A Meeting of Victoria County Municipal Council was held via Teams on January 26, 2026, at 1:00pm 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

STAFF PRESENT

Leanne MacEachen, CAO

Alix Redden, CFO

Steff MacLeod, Municipal Clerk and Executive Assistant, Recorder

Ursula Melski, Manager of Communications

Jessica Klein, Digital Communications Administrator

ABSENT

District #8 – Wanda Hennick

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, she read the following proclamation:

I, Warden Organ, do hereby proclaim that the month of January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month in the County of Victoria and encourage all our residents to learn more about this disease and support those who are affected by it.

On Motion of Councillor Patterson seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod to remove time limits from Council Meeting Agenda.

Motion Carried.

The discussion that followed this motion was focused on whether agenda timelines should be formally used to help council meetings run more smoothly. It was noted that timelines have historically existed, even if they were not always clearly identified on agendas or consistently followed. The view in favour of timelines emphasized that they support efficiency and structure, while still allowing flexibility to adjust time if a topic requires further discussion. Based on this belief, it was suggested that the matter be put to a vote.

Concerns were raised in opposition, arguing that timelines have not been necessary in many years and could limit open discussion. It was suggested that monitoring or enforcing timelines, or deferring items to a future meeting, could amount to cutting off debate. In response, it was clarified that timelines have appeared on past agendas, including as recently as 2022.

6 to 1 voted in favour of the motion.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod to approve the Agenda for January 26, 2026, with edits.

Motion Carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the December 15, 2025, Meeting of Council of Victoria County Municipal Council were presented for approval.

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod seconded by Councillor Donovan to approve the Regular Council Minutes of December 15, 2025.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Councillor Donovan seconded by Councillor Kerr to approve the Emergency Council Minutes of December 5, 2025.

Motion Carried.

PRESENTATIONS

MP BATTISTE

The following are the highlights of the discussion between MP Battiste and Council:

- An overview of the Federal budget process was provided, including upcoming passage through committees and expected progress in the coming weeks.
- Budget highlights included investments in infrastructure, housing, defense, AI, health infrastructure, and a new rink project, with expectations for projects to begin in the spring.
- Council priorities raised included housing (particularly in rural and aging communities), climate-related water security, coastal protection, infrastructure funding, tourism, Parks Canada collaboration, and the future of the Keltic Lodge.
- Significant Federal investment in housing was noted, with an emphasis on applying a rural lens to upcoming funding programs expected to open soon.
- Coastal protection funding was discussed, with uncertainty around new programs but acknowledgment of ongoing conversations at the Federal level.
- The future of the Keltic Lodge remains under discussion, with potential options including partnerships, redevelopment, or replacement due to the building's condition.
- Collaboration with Indigenous communities was encouraged, emphasizing direct engagement on shared priorities such as tourism, culture, economic development, and emergency services.
- Infrastructure funding pressures related to population growth and service delivery were highlighted, with encouragement for municipalities to apply for available Federal programs.
- Recent Federal actions to address affordability were outlined, including a new groceries affordability measure tied to GST benefits and targeted based on income rather than geography.
- Concerns were raised about higher costs in remote northern areas, including construction and transportation, and requests were made to revisit Northern Resident Tax considerations.
- The Federal approach was explained as focusing support on lower-income households regardless of location, rather than universal geographic benefits.
- The meeting concluded with appreciation for intergovernmental collaboration and interest in continued discussions following further progress on the Federal budget.

CABOT TRAIL RELAY PRESENTATION – DAVE PARKINSON

Mr. Parkinson presented to Council and the following are highlights from the presentation and discussion:

- Requested continued municipal support for the Cabot Trail Relay, a long-standing and highly successful event.
- The 2026 event will mark the 36th year, making it one of the longest-running and most recognized sporting events in Atlantic Canada.
- The event is a significant economic driver for Cape Breton and Nova Scotia, with a 2023 economic impact assessment estimating nearly $2 million in total economic activity, including $1.7 million in Cape Breton.
- The event supported 19 jobs, 17 of them in Cape Breton, and generated Federal, provincial, and municipal tax revenues.
- Participation interest continues to grow nationally, with demand exceeding capacity due to safety, permitting, and banquet limitations.
- Teams now register from across Canada and the northeastern United States, enhancing the national profile of the County.
- The municipality has been a long-time supporter, which the organizers acknowledged and appreciated.
- A request was made for a three-year funding commitment of $30,000 ($10,000 per year), consistent with previous annual support.
- Multi-year funding would provide certainty for planning, as event costs are significant.
- Temporary tenting and banquet costs are a short-term necessity until the Victoria Highland Civic Centre is constructed; runners have indicated strong support for maintaining the banquet even at higher registration fees.
- Councillors expressed strong support for the event, citing its reputation, tourism impact, community pride, and role as an unofficial start to the summer season.
- It was noted that Inverness County also benefits from the event, and additional advocacy support may help secure contributions from them.

Action Items:

- Funding request to be brought forward for consideration during upcoming budget discussions.
- Municipal staff and council to consider supporting advocacy efforts with Inverness County that benefit from the event.

VICTORIA COUNTY HEALTH PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT – DAVE PARKINSON

Mr. Parkinson presented to Council and the following are highlights from the presentation and discussion:

- Emphasis on the importance of flexible local incentive funding to attract and retain healthcare professionals.

- Mr. Parkinson chairs an informal Victoria County Welcoming and Recruitment Committee, initially formed pre-COVID, which has supported healthcare professionals with relocation assistance, welcome baskets, and orientation activities.
- Both Victoria County Memorial Hospital and Buchanan Memorial Hospital provide critical services but face ongoing recruitment and retention challenges due to rural location and competition from larger centers.
- Examples of challenges:
    - Victoria County Memorial Hospital hired an X-ray technologist on a one-year contract; risk of turnover after contract ends.
    - Nurses undergoing specialized training need incentives to stay long enough to complete training.
    - Buchanan Memorial Hospital faces accommodation issues for nurses, OTs, physiotherapists;
- Flexible funding could help:
    - Offset rental/accommodation costs for incoming healthcare professionals.
    - Support short-term incentives to encourage retention and longer-term community integration.
- Proposal: $10,000 for the 2026–2027 fiscal year as a pilot/flexible fund, with full tracking, documentation, and a review at year-end to assess effectiveness.
- Mr. Parkinson highlighted past successes in recruitment efforts and collaboration with hospital foundations, with the need to formalize the committee structure and bank account.
- Councillors expressed support, emphasizing:
    - Pilot/flexible program approach.
    - Coordination with existing committees and foundations.
    - Ensuring funds are tracked and used transparently.

Action Items:

- Formalize the recruitment/retention committee structure, including bank account and documentation process.
- Coordinate efforts between Buchanan Memorial Hospital, Victoria County Memorial Hospital, and hospital foundations.
- Continue pilot program and track spending and outcomes for year-end review.

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod seconded by Councillor Kerr approve $10,000 for healthcare professional recruitment and retention in Victoria County, to be formalized once the committee has its account and structure in place.

Motion Carried.

RECESS

Warden Organ called for a 15-minute recess.

Council reconvened and Warden Organ added an In Camera session to discuss real estate at the end of the council meeting.

COUNCIL DISCUSSIONS

1. *FCM: RURAL DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN – COUNCILLOR PATTERSON*

Councillor Patterson discussed communication from the FCM regarding participation in a rural development initiative through a survey. Councillor Patterson highlighted key points from the information, emphasizing the need to consider rural realities in Federal programs, the importance of allowing rural communities to guide their own development, and the limitations posed by unreliable internet and cell service.

On Motion of Councillor Patterson seconded by Councillor Donovan that Council participate in filling out the survey.

Motion Carried.

2. *THEATRE BADDECK – PHASE 2 FUNDING*

Deputy Warden MacLeod put forward a motion regarding the approval of $225,000 to the Theatre of Baddeck for Phase 2, and it did not receive a seconder, but further discussion proceeded and a new motion followed.

Below are the highlights of the discussion between the CAO, Council and Theatre Baddeck representative, Hannah Ziss:

- Council reviewed a time-sensitive funding request from Theatre Baddeck for phase 2.0 of their project, totaling $225,000. This is in addition to previously approved funding for phase 1.
- The funding is critical to secure additional Federal funding and to allow structural work to proceed, including fire separation and other necessary upgrades. Delays could risk losing the contractor and occupancy compliance.
- Past funding history: Phase 1 received $100,000 and phase 2 initially requested $75,000, which was supposed to come back to Council for approval.
- Ms. Ziss emphasized the need to complete renovations to maximize the building's use for live theatre, concerts, movies, meetings, and community events, noting increased construction costs and design improvements.
- Deputy Warden MacLeod highlighted the importance of timely funding to ensure the project proceeds within the fiscal year and does not miss opportunities for additional grants.
- Ms. Ziss confirmed that the funding is for infrastructure, not operational costs or shows, and supports community development, meeting spaces, and cultural opportunities.

- CFO Redden confirmed that unspent funds from the current budget year (capital projects and housing initiatives) could be reallocated to cover this request without affecting the overall budget balance.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod that Council approve the $225,000 in funding to Theatre Baddeck for phase 2.0.

Motion Carried.

COUNCIL REPORTS

Deputy Warden had questions pertaining to the CAO Report and below follows the discussion that took place:

Deputy Warden MacLeod also asked about the Jones Street roadwork, emphasizing coordination with the Village on pipe repairs before paving to avoid wasted expenditures. CAO MacEachen clarified that the road estimate excludes underground infrastructure and that the road is fully under County responsibility.

Deputy Warden MacLeod confirmed the water rate study should be booked and also requested a staff presentation to explain outreach projects and transit ridership data.

Deputy Warden MacLeod mentioned follow-ups for EMO and EDPC orientation sessions for council members.

DISTRICT 1

- I'd like to acknowledge the "Our Shining Lights" Little Narrows Drive-by and fundraiser on December 22nd. It was a truly heartwarming community event. Many thanks to all the volunteers, The Corner Crew for the music, the fire department, the Ferry Captain and crew, Santa, and everyone who contributed so generously. I'm pleased to share that the final total raised for the Barra Food Bank was $1,835. Thanks also to family, friends, and community members—your support made the evening so meaningful. It was a wonderful celebration of community spirit.

- The 2026 Polar Bear Dip in Iona was a huge success! Thanks to everyone's bravery (and perhaps questionable sanity), they raised $585 and collected 12 bags of food to support the local food bank through the Iona Fire Department. Hot chocolate and community spirit helped thaw frozen fingers—and warmed hearts!

- Keeping with the theme of the importance of the Barra Food Bank:

I would like to acknowledge the recent passing of Michael Anthony MacNeil of Iona, a dedicated volunteer with the Barra Food Bank. His loss is deeply felt by his family and by the community he served. On behalf of Council, we extend our sincere condolences and appreciation for his volunteer service.

On Motion of Councillor Matheson Le-Fort seconded by Councillor Born that Council authorize the preparation of a letter of appreciation to the family of the late Michael Anthony MacNeil in recognition of his volunteer service with the Barra Food Bank.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Councillor Matheson Le-Fort seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod that Council accept the recommendation from the January 5th, 2026 Committee of the Whole meeting to establish a CAO evaluation committee, consisting of Warden Organ, Deputy Warden MacLeod, Councillor Patterson and Councillor Donovan to begin examining the framework for evaluating the Chief Administrative Officer.

Motion Carried.

DISTRICT 2

- Requested to move the gate at the Transfer Station for access to the trail for ATV's, when weather permits it.
- Need to plan for bus parking for next summer, should be talking with the Visitor Information Centre, BABTA and the Co-Op for parking. We need a plan for next May.
- I asked to look with EMO about a Emergency plan for Victoria County. There is a good video from Sussex, NB on YouTube is very nicely done maybe something that we could do.
- Looking at the Municipal Building as a potential host to have Tai-Chi.

DISTRICT 3

- Ongoing community feedback continues to be received on road plowing and road conditions.
- Knox Hall is hosting a family games night on the third Friday of every month; attendance has been strong and the events have been well received.
- A high school basketball tournament was held January 9–10, with the girls' team from Baddeck Academy winning the tournament.
- BOLD hosts a biweekly community produce market offering quality produce at lower prices than many grocery stores, and it is open to the public.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr seconded by Councillor Born to take $1,500.00 from District 3 Budget for the Baddeck Volunteer Fire Department.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr seconded by Councillor Born to take $1,500.00 from District 3 Budget for the Baddeck Lions Club for the Island Project.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr seconded by Councillor Donovan to take $1,500.00 from District 3 Budget for the St. Marks Hall for repairs.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Councillor Kerr seconded by Deputy Warden MacLeod to take $1,500.00 from District 3 Budget for Knox Hall for roof repairs.

Motion Carried.

DISTRICT 4

- Englishtown Ferry Update - As of December 31, 2025, the Englishtown Ferry is out of service for its five-year refit and will be unavailable for about three months. We will keep residents informed of any updates.
- Road Conditions and Maintenance- I've received several concerns regarding road conditions, snow clearing, and salting. These concerns have been forwarded to Public Works for their attention. Additionally, the camera on Kelly's Mountain, which many residents rely on to assess road conditions before traveling, is currently out of service. I've flagged this issue for repair and hope to have it back up and running soon, as it's an important tool for those making decisions about travel, especially for medical appointments.
- Dave AuCoin Memorial Hockey Tournament. A huge thank you to everyone who helped make the 1st Annual Dave AuCoin Memorial Hockey Tournament a success. Players, volunteers, sponsors, and spectators all came together to raise funds for the Victoria Highland Civic Centre Redevelopment. Your support was invaluable.
- St. Ann's Gaelic College Comfort Station- For those passing through, the comfort station at St. Ann's Gaelic College is open 24/7 for public use. The entrance to the left side of the building is available for anyone in need of a pit stop while traveling.
- Proposed Paper Shredding Event Pilot Project. A resident suggested, and I believe it's a great idea, that we host a paper shredding event in our community. This would help residents securely dispose of sensitive documents, protect against identity theft, and reduce the environmental impact of burning paper. I propose we start with a pilot project to host two shredding events, one north of Smokey and one south of Smokey, at the local police station parking lots. The event could be done in collaboration with our police departments. I recommend directing staff to work with the police and other community

partners to organize the events, which would provide a much-needed service to our residents.

On Motion of Councillor Born seconded by Councillor Kerr that Council direct staff to organize a pilot paper shredding event, with two locations (north and south of Smokey), in collaboration with local police stations, to offer residents a secure way to dispose of sensitive documents and reduce waste.

Motion Carried.

- Requested access to printer supplies for Councillors to print municipal documents in preparations for meetings.

On Motion of Councillor Born seconded by Councillor Kerr that Council direct staff to provide Council members access to a municipal printer and supplies as requested.

Motion Carried.

- Cell and internet expense receipts discussion:
    - Council discussed changing the cell phone and Internet policy to remove the requirement for councillors to submit monthly receipts. The fixed allowances of $35 for cell phones and $45 for Internet would remain, with reporting on monthly expense forms. Concerns were raised about differences in actual bills versus allowances, prepay versus post-pay plans, and potential tax implications, including effects on T2200 forms. Council agreed to have staff provide guidance on reporting requirements, tax consequences, and any necessary adjustments before finalizing the policy change.

DISTRICT 5

- Thanked MP Battiste for attending Council today and setting up his constituency office in Boularderie.
- Councillor Patterson discussed a tax account where interest of $170.06 was charged after the property owner did not receive their tax bill due to an address change issue. Staff clarified that policy places responsibility on the property owner, but only Council has authority to waive interest; no motion was made at this time. The CFO and finance staff will review the specific account to determine the facts, after which the property owner may be invited to appear before Council if the matter remains unresolved.

DISTRICT 6

- The Ski Lodge is Closed today for snow grooming, reopening tomorrow. It is operating well overall; the parking lot is consistently full and there is Strong community participation and positive feedback.
- Sunday afternoon jam session has resumed at Smokey Recreation Center, strong attendance and positive response
- The Daycare Centre is Still not open; most recent update indicates a possible mid-to-late February opening and that timeline dependent on successful inspections and meeting all regulatory requirements.

DISTRICT 7

- Roads and snow clearing are a hot topic. All the complaints have been given to the Provincial Department of Public Works. I also urge residents to call and or email the area supervisor, Steve MacDonald with these issues. His contact number is 1-844-696-7737 email steve.macdonald@novascotia.ca
- I have had the privilege of attending two Young at Heart socials held at St Andrew's Hall in Neil's Harbour. Shout out to Karla Williams for coordinating these events which are quite engaging lovely time that are well attended with approx. 35 individuals. Please watch for posts for the upcoming sessions that are held on Wednesday s 1-4
- Diligently working with the Municipality and our MLA Dianne Timmins on finding a permanent solution to the South Harbour Channel blockage and flooding.

DISTRICT 8

Warden Organ read the District 8 Report on behalf of Councillor Hennick.

- All road concerns have been forwarded to the Provincial Department of Public Works.
- Still waiting on several streetlights to be repaired or replaced.

MOTIONS/RESOLUTIONS

On Motion of Warden Organ seconded by Councillor Matheson-LeFort to hire a contractor at the maximum cost of 2,500.00 to open the channel at South Harbour which is blocked and causing flooding to local residents.

Motion Carried.

CORRESPONDENCE

Warden Organ thanked all the organizations and other municipalities for Christmas cards

QUESTIONS FROM GALLERY

No questions.

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod seconded by Councillor Donovan to go In-Camera to discuss a Real Estate matter.

Motion Carried.

On Motion of Deputy Warden MacLeod seconded by Councillor Born to accept the In-Camera recommendations.

Motion Carried.

NEXT MEETNG

February 23, 2026, at 10:00am.

ADJOURN

Warden Organ made a motion to adjourn at 3:56pm.