

WEST HANTS MUNICIPALITY
Committee of the Whole – Budget Meeting Agenda
April 17, 2023, 6:00 p.m.
Sanford Council Chambers 76 Morison Dr, Windsor, NS
(also held via virtual via Zoom and Facebook livestreamed)
Agenda is subject to changes up to and including during the meeting



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1. Call to Order
 2. Attendance
 3. Announcements
 4. Approval of the Agenda, including additions or deletions
 5. Declaration(s) of Conflict of Interest
 6. 6:00-6:15 Review Follow-Up Items from April 12 Meeting
 7. 6:15-6:30 Council Discussion & Direction from April 12 Meeting
 8. 6:30-7:00 General Government Services Overview
 - a. Office of the CAO
 - b. Financial Services
 - c. Tax Exemption List Review and Motion
 9. 7:00-7:30 Planning and Development Overview
 10. 7:30-7:45 Break
 11. 7:45-8:30 Community Development Overview
 12. 8:30-9:45 Public Works Overview
 13. 9:45-10:00 Discussion & Direction from Council
 14. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment
 - a. Committee of the Whole Budget Meeting April 18, 2023, at 6p.m.

WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
Special Committee of the Whole (Budget) - Meeting Minutes
April 17, 2023 - 6:00 p.m.



West Hants
something inspiring awaits

1. Call to Order – Deputy Mayor Paul Morton (Chair) called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Attendance

Council

Abraham Zebian, Mayor

Rupert Jannasch, Councillor Dist. 1

Scott McLean, Councillor Dist. 2

Mark McLean, Councillor Dist. 3 6:09 p.m.

Jeff Hartt, Councillor Dist. 4

Debbie Francis, Councillor Dist. 5

Paul Morton, Deputy Mayor Dist. 8

Bob Morton, Councillor Dist. 6

Ed Sherman, Councillor Dist. 7

John Smith, Councillor Dist. 9

Laurie Murley, Councillor Dist. 10

Jim Ivey, Councillor Dist. 11

Staff

Mark Phillips, CAO

Diana Gibson, Acting Director of Financial Services

Shelleena Thornton, Municipal Operations Supervisor

Kathy Kehoe, Dir. Community Development

Deanna Snair, Exec. Asst/ Clerk

Todd Richard, Dir. Public Works

Carmen Dewar-Miller, Admin Assistant(ZOOM)

Sara Poirier, Dir. Planning and Development

3. Announcements (6:01 p.m.)

Deputy Mayor P. Morton acknowledged that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People and that this land is governed by the treaties of Peace and Friendship signed in 1726.

Birthday wishes were extended to Deputy Mayor P. Morton and Councillor Sherman.

4. Approval of the Agenda, including additions or deletions (6:01 p.m.)

Voting occurred by a show of hands.

MOVED BY COUNCILLORS FRANCIS AND SHERMAN THAT THE 2023-04-17 SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (BUDGET) AGENDA BE APPROVED. MOTION CARRIED.

5. Declaration(s) of Conflict of Interest (6:01 p.m.) - None

Consensus was that discussions from the April 12th and tonight's meeting would occur at 9 p.m.

6. Review Follow-Up from April 12th meeting.

Acting Director Gibson provided a brief overview of the debt servicing information with the 5-year forecasted debt ratios related to Cunnabel Creek and without the addition of Cunnabel Creek that was requested earlier today.

Discussion Points:

- Revenue was based on a 3% increase each year. Previous debt serving information was shared last week.
- Cunnabel Creek projection was based on 25 years of debt servicing (half of the \$23 million dollars due to expecting/hoping half will come from other funding sources). \$5 million more was projected for the 2028-29 year. Due to the size and scale of the project it was anticipated the debt could last up to 40 years.
- A total of \$80,562.76 was spent on Hobart's beach. \$41,872.44 for the boat launch and \$38,690.32 for parking area improvements. All funded through the CCBF, with the work primarily done by the contractor.
- Electronic records indicate the first tax sale was in 2010. A redemption was done in that same year resulting in a balance of \$59,853.28 (no paper records have been found). The surplus from this tax sale will not be available to the Municipality until 2030. Since 2010, records for all sales are available and the surplus was reconciled and reviewed by the auditors each year. The tax sale and surplus process were reviewed. All tax sale surpluses are held in reserves for 20 years, during that time an interested party can make an application through the courts to claim the surplus amount. If after 20 years no claim was made, the funds were transferred into municipal funds.

A brief overview of debt servicing information was provided as it related to the increase in debt servicing. \$19,881.51 was associated with the principal amount (not including the interest amount). A total of \$710,000 of debt servicing was removed (due to debt maturing or being funded differently) since the 2022-23 budget deliberations. A list of the new proposed debt for 2023-24 was provided. The proposed new debt list only showed new debt, items that were carried forward were not included on this list.

7. General Government Services Overview

Office of the CAO

Increases were attributed to legislation (cost of living), salaries included benefits, the addition of an HR Specialist, training and more conferences being offered, professional services to better align with actual expenditures in 2022 and a \$10,000 increase for land related matters (surveys, etc.) and in pensions (related to previous agreements in place with individuals).

Emergency Management Office (EMO)

Overall expenses had decreased. COVID related expenses decreased (extra cleaning supplies were removed. Telephone (increased to \$2,800) and Insurance (increased to \$460) amounts were corrected.

Financial Services

Primary increases were due to increased costs associated with the 2022-23 audit. A yearly increase was built into the contract with Kent and Duffett.

Taxation

The tax exemption list was reviewed. Increases in expenses were due to increases seen in assessment values and the costs for exemptions and rebates.

Discussion Points:

- Six new properties (Pisiquid Canoe Club, The Trustees of the Martock 4-H Club and the Panuke Road Park, all fell under the non-profit section (qualify for 100% exemption) were added to the list. All parties on the list had submitted the required documentation. All other properties remained the same as last year.

Discussion Points:

- Clarity was requested regarding how exemptions were allocated. (Reduction from Commercial rate to Residential rate, 100% exemption or partial exemption). Charitable or not-for profits were eligible for 100% exemption upon receipt of their information and Council approval.
- Commercial based businesses were eligible for a 100% reduction (Commercial to Residential), specifically Day Cares and the Masonic Society.
- If it was a commercial-based business but they fell within specific By-Laws, then this was where the amount of change in reduction came from. Mermaid Theatre, have some commercial space which results in having a special amount determined by the by-law attached to them.
- Staff will follow up with information related to the by-law and percentages and confirm the criteria has been met for all properties on the list, including new additions.
- Consensus was to move forward on the agenda. The tax exemption resolution would be discussed further later in the meeting.

General Administration Services

Increases were seen in office supplies (supply expense increase) and within the “other” section (additional allocations to committees and accessibility programming, increases in PVSC charges (\$1,800), a 17% increase in insurance (no additional properties were being insured) and communications increases (newsletter costs and staff attending community events to showcase the website/branded recognition). Land matters professional service account was an error, this was accounted for in the CAO’s Office.

Decreases in IT were due to moving programs to cloud based platforms, with an increased focus on cyber security across the Municipality.

8. Department of Planning and Development

Increases were attributed to higher levels of advertising required, however, this cost was also offset by the revenue received from applicants (pay for advertising), training and conferences opening up post COVID, the approval of the new MCCAP Coordinator position (salary line included the remainder of the contract for the current temporary coordinator and then a pro-

rated amount for a new coordinator's position later in the year), the MCCAP Workplan (provides the committee with the opportunity to leverage more funding for projects/programs).

Discussion Points:

- Salary and benefits have been under budget on the expense side for a few years (budgeted for intended hires but was not hired). Items were billed in previous years and transferred to the Operating Reserve when not used. The thought was that funds should be pulled from the Operating Reserve for this item.

Building Inspection

- Projected decreases in mileage were due to the request to support the lease of an Electric vehicle for their fleet.
- The increases were a result of training and conferences opening up. Additional training was required as staff needed to catch up on training that was not available during COVID.
- The drone was included in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 Capital budgets. \$25,000 included the drone and staff training (\$20,000 for the drone and \$5,000 for staff training). It would be used by By-Law, and Fire Inspection as an additional tool for inspections, complaints and to review areas where access was limited. Training should be removed from the Capital Budget.

By-Law

- Increases were attributed to increased costs in fuel, maintenance and costs to update uniforms (boots and vests).
- A decrease was made to insurance (\$860) as the projection was too high.

9. Department of Community Development

Acting Director Gibson reviewed the revenues (increases and decreases) associated with Community Development.

Discussion Points:

- The increase in power expenses at the Sports Complex was a result of the facility requiring a lot of power to operate and the increase in the N.S. power rate. Comparisons with the 2021 costs did not accurately reflect operational costs as the facility was only open a few months. Another 7% power increase was expected next year. There may be value in exploring a larger solar project for this site or moving forward with a municipally funded project to decrease power costs.
- Removing financial barriers (providing little or no cost programming) was ideal.
- Rather than decreasing revenue, two new expenses were created to assist with reducing costs associated with programming. It was suggested there was value in understanding what the total cost of programming was (broken out by age demographics).
- The 100% variances for HMCC were incorrect.
- Solar project funding percentages were dependent on total amounts for each project. MCCAP were awaiting a response from the province on the \$20,000 application previously submitted.

Acting Director Gibson reviewed the expenses (increases and decreases) associated with Community Development.

Discussions:

- \$71,000 allocated for Development Societies included \$30,000 for the Windsor Township (\$60,000 was requested). Further clarity on the job description was requested. The employee would be a township employee and the Municipality would assist with payroll (similar to HMCC).
- Approximately \$64,000 was lost from revenue to expenses with the Sports Complex. The more the facility was used for summer activities the deficit will decrease more. If coupled with a solar project there was potential to generate revenue.

Acting Director Gibson reviewed the revenue and expenses for the Riverbank Cemetery (Area Rated)

Discussion Points:

- There may be value in having a conversation related to ways to better address increased service costs for residents who no longer live in the area and want to purchase services (General rating vs Area rating).
- If cemeteries were general rated, questions were raised regarding Councils appetite to assume responsibility for all cemeteries (approximately 42) in West Hants.

10. Department of Public Works Overview

Acting Director Gibson reviewed the expenses (increases and decreases) associated with General Rated Roads.

- Decreases were a result of salaries being allocated differently. Allocations done were based on the needs for each road and the staffing required for the work to be completed.
- Increases were attributed to the Dept of Transportation costs increasing, this was a general rated number that came from the province (represents 0.0089% of the general tax rate for this fee), equipment costs (including maintenance and fuel costs) due to expected work to be completed and to better represent the costs in this area.
- J Class Roads also pay the general rate (J Class Roads).
- Road maintenance and snow removal were area rated items.

Acting Director Gibson reviewed the expenses (increases and decreases) associated with Area Rated Roads. (7:12 p.m.)

Increases were seen across all three areas as a result of a higher allocation of salaries going to each area rate rather than the general rated portion.

Increases were seen in snow removal and equipment maintenance accounts as a result of the cost to provide the service.

Discussion Points

- 2022-23 snow removal costs were anticipated to be on budget, with a possibility of being slightly under budget. Most snow removal costs were fixed costs.

Waste Collection and Disposal (Area Rated Cost)

Increase in expenses were due to the contract extension, currently in the 4th year of the current contract. Costs for next year have not been determined (new contract has not been signed).

Landfill (Does not impact the General Tax Rate)

Slight decrease seen in salaries.

Costs associated with this item was covered by reserves. A transfer from the ARO (Asset Retirement Obligation Standard) now covers the cost instead of the former closed landfill reserve.

Discussion Points:

- Water sampling was done by an external source (Fracflow).

Waste Diversion (No impact on General rate)

Funds received from Region 6 help offset costs for this item.

Municipal Facilities (100 King Street and 76 Morison Drive) (Expenses were General Rated)

Decreases at 100 King were attributed to salary allocations (related to PW staff doing maintenance to the buildings, salaries allocated to another area in PW) and increased contract cleaning.

Increases were due to maintenance costs and 76 Morison required a Fire Inspection.

Discussion Points:

- Increase at 100 King did not include any asbestos abatement.

Libraries (General Rated)

The increase was due to salary allocation. Hantsport was forecasting a decrease and Windsor forecasting and increase as a result of work needed to be done in the coming year.

Courthouse (No impact on the General Rate)

Salary allocation decreased.

The Provincial government pays for costs associated with this building. Some additional cleaning was being contracted out. Past conversations have occurred around selling the property.

Foodbank

The decrease was attributed to this property no longer being on municipal land, therefore no tax bill having to be paid.

11. Break occurred at 7:25 p.m. The meeting resumed at 7:47 p.m.

12. Sewer

- Seeking Council's input regarding moving the sewer utilities out of the general operating to be a standalone item. The sewer rate does not affect the taxpayer, its revenues pay directly for their expenses, staff would like to separate it from the General Operating Budget and have it as their own budget, like the water utility. Sewers tend to run deficits, resulting in the general operation needing to cover the deficit. If it was removed the general operation would be completely balanced. Makes it cleaner.

West Hants

- Administration increase was attributed to salary allocation, insurances and fuel costs. A carryover for the rate study was done (budgeted in the previous year).
- Lift station increase (28%) was due to insurance and power.
- Sewage treatment and Disposal increase was due to increased power costs.

Windsor

- Administration decreases were due to salary allocations and public works distributions costs. The rate study was still being carried over in this section.
- Sewage collections increases were due to outside contract work costs.
- Other areas were affected by power and insurance cost increases.

Discussion Points:

- West Hants has 32 lift stations and Windsor has 7.
- A solar project requires land, lift stations do not have a lot of land associated with them. Solar could be associated with a wastewater treatment plant allocated to a sewer. Power rates were based on actual costs (including the NS rate increase). The power saved did not need to go directly to a specific building, it could be used to decrease power usage across the whole portfolio.
- Increases were based off actual projected cost at the end of March. If Windsor's actual projected cost was less than last year's budget, there was still the 7% increase worked into that budget (the spend may not have been as much as what was budgeted). West Hants may have spent more than what was budgeted. The increase in West Hants was based on the actual dollar amount spent.
- The rate study was in both West Hants and Windsor for the same amount. In West Hants there was an increase in salary allocation to the West Hants Utility from last year to this year. Windsor had a decrease in salary allocation and a small decrease in public works cost distribution for Windsor.
- The revenue stream allocated to the sewer utility increased when the billing structure changed. Previously the revenue stream did not actually show the revenue stream.
- The administrative increase was due to salary allocations (where work needed to be done). West Hants has a larger number of lift stations resulting in a larger amount of work required.
- Long term debt associated with the sewer was included in the overall debt for the municipality, but water was not. The sewer debt would be shown separately but it would still make up the general debt ratio.
- No changes to the billing or regulations. It would be billed the same way, but the actual budget document would be by itself. Just changing the presentation.
- Water Utilities debt was a separate. Perhaps there was a benefit to exploring a sewer utility. Unknown if a sewer utility would work the same as the water utility.
- Sewer and Water Utility both fall under Public Works.

Discussion Period

Suggestions:

Capital Budget for J Class Road Funding: \$200,000 was identified in the budget for the next 5 years. If supported, it may be prudent to expedite the process. The proposal was to increase the

amount to \$500,000 from post consolidation funding this year (accelerate the process) and then revisit next year.

Key Points:

- J Class Roads touch a lot of Districts but were not evenly distributed throughout the municipality. As presented
- The suggestion was to increase it to a million, concern was that this amount was a large portion of the post consolidation funding. Post Consolidation funding should be spread across the municipality as a whole.
- The province determines what roads are completed and timeframe for the work based on the application received. The application would be submitted with the proposed amount and list of proposed roads to upgrade. It was unsure if the province had capacity to complete all the work this year.
- The province would determine what process was undertaken (double chip seal).
- Other municipalities have taken over ownership of J Class roads.
- Benefit to have a larger discussion regarding roads across the entire municipality.

Inspire West Hants Fund: The fund affects all areas within the region across all age demographics. Proposed to increase this amount to \$20,000.

Items suggested being removed from the budget: the Street Sweeper, the drone and the Windsor Township employee.

Items added to the budget were: Cameras located at the entry and exit points within West Hants. Add BFD Chief's training amount back into the budget.

Hants Shore Community Health Centre: The outlook for this asset to the community on the shore was uncertain. Programs offered by the centre were similar to yoga and movement programs geared towards seniors and after school programs were impactful to the community. Funding was seen more as support for continued programming. The request was for long-term funding in the form of a \$50,000 grant to be paid annually. There was value in supporting the request.

West Hants Ground Search and Rescue: Evident that the f-group does not have standardized uniforms. Each person was responsible for providing their own attire. Other emergency service providers had municipal support to outfit them properly. The proposal was for a \$20,000 grant this year to assist with achieving standardized uniforms outside of what their line item within the budget was. Consensus was to support the proposal.

Roads: The provincial portion of roads (\$209,000/year) were General rated (everyone pays). Hantsport and Windsor also pay for their roads (Area rated) in addition to also paying the General rate. If roads were General rated, substantial savings would be seen in the communities of Windsor and Hantsport (growth areas).

Due to the increase in development a large tax revenue was expected in the next few years that the region as a whole would benefit from. The revenue seen from the increased development would benefit the whole region.

There was capacity to offset the hit that West Hants would take from General rating roads.

Concern was raised re: future infrastructure needs and costs, what the future growth of the region looked like and if it could sustain the costs/needs of General rated roads.

There was value in knowing what the 5-year revenue projection for the region as a whole looked like.

Value in exploring different scenarios (all roads General rated, main roads General rated, etc).

The Operating Reserve could be used to help offset tax rates for the communities of Windsor and Hantsport.

Capital projects were General rated. Snow control and maintenance were Area rated. The fees paid to the N.S. Dept. of Transportation to maintain roads they own outside of the former towns were General rated expenses.

Residential Property Tax Assistance program: Value in increasing the household limits to \$42,000 in addition to increasing the rebate to \$400 for all of West Hants. Consensus was that this change would be beneficial to all areas within the region. There was support to see the household income amount increase to \$46,000. Information could be communicated through the newsletter (with the updated amounts), on the website, Facebook, could also be put an insert in the water and tax bills. Value in making it so individuals could retroactively apply. The revenue seen from the increased development would benefit the whole region. Look at changing the policy and exploring radio advertising to get the information out.

Sewer Rebates: Currently in the process of a rate study. Was there a way to explore a base rate change compared to water in and water out? There was potentially some capacity/flexibility to look at the base amounts for sewer (water in vs water out).

Bulk Water: When the bulk water station was moved from Morison to Falmouth it resulted in increased costs. A rebate program would be beneficial to those who rely on bulk water service; however, the challenge would be ensuring the residents received the rebate vs the water haulers not passing on the savings. The Municipality does not control what the water hauler charges. A rebate program would need to be receipt based (ensuring that residents receive the rebate) vs changing/reducing the actual rate.

HMCC Funding Request for renovations/improvements to the Pickle Ball Court: Proposing Council consider funding the entire project (\$250,000) to include the accessibility aspect be included in phase one of the project and not wait until a later date. The project could be funded through the Grants process, the Hantsport Smoothing Reserve and some Post-consolidation funds.

Streetlights: There are intersections in the region (in rural areas) that would benefit from lighting. Need a way to identify areas that may benefit from a light on a power pole and the Municipality look after the costs. Staff are drafting a streetlight policy to come to Council. Streetlighting could

be request based and be presented to Council for approval vs policy based. If lighting was requested on a Provincial Road, permission from the province would be required. There needs to be a way to ensure areas were not negatively affected (some areas do not want lighting). Considerations need to be reviewed for lighting that is currently in the rural areas and being area rated to these communities, would the Municipality take over this lighting.

If lighting was explored was there potential to hook into the power supply for cameras and what that cost would be.

Consensus was to take the proposed list and discuss them at the next meeting.

Future discussions could involve Reserves (their health and potentially injecting funds into other areas) and seating in Council chambers.

MOVED BY COUNCILLORS M. MCLEAN AND B. MORTON THAT THE MEETING ADJOURN AT 9:56 P.M. MOTION CARRIED

13. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment – Next meeting will be Committee of the Whole Budget Meeting April 17, 2023, at 6p.m.

Mayor Abraham Zebian

Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk