



Swearing In - Christine Blair - Mayor



Swearing In - Laurie Sandeson - District 2



Swearing In - Lisa Patton - District 8



Swearing In - Marie Benoit - District 9



Swearing In - Tim Johnson - District 5

## Council Resumes “In-Person” Meetings

By Maurice Rees

Colchester council is not alone resuming “in-person” meetings. The decision to go back to council chambers was made at the October 29th “swearing in” meeting held at the Truro Legion. Surrounding municipalities of East Hants, County of Pictou and Town of Pictou recently decided to abandon Zoom and other electronic platforms for meetings and resume “in-person” versions.

Cumberland and Town of Amherst will continue with Zoom and other platforms for the foreseeable future.

Colchester Municipal office has released the following information relating to continuance of meetings during the pandemic:

The Municipality is following all public health guidelines as issued by the Province.

In-person attendance for Council Meetings will involve members of Council and three

staff members only. Other staff, media and public may only attend by virtual means (Zoom) at this time. (Anyone who is feeling unwell or experiencing worsening health symptoms; anyone having COVID-19 related symptoms 48 hours prior to a meeting; anyone who has travelled outside of Atlantic Canada in the past 14 days; anyone who has had close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19; and anyone who is waiting for results from a COVID-19 test are required to self-identify and will not be permitted to attend in-person meetings).

Masks will be mandatory for all attending in-person meetings until seated, physically distanced by 6ft/2m.

Hand sanitizer will be available to all in attendance.

A contact tracing list will be maintained for each meeting.

The statement continued: If

an in-person meeting involving the public is required (in an instance when more extensive public engagement is needed) additional measures will be taken. In these cases the Municipality will secure a larger venue, adhere to COVID-19 gathering limits and capacity restrictions for the venue (maximum 50% capacity), and all attendees will be required to wear a non medical mask at all times (even when seated, physically distanced 6ft/2m apart).

Councillors and staff are required to self-identify and are not to attend meetings if feeling unwell or experiencing worsening health symptoms; if having COVID-19 related symptoms 48 hours prior to a meeting; if travelled outside of Atlantic Canada in the past 14 days; if had close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19; and if waiting for results from a COVID-19.

At meetings where mem-

bers of the public are not physically present councillors and staff will be required to where non-medical masks until seated, physically distanced 6ft/2m apart. When seated they will not be required to wear their masks.

All Councillors have the option to participate virtually via Zoom if they are not comfortable meeting in-person.

With regard to the layout for meetings in council chambers, the municipality has taken additional steps by purchasing additional tables as an extension of the Council table. Only 5 members are seated at the original horse-shoe table, at least six feet apart, and remaining Council members are seated at the additional tables, which, are also at least 6 feet apart. All activities are part of council’s measures to maintain appropriate physical distancing.

Details of how adjoining municipalities are contained in a separate story, below.

## Council Meetings in Adjoining Municipalities

By Maurice Rees

The Shoreline Journal contacted Chief Administrative Officers (CAO) in Municipalities of East Hants, Cumberland, Pictou, and Towns of Amherst and Pictou. Details of their responses are outlined below.

Because this writer has been attending Cumberland Council meetings on Zoom since March, it can be noted, council has decided to continue Zoom and other electronic platforms for all meeting for the foreseeable future. (Cumberland’s swearing in meeting of the new council was held in Springhill under strict mask and distancing requirements as the end of October).

A work plan document presented to Cumberland Council at its November 18th meeting stated: “The COVID 19 Global Pandemic resulted in significant change and continues to result in change in the way in which Municipalities govern, manage and provide municipal services. The health and safety of our residents, Council and staff is the most important challenge in a global pandemic.

In adjoining Municipality of East Hants, council had used Zoom and other electronic platforms from March until their new council swearing in meeting on October 28th. Jody MacArthur, communications office told the Shoreline, chambers can hold approximately 43 people, which provides for 20 seats for the public in addition to council and staff in attendance; and plexi-glass barriers separate staff from council and dividers are in place to separate councillors from each other.

Amherst, CAO, Greg Herrett replied to this writer stating: “Amherst has used the Zoom platform for all council and committee meetings since late March. We have been testing the technology that would allow us to return to some form of in person meetings. We believe we now have the capability to hold hybrid meetings where there would be a limited number (including and very limited number of members of the public) physically in our chamber and any staff or council member who wished or was required to participate remotely could do so. All this while still being able to have everyone interact seam-

lessly AND provide a public stream via either YouTube or using or normal provided that allows us to stream and archive directly on our website.

So we’ve been testing that and we are ready to try a hybrid meeting. However the recent spike has prompted us to continue for now with zoom only.

In terms of how long this will continue, it depends on the virus. That said, we’ve come to realize that there is an application for continuing to use zoom for some types of meetings even after the pandemic subsides. So we’ll be pursuing that a bit.

Staff have been accessing

our meetings along side council as zoom participants. Members of the public who have presented to council have also come in as participants. Other than that the public has consumed our stream on YouTube”.

Brian Cullen, Municipality of County of Pictou replied: Since the CoVid pandemic invaded us in March, the county has held meetings via MS Teams. During the third week of November, council held their first in-person meeting. Most staff are joined through MSTeams and councilors have the option to join remotely as well. He added, “We will continue to operate in both an in-person sessions and virtual for

the foreseeable future and public and staff have participated through virtual formats”.

Perhaps the Town of Pictou enjoyed their best of both worlds according to Dan Troke, CAO. Initially in March the Town of Pictou went virtual for committee of council and council meetings. As the province provided new protocols etc we were able to meet in person using the Decoste Centre for these meetings and new council briefings”. He added, “We anticipate this will continue for the next number of months due to Covid 19. All attendees are screened for CoVid-19 and must pre register before attending.

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