



Municipality of the District of Argyle

Item: Drought 2020 - update

Date: August 19, 2020

VISION

We see Argyle as home to a healthy and thriving rural population. Our municipality promotes and supports economic and social opportunities for the region and engages in the active expression of our unique Acadian heritage. We are a place of choice for rural living and are widely recognized for our warm hospitality and joie de vivre. Surrounded by fresh air and cool ocean breezes, we work and play in the great outdoors. People choose to live in Argyle because of our commitment to each other, to our community and to our neighbors. Argyle is a place we are proud to call home.

Background:

The purpose of this document is to bring to light a significant community issue, one that all councilors are very familiar with. There are several community services being offered to support residents in the distribution of potable and non-potable water. Many residents have arranged for transportation and storage bins for non-potable water, some fire departments are doing what they can to help, one of which recently purchased a cube van for transportation of water. The current conditions are dryer earlier, and with no significant precipitation in the coming days, this problem is getting worse, and is having a drastic negative impact on our community health and welfare. We are aware that Argyle Municipality cannot solve this problem, but we have instituted some programs to help assist residents. Below is a summary of those, and a status update on them.

Update from Director of Finance -Water loans:

As of today, there is \$300,000 in committed funds for water loans. As you are aware, the cap was set less than a month ago at \$320,000. Based on booked appointments and expected future appointments, the DOF will have to reject applications unless there is further direction from Council. Currently, the water loans interviews, contract set up and accounting is taking up almost 100% of the DOF's time.

Update on Coupon program

As of Monday, end of day, we have distributed 250 coupons for MODA and 214 for MODY. Keeping in mind that this represents 5 days of distribution. Most coupons are for 3 four litre bottles. The service is appreciated by the residents; however, the distribution of free water is not a sustainable approach financially. A four liter bottle of water costs us \$

The Province is ready to send us drinking and non-drinking water at this time but with Covid still around, the distribution of water will be challenging. REMO is making plans.

Update from REMO Coordinator – other:

There have been over 350 loads of water (usually the 1000 litre containers) that have been taken from the Mariner's Centre since it started mid July, 110 as of Friday in Pubnico, not even counting the ones that came before we started counting in Pubnico.

Other options, if I may, would be:

- 1) Put a drilled well at the new fire hall in Eel-Brook (lots of people between SAR, Amirault's Hill, Tusket, Argyle areas are running out of water)
- 2) There is a drilled well in Tusket where "Ducks" Greenhouses were located (the land is for sale and it's in a strategic place).
- 3) Potential well at the new school location in Wedgeport. Can we add an additional well as part of that project? – require coordination with CSAP.
- 4) A drilled well with outside water station on new municipal property in Tusket? Currently there are no plans for the current building location, but it would not be too late to amend the project for that purpose.
- 5) There will be a bulk water station in Yarmouth in the near future which should help.
- 6) Comeau's hill wells, well at East Kempt at the former Department of Forests facility. Both would require coordination with the Province.

After 2018, I put forth some recommendations to Argyle Council and here are some of those recommendations:

- 1) That at least 2 water stations be set up in the Municipality strategically placed for easy accessibility to residents. Costs vary in each situation, but we are possibility looking at \$40,000 to \$50,000 each.
- 2) Further install showers in some of our Comfort centres
- 3) Install washers in some of our Comfort centres
- 4) Educate low income families on provincial grants to assist with water upgrades to their homes
- 5) Request further provincial funding to support these needs (Warden Donaldson did write a letter to the Hon Chuck Porter requesting assistance in Sept 2018).

MGA considerations:

Enabling legislation under Section 65, also intermunicipal REMO agreement is allowable under the MGA.

CAO's Commentary

The scarce water situation has hit this region the third time in 5 years. At our most recent REMO executive meeting, there was a request to reach out to our local Provincial politicians to have them understand the severity of the situation. The REMO executive agreed that the solutions offered by EMO-NS were either insufficient or not practical when you consider we have pandemic considerations in the delivery of service.

The option of offering free water coupons is not a sustainable one. It is a tremendously generous service, one that does not contemplate a long-term solution. The Coupon program is an improvement from the prior year programs, that allowed for a bit of a free for all at local stores. This way, the coupons provide an additional level of control, but does not eliminate abuse or necessarily targets the right people. It is, what I would call a great community service, but not a service that offers predictable costs. Furthermore, it certainly sends a message that water is free, which it is not. The water collected at the Mariners Center is also

not billed to the collector. We will be billed for that water service, as well as the service delivery fee, which is 100\$ daily, split equally with the Municipality of Yarmouth.

Our water loan program will have to be re-re considered by Council. Staff requires further instruction from Council, in absence of which, we will be refusing applications. While we borrowed \$1,640,000 in 2020 for COVID related loans, this money is unlikely to be utilized for lending purposes related to water loans. Should Council not wish to refuse applications, we would require direction in that area to extend the lendable amount. While not immediately, we would eventually transfer an amount from the operating reserve if the amount was to be considerably larger than \$375,000.

Our REMO Coordinator provided recommendations. I would recommend that staff be instructed to provide a comprehensive report, assessing these and other options for additional water sourcing. More information would have to be obtained from the Province and potentially our neighbors

Suggested motion:

Water lending expansion:

Move that the water lending cap be amended to \$_____, and any amount in excess of \$400,000 shall be borrowed from operating reserves to operating fund

Water lending non-expansion – no motion

Capital improvements:

That the CAO lead a report assessing the merits and limitations of the recommendations presented by our REMO Coordinator, and present a report to Council regarding potential improvements to water access in our communities, and that the Province of NS be engaged to financially assist in the capital improvements.