



**Subject:** *Canadian Heritage River Nomination Staff Report*  
**To:** Parks, Recreation & Culture Committee  
**Date Prepared:** January 31, 2023  
**Related Motions:** C22(380)  
**Prepared by:** Aurora Douthwright, Tourism & Events Supervisor  
Alana Tapper, Director of Parks, Recreation & Culture  
**Approved by:** Kim Ramsay, CAO

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### Summary

This report provides further information as requested from Council motion C22(380) *That Council direct staff to interact with the Shubenacadie Canal Commission to receive more information, and have staff bring back a report to make a decision on their request (for a letter of support for their effort to have the Shubenacadie River designated as a Canadian Heritage River).*

### Financial Impact Statement

There are no immediate financial impacts associated with the recommendations outlined in this report.

Potential future impact, if the nomination was successful, could be increased tourism/recreation revenue as the Shubenacadie River is added to a national list of heritage rivers. This designation could also strengthen future grant applications tied to recreation/cultural projects along the river.

### Recommendation

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee recommends that Council support the Canadian Heritage River nomination and that East Hants provides a letter of support to the Shubenacadie Canal Commission.

### Recommended Motion

*The Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee recommends that Council support the Canadian Heritage River nomination and that East Hants provides a letter of support to the Shubenacadie Canal Commission.*

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### Background

At the November 2022 Executive Committee, the Shubenacadie Canal Commission presented an update on *Transitions* - a multi-year research and planning project to increase awareness, access, and usage of the Shubenacadie Canal Waterway as a natural and cultural resource. *Transitions* is a \$454,000 project funded equally by NS Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage and ACOA.

One of the deliverables of the *Transitions* project includes pursuing a Canadian Heritage River nomination for the Shubenacadie River/Waterway. The Shubenacadie Waterway encompasses the canal system in its entirety from Halifax Harbour to the Bay of Fundy by way of the Shubenacadie River and Shubenacadie Grand Lake.

In 2009, SCC submitted a similar request to East Hants Council that included a \$20,000 funding request which Council voted against at the time. Following that decision from Council, the SCC paused their pursuit of a CHRS nomination. As part of the *Transitions* project, SCC have opted to revisit the nomination process.

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## Discussion

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) is Canada's national program for recognizing, celebrating and conserving the natural, cultural and recreational values of rivers across Canada. The CHRS program has oversight at the federal level via Parks Canada, and is a collaboration between federal/provincial/local governments and community groups. There are currently 41 rivers with the designation, from remote waterways in the Arctic to rivers running through Canada's largest cities. There are two rivers in Nova Scotia with this designation: the Margaree-Lake Ainslie River System and the Shelburne River. The SCC is nominating the Shubenacadie Waterway for its cultural, recreational and environmental significance. The nomination cites the importance and heritage of the waterway especially for the Mi'kmaq first nations, as well as the story of the Shubenacadie Canal and other unique pieces of heritage, such as its shipbuilding history and world-famous tidal bore rafting.

While the title of Canadian Heritage River may imply a level of regulation, "Designation has no legislative authority; jurisdictions and land owners retain their management authority and responsibilities." No new regulations or laws are created when rivers are designated. Rather, the program seeks to recognize and celebrate significant river systems throughout the country.

Currently, the nomination process is still in its early stages. If Council chooses to support the nomination, SCC will work with the CHRS to update a background study. If this background study concludes that the waterway is still a suitable candidate for CHRS designation, the nomination is voted upon by the CHRS. If the nomination is successful, the SCC would be required to prepare a document outlining how the river will be managed to preserve natural, cultural and recreational values. The creation of this document requires public consultation and East Hants could provide further feedback throughout this process. Any actions described in this document would be voluntary; as mentioned above, no new regulations or laws are created when a river is designated to the CHRS. SCC estimates a timeline of 3-5 years for designation, if the nomination is successful.

### STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Supporting this nomination aligns with the Strong Community piece of the Strategic Plan, specifically the objective to support tourism, heritage, sport, social recreation and the arts by enriching the quality of life for residents and attracting visitors. The Strategic Plan also seeks to support and deliver programs that enhance the pride of place felt by members of our community, as well as strengthen community connections between the Mi'kmaq and East Hants communities. This nomination speaks to all of these items.

In November of 2019, Council approved the [East Hants Tourism Strategy](#). Pieces of the strategy that align with supporting a Heritage River Nomination include the goal to promote all East Hants tourism assets; establish and enhance natural attractions to support visitation; and evaluate natural attraction development opportunities.

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## Alternatives

1. That the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee direct Council to provide alternate direction to staff.