



Subject: *Municipal Housing Strategy*
To: CAO for Planning Advisory Committee, July 15, 2025
Date Prepared: July 3, 2025
Related Motions: PAC23(60), C23(383), PAC23(66) and C23(402)
Prepared by: John Woodford, Director of Planning & Development
Approved by: John Woodford, Director of Planning & Development

Summary

The Municipal Housing Working Group has completed its work in the development of a draft municipal housing strategy. The strategy is intended to provide guidance to the municipality on how it can enable additional affordable housing to be built. The strategy contains 16 priority strategies and 30 short, medium and long-term action items.

Financial Impact Statement

There is no immediate financial impact of adopting this strategy. However, some of the actions recommended would have a financial impact, which will be examined as each action is considered for future implementation.

Recommendation

Approve the East Hants Housing Strategy

Recommended Motion

Planning Advisory Committee recommends to Council that Council:

- Approve the East Hants Housing Strategy.

Background

In November 2023 Council approved the establishment of a Municipal Housing Working Group to aid in developing a Municipal Housing Strategy. In December 2023 the Terms of Reference for the Housing Working Group were approved by Council. The Working Group consisted of the following members:

- 3 Councillors - Councillors Garden-Cole (chair), Moussa, and MacPhee (vice-chair)
- 2 members representing the East Hants Development Community - Andrew Bone (Clayton Developments) and Brad Ross (Citadel Homes)
- 2 members representing the Non-Profit Housing Community - Paul Mombourquette (CCOA) and Linda Wood (HEART Society).
- 1 member representing the East Hants Chamber of Commerce - Tracy Williams
- 1 public member at large - Jacob White
- Director of Planning & Development - Non-Voting
- 1 staff member representing Economic & Business Development - Non-Voting

The Municipal Housing Working Group met from March 2024 until July 2025 and received and discussed staff background papers on the following topics:

- Accessible housing
- General zoning & land use regulation
 - a. Multi-unit housing
 - b. Manufactured housing
 - c. Mixed use
 - d. Lot size
- Short term rentals
- Bonus/inclusionary zoning
- Transportation/transit
- Accessory dwelling units
- Gravel roads
- Surplus land
- Rural housing
- Incentives
 - a. Building/development permit fees
 - b. Infrastructure charges
 - c. Grants
- Energy poverty
- Non market housing
- Connection between housing & health
- Homelessness
- Municipal position on provincial & federal responsibility/programs
- Tax incentives for non-profit housing

All of the background papers were posted for Council's information.

At their meeting on July 2, 2025 the Working Group passed a motion recommending approval of the East Hants Housing Strategy.

Draft Municipal Housing Strategy

The housing strategy identifies that East Hants has been producing housing at a historic pace in the past few years. A housing needs assessment conducted by Turner Drake & Partners Ltd., under contract to the province, identified a need of 220 dwelling units per year from 2022 to 2032 to meet demand, but predicted only 175 units would be built per year. This would have led to a 535 unit deficit by 2032. The table below shows that East Hants has significantly exceeded this target for the past 3 years and has a surplus to that target of 392 units at the end of 2024.

	Needed New Dwelling Units	Predicted New Dwelling Units	Actual New Dwelling Units	Cumulative Surplus/Deficit
2022	220	175	372	+152
2023	220	175	236	+168
2024	220	175	444	+392

However, the strategy notes that all of this new housing is market housing that would not be classified as affordable.

Another notable finding is that the housing stock in East Hants is changing rapidly to meet needs. Currently 84% of the housing stock in East Hants consists of single unit dwellings. However, building permits for 2024 show that this percentage has dropped to 41% with many more multi-unit, townhouse and semi-detached dwellings being built than has traditionally been the case.

The strategy shows that East Hants is underserved with public housing and non-profit housing. For example, approximately 2.6% of the housing stock in Nova Scotia is public housing, whereas in East Hants it is only 0.83%. Similarly, in the non-profit sector, staff are only aware of one community housing provider operating in East Hants (CCOA).

The strategy also found that there are an estimated 50 individuals in East Hants experiencing some form of homelessness.

Although more housing and more types of housing are part of the solution, it is also clear that more needs to be done to ensure there is more affordable housing developed in East Hants.

The strategy notes East Hants sees housing as a shared responsibility between the three levels of government, the private development industry and the non-profit housing sector.

The strategy also outlines many steps that East Hants has already taken to aid in the development of housing as follows:

- Over the past decade East Hants Council has approved developments that will enable 7,479 new dwelling units.
- This housing contains a wide range of unit types and will eventually house an estimated 17,950 new East Hants residents, increasing the population by 72%.
- Additional units are currently in the application process and developer interest remains strong in East Hants with other projects in discussions between staff and the development community.

- Small option or group homes are permitted as single unit dwellings.
- The EH planning documents use a variety of zones that permit denser forms of housing including manufactured housing, multi-units, semi-detached units and townhouses.
- There is also a provision for unique housing solutions such as accessory dwelling units, tiny homes on wheels and urban cottage developments.
- Building permit fees for accessory dwelling units have been waived until December 31, 2026.
- East Hants has also been planning for and making critical investments in sewer and water infrastructure to enable growth (e.g., Enfield Water Treatment Plant, Shubenacadie Waste Water Treatment Plant).

However, the strategy also makes it clear that East Hants does not see itself as a builder or operator of non-market housing.

The housing strategy is broken into 16 priority strategies as follows:

PRIORITY STRATEGIES:

- 6.1.1.: Increase opportunities for special care housing.
- 6.1.2.: Provide more options for people to live in the rural areas of East Hants.
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- 6.1.3.: Investigate how the location of housing can take advantage of a new transit service.
- 6.1.4.: Increasing the use of manufactured housing.
- 6.1.5.: Review lot size requirements to determine if smaller lot sizes are possible.
- 6.1.6.: Increasing density in the Village Core (VC) Zone.
- 6.1.7.: Options for bonus and inclusionary zoning.
- 6.1.8.: Take action to create more opportunities to build accessory dwelling units through a review of municipal regulations.
- 6.1.9.: Advocate for federal & provincial government action regarding housing.
- 6.2.1.: Utilize surplus property for affordable housing.
- 6.3.1.: Take action to create a tax relief program for non-profit organizations that provide housing in East Hants.
- 6.3.2.: Provide incentives to reduce energy poverty.
- 6.3.3.: Investigate a discounted fare program for a future transit service.
- 6.4.1.: Address homelessness through advocacy to senior levels of government and review of municipal regulations.

6.5.1: Attract non-market housing development to East Hants.

6.6.1.: Build Capacity within the Municipality and Community to address housing needs

Within each priority strategy there are action items to implement. In total, there are 30 action items that are short, medium or long-term in nature.

ACTION ITEMS

Action 001: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly increase the number of individuals living in a Special Care dwelling be increased to 8 people or less.

Action 002: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable two-unit dwellings be an approved residential type where a maximum of 12 units are permitted in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone.

Action 003: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable two mini-homes be permitted on a lot in the Rural Use (RU) Zone, if the lot meets the requirements to be subdivided.

Action 004: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly permit five mini-homes on a lot in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone as-of-right.

Action 005: As a future municipal project and study, review how existing planning policies and regulations (e.g., Transit Oriented Development) can be amended to take advantage of a new transit service.

Action 006: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly permitting Mini homes across the municipality as an affordable housing option with an emphasis on permitting mini homes in serviced areas.

Action 007: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, 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.

Action 008: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable 16 foot wide townhouses to enable the use of manufactured housing for this purpose.

Action 009: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly reduce lot area and frontage requirement in unserviced area, while ensuring the lot is technically feasible to accommodate septic and wells.

Action 010: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly reduce the minimum lot requirements for serviced R1 lots to 12.2m of frontage and 372m² of area.

Action 011: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly permit small lot single unit dwellings on an R2 lot where the R2 lot meets the minimum provisions for the lot to be subdivided under Section 6.6.1 of the LUB.

Action 012: East Hants Council are actively considering amendments to the East Hants Planning documents to permit the as-of-right density in the Village Core (VC) Zone be increased from 12 to 16 units, in accordance to the Housing Accelerator Fund Initiatives.

Action 013: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly consider offering a height and/or unit bonus to developers who are offering a federal or provincial affordable housing program.

Action 014: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable semi-detached dwellings to be permitted to have an accessory dwelling unit.

Action 015: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026 East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable townhouse dwelling units to be permitted to have an accessory dwelling unit.

Action 016: As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly increase the current maximum size of an accessory dwelling unit.

Action 017: East Hants communicate to the federal and provincial governments:

- Continue to invest in infrastructure, particularly water and wastewater, that supports housing.
- Build more public housing in East Hants.
- Provide financial incentives for the community housing sector to build non-market housing.
- Provide social and financial supports to the homeless and at-risk population in East Hants.
- Stay engaged in housing issues and continue to provide relevant housing statistics.
- Communicate to the province that the provincial subdivision regulations should be reviewed, to possibly allow smaller lots.

Action 018: Review the East Hants Disposal of Surplus Property Policy to consider prioritizing the utilization of suitable surplus property for affordable housing.

Action 019: Explore the option of implementing a tax relief program for non-profit organizations that provide housing within East Hants.

Action 020: Investigate policies to incentivize developers to construct multi-unit residential buildings with a higher energy efficiency.

Action 021: Provide information to homeowners, builders and home buyers regarding existing energy efficiency funding and rebate programs that are available.

Action 022: Investigate a discounted fare program for a future East Hants transit service.

Action 023: Direct homeless individuals to support services (i.e., Housing NS, NS Dept of Opportunities and Social Development, Emergency Shelters, 211 NS).

Action 024: As part of the East Hants Plan Review scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to ensure emergency shelters would be permitted at appropriate locations.

Action 025: East Hants communicate to the province the need for additional supports for those experiencing rural homelessness.

Action 026: East Hants communicate to the province the need for additional non-market housing and public housing in East Hants and specifically point to the low ratio of public housing and absence of co-op housing in East Hants compared to the provincial average.

Action 027: Further communicate the municipality's willingness to work with the province to bring about additional non-market housing in East Hants.

Action 028: Review the municipality's current internal capacity to ensure it is able to manage the required increase in housing development through appropriate staffing & skills training.

Action 029: Implement technology such as electronic permitting to enable building permits to be more efficiently submitted and reviewed while also enabling more effective communications between the municipality and builders/developers.

Action 030: Actively recruit community housing providers to undertake projects in East Hants, listen to how East Hants can help them succeed and encourage these organizations to take advantage of the Provincial Community Housing Capacity Building Program.

MONITORING & REPORTING

The report concludes with a monitoring and progress reporting section. An annual report to council on progress on the 30 action items is recommended as well as a 5 year review of the strategy. It is also recommended that the housing needs assessment be updated to reflect East Hants unique situation.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

One of the Key Strategies from the Strategic Plan is Strong Community. Housing opportunities for everyone will help to create a strong community.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The legislative authority to develop planning policies and land use regulations is set out in the Municipal Government Act.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some actions recommended in the housing strategy (e.g., tax abatement program for non-profit housing) would have a financial impact. The financial impact of each item will be considered as implementation is proposed.

Alternatives

- 1) Choose not to implement a municipal housing strategy.
- 2) Direct staff to make changes to the draft municipal housing strategy.

Attachments

Draft East Hants Housing Strategy.