



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information ☒	Recommendation ☐	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
---	---	---	--

To: Mayor Zebian and Members of West Hants Regional Municipality Council

Submitted by: _____
Will Hong, Planner

Date: 2025-07-22

Subject: Information Report: Housing Accelerator Fund Update

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Part VIII Planning and Development of the Municipal Government Act.

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

This report is provided for information purposes only.

BACKGROUND

Property ☒	Public Opinion ☐	Environment ☐	Social ☐	Economic ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
--	---	--------------------------------------	---------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--

In March 2023, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) announced the launch of the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), a \$4 billion fund to support local governments to accelerate housing development, support housing policy research, and promote the development of affordable, inclusive, and diverse communities.

West Hants Regional Municipality submitted a Housing Action Plan as part of the application for the Housing Accelerator Fund on August 16, 2023. This plan identified attainable actions Council could take between 2024-2027 to support the development of new housing units by making policy changes that will enable or incentivize housing development.

In January 2024, the Municipality secured funding to participate in the HAF program. On January 30, 2024, Council approved the Housing Action Plan as submitted to CMHC and directed staff to begin implementation. The Municipality signed a contribution agreement with the CMHC and was approved for \$1.08 million for the 3-year HAF term. The Municipality received the first disbursement in February 2024 and second disbursement in March 2025.

The funding agreement consists of the following seven (7) action items that the Municipality agrees to explore in the approved Housing Action Plan:

- 1. Allow greater density as-of-right in serviced areas of the Municipality
- 2. Create affordable housing policy requirements
- 3. Reduce parking requirements for new residential developments
- 4. Remove permit fees for accessory dwelling units
- 5. Promote infill development
- 6. Promote alternative housing forms
- 7. Upgrade permitting software

Another component of the funding agreement is tied to the number of housing units that the Municipality needs to achieve by the end of the three-year funding period in 2027, and the established target numbers are as follows:

Target Items	Number of Units
Missing Middle Housing	42 units
Affordable Housing	6 units
Overall Housing Target	370 units

DISCUSSION

Contribution Agreement Progress

As of July 2025, the Municipality has completed four action items from the Housing Action Plan: Action#1, #2, #3, and #4. Actions #1 to #3 were marked as complete following Council’s adoption of the HAF amendments to the Planning Documents in March 2025, which officially came into effect on May 13, 2025after receiving provincial approval on April 23, 2025. Action #4 was completed earlier, in May 2024. Staff are working toward the remaining action items — #5, #6, and #7.

When it comes to housing units target, staff are of the opinion that the Municipality is on track to meet and potentially exceed the established agreement targets. During the first annual

reporting between February 2024 to February 2025, the Municipality has not only met the full target for Missing Middle Housing but also exceeded it by an additional 64 units. In addition, the Municipality has met 62% of the Overall Housing Target as of February 2025. Based on current development trends and building activity, staff project that the full target will be met by the end of the second annual reporting period—one year ahead of the deadline set in the contribution agreement. Efforts are underway to support and facilitate the delivery of the six-unit Affordable Housing target by the end of the funding period.

Ongoing Actions Items

Initiative 5: Promote infill development

In January 2025, staff collaborated with a group of Master of Planning students from Dalhousie University to undertake the background research for this initiative. As part of their work, the students developed maps identifying potential infill development opportunities across the Municipality. Staff are currently reviewing and validating these deliverables to inform next steps.

Initiative 6: Promote alternative housing forms

The objective of this initiative is to streamline housing development by creating a simplified development approval process for lower-density housing, by offering pre-approved housing plans for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and two-unit dwellings (duplexes, and semi-detached dwellings). This action also aims to reduce the associated design costs, making it both easier and more affordable for homeowners to pursue these housing options. A Request for Proposals was posted on December 20, 2024, and Council awarded the RFP to Passive Design Solutions and UPLAND Studio on February 11, 2025. Staff are coordinating with the selected proponents to develop housing designs, with completion anticipated by the end of September.

Initiative 7: Upgrade permitting software

The objective of this initiative is to enable the online application service to provide applicants with a faster process for building and development permit. Between August and November 2024, staff engaged with several e-permitting software providers to assess the cost and suitability of their services. Following this review, staff identified the existing system—TownSuite, currently used for planning applications—as the most suitable option based on pricing, implementation timelines, and overall compatibility. Staff anticipate launching the service in mid-2026. This timeline allows for a buffer period to accommodate staff training, system testing, public awareness, and integration with existing processes.

Initiative: Integrated Resource Plan

This initiative was identified as an additional action the Municipality can take to support the development of an Integrated Resource Master Plan, which will help ensure adequate service delivery for existing developments while enabling the Municipality to better plan for and

accommodate future housing development. Staff are currently coordinating with the consultants to develop the scope of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for this plan.

Housing Development Trend

As shown in Chart 1, among the total building permits issued in 2025, a significant portion (62%) comes from single unit dwellings. While they continue to dominate by dwelling type, this represents a decrease from 67% in 2024, indicating a modest rise in permits for other forms of housing (e.g., missing middle housing). Notably, applications for secondary suites represent a substantial increase, rising from 15% in 2024 to 25% in 2025, suggesting a possible link between the permit fee removal in May 2024 and the increased interest among the public.

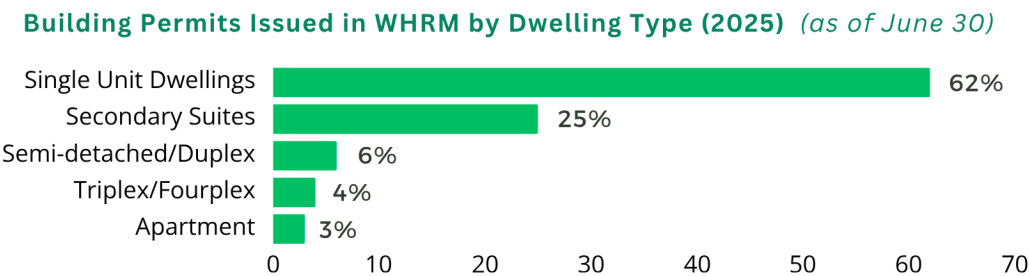


Chart 1. Building permits issued in 2025

Chart 2 provides further insight into the overall distribution of dwelling units by type, showing that apartments make up nearly one-third of the total dwelling units (31%), yet account for only 3% of building permits issued in 2025, as shown in Chart 1. Additionally, missing middle housing types—such as secondary suites, duplex/semi-detached, and triplex/fourplex—collectively represent a growing share of both new permits and the future housing stock. Overall, the data indicates a modest shift toward more diverse housing types in the Municipality.

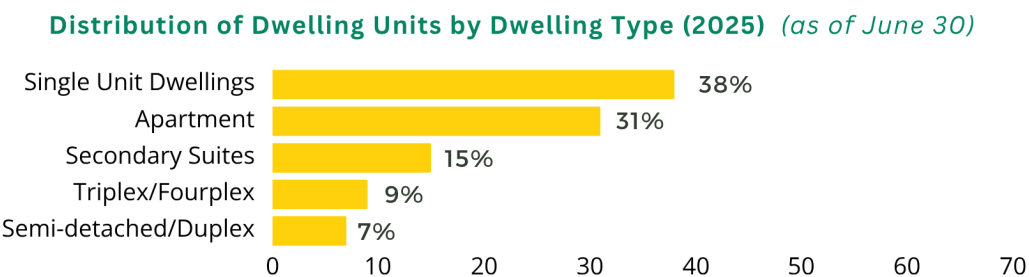


Chart 2. Distribution of dwelling units in 2025

Housekeeping Amendments

On March 25, 2025, West Hants Council adopted the amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategies and Land Use By-laws in relation to Housing Action Plan Initiatives 1 to 3. Since the

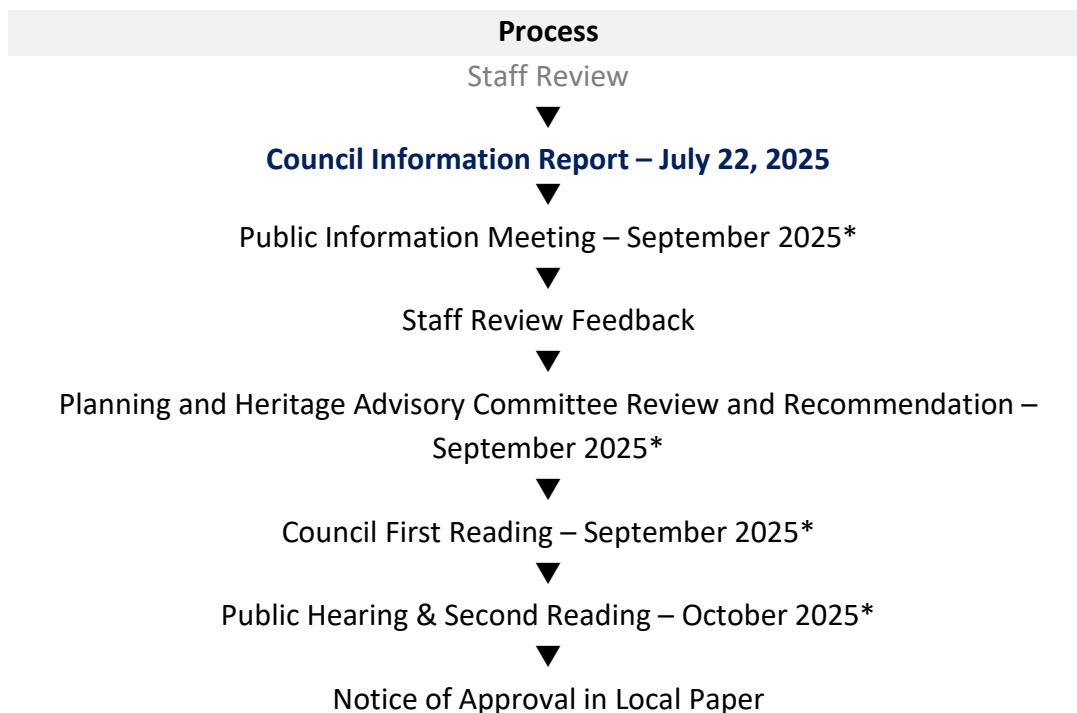
official adoption of the Planning Documents in May, staff have identified some housekeeping items that need to be addressed, which include:

- A revised definition of “Lot Coverage” in the Land Use By-laws to provide greater clarity on applicable requirements;
- A revised standard of front yard setback in the Low Density Residential (R-1) zone to meet the minimum provincial standard on Provincial roads; and
- Typographical errors discovered through the implementation of the bylaw that will improve clarity and intent.

To fix the above issues, staff anticipate bringing forward a housekeeping amendment package to the Land Use By-laws for Planning Advisory Committee’s recommendation and Council’s consideration in September.

NEXT STEPS

Staff are prioritizing toward the remaining action items —#5, #6, and #7, and will continue monitoring building activity and housing development patterns, particularly following the implementation of the HAF amendments in May. In the meantime, staff are preparing to bring forward a housekeeping amendment to the Land Use By-laws, with the following process anticipated.



*anticipated dates; final dates set by Council

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications in relation to this information report.

ALTERNATIVES

N/A

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

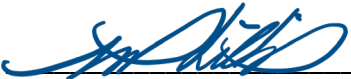
Thank you, Will, for the update. This is a great indicator of development activity in our region.

Report Prepared by: _____

Will Hong, Planner

Report Reviewed by: _____

Kari Fougere, Acting Director of Planning and Development

Report Approved by:  _____

Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer