



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

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

Submitted by: Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

Date: July 28, 2026

Subject: West Hants Homelessness Engagement Discussion Report

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

Council establish a Homelessness Engagement Subcommittee under the Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee to advance Strategic Action #23 of the West Hants Regional Municipality Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility Strategy Plan, and to provide a forum for collaboration among community partners, service providers, and individuals with lived experience to identify priorities and make recommendations regarding homelessness and housing insecurity in West Hants

BACKGROUND

Property ☐	Public Opinion ☐	Environment ☐	Social ☐	Economic ☒	Councillor Activity ☐
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At the February 24, 2026 Council meeting, Council considered a recommendation from the Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee related to *Strategic Action #23 – Homelessness Engagement and Strategy Development* within the West Hants Regional Municipality Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility Strategy Plan.

The discussion recognized homelessness as a complex issue requiring collaboration among community organizations, people with lived experience, and municipal and provincial partners. Council noted that while the Municipality has a role to play, successful homelessness initiatives were often led through coordinated community partnerships rather than direct municipal leadership. Potential municipal supports identified included convening community partners, facilitating discussions, providing meeting space, providing a space to support temporary warming centres when required, and advocating for organizations working directly with vulnerable individuals.

To better understand the Municipality's potential role and available options, Council adopted the following motion:

THAT COUNCIL DIRECT STAFF TO EXPLORE AND REPORT BACK ON OPTIONS TO FACILITATE A COORDINATED REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS ENGAGEMENT MODEL, INCLUDING COLLABORATION WITH EXISTING COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATIVES, ALIGNED WITH STRATEGIC ACTION #23, WHILE CLEARLY DEFINING MUNICIPAL ROLE AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS PRIOR TO ESTABLISHING A FORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OR MUNICIPAL STRATEGY.

The stakeholder discussions summarized in this report were undertaken to inform Council's consideration of potential models, partnerships, and next steps toward a coordinated regional approach to homelessness in West Hants

DISCUSSION

On June 25, 2026 a discussion was held which included Participants in the discussion included municipal representatives, provincial representatives, along with representatives from the RCMP, community organizations, housing and social service providers, and other stakeholders working to support individuals experiencing homelessness. The diverse group brought perspectives from municipal and provincial governance, public safety, housing, health and social services, and community supports, contributing to a broad discussion on the challenges, gaps, and opportunities associated with homelessness and housing insecurity in West Hants.

Participants identified homelessness as a complex and growing issue influenced by housing shortages, affordability challenges, poverty, mental health needs, and gaps within existing support systems.

The absence of permanent local shelter services, low housing availability, and the lack of supportive and harm reduction housing options. Stakeholders also noted that current services often operate independently, creating fragmentation, duplication, and barriers for individuals attempting to access support.

Several systemic challenges were highlighted, including limited mental health resources, restrictive funding models, privacy barriers to information sharing, lengthy government processes, and a lack of coordinated leadership. Participants emphasized that homelessness extends beyond housing and requires collaboration across multiple systems, including health care, mental health services, transportation, income supports, and community development. Particular attention was drawn to the unique needs of youth, families, and individuals experiencing complex social and health-related challenges.

While stakeholders identified many challenges, there was consensus on the elements required for a successful response. Key priorities included establishing a coordinated and integrated system of care, identifying a lead or backbone organization to drive collaboration, expanding supportive and harm reduction housing options, improving communication and information sharing among service providers, and strengthening community understanding and inclusion.

Participants also noted that many of the solutions identified, including supportive housing, harm reduction services, mental health supports, sheltering options, and long-term housing development, fall primarily within provincial mandates and require significant investment beyond municipal capacity. As a result, meaningful progress will depend on strong collaboration among municipal, provincial, and community partners, as well as sustained provincial funding and policy support.

While the Municipality can play an important role as a convenor, facilitator, advocate, and community partner, stakeholders emphasized that lasting solutions would require coordinated action and shared responsibility across multiple sectors and levels of government.

*Council should continue pursuing a **coordinated regional homelessness engagement model** that leverages partnerships, clearly defines the Municipality's role, and advocates for the provincial resources and leadership required to implement long-term housing and support solutions. The Municipality's greatest value appears to be in facilitating collaboration, supporting community partners, and helping build a coordinated system capable of addressing homelessness in a sustainable and effective manner.*

NEXT STEPS

To be determined ...

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should Council support the recommendation there has potential to be financial implications associated with stipends for this subcommittee.

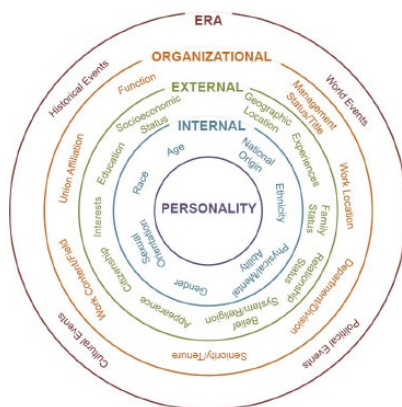
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Housing insecurity and homelessness disproportionately impact individuals and groups who experience barriers related to poverty, disability, mental health, age, gender identity, sexual

orientation, racism, and other forms of marginalization. As a result, addressing homelessness is closely connected to the Municipality's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging.

By establishing the Subcommittee through the DEI Committee, Council would create a dedicated forum for community partners, service providers, individuals with lived experience, and other stakeholders to collaborate, share perspectives, and identify solutions that promote equitable access to housing and supports. The Subcommittee would help ensure that the voices of those most affected by homelessness are included in discussions and recommendations while advancing a coordinated, community-based approach that aligns with the Municipality's broader DEI objectives.

The Subcommittee would operate in an advisory capacity, providing recommendations to the DEI Committee, who would then forward recommendation to Council while fostering collaboration among organizations and advocating for the provincial partnerships and funding necessary to achieve meaningful, long-term outcomes.



ALTERNATIVES

To be determined by Council:

- ***Continue with an Informal Community Working Group*** - Rather than establishing a formal committee, Council could direct staff to facilitate periodic meetings with community partners on an as-needed basis.
- ***Defer Leadership to a Community Organization*** - Council could encourage a community agency or coalition of organizations to lead homelessness engagement efforts, with the Municipality participating as a partner and advocate
- ***Focus on Advocacy and Partnership Building*** - Council could choose not to establish a committee and instead focus on advocating to the Province for increased housing, mental health, and homelessness supports while continuing to participate in regional discussions.

Based on stakeholder feedback provided at the recent meeting and Council's previous direction, establishing a Homelessness Engagement Subcommittee under the Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive

Communities Committee provides the strongest alignment with Strategic Action #23 while recognizing the Municipality's role as a facilitator, convener, and advocate. The Subcommittee would create a structured forum for collaboration and community engagement without positioning the Municipality as the sole lead for homelessness initiatives, many of which require provincial leadership and funding.

ATTACHMENTS

None

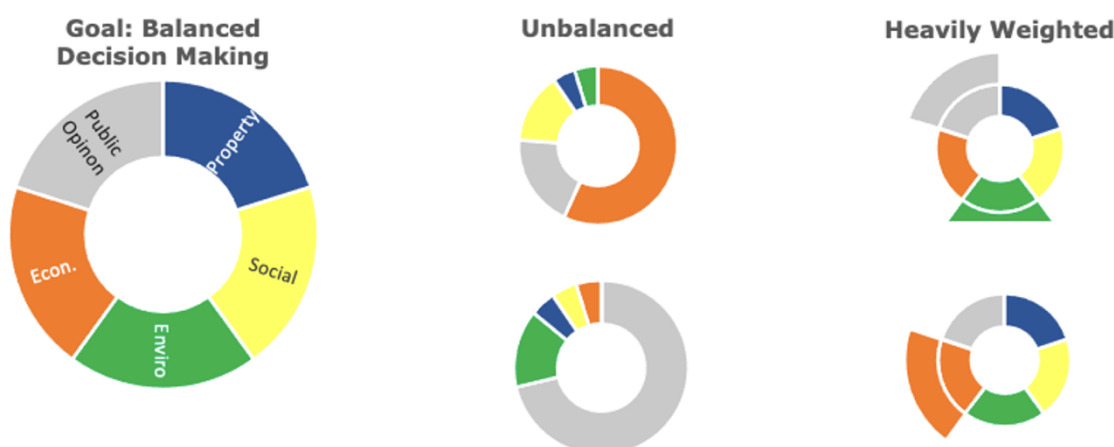
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

The clerk has accurately summarized the comments made at the workshop setting. We continue to highlight the limited capacity and lack of internal expertise within the WHRM to support homelessness at an increased level. The recommendation highlights our role as a facilitator and support vs a direct service provider in this area.

I do support an initiative that provides individuals with lived homelessness experiences an opportunity to have their voices heard so that we can all be guided better by their comments. Some of the challenges noted in the attachments highlight systematic and policy changes requirements within different levels of government while other comments reflect human behaviours and basic supports that may help those living rough or living with a mental health challenges better cope on a day to day basis.

I support the recommendation.

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: _____
Carlee Rochon, Director of Financial Services

Report Approved by:  _____
Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer

Challenges

Community & Social Dynamics

- Public pushback from multiple sides — residents, community members, unhoused individuals, and advocates — creating tension and resistance to solutions.
- Isolation and lack of community acceptance; concerns about integrating unhoused individuals into broader community life.
- Compassion fatigue among service providers and community members.
- Lack of community buy-in for housing initiatives.
- Stigma and varied definitions of “vulnerable people” and “homelessness,” leading to inconsistent responses.

Mental Health & Complex Needs

- Significant mental health challenges among unhoused individuals.
- Insufficient mental health resources and supports.
- Requirement for a criminal process to access certain mental health services.
- Difficulty responding to multiple complex needs simultaneously.
- Systemic cracks causing individuals to fall through gaps in care.

Housing Availability & Affordability

- No affordable housing options available.
- Lack of shelter services in West Hants.
- Low vacancy rates and limited housing stock.
- Market-value housing does not solve homelessness for those with complex needs.
- Existing subsidies and supplements do not match current market rental rates.
- Fixed-term leases create instability and need to be eliminated.
- No harm-reduction or supportive housing options in the region.
- Lack of an organization willing to lead housing development in West Hants.
- Development is costly and slow; resources are insufficient.

Systemic & Structural Barriers

- No coordinated system; services operate independently and do not work together.
- Several Acts and regulations are difficult to navigate.
- Privacy restrictions limit information sharing between organizations.
- Government processes are slow, delaying progress.
- Inconsistencies across organizations province-wide.
- Lack of partners to address needs; existing organizations sometimes compete rather than collaborate.
- Disconnection between services results in no fully rounded system of care.

Administrative & Operational Challenges

- High volume of cases and inability to process intake paperwork quickly.
- Need for priority timelines (30 days or less) for applications and paperwork.
- Lack of a mapping tool (Asset - federal program).

- Need for a centralized landlord list for West Hants.
- Need for median market rental options.
- Funding structures are too restrictive, especially for individuals earning small amounts of extra income.
- Frequent staff turnover and shifting roles create confusion about available supports.

Socioeconomic Factors

- Poverty remains a core driver of homelessness.
- Youth face unique barriers, including needing income to access services or housing.
- Families often need only housing, not additional supports, but options are limit

Missing Pieces:

System

- A coordinated, integrated system approach — a fully developed system that works for all.
- A dedicated lead or backbone organization to drive momentum and progress.
- Better coordination and collaboration across departments, organizations, and sectors.
- A system that is responsive and capable of providing real, long-term solutions.
- Mechanisms for turning conversations into actionable steps.

Housing & Support Models

- Supportive harm-reduction housing options.
- Expanded definitions of shelter to include modern, flexible models.
- Creation of a “housing community” rather than temporary sheltering.
- Buildings that can be converted into supportive housing.

Community & Human Needs

- Inclusion, acceptance, and a sense of belonging for unhoused individuals.
- Empathy, dignity, and safety — aligning with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.
- Feeling safe from weather, violence, poverty, and instability.
- Building community trust and reducing stigma.

Resources & Funding

- More resources across all sectors.
- Guaranteed universal income to stabilize individuals and families.
- More flexible funding models that do not penalize individuals for earning small amounts of income.
- Expanded NGO involvement and community support.

Communication & Information Sharing

- A system where partners can share information to better support unhoused individuals.
- Improved communication channels between organizations.
- Consistency and awareness of available supports.

Data, Tools & Infrastructure

- Asset mapping tools for federal programs.
- Centralized landlord and housing resource lists.
- Median market rental data to guide planning and policy.