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Policy & Strategy Committee Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, January 20, 2026 – 9:00 a.m.

MODL Council Chambers, 10 Allée Champlain Drive Cookville NS

- 1. Call to Order**
 - 1.1 Mi'kma'ki Territorial Acknowledgement
- 2. Nomination and Election of Vice Chair for Policy & Strategy Committee**
- 3. Announcements, Acknowledgements, Recognition**
- 4. Public Input (15 Minutes)**
- 5. Changes/Approval of Agenda** (as circulated)
- 6. Approval of Minutes – December 16, 2025** (as circulated)
- 7. Business Arising from Minutes**
- 8. Presentations/Scheduled Times**
 - 8.1 Partners for Care WellTide Health, Amanda Hatt,
Chief Program Officer 9:15 a.m. 1-11
 - 8.2 Community Working Forest Easements, Jennika Hunsinger,
Stewardship Forester 10:15 a.m. 12-24
- 9. Referral from Council - Nil**
- 10. Staff Reports**
 - 10.1 Recreation, Parks & Tourism Department**
 - 10.1.1 Evaluation of Visitor Information Services 25 - 33
 - 10.1.2 Park Evaluation Criteria Staff Report 34 - 42
 - 10.2 Finance Department**
 - 10.2.1 Property Tax Rebate 2026-2027 43-52
 - 10.2.2 Amendments to Policy 049 Property Tax Rebate 43-52
 - 10.3 Administration**
 - 10.3.1 Draft Housing Strategy Engagement Results 53-57
 - 10.3.2 2024 Election Overview 58-66
- 11. Mayor's/Deputy Mayor's/Councillors' Matters - Nil**
- 12. Added Items**

13. In Camera - Nil

14. Adjournment



Municipality of the District of Lunenburg Council Update

January 20, 2026

WellTide Health

Introduction

- Led by Partners for Care, supported by Lindsay Construction and RCS Construction
- 45,000 sq. ft., two-storey building offering modern space that brings together community-centred health and wellness programs, businesses, and supports
- Partners for Care conducted a comprehensive community profile and needs assessment between April – August 2025
- Findings informed our concept planning, guiding our recruitment strategy and focus for tenants to operate within WellTide Health, as well as how to design the Partners for Care Collaboration Hub that we will be operating within the facility



Community Needs Assessment Highlights

- Aging population: 30% residents aged 65+
- Nearly 7,000 unattached to primary care home (11% of population, Dec 2025)
- Some of the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the province
- Poor social determinants of health pose a significant barrier to health
- High acute care dependency for non-urgent conditions
- Limited local access to specialty services and preventative care services
- Mental health and addictions pose a pressing issue
- Fragmented health and social care services

Gaps & Opportunities



Primary Health Care Services



Allied & Regulated Health Professions



Women's Health Services



Pediatric Care Services



Caregiver & Child Care Support



Mental Health & Addictions Services



Aging Population Care Services



Orthopedic & Arthritis Services



Health & Social Services Coordination



Community Education & Information Sessions



Culturally Safe & Trauma-Informed Care



System Navigation

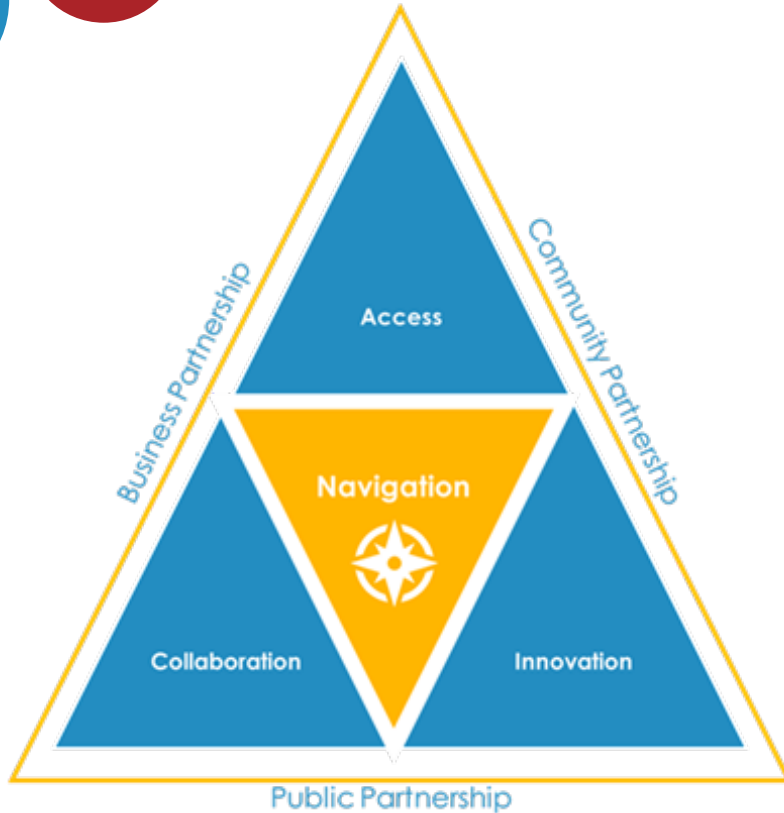


Grounded With Purpose

Help people feel informed and connect them with accessible, community-centred health and social supports that are important to their well-being.

Our commitment is to understand and address the needs that the community cares deeply about. For many, health and social support options are not well understood and too often feel out of reach. Partners for Care is focused on breaking down barriers by building partnerships across sectors through WellTide Health.

Our Guiding Principles



Navigation

Creating an environment where people are informed and cared for. It's relational, not transactional, and built on trust and deep knowledge of available resources.

Collaboration

Creating an environment to encourage collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and roles to provide person-centered, coordinated, and holistic care anchored by the community's needs and values.

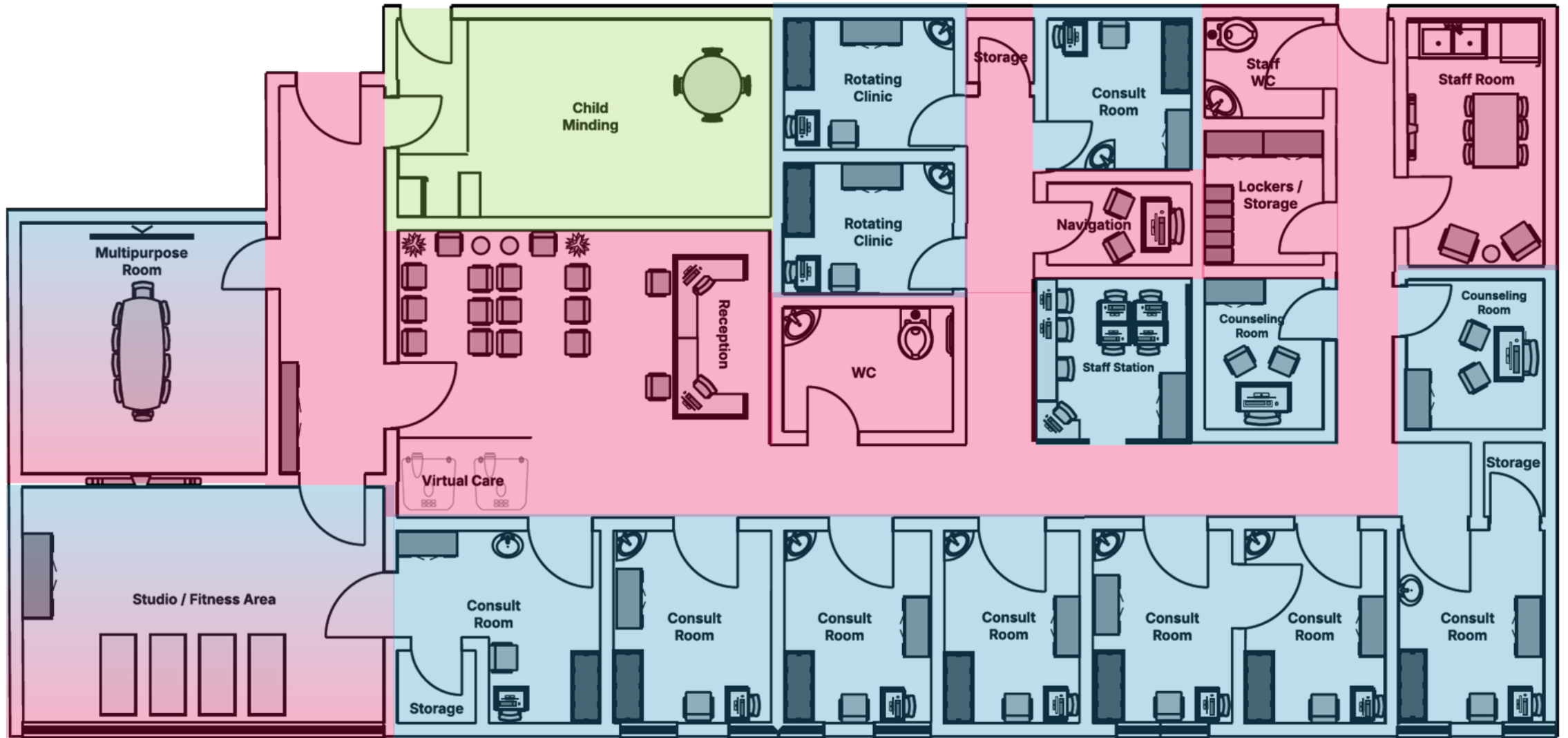
Access

Creating an environment that offers services, spaces, and systems so everyone—especially those facing systemic barriers—can use and benefit from them with dignity.

Innovation

Creating an environment that challenges the status quo to encourage new or adapted approaches that are community-driven, evidence-informed, and equity-oriented.

PFC Collaboration Hub





for Partners
Care

for Partners
Care
Virtual
Care Pod

Reception

↑ Massage Therapy ↑ Dermatology
↓ Family Health ↓ Cardiac Counseling
↑ Speech Therapy ↓ Allergy Testing
↓ Counseling ↓ Physio

WellTide Health Navigation Journey

These journeys are examples of what a community member could experience when visiting the Partners for Care Collaboration Hub.



Emma and Josh are parents of 6 year-old Lucas. Emma works in retail management; Josh works full-time in carpentry. They rent a house in town and have a car, but getting to appointments is hard because they also have a toddler at home. Lucas is in Grade 1 and his teacher has raised concerns about his speech, fine-motor skills, and difficulty keeping up in class. The family feels unsure where to start and is worried about "missing the window" to get him help.

They see a post about the PFC Collaboration Hub in the school's newsletter and come in for help.

At reception, the Hub Experience Specialist notices that they have several questions about their child's development and suggests meeting with a Navigator.

The Navigator invites them into a private space and begins a conversational, family-centred discussion.

RECEPTION

The Navigator learns that Lucas is having trouble with **speech clarity, fine-motor tasks**, and staying focused in class. His teacher has mentioned "**maybe occupational therapy or speech**," but Emma is unsure how referrals work or what is publicly covered. They can drive but find it **stressful to go to Halifax** for care, and **worry about what to do with their toddler** when Lucas has appointments. They would like **clear next steps** and want to feel confident they are doing the right thing for Lucas.

NAVIGATION

The Navigator reviews options with the family, who feels informed and supported.



Two weeks later, the Navigator calls Emma to follow up. Emma reports that they attended their speech and occupational therapy assessment appointment and will be pursuing both. They booked their upcoming appointments online. They were coached by the Speech Language Pathologist on what to request from the school, so Emma met with Lucas's teacher, and they have started some classroom strategies while they wait for their diagnostic appointment. They haven't made final decisions about every option, but the family feels "much less lost" and knows who to contact at the Hub if new questions come up.

Diagnosis Support

Provides information about public child and adolescent clinics that offer diagnostic assessment and typical wait times

Psychology

Provides information on what a private psycho-educational assessment involves and when families sometimes consider it

Speech and Occupational Therapy

Explores Emma's coverage and books Lucas for an assessment with the OT/ST team at the Hub

Parent Support

Shares details on local parent support groups and upcoming information nights at the MODL Community Hub

Childminding

Informs about childminding service at the Hub for Lucas' brother when they attend appointments or events



WellTide Health Navigation Journey

These journeys are examples of what a community member could experience when visiting the Partners for Care Collaboration Hub.



Tom is a 61 year-old seasonal worker who rents a small house outside town. In winter, his hours drop, and he worries about keeping up with bills and staying active when he is home more. He has mild COPD and knee pain but wants to keep working a few more years.

Tom hears about the PFC Collaboration Hub from a neighbour and visits after a shift.

At reception, Hub Experience Specialist suggest he speak with a Navigator to explore health and community options.

The Navigator talks with Tom about his work pattern, health concerns, and winter worries.

RECEPTION

NAVIGATION

The Navigator learns that Tom is concerned about winter **heating costs**, so he does not want to spend money on **transportation** to appointments. His **Primary Care** physician is on leave for the next month, and he has not had recent **lung check-ups** nor the opportunity to address his **knee pain**, which usually flares up in winter, with his **rheumatologist**. He would like to stay active but cannot afford pay for a **mobility class membership**.

The Navigator reviews options with Tom, who is thrilled to get person-centred care.

Two weeks later, the Navigator chats with Tom when he comes for his physiotherapy appointment. He used Lunenburg County Wheels to get to his appointment, where he started knee-strengthening exercises and was cleared for low-impact group sessions. He booked an appointment at the rotating rheumatology clinic and attended his virtual care appointment from which he got a requisition for labs and imaging. He is awaiting a decision on his HARP application.

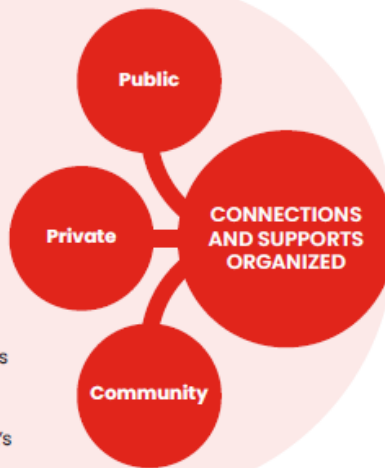
Rheumatology
Provides information about a rotating rheumatology clinic that will be present at the Hub through NSH

Episodic Virtual Care
Informs about virtual care at the Hub that allows him to connect with a Nurse Practitioner to order workup for his COPD

Physiotherapy
Assesses for Access Fund eligibility and schedules him for an appointment with the Hub physiotherapist

Heating Assistance
Provides a printed application for the province's Heating Assistance Rebate Program (HARP)

Exercise
Shares information about Thrive 55+ and YMCA's weekly low-impact senior exercise classes



Thank You

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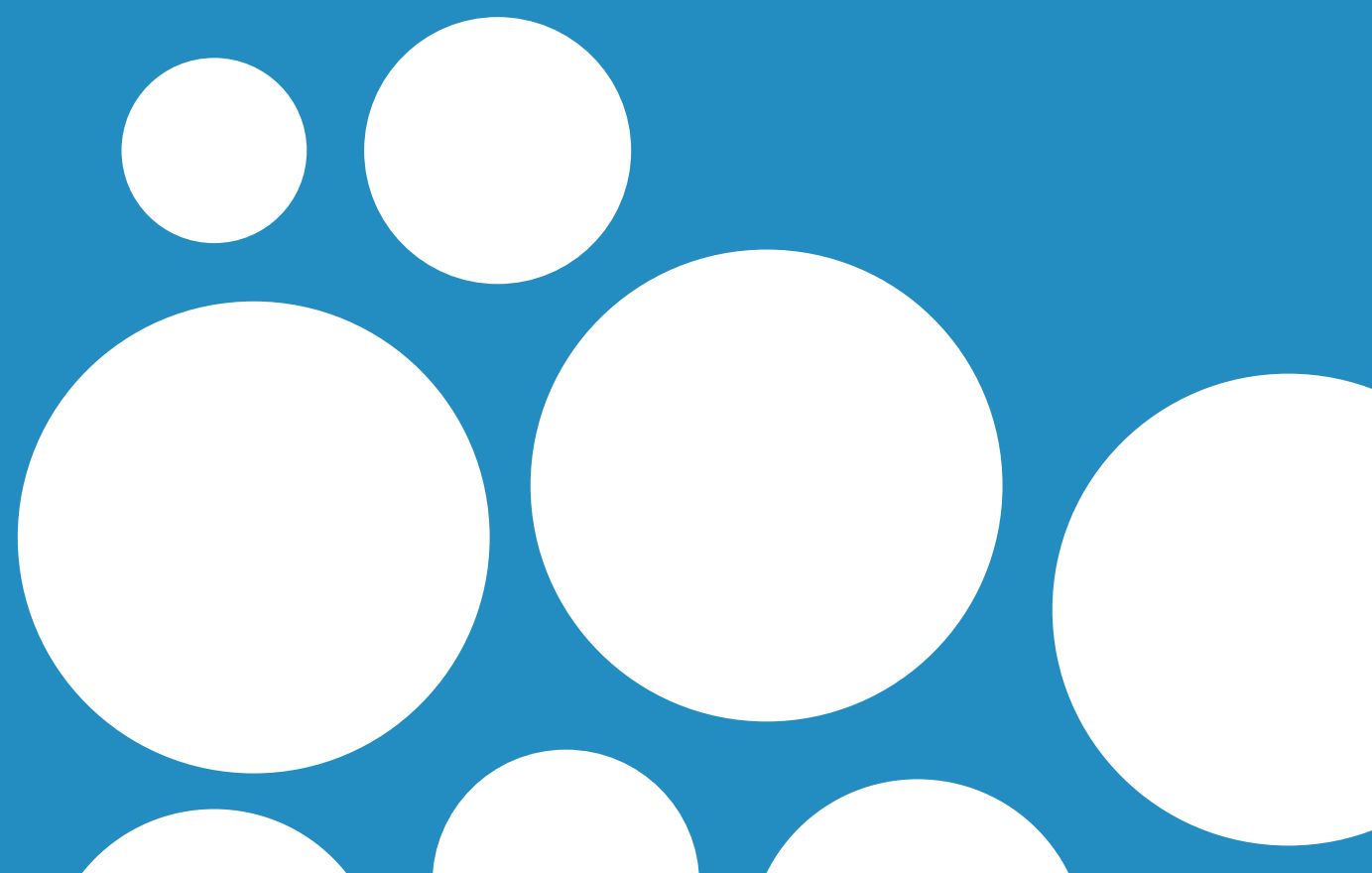
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NSWWT

NOVA SCOTIA WORKING
WOODLANDS TRUST



Policy & Strategy Committee
Item # 8.2
January 20, 2026



Community Working Forest Easements

January 21st, 2026

Mary Jane Rodger, Executive Director
Jennika Hunsinger, Stewardship Forester

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Threats to Nova Scotia's Forests



**LIQUIDATION
LOGGING &
CLEAR-CUTTING**



**CLIMATE
CHANGE**



**SUBDIVISION &
DEVELOPMENT**



**INVASIVE
SPECIES**

Woodland Stewards in NS

- 70% of forests are privately owned, over 30,000 land stewards.
- Most stewards are over age 60, often without robust succession planning.
- Asset rich and cash poor - the woodlot is often seen as an economic investment.
- Capital gains barrier – stewards face significant tax penalties if they transfer/sell woodlots outside direct family.

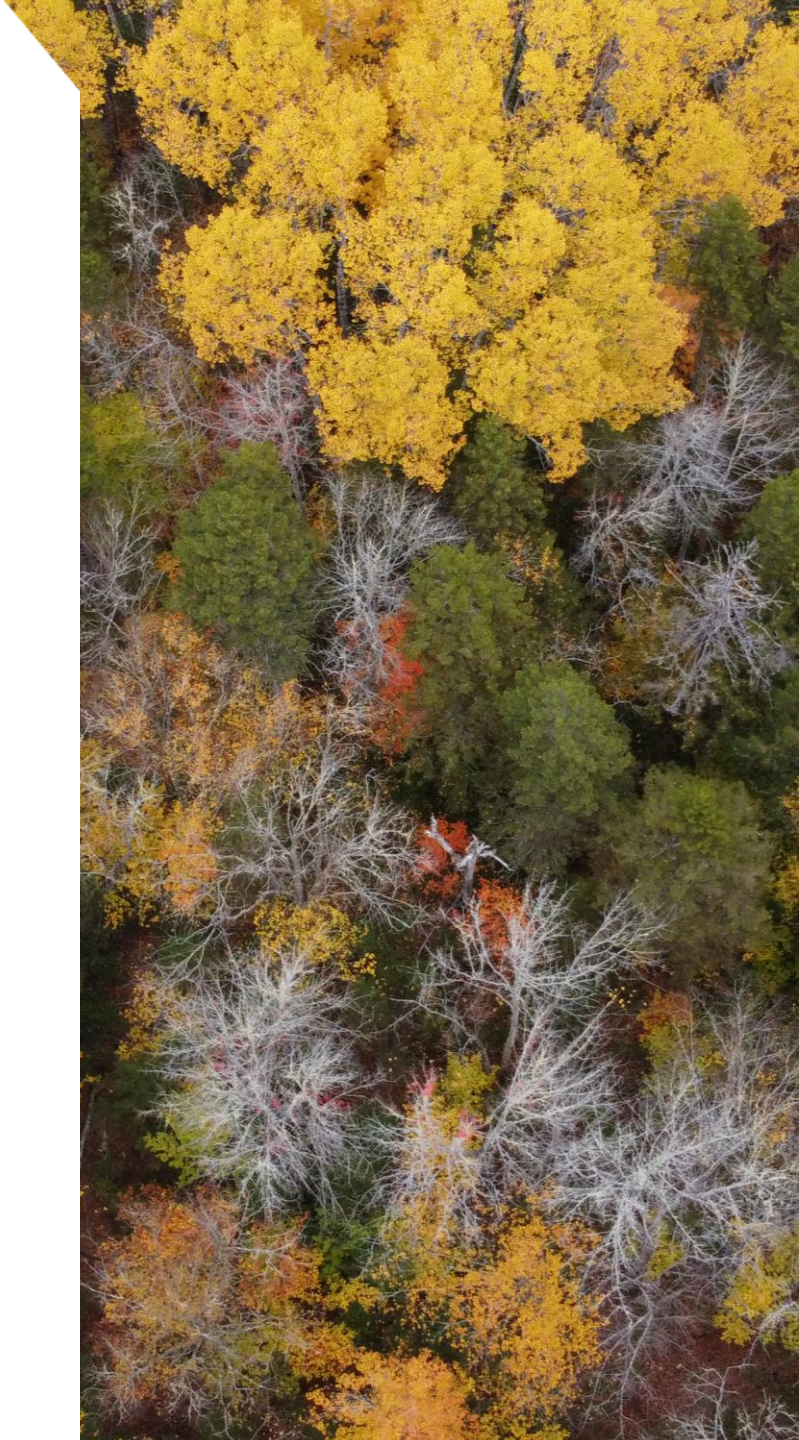


What we do

Built from a partnership with woodland stewards & conservation organizations, NSWWT fills an important niche in private land stewardship.

Our Vision:

We envision a healthy, resilient forested landscape across Nova Scotia through a network of land stewards with a shared commitment to long-term stewardship.



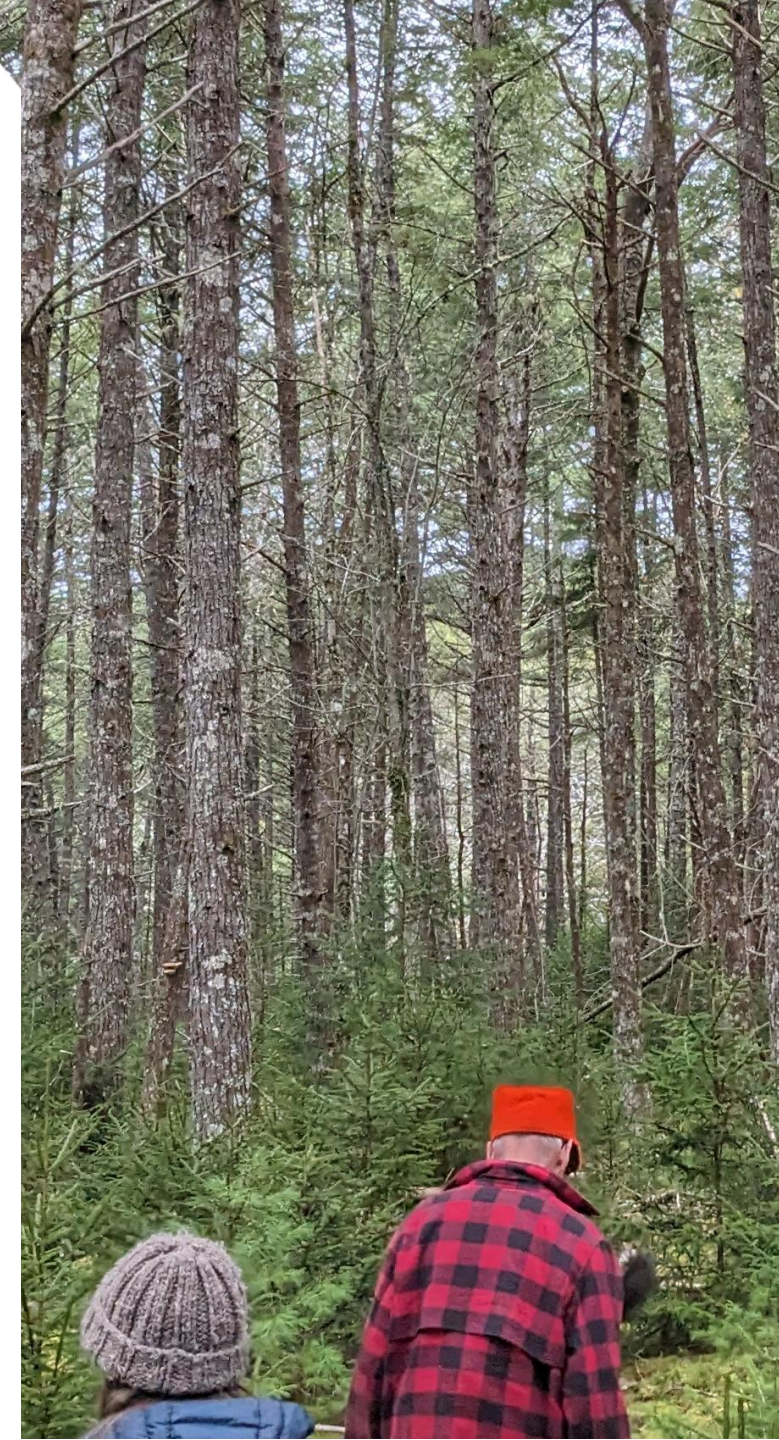
Eligibility for NSWWT

Carbon Program:

- Over 200 forested acres
- Comprised of 50% or more mature forest (over 60 years)
- Either managed or natural state
- **NEW cluster policy:** at least 100 acres within a 20km radius of an existing 200-acre NSSWT property.

Hemlock Program:

- Over 100 forested acres
- Comprised of 50% or more mature forest (over 60 years)
- < 50 acres



Benefits to Land Stewards



**LONG-TERM
STEWARDSHIP
& MONITORING**



**ACCESS TO ADVICE
FROM PROFESSIONAL
FORESTERS**



**EASEMENT &
STEWARDSHIP PLANS**



**OPTION TO RETAIN
OWNERSHIP**



PEACE OF MIND

Working Forest ≠ Conservation Easements

Conservation Easement

- ✓ Prioritizes preserving natural resources with minimal human intervention
- ✓ Restricts all commercial activity
- ✓ Residential/agriculture areas need to be subdivided out
- ✓ Filed under the Conservation Easements Act

Working Forest Easement

- ✓ Integrates sustainable management practices to balance conservation with human use
- ✓ Permits ecological forestry practices
- ✓ Residential/agriculture areas can remain within the easement
- ✓ Filed under the Community Easements Act



Regenerative Model for Forestry?

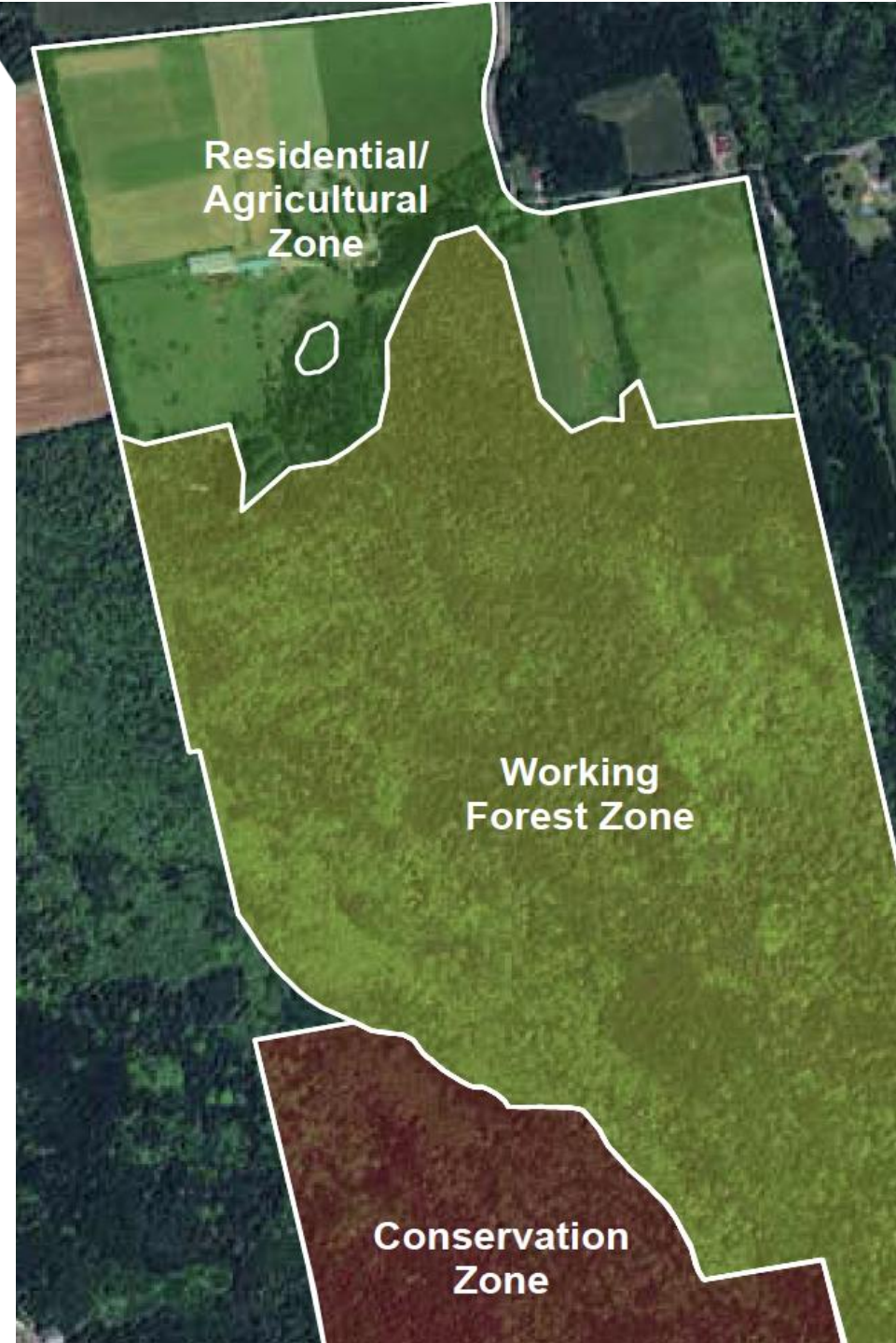
Our easements:

- Build natural resiliency to climate change
- Build long-term rural economic assets
- Demonstrate best practices and **ecological forestry**
- Promote public access and recreation
- Provide ecosystem services like protecting watershed health and species at risk habitat
- Break exploitive cycles, without abandoning rural economies



Easement Zoning

- We integrate **zoning** into each easement agreement to tailor to specific land uses
 - Residential/Agricultural Zone
 - Working Forest Zone
 - Conservation Zone
- All easements must have either a conservation or working forest zone.
- Primary area for current landowners to influence future practices.
- **Conservation zones are eligible to count towards Canada's Protected Area targets.**



Agreed Practices

Within the easement there are specific agreed practices the landowner must follow:



PERMITTED ACTIVITIES

- Hiking
- Trail clearing
- Non-commercial foraging
- Motorized vehicle use on designated roads



RESTRICTED ACTIVITIES

(Requires notification period)

- Forest harvesting (according to stewardship plan)
- New road construction
- Restoration projects

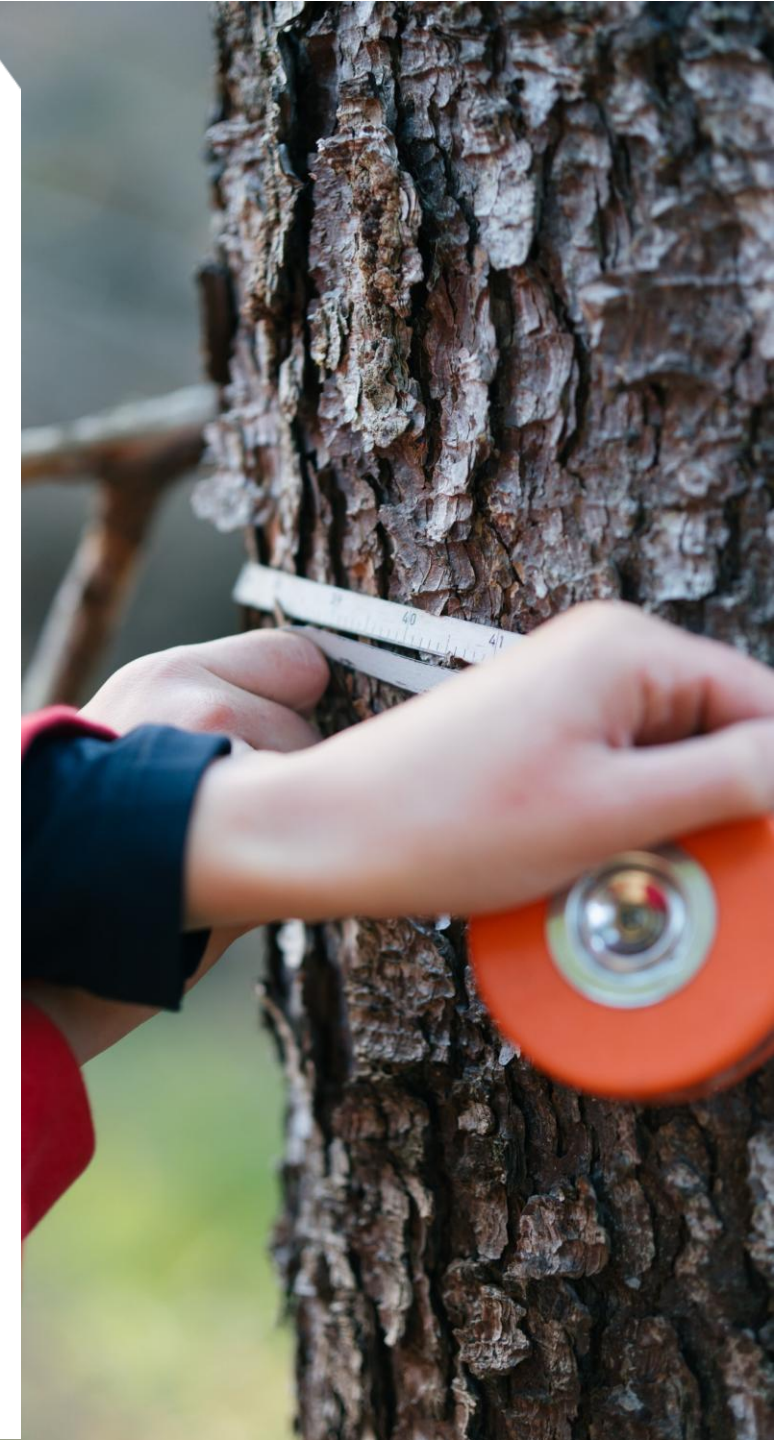


PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

- Property subdivision
- New residence construction
- Exploitive forestry

Partnerships with Municipalities

- Opportunity to influence management in areas ineligible for traditional conservation
- Provide regulatory mechanism to help protect municipal lands or watershed areas
- Shared capacity and forestry expertise
- Encourage public access, communal stewardship and demonstration of sustainable practices
- Ability to contribute conservation zones for recognition as Other Effective Conservation Areas (OECMs)

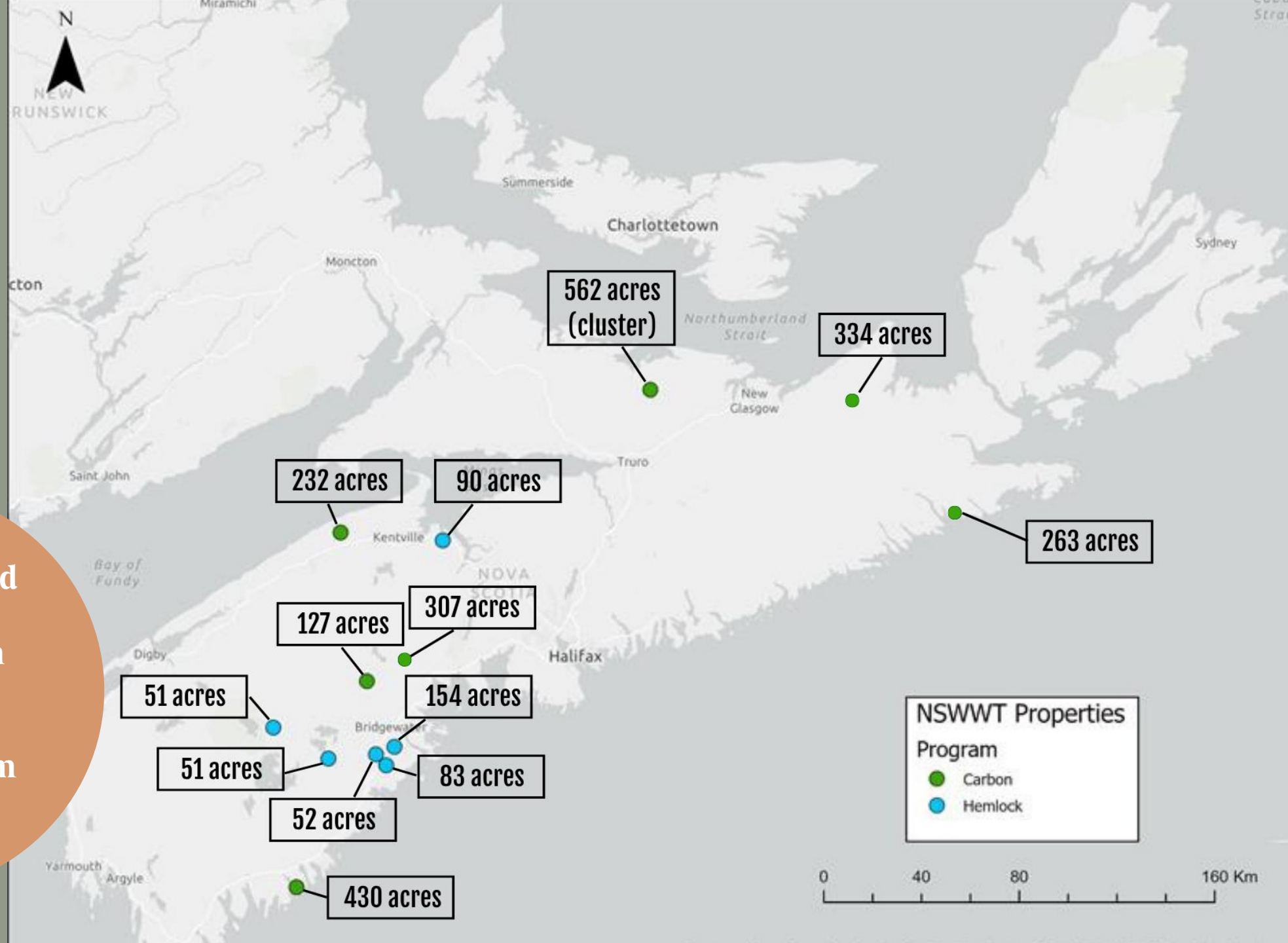


Our work to date

Currently Enrolled

Carbon program
3000 acres

Hemlock Program
450 acres





Questions?

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FAQ





The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg Information Report

Report To: Policy & Strategy Committee
Submitted By: Ruth Wawin, Tourism & Event Development Officer
Date: January 20, 2026
Re: Visitor Services Evaluation Report

Background

In 2023, the Municipality transitioned to delivering Visitor Information Services through a Mobile Visitor Information Centre (VIC) model, also referred to as pop-up VICs. This shift was made to better align service delivery with changing visitor behaviours, expand outreach beyond a single fixed location, and improve access to visitor information at community events and high-traffic locations throughout the Municipality.

Prior to this change, from 2013 until April 30, 2023, the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg cost-shared a brick-and-mortar VIC with the Town of Bridgewater, which served as a centralized visitor information point for the region. The transition away from the brick-and-mortar model occurred following notice from the Town of Bridgewater that it was no longer interested in continuing the cost-sharing arrangement.

Introduction

This evaluation is provided in response to Council direction to evaluate Mobile Visitor Information Services and establish output and outcome measures for the program.

The Mobile VIC model delivers in-person visitor information through temporary pop-up locations during the peak tourism season. These pop-ups operate at scheduled times and locations, including community events and high-traffic areas, and are intended to improve

access to local information for both residents and visitors, promote events, experiences, and businesses, and increase the Municipality's visibility within the District and surrounding areas.

Mobile VIC pop-ups represent one component of the Municipality's broader Visitor Information Services model, which combines in-person engagement with digital outreach and industry support activities. In addition to pop-up delivery, summer tourism staff contribute to maintaining visitor information on ExploreMODL.ca, managing tourism-related social media channels, conducting familiarization (FAM) tours and business visits, distributing print materials, and supporting other tourism initiatives and events.

Overview of Visitor Information Services

Mobile VIC

The Mobile VIC or pop-up VICs, operate seasonally with tourism staff attending a range of locations and events throughout the Municipality and surrounding areas. These pop-ups are intended to provide both locals and visitors with in-person access to information on local tourism businesses, experiences, parks, trails, beaches, and community events.

At each pop-up location, staff set up a branded tent and brochure racks stocked with municipal and local tourism materials, as well as information about upcoming community events. At high-traffic events, a prize draw is often used to encourage attendees to stop and engage with staff, while at smaller or community-based events, small promotional giveaways are used as an additional incentive to initiate conversation and information sharing.

During the first year of operation in 2023, the program targeted attendance at approximately three pop-up events per week. Based on staff experience and operational review, this standard was later adjusted to a minimum of two pop-ups per week, with additional events attended where capacity allows. This adjustment reflects a more sustainable delivery model that balances the time required for event preparation, travel, setup and teardown, and post-event reporting, alongside other core visitor service responsibilities.

Seasonal tourism staff are responsible for responding to visitor inquiries, maintaining and updating visitor information on ExploreMODL.ca, supporting tourism-related social media channels, distributing print materials, and completing business visits and familiarization tours. In addition, broader shifts in visitor behaviour, particularly the growing reliance on online sources for travel planning have reinforced the importance of dedicating sufficient staff time to digital content and online information accuracy.

As such, Visitor Information pop-ups represent one component of a broader, summer work plan undertaken by seasonal tourism staff. This context is important in understanding the scope of Mobile VIC delivery and the operational considerations that inform how the program is implemented each season.

Email, Phone, and Social Media Visitor Counselling

Tourism staff are responsible for providing visitor counselling through email, phone, and social media messaging. These channels support both trip planning and in-destination decision-making by responding to inquiries related to accommodations, attractions, events, outdoor recreation, and local services. Together, these communication methods extend the reach of visitor services beyond physical pop-up locations, provide year-round access to timely and accurate local tourism information, and allow staff to engage with visitors across multiple platforms.

Social media direct messages have become an increasingly used channel for visitor inquiries. Staff have observed a growing reliance on direct messaging for tourism-related questions, reflecting changing visitor communication preferences and the importance of maintaining a timely, responsive social media presence.

Distribution of Visitor Materials

At the beginning of each season, staff coordinate the collection, packaging, and distribution of tourism operator promotional materials, in addition to MODL brochures, to community and provincial Visitor Information Centres across the province.

Familiarization Tours

Familiarization (FAM) tours are used as a staff training tool and involve visiting tourism businesses to build knowledge of local experiences and services. These visits also provide opportunities to engage directly with business owners and to capture photos and content for social media and digital marketing.

Digital Presence and Content Management

Staff are responsible for maintaining the tourism website, *exploremodl.ca*, including conducting a comprehensive annual review of business listings to ensure accuracy, adding new businesses, removing outdated listings, and creating updated blog content. Seasonal staff also manage the Municipality's tourism-focused social media channels, including Facebook and Instagram, through regular posts, stories, and public engagement. In-season, minimum standards include one Instagram feed post each week, daily Instagram stories, and one original Facebook post per day, in addition to shared posts and stories.

In March 2025, the Municipality completed its website redevelopment after successfully securing funding through Tourism Nova Scotia's Tourism Digital Assistance Program. The project resulted in the launch of a modern, user-friendly website, *exploremodl.ca*, designed to improve access to local tourism information for both visitors and locals.

Additional Projects

In addition to planned responsibilities, staff may undertake ad hoc projects as required. These may include planning and delivering contests, developing visitor engagement tools such as

scavenger hunts, or supporting event planning and execution, such as the LaHave Sunset Park Pencil Walk launch event.

Operations

Core Visitor Services are delivered year-round by permanent staff, with service levels expanded during the peak tourism season through two full-time seasonal positions. A Visitor Services Manager and a Tourism Ambassador. The Visitor Services Manager is typically onboarded in early May, followed shortly by the Tourism Ambassador. Both positions work 35 hours per week and conclude at the end of August. In addition, a part-time staff member supports social media content, visitor messaging, and website updates for approximately 10 hours per week from September to March.

Visitor Information Services-Program Outputs & Outcomes

Visitor Services Output Measures

The following section identifies the outputs and outcomes used to evaluate Visitor Information Services and inform ongoing service planning and improvement.

Email & Phone

- Number of visitor inquiries responded to by email during peak season
- Number of visitor inquiries responded to by phone during peak season

Distribution of Visitor Materials

- Number of brochures and maps distributed to community and provincial Visitor Information Centres
- Number of participating tourism operators represented in distributed materials

Familiarization (FAM) Tours

- Number of tourism businesses visited

Digital Presence and Content Management

- Number of business listings reviewed and updated annually on ExploreMODL.ca
- Number of blog posts or new content pieces created
- Volume and frequency of social media content published during the season, aligned with established minimum posting standards
- Growth in social media followers and total engagement metrics, including likes, comments, shares, saves, and story interactions.

Visitor Services Outcome Measures

Visitor Experience & Access

- Improved access to accurate, timely visitor information across multiple channels (in-person, email, phone, and digital)
- Enhanced visitor ability to plan trips and make in-destination decisions
- Increased awareness of District of Lunenburg experiences, events, and businesses

Information Quality & Accuracy

- Improved accuracy and completeness of tourism information available online and in print
- Reduced reliance on outdated or incomplete business information
- Increased consistency of messaging across visitor touchpoints

Staff Capacity & Knowledge

- Improved staff knowledge of local businesses, attractions, and experiences through FAM tours and business visits
- Increased staff confidence in responding to visitor inquiries across platforms
- Stronger relationships between staff and local tourism operators

Program Integration & Reach

- Expanded reach of visitor services beyond physical pop-up locations
- More consistent year-round visitor engagement through digital and remote channels
- Improved alignment between in-person services, online content, and marketing materials

Mobile VIC Pop-ups Evaluation Framework & Data Collection

During each Mobile VIC pop-up, staff record the number of individuals within each party they interact with, visitors' geographic origin, and the type of information requested or discussed. This data is compiled and used to report visitor interaction counts and origin data through monthly statistical submissions to the Province. As a condition of provincial funding, the Municipality is required to submit monthly tourism statistics reports for the peak season months of June, July, and August.

In addition to monthly reporting, tourism staff complete an event report following each event or location attended. Event reporting was introduced in 2023, the first year of Mobile Visitor Information Service delivery, as a standardized tool to assess the effectiveness of individual events and locations.

Event reports document key details about each event, including the event organizer and contact information, date, time, location, weather conditions, estimated overall event attendance, and the number of direct visitor interactions by staff. Staff also record qualitative feedback from visitors, including notable positive or negative comments, as well as participation in any prize draws, where applicable. Each event report includes a staff assessment of whether the event or location should be attended in future seasons, along with a supporting rationale. These reports are used to inform annual planning and decision-making related to Mobile VIC pop-up locations.

Program Performance Framework-Outputs & Outcomes

Data collected through Mobile Visitor Information Services supports both output and outcome measurement. Outputs track service delivery and reach, while outcomes provide insight into program effectiveness, engagement quality, and opportunities for improvement.

Mobile VIC Pop-ups Output measures

- Number of Mobile VIC pop-ups delivered per season
- Number of locations and events attended
- Number of visitor interactions recorded
- Number of prize draws or giveaways used to encourage engagement
- Number of event reports completed

Mobile VIC Pop-ups Outcome Measures

- Increased awareness of local tourism businesses, attractions, parks, trails, and events
- Improved access to in-person visitor information for both visitors and locals
- Increased promotion of District of Lunenburg experiences at high-traffic locations and events
- Identification of the most frequently requested information (e.g., beaches, trails, events) to inform marketing and planning decisions
- Improved understanding of visitor origins and travel patterns
- Strengthened municipal visibility and presence within the regional tourism landscape
- Enhanced ability to adjust pop-up locations and scheduling based on performance and engagement trends

Mobile VIC data reflects direct, in-person engagement only and does not capture indirect exposure, post-visit decision-making, or digital follow-up behaviour.

Year-Over-Year Trends

The following section reviews Mobile Visitor Information Services delivery over the past three seasons to identify trends in engagement, inform operational decisions, and support continuous improvement.

2023

In 2023, tourism staff attended 25 Mobile VIC pop-ups, resulting in 958 visitor interactions. This year served as a baseline for understanding demand, identifying high-traffic locations, and refining staff reporting methods.

While overall interaction numbers were strong, they were influenced by multiple pop-ups at the Lunenburg waterfront. Event reports indicate that engagement numbers were high at this location but were generally brief and focused primarily on general inquiries about the Town of Lunenburg, rather than broader experiences within the District. Other highly successful events include the Michelin Seniors' Expo and the More on the Shore Vendor Showcase in Chester. These events highlight a consistent year-over-year trend, trade-show-style events featuring multiple vendors generate a high volume of meaningful, high-quality visitor interactions. Based on event report data, the South Shore Exhibition and Lunenburg Waterfront consistently recorded lower-quality or less targeted engagement relative to staff time invested.

2024

In 2024, 23 pop-ups were scheduled; however, three were cancelled due to weather and one due to staff illness. Staff recorded 422 individual visitor interactions.

The decrease in interactions reflects both the impact of cancellations and deliberate program adjustments. Staff did not attend the Lunenburg waterfront during the 2024 season, instead piloting new locations, including select businesses and park sites.

Consistent with 2023, the highest interaction levels in 2024 were observed at trade show-style events featuring multiple vendors, including the Seniors' Expo at the Michelin Social Club, Community Connections at the Lunenburg County Lifestyle Centre, and International Trails Day on the Dynamite Trail.

2025

In 2025, 21 Mobile VIC pop-ups were scheduled, with one cancellation due to weather, resulting in 666 visitor interactions.

Although fewer pop-ups were delivered compared to earlier years, overall engagement increased relative to 2024, indicating improved targeting of locations and events, as well as

more efficient use of staff time. Successful locations included The Ovens and Hirtle's Beach, along with the South Shore Shunpike event in Blue Rocks and two pop-up activations held during the Maritime Mega Geocaching event near the end of June. Of all pop-up locations attended, only two recorded fewer than 20 visitor interactions and were therefore considered low-performing.

While the data provides valuable insight into visitor engagement and program performance, it is intended to inform decision-making rather than serve as a comprehensive measure of overall tourism activity.

Top Visitor Interests, Year Over Year

Consistent year-over-year inquiry patterns show that outdoor experiences, particularly beaches and trails, remain the primary driver of visitor interest, supported by strong demand for the Trail Map brochure and the District of Lunenburg Tourism Map brochure.

Conclusion

While the data collected through Mobile Visitor Information Services provides valuable insight into visitor engagement and program performance, it is intended to inform operational decision-making rather than serve as a comprehensive measure of overall tourism activity. Results should be interpreted within this context.

Looking ahead, Visitor Information Services will prioritize high-impact, visitor-focused service delivery that improves access to local information, supports informed trip planning, and enhances the overall visitor experience. Emphasis will be placed on the efficient use of staff time, strong alignment with community events and peak visitor activity, and adaptable service models that respond to changing visitor behaviours, technology, and available resources.

For Mobile Visitor Information pop-ups, we will continue to prioritize trade-show-style and events that provide strong opportunities for meaningful engagement. Low-performing locations will be limited unless they are directly connected to larger initiatives or community events. Program delivery will remain flexible, allowing staff to adjust schedules and locations in response to weather conditions, staffing capacity, and observed event performance.

To better reflect how visitors access information throughout the year, staff will begin tracking social media inquiries on a year-round basis. In addition, phone and email visitor inquiries will be recorded outside of the peak tourism season, building on the tracking currently completed during peak months. Expanding data collection across all channels will support more complete reporting on visitor services and improve understanding of visitor information needs.

Report Preparation	
Department	Recreation, Parks, & Tourism
Report Prepared by	Ruth Wawin, Tourism & Event Development Officer
Report Approved by	
Date Reviewed by C.A.O.	



Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Request for Decision

Report to: Policy and Strategy Committee

Submitted by: Trudy Payne, Director of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism

Date: January 20, 2026

Re: Parks Evaluation Criteria and Framework

Recommendation

That the Policy and Strategy Committee recommend to Council to adopt the parks evaluation criteria and framework as presented.

Background

The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg since the early 80's has developed an extensive park system, with parks spread throughout the district.

In 2001 the Municipality undertook an extensive public consultation and research project which resulted in the 2002-2003 Open Space Strategic Plan (OSSP), which outlined 26 open space priorities focusing on developing lands MODL already owned into parks, acquiring lands for parks in certain communities or on certain bodies of water, or working with other entities to provide park and open space amenities to the public. The goal of this project was "to develop a long-range strategic plan for the **acquisition and development** of existing and future municipal land within the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg." It was outlined that "Such a plan will enhance the existing **quality of life** by meeting recreational needs of todays and future residents of the Municipality." (page 24, OSSP). The value of recreation and parks and its ability to positively impact individuals and communities' quality of life was recognized as well in 2002-2003 as it is today with Council deeming quality of life as a strategic priority.

The OSSP stated the intent of the Plan was to guide the Municipality over the next 10-15 years in making decisions concerning parks and open space. Seven years later, in 2010 an internal review was conducted, resulting in an updated Plan that outlined 21 priorities and included a number of policy recommendations. Actions have been undertaken on a number of these priorities to date. This updated plan is now 15 years old. A staff report outlining the history and evaluation of the Plan is scheduled to take place for the second quarter of 2026.

Since 2002 the Municipality has focused on the acquisition and development of existing and future municipal lands as outlined in the OSSP. The implementation of this Plan has resulted in an additional parks, sports fields, trails and/or conservation areas being added or amenities being added to an established municipal park, open space and conservation system.

In 2020 Council made the decision to invest in parks already in the park system to bring them up to an acceptable standard before investing into new parks. This practice continued with the new Council in 2024, aligning with Council's strategic priorities of quality of life, infrastructure, communication and engagement, climate change action, and regional economic development. This was recently re-enforced on page 83 of "The What We Heard Report" for municipal wide planning which stated, "Residents also want MODL to focus on maintaining the existing public spaces, including parks, as opposed to acquiring new ones."

The 2010 updated OSSP also included a number of policy recommendations on which many have been acted on including developing a Parks and Open Space Standards and Guidelines document in 2023, as the focus switched to upgrading the parks already in the park system. The standards and guidelines document was informed by the patterns of usage, the amenities at each park and by a park survey conducted in 2023 which provided great information concerning the parks most used and the amenities people are seeking in our parks.

In 2024 Council also received a presentation on five parks that had accessibility audits conducted by EXP. The five parks included in this accessibility audit were Hirtles Beach, Mushamush Beach, Miller Point Peace Park, River Ridge Commons and Indian Falls.

All these documents have and continue to aid Council in their decision making when it comes to investing in parks.

Executive summary

This year to further aid Council in decisions when it comes to investing in parks, staff were directed to bring forth a report outlining proposed park evaluation criteria.

The following outlines the proposed park evaluation criteria with definitions.

1. Safety – the absence of hazards.
2. Physical Condition – the general state, functionality, maintenance and quality of each parks' natural environment, features, and amenities. The condition can be impacted by maintenance, age of the park/amenity, degradation, and wear and tear endured overtime from use and exposure to environmental elements.

3. Welcoming and Safe – inclusive and well-maintained, providing a public space that is accessible to everyone. This criterion looks beyond the park and amenities being free from hazards and being designed to reduce crimes – it is about a safe place that fosters belonging, comfort, and positive engagement.
4. Accessible – people of all abilities can enter, navigate and use the park without challenge. It is about minimizing barriers.
5. Positive User Experience – a holistic and satisfying interaction with the space, that offers physical, mental, social and/or emotional benefits.
6. Environmental Impact & Sustainability – managing parks in a way that preserves natural ecosystems, supports biodiversity and minimizes negative impact, while also ensuring the ability to enjoy them for future generations.
7. Adaptability – can adjust to changing environmental conditions, community need and long-term use.
8. Park Equity – the fair and just distribution of quality parks and green spaces to ensure all communities have access to parks. It is about providing the appropriate level of investment based on need – not simply giving everyone the same amount. It is also about expanding park access and recreational opportunities for all people, of all races, ethnicities, income and abilities.
9. Align with Strategic Plans – does the investment align with municipal plans such as the Parks Standards document and strategic priorities such as investing in infrastructure, regional economic development, climate resiliency and quality of life.
10. Community Support and Engagement – an active collaborative process where residents help plan, design and manage local green spaces – building long-term relationships and shared ownership so parks genuinely reflect community needs.
11. Financial Considerations – weighing the benefits to communities to the cost involved. This considers the lifecycle costs, long-term maintenance, replacement costs and whether funding partners or partnerships (such as management agreements) can offset costs or improve service delivery.
12. Reflects Population and Demographics – this refers to who lives near the park or in a geographic area and the characteristics of the people such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, education, marital status and household size.

Attached to this report is a recommended park evaluation criteria framework which lists the 12 evaluation criteria and definitions with questions to help assess parks and guide Council in making investment decisions.

Discussion

As part of next steps, if the parks evaluation criteria and framework are adopted by Council staff would bring a report using this framework to provide an update on the status of each park and identify which parks are essentially at the maintenance stage.

As previously stated, the focus from 2002 up to 2020 was on the acquisition and development of new parks and since 2020 the focus has been on updating the parks currently in the park

system to an acceptable standard, staff have three recommendations for Council's consideration. They are:

1. Continue to focus on updating current parks in the system to bring them to minimum standards before creating new parks, while balancing the need for any potential new parks that may be identified using the park evaluation criteria framework.
2. When making upgrades to current parks or possibly adding a park in the system, consider investing in one larger project and a couple smaller ones each fiscal year.
3. Ensure all funds are not being directed at larger parks such as the Regional or Destination parks but also the smaller parks such as the neighbourhood parks or parkettes.

Budget implications

Each year Council approves an annual operating budget which includes funds to operate and maintain parks and adopts a five-year capital plan. The parks evaluation criteria and framework will impact on both budgets, which may see funds allocated previously for one park being re-allocated, additional partners being sought or more funds allocated in the five-year plan.

Strategic plan

Developing parks evaluation criteria and a framework align well with the Municipality's strategic priorities of infrastructure upgrades, expansion and management, specifically making strategic investments in recreational assets; quality parks contribute to quality of life; the criteria of community support and engagement align with Council's strategic priority of communication and engagement; parks support regional economic development and climate change action.

Work plan

Budgeting and planning for parks operation and maintenance is part of the Recreation, Parks and Tourism Department's workplan. Capital budgeting and project management also fall within this department's workplan as well as the Engineering Department's workplan.

Alternatives

The alternatives are:

1. To make changes to the proposed parks evaluation criteria and framework and have staff come back to Council with an updated framework.
2. To not adopt a parks evaluation criteria and framework.

Conclusion

The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg has been delivering parks services since the early 80's. Over the years the focus of parks has changed with various strategic plans guiding Council in their decisions. In 2020 the focus on parks was to bring the parks already in the park system up to a standard, improving the park services for residents and visitors. Covid highly demonstrated the value of parks in our communities. In 2023 Council adopted a Parks and Open Space Standards and Guidelines document which has helped guide investment decisions. This year, Council directed staff to bring forth a parks evaluation criteria framework that would further assist them in making strategic and budgetary decisions when it comes to investing in parks. These criteria should aid in making parks safer and more welcoming, inclusive, accessible and equitably distributed throughout the Municipality. Having such a framework aligns with Council's strategic priorities as well.

Attachments

Attachment 1 - Recommended Park Evaluation Criteria Framework

Report Preparation	
Department	Recreation, Parks, & Tourism
Report Prepared by	Trudy Payne, Director of Recreation, Parks & Tourism
Report Approved by	
Date Reviewed by C.A.O.	

References:

"Five Characteristics of High-Quality Parks", Urban Land Institute, 2021

"Recommended Measures to Evaluate Park Use and Quality", National Recreation & Park Association

CRITERIA		EVALUATION FOR (PARK NAME):			DATE:
SAFETY - the absence of hazards.	Any physical hazards?	Regular maintenance checks?	Any broken equipment?	Are risks so high the park should be closed?	Anything else?
PHYSICAL CONDITION - the general state, functionality, maintenance and quality of each park’s natural environment, features, and amenities. The condition can be impacted by maintenance, age of the park/amenity, degradation, and wear and tear endured overtime from use and exposure to environmental elements.	Are park amenities in good condition?	Is the park well maintained?	Any concerns identified from maintenance inspections reports / checklists?	Any physical limitations? (e.g., limited space for additional parking)?	Anything else?
WELCOMING & SAFE – inclusive and well-maintained, providing a public space that is accessible to everyone. This criterion looks beyond the park and amenities being free from hazards and being designed to reduce crimes – it is about a safe place that fosters belonging, comfort, and positive engagement.	Is there lighting / seating areas, shady pathways?	Is there external, internal wayfinding?	Is there a variety of activities to engage users?	Is the park comfortable to spend time in?	Anything else?

<p>ACCESSIBLE - people of all abilities can enter, navigate and use the park without challenge. It is about minimizing barriers.</p>	<p>Can people of all ages and abilities enter, navigate and use the park with challenge?</p> <p>Is accessibility supporting diverse needs and capabilities?</p>	<p>Do people know about the facility and what they can do there?</p>	<p>Are Provincial accessibility regulations being met?</p>		<p>Anything else?</p>
<p>POSITIVE USER EXPERIENCE – a holistic and satisfying interaction with the space, that offers physical, mental, social and/or emotional benefits.</p>	<p>Does the park provide a diverse range of amenities and activities?</p>	<p>Is the park comfortable to spend time in?</p>	<p>Do all community members feel welcome and safe in and around the park?</p>	<p>Is the park clean?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>
<p>ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY – managing parks in a way that preserves natural ecosystems, supports biodiversity and minimizes negative impact, while also ensuring the ability to enjoy them for future generations.</p>	<p>Does the park protect or enhance natural areas (water quality or biodiversity)?</p>	<p>Can investment improve things like storm water management or increase tree canopy?</p> <p>Does the park support or enhance environmental sustainability and resilience?</p>	<p>Can improvements reduce maintenance, energy use or carbon footprint?</p>	<p>Is the park at risk if we do not invest (i.e. hemlock woolly adelgid)?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>

<p>ADAPTABILITY – can adjust to changing environmental conditions, community need and long-term use.</p>	<p>Can the space be used for multiple activities?</p>	<p>Can the space be easily and inexpensively changed to meet changing needs?</p>			<p>Anything else?</p>
<p>PARK EQUITY - the fair and just distribution of quality parks and green spaces to ensure all communities have access to parks. It is about providing the appropriate level of investment based on need – not simply giving everyone the same amount. Expanding park access and recreational opportunities for all people, of all races, ethnicities, income and abilities.</p>	<p>Do different neighbourhoods have equitable access to open spaces?</p>	<p>Are amenities of equal quality?</p>	<p>Are amenities culturally relevant and appropriate for diverse users?</p>	<p>Are maintenance standards being met?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>
<p>ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLANS – does the investment align with municipal plans such as the Parks Standards document and strategic priorities such as investing in infrastructure, regional economic development, climate resiliency and quality of life.</p>	<p>Are minimum standards being met?</p>	<p>Align with Council's Strategic Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure • Regional Economic Development • Quality of Life • Empowering Communities 	<p>Align with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility Plan • AT Plan • OSSP • Climate Action Plan 	<p>Should any plans/priorities be revised, reviewed and/or updated?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>

<p>COMMUNITY SUPPORT & ENGAGEMENT – Active collaborative process where residents help plan, design and manage local green spaces – building long-term relationships and shared ownership so parks genuinely reflect community needs.</p>	<p>Does the park hold historical or cultural significance to the community?</p>	<p>Are there opportunities for partnerships (i.e. management agreements / stewardship agreements)?</p>	<p>Has the community identified this park as a priority through surveys, emails etc.?</p>		<p>Anything else?</p>
<p>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – weighing the benefits to communities to the cost involved. Considering lifecycle costs, long-term maintenance, replacement costs and whether funding partners or partnerships (such as management agreements) can offset costs or improve service delivery.</p>	<p>Can we afford to make the investment (reserves, grants)?</p>	<p>Any funding or community partners?</p>	<p>What are the costs if we don't invest? (i.e. increase crime, impacts to physical, mental, emotional health, economic impact)</p>	<p>What are the expected life cycle costs? Long term maintenance? Will service be improved?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>
<p>REFLECTS POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS - Who lives near the park or in a geographic area and the characteristics of the people such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, education, marital status and household size.</p>	<p>Is the park reflective of the communities it serves?</p>	<p>Does the surrounding community use the park; why, why not?</p>	<p>Does the park design and programming reflect the culture and interest of the demographics?</p>	<p>Is more than one park needed? Are community-based organizations involved in the park discussions and operations?</p>	<p>Anything else?</p>



The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Request for Decision

Report to: Policy & Strategy Committee
Submitted by: Elana Wentzell, CPA, CMA, Director of Finance
Date: 2026-01-20
Re: Policy 49 – Property Tax Rebate for 2026-27

Recommendation

1 That the Policy and Strategy Committee recommends to Council that the following changes to the calculation for the Property Tax Rebate program, and further that they be included in the 2026-27 Draft Operating Budget with a rebate of up to \$700 based on household size and income thresholds as follows:

<u>Income Threshold</u>	<u>Household Size</u>
Under \$31,500	1 resident
\$31,501 – \$41,500	2 residents (2 adults or 1 adult & 1 child)
\$41,501 – \$51,500	3 residents (2 adults & 1 child)
\$51,501 – \$61,500	4 residents (2 adults & 2 children)
\$61,501 – \$71,500	5 residents (2 adults & 3 children)
\$71,501 – \$81,500	6 or more residents (2 adults & more than 3 children)

With the above noted change of including “household size”, staff also reviewed and is recommending amendments to Policy 049, Property Tax Rebate. If the committee concurs with those changes presented, then the following recommendation would be appropriate.

2 That the Policy and Strategy Committee recommends to Council amendments to Policy 049, Property Tax Rebate as presented and hereby gives seven days’ notice of Council’s intention to adopt on January 27, 2026.

Executive summary

The Property Tax Rebate Program is one of the ways that Council supports low-income homeowners by granting a property tax rebate based on household income. During 2025-26 budget deliberations, Council asked that the Policy be re-visited to consider household size in the determination of the rebate.

Discussion

Staff started with a jurisdictional scan to compare other municipal units' thresholds for household income and household size. Both Colchester County and East Hants do look at household size for rebate determination. Colchester provides a \$635.67 rebate amount with incremental income thresholds for up to 3 or more household residents (maximum income \$49,915). East Hants has more income and family size categories but only provides a rebate of up to 20% of the annual tax bill. Details of the jurisdictional scan are attached to this report.

As of December 31, 2025, staff have processed 1,184 qualifying applications totaling \$579,518. The district had 15,551 assessed dwelling units in 2025, which means that 7.6% of homeowners have received a rebate. Of the 1,184 applications received to date, 1,110 were processed as a credit on the final tax bill.

Household income	Rebate Amount	Number of Qualifying Applicants
Under \$30,750	Up to \$680	510
\$30,751 - \$45,000	Up to \$475	454
\$45,001 - \$60,000	Up to \$270	220

Staff have looked at the rebates other units provide and considered the cost of living to determine a revised income threshold and rebate amount. The policy has been updated to clarify that household income documentation would be required for all adults in the household (over the age of 18). Proof of dependent children would be required in the form of the CRA Notice of Child Tax Benefit.

A revised income level threshold and proposed rebate schedule could look like the following:

Income Threshold	Family Size	Rebate
Under \$31,500	1 resident	\$700
\$31,501 – \$41,500	2 residents (2 adults or 1 adult & 1 child)	\$700
\$41,501 – \$51,500	3 residents (2 adults & 1 child)	\$700
\$51,501 – \$61,500	4 residents (2 adults & 2 children)	\$700
\$61,501 – \$71,500	5 residents (2 adults & 3 children)	\$700
\$71,501 – \$81,500	5 residents (2 adults & 3 children)	\$700

Budget implications

In fiscal 2025-26 staff made some conservative assumptions on how the increased upper income limit would affect the number of applications. The existing budget is \$763,400 with \$579,518 spent to date. If the rebate were increased to \$700 for all applicants, and the current applicants continued to qualify, a budget of \$828,000 would be required. This is not a one to one relationship, the higher income level corresponding to household size might now exclude some homeowners from getting a rebate if there are only 2 residents living at the property.

However, families with more dependents could earn a higher income and receive a rebate under the proposed program. Staff recommend that a budget of \$850,000 be set to accommodate the suggested revisions to the rebate program.

Strategic plan

Council's Strategic Plan looks to address quality of life and affordability for residents. The property tax rebate is a good fit to target those homeowners who need tax relief the most.

Work plan

Applications for the property tax rebate are mailed to all qualifying applicants from the prior year and any organizations that deal with those who may be low income. Also, the updated information will be posted on the Municipal webpage, social media accounts, in upcoming newsletters and printed on the back of the interim tax bill.

Alternatives

The household income thresholds, rebate amounts and policy could remain unchanged or staff could be directed to make further revisions.

Conclusion

The revisions align with Council's Strategic Plan and direction to consider household size when determining rebate eligibility.

Report Preparation	
Department	Finance
Report Prepared by	Elana Wentzell & Hailey Authier (research)
Report Approved by	
Date Reviewed by C.A.O.	

Municipality	Type		Income Threshold	2025 Rebate Amount
County of Colchester	income & family size	first check - income thresholds (2025)		2025 rebate amounts one person, \$635.67 two persons, \$635.67 three or more, \$635.67 (in previous years they had different amounts for each category)
		1 person	31,491	
		2 persons	41,959	
		3 persons or more	49,915	
East Hants	income & family size	1 adult	29,273	Minimum of \$267 or up to 20% of annual tax bill, whichever is the greater amount (based on Council approved formula) CRA Notice of Child Tax Benefit must be presented as proof of any dependent children.
		2 adults	35,629	
		1 adult + 1 child	44,313	
		3 persons	54,539	
		4 persons	66,129	
		5 persons	74,992	
		6+ persons	84,536	
District of Chester	household income	3 tiers	1st tier - \$17,896 or less 2nd tier - \$17,896 - \$30,036 3rd tier - \$30,036 - \$32,251	Council Equation for 1st tier - \$882 - (((income - \$17,896) / (\$30,036 - \$17,896)) x (\$882 - \$354))
Region of Queens	household income	3 tiers	\$25,000 or less	500.00
			\$25,001 to \$30,000	440.00
			\$30,001 to \$35,000	375.00
Town of Mahone Bay	household income	3 tiers	\$30,000 or less	1,000.00
			\$30,001 to \$35,000	500.00
			\$35,001 to \$40,000	250.00
Town of Lunenburg	household income	3 tiers	\$34,311 or less	1,000.00
			\$34,312 or \$40,030	500.00
			\$40,031 to \$45,749	250.00
Town of Bridgewater	household income	4 tiers	\$20,000 or less	800.00
			\$20,001 or \$25,000	500.00
			\$25,001 or \$30,000	300.00
			\$30,001 or \$35,000	100.00

Municipality	Type		Income Threshold	2025 Rebate Amount
County of Kings	household income		47,000	580.00
County of Annapolis	household income		\$31,000 or less	400.00
HRM	household income	1st tier - 100%	\$33,000 or less	Minimum tax payable of \$170. Rebate \$1,200 (taxes payable up to \$2,500) \$1,300 (taxes payable \$2,501 - \$3,500) & \$1,400 (taxes payable \$3,501 & up)
		2nd tier - 80%	\$33,001 - \$37,000	Minimum tax payable of \$350. Rebate \$960 (taxes payable up to \$2,500) \$1,040 (taxes payable \$2,501 - \$3,500) & \$1,120 (taxes payable \$3,501 & up)
		3rd tier - 60%	\$37,001 - \$41,000	Minimum tax payable of \$390. Rebate \$720 (taxes payable up to \$2,500) \$780 (taxes payable \$2,501 - \$3,500) & \$840 (taxes payable \$3,501 & up)
		4th tier - 40%	\$41,001 - \$45,000	Minimum tax payable of \$430. Rebate \$480 (taxes payable up to \$2,500) \$520 (taxes payable \$2,501 - \$3,500) & \$560 (taxes payable \$3,501 & up)
		5th tier - 20%	\$45,001 - \$49,000	Minimum tax payable of \$470. Rebate \$240 (taxes payable up to \$2,500) \$260 (taxes payable \$2,501 - \$3,500) & \$280 (taxes payable \$3,501 & up)
West Hants	household income		46,000	400.00 but not to exceed 50% of the previous years total taxes
Town of Truro	household income		32,147	258.00
CBRM	household income		48,000	300.00

Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Policy Details	
Name	Property Tax Rebate Policy
Number	049
Legislative Authority	MGA – 69(2)
Effective Date	February 11, 2025 April 1, 2026

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this policy is to provide compassionate property tax relief for low income taxpayers residing in their own principal residences.

Title

- 2 This policy is entitled the “Property Tax Rebate Policy”.

Definitions

- 3 (1) In this Policy:
 - a) **Income** means ~~the a person’s~~ total gross income (total income before deductions) from all sources for the calendar year preceding the **municipal** fiscal year **for all members of the household residing at the property over the age of 18 of** ~~the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg excluding any allowances paid pursuant to the War Veterans Allowance Act (Canada) or Pension paid pursuant to the Pension Act (Canada) and includes the income of all assessed owners, their spouse(s), including common law spouses residing at the property and all owners defined in section 3(3) residing at the property.~~
 - b) **Excluded Income** means a War Veterans Allowance Act income or income from the **Pension Act** (Canada). The Pension Act (Canada) is **not** the Canada Pension Plan or Old Age Security, but it is a Pension for members of the Armed Forces who have been disabled or their dependents.
 - c) **Owner** includes:
 - (i) the person assessed for the property;
 - (ii) a person who holds title including a part owner, joint owner, tenant in common, or joint tenant of the property;
 - (iii) a person having the care or control of the property through adverse possession; and

(iv) a person with a life interest in the property.

d) **Dependent Child** means a child under the age of 18 who depends on their parent for financial and other support.

e) **Principal Residence** includes the ordinary place of residence of an owner who is in a hospital or nursing care facility, unless that person has not slept at the property for a period of two (2) years or more, or the property has been rented to paying tenants, in either of which events, the property will be deemed to cease being the owner's ordinary place of residence.

f) **Taxes** means residential property taxes, interest on the current interim tax bill and any applicable area rates excluding property improvement charges, fines, liens and other charges on the account.

g) **Treasurer** includes persons authorized by the Treasurer.

Exemption Rebate

4 (1) The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg grants on an annual basis a rebate from taxation, operating as a reduction in the taxes payable to the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg in respect of a property subject to subsections 4 and 5.

(2) The rebate will only apply to owners who occupy the property as that owner's principal residence.

a) Applications can be made on behalf of a deceased property owner if the property owner received the property tax rebate in the previous fiscal year.

(3) Where a property is assessed to more than one owner other than persons whose income is included in the calculation of income in relation to this Policy, any who are entitled to a rebate may receive only the portion of the rebate equal to that person's share of the assessment for the property, but where the different interests are not separate, then to that portion determined by the Treasurer, whose determination is final.

(4) Despite any other provision of this Policy,

a) The maximum rebate amount will be determined based on income and household size and approved as part of the annual budget deliberations. ~~The rebate and~~

~~household income threshold will be adjusted annually by NS-CPI (All items) beginning in April 2022.~~

- b) Council will set the total rebate budget each year by motion.
 - c) The Treasurer can approve rebates for qualified applicants that exceed the approved budget when those approvals do not exceed 10% of the total rebate budget. Council will be notified of such approvals.
- (5) In order to be eligible for a rebate, the property owner will submit to the Treasurer a Statutory Declaration Certification of household income no later than August 1 of the fiscal year. The required Statutory Declaration Certification must be completed and processed each year.
- a) Late applications will be considered only after the regular review of those applicants that applied on time. Late applications will be subject to annual budget constraints.
- (6) Documentation for proof of income is required for all persons living in the household over the age of 18. Required documentation includes:
- a) A copy of the previous year's Notice of Assessment from Canada Revenue Agency for each household member is required to be attached to the application, showing total income on line 15000.
 - b) If the resident has worldwide income, Schedule T1 must be included. Under Administrative Order 10 Net World Income must be declared.
 - c) If the resident has rental income, a copy of the Statement of Rental activities must be attached.
 - d) If the resident claims working from home/self-employed, a copy of the Business Statement must be included.
- (7) CRA Notice of Child Tax Benefit must be presented as proof of any dependent children. Failure to supply household members' Notices of Assessment and other required documentation will render the application ineligible. The Treasurer can reject an application, where in the Treasurer's opinion, is not adequately verified or substantiated.
- (8) All decisions made by the Treasurer relating to this Policy and its application are final.

Enforcement Charges Not Exempted

- 5 No rebate can be applied to any obligations to remedy unsightly or dangerous premises or any other infractions against a statute, regulation or by-law, whether Municipal, Provincial, or Federal and any charges imposed upon a property arising from enforcement of such provisions will not be subject to a tax rebate authorized by this Policy.

Effective Date

- 6 The effective date of this Policy 049 Property Tax Rebate is April 1, 2026.

Policy Adoption	
Date of Original Passage	July 14, 2009
Date of Notice of Intent to Amend/Repeal	January 20, 2026
Date of Council Approval	January XX, 2026
Date of Effective Date	April 1, 2026
I certify that this Policy 049 Property Tax Rebate was amended by Municipal Council as indicated above.	
Signature of Municipal Clerk	Date

Version	Amendment Description	Approval Date
Original V1	Property Tax Rebate (formerly – Low Income Property Tax Rebate)	July 14, 2009
V2	Amended income threshold and rebate	April 14, 2015
V3	Amended title of policy, clarified income definition, revised maximum percentage of bill (66%to 100%) and housekeeping amendments	Nov 10, 2015
V4	Amended definition of taxes to include area rates excluding property improvements charges, added maximum rebate value, deleted references in section 6.1 as they were redundant and updated the application form with new thresholds	Jan 22, 2019
V5	Addition of new section 4.1 re deceased property owners, and added references to application form regarding 4.1	Oct 22, 2019
V6	Added new section 7.1 to allow late applications if budget permitted.	Sep 22, 2020
V7	Amended section 7 by replacing statutory declaration with certification, amended title of application to say same, replaced solemnly declare with certify on the application, and housekeeping amendments	May 25, 2021
V8	Amendment for clear language, moved rebate schedule and income threshold for ease of amending during budget deliberations, added annual increases using CPI, requirement of proof of household income, pro-rating of rebates based on budget was deleted, application form separated from policy for ease of amending as needed, and added provision for Treasurer to approve budget overages of 10%.	Mar 22, 2022
V9	Amended to add interest to the definition of taxes and housekeeping	Feb 11, 2025
V10	Amended definition of income and new definition of dependent child, renamed section 4 and added new section 6, removed annual CPI adjustment and added additional proof of income requirements. Renumbering accordingly	



The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Request for Decision

Report to: Policy and Strategy Committee
Submitted by: Alex Dumaresq, Deputy CAO
Date: January 20, 2026
Re: Housing Strategy Development – What we Heard Report

Recommendation

Move that the Policy and Strategy Committee recommend that Municipal Council adopt the housing strategy as presented;

Background

In reviewing available data about income and the housing market, it is clear that there is a gap in the number of available units and the affordability of those units. Currently, there are approximately 12,600 housing units in the municipality and current construction rates will result in 14,000 units by 2030. This pace is not sufficient to affect the supply and affordability of units as approximately 16,000 units are needed to return affordability to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, the median household income data for the municipality suggested that the maximum affordable price for a house was \$264,000, while actual median sale price was \$335,000, leaving an affordability gap of \$71,000. The shortage of units and the high costs for housing mean that shelter costs and homeownership is beyond the reach of many residents.

Through jurisdictional scans, academic research, interviews with relevant people and organizations, and council deliberation, three broad strategic approaches to addressing housing supply and affordability issues were identified:

1. **Create an environment for growth:** work regionally to provide more serviced land for high density development and speed up the municipal regulatory processes.

2. **Facilitate private sector housing starts:** remove barriers that prevent or slow construction of new units.

3. **Catalyze community efforts to provide housing solutions:** provide wraparound support for community groups who want to provide non-profit housing or develop innovative housing options.

With several draft actions under these three broad headings, Council directed staff to conduct public engagement to determine if the problem definition and proposed solutions are accurate and in line with public expectations.

Public Engagement

Public engagement was conducted using the engage.modl website and four in-person events across the municipality. Three-hundred and sixty-five citizens visited the housing project webpage and 53 of those could be classified as informed visitors. The Dayspring, Broad Cove, and New Germany engagements sessions involved a brief presentation summarizing the main points of the municipal housing strategy followed by open discussion with residents. The LCLC engagement session was a ‘pop-up’ session involving short and informal discussions with residents and LCLC patrons. A total of 20 citizens participated in the engagement opportunities as outlined in the table below:

Date & Location	Attendees
October 29 – Dayspring	2
November 13 - Broad Cove	3
Nov 17 - New Germany	3
Nov 26 – LCLC	12
Total	20

Results obtained from the engagement sessions were analyzed using thematic coding. Thematic coding is a qualitative research method commonly used to draw broader conclusions from engagement material. The process involves taking available comments, grouping them into themes representing the underlying concern, and grouping those themes together so that they can be compared.

The three most common themes identified by analysis were:

- A need for alternative housing options
- A lack of provincial support (funding, available programs, and related services like health)
- A desire for residents to stay in their community (including ageing in place)

When considering the proposed housing actions, the most common theme identified was support for community efforts to solve their own housing challenges.

Residents shared many concerns about housing that were identified in the development of the draft strategy. In addition, residents offered solutions in line with the actions proposed in Council's draft. Underpinning the engagement, there is a strong desire to see the municipality take action on housing. Problems common to most residents are a lack of housing, low affordability, and few options beyond single-family homes. Remaining flexible in how the municipality works with partners is important to residents as they want to see the municipality open to creative local solutions. A focus on community actions, playing a supportive role in housing, and making targeted approaches to increasing density were identified as necessary to alleviate housing pressures while preserving community character.

While the scope of engagement was limited by attendance, a variety of residents representing diverse community interests (working adult, private developer, senior, single parent, etc.) expressed support for the proposed municipal actions on housing.

Discussion

The public engagement, while limited in size, revealed good support for the proposed actions within the draft plan. There was a strong desire among participants to see more action on addressing housing needs, and general agreement and excitement for the initiatives identified. As a result, staff recommend that Council adopt the draft actions for the finalized housing strategy:

1. Environment for Growth

- 1.1. Collaborate with partner municipalities to provide infrastructure for high density housing
- 1.2. Establish a land bank of municipal property available for housing development

2. Facilitate Private sector housing starts

- 2.1. Adopt e-permitting and advocate for improved federal/provincial regulation of development

- 2.2. Promote the use of the provincial secondary suites program and advocate for improvements to the program
- 2.3. Maintain a flexible approach when considering housing proposals

3. Catalyze community efforts

- 3.1. Establish a pre-development grant for non-profit housing projects
- 3.2. Prioritize access to the municipal land bank to non-profit projects
- 3.3. Facilitate and support non-profit activity and networking throughout the region
- 3.4. Develop a property tax reduction program for non-profit housing providers mirroring the income-based property tax rebate for individual homeowners.

Strategic Focus

Adopting and implementing a housing strategy was identified as a top priority for Council during 2026/27 strategic planning.

Budget/Financial Implications

New elements of the housing strategy action plan will be included in the 2026/27 budget process for Council consideration.

Climate Change/Sustainability

No direct application to climate change; however, recommended actions do align with sustainability principles; for example, seeking to create higher density in planned areas where central services are available to maximize underground services and reduce need for individual car trips.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA@MODL)

Inclusion was a principle used in designing the research as well as public engagement phases of the project. The Anti-Racism Coordinator was consulted on venue location and assisted in promoting the events. Groups representing and serving domestic abuse survivors and newcomers were included in stakeholder interviews.

The nature of the housing crisis means that lower income citizens are disproportionately impacted. Actions that the municipality takes to reduce the affordability gap and increase supply will have a positive effect on core equity indicators such as income inequality.

Strategic Communications

Public engagement is now complete on the project.

Work plan

Significant elements of the housing strategy align with existing municipal work, including developing the e-permitting system, and collaborating with municipal partners to expand available serviced land for higher density housing.

New elements in the plan such as developing and administering a pre-development grant and providing support and networking for potential non-profit providers requires additional planning and consideration in conjunction with Council's community development project.

Alternatives

- Council could choose to amend one or more of the recommended actions in the strategy
- Council could direct further targeted engagement if there was a concern that there was a gap in the background and engagement phases of the strategy development

Conclusion

Housing remains a significant challenge for citizens in the municipality. The proposed housing strategy measures the affordability and supply gap and sets out concrete actions for Council to pursue to reduce those gaps.

Report Preparation	
Department	Administration
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Report Approved by	
Date Reviewed by C.A.O.	



Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Report to Council

Report To: Chair and Members of Council
Submitted By: April Whynot-Lohnes, Municipal Clerk
Date: January 20, 2026
Re: **2024 Municipal & CSAP Election Overview**

Executive summary

The 2024 municipal election marked the second consecutive cycle of 100% electronic voting, with all ballots cast online or by phone. Even with two acclamations, voter participation rose by 988 over 2020, indicating continued growth in civic engagement through digital voting methods.

In 2016, 8,449 voters participated, with advance voting conducted electronically and traditional paper ballots used on polling day. By 2020, the municipality transitioned fully to electronic voting due to Covid, resulting in an increase of participation of 635 voters. The steady rise in voter turnout over the past three election cycles suggests that improved accessibility may be a contributing factor.

However, as noted by the Returning Officer, a more significant influence may be the growing public concern and criticism directed at candidates, municipal governance, and the election process itself. These factors are expected to continue shaping the nature and engagement levels of future elections.

Background

The municipality is required to hold municipal elections for the positions of district councillor and mayor every 4 years in accordance with the processes set out in the municipal elections act. Following each election, the municipality reviews the election to determine if changes

could be made to improve the process. Several key areas were raised by candidates, electors, and the Returning Officer. Electors primarily expressed feedback regarding the paper/electronic ballots, the security of the voting process, and the difficulty in accessing information about candidates. While candidates shared some of these concerns, their focus was more often on issues related to campaign activities, including signage regulations, electoral boundaries, and helping voters during the election period. The Returning Officer’s concerns were largely centered on the accuracy and completeness of the elector list.

In order to better understand the impact and implications of these concerns, the following outlines the specific challenges raised by electors, candidates, and the Returning Officer, providing context and detail to highlight how these concerns may have influenced the overall election experience and process.

Discussion

1 Paper vs. E-Voting

The method of voting, whether through paper ballots or electronic voting, was one of the most frequently discussed topics among electors and candidates. While opinions varied, the strong consensus was in favor of continuing with electronic voting. This preference was due to the cost, time, and logistical challenges involved in implementing a paper-based voting system, especially when such a shift may not improve electoral outcomes in any meaningful way.

One key concern raised was whether older residents, particularly those aged seventy and over, would have greater access or turnout if paper ballots were re-introduced. However, since paper ballots were not an option in this election, most older voters opted for internet versus phone voting, as their preferred method. (see Figure 1) This suggests that shifting to paper may not have a significant impact on voter participation among this group.

Figure 1

Voter Turnout by Age and Technology Used					
Age	Eligible	Voted	Internet	Phone	Participation %
18-19	126	37	35	2	29.4%
20s	1,839	455	419	36	24.7%
30s	2,836	821	781	40	28.9%
40s	2,876	1,015	933	82	35.3%
50s	3,739	1,613	1,400	213	43.1%

60s	5,211	2,901	2,320	581	55.7%
70s	3,837	2,338	1,654	684	60.9%
80s	1,463	792	476	316	54.1%
90s	233	100	53	47	42.9%
99+	11	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	22,171	10,072	8,071	2,001	45.4%
			80.1%	19.9%	

Recommendation: Instead of reintroducing paper ballots, resources might be better spent on public education campaigns designed to increase voter participation, particularly among voters under fifty, as this appears to be the demographics that has lower participation rates.

2 Accessibility and Confidentiality

In addition to discussions on voting methods, accessibility and confidentiality of online voting were raised. Some felt that, without broad access to reliable internet services, not all electors could participate equally. To address this, alternatives such as phone voting and in-person Voter Help Centers were made available in each district and at the election office on Election Day. In person Voter Help Centers are a critical part of our voting options, ensuring that voters who are not comfortable navigating the system on their own have access to assistance. They also provide an important opportunity for civic engagement, as many voters find the experience of going to a physical location to vote to be a helpful and meaningful alternative. (see Figure 2) The percentage of eligible voters using the voter help centers during the 2024 elections was approximately 1%.

Figure 2

Voter Help Center Turnout (Election Day)										
Election Office	Dist. 1	Dist. 2	Dist. 3	Dist. 4	Dist. 5	Dist. 6	Dist. 7	Dist. 8	Dist. 9	Dist. 10
49	25	24	23	21	21	14	16	14	26	10

(1 mobile at Rosedale, New Germany where 10 voters voted)

TOTAL 253

Privacy was another issue raised. Ensuring robust security measures, such as two-step login processes, encryption, and anonymous ballot handling, was seen as vital. The Intelivote system provided the ability to conduct thorough audits throughout the voting process. Additionally, technical support was available throughout the voting period to ensure all voters felt confident using the system.

While opinions varied on whether the municipality should adopt paper, electronic, or hybrid voting methods in the future, most participants acknowledged and appreciated the efforts of election staff in managing the election process. However, ultimately, the decision on the preferred voting method rests with Council.

Recommendation: To further improve accessibility, online voting platforms should prioritize ease of use with simple layouts, support assistive technologies like screen readers and keyboard navigation, touch screens at voter help centres and be mobile-friendly. Offering the platform in multiple languages would also help reduce barriers if a need was identified.

Recommendation: Clearer communication on how voter data is protected to build public trust in the system.

Recommendation: Utilize and communicate that a voter audit system is available which allows voters to confirm that their vote was processed correctly.

3 Enhancing Candidate Visibility in Municipal Elections

During the election period, the issue of candidate visibility was a recurring topic of discussion, both at the municipal administration level and at the election office. Many electors expressed frustration over the lack of a single platform where they could easily access information about the candidates running in their district.

This challenge made it difficult for voters to make fully informed decisions, leading to concerns that the election process could be perceived as unfair. Such issues are more prevalent at the municipal level, where candidates often struggle with low name recognition and limited resources to boost their visibility.

Although we directed electors to candidates' social media profiles and contact information, some electors expressed that they would not cast their ballots without more detailed information about the candidates or a personal visit. This highlights the importance of direct, personal engagement in the campaign process.

For many electors, particularly those in older demographics, face-to-face interactions remain a key part of how they assess candidates. Many believe that meeting candidates in person or

receiving a personal visit helps establish trust and provides an opportunity for meaningful conversations about issues that matter to them.

In a time when digital engagement is growing, this preference for personal contact suggests that traditional campaigning methods still play a significant role in voter decision-making, especially at the local level.

Consequently, without the chance for direct interaction or more comprehensive information, voters will continue to feel disconnected from the election process and less confident in their ability to make an informed choice.

Options:

- Create standard candidate profiles on the municipal website that include bios, photos, and contact information for each candidate.
- Public engagement can be supported by hosting town halls and Q&A sessions with community partners, giving voters a chance to meet and speak with candidates directly.
- Social media could be used to promote all candidates equally through a “Meet Your Candidates” series and other outreach.
- Ensure materials are easy to understand, consistent and available both online and in print at public locations.
- Working with local media outlets to provide fair and consistent coverage of all candidates will also help ensure voters have access to the information they need.

To improve candidate visibility and support informed voter decision making, the municipality should consider implementing these key strategies to make the election process more accessible, transparent, and inclusive.

4 Addressing the Lack of Provincial Standards and Oversight in Electronic Voting

The growing use of electronic voting in municipalities has exposed a gap in the current electoral framework, specifically, the absence of clear and consistent provincial standards, oversight mechanisms, and modernized legislation. This lack of uniformity has resulted in varying practices across municipalities, raising concerns around transparency, security, accessibility, and public trust in the electoral process.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive provincial review of the Municipal Elections Act to ensure it is modern, equitable, and capable of supporting evolving voting technologies.

Implementing clear, province-wide standards is essential to promote consistency, safeguard election integrity, and build public confidence in electronic voting. A standardized framework would offer municipalities the guidance and support needed to adopt and manage electronic voting systems responsibly.

By adopting these measures, the province can close the existing regulatory gap, protect the integrity of local elections, and strengthen voter trust as electronic voting continues to expand across Nova Scotia.

Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should conduct a comprehensive review of the Municipal Elections Act to establish clear, province-wide standards for electronic voting. This should include; consistent guidelines for security, accessibility, and transparency, continued oversight and support for municipalities through a designated body, standardized auditing and reporting procedures and stakeholder consultation to ensure practical and public input.

5 Limited Data Access for Elector Movement Between Municipalities

While technology has streamlined the voting process, backend challenges, particularly around voter data, continue to complicate election administration.

One of the key operational challenges during the election was limited visibility into elector movement between municipalities. When electors moved from one municipality to another, we were unable to see their previous registration location within the provincial database. Under the current agreement with Elections Nova Scotia (ENS), municipalities do not have read-only access to data from other municipal units. This limited our ability to seamlessly transfer electors, resulting in inefficiencies and unnecessary in-person visits of electors at the election office.

In practice, municipal units were in frequent contact with one another to try to avoid duplication and reduce the administrative burden on electors. However, a more efficient system would allow municipalities to directly access and manage transfers within a centralized database.

Recommendation: Advocate Elections Nova Scotia so that we can update elector information within our own municipal records in real time, based on a read-only view of other jurisdictions.

6 Data Accuracy and Mail Delivery Challenges

Persistent issues with data accuracy and mail delivery continued to create challenges during the 2024 municipal election cycle, many of which were also identified in 2020 but remain unresolved. These issues negatively impacted voter communication, increased administrative workload, and raised concerns about the reliability of elector data and mail processes.

To address ongoing issues with data accuracy and mail delivery, municipalities need to work collaboratively with Elections Nova Scotia (ENS), Canada Post, and third-party vendors to implement the following measures:

Address Mismatches - A considerable number of discrepancies were identified where mailing addresses did not align with the corresponding postal codes, often indicating that the elector had moved. ENS records appeared to capture only the postal code from Canada Post, rather than the full address. This longstanding issue was flagged in both the 2020 and 2024 elections but has not yet been addressed by ENS.

Recommendation: ENS should be required to capture and validate full mailing addresses, not just postal codes, using complete and up-to-date Canada Post address data. This would significantly reduce mismatches and ensure elector information is accurate.

Lack of Pre-Mailout Data Validation - The printing company did not provide a verification file prior to mailing, which would have allowed the municipality to identify and correct mismatched or outdated addresses. As a result, voter notification cards were sent to incorrect addresses, leading to waste, inefficiencies, and additional financial costs.

Recommendation: Vendors (including the printing company) should provide a data verification file prior to any mail being sent. This would allow for the review and flagging of address inconsistencies and prevent unnecessary or misdirected mailings.

Incomplete Voter Card Delivery - Numerous households reported that while one family member received a voter card, others did not, despite all address information being correct. The root cause remains unclear, with potential responsibility falling on either the printing company or Canada Post. This issue further highlights the need for improved quality control and accountability in the mailing process.

Recommendation: Further discussions with ENS to determine if other municipalities faced this challenge and then formal discussions with Canada Post to determine if delivery challenges are needed.

Lack of Standardized Mail Return Protocols - There were no formal protocols in place regarding how Canada Post should manage undeliverable or misdirected election mail. Key questions, such as whether mail should be forwarded if an elector moved within the district or returned immediately if moved outside, were left unaddressed. Although we communicated directly with local postmasters, compliance varied. Future directives must be issued by Canada Post at the supervisory level to ensure consistent handling across all regions.

Recommendation: Standardized, province-wide protocols for how Canada Post handles undeliverable and redirected election mail should be developed and formally communicated to ensure consistency across all municipalities. These protocols should clearly outline forwarding rules based on whether an elector has moved within or outside the district, require the immediate return of undeliverable mail, and include formal directives issued to local postmasters by Canada Post supervisory staff to ensure compliance and avoid inconsistent practices at the local level.

By implementing these measures, the municipality can improve the integrity of the elector list, reduce voter confusion, and ensure more reliable delivery of election materials.

Strategic Focus

The activities discussed focus on communication and engagement which is a priority of council.

Budget/Financial Implications

There would be an anticipated increase of budget cost for some of the suggested recommendations if they are actioned. (e.g. Website updates, meet the candidate's forum, mobile devices for voting) However, at this time no budget increase has been determined.

Climate Change/sustainability

Continuing with electronic methods in voting supports climate change initiatives.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA@MODL)

An increase in educating electors on voting methods, holding events to meet the candidates, and providing candidates with a presence on the municipal website will improve inclusion, accessibility and equity.

Strategic Communications

If direction is given to proceed with initiatives an increase in communicating with the public prior to the election period will become necessary to ensure awareness of resources available and how to vote. This will be a key factor in increasing voter turnout.

Work Plan

- Council and staff to review recommendations/options and determine policy direction for the 2028 election.
- Engage Elections Nova Scotia and the Province on legislative and data access improvements.
- Begin planning early outreach and communication strategies to enhance voter and candidate engagement.

- Ensure budget availability is set to meet the demands of communication and outreach

Alternatives

Council can decide not to proceed with some or all of the recommendations.

Conclusion

The 2024 municipal election demonstrated the growing public acceptance of electronic voting, with increased voter turnout and positive engagement levels indicating that digital methods are both viable and effective. However, the election also highlighted several systemic and operational challenges that, if left unaddressed, may hinder future improvements and public trust in the process.

Key areas for improvement include better access to elector data across municipal boundaries, enhanced management of mailing and address validation processes, clearer standards for electronic voting, and stronger support for candidate visibility. The persistence of issues first identified in 2020, particularly those related to data accuracy and mail delivery, reinforces the need for a coordinated, province-wide approach involving Elections Nova Scotia, Canada Post, and third-party vendors.

While the shift to 100% electronic voting has increased accessibility, it has also underscored the importance of robust infrastructure, clear communication, and inclusive practices. Modernizing the Municipal Elections Act and establishing consistent standards across jurisdictions will be essential to maintain voter confidence, and upholding the integrity of elections.

By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, the municipality, and the province more broadly, can continue to build a voting system that is secure, accessible, transparent, and responsive to the evolving needs of its citizens.

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