

NEW MERRICKVILLE-WOLFORD COUNCIL HOLDS FIRST MEETING

By Hilary Thomson - December 19, 2018

The new council of Merrickville-Wolford held their first meeting on Monday, December 10. It was a relatively light meeting in terms of agenda items, but it definitely set the tone for the how council will be working moving forward.

One of the agenda items was the approval of the cost of OPP services for 2019. Although council has little to no control over the amount the municipality has to pay for policing services, Councillor Timothy Molloy refused to approve the OPP cost, as Council didn't have an overall budget for the Village on the table. The bylaw approving the cost of OPP services was still passed, however Councillor Molloy raised his hand to make sure everyone knew he was clearly opposed. "To not be able to see a budget in front of us is a little bit strange," he said.

Council received a letter from MPP Steve Clark asking them to participate in informing their residents of the province's Housing Supply Action Plan. The province's goal is to gather information on how to increase the supply and mix of housing, speed up development timelines, and drive down costs. As part of the consultation process, they are undertaking a fundamental review of all aspects of the development approvals process as it relates to building more houses people can afford, and attracting and retaining new business investments. Councillor Molloy mentioned that this might be a good opportunity to discuss bringing natural gas to the north side of the river in Merrickville. He sees this as a great opportunity to attract housing and new businesses to the municipality.

Council also passed the group benefits plan for municipal staff at the meeting. Councillor Bob Foster asked Treasurer Kirsten Rahm how long the municipality had been with the current supplier of this service, and whether their insurance broker was satisfied with the plan as presented. Kirsten assured council that the broker was happy with the group benefits package and that there was a review scheduled for 2019.

The possibility of having Cannabis outlets in Merrickville-Wolford was discussed briefly, with council agreeing with CAO Doug Robertson's report that more public input is needed before they pass a resolution to allow, or ban, the shops in the Municipality. Doug says there is a public meeting scheduled for January 7, 2019 to allow the residents of Merrickville-Wolford to give their input on whether or not they want pot shops in the municipality.

"It is very beneficial to have input, one way or another," said Mayor Doug Struthers at the meeting. Council will have to make a decision at their first meeting of the new year to meet the deadline to opt in or out by January 22, 2019. If council does not meet the deadline, cannabis stores will be allowed in the municipality by default.

Finally, council discussed the decision of the previous council to extend the committees of council for three months past their original end-date, to aid in continuity after the election. Mayor Doug Struthers seemed to think this was beneficial. "I don't see a problem with the extension," he said at the meeting. "It will give us time to review mandates, expectations, and gauge interest."

Councillor Michael Cameron pointed out that many committees had not met for quite some time, and he thought it was strange to extend committees that were already "dead in the water." His recommendation was that they end all committees and start fresh. The problem with this was that the Planning Advisory Committee is still deep into the municipality's Official Plan review, and disbanding them at this point would be detrimental to the process. "All committees feel that what they are doing is important," Councillor Bob Foster pointed out. "It's smart for committees to be extended. It's been done, and it's not a bad idea."

In the end, it was decided that the extension of the committees of council would stand, and that a member of council would be asked to attend any meetings to cover their bases until a council liaison can be appointed. There will be the opportunity for new members of the public to sit on the committees starting at the end of February 2018. Volunteer forms are available on the municipality's website.

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