

Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Minutes of a Meeting of the Finance Committee

Held in Council Chamber, 10 Allée Champlain Drive, Cookville, N.S.
Tuesday, March 3, 2026 – 9:00 a.m.

Attendance

Councillor Morgen Reinhardt, District 1, Chair
Councillor Edgar Burns, District 7, Vice Chair
Mayor Elspeth McLean-Wile
Councillor Martin Bell, District 2
Councillor Wendy Oickle, District 3
Councillor Cathy Moore, District 5
Councillor Alison Smith, District 6
Councillor Ben Brooks, District 9
Deputy Mayor Chasidy Veinotte, District 10

Regrets

Councillor Pam Hubleby, District 4
Councillor Kacy DeLong, District 8

Staff

Tom MacEwan, Chief Administrative Officer
Alex Dumaresq, Deputy CAO
Elana Wentzell, Director of Finance
April Whynot-Lohnes, Municipal Clerk
Lisa Andrews, Executive Assistant

1. Call to Order

Councillor Reinhardt called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. and began by acknowledging that the meeting was held in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

2. Announcements/Acknowledgements/Recognition

Mayor McLean-Wile proclaimed March as Kidney Health Month and March 12 as World Kidney Day. The proclamation acknowledges that one in ten Canadians live with chronic kidney disease and the Kidney Foundation of Canada is the only national health charity serving those affected by kidney disease.

Mayor McLean-Wile also acknowledged March as Amyloidosis Awareness Month, a month dedicated to raising awareness, funding research, and supporting those living with Amyloidosis, a group of complex rare diseases caused when an abnormal protein deposits in various locations throughout the body.

Councillor Smith offered best wishes to Livewires 4-H as they will be attending the DIVERT NS Speech Competition this week.

Councillor Oickle declared a conflict of interest on Item 10.1.1.

3. Public Input - Nil

4. Approval of Agenda

Deputy Mayor Veinotte requested the addition of a Public Input session immediately following Agenda Item # 7.2 NS Fire Services Governance Study.

Moved by Mayor McLean-Wile, seconded by Deputy Mayor Veinotte that the Agenda be approved as amended. Carried unanimously.

5. Approval of Minutes – February 3, 2026

The Minutes of the February 3, 2026, Finance Committee meeting were approved as circulated.

6. Business Arising from Minutes - Nil

7. Presentations/Scheduled Times

7.1 Revitalizing Recreation, A Partnership for the MARC

Jody Wagstaff, President, South Shore Disc Golf Association, attended the meeting and presented on “Revitalizing Recreation, A Partnership for the MARC” (circulated with Agenda, additional information attached with Minutes), on a proposal for a partnership to revitalize the disc golf course at the MARC.

Key highlights:

- Overview of disc golf; growing popularity, accessibility, low cost, and benefits on mental/physical health.
- Course already attracts local and out of region users despite infrastructure limitations.
- Expanding to a full 18-hole course.
- \$20,000 in municipal funding requested for baskets, tee pads, signage, and design.
- Association would provide volunteer labour and ongoing stewardship.

Clarification was provided on the following; why the MARC was ideal, limitations on cell service, league participation and visitor attraction potential.

10.1.5 Administrative Fee Increase for Clean Energy Financing and Water Supply Upgrade Program

Abhi Jain, Climate Change and Sustainability Manager reviewed a report “Administrative Fee Increase for Clean Energy Financing and Water Supply Program” (circulated with Agenda), regarding an increase to the administrative fee for the Clean Energy Financing and Water Supply Upgrade programs, administered by the Clean Foundation under a five-year agreement with the Municipality (2023–2028).

Staff clarified that the \$1,400 administrative fee for both programs would be reduced to \$1,000 per applicant after the FCM subsidy. Bringing the Water Supply Upgrade program in-house would keep the fee at \$250, while the Clean Energy Financing program would remain external due to technical complexity. The November 2026 transition would allow for staff training, policy updates, and phased management of active files.

Moved by Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Smith that the Finance Committee recommends to Municipal Council to” approve the increase of administrative fees to \$1,400 per participant for the Clean Energy Financing Program and Water Supply Upgrade Program, effective April 1, 2026, for all new participants”.

Staff clarified that the energy program fees remain justified by savings, the Water Supply Upgrade program would move in-house with a \$250 fee, and existing applicants would not be affected.

Motion was voted on and carried unanimously.

Moved by Deputy Mayor Veinotte, seconded by Councillor Bell that the Finance Committee recommends to Municipal Council to “approve transitioning administration of the Water Supply Upgrade Program from Clean Foundation to in-house delivery by the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, effective November 1, 2026”. Carried unanimously.

Finance Committee recessed at 9:58 a.m. and reconvened at 10:15 a.m.

7.2 NS Fire Governance Study

Deputy Minister Paul LaFleche, ADM Valerie Pottie Bunge, and Carolyn Hemstock, Emergency Management attended via Teams and presented “Bill 186: An Act to Provide Support for Fire Protection Services”. (attached to Minutes) The provincial vision being that all residents have access to reliable, evidence-based fire services and all firefighters have the training and equipment to stay safe.

Highlights of the presentation included:

1. Who was Engaged
 - a. FSANS Governance and Administration Review (2025)
 - b. NSFS Value for Money Audit (2025)
 - c. Fire Service Modernization Planning Sessions (2026)
2. What was Heard
3. New Legislation (Bill 186)
4. FSANS Recommendations
5. Key Changes
6. New Responsibilities
7. Risk Based Assessments
8. Level of Service
9. Moving Forward

Council members engaged in a detailed Q&A with provincial representatives, raising concerns about service standards, volunteer recruitment and retention, administrative burdens, and ensuring local knowledge and voices are incorporated into future regulations.

The province clarified/confirmed the following:

- Departments remain independent, Bill 186 does not mandate service levels.
- Only some Fire Service Association recommendations were included, broader changes will come through consultation.
- Training can continue through flexible or hybrid models, national standards were considered with practical flexibility for rural departments.
- Mutual aid and inter-department cooperation remains unchanged.
- New funding was added, multi-year guarantees not possible, but sustainability would be addressed.
- Community risk assessments would guide planning, not imposing rigid standards; expectations would evolve collaboratively.
- Recruitment and retention strategies were being examined through the Fire Service Association, and ongoing consultations.
- NFPA standards not fully adopted in the legislation, future standards would involve local fire departments for practical solutions.
- Municipalities and local service providers would complete reviews, the province would provide standardized tools, training, and supports.
- Intention aims to reduce administrative burdens, tools and supports were intended to simplify processes and build capacity.

Provincial officials emphasized that Bill 186 represented the first phase of reform, with further consultation and collaboration with municipalities, fire departments, and stakeholders to develop future policies, supports, and incentives for fire services.

7.2.1 Public Input:

Peter Stevens, Fire Chief, Big Tancook Island expressed concerns with how standards are measured, noting confusion within the Province regarding “qualified” vs “certified” and that standards should be based on knowledge and experience rather than who provides the training.

Cory Zinck – Fire Chief, Oakhill expressed concerns about recruitment, retention and training challenges, emphasizing the need for input from all departments.

Finance Committee recessed for lunch at 12:07 p.m. and reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

8. Consideration of Correspondence - Nil

9. Recommendations from Committees & Boards

10. Staff Reports

10.1 Finance Department

10.1.1 2026-2027 Draft Operating Budget Update

Councillor Oickle left the table.

Elana Wentzell, Director of Finance presented the 2026-2027 Draft Operating Budget Update (circulated with Agenda) and, along with each Director, reviewed their respective department's operational budget changes.

The following key updates and budget considerations were discussed:

- Coastal Support Program and MODL's partnership with four municipalities to address an industry gap.
- Community Hub budget increase reflected higher overall costs and delays in completing planned work.
- The \$40,000 discretionary portion of the tourism budget was discussed, and it was agreed to keep the funds unchanged for now, with their use to be determined as part of a future tourism strategy.

Councillor Oickle returned to the table.

10.1.2 2026-2027 Draft Budget Update: Capital & Reserves

Elana Wentzell, Director of Finance, presented the 2026-2027 Draft Capital & Reserves Budget Update (circulated with Agenda) and, along with each Director, reviewed their respective department's operational budget changes.

The following key updates and budget considerations were discussed:

- The budget for the Centre School Site was confirmed as an estimate for building demolition only, not remediation, as different levels of remediation have varying costs.
- Opportunities for outsourcing EV chargers for the MARC were noted.
- The washrooms for Mush-a-Mush were expected to be constructed after peak season.
- The addition of the removal and replacement of wooden playground structures at River Ridge Common was highlighted, noting that not addressing the deterioration of the structures at the park posed a liability and safety risk. The assessment of the wooden playground structures identified parts to be replaced and others removed, with decisions still required on materials to be used.
- Payments to self-employed artists were confirmed to be permitted under the MGA.

10.1.3 Expanded Public Input

Andrew Himmelman, Newcombville, stated that he did not see much in the budget presentations on reductions and asked whether Council had requested staff to explore cost saving initiatives.

10.1.4 Council Deliberation and Direction to Staff

Council discussed several items arising from the draft operating and capital budget presentations and provided direction to staff on specific matters.

Tourism

The following key updates and budget considerations were discussed:

- Tourism strategy lacks clear alignment with municipal priorities.
- Mobile VIC program mostly engaged residents, not visitors.
- Support for broader review, including cultural and heritage opportunities.
- Budget covering staff and discretionary funding to be maintained; some spending deferred.

Council directed staff to pause the mobile VIC pop-up program for the year while retaining tourism funding, and to return with options for its future use, including a potential tourism strategy.

Art on the Trail

- Council discussed the Art on the Trail budget needs clearer long-term vision and alignment with tourism, heritage, and community development

Council agreed to reduce the budget for Art on the Trail from \$65,000 to \$15,000, keeping only last year's carryover, while future plans are reviewed.

Disc Golf

- Council discussed adding a disc golf course and noted it might fit within the existing park development budget

Council indicated support for exploring the inclusion of a disc golf course and directed staff to review feasibility and costs prior to final budget approval.

Osprey Village Enhancement

Council discussed several capital projects, including sidewalks in Osprey Village, noting the need to distinguish between aesthetic enhancements and infrastructure required for safety.

No additional direction to staff was provided on these projects during the discussion.

11. Added Items – Nil

12. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:43 p.m.

Revitalizing the MARC: A Low-Cost, High-Yield Community Investment

A Partnership Proposal from the South Shore Disc Golf Association (SSDGA)

The Vision: To upgrade the MARC disc golf course into a permanent, 18-hole premier destination that drives regional tourism, supports community mental health, and provides accessible recreation for all residents.

1. Zero Barriers: A Sport for Every Age, Income, and Skill Level

Traditional sports often require expensive equipment, memberships, or scheduled team commitments. Disc golf removes these barriers entirely.

- **Low Cost:** The only equipment required is a single plastic disc (typically 15–20). There are no greens fees or ongoing membership costs.
- **Intergenerational Play:** Disc golf is a low-impact exercise where grandparents can actively play alongside their grandchildren.
- **Skill Inclusivity:** The proposed upgrade includes a dual-tee system. "Red Tees" offer shorter, safer lines to build confidence for beginners, families, and seniors. "Blue Tees" provide technical challenges for experienced tournament players. Everyone plays the same beautiful property at their own pace.

2. "Nature Therapy" and Mental Wellness

Disc golf is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for mental health, functioning as "Nature Therapy."

- **The Science:** A Stanford Woods Institute study found that 90 minutes of walking in a natural environment physically lowers neural activity in the area of the brain linked to depression and mental illness.
- **Mindfulness in Motion:** The sport requires players to focus entirely on the wind, the angle, and the flight of the disc. This provides a necessary "mindfulness break" that clears the mind of daily stressors and anxiety.
- **Combating Isolation:** It provides a free, accessible reason to leave the house, get fresh air, and socialize in a healthy, supportive community setting.

3. Directly Advancing "Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia"

This expansion is not just a club request; it is a direct fulfillment of the Province's *Let's Get Moving* mandates:

- **Goal 1 (Redefining Movement):** We are shifting exercise from indoor gyms to accessible, fun outdoor activity. It turns a simple walk in the woods into an engaging game.
- **Goal 4 (Enhancing Opportunities):** We are using under-utilized municipal green space to create an inclusive environment that removes financial and physical barriers to physical activity.

4. The Economic Engine (Why Bridgewater Needs to Act Now)

Disc golf is a massive driver of local tourism, and Bridgewater is perfectly positioned to capture this demographic.

- **The Hidden Traffic:** Due to poor cell service at the MARC, digital check-ins are vastly under-reported. Despite this, 2025 UDisc data still captured 108 players traveling over 50km and 30 players traveling over 500km just to play here.
- **Local Spending:** During the 2025 Salty Chains Open, 91.7% of visiting players ate at local restaurants and 33.3% paid for local lodging.
- **The 2026 Lighthouse Route Tour:** The MARC has been officially selected as a stop on the 2026 provincial tour. Hundreds of players are coming next summer. Upgrading the temporary

dirt/sawdust tee pads to permanent infrastructure is critical to successfully hosting this regional influx.

- **The Regional Arms Race:** With Martock, Ski Wentworth, Moncton, and Fredericton investing heavily in championship courses, Bridgewater risks being bypassed by sports tourists if the MARC is left as a temporary, unfinished layout.

5. The Investment: Unmatched ROI

Compared to tennis courts, splash pads, or playgrounds, disc golf is incredibly inexpensive to build and maintain.

- **Cost Efficiency:** We can install professional-grade baskets, durable tee pads, and high-quality signage for approximately \$1,000 per hole.
- **The Ask:** We are requesting ~\$20,000 in material funding from the municipality, alongside land-use approval for the 18 holes and municipal support for heavy machinery site prep.
- **The "Sweat Equity" Partnership:** The SSDGA will provide the volunteer labor for brush clearing, basket assembly, course design, and long-term community stewardship.

The Bottom Line: For a \$20,000 material investment, the Municipality gains a permanent, highly durable recreation facility that improves public health, drives restaurant/hotel revenue, and puts Bridgewater on the map as a premier destination in Atlantic Canada.

Bill 186: *An Act to Provide Support for Fire Protection Services*

FEBRUARY 27, 2026

DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT



Our Vision

Every Nova Scotian has access to reliable, evidence-based fire services—no matter where they live.

Every firefighter has access to the training and equipment needed to stay safe while serving their communities.

Who We've Engaged

FSANS Governance and Administration Review (2025)

- Review of half a dozen previous reports/recommendations on fire services and governance over two decades
- 390 fire service representatives attended community-based workshops
- 400 fire service representatives completed FSANS survey
- 30 group sessions were also held with provincial government departments, fire and emergency management professionals, etc.
- Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia (AMANS)

NSFS Value for Money Audit (2025)

- 680 firefighters
- 52 fire service leaders
- 8 members of the Board of Directors of the NSFS

Fire Service Modernization Planning Sessions (2026)

- 700 fire chiefs, deputy chiefs, fire service coordinators, and municipal leaders to determine how best to implement the recommendations from the FSANS report.
- 15 sessions held online and in multiple locations including Springhill, Baddeck, Sydney, Yarmouth, and Bridgewater

What We Heard - FSANS and the Value for Money Audit

- ▶ FSANS Governance Review identified governance gaps, inconsistent training, and uneven service levels province-wide.
- ▶ A value-for-money audit of the Nova Scotia Firefighters School showed troubling safety issues, governance failures, and a lack of oversight.
- ▶ Sector-wide concerns regarding inconsistent standards, patchwork funding, recruitment/retention challenges, and inequitable access to training and equipment.
- ▶ Municipalities and fire service leaders broadly expressed the need for:
 - Better and clearer governance
 - Safe, standardized, and accessible training
 - Consistent service levels across the province

What We Heard – Recent Planning Sessions

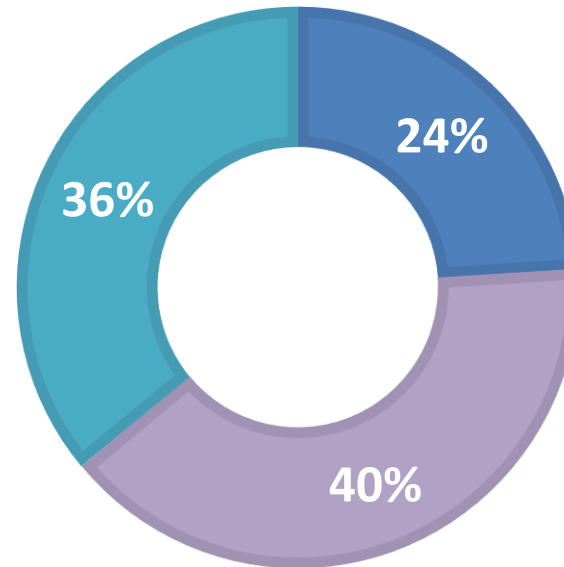
- General support for **standardized provincial frameworks, clearer roles, and sustainable long-term funding**, with concerns about equity between rural and urban departments.
- **Strong backing for NFPA-aligned training**, though access is limited by travel, facilities, and instructor availability; preference for regional, mobile, and hybrid delivery models.
- **Mixed reactions to FSANS recommendation for a new model where municipalities must lead fire service provision** with each group sharing unique questions and concerns about implementation.
- **Emphasis on firefighter wellness and volunteer retention**, highlighting burnout, administrative burden, equipment inequities, and the importance of employer/family support.
- **Municipal administrators support modernization if accompanied by predictable provincial funding**, stronger governance/oversight, and accessible training options.
- **Improved accountability and oversight was the most commonly cited benefit of a new model.**
- **While consensus on a new governance model was not reached, many participants expressed keen interest in being engaged in decision-making and using education to support change.**

New Legislation (Bill 186)

- On February 23, the Province introduced the [Support for Fire Protection Services Act](#), which will strengthen fire services across Nova Scotia
- This legislation sets the stage for a phased approach to change (e.g., standards, evidence-driven levels of service) that is both achievable and sustainable
- These changes are intended to strengthen the vital services provided by municipalities and diverse fire service providers including associations and commissions
- Aligns to some FSANS Governance Review recommendations in key thematic areas of importance to the fire service sector

FSANS GOVERNANCE REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

- Included in Bill 186
- Operational Activity Already in Progress
- Under consideration



- ✓ 32 Recommendations Accepted and Addressed by the Province
- ✓ Total = 50 Recommendations

Theme	FSANS Recommendations for Improvement	Integrated in Bill 186
Governance & Legislation	Consider aligning oversight under one provincial ministry reporting with a Fire Commissioner reporting to the DM.	✓
	Standardize definitions (Firefighter, Fire chief).	✓
Administration & Coordination	Consider creating a single executive position to provide centralized oversight and serve as the main contact for municipal fire departments.	✓
Dispatch & Communications	Ensure comprehensive records management systems, processes and performance analytics functionality to inform effective community risk assessments.	✓
Professional Standards & Training	Establish comprehensive, standardized provincial training standards based on the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards.	✓
Health, Safety & Wellness	Establish standardized fire service PPE and equipment standards.	✓
	Proactive mental health and resilience education/support.	✓
	Work with FSANS to create a drivers certification process making it easier to obtain a license to safely operate a fire apparatus.	✓
Data, Reporting & KPIs	Mandate annual reporting requirements for all fire departments to inform service levels.	✓
Risk-Based Planning	Require municipalities to maintain community risk assessments to inform service levels.	✓
	Province must ensure comprehensive records management system, processes and performance analytics functionality are in place to inform effective community risk assessments.	✓
Implementation Roadmap	Implement a staged approach to adoption.	✓

Theme	FSANS Recommendations for Improvement	Operational Activity Underway
Dispatch & Communications	Implement a consolidated, province-wide dispatch system.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Facilitate and enable the implementation of NG911.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Professional Standards & Training	Create a centralized and accessible Provincial Fire Training School.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Mobile training schools to reach all fire departments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Offer online and other distance-education models.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Create an effective “grandparenting” process for experienced fire fighters.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Provide training for all senior municipal administrators and elected officials to establish province-wide clarity of governance following each provincial election.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Health, Safety & Wellness	With appropriate cleaning and decontamination resources.
Access to proactive PTSD support.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Funding & Financial Sustainability	Collaborate with municipalities to develop funding models for fire departments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Make grant funding available to municipalities to conduct risk assessments relating to consolidation of fire departments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Explore bulk purchasing of equipment.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Recruitment & Retention (Volunteers)	Explore opportunities to enhance collaboration with the NS Guard.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Explore incentives to retain volunteers.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interoperability & Mutual Aid	Strengthen DNR collaboration on wildland fire services to improve fire safety and operational efficiency.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Explore opportunities for expanded cross-training through collaboration.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Implementation Roadmap	0-6 mo: preparation 6-18 mo: transition 18-36 mo: implementation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Develop a comprehensive change-management and communications plan to support implementation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Key Changes Introduced by the Legislation

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- ▶ Transfers oversight for fire safety and fire services to the Minister of Emergency Management
- ▶ Transfers responsibility for the *Fire Safety Act* and *Rural Fire District Act* to the Department of Emergency Management
- ▶ Establishes the authorities of the Fire Commissioner

Key Changes to Firefighter Training

- ▶ The Act enables the Fire Commissioner to regulate training programs, which must be accredited by the Fire Commissioner, or a recognized accreditation body
- ▶ The Fire Commissioner may suspend or revoke training program accreditations for non-compliance



New Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC)

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- ▶ This Act creates the OFC as a home in government to provide oversight of all aspects of fire safety and services.
- ▶ The OFC will:
 - ▶ Expand the Province's mandate for fire safety by complementing the current work of the Office of the Fire Marshal through three strategic areas of work:
 - ▶ Investigations & Compliance
 - ▶ Training & Certification
 - ▶ Legislation, Policy, and Municipal Relations
 - ▶ Oversee personal protective equipment standards
 - ▶ Provide transition support for fire departments interested in moving to a municipal model

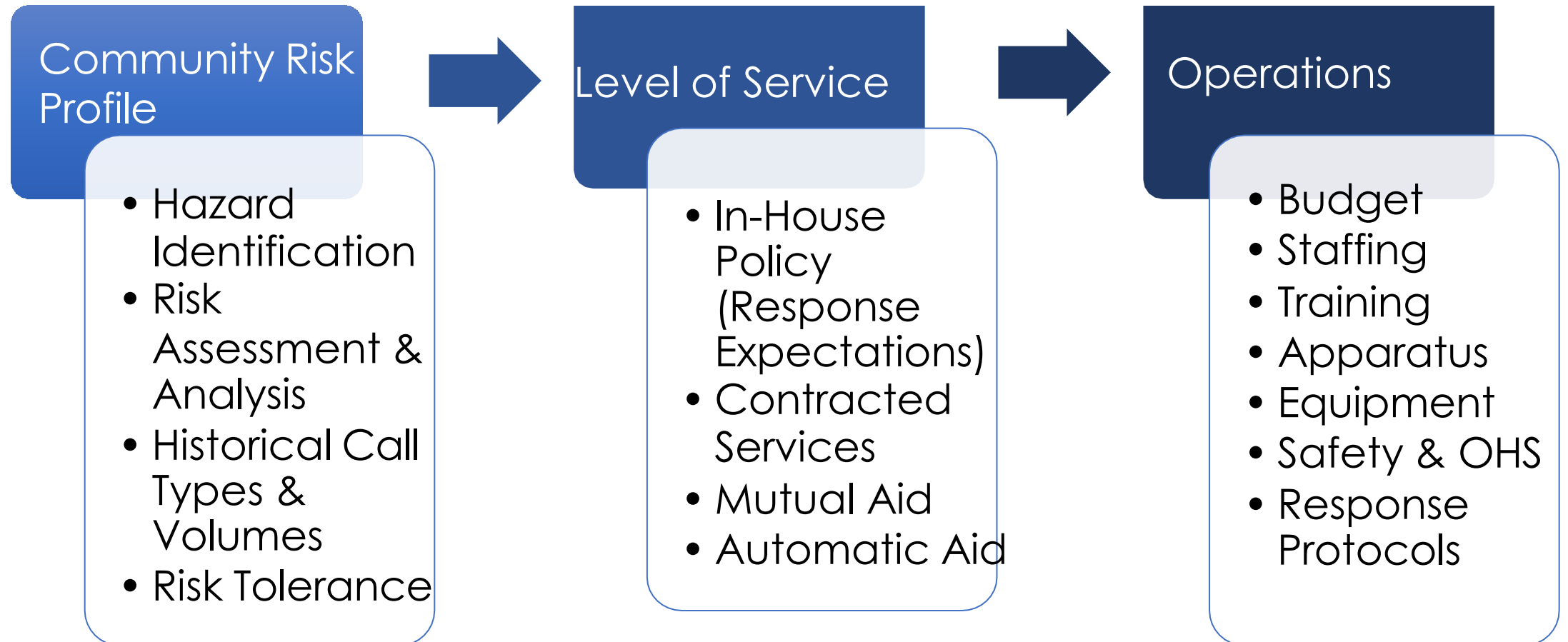
What Is Not Changing

- ▶ The vital role that firefighters and fire service leaders play in their communities is not changing.
- ▶ This legislation does not change section 293 of the *Municipal Government Act*. Municipalities may maintain and provide fire and emergency services but will not be required to do so.
- ▶ Diverse fire service provider organizations such as fire commissions, association, brigades and departments will remain as they are—governance structures are not being changed at this time.
- ▶ Volunteer firefighters that provide services through diverse organizations will not be not become municipal employees.

New Municipal & Fire Service Provider Responsibilities

- ▶ Although municipalities are not required to provide fire services, the Act creates new responsibilities for all municipalities and fire service providers, including fire commissions and brigades:
 - ▶ Conduct a fire protection service review using a risk-based assessment
 - ▶ Ensure local competencies and PPE meet provincial standards
 - ▶ Participate in a common fire service management system (also known as the FRMS)

FIRE SERVICE REVIEW AND PLANNING INFORMED BY RISK BASED ASSESSMENTS



Community Risk Assessment

Specific profiles are reviewed to determine risk landscape



Geographic



Demographic



Economic



Heavy Industry



Building Stock



Critical Infrastructure



Public Safety Response



Transportation



Natural Occurring Emergencies



Human-Caused Emergencies

Training & Standards Aligned with Level of Service

- ▶ Whichever service is selected using risk-based assessments during the review process, a corresponding training Ensures all fire departments are training similar for each service offered
- ▶ Ensures all fire departments are training similar for each service offered
- ▶ Will enable more training regionally and provincially as standards are same for each department

Upcoming Provincial Work to Strengthen Fire Services

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- ▶ Operationalizing the Office of the Fire Commissioner
- ▶ Rolling out provincewide training and building regional training capacity
- ▶ Developing new standards and regulations in consultation with municipalities
- ▶ Supporting municipalities transitioning to a municipal model by implementing shared procurement for equipment, insurance, and vehicles to reduce costs for fire departments
- ▶ Continuing to build on FSANS recommendations in areas such as dispatch, firefighter health and wellness, volunteer recruitment and retention, mutual aid, and interoperability
- ▶ Building capacity to continue modernizing the fire service system by providing:
 - Fire service maps and service agreement templates
 - Uniform risk assessment tools to help inform fire service reviews and service planning
 - A Fire Records Management System
 - Support for regional training centres and hybrid training delivery

Moving Forward, Together

- ▶ We look forward to continuing our work with municipalities and the fire service sector to build a modernized fire service system that better serves Nova Scotians.
- ▶ We want to continue hearing from you. If you have questions or feedback, please email firemodernization@novascotia.ca