

MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

GRAND FALLS

MEETING

The Grand Falls Town Council held a special meeting in the council room at the Grand Falls Town Hall at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, September 8, 2021, following the notices required by law.

PRESENCE

His Honour the Mayor:

Marcel Deschênes

Councillors:

Renaud Ouellette
Annie Deschênes
Jean Réal Michaud
Jocelyn « Joe » Themens
Jean Maurice Gagnon
David Raines

as well as the CAO/Clerk, Peter Michaud and the Deputy Clerk, Lise J. Ouellette.

Goal

The goal of this meeting is to inform the population concerning the marina file.

1. **Welcome**

Mayor Deschênes welcomes everyone in person and on Facebook.

2. **The last months / history**

The Mayor explains the history of the marina property and recognizes the founding members.

He clarifies that the Town of Grand Falls bought the vacant land in 2001. The Town has been implicated with the project to install docks and build a pavilion since its first day and has paid for expenses, except for the construction, as the project progressed.

In 2009, the president at the time advised the Town of the dissolution of the Association des mariniers de la rivière St-Jean and requested that the Town take over the dock rentals.

The Mayor recognizes the financial contributions of \$5,000 from members but specifies that the property was never sold to the Town for \$1.

Given the \$1.3 million evaluation of the property and that it is used solely for a daily rental of \$60, Council needed to find a way to maximise the use of the building, hence the reason for the call for propositions. Council agrees that the building should be part of our heritage but reminds that there was no greater heritage than the old town hall which was sold to Patrick Durepos. Yet, that sale saved the building which is in pristine condition today.

The Town wanted to see if it could work with a group to improve the property. The Mayor requested that people calm down and remain respectful.

3. **Petition**

Mayor Deschênes notes that the petition often mentioned was withdrawn and was never deposited with Council.

4. **The Marina Restaurant – renter**

As for the allegations that the renter of the restaurant has been mistreated by the Town, the Mayor explains the arrangement of reduced rent and even cancelled rent during the pandemic. One offer was also made and refused by the renter to sign a multi-year contract. The renter was also the first to be informed of the call for propositions to give her the first option to buy. The letter informing her of the call for propositions was not an eviction

notice and the Mayor proceeds to read the letter in question. This was explained to P. Durepos during a meeting with the Town. The latter never took the opportunity to inform the population of this mistake.

The Mayor strongly objects to the e-mail from P. Durepos in which he references his and Councillor R. Ouellette's daughters.

5. Intervention from council members

Members of Council express, each in turn, their impression, vision and feelings about the marina file.

David Raines – recognises the great potential for development of the property. He believes that the way things are unfolding is not constructive. He finds the published comments and miscellaneous accusations unjust and offensive. His goal is to find a way to work together.

Joe Themens – reminds people that this Council was only sworn-in on June 14. He decided to offer his candidacy to get involved in the community and to accomplish nice projects for all age groups. That said, he has spent over 100 hours just on the marina file. He mentions the meetings that were held with the citizens' group and explains the proposed meeting on August 31 that was planned to give the group the opportunity to work with Council on the future of the marina property, as the group was requesting. The meeting was cancelled by the spokesperson saying that Council was refusing to meet in public. Council's intent was to work with the committee, then hold a public press conference to inform citizens of the result.

Jean Réal Michaud – indicates that all, including Council and staff, are here for the greater good and are listening. Nothing is moving forward since the marina file.

Renaud Ouellette – still believes that the Town has great development possibilities. Council tries to maintain costs as low as possible for citizens. We must work together to advance projects. People moving to our region come because of our quality of life.

Annie Deschênes – explains that Council had to face the marina conflict very early in its mandate. She mentions both offers received. One of which was for \$327,000 plus \$250,000 in investments in the building and two restaurants. She liked the vision from P. Durepos that the Town improve the property and wharves. She had a positive feeling after the first meeting since everyone seemed to be working towards a common goal. Despite Council's best efforts nothing came of it.

All this public conflict leaves a bitter taste, but she is ready to continue working together. The marina file has monopolized Council's time to the point that nothing else has been done. Council is here to invest its time and energy in the town and wants to work with the population.

She encourages citizens to offer their candidacy at the next elections since there is a great team working for the town.

Jean Maurice Gagnon – supports his colleagues' comments. He cares for the marina and mentions that Council needs help to realize all kinds of projects. We must work together.

6. Fire station – land

Lucie Nadeau from the accounting firm Nadeau Picard explains the numbers concerning the purchase of a Northern Construction property on Portage Road then the sale of this same property back to Northern a few years later.

The land was bought for \$500,000 on the condition that it be vacant and that any contamination would be cleaned by Northern.

The old Town Hall was returned to the Town in exchange for a piece of land for the entrance to the new Northern complex on West River Road. All for a value of \$150,000.

The land was then sold back to Northern some time later for \$350,000, the same value as the previous purchase, contrary to the press release that notes a loss.

Ms. Nadeau notes a real loss of \$41,000 and explains the accounting principal to arrive to that result.

P. Durepos responds that a clarification will be posted on social media.

He questions by-law 10 which, according to him, requires that all property sold be done so by tendering. He insists that the lack of transparency at the town has been the cause of the false information in the press releases.

7. **Public intervention**

Pat Durepos – believes that his comments have been positive and professional. He invites Council to decide whether to sell or not. If not, he will continue his efforts. He confirms that the group has not amended its original position.

Mr. Durepos announces that the renter has given her termination notice. He mentions again the eviction notice received from the Town.

He adds that there are 13 other projects to come and that he will continue to push them through press releases. He asks that the Town use its 4-million-dollar reserve for projects such as picnic tables at the marina.

He asks for authorization to apply for grants for the marina.

He hopes that Council will announce its decision at the September 14 meeting.

Robert Godbout – his business has existed for 75 years, and the Town has never come to see him to grow his business. He hopes that the Town will act transparently.

Danny Zolondek – complains about the lack of transparency. He asks that Council help the homeless and asks, “where is the money”.

He offers to sit on the ad-hoc committee proposed by Council.

He questions the purchase price and when the Town will develop the sports complex (bowling). Council informs him that plans are ready, and the Town is waiting for grants to proceed. A consultant has been hired to plan indoor renovations.

Mr. Zolondek questions about the theatre equipment that was given to the town. Council indicated that it plans to offer the equipment to the public if someone is interested in opening another theatre.

Danny Soucy – is disappointed about much and is losing confidence. He asks that the Town be honest concerning the marina and questions why sell. The Mayor responds that the sale is being considered to increase the usage or value of the property.

Mr. Soucy believes that the right information should have been given at the beginning and that people should get the right information from the start.

David Côté – questions concerning a re-zoning in his neighborhood. The Mayor recommends that he contact the Land Use Planning Department for answers.

Michel Blais – remains convinced that the marina building must remain town property. The group has requested a revenue and loss report and is still waiting. The Mayor explains that such a report does not exist. The marina’s revenues and expenses are part of the general financial statement. The Finance Department is currently working at determining these amounts for the group.

Mayor Deschênes announces that Council has decided to suspend the offers received for up to one year and that it will form a committee on the future of the marina.

Some individuals mention the Knights of Columbus parking and hope that the matter will soon be resolved.

Paul Bourgoïn – notes the group’s interest in the community. He believes that the press releases have woken the population and congratulates the committee.

P. Durepos offers to show the next press releases to Councilor Deschênes before they are released. She asks that the groups have the opportunity to discuss matters before going to the media. She hopes that people will be informed with facts and is saddened that lies are reported. She asks that citizens give a chance for this new Council to prove itself.

Council requests that the divisive press releases end and that groups meet instead.

P. Durepos finds himself encouraged to continue and that the atmosphere in town will be changed.

Dave Olmstead – asks for English minutes of tonight’s meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Jean Réal Michaud/Jean Maurice Gagnon, that the meeting is adjourned at 8:55 p.m. Carried

Marcel Deschênes, Mayor

Lise J. Ouellette, Deputy Clerk