

Township of South-West Oxford
Minutes
Special Council Meeting
November 12, 2024

Members Present: Mayor: Mayor David Mayberry
Peter Ypma (Ward 2), Valerie Durston
Councillors: (Ward 3), George Way (Ward 4), Jim
Pickard (Ward 5), Craig Gillis (Ward 6)

Members Absent: Paul Buchner (Ward 1)

Staff Present: Mary Ellen Greb, Chief Administrative Officer/Deputy
Clerk
Adam Prouse, Works Superintendent
Brooke Crane, Treasurer
Julie Middleton, Clerk/Deputy CAO

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mayor David Mayberry and a quorum was present.

Motion to Accept Agenda

Resolution No. 1 Moved by Craig Gillis
Seconded by George Way

RESOLVED that the meeting agenda for the November 12th, 2024 meeting of council be approved.

DISPOSITION: Motion Carried

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

None.

Discussion Items

2025 Budget Deliberations

Council reviewed and discussed proposed changes to the draft 2025 budget, noting items to be revisited after the full budget review is complete.

Council provided initial comments as follows:

- Councillor Pickard commended staff for doing a good job putting the budget together.
- Councillor Ypma expressed concern about the proposed 10% increase in the budget overall and echoed Councillor Pickard's appreciation for staff's work. He also voiced frustration with the proposed OPP budget increase.
- Mayor Mayberry stated that the draft budget fairly represents Council's aspirations, particularly in advancing parks and recreation in the Township. He noted that 1% of the tax levy is approximately \$73,000.
- Councillor Way commented on the rising OPP costs and the significant increase Council has received in requests from various Township hall and park boards. He suggested there may be areas where Council can reduce spending to lower the overall budget. He also noted that OPP costs are non-negotiable.

General Government – Council

Treasurer Brooke Crane provided an overview of the draft 2025 budget, starting with the departmental summary. She pointed out an error in the Council Operations section, where \$25,000 for contributions to reserves was incorrectly included. She advised that staff have used a 1.9% cost of living increase across the budget, based on the September CPI. The October figures will be available soon.

Councillor Pickard requested that a \$1,500 increase for Lawson Trail be added to the list of potential changes.

Councillor Ypma inquired about the asset management software, specifically inquiring about what the County is working on for the Township. Treasurer Crane explained that the proposed software is for staff use moving forward, and that County staff are working on inputting all Township assets into the system. The contract is a four-year term, and it's unclear whether the contract will end after this period. Mayor Mayberry will follow up.

Mayor Mayberry suggested taking \$100,000 from the working capital reserve to reduce the debenture for the land purchase in Mount Elgin from \$975,000 to \$875,000, noting there is approximately \$1.5 million in the reserve. Mayor Mayberry also expressed support for putting funds into the tax stabilization reserve. The major write-off has been established, and the reserve balance is about \$1.3 million. He proposed that rather than leaving the reserve untouched, funds should be added and withdrawn as needed to stabilize taxes in 2025. He estimates that \$100,000 is needed annually.

CAO Greb noted that there are no funds allocated for a potential new build in the 2025 budget, only for land acquisition. This may not be required in the near future, but there is a plan for a new build within the next few years. The debenture payment is projected to be about \$500,000 annually for this project.

Councillor Ypma suggested that Council consider spreading the cost of the land purchase and the full project over ten years instead of five, which would reduce the annual cost. CAO Greb proposed adding funds to the building reserve.

Council Memberships – It was suggested that Council reduce the budget for memberships by \$1,500, bringing the total to \$5,000.

Tax Write-Offs – The 2024 budget included \$780,000 for tax write-offs. Of this, \$230,000 is expected to remain in reserve in 2025. The Township is not likely to receive another large appeal in 2025. Treasurer Crane will review anticipated smaller write-off amounts for future years. The major settlement in 2024 covered about 11 years, at approximately \$50,000 per year. The Township has proactively set funds aside annually for tax write-offs – it was noted that 2025 may be a good year to utilize these reserves to stabilize taxes.

Health Services

Treasurer Brooke Crane reviewed the Health Services summary. She noted that Council will continue to hear presentations from Township hall and park boards at upcoming meetings.

Council briefly discussed the possibility that the Township might have to assume the operation and maintenance of cemeteries if the boards are no longer able to manage them. The cemeteries remain active, but their expenses exceed income.

Council also discussed snow removal and grass cutting services at Township halls and parks for 2025. Staff intend to extend the grass-cutting contract into 2025 with an option for further extension. The future of waste management services post-2025 is still uncertain.

CAO Greb suggested the Township take responsibility for security costs at certain facilities going forward. The grant request from Brownsville Hall and Park has increased, primarily due to consistently exceeding their budget for repairs and maintenance. Some halls rely on volunteers for repairs, but others need to contract the required work.

A new request from Sweaburg Minor Ball has been received and will be added to the discussion list for 2025.

Council noted that the majority of requests from park committees cannot be funded, as they would deplete Township recreation reserves. There are other ongoing Township-wide projects, such as fiber optics, new park development, and future development to be considered. Council noted that they cannot afford to fund all requests, particularly if the annual reserve contribution is \$125,000 but the requested funds are two to three times that amount.

Council agreed that they need to better assess needs versus wants, adjusting expectations accordingly, and going through each request carefully. Council also discussed available grants for park projects. It was stated that if a particular grant is not received, the project will not move forward. Brownsville's playground equipment, which is nearly 20 years old, may be replaced if the Trillium grant is approved.

Councillor Pickard emphasized the need to consider projects for the Mount Elgin and Brownsville playgrounds and parking lots, either now or during follow-up discussions.

Council discussed whether the proposed addition at the Mount Elgin Community Centre could be split over two years. The hall board did not submit a capital request in 2024, knowing there would be a larger request in 2025. It was suggested to consider splitting the project into two years or possibly deferring it. Concerns about health and safety (e.g., storage issues in the furnace room) were noted.

Council noted that committees have not reduced their operating budgets to account for snow removal and grass cutting, which the Township is now handling.

The estimate for the Brownsville parking lot expansion was considered high. Works Superintendent Adam Prouse will provide a more accurate estimate.

The proposed \$10,000 for work on the shed at the Salford Community Centre was questioned, as the structure may not be worth that investment. It was suggested that the hall's storage room should be insulated instead.

Treasurer Crane updated Council on the grant received for the Beachville District Museum – she noted that the Township's cost will be less than initially anticipated. The full project cost is approximately \$32,000, with the Township's share expected to be about \$9,750, instead of the previously estimated \$12,000.

Council discussed the proposed \$125,000 transfer to the recreation reserve. It was noted that this amount may not be sufficient, and that Council increased the transfer to \$150,000 in 2024.

Dereham Community Hall and Park

The sign project was removed from last year's budget, but Council suggested it remain in the 2025 budget. The sign cost is expected to be lower than originally estimated. The resurfacing of the cupboards to match the new kitchen was also discussed.

Hilltop Park

The addition of two beach volleyball courts was requested. Council also discussed the possibility of amalgamating the Mount Elgin parks and recreation committees – it was stated that this proposal was not well received among members.

Salford Hall

A required correction to the budget was noted: the 'capital projects' expense should be removed from the operating budget. This same error was also identified in the operating budget for Dereham Centre Hall.

Sweaburg Parks

Councillor Pickard spoke about the cost of installing drainage at the park, which is estimated at \$4,000.

West Oxford (Foldens) Community Hall & Park

The capital request for 2025 includes \$15,000 for interior painting, which Council suggested removing. The park fence was originally planned for installation in 2025 and will be funded by the Township within the Health & Safety portion of the budget due to safety concerns. It was noted that funds received by the committee for a walking trail were approved in 2024, and the project came in under budget.

5 Year Capital Plan – Health Services 2025-2029

A correction was noted in this portion of the budget – the transfer to recreation reserve should be \$125,000, not \$100,000.

** Council took a ten-minute break at 8:10 p.m.*

Roads and Transportation

Works Superintendent Adam Prouse reviewed the draft 2025 budget summary for roads and transportation. Discussion included the replacement of truck #67 in 2025 and the identification of Clarke Road in the road needs study. There is an increased cost for municipal drains in 2025 which reflects the Township roads share of the construction projects noted. Council reviewed the details of the roads and transportation budget.

Council also discussed the energy efficiencies achieved at the Dereham Shop with the new furnace, LED lights, and boiler, noting this as a success.

Environmental Services – Waste Management

Adam Prouse reviewed the draft 2025 budget summary for environmental services and waste management, noting minimal changes. The future of waste management services beyond 2025 is uncertain, particularly with the upcoming transition to producer responsibility. The Township's contract with the County extends for one more year. It was discussed that it is expected that the Township can get another year of service from its current waste management trucks. The Township maintains two trucks and replaces one every five years. Council reviewed the waste management reserves.

Protection Services - By-law Enforcement – Policing

Treasurer Brooke Crane reviewed the protection services and by-law enforcement summary of the budget, including interdepartmental charges related to shared enforcement services. Council reviewed the anticipated policing costs for 2025, which include a 19% increase. Discussion also took place regarding the anticipated costs associated with the Oxford Joint Rural Police Services Board, particularly insurance costs.

Planning and Development – Economic Development – Strategic Planning – Energy

Treasurer Crane reviewed the budget summary for planning and development, noting minimal changes proposed for 2025.

Councillor Gillis questioned the timing of the turning lane on Plank Line for the Salford Group expansion. It's likely that the turning lane will not be built until MTO addresses the overall expansion of the road in that area. CAO Greb suggested continuing to set aside \$21,000 for the project.

Councillor Pickard highlighted the positive impact of the Beachville Fire Hall solar project, which has significantly reduced monthly hydro costs.

Council also discussed site plan application fees, questioning whether the fees adequately cover the Township's costs for reviewing and approving site plans.

Items arising from this meeting for future consideration and discussion in relation to the 2025 budget:

- Consider the increased request from the Lawson Trail (increase of \$1,500)
- Asset Management Software – this is intended to be for staff use moving forward. County staff is working on inputting all Township assets into the system for future use. This contract is a four-year term. Will it end at the end of the term?

- Consider allocating \$100,000 from the working capital reserve to reduce the land purchase debenture from \$975,000 to \$975,000. There is currently \$1.5 million in the working capital reserve.
- Discussion regarding write-offs and the tax stabilization reserve – the major anticipated write-off has been established in 2024. The account balance is approximately \$1.3 million. Consider allocating some funds in 2025 to stabilize taxes.
- Consider adding funds to the building reserve for future development (municipal office and child care).
- Consider reducing the Council memberships budget by \$1,500 (current allocation is \$6,500).
- Consider new funding request received from Sweaburg Minor Ball.
- Consider proposed playground project at Mount Elgin Community Centre.
- Consider proposed playground project (\$225,000) and parking lot expansion (\$50,000) and paving project at Brownsville Community Centre.
- Mount Elgin Community Centre – storage addition (\$199,500) – Is this necessary in 2025? Consider splitting this project over two years.
- Salford Hall – Shed (\$10,000) – is this work required and is the estimate appropriate?
- Review proposed transfer of \$125,000 to the Recreation Reserve – this was increased to \$150,000 in 2024.
- West Oxford (Foldens) Community Hall – Consider removing Interior Painting (\$15,000) from the 2025 project list.

The remainder of budget deliberations will continue into the Regular Council Meeting of November 19th, 2024 commencing at 6:30 p.m.

Confirmatory By-law

By-law 81-2024 - To confirm all actions and proceedings of Council (November 12th, 2024)

Resolution No. 2 Moved by Valerie Durston
 Seconded by Craig Gillis

RESOLVED that By-law 81-2024 being a By-law to confirm the proceedings of Council held Tuesday, November 12th, 2024 be read a first, second and third time this 12th day of November, 2024.

AND FURTHER THAT the Mayor and Clerk are hereby authorized to sign the By-law and affix the corporate seal.

DISPOSITION: Motion Carried

Adjournment

Resolution No. 3 Moved by Peter Ypma
 Seconded by Jim Pickard

RESOLVED that there being no further business, the Council meeting be adjourned at 9:35 p.m. to meet again on Tuesday, November 19th, 2024 at 6:30 p.m.

DISPOSITION: Motion Carried

CLERK: Julie Middleton

MAYOR: David Mayberry

This document is available in alternate formats upon request.

APPROVED