



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information ☐	Recommendation ☒	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
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To: West Hants Regional Municipal Council

Submitted by: Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer

Date: December 3, 2024

Subject: 2024 Council Remuneration Review

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 23(1)(d) of the *Municipal Government Act* states that the council may make policies providing for and fixing:

- (i) the annual remuneration to be paid to the mayor or warden,
- (ii) the annual remuneration to be paid to the deputy mayor or deputy warden,
- (iii) the annual remuneration to be paid to councillors,
- (iv) that part of the salary or remuneration that is an allowance for expenses incidental to the discharge of the duties of such persons as elected officers of the municipality,
- (v) the deduction to be made from the remuneration of such persons, other than persons on parental accommodation, for missing more than three council or committee meetings in a year, and
- (vi) the rate per kilometre as a travelling allowance for such persons for actual distance travelled once each day to go to, and return from, every daily session of a meeting of the council or of a committee.

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

... that the Council Remuneration policy be updated to include the following:

a) That annual remuneration levels for Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councilor increase, as per the December 2024 report, on April 1st of each fiscal year as per the Annual Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index (CPI – All Items) for the Province of Nova Scotia for the preceding calendar year until the 2028 NS Municipal Election.

b) That the West Hants Regional Municipality Expense Policy be revised to reflect the updated meal allowance values noted in the report.

c) That Council continues to extend the defined contribution group pension plan to elected officials with matching funds from the municipal and council member of 8%.

d) That Council implements a parental/dependent care leave policy for elected officials, allowing elected officials to take up to 52 weeks leave without pay.

e) That Council provide up to \$1,500 per year for elected officials and \$750.00 per year for non-elected committee members to support dependent care expenses.

BACKGROUND

Property ☐	Public Opinion ☐	Environment ☐	Social ☐	Economic ☐	Councillor Activity ☐
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Council remuneration provides an incentive for community members to hold public office and compensation for the time and energy required to fulfill the duties associated with being a member of Council for the Municipality.

The Council Remuneration Policy was established in 2020 for the West Hants Regional Municipality (WHRM) following consolidation and is set to be reviewed prior to the annual elections taking place in October of 2024. In alignment with the Municipal Government Act (MGA), the outgoing council must determine the remuneration for the incoming council.

Through the Association of Municipal Administrators (AMANS), remuneration data is gathered annually through surveys, and shared with participating municipalities to review and incorporate into their updated remuneration policies to ensure we are compensating our councillors equitably across the province.

DISCUSSION

This report was prepared to review remuneration of Councillors and Mayor of the West Hants Regional Municipality.

Determining the correct remuneration for elected officials of a Municipality is the independent responsibility of the municipal unit. Common community comparisons often include the range of services provided by the municipality, the geographic area serviced, number of residents per district and unit wide, uniform assessment, then number of committees requiring council appointments and direct comparisons to other Towns, Rurals or Regional municipal units. It should be highlighted that Council remuneration adjustments should factor in that regional municipalities truly encompass both rural and town related governance and policy. There are

distinct jurisdictional differences between town and rural community as it relates to municipal service provisions, policy, fiscal responsibilities, planning and land use regulations, municipal infrastructure and the degree of Provincial and Federal collaboration or advocacy depending on the environmental characteristics of the municipal, community. Regional Council agendas very often have items that might otherwise appear singularly on a Town or Rural municipal agenda. Remuneration should be reflective of both the complexity and range of subject matters as well as the time required to perform governance duties.

Over the past 4 years, the Province of NS has experienced numerous socioeconomic and environmental shifts that have led to additional time requirements to the role of our elected officials within the West Hants Regional Municipality and the Province. The accountability, transparency, and number of contacts for councilors has been increased significantly through the expansion of electronic and social media activity. Whether residents live in an urban area or in a very rural community, they expect their Councilor to be accessible, well-informed, dedicated to the task and vocal in the decisions made at the Council table.

With the growing demands required from our elected officials, work-life balance, and time management may become challenging for some who have additional commitments and responsibilities outside of council (i.e. families, less flexible and/or full-time jobs, additional financial burdens, etc.). Ongoing council remuneration review is necessary to ensure that remuneration accurately reflects the time that is necessary to meet the requirements of the position.

Council remuneration alone may not impact the participation of more diverse elected representatives on the WHRM Council, but it is important to review the remuneration policy periodically and see if changes should be made to one or more elements of the policy to improve the potential to attract more diverse voices to Council, and to ensure the different communities within the Municipality have strong representation. Additional items that could be considered in an effort to attract more diverse candidates include additional health and dental benefits, reviewing the time of day that council and committee of the whole meetings take place and the duration of meetings.

Below you will find an overview of the previous five (5) years of council remuneration for the elected officials of the West Hants Regional Municipality:

WHRM Council Remuneration Over the Past Five Years

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Mayor	\$ 53,000	\$ 53,954.00	\$ 58,029.38	\$ 58,740.26	\$ 60,502.43
Deputy Mayor	\$ 27,950	\$ 28,453.10	\$ 30,074.93	\$ 30,977.18	\$ 31,906.49
Councillor	\$ 26,500	\$ 26,977.00	\$ 28,514.69	\$ 29,370.13	\$ 30,251.21

The typical increases each year over this period have ranged from 1.8% to 5.7%, very similar to CPI increases. Note that 2022/23* stands out as having an increase of 5.7%. This change occurred in response to the impacts Covid-19 had on the Consumer Price Index.

In addition to the above salaries, in 2022/23, pension contributions were increased from 6% to 7% for members of Council, and in 2024/25, pension contributions were increased again from 7% to 8%.

Compiling Information about Remuneration, Pension and Benefits

The foundation for collecting the data with respect to reviewing WHRM Council remuneration and benefits is through AMANS, as well as engaging with the below municipalities to gain further insight into their benefits and remuneration for their elected officials to ensure that the data being presented is consistent with what is being offered by other regions as well. Below is a table outlining the details of these findings. For the purpose of this report, we have reviewed council remuneration for like-sized communities' geography and urban/rural mix.

Table A: Remuneration Comparison 2023/24

	Municipality	Population (2021 census)	Mayor Salary	Deputy Mayor Salary	Councilor Salary
	Region of Queens Municipality	10,422	\$41,730.00	\$20,865.00	\$20,865.00
	Municipality of the County of Cumberland	30,538	\$42,058.00	\$27,639.00	\$25,210.00
	Municipality of the District of Yarmouth	10,067	\$46,814.00	\$32,361.00	\$27,867.00
	Town of Truro	12,954	\$53,373.00	\$33,446.00	\$29,723.00
	West Hants Regional Municipality	19,509	\$60,502.43	\$31,906.49	\$30,251.21
	Municipality of East Hants	22,892	\$64,411.00	\$41,289.00	\$33,030.00
	County of Kings	62,914	\$85,355.00	\$56,402.00	\$47,799.00
	Municipality of the County of Annapolis	21,252	\$71,342.00	\$47,319.00	\$35,671.00
	Cape Breton Regional Municipality	93,694	\$143,838.24	\$54,202.40	\$49,202.40
	Halifax Regional Municipality	439,819	\$176,033.75	\$93,988.33	\$82,652.64
TOTAL (excluding CBRM and HRM)		190,548	\$465,585.43	\$291,227.49	\$250,416.21
AVERAGE		27,221	\$66,512.20	\$41,603.93	\$35,773.74
WHRM/Average		72%	91%	77%	85%

Population Data Source: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=West%20Hants&DGUIDlist=2021A00051208003&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

Table B: Benefits Comparison

Municipality	Health & Dental Benefits	Pension Plan	Travel and Meeting Expense	Parental /Dependent Leave	Adjustment Mechanism
Region of Queens Municipality	No	No	Yes, reimbursement for travel outside of their electoral district (provincial rate). Meals reimbursed at cost, with detailed receipt and CAO approval.	Yes,	Cumulative percentage of the average salary increase of all employees over the prior 4 years OR CPI, whichever is less
Municipality of the County of Cumberland	No	Yes, 6.5% - 9% depending on length of service	Yes, km reimbursement (provincial rate). Breakfast \$20, Lunch \$20, Dinner \$35.	Yes	No
Municipality of the District of Yarmouth	No	No	Yes, reimbursement for mileage and allowances when travelling outside the municipality for meetings or training.	No	CPI (capped at 3.5%)
Town of Truro	Yes	No	Yes, km reimbursement (provincial rate). Breakfast \$15, Lunch \$15, Dinner \$30.	No	Aligned with collective agreement, however they have often not taken it.
West Hants Regional Municipality	No	Yes - 8%	Yes, km reimbursement (provincial rate). Breakfast \$17, Lunch \$20, Dinner \$30	No	CPI
Municipality of East Hants	Yes	No	Yes, travel allowance incorporated into salary based on distance from municipal office. Any additional travel is reimbursed. Breakfast \$18, Lunch\$21, Dinner \$30.	No	CPI
County of Kings	Yes	No	Yes, expense reimbursement not to exceed 20% of total remuneration	Yes	CPI
Municipality of the County of Annapolis	Yes	Yes	Yes, expense reimbursement.	No reference	Aligned with non-union employee increase annually.
Cape Breton Regional Municipality	Yes	Yes - 8%	No reference	No reference	Aligned with collective agreement for CBRM union

Halifax Regional Municipality	Yes	Yes	Yes, expense reimbursement.	Yes	Average Industrial Weekly Earning. Not to exceed 4% for councilors, or 2% for Mayor.
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Table C: Meal Allowance Comparison 2023/2024

Municipality	Incidentals	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
West Hants Regional Municipality	\$5	\$17	\$20	\$30
Truro	\$17	\$15	\$15	\$30
Cumberland		\$20	\$20	\$35
Kentville	\$17.30	\$17	\$17.25	\$45.25
East Hants		\$18	\$21	\$30
Yarmouth County	\$10	\$20	\$20	\$35
Town of Yarmouth		\$15	\$20	\$40
County of Antigonish	\$10	\$15	\$20	\$36
Town of Antigonish		\$8	\$15	\$20
Amherst		\$15	\$20	\$30
Victoria County	\$10	\$13	\$20	\$30
Inverness County		\$13	\$15	\$20
Town of Lunenburg	\$15	\$15	\$20	\$35

Health and Dental Benefits

From the research gathered included in Table B, there is evidence of increasing interest to offer elected officials the option of joining existing employee health and dental plans, at the same rates and shared costs for employees/employer.

Details on the costs associated with the WHRM benefits are outlined below. The elected official, and the municipality would both contribute the below amounts to be able to participate in the plan depending on the level of coverage chosen.

As of April 1, 2024, the rates are as follows:

Benefit Type	Single – Monthly Rate	Family – Monthly Rate
Health	\$145.84	\$378.19
Dental	\$35.21	\$90.83
Employee Assistance Program (paid by the Municipality 100%)	\$3.54	

To be able to participate in the health and dental benefits plan there are eligibility criteria that would need to be met. Additionally, it would be required that all elected officials must enroll for health & dental benefits however, each could waive participation if they have alternate coverage.

The details of a health and dental plan contribution are a little more difficult to estimate, depending on individual choices and family circumstances, but these plans could be extended to Council as a whole for between \$10,000 and \$50,000 annually, depending on the level of participation.

Pension Plan Benefits

Currently our elected officials have the option to participate in our defined contribution pension plan, at the percentage contribution as employees, which is currently 8%. In some municipalities, council members over the age of eligibility for pension contributions, an equal employer contribution is added to the member's monthly remuneration.

Maternity, Parental, Dependent Care Leave

Since the change in provincial legislation to allow for parental leave for elected municipal officials, some municipalities have implemented policies to support this within their organizations, the majority being without pay but with excused leave. Additionally, some municipalities have incorporated expense reimbursement for dependent care needs into their policies as well. This is primarily in response to reducing barriers for broader attraction of candidates to offer in municipal elections and a larger number of younger candidates elected in recent years seeking this type of support. It would be encouraged to consider expanding this to dependent care leave, to support all family members who may require support during various phases of life.

Dependent Care leave is a topic that has become more available across municipal government, while it is not yet a universal benefit for Nova Scotia municipalities, it is something that should be strongly considered if organizations are attempting to support and attract diverse elected officials.

Annual Increase/Adjustment

Remuneration increases are typically tied to the annual Consumer Price Index for all goods in Nova Scotia. The current policy makes it clear to both current officials and potential election candidates and staff when forecasting and developing annual budgets. For the purpose of the policy and report, an annual increase will be defined to be in alignment with the Annual Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index (CPI – All Items) for the Province of Nova Scotia for the previous calendar year and will be effective April 1 for the preceding calendar years and be applied annually until 2028.

Travel and Meeting Expenses

Expenses are currently part of the Municipal Expense Reimbursement policy; and, have been included in this report for review. Many municipalities have similar policies in place where elected officials and staff are reimbursed for travel requirements while performing the duties of the position. Municipalities have policy statements that provide mileage, meal and other claims for officials to attend Council, Committee of the Whole, Committee, and other formal business meetings both within and outside of the municipal unit. Travel by individual Council members to meet with constituents or other purposes are deemed part of the regular duties as well.

This research did not suggest other approaches. The current values for reimbursements are noted below as well as the suggested changes to the values.

NEXT STEPS

The Council Remuneration Policy and Municipal Expense Reimbursement policy be updated as noted, specifically adjusting the annual stipend (remuneration) of all Council Members, including an annual increase in alignment with the Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index (CPI – All Items) for the Province of Nova Scotia effective April 1 for the preceding calendar years until 2028.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The council remuneration and reimbursement values will be increased effective November 1, 2024, and will impact the approved budget for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Based on the proposed remuneration increases, the estimated impact will be a shortfall of \$43,713. Reimbursement benefit is dependant on the individual, but shortfalls are anticipated with any new reimbursement benefits, such as childcare, and health and dental.

This adjustment will be incorporated into the 2025-2026 budgeting process and adjusted accordingly to include other mandatory contributions (i.e. CPP, etc.).

Annual Remuneration

	2020 Salary as per existing policy	Present, 2024 Salary (after annual CPI adjustments)	Proposed Salary – 2024 – 2028 (10% increase / adjustment proposed for Council member)

Mayor	\$ 53,000	\$ 60,502.43	\$ 68,752.66
Deputy Mayor	\$ 27,950	\$ 31,906.49	\$ 37,814.03 (~10% more than Councillor)
Councillors	\$ 26,500	\$ 31,251.21	\$ 34,376.33 (~50% of Mayor)

2020

Remuneration Data

Mayor	\$ 53,000
Deputy Mayor	\$ 27,950
10 Councillors @\$26,500	\$ 265,000
Total Base Pay	\$ 345,950

2020

Annual Pension @ 6% (municipality portion)

Mayor	\$ 3,180
Deputy Mayor	\$ 1,677
10 Councillors	\$ 15,900
Total Pension Contribution	\$ 20,757

2024 - 2028

Remuneration Recommendation

Mayor	\$ 68,800
Deputy Mayor	\$ 37,900
10 Councillors @\$34,400	\$ 344,000
Total Yearly Base Pay	\$ 450,700

2024 - 2028

Annual Pension @ 8% (municipality portion)

Mayor	\$ 5,504
Deputy Mayor	\$ 3,032
10 Councillors	\$ 27,520
Total Yearly Pension Contribution	\$ 36,056

2020 Meal Allowance:

Incidentals	\$5
Breakfast	\$17
Lunch	\$20
Dinner	\$30

2024-2028 Meal Allowance (proposed):

Incidentals	\$10
Breakfast	\$20
Lunch	\$22.50
Dinner	\$35

ALTERNATIVES

Council may consider:

- Making no changes to Councillor remuneration
- Continue to increase Councillor remuneration solely by CPI
- Change Councillor remuneration by an agreed upon amount
- Consider decreasing the number of Councillors, to increase remuneration to reflect a full-time salary.

ATTACHMENTS

- Regional Council Remuneration Report dated 28 October 2019
- Draft Policy of Council Remuneration
- Draft Policy of Parental/Dependent Care Leave Policy
- Municipal Expense Reimbursement Policy

Report Prepared by: 
Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer

Report Prepared by: _____
Sarah Taylor, Human Resource Specialist

Report Prepared by: _____
Deanna Snair, Clerk

Report Review by: _____
Carlee Rochon, Director, Financial Services

Report Approved by: 
Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer