



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information x	Recommendation ☐	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
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To: Mayor Zebian and members of Council

Submitted by: _____
Laurie Murley, Councillor District 10

Date: August 28, 2024 Council

Subject: Property Tax Assistance Policy Communication

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia Municipal Government Act (MGA), Section 69

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

It is recommended...

that Council direct staff to extend the Property Tax Assistance Application deadline date to Oct 31st and direct staff to ensure the extension date is communicated effectively to residents in West Hants.

BACKGROUND

To paraphrase the email I sent to Council on August 10, 2024, I was contacted by several residents who say they did not receive the Property Tax Assistance Application with their property tax bill as they have come to expect. They only became concerned when they realized that no other notice had been received. One resident said that they have never received the Mayor's Newsletter in which a reminder had apparently been included, and others are not active on social media. The deadline has come and gone, and I am concerned that the residents who reached out may not have been the only ones affected.

Property ✓	Public Opinion ✓	Environment ☐	Social ☐	Economic ✓	Councillor Activity ☐
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DISCUSSION

Staff provided information regarding former communications and deadlines for the property tax assistance program application. Deadlines have not been consistent for a variety of reasons, but due to the creation and changing of policy as well as insufficient communication, especially for those not active on social media, some residents have missed the deadline.

A brief rundown of the years and reasons for the change in deadlines:

- Original policy originated with the Town of Windsor and was approved on May 23, 2017. The town's application deadline was July 31st.

2020 - When consolidation happened, our new regional municipality developed a policy with a June 30th deadline. This was new to West Hants residents and due to late approval the deadline was extended to September 1, 2020.

2021 - 2022 - Deadline was extended from June 30, 2021 to July 30, 2021.

2022 - 2023 - Deadline was as per the policy at that time - June 30, 2022.

2023 - 2024 - Council increased the total household income and capped rates and standardized the capped rate amount for all communities. Council gave direction to update the policy and due to the significant changes direction was also given to extend the application deadline that year from the June 30th policy date to October 31, 2023. In addition to the usual notices on social media, the municipal website and the mayor's newsletter and insert was included in the 2023 - 2024 tax bill. The insert promoted the changes to the program.

2024 -2025 - A new policy was presented to Council in May 2024 with an extended deadline of July 31st, a change from the original policy's June 30th deadline.

It's understandable that residents are confused. Again, the application due dates from beginning to present day:

Town of Windsor

July 31st

West Hants Regional Municipality

June 30th but extended to September 1, 2020

June 30th, but extended to July 30, 2021

June 30, 2022

June 30th to October 31, 2023

Policy changed from June 30th to July 31, 2024

*****For each of the 5 years West Hants Regional Municipality has been in existence there have been 5 different property tax assistance application deadlines.

NEXT STEPS

Discussion and consideration of the following:

Council considers extending the property tax assistance application deadline for 2024 - 2025 (date of extension to be determined) to address the confusion caused by the yearly changes to that date.

and

Council give direction that residents be notified, via all electronic and paper channels at our disposal, of the July 31st Property Tax Assistance application deadline and that every opportunity be taken to include information on the program in whatever printed materials are mailed out as each year's deadline approaches.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To be determined

ALTERNATIVES

ATTACHMENTS

None

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

Pending CAO review and comments

Report Prepared by: _____
Laurie Murley, Councillor District 10

Report Reviewed by: _____
Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

Report Approved by: _____
(Name and Title)