

**PORT HAWKESBURY TOWN COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING
Shannon Studio
Minutes of Meeting
February 17, 2026**

Present

Mayor, Brenda Chisholm-Beaton
Deputy Mayor, Todd Barrett
Councillor, Blaine MacQuarrie
Councillor, Iaian Langley – **Virtually**
Chief Administrative Officer, Terry Doyle
Director of Finance, Brian Luciano
Communications and Administrative Officer, Melissa Warner

Regrets

Councillor, Paula Hart

1. Call to Order

A Public Hearing of the Port Hawkesbury Town Council was held in the Shannon Studio, Tuesday, February 17, 2026, and called to order by Mayor, Brenda Chisholm-Beaton at 6:30pm.

2. Sale of Municipal Land PID - 50155795 CAO, T. Doyle

CAO, T. Doyle noted that the Public Hearing is being held pursuant to Section 51 of the Nova Scotia Municipal Government Act for the purpose of considering the sale of municipal land for a nominal value to New Dawn Enterprises, in partnership with the At Home Housing Association, for the purpose of developing a housing project. The property under consideration is PID 50155795, commonly known as the former Port Hawkesbury Arena and Lions Club property. The estimated market value of the land is \$145,000, excluding demolition and environmental remediation costs, which will be the responsibility of the purchaser. The proposed sale is subject to an Agreement of Purchase and Sale, which includes several conditions: the purchaser must assume all demolition and environmental remediation costs; transfer of the property will occur only upon demonstration of adequate project financing to the Town; development must commence within two years of the agreement being signed; and a transfer agreement between New Dawn Enterprises and the At Home Housing Association must be in place. Council will receive a presentation from Erika Shea of New Dawn Enterprises regarding the proposed development.

3. Presentation New Dawn Enterprises – Erika Shea

Erika Shea with New Dawn Enterprises provided an overview of its organization and the proposed MacQuarrie Drive development. She noted that New Dawn Enterprises was founded nearly 50 years ago, New Dawn is Canada's oldest non-profit Community Development Corporation, comprised of 18 non-profits and charities operating in areas such as healthcare, food security, home care, immigration settlement, arts and culture,

and affordable and supportive housing. The organization currently owns and operates 85 housing units in the CBRM and reinvests all revenues into community services. The proposed MacQuarrie Drive project is a \$12 million mixed-income development consisting of 55 one-, two- and three-bedroom units, with 50% offered at market rent and 50% at affordable rates (minimum 20% below CMHC average market rents). Affordable rents are projected at approximately \$700 (1-bedroom), \$900 (2-bedroom), and \$1,200 (3-bedroom), with market rents at \$900, \$1,200, and \$1,500 respectively. The development will include at least 30% fully accessible barrier-free units, with potential to increase to 50% if the design transitions to primarily two-storey buildings. The site has completed Phase I and II environmental assessments.

The project is a partnership between New Dawn Enterprises and the newly formed At Home Housing Association, a local non-profit established to own and operate the development long-term. A Memorandum of Understanding outlines the eventual transfer of ownership and operations from New Dawn to At Home following construction, with capacity-building support provided during the transition. Preliminary funding has supported environmental, geotechnical, design, and budgeting work, enabling applications to federal (Build Canada Homes/CMHC) and provincial funding programs. If approved, detailed design and tendering would proceed, with construction targeted for spring/summer start and completion anticipated in 2028, potentially sooner if modular construction is utilized. Council members expressed appreciation for the project, noting its importance to housing supply, workforce attraction, accessibility, and community growth.

4. Council Question Period

During the question-and-answer period, Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton thanked New Dawn for the presentation and noted that the project has generated significant attention on social media. Questions were raised regarding pet policies, and it was confirmed that the development would be pet-friendly, with individual discussions for larger dog breeds to ensure the comfort of all residents. Council also inquired about parking, noting that the current design includes 60 parking spaces for 54 units within an interior parking court, with discussions underway with the CAO regarding potential overflow parking. CAO Terry Doyle acknowledged the design considerations.

Deputy Mayor Todd Barrett confirmed the unit breakdown of 27 market-rent and 27 affordable units and highlighted the importance of housing in attracting business and supporting workforce growth. It was also noted that opportunities may exist for master leasing up to five units by partner organizations. Councillor Blaine MacQuarrie asked about accessibility, and it was confirmed that while the preliminary design proposes three-storey buildings with 30% accessible units, discussions are ongoing with architects about transitioning to two-storey buildings, which could increase fully accessible and barrier-free units to 50% of the development.

It was noted that as the project progresses, New Dawn will work with the Nova Scotia Department of Opportunities and Social Development to explore a partnership to provide

deeply affordable units set at 30% of an individual's income. An example was shared from a recent Sydney development, where, through such a partnership, tenants on income assistance pay approximately \$217 per month, reflecting 30% of their income. Similar arrangements could apply to individuals receiving income assistance, CPP, OAS, or those who are employed but require deeply affordable housing, with rents determined through the intake process. Following the discussion, the meeting moved on to gallery presentations.

5. Gallery Presentations

- a) Call for opposing presentations.

Town Resident Craig Power

Town resident Craig Power addressed Council and advised that, after discussions with the proponent and Town officials, most of his previously submitted concerns had been addressed and he viewed the project as generally well thought out. However, he expressed specific concerns regarding logistics and infrastructure impacts, particularly increased traffic and parking pressures in the area. He noted that the Reeves Street and Reynolds Street intersection has already experienced significant traffic growth—becoming a topic during the recent municipal election—and questioned how the addition of new housing units would further affect congestion and parking, especially given proximity to the rink. Mr. Powers requested clarification on concrete, established plans to address infrastructure and traffic impacts, rather than potential or speculative solutions.

CAO, T. Doyle noted that the Town of Port Hawkesbury's population has declined from approximately 4,000 residents in 1991 to about 3,200 currently, and that the former arena and Lions Club site was once a central hub of activity with significant traffic in the area. The proposed development is viewed as an opportunity to revitalize the property, address local housing needs, and restore activity to the site. It was acknowledged that traffic and parking considerations will form part of the building permit and design process, and the Town committed to improving off-site parking in a manner that enhances public safety, particularly for children, while continuing discussions with nearby stakeholders such as the curling club and shopping centre. Staff further advised that a 2026 municipal infrastructure master planning study, being undertaken in partnership with the County of Inverness, will assess existing infrastructure condition, capacity, water and sewer system modeling, and asset management practices to ensure the Town can adequately service the development and guide future capital investment decisions.

b) Call for presentations in favor.

Cheryl – Deveaux McDaniel a 23-year resident of Port Hawkesbury, spoke in support of the proposed housing development. She outlined her background in human resources and extensive community involvement, including co-chairing the Strait Richmond Housing Matters Coalition, serving on the Nova Scotia Non-Profit Housing Association, the Strait Richmond Community Health Board, and local business and community development boards. She emphasized that the town is facing a critical shortage of affordable rental housing, with extremely low vacancy rates and rising rents impacting seniors, young families, workers, and persons with disabilities. She expressed strong support for the 55-unit proposal by New Dawn Enterprises and the At Home Housing Association, citing New Dawn's experience and capacity, as well as the strength and diversity of the newly formed local housing association board.

Ms. McDaniel noted that the development aligns with municipal, provincial, and federal housing strategies and is ideally located near essential services, recreation, transit, and employment. She stated the project would support workforce retention, provide affordable options for seniors wishing to downsize, free up existing housing stock for first-time homebuyers, and improve overall community well-being. She concluded by encouraging Council to approve the sale of the property to facilitate the project and help ensure Port Hawkesbury remains an inclusive and sustainable community.

John Ouellette, Past President of the Strait Area Chamber of Commerce, spoke on behalf of the Chamber in support of the proposed housing development. He noted that housing availability—not workforce recruitment—is currently the primary concern of Chamber members, as businesses are able to find employees but cannot find places for them to live. He emphasized that adequate housing is essential for attracting and retaining workers and supporting local economic growth. The Chamber supports the partnership model, particularly New Dawn's role in incubating the At Home Housing Association as a sustainable, locally rooted organization, and endorsed the mixed market and affordable housing approach. He also expressed hope that local trades and businesses would benefit from the project and indicated that the Chamber, representing approximately 350 members and celebrating its 75th anniversary, views housing as a critical priority for the region's continued growth and sustainability.

Karen MacLean, Stephanie Myette & Stacey Boudreau spoke on behalf of the ROC Society, in support of the proposed MacQuarrie Drive development. Ms. MacLean noted that the ROC Society has supported individuals of all abilities for over 50 years and emphasized the ongoing shortage of safe, accessible, and affordable housing in the region. ROC members shared personal perspectives, highlighting the challenges individuals with mobility and other disabilities face in securing suitable housing and expressing appreciation for the inclusion of accessible units within the project. The group voiced strong support for the 55-unit mixed-income development and expressed confidence in the partnership between New Dawn Enterprises and the At Home Housing Association to deliver a sustainable, community-focused project.

Joe Praught, a 56-year resident of Port Hawkesbury, spoke in support of the project and expressed pride in being a member of the community. He reflected on raising his family in the Town and commended the civility and respectful dialogue demonstrated during the meeting. Mr. Pratt noted that he has seen many projects over the years and described the proposed development as one of the most positive initiatives he has witnessed in a long time, offering his appreciation to Council and all involved.

6. Written Submissions

CAO, T. Doyle indicated that there were a number of written submissions that were included in the council packages and forwarded along to council prior to the meeting. He listed the names and organizations in favor of the project, Town Residents Allison MacEachern, Debbie Gagnon, and Cher McDaniel, YMCA Cape Breton, Leaside Society, and NSCC Strait Area Campus were all in favor while Town Resident, Craig Power was opposed.

7. Adjournment

MOVED by Deputy Mayor, T. Barrett and SECONDED by Councillor, B. MacQuarrie “to adjourn the Public Hearing at 7:24p.m.” MOTION CARRIED.

Date:

Approved by: Terry Doyle, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

Recorded by: Melissa Warner
Communications &
Administrative Officer