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Item No.13.1.3
Audit & Finance Standing Committee
January 21, 2026

TO: Chair and Members of Audit & Finance Standing Committee

FROM: Brad Anguish, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: January 14, 2026

SUBJECT: Wanderers Grounds Temporary Stadium Expenditures

ORIGIN

Staff initiated report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 season marked the first year that the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) assumed full operational responsibility for the Wanderers Grounds temporary stadium (Wanderers Grounds). This transition followed the acquisition of stadium assets previously owned by the Halifax Wanderers Football Club (HWFC) and coincided with the addition of a second professional team, the Halifax Tides FC (HTFC) of the newly established Northern Super League (NSL).

The stadium budget planning and approval occurred before key agreements were finalized so the 2025/26 budget relied on early assumptions. With minimal historical data and no prior experience managing a professional sports stadium, HRM relied on information provided by HWFC and assumptions about its operation with an additional professional sports team. These assumptions did not fully capture the scope of services, operating standards, and infrastructure requirements associated with hosting two professional soccer teams.

Operating costs for the stadium exceeded the approved budget due to a combination of factors, including additional staffing needs, expanded service definitions, logistical demands of transitioning the stadium between tenants, and the implementation of HRM operating standards, and unplanned costs for necessary facility upgrades.

The total unbudgeted amount is $590,385.10. This amount includes

(1) the service fees that are required to be paid by HRM to HWFC, in accordance with the Services Agreement between HRM and HWFC;

(2) the reimbursement of operating cost overruns, properly incurred by HWFC in managing the Wanderers Grounds stadium, that are required to be paid by HRM to HWFC, in accordance with the Services Agreement; and,

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(3) small capital expenses related to the facility's transition to HRM management.

Despite logistical and financial forecasting challenges, Wanderers Grounds successfully hosted both professional football team home games and several community events, providing fans with a positive experience and contributed to increased vibrancy and activity in downtown Halifax. The first year of HRM's management provided valuable insight into the full operational scope of the Wanderers Grounds. This information will inform future cost recovery strategies, rate adjustments, and service standards. Operational efficiencies are expected to be realized through alignment with existing HRM Parks contracts and increased clarity of service definitions in team agreements.

Staff will build on the learnings from the past year to inform updated rental rates and cost allocation strategies to ensure the facility moves toward full cost recovery and provides equitable access to the Wanderers Grounds for the two primary tenants.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Audit and Finance Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council

(1) approve a one-time withdrawal of $590,385 from the Options Reserve Q421, with this amount deposited to Cost Centre C721 in order to fund the Wanderers Grounds Temporary Stadium Expenditures; and,

(2) pay the Halifax Wanderers Football Club (HWFC) the amount of $590,385, in accordance with the Services Agreement, with such payment addressing both the HWFC fees to manage the Wanderers Grounds stadium on behalf of HRM and to reimburse HWFC the additional expenses it properly incurred in its management of the Wanderers Grounds stadium.

BACKGROUND

The Wanderers Grounds has been home to HWFC since the launch of the Canadian Premier League in 2019. HRM, through a short-term license agreement, starting in 2018, provided the HWFC permission to install temporary infrastructure to be used as a facility for the HWFC professional football team. The HWFC assumed all financial responsibility for the stadium assets, including the rental of the two main bleachers and the purchase of sea containers that have been converted into locker rooms and VIP suites.

In 2024 HRM received a request from a new professional women's soccer team, HTFC, to host games at the Wanderers Grounds starting in 2025. The HTFC is one of six Canadian professional women's soccer clubs competing in the new Northern Super League.

As a result, HRM staff, who had been considering assumption of the assets and management of the Wanderers Grounds, recommended the acceleration of these plans, completing the transition in a much shorter timeframe than would otherwise have been the case, in order to ensure readiness for the 2025 season. By assuming full ownership and operational responsibility for the bleachers and all supporting event assets, HRM can now apply its policies throughout the facility to ensure equitable access for all users.

The day-to-day operations of the stadium and event management have been contracted out to the HWFC through a Services Agreement. The Services Agreement permits HRM to provide HWFC a payment for its "day-to-day" management of the Wanderers Ground stadium. The Services Agreement also permits HRM to pay HWFC for additional expenses and costs, properly incurred by HWFC, that HWFC had to incur in order to operate the Wanderers Grounds stadium to the levels required by HWFC and HTFC.

The HWFC were the only service provider option that had experience with the uniqueness of the Wanderers Grounds as a temporary stadium for professional sport. HRM maintains control over key elements including the liquor license, facility bookings, rental rates, and the operating budget.

As HRM assumed operational control of the stadium for the first time, there was limited financial data to support traditional budget development. The 2025–26 operating budget was therefore based on estimates provided by HWFC, drawing from their experience managing the facility for Wanderers games. Forecasting attempted to account for the financial impacts of having a second tenant and increased activity.

Despite logistical and financial forecasting challenges, Wanderers Grounds successfully hosted both HWFC and HTFC home games, and several community events, providing fans with a positive experience and contributed to increased vibrancy and activity in downtown Halifax.

DISCUSSION

HRM adopted a turnkey approach to stadium operations in 2025, bundling all services into rental agreements in order to simplify operations and ensure renters received the same service level. Due to timing constraints, there was limited opportunity to revise the budget as new information emerged during negotiations of the team rental agreements. The costs associated with expectations for service levels to be provided for the facility rental fee exceeded HRM's initial budget assumptions.

The full financial impact of several known variables only became apparent once the HWFC and HTFC seasons started. These variables included the implementation of HRM operating standards, adaptation to the requirements of different professional leagues, and the logistical demands of transitioning the stadium between HWFC and HTFC home games. Additionally, the stadium required upgrades that were not included in HRM's capital budget.

Facility Upgrades

In preparation for the 2025 season opening, HRM approved a series of modifications to the newly acquired stadium to support its expanded use. These upgrades included the creation of an enhanced accessibility section and several other alterations that were necessary to accommodate the introduction of a second professional team. These upgrades were completed to better support both teams and game-day operations, which included the following:

- expanded team spaces;
- relocated media areas; and
- improved capacity for food, beverage, and merchandise services.

Significant electrical upgrades were required to support the stadium's reconfiguration, including the installation of additional transformers and underground conduit work. New fire safety and egress plans were commissioned, and neutral, non-branded signage was purchased for shared use. Additional equipment and furnishings were also purchased to address safety concerns. Only the upgrades needed to meet mandatory client requirements and ensure overall safety were approved. Any further improvements will be reviewed as part of future capital budgeting processes.

Portable Washroom Facilities and Garbage Removal

At the time the stadium operating budget was approved, the rental of portable washroom units and the waste disposal were expected to be included in the Parks budget. Due to timing, the Parks budget was not adjusted and these costs must be charged directly to the stadium budget (C721).

Operating Budget

HRM maintains an operating budget to reimburse stadium-related expenses incurred and paid by HWFC on HRM's behalf, consistent with the service exchange agreement. In accordance with the service

exchange agreement between HRM and HWFC, HRM staff have conducted in-depth reviews of the fees charged by HWFC and the additional costs and expenses incurred by HWFC throughout the season. HRM has declined some of the additional costs and expenses put forward by HWFC, but the majority of the additional costs and expenses claimed by HWFC were properly incurred by HWFC during its operation of the Wanderers Grounds stadium in 2025.

The 2025/26 budget was submitted before negotiations were completed for both the purchase of the temporary stadium assets, and the rental contract details with the two teams. With limited prior experience operating a stadium, budget assumptions were based on the best information at the time.

Operating costs for the stadium have exceeded the approved budget. Several variable expenses, particularly staffing costs related to stadium operations, were higher than projected. The budget was developed using information from prior operations of the HWFC and the Canadian Premier League. However, 2025 represented a new operational model for HRM, with expanded facility responsibilities and the introduction of the second professional soccer team. As a result, certain service definitions and cost assumptions within the rental agreements required clarification as the season progressed.

For example, the rental agreements allowed for the changeover of all team-branded signage but did not specify limits regarding the number, size, or storage of signage materials. Each team maintains distinct sponsorship and branding requirements, as such, the labour and logistics associated with transitioning the facility between home games were greater than originally anticipated. To help mitigate these costs, HRM purchased neutral, reusable signage for common areas to reduce the extent of future changeovers.

Similarly, the interpretation of “game day” services required adjustment once operational schedules were finalized. While all standard services were provided, differences in game day timing and league protocols resulted in longer staffing hours than had been forecasted during budget preparation. Use of security contractors also evolved as operations began, ultimately including roles such as ushers and ticket scanners to meet overall event management and safety requirements.

Finally, enhanced operational standards required by a new professional league, including upgraded internet connectivity, on-site medical support, and facility readiness for pre-match activities, also contributed to higher operating costs.

The full scope of stadium operations and the associated costs are now understood and will be recovered through adjustments to fees and a reduction in the scope of stadium services provided through HRM. Some operational efficiencies are also expected to be realized using existing HRM Parks contracts. Staff are advancing a plan for the stadium and its operations which is anticipated to progress to full cost recovery.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff are recommending that funding in the amount of $590,385 be withdrawn from Options Reserve Q421, as an unbudgeted reserve withdrawal, and deposited into cost centre C721. This amount would, in turn, be paid to HWFC as fulfillment of HRM’s contractually obligated service payment to HWFC as well as a reimbursement for the additional costs and expenses HWFC properly incurred in providing the services to HRM in accordance with the Services Agreement. The following table sets forth these amounts.

Options Reserve Q421 Summary

Current projected closing balance as of Q2	$13,806,576
Less un-forecasted withdrawal for consideration	($590,385)

Forecasted available closing 2025/26 balance $13,216,191

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risks identified with the recommendation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVE

The Audit and Finance Committee could choose to recommend that Regional Council direct the CAO to pay an amount to HWFC that is different than the amount set forth in this report. The Services Agreement between HRM and HWFC requires that HRM pay HWFC a services payment as well as a reimbursement for those expenses that have been properly incurred by HWFC, in accordance with the Agreement, for HWFC's operation of the Wanderers Grounds stadium in 2025. Failure to pay this amount may lead to HWFC, as the contracted service provider, proceeding with legal action against HRM to recover this amount that HWFC paid on behalf of HRM in accordance with the Services Agreement.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39

7A The purposes of the municipality are to

(a) provide good government;
(b) provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality; and
(c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities

35(2) The Chief Administrative Officer may
(d) subject to policies adopted by the Council,
(i) make or authorize expenditures, and enter into contracts on behalf of the Municipality, for anything required for the Municipality where the amount of the expenditure is budgeted or within the amount determined by the Council by policy, and may delegate this authority to employees of the Municipality.

79A (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if
(a) the expenditure is included in the municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the municipality;
(b) the expenditure is in respect of an emergency under the Emergency Management Act; or
(c) the expenditure is legally required to be paid.

(2) The Municipality may expend money provided for in an operating budget or capital budget for a purpose other than that set out in the operating budget or capital budget for that fiscal year if the expenditure does not affect the total of the amounts estimated for the operating budget and the capital budget.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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