

**News from our Provincial Council - Dave Ritcey**

*Continued from page 5*

province.

Nurses graduating from post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia cannot work as travel nurses in the province for one year following graduation. A travel nurse is a nurse who works in Nova Scotia under a government contract with a staffing agency, travel nurse agency or organization that supplies nurses on a contract basis; there are more than 350 travel nurses working Nova Scotia at any given time

**Electronic Referral System Expands to Include MRIs & Ultrasounds**

More patients will see better communication around referrals with the addition of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and ultrasound tests to the e-referral system.

Patients who provide an email address receive automatic notifications when the referral is sent, when an appointment is booked and if the referral is updated. The referring provider also receives the notifications.

This system provides better tracking, review and co-ordination of referrals. Patients still choose where they receive care and receive better information on the status of their referral.

**Suicide Crisis Helpline 9-8-8 Launches**

Nova Scotians thinking about attempting suicide or worried about someone else who may be thinking about suicide now have another place to turn to for help.

The new 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline provides urgent, live, trauma-informed support by phone and text 24 hours a day, every day of the year. As of November 30, it is available in every province

and territory in Canada.

The 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline, available across the country, is funded by the Government of Canada, managed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto and delivered through mental health partners in provinces and territories.

Staff from Nova Scotia Health, IWK Health and the Office of Addictions and Mental Health have been active participants in the planning and launch of 9-8-8.

People who call or text 9-8-8 can communicate with trained crisis responders in either English or French. The new line will also help streamline access to other national resources. For example: through 9-8-8, Indigenous people will also be able to access the Hope for Wellness Helpline, which provides immediate, non-judgmental, culturally competent and trauma-informed emotional support, crisis intervention or referrals to community-based services. Children and young adults in Canada in need of mental health supports and crisis services will also be able to connect with Kids Help Phone.

Nova Scotians can continue to access the provincial mental health and addictions crisis line toll-free at 1-888-429-8167, 24 hours a day, seven days a week for themselves or someone they are concerned about. The provincial crisis line connects Nova Scotians to trained clinicians and is available to anyone across the province. The 9-8-8 service is intended to provide an additional, three-digit option.

**Dave Ritcey is MLA, Truro-Millbrook-Bible Hill-Salmon River. He can be reached by telephone at 902-897-0884 or by e-mail at mlaritcey@bellaliant.com.**

**News from our Municipal Council - District 9**

*Continued from page 5*

encourage enough for you, the residents, to come to the next round of consultations to be informed and ask the questions and share your concerns and ideas!

Upland Planning and Design is preparing a draft county-wide planning strategy and land use bylaw which will hopefully be complete by early March 2024. The planning team will be rolling out another community engagement program shortly thereafter to solicit feedback on the draft documents and make changes as appropriate. Residents should monitor our project website at <https://www.colchester.ca/plan-it-colchester> for updates, background information and a schedule of upcoming engagement events.

By now residents have received their assessments in the mail from Property Valuation Services Corporation (PVSC). In most cases property values have gone up yet again. I have heard from several residents who have valid concerns.

To start, it's important to note that the "capped assessment" or "taxable assessed value" is the amount you will be taxed on, not the "assessed value" which is typically much higher.

Like everyone, over the past number of years the Municipality has faced rising costs in most aspects of its operations. There are also many competing demands and challenges involved in Council's annual budget process. What many may not know is that a large portion of the property tax you pay to the Municipality is actually transferred to the province for services like policing and education. These amounts increase year after year and are not within the Municipality's control. Therefore, Council must adjust its annual operating budget accordingly to accommodate for these rising costs.

The remaining portion of your property tax goes toward municipal services like waste collection, public works, emergency/protective services, economic development, administration, and community development services such as planning, building inspections, animal control, and recreation.

Colchester Council has a proven track record of careful spending, low debt, and sound financial planning. Over the past six years our tax rates have only gone up once (i.e., by half a cent in 2019) to meet rising demands. Although it is too early to tell what the 2024/25 budget or tax rates might look like, I am confident Council will continue to maintain high quality services as affordably as possible for its residents.

For those who may qualify, details of Colchester's Low Income Municipal Tax Assistance Program for 2024 will be available on March 1st on the Municipality's website. Anyone with questions relating to their property assessment should contact PVSC at 1-800-380-7775, 902-893-5800 or [inquiry@pvsc.ca](mailto:inquiry@pvsc.ca).

In closing, I would like to take a moment to congratulate Debbie Howell and also Roger Morrissey on their recent retirements and wish you both well on the next chapter of your lives.

A big Happy 89th Birthday wish to Jean Barnhill, whom I wish you good health for many years to come. My thoughts are with Mennica Durling (Nina) on the passing of her partner Garnet Hume. Also, sorry to hear of the passing of Len Brandstad, a resident of Debert, who was a volunteer with Colchester Ground Search and rescue for 33 years. My thoughts are with his wife Gwen and family.

**Marie Benoit is Colchester municipal councillor for District 9. She can be reached at 902-324-9011 or [mboenoit@colchester.ca](mailto:mboenoit@colchester.ca)**



**CULGIN**  
CONSTRUCTION LTD.

- ◊ FILL ◊ GRAVEL ◊ ROAD CONSTRUCTION
- ◊ EXCAVATING ◊ TRUCKING ◊ DOZER
- ◊ SEPTIC TANK INSTALLATION
- ◊ NEW HOME SITE PREP

781 Belmont Road  
Belmont, NS B0M 1G0  
Tel: 902-662-3867  
Email: [sculgin@eastlink.ca](mailto:sculgin@eastlink.ca)

**Wage Increases for Early Childhood Educators**

Early childhood educators and employees working in licensed child-care centres will receive benefits and pensions for the first time. The government is raising the wages of early childhood educators (ECEs) and introducing a benefits and pension package for all employees of the licensed sector.

"ECEs and support staff do incredible, valuable work and we know that a strong, stable early learning and child-care system means providing programs and benefits that support staff working in the sector," said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Becky Druhan. "We heard from the sector that balancing affordability while implementing a health benefits and retirement plan is crucial. We heard, we listened, and now we are delivering."

ECEs working in provincially licensed and funded child-care centres and family home agencies will receive hourly wage increases ranging from about \$3.14 to \$4.24. All employees will be included in a comprehensive group benefits and pension plan.

The wage increase will be

for ECEs - including those working as inclusion co-ordinators - assistant directors, directors and family home consultants. Based on education and experience, wages range from \$22.91 to \$28.78 per hour for ECEs Level 1, 2 and 3, and up to \$34.54 for ECEs in leadership roles.

Group benefits will be provided by the non-profit Health Association Nova Scotia and a modern defined-benefit pension through CAAT Pension Plan, also a non-profit.

These initiatives will cost \$111 million beginning in 2024, with the Province funding \$75.7 million and \$35.3 million provided through an agreement with the federal government.

The new benefits and wages will be phased in as follows: All employees will have access to an Employee and Family Assistance Program as of January 1; the wage increase will take effect April 1, 2024; employers will start enrolling in group benefits and the pension plan in May 2024, with full enrolment by the end of 2024 and the Province will fund employers to provide retroactive pension contributions to January 1, 2024.



**Millen Farms**

80 Little Dyke Road RR #1 Great Village 902-662-3848

**SUPPORT LOCAL PRODUCERS**

**Frozen Blueberries**  
**IN STORES NOW**  
**SHOP LOCAL**



**Lawrence R. Nicoll**  
NOVA SCOTIA LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER  
Parrsboro - Nova Scotia  
902-254-3334 or [LRN@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:LRN@ns.sympatico.ca)

Local Landscape photographs make wonderful gifts for birthdays, Christmas and retirement

Choose from samples at:  
[www.LRNphotographic.ca](http://www.LRNphotographic.ca)

**LRN PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICES**

**School is in session...  
DRIVE CAREFULLY**

SPONSORED CONTENT

**How the emerging green hydrogen sector will help green Nova Scotia's grid**

Nova Scotia is on the verge of becoming a global leader in the green hydrogen sector, helping reduce CO2 emissions globally while adding jobs and benefits to our communities. Thousands of direct and indirect jobs and millions of dollars invested in our communities, all through turning our incredible wind resources into green fuels.

But among all this excitement, what's often forgotten is how this will make Nova Scotia's electricity grid cleaner, greener, and more reliable.

Wind turbines generate electricity when the wind blows. This seems simple enough, but the catch is that the wind doesn't blow consistently all the time. Sometimes it's strong, sometimes it's weak, and other times it's not blowing at all. This variability means that the amount of electricity produced by wind turbines can fluctuate greatly. When there's a lot of wind, turbines can generate a lot of electricity, but when there's little or no wind, they generate much less.

Due to this fluctuation, the electrical grid is kind of a big balancing act. It can be difficult to add wind or other renewables to the grid, as it constantly needs to match the amount of electricity being used (demand) with the amount of electricity being produced (supply). Maintaining this balance helps ensure there are no technical issues, such as power outages or equipment damage.

This is where large operators that are flexible in their power usage, like EverWind's green hydrogen and ammonia production facility, come into play. EverWind's production facility can adjust electricity consumption based on the availability of renewable electricity, as well as the grid's needs. So, if there's a lot of wind during times of less demand (at night, for example), the facility can increase operations and make use of the renewable power that would otherwise be wasted. On the other hand, when there's not enough wind and electricity supply is low, the facility can reduce its power usage to help ease the demand on the grid.

Having a large, flexible power user like EverWind help balance the grid makes it easier to integrate more wind energy into the system. This means that even when the wind generation is high and intermittent, the grid can remain stable. As a result, homes and businesses can enjoy a more consistent supply of renewable energy from wind turbines, contributing to a greener environment and lower energy costs in the long run.

EverWind's green hydrogen and ammonia production facility make adding renewable energy to Nova Scotia's grid easier and less expensive. By building new, renewable energy not paid for by the utility or ratepayers, EverWind is helping Nova Scotia get off coal by stabilizing the grid and making wind energy available without impacting rates.

**EverWind Fuels**