



**Subject:** *2026-27 Plan Review Scoping Report*  
**To:** CAO for Planning Advisory Committee, January 20, 2026  
**Date Prepared:** January 9, 2026  
**Related Motions:**  
**Prepared by:** John Woodford, Director of Planning and Development  
**Approved by:** Kim Ramsay, Chief Administrative Officer

### Summary

Staff are seeking authorisation to begin a comprehensive review of the East Hants Official Community Plan. The review will have an extensive public consultation program, deal with existing issues raised by Council and staff and study other issues which will result in updated planning documents.

### Financial Impact Statement

\$17,000 has been proposed in the 2026/27 Budget to cover additional staff overtime, mailings, supplies, advertising & hall rentals related to year 1 of the plan review. There are also three consultant studies proposed as part of the plan review with a budget of \$490,000. In addition, a new planner position has been proposed to assist with the volume of work associated with the plan review and beyond.

### Recommendation

That staff be authorized to begin a plan review as outlined in this report and direct staff to follow one of the three options for governance of the review process.

### Recommended Motion

*Planning Advisory Committee recommends to Council that Council:*

- authorize staff to begin a plan review as outlined in the staff report “2026-27 Plan Review Scoping Report” dated January 9, 2026 *following Option*\_\_\_\_.

## Background

Although a significant update to East Hants Planning documents was completed in 2023, at which time land use planning was brought to all areas of East Hants, the last comprehensive plan review was completed in 2016. Staff are now proposing that a comprehensive review of East Hants planning documents (Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use Bylaw & Subdivision Bylaw) begin in 2026 for these reasons:

- Section 3(2) of the *Minimum Planning Requirements Regulations* made under Section 214(4) of the *Municipal Government Act* requires that municipalities conduct a plan review every 10 years.
- Council has made several motions directing staff to address potential changes in planning documents.
- Staff have identified a number of both minor and significant issues that should be addressed through a plan review.
- Best practice for municipal land use planning suggests that plans should be reviewed every decade to keep up with changing land uses, housing patterns and societal changes.

## East Hants Official Community Plan Purpose

The East Hants Official Community Plan directs land use, development and community design. These documents - the Municipal Planning Strategy, the Land Use Bylaw and the Subdivision Bylaw - determine how East Hants will grow and change. These documents determine the quality of life and the quality of place in East Hants.

The Official Community Plan was last comprehensively reviewed in 2016. Amendments and edits have taken place since then, but as East Hants has grown and changed new land use issues have arisen. The Community Plan needs to be reviewed and revised to address these issues.

Land use planning balances community needs with private property rights. In Nova Scotia, municipalities use three main planning documents: the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS), the Land Use Bylaw (LUB), and the Subdivision Bylaw (SUB). In a planned area, only development that meets the standards in these planning documents is permitted.

### Municipal Planning Strategy

The Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) is the Municipality's' long-term, high-level land use policy document. The MPS controls all aspects of development and land use within the Municipality. It sets policy for where growth and different land uses can happen. The MPS also contains policy on the environment, on infrastructure, on the economy, on public consultation and on transportation. All other planning documents must be consistent with the MPS.

The Province of Nova Scotia requires Municipal Planning Strategies to be reasonably consistent with five statements of provincial interest relating to:

- Drinking water
- Flood risk areas
- Agricultural land
- Infrastructure
- Housing

## Land Use Bylaw

The Land Use Bylaw (LUB) regulations control development and land use, in order to implement the MPS. The LUB divides the Municipality into zones. Each zone has standards that include building sizes, lot sizes, setbacks, landscaping and parking. Zoning also permits and prohibits different land uses to minimize land use conflicts.

## Subdivision Bylaw

The Subdivision Bylaw (SUB) regulates the creation of lots. The provision of services, parks, and street connections are regulated by the Subdivision Bylaw. Municipal Subdivision Bylaws must adhere to provincial subdivision regulations.

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## Existing Policy Issues

There are a number of issues to be dealt with in this review as a result of council motions, staff research, property owners concerns, and new knowledge.

Appendix A outlines 14 motions that council has made to be addressed through this plan review.

Appendix B outlines 15 action items identified in the East Hants Housing Strategy that need to be addressed in this plan review.

Other issues staff are aware of that should be dealt with in this plan review include:

- **Big Picture** - Where and how do we grow next?
  - Follow up from Mount Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy - Servicing Study
  - Renfrew/Grand Lake Growth Reserve Area - Proposed study as part of plan review
  - Lantz Secondary Planning Strategy - Further implementation
- **Formerly Unplanned Area** - Planning was brought to all areas of the municipality in 2023. This review will be an opportunity to update the plan to deal with issues that have arisen since (e.g., Province deciding to not implement coastal zone management regulations)
- **Flood Information Verification** - New information from the Province shows differences from the zoned floodplain along the Shubenacadie River. A study is proposed to reconcile these differences.
- **Agricultural Land Use Planning** - Should we follow a different model? Should we focus on significant agricultural resources and stop trying to protect small isolated parcels of agricultural land?
- **Communal Services** - To allow municipal services in rural areas.
- **First Nations Consultation** - current planning documents are silent on this issue
- **Administrative** - Policy Update, Errors, omissions, requested changes

Since the Official Plan's last major review in 2016, the Municipality has added a number of accessory plans, strategies and studies. These documents provide a deeper understanding of the issues and needs of the community. Some findings have not yet been fully integrated into planning policy. The documents which are complete or underway include:

- East Hants, Parks, Open Space & Active Transportation Master Plan (2017)
- East Hants Tourism Strategy (2019)
- Accessible East Hants (2021)
- East Hants Playground Development Strategy (2021)
- Fundy Shoreline Vulnerability Study (2022)
- Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy (2022)
- Main Street Design for Elmsdale Route 214 (2022)
- East Hants Traffic Study (2024)
- East Hants Strategic Plan (2025)
- Uniacke Groundwater Study (2025)
- Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy (2025)
- Lantz Secondary Planning Strategy (2025)
- East Hants Housing Strategy (2025)
- Climate Change Action Plan - under development
- Recreation Facilities Master Plan - under development

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## PLAN REVIEW PROCESS

The first step in the proposed Official Community Plan Review will be for Council to approve a process for conducting the review. After a process is adopted, staff will begin preparing background materials and reports. Staff will also prepare for the public engagement process. A clear and fair public and stakeholder engagement process will clarify community needs and desires about how the municipality develops.

### Plan Review Governance Structure

Staff have identified three models to follow in the review process as outlined below:

- a. All background and update reports proceed to regular PAC meetings
- b.
  - i. All background reports will be reviewed by an 8 member Citizen's Plan Review Steering Committee consisting of:
    1. 3 Councillors
    2. 1 member federation of agricultural
    3. 1 member of development community
    4. 1 member Chamber of Commerce
    5. 2 citizen's at large; and
  - ii. Regular update reports provided to PAC.
- c. All background and update reports proceed to pre-scheduled separate PAC meetings (Thurs Eve.) dedicated to the Plan Review.

There are pros and cons of each approach. Council has had recent experience with a citizen panel approach with the development of the East Hants Housing Strategy and this was also the approach taken for the 2016 Plan Review. The intent of a citizen panel would be to:

- Promote a transparent and accessible community engagement process;
- Identify and encourage diverse stakeholder engagement throughout the Plan Review;
- Provide feedback, advice and recommendations to the Planning and Development Department, the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) and Municipal Council on all aspects of the Plan Review, especially the development of the new Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS), Land Use By-law (LUB) and Subdivision By-law.

However, a citizen's panel does add an additional layer of review and as not all councillors are on the panel, some will not have the same depth of knowledge as those who are directly involved. Bringing these councillors up to speed, will require additional time at PAC.

A disadvantage of a 'straight to PAC' approach is that issues don't get the same level of discussion and review as they do at a stand-alone committee due to agenda constraints. As a result, staff have added a third option whereby a regular PAC meeting is set aside for Plan Review reports.

## Plan Review Phases

PROCESS DIAGRAM



	PROJECT STAGE	QUESTION(S) TO ANSWER	STATUS
STEP 1	Determine the scope of the Plan Review?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is this review to be conducted?</li> </ul>	STARTED
STEP 2	Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you want your community to look like in the future?</li> </ul>	NOT STARTED
STEP 3	Determine the objectives and planning principles which will meet these objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should we develop?</li> <li>• What is important to consider in how we consider?</li> </ul>	NOT STARTED
STEP 4	Review current and potential policy and regulations based on the objectives and topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What policies do we have now?</li> <li>• What policies are missing?</li> <li>• What best practices can we adopt?</li> </ul>	NOT STARTED
STEP 5	Draft East Hants Official Community Plan documents (MPS/LUB/SUB).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we regulate, and use our planning principles to achieve our objectives?</li> </ul>	NOT STARTED
STEP 6	Enact the policy through the statutory approvals process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do our proposed policies meet Provincial requirements?</li> </ul>	NOT STARTED

Darkened colours indicate the current phase of the review.

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## Citizen Engagement/Consultation

The goal of the community engagement process is to ensure that all East Hants residents can contribute their knowledge, their desires and their perspective to the Official Community Plan Review.

In addition to stakeholder input, community input will be sought throughout the Plan Review. Staff will propose a series of community engagement events, held throughout the Municipality. Highlights of the proposed engagement process are included in Appendix C of this report. Staff will present a more detailed consultation program, tailored to each phase of the Plan Review, at the February meeting of PAC.

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## Alternatives

Planning Advisory Committee/Council need to direct staff which alternative is chosen to conduct the review:

- a. All background and update reports proceed to regular PAC meetings.
- b. All background reports to be reviewed by an 8 member Plan Review Steering Committee, with periodic update reports to PAC.
- c. All background and update reports proceed to pre-scheduled separate PAC meetings.

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## Attachments

- Appendix A - Council motions related to Plan Review
- Appendix B - Action Items from East Hants Housing Strategy to be dealt with in this Plan Review
- Appendix C - Engagement Milestones & Events by Phase

## Appendix A

Council Motions Related to Plan Review	
	<b><u>SECOND ACCESS REPORT</u></b>
C24(15) January	Council authorize staff to review planning and subdivision regulations to aid in the implementation of Fire Smart principles.
	<b><u>HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT</u></b>
C24(258) July	Passed that Council direct staff to revisit the current regulations that prevent the establishment of new roads in some zones and parts of the Municipality.
	<b><u>PLAN UPDATE - MINI HOMES AND CONTAINER HOMES IN SUBDIVISIONS</u></b>
C25(78) February	Passed that Council investigate not permitting mini-homes and container homes as accessory dwelling in subdivisions in the Growth Management Areas be looked at during the next Planning Review Update.
	<b><u>MINI HOMES AS ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS</u></b>
C25(113) March	Passed that Council direct staff, during the 2026 Plan Review, to look at reducing the acreage size for an Accessory Dwelling Unit or tie the Accessory Dwelling Unit to other specifications such as sewer and water capabilities, as well as to look at the design requirements (to match the main house).
	<b><u>MINI HOME DEFINITION</u></b>
C25(114) March	Passed that Council direct staff to bring a report back regarding the definition of mini-homes during the next plan review (2026).
	<b><u>UNIACKE SECONDARY PLANNING STRATEGY - FINAL REPORT</u></b>
C25(151) April	Passed that Council adopt the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy and authorize staff to incorporate the Uniacke SPS policies into the East Hants Official Community Plan as part of the 2026 Plan Review.
	<b><u>ROAD RESERVES</u></b>
C25(157) April	Passed to direct staff to review subdivision regulations, through the 2026 Plan Review, to give the municipality more control over where road reserves to adjoining properties are located.
	<b><u>ROAD PRIVATE ROAD STANDARDS BACKGROUND</u></b>
C25(214) June	Passed that Council add the discussion of private driveways & laneways as well as possible standards as part of the next Plan Review.
	<b><u>DRY HYDRANTS &amp; CISTERS</u></b>
C25(295) September	Passed that Council direct staff to investigate the implementation of cisterns as part of the 2026 planning review, and that locations and costs of doing so be up for discussion.
	<b><u>VARIANCES OF PRIVATE OR PUBLIC ROADS</u></b>
C25(310) September	Passed that staff include the item of variances on private and public roads with the Planning Review.
	<b><u>PLAN REVIEW - AGRICULTURAL ITEMS</u></b>
C25(349) October	Passed that, in the upcoming Planning Review, definitions around in terms of livestock be reviewed and that regulations around setbacks required and definitions around adjacent land be reviewed.
	<b><u>DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS - FUNDING CROSSWALKS</u></b>
C25(351) October	Moved to add discussion around requirements for developers to put in crosswalks to (connect to) sidewalks in the developed areas in the Planning Review.
	<b><u>PRIVATE ROAD STANDARDS</u></b>
C25(353) October	Passed to review the Subdivision Requirements with a view to improve waste collection and emergency vehicle access on private roads as part of the Plan Review.
	<b><u>AR SETBACKS</u></b>
C25(375) November	Passed that Council direct staff to include a review of the setbacks in the AR, RU, RU North zones be included in the next Plan Review.

## Appendix B

<b>Actions Identified in the East Hants Housing Strategy to be Dealt with in this Plan Review</b>	
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 minihomes be permitted on a lot in the Rural Use (RU) Zone, if the lot meets the requirements to be subdivided.
Action 004	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 005	As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January 2026, 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, scheduled to start in January 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable the MiniHome (MH) Zone regulations be amended to permit mobile homes on free-hold (individual) lots.
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 townhouses that are 16 ft wide to permit the use of manufactured housing in townhouse development.
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 reduce lot area and frontage requirement in unserviced area, while ensuring the lot is technically feasible to accommodate septic and wells.
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 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 011	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 012	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 013	As part of the East Hants Plan Review, scheduled to start in January MUNICIPAL ROLE REGULATE 23 2026, East Hants Planning documents will be reviewed to possibly enable townhouse dwelling units to be permitted to have an accessory dwelling unit.
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 increase the current maximum size of an accessory dwelling unit.
Action 018	Investigate policies to incentivize developers to construct multi-unit residential buildings with a higher energy efficiency
Action 022	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.

## ENGAGEMENT MILESTONES & EVENTS BY PHASE



PROJECT STAGE	Determine the process	Visioning	Objectives & Planning Principles	Review Policy	Draft Planning Documents	Statutory Approvals Process
ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal kick-off meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community meetings</li> <li>Focus Groups</li> <li>Consultation</li> <li>Report</li> <li>PAC/Council Approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principles / objectives meeting</li> <li>What we heard report</li> <li>What we heard public meetings</li> <li>PAC/Council Approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directors and CAO update</li> <li>Community open houses</li> <li>PAC/Council Approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy workshops</li> <li>Directors and CAO update</li> <li>Community open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directors and CAO update</li> <li>PAC and Council Meetings</li> <li>Public Hearing</li> </ul>
MEETINGS				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stake Holders</li> <li>Advisory Committees (Heritage, Agriculture, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning Advisory Committee</li> <li>Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning Advisory Committee</li> <li>Staff</li> </ul>

### LEGEND:

- Public
- Stake Holders
- Advisory Committees (Heritage, Agriculture, etc.)
- Council
- Planning Advisory Committee
- Staff