



LOWER TRENT CONSERVATION

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Registered Charitable Organization No. 107646598RR0001

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board of Directors refers to the General Membership as set out in the Lower Trent Conservation Administrative By-Law No. 2023-01

SPECIAL BUDGET BOARD MEETING MINUTES

MEETING # 2023-10

DATE: November 29, 2023

TIME: 11:00 AM

LOCATION: Administration Office, 714 Murray Street, Trenton / Virtually

PRESENT:

| REMOTE SITE (R) | ON SITE | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| | Bob Mullin (Chair) | Eric Sandford |
| Lynda Reid | Gene Brahaney (Vice-Chair) | Sherry Hamilton |
| | Mike Ainsworth | Jim Alyea |
| | Jeff Wheeldon | Gene Brahaney |
| | Bobbi Wright | Rick English |

STAFF: Rhonda Bateman and Kelly Vandette

1. Meeting called to order by the Chair

The meeting was called to order by Chair Mullin at 11:00 a.m.

2. First Nations Acknowledgement

"This land is located on the traditional territories of the Anishnabek, Huron-Wendat, and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) peoples. We acknowledge our shared responsibilities and obligations to preserve and protect the land, air and water. We are grateful to have the privilege to meet, explore, and connect here on these shared lands. In the spirit of friendship, peace and respect, we extend our thanks to all the generations that came before us and cared for these lands - for time immemorial."

3. Disclosure of pecuniary interests

There was no disclosure of pecuniary interests.

4. Approval of the Agenda

RES: G151/23

Moved by: Eric Sandford

Seconded by: Sherry Hamilton

THAT the agenda be approved as presented.

Carried

5. Delegations

There were no delegations received for this meeting.

6. Public Input (3 minutes per speaker)

There was no public input for this meeting.

7. Adoption of the Minutes:

a. Board Meeting Minutes of November 9, 2023

RES: G152/23

Moved by: Rick English

Seconded by: Bobbi Wright

THAT the minutes of the Regular Board Meeting and Regular Board Meeting In-camera session held on November 9, 2023 be adopted.

Carried

8. Business arising from these minutes

Business arising from the November 9, 2023 minutes.

a) Director Wright asked for a copy of the CAO's 2024 Budget notes. Kelly stated that the CAO's prepared speech will be included in the minutes - completed.

b) Director Reid asked for a copy of apportionment to members for category 1 and the MOU's – completed.

9. 2024 Budget Discussion

Chair Mullin asked if any Board members wished to speak to the 2024 draft budget as it currently stands for discussion.

Director Wheeldon commented:

"I understand how challenging budgeting can be. In Brighton we're currently working through a budget for the second time this year, and I've learned a lot. I know that there are few easy answers, and that nothing can be taken for granted. I've also learned how easy it is to set arbitrary metrics, like maintaining the status quo or holding the line against tax increases. Those things seem somehow more tangible, at times, than the hundreds of line items we're presented with, each of which is a numerical abstraction from the assets, services, and people that they represent.

This case is even more complex, because I need to consider it as a board member AND as a councillor.

As a board member, I feel very unsupported by the Province; they've messed with our mandate AND our funding, reducing our scope of usefulness to our communities and our capacity to deliver what services we still provide. The services covered by the MOU are, by definition, non-essential, and yet I still see their value; as a board member I want to support any efforts to educate the public about the value and importance of ecosystem services and conservation, especially given

the many ways the climate crisis is making itself felt in our communities. A regulatory body can compel compliance to certain things, but I know that it's far better to inspire change through education and establishing social norms around our relationship to our environment. Those "non-essential" programs are about inspiring the approaches and attitudes that our mandatory programs are supposed to enforce.

And as for our mandatory programs, they're still mandatory. It is possible for us to save money, but our staff have made it very clear to us that the quality and timeliness of our regulatory services will suffer if we keep staffing at the current levels. There's more pressure than ever to quickly regulate a rising number of applications, and the provincial government and the federal conservatives are both talking about tying institutional funding to the number of approvals related to housing. As with many public services, I fear that conservation authorities are being subjected to a tactic, intentionally or not, of defunding essential public services and then pointing to how ineffective they are, usually with comparison to privatized services that are supposedly superior. Another way of looking at it that we're all familiar with is that when the province defunds essential services, municipalities end up picking up the bill as part of an ongoing pattern of unofficially downloading services to municipalities. Whether intentionally or not, I believe that the province has set us up to fail; and yet we must not.

As a member of this board, I also feel a responsibility for our staff. Healthy leadership is a matter of empowering and supporting the members of our team, and our staff have told us directly that they feel unsupported. I believe that every staff member we lose to something other than retirement is a reflection on us as leaders. We've been told that our staff are on the verge of burning out; I know from experience that if burnout is at all noticeable, then it's been there for a while already. And its costs are enormous. It can fundamentally change a person's life, their ability to function in the world. We owe it to our staff to present them with balanced work loads that are manageable. We cannot in good conscience balance the budget by taking the difference out of their mental health. And from the perspective of strategic leadership, it's bad business to undermine our own workforce. Even without staff turnover, burnout can cut someone's productivity in half, or worse. The cost tomorrow of saving money today will be felt in the form of further reducing our effectiveness as an organization at the very least; but the monetary cost of turnover is much higher than the cost of funding a few new positions, and it will have to be made up from unbudgeted funds. Better to fund it now than to have to ask our municipalities for emergency relief later.

So as a board member I feel that we have a responsibility to our staff, but we also have real value to offer. Our role as leaders includes ensuring adequate resources to accomplish our mission.

As a councillor, I feel other pressures. As I'm sure you all do, I hear from members of my community who want us to hold the line on tax increases. The cost of everything is going up these days, and it's difficult to justify the cost of services that most people don't interact with, much less understand. And that's the nature of municipal services: if we're doing our jobs right, most people won't know what we do, because they can safely take our services for granted. This is why we

only hear from people when there's a problem: because they rely on us. And Conservation Authority services are the perfect example of one of those services that people don't understand; but I know how essential they are.

The most exciting thing to happen in Brighton all year has been a development proposal down in Gosport; we had public meetings in January, and we'll finally make a decision in December. I've spent all year explaining to people that it is not in fact in a wetland, that I've checked with Gage myself; explaining that it would not be approved by Lower Trent if it was actually at risk of flooding; explaining that Conservation Authorities no longer regulate habitat protection as much as they used to, because of the changes the provincial government has made. I have been talking up our staff and their expertise, pointing people to the facts instead of the Facebook rumours and armchair opinions. And I can say unequivocally that my credibility as a public representative, and the credibility of municipal government, is closely tied to the credibility of Lower Trent Conservation Authority. When I consider the amount of resources and attention that we devote to the credibility of our institutions, in the form of Integrity Commissioners and codes of conduct and declarations of interest, all so that people can trust that we're acting in their interests...Conservation Authorities provide that integrity and authority to our Planning-related decisions. If we reduce the effectiveness of this organization, we undermine all of our land use planning decisions. So as much as I'm conscious of the blowback that may (or may not) come from tax increases, and the way that individuals will feel a tax increase in their lives, I'm also conscious of the state of public trust in our society that has accompanied the decline of institutions. Our world is increasingly nasty, a fact that the Edelman Trust Barometer associates with "information bankruptcy." The essential service that Lower Trent Conservation Authority provides is legitimate and authoritative information that forms the basis of trustworthy and fair decisions. Let's hold the line on the trustworthiness and authority of our local institutions."

Director Ainsworth commented that the Township of Alnwick-Haldimand council is pushing back on the 18.8% levy increase as they have other township priorities to consider, including major repairs for community centre. He stated that Alnwick-Haldimand may be in favour of supporting slight increases over next few years. They also have similar issues regarding staffing and costs.

Rhonda Bateman thanked Director Ainsworth and the Township of Alnwick-Haldimand for inviting her to present and speak at a recent council meeting. She was happy with the reception received and that Alnwick-Haldimand council was understanding and respectfully accepted the MOU discussion but indeed asked for consideration of a lower levy.

Director English shared that Trent Hills Council are struggling with the total impact of the general levy and MOUs increasing Trent Hills amount by approximately 30% and when comparing the increase in levy to other neighbouring CAs. Rhonda Bateman responded that it is difficult in comparing neighbouring CAs based on budget sizes and percentages that are not reflective of amounts in comparison to LTC's budget.

Director Hamilton shared that the struggle of funding is a result of provincial funding and that something is wrong when upper government decisions result in damages to conservation authorities. She further spoke to the history of using funds from reserves to provide staffing and equipment that is now unavailable even though the Authority still needs these positions to delivery it services, why would it not be valued now?

Director Wright asked what positions we are converting for the additional funding?

Rhonda Bateman said the positions are 2.25 FTE:

- 1 Admin and Client Services
- 1 CL Stewardship Technician
- 0.25 summer placement

Director Wheelan asked if we know what the staff turnover numbers have been?

Rhonda Bateman commented that there has been a high turnover in the past two years with two staff leaving, one on maternity leave, and a retirement. The impact has resulted in additional staff time and workload. The challenge of recruiting; such as, the replacement for a maternity leave has required three postings where qualified applicants were not available. Rhonda Bateman also commented on the change in the passage of Conservation Ontario permitting guidelines resulting in staff review time being cut in half.

Director Wheelan ask what is the impact if not meeting the turnaround times. Rhonda Bateman responded that LTC reports back on our delivery time annually and we have scored greater than 95% each year. If LTC doesn't meet timelines, we would be seen as not meeting our mandate and Chair Mullin said that it also impacts municipalities in trying to do their part. There is potential for the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) to take control over planning applications.

Chair Mullin ask the Board members for a raise in hands as to who was comfortable with the 18.8% levy increase. 4 Board members raised their hands. Recorded vote was not taken.

Director English said similar to the Township of Alnwick-Haldimand, Municipality of Trent Hills council members cannot support the 18.8% increase.

Director English asked if there was any possible scenario for staffing to gradually increase to reduce the 18.8%.

Gene Brahaney commented that he supports LTC's need for the increase and does not support removing the staff to reduce the levy amount.

Jim Alyea commented that although he does not support a net zero increase, nor does he want to cut program staff; however, the MOU presentation amounts have made it difficult for the municipality to support. Rhonda Bateman commented that on the category 3, the municipal contribution is shared across the watershed as per the levy apportionment. Any negative decision made on MOUs will affect staff being they wear multiple hats and the revised funding structure results in staff reporting under different Categories.

Chair Mullin asked staff to provide options and results to levy. Kelly Vandette provided the following breakdown:

Option 1: Less 1 staff – Administrative/Client Services Technician will bring the levy down to 12%

Option 2: Less 1 staff – Conservation Lands and Stewardship Technician will bring the levy down to 13.3%

Option 3: Less 2 staff – both positions identified above will bring the levy down to 6.5%

It was noted that removing to the Memorandum of Understanding agreement funding would not impact the general levy portion under Category 1; however, the Conservation Lands and Stewardship Technician position is comprised of .8 FTE under Category 1 (general levy) and .2 FTE under MOU Category 3 agreements and will result in staffing ability to fulfill category 3 as related to category 1. Overall impact on staff wearing multiple hats and that the impact if removed would require review of the job descriptions as they relate to service delivery and thus legal advice would be required if there are any changes in staff job duties as per original employment contracts.

Director Alyea asked that the changes to the collection of development charges, while still unknown, what impact will this have on further risk for potential deficit if fees are not collected. Rhonda Bateman said that technically, LTC is not to be funded from development charges and CAs have not received further update regarding the frozen fees that are applicable to charge for 2024. Changes in fees will impact both municipalities and the CA.

Director Ainsworth asked about the ability of a municipality to appeal the levy amount. Rhonda Bateman explained under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, the appeal process is only applicable to the levy apportionment not the levy amount. Municipalities have 30 days after notification to appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Board members, Director Wheeldon and Director Hamilton commented about current staff workload and that it is unsustainable. Rhonda Bateman spoke to the overtime hours staff have added in particular for this year.

Chair Mullin asked if the Budget as it currently stands, what would the Board members vote at this time. The unrecorded vote to approve the budget in its entirety was 6 in favour and 4 against. If the vote was applied to the general levy amount of 18.8% and a weighted vote, it would not pass at this time.

The Board asked staff to bring the budget back to December 14th meeting to hold the official vote. In the meantime, Rhonda Bateman will be attending Trent Hills council meeting to speak to the budget and offers to attend other municipal council meetings if requested.

RES: G153/23

Moved by: Jim Alyea

Seconded by: Bobbi Wright

THAT the 2024 Draft Budget be brought back to the December 14, 2023 Board meeting.

Carried

10. Members Inquiries/Other Business

There was no Members inquiries or other business.

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

RES: G154/23


Moved by: Rick English

Seconded by: Jim Alyea

THAT the meeting be adjourned.

Carried

Time 12:46 p.m.



Bob Mullin, Chair



Rhonda Bateman, CAO/ST