



Committee of the Whole Excerpts
October 14, 2025

EXPLORING MUNICIPAL SUPPORT FOR RESIDENTS WITH DRY FAILED WELLS EXCERPT

Residents across the region continue to experience challenges with dry wells, particularly during periods of drought. Currently, there is no municipal policy or support program in place to assist affected households. This lack of support disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations, including seniors, individuals on fixed incomes, and agricultural households, who face significant financial barriers. The cost of drilling a new well typically ranges between \$10,000 and \$20,000, making it inaccessible for many. Other municipalities in Nova Scotia have implemented assistance programs to address similar issues, providing potential models for West Hants to explore in developing a local response.

The recommended motion was that Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee recommends ...

COUNCIL DIRECT STAFF TO PREPARE A REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A MUNICIPAL PROGRAM TO SUPPORT RESIDENTS EXPERIENCING WELL FAILURES, INCLUDING A REVIEW OF MODELS USED IN OTHER NOVA SCOTIA MUNICIPALITIES.



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information ☐	Recommendation X	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
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To: WHRM Committee of the Whole
Submitted by: Chrystal Remme, Councillor District 3
Date: October 1, 2025
Subject: Exploring Municipal Support for Residents with Dry/Failed Wells

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Municipal Government Act provides municipalities with the authority to deliver services and supports that protect the health and welfare of residents. Specifically:

- Section 65 authorizes municipalities to make bylaws and policies respecting services and programs, including water supply and financing.
- Sections 81–82 permit municipalities to provide financing for private infrastructure improvements such as wells or septic systems, with repayment collected through property taxation.
- Section 172 enables borrowing and loan programs to support capital works and municipal services.

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

That Council direct staff to prepare a report on the feasibility of establishing a municipal program to support residents experiencing well failures, including a review of models used in other Nova Scotia municipalities.

BACKGROUND

Residents across West Hants are experiencing wells running dry, particularly during periods of drought. A recent inquiry from a District 3 resident highlighted the impacts: their well has failed repeatedly and no longer holds water, leaving them with livestock to care for, limited financial means as a pensioner, and no affordable options for drilling a new well.

Currently, West Hants does not have a policy or program to assist residents facing failed wells. For many households, the cost of drilling or repairing a well — often \$10,000–\$20,000 — is prohibitive, particularly for seniors, residents on fixed incomes, or families with agricultural needs.

Other municipalities in Nova Scotia have developed structured programs to address similar issues, offering examples that West Hants may consider.

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

Several Nova Scotia municipalities have introduced well and water supply upgrade programs that allow residents to spread out the cost of well repair or replacement:

- Municipality of Argyle – Well Upgrade Lending Program
Residents can borrow funds from the Municipality for well replacement or upgrades, repaid over 10 years through their property tax bill. This reduces the burden of upfront costs.
- Municipality of Chester – Water Supply Upgrade Lending Program
Offers loans up to \$15,000 for new wells, well deepening, or cisterns, with repayment over 10 years. The program provides reliable water access without immediate high expenses.
- Municipality of East Hants – Well & Septic Loan Program
Provides loans up to \$20,000 for well or septic upgrades. Repayment is made over 10 years through property taxes. The program addresses both water security and environmental protection.

These programs are designed to ensure residents have access to safe, reliable water while maintaining municipal cost recovery. Some municipalities also include flexibility for seniors or low-income households.

By asking staff to research these models and their applicability to West Hants, Council can consider whether a similar program should be implemented locally.

NEXT STEPS

If Council approves the recommendation, staff would:

- Research well support programs in other Nova Scotia municipalities.
- Assess how such a program could be structured for West Hants, including loan amounts, repayment terms, and eligibility criteria.
- Report back to Council with options, costs, and recommendations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial impacts from this recommendation.

Should Council decide to establish a program, the financial implications would depend on the model chosen:

- Loan Program – Minimal upfront cost to the Municipality, with funds recouped through property taxes over time.
- Grant or Forgivable Loan Program – Direct municipal expenditure, requiring budget allocation.
- Hybrid Model – A mix of loans and partial grants, balancing resident affordability with cost recovery.

Staff would provide financial projections, including likely participation and average household costs, before any program is implemented.

ALTERNATIVES

- Status Quo – Take no action, leaving residents responsible for covering well failures privately.
- Provincial/Federal Partnerships – Explore coordination with higher levels of government before establishing a municipal program.
- Pilot Program – Test a small-scale program (limited funding or eligibility) before expanding municipality-wide.
- Technical Support Only – Offer assistance with assessments, well yield testing, or engineering advice without financial aid.

ATTACHMENTS

Municipality of Argyle – Well Upgrade Lending Program

<https://www.munargyle.com/well-upgrade-lending-program.html>

Municipality of Chester – Water Supply Upgrade Lending Program

<https://chester.ca/water-sewer/water-supply-upgrade-lending-program>

Municipality of East Hants – Well & Septic Loan Program

<https://www.easthants.ca/well-and-septic-loan-program/>

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

Councillor Remme has provided examples of existing municipal programs from other units. The WHRM Home Flood Protection Pilot Program (HFPPP) and the Switch West Hants Program could be referenced as well as enabling programs.

Staff await direction of Council.

Report Prepared by: Chrystal Remme, Councillor District 3 WHRM

Report Reviewed by: 
Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer