



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

Minutes - Draft

Council

Municipal Hall
1229 Esquimalt Road
Esquimalt, B.C. V9A 3P1

Monday, March 2, 2026

6:00 PM

Esquimalt Municipal Hall

THE REGULAR MEETING OF COUNCIL RECONVENES AT 7:00 PM WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

Present: 7 - Mayor Barbara Desjardins
Councillor Ken Armour
Councillor Andrea Boardman
Councillor Meagan Brame
Councillor Duncan Cavens
Councillor Jacob Helliwell
Councillor Tim Morrison

Councillor Helliwell attended the meeting via conference call.

Staff: Dan Horan, Chief Administrative Officer
Deb Hopkins, Corporate Officer/Director of
Corporate Services
Ian Irvine, Director of Financial Services & IT
Matt Furlot, Fire Chief
Terése Finegan, Manager of Economic Development
Jonah Ross, Recording Secretary

1. CALL TO ORDER - WURTELE ROOM

Mayor Desjardins called the Regular Council meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

I. RESOLUTION TO CLOSE THE MEETING PURSUANT TO SECTION 90 OF THE COMMUNITY CHARTER

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Brame: That pursuant to Section 90 (1) (a), (i), and (m) of the Community Charter, the meeting be closed to the general public to discuss personal information about an identifiable individual who holds or is being considered for a position as an officer, employee or agent of the municipality or another position appointed by the municipality; the receipt of advice that is subject to solicitor-client privilege, including communications necessary for that purpose; and a matter that, under another enactment, is such that the public may be excluded from the meeting. Carried Unanimously.

II. CLOSED MEETING

III. RECONVENE THE REGULAR MEETING OF COUNCIL AT 7:00 PM IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

Moved by Councillor Brame, seconded by Councillor Boardman: That the Regular Meeting of Council be reconvened at 7:03 PM. Carried Unanimously.

Councillor Armour encouraged us to be mindful of the potential implications that their decisions have on Indigenous peoples and to consider the common interests shared with neighbouring First Nations governments who are also making decisions and passing laws that support a sustainable region.

2. INTRODUCTION OF LATE ITEMS

There were no late items.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Brame: That the agenda be approved as circulated. Carried Unanimously.

4. PUBLIC INPUT ON AGENDA ITEM 5

Dwight Ince, resident, expressed concern regarding budget items being considered individually, outside of the broader budget, and requested clarification on the process.

5. STAFF REPORTS

1) [26-070](#) Staffing Assessment, Staff Report No. FIRE 26-002

The Fire Chief gave a presentation and responded to questions from Council regarding overtime and staffing needs, the Fire Department's established levels of service, and the Township's fire safety rating.

Council commented that decisions would be determined after all reports on the agenda have been presented.

Staff responded to further questions from Council regarding costs and qualifications for the Fire Inspector position, opportunities to share inspection services among supplemental staff or with other Fire Departments, and the impacts of overtime on staff.

2) [26-086](#) Supplemental Information for 2026 Budget – Local Grants, Staff Report No. SI-26-006

Councillor Cavens recused himself and left the meeting at 7:43 PM due to his involvement as a board member with an organization which receives funding through the Local Grant Program.

The Manager of Economic Development introduced the report. Staff responded to questions from Council regarding the grant funding scenarios presented, timelines for grant disbursements, and items not funded through the Local Grant Policy ADM-83.

Councillor Cavens returned to the meeting at 7:51 PM.

- 3) [26-084](#) Supplemental Budget Information - Advertising, Staff Report No. ADM-26-009

The Director of Corporate Services introduced the report, and responded to questions from Council regarding public notice requirements, newspaper advertising options, and the Township's e-mail subscription service and newsletter.

- 4) [26-091](#) 2026 Financial Plan Update, Staff REport No. FIN-26-006

The Director of Financial Services and IT gave a presentation regarding updates to the 2026 Draft Budget.

Council commented that decisions on the Police Budget should occur at the next budget discussion, after the City of Victoria has made decisions on the budget.

Council commented that discussion of any reductions to infrastructure reserve contributions should be guided by information regarding short and medium term impacts, and risks of depleting reserves.

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Morrison: That Council direct staff to provide information on the short term impacts of a reduction of infrastructure reserve contributions.

Council commented that a review of presentation materials previously received may be sufficient to avoid delay and additional staff work.

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Morrison: That this item be tabled until discussion of other items is complete. Carried Unanimously.

Council comments included the following:

- Advertising in a neighbouring municipality's newspaper may not be the most effective way to reach residents, especially in an increasingly online information environment.
- The advertisements included under this item are not statutory requirements.
- Online engagement is becoming more common across age groups, and allows self-service without the delays of print media.

- Cost savings to be achieved through a reduction of the advertising budget are minimal.
- Advertising contributes to the public's perception of transparency in governance.
- Victoria News readership statistics show that 35% of readers are over the age of 55; newspaper advertising may be an important tool for engaging community members in this age group.
- Part of the advertising budget is used to send letters to residents regarding bylaw, construction, and parking changes; scaling back measures to notify residents of changes which impact them would be concerning.
- Staff's recommendation to maintain this funding reflects the continued effectiveness of these tools for public engagement and outreach.

Moved by Councillor Morrison, seconded by Councillor Brame: That Council direct staff to implement service reductions to advertising in Corporate Services, Engineering and Public Works, and Communications by eliminating them from the 2026 budget. Defeated with Mayor Desjardins, and Councillors Armour, Boardman, Brame, Cavens, and Helliwell Opposed.

Councillor Cavens recused himself and left the meeting at 8:24 PM due to his involvement as a board member with an organization which receives funding through the Local Grant Program.

Council comments included:

- Organizations approved for grant funding in 2026 have not been provided notice regarding Council's budget review; any review of this budget should be deferred to 2027 to ensure they are aware and able to provide input.
- The budgeted amount could be reallocated to ease budget pressures.

Councillor Cavens returned to the meeting at 8:28 PM.

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Armour: That Council:
1) approve the conversion of the three Temporary Firefighter FTEs to permanent positions and reduce the proposed overtime in the budget to \$50,000; and
2) defer the creation of the Fire Inspector FTE to 2027.

Council comments included:

- Conversion of the three temporary positions will not have a significant impact on the budget.
- While staff recommended that the Fire Inspector position be included in the Five-Year Financial Plan if deferred from this year's budget, this may constrain the next Council; allowing an opportunity for review during the next Council term is preferred.
- Although the need for the Fire Inspector position is understood, residents

are concerned regarding property tax rate increases.

- Delaying necessary expenditures can also constrain the next Council.
- Deferral of the Fire Inspector position would provide an opportunity to gather more data, and assess whether additional Firefighter positions can create any capacity for inspections.

By way of consensus, Council agreed to split the main motion to consider each request separately.

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Armour: That Council approve the conversion of the three Temporary Firefighter FTEs to permanent positions and reduce the proposed overtime in the budget to \$50,000. Carried Unanimously.

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Morrison: That Council defer the creation of the Fire Inspector FTE to 2027. Carried with Mayor Desjardins, and Councillors Armour and Brame Opposed.

The Director of Financial Services and IT presented a review of information regarding long term capital funding. Staff responded to questions regarding funding allocation, the anticipated impacts of reserve contribution scenarios over time, and the risks of deferring contribution increases.

Council comments included:

- Deferring necessary increases will pass on costs and risks to future Councils' financial flexibility.
- If infrastructure reserve contributions are maintained at 3%, the property tax rate increase would be anticipated to be 11.97% through other reductions approved; an increase below 12% is supportable..
- Infrastructure maintenance is a core municipal responsibility that cannot be effectively delivered without sufficient funding.
- Funding levels below 3% should not be ruled out given the need to manage the property tax rate increase, and the significant portion of the budget which is inflexible.
- Reducing contributions to 2.5% could be supportable in the current budget environment.
- The 3% contribution level only begins to address the deficit, and lower amounts will worsen the problem for next year's budget given the compounding effects on the deficit.
- While this item could be easily reduced to manage the current budget, the cumulative increases recommended by staff reflect a concerning gap in funding that needs to be addressed.

Moved by Councillor Armour, seconded by Councillor Brame: That Council maintain annual infrastructure reserve contributions at 3%. Carried Unanimously.

Staff responded to questions from Council regarding outstanding business from the February 9, 2026 Special Committee of the Whole meeting, regarding potential new impact assessments for third party benchmarking opportunities, and a brief on new initiatives to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Council commented that these impact assessments will produce information that will help guide future budget discussions, and identify opportunities to improve long term sustainability.

Moved by Councillor Cavens, seconded by Councillor Armour: That Council:

- 1) Direct staff to prepare a project backgrounder/impact assessment to initiate the 3rd party benchmarking analysis for revenue.
- 2) Direct staff to prepare a project backgrounder/impact assessment to initiate the 3rd party benchmarking analysis for operating budget/service delivery; and
- 3) Direct staff to brief Council on staff’s potential initiatives on efficiency/effectiveness prior to development of Council’s 2026-2030 strategic plan. Carried Unanimously.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Dwight Ince, resident, expressed concern regarding the effectiveness of current reserve fund policies, and requested that Council consider reallocating reserve funds to reduce the property tax rate increase.

Matthew Brandwood, resident, requested that Bylaw No. 3142 be reviewed, as its implementation of Bill 44 requirements for Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing was subject to a compressed timeline, and other communities have been able to implement alternative approaches; a continuation of current trends will otherwise have concerning results on the community over the years to come.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Councillor Armour, seconded by Councillor Boardman: That the the Regular Council meeting be adjourned at 9:09 PM. Carried Unanimously.

MAYOR BARBARA DESJARDINS

DEB HOPKINS,
CORPORATE OFFICER
CERTIFIED CORRECT

THIS DAY OF , 2026