Introduction

Council approved the East Hants Housing Strategy in October 2025. This strategy included the following two actions to be completed during this Plan Review:

> *Action 005: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly permit mini homes across the municipality as an affordable housing option with an emphasis on permitting mini-homes in serviced areas.*
>
> *Action 006: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, East Hants planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable the Mini-Home (MH) Zone regulations be amended to permit mobile homes on free-hold (individual) lots*

In March 2025, before the Housing Strategy was completed, Council motioned (motion C12(114)) for staff to bring back a report regarding the definition of mini-homes to be completed during the Plan Review.

Policy Analysis

The current definition of a single unit dwelling is as follows:

> ***Dwelling, Single Unit*** *means a detached dwelling unit used or intended to be used by 1 household. For the purpose of this bylaw, a manufactured home shall be a single unit dwelling. This use shall not include mini-homes.*

Because the definition does not include mini-homes, they are not permitted as the primary dwelling in the Country Residential, Lakeshore Residential, Established Residential Neighbourhood, or Two Dwelling Unit Residential Zones. They are explicitly permitted as the primary dwelling unit on properties within the Rural Use and Rural Use North Zones.

The following is the definition for a mini-home in the Land Use Bylaw:

Dwelling, Mini-home *means a dwelling designated for transportation after fabrication, whether on its own wheels or on a flatbeds or other trailer, and which arrives at the site where it is to be occupied as a dwelling complete and ready for occupancy, except for minor and incidental unpacking and assembling, and the foregoing shall include mobile homes and modular dwellings having any main walls with a width of less than 6.2 metres.*
Below are examples of mini-homes from a company that is currently active within the municipality:

Patterson Homes "Bunkhouse" Model Mini-home



Patterson Homes "The Shadow" Model Mini-home



Although mini-homes are permitted on freehold lots in the Rural Zones, the current policy framework does not readily support the creation of new subdivisions for mini-homes on individual free-hold lots. Where a property owner proposes to subdivide a rural property and construct a new road to serve the resulting lots, the property would be required to rezone to the Country Residential (CR) Zone, which does not permit mini-homes. As a result, the current framework limits the ability to create a new subdivision specifically for mini-home development on individual free-hold lots. To enable this form of development, mini-homes would either need to be permitted in the CR zone, or the mini-home designation would need to be amended to allow for mini-home developments on individual free-hold lots.

The width to length ratio design requirements for residential buildings further limits small scale housing as a single unit within the municipality's serviced areas. This 3 to 1 ratio governs all the Residential Neighbourhood zones except for the Mini-Home Zone. In order for mini-homes to be used as single unit dwellings in the municipality's serviced areas, it would have to comply with this ratio. The policy is written as follows:

6.2.5. Width to Length Ratio for Residential Buildings

A development permit shall not be issued for a residential dwelling in a CR, LR, R1 or R2 Zone unless the following design standard for the dwelling is adhered to, exclusive of any additions: the length of the dwelling must not exceed the most common minimum width of the dwelling (normally measured at the centre point of the dwelling) by a ratio of 3 to 1, that is the length must not exceed 3 times the prevalent width, except for the replacement of mini-home homes which were lawfully existing at the time the Bylaw came into effect. Residential dwellings where the majority of the structure is constructed using shipping containers shall be exempt from the width to length ratio requirements of this section.

Policy RD45. In the Municipal Planning Strategy also limits mini-home zone uses within Growth Management Areas and Growth Reserve Areas. The policy is as follows:

RD45. Council shall not consider the rezoning or redesignation of any new lands to Mini-home (MH) Zone or designation within a Growth Management Area or Growth Reserve Area.

Jurisdictional Scan

The municipalities reviewed have varying classification for single unit dwellings. Depending on their definition, mini-homes may be considered as primary dwellings in some residential zones. West Hants has specific limitations on where mini-homes can be used as a primary dwelling. Other municipalities like Kings County, Colchester, and Halifax (Centre) have broad definitions of what a one-unit dwelling is, consequently permitting mini-homes as single unit dwellings in serviced residential areas.

The municipalities examined do not have a width to length ratio governing residential buildings. They either regulate mini-homes in residential areas by excluding them from their definition of a single dwelling unit or not permitting them within residential zone policy.

Municipality	Regulatory Classification & Approach	Permitted Zones	Conditions & Requirements
Kings County	**Direct Inclusion:** Includes “mini-homes or prefabricated homes” within the definition of a “one unit dwelling” (excludes mobile homes and RVs)	R1, R2, R3, and R4 zones	Permitted as-of-right as primary dwelling
Colchester	**Direct Inclusion**: Includes mini-homes directly within the definition of a "dwelling unit"	Single dwelling unit zone	Permitted as a primary use. (Mobile homes are restricted to specific areas like Guest Drive in Bible Hill)
Halifax Regional Centre	**Direct Inclusion**: Definition of a "single unit dwelling use" includes mobile home use	Most residential zones, including those on the peninsula	Permitted under standard single unit dwelling regulations
Region of Queens	**Conditional Permission**: Permits mini-homes as "single detached dwellings" if specific foundation and aesthetic rules are satisfied	R1, R2, R5 (Mixed Use Rural Residential), and Mixed Use Coastal Residential zones	• **R1 & R2:** Must be placed on a permanent concrete foundation. • **R2:** Must be oriented with the long side facing the front lot line. **R5:** Visual skirting required around the base. • Restricted to mobile home parks if structural standards are not met
West Hants	**Separate Classification**: Excludes mini-homes from "single unit dwellings" (which require on-site construction from basic materials) and categorizes them as "manufactured homes”	Low-density, medium-density, high-density residential, and manufactured home park zones	Allowed across standard residential zones, but regulated under the "manufactured home" definition rather than standard single unit dwelling rules

Urban Design

Traditional urban neighbourhoods have homes that are oriented to the street where the front of the house faces the street. Urban homes typically have small front yards and a larger backyard. Due to the dimensions of a mini-home, this is difficult to achieve. The front of a mini-home is typically located on the long side of the home. If the front of the mini-home is located to face the street, the same as in traditional neighbourhoods, the mini-home takes up more road frontage. From a Municipal tax perspective, larger road frontages mean increased cost to develop the lot and increased costs to

service the lot. However, if the home is located with the short end of the mini-home facing the street, the traditional feel of the neighbourhood is lost.

The municipality currently has design requirements in certain urban zones to ensure that façades facing a public street are designed as a street facing façade. This requires the building's main entrance, windows, and exterior to appear as a street facing façade to improve the overall aesthetics of the street. It would be counterproductive to allow for housing types that orient away from the street in an urban setting. Street facing facades reinforce vibrant and safe neighborhoods and promote community interaction.

Mini-homes designed to take on the vernacular of a traditional urban home with a street facing façade is one way to allow for more mini-homes in urban settings. Homes where the entrance is facing the street with windows and a porch or deck encourage more connection to the street and keep the neighbourhood vibrant. Implementing a similar design requirement to the street facing facades for the Two Dwelling Unit Residential (R2) Zone on mini-homes may be a solution to incorporating mini-homes into the municipalities serviced areas.

Mini-home providers in our region do have mini-home models that incorporate the elements of a street facing façade. Below are two examples. These design elements should be prioritized when considering mini-homes in the corridor neighbourhoods.

Prestige Homes (40' x16') – meets 3:1 ratio



Servicing

Mini-homes on serviced land may not always represent the most efficient use of a property from the Municipality's financial perspective. The cost of maintaining municipal infrastructure, including street maintenance, sewer, and water, may exceed the property tax revenue generated by a single mini-home. This especially the case if mini-homes are placed with their long side fronting the property. The longer a property's frontage is the more it costs to extend and maintain services across the frontage. The minimum lot size for a R1 zoned property is 16 metres, a mini-home positioned long ways could require upwards of 30 metres of frontage. If mini-homes were placed with their short side facing the

road, there is potential to have more homes taking up less road frontage and lowering servicing costs opposed to requiring 30m of frontage per mini-home property.

Conclusion

There are several considerations regarding the potential use of mini-homes as an affordable housing option within East Hants' residential areas. Under the current Land Bylaw, mini-homes are permitted as primary dwellings in the Rural Use (RU) and Rural Use North (RU-2) Zones but are generally excluded from other residential zones. Existing policies also limit the ability to establish new mini-home subdivisions on individual freehold lots and restrict their use in serviced areas due to residential width ratio requirements.

The jurisdictional scan demonstrates that other municipalities take varying approaches to regulating mini-homes, with some permitting them as primary dwellings in residential zones and others applying specific design or location requirements. In East Hants, consideration must be given to how mini-homes fit within established neighbourhoods, particularly in relation to street-facing design, neighbourhood character, and the efficient use of land and municipal infrastructure. These factors provide context for reviewing the current policy framework and considering potential changes to support alternative housing options while maintaining appropriate planning and design standards.

Recommendations

Addressing Action 005 of the Housing Strategy, possibly permitting mini-homes across the municipality as an affordable housing option with an emphasis on permitting mini-homes in serviced areas:

Recommendation:

> Permit mini-homes in the Established Residential Neighbourhood (R1) and Two Dwelling Residential Neighbourhood (R2) Zone with street-facing façade requirements and remove policy *6.2.5. Width to Length Ratio for Residential Buildings* to allow a variety of mini-home styles within residential areas.

Alternative:

> Maintain the existing restrictions to mini-home uses within the Growth Management Areas and Growth Reserve Areas

Addressing Action 006 of the Housing Strategy, possibly enabling the Mini-Home (MH) Zone regulations be amended to permit mobile homes on free-hold (individual) lots:

Recommendation:

> Amend the Country Residential (CR) Zone and to allow mini-homes as-of-right and amend the Mini-Home (MH) Designation and Zone to allow new developments of mini-home communities on freehold lots.

Alternative:

Maintain the existing provisions that retain current restrictions on mini-homes as-of-right in Residential Zones and the development of new mini-home communities on free-hold lots in the Rural Use (RU) and Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone.