A Meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held in Baddeck on February 23, 2026, at 10:00am with Warden Organ in the Chair.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT

District #1 - Donna Matheson-Lefort

District #2 - Perla MacLeod, Deputy Warden

District #3 - Jess Kerr

District #4 - Rosella Born

District #5 - Fraser Patterson

District #6 – Tim Donovan

District #7 - Jackie Organ, Warden

District #8 – Wanda Hennick

STAFF PRESENT

Leanne MacEachen, CAO

Alix Redden, CFO

Morgan MacInnis, Recorder

Ursula Melski, Manager of Communications

Jessica Klein, Digital Communications Administrator

CALL TO ORDER

Warden Organ called the meeting to order and presented the agenda for approval.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Warden Organ, before asking for approval of the agenda, read the following proclamations and acknowledgments:

I Warden Organ, on behalf of Council proclaim February 2026 as Black History Month in the County of Victoria. We recognize and value the significant contributions that Black Canadians have made and continue to make to Canadian society and recognize the quest for Black

Canadians for equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination in Canada. I encourage all residents to celebrate our diverse heritage and culture and continue to make Victoria County an inclusive community for all. Therefore, I Warden Organ do hereby proclaim February 2026, as Black History Month in the County of Victoria

I warden Organ on behalf of council proclaim March 2026 as Month of La Francophonie. We recognize the richness and vibrancy of the French language, as well as the contributions of Francophones to our culture. Whereas bilingualism constitutes a fundamental Canadian value and is celebrated in all Provinces and Territories in Canada, Therefore I Warden Organ do hereby proclaim March 2026, as Francophone Month in the county of Victoria.

I would like to take a moment of silence to offer our most sincere acknowledgement of the lives lost in Tumbler Ridge British Columbia. We honor each and every person who tragically lost their life, individuals who were deeply loved and valued by their families, friends and community. To their family and friends, we extend our deepest condolences. No words can truly ease your pain, but we hold you in our hearts. May you find the strength in one another and comfort in shared memories. Hold one another close, honour their lives through compassion, and ensure they are never forgotten.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr, seconded by Councillor Hennick to approve the Agenda for February 23, 2026, with the addition of the Audit Committee recommendations.

Motion Carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the January 26, 2026, Meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council were presented for approval.

On Motion of Councillor Matheson-Lefort, seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod it was moved that the Regular Council Meeting Minutes of January 26, 2026, be amended to include the original motion regarding the approval of $225,000 to the Theatre of Baddeck for Phase 2, which failed for lack of a second.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod, seconded by Councillor Donovan to approve the Regular Council Meeting Minutes of January 26, 2026.

Motion Carried.

PRESENTATIONS

BADDECK 4H CLUB

A presentation was delivered by the Baddeck Valley 4H group and Adam Malcolm from ACAP. Within their presentation they focused on the importance of Peters Brook, its history, and ongoing restoration efforts to improve the health of its riparian zone.

Key points of presentation:

- Peters Brook is one of the largest water sources in the Baddeck River watershed and has a long history of use, including farming, forestry, and quarrying.
- A riparian zone is the transitional area between water and land that provides crucial ecological functions, such as filtering water, stabilizing stream banks, controlling floods, and providing food and shelter for wildlife.
- Characteristics of a healthy riparian zone include stable banks, consistent water flow, cool and clean water, nutrient-rich soil, shaded areas, abundant vegetation, and evidence of wildlife activity.
- Restoration work already completed by the Baddeck Valley 4H group and ACAP at Peters Brook includes analyzing river components (rocks, insects, plants) and planting over 600 trees to stabilize banks and improve stream health.
- Future plans involve planting shrub cuttings in eroded areas and enhancing fish habitat through in-stream restoration work.

The presentation highlighted the ongoing commitment of the 4H group and ACAP to protecting and improving watershed health through hands-on ecological restoration and community involvement. The purpose of this presentation was to let Council know of the importance of riparian zone restoration, and that the 4H club is available to assist with future projects in the community.

NORTH HIGHLANDS NORDIC – PAULA MICHAELS

Paula Michaels and Katherine Fitzgerald presented on behalf of North Highlands Nordic (NHN) a funding proposal for facility expansion at the Nordic Centre, accompanied by several letters of support. The proposal includes a 24x30 garage extension to accommodate their new snow groomer, to ensure unobstructed access to equipment and allow for quick and safe emergency responses. Within their presentation NHN emphasized their strong organizational capacity and long-term financial sustainability, highlighting previous successful capital and equipment projects.

Key points of presentation:

NHN discussed their multi-phase facility improvements and equipment purchases:

- Phase One (2020): Facility construction costing $200,000, funded through ACOA and community fundraising, with the majority built by volunteers.
- Phase Two (2022): Improvements costing $167,000, supported by Victoria County ($20,000), Province of NS ($62,000), and NHN fundraising.
- Phase Three (2023): $150,000 in improvements funded by provincial grants, fundraising, and contributions from Gillis Building & Materials.
- Equipment Purchases (2023):
    - ATV for grooming and emergency response, funded by Province of NS, Victoria County, and Cross County NS.
    - Bushhog purchased through NHN fundraising efforts.
    - $437,000 snow groomer purchased with assistance from ACOA, Victoria County, Province of Nova Scotia, and fundraising.
- Additional support included a $10,000 municipal trail grant from Victoria County.

Overall, NHN has invested over $1 million in high-value infrastructure and equipment projects.

Community Engagement and Fundraising

NHN maintains financial sustainability through volunteer-led fundraising and community programs, including but not limited to:

- Chase the Ace
- Weekly breakfast and lunch programs
- Community suppers
- Social fundraising dinners
- Online auctions
- Raffles

Current Funding Proposal Includes

- Quoted proposed project cost: $204,000 (valid until March 2026)
- Provincial grant: $150,000 (application submitted)
- Request to Victoria County: $50,000
- Remaining funding: NHN fundraising efforts

Discussion

Council requested financial statements for the past two years, which NHN confirmed will be provided. NHN also advised that they maintain a contingency fund of $51,000 and continue to implement ongoing strategies to support capital reserves and long-term project sustainability. Council will review the funding request and accompanying financial documentation as part of the upcoming budget discussions.

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NORTH HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY MUSEUM – KEN MURRAY AND KEN DONOVAN

North Highlands Community Museum (NHCM) board members Ken Murray and Ken Donovan presented an overview of the Museum's history, current operations, programming, staffing, and revenue sources. The primary focus of the presentation was to highlight capital needs and future funding requests.

It is noted that Councillor Hennick stepped away from participating in the discussion due to her involvement with the North Highlands Community Museum.

Governance and Staffing

The museum is overseen by a seven-member Board of Directors, including Ken Murray (Chair), Naomi Stockley (Secretary), Josee Sabourin (Treasurer), Ray Fraser, Norm MacDonald, Ken Donovan, and Kaleb DeLeskie. Seasonal staffing includes a manager, Wander Hannick, as well as summer students.

The museum has recently extended its operating season to approximately 110–120 days per year, with the goal of generating sufficient revenue to support the hiring of additional staff.

Priorities and Capital Needs

Urgent priorities include replacing the main fire alarm panel, updating the Steffes backup heating system, remediating septic beds, grounds, and pole fencing, replacing the shingle roof with metal roofing, replacing the exterior side deck, and repairing/upgrading public washrooms and building access.

Discussion

At the request of Council, financials for the past two years will be provided. It was noted that NHCM does not currently maintain a capital budget or reserve but intends to include one going forward. After discussion, it was recommended that all current funding requests for specific repairs, including the washroom, fire alarm, fence, and garden, be clearly itemized and submitted to Council for formal consideration.

RECESS

Warden Organ called for a 15-minute recess.

COUNCIL DISCUSSIONS

1. *STAFF REPORT – NET ZERO COMMUNITY BUILDING PROJECT*

On Motion of Councillor Matheson-Lefort, seconded by Councillor Born to approve the recommendation at the bottom of the Net Zero Community Building Project Report.

Motion Carried.

2. *STAFF REPORT – PHONE AND INTERNET REIMBURSEMENT*

After reviewing information regarding phone and internet reimbursement, at the Committee of the Whole, Council agreed to continue with the current model, whereby members submit documentation of their usage.

INFORMATION REPORT – REQUEST TO WAIVE INTEREST

On motion of Councillor Patterson, seconded by Councillor Donovan it was moved that the individuals involved in the case of waiving interest payments be invited to make a presentation to Council.

Motion Carried.

3. *NSFM SPRING CONFERENCE*

Warden Organ asked Council who would be interested in attending the NSFM Spring Conference in Yarmouth. Councillors Born, Patterson, Matheson-Lefort, Hennick, and Donovan, along with the Warden, indicated their interest in attending. Councillors are responsible for completing their own registration with NSFM and must notify Municipal Clerk, Steff MacLeod, of their intentions to attend for accommodation purposes.

COUNCIL REPORTS

DISTRICT 1

Little Narrows Ferry Operations:

- Following several public inquiries regarding the operation of the Little Narrows Ferry, I sought clarification directly from the responsible authorities to ensure accurate reporting of policies and procedures.
- The ferry operates under clearly defined safety protocols designed to protect both passengers and equipment. Specifically:
    - **Wind Limitations:** Ferry operations are suspended when wind speeds exceed 30 knots.
    - **Ice Conditions:** The ferry does not operate when ice obstructs the crossing. The vessel is not equipped to break through ice, as doing so could damage the ferry cable, creating serious safety and operational risks.
- These measures reflect a commitment to providing a safe and reliable service.
- Based on the limited number of concerns reported this past month, the clearing and salting of our roads in district 1 have generally been effective. One issue was raised through the Warden regarding Dunn Road; this matter was promptly referred to Public Works for follow-up.
- It was recently brought to my attention that the Barra Food Bank received a notice regarding outstanding property taxes.
- As previously reported to Council, a long-serving board member, Michael MacNeil, passed away unexpectedly. Mr. MacNeil had managed many of the organization's administrative responsibilities, and the remaining board members have since been working to identify and organize those matters.
- It has since been determined that, in prior years, Councillor Paul MacNeil, reminded Mr. MacNeil annually to apply for tax relief through the Municipal Grants Program. Unfortunately, this application was not submitted last year. As I was newly elected at the time, I was unaware of this longstanding arrangement.

The Barra Food Bank serves residents in the following areas:

• From the foot of Barrachois Mountain westward, including all communities through to Grand Narrows–Derby Point
• Along Highway 216, including communities as far as Castle Bay
• Along Highway 223 from the Iona community westward
• The Portage Road area
• Alba
• Orangedale
• Whycocomagh
• Little Narrows
• All communities throughout the Washabuck Peninsula

This reflects the full geographic area supported by the Barra Food Bank.

On Motion of Councillor Matheson-Lefort, seconded by Councillor Donovan that Council wave the outstanding property tax balance of $862.76 for the Barra Food Bank in light of exceptional circumstances that led to the oversight of submitting in the annual tax relief application.

Motion Defeated.

During discussion, it was asked whether the organization would be required to make a presentation to Council to state its case. It was expressed that the Food Bank should appear before Council in accordance with the recently discussed approach regarding requests of this nature.

DISTRICT 2

- Everyone is welcome to attend the Senior Lunch that is held every third Thursday at the Middle River Hall from 10am – 1pm.
- I would like to request that Susan Kelley (CBVRCE) be contacted, inviting her to Council to discuss Baddeck Academy. The number of students in the elementary grade is quite high, and some classes are being held in the kitchen classroom. I would like to see if there are any plans to expand the school or conduct a study about adding extensions to the building.

- I would like to send a letter to the Minister of Tourism and Premier Houston expressing concern regarding the closure of Visitor Information Centres across the island. The letter will highlight the importance of tourism to the County and note that the removal of these centres may negatively impact tourism on the island. Warden Organ has agreed to sign the letter at the request of the Deputy Warden.

DISTRICT 3

- There was a winter festival held within the village. With many snow sculptures, games for the children, and a number of events taking place. This event brought a lot of people into the community, and it created a lot of local participation as well. Congratulations to the organizers.
- Reminder also to our area that our winter produce market is held every second week at BOLD, which seems to be a big hit in the area.
- Our high school girls are hosting the provincial basketball tournament this year, and we wish them all the best.
- Branch 53 Legion in Baddeck is hoping to change its name to the Percival Anderson Memorial Legion. Percival Anderson was a citizen from Big Baddeck who received the Victoria Cross in WWI. It would be a fitting event if this took place.
- Congratulations to Laura Dixon who is now the new president of the Legion.
- I also ask if council could send a card to Mr. Rollie Thornhill who is having some health issues right now but was a great supporter of this Municipality over the years.

DISTRICT 4

- On January 28th, the East Coast Music Awards announced that the Gaelic College received its first-ever nomination for Venue of the Year. Congratulations to everyone involved.
- On January 31st, South Haven Hall held a very successful community breakfast by goodwill donation. The next one is coming up February 28th.
- On February 17th, I attended a virtual Fire Modernization Planning session hosted by the Province. It was very informative regarding the future of fire services in our county.
- From February 24th to April 28th, South Haven Hall is hosting square dancing every Tuesday from 7 to 9pm, with details on their Facebook page.
- In St. Ann's Bay, the Community Health Group continues its bi-weekly pop-up market with fresh, affordable produce, senior lunches every Wednesday with presentations beforehand, and community hikes every Saturday. Details can be found on their Facebook page and the St. Ann's Bay Event Sheet.
- Coming up March 7th, there will be a free tax clinic at St. Ann's Bay United Church Hall.

Councillor Born brought forth the idea of potentially inviting Lyle Donovan (Emergency Management and Fire Services Coordinator) to come and do a presentation on Fire Modernization Planning and changes to fire services governance, whether in Committee of the Whole or in a separate session to stay well informed. Staff will investigate organizing a presentation with Lyle but also seek presentations from individuals who offer different perspectives on this topic.

Councillor Born also presented the following:

On Motion of Councillor Born, seconded by Councillor Kerr that the CAO directs staff to develop a pre-Application checklist and submission process for non-profit funding requests received outside the annual grant application process. Including requirements for financial statements, project estimates, and demonstration of public benefit. With a threshold to be considered part of the scope of the work to ensure consistent and complete information is provided to Council prior to consideration.

Motion Carried.

DISTRICT 5

- There were three FCM meetings held last week. One was The Caucus of Atlantic Council, where we discussed *Towards Prosperity*, Don Mills and David Campbells booklet. Secondly, the Public Safety Committee met and had a discussion on the RCMP, particularly the issue of staffing. Finally, the Infrastructure of Transportation Committee made a resolution regarding high-beam LED lights.
- I just received on Friday an email regarding the FCM annual general meeting in Edmonton and registration opens this Thursday the 26th. They have booked a set of rooms and suites for board members and so on. I would like to move to request permission to attend the FCM AGM in Edmonton in early June.

On Motion of Councillor Patterson, seconded by Councillor Matheson-Lefort to request approval to attend the FCM Annual General Meeting in Edmonton in early June.

Motion Carried.

DISTRICT 6

- The Smokey Recreation Center, they have Sunday afternoon jam sessions, with local musicians and refreshments. If you're in the area and want to listen to some good local talent, it is well worth the trip.
- The folks at the Cape Smokey Recreation Society asked me to extend a huge thank you to Bill O'Brian and volunteers who donated, transported, and helped install rink boards at the outdoor rink.

DISTRICT 7

- I attended two community brunches at the Cape North Nordic ski club and St Andrew's Parish. I must say both are highly recommended. The Cape North one is held every Saturday, and I urge people to attend, enjoy a meal, and catch up with friends. Watch for a date in March for the next one at St. Andrew's.
- The Young at Heart Socials held in District 7 are a continued success. The one held on February 11th had 50 in attendance for a meal of Chinese food. Thank you to all that make this outing a success. This week coming up sloppy joes and salads will be served along with a session from Shannon Ingram-Christie. She is going to be talking about wills and other legal topics. She is a lawyer and is born and raised in Neils Harbour.
- Also, on Tuesdays at 10am the Parish Hall is open for a walking session with smoothies and toast to follow.
- I had the pleasure of attending a water colour paint day in Iona with Cassandra, our Senior Safety Officer, had a great time, great lunch and a great discussion. I will go back again.
- I have asked the other Councillors to let me know when an event is going on in their districts and I will also put it out to the residents, if you have an event you would like me to attend, please email me. If I am not busy, I would love to attend as I would like to visit all the areas I can.
- We had a meeting with the RCMP in Ingonish to discuss local events, and they also wanted to put out to Council that there is a new design for their cruisers, which will now be black and white. Their uniform shirts will also be changing from gray to blue.
- I would also like to add again a street light repair is needed at 424 Shore Road South Harbour. The arm is loose, so when it blows it shakes the light and it goes out.
- I would like to take $500.00 out of my district budget for the North Ingonish Legion Branch 105 for their new fundraising committee.

At the request of Council, the RCMP will be invited to a future Council Meeting to discuss the changes in their vehicles and uniforms. Council also requested an update on the status of the formation of a Police Advisory Committee and staff will follow up with information at a later date.

DISTRICT 8

- As we get ready for another storm, these two events in my district are loving the snow!
- North Highlands Nordic hosted Provincials this past weekend with Waden Organ and our MLA Dianne Timmons in Attendance. Thank you to all the Volunteers for their hard work to make this event such a success.
- Also, the Bay St. Lawerence Community Center will be hosting their Snowmobile Rally on March 7th. Please go to their Facebook for more information.
- Congratulations to Myles Dixon for winning a Heat pump that was a Fundraiser for our local Aspy Bay Church. Thank you to everyone that supported this wonderful cause and a great thank you to Dave Wilkie for donating the Heat Pump. It was very much appreciated.
- This weekend, the annual John John Fraser Memorial Bursary Auction will be held from Friday to Monday with all the proceeds going to school scholarships at Cabot and to CBHA.

LUNCH

Warden called for a 30-minute lunch break.

Councillor Kerr was unable to attend the meeting following the lunch period due to prior commitments

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Deputy Warden MacLeod provided an update from the Victoria County Transit Committee. The B2 bus will be going out for quotations for required bodywork repairs. Three quotes will be obtained and presented to Council for review and selection.

MOTIONS/RESOLUTIONS

COST SHARING AGREEMENT FOR J CLASS ROADS – COUNCIL

Every three years, the Department of Public Works for roads provides the Municipality with a three-year cost-sharing agreement for J-class roads. We have received notice that the current

agreement will expire on March 31, 2027, and the Department has requested that the Municipality sign a new agreement by July 3, 2026, if we wish to participate.

On motion of Councillor Donovan, seconded by Councillor Born it was moved that the Warden and CEO be authorized to sign Cost Share Agreement Number 2026-021. The motion was passed at the Council meeting of the Municipality of the County of Victoria held on February 23, 2026.

Motion Carried.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE RECOMMENDATIONS – COUNCIL

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod, seconded by Councillor Donovan to approve the recommendations made at the February 9, 2026, Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Motion denied.

It is recommended that the Committee of the Whole's recommendations be denied and addressed separately, rather than collectively, due to the specific nature of each item.

CAO EVALUATION – COUNCILLOR MATHESON-LEFORT

On Motion of Councillor Matheson-LeFort, seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod that Council direct CAO to direct staff to prepare and issue a Request for Proposals for a third-party CAO performance evaluation, with the scope and evaluation criteria to be approved by the CAO and Council prior to issuance.

Motion Carried.

MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY - COUNCILLOR MATHESON-LEFORT

On Motion of Councillor Matheson-LeFort, seconded by Councillor Donovan that Council affirm municipal advocacy as a core function of Council.

AND FURTHER THAT the Warden be authorized to sign advocacy correspondence where the communication is government-to-government in nature.

Motion Carried.

SIDEWALK PLOWING – DEPUTY WARDEN MACLEOD

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod, seconded by Councillor Matheson-Lefort that Council approve Option 1 from the Staff Report submitted at the February 9, 2026, Committee of the Whole Meeting (County-funded sidewalk plowing) for the 2025–2026 winter season only.

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct the CAO to investigate the legal ownership of sidewalks within the Village of Baddeck and report back.

AND FURTHER THAT staff provide a report identifying which sidewalks the County would or could own in the Village of Baddeck and what such ownership would entail.

AND FURTHER THAT staff provide analysis of area rate implications for sidewalk plowing in both the Village of Baddeck and Ingonish.

Motion Carried.

CORRESPONDENCE

Warden Organ reads correspondence from District 3 Councillor, Jess Kerr:

Dear Warden, fellow Councillors, and Municipal staff,

I'm announcing my resignation as Councillor for District 3 for personal reasons. I would like to thank all voters for District 3 for the opportunity to have been their representative. I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and the Municipal staff for the tremendous support over this last difficult year for our family. It has been an honour to represent District 3 and to work with such diligent Councillors and Staff of the Municipality of Victoria. I certainly wish our great County well in the future.

I thank you all,

Jess Kerr.

Warden Organ officially declared a by-election for District 3. The process of a by-election will be researched and information will follow.

QUESTIONS FROM GALLERY

No questions.

On Motion of Councillor Donovan, seconded by Councillor Born to go In-Camera to discuss a Real Estate and a Personnel matter.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Councillor Donovan, seconded by Councillor Hennick to accept the In-Camera recommendations.

Motion Carried.

NEXT MEETNG

March 23, 2026, at 10:00am.

ADJOURN

Warden Organ made a motion to adjourn at 2:26pm