



**West Hants**  
something inspiring awaits

**WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

**Special Council Meeting Agenda**

**October 7, 2025 - 6:00 p.m.**

In-person, Sanford Council Chambers, 76 Morison Dr, Windsor, NS

Virtual via Zoom (also YouTube Livestream)

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1. Call to Order
2. Attendance
3. Announcements
4. Approval of the Agenda
5. Declaration(s) of Conflict of Interest
6. Emergency Funding Request – Supplement water from Avon River to Mill Lakes Watershed, Operation Make it Rain
7. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment

## WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

### Special Council Meeting Minutes

October 7, 2025 - 6:00 p.m.

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And virtually via Zoom (also YouTube Livestreamed)



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1. **As Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

#### 2. Attendance

##### Council:

Abraham Zebian, Mayor

Rupert Jannasch, Councillor, District 1

Chrystal Remme, Councillor, District 3

Paul Wheadon, Councillor, District 4

Bob Morton, Councillor, District 6

Debbie Francis, Deputy Mayor, Dist. 5

Kayla Learey-Pinch, Councillor, District 7

Paul Morton, Councillor, District 8

John Smith, Councillor, District 9

Bonnie Smith, Councillor, District 10

Jim Ivey, Councillor, District 11

##### Regrets:

Scott McLean, Councillor, District 2

##### Staff:

Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer

John Ogilvie, Climate Action Coordinator

Vanessa Lake, Planning Assistant

Troy Burgess, Manager Public Works/ Traffic Authority

Todd Richard, Dir. Public Works

Carlee Rochon, Dir. Finance

Tim Bouter, Project Engineer

#### 3. Announcements

West Hants Regional Municipality is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This land is governed by the treaties of Peace and Friendship signed in 1726. West Hants Regional Municipality recognizes we are all treaty people and have responsibilities to this land and each other. West Hants Regional Municipality also recognizes African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose history, legacies, and contributions have enriched that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

4. **Approval of the Agenda including additions or deletions**

5. **Declaration of Conflict of Interest - None**

6. **Emergency Funding Request – Supplement water from Avon River to Mill Lakes Watershed, Operation Make it Rain Recommendation Report**

Director Richard reviewed the report. Due to unprecedented ongoing drought conditions affecting WHRM, the Mill Lakes Watershed (the primary potable water source for Windsor, Three Mile Plains, Garlands Crossing, and potentially Falmouth) were at risk of reaching critically low levels. To ensure continued water supply and fire protection capacity, a contingency initiative ("Operation Make it Rain") was recommended to pump freshwater from the Avon River to Mill Lakes using existing well-established infrastructure at Ski Martock. This proactive measure was

viewed as a critical step to safeguarding public health, infrastructure resilience, and environmental integrity during ongoing drought conditions.

The utility was responsible for meeting the needs of its consumers, and due to current conditions, it may soon need to prioritize residential and commercial users. To address this, the proposed “Operation Make It Rain” project aimed to create additional water resources, supporting both the utility’s core consumer base and bulk water haulers serving rural communities.

The project was estimated to cost \$360,913.50 and would require approval from the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board, as it exceeded the \$250,000 threshold. Funding was proposed through a mix of long-term borrowing (95.5% or \$344,672.39) and the WH Operating Reserve (4.5% or \$16,241.11), based on the proportion of bulk water usage during August and September. The initiative was expected to not only protect current consumers from further impact but also enhance long-term system resilience. Cost estimates include HDPE pipe purchase, installation, rentals, labour, and a 25% contingency, with final costs including applicable HST.

#### Discussion Points:

- Regarding the recent lake water level measurements. A number of concerns were raised about the use and interpretation of the staff gauge readings. It was clarified that the staff gauge was actually a survey stick embedded into the soft lakebed and was not designed to indicate total water depth in that location. Instead, it served as a reference point to track changes in water level over time, particularly the daily rate of decline. The most recent measurement on September 26<sup>th</sup> was acquired by dropping a rock with a string tied around it in the lake to achieve a more accurate measurement. Currently the lake levels were dropping at roughly an inch per day; at some point there would be a need to act in order to mitigate and protect the resources to maintain water supplies. Once the staff gauge reads zero, there was approximately 40 inches measuring from the surface to the bottom of the lake.
- Pumping water from the deeper part of the lake to the shallower area was considered feasible; however, it would require the construction of an access road, installation of a pump system, and active water transfer. It was noted that this action could further deplete the lake’s overall water supply. The proposal forms part of a broader strategy to address a significant rainfall deficit of 700–800 mm. Even with some precipitation, the region is expected to remain below average heading into winter. The proposed pumping would be in place until mid-December, after which the pipe would be disassembled, drained and left on the ground for potential reuse in the spring or summer. The permit was valid for one year. If drought conditions persisted and the project proved effective, it could serve as a longer-term solution to help address future water shortages, provided a permit was approved again. The costs associated with get it up and running again would be substantially less.
- There was concern that without dredging the lake channel, water flow from the deeper to the shallower areas would remain limited, making drought conditions a recurring issue. ~~The current proposal relied on an alternate, recreational water source, which presents additional regulatory challenges. Dredging was viewed as a potential way to improve~~

access to the main water body; however, it was noted that ecological flow requirements downstream are already not being met. Draining the lake during a drought could worsen conditions in subsequent years, especially since the watershed's only means of replenishment was rainfall.

- Costs included negotiations with landowners where the pipe will be placed, as well as potential costs to Martock. Discussions have already taken place with all affected landowners, and they are in agreement with the plan. The contingency and overall cost estimates account for any measures that may be required, such as trenching across private roads, brush clearing, or further negotiations. The land was not being purchased, and there was a strong, cooperative relationship with the landowners.
- Manipulating the dam structure would not provide any benefits at this time.
- The dam structure at Mill Lakes operates independently of the Avon River pump system. There was no direct relationship between the flow capacity at Mill Lakes and the Ski Martock system.
- The portion billed to the water utility was proposed to be funded through long-term borrowing over 10 years and would be included in the second year of the current rate study. Since rates were already set, they cannot be adjusted without applying to the Utility and Review Board (UARB). In addition, any external funding not included in the rate study provided some capacity. The plan was to return to the UARB in the coming year to set new rates, and this cost would be incorporated at that time. A portion of the funding was also proposed to come from the West Hants Operating Reserves to demonstrate that some of the utility's capacity is being used to support bulk water stations and rural residents.
- Salinity sampling was ongoing at the Avon River structure, alongside discussions with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Salinity will be continuously monitored, and gate operations may need to be adjusted to limit saltwater intrusion during incoming tides. Another potential mitigation option was leveraging the flushing effect from freshwater lakes feeding into the Avon River. Preliminary discussions with Nova Scotia Power indicate that, if necessary, additional freshwater could be released into the system. Mitigation measures will be implemented as needed.
- High salinity levels were difficult to treat using conventional methods, whereas lower levels were more manageable. If salinity were to exceed Canadian Drinking Water Standards, a mitigation strategy would be in place beforehand to prevent this. A key concern was that treatment might occur too late, after water enters Mill Lakes, which posed a risk. However, staff expressed confidence in their ability to manage the situation, noting existing dilution from the Avon River. A sampling protocol was also being developed, and testing would ensure compliance with all Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines to prevent salinity from compromising the system.
- Power costs and outside labour were built into the costing. Only 1 or 2 of Martock's pumps would be utilized, reducing power costs.
- WHRM needs to meet all Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) requirements and **conditions within the approvals.**

- Mill Lakes will remain a municipal watershed, with current regulatory approvals in place to supplement it for immediate needs. However, if it were to become a long-term solution, a different and more extensive approval process would be required.
- With respect to having another plan, it was felt that it was not feasible due to high costs and limited time or opportunities. While other options may exist, transporting water from other areas was expensive. The current contingency plan was viable as most infrastructure was already in place.
- It was noted that a full Council tour of the watershed would have been beneficial to better understand the gravity of the situation and support more informed decision-making.

MOVED BY DEPUTY MAYOR FRANCIS AND COUNCILLOR J. SMITH THAT COUNCIL APPROVE A FUNDING ALLOTMENT UP TO \$347,500 BEFORE APPLICABLE TAXES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONTINGENCY PLAN "OPERATION MAKE IT RAIN", ALLOWING AUTHORIZATION FOR PURCHASING OF PIPE, MATERIAL, EQUIPMENT AND APPLICABLE LABOUR AND EXPENSES RELATED TO THIS PROJECT.

Concerns were raised that previous updates were confusing or misleading, potentially giving a false sense of security or misinformation. While the current report outlined infrastructure to carry water to the watershed, questions were raised about whether it was the right path forward. The report mentioned alternative options but lacked detail on them, including the nature of the channel blockage. It was felt that this information should have been provided to support a more informed decision.

There was a sense of urgency as relying on rainfall was not realistic, as the water utility has obligations to meet. Some residents are now experiencing dry wells for the first time.

There were intermediate steps between the current situation and a declared emergency. Measures would focus on proportionally scaling down water use for all customers rather than cutting anyone off entirely.

MOVED BY COUNCILLORS IVEY AND REMME THAT COUNCIL DEFER MOTION UNTIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOL MEETING (OCTOBER 14, 2025). MOTION DEFEATED. Nays: Zebian, Francis, B. Smith, J. Smith, P. Morton and B. Morton

**MOVED BY DEPUTY MAYOR FRANCIS AND COUNCILLOR J. SMITH THAT COUNCIL APPROVE A FUNDING ALLOTMENT UP TO \$347,500 BEFORE APPLICABLE TAXES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONTINGENCY PLAN "OPERATION MAKE IT RAIN", ALLOWING AUTHORIZATION FOR PURCHASING OF PIPE, MATERIAL, EQUIPMENT AND APPLICABLE LABOUR AND EXPENSES RELATED TO THIS PROJECT. MOTION CARRIED.**

Nays: Ivey, Leary-Pinch, Wheadon and Remme

7. Next Meeting Date / Adjournment – October 14, 2025 Committee of the Whole Meeting  
The meeting adjourned at 8:02 p.m. as there was no further business to discuss.

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**Mayor Zebian (Chair)**

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**Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk**

