

March2, 2025

Dear Mayor Zebian, CAO Mr. Phillips and Council Members,

My name is Todd Miller, homeowner in District 11. Firstly thank you in advance for taking the time to view the contents of this letter. I have had the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Ivey on a couple occasions regarding this content. But rather than burden just Mr. Ivey, I thought I would reach out to all of you. This content is not a viewpoint that taxes are not necessary, I strongly agree they are. But I also believe taxes should be logical and fair to everyone.

I have 1 main area of concern/consideration and 2 proposals:

Budget pertaining to the tax rate – it's undeniable over the past 4 years municipalities have seen revenues increase like never before. West Hants has seen an increase of \$6.5 million resulting from the last 4 years. And not by municipal initiatives drawing that extra revenue, but rather by luck of the pandemic. From surface research, house sales in NS grew (over average) by roughly 1600 in 2020, and roughly 3000 in 2021, then dropping back to normal volumes. These few extra sales, mostly from out of province money, triggered high CPI's starting a trend not sustainable by Nova Scotians. If there was no pandemic and we saw normal growth increases with a typical CPI of 2.5% over the last 4 years, West Hants would have \$3.5 - 4 million less in revenue moving forward. But by sheer luck of the pandemic, this has led to an extra \$3.5 - 4 million per year in revenue moving forward. This is money that has been removed from local economy spending. Looking through our budget over the last 4 years the expenses reflect this good fortune by keeping up. In some budget areas, doubling, tripling and even more. High house prices and high CPI's DO NOT make operating expenses go up!! Realizing the municipality must work off a balanced budget, the capital fund is growing at a rapid pace. In 2023-24 you did lower the rate across the board while still seeing an increase in property tax revenue around \$1.68 million. And then last year's 1 cent drop (???), while revenues increased around the same, \$1.68 million.

As you know, condense areas usually see a lower tax rate through efficiency. The Windsor area is close to double that of the West Hants area. This area (Windsor) historically needed the high tax rate to be able to produce tax revenues to operate. That is no longer the case!!! While all homeowners in the municipality are deserving of a rate reduction, Windsor area home owners are facing a faster developing problem I don't believe many know is coming...homes being assessed so high their homes will become unsellable. Although the PVSC is ultimately responsible for these tax hikes, the municipalities have the last call on lightening the load. Homeowners are hurting financially in West Hants, the \$322,000 in interest charges would indicate this. Team Canada is what I've been hearing.

Proposal - Renovations exemption – It should be encouraged for community members to spend and support local businesses while performing their renovations. It's very common for a new homebuyer to make adjustments and updates to their new home, and seems wrong to be hit with extra property taxes for doing so. Homeowners are expected to obtain a permit for all work, and in the end that work gets reported to the PVSC. This work is often over inflated through some magical formula applied by the PVSC leading to higher than normal assessments. Double whammy!! I'm proposing an exemption on renovations. For argument sakes a \$10,000 exemption every 5 years where renovations are marked as such or not reported at all to PVSC. The benefits to the municipality of such a program...

1. Shows empathy or an understanding by the town to an often unreasonable assessment process
2. Leads to more permits
3. Reno's under permit would be completed properly, up to code and be safe
4. More money spent, and spent to support local businesses instead of a fear unpredictable assessment hikes

I see the roll of the municipality to indeed collect fair revenue and responsibly expense that revenue to provide a reasonably functioning and safe community. But I also see the roll of the municipality to serve in the best interest of all community members, businesses and homeowners.

Proposal - Property tax assistance program expanded – Currently you do offer an assistance program, which is great. The problem is some of us are getting caught in extraordinary tax situations where the current assistance program doesn't provide adequate relief.

My personal story...

Recently I completed a house build on Highland Avenue. It's been a slow process (4 years) as finances were leading the timing. Now assessed 100% complete my assessment came in at \$434,000, \$306,600 capped. I don't mind paying my fair share, but I do have an exception to being gouged. So 2 points I'd like to raise other than the sheer silliness of this assessment....

1. My property is assessed over 3 times that of my immediate neighbor, and higher than any property in the immediate neighborhood, and mostly double. This is due to a laughable, unfair, out of date PVSC assessment process. My house is smaller than most on a very small lot. Nonetheless I'm left with a tax bill over \$5000 (capped, gee thanks) with the same services as everyone else. If I built a \$434,000 house then yes, tax me accordingly, but I spent \$137,000 on materials and built it myself. It's unconscionable to think that I or anyone should pay 3 times that of their neighbor with a lot size half the size and a comparable house size. And with the current benchmark of the CPI leading the yearly increases, my \$5047 will grow at a much faster rate than everyone else. It's just not right!

2. My assessment (not capped one) is so high my house is likely not sellable with yearly taxes starting at \$7153 for a new buyer. At the rate at which assessments increase yearly it will not be sellable soon. Who in their right mind is going to take that on? Absolutely no one that grew up around here!! This just can't be the goal, taxing to the point where some of us won't be able to keep our homes! Something needs to change with the PVSC process!!

So I'm asking for consideration on a logical, fair expanded assistance program that can help the few homeowners that are being caught in unfair tax situations. I have a couple suggestions...

1. Blanket assessment – take the 10 closest properties, remove the bottom and top assessment and average the other 8. No new assessment can exceed that average.
2. Cross reference to income – on an individual basis or special circumstances, a homeowner qualifies for additional assistance that would be tied to their income/assessment.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns, considerations and potential proposals. If there is a process to further these 2 proposals I'd appreciate any feedback. Many in this municipality are hurting financially! And things are only going to get worse if and when Trump's tariffs hit. At least the Canadian Government has recourse...all we can do is ask for help. We need your help!! Team Canada!!

Respectfully,

Todd Miller