

Township of South-West Oxford
Minutes
Special Council Meeting
November 14, 2023

Members Present: Mayor: Mayor David Mayberry
Councillors: Paul Buchner (Ward 1), Peter Ypma
(Ward 2), Valerie Durston (Ward 3), Jim
Pickard (Ward 5), Craig Gillis (Ward 6)

Members Absent: George Way (Ward 4)

Staff Present: Mary Ellen Greb, Chief Administrative Officer/Deputy
Clerk
Adam Prouse, Works Superintendent
Brooke Crane, Treasurer
Rob Serson, Fire Chief & CEMC
Howard Leaver, Chief Building Official
Julie Middleton, Clerk/Deputy CAO

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Mayor David Mayberry and a quorum was present.

Motion to Accept Agenda

Resolution No. 1 Moved by Jim Pickard
Seconded by Craig Gillis

RESOLVED that the meeting agenda for the November 14th, 2023 meeting of council be approved.

DISPOSITION: Motion Carried

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

None.

Discussion Items

2024 Budget Deliberations

Treasurer Brooke Crane provided Council with a brief overview of the draft 2024 budget and noted two additions to the budget as follows:

- Hot mix patching - \$43,000
- Traffic sign material - \$15,000

With these additions, the overall draft 2024 budget reflects an 8.51% increase to the tax levy.

There is an additional anticipated expense related to emergency services communication upgrades in the amount of \$10,000 – this will be funded by reserves and have no impact on taxation.

2024 Budget – Comments from Council – Round Table

Members of Council shared their initial thoughts and comments as follows:

- Councillor Buchner commented that this is going to be a tough budget and will be hard on individuals with fixed incomes. Decreasing services and lowering any proposed increase will only put the Township further behind.
- Councillor Gillis agreed with Councillor Buchner's comments. He noted concerns with proposed expenses in the Health Services section of the budget.
- Councillor Durston agreed that this will be a tough budget to work through. She commented on her own personal financial impact with raising costs.
- Councillor Ypma stated that he was pleasantly surprised at the proposed increase at 7.5%. He noted that there is not much to trim, and believes that staff have put together a good budget. He doesn't think that it is reasonable that the budget will get down to 2-3% this year and it may be difficult to get down to 5%. He stated that he thinks that some reserves need to be increased, and that Council may need to revisit debenturing some high-cost items. He believes that the cost of doing business needs to be recognized each year or the Township will only get further behind.
- Councillor Pickard also commented that he was pleasantly surprised with the draft budget and stated that he hopes to see the budget at 5%. He stated that staff have done a good job with the draft as presented.
- Mayor Mayberry commented that he thinks the draft budget was very well done and that the proposed increase is not as bad as he thought that it was going to be. He is concerned about some reserve levels. He advised that the County budget is sitting at a proposed 15% increase and area conservation authorities are at around 20%. He stated that he thinks that Council is going to have to look at the Health Services portion of the budget, community investment and how this will be handled going forward. He thanked staff for their work in preparing the budget.

Departmental Summary

Treasurer Brooke Crane presented the executive summary for the overall budget and advised that departmental review will begin with Emergency Services followed by Roads and Transportation.

Protection Services - Fire

Fire Chief Rob Serson reviewed the departmental summary for the emergency services and fire portion of the draft budget. The following discussions took place and comments were made:

- The oil water separator in the floor at the Brownsville Fire Hall needs to be replaced. Bathroom tiles are also in need of replacement.
- Honorariums have been maintained at the same level as the year before. Discussion took place regarding wages for fire fighters. Chief Serson advised that he used a five-year average plus the cost-of-living increase (4%) to prepare the draft budget for 2024. It was noted that for training, less than minimum wage was being paid and this has been increased.
- The cost of the snow clearing contract for all fire halls has increased and this is reflected in the draft budget – this is as a result of increased insurance costs for the provider.
- Proposed maintenance costs (\$1,000) for some fire services vehicles were discussed. It is not anticipated that significant repairs will be needed in 2024 unless there is an emergency breakdown.
- There is a serious fly problem at the Beachville Fire Hall. Staff are planning to get the building sprayed and a fly catch device installed in 2024.
- The number of trucks within the department was discussed. The long-term plan is to eliminate one rescue truck. It was noted that only pumpers are required to be replaced every 20 years according to NFPA standards. It was stated that vehicles undergo a lot of wear and tear sitting for period of time with a lot of weight on them (this has an impact on the chassis).
- The fire fighter appreciation evening is planned to take place again in 2024.
- Communication services costs are down with the new contract and shared services agreement with other rural municipalities.
- Salaries and wages were discussed – this includes the Fire Chief position and administration support.
- Discussion took place regarding the replacement needs for the fire department's extrication tools. Currently there are four different sets of tools and staff would like to ensure that all stations have the same. These existing tools are very old and some are not adequate for use on modern vehicles. Staff are proposed to replace all sets with electric/battery powered tools. This will cut down on maintenance costs. It was also noted that a motor or pump won't be required to operate these tools which will save on oil and gas and carbon emissions. Two full sets are proposed to be purchased in 2024 and Brownsville will get a combination unit – not a full set.
- Turnout gear needs to be replaced every ten years. Helmets also have an expiration date. Staff are proposing to purchase a lighter style of helmet which will save some costs.

- Discussion took place regarding the amount of funds transferred to reserves each year. There are more funds in the vehicle reserve than originally thought. Looking ahead the Township will be in a good financial position with respect to vehicle reserves as budgeted/planned. It was acknowledged that the vehicle reserve will have a deficit in 2027 but is solid moving forward in considering vehicle replacement needs of the next 10 to 15 years. Beyond 2027, there are no other vehicles to be purchased until 2035. Rescue vans may last longer than 20 years. The cost of trucks is increasing – the capital forecast may not accurately reflect the price of trucks 2-3 years from now. The proposed transfer to reserve is indexed to inflation at a rate of approximately 2-3%.
- Council requested that a report come forward to Council regarding the age of vehicles and the replacement schedule for vehicles within the fire services department.
- Discussion took place regarding debentures for the emergency services department. It was noted that the Township paid the last Beachville drain payment in 2023 – this payment is not reflected going into 2024.

When asked if he thought that any items could be cut or postponed from within the Emergency Services portion of the budget, Chief Serson advised that he believes that the budget reflects the minimum required going into 2024. He stated that there are priorities that he would move forward to 2024 if more funds were available (training centre at station #3 including fencing, resurfacing/sealing floors in both Brownsville and Mount Elgin Fire Halls).

Councillor Gillis stated that staff need to get the request for proposal out quickly for the truck that is proposed to be purchased in 2024 before costs continue to increase.

** Council took a five-minute break at 10:13 a.m.*

Roads and Transportation

Works Superintendent Adam Prouse reviewed the departmental summary of the roads and transportation department as outlined in the draft 2024 budget. He commented on the two additions to the agenda that were previously discussed. He advised that Council may give some consideration to the amount of funds transferred to reserves in 2024 as this reserve fund is in a healthy position (just under \$1 million).

Members of Council shared the following comments and discussion took place as follows:

- Staff are planning some accessibility upgrades to sidewalks in Beachville.
- Proposed purchase of another used trackless for snow removal – staff will refurbish it. With additional sidewalks to clear, it is difficult to get around

everywhere on time. A back-up is also required in case the one the Township has were to break down. Part-time staff are hired in the winter months for snow removal on an on-call, as needed basis.

- Hawkins Road is scheduled to be paved – discussion took place regarding this need and the condition of the road.
- Clarke Road may be rebuilt to full load in 2025.
- Ostrander Road is in need of repair. It was questioned if Hawkins Road could be done in 2025 and all of Ostrander Road in 2024.
- Discussion took place in relation to how staff wages are assigned to projects and equipment within the public works department.
- Discussion took place regarding base repair using old tires filled with gravel. Adam advised that he would look into this.
- Structure inspections are required every other year for bridges and structures over 3m. This is scheduled in 2024.
- The Township does weed control every year – the Township has not had a problem with giant hogweed but have experienced issues with angelica and phragmites. This is having some impact on surrounding farmland. The Township is not permitted to spray roadside ditches for weeds.
- How wages are assigned in the budget for the Works Superintendent and Foreman was discussed. It was agreed that this item will be adjusted to \$200,000. Adam will consult with other neighbouring municipalities to see how they capture this expense as well. There was concern that these expenses are being captured twice within the budget.
- Gas tax funding is expected to be released in December. This may increase by 2-3%.
- The Township receives a levy for all gravel that is sold from within the Township. The Johnson Pit came online in 2023 and the Township received additional revenue from this. This is expected to continue into 2024.
- The Township is planning to buy a new loader in 2024.
- Council reviewed capital projects planned for 2024 and discussed proposed transfer to reserves.
- Council will receive a presentation from R.J. Burnside in the coming months re: the Township's Road Needs Study.
- Road needs for West Hill Line were also discussed – this road see a lot of vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

Environmental Services - Waste Management

Works Superintendent Adam Prouse reviewed the departmental summary for the Environmental Services department. The Township receives funds from the County of Oxford on an annual basis to provide this service for South-West Oxford residents. The impact to the tax levy going into 2024 is approximately \$1,053.

**Council took a break for lunch at 11:58 a.m. for 45 minutes.*

Protection Services - Building

Chief Building Official Howard Leaver reviewed the departmental summary for the building department as contained within the draft 2024 budget.

Council provided direction to staff to increase the proposed transfer to the vehicle reserve for the building department from \$3,500 to \$5,000. Discussion took place regarding the lifespan of electric vehicles and their batteries – a battery is expected to have a lifespan of about 8 years.

Additional increased costs for the building department include the cost of paper for the new plotter/printer and professional development/training/certifications.

The use of Cloudpermit was also discussed – this software is used by many municipalities within Ontario for building permits however there are some reporting problems that the company is working on. It is said that this will be improved in the new year.

With respect to reserves, it was stated that the reserve balance is recommended to be twice what annual building permit fees are. The building reserve is an obligatory reserve and may only be used to fund the building department.

General Government

Treasurer Brooke Crane presented the general government portion of the draft budget. Council and staff reviewed and discussed the 2024 community grant requests received. Council provided direction to staff to make the following amendments:

- Adjust Royal Canada Legion Grant to \$2,500;
- Adjust Cycles of Life grant to \$1,000;
- Adjust Tillsonburg Multi-Service Centre to \$1,500; and
- Adjust Ingamo Homes grant to \$2,500.

Council suggested that other rural municipalities be encourage to match the Township's 2024 grant contribution to Ingamo Homes. It was stated that gender-based violence is a greater concern per capital in rural areas than in urban areas.

Discussion took place regarding expenses projected for attendance at annual conferences, wages and staff movement on the salary grid, the increase of one finance admin position from part-time to full-time and benefit cost increases.

Transfers to the tax stabilization reserve and for potential future property assessment appeals will continue.

Health Services

Chief Administrative Officer Mary Ellen Greb reviewed the departmental summary for the Health Services portion of the 2024 draft budget. The following discussion took place:

- The Beachville cemetery is in a deficit position of approximately \$20,000 – the Township has budgeted \$2,500 annual towards this deficit. The Township is currently covering all of the expenses.
- It was noted that there are a couple of other cemeteries in the Township that may end up with Township ownership over the next ten years. A cemetery reserve fund will be created going forward and an annual budgeted transfer to reserve.
- Discussion took place regarding requests received from Township Hall and Park boards for both operating and capital expenditures. Council provided the following direction in relation to these requests:
 - No funds will be provided to South Oxford Minor Hockey in 2024.
 - Dereham Hall signage may be deferred for a year – drainage project needs to continue in 2024.
 - Brownsville Hall pickleball court may be removed from 2024 – picnic tables and benches should continue.
 - Beachville Museum projects should continue in 2024 (AC and Barn #1 design work).
 - Salford Hall – front entrance canopy is needed. The cost of this projects will likely be closer to \$12,000.
 - Salford Hall board suggested to consider alternative heating system for the building prior to replacing the heating radiators. There may be something that is more appropriate. This will be brought forward to the Environment and Energy Innovation Committee in December.
 - Adjust funds allocated for the Foldens Hall walking path to \$35,000.
 - May be an opportunity to replace the multi-surface pad in Mount Elgin for a lower cost.
- The above amendments bring the total capital requests to approximately \$166,000. A revised report will be brought forward to Council at the next meeting.
- Funds have been included in the draft 2024 budget for a potential community hall and facility maintenance person (for approximately 6-months).
- Council provided direction to staff to increase the drainage vehicle reserve transfer from \$3,500 to \$5,000.

The remainder of budget deliberations will continue into the Regular Council Meeting of November 21st, 2023 commencing at 6:30 p.m.

