



West Hants

something inspiring awaits

**WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
Climate Action Committee (CAC) Meeting Minutes
February 26, 2025, 11:02am – 11:45am
Sanford Council Chambers / Zoom / YouTube Live**

PRESENT: Councillor Bonnie Smith, District 10, Vice-Chair
Councillor Jim Ivey, District 11
Jamie Juteau, Resident Member
Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer
Kari Fougere, Acting Director of Planning & Development
Carlee Rochon, Director of Financial Services
Todd Richard, Director of Public Works
Shelleena Thornton, Protective Services Designate
VanEssa Roberts, Community Development Designate

STAFF: John Ogilvie, Climate Action Coordinator
Vanessa Lake, Planning Assistant

PUBLIC: There were no members of the public present.

REGRETS: Councillor Debbie Francis, District 5, Chair

Call to Order and Introductions

Councillor Smith called the meeting to order at 11:02 am. Everyone introduced themselves and their designation (i.e. Councillor, resident member, or staff). The Committee welcomed Jamie Juteau to his position. Councillor Smith read the Land Acknowledgements, reminded everyone of the expectations from the code of conduct, and outlined the emergency exit procedure.

Approval of Agenda

Moved by Jim Ivey and seconded by Mark Phillips that the agenda be approved as circulated. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes (November 13, 2024)

Moved by Jim Ivey and seconded by Jamie Juteau that the minutes be approved as circulated. Motion carried unanimously.

New Business

Update: Transit Feasibility Study (John Ogilvie)

A transit feasibility study is a major Council priority and a part of the 2025 CAC Workplan. In the fall of last year, the Municipality was not able to secure funding from the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund for this study. Since then, John has been working with the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Renewables (DNRR) to look for the funding for a transit feasibility study. The focus of the study will be on a zero-emissions transit system. The Municipality was able to secure \$80k in funding from the provincial government to support this study with a \$20k municipal contribution. John is currently working on the Request for Proposals (RFP) for consultant services.

Councillor Ivey asked about the timeline. John replied that the funding deadline with DNRR is March 31, 2026, and that the study will be completed this year.

CAO Phillips noted that the Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA) has been renamed to Link Nova Scotia and subsequently restructured. The revised mandate makes the connection between the JRTA and the Municipality more prevalent, and John will be keeping up with new developments and collaboration possibilities.

Director Rochon asked about the timeline for the RFP and which stream of procurement will be used. John has not gotten to this point yet.

Councillor Ivey asked about the focus on “zero emissions.” John explained that the focus is on the system itself, such as electric buses or the use of an alternate fuel type.

Update: Solar Installation (John Ogilvie)

Over the last few years, the Committee set aside funding for a small-scale solar project. The feasibility study has now been completed and the report received, and John is looking to build this year. During budget requests, John hopes Council will set aside the same \$25k to complete the project. It will be a huge accomplishment for the Committee and Municipality.

Councillor Ivey asked if the location had been chosen yet and what constitutes “small scale.” He noted that Council had previously discussed putting solar panels on the Sports Complex.

John replied that in terms of the allocated budget, “small-scale” refers to a project size that would generate enough energy to offset a home’s worth of emissions. He hopes to leverage the \$25k to augment the amount available with further funding. Regarding the Sports Complex, he noted that a structural assessment would be required. This study can be done if Council identifies it as a priority.

Director Rochon thought a structural assessment had been completed as part of the LEED assessment for the building, and there had been some discussion around how the panels would look based on the weight. She and John will investigate this further. The Sports Complex is a large contributor to the Municipality’s energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions, and it would be beneficial to offset it.

Update: Climate and Health Vulnerability Assessment (John Ogilvie)

Previously, the Municipality provided a letter of support for this initiative to NS Health when they requested funding from Health Canada. Last week, John was informed that funding was approved. This study will identify locations in the Central Zone (including WHRM) where residents are at risk of negative health impacts from climate change and related events such as extreme heat or drought. Discussions about this project are expected to begin in March. It will also help to identify which municipal facilities and communities are susceptible to these events and how to better support them. The focus of this study is human health in relation to climate change.

CAO Phillips noted this may be incorporated with the ongoing Plan Review and influence policy.

Budget Requests (John Ogilvie)

John provided an overview of what he has put forward to the Finance Department in terms of budget requests. As mentioned previously, he requested to carry over the \$25k in Capital for the solar project; he also requested that \$20k be separated out as a line item for the transit feasibility study, and to keep the \$30k set aside for the workplan. This \$30k was previously intended for the transit feasibility study, but when the previous application was unsuccessful, this amount was used to backstop discussions with the Province and DNRR. Due to the timing of receiving final approval for funding, there had not been enough time to use this amount on other projects during the current fiscal year. If included in the next budget, this \$30k can be used for other projects within the workplan.

Councillor Ivey asked for clarification on what the \$30k will be used for. John explained that it is general in nature and set aside to complete items in the workplan, such as facility renovations, or as a backstop for funding applications. Councillor Ivey asked if the Home Flood Protection Pilot Program (HFPPP) comes out of the CAC budget. Director Rochon explained that the \$480k expense will show up in the CAC budget, and \$80k is funded through the reserves. Councillor Ivey commented that the HFPPP is very specific to current events, and there may not be enough in the budget left over for other initiatives within the workplan. He asked if there was a capacity for more, regarding items such as property, facilities, and infrastructure. CAO Phillips mentioned that climate change related items done for different departments are budgeted to that department, rather than the CAC. John is engaged on various department projects as a resource or to assist in managing project implementation, but the projects would still be assigned to their respective departments. Councillor Ivey asked if there was anything that could be done with peoples' properties to mitigate the ongoing flood and stormwater incidents as part of the mandate to protect people and property. John said that Council may allocate more money to climate action if they wish, but he acknowledged that Council must balance many other projects as well. As CAO Phillips mentioned, not all climate-related projects will show in the CAC budget.

Councillor Smith asked if there had been any specific reasoning for the Municipality's unsuccessful applications. John said the replies had not gone into detail, citing general reasons like numerous applications and limited funding. John feels having the feasibility studies in place and having a more specific action in mind may help with future applications. He is always watching for funding opportunities.

Business Arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes.

Roundtable Discussion

CAO Phillips reiterated the changing of the JRTA's name and mandate and added that Community Development's Active Transportation Strategy may be able to work in tandem.

Acting Director Fougere provided some climate-related updates from the Planning and Development Department. An application was recently received from King's Edgehill School for an agrivoltaics system on their property. A site visit and Public Information Meeting were held earlier this month and will likely be considered by the Planning Advisory Committee in March. Large solar arrays or solar farms are also being considered in the Plan Review. Notification was received from the Province regarding Council's amendments to the West Hants Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Land Use By-law (LUB) regarding wind farm policy criteria and regulations. The amendments by the Province are now in effect. The Bear Lake wind farm application was withdrawn and resubmitted under these new criteria. The application remains

the same with 11 turbines within the Upper Vaughan area, and 4 other turbines just outside the boundaries of WHRM.

Director Rochon said Council is heading into the second phase of the budgeting process. This will look at what initiatives can be highlighted for a variety of committees, including the CAC.

Jamie Juteau felt this Committee is an excellent learning opportunity. He was particularly interested in the transit feasibility study and the climate and health vulnerability assessment.

Councillor Ivey appreciated the discussion happening around the table. He asked John if there was any news about the Switch West Hants program.

John explained that there are now 21 full participants with the Switch WH program with over 32 individual projects completed. There has been a lot of interest since the fall. Switch WH was recently able to secure an interest rate decrease from their lender of almost a full percentage point, coming down from 8.5% to 7.7%. This will improve affordability regarding program loans. Loan terms for solar projects have been extended from 10 years to 15 to allow for more affordable payments.

Director Richard attended an information session from New Glasgow on power generation. One possibility was generating power from the pressure reduction valve chambers in their water utilities. They conducted a feasibility study on generating electricity from this process through CBCL. The result was a very long-term payback that exceeded the 100-year life cycle cost. The other idea was a micro hydro turbine in their water control structure, generating electricity through the spillway. The payback for this process was less than 20 years and deemed feasible from a cost perspective. More studies will be conducted for this process. It was an interesting presentation, and Director Richard has already shared the information with John. John will share the information with the CAC. The Municipality is going through a third-phase expansion at the Falmouth Sewage Treatment Plant and drafting a tentative RFP to generate and utilize the methane created by the digestors for heating.

VanEssa mentioned that the Municipality had applied for a community fund grant from the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment. As a part of the application process, Community Development staff interviewed clinics, hospitals, and long-term care facilities. The number one issue that came up regarding recruitment and retention in health professionals was transportation, both into and out of West Hants toward HRM and the Annapolis Valley.

Public Comments

The public is encouraged to attend the meeting or contact staff directly with any questions or comments. There were no members of the public present at this time.

Next Meeting Date / Adjournment

The next meeting is scheduled for April 9, 2025. The Committee and the public will be notified if there are any changes.

Moved by Jamie Juteau and seconded by Carlee Rochon that the meeting be adjourned at 11:45am. Motion carried unanimously.