



WARDEN'S 2020-21 BUDGET ADDRESS

June 1, 2020



**Municipality of the District of Shelburne
2020 – 2021 WARDEN'S BUDGET ADDRESS
Monday, June 1, 2020**

As we enter into the end of our four-year mandate, I am pleased to outline the continued plans and priorities that the 51st Council of Municipality of the District of Shelburne will undertake in the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Since 2016, we have worked diligently to ensure that strategic decisions have been made to positively impact the growth and wellbeing of our Municipality.

This year, Council has identified the following four key priorities:

- 1) Access to high speed internet;
- 2) Investment in health care;
- 3) New municipal building; and
- 4) Accessibility

Access to High Speed Internet

In partnership with Bell Canada and Develop Nova Scotia, the Municipality is in the process of bringing the best high-speed internet (fibre to the home) available in Canada to its residents and businesses. This \$5.1 million project is expected to be completed before the end of the fiscal year. The Municipality has invested \$1.14 million for this project.

The project aimed to provide high-speed internet service to at least 95% of our rural household. In recent discussions with Bell Canada, we are now anticipating that we will exceed that number, once the phases are completed. We are continuing to work to provide access to the remaining residents and businesses that were not included in the current project.

Investment in Health Care

Quality health care for our residents has been and continues to be one of Council's top priorities. The Municipality continues to invest in health care by providing financial support for the Roseway Hospital Student Sponsorship Program, housing allowances, locum funding, grant monies to the Chronic Illness Committee, as well as recruitment efforts, including the creation of two recruitment videos for doctors and nurse practitioners (NPs). Late last year, we were approached by the Roseway Hospital Charitable Foundation to assist with the purchase of a new x-ray

machine and have subsequently approved funding the total request of \$53,000 once the equipment is purchased. In this year's budget, another \$60,000 has been allocated towards health care.

Emergency departments around the Province continue to experience frequent closures, with last year being one of the worst years for ER closures at Roseway Hospital. This has put an immense strain on those requiring emergency care, often having to travel over an hour to get that care. The Municipality has been persistent in its efforts to meet with our Health & Wellness Minister to discuss these closures and potential solutions as well as other health care issues, including advocating for changes to the Hospital Act to allow NPs to admit patients to the hospital. A meeting was planned in April, 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19. We have been back in touch with the Minister's office and we are hopeful that a meeting will take place in the near future.

I would like to remind anyone who does not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner and wants to be considered for the Shelburne Family Practice that they must be on the Need a Family Practice provincial registry.

To register with the Need a Family Practice provincial registry, call 811 or visit:

<https://needafamilypractice.nshealth.ca>.

New Municipal Building

Work continues on our plans for a new, modern municipal building. Our goal was to create a tri-government complex where our residents and the public could access municipal, provincial, and federal services. We are currently working with the federal government to secure space in our new building; however, we have been advised by the provincial government that they wish for their offices to remain at the current location. We are working with the Province to secure a new lease agreement. We recognize that maintaining these services and jobs are extremely important to the community.

Once the agreements are in place with the federal government, we will resume work with the architect on the conceptual design of the building. Opportunities will be provided to the public to review the designs once completed.

Accessibility

In 2017, the Accessibility Act was passed and proclaimed in Nova Scotia, demonstrating a commitment to a more equitable and barrier-free province. It also recognized accessibility as a human right and has set a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Almost 1 in 5 Nova Scotians over the age of 15 identify as having a disability and it is anticipated that this number will grow as our population ages.

An Accessibility Committee will be formed for Eastern Shelburne County and the Municipality will examine ways in which it can make its infrastructure and the community as a whole more accessible. Currently, there is a Request for Proposals (RFP) for capital upgrades to increase accessibility at Welkum Park, with work to be completed by October 31, 2020. The Municipality's new municipal building will also meet accessible standards and is one of the reasons why a new municipal building has been identified as one of Council's strategic priorities.

Council recognizes that in order to achieve our priorities, we will need to maintain and further develop strong partnerships.

Other Noteworthy Items

Tax Exemption – Community Organizations & Low Income

The Municipality is fortunate to have so many citizens who volunteer with dozens of community organizations from arts and culture, to sports and recreation, service clubs, and various other groups. To support their continuing efforts, I am pleased to acknowledge that this budget includes \$30,202 in property tax exemptions to these organizations. This is a small way that our Municipality continues to support our volunteers and to recognize their significant efforts in our community.

We know these are challenging times for some of our residents in paying their property taxes. Council has recently increased the low income tax exemption thresholds and has increased the amount allocated in the budget from \$25,000 to \$50,000. The program was also amended so that those with total household incomes of \$35,000 or less are eligible for a tax exemption of up to \$50; those with total household incomes of \$30,000 or less are eligible for up to \$150; those with total household incomes of \$25,000 or less are eligible for up to \$300, and those with total household incomes of \$20,000 or less are eligible for up to \$600.

These are some of the most generous tax exemptions in Nova Scotia and we are very pleased to be able to provide this support to our most vulnerable population.

Economic Development

Council understands that economic development at the municipal level is vital to the growth, accessibility, stability, and strength of the Municipality. From investments in access to high speed internet, trails and bridges, marine innovation, tourism and other important initiatives, the Municipality continues to invest in organizations and initiatives that it feels positively promotes the area as well as works towards ensuring a prosperous tomorrow. These also include partnerships with other municipalities and stakeholders. Some of these investments include the following:

- Shelburne Marine Terminal Upgrades – \$143,000 in total; in this year’s budget \$92,950
- Economic Development and Tourism (i.e. trails, marketing)- \$154,911
- Integrated Community Sustainability Plan - \$56,150
- Sou’West Nova Transit - \$10,000
- Shelburne County Senior Safety Services - \$11,073
- Shelburne Curling Centre - \$10,000
- Shelburne County Arena - \$58,316
- Little People’s Place - \$20,000
- Shelburne Historical Society - \$10,000
- Osprey Arts Centre - \$8,000
- Sandy Point Lighthouse - \$8,961

- Grants to Organizations Program - \$63,250 (for applications that have a cap of \$5,000 for operating and \$2,500 for capital)

These initiatives include marketing and promoting our community as an attractive area to live, work and thrive not only to tourists, but for businesses and residents to our area. We are open for business!

Council has also invested to work in partnership with the Atlantic Infrastructure Management Network Cohort Group and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to develop an asset management plan. This will enable the Municipality to develop capital plans and investments for today and the future.

Municipal Relations

Over the past year, Council has had conversations with the two neighboring towns, Shelburne and Lockeport, concerning the processes for unification, consolidation and dissolution. The Municipality specifically stated we would consider further discussions, only if the Province agreed to come and present information on significant funding they would provide to aid with current and future infrastructure costs. This remains our position. Our staff will continue to gather information and to reach out to other municipal units who have gone through the unification, consolidation, or dissolution process. This information will be extremely important in assisting us in any future discussions and decisions, which will have a significant impact on our residents.

2020-21 Budget

The Municipality's 2020-21 budget is set at \$8,255,571, as well a capital budget of \$536,000.

Council will maintain the current residential and resource tax rate of \$1.26 per \$100 of assessment and current commercial tax rate of \$1.82 per \$100 of assessment. One cent of residential and resource generates \$38,505; one cent commercial generates \$3,300.

Council approved two fire area rate; for municipal residents serviced by the Town of Shelburne, 1.7 cents per \$100 of assessment for a one-year term and for those municipal residents serviced by the Town of Lockeport, 3.6 cents per \$100 of assessment for a 10 year term.

Council will continue to appropriately fund reserves with \$303,079 being budgeted for the capital reserve and \$72,249 for the operating reserve.

At the end of fiscal 2019-20, the Municipality's total reserves is anticipated to be approximately \$6,824,034. This amount is higher than anticipated largely in part due to the internet project being delayed. These reserves are estimates only as our final audited statements will not be completed for the 2019-20 fiscal year until July, 2020. Once all projects are completed for this fiscal year, reserves are estimated to be \$5,817,250.

This budget ensures that we will continue to maintain the services our residents and businesses have come to expect while strategically investing in our community within our fiscal resources.

Our strong relationships with neighbouring municipalities and others have assisted us in becoming more efficient and effective through sharing of resources, where possible. We will continue to be a positive proponent of such arrangements where our residents will see a clear benefit in doing so.

COVID-19

Our lives have changed dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dealing with uncertainty can be challenging under regular circumstances. Adding a pandemic into the mix has left many of us feeling quite overwhelmed. Because of the Municipality's excellent financial position, we are able to continue to provide our services at the same level prior to COVID-19 as well as enhance and introduce new programs that will aid our residents and businesses that have been adversely affected. These include the following:

- Suspended interest on payments from March 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020
- Delayed sending out the tax bill for one month with the new due date being July 31, 2020
- Decreased the interest charged on tax bills from 14% to 10%
- *Developed an Emergency Fund for Community Groups - \$15,000 has been allocated with a maximum of \$500

- *Developed a Tax Financing Program for those financially impacted by COVID-19 – Qualifying taxpayers will be able to pay their 2020-21 taxes over a 12-month period at an interest rate of 1.35%

* For additional information on these programs, please visit the municipal website at www.municipalityofshelburne.ca.

Although there are many financial uncertainties and challenges due to COVID-19, Council understood there could be challenges physically, mentally and socially for our residents as well and felt that it was very important to bring the community together during this time and spread positivity. This was done through the Community Heroes initiative that was launched on March 30, 2020. The goal was to show appreciation, highlight the positive things people were doing and support local businesses. Over 100 people (including groups) were recognized and local prizes awarded through draws. It also sparked interest for similar initiatives in the Town of Yarmouth, Municipality of Clare and Municipality of Lunenburg. Council erected a “Thank you to Our Heroes” banner in front of the Municipal building as well to thank all essential workers for keeping our community safe.

We also wanted to recognize our graduating students from Shelburne and Lockeport Regional High Schools who will not have the opportunity to walk across the stage to receive their high school diploma. The Municipality is contributing \$1,000 to assist the schools and parent groups who are working so diligently to help ensure all our grads have a memorable graduating year. Congratulations grads of 2020! Be fearless. Be kind. Be yourself.

As the future impacts of COVID-19 become known, Council will continue to monitor and be responsive to the needs of our community now and in the future.

As I conclude my remarks, I must recognize Municipal staff for going above and beyond in ensuring that programs and services are provided efficiently and effectively, and that we as Council have timely and accurate information to make the best decisions for our residents. On behalf of Council, thank you. We appreciate everything you do.

I would also like to thank my fellow Council members. We worked hard together and accomplished many worthwhile projects for our citizens. In a few months, we will be leaving the

Municipality in a sound, financial position with a positive, sustainable future. I wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

And to the residents of the Municipality of the District of Shelburne, it's difficult to believe how quickly time has passed. Thank you for giving me the privilege and honour of representing you. I am proud of what has been achieved through the desire to make a positive difference in the Municipality.

Warden Penny Smith