COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
FEBRUARY 9, 2026

A Committee of the Whole meeting was held in Council Chambers in Baddeck, on February 9, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. with Deputy Warden MacLeod 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

Steff MacLeod, Municipal Clerk and Executive Assistant

CALL TO ORDER

Deputy Warden MacLeod called the meeting to order and presented the agenda for approval with the noted change of Trails Update being postponed.

On Motion of Councillor Donovan seconded by Councillor Born that the Agenda for February 9, 2026, be approved with noted change.

Motion Carried.

APPROVAL OF JANUARY 5, 2026, COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

On Motion of Councillor Hennick seconded by Councillor Matheson-LeFort to approve the January 5, 2026, Minutes.

Motion Carried.

PROPERTY VALUATION SERVICES CORP. (PVSC) PRESENTATION –LAURA MACLEAN, COLIN CURRY

Highlights from the presentation include:

PVSC does:

- Deliver an Assessment Roll to all 49 NS municipalities.
- Deliver ~650,000 Assessment Notices to NS property owners.
- Administer the Capped Assessment Program (CAP) and Seasonal Tourist Business Designation program on behalf of the provincial government.

PVSC does NOT:

- Determine land ownership
- Set tax rates
- Collect taxes
- Create tax policy
- Provide tax relief

3 Approaches to Determine Value:

Sales Comparison

- Analyze sales of comparable properties to determine value and adjust for local market conditions.

Income

- Determine the income a property can earn (after expenses) and convert net operating income to market value.

Cost

- Calculate land value and current cost to replace buildings, then deduct for depreciation.

Appeal Process:

- Should a property owner disagree with their assessed value, classification, or ownership they may file an appeal:2026 assessment appeals must be received by February 12, 2026.
- Instructions on how to file an appeal are included on the assessment notice.

CAP Rate:

- 2.6%

Seasonal Residents:

- Purchase price vs assessed value, why aren't we taxing them on the total price they paid, any talk about non resident rules in NS. Not anything specific, we don't assess to ownership, we assess by market value.

FIRE EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND FUNDING – SCOTT MACKINNON

Mr. MacKinnon, speaking on behalf of Cabot Fire, shared his personal concerns and perspectives with Council regarding the current state of fire services in the municipality. He expressed the view that long-standing recommendations from a past fire service study have largely gone unimplemented, and he believes this has contributed to gaps in training, policy clarity, and overall service consistency across departments.

In his remarks, he voiced concern about what he sees as inconsistent training standards, limited officer training, unclear insurance requirements for trainers, reimbursement challenges, and barriers that he feels prevent effective and compliant firefighter training. He also stated his belief that Cabot Fire has taken independent steps to meet higher training standards and provide specialized mutual-aid services, often without municipal reimbursement.

Overall, Mr. MacKinnon's comments reflected his concern about firefighter safety, municipal liability, fairness in training support, and the need for proactive reform, emphasizing that these views were his own assessment of the current situation.

After the presentation concluded there was discussions between Council and Mr. MacKinnon that addressed the following:

- It was noted that although no one was speaking on behalf of other fire departments, programs introduced in one area can impact other departments across the County.
- Mr. MacKinnon stated that, in his opinion, the training delivered meets the same standards as Level One instructors, and that instruction methods are consistent with training standards used across North America.
- The County had previously reimbursed training costs, but this changed approximately two years ago, and the reasons provided for the change were viewed as unreasonable by Mr. MacKinnon.
- It was clarified that Mr. MacKinnon does not issue formal certification because certification is tied to standardized testing requirements. The training provided results in a certificate of completion, not formal certification to a recognized provincial standard.
- It was acknowledged that the Nova Scotia Firefighters School issues recognized certifications, while Mr. MacKinnon provides certificates upon request but does not certify to an official testing standard.
- A concern was raised that it is unfair to question the qualifications of other departments when they are not present to respond.
- It was noted that a Fire Services Governance Review is currently underway at the provincial level, with anticipated legislative updates. The direction appears to be toward a provincial approach where all firefighters are trained to the same standardized level.

Commented [LM1]: In his opinion,

SIDEWALK PLOWING RECOVERY COSTS – CAO MACEACHEN

CAO MacEachen provided Council with a Staff Report for Sidewalk Plowing Recovery Costs for Council consideration and direction on how these costs will be recovered.

The options included in the report were:

Option 1: Victoria County funds sidewalk snow clearing
Under this option, Victoria County would continue to provide and fully fund sidewalk snow clearing services within the Village of Baddeck and Ingonish.

- Estimated annual cost: $34,000.00
- Cost would be absorbed into the County's operating budget.
- No direct charge to the Village of Baddeck, Ingonish, or their residents.

Option 2: Victoria County charges the Village of Baddeck
Under this option, Victoria County would continue to provide the service but would recover the full cost of sidewalk snow clearing by invoicing the Village of Baddeck annually.

- Estimated annual cost to the Village: $24,000.00
- Cost recovery would be managed through an agreement between the County and the Village.
- Village Commission would determine how the cost is funded (e.g., from general revenues or other mechanisms).

Option 3: Area rate applied to Village of Baddeck and Ingonish residents
Under this option, Victoria County would continue to provide sidewalk snow clearing and recover the cost through an area rate applied to properties within the Village of Baddeck and Ingonish.

- Estimated annual cost to be recovered through area rate: $24,000.00 and $10,000 respectively.
- Cost would be funded directly by Village of Baddeck residents and Ingonish residents.
- Requires establishment of an area rate in accordance with the Municipal Government Act.

Warden Organ said there should be an Option 4 stating that Victoria County will not plow sidewalks after March 2026 until the sidewalks are legally signed over to Victoria County.

It was requested to a get a report on the sidewalks including what the area rate would look like and to look into what it would legally take to owning the sidewalks.

On recommendation of Councillor Born to choose Option 1 for this year only. Councillors Patterson, Kerr, Donovan and MacLeod agreed to this option as well.

Councillors Organ, Hennick and Matheson-LeFort recommended Option 2.

Council directed CAO MacEachen to find out how we can legally own them and a report looking into what ones Victoria County could potentially own within the Village of Baddeck.

CAO PERFORMANCE EVALUATION - COUNCIL

Council discussed the CAO Evaluation process and some highlights from that discussion included:

- One Council member supports the proposed evaluation format and would like to proceed with it.
- Another suggested reviewing what other municipalities are doing and possibly hiring an external consultant.
- One member feels the current format lacks sufficient detail and needs improvement.
- Concerns were raised that Council is not trained in executive performance evaluations and may lack the expertise to conduct a fair, transparent, and unbiased CAO evaluation. It was suggested there is no need to rush the process and that experts would provide more confidence in the outcome.
- There was general support from several members for engaging a third party through an RFP process.
- One member questioned the value of hiring an external consultant, noting that an outside party would not be familiar with Council dynamics or Municipal operations, and expressed concern about expanding the process beyond Council's original direction.
- On recommendation of Councillor Matheson-LeFort, to seek a third party to conduct the evaluation and for Council to contact the NSFM for guidance.
- It was concluded that there is no need for the previously formed CAO Evaluation Committee at this time.

On recommendation of Councillor Matheson-LeFort to get a third party to evaluate and council to contact NSFM.

MUNICIPAL LETTER WRITING ADOCACY – COUNCILLOR MATHESON-LEFORT

Councillor Matheson-LeFort expressed that advocacy is a core municipal function and there is need to clarify advocacy and partisanship and suggested that the Warden should be signing government to government correspondence.

On recommendation of Councillor Matheson-LeFort that the Municipality continue our advocacy and have the Warden sign government letters when it is requested.

NEXT MEETING

March 9, 2026, 10:00 am.

ADJOURN

Deputy Warden MacLeod adjourned the meeting at 11:55pm.