

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

GENERAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday, February 24, 2023, 1:30 p.m.

Via Videoconference

Board Members Present: Ed McGugan, Councillor Township of Huron-Kinloss, President
Doug Townsend, Councillor, West Grey, Vice-President
Warren Dickert, Deputy Mayor, Town of Hanover, Past President
Cheryl Grace, Councillor, Saugeen Shores
Councillor Kym Hutcheon, Councillor, Brockton
Doug Kennedy, Councillor, Kincardine
Scott Mackey, Mayor, Township of Chatsworth
Jennifer Christie-Shaw, Deputy Mayor, Arran-Elderslie
Monica Singh-Soares, Councillor, Southgate

Board Members Absent: None

Others Present: Stephan Labelle, SMART Manager
Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

1. Introduction

2. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:31 p.m.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None declared.

4. Approval of the Agenda

Motion #2023-008

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Monica Singh-Soares

That the agenda for February 24, 2023 be amended to add the following items: 8E Cost Recovery; 8F, Annual Wage and Salary Review; 8G Mask Update; 8H GTR Update; 8I Strategic Planning Session, March 24, 2023, and that the agenda be accepted as so amended.

Carried

5. Delegations

There were no delegations.

6. Minutes of Previous Meeting – February 3, 2023

Motion #2023-009

Moved by Cheryl Grace; Seconded by Jennifer Christie-Shaw

That the minutes of the October 28, 2022 General Board Meeting be accepted as circulated.

Carried

7. Business Arising from the Minutes

A. Open Board Meetings Policy

Cheryl Grace referred to an email which she had sent to all Board members, the Manager and the Recording Secretary regarding the provision which states: “The Board will not schedule a delegation by a person or organization has made a delegation on the same subject matter within the previous 6 months unless approved by the President.” Saugeen Shores had a similar restriction, but after reviewing the policies of other municipalities as well as relevant sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and court decisions, Council approved the removal of the “six-month rule”, and

replaced it with: “Previously heard individuals addressing Council for subsequent times on the same topic, must only present new information during subsequent delegations. New information is deemed to be information that Council has not previously heard.” The Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the rights of citizens to address their governmental representatives, but those rights are not unlimited. Courts have ruled that those individual rights must be balanced with protecting the duty of public Councils and Boards to operate efficiently. In 2020, the Town of Saugeen Shores revised its procedural by-law because a simple “six-month rule” could be unconstitutional. While there is a rational objective for such exclusions (to prevent wasting the Board’s time with repetitive information), it doesn’t necessarily follow that addressing the Board on the same subject matter would be repetitive. By changing the wording to require new information only, Council was seeking to balance the free speech rights of individuals with Council’s duty to conduct business as efficiently as possible.

Scott Mackey supported the policy and asked who at SMART would determine if information is “new”. In a municipality, this would be the Clerk in consultation with the Mayor. Warren Dickert asked who at SMART would be the “gate keeper” in deciding whether information is “new”.

Motion #2023-010

Moved by Cheryl Grace; Seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the draft policy be amended to delete “The Board will not schedule a delegation by a person or organization if the person or organization has made a delegation on the same subject matter within the previous six (6) months unless approved by the President” and replace it with “Previously heard individuals addressing the Board for subsequent times on the same topic, must only present new information during subsequent delegations. New information is deemed to be information that the Board has not previously heard.” and that the draft policy be so amended.

Carried

8. New Business

A. Budget 2023

The Manager noted that user fees changed to \$350,000 and changes were made to the cash flow. Word has been received from the province that SMART will receive \$748,7445 in gas tax for the 2022-2023 year ending March 31. About \$748,745 is yet to come, an amount which will be confirmed in January or February of 2024.

The Manager advised the Board that SMART is in a good financial position and that the Past President and Vice President worked to ensure financial stability. It was noted from the amount of user fees that SMART seems to be recovering from COVID. The Manager said that fees are gradually returning to pre-COVID levels, but SMART had more vehicles and more drivers pre-COVID and so would now need more resources in order to get back to pre-pandemic ridership levels. The President confirmed that the numbers of drivers and vehicles constrains the number of rides, with the Manager adding that the number of hours drivers work is also a factor. Increases in ridership would lead to increases in expenses, although the revenue earned should offset those expenses. The President noted that increases in rides lead to increases in costs and the Board has had discussions about controlling rides. In response to a question about whether the gas tax could be cut if SMART has a positive financial balance, the Manager said that 70% of the gas tax is determined by the number of rides and 30% by population, so if rides go up, the gas tax goes up. The issue is how to predict rides taking into account that every ride costs money and the question is how to strike a balance between increasing the gas tax, controlling costs and providing service to residents, while avoiding an operating deficit.

The President thanked the Past President and former Vice President, Beth Hamilton, for their work in bringing SMART into a positive situation and the Past President noted that this was a Board, rather than an individual, effort.

A question arose about grants and the Manager said that he has applied for two grants to purchase dashcam equipment and software upgrades to manage rides and finances. It was noted that SMART is pursuing donations and at the last meeting, there was a discussion of increasing wages. The Manager noted that a wage increase of 1.9% had been built into the budget and is awaiting the municipalities to finalize their budgets and wage increases, information which he expects to have by the end of March. Scott Mackey stated that Chatsworth increased wages by 2.5% and he would like to hear from other municipalities as to their increases to know whether 1.9% is in line.

In the past, SMART received \$700,000 in federal ICIP funds for new vehicles and such funds may become available again. SMART would apply for any provincial funding through its host municipality (the Town of Hanover). Christine Walker, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer for the Town of Hanover, monitors information about available grants and sends it to SMART. The wage increase is estimated to end up in the 2% - 3% range. The Manager stated that the amount of the budgeted wage increase is \$42,000, and a wage increase also impacts benefits costs. He would be more confident in presenting this information to the Board at its next meeting once he has received all the numbers from the municipalities to calculate the average increase. Cheryl Grace noted that she had informed the Manager of Saugeen Shores' wage adjustment of 3.5%, up from an initial amount of 1.9%, which seems fair given that inflation last month was 6.8%. The Past President noted that due to the gas tax, the wage increase should not impact municipal contributions.

Regarding donations, Doug Townsend agreed to send the Manager the name of an organization interested in making a donation.

Jennifer Christie-Shaw stated that Arran-Elderslie's wage increase was 2.0% and asked which municipalities had not yet submitted their information. The Manager is missing Grey Highlands, West Grey and Huron Kinloss. The President had requested the information from the Clerk's Department in Huron-Kinloss and will follow up.

The Manager has sent 82 letters requesting donations and received two donations of \$100 and \$1,000 so far. He expects six to eight donations to come in amounting to close to \$7,000.

Discussion took place about approving the budget so as to avoid unnecessary surprises, and if the 1.9% wage increase will not be high enough, it should be raised given that the average is likely 2.5% or 3%. It would be reasonable to make an adjustment in that range and the Manager needs an approved budget to work within.

Motion #2023-011

Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Warren Dickert
That the Board support the 2023 budget as presented.

Carried

B. Vehicles for Sale

The Manager had previously received approval to sell two vehicles which were posted on govdeals.ca but bids of \$3,000 for each vehicle did not meet the reserve price.

Motion #2023-012

Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Doug Kennedy
That the bids made on the vehicles be accepted.

Carried

C. Home & Community Support Services Transportation Agreement

The Manager explained that the agreement with Home & Community Support Services (H&CSS) ended last year before he joined SMART. The new H&CSS manager was looking for synergies and

opportunities to work together and the agreement between H&CSS and SMART was seen as a stepping stone to bring the services together without a big financial impact. He believes SMART is now in a position to continue the agreement, but would provide service only to H&CSS clients who meet SMART's eligibility. H&CSS provides rides for its Day Away program, but also for other medical, social and recreation purposes. Warren Dickert clarified that SMART would bill H&CSS in the same way as it bills its clients, and H&CSS would in turn bill its client, but H&CSS clients have to meet SMART eligibility. He thanked the Manager for getting the agreement back in place, although it is not clear now why it ended, but changes made at one time were not well received and did not support SMART's direction.

Discussion took place about whether SMART is subsidizing H&CSS. Warren Dickert clarified that SMART only provides service to H&CSS clients who live in a member municipality and who would be eligible for SMART service in any event. H&CSS is volunteer run and a ride that might cost SMART \$50 costs \$25 to H&CSS because of their volunteers. Providing service to H&CSS is a way for SMART to indirectly receive provincial funds, and SMART is not giving anything to H&CSS since rides are provided only to people who are eligible for SMART.

Discussion occurred about standardizing the various mobility services across Grey Bruce at the County level. A Board member asked why a person would pay SMART for a ride when they could get it cheaper from H&CSS, and more information is needed for a Board decision on the agreement. The Manager pointed out that H&CSS does not have the same capacity as SMART, and since they depend to a large extent on volunteers, they do not provide the same level of service as SMART. A motion to table the item was suggested.

Motion #2023-013

Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Cheryl Grace

That the Board defer the issue of the agreement with Home and Community Support Services to its strategic planning session on March 24, 2023.

Carried

D. Annual Audit

BDO has begun the audit with staff on site at SMART from Monday, February 20 to Friday, February 24, 2023. They will prepare their report and following internal review at BDO, they hope to have it to the Manager by mid-March and then to the Board at its March 24, 2023 meeting.

Kym Hutcheon left the meeting at 2:45 p.m..

E. Cost Recovery

It was suggested that the March 24, 2023 strategic planning session is a better forum for discussion of this issue, including the question of what actual costs are and what cost recovery would be on per kilometre basis. Additional discussion on the issue noted that since SMART is a specialized service, it could look at rates that are higher than taxis. Adding flexibility to choose a certain level of the contribution might retain the member municipalities if they could determine the level at which they want to contribute. Cost recovery has been discussed at SMART for several years, and a menu allowing different levels of participation might be appropriate and it was suggested that the Manager develop some ideas for the strategic planning session. The President said that he did a spreadsheet analysis of costs a few years ago which could be discussed at the strategic planning session. He and the Manager will discuss it to determine if that would be appropriate. Jennifer Christie-Shaw suggested that the spreadsheet should be shared with Board members, but the President said that he would like to first discuss it with the Manager in case some fine tuning is required. Scott Mackey thanked his colleagues for their support of this issue.

Motion #2023-014

Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Warren Dickert

That the Manager bring to the March 24, 2023 strategic planning session more information on cost recovery and its variations.

Carried

F. Annual Wage and Salary Review

This item was deferred to the next Board meeting.

G. Mask Update

The Manager is awaiting the responses from transit agencies regarding their mask mandates.

H. GTR Update

The Manager expects to complete his review of the 17 page contract within a week and a revised version will be sent to Frank Fitzsimmons at the GTR, or Stephanie Stewart at the County of Bruce.

I. Strategic Planning Session

Jennifer Christie-Shaw noted that as a new Board member, she would find it helpful to get some background documents in addition to what is available on the web site and in the binder provided by the Manager. The web site and the binder refer to documents such as the Level of Service Report, the client survey and the Business Plan and she asked if these could be shared ahead of the session so that it can focus on the future. The Manager will distribute the client survey and asked if the Level of Service and the Business Plan documents are available. Warren Dickert provided some background on the Level of Service initiative, noting that prior to the review, SMART service ran 24/7 and provided rides anywhere in Ontario. The Level of Service initiative reviewed the situation and made changes so that the operating hours were from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with some additional adjustments made to add Friday night, and rides being limited to within 20 km of a member municipalities, except for medical appointments. This limit allowed people living in Southgate for example to travel to Shelburne and those in Saugeen Shores to go to Owen Sound. Warren Dickert asked the Manager to share the Level of Service document and provided background information on the business Plan which Saugeen Shores helped develop. As a result of management changes, the plan fell by the wayside, although once the strategic plan is updated, a business plan can be developed and put in place.

Scott Mackey suggested that as much information as possible should be provided to new members. He added that SMART's situation has recently improved and has come a long way as a result of Warren Dickert and Ed McGugan dealing with a number of issues. Making meeting minutes available was discussed, but it was determined that this would amount to an unmanageable amount of reading material. A suggestion was made that documents and plans be shared in order to provide the whole picture, and also see it from the customer perspective. Monica Singh-Soares suggested that an overview be provided for the March planning session.

The President referred to the binder that the Manager assembled for the new Board as comprehensive and a good basis for the so that everyone is starting from the same place. Any members who would like to receive minutes should contact the Manager. The President also asked Warren Dickert to prepare a 10-15 minutes summary of where SMART is at and how it got there, for the session. Warren Dickert agreed to do his best, noting that it might take more than 10 minutes, with assistance from the President and Scott Mackey, who can all share their knowledge.

Warren Dickert explained that the Board was looking for more detail in the minutes when it retained the Recording Secretary, since minutes prior to that time were too vague. He questioned whether they are now too involved, suggesting that meeting notes could be done to provide detail on the discussion, with formal minutes being less detailed.

The Manager presented the strategic planning framework he used in his interview for the Manager position which covers mission, vision, and objectives. It could be used in the session where a lot of discussion is possible, but the focus should be on creating a plan. Jennifer Christie-Shaw found this helpful in terms of what to expect from the session. The President thanked the Manager for presenting the framework and suggested that it should be shown to the SMART municipalities, as well as to Grey and Bruce counties.

9. Correspondence

The Manager noted the donation letters sent out which he referred to earlier in the meeting.

10. Reports and Recommendations

A. Report on January 2023 Operations

The Manager reviewed the report, noting an increase of 48% in rides and 46% in fees compared to January 2022. Billings of 10,000 km were made to clients in Saugeen Shores, more than the other municipalities. Overall, business is getting back to pre-pandemic levels. Warren Dickert noted that in the past, information was broken down to show rides per municipality and he asked if this detail could be added to future reports, since he likes to report this information to Hanover Council. The Manager agreed to provide this information in the future, and added that there were 1,737 rides in total in January, with 463, or 26.66% for Hanover residents. Jennifer Christie-Shaw asked if the report goes with the minutes, and the manager agreed to send it in the future.

Motion #2023-015

Moved by Jennifer Christie-Shaw; seconded by Monica Singh-Soares

That the Board approve Report SL2023-0101 January 2023 Operational report as presented.

Carried

11. Committee Reports

There were no Committee Reports.

12. Closed Session

There were no items for a closed session.

13. Adjournment & Upcoming Meeting Dates

It was agreed that Catharine McKay will attend on March 24, 2023 to take notes/minutes.

The Manager agreed to add SMART minutes to the web site.

Meetings for the rest of 2023 have been scheduled, although there will be no meeting in July or August.

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Friday, March 24, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., Strategic Planning Session to be followed by the Regular Monthly Board Meeting at 2:00 p.m., SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

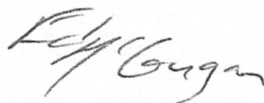
Friday April 28, 2023, 1:30 p.m. SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

Motion

Moved by Monica Singh-Soares; Seconded by Cheryl Grace

That the Board of Directors of SMART adjourn at 3:39 p.m.

Carried



Ed McGugan, President



Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

These minutes are considered to be in draft form until signed by the President and the Recording Secretary.