

Press Release



Town of Shelburne Press Release

January 23, 2020

To Town and Area Residents and Businesses,

It became clear during our budget deliberations last year that the writing was on the wall in terms of our ability to maintain service levels for the Town and that we would be required to look to regional solutions going forward. In the spring of 2019, the Towns of Shelburne and Lockeport as well as the Municipality of the District of Shelburne initiated a series of conversations to determine whether consolidation, based on the Windsor-West Hants model, could occur in Eastern Shelburne County. Consolidation is a unification process which is facilitated under a special act of the Province in which all municipal units enter into agreement that a shared future is in the best interests of the region. The consolidation process has the benefit of allowing the municipal units decide their terms and transition process rather than turning the control over to an outside body.

While we have had several smaller meetings since last spring, with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing (DMAH) in attendance, we have not been successful in bringing the District Council into full conversation with all three Councils about a collective future. Further, last week the District Council decided to opt out of any further discussions on consolidation unless the Province was willing to commit to funding to assist in the renewal of Town of Shelburne infrastructure. We have been told consistently by the Province that they are not in a position to contribute unspecified funds to Town infrastructure, however the potential to discuss specific assets and services remains available.

This leaves our Council in a position to decide between dissolution and significant cuts in service. As we are projecting operating deficits for the foreseeable future, service cuts and/or tax increases will become an annual event as we are required by the Province to submit a balanced budget. Under dissolution, the Town of Shelburne would submit an application to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board who would then oversee the process of public hearings and decide whether there is merit in the application. If the application goes forward, a Transition Committee would be established to make decisions for all municipal units during the transition period.

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We would prefer that there be more local control over any future outcome for the region, and in this sense the consolidation process is better suited than is the dissolution process.

Towns across the province struggle to maintain expected levels of services with funding based primarily on property tax revenue. In areas of the province where property assessment growth remains flat, costs of services will continue to outpace our revenue and the pressure to regionalize will continue. The imposition of mandatory service standards, such as the recent federal requirement regarding wastewater system effluent, has further accelerated the financial challenges of small towns, particularly when any project overruns are borne by the Towns. The Town of Shelburne has started an asset management program to address and better manage the aging infrastructure we have inherited from both the federal and provincial governments in the marine terminal and water utility, however this program is in its infancy and policies aimed at addressing infrastructure deficits have only recently been implemented. We recognize that we need regional support to maintain the level of services that keep this area viable.

We have heard in recent weeks from the municipal units in Yarmouth County and with Cape Breton Regional Municipality on their various takes on municipal challenges and realities. We will continue to move for constructive dialogue between the units for the best possible outcome for regional residents.