



Municipality of the District of Argyle

Item: Feb 22, 2021

Date: Regional meetings and
inclusiveness of councilors

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:

It was recently brought to our attention that many councilors are interested in the goings on at the regional tables; understandably. There have been recent committees re-forged in light of the loss of aquatic center operations (former YMCA) and the potential expansion of the Mariners Center to be the long term home of such infrastructure.

In 2019, the municipal leaders of the 3 units at the time were provided information that there may be funding available for an expanded Mariners Center. This resulted in a quick committee setup and a very short timeline to produce a concept plan for an expansion. This situation was not an ideal situation from an inclusive communication perspective, but at the time, deemed necessary to not miss a funding opportunity. This was the creation of the first 'group of nine'. Because of the speed and sense that there was funding available and a small window, this raised the eyebrows of councilors not in the room, and questions about involvement (from a spectator point of view).

The requests to be included were accommodated, but to this day, we do not have a solid approach to inviting all councilors to participate (not as voting members, but as interested councilors who seek to inform their residents on important issues. Our approach to invite non-voting members of councils has not been consistent and varies depending on who organizes the meeting. This has generated the unintentional result of leaving councilors outside the information channel.

It is Argyle's administrative position that there is no reason why councilors of any of the three municipal units cannot attend meetings for information purposes, and to do that, we must commit to a better system of invitation. COVID has provided us opportunity to use Zoom or similar platforms to record meetings, or to invite councilors in on the meeting from the comforts of their home.

Recently, we have initiated recording of all the Mariners Center discussions, both for the bridge of aquatic services, and the new build. This is a step in a positive direction. Staff would like to determine your needs as a Council, and prepare policy that secures a more open environment for these regional meetings, both for councilors and the general public. In short, we have

tremendously improved access to our own regular council and committee of the whole, but have not applied this access to regional meetings of note.

Staff is raising this item with the Warden's permission and would request discussion and consideration from Council on your needs and wants for this to happen.

Current policy at MODA speaks primarily on what the official record is of meetings (minutes), and is dated on COVID realities, as well, does not address any Facebook or other streaming. Suspecting that Council wishes to be more transparent both to its constituents and each other around the work, policy amendment would be recommended both for us, and for our municipal partners. There is some templated work that was done by the Association of Municipal Administrators of NS.

Budget considerations:

None of considerable note

There would be a cost of time from staff to prepare policy and recommendations. This is likely done best by the three units and those responsible for policy development.

MGA considerations:

Policy on meetings and how they are shown to the public shall meet any MGA requirements, which are not considerable.

CAO's Recommendation:

That we amend or create policy to increase Councilor and resident access to regional meetings.

Suggested motion:

That the CAO or his designate create and/or amend policy to increase Councilor and citizen access and inclusion on regional meetings, and that the policy be shared and presented to our partners for implementation.