

WEST HANTS MUNICIPALITY
Committee of the Whole – Budget Meeting Agenda
June 16, 2025, 5:00 p.m. Amended July 10, 2025
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. 5:00-6:00 Discussion & Direction from Council
 7. 6:00-6:30 Break if required to address changes
 8. 6:30-7:00 Review of changes if required
 9. Motions & Resolutions – Pending Council Discussions
 - a. Capital Budget Approval Motion
 - b. Dial-A-Ride Motion
 10. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment
 - a. Committee of the Whole Budget Meeting TBD

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

2. **Attendance**

Council

Abraham Zebian, Mayor

Rupert Jannasch, Councillor Dist. 1 (Regrets)

Scott McLean, Councillor Dist. 2

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 (5:07)

Paul Morton, Councillor Dist. 8 (6:05)

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

Tim Bouter, Public Works Engineer

Deanna Snair, Exec. Asst/ Clerk

Carmen Dewar-Miller, Finance Admin

Troy Burgess, Manager Public Works

Kevin Bennett, Manager Parks and
Facilities

Regrets:

Kathy Kehoe, Dir. Community Development

Kari Fougere, Act. Dir. Planning & Development

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

The agenda as presented was accepted.

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

5. **Announcements**

West Hants Regional Municipality is 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. **Discussion & Direction from Council (Capital Budget)**

Capital Budget Direction and Affordability Considerations

Staff were seeking direction regarding the adjusted Capital Budget that was previously presented. With the Operating and Reserve budgets already approved, there was now some capacity within

those approved budgets to accommodate elements of the Capital Budget. Any adjustments to the Capital Budget can have the following implications: Adding items: Will require consideration of affordability. Removing items: Would increase capacity, which could either reduce the reliance on reserves or lower debt servicing requirements depending on the item.

The discussion focused on the current funding support for Dial-A-Ride. It was noted that 100% of the funding received from the West Hants Regional Municipality (WHRM) is used to subsidize transportation services for residents of West Hants. This subsidy amounts to approximately \$2,500 per month. Once this monthly funding was exhausted, riders were charged the regular, unsubsidized rates. Dial-A-Ride representatives clarified their services were available throughout the West Hants region, with a particular emphasis on serving rural communities. The importance of addressing transportation gaps, especially in underserved areas, was highlighted as a key priority.

Director Rochon noted Dial-A-Ride was listed on the agenda later during the meeting with a potential funding source identified.

Discussion on the Public Works Operations Facility

The discussion shifted to the Public Works Operations facility. It was noted that the Capital Budget had not been passed, which was the primary reason for convening this meeting. Councillors were encouraged to voice any concerns they may have with the Capital Budget to allow for open discussion. It was suggested that there may be specific concerns related to the Public Works facility.

J-Class Roads and Capital Budget Funding Concerns

Concerns were raised regarding J-Class Roads and the allocation of funding in the Capital Budget, especially in light of uncertainty about whether the Province would continue to offer matching funds for this initiative. There was emphasis on ensuring that J-Class Roads were not forgotten or overlooked in future planning.

Originally, \$500,000 was allocated in the Capital Budget for J-Class Roads. However, this amount was reduced to \$250,000 for 2025/26, based on the Province's Trunks and Routes Funding Program. This funding came from the Consolidation Fund. The unspent \$250,000 will remain in the Consolidation Fund Reserve for future similar uses, as funding had been previously allocated for J-Class Roads over a five-year period.

Director Richard provided a brief overview of the Trunks and Routes Funding Program, noting that information on the program had already been shared with Council at an earlier meeting. The program title was updated to "Trunks and Routes/J-Class Roads Program" to reflect the potential for renewed provincial funding specific to Trunks and Routes but also including J-Class Roads.

Council had previously committed to funding J-Class Roads at \$500,000 annually for the next three years, followed by \$250,000 in the final year of the Capital Budget. With the 2025/26 allocation reduced to \$250,000, the remaining \$250,000 was reallocated to the final year, bringing that year's total to \$500,000.

As J-Class Roads are provincial roads, the continuation of this funding program depends on the Province. WHRM has expressed interest in participating if the funding becomes available again and has made budget provisions accordingly. However, the final decision rests with the Province. The proposed Public Works facility, a combined facility to accommodate both Community Development and Public Works, was included in the Capital Budget and was initially forecasted for debt servicing beginning next year.

Project Scope and Evolution:

There were initial concerns and questions regarding whether the project was originally intended as a renovation of the existing structure. Director Richard clarified that while the original report did present renovation as a key component, the Request for Proposal (RFP) included both renovation of the existing building and the addition of new space. The intent was to retain the existing building for heavy maintenance, while expanding the facility with new construction.

The RFP concept included the need for four (4) additional bays, ideally connected to the existing structure via shared walls to reduce costs. However, during ongoing biweekly meetings and consultations with the project architect and engineer, it became clear that a shared-wall approach was not feasible due to structural concerns, particularly snow load issues on the existing building.

As a result, staff pivoted to an alternative plan: a new, separate structure connected to the existing building by a breezeway, with the original building housing the four (4) maintenance bays. This revised approach still aligns with the original RFP, which included the possibility of an additional structure beyond just renovation.

Director Richard acknowledged that updates to Council have occurred primarily through weekly staff updates and apologized if the evolving nature of the project was not clearly communicated. He also emphasized that changes are typical throughout project development, including during the construction phase, often managed through change orders.

Request For Proposal

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Public Works building was posted on the Nova Scotia Procurement site on June 4th but has since been removed. The posting was made with the understanding that it was within the administrative authority of staff and not intended to exceed that scope. The primary intent was to initiate the RFP process in a timely manner so that a recommendation could be brought forward for Council's consideration in July, particularly given that there are no scheduled Council meetings in August. It was clearly understood that issuing the RFP did not constitute approval to proceed with the project. Final authority to proceed with the project remains with Council. A formal report, including recommendations and relevant evaluation outcomes, will be brought to Council for deliberation and decision before any award or work begins.

Safety Concerns

Current Building Safety Concerns

Physical Hazards:

- Usual incidents like trips, falls, and equipment freezing due to exposure to winter elements.

- Ventilation issues and lack of space impact worker safety during repairs and machinery cleaning.

Structural & Environmental Risks:

- The 60-year-old building previously used for oil changes poses contamination concerns.
- Additions or renovations are not structurally recommended—deemed a risky investment.

Facility Limitations:

- Only one washroom for over 19 staff, with additional seasonal workers.
- Locker rooms are located in a different building.
- Lunchroom lacks proper ventilation, violating OHS regulations.
- General overcrowding leads to hazardous working conditions.

Labour Standards & Regulatory Compliance

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations:

- Requirement for two toilets (for 10–26 employees) not met.
- Article 3 violations due to inadequate lunchroom ventilation.

Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code:

- *Inadequate changing facilities and overall non-compliance with basic employee needs.*

DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion):

- Current setup fails to support the municipality’s investment in inclusive infrastructure.

Temporary Solutions Considered

Portable Facilities:

- If the new project stalls, portable washrooms, locker rooms, and offices may be needed.
- These rentals could be seen as short-term and possibly cost-effective when compared to delaying a permanent solution.

Temporary Heating System:

- The current facility runs on a non-permanent heating setup, further complicating sustainability.

Project Development & Scope Shift

RFP Discrepancy:

- Original RFP focused on renovation, but architect proposed a new build.
- Misunderstanding arose around whether “addition” referred to expanding the current structure or constructing an entirely new building.
- Questions on how architect interpreted the scope differently than Council’s expectations.

Process Transparency:

- Director Richard explained the complexities of managing 60 active municipal projects and coordinating with six consulting firms.
- Difficulty in providing real-time updates to Council on changing project scopes acknowledged.

Cost Considerations & Future Planning

Cost-Benefit of New Build vs. Temporary Measures:

- Rental costs for temporary facilities could be redirected toward a new building.

- Delay in construction likely to increase overall project costs.

Long-Term Viability:

- Renovation of the existing structure was felt to be neither practical nor safe from the architecture’s stance.
- Recommendation to proceed with a new build remains unchanged - concept has not shifted.

Dial-A-Ride Motion – Council Discussion Summary

Clarity on Reporting Requirements:

Clarification was requested on the phrase “similar funding terms.” It was noted that this does not mean Dial-A-Ride would report directly to Council unless this was added to the funding agreement. Currently, the organization was expected to report key financial and operational metrics to the Finance Department at both the midpoint and end of the agreement term. A position was expressed that it would be beneficial for Council to receive the same reports being submitted to Finance.

Funding Source and Geographic Constraints:

Funding for this initiative was to come from the West Hants Regional Municipality Reserve. The West Hants Reserve was designated for use only within the former West Hants boundaries and it could not be confirmed at this time whether the Dial-A-Ride funds would be restricted to that geographic area.

Budget Impact:

There was a \$353,000 decrease in the Operating Reserve withdrawal. \$313,000 was added to the West Hants Reserves. The net result is a \$70,000 reduction in the overall proposed budget. However, with the addition of Dial-A-Ride funding, \$33,000 is added back into the current year’s budget. From the next fiscal year onward, this amount would be incorporated into the tax rate.

Reserve Forecast:

The Regional Reserve was forecasted to be \$595,000 by March 31, 2026.

Future Budget Considerations:

A point was raised that there was value in discussing how to systematically handle funding requests from community organizations in future budgets. There was a concern that continued funding commitments could lead to difficult budget decisions or significant cuts in future years. For assurance, it was noted that termination clauses exist in the agreements, allowing either party to end the funding arrangement if necessary.

MOVED BY MAYOR ZEBIAN AND COUNCILLOR J. SMITH THAT COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE RECOMMENDS COUNCIL APPROVES RENEWING THE 3-YEAR FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH THE DIAL-A-RIDE, FOR OPERATIONAL USE TO PROMOTE AND PROVIDE RATE SUBSIDIES, BEGINNING IN 2025-26, INCLUDING SIMILAR TERMS OF PREVIOUS FUNDING AGREEMENT. FURTHER, THAT THIS FUNDING BE SET AT \$33,677.92 PLUS AN ADJUSTMENT FOR COST-OF-LIVING

AND THAT 2025-26 FUNDING BE FUNDED THROUGH THE OPERATING RESERVE. MOTION CARRIED. Nays: McLean and Ivey

The CAO advised that staff had identified a path forward for Council, should they reach a point of agreement to proceed with the capital budget. A short recess then took place. Including the Public Works complex in the budget provided the necessary capacity and grants staff the authority to issue tenders. Without its inclusion, any such action would fall outside staff's authorized scope. The RFP to proceed with the Public Works/Community Development facility will be presented to Council for final approval and awarding of the project to a proponent.

7. Break if required to address changes

A break occurred at 5:55 p.m. The meeting resumed at 6:11 p.m.

8. Review of changes of required - no changes were made.

Concerns were raised regarding the appropriateness of bringing the Capital Budget back for debate and reconsideration, given that no changes had been made to the document since the previous meeting. Questions and uncertainty emerged about the correct procedure and policy governing such actions, with a focus on ensuring that Council remains within its established rules and does not act out of order.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) reviewed the available options to proceed. Two (2) paths were identified; however, due to the timing implications associated with a motion to reconsider, staff recommended proceeding by suspending the rules. As outlined in the Meeting and Committee Procedural Policy, Council has the authority to suspend the rules of order established in the policy. Specifically, Section 12.30 permits the suspension of any rules related to motions and voting, provided that a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of Council was achieved. Should this be the path that Council wished to take a motion would be required and supported by 2/3rds to suspend the rules of order. The suspension of this section of the policy would permit that to take place, however the solicitor did advise this was not a tool that should be used on a regular basis, but it was a tool that could be used to provide Council with a path forward to proceed with debating the Capital Budget.

Voting occurred by a show of hands.

MOVED BY COUNCILLOR LEARY-PINCH AND MAYOR ZEBIAN THAT COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE RECOMMEND COUNCIL SUSPEND THE RULES OF ORDER AS SET OUT IN THE MEETING AND COMMITTEE PROCEDURAL POLICY, SPECIFICALLY SECTION 12.13 (A) AS IT RELATES TO THE 2025/26 WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY CAPITAL BUDGET. MOTION CARRIED. Nays: McLean and Ivey

9. Motions

Voting occurred by a show of hands.

a. Capital Budget Approval Motion

MOVED BY MAYOR ZEBIAN AND COUNCILLOR REMME THAT COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE RECOMMENDS COUNCIL APPROVE THE 2025/26 CAPITAL BUDGET AS PRESENTED TO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON JUNE 16TH, 2025. MOTION CARRIED. Nays: Francis, McLean, Ivey, J. Smith and Leary-Pinch

10. Next Meeting Date/Adjournment

The next regular scheduled meeting will be Council on June 24, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Deputy Mayor Debbie Francis

Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk