

Parrsboro Wastewater Q & A
June 2019

1. **How was the Parrsboro Wastewater Treatment Project funded? What was the amount funded by each partner?**

Funding Summary

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
Parrsboro Pre-Dissolution Reserves	\$419,227	3%
Parrsboro Water Utility Depreciation Fund	\$61,000	<1%
Letter of Intent Funding - Provincial	\$1,345,000	11%
Canada Water Waste Water Fund - Provincial	\$2,150,000	17%
Canada Water Waste Water Fund - Federal	\$4,300,000	34%
Long Term Debt	\$4,400,000	35%
Total	\$12,675,227	100%

2. **Is it possible to do quarterly billings? Why or why not?**

It has been the practice of the Municipality of Cumberland to bill sewer charges at the same time as taxes. Staff will work with our financial software provider to investigate options to allow for sewer charges to be billed on quarterly basis.

Any changes to the billing frequency would not come into effect until the next fiscal year. We will communicate this well in advance.

3. **At the council meeting the councillor from Parrsboro declared a conflict of interest, what does that mean?**

Elected officials can be held accountable for a conflict of interest to both the general public and the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act concerning their position. Councillors have been elected to serve the public good, not to use their position to increase their personal wealth or that of their immediate family.

A “conflict of interest” occurs when a matter before council will result in a financial benefit for the Councillor or any of their family members. An example of this is when Councillor Rafuse excused himself from both the debate and the vote in the past when Rafes Construction submitted responses to the municipality’s requests for proposals or tenders.

As an elected official, Councillors have to consider the perception of a conflict or ethical breach. While an issue may not exist, the perception of one could be damaging to both a Councillor’s reputation as an elected official and the municipality. Avoiding conflicts of interest is extremely important as a municipal councillor.

Councillor Rafuse excused himself June 19th, so that the community would not see him as having a conflict as he owns a substantial amount of land in the Parrsboro area to which the sewer rate or decrease of the sewer rate would have an impact.

The Act states that “a Councillor must limit their participation if they suspect they have a pecuniary (financial) interest in an item on council’s agenda and cannot participate in debate

or vote on an issue where they or their family have a pecuniary interest.” This would be the rationale for Councillor Rafuse leaving his Council chair and sitting in the gallery.

4. Is there additional funding that the municipality can apply for and are we doing it?

At this time, we are not aware of a particular program where such additional funding may be found. Staff are already setting meetings with the Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs to investigate further funding opportunities.

5. How does a resident get their refund?

If you have already paid your tax bill, including the original sewer billing, any credit resulting from the changes will be refunded. Refund cheques will be processed by July 31, 2019. Refund cheques will be mailed directly to the property owners.

6. Is the project complete? If so, how long has the treatment facility been operational?

This project is completed and the wastewater treatment facility has been fully operational and compliant with the federal and provincial wastewater regulations since August 31, 2018.

7. Why was the sewer system extended?

The sewer extension was a long standing strategic objective of the former Town of Parrsboro. They had approved a publicly supported goal of providing sewer collection service to 100 % of Parrsboro residents.

The applications for funding was completed by town officials prior to dissolution. The original applications did in fact include the extension.

8. What do I pay if I have a vacant lot? What do I pay if I have a dwelling that is not connected to the sewer system?

If you have a vacant lot on the old or new sewer system you will pay \$50 for your 2019/2020 sewer rate.

If you own a residence not currently connected to, but fronting the old or new sewer system you will pay \$50 for your 2019/2020 sewer rate.

9. Is hooking up mandatory?

At this time, there is not a mandatory requirement to hook up, however the Parrsboro Sewer Charges By-Law #77-1 allows Council to order owners of land on which a building is situate to connect to sewer.

10. Why didn't residents hear about this issue before receiving their tax bills?

The Municipality of Cumberland acknowledges that residents in the service area were not kept informed throughout this project. This was not an intentional oversight, and we fully commit to being more open, transparent and timely in our communication moving forward.

11. The rate seems so much higher than ever expected, how can residents on fixed incomes afford this? Is this rate comparable to other sewer rates in the municipality?

The Municipality has a Low Income Tax Exemption Policy provides for the following tax exemptions:

- total household income is less than \$18,373 the exemption shall be \$314.
- total household income is between \$18,374 and \$20,803 the exemption shall be \$217.

This policy is reviewed annually by Council.

In addition the Province of Nova Scotia provides a property tax rebate to eligible senior's. This program, administered by Service Nova Scotia on behalf of the Department of Community Services, is designed to help eligible seniors remain in their homes by providing them with an annual rebate on their

municipal property taxes. The program provides eligible homeowners with a 50% rebate of the actual residential municipal property taxes paid the previous year, up to a maximum of \$800.00 per year. The rebate is always based on the property taxes paid in the previous year.

You are eligible to receive the rebate if you were receiving either the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) or the Allowance in January of the previous year and your previous year's property taxes were paid in full.

12. How can the residents of Parrsboro assist their municipality to address the concerns that have been put forward regarding this project?

Residents can do a number of things to help staff and Council address the situation. Residents can continue to make their concerns known to Councillor Rafuse and Municipal staff.

Councillor Rafuse can be contacted at 902-254-3366 or by email nrafuse@cumberlandcounty.ns.ca; and the staff contact is Communications Officer Shelley Hoeg at (902) 667-2758, email shoeg@cumberlandcounty.ns.ca.

Residents can also contact MLA for Cumberland South, Tory Rushton at (902) 597- 8079 or email toryrushtonmla@bellaliant.com with the objective of obtaining MLA Rushton's support for additional Provincial funding to fund some of or all the debt issued for this project. Residents can also contact MP Bill Casey at 902-667-8679 or by email at bill.casey@parl.gc.ca to request additional Federal funding support for the sewer project.

Residents can also continue to stay informed of the issue by reading all future communications that the Municipality provides including this communication and by providing input into the development of a funding policy for capital projects and a County wide sewer rate bylaw. These initiatives are intended to make sure that all Cumberland residents share in a portion of the capital costs of capital projects in a manner that is fair and equitable for all Cumberland residents.

13. What is going to change next year, or in coming years?

Council decided on June 19, 2019 to reduce the unit sewer charge to \$575 for 2019/2020 to provide some relief for residents for this year. A decision has not been made on the unit sewer rate for subsequent years.

Over the next several weeks the Municipality will review the financial issues with the funding partners with a view to obtaining additional funding.

Community engagement will occur to help collect the feedback of residents.

Staff and Council will develop a capital funding policy to identify how future infrastructure projects are to be funded.

Staff will develop and implement a communications and public engagement strategy for future infrastructure projects.

A by-law will be developed to encompass all county owned sewer systems and all sewer system service areas will be based on the revised by-law. Property owners will be advised in writing of their sewer assessment, appeal process by December 31st, 2019.