



COUNCIL MEETING

Meeting Minutes: February 23, 2026

This meeting was held in Town Hall and was livestreamed on YouTube.

(1) CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Andrew Zebian called the meeting to order at 5:11 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Andrew Zebian
Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell
Councillor John Andrew
Councillor Samantha Hamilton
Councillor Cate Savage
Councillor Cathy Maxwell

STAFF: Chris McNeill, Chief Administrative Officer
Victoria Martin, Deputy Clerk

REGRETS: Councillor Rob Baker

Mayor Andrew Zebian respectfully acknowledged that Kentville is on the traditional and unceded land of the Mi'kmaq People. The Town honours their deep connection to this land, past, present, and future; and also recognizes and honours the contributions and heritage of African Nova Scotians whose ancestors have shaped and enriched this community for generations.

Mayor Andrew Zebian extended his deepest condolences, on behalf of the town of Kentville and council, to the passing of the mother of Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, who passed away on the weekend at age 97. He noted that she had a very long and great life, and added that his thoughts were with Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell and her family at this time.

DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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(2) APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Item 4.b, Skateboard Kentville presentation, was postponed due to the weather and will be rescheduled in the following months.

Item 5.h, Taxation of business park property, was added.

It was moved by Councillor John Andrew, seconded by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell that the agenda of February 23, 2026, be approved as updated.

MOTION CARRIED

(3) APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

(a) January 27, 2026, Council Meeting Minutes

There being no changes, the minutes were approved.

(b) January 12, 2026, Special Council Meeting

There being no changes, the minutes were approved.

(4) INFORMATION REPORTS

(a) Downtown Kentville Business Community (KBC) presentation – Julie Ogilvie & Gary Morse

Julie Ogilvie, Executive Director of the downtown business community presented to Council regarding a proposed change to the KDCL funding model. She outlined that Council had advised in January that KDCL funding would be reduced from approximately \$141,758 to \$46,044, unless the downtown area rate was increased from 11.5 cents to 35 cents, effectively tripling the levy on downtown businesses.

KDCL characterized the proposed funding reduction as a 68% cut, stating it would fundamentally undermine the organization's ability to operate. She emphasized that KDCL's funding historically functioned as a shared investment model, with residential, commercial, and industrial taxpayers contributing through an economic development levy that cost the average household less than \$8 annually.

KDCL disputed the assertion that earlier funding mechanisms were not permitted under legislation, noting that previous funding was collected as a general economic development levy and granted to KDCL, which they stated is allowable under sections 56 and 75 of the Municipal Government Act. They noted Council's 2025 decision to shift to a commercial-only area rate, with the funding shortfall covered through general revenues for the current year.

The presenters argued that despite overall Town revenues increasing by approximately 7.8% due to assessment growth, KDCL funding is being significantly reduced. They

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stated KDCL's funding represents less than 1% of the Town's total revenue budget and that reducing it would not result in meaningful tax relief but would significantly reduce economic development capacity.

KDCL described its organizational structure, including one full-time Executive Director, part-time staff support, a volunteer board of nine business owners, and several subcommittees. They cautioned that at the proposed \$46,000 funding level, KDCL would be unsustainable and would be required to cease operations, referencing a previous defunding in 1999 that led to increased downtown vacancies.

The presentation detailed KDCL's activities and outcomes, including major seasonal activations (Multicultural Festival, Pumpkin People, Holly days, Winter Warm-Up), extensive promotional campaigns, grant programs, facade improvements, business support, advocacy, and over \$160,000 in external funding secured in recent years. KDCL also highlighted its role in advocacy for downtown businesses, including addressing concerns related to construction, safety, parking, and homelessness.

KDCL advised that reserves have been significantly depleted, with approximately \$15,000 remaining, and stated that to maintain current service levels in the next fiscal year, funding of approximately \$187,000 would be required. The presentation concluded with a request that Council give full consideration to KDCL's role, performance, and the long-term implications of reduced funding.

Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell asked:

- Why is there no line item for office rent in the 2025–26 and 2026–27 budgets? KDCL advised that office rent is not incurred because the Board President, Paul Dixon, provides office space at no cost. A \$5,000 placeholder was included in the current year budget in case new space was required, but free space continues to be available.
- What amount will remain in KDCL reserves as of March 31, 2026? KDLC responded, approximately \$15,000, assuming projected revenues and expenses materialize as outlined in the report.
- Is the projected \$36,131 deficit intended to be covered using reserves? KDLC responded that yes, the deficit is planned to be funded from KDCL's reserve balance.
- Does KDCL have audited financial statements available for Council review? KDLC advised that audited financial statements from the previous year are available and will be provided to Council upon request.

Councillor Samantha Hamilton asked:

- How many businesses operate downtown, and how many are KDCL members? KDLC responded that all businesses within the C1 zone are automatically members. Approximately 140 businesses and 17 organizations are listed on the downtown walking map.

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- How does KDCL ensure broad representation of differing views within the downtown business community?
KDCL gathers input through surveys, direct correspondence, and in-person outreach. Common themes and overarching concerns are identified and used to guide actions intended to reflect the majority of members.
- How does KDCL address board diversity?
KDCL actively seeks diversity across business types and sectors, in addition to traditional diversity considerations. The board includes representatives from various industries, such as retail, professional services, property management, construction, and real estate.
- How does KDCL's marketing differ from or complement Town-led marketing and events?
KDCL works in close coordination with the Town. While the Town often leads event delivery, KDCL focuses on strategic business activation, aiming to convert event traffic into downtown sales. The intent is to complement municipal events with business-focused strategies.
- How does KDCL ensure ongoing alignment and collaboration with the Town?
Alignment is maintained through regular communication, Town staff representation on the KDCL board, and a Council representative on the board. KDCL described this relationship as essential to the organization's operation.

Councillor Cate Savage asked:

- Could KDCL assist with the intake and evaluation of applications under a proposed Community Investment Fund, particularly for accessibility-related improvements?
Yes. KDCL confirmed it has a dedicated façade improvement subcommittee capable of administering evaluation and intake.
- Would KDCL recommend continued support for new business grants alongside façade programs?
Yes. KDCL stressed the importance of its new business stream, which provides up to \$2,500 in non-matching funding, often used for signage, and noted that more funding recently went to new businesses than to matching façade grants.

(Councillor Cate Savage's comments were limited by the Chair to questions only, as the item was for information.)

Councillor Cathy Maxwell asked:

- When was the C1 zone designated as KDCL's area of focus, and by which Council?
The designation was made by the Council of the day in 2013, when KDCL was reactivated. At that time, the decision was taken for KDCL to focus on downtown economic development, with broader economic development remaining a municipal responsibility.

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- When was the funding model established requiring contributions from all assessment categories, including residential and non-downtown businesses? The economic development levy was approved in 2013–2014, based on a report from the former CAO recommending a general tax levy (not an area rate) reflecting the town-wide benefit of a vibrant downtown.
- Have businesses outside the downtown core been surveyed regarding their support for paying the levy? KDCL advised it has not conducted a formal survey but noted that only one business outside the downtown core has raised concerns, and no objections have been received from businesses in the industrial park.

(5) RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) Large Scale Housing Housekeeping Amendments (First Reading)

It was moved by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, seconded by Councillor Cathy Maxwell that Council give First Reading to the proposed amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law related to the Large-Scale Housing and Community Development framework, as outlined in Appendix A of the staff report, and direct staff to schedule a Public Hearing.

MOTION CARRIED

(b) Rezone 160 Main Street (First Reading)

It was moved by Councillor John Andrew, seconded by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell that Council give First Reading to the proposed map and text amendments to the Land Use Bylaw, to permit a change of use within an existing building and to rezone 160 Main Street (PID 55246573) from the One and Two Unit Dwelling (R2) Zone to the Medium Density Residential (R3) and direct staff to schedule a Public Hearing.

MOTION CARRIED

(c) Award Mitchell Brook Culvert Replacement

It was moved by Councillor Cathy Maxwell, seconded by Councillor Samantha Hamilton that Council approve the award of Mitchell Brook Culvert Replacement to Hughes Excavating Limited as per lowest bid in tender submission of \$600,000 including contingency & non-recoverable HST.

MOTION CARRIED

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(d) Policy 110 - Targeted Income Property Tax Exemption

It was moved by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, seconded by Councillor John Andrew that Council adopt the Targeted Income Tax Exemption Policy, as attached, effective for the 2026-2027 taxation year.

MOTION CARRIED

(e) Recommended Tax Write Offs

It was moved by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, seconded by Councillor Cathy Maxwell that Council approve the write-off of outstanding property taxes including interest totaling \$ 1,474.33 for assessment account numbers 10738318 and 10992672 that were revested in Crown.

MOTION CARRIED

(f) Bylaw 204 - Partial Tax Exemption (First Reading)

It was moved by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, seconded by Councillor John Andrew that Council Give first reading to Bylaw 204 respecting partial tax exemption.

MOTION CARRIED

(g) Nominating Committee Report

It was moved by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, seconded by Councillor Cathy Maxwell that Council approve the following appointments to Committees and Water Commission effective February 23, 2026, to December 31, 2027:

**Finance and Audit Committee:
Kabindra Adhikari**

**Water Commission:
Jaimie Peerless**

**Planning Advisory Committee:
Carol Goodwin**

MOTION CARRIED

(h) Taxation of Business Park Property

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It was moved by Deputy Mayor Debra Crowell, seconded by Councillor John Andrew that Council authorize the mayor to confirm with MLA John Lohr and the Nova Scotia Legislative Counsel Office that Town of Kentville is agreeable and supportive of the 1983 Act Relating to Taxation of Industrial and Commercial Properties in the Annapolis Valley Regional Industrial Park, being Chapter 76 of the Acts of 1983, being amended by adding "classified as industrial or manufacturing, including food storage, processing and packaging businesses," immediately after "Kentville" the second time it appears.

Councillor Cathy Maxwell asked how many businesses were located in the business park, and how many would potentially be affected by a tax increase. Staff advised that an inventory has not been completed, but indicated that the vast majority of businesses in the business park would likely be subject to a tax increase, with only a small number falling under manufacturing or processing categories that may be treated differently.

Councillor Cate Savage asked if there was an understanding of why MLA John Lohr did not want industrial or manufacturing businesses included. CAO Chris McNeill stated that they had not spoken directly with the MLA on this matter and therefore could not speak to the rationale. The only comment previously received was that the MLA indicated he "couldn't do that to the bigger [businesses]," without further explanation.

Councillor Cate Savage asked if based on current estimates, would the proposed change generate approximately \$300,000 in additional revenue, and when would it take effect? It was confirmed that the estimate is approximately \$300,000 in additional revenue, and that the change would take effect April 1, 2026, impacting the 2026–27 fiscal year.

MOTION CARRIED

(6) COUNCIL REPORTS

Mayor Zebian noted that council members' monthly reports were included with the agenda in the meeting documents. He asked if there were any comments or questions on them.

Councillor John Andrew thanked Town of Kentville CAO Chris McNeill, Kentville Fire Chief, Scott Hamilton, and Kings County CAO for signing the Intermunicipal Fire Services Agreement.

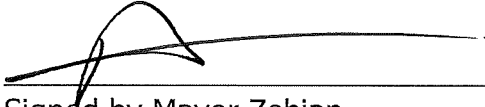
(7) ADJOURNMENT

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There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:55 p.m.



Signed by Mayor Zebian

Mar 23/26

Approval Date