



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information ☐	Recommendation ☒	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
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To: Mayor Zebian and Members of Council

Submitted by: Anne Bishop and Domenic Padula, Co-Chairs of the Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee

Date: February 24, 2026

Subject: Advancement of Strategic Action #23 – Homelessness Engagement and Strategy Development

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Municipal Government Act, Section 24 (2) Each committee shall perform the duties conferred on it by this Act, any other Act of the Legislature or the by-laws or policies of the municipality.

West Hants Regional Municipality Meeting and Committee Procedural Policy RCOGE-003.00, Section 17.1. The Council of the Municipality may establish Committees of Council for various matters.

West Hants Regional Municipality Equity-Anti Racism and Accessibility Plan

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

The Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee recommends ...

COUNCIL DIRECT STAFF TO INITIATE WORK ON STRATEGIC ACTION #23 BY ESTABLISHING THE ADVISORY GROUP AS OUTLINED IN ACTION 23.1; AND BEGINNING DEVELOPMENT OF A MUNICIPAL STRATEGY TO PREVENT, ADDRESS, AND END HOMELESSNESS IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE PROVINCIAL STRATEGY, AS OUTLINED IN ACTION 23.2.

BACKGROUND

Property ☒	Public Opinion ☒	Environment ☒	Social ☒	Economic ☒	Councillor Activity ☐
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On March 25, 2025, West Hants Regional Municipality Council formally adopted the West Hants Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility Strategy Plan. This plan, developed throughout 2024/2025, aligns with broader initiatives across Nova Scotia and Canada aimed at fostering safer, more inclusive, and equitable communities. A working group of eleven (11) community leaders was established to help guide the development of the Strategy and advise on meaningful public engagement. Between December 1, 2024, and January 16, 2025, more than 200 residents shared their perspectives, experiences, and ideas to help shape the final document.

The Strategy acts as guiding framework for the next ten (10) years, supporting West Hants Regional Municipality Council, municipal staff, local businesses, community organizations, and residents in working collaboratively to increase equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice; dismantle hate, including racism and discrimination; foster a strong sense of belonging for all; and advance Truth and Reconciliation efforts. Following adoption of the Plan, the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee began actively advancing identified priorities and implementing key actions outlined in the Strategy

DISCUSSION

The Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee uses the West Hants Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility Strategy Plan to guide their work.

Homelessness is addressed in the strategy under article 23 and those living rough continue to be supported by a combination of provincial, municipal, non government organizations (NGOs) and volunteers from within the community.

At the current time volunteer efforts combined with NGOs, municipal resources and assistance from the province have resulted in a warming center activities that have been operated over the past three winters. Additional supports from the same groups support those living rough throughout the other three seasons. Considerable discussion has taken place by Council in the 2025/26 fiscal year regarding jurisdictional responsibilities between the provincial government and the municipalities.

The Committee believes it is timely to advance Strategic Action #23 of the Equity Plan:

“Conduct meaningful engagement with people with lived or living experience to assist in building out supports for people impacted by homelessness.”

Article 23.1 Create an advisory group of people with lived or living experience of homelessness to provide input / context on community policy, program development or evaluation.

Article 23.2 Develop a strategy for the municipality to prevent, address and end homelessness in alignment with the Provincial Strategy.

The potential advisory group composition could include:

- Municipal Council member (s) x 1

- Municipal staff; x 2
- Representatives from relevant service providers; x 3
- Individuals with lived or living experience of homelessness; and x 2
- Where possible, a representative from the provincial government. x 1

With several months of lead time before the next winter season, there is an opportunity to thoughtfully develop a coordinated and effective strategy for next year.

NEXT STEPS

If supported, the following next steps are suggested to advance Strategic Action #23:

1. **Assign a Municipal Staff Leader** - Appoint a staff member to coordinate the initiative, including timelines, stakeholder engagement, and reporting requirements.
2. **Develop Terms of Reference** - Create Terms of Reference for the Homelessness Advisory Group outlining the purpose and mandate, membership composition (including individuals with lived or living experience, service providers, municipal staff, and provincial representation where possible), roles and responsibilities, meeting frequency and reporting structure to Council.
3. **Stakeholder Outreach and Recruitment** - Begin outreach with individuals with lived or living experience of homelessness, relevant community service providers, provincial government representatives and other key partners.
4. **Convene the First Advisory Group Meeting** - At the initial meeting review mandate and expectations, identify immediate priorities and establish a work plan and timelines.
5. **Conduct Environmental Scan and Data Review** – Review existing local supports and service gaps, relevant provincial strategies, best practices from other municipalities and available local data and seasonal trends.
6. **Draft Municipal Homelessness Strategy** - Using advisory group input, develop a draft strategy outlining prevention measures, emergency response coordination, housing stabilization approaches, partnership and funding opportunities and measurable goals and performance indicators.
7. **Report Back to Council** with a progress update and a draft strategy for review and consideration prior to the next winter season.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial costs associated with this recommendation initially. However, as this would be a new Committee of Council and it has not been addressed in the current budget.

In addition to the recommended next steps, it is important to acknowledge that advancing Strategic Action #23 will require significant staff time and coordination. Given existing workloads

and the number of active projects currently underway across departments, municipal capacity to take on this initiative within current resources may be limited.

While the establishment of the advisory group itself may not require immediate new program funding, there will likely be a future request for funding allocations to support implementation.

Having a dedicated staff resource provided by the Province, the Municipality or a NGO will assist in advancing short timelines and managing the workload associated with developing a comprehensive homelessness strategy.

ALTERNATIVES

Option 1: Status Quo (No Change)

Option 2: Pilot Engagement Initiative by conducting a smaller-scale, time-limited engagement with individuals with lived or living experience of homelessness without forming a formal advisory group. Use this pilot to gather initial insights and inform policy or program decisions while limiting staff resource commitments.

Option 3: Collaborate with Existing Service Providers. Leverage existing community organizations and service providers to provide input on homelessness-related policies and programs. This approach allows for stakeholder input without creating a new municipal advisory group, reducing administrative burden.

Option 4: Consider a Phased Approach, starting with staff coordination and data review, followed by gradual stakeholder engagement once resources or funding become available. This allows Council to support the initiative in principle while managing workload and resource constraints.

Option 5: Advocate and encourage the Province to explore partnerships with NGOs or non-profits, both within West Hants and outside the region, to establish a dedicated warming centre/ shelter. Such a partnership could provide infrastructure, staffing, and programming support without placing the full operational burden on municipal resources. Coordinating municipal input with provincial leadership and service providers would ensure that the shelter aligns with local needs, meets required standards, and incorporates equity-focused practices.

Option 6: Provide alternative direction or request additional changes to the proposed amendments.

ATTACHMENTS

None

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

Homelessness continues for members of our West Hants community. There are levels of government, agencies and volunteers supporting those living rough. The following government departments, NGOs and volunteers are currently providing support.

Nova Scotia Government – Department of Opportunities and Social Development, Supportive Housing and Homelessness, Access and Prevention

West Hants Regional Municipality

Family Resource Centre of West Hants – Housing Support Worker

Windsor- West Hants Caremonger Society

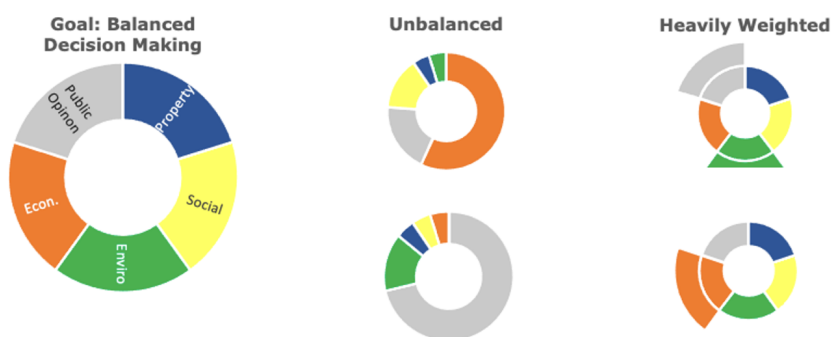
Harvest House

The POSSE Project

There have been ongoing informal meetings with representatives from the above groups. A more coordinated effort should provide better clarity with respect to resources and roles of each of the groups moving forward. It will also assist with an understanding of the journey from homelessness to a safe living space.

I support the formation of a committee to help facilitate a better coordinated effort but remain cautious in setting an expectation that the municipality is responsible for homelessness.

Council has been provided with a reference taken from the Meeting and Committee Procedural Policy , Appendix C “Decision Making by Council and Committee of the Whole” as a reminder of the principles highlighted for good decision making.



Report Prepared by: _____
Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

Report Reviewed by: _____
Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

Report Approved by:  _____
Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer