

Pontiac Council - emergency fund and legal action against offensive commenter

Mo Laidlaw

The regular meeting of Pontiac municipal council was held on 10 November 2020 at 7 pm, by teleconference.

Public input

Floods and other emergencies

Camille Beaufort and two other residents asked what is planned for municipal roads that are affected by floods. Mayor Joanne Labadie replied that at the moment there are no funds. Québec is planning to invest \$445 million province-wide in flood zones, but only after the flood map is completed, expected this winter. Beaufort also asked about planning for a possible flood in spring 2021. She felt it had been “fend for yourself” in spring 2020, during the pandemic. Labadie said that sand and bags had been delivered to areas identified by the Ministry of Public Security, (MSP), but employees and volunteers were unable to help according to public health guidelines. Emergency housing was also a problematic issue. She has met with the minister and MSP will give the municipality authority to make decisions in the event of a flood.

Council passed a resolution to set up a reserve fund of \$250,000 for all emergencies, to provide instant funds instead of having to wait for money from Municipal Affairs. The municipality has not yet received promised funds from MAMH to compensate for loss of revenue and additional costs linked to the pandemic.

Another reserve fund is set up for infrastructure, to allow major work to be done without having to pass borrowing bylaws and pay interest. The annual gas tax (TECQ) and other funds that council deems necessary will be transferred into this allocated surplus fund.

Anonymous presence on social media

Laura, a concerned resident, said the bullying and intimidation must be addressed. “It is a menace to employees, who have been videotaped and harassed. Aggressive messages have sometimes encouraged others, and produced a mob mentality. Those who join in should also be accountable.” Sheila McCrindle said, “Why spend money on this person. I’ve engaged with Mick Mars. We don’t need to spend money.” Laura replied that it’s easy to say “ignore” unless you’ve been attacked. Another resident said, “It’s important to do something about the fake name.” Diane Lacasse, who was unable to join the meeting, called councillor McDonald who relayed her question: “How much money will be spent on the Mick Mars episode?” Labadie replied that the cost would be comparable to that in Cantley, \$9,000 - which was recovered from “anon”, along with an apology.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/cantley-quebec-facebook-troll-defamation-1.5777157>

Council passed a resolution for the municipal lawyers to obtain a disclosure order, to find the author(s) of the derogatory and offensive comments and attacks on the municipality, employees and council. “The municipality has the responsibility to offer a safe work environment, free from harassment.” Councillors Draper-Maxsom and McDonald voted against, the former stating that not enough other options had been tried.

Livestock inventory

Blake Draper, the local UPA (farmers’ union) representative asked why the Urbanism department is surveying livestock farms. This is to make sure that building permits are not given for lots closer to livestock farms than bylaws allow, to safeguard farm activities. Agriculture is the largest industry in Pontiac, considered important, and the MRC (des Collines) is hiring an agronomist. Draper also

asked about problems with ditches that don't carry water away. Labadie said the first priority has been culverts, with 100 replaced since 2017. Ditches will be the focus in 2021.

Joan Belsher asked if the present mayor and councillors would run in next year's election. Councillors Draper-Maxsom, Howard and Patrie, said No, the others said they hadn't decided yet. Mayor Labadie said "there is a lot of work to be done".

Finally the other items on the agenda were addressed:

NCC evaluations

The NCC is contesting the increased evaluation of its properties (done by the MRC). Last year NCC refused to pay the increased taxes of its properties in Chelsea. In Pontiac NCC owns Gatineau Park, for which it pays an amount in lieu of taxes, as well as properties such as the Prime Minister's country residence, Harrington Lake, which recently underwent \$8.6 million of renovations, along with the guest house, \$2.5 million. Council agreed to give Me Paul Wayland of DHC Avocats the mandate to represent the municipality in this dispute. He already represents Chelsea and Gatineau in this.

Bronson-Bryant washout

The culvert and road was destroyed during the 2019 floods (sadly with loss of life). The municipality may be able to get a grant from MSP to repair the road. The alternative is to construct permanent dead-ends at each side. MSP requires engineering plans and drawings, a hydrological study and costs before confirming its contribution. Public works is given the mandate to obtain these.

Fire department expenses approved:

"Jaws of Life" to replace obsolete equipment, \$32,272 plus tax, from 1200 Degree.
An air exchanger and carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide detectors (to detect vehicle exhaust emissions) for Breckenridge fire station, from Modern Niagara, for \$11,746 plus tax.
A radio repeater to be installed at Breckenridge fire station as there are some radio dead spots in the area, from Group CLR for \$9,250 plus tax.

Expenses approved:

\$57,258.70 for lamp posts and bases for the Luskville ballpark lighting from Pro-Ballast, the lowest of 4 tenders. This is the second stage, the final stage will be having an electrician connect everything. The entire lighting project will be paid for by the Blue Jays grant and a grant from the Ministry of Education.

Cost overruns for justified but unforeseeable work on the St Andrew and St John project amounting to \$49,672 were approved, and will be paid from the gas tax.

\$36,786 for boards for the Quyon rink from Agora, the lowest of 3 tenders. Draper-Maxsom voted against, saying this is in a flood zone and the boards will be damaged again. Councillors Barber and McDonald also voted against, but Mayor Labadie broke the tie by voting for this proposal. She said the boards will be protected against floods, and Loisirs Outaouais and other organizations have confirmed this is a reasonable price.

Lacroix & Associés are given a 2-year mandate as external auditor, for \$35,900 plus tax, the lowest of 3 tenders.

Expenses for November amounting to \$17,246.

Analysis of the vulnerability of the municipal drinking water supply (Quyon), \$23,800 plus tax to Akifer, 50% of which will be paid by a grant if the study is sent to MMAH before 1 April 2021,

The Cégep de l'Outaouais has offered to redesign the municipal website at no cost. The municipality will hire a student intern to transfer data and train staff to operate and maintain the new website, for \$17 per hour for sixteen 36-hour weeks.

Councillors Draper-Maxsom and McDonald voted against the municipality joining the group insurance provided by the Union of Quebec municipalities for municipal officials and council members, for life insurance and protection of reputation and private life, until December 2025. Draper-Maxsom said she didn't know enough about this. This was adopted by a majority.

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