



Subject: *Non-Residential Market Analysis*
To: Corporate and Residential Services Committee
Date Prepared: 2026-09-09
Related Motions:
Prepared by: Graham Scott, Manager Economic and Business Development
Approved by: Adam Clarkson, Director Corporate Services

Summary

The 2025/2026 Business Plan included a non-residential market analysis for East Hants. The purpose of the analysis is to assess the commercial real estate supply, and forecast the future 10-year demand across East Hants.

This staff report presents an overview of the findings. The Market Analysis report identified that East Hants has four main commercial areas, or sectors. The Central Sector (Enfield, Elmsdale, Nine Mile River, and Lantz), the East Sector (Hardwood lands, Milford), the West Sector (Mount Uniacke) and the Kennetcook Sector (Kennetcook).

The report further outlined that the retail, construction, and manufacturing-focused Central Sector currently provides the majority of the municipality's commercial space and employment. Driven by population growth and low vacancy rates, the report forecasts a demand for nearly 824,000 square feet of new building space and over 251 acres of land by 2035 across East Hants. To meet these needs, it recommends focusing future commercial land development primarily within the Central and West sectors while capitalizing on an additional unique market opportunity for large format industrial lots.

Financial Impact Statement

None.

Recommendation

The Non-Residential Market Analysis report provides a current baseline and estimates of future commercial demand that Council and Staff can use for data and evidence-based decision making in the future in regards to land use, investments, and the types of commercial development that East Hants can work towards for over the next decade.

Staff recommend that Corporate and Residential Services committee recommended that Council receive the report dated May 2026 and titled Non-Residential Market Analysis for informational purposes to support future decision making.

Recommended Motion

That Corporate and Residential Services committee recommended that Council receive the report dated May 2026 and titled Non-Residential Market Analysis for informational purposes to support future decision making.

Background

As part of Council's Strategic Plan and current year Business Plan, Economic and Business Development completed a 10-year market outlook of real estate land and buildings for the industrial, commercial, retail, and office industries in East Hants. This report assesses current market supply and forecasts future demand for

land and building space across these sectors to help inform Council and Staff decisions on future land use and opportunities in East Hants.

Discussion

Four Primary Commercial Areas in East Hants

The report reviewed the geographic locations of commercial buildings and land in East Hants and found there were four distinct areas where there were clusters of commercial use that formed broad commercial sectors. The report identified the areas as the East Sector, Central Sector, West Sector, and Kenetcook Sector. The East Sector, is composed of the Milford Industrial Park, the Milford Village Core area and Milford Station. The Central Sector is made up of the various commercial clusters in Enfield, Elmsdale, Nine Mile River and Lantz. The West Sector contains The Uniacke Business Park and the Mount Uniacke Village Core area along the Highway 1. The Kennetcook Sector focuses on the main commercial strip of Highway 354 in the centre of Kennetcook.

Additional areas of East Hants were considered for the report, including along the Fundy Shore, but commercial locations were found to be too geographically dispersed, which prevented them from meeting the thresholds of inventory and clustering needed for the analysis. However, they remain an important part of the economic development efforts of East Hants and will continue to be a focus.

Majority of commercial land use is industrial

The report found that East Hants has a total estimated commercial building inventory of approximately 2.2 million sq ft. The majority of this space is primarily industrial uses, which occupy 58% of the total building inventory (~1.3 million sq ft), while retail composes 32% of space (582,307 sq ft), automotive 6% (145,896 sq ft) and office 6% (141,886 sq ft).

Business Industry mix is Retail, Manufacturing, and Construction Focused

Council's Economic Development Plan in 2023 outlined that the industry mix in East Hants was focused on Retail Trade, Construction, and Manufacturing. This report confirms that this focus continues in 2026, with Retail, Construction, and Manufacturing providing over 57% of all employment and over 48% of the total number of businesses.

Central Sector Provides Majority of Land, Building, and Employment in East Hants

The report found that East Hants approximate 2.2 million square feet of inventory is primarily concentrated in the Central Sector with over 1.5 million square feet (67%) of building space. The businesses that own and occupy this space, employ an estimated 1,793 workers, approximately 68% of the total 2,697 estimated people employed.

Regional Competition to the South and North

The competitive market landscape for East Hants is made up of commercial areas in Halifax, Dartmouth, and Bedford to the south, and Truro and Colchester County to the north. The areas to the south are dominated by low supply while the areas to the north have more options but an inferior location advantage to East Hants. All of the competitive commercial areas in the south benefit over East Hants from proximity to the primary Halifax market and from access to public transit which increases the market position even more due to workforce mobility. While the areas to the north have more room than the south for future growth, they have a lower location value proposition due to distance from Halifax. It is important to note the areas to the north, Truro and Colchester, have recently collaborated on a transit study to serve the commercial areas and business parks in the region to increase their workforce mobility and future value proposition.

The future expansion of the Areotech Business Park and Areotech Connector commercial area to the south are the immediate direct competitor to East Hants, but East Hants currently maintains a workforce advantage over

this area due to the proximity of residential growth. Halifax Transit currently serves the Areotech Business Park and Fall River with workforce commuter routes, and could potentially expanded into the future Aerotech Connector commercial area, increasing the workforce mobility value of the area to future businesses.

Vacancy Rates Low in East Hants

The East Hants market currently has a very lean overall lease vacancy rate of 4%. Retail and offices vacancies are less than 2%. This is well below the industry averages for a healthy market of around 5%. This low vacancy coupled with the “commuter shed” corridors along the Highway 101 and 102, and strong current and future population growth, indicate there will continue to be high demand across all types of commercial space for the next 10 years and potentially beyond.

Hundreds of Acres Needed to Meet Demand

To meet the needs of this growing business ecosystem, residential population, and changing regional economy, the report identifies a forecasted demand for nearly 824,000 sq ft of new building space and the need for over 251 acres of commercial land by 2035. The report also identifies the need for additional land moving past the 10-year forecast, but cannot reliably identify quantities.

211 acres of this estimated 10-year demand are needed for industrial or business park land. Approximately 35 acres are needed for future retail use, and office demand is estimated at an additional 5 acres by 2035. The report recommends that the majority of these future commercial lands should be focused in the Central Sector (61%) and the West Sector (28%) to support business growth over the next decade. In addition the future building space demand is estimated to be allocated similarly with 75% of the 824,000 sq ft in the Central Sector and 18% in the West Sector.

It is important to note that East Hants current time to market (acquisition to construction completion) for new commercial land products is measured at 5 years, if the Elmsdale Business Park Phase 7 is completed in 2027.

Opportunity for East Hants in Large Scale Industrial Lots

In addition, the report identifies that there is a unique opportunity available in the Nova Scotia market for large format industrial land (25-50+ acre lots) outside of the natural demand identified. This demand is not currently being met because of the development patterns and geography of the current market in Nova Scotia. The report speculates that a location along the primary “commuter shed” and shipping routes, like East Hants, could capitalize on this unmet demand, with specific product offerings for this type of customer.

Conclusion

This report and analysis are important for East Hants as the region continues to develop and change. The demand forecasts provide estimates of future commercial land uses that Council and Staff can use for data and evidence-based decision making on land use, Council investments, future business parks, and the types of commercial development that the community can expect over the next decade. This document will become part of Economic and Business Development’s tool kit in attracting investment and businesses into the area and in working with local businesses to grow their operations.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- East Hants Strategic Plan - Economic Prosperity - Plan for and develop future commercial, industrial and business park land.
- East Hants Strategic Plan - Economic Prosperity - Promote and grow commercial districts.
- East Hants Economic Development Plan - Identify and acquire lands for future business park, commercial, and social, infrastructure development to ensure an adequate supply of these lands for long-term growth.
- East Hants Economic Development Plan - Continue to expand, develop and manage Municipal owned business parks.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY
Municipal Government Act

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This report is presented for information purposes.

Alternatives

This report is presented for informational purposes.

Attachments

Municipality of East Hants Non-Residential Market Analysis FBM.pdf