

WEST HANTS MUNICIPALITY
Committee of the Whole – Budget Meeting Agenda
May 14, 2025, 5:00 p.m.
Sanford Council Chambers 76 Morison Dr, Windsor, NS
(also held via virtual via Zoom and YouTube livestreamed)
Agenda is subject to changes up to and including during the meeting



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1. Call to Order
 2. Attendance
 3. Approval of the Agenda, including additions or deletions
 4. Declaration(s) of Conflict of Interest
 5. Announcements
 6. 5:00-5:30 Review Follow-Up Items from May 12 Meeting
 7. 5:30-7:00 Protective Services
 - a. Royal Canadian Mounted Police
 - b. Fire Protection
 - i. Operating Budgets
 - ii. Capital Budgets
 8. 7:00-7:30 Break
 9. 7:30-8:30 Community Development Overview
 - c. Administration
 - d. Program
 - e. Parks & Grounds
 - f. Facilities
 - g. Community Economic Development
 10. 8:30-9:30 Discussion & Direction from Council
 11. 9:30-10:00 Break
 12. Motions & Resolutions – Pending Council Discussions
 - b. Budget Approval Motion

- c. Taxing Resolution
- d. HMCC Resolution
- e. Tax Exemption List
- f. Property Owners Association Resolutions
- g. Funding Agreement Motions

13. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment

- a. Committee of the Whole Budget Meeting TBD

For budget materials not linked above, please reference the linked agenda package from the 2025-05-06 Special COTW Budget Meeting (Operating, Capital and Reserves Budgets).

1. **Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m., quorum was achieved.

2. **Attendance**

Council

Abraham Zebian, Mayor

Rupert Jannasch, Councillor Dist. 1

Scott McLean, Councillor Dist. 2 (5:38 p.m.)

Crystal Remme, Councillor Dist. 3

Paul Wheadon, Councillor Dist. 4

Bob Morton, Councillor Dist. 6

Debbie Francis, Deputy Mayor Dist. 5

Kayla Leary-Pinch, Councillor Dist. 7 (5:50 p.m.)

Paul Morton, Councillor Dist. 8 (6:28 p.m.)

John Smith, Councillor Dist. 9

Bonnie Smith, Councillor Dist. 10

Jim Ivey, Councillor Dist. 11

Staff

Mark Phillips, CAO

Carlie Rochon, Dir. Financial Services

Todd Richard, Dir. Public Works (ZOOM)

Tim Leslie, Manager Building & Fire

Official

Deanna Snair, Exec. Asst/ Clerk

Kari Fougere, Dir. Planning and Development

Kevin Bennet, Manager of Parks and Facilities

Kathy Kehoe, Dir. Community Development

Tim Bouter, Project Engineer

Presenters

Sergeant Tim Doyle, West Hants RCMP

Kyla Dow, RCMP

Danielle Desjardins, RCMP

Chris Spence, Summerville Fire Chief

3. **Approval of the Agenda, including additions or deletions**

As there were no additions, the agenda as presented was accepted.

4. **Declaration(s) of Conflict of Interest** - None

5. **Announcements**

Deputy Mayor Francis acknowledged we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People and this land is governed by the treaties of Peace and Friendship signed in 1726. West Hants Regional Municipality also recognizes that we are all treaty people and have responsibilities to this land and each other. West Hants Regional Municipality also recognizes African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose history, legacies, and contributions have enriched that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

Council and I as Chair are committed to ensuring this meeting and its participants conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner as outlined in the municipality's Municipal Code of Conduct. Meeting presenters, staff and the public are expected to conduct themselves in an equally respectful manner at all times the meeting is being conducted. I thank you all in advance for your commitment to these important meeting principles.

6. **Review Follow items from May 12th**

Director Rochon reviewed additional details following the May 12th meeting. A total of \$252,431.22 was spent on legal fees in 2024/25 (appeals - \$73,410.33, \$12,588.48 0 judicial review, \$36,247.70 – regular planning, \$6,518.53 – land, \$2,327.67 – policy, \$33,535.09 – fire services, \$45,053.85 – tax sale and \$42,749.57 – day to day operations). Land purchases made in trust were removed from this area, and an additional invoice related to the tax sale was received and included in the updated figures.

A total of \$1,622,567.10 was spent on consulting fees in 2024/25.

A total of \$211,570.22 was spent on fuel through the Public Works shed. Not all fuel was purchased through the Public Works shed, some was purchased through other locations. A total \$231,022.94 was spent on fuel for 2024/25. As well RCMP or Fired Department fuel was not included in this amount.

Discussion Points:

- Legal fess associate with the tax sale were recouped through the tax sale process. It works out to be a net zero impact.
- Brooklyn Fire Department (Station 1 and 2) do not get their fuel through the Public Works depo. They get fuel from the Petro-Can where they have an account set up.
- Consulting fees for Capital projects did include some consulting fees for water, storm water, etc.
- If a developer was not doing what they need to be doing, consulting fees to determine if a developer was not doing what they were responsible to do were not normally billed back to the developer. There was no avenue to back bill developers.

Budget Adjustments following Council Direction

Position Direction – The Funding and Procurement Specialist, the Communications Specialist and the Building and Fire Official positions were added back into the budget. An adjustment was also made for the Court House.

The overall budget (compared to the budget presented on May 12th). Director Rochon noted the \$120,897.28 was associated with the Communication and Funding Services Specialist. The change in the Protective Services was associated with the Court House expenses being reduced as well as the addition of the Building and Fire Official. Based on the changes made, capacity within Transfers to/from Reserves for infrastructure (Windsor and West Hants) were impacted. There was a reduction in the sewer reserve contribution. There was also a reduction in the expected revenue being received from the Department of Justice.

Operating Budget Updates following Direction Summary

Admin and Courthouse adjustment/reduction of \$308,359.00. Increase of \$120,897.28 for the Communication and Funding Specialist. A reduction in Court House expenditures of \$235,319.00. An increase in Protective Services expenses associated with the addition of the Building and Fire Official. As well as a reduction in the Transfer to/from Reserves amounting to \$41,750.00. Overall, the total reduction was \$416,845.57.

Reserve Budget Updates following Release

A decrease of \$31,200.00 to the Windsor Infrastructure and a decrease of \$10,550.00 to the Hantsport Infrastructure Reserve. The total overall net change was a decrease amounting to \$41,750.00.

Based on the above changes, the proposed General Residential Rate was \$0.8526. The 2025/26 proposed rate for West Hants was \$1.0596, \$1.3537 for Hantsport and \$1.6464 for Windsor.

Director Rochon reviewed the increases to average properties within Hantsport, West Hants and Windsor based on the proposed tax rate.

Although expenses were reduced, revenue was also reduced (Court House). There were now expenses associated to the Court House that now need to be covered.

Discussion Points:

- Court House expenses were reduced by \$235,319.000 before admin fees but the overall revenue and admin fee charged to the Court House also had to be reduced by \$308.359.00. The overall impact on the Court House was that revenues were down 79% and expenses were down 30%. Approximately 40% of the expenses associated with this building would now need to be covered by the tax rate.

Director Rochon reviewed what a penny was worth in each of the areas. General Residential - \$196,874.79. West Hants - \$171,479.33. Hantsport - \$8,51.93 and Windsor was \$25,395.46. For General Commercial - \$15,677.78. West Hants - \$\$8,957.88. Hantsport - \$\$1,738.09. Windsor - \$6,719.90.

Director Rochon reviewed what \$1 million dollars in borrowing looked like depending on estimated debt servicing/terms and the debt service ratio forecast (including Cunnabel Creek and not including Cunnabel Creek). 50% of funding support/grant support received was used in the debt servicing forecast for Cunnabel Creek

7. Protective Services

a. Royal Canadian Mounted Police

The presentation covered the current fiscal year projections (April 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026), and where the costs were allocated. Key points to note were:

- There were 22 established positions, with three (3) additional positions paid for by the province.
- Vacant positions were not billable to WHRM.
- In 2024/25 RCMP utilization was 18.72, resulting in the amount able to be billed to WHRM.

Accommodation, Operation and Maintenance

WHRM was responsible for providing accommodations for policing services (part of the agreement). Rent rate was set every 5 years and was 100% charged to WHRM.

Equipment

Criminal operations accounts for firearms, ammunition and intervention equipment. In 2023/24 the role out of police modernization equipment was started. TMR2's are used as radios, computer equipment was replaced based on a four-year life cycle and police vehicles were scheduled to be

replaced based on the number of km's, age of vehicle or wear and tear on the vehicle and if repairs were reasonable based on costs associated with replacement.

Divisional Administration and Other Costs

Divisional administration included WHRM's proportional share of the program, and all costs associated with administration of police force.

Division specific costs included pooled and program costs for units (finance, human resourcing, records, information management/reporting systems and IT communications).

Region specific costs included pooled and program costs for procurement, fleet, business systems, facilities management.

Consolidated services included program costs for each unit (pay and comp, account operation and employee assistance).

Financial Summary

Total cost estimate for WHRM for 2025/26 was \$6,095,155, with \$613,4278 being paid by the Federal government. Within the financial summate, three (3) vehicles were identified for replacement and a live scan system (finger printing, changed out every eight years). Division Admin was also based on having 22 members fulltime (full compliment of staff).

Discussion Points:

- Investigational aids increase in 2025/26 was replacement of the IMIT estimate for full live scan system/Dash cams and the addition of portable ballistic shields. There was also a cost share subscription for TMR2 radios as well.
- Motor vehicle compliance numbers could be found within the quarterly report updates provided at the Police Advisory Board meetings.
- The upcoming closure of the Court House would impact member availability in the region. Officers will need to be pulled out of the region to travel to/from Kentville to attend Court and transport individuals. Having an additional resource to help alleviate impacts to RCMP presence within communities would be beneficial.

Director Rochon noted that within the proposed budget two (2) ATVs were deferred (\$24,400), pistol modernization was reduced by \$30,888.00, breaching tools were reduced by \$3,645. Basedon the changes made the new proposed budget was \$6,095,155.

b. Fire Protection

i. Operating Budgets

Overall, there was a 9.8% increase within the Fire Services. The proposed budget for 2025/26 was \$2,044,516. Funding for Walton was not expected to change as there was a funding agreement in pace for them.

Regional Fire Service

There was not a lot of increases seen in this area. The increases seen were related to insurance, WCB rates, EAP rates and Fire Fighting stipends.

Discussion Points:

- \$2,700 identified within the budget was the stipend provided for the Fire Chiefs to review and provide comments on development within the region.

Hantsport Fire Department

- WHRM owns the Fire Department building.
- There is an agreement in place with Kings County for funding of Capital and Operational expenses. Represents 48.2% of the funding.
- A one-year adjustment was approved by Kings County for a funding allotment increase (\$127,700) associated with the Hantsport Fire Departments increased operational costs.
- Apparatus increases were up due to the annual service for the Aerial as well equipment costs increased due to increased costs associated with pricing of items (most likely to be impacted by potential tariffs).
- Decreases in fire station costs associated with a charge to building maintenance and Maintenance-Apparatus Superintendent, as this was moved to a contract vs an individual.

Summerville Fire Department

- Fire station was owned by Summerville Fire.
- Administration costs increased due to supplies and expense, public events and a change in Fire Honorarium formula.
- Training costs increased as a Sea-Can was purchased.
- Equipment was the biggest increase due to increased operations and increased costs for equipment and required inspecting and testing on breathing equipment.

Discussion Points:

- Honorariums were not consistent across all departments, they have yet to be regionalized. Summerville's honorarium has not changed in over 15 years. Most members receive less than \$300/year, they were requesting an increase to match the standard proposed by WHRM.
- All operations were covered within the proposed budget. The Society does fund raise and last year they contributed over \$80,000 to the operation on the facility (resided the main station, added additional funds to support the paving project).

Brooklyn Station 1 Fire Department

- WHRM owns the Fire Department building.
- In 2025/26 they will receive \$90,335 in funding from East Hants.
- Equipment increase was due to purchase of Highrise kits and safety equipment.
- Communications increase was attributed to radio replacements.
- Training increase was attributed to elevator rescue training.
- Fire station costs were up due to the request to purchase and replace 10 chairs and building maintenance.
- Administration increases attributed to the health and wellness committee (increase to member recognition and administrative support staff).

Discussion Points:

- Administration (other) increased by 171%, it was associated with the chairs.

- All operations were covered within the proposed budget. The department was a very busy department with 426 calls last year; the Chief expressed it was unfair to ask members to fundraise.
- Most of the fire training done was with Brooklyn Station 1 and 2, if extra training was occurring on weekends and spots were available it was opened to other departments.
- Elevator training consisted of specialized training and equipment to lock out/tag out and elevator until a technician arrived (1 day course) or use rope rescue equipment already acquired to provide further service in the event a member was required to repel down an elevator shaft to enter an elevator through the top. Elevator rescue equipment purchase was identified in the Capital asks. The elevator equipment would be located at Brooklyn Station 1 on Rescue 5. Station 2 does not have room on the trucks for this equipment.

Brooklyn Station 2 Fire Department

- WHRM owns the Fire Department building.
- Apparatus increases were attributed to mirror conversion kit and fuel.
- Equipment (ice rescue sleds, ice reach pole, 2 ice suits, 2 cold water slings, rope and reel and Highrise gear) increases were attributed to new equipment request and repairs and maintenance to existing equipment.
- Communication increases were attributed to radios.
- Training increases were attributed to elevator and Highrise rescue training.
- Fire station cost increases were attributed to replacement of 6 chairs and required building maintenance.
- Administration increases attributed to the health and wellness committee (increase to member recognition and administrative support staff).

Discussion Points

- BFD Station 2 expenses were updated to reflect a reduction. The expense variance decreased from 64% to 33.1%.

Councillor Leary Pinch left the meeting at 7:20 p.m. prior to any discussions related to Windsor Fire Department.

Windsor Fire Department

- Located at 100 King Street – pay rent based on sq footage and operating cost of the facility.
- Apparatus increases were attributed to increased maintenance.
- Equipment increases were attributed to the purchase of 2 dry suits and other outfitting needs as well as hose replacement. Overall pricing of items also impacted this category.
- Communication increases were attributed to pager replacements.
- Fire station increases were attributed to the Maintenance and Apparatus Superintendent.
- Administration increases were attributed to increased public events and changes within the honorarium formula for Deputies and Captains. Prior to the budget document being released, there was an increase proposed for the Fire Chief that was removed for further Council discussion and direction on the matter.

Discussion Points

- Inter departmental transfer for rent between WHRM and WFD was \$81,718.

- CPI and WCB increase were associated with the Maintenance and Superintendent position.
- WFD expect to receive a \$20,000 grant (Emergency Services Provider Fund), this amount removed from the budget under municipal expenses and included as a revenue source for WFD.
- All operations were covered within the proposed budget.
- WFD received elevator training years ago. Inquiries have been made regarding this training but to date it was not being offered by the company the inquiry was made to. If it becomes available, they would like to partake in it.

Southwest Hants Fire Department

- Society owns the Fire Department building. WHRM reimburses the Society for fire station related costs.
- Proposed increase in funding (1.8% increase from 2024/25) in the amount of \$32,275.
- Fuel costs were the main driver in increases seen within Apparatus expenses.
- Equipment expenses were attributed to boat equipment and structural helmets.
- Communication increases were attributed to pager replacements.
- Training increases were attributed to boat training and travel to Expo.
- Administration increases were attributed to increased public events and changes within the honorarium formula for Deputies and Captains.

Discussion Points:

- Southwest Hants responded to between 35-40 calls per year. Windsor responded to over 300 calls last year.

Councillor Leary-Pinch returned to the meeting at 7:24 p.m.

Protective Services position

There was some fiscal flexibility associated with the current vacancy, should there be a desire to shift direction from the existing structure. The Nova Scotia Department of Emergency Management has established a set of standards and expectations for municipalities concerning Emergency Management Office (EMO) operations and service delivery.

Additionally, the Fire Service Association was currently undergoing a review process, which includes aspects such as governance, dispatch, and related services. It was anticipated that the Municipality's responsibilities with respect to EMO will remain at least consistent with current levels, if not elevated, reflecting a higher standard or duty of care.

Discussion Points:

- The Nova Scotia Department of EMO is expected to encourage—and potentially require—that municipalities designate a senior-level position specifically responsible for emergency management. This role would be dedicated to EMO-related duties, rather than being an ancillary task assigned to an existing position. The intention is to ensure compliance with provincial standards and to strengthen the effectiveness and accountability of emergency management within the municipality.
- Consensus was that the position of this nature is both valuable and worthy of support.
- The Province has indicated that funding was available to support this initiative; however, the specific details have not yet been disclosed.

- The position would be included in the Executive Summary.

The discussion turned to the potential tariffs. Council has yet to articulate their thoughts to the Federal government about placing tariffs on Protective Services items. There may be value in sending a letter off to the MP and Federal representatives to acknowledge the events occurring but also share how these same events were directly impacting the Municipality. This was worthy of a future discussion.

ii. Capital Budgets

Fire protection in the 5-year Capital budget represented 4.4%. Emergency Services had \$0 allocated in the next 5 years. Hantsport Fire had \$837,557 allocated. Windsor Fire had \$7,885,451 allocated. Brooklyn Station 1 had \$446,168 allocated. Brooklyn Station 2 had \$180,000 allocated. Southwest Hants had \$1,925,533 allocated and Summerville had \$168,232 allocated. The largest items within the categories were related to truck replacements.

Hantsport Fire had a carry over into 2025/26 for apparatus that just arrived. This item was budgeted for in the year previous year but arrived in April.

The 2027/28 budget year incorporated two (2) vehicles being purchased for Windsor Fire. These vehicles have already been approved and purchased but will not arrive until 2027/28.

2027/28 also included a replacement vehicle for Southwest Hants, this vehicle has not been approved yet.

The other item for consideration (not included in the budget as it was submitted after the budget was prepared) was a \$1.2 million for a bay expansion for BFD Station 2. Their board was endorsing the request for this item to be considered.

Five Year Capital Funding

The proposed total funding for five (5) years was \$11,442,941, with 95.2 % funded through long term debt and 4.8% funded through the former Town of Windsor Fire Equipment Reserve and the Regional Fire Equipment Reserve. Hantsport Fire was required to fund through long-term borrowing due to the agreement in place with Kings County.

2025/26 Protective Services Funding

20.8% was funded through the Reserves, while 79.2% was funded through long term borrowing. Fire represented 3.2% of the current year's budget, with borrowing at \$1.4 million. Hantsport (\$577,539), Windsor (\$641,265), Brooklyn Station 1 (\$207,361), Brooklyn Station 2 (\$180,000), Southwest Hants (\$25,533) and Summerville (\$168,232).

Director Rochon reviewed each department's current year capital equipment requests.

Discussion Points:

- Painting and repairs to the Civic Centre were put in the Capital budget before Chief Tetanish was chief. He noted interior and exterior (painting, caulking needs to be replaced) work was needed at the facility. Pressure washing the exterior of the building may also improve visual appeal of the structure.

- Hantsport Fire Department funding was shared with Kings County. The numbers presented in the budget did not reflect the cost sharing with Kings County. The operating budget showed 48% of debt servicing costs.
- Dump tank was a typo; the item was a dump valve for Tanker 2. One (1) of the three (3) valves was not working. The budgeted amount was to replace all three (3) valves with stainless steel valves to increase the lifespan of the unit.
- Epoxy coating protects the concrete floor and decreases slipperiness of the floors.
- Hydraulic Jaws of Lift (HFD) were used for entrapment in motor vehicle collisions. It was likely the ones currently owned were due to be replaced or upgraded to battery operated.
- Chief Tetanish noted that BFD did not include apparatus replacements in their Capital requests. BFD has two (2) trucks to be replaced in 2028 and one (1) in 2029, totaling approximately \$3.5 million for all three replacement vehicles.
- BFD Station 2 was cramped for space (four trucks, a side by side on a trailer and a boat were in this space). The proposed Bay Expansion would allow Station 2 to have dedicated gym space for their Health and Wellness program, provide storage and room for growth.

Council Direction and Discussion

- Concern was raised long term debt was being used to fund Capital projects at a rate that was not sustainable. If everything remained the same, \$1.7 million would be seen in additional revenue this year and the additional debt seen this year would be \$958,000, which was just over 50%. A bigger conversation was needed on how to fund the required projects for fire services that dealt with safety and projects that were needed in the region. It was important to prioritize needs vs wants.
- Concern was noted that development has not come on board as quickly as it was anticipated or as quickly as funds were being spent.
- The consensus was that the Bay expansion should be considered in the future, as it would not impact current service levels.
- To address the growing challenge of long-term debt, it is necessary to assess both ongoing and newly proposed capital projects. Projects carried forward from the previous year have compounded the workload and financial commitments, while new initiatives continue to be added. Conducting a comprehensive prioritization exercise will help determine which projects should proceed, be deferred, or potentially cancelled, or look at a broader based tax increase to offset increased costs.
- There was consensus among Council that a broader discussion should take place regarding Capital projects. The aim was to evaluate and potentially realign these projects to achieve more sustainable financial outcomes before making any final decisions on the tax rate.
- It would be beneficial for the Fire Chiefs to identify priority items and those that could be deferred within each of their Capital budgets.
- The concern was to find ways to decrease the tax increase for residents. Consensus among Council was that a broader discussion should take place regarding Capital projects. The aim was to evaluate and potentially realign these projects to achieve more sustainable financial outcomes before making any final decisions on the tax rate.

8. Break

A break occurred at 7:25 p.m. Councillor P. Morton left the meeting at 7:55 p.m. to tend to a personal matter. The regular Special Committee of the Whole meeting resumed at 8:05 p.m.

9. Community Development Overview

Revenue

Increases in HMCC administration revenue were related to the CPI adjustment for the Area rate portion as well as an increase in funding based on their request. Program revenue increases. Swimming pool revenue was projected to decrease (grant reduction); however, they were successful in receiving a grant (Swim to Survive in the amount of \$5,000) that will be added back into the budget). Sports Complex rental revenue has increased. Welcome Centre revenues have decreased. Community Economic Development revenue decreased based on what was expected to be received by way of grants. Total revenue (including HMCC) was projected to be \$905,613 for 2025/26 (7.1% increase from the previous year).

Discussion Points:

- The reduction in grants was due to adjusted actuals based on what grants WHRM was successful in receiving. This amount was less than the previous year.

Expenses

Parks and Grounds - Salary and Benefits: Increased to cover support staff costs aimed at improving community beautification, service levels, and standards of care. New Positions: Two seasonal positions proposed to address rising service demands and labour shortages. Fleet Maintenance: Higher costs due to aging vehicles. Snow Removal: Increase linked to the inclusion of the Falmouth Mini Park.

Facilities and Recreation - Swimming Pool and Building: Increased maintenance costs expected in 2025/26. Community Centres (Windsor & Brooklyn): Maintenance costs projected to rise in 2025/26, additional part-time staffing (2 casual positions) as well as general facility costs have also increased. Sports Complex: Increase due to an extended ice season. Welcome Centre: Higher costs related to staffing, supplies, and mileage.

Community Economic Development - Funding Agreement: Second year of support for the Downtown Development Society, funding a dedicated staff position in Windsor and Hantsport. Decreases: Noted in advertising, branding, communication, festivals, and community events, reflecting lower actual expenditures in prior years.

Community Support and Grants

Director Rochon highlighted all the community support WHRM provides. No changes proposed for Public Safety, School Bursaries, Sponsorship/Advertising/In-kind, Travel assistance, Newport District Rink. Landmark East School, West Hants Broomball Association, Windsor Food Bank, Inspire fund, Senior games support, Downtown Development Society – operating, Sewer rebates. Increases proposed for Heritage and Grants (total \$20,000), Grants & Contributions (total \$129,000), Trails (total \$5,000), Hants Shore Health Clinic (total \$50,450), HMCC (total \$60,000), Hole Flood Protection Plan (total \$480,000), Program subsidies (total \$65,878), Volunteer/Community recognition (total \$6,000), In-kind festival and parade support (total \$6,000), Unhoused community support (\$60,450), Low income tax rebates (total \$125,000), Day care reductions (total \$1,345), Other taxation – seasonal (total \$5,074).

Decreases proposed for Dial-A-Ride (\$35,658), Windsor Township program coordinator (\$60,000) and WH Ground Search and Rescue (\$30,270), Skate admission fees (\$5,000), Bulk water rebates, Tax rate exemptions (\$159,608).

In addition, there are three (3) new requests (Avon Community Farmers Market - \$5,000, 9 Lives Cat Rescue - \$5,000 and the Avon River Heritage Museum - \$25,000).

There was an increase of 6.1% (\$1,648,347) in this area if everything was approved.

Discussion Points:

- Avon River Days request was through a grant application.
- The Inspire fund supports all activities.
- Avon Community Farmers Market, 9 Lives Cat Rescue and the Avon River Heritage Museum all requested to be a line item in the budget.
- Council needs to determine if they want to pursue a second round for the Home Flood Protection program.
- Windsor Food bank approved funding (February 2025) was to support operational costs (up to \$3,700/month).
- WH Ground Search and Rescue funding decreased as the previous year included a capital request that was not part of their funding agreement. For 2025/26, it only included operational costs.
- Concerns were raised regarding the level of financial support provided for unhoused community initiatives, and whether alternative approaches could be explored. Council previously approved an additional \$50,000 in funding to support these initiatives. In 2023/24, the program operated out of the Community Centre; however, due to ongoing repairs at that facility, operations were temporarily relocated to the pool. The 2025/26 budget allocation includes sufficient flexibility to accommodate future needs, depending on the form that support may take. The original intent was to offer a space as the municipal contribution for this initiative; however, it morphed into subsidizing wages (financial support). If the intent was to move in this direction; the pool was suggested as being the best space for this program. Director Rochon noted this initiative also impacted insurance costs for whatever facility was used to support this initiative.
- Downtown Development Society (WTBA) operating funding was previously approved through the former Town of Windsor. This support continued after consolidation and was a set funding source, it also included some funding for the Hantsport Business Society as well. WHRM funds the coordinator's position as well through a 3-year funding agreement with the WTBA.
- The Heritage Grant amount was due to carry over from the previous year and the addition of a secondary application that was expected to be received in 2025/26.
- Public safety, Grants and Contributions, Sponsorships/Advertising and In-kind, Trails and Trails assistance grants were part of the Grants and Contributions policy. These items were presented to Council after the budget was approved. These amounts are supposed to fall within the approved policy amount of \$276,000 plus any major capital grants. Direction

and reapproval were needed for the Newport District Rink and Landmark East and if there was desire to have Dial-A-Ride in the budget as well as the requested increase for HMCC and the additions of the Avon River Heritage Museum, Avon Community Farmers Market and 9 Lives Cat Rescue; directions were needed.

- The Hants Aquatic Society owns the facility/pool. WHRM owns the land and was responsible for maintenance and operations.
- Dial-A-Ride funding agreement has ended; the group was advised that extending funding would be a discussion for Council to consider.
- Increases for Recreation program contributions for contractors were associated with hiring Limitless for inclusive programming.

Director Rochon provided updated proposed new debt servicing based on direction provided at the May 6th meeting. Proposed new debt servicing amounted to \$958,256. Each capital project was identified and highlighted the principal payment as well as interest payment for each project. Director Rochon reported Deed Transfer Tax was increased by \$200,000 (based on Council's direction), bringing the projected total to \$1,900,000 for 2025/26. Direction was being requested from Council on whether there remained interest in proceeding with the creation of the three additional reserve funds (Windmill Reserve, Deed Transfer Tax Reserve and Landfill Tipping Fees Reserve) proposed in the motion passed a year ago. If Council wished to move forward, clarity was needed on the intended purpose and use of each proposed reserve and the amount of revenue to be redirected from each applicable revenue stream to fund these reserves in order to draft a formal Reserve Policy to be brought forward for Council's review and approval.

10. Discussion & Direction from Council

Council Discussion and Direction:

- At the time the reserve motion was made it was a well thought out plan however it was felt that under the circumstances Council was not in a position to establish these reserves unless they were able to find the funds from somewhere else rather than removing these funds from revenue. This could be explored at another time.
- Items not borrowed against are transferred to a Carryover Reserve, which can be used to reduce future borrowing requirements and, in turn, lower future debt servicing costs when those items are eventually undertaken.
- The \$958,256 in proposed debt and new debt since consolidation was General Rated, only historical debt was Area Rated.

Directions on areas to push out/defer:

- HFD – Upgrades to Engine 12 compartments (holds and secures equipment on trucks)
- HFD – Hydraulic Jaws of Life (replacement for hydraulic – improvement)

Councillor Lerar-Pinch left the room at 9:04 p.m. during the WFD discussion and returned at 9:05 p.m. after the discussion ended.

- WFD – Truck Bay Floor Coating
- BFD 1 – Civic Centre Floor
- BFD 1 – Epoxy Coat for Apparatus Floor
- Electrical Outlets on Gerrish Street

Items (from Tregothic Creek to Lagoon Drive Disinfection equipment) related to sewer were funded through the sewer rate. They have no impact on the tax rate.

- Outside Operations Facility (Design was approved by Council and completed. The \$358,647 for tender and construction occurring in late fall/early spring). Concerns were expressed with deferring this item; however, consensus remained to defer. Buildings were financed for 20 years and borrowing can only be drawn out over 25 years. The first ask can be for 20 years and then refinanced for a longer period. A suggestion was to take a deeper look at municipal buildings to determine what/if any can be divested or consolidated to help save costs.
- Based on the changes made so far, the tax rate had only decreased by 1/3 of a penny. A suggestion was made that, rather than continuing to defer items due to a lack of information needed to make informed decisions, Council should instead direct staff to revise the current budget and present a version that results in a flat tax rate (i.e., no tax increase). Staff could also review their budgets; identify their priority items and remove/defer items that were less of a priority for the current year.
- Additional cuts/deferrals would like impact service delivery models or strategic goals identified by Council. The question was if Council was prepared to ask residents for more money and defend the decision made by Council as a whole.
- Based on PVSC assessments, residents would see a tax increase; if taxes increased this amount would also increase further. There may be items within other budgets that could be removed to help decrease costs.
- It suggested to send the budget back to staff and the fire departments to review and make cuts and present budgets with a 2, 4 and 6 cent increase for review and consideration.
- The CCBF Reserve would be at approximately \$300,000 by 2029/2030. Decisions need to be made by looking at the bigger picture and looking ahead in the coming years as well.
- Look at ways to decrease legal fees.

Director Rochon was looking for direction on the additional \$250,000 for Community funding requests (Newport Rink, Landmark East school, HMCC additional ask (cover increased costs associated with insurance and was proposed to be Area Rated), Avon Community Farmers Market, 9 Lives Cat Rescue and the Avon River Heritage Museum. Concern was raised there were two parts to the discussion, the first being whether the item should be a line item within the budget or just a request for funds.

A suggestion was to not make the requests a line items with the budget but to focus on the funding request separately as grants. Consensus was to move the funding request from Avon River Heritage Museum, 9 Lives Cat Rescue and Avon Community Farmers Market to Grants and Contributions for consideration. Based on the Grants and Contributions policy and amount requested, the Avon River Heritage Museum would not be considered for the amount that was requested (\$25,000 to support ongoing operations/staffing in 2025/26). They also have other grant funding requests as well.

It was suggested to look at an increase in all tax rates, not just West Hants, and look at increasing the Commercial rates to be more on par with other municipalities.

11. Break

The consensus was to break and for the meeting to resume. A break occurred at 9:57 p.m.

**MOVED BY COUNCILLORS JANNASCH AND J. SMITH THAT COUNCIL
TAKE A BREAK OCCUR AND AFTER THE BREAK THE MEETING
CONTINUES AFTER 10 P.M. MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting resumed at 10:08 p.m. Discussions regarding Community Supports and Grants resumed. Consensus was to leave the Avon River Heritage Museum request in the budget (as is as a line item). Consensus was to move 9 Lives Cate Rescue to Grants and Contributions for consideration. Consensus was to leave the Avon Community Farmers Market request in the budget (as is as a line item).

The Newport District Rink funding that was to be reconsidered each year and spread over four years (this was the third year) to assist with significant capital work to their ice plant. Consensus was to lease it “as is”.

Consensus was to leave Landmark East funding as a line item within the budget.

Consensus was to roll back funding for the unhoused initiative to what it was originally intended as (WHRM provides a space). There may be other ways to support the organizations providing supports for those unhoused in the community.

The Downtown Development Society receives a total of \$105,000 in area rated funding (\$5,000 for Hantsport, and the remaining funds are for the WTBA - \$40,000 for operations and \$60,000 for the WTBA Coordinator position). During the first year of consolidation, the Council of the day recognized economic development benefited everyone in the region and General Rated this funding. There was a desire to see what Area Rating this funding would look like.

Discussions resumed about the Public Works Outside Operations Facility. Another option to consider was to have it remain in the Capital Budget and have the debt servicing payments begin in 2026/27 vs the current fiscal year or debt finance half of the building in the current fiscal year. If decreasing the debt financing for the facility by 50%, the tax rate for West Hants would be at a 6.87 cent increase. At present the facility was in the budget for half the costs.

Consensus was to remove the three (3) proposed staff positions.

Discussions turned to Fire Operations. Their budget has increased \$183,058 from last year. It was noted each department has 50/50 funding that was not accounted for or included within their budgets. A suggestion was made to considered decreasing fire operations to the 2024/25 operating budget with an added increase of 0.9%. December CPI was 0.9%. The 3% CPI referenced for salary adjustments was consistent with the union agreement. It was suggested 3% may be a better figure to use. Consensus was to move in this direction of a 3% increase and review what this looked like.

Based on the proposed changes above; West Hants was looking at a 5.04 cent increase.

There was a desire to have RCMP look at reducing their vehicle replacement budget and reduce the number of vehicles replaced in 2025/26. Last year, the RCMP deferred two (2) vehicles, they advised they couldn't be deferred further due to repairs and maintenance.

There was value in looking at a reduction within the 50% of the growth rate (transportation, recreation and waste collection costs) within the operating budget and a percentage cut to all WHRM departments operational costs (Planning, Finance, Community Development, Admin and Public Works). Direction was for staff to go back and look at reductions within each department's operational expenses.

Public Works Salaries and benefits saw a significant increase compared to 2024/25. It was noted the overall staffing compliment for Public Works has not changed. Staffing percentage allocations had changed based on where staff hours were allocated in the current proposed budget.

Based on all the direction provided to date (staff changes, putting the general rate for the commercial up by \$100,000 for the Business communities), the West Hnats rate was still sitting at around a 5.3 cents increase.

Direction was to proceed with adding the \$105,000 for the Downtown development to be put on the general commercial rate.

Direction was to reduce Grants and Contributions to \$100,000.

12. Motions & Resolutions – Pending Council Discussions – did not discuss.

13. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment

The next Special Committee of the Whole Budget meeting was scheduled for Thursday, May 22, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 11:55 p.m.

Deputy Mayor Debbie Francis

Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk