

**Town of Amherst
Public Hearing
Minutes**

Date: July 8, 2026
Time: 5:00 pm
Location: Council Chambers, Town Hall

Members Present Mayor Robert Small
 Deputy Mayor Charlie Chambers
 Councillor Hal Davidson
 Councillor Nic Furlong
 Councillor Terry McManaman
 Councillor Dwayne Ripley
 Councillor Kathy Wells

Staff Present Jason MacDonald, Chief Administrative Officer
 Torben Laux, Planner
 Sean Payne, Marketing & Communications Officer
 Natalie LeBlanc, Municipal Clerk
 Cindy Brown, Administrative Assistant

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Small called the meeting to order.

2. TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Mayor Small gave the Territorial Acknowledgement.

3. 1 Albion Street Development Agreement

3.1 Presentation

Torben Laux presented the application for a Development Agreement on the property located at 1 Albion Street (PID 25009432) to permit the construction of a 24-unit and 12-unit apartment building.

3.1.1 Written Submissions

Mayor Small acknowledged the written submissions received. Information item only, included as part of the agenda package.

3.2 Council Questions / Comments

Councillor Ripley wanted it said for the record that he is weary about what this development will do to the downtown, adding that business owners and residents are already concerned with the state of the downtown area. He wants to know more about what the percentage is of what is subsidized and what is affordable housing within the development, as it seems the majority of it is subsidized. He feels having this development and the shelter in the downtown area will do the downtown a disservice, and although he acknowledges the YMCA is directly across the street from the proposed site, he would like to see this developed at a different location.

Deputy Mayor Chambers said although he somewhat agrees with Councillor Ripley, he has learned more about this application since it was originally received and knows that the YMCA is a great organization and they will do a good job looking after this development.

Councillor Furlong inquired about the parking again and asked if we should be considering signage for no parking in the area. Jason MacDonald answered that generally if cars are parked on the street, it slows traffic down, that most streets are designed for street parking, adding that the Traffic Authority can monitor the situation and if warranted they can have no parking signs installed.

Councillor Furlong asked if dust and noise control during construction has been addressed. Torben Laux replied that yes, it is addressed as part of the development agreement.

Councillor McManaman said his only concerns with this application have been around parking; however, the YMCA is working to address this.

Councillor Wells spoke in total favor of the application, noting the YMCA has proven success with affordable housing. She feels concerns around parking is a good thing, it means residents can afford both an apartment and a vehicle. She further added that she feels it is unfair to compare affordable housing to the shelter, that it is comparing apples to oranges and she wants to be sure everyone understands the difference.

Councillor Furlong asked for clarity of the Town's definition of supportive housing. Jason MacDonald answered that supportive housing as defined in our policies means things like seniors' homes and group homes, where there is communal living with staff 24/7, which is different from how service organizations define it which is individual units with supports in other forms such as social services or other support staff.

3.3 Public Questions / Comments

Wayne MacKenzie spoke to how he sees the downtown area ending up and does not see how low rentals will help revitalize the downtown. He feels kids cannot go downtown now as it is not safe and believes our police force is already overwhelmed. He feels bad for downtown business owners, particularly the Portlander Jamaican restaurant, adding that he would not want this proposed development next to his residence or business. He also does not believe that the YMCA can accommodate overflow parking as the parking lot there is typically full.

Kevin Nelson spoke as a business and property owner in the downtown area, indicating he is constantly replacing vandalized windows at his property on Havelock Street. He agrees with Councillor Ripley in that affordable housing developments such as this application should be spread out and not located in the downtown core and feels we do not need this at this location and that Council should be promoting business in the downtown as there is currently not even a grocery store in the area.

Renee Pilgrim indicated she is new to Amherst and believes having diversity in the downtown area will help to revitalize it adding that we need people downtown to help it flourish. She believes people who need assistance are assumed dangerous and this is prejudice; horrible things happen everywhere not just with people who need subsidized housing. She said she looked at starting a business in the downtown however could not afford to rent a space. She also spoke to the Hillsdale development saying she does not believe it is necessarily considered affordable unless you are a two-income family or are doing very well. She believes it would be unfortunate to not support a project of this kind and that not taking a chance is not doing Amherst a favor, we need housing to support the people who are here.

Gillian Strong spoke as a somewhat new resident to Amherst, and as a YMCA Board member. She stated that she moved here in 2016 and at the time found a two-bedroom apartment for her family of four for \$600, adding this amount has gone up in 5% increments annually. It is not ideal however even though her and her husband both work they are stuck there and can't afford to move. She very much wants to see affording housing hoping it will open the market for other options. She encouraged councillors to look at available apartments and the costs to rent them, see if they could afford them, and what they would have to give up to do so. She spoke to the YMCA's affordable housing location on Church Street and one of the residents who was a single mother able to return to school to get her nursing degree while residing there, which would likely not have been possible had she have not been in an affordable housing situation. She believes in this town and the YMCA, and feels we need to invest in the community. She feels this is an incredible opportunity and asked that Council take their time in making this decision.

George Crawshaw, owner of Top Line Rentals, indicated he has no objections to this proposal and wished the YMCA every success. However, he is concerned about overflow parking in his lot and would like to respectfully submit for the record that his parking lot is private.

Ray Hickey, property owner and resident in the downtown area and a former municipal CAO stated that although he is fully in favor of supportive housing he is not in favor of this proposed location and that a downtown area is not the place for it, and generally goes against a good Municipal Planning Strategy, adding you would not see any of this in Halifax, Mahone Bay, Bridgewater or Antigonish for example. He feels downtowns are meant to be safe, architecturally beautiful, a place to shop and to gather. He stated that living in the downtown area has been an absolute disaster, he has had to call 911 at least two dozen times recently and that what he has to deal with as a property owner in the downtown is challenging, adding that he is not criticizing the shelter but it's location. He spoke to his enjoyment of going to Shediac adding that if he went there at 3:00 in the afternoon and seen groups of people in distress in the downtown area like we do here he would not stay. He reiterated he is not criticizing the shelter, or the staff or the volunteers, or this application, only the locations. He feels that these types of development can be limited through Municipal Planning Strategies and Land Use Bylaws. He feels people will feel even more unsafe going to the downtown area if this is approved, and no one will want to invest or build in the downtown.

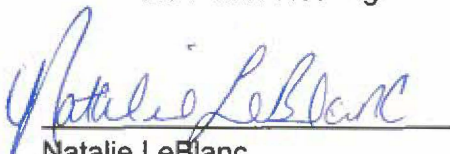
He also feels Council are kind of the "landlords", and he would like them to think of the greater area as they are the ones responsible for housing and investing. He wished the YMCA the best of luck but is not in favor of this location.

Trina Clark, CEO of the YMCA of Cumberland, spoke to address some of the concerns raised. She started by saying there has been talk of revitalizing the downtown for decades, it is not a new one-year or two-year problem. She does not believe people consider the location of the YMCA as downtown, and she has an incredible concern with the correlation of this proposal and the shelter as it is not what they are doing and comparing the two is inaccurate. She added that comparing poverty to criminal activity is wrong, and that the clientele of this proposal will be able to improve their lives. In response to the concerns of parking, she said that they are working on it, and that if more parking is needed this would mean the project is a success.

Aiden Kivisto, Manager of Community Development with the YMCA of Cumberland, appreciated the comments and the healthy debate. He indicated although they have not yet secured funding for this project, funding partners do have a definition for supportive housing. He feels perception can make a huge difference, adding that they have seen a huge increase in senior clientele. He realizes there are layers of complexities with this type of development, however, feels problems only continue to get worse when we leave people out. He knows that there are concerns surrounding this application however they want this to be a success for the whole community.

4. Adjournment

There being nothing further, Mayor Small thanked everyone for coming and for their input. A special Council meeting will be scheduled for a later date. With that, Mayor Small adjourned the Public Hearing.


Natalie LeBlanc
Municipal Clerk


Robert Small
Mayor