

Minutes of a Town of Pictou Public Hearing meeting convened at the CN Station – Council Chambers on the above date. Mayor James Ryan presiding.

PRESENT: Deputy Mayor Melinda MacKenzie; Councillors Dan Currie, Nadine LeBlanc and Shawn McNamara

ALSO PRESENT: Kyle Slaunwhite, CAO
Michelle Young, Community Development Manager
Nicole MacDonald, Deputy Clerk/Minute Recorder

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It was acknowledged that Town Council was meeting in the unceded territory of Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded land of the Mi'kmaq people.

3. FORMAT OF MEETING

The Chair provided an overview of the format and purpose of the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was for Council to receive feedback on a proposed Town of Pictou Tourism Marketing Levy By-law. Council is the body receiving all information, questions and feedback, for the purposes of helping them to make an informed decision on whether to enact the by-law.

No decisions are made at Public Hearings.

4. REVIEW OF PROPOSED TOURISM MARKETING LEVY BY-LAW

The Chair and CAO provided a summary of the proposed levy:

- In fall 2022, the Province of Nova Scotia made amendments to the MGA allowing municipalities to consider a marketing levy of up to 3% of the nightly accommodation cost on short-term accommodations. This levy may be used to attract events, people and tourists to their communities.
- In spring 2023, the Province of Nova Scotia also made amendments to the Tourist Accommodation Registration Act that required all short-term accommodation providers to register with the Province, including Air B&B type of accommodations.
- Council introduced the levy on September 5 at Committee of Council, and then passed First Reading on September 18 which triggered an Intent to Consider by Council
- The draft bylaw was posted on the Town website with the official notice of hearing on September 28
- If passed, Council may consider entering into a marketing levy service agreement with Destination Eastern and Northumberland Shores (DEANS) where funds are transferred to market communities participating in the levy

5. REVIEW OF BENEFITS AND PURPOSE OF TOURISM MARKETING LEVY BY-LAW

The following representatives were on hand to make a presentation and answer questions on behalf of DEANS:

- Cindy MacKinnon – Managing Director of DEANS
- Liz LaPier – Events Manager of DEANS
- Wes Surrett – Past Chair and current Treasurer of DEANS; Chair of Tourism Industry Association of NS
- Erica McCluskey – DEANS Board Member; General Manager of Holiday Inn and Travel Lodge

The presentation provided information on other communities that have implemented a marketing levy, the process for collecting the levy, estimated annual collection and how the money would be spent.

Comments from presenters:

- Comment that in 2005, Cape Breton implemented a pay-to-participate in regional marketing if certain municipalities did not enact the marketing levy
- Comment that Pictou County isn't fairly marketed by the Province at the level of high visitation locations, so this would be a way for our area to have a healthy amount of money to market ourselves

Comments/questions from Councillors:

- Funding model outside of the levy – usually \$300,000; spent mainly on marketing, visitor services, special projects
- Comment about consultation – missed step to get people on board early on – industry outreach was conducted a few years back
- Looking for more information to agree with the levy

6. PUBLIC INPUT/FEEDBACK/QUESTIONS

Doug desBarres, Customs House Inn, met with other accommodations owners. They agreed that he would speak on their behalf. High points from Mr. desBarres included:

- the group feels there was no consultation and there is no buy-in from the group
- the breakdown of their market was shared, noting they rely heavily on online travel agencies for customers with heavy fees
- the customer looks at the overall bill, so the accommodations owners would have to reduce their base rate and they can't afford to
- pressures: they are seasonal, have high insurance and liability costs, older buildings that are maintenance heavy; small businesses with larger overhead; inflation; uncontrollable events (covid, threat of hurricane, extreme weather)
- Could put some businesses out that are on the verge of closing
- If you tax this sector it will hurt this sector, and they receive the least benefit of regional promotion

Comments/questions from Councillors:

- Is there value to investing in off-season events to help accommodations? – Yes, but not now; still recouping from uncontrollable events
- During peak season, are you operating at 100%? – no
- Do you think regional promotion can help? – covid and US elections are too large of a problem for regional promotion to help; they can survive now with no increase in rooms; regional promotion doesn't increase room nights
- Who are the DEANS board members?
- Does this create more work for the Town?
- Enforcement – the Town would have ability to audit; or can hand over this confidential process to an organization like DEANS to conduct; fines can be applied
- Comment that it will hurt smaller accommodations more than larger chains

Glenn Cunningham, Seabank House B&B, also provided some comments:

- Auditing the books is not fair
- 55+ Games – did not come from local promotion, came from online booking services
- If this is such a good idea, give accommodations more time to bounce back from world and weather events
- A room listed at \$180 costs \$207 with fees, however accommodation owners clear roughly \$140; 15-18% online booking fees; credit card fees; inflation with breakfast food, heat, fuel; businesses will pay the price if even 5% of the room bookings are lost
- Find a way to tax every business in town, not just accommodations

Comments/questions by the Chair:

- Tax is on visitor not accommodations owners, yet understand the comment about concern with overall price and loss of market
- Comment that DEANS is in conflict with proposal – they have been a partner at the table for several decades with the purpose of promoting the region
- The Province gives municipalities authority via the Municipal Government Act to audit particular aspects of required reporting
- Are there any circumstances, consultation or not, where the accommodations owners would accept this levy? – No
- There are levies across the country for a reason – how can we use that tool to grow the industry in our region?

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:40 pm.

APPROVED

James J. Ryan
Mayor

Kyle Slaunwhite
CAO