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ISSUE 02

Behind Closed Doors: A Look at Municipal Rules

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJI

The Local Governance Commission of New Brunswick (LGC) has issued an advisory telling local governments code of conduct and conflict of interest complaints cannot be dealt with in closed session.

Giselle Gougen, the commission's chair, said the organization became aware many councils were holding these discussions and votes in closed session and classifying elected officials as employees of the local government.

"This is not permitted under section 68 of the *Local Governance Act*," the advisory reads.

Section 68 of the *Local Governance Act* sets out the criteria for a meeting to be held in closed session, which the commission said is being incorrectly interpreted by councils.

"The list does not include code of conduct by-law or conflict of interest provision violation allegations," the advisory reads. The commission said it appears these meetings are being done in closed session through section 68(1)(j), which covers "labour and employment matters, including collective agreement negotiations."

It said councillors and mayors are not employees of the local government, which is also specifically outlined in the *Act*.

"As mayors and councillors are not employees of local governments, it is a violation of the *Local Governance Act* for local governments to be discussing and (or) deciding these matters in closed meetings," the advisory said. "This practice also denies public accountability and transparency not only to complainants, but also to the broader public served by elected officials."

"The entirety of council's discussion of the matter must not be conducted in a closed meeting, and any decisions on these matters must be made in open meetings," - *Local Governance Commission*

The commission pointed to a recent decision of the New Brunswick Labour and Employment

Board, which established that council members are not employees of the local government they represent under the *Employment Standards Act*.

It cited two examples of case law that reinforce the rules about council members not being employees.

In Eastern Charlotte, there were five code of conduct complaints between December 2024 and November 2025.

Chief Administrative Officer, Jason Gaudet, told *The Courier* all those meetings had been done in closed session, adding the final one in November was related to a staff member.

"Yes, we are planning on reviewing [our] code of conduct policy/procedural bylaws," he said in a statement. "As with other municipalities, we were doing code of conduct complaints as we interpret the *Local Governance Act*."

Gaudet said he was present at the Union of Municipalities of New Brunswick (UMNB) conference where most municipalities "immediately" had concerns and questions when the commission brought up the advisory.

A few of those, Gaudet explained, were that some complaints can be baseless or hold no merit and that the complainant is not limited to the municipality, meaning they can be made from anywhere in Canada.

The Courier reached out to the Town of Saint Andrews by email and in-person for the number of meetings related to code of conduct complaints that were handled in closed session within the last two years but did not hear back by deadline.

In a staff-led meeting, which is not recorded but is open to the public, Chief Administrative Officer Chris Spear said the province wanted councils to review the code of conduct bylaw.

He said Town Clerk Chris MacKinnon would draft a new bylaw and bring it back to council later this month.

In St. Stephen, one code of conduct complaint was filed against Coun. Emily Rodas. It was discussed in closed session on June 20, 2024, and the council deter-



mined no breach had been found.

"The appeal of this same matter was heard in closed session and council upheld the original decision," said Chief Administrative Officer Jeff Renaud.

St. Stephen is also expected to bring code of conduct bylaw before the council at the next Committee of the Whole scheduled for Jan. 14.

More training needed

Dan Murphy, the executive director of the UMNB, said this advisory leads back to training and education around the rules governing municipal elected officials.

"I think it underpins what we want to do," he said, noting it comes just after the commission's first annual report recommending mandatory training for staff and elected officials. "That's something they identified, the need for mandatory training after the election, but also doing some of that pre-election work as well."

An election for local governments and local boards is scheduled for May 11.

Murphy said there is a financial component to escalating code of conduct complaints to a third-party, which can be a barrier. In February, former Saint Andrews mayor Brad Henderson was cleared of a code of conduct investigation.

The subject of the complaint is not public, but could have been discussed in an open session, according to the commission. The advice

filed by a lawyer may be discussed in closed session, according to the LGC, under section Section 68(1)(f).

That section states a closed session 'may' be granted through "information concerning legal opinions or advice provided to the local government by its solicitor or privileged communications between solicitor and client in a matter of local government business"

However, the commission said that is where the exception ends.

"The entirety of council's discussion of the matter must not be conducted in a closed meeting, and any decisions on these matters must be made in open meetings," it said in the advisory.

Murphy said the size of responsibility placed at the feet of local governments continues to grow without the resources keeping pace.

"We're all doing more with less, and [there are] more and more responsibilities finding their way onto municipal plates," he said of the financial aspect of investigating complaints. "So for us, that's a big piece of it, for sure."

Every code of conduct or conflict of interest complaint is required to be reviewed by the local government, but it does not necessarily need to escalate to a third-party investigation.

"The more that we can spend time talking and training our officials on what they are, hopefully we won't have to go through that, and

Continued on Page 2

The Courier

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Behind Closed Doors: A Look at Municipal Rules (continued from Page 1)

hopefully they won't be needed, because that's really the best," Murphy said.

In 2018, former Saint John mayor Mel Norton, who is also a lawyer with Lawson Creamer in the Port City, gave a presentation titled "How to Stay Out of Trouble", aimed at sharing some of the obligations of members of municipal councils, and dealing with possible misclassification on the part of councils when it comes to code of conduct.

Speaking with *The Courier*, Norton said, "Probably what is happening is some councils are treating members of councils as labour or employment issues, and that is not permitted; it's pretty clear that mayors and councillors are not employees."

He explained this may be done to avoid embarrassment or conflict and keeping it private may diminish the impact.

Section 68(1) does say the local government "may" be closed to the public for the duration of the discussion, further outlining 10 specific reasons under which council can close the meeting to the public.

"If you see the word 'shall' you have to assume you have no choice in the matter, and if you see 'may' it assumes you have a choice, but you still have to act reasonably," he said. "We have to kind of check our own personal interpretation of what something might say. We have to, first of all, recognize that our good intentions and personal interpretation does [sic] not trump the legislation."

He said the closed door element may provide councils with short-term comfort, but comes at the cost of long-term trust.

Disclosure rules and conflicts

On the provincial and federal level, the rules around disclosure are much more strict and include contribution limits. However, disclosure of shareholdings, investments and businesses are not required at the municipal level. It is up to the individual councillor or mayor to identify the conflicts and declare them.

Councillors and mayors are required in New Brunswick to sign a *Form 3* that indicates they have declared a conflict and when the conflict was declared.

The Courier reviewed the regular minutes of council and special minutes of council in Saint Andrews for 2025 and found seven conflicts of interests declared by councillors or the mayor.

According to the Town of Saint Andrews, only five forms had been filed, while two declared by former mayor Henderson have not yet been made available.

At the Nov. 3 council meeting, Coun. Darrell Weare called out the fact the forms were not being filed appropriately.

"The legislation does require that there be a permanent record maintained by the clerk of all conflicts of interests," he said. "To the best of my knowledge, that is not happening."

"I just want to make sure that, since I sit on the council, that the town is complying with legislation."

Weare said he was told if a councillor had a serious concern, they could reach out to the New Brunswick RCMP.

The regular minutes of the St. Stephen council for 2025 were reviewed by *The Courier* and found five conflicts declared by councillors.

Only one *Form 3* had been filed, by Coun. Rodas on April 30. Minutes from November and December meetings were not available.

The Courier also reviewed the minutes of the 2025 regular meetings for Eastern Charlotte. One conflict was declared by Mayor John Craig in May and one *Form 3* had been filed.

But the rules are subject to an individual councillor's judgement.

Norton said there is a very clear definition of conflict of interest in the Act. Section (87)(1) outlines that definition.

"I would say generally that anytime there may be a risk that you could benefit directly or indirectly, and whether it's actual or just perceived, the safe course of action is to remove yourself from that process," he said.

Norton said a clear example is a contract with a company that you own or a company that you have shares in.

"That's a clear financial benefit to you," he said, adding it gets more remote when you involve extended family or friends in a small province like New Brunswick.

In some cases for councillors, he said, it can feel like a personal attack on their integrity, but it isn't.

"This is simply a governance issue and what is the safest way to ensure good governance? Solid decision making and decisions that can't be questioned or called into question because of some per-

ception by anyone," Norton added.

For most councillors, he explained, the good intentions are there. However, in smaller communities, he feels it is even more important to be clear about conflicts of interest.

"That makes it probably, though, all the more important to be extra diligent in eliminating the risk," he said. "Yes, I looked, it's probably not a true conflict, but there might be a perception of it."

He said while this might mean an individual councillor is not at the table for every decision, it does encourage trust in the system and foster public confidence.

Norton said it is imperative councils keep up-to-date records of *Form 3s*.

"Without it, there may not be a record," he said. "Maybe the minutes don't get recorded properly. Maybe there is some gap, but it is a proactive step that guarantees you're going to be safe."

He said the consequences for not declaring conflicts and keeping records are very real

"The more you fail to declare conflicts of interest, the more you fail to file those forms, the greater risk that you personally, as a member of council, face," he said.

Councillors could be barred from re-offering, face financial penalties, and even be removed from a sitting council, Norton explained.

"At the end of the day, these members of council, they're trying to provide and deliver service and value for the greater good of their communities. Why risk all of that and the value that that brings over the long term?"

He said at the end of the day, more training is needed.

"We know that poor training leads to poor results," he said. "Probably what we're experiencing is hopefully some growing pains with adapting to the new municipal models we have in New Brunswick, but probably what it also says is that there needs to be constant education for members of council."

Norton doesn't believe the rules should be tightened on disclosure of assets at the municipal level, but said the greater good comes from robust participation.

"From my perspective, the greater good comes from having that increased rate of participation and voter turnout, and all the things that are really near and dear to having a great municipal democratic [process] in our province."

Letters to the Editor

The views expressed in letters to the editor are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Courier or its staff.

Letters to the editor should be limited to a maximum of 200 words and can be sent to thecourier@chco.tv and although all letters will be read, the Courier reserves the right to not publish letters that are unsuitable for a Community newspaper.

Dear Editor,

Concerning the letter in January's Courier which advised the wearing of reflective clothing while walking at dusk. My question: what should one wear while walking across a clearly marked pedestrian crossing in broad daylight when nearly run down by vehicles going well above the speed limit?

Donald Hunter
St Stephen

Dear Editor,

The Town of St Andrews is currently proposing to change the By-laws for the town platt. Some areas will be designated low-density urban zones, where properties can have up to four dwelling units. More central areas will be designated medium density-urban zones and can have up to eight dwelling units. Plus, presumably, the required parking?

Unfortunately, some property owners will see this as an opportunity to erect Air B&Bs in their backyards. Proposed changes to the by-law also allow short-term rentals and home-based businesses. The type of business allowed is not specified.

My concern is that there seems to

be no consideration given to the Heritage nature of St Andrews or any consultation as to what permanent town residents want. What will St Andrews look like with more apartments everywhere? Recently, several new buildings have already been erected and more are planned. Last summer New Brunswickers' wells ran dry. Can Chamcook Lake, the local Municipal water source, support a higher density population? What about sewage? Other municipal services? The one grocery store? The congested main street? Parking?

What do residents want?

Gillian Pedersen-Mjaanes
St Andrews

Dear Editor,

Why Advanced Requests for MAID should be approved by Parliament:

Absolutely, as caring humans, we are responsible to care for those with dementia and all who are vulnerable. However, society should not have the right to determine the fate of others who have looked ahead. Those of us who wish to complete very clear, carefully considered legal Advance Request for Medical Assistance in Dying

should have that right.

All Canadian provinces have legally permitted wills which are 'advance requests' for disposing property after death. Sufficient guardrails are built around property wills to control manipulation by family members or others.

We have the legal right to determine what happens to our property after death. We should not be denied the 'right' to determine and specify that our life end when self care is no longer possible.

The new laws also need to allow Advance Requests for MAID even before diagnosis. If while healthy I legally prepared a witnessed Advance Request for MAID, I expect it should be honoured.

If experiencing a sudden, unanticipated, irrecoverable condition from accident, stroke, etc., there is no time to complete an Advance Request for MAID. Completed Advance Requests for MAID should be legal before diagnosis.

Bertha Day
St Andrews

Dear Editor,

Write to Council on the Municipal Plan

The Saint Andrews Town Council is just weeks away from voting on a new municipal plan that will dramatically alter the town's future.

Council will hold a required Public Hearing of Objections on Wednesday, February 11, at 6 pm, at the W.C. O'Neill Arena and will receive written submissions until then. Please get involved.

The proposed plan departs radically from past Saint Andrews plans and other New Brunswick municipal plans. Residents have largely been locked out of its de-

velopment. After initial consultations in 2024, they heard nothing until a completed plan draft was released in August 2025, with a 30-day comment period. The Council has not replied to the comments received, then or since. It has continued legal steps for plan adoption.

Some of the proposed plan's major changes:

- Eliminating the guiding values and goals found in other municipal plans, it focuses solely on technical aspects of management and development, without setting priorities. Future councils will have to face action without direction.
- Eliminating Residential zoning, to allow commercial and institutional uses and apartment buildings in all residential neighborhoods.
- Supporting major construction and population growth in one of Canada's iconic National Historic Districts, with implications to the town's highly-valued identity and lifestyle.

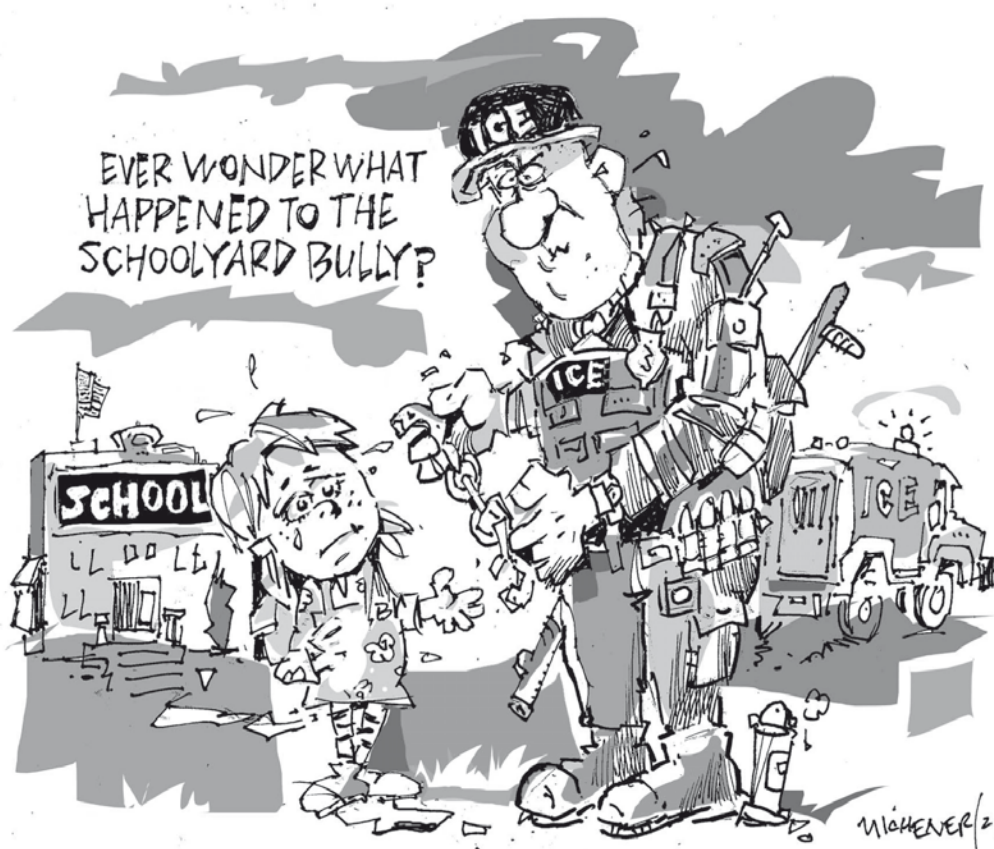
Our remarkable town needs a municipal plan that respects its unique character and aspirations. Town residents need to be more actively involved in developing and delivering it.

A new municipal plan isn't required until 2028. Let's take the time to do it right. Tell the Council that you want more input into the plan that will guide our town for the next decade. Write to

clerk@townofstandrews.ca

Do it now.

Lee Sochasky
St Andrews



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Editorial : The Question of Good Governance

Courier Editorial Board

Recently, the Local Governance Commission advised councils in New Brunswick that code of conduct and conflict of interest meetings could not be held in closed session. This is due to the broad interpretation that our local governments have held of the laws that govern them.

This advisory appears to have been a surprise to the governing councils within Charlotte County—who had been holding those meetings in closed session. That means, our local governments are denying the public the transparency and accountability it deserves. In small communities like Charlotte County, it appears this responsibility should be taken far more seriously.

The councils elected to sit at the leadership table are your neighbours, friends and perhaps even your family—this makes it difficult to look at them with objective eyes. However, operating behind closed doors, in secret, whether intentional or not, deprives the public of what it wants most—a hand in shaping the communities they live and work in.

Closed meetings are to protect specific things, not the opinions of elected leaders, all outlined in the *Local Governance Act* in Section 68(1). One will find there is no mention of the words “initiatives” or “presentations” or “direction.”

This is not unique to Charlotte County—or municipal politics. Conversations happen in rooms where the public is never allowed. But what is the cost of keeping the public in the dark? That consequence presents itself in the form of a ballot box. Our political fabric

in this country is sewn together by the opinions of elected leaders based on what they allowed the public to see and understand about them—and how those are reflected in their own values.

A curated cocktail of agreeable statements makes the decision easier to swallow.

Recently, a St. Stephen councillor suggested cameras have made them feel like they cannot be as open or honest. This is exactly the opposite of their intended purpose—accessibility and accountability.

Geoff Martin, a political researcher and assistant professor at Mount Allison University, said leaders have to be accountable for the things they say—and cannot only invite the public to communicate



in ways that suit them.

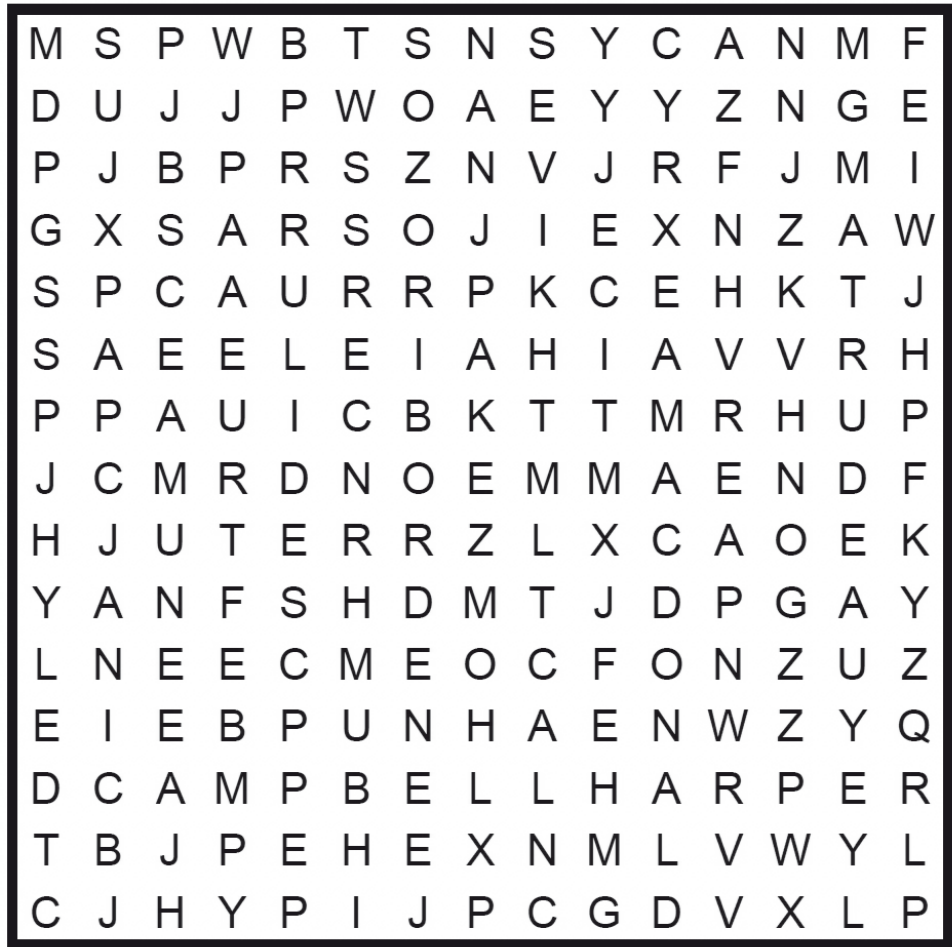
It is not about a certain comfort level. It is a privilege to be elected to any political office, albeit a significant sacrifice. The privilege of serving your community should steer all those with decision-making power toward good gover-

nance.

Operating secretly or in the dark robs Canadians of the very principle our country is founded upon—democracy—in a time when it is being tested by some of the greatest powers around the world.

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Three-Year Strategy and Action Plan on Dementia Released in N.B.

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJI

The Liberal government in New Brunswick has launched a three-year strategy and action plan for Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

The plan looks to reduce risk, improve early diagnosis and ensure co-ordinated, compassionate care for New Brunswickers, especially for those living with dementia and the individuals who care for them.

"This plan is about making sure no one travels the dementia journey alone," said Premier Susan Holt, in a release issued on Thursday. "That's why we worked directly with more than 1,700 New Brunswickers – people with lived experience, care partners, advocates and community partners – to shape this strategy."

The Department of Health and Social Development said people involved in the process and consultation were asked to share their insight and ideas to improve quality of life for those in New Brunswick living with dementia. Minister responsible for seniors, Lyne Chantal Boudreau, said the experiences of those with lived experience guided the strategy.

The strategy focuses on five areas: risk reduction, public education and awareness, support for people living with dementia and their care partners, a trained and supported workforce, and timely diagnosis and care delivery, according

to the release.

It also includes 14 priority actions:

- brain health promotion and dementia risk reduction
- dementia-friendly communities
- public awareness campaigns
- navigation and care coordination
- care partner supports and education
- care partner respite
- identification of financial supports
- self-management approaches
- dementia-specific continuing education programs
- timely diagnosis
- behavioural supports
- palliative and end-of-life care
- dementia population monitoring
- research

Health Minister John Dornan said dementia is complex and there is no one single plan toward solutions on helping New Brunswickers. "This plan is a starting point. We will keep building on it to make sure our health and social care systems evolve to meet the needs of people living with dementia and the people who care for them," he said in the release.

The release said the strategy will be the responsibility of govern-



ment departments, not-for-profit organizations, professional associations, the research community and patient partners, with oversight from the Department of Health.

DOH said the Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick has been granted \$1 million to enhance programs and services in support of

the strategy. "We are deeply grateful for the government's investment in our organization as a key implementation partner," said Chandra MacBean, the society's executive director, in the release.

More information on Alzheimer's disease and dementia is available online.

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N.B. Seeks to Make Home Care 'More Affordable'

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJ1

The provincial government said it is investing \$10 million to make home care support for seniors and people with disabilities more affordable.

Minister responsible for seniors, Lyne Chantal Boudreau, said the government feels this is "the right thing to do."

"Those who wish to age in place and remain in their homes as long as is safely possible should be able to do so," she said in a release from the Government of New Brunswick (GNB). "Affordable home care will give them this ability."

According to the Department of Social Development, this is the first increase in investment in long-term care and disability support in nearly 30 years.

Shelley Petit, the chair of the New Brunswick Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, said any money that goes toward assisting seniors and persons with a disability is always a good thing.

"We really saw it hit married couples or especially senior women who just lost their spouse," she said. "I've already had emails from a couple of married couples that they will be saving \$400 or \$500 a month from this off their co-payments."

Seniors and persons with a disability are required to pay a certain amount toward in-home care. She said in some cases any amount of co-pay is considered too much.

Petit said the concern here is lack of human resources to provide in-home care.

"We have an idea at the Coalition. We're going to approach the minister, because thinking outside the box is necessary," she said. "They have to take a hard look at the services they provide and do they all need to be by a registered home care worker."

She said there is a case to be made that some people don't need full in-home support but could need cleaning service or other smaller tasks that don't meet the 40 hours per week required in the legislation.

Individuals who are paying for full hours under the program will expect to receive those hours, even if they are not necessarily needed.

"This is where we're tying up some really valuable resources and that we have to think outside the box and do it better," Petit said.

The annual income thresholds will increase by 10 per cent, it said.

to \$27,500 from \$25,000 for singles

to \$38,500 from \$35,000 for couples

to \$55,000 from \$50,000 for couples with one dependent



The department said this is expected to expand the program to more people and affect the subsidies of its 2,100 clients. "This investment will help people remain in their homes and communities as long as it is safe to do so, which benefits individuals, families and our health-care system as a whole."

Those already registered as clients of the DSD do not need to reapply and the changes will be applied to their subsidies on Jan. 1. Petit said the next step needs to be the appropriate remuneration for those in-home care workers. "What are we saying about home care workers and their value there?" she asked "Show a little respect, and we're going to keep pushing on this, because we have too many people in New Brunswick who

need private home care workers."

Tina Learmonth, the president of the New Brunswick Home Support Association, said in the release that this is a step in the right direction.

"We must work together to strengthen the home support workforce, expand access to services, and ensure providers have the tools they need to deliver high-quality care to New Brunswickers," Learmonth said in the release.

More information on home support, as well as a financial assistance calculator, can be found online at <https://socialsupport-snb.ca/en/program/home-support-services>

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Operation White Heart Offers Signal of Care in N.B. Communities

Vicki Hogarth
Reporter, The Courier

Warning: This story contains a discussion about suicide

A white heart framed in black and filled with pale stones rests in the ground at Langmaid Park, just off Water Street in St. Andrews. A few blocks away, another punctuates the landscaping at Salty Towers Inn, a gathering place beloved by locals and visitors alike. Farther along the waterfront, a third sits in the place of a flowerbed outside Buoy Up!, a shop whose name means, simply, to lift someone's spirits.

You may notice the hearts without knowing why they are there. Even so, they have an effect: they slow a walk, lighten a moment, invite reflection.

The hearts are part of Operation White Heart, a grassroots mental-health initiative that began in Saint John in 2022. Its founder, Gary Brown, did not set out to start a movement, or even a program. He was responding to what he was hearing.

Brown's involvement in suicide prevention traces back to the Maddy Murphy Memorial Fund, created after the death of a young woman whose loss rippled through her community. While helping sell memorial stickers in support of the fund, Brown began hearing stories from people who had lost loved ones, and from others who quietly admitted they themselves had struggled.

"It woke me up," Brown said. "I realized this was much bigger than I ever knew."

Searching for a way to acknowledge that shared weight, Brown approached a church in Saint John and asked permission to create a small public space. At its centre stood a 17-foot white heart, flanked by benches dedicated to young people lost too soon. When the park opened in 2021, people were drawn to it. They stopped. They sat. More often than not, they talked.

What surprised Brown was not the attention, but the response.

"People kept telling me the heart was beautiful," he said. "And I thought to myself, well, let's take that big heart and scale it down and put small ones on people's lawns."

That thought stayed with him. Over the winter, Brown began to wonder what might happen if the symbol moved beyond the park and into everyday life. He encour-



aged people to build smaller white hearts on their own properties. When he shared the idea online, the response was immediate. Dozens of people reached out, asking for hearts of their own.

By the spring of 2022, Operation White Heart had taken shape, not as a formal organization, but as a growing network of symbols and conversations.

As requests increased, Brown began building and installing hearts for those who asked. Modest commissions followed, and with them came a question he had not anticipated: what should the money support?

The answer came from his own experience.

In 2020, Brown had taken Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, known as ASIST. The program does not promise solutions or quick fixes. Instead, it teaches ordinary people how to listen, how to ask direct questions, how to sit with discomfort, and how to help someone feel less alone long enough to reach a safer place.

"[ASIST] not only teaches you how to save people and bring them back to a safe place, but it teaches you how to listen," Brown said. "To me that was the most important part because I didn't know how to listen."

He began to see that the hearts were already doing something similar. They created moments of presence and opened space for conversation. Funding ASIST felt like a natural extension of that instinct. Through commissions from white heart installations,

Brown has since helped fund ASIST training for more than 140 people across New Brunswick and beyond.

In St. Andrews, the town's Mental Wellness Committee, a council-appointed group formed in 2025, learned about Operation White Heart and commissioned the installation of the first local heart at Langmaid Park.

"When we were thinking about how we can build support and build awareness for mental wellness and mental health in our area, we wanted to be able to do some tangible things, and to also have some opportunities for people to get involved," said Caleigh Dunfield, who is a committee member.

Inspired by how Brown paired visibility with skill-building, the committee decided to take the next step. With funding from the Fundy Community Foundation, it brought ASIST training to St. Andrews in a way that would reach as many people as possible.

Over the course of two days in mid-January 2026, over 20 residents completed the training, including people from schools, the nursing home, the fire station and search and rescue.

"It's huge to know that at the end of the two-day training, we have over 20 newly qualified folks just in our small area who have that skill set and that motivation," said Dunfield said.

Participants learned how to listen without rushing, how to ask again when someone says they are fine, and how to stay with someone in a

difficult moment rather than trying to fix it.

When Brown visited St. Andrews to see the hearts in place and the training underway, he saw something he had not planned, but had hoped for.

"That's how it's supposed to work," he said. "I can't be everywhere. Communities take it on themselves."

New hearts continue to appear, many built by people Brown has never met in towns he has never visited.

In St. Andrews, the hearts remain along Water Street, quiet and unassuming, easy to miss. They are not monuments to despair, but small, steady signs of care and compassion in a winter-lit town. Behind them is something sturdier still: a growing network of people learning how to listen, how to notice, how to be there.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911. Help is available 24/7.

Here are some resources:

- 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline: Call or text 9-8-8. Support is available 24/7.
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868
- Hope for Wellness Helpline for Indigenous peoples: 1-855-242-3310
- Trans Lifeline: 1-877-330-6366

St. Andrews looks to Formalize Public Access to Staff-Led Meetings

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJI

The Town of St. Andrews is moving to amend its procedural bylaw to make staff-led meetings open to the public and to keep minutes of the local governments discussions.

Staff-led meetings were only recently placed on the town's meeting calendar, as of August 2025. These meetings are led by Chief Administrative Office Chris Spear who discusses various policies, issues in preparation for decision making.

However, Bylaw 23-06 currently states under section 8.2 states "staff meetings of council are staff-led and will not be televised or broadcast to the public and are not open to the public to attend in person."

The *Local Governance Act* outlines the reasons a council 'may' enter closed session under Section 68(1).

Coun. Lee Heenan read out to the council the background on the changes to the bylaw.

"In August 2025, council started to review the staff-led meeting following concerns raised by a resident regarding the closed nature of the meetings," he said during the meeting on Jan. 19. "Staff had researched requirements in the *Local Governance Act* and the models of municipalities regarding a similar meeting style.

"It is not the most honest form of government." — Geoff Martin, Mount Allison University professor.

An amendment has been prepared by staff to provide more detail for the meeting's purpose, format, and procedure."

It provides clarity on the purpose of the meeting, including the informal style, that it is chaired by someone other than the mayor, and that those meetings be open to the public.

The amendment is not yet in place because the change requires three readings by the local government before it is enacted.

Spear confirmed to *The Courier* the bylaw was amended to open those meetings to the public.

"Council also suspended the rule for staff-led meetings to be closed

part way through 2025 to allow the public access," he said in the email statement. "It needs to be noted that no decisions were made."

Spear added the meetings allowed staff to update the council on ongoing initiatives and get direction on future meetings.

"Sometimes guests would be invited to provide an update/input on an initiative," he said.

Between 2024 and 2025, 17 staff-led meetings were held in closed session, according to Spear.

'Don't tell me, show me'

Geoff Martin, an assistant professor who studies New Brunswick politics at Mount Allison University in Sackville, said any discussion that involves policy or use of tax dollars, like building a facility or improving sidewalks, should be done in public.

He said a voter should know where each individual councillor stands on an issue, even if they don't agree, to inform how they choose to be represented.

You don't know that if you're only relying on the superficiality of a council meeting where not much is said, because everyone's voting for motions and budgets and things that everything's been worked out in advance," he said, speaking to *The Courier*.

Martin said he believes councils do this to protect themselves.

Let's stay unanimous as a group, and we're all protected, because no one can figure out if there's something they don't like," he said. "Well, we can say, that's someone else's fault, but we can't really say who and we'll all take credit for what the voters do like, even if some of us never supported it.

"It is not the most honest form of government."

Martin said there is accountability attached to saying things in public.

"I think if you try to avoid accountability by saying as little in public as possible, that itself, I think, erodes trust because ... when it comes to government, including municipal government, they (the public) have a show me attitude. Don't tell me, show me," he said.

It comes a month after the Local Governance Commission released an advisory to all municipalities in the province saying code of conduct and conflict of interest could not be discussed in closed session, outside of the advice of a solicitor or lawyer, which is contained under Section 68(1) of the Act.



The Commission also asked the councils to review the code of conduct bylaw to bring it in line with the Act.

What happens elsewhere

In St. Stephen, a similar meeting known as Committee of the Whole—where staff give reports, discuss various initiatives, receive presentations, and review policy and is similar to the St. Andrews staff-led meeting—but is and has been open to the public, recorded, and broadcast.

St. Stephen council has held code of conduct and conflict of interest complaints in closed session, which is not permitted under the Act. The council brought the code of conduct bylaw before council on Jan. 14 through Committee of the Whole to bring it into compliance with the commission's advisory.

"The Commission in its wisdom has made a clarification statement banning the decision making or much of the dialogue around any code of conduct complaint from being held in closed, which is common practice across Canada to be perfectly honest with you," said St. Stephen Chief Administrative Officer Jeff Renaud.

"As a result of their decision, we had to go through our bylaw and remove any references to closed session with the exception of solicitor advice [or] the results of an investigators report, which is generally done by a solicitor."

Coun. Wade Greenlaw asked how the commission would suggest councillors become familiar with the various Acts it is required to follow.

The Commission recommended mandatory training within six months of an election of elected officials and staff on the legisla-

"I understand the pressures but then we're a democracy and it becomes very difficult to try and limit the public's input."

tions and the responsibilities of holding municipal office.

Renaud said this would also be part of an orientation package being prepared ahead of the incoming council—a project he took on with the late Coun. Earl Eastman.

"We are spending time [within our] internal orientation program on some of those key items," he said, adding there is an individual responsibility that each councillor holds to keep themselves informed of the proper rules and regulations assigned to local governments.

No decisions were made during the Committee of the Whole, but is expected to be brought before council for three readings over the next several weeks.

The Courier reviewed the procedural bylaw for Eastern Charlotte and found no reference to closed meetings outside of those allowed by the Act.

Eastern Charlotte Chief Administrative Officer Jason Gaudet said it does hold Committee of the Whole Meetings, similar to St. Stephen, but [published minutes](#) do reflect some of those meetings, in part, were held in closed session but cites the reason.

Jamie Gillies, a professor of public policy at St. Thomas University, said councils across the province have fallen apart because of internal dynamics.

"Sometimes it is just a bit of a learning curve," he said, adding he believes there is likely some pressure when there are meetings with stakeholders or experts to hold those in closed.

"I think part of it is the stress and concerns of elected council members and the basic decorum of the public," he said. "This has become an era where people will come before council with anything that bothers them, and it takes a lot of time to address those issues and council has to get through a lot of things in these meetings.

"I understand the pressures but then we're a democracy and it becomes very difficult to try and limit the public's input."

St. Stephen Council Rejects Removing Public Comment Period



Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJI

The Municipal District of St. Stephen (MDSS) has decided not to change the public comment period from its regular meetings.

A public comment period is held toward the beginning of the meeting, allowing individuals to speak and ask questions, though the council cannot respond or enter into debate.

Chief Administrative Officer Jeff Renaud offered change to the council through three options but said staff was not making a recommendation because the decision must be made by the councillors.

Some of the options included pre-registration prior to the meeting, eliminating it all together, and not broadcasting or recording it.

"We wanted to make sure that this came to this council, you have three options there of varying styles," Renaud told the council. "Administration is looking for direction or if there is a preferred style there ... or if you just want to keep things how they are, just feedback for us so we know where to direct our energies."

Many councillors expressed a desire for change. The municipality has been open about facing harassment in recent months and issued a statement in August 2025.

Not the right time

Coun. Joyce Wright said she prefers a one-on-one discussion outside of a council meeting.

"Every time I've offered to meet with someone and have a coffee when there [are] concerns, I never get taken up on that," she said, during the meeting. "We need to foster [a community that] reaches out to their councillors just like they do their MLA, just like they do with their MP."

She said although she felt something needed to change, the timing was not right.

"I'm going to throw a bombshell here, I think we were late to the game in doing it," Wright said. "If we were going to do this as this council, I would want to see us do it in a time frame that allows ... for the public to see the benefits of it, to see the results of it."

Wright pointed to the fact that councils across the province are nearing the end of their terms, with an election scheduled May 11.

"While I agree changes need to be made, I'm not sure now is the time to make them," she said.

Coun. David Hyslop said he agreed with Wright, noting this council would be unlikely to see the benefits and could create a challenge for the incoming council, depending on how it wants the meetings to operate.

Hyslop and Coun. Marg Harding both sat on the council that brought a public comment period to regular council meetings.

"It was before all the cameras, and everything, and it was a pretty open conversation," he said. "I like to see [the] comment period before decisions are made."

He believed the public comment period should move to Committee

of the Whole—a meeting where council discusses reports, policies with staff in a less formal manner—which would allow him more insight into how the community feels before casting his vote on an issue.

"It used to be ... everybody turned around and said 'do you have any questions' after every committee presented and that is how it went, it was pretty easy-going, but then when you've got cameras on you, we don't talk as openly as what we used to ... because you've got cameras because you've got people watching us and taking it out context," he said.

Hyslop said people have published parts of videos out of context, which has led to harassment of him and his family.

"I've got 300 messages on my phone that are disgusting—that attack me and attack my wife for something that was never said at a council meeting," he said. "So something has got to change."

Hyslop said he doesn't believe it is the right time to make the change so close to an election.

CHCO-TV, which is owner of *The Courier*, provides an operator for the camera system at the Garcelon Civic Centre. Those meetings are broadcast on television and posted to YouTube.

Mayor Allan MacEachern said in the past, the public comment period was about something specific—an issue an individual was passionate about—but said that it has become individuals who persistently come to the podium.

"A lot of these questions deserve a

lot of dialogue and you can't do that in the two minutes either," he said. "My goal was to, hopefully, pave the way for the new council."

Coun. Wade Greenlaw said he agreed with Hyslop that the public comment period should be moved to Committee of the Whole, where much of the debate and discussion around policy decisions takes place.

"I feel that any feedback from the community is valuable in any format," he said during the meeting, adding he believed the podium provides people with a stronger impact than an email or a one-on-one conversation.

Greenlaw said he felt the public comment period needed to be kept, but thinks it should be more meaningful, in the form of town halls—an informal meeting where a dialogue can be held between council and the public on a particular issue.

Coun. Marg Harding has been around the horseshoe for a little more than two decades. She said people come to her all the time in regards to issues within the municipality. She said if you keep pushing people to come speak to you on an individual basis, they will come in time.

MacEachern said he understands the frustration by the public who are looking for a dialogue and a response to their questions.

"It just ends there, and it's dead air, and we go back into our meeting," he said.

Continued on Page 10

St. Stephen Council Rejects Removing Public Comment Period

(Continued from page 9)

Renaud explained to the council, a newly hired communications officer would be part of how it moves forward with public engagement, including public comment period.

Coun. Brian Cornish said he agrees this council shouldn't be the one to decide. He said it shouldn't be about controlling it, but managing it effectively when it does get out of hand.

The council ultimately decided not to move forward with any changes. Renaud said the dialogue will be carried forward to the new council.

'The public won't stand for it' Geoff Martin, an assistant professor at Mount Allison University, said the administration should look to see if what they are proposing is legally allowed, like preventing people from filming a public meeting.

"I'm not a lawyer, but I think the answer is probably no," he said, speaking to *The Courier*.

He said it is often easier for municipalities to operate in closed because people don't really know what is going on.

"You can kind of say: oh, well, [the public] can come and vote in three or four years based on the results we get and so on. But you know, we don't really want to hear from you, or we [only] want you to communicate with us only in the ways that suit us," he said.

He said some of the strife comes from the amalgamation of communities not previously included in municipalities—who feel like they have been taken over by a level of government they didn't necessarily want—who may be unfamiliar with that type of governance.

"I think in that environment, I think there has to be greater sensitivity," he said. "To be careful with how things are done, and being more than willing to show that things are being done in [an] efficient way and that the municipality is open to hearing from the

people, and is open to providing explanations for what they're doing."

Martin said when questions become repetitive on a single issue then it is up to the chair to handle it appropriately.

Public life, he explained, is just that—public.

"If you want to go into public life, you need to choose your words carefully. You need to plan on how you're going to communicate," he said.

Martin said he recognizes that municipal officials are facing more scrutiny than before, but there should be proper resources to deal with the small population of people who go over the line.

"It doesn't necessarily justify, sort of, shutting down the communications or things like that," he said. "It certainly is a challenge for people in public life."

St. Thomas University Public Policy professor Jamie Gillies said this is a moment in time where

people wished to be heard, but also one that has brought safety concerns to the front doors of municipal leaders.

"So you can see the pressure on council to try to limit public comment or get people to register in advance so they know what is going to be on the agenda," he said, speaking to *The Courier*.

Gillies said this also coincides with a desire for councils to be more transparent, accountable and accessible to the public.

He said an issue that is being pushed by the public can often become heated and animated, taking resources away from other topics the council needs to deal with.

"But trying to limit public debate is a very difficult thing to do, because the public won't stand for it," Gillies said, adding there are likely things council can do procedurally to make the discussion more fruitful and bring decorum back to the kind of discussions seen at the local level.

The Equality Flaw in Bill C-16

Heather Campbell Pope
Columnist, *The Courier*

Mrs. Schneider, 78, can no longer access her own bank account, having been told she is "too stupid" to handle money. Her mail is intercepted, and her medications are withheld. Visits with friends are monitored, and she is not allowed to attend her book club. Violent threats are routine. Her wheelchair and hearing aids are broken. Her days are organized around keeping the peace, where obedience feels safer than seeking help.

In December, federal Justice Minister Sean Fraser tabled Bill C-16, which proposes to create a standalone criminal offence targeting patterns of abusive behaviour, known as coercive control.

This is welcome reform. Coercive control is a known precursor to intimate femicide, and early intervention can save the lives of women and children.

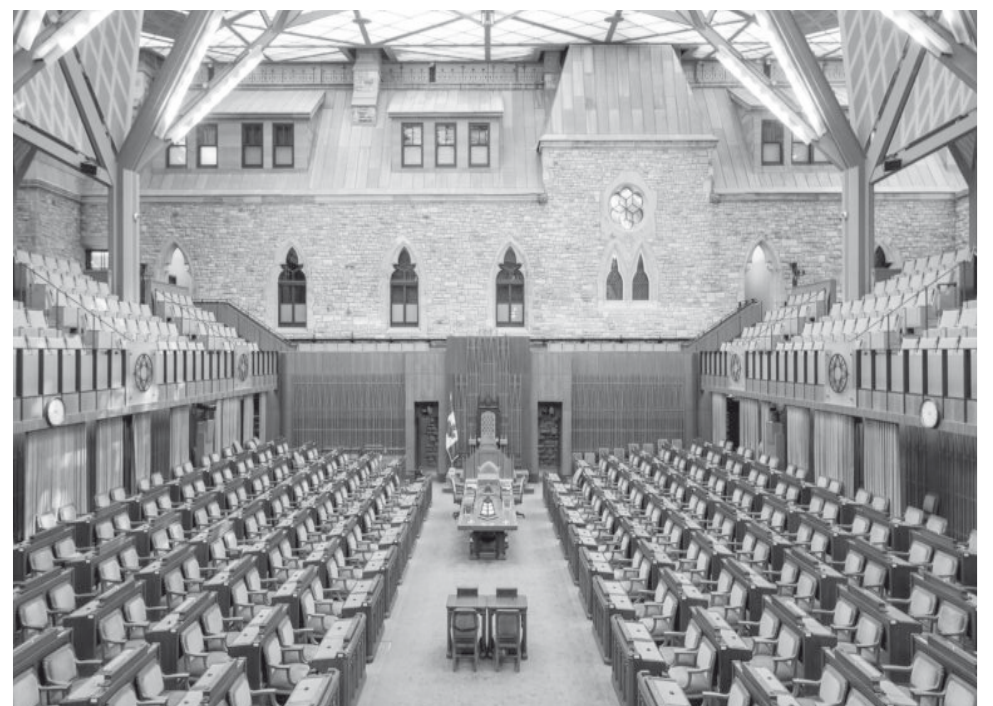
Yet Bill C-16 raises a constitutional concern, as the offence appears vulnerable to a challenge under section 15 of the Charter, which guarantees equality rights. If the person exerting control is the victim's spouse, the proposed law would offer protection. If it is her

son, however, it would not, because the offence is limited to intimate partner relationships. That matters because elder abuse often involves adult children, grandchildren, siblings, or caregivers who control money, housing, medical care, and access to friends and family.

By protecting some victims but not others, the offence creates a hierarchy that conflicts with the principle that all people have equal worth. Seniors abused by relatives or caregivers would be denied the protection available to intimate partners, resulting in unequal access to the criminal law for those harmed in relationships shaped by age, dependence, and disabilities such as dementia, which can heighten vulnerability to mistreatment and make seeking help more difficult.

Of course, the government can attempt to justify the rights infringement under section 1 of the Charter by showing that the limit on equality is reasonable in a free and democratic society. That will be a challenging case to make.

The government's well-intentioned objective of addressing violence against women can be met with an inclusive approach that extends to elder abuse victims. Indeed, it would further that ob-



jective: according to 2024 data from the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, when a woman is killed by a family member, the accused is her son more than half the time (55 percent). A coercive control offence could help police intervene before the situation escalates to deadly violence or neglect.

Those concerned that broadening the offence might weaken its impact on domestic abuse can rest assured. Fraser's draft makes it a hybrid crime, allowing Crown counsel to proceed summarily or by indictment, which carries harsher penalties for more serious

cases. Judges must also treat abuse of an intimate partner as an aggravating factor under existing sentencing law.

As MPs consider Bill C-16, they have the opportunity to close the equality gap. Amending the offence to include elder abuse victims would provide stronger protection to a vulnerable group and strengthen its Charter compliance, signaling that harms experienced by older Canadians, including those with dementia, are taken seriously under the law.

Heather Campbell Pope is founder of Dementia Justice Canada.



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February 10	6pm	Tuesday Talks: Perter Von Tissenhausen
February 22	1-3pm	Life Drawing
February 27	10am - 3pm	Open Studio
February 28	1-3pm	Hands On: A monthly directed craft or art project for all ages

Events
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Eastern Charlotte Night Market Soars to New Heights with Community

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJ1

The Eastern Charlotte Night Market is something many community members enjoy, but was an idea born out of bringing something unique to Charlotte County.

Sue Guthrie, Jordan Holmes, and Jen Martin set reasonable expectations and had a good response from a variety of vendors.

“And the community has really taken [it] on, very enthusiastic,” Guthrie said. “We keep our vendor list varied and hopefully, in time, it will become a market where you can buy fruits and vegetables, everyday things to use, and make it a social event.”

It has become so popular, the market has received more requests to take part in its February market than it has space to accommodate them.



The Eastern Charlotte Night Market (Submitted Photo)

“We reached capacity right away,” said Holmes, adding it was able to fit about 38 vendors inside Maguadavic Place, a community centre in St. George. “We were expecting that because we’ve had such an amazing turnout and variation of vendors.”

It started in partnership with Eastern Charlotte—the local government—in September.

“We found overall it was positive from all sides,” Holmes said, speaking to *The Courier*. “The municipality liked it, the vendors liked it, and most importantly the community liked it.”

Holmes said from that point forward the market saw exponential growth. The first list of vendors included about ten operators; now the list is at 82.

The growth was also reflected in the number of people attending the market. Its second market brought in about 200 people. The third coincided with Ladies Night—where businesses stay

open later for community members to shop and dine—bringing in about 400 people.

St. George used to have markets on a fairly consistent basis according to Guthrie, but over time those stopped operating.

“We started mentioning it to people just in general conversation and people would bring up, ‘oh, it would be lovely to have a market,’ ” she said. “So, this is what made me lean toward a market ... and there was a lot of excitement.”

The group has vendors on the waitlist to join them.

Holmes said the intention is not to compete with markets that operate in St. Andrews and St. Stephen, but to offer a unique experience only Charlotte County can provide.

“On April 3, we are officially launching weekly markets in Eastern Charlotte,” he said. “Every Friday, they will primarily be at the Riverside Park Pavilion that

was built just last year.”

Those markets will run from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

But the group isn’t stopping there. It plans to keep working on the market’s future with the municipality who Holmes said has been supportive of their initiative.

“We’re looking at bringing in volunteers ... to offset our own time,” he said. “We really need the community behind us to make this thing work.”

The market has worked to support local businesses, to encourage individuals to “shop local”, and to promote fundraising efforts, including with the Fundy Middle and High School graduating class.

“We’re trying to keep it exciting and interesting,” Holmes said.

The next Eastern Charlotte Night Market is on February 13 at 11 J O Spinney Street in St. George from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.



There are up to 82 vendors in the market (Submitted)

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For the Love of Maud: Chapter 9

The Sacred Morning Routine

Vicki Hogarth
Reporter, The Courier

We bought a dog bed for Maud when she was a puppy, which in hindsight was very optimistic of us. It was immediately clear she would never use it. Instead, she installed herself in our bed like a permanent fixture, often wedged directly between my husband and me, her head on the pillow with her legs stretched out like a human. The look on her face suggested a genuine confusion about our expectations. *How*, exactly, did we imagine she was supposed to sleep on a sad little circular mat on the floor?

I have spent countless nights clinging to the outer edge of our bed, suspended like a person who lost a game of musical chairs. We eventually bought a king-sized bed specifically to accommodate our growing, full-sized goldendoodle, never once considering that we might want to *discourage* her from sleeping with us. That would have felt cruel, even if we had to knock down a wall to make space for a bigger bed. We live in a second floor apartment above my husband's surf and scuba business on Water Street, and while some might argue that a king-sized bed is excessive for a small home, those people have clearly never lived with a doodle. When you bring a life-sized teddy bear into your life, you make room.

Now that Maud is a 65-pound real-life muppet, she's occasionally the one who needs space from us. She still starts every night in our bed, but once we've all drifted off, she sometimes wakes and slowly saunters into the living room, curling up in her favourite chair. From there, she can still see us, but she also has a clear view of Water Street through the window. It's the

perfect vantage point: close enough to monitor her people, far enough away to enjoy the cool independence of her own seat.

I'm almost always the first one up in the morning. If Maud is in her chair, I kiss her sleepy head on my way to the shower. This is not just affection—it's activation. Like a human hitting the snooze button, Maud jumps down, stretches dramatically, and with her eyes half-open slowly makes her way back to the bedroom where her Dad is still asleep.

She climbs onto him, places both paws on his shoulders, rests her head gently on one of them, and just... stays there.

This is Patrick's alarm clock. And I am deeply jealous of it.

I have tried—repeatedly—to convince her to do the same thing with me. I've pleaded. I've patted the bed. I've made myself emotionally available. I've even put her favourite liver treat on my shoulder while lying down and

trying to coerce her into the same cuddle formation. She will not. This is clearly *their* ritual, a sacred father-daughter moment she refuses to dilute by sharing it with anyone but her Dad. I've accepted my role as witness. I stand quietly in the doorway, watching, like someone who has wandered into a monastery by accident and understands that even breathing too loudly would be disrespectful.

Even after I'm showered and am back in the bedroom getting ready, they remain locked in their morning cuddle. Sometimes they're both snoring, deep in whatever dream world they share. Other times they're awake, silent, and staring into space with matching expressions, clearly gathering themselves for the day ahead. It's how they begin: together, unhur-



ried, bracing for the world before stepping out the door.

The spell only breaks when Maud sees me put my shoes on. That means it's time for her morning walk with her Mom to her Granny's house on Edward Street, a route rich with squirrel activity and therefore not to be missed.

This is how our mornings begin. It's our routine. It's simple, and somehow it's everything I didn't know I needed until it was ours.

And, maybe, at its essence, that's what love is.

"Winter is a sketch; summer a painting."
— Soren Kierkegaard

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County Moose Sign Three-Year Deal to Stay in St Stephen

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJI

The County Moose are staying in St. Stephen for at least the next three seasons.

It has signed a contract with the municipality to continue the bringing junior hockey to the community at the Garcelon Civic Centre.

"This agreement marks an exciting milestone for the organization and reinforces a shared commitment to hockey, community engagement, and long-term growth in Charlotte County," a statement from the team reads.

The County Moose are part of the United States Premier Hockey League's National Collegiate De-

velopment Conference. It was one of two teams selected to make Charlotte County its home base, but another team in Blacks Harbour was sold to a U.S. owner.

"Since the arrival, the County Moose have worked hard to become more than just a hockey, focusing on building connections, supporting local initiatives, and creating memorable experiences on and off the ice," the statement reads.

The ownership of the team thanked the Municipal District of St. Stephen, community partners, billet families, and sponsors for its continued to support for the team.

"As the Moose look ahead, one thing remains clear, this is just the beginning," the statement said.



The Etiquette Guy at Large: What if Our Political Leaders Took a Breath ?

Jay Remer
Columnist, The Courier

Sometimes, a small act could reshape our politics: What if leaders from all sides paused and breathed, focusing on progress over blame?

Not a strategic pause.

Not a poll-tested one.

Just a breath.

A pause could remind us that public service aims for collective progress, not the defeat of opponents.

Too often, public problems become battles over blame rather than solutions. Housing, health care, education, affordability: each is quickly assigned a villain, and progress leaves the room.

What if, instead of seeking blame, we centered our politics on shared problem-solving?

The most immediate change would not be a sudden flood of perfect policies. It would be a shift in tone. Fewer speeches are designed to embarrass the other side. Less performative outrage. More room for thoughtful disagreement.

Instead, we might hear language that reflects maturity rather than certainty:

"We see this differently."

"We don't yet have the full picture."

"This is more complex than a single policy or party."

These are not signs of weakness. They are signs of leadership.

Many challenges stall because problem-naming becomes finger-pointing. Most pressures are decades in the making — layered, structural, and shaped by shifting demographics and economics.

When we stop searching for villains, we create space to design solutions.

A healthier political culture would also speak more honestly about trade-offs. Every meaningful solution carries costs — in money, time, flexibility, or patience. Pretending otherwise may win headlines, but it erodes trust. Citizens can understand complexity; what they reject is being misled.

Collaboration would look different as well. Instead of rigid camps, we might see issue-based partnerships that form and dissolve as needed — conservatives and progressives aligning on addiction recovery, rural and urban representatives working together on infrastructure, or business and labor groups co-designing workforce solutions.

That is how complex systems adapt.

Success, too, would be measured differently. Not by who "won the week" or dominated the news cycle, but by durability. Does a policy still work five years from now? Does it reduce pressure rather than shift it elsewhere? Does it make daily life more stable for the people it affects?

These are quieter victories. They



rarely generate applause. But they endure.

Perhaps the most important change would be what this approach signals to the public. It would treat citizens like adults — capable of nuance, patience, and shared responsibility. Rather than fueling fear or tribal loyalty, leadership would invite participation: not agreement, but contribution.

Disagreement would remain. It always will. But it would be held without tearing the social fabric that allows for dispute in the first place.

Civility is not politeness.

It is restraint.

It is repair.

It is the decision to breathe before reacting.

In a culture that rewards speed and outrage, that pause may feel

radical. Yet complex societies do not survive on outrage. They survive on cooperation, proportion, and the willingness to keep talking — especially when it is difficult.

Let's make the choice to pause— leaders and citizens alike. Take a moment to consider, before reacting, how our words and actions contribute to building a better, more cooperative society. By doing so together, we can shape the kind of future our communities truly need.

Jay Remer has been involved in the writers' community and author of "The Etiquette Guy at Large" in a number of different publications. Please feel free to send your questions to Jay at jayremer@chco.tv

Kiwanis Costume Carnival Returns to WC O'Neill Arena on 16 February

CHCO News

Have the mid-winter blues? Wondering what to do on this month's provincial Family Day holiday?

Come to the Costume Carnival in Saint Andrews on Monday, February 16.

For over 80 years, the St. Andrews Kiwanis Club has sponsored a Costume Carnival that offers local families an afternoon of fun in the middle of the long winter.

There is free skating, candy, hot chocolate and draw prizes for everyone who wears a simple costume. and a traditional handful of coins for the younger ones.

"The Costume Carnival is a wonderful winter tradition here", says Lee Sochasky, the Kiwanis carnival organizer.

"It is open to everyone in the area, whether they want to skate or not. We just want everyone to have a good time."

She says that she shops all year for great draw prizes for all the kids – each one gets to choose what they want – and for other prizes that families can enjoy together.

Everyone is invited to this year's Kiwanis Costume Carnival at the W.C. O'Neill Arena in Saint Andrews, 1- 2:30pm on Family Day, Monday, February 16.

For more information, see the local posters or call/text 506-321-490



Children enjoying the 2025 Costume Carnival (Submitted)

OP Ed: Eastern Charlotte's Water Questions Remain Unanswered

Tori Hawkins
Pennfield Resident

In Eastern Charlotte, the drinking water system serving Blacks Harbour and parts of Beaver Harbour operates under an arrangement many residents are only now fully understanding—and questioning.

Blacks Harbour's municipal drinking water does not come from a municipally owned source.

Instead, it is drawn from groundwater wells owned by Connors Bros. (AKA Clover Leaf Seafoods, owned by the American company Bumblebee Foods), a private seafood processing company that also uses large volumes of water for its industrial operations. The same water source that supplies households also supports the company's processing plant, where an unknown amount of water is used.

While the municipality holds the provincial approval to operate the drinking water system, it does not own the source itself, and much of the infrastructure carrying water into the community dates back decades. This unusual structure, private ownership serving a public need, has created long-standing challenges around oversight, maintenance, and accountability.

For years, Blacks and Beaver Harbour residents have experienced recurring water-quality issues, including boil-water advisories, turbidity, and discoloration. More recently, neighbouring rural areas such as Pennfield and Beaver Harbour have begun facing something

new and deeply concerning: private wells that historically never failed are now running dry. Some directly neighbouring the source, are not recovering at all, requiring repeated and costly re-drilling.

Families are spending tens of thousands of dollars simply to maintain access to water.

In a recent response, Premier Susan Holt confirmed in an email that the province is aware of increased water extraction by Clover Leaf Seafoods, attributing higher withdrawal rates to increased flushing activities needed to address turbidity in the system. She stated that the company is operating within the limits of its existing approvals, noting that the original wells date back to the 1960s and therefore do not trigger an Environmental Impact Assessment.

However, that explanation has raised further questions.

Residents living directly beside the water source have firsthand knowledge that additional wells were drilled in the early 1990s, after the Clean Water Act was legislated, at a different nearby location. At that time, neighbouring private wells experienced noticeable water loss. Residents are now asking whether those newer wells and increased withdrawals were ever properly assessed, and whether current approvals accurately reflect today's reality.

The issue extends beyond the wells themselves. The aging infrastructure that carries water approximately 8.5 kilometres into Blacks Harbour and Beaver Harbour continues to fail. Portions of the



system include repurposed pipes from infrastructure associated with the former WWII-era Pennfield airport. Frequent breaks persist, raising concerns not only about service interruptions, but about what may be leaking into the surrounding groundwater.

Another major concern is transparency around water use. Residents are being asked to conserve water during drought conditions, yet there is no publicly available data clearly showing how much water is being withdrawn, how much is lost through leaks, or how compliance with provincial guidelines is being measured. Without access to this information, assurances that operations are "within limits" are difficult for the public to evaluate.

Approximately \$500,000 in public funding has been allocated for water infrastructure studies, though only a portion has been spent to date, largely on further assessment rather than repairing the existing system. Meanwhile, responsibility remains divided between private ownership, municipal operation, and provincial regulation.

Where things stand now is uncom-

fortable but clear: residents are absorbing the consequences of a system that has not kept pace with modern demands, climate stress, or public expectations.

This is not about assigning blame. It is about acknowledging that decades of deferred decisions and unclear accountability have brought the community to this point, and that continued reliance on studies without transparent data or firm timelines will not restore public confidence-or water security.

Clean, reliable drinking water is not optional. It is foundational. The people of Eastern Charlotte deserve clear answers, open communication, and a coordinated plan that puts public health and environmental protection first. This massive infrastructure project will require funding from all levels of government; therefore, it only makes sense that all levels of government and involved stakeholders meet publicly, approve funding, and determine a timeline. Every day of government inaction is another day of real consequences faced by this community. Enough is enough.

Wishing You All the Est

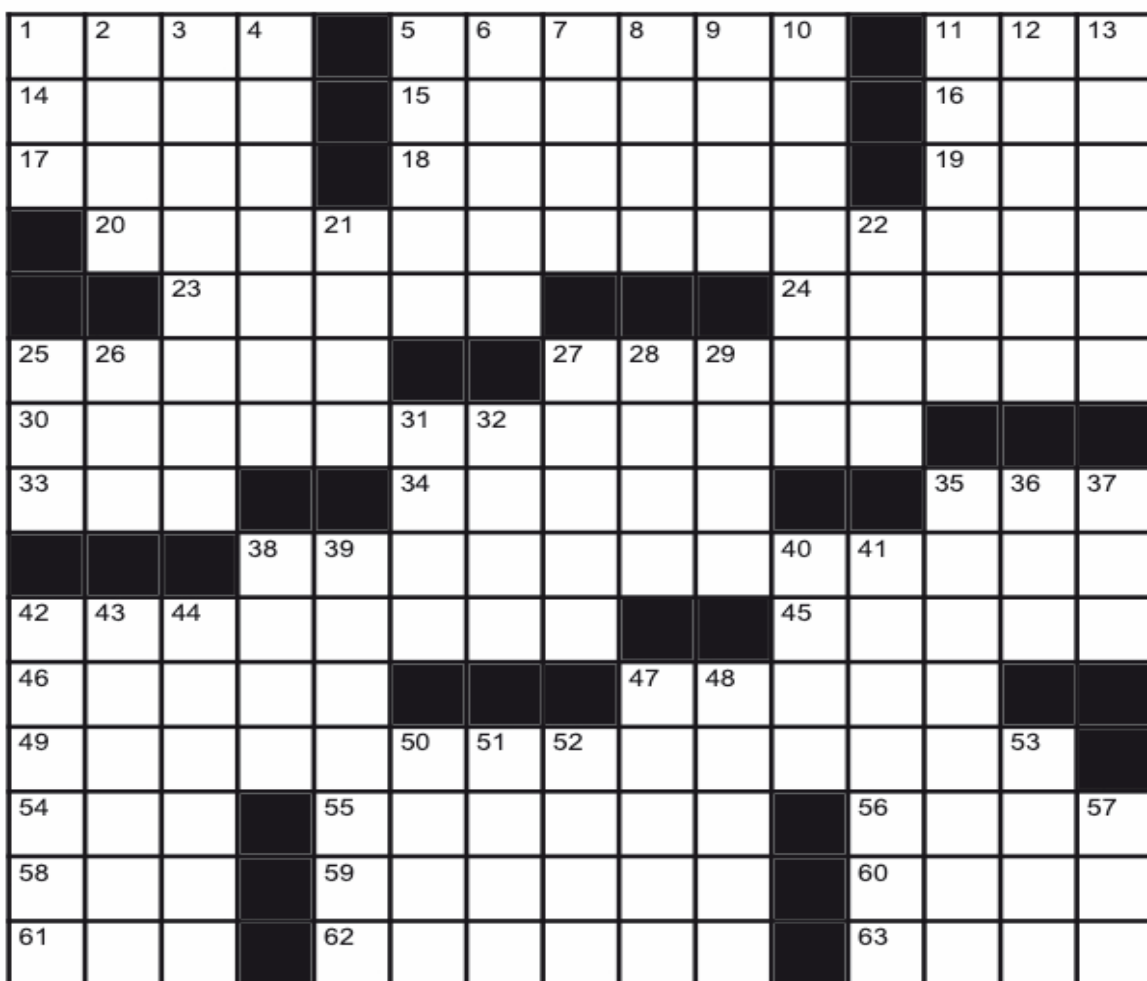
by Barbara Olson
© ClassiCanadian Crosswords

Across

- 1 What Horton hears
- 5 ___ number (element's I.D.)
- 11 Film set VIP: Abbr.
- 14 Bed beneath a mobile
- 15 Saskatchewan's capital
- 16 Philips who said "I ran five miles today. Then I said, 'Here, lady, take your purse.'"
- 17 Roughnecks' worksites
- 18 Latin for "actually existing"
- 19 Medical aide, for short
- 20 TV show about a humble police team?
- 23 Worries frantically
- 24 What a headphone icon indicates
- 25 Stabbed martini garnish
- 27 Horseshoe fitters
- 30 "Climb the world's highest peak? When pigs fly!"?
- 33 Site of gout pain
- 34 Knot again
- 35 PhD precursors
- 38 Fictional woodland?
- 42 Woofers' counterparts
- 45 ___-panky
- 46 Prepare for a Musclemag photo
- 47 Stash, as cargo
- 49 Hired windstorm chasers?
- 54 Ginger ___
- 55 Working virtually, maybe
- 56 Flub
- 58 One in charge: Abbr.
- 59 Rebounding pool shots
- 60 ___ pot (deteriorate)
- 61 Pt. of "iOS" or "DOS"
- 62 Practise pieces, from the French for "studies"
- 63 Portmanteau of smoke + 57-Down

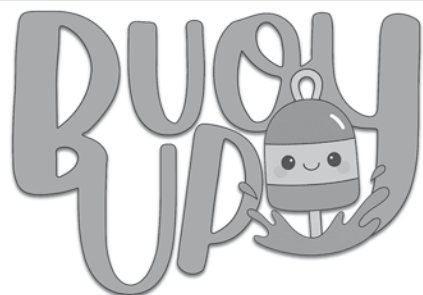
Down

- 1 Not dn.
- 2 ___ large (clearly)
- 3 Victorious hand slap
- 4 Respect, as a holy day



- 5 "You're ___!" (comment to a comic)
- 6 Is inclined (to)
- 7 Wavy molding
- 8 Be a bad sniper
- 9 The "I" of NAIT or SAIT: Abbr
- 10 Vodka and clamato cocktails
- 11 Lie, often to oneself
- 12 Render less effective
- 13 Sonata finales
- 21 Dutch painter Jan van der ___
- 22 Give up, as a habit
- 25 Three east of Alta.
- 26 Singer Sayer
- 27 Midwife's wall diagram, perhaps
- 28 "What ___!" (words to a gouger)
- 29 Coral-rich ridge
- 31 German "earth"
- 32 Swerve sharply
- 35 Lav for lads
- 36 Use a chatbot, say
- 37 Pig's digs
- 38 The Rolling Stones' "Start ___"
- 39 Resting easy
- 40 Reluctant agreement
- 41 Rocky's breakfast ingredients
- 42 Sales slip final figures
- 43 Easy to handle
- 44 Sticky alternative to Gorilla
- 47 French site of World War battles
- 48 Rapunzel's "ladder" for the prince
- 50 Athlete's bio bit
- 51 No ___ road
- 52 Sliver source, often
- 53 Pepys words before bed?
- 57 See 63-Across

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CHARLES FAIRWEATHER

It is with great sadness the family of Charles "Charlie" Fairweather announce his passing at home on Friday, December 19, 2025.

He is survived by his wife, Bonnie (Booth), his children, Anna Booth, John Adams and Jennifer Adams, grandchildren, Kaedynce, Braden and Jase. Charlie is also survived by his siblings, Albert, David, Norma, Peter and Freddie, several nieces, nephews and cousins.

In addition to his parents Archie and Addie, he was predeceased by his infant brother, Ronnie, brother, Doug, and his fur babies, Rocky, Emma and Bob.

*Funeral service was held on
December 23, 2025*



BRETT HEMPHILL

It is with great sadness that the family of Brett Hemphill announces his passing at 31 years old on Friday, December 19, 2025.

Brett was born in 1994, in Woodstock, New Brunswick to Matthew and Courtney Hemphill.

The loss of Brett will be felt deeply by his wife, Emma Hemphill and son Soren Hemphill, his parents Matthew and Courtney Hemphill, siblings, Daemen and Cassy Hemphill, his grandmothers Betty Lou Hemphill and Sandra Lewis, and his many uncles, aunts, and cousins.

*A celebration of life was held on
December 30, 2025*



ABBY L. MACMILLAN

It is with great sadness that the family of Abby L. MacMillan (Henderson) announces her unexpected passing on Tuesday, December 23, 2025.

She will be greatly missed by her sons, Reid and Riley, parents, David and Terry, sister Emma (Bryan), brother Jason (Shaunalee), along with nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Abby will also be missed deeply by lifelong friends, and anyone else who had the privilege of being loved by her.

*Funeral service was held
December 31, 2025.*



SUSAN M. CORNING

Susan M. Corning, wife of Arthur Corning, of Rolling Dam, NB passed away on Monday December 29, 2025 at the Charlotte County Hospital St. Stephen, NB.

*As per Susan's request,
there will be no services held.*



MAURICE G. RICHARDS

It is with great sadness that the family of Maurice G. Richards announce his passing on Monday December 29, 2025, at Lincourt Manor St. Stephen, NB.

Maurice is survived by his loving wife; Linda, sons; Jeff and Jamie (Kathleen), granddaughter; Anna, his special friend; Cheryl Dow, nieces, nephews and cousins.

*Funeral Mass was celebrated
on January 2, 2026*



MARGARET E. BROOKER

Margaret E. Brooker, a loving daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and dedicated nurse and mentor, passed away peacefully on December 22, 2025, at Campobello Lodge, New Brunswick.

She is survived by her son, David (Jody Watson) Brooker; her daughter, Julie (Orville) Hartford; her grandchildren, Melissa (Brayden) Woodman, Sarah Hartford, and Amelia Hartford; her great-granddaughter, Mallory Woodman; and extended family including her aunt, Margaret (Charles) Reid.

*A graveside service will
be held in the spring, with the
date to be announced.*



YVONNE NORDSTROM

The family of Yvonne Nordstrom sadly announces her passing on December 21, 2025, at the age of 88.

She is lovingly survived by her children Charlotte (Tex) Giddens, Gregory (Jackie), Gwen (Bill) Borthwick, Allison (Anne), Kenneth, and Andrew (Troy). She will be dearly missed by her grandchildren, Ryan (Meaghan), Andrew (Krissi), and Scott (Amy); Greg Jackson, Hailey, Lindsey; Cameron (Danielle), Cara, Bethany (Alan), Chrissy (Dave); Colton and Sydney (Chris), several great grandchildren, all of whom brought her immense pride and joy.

*Yvonne's family will be
celebrating her life at a Catholic
Mass at a future date.*

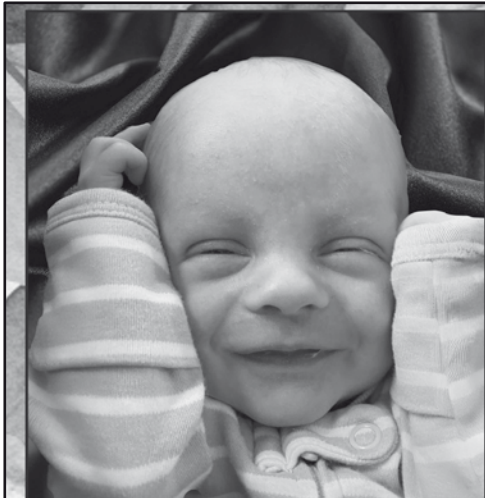


BARRY E. PETERSON

It is with a heavy heart to announce the passing of Barry E. Peterson on Wednesday December 31, 2025, at his residence in Tower Hill, NB.

He is survived by longtime partner of 34 years; Rosie McCutcheon, daughter; Alicia McCutcheon, son; Drake McCutcheon, grandson; Ezra, his parents, siblings; Shirley Arbeau (Shepard) of Miramichi, NB, Jeanette Peterson (Blair) of St Stephen, NB, Basil Peterson (Tracy) of Chelmsford, NB and Heather Ward (Chris) from Red Bank, NB, several aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews.

*A graveside service will be
held at a later date.*



ALEXANDER F. MUNDIE

With extreme sadness the family announce the sudden passing of infant son and brother, Alexander F. Mundie on January 14, 2026, at his residence.

He will be lovingly remembered by his mom; Rachel Mundie, siblings; Donavon Mundie, Michael O'Neil Jr and Jaclyn MacLeod, maternal grandmother; Michelle Mundie, great-grandmother; Thelma Mundie aunts, uncles, great-aunts, great-uncles and cousins.

Predeceased by his maternal grandfather; Ian Mundie and great-grandparents; Roy and Frances Gullison.

Funeral service was held January 23, 2026.



MAVIS A. ROUSE

With deep sadness, that family announce the sudden passing of Mavis A. Rouse at the Dr. Everett Chambers Hospital Fredericton, NB, after a tragic accident in Brockway, NB.

Marvis is survived by her son; Thomas (Samantha Byres) of Halifax, NS and two sisters, several nieces, nephews and cousins.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by her husband; Donald L Rouse, three brothers and two sisters.

In keeping with Mom's wishes, there will be no funeral service or visitation held.



C. BRUCE MACMILLAN

It is with great sadness the family of C. Bruce MacMillan announce his passing from this life on January 3, 2026, at Lincourt Manor, St Stephen, NB.

Bruce is survived by his two sons who he loved deeply; Cameron MacMillan, Oromocto, NB and Phillip MacMillan, Tower Hill, NB, two sisters; Bonnie Sprague, Calais, ME and Heather MacMillan, Milltown, NB, nephew; Tyler MacMillan, Milltown, NB and several cousins.

A graveside service will be held at a later date.



DOROTHY P. BATTEN

Dorothy P. Batten passed away peacefully at the Charlotte County Hospital on January 8th, 2026.

Dorothy is survived by her children; Dee, Linda, Larry, Jeff, Debbie, Tony and Judy, along with her siblings in Newfoundland; Florence, Evelyn, Lillian and Sam.

In keeping with Mom's wishes, there will be no funeral service or visitation.



DANIEL A. DEFAZIO

It is with deepest sadness that we share, the family announce the passing of Daniel "Dan" A. Defazio on Tuesday January 6, 2026, at the Charlotte County Hospital St. Stephen, NB.

Dan is survived by his beloved, devoted wife of 38 years, Donita (Russel), his three children; Chad, Katelynn, and Bradlee (Makayla) all of St. Stephen, NB and one chosen child Kirsten (Daniel) of Shediac NB., their seven precious grandchildren; Jamison, Dreyden, Gunner, Sylus, Sirena, Jaxton, and Danni-Lynn, his special family dog, Bruno, three brothers; David of St. Stephen, Paul (Heather) of Woodstock NB, and Royden (Bobby) of Nova Scotia, two brothers-in-law; Joe Keenan of St. Stephen, NB and Joe Henry of Upper Mills, NB., father-in-law; Don Russell of St. Stephen, NB, several aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date.



E. DOROTHY MURCHIE

E. Dorothy "Dot" Murchie, age 91, passed away peacefully on January 16, 2026, at her daughter's home in Tower Hill, NB.

Dot is survived by her children, Bill Murchie of St. Stephen, NB, Judy Mitchell (Don) of Tower Hill, NB, Beth Murchie (John Bryden) of Stillwater Lake, NS, and Gordon Murchie (Alanna) of Red Deer, AB, and her grandchildren, Kyle Mitchell and Tanis Mitchell, of Edmonton, AB, David Mitchell (Jess) of Tower Hill, NB, Melissa Murchie (Tyler) of Winnipeg, MB, Ben Bryden and Henry Bryden of Halifax, NS. She is also survived by her cherished nieces and nephews: Gail, Stu, John, Bruce, Marion, Susan, Janet, Charles, Cindy, Cathy and their families.

Funeral service and visitation were held January 27, 2026.



MATILDA L. ALLEN

Matilda L. Allen passed away with her family by her side at Lincourt Manor, St. Stephen, N.B. on January 18, 2026 at the age of 101 years.

Born in Port Elgin, N.B., daughter of the late George and Annie LeBlanc. Matilda is survived by her daughter, Debbie Trenholm (Curtis), grandson, Tyler (Katelyn) and their sons, Bowan and Tristan, grandson, Ryan, son-in-law, Kevin Trenholm.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by her husband, Ronald in 2011.

There will be no funeral service or visitation held at this time. A private family service will be held in Port Elgin at a later date.



JOSEPH N. HANSEN

It is with great sadness the family of Joseph "Joe" N. Hansen announces his passing on Saturday January 3, 2026, at the Charlotte County Hospital St. Stephen, NB.

Joe is survived by his loving wife; Sheah, his children, both by blood and by choice; daughter Annette Rubin (Josh) of Calgary, Alberta; son Justin Hansen (Jacqueline) of Waterboro, Maine; Jennifer Crilley (Dave) of Chance Harbour, New Brunswick; Meredith Cunningham (Ryan) of Scotch Ridge, New Brunswick; Theresa Sprague; and Douglas Sprague, along with their respective families, grandfather to McKenzie Tilton, Mitchell and Alexis McLean, Libby and Warren Hansen, Cara McLeod (Jesse), Brady McLeod (Aby), and to Hunter and Hayden Grenier, he was also blessed with great-grandchildren; Jayden Morrison-Lee, Brinley Lee, and Colter McLeod; his sister; Janet Campbell brothers; Rick Hansen (Debbie) and Jim Hansen, his cat; Flip, who already feels his absence, several nephews and nieces.

Funeral service will be held at a later date.

N.B. Assigns Minister to Oversee Seniors, Long-Term Care

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJ1



The Liberal government has appointed Lyne Chantal Boudreau as Minister of Seniors despite previously telling industry associations it wouldn't.

Kathy Bockus, the MLA for Saint Croix, who was the Minister responsible for Seniors under the Blaine Higgs government, criticized the Liberals for not committing to creating a stand-alone department and minister despite it being requested by stakeholders.

Boudreau was previously the Minister responsible for seniors, which does not carry an independent portfolio or budget, and seniors fell under the purview of Social Development.

"We'd be able to establish procedures and policies without having to go through social development," Bockus said, speaking to *The Courier*. "I think our seniors are important enough in this province that they deserve a department of their own."

The Progressive Conservatives released a statement on Jan. 7 saying it and several associations involved with seniors and long-term care were given a hard no without explanation from the Holt government.

Bockus said had the PCs stayed in power, they likely would have been working towards a separate department, but had not developed one during her tenure.

"I was just working to upgrade what we already had, all the services and things," she said.

Bockus said when she first sat down with leadership in the Department of Social Development, there wasn't a lot of consultation being done with seniors. The Higgs government started the Nursing Home Without Walls pro-

gram as a pilot, but found success with it and continued it and began expansion—aiming to keep seniors in their home—and is now being continued with the Liberal government.

This is a program that is being heavily used in Charlotte County, Bockus's riding, through the Charlotte County Seniors Resource Centre.

"These are our seniors, they've built this province;" she said. "I just think that seniors are important enough that we need to dedicate a department to them."

Both Horizon Health Network and Vitalite Health Network have said alternative level of care (ALC) patients, who no longer need to be in hospital and are waiting for placement, are placing regional hospitals in a state of overcapacity.

"This is not a request we make lightly, however. Despite the great effort by staff and physicians to care for all inpatients, the current situation across our hospital system is unsustainable," Margaret Melanson, the CEO of HHN said back in July.

Patients have reported being treated in hallways, storage closets and ambulance bays in condi-

tions they describe as "disgusting", according to reports by CBC New Brunswick.

Richard Loiser, the chief executive officer of the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes, said the decision to create an accountable ministerial position is one in the right direction.

"What we really do want is a separate department with a deputy minister and everything else that comes with it to focus on the needs of seniors and long term care, not only for today, but also have a long term vision, which is desperately needed in the situation we're in today," he said in an interview with *The Courier*.

Loiser said a coalition of associations met with Premier Susan Holt in September and said it was clear the government was heading in that direction. He said time will tell whether this new position comes with results.

"The only thing we could do is to wait it out and see how this will turn out," he said, noting the large number of seniors waiting in alternative levels of care beds in hospitals across the province.

Loiser said, right now, there are no new bed plans available in New

Brunswick, with approximately 1,100 seniors waiting for placement in the province.

"If there's no space in the community, it's going to be an issue," he said. "It all comes down, unfortunately, on a lot of fronts, it's money."

He said the work the government has done to improve compensation for those working in the long-term care sector has gone a long way in improving recruitment and retention.

But work is needed to improve the number of hours of care per patient. New Brunswick, he explained, hits at about 3.6 hours per patient, whereas neighbouring Nova Scotia is around 4.1 hours per patient.

"But you need investments; we'll have to wait and see how this is going to play out," he said, adding this was a predicted situation, and this government and successive governments must ensure long-term planning to avoid it from happening again.

The Courier asked for an interview from the Department of Social Development but did not hear back by deadline.

Registration Open for 2026 Artsipelago Guide

Lura Jackson
Tides Institute

Artists and cultural organizations in the Passamaquoddy Bay region are invited to sign up for the 2026 Artsipelago map and cultural guide coming out in print this May. The guide, published by the Tides Institute & Museum of Art (TIMA) in Eastport, is now in its 13th edition and is the only printed resource of its kind for the

international Passamaquoddy Bay area.

Each participating artist, gallery, and cultural institution is marked on the map and detailed in the guide, while spo

nsors are recognized prominently within the guide. This year, 6,000 double-sided guides will be distributed throughout Maine and New Brunswick at visitor information centers, galleries, and hotels.

Beginning with the 2022 edition,

TIMA has collaborated with the Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Office to accurately record significant place names throughout the region and add them to the map. Dozens of Passamaquoddy place names are now accurately recorded on the map and referenced in the guide.

If you live in Lubec, Pembroke, Dennysville, Trescott, Eastport, Perry, Sipayik, Calais, Robbinston, Campobello, Deer Island, St.

Stephen, St. Andrews, Bocabec, St. George, Blacks Harbour, Pennfield, or Grand Manan and would like to be included as an artist, gallery, cultural institution or sponsor in the 2026 edition of Artsipelago, please contact Lura Jackson at Ljackson@tidesinstitute.org or leave a message at 207-853-4047 prior to the deadline of March 1.

St. Stephen Clinic Location Announced, Access Clinic Opens

Nathalie Sturgeon
Reporter, LJI

erating out of the Charlotte County Hospital (CCH) since February, taking 310 patients off the waitlist for a family health-care provider.

It pales in comparison to the roughly 8,000 unattached patients in Charlotte County. Both Holt and Dr. Wael Saber—the clinic’s primary physician — said space has prevented them from taking on more patients and adding additional health-care workers.

St. Stephen is the first part of the county to open a collaborative care clinic, with the Holt government promising 30 over the next four years — this being one of ten announced within the first 18 months of the Liberal mandate.

The Courier has reached out to the Department of Health for comment and is awaiting a response.

Another clinic is expected to open in Blacks Harbour this year. Recently, HHN announced its Fundy Health Centre would be opening an access clinic similar to the one established in St. Stephen — which sees non-urgent patients for their medical needs in order to divert them from the emergency

The new location for the St. Stephen collaborative care clinic has been announced on King Street, a little more than a month after funding was allocated.

A team of physicians, nurse practitioners (NPs), registered nurses (RNs), and other allied health professionals will run the St. Stephen Family Health Team from 210 King Street — the former Sobeys building in the Charlotte Mall.

“Space planning and renovations will begin in the new year, and once complete, will open as the new St. Stephen Family Health Team,” said a release from Horizon Health Network (HHN).

It said the space is roughly 12,000 sq. ft. and will allow the clinic to expand services, recruit health-care professionals, and take on more patients.

In November, Premier Susan Holt and Health Minister Dr. John Dornan announced \$3.6 million for the new space. The announcement said the clinic had been op-



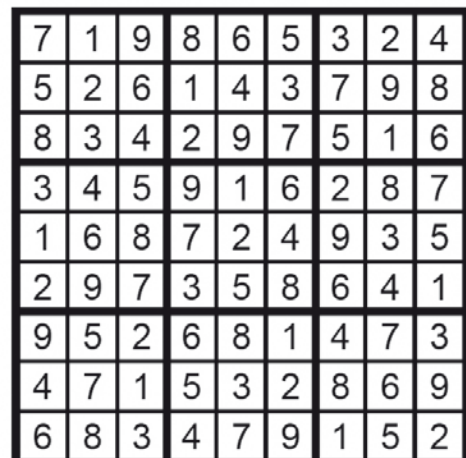
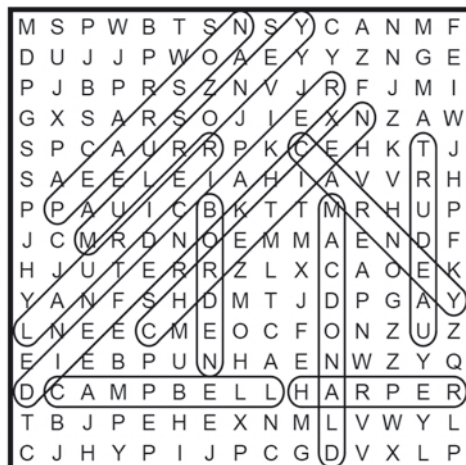
department.

It would offer same-day or next-day care. The access clinic opened for appointments on Jan. 5.

St. Andrews is also expected to see its Wellness Centre inside the W.C. O’Neill Arena Complex transition to a collaborative clinic. Recently, the town council signed a

memorandum of understanding with HHN for renovations to allow the clinic to operate a blood-work lab in exchange for continuing to provide the clinic — and its practitioners — free space.

In November, Dornan said the government was close to announcing St. Andrews.



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N.B. Investigation Finds No Evidence of Environmental Cause of Neurological Illness



Brian Owens
Reporter, The Courier

There is no evidence that the apparent cluster of undiagnosed neurological illnesses in New Brunswick is caused by environmental contaminants, according to the results of an investigation by the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

"Our findings do not suggest widespread exposure to herbicides or metals that would be a contributing factor to these illnesses," Dr. Yves Léger said at a press conference in Fredericton on 23 January.

The existence of a potential "mystery brain disease" in the province was first suggested in 2019 when a neurologist in Moncton identified several patients with unexplained neurodegenerative symptoms. Since then almost 400 possible cases have been identified.

But an investigation by Public Health New Brunswick, published in 2022, concluded that there was "no evidence of a cluster of a neurological syndrome of unknown cause", a conclusion supported by an independent study published in May last year.

The latest study began in 2023, when Dr. Alier Marrero, the neurologist who first identified the potential new disease, raised concerns about potential new patients who also had elevated levels of substances such as herbicides or metals in their bodies.

Léger and his team reviewed records for 222 patients, looking at two herbicides – glyphosate and glufosinate – and nine metals including aluminum, lead, mercury, and arsenic. Three other metals – cobalt, nickel and zinc – had too few samples to include in the analysis. They examined whether the levels detected were above the laboratory reference levels, how those levels compared to the population at large, and whether there was any published guidance that indicated the levels detected might have any health effects.

The analysis of the herbicides found that 95 per cent% of the results were within the normal expected range of lab reference levels, and were similar to the levels seen in Atlantic Canadians at large.

"They were unlikely to be levels that would be of concern for these patients," said Léger.

For the metals, some patients had levels higher than expected, but most were not. Most were also the same as those in the wider population, though some were slightly elevated. They were only able to find current health guidance for aluminum, with only a few patients over that value.

Léger said the investigation faced several major challenges that made it difficult to answer some questions. Not all of the labs that performed the testing provided information on how they set their reference levels, and in some cases information on the wider Atlantic Canadian population was not available for comparison. In addition, not all of the patient tests were done using the correct specimen, for example blood or urine, for the substance being investigated. And very few of those who tested high were retested to confirm the result, which is best practice in these cases. Of those that were, the vast majority returned normal results on the follow-up test.

Despite these limitations, Léger said he was confident in the conclusion that there is no widespread environmental exposure that is contributing to these patients' illnesses. The study underwent two rounds of scientific review by experts at the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

Though it was not the main goal, the study also added to the evidence that there is no new, unknown disease in play. The team examined autopsies for nine patients who had since died, and in all cases determined they had been suffering from well-known conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body disease, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Almost 60 per cent% of the patients had

also been examined by another neurologist and none had raised concerns with Léger's office.

Dr. Anthony Lang, a neurologist at the Kembril Brain Institute in Toronto who led the independent study last year, said these results confirm his earlier belief that it was unlikely there was any consistent environmental factor causing the diverse neurological diseases his team diagnosed in the patients they studied.

"This proves the whole concept of a neurological condition of unknown cause was a house of cards," he said. "It was based on one individual's belief, without sufficient clinical or laboratory evidence."

Marrero did not respond to a request for comment before deadline.

The report includes three recommendations. First, tests for environmental exposures should be repeated at least once, and preferably multiple times, using the correct type of sample. Second, these patients should receive an independent second assessment, to help them get a diagnosis and the follow-up care they need. The regional health authorities will take the lead on arranging this, Léger said, and will reach out to patients directly.

"You've been told you have an undiagnosed illness, but you likely have one that can be diagnosed," he said.

Third, Léger wants any future potential diagnosis of an unknown neurological illness to be reviewed and agreed upon by two specialists before it is reported to the government.

The process is not yet finished, however. The Government of New Brunswick has also asked PHAC to conduct a second review of all the data from this investigation. There is no timeline yet for that review.

Lang said he believes there should be an investigation into the costs of this whole process to New Brunswick's health system – both the cost of unnecessary testing and the various government reviews.

"That might not have been needed if the patients had first received an independent second opinion," he said.

Lang also said Marrero should be reported to the New Brunswick College of Physicians and Surgeons for possible investigation. Léger said questions about Marrero's competence will be left to his employer and the college.

OBITUARY



Moffatt, Joan Ella
1948 – 2026

Our beloved mother, Joan Ella Moffatt, passed away peacefully on January 17, 2026, at the age of 77 in Edmonton, Alberta. She was a force of nature, the heart of our family, a well of quiet strength, and a source of endless laughter.

Born on July 25, 1948, in Pembroke, Ontario, Mom lived a life marked by love, optimism, and resilience. She devoted herself to her family, finding her greatest joy in the moments spent with her children, grandchildren, and the many friends and family who cherished her. She found peace in her garden and delight in the birds that visited, especially the hummingbirds she adored.

Mom created a home that was warm, welcoming, and full of life, a place where everyone felt safe, loved, and eager to gather. She was known for her infectious laugh, her thoughtful wisdom, and her unwavering support. Her kindness and generous spirit touched countless lives, leaving an imprint that will be felt for years to come.

She is survived by her devoted children, James (Karee), Tracey, and Alison (Michel); her cherished grandchildren, Kadie, Kaden, Cooper, Connor, and Kyle; her brothers and sisters; as well as a wide circle of family and friends who loved her deeply.

She is predeceased by her loving husband, Alan; her granddaughter, Breena; and her parents, Percy and Laurinda.

Mom leaves behind a legacy of love, strength, and joy-one we will carry with us always.

To share photos, memories, and condolences, please visit www.connelly-mckinley.com.

Reading Between the Listings: What the Numbers Really Say

Brittany Locking
Columnist, The Courier

Real estate has always been a hot topic, but since the pandemic, it's become the dinner table debate. The market shifted quickly, and many expectations formed just as fast. While some of those perceptions still linger, the numbers in Charlotte County tell a calmer, and far more reassuring story.

One of the simplest ways to understand our local housing market is by looking at the list-to-sale ratio: how many homes sell compared to how many come to market each year. It's not flashy, but it's honest.

Over the past three years in Charlotte County, inventory has steadily increased. In 2023, just under 800 homes were listed, with about half of them selling. In 2024, listings climbed again, and sales rose alongside them. The same trend held true in 2025, with more homes entering the market and, once again, roughly 50 per cent successfully selling.

Despite changes in headlines, interest rates, and public sentiment, that ratio has remained remarkably steady.

For sellers, this is encouraging. While buyers have more options to choose from, demand has not disappeared. Roughly half of the homes listed each year continue to sell, which helps set realistic expectations. Today's market isn't about tossing up a sign and waiting for a bidding war; it's about thoughtful pricing, strong presentation, and a little patience. When those pieces align, homes in Charlotte County continue to move.

Buyers, on the other hand, are enjoying a more relaxed pace. Increased inventory means more choice and more time to make decisions. This has contributed to a

gradual rise in average days on market over the past few years—a sign not of a struggling market, but of a healthier, more balanced one.

So, what does this mean as we look ahead in 2026?

If current trends hold, we can expect inventory to remain relatively stable, with buyers continuing to take a measured approach

Charlotte County's real estate market appears to be less about extremes and more about equilibrium.

and sellers benefiting from clearer expectations. Barring any major economic surprises, the market is likely to continue rewarding well-prepared listings and informed buyers rather than impulsive decisions on either side.

In short, Charlotte County's real estate market appears to be less about extremes and more about equilibrium.

Real estate will always spark opinions and predictions. But when you step back and look at the bigger picture, the story becomes much easier to understand. It's simply a market that encourages thoughtful planning, realistic expectations, and decisions made with confidence.

Brittany Locking is a REALTOR® with Fundy Bay Real Estate, specializing in the Charlotte County market. She began her real estate career in the Greater Toronto Area before becoming a licensed REALTOR®, and later relocating to St. Andrews in 2017 after a visit that quickly turned into a love for the town, its pace of life, and the natural beauty of Charlotte County.



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