



STAFF REPORT

SUBMITTED BY: Chris Frotten

DATE: October 4, 2019

SUBJECT: Regional Planning Proposal

ORIGIN

Due to the lack of planning services within the Tri-Counties and upcoming Provincial minimum planning standards, the members of the AMANS South Western Shore Region have recently discussed this topic in detail. In an effort to address this gap in service, the members have jointly prepared a proposal to the Province which would see the concept of a regional planning service developed.

BACKGROUND

During regional meetings of the South West AMA committee, there was discussion around the need for planning services in response to the Province's new legislation respecting minimum planning standards. This discussion sparked a comparison of planning services amongst the municipal units in the region.

The result was mixed, many hired a contractor to do their planning work, and some recently had a retirement of a shared planner, and others have a full-time planner. The results of this work can be found in the attached document. We encourage you to read the details of the attachment at this time.

Through our connections at the AMA board and provincial subcommittees, we are aware that the Province is attempting to launch a funding stream for municipal modernization – they do not have a terms-of-reference developed yet to the best of our knowledge. The AMA regional committee saw an opportunity to request funds from the Province under this stream to engage a third party to lead, investigate and develop an intermunicipal model to deliver a regional land-use planning service – one that not only delivers a quality service to our collective municipalities, but integrates the work and planning across a region where possible.

We are confident that this model would be more successful in attracting and retaining professionals in this field, and could create a collaborative model that improves the service, and provides potential succession planning opportunities.

DISCUSSION

We are collectively asking our municipal councils to respectfully consider supporting an application for funding under the “Provincial Municipal Modernization Fund” – the purpose of which would be to support a third-party recommendation on structure, staffing and other considerations to build a regional solution that suits the participating municipalities.

It should be noted that we are not making a financial request at this time, we are asking for Council’s endorsement of the application. Funding requests would follow.

Next steps – we respectfully request a response by the end of October for the municipal units willing to support this application, this way we can work on an application and submit it by late 2019 to early 2020. This is significant as the funding may expire on March 31, 2020, and we are attempting to get provincial funding before that date.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The cost of such a service is currently speculative. We are projecting the cost could approach \$75,000 on the higher end, which would mean the participating municipal units would be asked to inject up to \$7,500. Actual amount will differ, this is for illustration purposes based on collective CAO experience with this type of engagement. The allocation of municipal funding is being proposed as an average of uniform assessment calculation and population, as is often the case on regional sharing.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

PUBLIC CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATIONS

N/A

RECOMMENDATION

As the Municipality of Barrington does not currently have a planner.

SUGGESTED MOTION

That Council support the application for provincial funding for a shared land use planning service, and that the request be for 90% funding provincially, and the remaining 10% paid by participating municipalities if the application is successful.

NB – actual percentage acceptable to the Province may not be 90-10%. The participating municipalities will receive the result of the application for review.

ATTACHMENTS

- Regional Planning Services AMANS South Western Shore Region Proposal

The Case for Regional Land use Planning Services

Submitted by your Regional AMANS representatives



Why now?

The Province of Nova Scotia recently introduced legislation for minimum planning standards for all municipalities in Nova Scotia. The MGA has been amended to reflect these new standards, and municipalities are required to comply, the date which is yet to be announced.

Furthermore, the Province recently announced funding for innovation in modernizing municipal government.

These two combined factors inspired our AMANS regional team to assess the capacity of each unit and the current status of respective MPS/LUB plans as compared to the new legislation.



The AMANS regional group is comprised of AMA members from Digby, Yarmouth and Shelburne Counties. This group tasked CAOs Chris Frotten, Alain Muise and Stephane Cyr to develop a presentation to respective councils.

Identification of gaps

Other than the Town of Yarmouth, no municipality in the Tri-County area has a full-time planner on staff. Most use contracted services, and these services differ depending on the unit. Some share the same consultant. Recently, the municipalities of Yarmouth and Argyle shared a full-time planner, who retired in September of 2018. While the planner was shared, the MPS/LUB were prepared separately.

The illustration on page two indicates the status of each municipal unit – as you can see, units are either fully compliant with the legislation with updated plans or do not have a plan in place.

The disconnect

Currently, even if all municipal units were compliant, our land use planning services are fragmented and represent a transactional approach to planning. There is no planning department that consistently considers the assets and status of neighbouring units. Our planning is often reactionary (which is contrary to planning) and isn't focused on regional growth.

We do have a regional organization in place – the WREN. The WREN certainly has membership at a regional level for economic development, however its role does not include land use planning or strategies relating to this. A regional planning organization would certainly strengthen the work of the WREN.

Unfortunately, without dedicated planning staff, land use planning issues are not always at top of mind for administrators or councillors. We have all experienced a time where controversial land use has been difficult to navigate politically and administratively. Also, residents often feel left out or ill-represented when these issues arise. Proper and professional land use planning is an effective insurance policy to reduce the likelihood of land use conflict. An effective public

engagement strategy is a critical piece to planning, as residents are more effectively informed on why planning controls are (or are not) put in place.

What are our common goals and values?

In developing this idea of a regional solution, we understand all units are interested in the following goals and values:

- Fairness in cost allocation and cost sharing, using a combined base fee plus user fee;
- Growth-oriented approach to land use and municipal planning, integrating all our regional assets;
- Attraction and retention of talent for the region, with opportunities for multiple planning personnel working together and supporting one another;
- Improved capacity and response to municipal planning needs;
- Proactive approach to planning services;
- Reduction of duplication of services;
- Simplification of planning services, which would include the merging of language of MPS/LUB documents for customer ease;
- Ensure ease of compliance of legislation now and into the future;
- Cost reduction through shared service provision desirable, but not a main driver.

Our proposal – a request for a Tri-County Land Use Planning Service

We are requesting permission from your Council to propose a regional land use planning service, which would potentially provide services to the following:

Municipalities: Shelburne, Barrington, Argyle, Clare, Yarmouth, Digby. Towns: Digby, Shelburne, Clarks Harbour, Yarmouth.

Any total municipal assistance is not yet calculated and would depend on the amount of interested parties. Our plan would be, with your approval, to submit a proposal to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing (DMAH) under the innovation/modernization funding stream.

The application would request 90% funding support to engage a third party to lead and develop an intermunicipal model supported by a governance framework suitable to its members. This would leave a 10% remaining for the participating municipalities to pay.

Should this application be accepted by DMAH, a Request for Proposal would be prepared by our AMANS regional team, which would be brought to interested councils for approval.

Furthermore, we would create a regional subcommittee consisting of elected officials and staff from each interested unit.

A taste of what could be...

Imagine regional intermunicipal cooperation that would head up all land use planning issues, work collaboratively with your respective development officers, lead Planning Advisory Committee meetings with proactive ideas for land use, and share those ideas with other municipal units in the agreement.

Imagine two to three planners working on issues quickly and efficiently, and fully representing your interests when controversial issues arise, or representing your planning interests at UARB hearings.

Imagine a fully developed public engagement strategy handled regionally, ensuring that our residents and municipal units are well informed on land use issues and are able to engage properly in the process.

Status of Planning Needs

Level of planning service	Limited political discussion or admin. issues	Growth issues needing planning support
Meet standards, comprehensive plan current		Mun Digby, Town Digby, Barrington, Town Yarmouth
Meet standard, needs updated plan	Mun Shelburne, Mun Clare	Mun Argyle, Mun Yarmouth
Not sure if standards are met, need update and deeper engagement of community		
Not meeting standards/ no plan	Town of Shelburne	