



Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting

Place: Council Chambers, Recorded locally via Zoom
Date: Wednesday, May 1, 2024
Presiding Officer: Paul Jones
Councillors Present: Deputy Mayor Arnold MacDonald, and Josephine MacDonald.
Regrets: Chrystal McNutt

A quorum was present throughout the meeting.

Staff present: CAO – Linda Cloney, Manager of Finance – Ruthann Brookins, and Administrative Assistant – Stan McDougall (recording secretary).

Presenters: *Nil*

1. Call to Order

At 4:59 PM Councillor Jones called the meeting to order as chair for tonight's meeting, welcoming all who were in attendance and acknowledging chair Councillor McNutt sent her regrets.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Deputy Mayor MacDonald and seconded by Josephine MacDonald to approve the May 1, 2024, agenda as presented.

Motion Carried

3. Approval of Previous Minutes

3.1 Audit Committee Meeting – February 26, 2024

Approved by:



Councillor Jones, Chair, on May 1, 2024

4. New Business

4.1 Draft Financial Budget 2024/2025, verbal presentation by Manager of Finance, Ruthann Brookins

The Manager of Finance, Ruthann Brookins, presented the draft 2024/2025 Financial Budget to the Audit Committee, which included Water Operating, General Operating, and Capital Budgets.

The Manager of Finance discussed that last year's Nova Scotia Department of Finance Statistics Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase of 4% was used as a general increase percentage in the overall 2024/2025 budget.

Generally, a plan to budget yearly amounts towards repairs and maintenance of Town of Oxford-owned buildings was discussed. The Audit Committee discussed and recommended that the Building Committee consider site visits yearly to each Oxford-owned building to assess and recommend repairs, and upgrades, and provide input toward the yearly budgeted amount for each building for subsequent budget years.

In the Water Operating Budget, sales of services for water increased due to new house sales and new account creation fees. Revenue from fees also included water connection and disconnection.

It was discussed that upon completion of the prioritized installation of new water meters for new residential, and existing defective water meters, a new UARB rate review will be requested.

New residential developments will help increase revenues in the Water Operating budget once the installation of new meters is completed. Currently, new residential units are being charged a flat-water rate.

Water consumption by Oxford Frozen Foods has decreased and the Department of Transportation is hauling water to create brine this coming winter season resulting in a decrease in revenues in the Water Operating budget this year.

The base rate for water for April 1, 2024, as outlined by the last UARB Water Rate Review has gone down, and consumption rates have gone up. This has further caused revenues to go down on broken meter accounts which have been estimated twice and are now only being charged the base rate until the water meter can be replaced.

Several mandated requirements for water, including a level 2 ORDC Water qualified person for water approvals have also been factored into the new Water Operating budget.

In the General Operating budget, it was discussed that Tax Revenues were up 6.64%.

It was discussed that prices for registrations for sports and pets, as well as Capitol Theatre rentals should be adjusted at least to reflect CPI.

Fire Protection Services from the County would increase this year only by CPI.

In staff wages, due to the signed CUPE contract negotiation; all staff should be considered for similar wage increases. An increase to the Public Works Supervisor salary was also discussed as well as an increase to Council honorariums as previously considered. This would help align Council wages to other comparable-sized Nova Scotia communities and aid in attracting Councillors in this year's upcoming election. Further, discussion was had on training for new Councillors and should also be considered. The Audit Committee agreed through consensus that the rates negotiated in the recent CUPE contract negotiation should be extended to all staff and an increase to the Public Works Supervisor salary was also agreed. The Council Honorariums and training for new Councillors were agreed to be included in the budget by reduction of the budget contingency amount.

A discussion to include dental in the Town of Oxford's health care plan was discussed. The recommendation from the Audit Committee was to table this until the next CUPE contract negotiations.

An additional employee for the Public Works Department was discussed. The option for either a full-time or part-time employee was tabled. The part-time employee would work the three days at the transfer station with the current employee filling this role becoming full-time Public Works. The consensus from the Audit Committee was to not acquire a full or part-time additional employee for Public Works. Doing so would require a substantial increase in residential and commercial tax rates.

It was the consensus of the Audit Committee to contribute toward the AMANS Spring Conference this year because it is hosted in Cumberland County this year.

It was noted that the Comfort Centre at the Oxford Firehall has been fully funded and implemented.

In discussing the OREC bursary increase, the consensus of the Audit Committee was given to increase the OREC bursary.

A mandated expense for wastewater has been noted in this year's budget for an ORDC member who is required for a minimum of a 4-month period.

It was also recommended to the Audit Committee to budget for sewer flushing and sewer maintenance services with money added to allow for First On Site restoration services if required in this year's budget. The Audit Committee agreed through consensus. A future potential increase in sewer rates was also discussed with the committee.

It was discussed with the Audit Committee that debentures would be required for the Public Works building and a new fire truck for the Oxford Fire Department. It was also noted that the interest rate for a debenture is now higher than it was in previous years.

The transfer station costs would increase this year due to mandated monitoring plans from Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change. Costs for Project Management and Contingency Plan would have to be included in this year's budget.

It was noted that the Fero contract for garbage and recycling services could be renewed anytime, and the Audit Committee agreed that Fero should be requested to improve their services. The Audit Committee also agreed through consensus not to include the budget amount for additional bins at the transfer station.

Upgraded lighting for the Oxford Medical Centre has been included in this year's budget and additional repairs, maintenance, and accessibility upgrades were noted. The funds for these improvements may have to come from the contingency unless grants could be obtained.

It was also noted that this year the province has agreed to absorb the Deficit Regional Housing Authority and Corrections amounts that were payable by the Town of Oxford in 2024.

The Audit Committee discussed the re-instatement of the Cumberland Business Connector and the consensus of the committee was to not re-instate the Cumberland Business Connector.

In Fields and Libraries, the consensus from the Audit Committee was to include in the budget the amount to install new flag poles so the Town can re-install and fly the Town and provincial flags.

The Audit Committee discussed that grants for trees and trails should be explored and applied for this year, if available.

For the Capital Budget, the Manager of Finance discussed with the Audit Committee that staff is working to obtain quotes for the heating and cooling system upgrades for the Town Hall and Theatre and are currently awaiting one quote to come back which would provide several options for heating and cooling for both buildings.

Quotes were also coming in for pavement for sidewalks and several potential projects in the Town of Oxford including Foundry Street. An RFP for Foundry Street was posted on April 30, 2024. It was discussed that the Town of Oxford would pay 23% toward the cost of Foundry Street if an accepted RFP and budget were approved. The rest of the funding would

come from the Community Building Fund (formally known as the Gas Tax) and Grants. It was agreed through consensus that the current paving budget amount be left in for this year's budget. The amount and scope of work are yet to be determined pending quotes coming in.

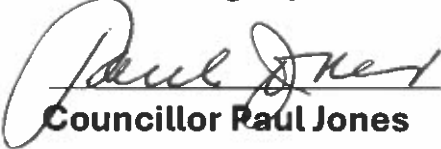
The Public Works heating system and a budgeted amount were discussed. If the current wood stove is certified, the heating system may not be required. It would not be determined until the wood stove is inspected.

Moved by Joesphine MacDonald and seconded by Deputy Mayor MacDonald that the Audit Committee recommends approving the draft 2024-25 Water Operating, General Operating and Capital budgets to Council, as amended.


Motion Carried

5. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:14 PM



Councillor Paul Jones



Stan McDougall, Admin Assistant

05-28-2024

Date Approved