

# Cumberland Approves \$41-Million Operating Budget

By Darrell Cole

The Municipality of Cumberland approved a \$41-million operating budget and a \$14.3-million capital budget at a special online meeting on Monday, March 31, 2025.

The general residential rate is \$1.17 per \$100 and commercial general rate is \$2.74 per hundred assessment. Property owners in the former towns of Springhill and Parrsboro also pay area rates in addition to the general rate. The area rates were unchanged.

It was the first time in recent memory that the municipality's operating and capital budgets have been brought forward for council's consideration and final approval prior to the beginning of the fiscal year.

The municipality's commercial assessment values remained relatively flat this year, but residential capped assessment grew by about seven per cent. With the Property Valuation Services Corporation setting the assessment cap at 1.5 per cent, real residential assessment growth, or new assessment, was about 5.5 per cent. This growth produced about \$1.5 million in additional tax revenue.

Mandatory costs for policing, education, Property Valuation Services Corporation, and provincial roads increased by an estimated \$936,000, with education costs up a whopping \$586,000 coming in at \$6.5 million. Salary and benefits costs rose by about \$374,000 due to CPI adjustments for staff and increased



pension, benefits and WCB costs. One new position, an Occupational Health & Safety Coordinator was also recommended.

The provision of fire protection is one of the municipality's significant cost drivers. The municipality supports 16 volunteer fire departments, operating over 90 individual trucks and pieces of equipment essential to the fire service.

In addition, the municipality makes payments under agreement with three fire other departments in Amherst, Oxford and Five Islands.

The annual budget this year for the fire service is just over \$3 million. It is estimated that operating costs alone in the fire service will rise by about \$200,000

The increased costs of postage, insurance, electricity and other miscellaneous services and inputs accounted for about \$260,000. It is also estimating that costs related to solid waste management - collection, tip fees and transfer stations - will rise by about \$150,000.

The capital budget for 2025-26 comes in at \$14.3 million, with just over \$9 million of that being spent on fire buildings, apparatus (trucks) and equipment.

An additional \$3 million is earmarked for building, vehicles, equipment, and infrastructure like sewage treatment plants, while another \$1.15 million, funded by gas tax, is set aside for capital paving.

The capital budget is funded from operations, reserves, the Canada Community Building Fund (gas tax), and planned long term debt of \$2 million.

In presenting the budget, CAO Greg Herrett told council there are some financial challenges on the horizon.

"Continuing to fund contributions to major community projects, finding the funds to pay for the ongoing replacement of fire trucks, buildings and equipment and maintaining over \$700 million worth of municipal infrastructure - all while maintaining healthy levels of long-term debt and operating and capital reserves - are all unsustainable without additional sources of funding," CAO Herrett said.

To address these long-term challenges, council unanimously approved an increase of three cents per \$100 of assessment to the general residential and commercial tax rates for the 2025/26 fiscal year, resulting in a general residential rate of \$1.17 per \$100

and commercial general rate of \$2.74 per hundred. Property owners in the former towns of Springhill and Parrsboro also pay area rates in addition to the general rate. The area rates were unchanged. An increase of 3 cents per hundred amounts to \$30 per year on a \$100,000 home. Combined with the assessment capped increase of 1.5%, the overall increase is approximately 4.2% for residential property owners who qualify for the assessment cap.

This increase will allow the municipality to fund most of the major community project requests it has received, increase contributions to capital reserves to address infrastructure renewal and, combined with anticipated EPR revenues, begin to provide funds for capital spending to support fire service.

Speaking for Council, Mayor Rod Gilroy said, "we don't make these changes lightly, but the cost of all our inputs have gone up, just like every other organization."

"As well, it's critical that we continue to support our communities with contributions to major projects and continue to invest in the fire service as we implement our hub model of fire protection. We also must continue to maintain and renew our municipal infrastructure and the cost of doing that has increased exponentially over the past few years"

**Darrell Cole, Corporate Communications Officer, 902-297-1333, dcolem@cumberlandcounty.ns.ca**

# Cumberland Honours Employees

Continued from page 1

showing up on my desk because you are dealing with them. The departments are very good at what they do. I know council appreciates that."

Herrett said he is proud of the work of the county's employees and they should be proud as well.

"The municipality is a great place to work and we're doing that together," the CAO said, adding benefits of working for the municipality include a new pension plan, a wellness plan, an employee computer purchase program, the optional four-day work week and other initiatives.

Those recognized in 2025 include: 25 Years - Chris Clarke, Public Works supervisor (Parrsboro);

15 Years - Mike Gerrior, Water Distribution operator and driver (Springhill) and Steve

Ripley, driver (Springhill); 10 Years - Allie McCormick, Director of Recreation and Community Services.

Those recognized in 2024 include:

35 Years - Steve Varner, facility maintenance and building official;

30 Years - John Burbine, Public Works superintendent (Upper Nappan); 25 Years - Fred Arsenault, Public Works superintendent (Springhill); 20 Years - Fred Chapman, community centre lead hand (Springhill); 15 Years - Chris Chapman, wastewater treatment plant operator (Springhill) and Mandy Hunter, community centre maintenance (Springhill) and 10 Years - Jaime Spicer, Bylaw and Canine Control officer.

# Three Men, Three Stories

Continued from page 3

"He says, 'You do G—damn well what you're told, dontcha?' That was Alan Taylor."

"I'll tell you a story about a really good story-teller, and a good man. He died about a month after I met him.

"He had been to sea on Parrsboro ships before the war. He was still quite a young guy when the war broke out, so he joined the reserve navy. He was put on a Corvette, and he said he found himself, like most of the people on the navy boats, with no experience whatsoever. The captain was usually the only person who had any experience at all. He'd be a civilian captain, from a tugboat or whatever.

"He said he got on this Corvette, and the Captain said he had to steer, because most of the guys didn't know how to steer by compass. They started out and he did it all night, so the captain made him quarter-master, in charge of steering. There were others who could watch a course. He said, that's how crazy it was. Of all the people on the ship, none of them had any experience except the Captain.

"He steered a four-hour watch, first time, and then he was on his way going aft, at night at sea. He heard a banging on the side of the ship, and it was what they call a Carley float. These were floats that were like rubber rafts that you go down rivers on. They were hard material, cork and so on. One was always tied on the side of the ship in case it goes down. It was loose and was banging on the side of the ship, so he investigated. So he went over the rail in the night and hoisted it up and lashed it down because he was used to doing that on a boat out of Parrsboro. And he said, 'This is how bad it was.'

"He lashed it down, and the next time he came on watch, the Captain said, 'Did you lash that Carleigh float down?' And he

thought he was going to be in trouble because nobody ordered him to do it. 'Yessir.' And the Captain said, 'Good, from now on you're quarter-master.' Lived in Sussex, New Brunswick. Don William Kelso. [Don, passed away in June, 2001. His obituary contains the following note: 'In his early years Don lived his dream and sailed aboard the 'Ralph and Arthur,' out of Parrsboro, NS.']

I boldly predicted a future, the future Age of Sail, when fossil fuels are no longer used for overseas transportation. 'Wind is a renewable resource, people will have to know how to sail!' I said. Conrad observed there was a revival attempt in the '80's and '90's. Companies were putting up sailing ships for long ocean transport: Europe to Japan and so on, and they produced some ships with computer driven sails. They were efficient on the long runs, the trade winds. They had a metal kind of sail, and the computers would readjust them to the strongest winds, and the direction. The computers were powered by solar energy. They had a small engine in case of computer problems. There were a number built, but Conrad did not know what had come of the experiment.

He said, "Another thing that was tried and was successful: a lot of super-tankers flew large kites that acted like a big parachute and they drug the boat when it got into the trade winds. Saved on fuel. I haven't heard anything more about them." He then launched into a sailing lesson in response to a question from me:

"To reeve something is to shorten it. On a sail, you'll notice in pictures, little ropes down on the face of the sail. Those are what they call reef points. A rope goes on each sail on each side. If the wind is blowing too hard, they lower the top of the sail down and they bunch that bottom part up and they tie the sail. That's called reefing. Usually they'll have

maybe two or three reef points to shorten the sail down. They use a reef knot to tie the ends of the rope together.

"If they're going full speed ahead, there's a point when they're going straight into the wind and the sail will start to flap, then it'll drop back again, and fill again, and keep doing that so you could sail a long time without anybody at the helm if you gear that up right. When you're luffing, it means you're going too close to the wind, and the whole sail shakes."

But knowing how to sail died in the Bay of Fundy. Conrad shook his head: "...Ships were of no use in East West trade. We were importing from Western Canada after the railroad. Nova Scotia had the most industries of any area in the Dominion before, and they all moved to Ontario from here, because there was more people, cheaper to produce. So the railway was to our disadvantage. We had the most universities, this was the richest province. And we lost it all because of Confederation." [Bruce Graham tells the same story, along with other older Nova Scotians.]

\*Conrad Byers: "This author

often says, 'Well I got another book out,' he says, 'and over half the stories are yours!' I get a copy of the book after he's put it together."



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[toryrushtonmla@bellaliant.com](mailto:toryrushtonmla@bellaliant.com)

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