



## WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

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| Information <input type="checkbox"/> | Recommendation X | Decision Request <input type="checkbox"/> | Councillor Activity <input type="checkbox"/> |
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**To:** Mayor Zebian and Members of West Hants Regional Municipality Council

**Submitted by:** Kari Fougere, Manager of Planning

**Date:** June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026

**Subject:** West Hants Regional Municipality Plan Review

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### LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

*MGA PART VIII*

### RECOMMENDATION

At the June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026 Planning and Heritage Advisory Committee (PAC/HAC) meeting, the Committee defeated the staff recommendations that would recommend Council proceed with First Reading and schedule a Public Hearing for the new Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use By-law and Subdivision By-law. The Committee passed a separate motion, detailed below, to request Council halt the process and request additional work from staff.

The PAC/HAC has recommended Council make the following motion to allow additional time for staff to create documents that show all the changes made to create the Regional planning documents and for staff to host a workshop with the Committee to review all the changes and rational.

*...that Council directs staff to provide a summary of all changes to the MPS and Land Use By-Law to PAC/HAC and follow up with a workshop opportunity with PAC/HAC to provide clarity and understanding of the updated MPS and Land Use By-law to make its best recommendation to Council.*

*Therefore, be it resolved that Council delays the plan review to allow additional time for an in-depth and comprehensive recommendation from PAC/HAC.*

Alternatively, staff would still recommend that Council forward a positive recommendation by passing the following motions. The rationale for this alternative and information for Council’s consideration is listed below in the report.

*...that Council give First Reading and hold a Public Hearing to consider adopting the new Regional Municipal Planning Strategy and repeals the Town of Windsor Municipal Planning Strategy (2005), the Town of Hantsport Municipal Planning Strategy (2010) and the Municipality of the District of West Hants Municipal Planning Strategy (2008).*

*...that Council give First Reading and holds a Public Hearing to consider adopting the new Regional Land use By-law and repeals the Town of Windsor Land Use By-law (2005), the Town of Hantsport Land Use By-law (2012) and the Municipality of the District of West Hants Land Use By-law (2008).*

*...that Council give First Reading and holds a Public Hearing to consider adopting the new Regional Subdivision By-law and repeals the Town of Windsor Subdivision By-law (2012), the Town of Hantsport Subdivision By-law (2010) and the Municipality of the District of West Hants Subdivision By-law (2008).*

Should Council give First Reading to the new documents, staff would also suggest the following motion:

*...that Council direct staff not to accept new applications for Municipal Planning Strategy amendments, Land Use By-law amendments, or Development Agreements following First Reading of the proposed Regional Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law and until Council has rendered a final decision on the proposed planning documents.  
This direction shall not apply to:  
a) applications deemed complete prior to the date of First Reading;  
b) development permits, subdivision applications, and other applications that may proceed as-of-right under the existing planning documents; and  
c) any application specifically exempted by Council resolution.*

**BACKGROUND**

|            |                     |               |          |            |                                                 |
|------------|---------------------|---------------|----------|------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Property X | Public<br>Opinion X | Environment X | Social X | Economic X | Councillor<br>Activity <input type="checkbox"/> |
|------------|---------------------|---------------|----------|------------|-------------------------------------------------|

The Municipality has been working on the Plan Review project in some capacity since 2017, and in 2023 hired WSP Consulting Ltd. to comprehensively review and update the existing planning documents with support from staff. The existing planning documents are from the historic

communities of the Town of Windsor, Municipality of the District of West Hants, and Town of Hantsport. The main intent of the project was to consolidate the documents and to ensure that planning policy reflects current community priorities, provincial legislation and modern best practice.

Since the project was initiated, staff and WSP have completed several phases of work including:

- Background research;
- Public and stakeholder engagement; and
- Preparation of draft policy documents.

After final public consultation in January 2026, internal staff review, preliminary review by the Province of Nova Scotia, and engagement with PAC/HAC at the May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026 regular meeting, staff have finalized the documents for final review and consideration by PAC/HAC and Council.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Plan Review project consolidated the Municipality's three existing planning frameworks into a single, modernized set of planning documents by standardizing zones, land use designations, definitions, and regulations across former municipal boundaries, generally favouring less restrictive standards where appropriate. The review also improved clarity and efficiency by addressing issues identified through staff experience, public feedback, and planning application reviews.

The proposed documents establish a growth framework focused on Growth Centres, Local Centres, Agricultural Areas, and Resource Areas, while incorporating recent initiatives such as Housing Accelerator Fund amendments, updated policies for solar energy, active transportation, infrastructure, recreation, cultural heritage, and agriculture. The documents also introduce new implementation tools and evaluation criteria for development agreements, rezonings, and amendments, with greater emphasis on stormwater management, housing diversity, accessibility, and compatibility with surrounding uses.

Overall, the proposed planning framework reflects extensive technical analysis, staff review, and public engagement, and is intended to provide a clear, consistent, and modernized approach to guiding future growth and development within the Municipality.

### ***Public Engagement:***

Public engagement has been a central component of the Plan Review project, beginning with early consultation that informed the background research and analysis and continuing through multiple phases of document drafting. Since 2023, engagement has included public open houses, an online survey that received 279 responses, virtual and in-person sessions on the draft documents, Council and PAC/HAC workshops, internal staff workshops, stakeholder meetings, and ongoing feedback gathered through related initiatives and planning applications. The feedback collected through these channels has directly informed the proposed planning

documents. Additional details on engagement activities and key themes can be found in the "What We Heard" reports available on the Municipality's Plan Review website.

***PAC/HAC Engagement and Recommendations:***

Staff and WSP presented the draft documents to the Committee on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Staff and WSP outlined the draft documents and presented the major changes between the existing documents and the proposed. This was an opportunity for the Committee to ask questions to both staff and WSP and provide their feedback. The drafts were also made available to the public and the Committee earlier this year in January. At that time, staff received minimal comments and feedback. Both the feedback from the Committee and from the January engagement efforts are outlined in the June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026, PAC/HAC report attached as Attachment 1 to this report.

At the June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026, PAC/HAC meeting staff provided an overview of the process, engagement, updates on the feedback received earlier, and presented recommendations. The Committee provided some comments reiterating concerns that were previously identified including, but not limited to:

- Household livestock provisions in Hantsport;
- Height provisions within the Nesbit Island Designation;
- Private road solid waste provisions;
- Secondary egress provisions; and
- General Resource zoning and wind farm policies.

Further, the Committee discussed the process of reviewing the proposed planning documents and expressed concerns regarding their size and complexity. Some members indicated that they would be more comfortable making recommendations following a more detailed staff-led workshop highlighting every change to planning policies and the rationale behind the change. Staff notes that the Plan Review process has included extensive engagement with the Committee over the course of the project, including workshops, presentations, circulation of draft materials, and opportunities for members to raise questions and provide feedback. While there was general recognition of the work completed to date, the Committee passed the following motion for Council's consideration:

*Whereas, PAC/ HAC requests a summary of all changes to the MPS and Land Use By-Law and followed up with a workshop opportunity with planning staff to provide clarity and understanding of the updated MPS and Land Use By-law to make its best recommendation to Council.*

*Therefore, be it resolved that PAC/HAC is requesting that Council considers delaying the plan review to allow additional time to provide an in-depth and comprehensive recommendation.*

Staff appreciates the Committee's desire to fully understand the proposed planning framework prior to making recommendations to Council. However, staff note that the Plan Review represents comprehensive modernization and consolidation of planning documents developed

over several years. The proposed documents contain a significant number of substantive amendments. As such, preparing a detailed track-change document and facilitating a policy-by-policy review would require substantial commitment of staff time and resources and would significantly extend the project timeline.

Based on the discussion, Council may wish to consider the following options:

***Option 1:***

As per the Committees request, Council could direct staff to halt the process and a prepare a track-change document detailing every substantive and non-substantive change the Plan Review documents are proposing followed by workshop opportunities with PAC/HAC and Council led by staff.

This option would require a significant amount of work from staff, and potentially assistance from external consultants due to the current workload of staff. The number of changes the documents propose is significant and staff anticipate at least eight (8) months to be able to gather documentation detailing every change. Further, to review this track-change document in detail with the Committee and Council will require multiple full-day workshops. This will require commitment in advance from Council and PAC/HAC as well as significant resources from staff to prepare and lead the discussion.

***Option 2:***

Staff could host a full-day workshop with Council, and PAC/HAC members if Council desires, to provide an overview of the documents at a high-level with specific focus on the fundamental and/or substantive changes to the planning framework the documents propose. While this would still take a few months to prepare materials, it would take less staff time and resources. A full-day workshop will require commitment in advance from Council.

***Option 3:***

Council can consider staff recommendations as is and proceed with First Reading or request additional information and consider First Reading at the next available Council meeting. Proceeding with First Reading does not constitute adoption of the documents. Following First Reading, Council would hold a Public Hearing and consider any additional information, feedback, or amendments prior to deciding whether to grant Second Reading and approve these documents.

**NEXT STEPS**

While these documents are intended to serve as the new baseline for future development, they are not intended to remain static. Municipal planning documents are living documents that should evolve over time in response to emerging issues, changing community needs, new provincial requirements, updated studies and plans, and planning best practices. The proposed

planning documents establish a clear and modern foundation from which future changes and updates can be made.

If First Reading is granted, a Public Hearing will be scheduled to receive additional public input. Following the Public Hearing, Council may consider Second Reading and adoption of the planning documents. Upon adoption, the documents will be forwarded to the Province for review and approval in accordance with the requirements of the *Municipal Government Act* and Statements of Provincial Interest.

Council's decision to give First Reading to the proposed Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use By-law and Subdivision By-law does not bring the new documents into force. The existing Municipal Planning Strategy's, Land Use By-law's and Subdivision By-law's remain the governing planning documents until the proposed documents have completed the statutory public hearing process, received final adoption by Council, and obtained required provincial approval.

First Reading does, however, signal Council's intent to consider replacing the existing planning framework. As a result, Council may wish to provide direction regarding the processing of new planning applications during the period between First Reading and final adoption to ensure that development proposals do not undermine the objectives of the proposed planning documents.

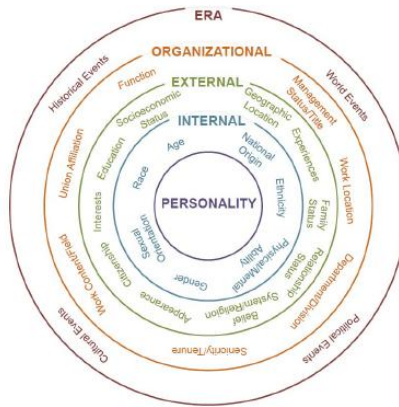
Should Council consider the request proposed by PAC/HAC, staff will proceed with gathering the information and proposing workshop dates based on Council and Committee availability and staff resources.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

WSP Consulting Ltd. was hired in 2023 to complete the Plan Review project. To date, the entirety of the budget has been spent on the project with an additional \$5000.00 approved in the 2026/2027 operating budget to wrap up the final approval of the project. Should there be additional work, Council may wish to consider additional budget for this work to be consultant led which would reduce the resource strain on staff.

## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility considerations were integrated into the development of the proposed planning documents through a focus on housing diversity, accessibility, active transportation, community connectivity and servicing. Public engagement activities were designed to provide multiple opportunities for participation and to inform the policy framework through a variety of community perspectives.



## ALTERNATIVES

In response to this report, Council may:

- hold First Reading and authorize a Public Hearing to approve the new planning documents as drafted or as specifically revised by direction of Council;
- hold First Reading and authorize a Public Hearing to refuse the new planning documents as drafted, citing the reasoning that Council considers the drafted documents to be incompatible with Council's vision; or
- provide alternative direction such as requesting further information on a specific topic.

As an alternative to the motion proposed to temporary not accept new planning applications until such time Second Reading is given, Council may:

- direct staff, following First Reading of the proposed Regional Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law, to advise prospective applicants that Council is considering a new planning framework and that applications inconsistent with the proposed documents may not be supported by Council. Staff shall include an analysis of consistency with both the existing and proposed planning documents in reports prepared during the Plan Review approval process.

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Staff Report to PAC/HAC - June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026

*Please note:* Due to the size of this file the attachments are available on the Municipal website - [westhants.ca/government/council/planning-advisory-committee-1/planning-advisory-committee-meeting-packages/2026-pac-hac-meeting-packages/7950-2026-06-11-pachac-agenda-package-pdf/file](https://westhants.ca/government/council/planning-advisory-committee-1/planning-advisory-committee-meeting-packages/2026-pac-hac-meeting-packages/7950-2026-06-11-pachac-agenda-package-pdf/file)

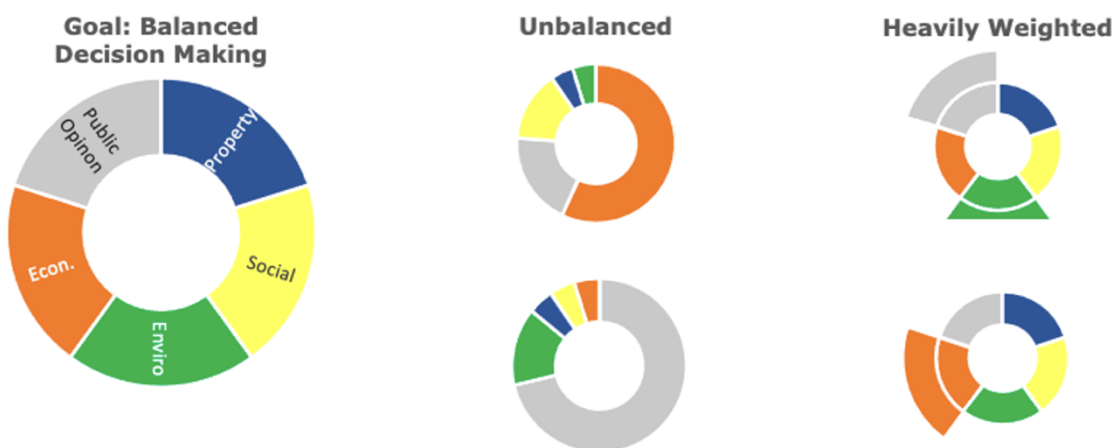
## CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

I would generally be in support of options 1 or 2 as noted in the report. Respecting that the purpose of the PAC/HAC to advise Council as well as respecting the final decision-making authority of Council, engaging both groups thoroughly is a priority. When discussing the

matter with the Director we explored the options noted, but continued to reflect upon the amount of information which is required to support the decision-making process of both groups. PAC/HAC is respectfully asking Council to direct staff to provide more detail, does Council wish for the same level of detail, and if so can we combine the two groups for the purposes of efficiency and timing while still allowing PAC/HAC to make its recommendations independent of Council? We are looking for Council's discussion and direction on this matter.

I do have concerns with a prolonged period between First Reading and Second Reading should that occur whenever First Reading is commenced. This can create interpretation challenges by the development community, particularly during this time of accelerated growth in our community. Having a concurrent information period will help to avoid a prolonged time frame.

*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: \_\_\_\_\_

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Report Reviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Alex Dunphy, Senior Planner

Report Reviewed by: Sara Poirier

Sara Poirier, Director of Planning and Development

Report Approved by: [Signature]

Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer