

WEST HANTS MUNICIPALITY
Committee of the Whole – Budget Meeting Agenda
May 28, 2025, 6:00 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. 5:00-5:45 Review of May 22 Meeting
 7. 5:45-7:00 Discussion & Direction from Council
 8. 7:00-8:15 Break
 9. 8:15-8:30 Review Direction
 10. Motions & Resolutions – Pending Council Discussions
 - a. Budget Approval Motion
 - b. Taxing Resolution
 - c. HMCC Resolution
 - d. Tax Exemption List
 - e. Property Owners Association Resolutions
 - f. Funding Agreement Motions
 11. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment
 - a. Committee of the Whole Budget Meeting TBD

1. **Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m., noting quorum was achieved.

2. **Attendance**

Council

Abraham Zebian, Mayor (Regrets)	Debbie Francis, Deputy Mayor Dist. 5
Rupert Jannasch, Councillor Dist. 1	Kayla Leary-Pinch, Councillor Dist. 7
Scott McLean, Councillor Dist. 2	Paul Morton, Councillor Dist. 8
Crystal Remme, Councillor Dist. 3 (Regrets)	John Smith, Councillor Dist. 9
Paul Wheadon, Councillor Dist. 4	Bonnie Smith, Councillor Dist. 10
Bob Morton, Councillor Dist. 6	Jim Ivey, Councillor Dist. 11

Staff

Mark Phillips, CAO	Deanna Snair, Exec. Asst/ Clerk
Carlie Rochon, Dir. Financial Services	Kathy Kehoe, Dir. Community Development
Todd Richard, Dir. Public Works	Carmen Dewar-Miller, Finance Admin

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.

Falmouth School was hosting Spring Fling from 5 – 7:30 p.m. tomorrow evening.

Belmont Hall was hosting a community breakfast this coming Saturday beginning at 7:30 am.

6. **Review of May 22 Meeting – Budget Adjustments**

2025-26 Operating Budget

Director Rochon briefly reviewed changes made prior to the budget document being released. Included in this information was the proposed staff positions and impacts these may have on the proposed budget. Staff reviewed the budget and removed \$432,780 prior to budget deliberations beginning.

Director Rochon reviewed all the changes in revenues and expenses based on updated accuracy information; items removed from the budget or items that were deferred. The net change was a reduction of \$974,143 in expenses.

Discussion Points:

- The epoxy coating cost presented was associated to debt servicing costs, not the entire cost for the floor coating.
- BFD 1 & 2 reductions were associated with updated accosts based on actuals.
- The reduction for fire departments was the 3% reduction requested within the fire services.
- Windsor Road renewal project (Payzant to King Street) debt servicing was being delayed to when the project would be completed.
- WFD Rescue 4 engine was in the 2023/34 Capital budget, it will not be dev=bt serviced until the vehicle arrives.

Director Rochon provided a snapshot of the Operating Budget, further explaining any changes/reductions made and impacts to debt servicing. Director Rochon shared the value of a penny in each of the communities with respect to residential and commercial properties.

Based on the proposed changes and adjustments made, the proposed general residential tax rate was 9.5 cents, West Hants was a proposed 5-cent increase, while the communities of Hantsport and Windsor saw no proposed change as contributions were being made to each of their infrastructure reserves.

The proposed commercial rate for all three communities was increase of 6.68 cents. Director Rochon reviewed a snapshot of what these rates would look like based on average property values in West Hants.

2025/26 Capital Budget

Director Rochon provided an overview of the Capital budget based on adjustments made or projects removed/deferred. Based on the changes made, the Capital budget was reduced by \$5,030,849. The new Capital Budget being proposed was \$51,310,834.

Discussion Points:

- Avondale Boat launch was being added in the budget and was currently being done based on what was permitted within the operating permit provided by the Department pf Fisheries.
- As part of the UARB, a Capital and Operating budget needs to be prepared for the water utility. The water utility pays for these charges within the Capital budget.

2025/26 Reserve Budget

Director Rochon provided an overview of the Reserve budget based on adjustments made or projects removed/deferred. Based on the changes, Reserves have increased by \$1,058,135.

Discussion Points:

- The addition to reserves was for the West Hants Operating Reserve.

CAO Phillips addressed key themes that emerged in recent correspondence between staff and Council concerning both the Capital and Operating components of the budget.

Capital Budget Themes

- **Public Works Outdoor Operations Facility:** Continued discussions focused on whether to include this facility in the budget, potential financing options, and the possible use of grant funding.
- **Splash Pad:** Ongoing conversations regarding the feasibility and prioritization of a splash pad.
- **Community Centre:** Questions were raised about the Community Centre, particularly regarding its inclusion and status within the capital planning process.

Operating Budget Themes

- **Community Development and Recreation:** Strong emphasis was placed on the value of these services, with multiple comments stressing the importance of maintaining — not reducing — service levels. It was noted that there were *no actual service reductions* in the proposed budget; instead, reductions were made against projected increases for 2025/26, which had anticipated enhanced service levels.
- **Township Costs:** There was discussion regarding the allocation of township-related costs and where these should appropriately be absorbed.
- **Dial-A-Ride Program:** Recognized as an important and valued service, with support expressed for its continuation.
- **Fire Services:** Input emphasized ensuring the fire department has the necessary resources to maintain service levels, while also avoiding overlap or duplication of services.
- **Reserves:** Several comments addressed the use of reserves, with considerations raised about the extent of reliance on them.
- **Staffing:** Suggestions were made to revisit and potentially reconsider some of the staffing positions proposed in the budget.

Questions Raised

- *Better explanation to understand what a Public Works cost distribution means?* These costs cover shed maintenance, supplies, fuel and power for both Windsor and Hantsport, meals for union and contract, safety clothing, CUPE union related items, road, gravel and materials and insurance for common public related items.
- *Explanation of the 30.2% increase in the Public Works Admin/Roads account?* Seeing an overall increase, some of which was associated with the CET position (which was not included in the previous year's budget). The position was supported after the budget was passed and was funded from Operating Reserves. This year it was included in the budget as the full position plus benefits. The other contributing factor was staff hours being properly allocated based on where work was being done. The overall Public Works budget was \$3.4 million which was broken out over libraries, waste, roads, stormwater, sewer, water, water, diversion, landfill and facilities.
- *What were the 50/50 funding levels for the Fire Services?* Values received in March 2025 were: WFD - \$114,000/fiscal year, HFD -\$73,000/calendar year, SFD – \$27,000 April thru to October, BFD - \$138,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year.

- *Community Centre projects and structural assessment?* Once the structural assessment report was completed, it would be reviewed, and the proposed projects would proceed based on what assessment states.
- *What does Community Beautification entail and mean?* Includes community and highway identification signage, beautification initiatives, community gateway and blade signage, waste bins, planters, Christmas lights if required to be purchased and the linger longer program.

Tremaine Crescent and what that work entails

- *Little River Trail and AT?* Addressed at the meeting held last night).
- *Community Way as a street?* WHRM owns this road and was responsible for maintenance and snow removal.
- *Sidewalk upgrades and impacts on the Capital budget?*
- *Maplewood Cemetery?* \$210,000 was the five-year allotment. The current year has \$45,000 proposed related to the expansion (survey, designs and preliminary groundwork). Next year would see costs associated with infrastructure, and then a columbarium in the next year.
- *Forecasting developments and when those tax steams would be on board?* This was unknown as it was dictated by the pace of development. Projecting when construction begins was a difficult task.
- *Clarify economic development and who was doing this work?* There were distinct levels and separation but at times there was crossover, and everyone may be doing the similar work at the same time.

Discussion Points:

- Based on land allocation and lots already assigned, there will be limited capacity at some point. WHRM already has the land, the work proposed would be to get the land in a state of readiness to allow capacity for more burials. Costs associated to the expansion were eligible under CCBF funding and have no impacts on the tax rates.
- Costs for the Old Parish cemetery was for cleaning and repairing headstones in conjunction with the West Hants Historical Society within that cemetery. This was year 3 of a multi year project.
- A suggestion was made that there may be value in exploring what other funding models for cemeteries exist and what other municipalities are doing to determine other ways to fund cemeteries.
- There was value in having information previously shared around developments in the que and their timelines.
- The funding agreement motion for the Windsor Township did not have a lot of stipulations attached to it. There was a condition within the agreement that the funding statements be reviewed externally and provided to WHRM, that there was also proof of good standing with Joint Stocks as well as the job description and timelines for the job be provided to WHRM (which was done). They also have an obligation to report to Council on a quarterly basis. It was hard to quantify the value of economic development, as it can be measured different ways.

- Asphalt and sidewalk replacement represented \$4.1 million out of the proposed \$7 million in the budget. This was to replace existing asphalt sidewalks with concrete sidewalks as well as the Gray to Avon Street sidewalk, the Centennial sidewalk, and five-year road renewal projects.
- Developers are responsible for the cost of a road until such time ownership of the road was taken over by WHRM. Developers need to have a road in order to subdivide lots to construct homes. In the case of Community Way, the developer built the street and was now shovel ready to construct.
- Cunnabel Creek was reduced to \$250,000 (from \$2.5 million) to support the design in the current year. The scope of the project was not reduced, just the forecasted amount.
- J-Class Roads was three-year agreement, but it was built into the 5-year Capital budget, \$500,000 was built into the budget for the next few years, then the amount was reduced to \$250,000. This was funded by way of post-consolidation funding.

7. Discussion and Direction from Council

Windsor Township Business Association Funding

A proposal was brought forward to update the funding approach for the Windsor Township Business Association. The suggested change would move the funding under the *Windsor and Hantsport Commercial rate* rather than the broader *West Hants General Commercial rate*. The rationale was that businesses located in Windsor and Hantsport derive more direct benefits from the services provided by the Township Business Association. However, it was acknowledged that some businesses located outside of these communities also see indirect benefits.

Another consideration was raised around the use of contributions to the *Windsor Infrastructure Reserves*. It was suggested these contributions could be reduced to help offset the Township funding requirements, thereby avoiding additional pressure on the commercial tax rate.

It was noted that the Township funding arrangement has been in place for several years, originally governed by a pre-consolidation funding agreement which has since expired. Concerns were expressed about implementing changes midstream, especially without prior consultation or discussion. It was emphasized that any change in funding arrangements should be preceded by appropriate engagement and dialogue.

Currently, the funding has already been transitioned from the *general residential rate* to the *general commercial rate*.

Consensus was to absorb the \$100,000 associated with the Windsor Township Business Association into the *Windsor Area Rate* for the time being. This would allow staff to assess the financial and service delivery impacts of this approach before making longer-term decisions.

General Tax Rate

It was important to continue the conversation about how services and infrastructure should be funded operationally, to limit the reliance on reserves. Drawing from the Windsor Infrastructure Reserve, for instance, reduces the funds available for road renewal projects. This shortfall often leads to increased borrowing, which is ultimately tied to the general tax rate.

All borrowing was general rated, when contributions were made to reserves, they directly reduce the amount of borrowing required and, in turn, the pressure on the general rate. Historically, both

Windsor and Hantsport were contributing to their reserves to reduce future borrowing needs and minimize the impact on the general tax rate.

Everyone across the region pays the general rate. However, area rates fluctuate depending on what services are shifted between general and area-rated categories. As services are moved from area rates to the general rate, the general rate increases — as seen in the case of West Hants.

In contrast, Windsor and Hantsport would have seen a decrease in their tax rates due to consolidation; however, the savings (or variances) from these rate changes were instead allocated to infrastructure reserves. This helped maintain a stable tax rate while continuing to build reserve balances for future capital needs.

For example, waste collection was moved to the general rate this year. However, RCMP costs remains area-rated due to its significant financial impact on West Hants (70/30 split).

It was also important to note that increasing tax rates for Windsor or Hantsport would not affect the West Hants rate. Instead, it would mean greater contributions to each respective area's reserve fund — again reducing future borrowing needs.

Following consolidation, many services that were previously area-rated are now general-rated. While each region historically had some level of road funding in their general rates, two years ago, all road services were transitioned to the general rate.

Community Development

The consensus was to put the Splash Pad back into the plan, with the understanding that it will not be completed this year. There was also a consensus not to reduce recreation services. The originally proposed budget included a Program Coordinator position to support increased service levels. However, with the removal of that position and other reductions, service levels will remain status quo, consistent with those provided in recent years.

Protective Services Manager position was included in the current proposed budget.

Additional Staff positions proposed have been removed from the budget.

Public Works Admin and Roads

The increase of approximately \$330,000 in Public Works administration and roads represented a 1.5 cent increase on the general tax rate, a change that was difficult to explain and justify to rural residents. A point of concern was the 30.2% increase in salaries, which was hard to support without a more detailed explanation. This level of salary growth raised questions about sustainability and equity, particularly when compared to other departments or community expectations. The overall cost for Public Works saw a notable increase compared to the previous year, it was suggested there may be opportunities to achieve operational cost reductions, especially in the areas of salaries and benefits.

Getting "inside the numbers" was essential to ensure that increases were justified and tied to measurable service improvements. This level of analysis will also help build public trust and support when increases are necessary.

Public Works Operations Facility

Design was completed and ready for tender. The facility was intended to house Public Works, Community Development staff, Operations Manager, and potentially the Director; potentially relocating Would relocate staff from 5 Public Works offices at 100 King Street, 2 Community

Development staff at 76 Morison Drive, 1 Community Development staff from King Street and approximately 15 seasonal/summer students/staff at 76 Morison Drive.

The current facility requires renovations for continued use, has a temporary heating system in place, inadequate washroom facilities resulting in poor and inadequate working conditions.

The facility was funded 100% through debt servicing (general rated). Half of the debt servicing cost was being deferred to next year to stabilize tax impact (equated to slightly less than a penny on the tax rate). A suggestion was made to explore what funding opportunities were available, as there were green funding opportunities that may assist with offsetting the costs of this build. It was suggested the Green Fund may be a beneficial resource to consider when retrofitting other municipal buildings.

Concerns were raised regarding the tight budget this year, which was supported heavily by reserves (below policy threshold). Council discussed the pros and cons of proceeding with the facility now or deferring it to another budget year and the three options proposed (leave the project in the budget “as-is”, defer the project to another year, approve the project with conditions). Leaving half of the debt servicing for the Public Works operations building in the proposed budget did not receive approval. The consensus was to remove the Public Works operations building from the budget until next year.

Public Works Salaries

A suggestion was made to limit the increase in the Public Works budget for salaries, benefits, and overtime to a maximum of 20%. This cap was intended to ensure adequate coverage for cost-of-living adjustments and a specified amount of overtime, without exceeding reasonable budget growth.

Director Rochon clarified the overall increase in Public Works general salaries from the previous year was approximately \$79,000. The increase in one division (e.g., Roads) was largely the result of staff reallocation rather than an actual net increase in staffing costs. Reducing salaries in one area merely shifts those costs elsewhere and does not result in true savings. Imposing a reduction in this budget area would likely lead to decreased service levels and potential staff reductions. While the increase was initially flagged as a potential area for reductions, Director Rochon advised that doing so would have operational consequences and could undermine service delivery.

A suggestion was made to display/show increased costs in a specific division as an all-encompassing spread sheet may help improve transparency and prevent data misinterpretation, as it better reflects where staff time and resources are being allocated.

Fire Services 50/50 Fund

There was a discussion regarding the use of 50/50 funding, with the key question being whether this funding should be allocated toward core firefighting services or used to enhance existing services or purchase items not included in the approved budget. According to the Fire Chief’s comments, the 50/50 funding has been used to supplement or cover items necessary for the provision of firefighting services.

The challenge for Council was determining whether this funding should be directed toward offsetting essential, core operational costs, or if it should remain at the discretion of each department to use as they see fit.

A suggestion was made that moving forward, Council should approve the annual fire services budget with input from a Fire Services Manager or Coordinator. Should a department wish to purchase equipment or services not included in the approved budget, it would then be up to that department to determine how to fund those additional items—whether through 50/50 funding, auxiliary support, fundraising efforts, or other sources.

A question was raised as to what it would take to generate an extra million dollars in new tax revenue in West Hants. What would it take to stop using the reserve to subsidize the tax rate, what does that look like? It was noted that through previous discussions and direction, the reliance of the reserves has been decreased from 1.125 million and through the direction it was now at \$682,000.

Dial A Ride

The three-year agreement was coming to an end, and there were concerns about the potential significant dependence on this funding. Broader information on service areas and the volume of calls per area had been requested but had not yet been received. Despite this, it remained important to understand what this information looked like.

Tremaine Crescent

The direction provided was to not proceed with the type of design previously presented. Instead, the plan was to wait until the King Street and O'Brien Street projects were designed and look at ways to divert stormwater away from the Tremaine Crescent catchment area. By addressing the upstream stormwater flows first, it was anticipated that when upgrades for Tremaine Crescent occurred, the volume of water requiring management would be significantly reduced. This would likely allow for a smaller, less complex cross culvert, which in turn would help to minimize the scale and cost of the Tremaine Crescent project.

Community Centre

A structural assessment was currently pending for the Community Centre. The completion and scheduling of any projects were contingent on the findings of this assessment. The structural report was expected to be finalized by the end of June. Once the assessment was received and reviewed, a determination will be made regarding which projects will proceed and the appropriate timeline for their implementation.

Insurance

All insurance policies were consolidated under a single provider. However, sub-policies were established for specific items or coverage areas. The insurance was renewed in April through a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

Fire Department Budget Consensus – Hantsport Fire Department (HFD)

The request from HFD was to defer the purchase of the Jaws of Life to the following fiscal year. However, they would like to proceed with the Engine 12 compartmental upgrades in the current budget. To balance the budget, they propose deferring the purchase of thermal imaging cameras and voice amplifiers to next year as well. These changes are cost neutral.

As per the cost-sharing agreement with Kings County, 40% of all expenditures related to Hantsport Fire Department are reimbursed to West Hants Regional Municipality (WHRM).

General Comments

There was value and a need to strategically prioritize capital projects over the next five years to balance community needs with fiscal responsibility, ensuring that key investments do not overextend municipal financial capacity or deplete reserves unnecessarily. Having a discussion on prioritization of projects for the next 5 years was important.

It was noted included a Splash Pad in the budget had no effect on the tax rate. It will, however, draw down reserves, this was identified as a concern given the desire to preserve reserve levels for emergencies or strategic opportunities.

Direction was provided for staff to review and consider staff have reviewed the potential impacts of incremental tax rate increases of 1.5¢, 2¢, 3¢, 4¢, and 5¢ per \$100 of assessed property value and provide that information after the break.

8. Break

A break occurred at 9:18 p.m. The meeting resumed at 10:03 p.m.

9. Review Direction

Director Rochon provided a broad overview of departmental variances (2025/26 vs. 2024/25) for each department with respect to salaries and benefits. Administration equated to \$13,042.30 (+2%); Financial Services equated to \$56,176.97 (+4.6%); Planning and Development equated to \$96,633.50 (-5.6%); Community Development equated to \$115,299.62 (+8.2%) and Public Works equated to \$79,445.66 (+2.5%). The total variance for the entire organization (all departments) compared to 2024/25 was \$170,331.05 (+2.1%). The 3% salary increase also led to a corresponding increase in benefits, inflating the overall salary and benefits expense. However, pension increases were classified as a separate expense, which offset some of the increase, effectively reducing the total net impact to 2% (despite the 3% base salary increase). Mandated changes such as Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) costs, adjustments, and benefit revisions were also included in the variances.

Budget and Tax Rate Update (Post-Break Discussion)

Director Rochon provided a summary of the updates made following prior discussions and direction: Debt Servicing - A change of \$179,324 in debt servicing was the most significant factor affecting the tax rate. Commercial Tax Impact - A minor adjustment occurred due to changes in commercial tax assessments, though the impact was minimal. Grants in Lieu of Taxes were reduced by \$194, and Transfers to/from Reserves resulted in a small change of \$21,050 was noted in net transfers to or from reserves.

The Resulting Tax Rate Impact was a proposed increase of 4 cents for West Hants residents. The Commercial Rate saw no change, as the rate was blended. The proposed residential rate is 2 cents lower than the pre-consolidation rate.

Director Rochon also outlined what the 4-cent residential rate increase would mean for properties of various values

Windsor Township Business Association Funding Impacts

Previously, the Hantsport side of the commercial area rate did not include charges for Environmental Development Services. With the recent changes, the addition of the Business

Association to Hantsport's area rate resulted in an increase of 1.12 cents to the commercial rate and an increase of 0.40 cents to the residential rate.

Similarly, Windsor was not previously paying under Environmental Health Services. The inclusion of the Township Association into their area rate has resulted in an increase of 7.23 cents to the commercial rate and an increase of 5.92 cents to the residential rate.

Scenario of how an additional million dollars impacted the rates

An increase of \$1 million would impact the rates, particularly in Windsor and Hantsport. To maintain flat rates, the additional cost would need to be absorbed by reducing the contributions to their respective infrastructure reserves.

Scenario of 3% on Each of the Rates from 2024/25.

Windsor rate would need to increase by 4.9% for a combined total of \$1.6958.

West Hants rate would need to increase by \$2.917 cents for a combined total \$1.015.

Hantsport rate would need to increase by \$4.0161 cents for a combined total of \$1.3943.

A question was raised as to How the 3% number impacts the budget overall? Director Rochon advised the increase would result in additional revenue. For Windsor it would be approximately 5 cents or \$125,000.

Direction

The request was to present the 3% increase scenario side by side with the approved budget in a paper format, in order to better understand the impacts and support an informed decision. It's important to note that the suggested scenarios would result in an increased tax rate.

A suggestion was made that if Council was not comfortable with a 4-cent tax increase and preferred a smaller increase, then significant budget cuts were necessary. If the desire was to pursue additional cuts, everyone should be prepared to identify those reductions at the next meeting. In addition, all were encouraged to share any ideas or suggestions for areas to review and potentially make further cuts before the next meeting via an email.

10. Motions and Resolutions – Pending Council Direction – This item was not discussed.

11. Next Meeting Date/Adjournment

The next Special Committee of the Whole Budget meeting will be June 2, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 10:39 p.m.

Deputy Mayor Debbie Francis

Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk