



**WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT**

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

**Submitted by:** Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

**Date:** April 14, 2026

**Subject:** *Coordinated Regional Homelessness Engagement Model*

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

**RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST**

**BACKGROUND**

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| Property <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Public<br>Opinion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Environment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Social <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Economic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Councillor<br>Activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
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At the February 24, 2026 Council meeting, Jess West, citizen member of the Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee presented a recommendation report which stemmed from discussions held at the Committee’s February 9, 2026 meeting regarding the Advancement of Strategic Action #23 – Homelessness Engagement and Strategy Development.

It outlined proposed next steps to support a coordinated, community-based approach to homelessness within the Municipality’s jurisdiction and capacity and alignment with Strategic Action #23 of West Hants Regional Municipality’s Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility Strategy Plan approved by Council on March 25, 2025. Developed with input from residents and a working group of community leaders, the plan guides the Committee in implementing key priorities. Strategic Action #23 focuses on homelessness, proposing an advisory group of people with lived experience and collaboration with municipal, provincial, and community partners to develop coordinated, year-round support.

During the discussion at the Council meeting, a new motion was proposed that better fit the Municipality's role while still supporting the intended outcome. Staff were asked to research successful examples and prepare a report with options for Council. It was noted that similar initiatives across the country have succeeded without direct municipal leadership and sometimes progressed faster. Local examples, including some in Kings County, were suggested for review.

West Hants Regional Municipality could act as a facilitator by bringing partners together, providing a space for meetings or a temporary warming centre (if need required), and advocating for those who help individuals in need. There was also interest in confirming whether Housing Support meetings were still active and what they currently focus on. Requesting a staff report was seen as a practical next step, as the Municipality cannot directly lead an initiative of this size.

Following that discussion, the following motion was made:

*MOVED BY COUNCILLOR REMME AND DEPUTY MAYOR FRANCIS 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. MOTION CARRIED*

## **DISCUSSION**

Municipalities across the province have approached homelessness engagement and strategy development in varying ways. The level of involvement often depends on internal capacity and staffing resources, available funding models, partnerships with provincial and federal governments, support from private donors, and differing perspectives on the scale and nature of local need.

To begin addressing Council's direction, staff first examined the current supports and resources available within West Hants and identified apparent service gaps.

Understanding what already exists is essential before establishing new structures or initiatives. By reviewing existing homelessness initiatives, services, and partnerships within the region, the Municipality can better identify opportunities to strengthen coordination, reduce duplication, and address unmet needs. This approach supports the development of practical, achievable actions for those seeking stable housing and advocating for those looking to provide support.

The following section outlines existing supports and engagement mechanisms currently operating within West Hants.

### ***West Hants Housing Coalition***

West Hants has an established Housing Coalition that meets monthly to discuss housing-related concerns, provide updates on ongoing initiatives, and engage in discussion and problem-solving. A representative of the Municipality has been involved with the group as well routinely.

The Coalition currently consists of a small and consistent group of attendees, including:

- Representatives from The POSSE Project
- The Municipality
- The local MLA's Constituency Assistant
- A member of the West Hants Community Health Board

The group's intent is to support collaborative problem-solving around housing and homelessness. At times, discussions have been broad in nature, and there may be opportunities to further strengthen the process by identifying clear action items and

measurable outcomes that help guide next steps. There may also be value in exploring opportunities to broaden participation to include additional service providers and community organizations currently delivering supports within West Hants who may not yet be engaged in Coalition discussions. Expanding representation could help enhance coordination, support information sharing, and contribute to identifying practical actions moving forward.

### ***Caremongers – Volunteer Warming Centre Initiative***

Caremongers is a volunteer-based community group that has evolved its support model over the past three (3) years to provide an overnight warming centre and temporary shelter from harsh winter conditions in West Hants. The service has operated seasonally from December through March 31 each year.

The initiative's success has been largely dependent on municipal support and a base of volunteers. Municipal Council has provided space for operations and assumed responsibility for maintenance, insurance, and operational costs associated with the facility. Council also supported the initial expenditures required to bring the space into compliance for use as a warming centre.

In addition to municipal contributions, the program has relied on a combination of:

- Direct Council funding including paid volunteers assisting with overnight supervision and operations,
- Community monetary donations
- In-kind item donations (e.g., bedding, food, supplies)
- Local fundraising efforts

While Caremongers has played a critical role in providing emergency winter relief, the model remains primarily volunteer-driven and seasonally focused. Continuation of the initiative is uncertain, as it remains fluid each year and dependent upon confirmed funding, Caremongers' interest in continuing the program, and the availability of both financial resources and volunteers to sustain operations.

Given their frontline experience in providing food security, shelter supports, and outreach services, Caremongers should be included in any discussions moving forward regarding homelessness engagement, coordination, or strategy development within West Hants.

### ***West Hants Unhoused Group***

The West Hants Unhoused Group works in partnership with Caremongers to support unhoused individuals and families living in West Hants. Given their supporting role in assisting Caremongers, they too should be included in any discussions moving forward regarding homelessness engagement, coordination, or strategy development within West Hants.

### ***Harvest House Community Outreach Centre***

Harvest House Community Outreach Centre is a registered charity providing critical support for individuals experiencing homelessness, poverty, and addiction. Now located at 211 King Street, the organization serves as a key frontline service provider within the West Hants area.

Harvest House operates a soup kitchen, offers a drop-in centre for individuals seeking support, provides clothing and essential items, and facilitates limited, temporary overnight shelter options.

Key services and activities include:

- **Food Security:** Preparation and service of regular meals, along with access to food supports for individuals experiencing food insecurity.

- **Shelter and Drop-in Services:** Provision of a safe, warm space where individuals can rest during operating hours, with limited overnight accommodation available.
- **Support Services:** Facilitation of support groups, assistance for individuals struggling with addiction and mental health challenges, and support for victims of violence and abuse.
- **Community Outreach and Advocacy:** General advocacy, referrals, and navigation support for vulnerable individuals within West Hants

At present, Harvest House is operating at a very limited capacity as renovations are underway to facilitate the operation of a shelter within the facility. Details remain undefined regarding the intended target population of the shelter and the number of individuals it will be able to accommodate once operational.

Given their frontline experience in providing food security, shelter supports, and outreach services, Harvest House should be included in any discussions moving forward regarding homelessness engagement, coordination, or strategy development within West Hants.

### ***Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency – Senior Housing***

The Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency provides rent-geared-to-income housing units for seniors aged 58 and older. These units are intended to support low- to moderate-income seniors in maintaining stable and affordable housing within the community.

Given that West Hants has a comparatively high senior population, senior housing stability and affordability are important considerations within the broader housing and homelessness continuum. As such, representation from senior housing providers and the Provincial Housing Agency should be included in any future discussions related to homelessness engagement, housing coordination, or strategy development to ensure the needs of older residents are appropriately reflected.

### ***Family Resource Centre of West Hants***

The Family Resource Centre of West Hants (FRC) provides housing support and assistance to youth, adults, and seniors who are facing housing challenges. The organization plays an important prevention-focused role by supporting individuals who are seeking housing, as well as those who are currently housed but experiencing difficulties that may place their housing stability at risk.

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The FRC can assist clients by:

- Sending referrals to the Housing Locator
- Scheduling regular check-ins to provide ongoing support
- Mediating landlord and tenant issues to foster and maintain positive relationships
- Assisting with forms required for the Tenancy Board, public housing applications, housing benefits, or other funding opportunities
- Working with a low-income advocate at Nova Scotia Power to address issues such as outstanding balances or related fees
- Connecting clients with other relevant community resources and supports

At present, the Housing Support Worker position is vacant. This vacancy may limit the Centre's capacity to provide timely and consistent housing-related assistance. However, given the FRC's role in early intervention, housing stabilization, and system navigation, the organization should be included in any future discussions related to coordinated homelessness engagement and housing strategy development within West Hants.

### ***West Hants Regional Municipality***

The Municipality of West Hants is actively working to increase affordable housing availability through participation in the Housing Accelerator Fund. Efforts are focused on policy changes, land-use planning, and strategic support for development projects that will expand the local housing supply.

In March 2023, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) launched the \$4 billion Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) to help local governments accelerate housing development and support affordable, inclusive communities. West Hants Regional Municipality submitted a Housing Action Plan in 2023 outlining actions items for 2024–2027 to enable and incentivize new housing through policy changes, secured HAF funding in January 2024, and received Council approval on January 30, 2024, to implement the plan. The Municipality signed a contribution agreement for \$1.08 million over the three-year HAF term and received its first disbursement in February 2024 and its second in March 2025.

According to the development activity data for the full year 2025, the Municipality approved 283 new dwelling units throughout the year. In addition, following Council's adoption of the HAF amendments to the Planning Documents in March 2025, a total of five affordable housing units has been created through the new affordable housing density bonus provision, progressing the Municipality toward the six affordable housing unit target. Notably, the Municipality recorded its highest number of secondary suites permits in 2025, representing a 45% increase compared to 2024. Under the Housing Accelerator Fund Action Plan, all permit fees for secondary suite applications are waived.

The Municipality also aims to further streamline housing development by offering free, fast-tracked housing plans for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and two-unit dwellings (duplexes and semi-detached dwellings), as well as implementing an e-permitting system for online submission of development and building permits. These initiatives will reduce design and application costs, making it easier and more affordable for homeowners to develop housing.

As of March 1, 2026, the Municipality has now officially met the original HAF housing unit target one year ahead of the deadline, where a total of 514 units has been permitted between February 1, 2024, to January 31, 2026, surpassing the original target of 370 units by 38.9%. In addition to these initiatives, the Municipality has supported community-led emergency housing efforts over the past three (3) years by providing space and funding for the Caremongers Warming Centre. This demonstrates the Municipality's commitment to supporting immediate needs while recognizing that the broader responsibility for housing resides at the provincial level.

The Municipality's role is therefore focused on enabling and facilitating local solutions, such as advocating, providing space, creating a forum for discussions to occur, and offering policy support—while collaborating with provincial partners and community organizations to ensure sustainable housing outcomes for residents.

### ***West Hants Uniacke Community Health Board (WHUCHB)***

The West Hants Uniacke Community Health Board (WHUCHB) is an advisory body that serves as a link between the Nova Scotia Health Authority and local residents. Its role is to provide

community input on health-related matters and act as a connector, ensuring that community perspectives and priorities are considered in health planning and service delivery. Given its position and relationships, WHUCHB should be included in ongoing discussions related to homelessness, housing supports, and community well-being, as health and housing needs are closely interconnected.

### ***Peer Outreach Support Services & Education (POSSE)***

Peer Outreach Support Services & Education facilitates non-judgmental Harm Reduction and Human Rights training for youth and young adults ages 15-35 to provide peer support, crisis intervention, harm reduction street-level outreach, services and education while fostering communities of care.

To enhance mental health and addictions crisis support in West Hants, the Province of Nova Scotia provided \$3.7 million in funding and entered into a three-year contract with POSSE to develop and oversee a community-based mental health and addictions crisis response pilot. The pilot aims to increase access to crisis supports and provide alternatives to law enforcement interventions for non-violent situations.

#### **Program Overview:**

- Target population: Nova Scotians experiencing mental health or addictions crises in West Hants.
- Services provided:
  - De-escalation and stabilization of individuals in crisis
  - Substance-use intervention
  - Wellness checks
  - Connection to additional services and supports once stabilized
- Response teams: Comprised of two community crisis responders per dispatch, blending peer support and clinical expertise (social workers, peer support workers).
- Availability: 24/7, 365 days a year

Given POSSE's expertise and community-focused model, the organization should be included in future discussions related to homelessness engagement, housing supports, and coordinated community response strategies, as mental health and addictions crises often intersect with housing instability.

### ***Lessons from Neighboring Communities and Other Jurisdictions***

A review of regional and broader practices demonstrates that municipalities often achieve better outcomes in addressing homelessness by facilitating coordination rather than directly managing services. Collaborative, community-driven approaches allow for more flexible and responsive action while aligning with municipal mandates.

For example, Kings County leverages partnerships with non-profit service providers, regional housing coalitions, and provincial supports to create coordinated systems such as the Annapolis Valley Coordinated Access System, which provides simplified, client-focused access to services without direct municipal leadership.

### ***Project H.O.P.E. (Housing Outreach and Peer Empowerment) through CMHC***

Project H.O.P.E. serves Kings, Annapolis, and Digby Counties, supporting individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program focuses on helping clients find and maintain safe, sustainable, and affordable housing through community-based outreach and tenancy support, emphasizing homelessness prevention, housing stabilization, and connection to appropriate services.

Services include housing support and case management, such as assessing client needs, creating individualized action plans, assisting with locating and securing housing, connecting

clients with community and government resources, and providing eviction prevention support through coordination with landlords, utilities, community agencies, and the NS Tenancy Board. The program also assists with applications for the Canada Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit (CNSTHB) and housing authorities.

Through trustee services, Project H.O.P.E. supports clients who struggle to pay bills or have lost housing due to late payments by helping create budgets, liaising with landlords and housing authorities, and connecting clients to Income Assistance when needed. This holistic, community-based approach promotes long-term housing stability while leveraging local partnerships, without requiring direct municipal management.

### ***Open Arms***

Open Arms is a comprehensive homelessness and housing support organization serving the Annapolis Valley, with a mission to create lasting, positive change by addressing the root causes of homelessness and fostering a supportive environment for those in need. Their services span multiple streams:

- **Emergency and Second-Stage Shelters:** The Oasis Emergency Shelter offers low-barrier, housing-focused respite with beds, meals, laundry, and individualized case planning, while Tiny Meadows Shelter Village provides second-stage housing for individuals demonstrating housing readiness, including private units, hygiene facilities, communal spaces, and skills training. Guests at Oasis are eligible for referral to Tiny Meadows.
- **Housing Programs:** Client-centered programs, including Intensive Case Management, support individuals in achieving long-term housing stability, addressing financial, employment, health, and life skills to promote housing readiness and self-sufficiency.
- **Affordable Housing Acquisition and Support:** Open Arms pursues affordable housing projects in the Annapolis Valley, offering units alongside life skills and housing supports to address needs across the housing spectrum.
- **Open Arms Kick Start (OAKS):** Provides furniture, household essentials, and vouchers to newly housed individuals, helping transform houses into homes while fostering dignity and stability. The program also offers the community opportunities to access affordable items online.
- **Community Outreach:** Staff build relationships with unsheltered individuals, provide advocacy, connect clients to services and shelters, and offer mobile outreach, food, hygiene support, and assistance during extreme weather, ensuring clients receive holistic, wrap-around care.

Through this integrated, community-based approach, Open Arms addresses homelessness at multiple stages; emergency, transitional, and long-term, while promoting housing readiness, stability, and sustainable independence.

### ***The Portal Youth Outreach Association***

*As noted on their website -*

The Portal Youth Association dedicated to supporting youth aged 16–24 who face challenges like homelessness, instability, or barriers to education, employment, and wellness. We walk alongside young people, offering the respect, connection, and consistent support they need to build a safe and hopeful future.

The Portal began in 2008 as a grassroots response to a community crisis. After learning how many youth in the Annapolis Valley were facing homelessness, concerned individuals and organizations came together to act. With early support from Valley Gate Church and other local partners, the Portal launched as an outreach initiative focused on meeting youth where they were at.

Since 2010, we've grown from a team of two to over 50 staff across three counties. Today, The Portal is a trusted resource and a regional leader in youth support, helping more than 2,000 young people navigate complex systems and access the care they deserve. We continue to grow — driven by the needs and voices of youth, and grounded in strong partnerships across the public and community sectors.

#### Programs

- Youth Outreach Program
- Edge on Employment
- Supportive Living Program
- Cultural Connector Initiative
- Supportive Apartment Program
- Summer Program

#### ***Chrysalis House Association***

*As noted on their website -*

Chrysalis House provides crisis, shelter, support, outreach, advocacy and transitional services for women and their children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence and abuse. Our catchment area includes Kings, Annapolis and West Hants counties in Nova Scotia. We also provide support and information for family, friends and community members in relation to violence against women.

#### ***Broader Municipal and Interjurisdictional Approaches***

Elsewhere in Nova Scotia, larger municipalities such as Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) have taken a collaborative approach that balances partnerships with service providers and provincial leadership. HRM has supported modular housing units, temporary designated shelter locations, and arrangements that make municipal land available for provincially led shelter villages, alongside policies facilitating affordable housing development and housing supports. These models demonstrate that municipalities can play supportive roles, for example, facilitating land use, removing regulatory barriers, and partnering with provincial and non-profit service providers, without taking on direct management of all services.

Beyond Nova Scotia, municipalities in other provinces have also adopted facilitative, partnership-centered strategies. Coordinated tiny house communities and non-profit-led supportive housing projects in some British Columbia cities have been established through collaboration between provincial, municipal, and private partners. These examples highlight alternative models for addressing homelessness that emphasize housing-first principles, community engagement, and local collaboration, showing how municipalities can enable solutions without directly operating all services themselves.

From the earliest stages of supporting individuals experiencing homelessness, the Municipality has taken a compassionate approach. We have accommodated those living in tents on municipal lands in selected sites and have provided supports such as waste collection and port-a-potties. Clean-up efforts have also been coordinated at these sites over the past few years.

In addition, the Province of Nova Scotia has made funding and support available for several indoor shelters and housing options. More details about these programs can be found at [the provincial webpage](#).

It is important to understand the needs of individuals, the resources available, and the barriers that may prevent people from accessing services, including the fact that not everyone is willing or able to follow program rules

#### **NEXT STEPS**

A recommended first step is to engage with neighboring municipalities, including Kings County and Halifax Regional Municipality, as well as the local MLA and the Minister, to gain a clearer understanding of current initiatives and future plans related to housing and homelessness.

Feedback has indicated that accessing services such as housing can sometimes require individuals to first be “in the system,” which in some cases may involve entering a shelter.

Understanding how individuals navigate this process, as well as identifying current vacancies and available support, would help clarify the resources needed in West Hants and guide discussions with local service providers toward a coordinated approach. At the same time, there are emerging signs that capacity for indoor shelters and supportive housing is increasing, which could create new opportunities for collaboration and more effective service delivery.

The next step would be to bring local service providers together to share information from the initial engagement and explore opportunities for collaboration. This would help ensure a shared understanding of available resources and support the development of a collective plan, rather than continuing to work independently.

The West Hants Housing Coalition is already established and engaged in this work. Increased collaboration with the Coalition and all local service providers ensures all service providers have a voice in discussions and that the perspectives of individuals with lived experience of homelessness are included in planning and decision-making.

Through this partnership, the Coalition can continue to advance a coordinated regional approach to homelessness while identifying opportunities to access funding and resources beyond Windsor. The Coalition may also pursue partnerships with provincial agencies and non-profit or for-profit organizations interested in operating a shelter in West Hants to help meet community needs.

In this role, the Municipality would act as a facilitator and partner by supporting collaboration, sharing information, providing meeting space where feasible, and assisting in identifying opportunities to access provincial and external funding. This approach promotes coordination, strengthens partnerships, and supports long-term solutions alongside community organizations providing services on the ground.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Outside of potential operational costs associated with providing space for a Warming Centre, should the need arise, there are no direct financial implications associated with this report or the collaborative work with the Housing Coalition. Staff are already participating in these meetings as part of their existing responsibilities.

There may be minor costs associated with hosting in-person meetings, such as providing a meeting space and light refreshments (e.g., coffee, tea, water, and cookies), if there is a desire to gather in person to support discussion and advance the development of a strategy for West Hants.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

## **ATTACHMENTS**

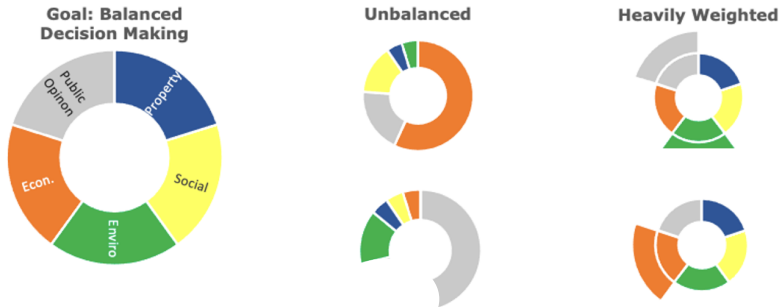
## **CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW**

Clerk Snair has drafted a very comprehensive report detailing some of the supports with our community. A more coordinated partnership is needed to ensure what resources and supports that are available, are directed to those in need moving forward. Her draft

engagement model / policy is a great framework for suggesting how a coordinated effort could be delivered. She is to be commended for her support and administration of this file over the past number of years. I appreciate her support as we navigate and support those in need in our community in a service space not traditionally delivered by the municipality.

I support her suggestions as outlined but caution Council that our office does have limited capacity should a more extensive approach be considered or a prominent role expected by the municipality. We look forward to Council's direction and continuing to support the many volunteers and groups in the WHRM supporting those in need.

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

Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

Report Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_

Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer

See draft policy:

## **West Hants Regional Municipality Coordinated Regional Homelessness Engagement Model Policy**

### **Purpose:**

To support a coordinated, community-led approach to homelessness in West Hants, the Municipality would act as a facilitator and partner, working with community organizations and agencies to share information, guide planning, and help leverage provincial and federal funding, while allowing the community to lead solutions.

### **Guiding Principles**

Facilitative Municipal Role: The Municipality will focus on enabling solutions through advocacy, policy support, providing spaces for programs, and coordinating communication between stakeholders.

Community-Led Operations: Non-profit, for-profit, and community-based organizations will lead operational delivery of housing, shelter, and support services.

Collaboration & Coordination: Encourage partnerships across municipal, provincial, and community sectors to maximize efficiency, reduce duplication, and ensure equitable access to services.

Sustainability: Promote long-term, stable housing solutions by supporting capacity building and resource development among operational partners.

Inclusivity: Ensure that strategies reflect the needs of all residents, including seniors, youth, individuals with mental health or addictions challenges, and other vulnerable populations.

### **Municipal Role**

The Municipality will bring together partners, provide support and resources, ensure policies enable services, and share information with Council to guide planning and address community needs.

### **Community & Operational Partners**

Operational partners will manage daily homelessness services, secure funding, oversee staff and programs, and share data with the Housing Coalition and Municipality to support planning.

### **Housing Coalition Role**

The West Hants Housing Coalition will coordinate regional homelessness efforts, assist with the development of a Regional Homelessness Plan, facilitate collaboration, and advocate for funding and programs to address service gaps.

### **Strategic Objectives**

The Strategic Objectives are to coordinate communication among partners, engage the community, optimize resources, identify service gaps and prioritize solutions, and monitor outcomes to support continuous improvement.

### **Implementation**

Phase 1: Define the Municipality's role, resources, and expectations for partners.

### **Accountability**

Municipality: Strategy, policy, funding advocacy.

Housing Coalition: Planning coordination and collaboration oversight.

Operational Partners: Service delivery, fund management, outcome reporting.

### **Outcome:**

This policy ensures a community-driven, sustainable, and coordinated approach to homelessness in West Hants, where the Municipality plays a supporting role and community and provincial partners operationalize and fund services.



**West Hants**  
something inspiring awaits