



**WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
February 5, 2026**

**PRESENT:** Doreen Redmond, Chair  
Michelle Benson, Vice Chair  
Councillor Virginia Hinch  
Councillor Nancy Hartling  
Devi Ayyagari  
Natalie Borden  
Mairi Graham  
Sherryl Murphy

**REGRETS:** Cheryl Copage-Gehue – Leave of Absence  
Rhiannon Makohoniuk  
Delainey McCarron

**STAFF:** Carla John, Advisor Diversity & Inclusion  
Raine Sparling, Coordinator 2SLGBTQ+ /Gender Equity Community  
Engagement and Research  
Elizabeth Macdonald, Legislative Assistant

*The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.*

*The agenda, reports, supporting documents, and information items circulated are online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca).*

## **1. CALL TO ORDER AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m. and acknowledged that the meeting took place in the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, and that we are all treaty people. The Chair led the Committee in the African Nova Scotian Affirmation.

## **2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – January 15, 2026**

MOVED by Natalie Borden, seconded by Michelle Benson

**THAT the minutes of January 15, 2026 be approved as circulated.**

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

## **3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS**

Additions: None

Deletions: None

As provided for in section 37 (1) of Administrative Order One, *Respecting the Procedures of the Council*, Michelle Benson requested that Item 9.2.2 – Overview of Upcoming Meetings be considered prior to Item 9.1.1.

MOVED by Sherryll Murphy, seconded by Councillor Hinch

**THAT the agenda be approved as amended.**

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

## **4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES – NONE**

## **5. CALL FOR DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS – NONE**

## **6. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS – NONE**

## **7. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & DELEGATIONS**

**7.1 Correspondence – None**

**7.2 Petitions – None**

**7.3 Presentation – None**

## **8. INFORMATION ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD – NONE**

## **9. REPORTS/DISCUSSION**

### **9.1 STAFF**

#### **9.1.1 Request for Feedback on Committee Member Experience**

Cathy Collett, Senior Policy Advisor spoke to Phase 2 of Halifax Regional Municipality's ongoing Governance Review, seeking feedback on Committee member experience and responded to questions of clarification from the Committee.

The Committee identified the following as areas of strength:

- The effectiveness of support staff in providing follow up and coordinating presentations as requested;

- The Councillors on the Committee providing useful updates on the activities of Halifax Regional Council and Budget Committee;
- The helpfulness and responsiveness of support staff;
- The use of a speaking lists by the Chair following presentations and during items of discussion;
- The diversity of perspectives amongst members;
- Meetings being well structured and organized;
- Topics of discussion being engaging; and
- The usefulness of external presentations which provide opportunities for further learning.

The Committee identified the following as areas to improve upon:

- The need for clarity regarding how the Committee could more greatly impact municipal policies, programs and services;
- A better understanding on how to act on priority issues as identified by the Committee;
- Clarity being provided by staff when presentations are information sharing only;
- A better understanding regarding what actions can be taken following a presentation;
- Being informed on the activities of other advisory committees;
- Feeling removed from Halifax Regional Council despite being a Committee of Council;
- Lack of tangible impact;
- The need for interaction between advisory Committees of Council and Halifax Regional Council;
- The public's lack of knowledge regarding the Committee's existence and mandate;
- The need to engage in community outreach and the potential for the outreach to result in more motions being passed;
- Lack of engagement with Budget Committee;
- Being better informed on the governance decisions being made;
- The need for the Committee to be utilized by municipal staff more often; and
- An orientation process that better establishes the role of the Committee.

Collett spoke to the possibility of returning to the Committee to answer questions after the final report goes before Halifax Regional Council. Collett requested the Legislature Assistant circulate their contact information so members may submit further feedback.

### **9.1.2 Overview of Project UPSTREAM**

The following was before the Committee:

- Staff presentation dated February 5, 2026

Amy Siciliano, Public Safety Advisor and Shehab Matar, Immigrant Services Advisor gave a presentation.

Siciliano, Mater, Lauren Salim, Research & Development Specialist and Sylvia Ofunne, Social Policy Strategist responded to questions of clarification from the Committee.

The Committee suggested the presentation be shared with other Boards and Committees of Council. The Committee requested staff provide further information to the Committee regarding their engagement process as the project progresses.

## **9.2 MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

### **9.2.1 Regional Council Update**

Councillor Hinch noted the Budget Committee had begun deliberations for the 2026/27 municipal budget and outlined options for public participation. Councillor Hinch noted the approval of items "HRM One Membership for Parks and Recreation Facilities" and "Request for Provincial Action on Strengthening Dog Policies" by Halifax Regional Council at the January 27, 2026 meeting. Councillor Hinch explained the Halifax Regional Municipality was inviting residents to share their thoughts on three proposed tartan designs to help select an official tartan and feedback could be submitted until February 11, 2026.

Councillor Hartling spoke to the ongoing community engagement for the Suburban Plan and outlined options for residents to participate in the engagement process.

Councillor Hinch and Councillor Hartling responded to questions of clarification from the Committee.

### **9.2.2 Overview of Upcoming Meetings**

The following was before the Committee:

- Handout dated February 5, 2026

Doreen Redmond spoke to the handout titled “Women and Gender Equity Advisory Committee – Upcoming Meetings Summary” and noted the items tracking for upcoming Committee meetings.

### **10. ADDED ITEMS – NONE**

### **11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – March 5, 2026**

### **12. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

Elizabeth Macdonald  
Legislative Assistant