

Introduction

This report follows up on the July 2026 “What We Heard” report, which presented the public feedback received at public meetings and surveys conducted in the Spring of 2026. Consultation findings have been translated into objectives and planning principles. These objectives and planning principles will be shared with the public at a series of meetings in October & November 2026. Following feedback from these meetings to ensure that “we got it right”, drafting of a new East Hants Official Community Plan will commence.

Background

The current Official Community Plan establishes the policy framework for land use planning in East Hants. The current Official Community Plan contains MPS Part A – Introduction, including Plan Overview, Plan Direction and Plan Coordination. The current Plan identifies eight community planning directions, including parks and open space, pedestrian-friendly centres, economic development, healthy transportation, compact and sustainable development, compatible land uses and transitions, protection of natural beauty and rural character, and a range of housing options.

The Spring 2026 engagement consisted of six community visioning meetings in Rawdon, Mount Uniacke, Milford, Maitland, Walton and Enfield, an online land-use survey, a visual preference survey, and a development community interest-holder meet. Since this report was completed, consultation has continued with a meeting with the East Hants & District Chamber of Commerce. Staff are also planning a meeting with the agricultural community. Staff also reached out to adjoining municipalities and the Sipekne'katik first nation, inviting any consultation that they deemed desirable.

The *What We Heard* report records 586 land-use survey respondents, 262 visual preference survey respondents, 179 visioning-meeting participants, and 4,575 written survey comments reviewed and summarized.

What we Heard - Planning Principles

1. Rural Character & Community Identity

A consistent theme across the visioning meetings was the desire to protect the rural nature and small-town identity of East Hants. Participants in Milford, Maitland, Walton, Mount Uniacke, Rawdon and Enfield expressed concern about development that is perceived as urban, visually inconsistent, or poorly integrated with existing communities. A desire for traditional building forms and stronger community character were repeatedly identified.

Policy Direction: The MPS should explicitly recognize that East Hants does not have a single urban development pattern. Growth should be planned according to the character, servicing context, capacity and role of individual communities, with stronger expectations for context-sensitive design.

2. Growth Management, Infrastructure & Sequencing

Residents repeatedly connected concerns about growth with road capacity, water supply, wastewater capacity, stormwater, emergency access and other infrastructure. The visioning summary specifically records concerns about potable water, sewer capacity, road capacity and single-access neighbourhoods.

The development community expressed a complementary concern: avoid exurban and unserved development and increase density where municipal services are available. Developers also identified interest in additional development forms and transit.

Policy Direction: Growth management should be based on infrastructure capacity and efficient settlement patterns, while avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to density.

3. Housing Choice & Affordability

The consultation identified both a need for more housing choices and significant concern about affordability. Residents identified demand for smaller homes, senior housing, accessory housing, multi-generational housing, rental options and a broader range of housing types. At the same time, there was strong concern about the location, scale, height and design of multi-unit development. The survey found that availability and quality of affordable housing received the most negative assessment among the characteristics tested.

The survey also found that more than 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that single and two-unit neighbourhoods should be protected from higher-density housing.

Policy Direction: The revised Plan should support a broad range of housing while directing greater intensity toward locations where services, amenities, transportation and infrastructure can support it, and should establish clear transitions between different scales of development.

4. Built Form, Design & Placemaking

The visual preference survey provides clear direction on built form. 57% selected a compact apartment design; approximately 77% preferred shorter and bulkier buildings over taller and narrower buildings; 93% supported common amenity space in apartment buildings; 77% preferred a sidewalk environment with trees and benches; and village-style and main-street commercial forms were substantially preferred over strip-mall development.

Policy Direction: The MPS should establish a stronger design framework covering building massing, relationship to streets, landscaping, parking, pedestrian connections, public spaces, transitions and community context.

5. Natural Assets, Water and Climate Resilience

Water quantity, water quality, wetlands, watercourses, flooding, drought and wildfire were recurring concerns. Participants identified dry wells, falling lake levels, septic impacts, stormwater problems, wetland disturbance and the need for stronger environmental protection and emergency access.

Policy Direction: Climate resilience and environmental risk should inform decision making about both individual planning applications and broader policy initiatives.

6. Agricultural Land & Food Security

Protection of agricultural land was one of the clearest survey findings: 95.31% of 576 respondents indicated that agricultural land protection is important. Visioning participants also linked agricultural land protection with future food security and expressed concern about fragmentation of farms.

Policy Direction: The MPS should give agricultural land protection an explicit strategic role and should distinguish agricultural land from general rural development land where appropriate.

7. Walkability, Active Transportation & the Public Realm

Residents identified sidewalk gaps, poor sidewalk conditions, unsafe crossings, lack of shoulders, limited destinations and disconnected trails. The visual preference survey found strong preference for a more comfortable, landscaped pedestrian environment.

Policy Direction: Land-use policy should require new development to connect to pedestrian and active-transportation networks and should support compact, mixed-use and amenity-rich centres.

8. Parks, Open Space & Access to Nature

The visioning meetings repeatedly called for more parks, trails and green space. The visual preference survey found that wilderness parks were preferred by approximately 75% of respondents, while beach and garden parks were each selected by approximately half of respondents.

Policy Direction: Open space should be planned as a connected system rather than treated primarily as residual land within subdivisions. Fortunately, this is the direction the municipality has been moving in over the past decade. However, the municipality still has a legacy of disconnected and questionable open space parcels.

9. Public Engagement & Implementation

Survey respondents supported multiple engagement methods. Surveys were selected by 82.47%, public meetings by 77.60%, information letters by 67.71%, and social media by 62.67%.

Policy Direction: The MPS should recognize engagement as an ongoing implementation practice, with early communication on major planning initiatives and clear explanations of how public input is considered.

Proposed Policy Framework

Based on these policy directions, Part A of the MPS will be amended around nine principles. The proposed framework does not attempt to place every consultation request into the MPS. Instead, it establishes strategic policy direction that can subsequently be translated into detailed policies, land-use designations, zoning standards, subdivision requirements, infrastructure planning and municipal work programs.

Planning Principle	Primary Consultation Message	Policy Response
1. Rural Character & Community Identity	Protect East Hants rural nature and areas with a small-town identity while recognizing the distinct character and role of individual communities.	Plan for context sensitive growth and design that reflects local character, servicing constraints and community identity.
2. Growth Management, Infrastructure & Sequencing	Concerns about growth pace, road capacity, water & wastewater, stormwater, emergency access and unserved expansion.	Coordinate the location and timing of growth with infrastructure capacity and efficient settlement patterns: avoid a one-size-fits all approach.
3. Housing Choice and Affordability	Demand for smaller, senior, accessory, multi-generational and rental housing, along side concerns about affordability and compatibility.	Enable diverse housing types while managing scale and compatibility.
4. Built Form, Design & Placemaking	Preference for attractive, context-sensitive buildings, shorter and bulkier forms, amenity space, landscaped streets and village/main-street commercial forms.	Establish design policies for building massing, streets, landscaping, parking, pedestrian connections, public spaces and transitions.
5. Natural Assets, Water & Climate Resilience	Concerns about water quantity and quality, wetlands, watercourses, flooding, drought, wildfire and stormwater impacts.	Stronger watershed, stormwater, natural asset and climate-resilience policies.
6. Agricultural Land & Food Security	Strong support for protecting agricultural land and concern about farm fragmentation and future food security.	Give agricultural land protection a clear strategic role and distinguish agricultural land from general rural development land where appropriate.
7. Walkability, Active Transportation & the Public Realm	Sidewalk gaps and conditions, unsafe crossings, limited destinations, disconnected trails and demand for comfortable pedestrian environments.	Support connected active-transportation networks, complete streets, walkable centres and connections between new development and existing networks.
8. Parks, Open Space & Access to Nature	Demand for parks, trails, green space, waterfront access and opportunities to experience nature.	Network approach; meaningful open-space dedication; public access and green infrastructure.
9. Public Engagement & Implementation	Support for multiple engagement methods and requests for better communication, transparency and accountability.	Provide early engagement and clear communication, explain how input is considered and support implementation, monitoring and review.

Alternatives

PAC may decide to recommend that Council add, delete or edit any of the proposed nine policy directions.

Recommendation

Recommend that the nine policy directions in this report form the basis of an amended Part A of the MPS.

Recommended Motion

Planning Advisory Committee recommends to Council that Council:

- *Direct staff to prepare amendments to Part A of the MPS based on the nine planning principles outlined in Plan Review Topic Paper 005, dated October 1, 2026.*