered for Mary Street, a favourable tender price for the sanitary sewer could be realized by the owners.

COMMUNITY CENTRE UPDATE

The Parks and Recreation Committee modified the recommendations of the Community Centre Steering Committee and directed a letter to be forwarded to the DSBN requesting a response by April 15, 2009. The purpose of the letter is to inquire of the Board's interest in partnering with the Town to construct a community centre on the NDSS lands and to stress the partnership is in the context of retaining a viable high school. Committee discussed the importance of the DSBN commitment, the process to achieve a working agreement if the Board is committed to a partnership, and the need to proceed with the planning of the new community centre with some haste as the grants have been received. A draft letter will be prepared for Council's consideration and direction was provided for copies of the letter to be forwarded to the Minister of Education and the Premier.

NIAGARA HEALTH SYSTEM LEVY

The Corporate Services Advisory Committee reviewed in detail background information provided in a staff report related to a hospital levy for the new Niagara Health System hospital. The report was a result of questions raised at the March 2 Council meeting regarding other methods for collecting the levy, including a levy per house/per person, user charges, or a levy against residential properties only. Staff provided a detailed analysis relating to each question and provided background information on the legislative restrictions of the Municipal Act with respect to taxation. The report also reviewed the division of costs between the funding partners and the impact on the annual tax bill.

Committee discussed the implications of the levy on local ratepayers and the impact of the Regional levy based on assessment, similar to impacts on the Town for other Regional services.

Committee determined to receive the information provided by staff. Considerable discussion took place and Committee tabled the report pending the submission of further information regarding comparison costs with other partnering municipalities for the new hospital, information on the method of financing of a new hospital in Brampton, and input from the Town's solicitor.

CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE

The Corporate Services Advisory Committee endorsed a staff report (CS-09-007A) recommending a modification to the proposed 2009 – 2013 Capital Budget and Forecast to consider the Niagara Stone Road Multi-Purpose Trail project in 2010 should funding and design issues be resolved. Committee also adopted recommendations included in the direction provided by Committee during the budget presentation of February 23, 2009. (NOTL News, Issue # 167).

In a related matter, under New Business, the Director of Corporate Services updated Committee on the budget review process and the issues staff are facing in preparing the 2009 Current Budget while keeping in mind the philosophies established last fall. Committee noted this will be a challenging year for budget and suggested that options be provided for consideration; at which time Committee would become involved in establishing priorities.

Committee also endorsed a recommendation to facilitate a meeting with business leaders of the community, including the Chamber of Commerce, various businesses, growers, winery representatives, and other local stakeholders in an effort to identify possible actionable items in which the Town may assist in dealing with difficult economic times.

COUNCIL SUMMARY – MARCH 2, 2009

Lord Mayor Gary Burroughs opened the meeting and reminded those present that March is Easter Seals month. He noted earlier in the day he attended a citizenship ceremony at the NOTL Public Library where 30 new Canadians were sworn in, and remarked it is a ceremony which raises the emotions of being a Canadian. Lord Mayor Burroughs congratulated organizers of the recent Cuvee event held at Casino Niagara in Niagara Falls. He noted locally produced wines received a number of awards for their quality, and the event is a celebration of wine in the community and highlights its impact on the local economy. The Lord Mayor announced the Olympic Torch will be in Town on December 20, 2009, and further details of the event will be published as they become available.

Mr. Scott Tipping, Director of Corporate Services, made a 2009 – 2013 Capital Budget and Forecast Overview presentation to Council. The Director's presentation was essentially a repeat of the overview given at the Committee of the Whole on February 23, 2009, (NOTL News, Issue # 167, February 24, 2009). The presentation reviewed important elements of the Capital Budget, including departmental capital project costs; financing strategies and the role of development charges; flexible capital financing strategies to provide flexibility to accommodate financing while stabilizing the impact on tax rate changes; analysis of reserve funds; consolidation of certain reserves and the future funding of reserves. Council posed a number of questions relating to the estimated project costs and the proposed financing strategies. Council concluded with support of the staff recommendations, including support in principle for a 2009 Capital Budget; for the 2009 Capital Projects to proceed in advance of final budget approval provided spending does not exceed 50 percent of Capital Budget funding; and for the 2009 –2013 Proposed Capital Budget and Forecast to be forwarded to the March 9 COTW meeting for final review and approval. The Director further noted changes to the budget process dates being as follows: March 23 COTW meeting to include the 2009 Current Budget overview presentation; April 6 COTW meeting to review, amend and approve the proposed 2009 Current Budget; and April 20 Council meeting to provide final approval for both Current and Capital Budgets.

In review of the Corporate Services Advisory Committee recommendations, Council discussed the potential financial impacts of the recommendations related to the Niagara Health System, proposed hospital funding, and determined to defer the recommendations for further review.

The balance of the recommendations of the Committee of the Whole were adopted without change.

The potential removal of future provincial partnership funding in the amount of approximately \$800,000 was also discussed and how this would affect future budgets. It was noted staff will be considering the matter as part of the Current Budget review process.

In addition, pursuant to Notice of Motion, the matter of the provinces Green Energy Act and its potential effects on the sale of older homes, particularly in light of the Town's older housing stock, was raised and information from other municipalities may be pursued as well as an analysis and report from staff.

Furthermore, discussion took place requesting the District School Board of Niagara to supply the Town with a letter explaining why the community schools are not receiving any of the 94 million received by the school board.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for March 16, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. Additional information on meeting schedules and deputation procedures may be obtained by contacting the Clerk's Department or visiting the Town's website 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**