

VILLAGE COMMISSION OF NEW MINAS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

May 30, 2005

8:00 p.m.

The Annual General Meeting of the Electors of the Village of New Minas was held on May 30, 2005 at 8:00 p.m. in the Civic Centre

In Attendance

Chair Dave Chaulk
 Vice-Chair Linda Lockhart
 Commissioner Les Barrett
 Commissioner Dale Pineo
 Commissioner Sherry Swanburg
 Clerk Treasurer Terry Silver

**Electors in
Attendance**

Maynard Stevens
 Don Zwicker
 Gordon Silver
 Karen Cogswell
 Joseph Huntley
 Sam (S.A.) Milne
 Marine Pinch
 Anthony Bezanson
 Joey LeBlanc
 Donald Morine
 Barbara Messom
 Marvin Messom
 Rod MacInnis
 Scott Callaghan
 Brad Milton
 Bob Horne
 Sharon Boyd
 Travis Tibbitts
 Mark Redmond
 Allen Milton
 Cindy Milton
 Councillor Eric Smith
 Brent Fox, Reporter the Advertiser

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Chaulk called the meeting to order. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated it is always good to see electors come out to any meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: AGM May 10, 2004

It was moved by Vice-Chair Lockhart, seconded by Commissioner Barrett, that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of May 10, 2004 be approved as circulated. MOTION CARRIED

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: RECONVENED AGM MEETING JUNE 28, 2004

It was moved by Vice-Chair Lockhart, seconded by Commissioner Swanburg, that the minutes of the Reconvened Annual General Meeting of June 28, 2004 be approved as circulated. MOTION CARRIED

ANNUAL REPORTS

Village of New Minas
New Minas Water and Sewer Commission
New Minas Volunteer Fire Department
Area Advisory Committee
Recreation Advisory Committee

Chair Chaulk gave the Annual Reports for the Village of New Minas, New Minas Water and Sewer Commission, Area Advisory Committee, Recreation Advisory Committee, submitted by the Chair, and the New Minas Volunteer Fire Department submitted by Chief James Redmond. Report attached to original minutes.

It was moved by Commissioner Barrett, seconded by Commissioner Pineo, that the Annual Reports as read by Chair Chaulk be accepted as presented. MOTION CARRIED

AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2004/2005

Chair Chaulk stated that the Audited Financial Statements were accepted by the Village Commission of New Minas at a Special Meeting held on May 26, 2005, and presented them to the electors.

2005/2006 BUDGETS

Chair Chaulk stated that the 2005/2006 Budgets were approved by the Village Commission of New Minas at a Water Commission Meeting held May 25th, and a Special Meeting held on May 26, 2005, and presented these to the electors. This sparked much discussion as noted below:

Mark Redmond

Noted Page 3, Fire Department Honorarium, has been cut this year to \$5,500 from previous years' \$8,500, and asked for comments. Chair Chaulk stated that this was a hotly debated issue and that he personally did not agree with cutting this item. He stated he still does not understand the explanations behind the cut.

Commissioner Barrett stated the Budget had to be cut and this was one of the areas that can be cut. There were items that couldn't be cut; Fire Department Honoraria could be cut.

Mark Redmond stated that over the past three or four years, the remuneration for Commissioners has doubled; how can they explain this while at the same time cutting honorariums to Fire Fighters?

Chair Chaulk explained that any item in the budget can be reduced or increased by the Commission. He stated he wasn't on the Commission when the Remuneration was increased and couldn't comment.

Don Zwicker

Stated that during the November 2004 power outage the Fire Fighters worked around the clock with no sleep, and asked if this is the thanks they get for dedicating their time to the people of New Minas. He asked who voted for the reduction. Commissioner Barrett stated he voted for the reduction.

Chair Chaulk stated that the item was discussed and agreed to by majority decision. Mr. Zwicker stated that Fire Fighters pay for the gas and wear and tear on their own vehicles. He said for 15 years the Commission has given them \$8,500; the Fire Fighters never asked for more and the Commission never offered more. Chair Chaulk advised that the Commission voted as a whole on the Budget, and the vote was 2 against and 3 for. He was asked who voted which way and he stated that Commissioners Barrett and Swanburg and Vice-Chair Lockhart voted for the Budget and Chair Chaulk and Commissioner Pineo voted against.

Rod MacInnis

Mr. MacInnis stated that he was looking at the budget and there is nothing in the last line "Surplus/Deficit". He asked if the Commission was in a deficit position at the time of considering the budget and why doesn't something show in that area. Clerk Treasurer Silver advised that in 2004/2005, the Commission realized a surplus of \$1,048 in the General Operating budget. Commissions cannot budget for a deficit or a surplus when creating their budget, but when the Commission started the budget process, there was an amount in the "bottom line" which had to be used up in the budget so that the revenues equaled the expenditures when the budget was approved.

Chair Chaulk advised that at the time of doing the budget, the Commission was not looking at being in a deficit position. Mr. MacInnis stated that this was not a move to balance the budget, but a move to reduce the honorarium, and Chair Chaulk answered "yes".

Karen Cogswell

Karen Cogswell asked why the Commission chose the Fire Department to reduce honorarium, when the members go above and beyond the call of duty. Why zero in on Fire Fighters? They answer every alarm as a group and provide an essential service to the people in and around New Minas. She stated she just does not understand. Paid Fire Fighters in Halifax start off at \$57,000. All New Minas Fire Fighters are asking for is a little gesture of thanks. She asked for an explanation.

Chair Chaulk asked everyone to from hereon to direct their questions to the individual they would like the answer from. He stated he cannot answer the questions because he doesn't understand the rationale behind the majority decision.

Commissioner Barrett stated the Honoraria was the only category in the Fire Department's budget that was cut; nothing else was cut. He stated that they looked at the Fire Fighters Honorarium because this is one area they could cut; this is a gratuity, a gift. The Commission is not required to provide this to the Fire Fighters. There were many items cut in the budget and this was only one category. He went on to say that since Mark Redmond had "opened up a can of worms", when he was a Commissioner previously, he had actually made the motion to increase the remuneration and the Commission consisted of himself, Ted Nicholson, Marvin Messom, Jim Redmond and Wayne Merrill. They all voted to accept that. He later made a motion to not pay Commissioners anything and he did not have the support of the other Commissioners at that time.

Commissioner Swanburg was asked why she voted for the Budget in this way. She stated that she did not look at it as cutting the Fire Department, but allocating funds to other important projects. Don Zwicker asked her to name the projects. Commissioner Swanburg stated they are laid out in the Budget. Mr. Zwicker asked for specific items. She stated recreation, sidewalks (no new sidewalks have taken place for a number of years), truck for parks, street lighting. She added that contrary to what Chair Chaulk had stated, this money was required to be allocated to other areas of the budget, and the Commission is here to balance the budget.

Vice Chair Lockhart stated that in 1984 the Honorarium was \$1,500, and the Fire Department requested an increase of \$7,000, which took place, some 15 years ago, if that's what was stated by Mr. Zwicker. The cuts weren't just with the Fire Department; the Commission went through each and every item in the budget, and over \$120,000 is now in the budget for sidewalks.

Don Zwicker stated, and \$3,500 lost.

Marvin Messom gave a special thanks to the Fire Department for all their dedication and hard work. He asked if everyone realizes that \$50,000 was allocated from last year towards the sidewalks this year. The sidewalk project has nothing to do with the honorarium issue. He asked if there is any committee pay budgeted for this budget, and did anyone request honorarium for these committees? Commissioner Swanburg answered that there was none. Mr. Messom asked them if they realize how important this emergency function is to the people of New Minas? They are trying to help make this place safe and there is something desperately wrong somewhere when the Commission won't even give them a little "thank you".

Chair Chaulk clarified the "no" response to Mr. Messom's question about budgeting for honorariums for other committees. He stated that at the present time there are no committee members being paid honorariums. The Water Commission members are paid pursuant to the Bylaw. He stated there is an item in this budget to establish two new committees and each citizen member of those two committees will receive \$200 a year, if the committees are formed. Also, the Commission is looking at giving Area Advisory

Committee citizen members \$200 per year each if the Terms of Reference are amended by the Planning Advisory Committee for the County.

Rod MacInnis

Mr. MacInnis stated that he doesn't know the value of the equipment at the fire department, but guessed it was far in excess of \$3,000,00. Vice-Chair Lockhart stated that we pay the Fire Fighters \$8,500 per year for an honorarium. He went on to say that the services provided by those volunteer fire fighters is available to each and every resident in New Minas, and beyond, and \$8,500 is a very small price to pay to say thank you to each of these volunteers. But now some of you are going to cut back, and that the Commissioners were cutting back in a budget that was not in a shortfall position, and it seems not many other projects have been cut. He stated he also feels that the sidewalks are an on-going thing and they are a disgrace in New Minas, and putting money in to them is important. But, he stated, if no other departments have been cut, why would they want to cut \$3,000 from honorariums for the fire fighters be cut. He asked them to think about it. This is an invaluable service and he asked who we could call for emergency service if those fire fighters were not here.

Chair Chaulk responded by saying that, in all fairness, other areas that were significantly cut in the budget. As it turned out it was a good thing they did because a mis-calculation in the Commission's mandatory cost to install crosswalk signs.

Vice-Chair Lockhart added that there was over \$40,000 in the original capital budget to upgrade the civic centre, but that was all cut. She stated they wanted to do something for the staff, but didn't want to spend any more on this building.

Karen Cogswell

Asked the Commission if there are other things more important than the fire department, and what they are. She asked if anyone at the Commission table would be willing to do what they do.

Vice Chair Lockhart stated that they certainly appreciate the job the Fire Fighters do.

Don Zwicker

Stated that all day Sunday every Sunday, asked if anyone sitting on the Commission would be willing to dedicate the time that Fire Fighters dedicate. He said the best thing to do is let it rest and deal with it at election time.

Blake Currie

Asked if he understood that this is the first increase the fire fighters have had in fifteen years? Vice Chair Lockhart answered yes, that the honorarium started out at \$1,500 and a few years later they were given \$8,500 . Mr. Currie went on to say that after fifteen years they haven't asked for any more and the Commission hasn't offered to give them anymore, and then the decide to cut the honorarium. He strongly suggested to the Commission that they go out to the ratepayers of New Minas and ask for a vote from them. He stated he was not too happy about this and suggested that the people of New Minas would be very unhappy as well. He asked what "we" would ever do without the fire department and its fire fighters. He stated he has had 2 chimney fires in the past several years and the fire fighters were there, plus they work hard for countless hours to raise their own money for equipment and trucks.

He stated that the honorarium, after fifteen or so years, is expected by the fire fighters, and since the last increase was fifteen years ago, he couldn't understand why it's not up to twice that, when its considered what it costs to have a paid fire department. He stated that these people don't only look after our Village, but everyone else in the area who needs assistance. He said he was asked many years ago to join the fire department, and was told it would be only a few hours a week. He knew he wouldn't have time to do it. He strongly suggested that they go straight to the ratepayers, go to an in camera session and straighten this thing out right now. He suggested that if someone is trying to grind an axe this is not the place to do it.

Commissioner Barrett asked the fire fighters in the audience what their purpose is of being a member of the volunteer fire department – to get an honorarium?

Mr. Don Zwicker answer that the question did not deserve an answer.

Mr. Mark Redmond stated that his answer would be forthcoming if the Commissioners involved would answer the question why there is a recommendation to pay \$200 to committee members, when they won't pay volunteer fire fighters \$200. He asked Commissioner Barrett if he considered that volunteer positions.

Commissioner Barrett stated at first of all those Committees do not exist, they are only proposed. Commissioner Barrett stated that secondly, sitting on this commission, running a campaign and getting elected by the community, this does not represent the entire community or he would not be sitting there. He stated that he was quite prepared, and will still serve this community for nothing. How the rest of the Commission feels is up to them. He stated that he does value the fire department, and the discussion of cutting the entire \$8,500 was considered. Obviously there was reconsideration. He said these were budgetary items and it was an area that we could cut, whether it be assumed there is an "axe to grind" or whatever. If you look at the financial statements you will see

that there is not one other area in the fire department budget that was even suggested to be cut.

Don Morine

How much money did the Village actually put into the Fire Department this year. Vice-Chair Lockhart stated that the Village has done that before; she could remember the Village putting \$15,000 over three years towards the budget. Also over \$45,000 over three years (for a truck as stated by Mr. Morine). Vice-Chair Lockhart stated that the Village has over the years; another time it was \$50,000 – so the Village has over the years given money for capital items.

Marvin Messom

Mr. Messom stated that the Commission is worried about \$3,000 or \$4,000 now -- something is wrong.

Don Zwicker

Felt that the Fire Department should go to the public.

Commissioner Barrett stated that the Fire Department does have a right to go to the public for capital expenditures. He stated that the honorarium for fire fighters was not a requirement for this village.

Mr. Zwicker said they are going to see how the public feels, and Commissioner Barrett responded that that is democracy.

Allen Milton

Mr. Milton reiterated the fact that the fire fighters and others are pretty upset about losing the honorarium. He stated that the Commissioners come to meetings at night and don't lose any pay for that, and they get paid. He stated that not only do the fire fighters stand to lose their honorarium, which they are very thankful for, but they lose much more money in wages, etc, than the Commissioners will ever know. He stated they don't mind; they are there to help the community be a safe place to live. He stated that it is a very small thing to say "thanks" to those guys and gals that do volunteer an amazing amount of time. He stated as angry as people are here tonight, they will go home, go to bed, and if the alarm goes off two minutes after they get in bed, they will respond to help protect the Commissioners and the rest of New Minas. He said he hoped that "you people" can go to bed and sleep as well as "we can".

Scott Callaghan

Stated as he understands it, the Commissioners get \$6,000, and suggested Commissioner Barrett in offering to serve for free, should give the Fire Department his \$6,000.

Sam Milne

Stated he is the oldest fire fighter; he joined 45 years ago. He stated he is not able to respond to fires, but when needed, he has often attended to direct traffic. He stated that over the years regulations have changed drastically. He stated when he started in Annapolis Royal, the fire fighters received \$30/year. He stated, even though he is not able to fight fires, he constantly volunteers in the fund raising efforts, as an example with the ladies auxiliary to raise money.

He stated that the honorarium should not be reduced, but should actually go up. He stated gas has gone up, vehicle insurance, maintenance has gone up. He endorsed what Mr. Currie said 100%.

He asked if the electors, as a body at this meeting, have any say in the reduction of the fire fighters honorarium?

Chair Chaulk advised that the budget has been approved by the Commission, and from that perspective, at this point, he would say no. He continued that if the arguments tonight were strong enough to sway some people to revisit, but he wasn't sure of the process in this regard. If there are people tonight that feel it should be revisited, the budget could be amended or a motion could be made to provide last year's amount for honorarium, thus having an over expenditure in that category. This would all be contingent upon whether the arguments tonight have been strong enough to sway people to change certain commissioners' decision.

Don Zwicker

Asked if it would be appropriate to call a vote to change that part of the budget. Commissioner Barrett stated that this had to be decided by the Commission and he would certainly argue that. Chair Chaulk stated that this is a meeting of the electors, but the Commission approves the budget.

It was moved by Rod MacInnis, seconded by Marvin Messom that the Commission reinstate the honorarium for the fire department to \$8,500. MOTION VOTED ON BY ELECTORS AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Chair Chaulk stated that the motion of the electors can be made and voted upon, but whether the Commission is obligated to change the budget is another matter which must be investigated.

Commissioner Barrett stated that this is a point of order, and must be a "Notice of Motion". Mr. MacInnis asked if he meant to make a notice of motion for next year's AGM, and Commissioner Barrett said yes. Mr. MacInnis said he was not prepared to do that, he made a motion, it was seconded and as an elector he wished it to continue.

Chair Chaulk stated that the Commission's position on this motion would be checked.

Maynard Stevens

Stated that he is not a fire fighter, and he is very thankful that he has never had to require the fire department to come to his house. He stated that during the November 2004 power outage, he called the fire department to bring hot food to his elderly mother, and he thanks God that the fire department was there.

He stated he doesn't know the legalities are with regard to the Commission taking another look at this, but if there is any way the Commission could look at this and see what they have the power to do. To reduce an honorarium for the fire department. He stated that this reduction is incredibly short sighted in regards to what some of the Commissioners have done with this, he asked that the Commissioners to please do this for the fire fighters.

Blake Currie

He asked if there is any indication as to the cost of sidewalks per foot. He went on to say that maybe they could reduce the length of a sidewalk by "1-3/4" and give that \$3,000 back to the fire fighters.

Don Morine

Stated he moved to the Village 26 years ago, and been a fire fighter for 25-1/2 of those years. He stated until now, the Commission has always supported the Fire Department. He added that right now he is ashamed to say he is a resident of New Minas, after this.

Rod MacInnis

Mr. MacInnis asked what the approved tax village rate is this year. Chair Chaulk responded that it is the same as last year. He stated that the Commission looked at surplus figures, have not increased the tax rate, and is still cutting the fire department's honorarium.

Don Zwicker

Stated that it all comes back to Mr. Currie's statement about Commissioner Barrett.

Chair Chaulk asked if there was anything else, and there were no more statements from the floor.

Chair Chaulk stepped down from the Chair and offered his opinion as a Commissioner and citizen of New Minas. He stated he tried to sit back and listen to everything and be objective to everything and not withhold information from anyone. He felt he must say what is on his mind to say what's on his mind, which he felt is one of the reasons he was elected. He stated he personally thinks what has gone on is an outrage. He said he has repeatedly asked in budget discussions for explanations as to why the cut has occurred, and has not been given an explanation as to why this has been done. He stated he does not understand; we are cutting from what he considers to be the most valuable group of volunteers in this community. Not only is there a cut, but the Commission is taking control as to how the honorarium is to be disbursed: there is a provision on the \$4,500 that it be divided evenly among the fire fighters, regardless of their commitment, which works out to \$100 per fire fighter. He stated he feels it is wrong that the cut has been made; he feels that it is wrong that they are offering \$200 to come and sit at a meeting

once a month. He stated that even though the committees haven't been formed yet, the money has been allocated and approved if and when the committees are approved. He stated he has a problem with paying these people to attend one meeting a month for ten months of the year twice as much as what the volunteer fire fighters will get. He feels that is morally wrong. He feels strongly this is just not the right thing to do.

Rod MacInnis

Mr. MacInnis asked if it is a possibility that the only way the Commission can entice people to serve on these committees is to pay them \$200.

Commissioner Dale Pineo

Commissioner Pineo stated he also wanted to comment on the Commission's decision to reduce the 2005 honorarium for the fire fighters. He stated he reflects Chair Chaulk's opinion; he could not accept that item. He stated he feels it is unjustifiable, and that we are cutting the most valuable resource. He stated it was beyond his rationality and he could not support the budget. He added that these volunteers go above and beyond the call of duty, and he commended them for it.

County Councillor Eric Smith

Councillor Smith stated as a County Councillor, and given the fire departments they negotiated with, he cannot believe what has taken place. He said the County has given substantial increased towards fire departments, and they are asked that the honorarium be held at \$8,500. He emphasized that he feels this is totally ridiculous.

Scott Callaghan

Stated that they haven't received from the question to Commissioner Barrett as to whether he would give the Fire Department his \$6,000. Commissioner Barrett stated if they could get the entire Commissioners to pledge theirs, they would have well over \$8,500. He stated that there were a lot of personality conflicts here tonight. He stated Chairman Chaulk took off his Chairman hat and spoke for himself as a citizen, and democracy has happened here, whether they like it or don't like it, on the decisions that were rendered by this Commission. He stated it was a budgetary item; if anyone wants to make it personal, by all means feel free to do so.

Brad Milton

Asked Commissioner Swanburg and Vice-Chair Lockhart if they would be willing to give up their pay. Commissioner Swanburg and Vice-Chair Lockhart stated they wouldn't respond to the question.

On motion of Rod MacInnis, the meeting adjourned.

Dave Chaulk, Chair

Terry Silver, Clerk Treasurer