



**MUNICIPALITY OF NORTH MIDDLESEX
MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
October 23, 2024**

The Meeting for the Policy Committee was held on October 23, 2024, at the Shared Services Centre.

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 2:03 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Council - Councillor Chuck Daigle (Chair)
Mayor Brian Ropp
Deputy Mayor Paul Hodgins

Staff - Carolyn Tripp, CAO
Ralph D'Alessandro, Interim Treasurer
Jaden Hodgins, Director of Infrastructure and Operations
Alan Bushell, Director of Corporate Services/Clerk
Brandon Drew, Director of Community Services
Greg Vandenheuvel, Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief
Mandy Walker, Revenue and Taxation Coordinator
Donna VanHooydonk, Secretary

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

P. Hodgins/B. Ropp That the August 14, 2024, Policy Committee Meeting Minutes be accepted as presented. **CARRIED**

PROVISION FOR PECUNIARY INTEREST

None

DEFERRED POLICIES

Sewer Use Policy

Jaden Hodgins reported that he is still consulting with County legal regarding this policy and will be in receipt of this by the end of this week, the policy will be ready for the next policy committee meeting agenda.

Water Charges Exception Policy

Jaden Hodgins and Mandy Walker presented their notes with respect to the proposed Water Charges Exception Policy. The proposed policy will be a comprehensive update to the current

Utility Billing and Collection Policy FP.09.V1, replacing this policy. The Director of Infrastructure and Operations and the Revenue and Taxation Coordinator reported that they have been working together on updating the existing policy regarding water and wastewater billing processes and procedures with the goal of improving some of the following ongoing issues and challenges. These include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Better documentation. Currently, there are no written processes how/why the 3-year average billing is used for the water and wastewater base charges.
2. The 3-year billing structure leads to issues and challenges with certain situation. As examples:
 - a. If someone has a significant water leak, they will “pay” for this leak for three years, due to their 3-year average consumption being affected by the large water consumption from the leak. The Municipality does not have a process for handling these situations, and in the past the Treasurer has not made exceptions/corrections for leaks.
 - b. If a large water user (farmer) decides to discontinue use of municipal water for a barn (e.g., because they have installed a well, or no longer have livestock), with the current structure, they are paying high water rates for three years based on past consumption, which many people think is unfair.
3. There are certain situations where a farm or agricultural property is a high-water user and has a dwelling or building connected to sewers, but only a fraction of the water being used is going to the sewer (with the rest going to a barn/agricultural use). There is not a defined process for having some properties in high water categories but lower sewer categories, although some properties have this set up.

To Address these issues, staff are recommending the following:

Item 1 (3-year average billing, and existing policy)

- i) Do a complete and comprehensive update to the existing Utility Collection and Billing Policy.
- ii) Ensure that the updated policy is clearly written, practical and addresses the various issues and challenges with the Municipality’s current water/wastewater billing practices.
- iii) Clearly document how the three-year average billing works, including steps in the procedure for doing the annual update of putting customers in their respective billing categories.
- iv) Review other municipalities’ similar policies to seek out best practices in water/wastewater billing policies.
- v) Define roles and responsibilities within the policy (e.g., who has authority to make billing adjustments?).

Item 2 (challenges with the three-year average consumption billing model)

- i. Create a water/wastewater billing adjustment procedure and include this within the updated Utility Collection and Billing Policy. The adjustment procedure would allow staff to fairly and equitably address billing issues that may arise due to the 3-year average billing model.

- ii. Example 1: if a customer has a major water leak which then gets repaired, they still must pay for the water and sewer consumption, but their account should be “adjusted” so that they do not have to pay for it for the next three years (through increased base rates).
- iii. Example 2: A customer has a barn full of animals and uses an average of 8,000 m³ of water per year. They decide to sell all their animals and abandon the barn, but still use municipal water for their house. Their water account should be “adjusted” so that they are not paying the base rate based on the previous three years when there was a barn and animals.

Item 3 (unique situations)

- i. The updated policy should give staff the necessary authority and guidance to deal with unique billing arrangements, such as the one highlighted above (agricultural property connected to sanitary sewer).

Additional items for discussion and consideration:

- A. The current billing structure has the majority of average customers within the 75 to 250 m³ per year category. The upper limit of 250 m³/year may disincentivize customers from conserving water. Do we want to look at different “blocks” of base charges, so that amount of consumption has more of an effect?
- B. The way the rates are currently set up, there are two different consumption charges: customers who use 0-75 m³/year pay \$0.48/m³, customers above 75 m³/year pay \$0.96/m³. Note that \$0.48/m³ is cheaper than the price the municipality pays for water from Lake Huron. Staff would recommend just having one single consistent consumption charge for water.
- C. When a new customer opens a water/sewer account, they must be placed into one of the billing categories (without any prior consumption to reference). Current practice has been to put new customers in the 75-250 m³/year category. This may be unfair if they are actually low water users (<75m³) or high-water users (>250m³). This should be clarified in the updated policy.
- D. There have been situations where water meters have malfunctioned and read zero for several years. Once a new meter is installed and water consumption goes up, should the water account be “adjusted” to go into the proper category?

Staff will continue to work on updating the Utility Collection and Billing Policy, and an updated policy will be brought back to the committee for review.

NEW AND EXISTING POLICIES FOR REVIEW

Video Monitoring Policy:

The Director of Community Services presented the updated Video Monitoring Policy. The purpose of bringing this forward is to update the persons/positions that may review the information recorded. The first version of the policy only allowed for the Municipal Clerk,

Manager of Recreation and Facilities and the CAO to review recorded surveillance. Firstly, there was the title change update for the Manager of Recreation and Facilities to the Director of Community Services. It was suggested further that this also be extended to the following positions:

- Designate of the Municipal Clerk
- Designate of the Director of Community Services
- Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief or designate
- Human Resources Coordinator

Further, it was suggested to add “All staff shall have permission to view the live footage from the monitors at the physical facilities.

Following a discussion, the committee recommends the following:

P. HODGINS/C. TRIPP

That the committee recommends to Council the updated version of the Video Monitoring Policy to reflect the recent title change as well as the positions that may review the video footage. It is further recommended that this policy be reviewed every 4 years rather than annually.

CARRIED

Gym Membership Policy:

The HR Coordinator presented the Gym Membership Policy. The current policy aligns with the Collective Agreement benefit for a 50% the cost of a personal YMCA membership (employee only) upon presentation of receipts. Effective August 31, 2024, the YMCA ceased its operations, and effective September 1, 2024 Damen Optimal Health Team Fitness took over the gym. The proposed policy reflects the updated provider of the gym.

B. ROPP/C. TRIPP

That the committee recommends to Council the updated provider, Damen Optimal Health and Fitness for the employee Gym Membership.

CARRIED

OTHER BUSINESS

The Interim Treasurer questioned if there was a Finance Policy with respect to the Asset Management obligations – April 1, 2022. This would include recognition of the asset. As an example, closure and post closure obligations associated with landfills; Measurement, Recovery, Disclosure and Departmental Financial Statements.

Ralph further highlighted the importance of the five accounting principles for municipalities which help to maintain the integrity of their financial practices and foster trust among residents and stakeholders. As an example, Financial Statements must be prepared consistently from year to year, allowing for comparability and transparency in reporting financial performance and position. This ensures that we are providing an accurate picture of the municipality’s financial health.

POLICIES FOR REVIEW – November 8, 2024

Deferred:

- Sewer Use By-law (Jaden Hodgins)
- Water Charges Exception Policy (Jaden Hodgins, Mandy Walker)
- Electronic Sign Policy (Brandon Drew, Felicia Krista)
- EDAC – Terms of Reference (Felicia Krista)

ADJOURNMENT

M. Walker/R. D'Alessandro That the meeting be adjourned at 3:22 p.m.

CARRIED

Chair: _____

Secretary: _____