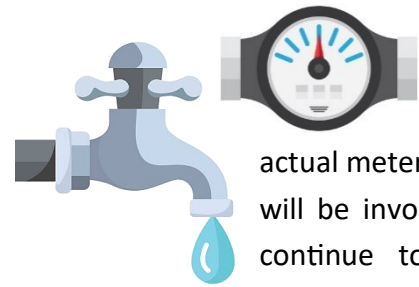


Public Works Department

Water Rate Study Information

The Town of Stellarton Water Utility has experienced operating losses for each of March 2021 and March 2022 and is projecting a loss for March 2023. Combined, these losses are in excess of \$600,000 and are equivalent to 50% of the March 31, 2022, accumulated surplus. The operations of the Utility are not sustainable with this trend. The last water rate study was completed in 2006 with the last water rate increase for April 1, 2008. Water rates have been maintained at the same rate for 15 years.



As residents are aware, the Town is currently installing water meters for all customers. Although the metered system is expected to be fully implemented by the summer of 2023, the Town needs to collect one year of actual meter usage data and complete a water rate study using this data before residents will be invoiced on a metered basis. This means that current flat rate customers will continue to be invoiced on a flat rate basis for the next couple of years.

In response to the trend of Utility operating losses, Council approved a water rate study to be completed by G.A. Isenor Consulting Limited in association with Blaine S. Rooney Consulting Limited. The resulting report indicates that water rate increases are required to sustain operations and will be required prior to the full adoption of the water metering process. For the current flat rate residential customers, the proposed increase is equivalent to \$4.85 per month in year one and an additional \$5.43 per month in year two. As part of the rate study, the consultants were able to use a portion of the current accumulated surplus to effectively reduce the amount of the rate increase in each of these two years. It is worth noting that the current average water bill in NS ranges from \$125 to \$135 per quarter.



(Photo of the Stellarton Water Treatment Plant)

The decision for Council was between increasing rates this smaller amount over the next few years or to delay the decision which would mean a far greater increase in rates once meters are installed. The next step in the process is to submit the water rate study to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board for their review and approval.

The public hearing with the NSUARB will be taking place on June 1 at the Stellarton Fire Hall. Please visit our website for details on the timetable for the hearing: <https://bit.ly/3mZ2zGF>



STELLAR NEWS

SPIRIT | PEOPLE | PRIDE

CONTACT US

- Mayor, Danny MacGillivray**
(902) 759-6840
- Deputy Mayor, Bryan Knight (Ward 1)**
(902) 755-2904
- Councillor, Simon Lawand (Ward 1)**
(902) 752-4766
- Councillor, Susan Campbell (Ward 2)**
(902) 752-2873
- Councillor, Garry Pentz (Ward 2)**
(902) 752-3137
- Chief Administrative Officer, Susan Higdon**
(902) 752-2114
- Town Engineer, Blaine Murray**
(902) 752-2946
- Marketing & Communications, Paige Draper**
(902) 752-2114
- Active Living Coordinator, Noah Delorey**
(902) 752-2114
- Fire Chief, Mike O'Sullivan**
(902) 754-6999
- Chief of Police, Mark Hobeck**
(902) 752-6160
- Planning Dept, Roland Burek**
(902) 752-5311

IMPORTANT DATES

- Apr 7: Good Friday—ADMIN OFFICE CLOSED**
- Apr 10: Easter Monday—ADMIN OFFICE CLOSED**
- Apr 11: Council**
- Apr 24: Committee of the Whole**
- May 3: Police Commission**
- May 8: Council**
- May 22: Victoria Day—ADMIN OFFICE CLOSED**
- May 23: Committee of the Whole**
- Jun 1: Police Commission**
- Jun 11: Davis Day**
- Jun 12: Council**
- Jun 26: Committee of the Whole**

Mayor's Message

Dear Friends and Neighbours:

Another winter passes us by, as the last remnants of snow slowly melt away. Our days are growing longer, the natural world is awakening once again, the cycles of growth and rebirth begin anew with the spring season. A time of fresh starts, and gratefulness for the growing warmth of our days.



As the natural cycles renew, so do other cycles, such as the ones we create in our public lives. April 1st brings the start of a new fiscal year for the Town of Stellarton. Therefore, the weeks and months leading up to it are budget time, the most difficult time of year for council, as we plan to allocate our limited resources as effectively and efficiently as possible, in a manner consistent with the will of you, the residents of Stellarton.

If you've been reading my messages over the past few years, you know the town is on a path of soon requiring more revenue to keep our day-to-day operations funded. The Town of Stellarton has over \$128,000,000 in infrastructure to maintain. \$33,000,000 in transportation infrastructure (roads etc.), and almost \$30,000,000 in water infrastructure (treatment plant, pipes, etc.), being the two biggest buckets. Our town is a large entity that requires sound management and adequate financial resources to function properly. Residents of the Town of Stellarton currently carry the lowest consolidated residential tax burden of any town in Pictou County. Some towns have a lower tax rate but have added user fees. Stellarton residents pay less than residents of all the other towns.

Budget discussions this year presented council with a stark choice, reduce service levels, or raise taxes.

Two budget cycles ago, we escaped the conundrum because the newly elected provincial government did a one-time doubling of our equalization payment, an extra \$500,000 in revenue. One budget cycle ago, council was asked by staff to consider a raise in taxes, but

instead we budgeted for a balanced budget, by removing \$350,000 from the Towns' financial reserves. We cannot repeat this process, our reserves need to stay at a certain level for emergencies or other pressing priorities, and they are at that level now. We cannot draw them down further to fund regular day to day operations. Thus, the stark choice, that council must make.

We asked staff to come back with cost cutting measures. Alternatives that were presented included reducing our Police Service to one officer instead of two on some shifts. Council did not like this option because of resident and officer safety. Your council always looks for ways to save valuable tax dollars, however, we are unwilling to sacrifice safety. Another option presented was laying off three Public Works employees, which would result in a significant reduction in service levels, which you would notice quickly in the wintertime with street/sidewalk clearing and salting. We only have eleven people on the Public Works frontline, removing almost 30% of that work force would also have a detrimental effect on the safety of our residents.

Council sees no other option but to raise the tax rate, to properly fund the operations of our town. We did not want to do this and have made difficult decisions over the last seven years to delay this day, but it is now upon us, and we can't reasonably put it off any longer, without jeopardizing the towns overall financial position. This is the first adjustment to the tax rate since 1997. It does not come at an ideal time for you, the taxpayer, as assessments have risen this year. Rest assured, the Town and Council respect your money, and strive to use it in a manner consistent with your wishes. There is no fat to trim at Town Hall.

We all know the cost of living has significantly increased in the last year or two, inflation has hit our household budgets. Municipal budgets have also been severely impacted, and we need to adjust the tax rate to sustain our operations. Raising taxes was our last option, now, in councils view, it is our only option.

It is important to note that we also bear costs outside of our control. For example, we are required to fund education in the amount of \$822,000; Seniors Housing \$100,000; Corrections \$52,000; and Pictou County Solid Waste and Wastewater Treatment in the amount of \$752,500.

The good news, even with the new tax rates, Stellarton will still have the lowest consolidated residential tax rate of any town in Pictou County. Let us not forget our favorable position as a municipal unit. Stellarton is strong. And will remain so, with continued prudent financial decision making.

Thank you for your contribution to our town.

Danny

Town Hall Updates

Tax Billing

Property taxes levied by the Town of Stellarton are billed in instalments as follows: 50% of the assessed taxes are billed on April 1st of each year due in June. The remainder of the current year tax levy is billed on September 1st and due in November.

Plow Damage

Plow damage can be reported to Town Hall at 902-752-2114. You will be added to the list of properties that require attention.



Low Income Property Tax Exemption

Council has increased the low income property tax exemption for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. If your household income is \$28,429 or less, you are eligible for a \$300 rebate on your final property tax bill. This exemption will be applied to your tax account during the final property tax billing in September 2023. You must provide a copy of your 2022 Notice of Assessment received from the Canada Revenue Agency as proof of income. Forms are available at Town Hall or via our website: www.stellarton.ca

Cross-Town Tree Removal

When Hurricane Fiona hit back in September, we received many calls from concerned residents throughout the town where damaged trees did or will likely cause liability issues on private homeowner properties. As a result of the high volume of these calls, we conducted a tree damage report of all areas of Stellarton.



This report was presented by staff to Council at a public Committee of the Whole meeting held on November 28, 2022. An estimated budget of \$141,000 was presented at that time. The federal grant for costs associated with Hurricane Fiona will be reimbursed.

Several town-owned areas were identified to be of serious concern and homeowners with property sharing a boundary with these areas were notified prior to work beginning. A letter was mailed to the directly impacted property owners in January indicating the clean up would be occurring and why Council decided this was the necessary approach.

Town staff have been directed to look into a reforestation plan that is less threatening to the health and safety of our community.

Our top priority is the health and safety of all residents. While the town may look a little different, we're confident that as a result of this clean-up, there will be significantly less damage and destruction when serious weather events occur in the future.

Those looking for further clarification are encouraged to reach out to senior staff, our Town Engineer, or our CAO: 902-752-2114



Community & Recreation

We are hiring for the summer season!

Youth employment opportunities for the Town are posted on our website and on our social media channels. To access job descriptions, go online to:

<https://bit.ly/428n2Jx>

(Type directly into address bar of your browser)

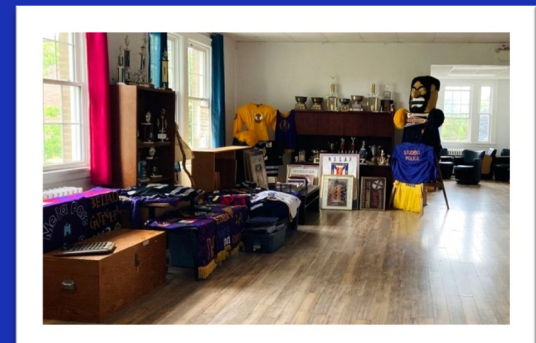
There are positions available in park maintenance, sport and recreation maintenance, day camp councilors, and day camp programmer.

Please send resumes to: town.office@stellarton.ca



Stellarton Heritage Corner

Heritage Room: Opening Soon!



(Stellarton High Artifacts in preparation to be exhibited.)

Stellarton's Heritage Committee and staff have been working to open our "Heritage Room." This space is meant to serve as somewhat of a community museum and meeting space. There will also be rooms designated as tributes to Stellarton's education systems, and to the Sobeyes history in our town.

Stay tuned for an opening date!