



Rural Municipality of Belfast (RMB)

Mayor: Garth Gillis; Chief Administrative Officer: Bob Brooks; *Incorporated 1972*

COUNCIL MEETING - MINUTES

Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 7:00 PM
Upstairs Hall, Wood Islands Market

Council:	Mayor Garth Gillis (<i>Chair</i>)	Deputy Mayor Lynn Docherty
	Councillor Katherine Bryson	Councillor Trisha Carter
	Councillor Billy Gamble	Councillor Charley McGivern
	Councillor James Kinnee	
Administration:	CAO Bob Brooks	Ashley Feschuk
Public:	Sherry Pelkey – Executive Director – Belfast Area Watershed Group, Ricky BFD, Graham LaBonte BFD, William McGuigan BFD, Richard Hews BFD, Josh MacDonald BFD, Robert Macdonald Belle River Resident, Joanne Vessey BFD, Jason Rector (Big Jay) BFD - Fire Chief	
Presenter:	Josh MacDonald – BFD - Belfast Rural Community Fire Department	
Livestream:	16 Views during the meeting, 915 Views 12 hours later	

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Item **Order of Business**

1. **Call to Order** – Council Meeting was called to order by Mayor Gillis at 7:02 PM.

“In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge that the land upon which our organization stands is unceded Mi’kmaq territory. Epekwitk (PEI), Mi’kma’ki, is covered by the historic Treaties of Peace and Friendship. We pay our respects to the Indigenous Mi’kmaq People who have occupied this Island for over 12,000 years; past, present, and future.”

2. **Declarations of Conflict of Interest** – Yes four members of Council have a conflict of interest with the items on today’s Agenda. Deputy Mayor Docherty – Belfast Days, Councillor Carter – Belfast Fire Department, Councillor McGivern – Iona Park Project.
3. **Approval of Agenda** – No other items were suggested for today’s Agenda; however, Item #14 was moved to be after item #4.

Moved by **Councillor Gamble** and seconded by **Councillor Carter** to adopt the agenda as amended.

Votes for: 6 Votes against: 0 Result: **Carried Unanimously**

4. **RCMP Report for the Month of February 2026** (*Admin - Ashley Feschuk*) All RCMP reports are available for public review on the RMB website www.ruralmunicipalityofbelfast.com. The seriousness of the incidents is of concerns; however, overall incident rates are down by nearly half. Sergeant Robinson wanted to thank Council for the going-away card, he is departing to a new post and will no longer be our point of contact. RMB administration will provide an update to Council once a new RCMP liaison is appointed to assist the community.
5. **Belfast Rural Fire Department** – Monthly Update (*Councillor Carter*) Looking ahead, several **fundraisers and community events** are planned: A **bingo night fundraiser** will take place on **April 17 at 7 p.m.** at the Belfast Rec Centre (19+ event). On **April 25**, the department will

participate in the **Doors Open Downtown East event**, inviting the public—especially families—to visit, explore the station, and see the fire trucks. A **raffle fundraiser** is also being organized, with more details to be announced. On the training side, members continue to stay active: Two firefighters are working toward Level 1 certification. Others will attend incident management training and the FDIC conference. The department maintains a strong training schedule, practicing at least three times per month to stay prepared for fire and medical emergencies. A reminder was issued that burn season is now in effect until November 15: Category 1 fires do not require a permit but must follow daily burn restrictions. **Categories 2–4 fires require permits**, and all permit holders must check daily conditions. **Burning is never permitted between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m.** failure to follow regulations may result in fines. When asked about the status of the Planning and Design Report that was due for the Firehall Expansion Project, Council was informed that it should be ready “any day now”.

6. **Public Presentations (if any) – *Members of the public are offered five minutes to make a presentation to Council. Reminder should any member of the public wish to speak on any issue on today’s Agenda, this is the time allotted for that. All other Agenda items are reserved for Council Participation.*** Deputy Fire Chief Josh MacDonald: A brief update on an ongoing **project/quote process**, indicating: About **50% progress** in gathering contractor quotes, some contractors declined due to timing. Final pricing is still being compiled, with an update expected soon with early estimates may come in **lower than initially projected**, though no confirmed final number is available yet
7. **Adoption of the February 25, 2026, Council Meeting Minutes (*attached - previously distributed; all suggested changes already incorporated*)**

Moved by Deputy Mayor Docherty and seconded by Councillor Carter to approve the Minutes of the February 25, 2026, Council Meeting as presented.

Votes for: 6 Votes against: 0 Result: **Carried Unanimously**

8. **CAO Report (CAO – Bob Brooks)**

a) **Financial/Variance/Planning Report**

i. **Provincial Credit Union Account Balances @ February 9, 2026:**

a. Share Acct 001		\$5.56
b. Chequing Acct 010		\$98,725.16
c. Gas Tax (CCBF) Acct 011 (<i>for approved projects</i>)		\$83,156.53
d. Reserve Savings Acct 020		\$38.27
e. Reserve Savings GICs; Acct 041		\$50,887.26
(Reserves Breakdown \$50,887.26 in GIC)		
1. RMB Expansion Reserve	\$5,547.44	
2. Emergency Preparedness Reserve	\$10,000.00	
3. Legal Reserve Fund	\$1,250.00	
4. Elections Reserve Fund	\$500.00	
5. Remaining – (for Budget Shortfall)	\$33,589.82	

b) **Revenues and Expenditures Tracking (2025/26) to February 28, 2026:**

Revenues:	Budgeted	To-Date
i1 – Assessment Income (Commercial & Non-Comm)	\$407,697	377,114
i2 – GPEI Rink Grant (<i>in</i>)	8,500	0
i3 – Sub-Lease Rent (<i>starting July 1, 2025</i>)	5,635	4,508
i4 – CCBF (<i>in</i>) (<i>New Projection w 2026 CCBF Approval</i>)	57,624	134,342
i5 – Other (<i>a HST & Govt, b Govt Programs, c. Foundation</i>) (<i>in</i>)	1,900	18,540
Total	481,356	534,504
Expenditures:	Budgeted	To-Date
e1 – Council Remuneration, RMB Payroll, Deductions	\$133,759	115,529
e2 – Travel Allowance	1,500	530
e3 – Office Admin (Supplies/Hardware/Lease/Cleaning)	30,157	25,040

e4 – Advertising, Promotion & Website	2,119	1,348
e5 – Audit, Financial, Bank Fees, Amortization	7,876	4,626
e6 – Insurance, Legal, WCB	11,208	10,355
e7abc – Projects (MEMP/Com.Plan/ShopBelfastPEI/Other)	750	0
e7d – Events (Remembrance/Halloween/Christmas/Other)	2,450	1,531
e8 – Elections or By-Elections	500	0
e9 – FPEIM, FCM, Prof Fees, Conferences, Workshops	5,750	3,474
e10 – Miscellaneous	500	500
e11 – Fire Protection Grant	120,000	110,000
e12 – GPEI Rink Grant (out) & BAWG & Pantry (out)	8,500	196
e13 – Community Grants	106,860	106,660
i4 – CCBF (out) (New Projection w 2026 CCBF Approval)	57,624	134,342
e14 – Contingency	1,000	395
e16 – Warming Ctr Operations (Belfast Rec Ctr/WIADC)	3,000	3,000
e17 – New Office (New)	19,586	14,039
Total	513,138	531,565
	=====	=====
Change in Fund Balance (Net)	-\$31,782	\$2,939

Community Grants are on track per payment schedule. Better than expected Expenditures savings and additional GPEI revenues are being realized. RMB have now reached a surplus by the end of February and expect to improve on that by the end of the fiscal year.

9. **Update on Snowmobile Issue (Admin – Ashley Feschuk)** Since our last Council meeting and prior to that RMB administration has working on this topic and on Tuesday March 10th the Province coordinated a sit down together to discuss the issue here at the Wood Islands Market. In attendance: Stephen Szwarc Director - Highway Maintenance Division, Ryan Williams - Highway Maintenance PEI Dept. of Transportation & Infrastructure, Dale Hickox- President of the Snowmobile Association, Todd St. Clair - Executive Director of Wood Islands Market/representing the café, Gwyn Davies - Board Member Wood Islands Market/representing the café, Ashley Feschuk - RMB Representative, Brenda Hancock - Belfast Resident, Kathy Luppe - Belfast Resident. RMB Administration is cautiously optimistic that there is a potential solution to this issue - which seems to satisfy everyone, however, the details are still being ironed out. Administration will have a more detailed update at our next council meeting. A second meeting was held with the Island Express Cafe and WIADC Board members at a later time to make sure they were in the loop of conversations and a potential resolution plan.

10. **Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) (Admin - Ashley Feschuk)** RMB Administration met with Chris Hancock RMB's new Public Safety Officer with Emergency Management PEI on Monday, March 9th. He was very impressed with all the work Council has done to date and wanted to thank the Council for all their efforts to take preparation seriously by dedicating their time to their community. Every year RMB is required to do a tabletop exercise with EMO which takes approximately two hours. Chris suggested the focus be on potential wildfires, since this year is expected to be hotter and dryer than last year. Ahead of this meeting in May, I am asking Council to review what your designated role to play in an emergency is and if you have any questions, to let the RMB office know. Council should all be very proud of having established two warming centres during the past four years - the primary one at the Belfast Rec Centre and "the secondary", right here at the Wood Islands Market. Also, last year RMB was able to secure a 25-person emergency supply kit complete with cots and blankets. Further updates to follow.

11. **2026/2027 Community Grants Committee Recommendations (Committee Chair – Councillor Gamble)** On March 11, 2025, the Community Grants Committee deliberated on 15 Grant Applications for this year's 2026/2027 Community Grants cycle.

Following the deliberations Committee Members approved recommendations for Council consideration for grant allocations. As well as a second recommendation that would see applicants providing Financial Statement information with their grant applications. With these Community Grant allocations, Committee Members recognized that by providing these Community Grants to the various not-for-profit groups, community groups, volunteer groups, facilities, sporting groups, and numerous miscellaneous groups; RMB is able to help support many ***integral services*** to the RMB residents. One of those integral services, is funding for the Belfast Rural Fire Department for ***Fire Protection Services*** – seen as an ***Essential Service*** for our municipality.

Additionally, Committee Members recognised the current state of the local economy, all the way up to world events that are causing everyone to be more cautious in their spending, and necessitating, more than ever, the need to live within our means. With that lens in mind, Committee Members deliberated to achieve (with Council approval) allocation recommendations that would see the municipality achieve a ***0% increase*** for the 2026/2027 fiscal year, with a projected Balanced Budget. Unfortunately, that goal necessitated awarding less than requested, for almost all of the applicants.

Therefore, the Community Grants Committee is recommending the following for 2026/2027:

(1) Recommended 2026/2027 Allocations as follows:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Belfast Rural Fire Department - Fire Protection Services | <u>\$165,000</u> |
| 2. Belfast Rec Centre (GPEI Rink (In/Out) Grant) | <u>\$8,500</u> |

Community Grants:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 3. BAWG - Belfast Area Watershed Group | <u>\$8,000</u> |
| 4. BCDC - Belfast Community Development Corp. | <u>\$5,000</u> |
| 5. Belfast Days | <u>\$4,000</u> |
| 6. Belfast Historical Society | <u>\$2,500</u> |
| 7. Belfast Minor Hockey Assoc. | <u>\$2,500</u> |
| 8. Belfast Rec Centre - Operations | <u>\$29,000</u> |
| 9. Coop Cottage | <u>\$0</u> |
| 10. Iona Park Inc. | <u>\$2,000</u> |
| 11. Pinette Raceway Inc. | <u>\$2,000</u> |
| 12. Point Prim Lighthouse Society | <u>\$2,000</u> |
| 13. Vernon River/Belfast Community Pantry | <u>\$2,400</u> |
| 14. WIADC - Wood Islands Lighthouse | <u>\$2,000</u> |
| 15. WIADC - Wood Islands Market - Operations | <u>\$5,000</u> |

<i>Total Allocations Recommended</i>	<u><i>\$239,900</i></u>
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Moved by Councillor Kinnee and seconded by Deputy Mayor Docherty to accept the Community Grants Committee recommendation (1), as detailed above, and add those allocation recommendations into the 2026/2027 RMB Budget document for Council Consideration.

Votes for: 6 Votes against: 0 Result: ***Carried Unanimously***

Additionally, Committee Members found that many of the applicants did not have the sufficient financial information within the applications for Committee to assess their applications properly. Committee wanted to see financial information that showed: operations, capital, revenues, expenditures and balances, and how the funds were to be spent. This resulted in a second recommendation...

(2) A second recommendation was made by Committee members that all future applicants must submit the following documentation with their Community Grants Application for review.

1. Operational budget - including revenue sources and expenses.
2. Capital projects - including funding sources and expenses
3. A profit/loss statement with year end bank balance.
4. Request identifying the amount and anticipated use of funds from RMB.

Following discussion, Council decided it wanted to send this recommendation back to Committee for further work; Council will review/discuss/approve the Committee new Recommendation in the fall of 2026 – prior to the next Community Grants Cycle.

Moved by Councillor McGivern and seconded by Councillor Carter to defer this second Community Grants Committee recommendation back to Committee for further work.

Votes for: 6 Votes against: 0 Result: **Carried Unanimously**

12. **Adoption of the March 11, 2026, Community Grants Committee Meeting Minutes** (*Committee Chair – Councillor Gamble*) (*attached – as there are no further committee meetings scheduled in the near future, Committee Members Only will approve their attached Minutes of March 11, 2026.*)

Moved by Mayor Garth Gillis and seconded by Councillor Bryson to approve the Minutes of the March 11, 2026, Community Grants Committee Meeting as presented.

Votes for: 4 Votes against: 0 Result: **Carried Unanimously**

13. **2026/2027 Budget, Financial Plan and Capital Plan – 2nd Reading and Final Approval -** (*presented by CAO Bob Brooks*). On February 25, 2026, Council received a full briefing on the contents of the Feb 10th Draft Budget (*attached*). After clarifications and discussion, Council gave the Draft Budget – 1st Reading without amendments. Council reserved any amendments for the March 18th meeting.

CAO Bob Brooks presented the known Amendments to the Budget document, then handed the floor back to the Mayor for any further Discussion, Amendments, 2nd Reading, and ultimately Final Approval.

Additionally, Council had requested some more-detailed information on the ***e1b line item*** – specifically speaking to the tasks and duties of the Administration, planned over this upcoming fiscal year. In addition to the (*attached*) Job Description, as mandated by the ***Municipal Government Act***, some of the additional planned tasks for the two workers (one staff and one contracted) are projected as follows:

- Review of the Municipal Elections Bylaw and Legislation to ensure that RMB is current, in preparation for the 2026 Municipal General Election.
- Review of the new Provincial ***Dog Act*** to check Municipality requirements, legal positions and liabilities, enforcement provisions, municipal costs, other municipal examples, etc.
- Review of soon to be tabled Provincial Legislation/Policies for new Land's Act, Official Plan Requirements, Municipal Government Funding models; and whatever else the Province brings forward for consultation.

- Dealing with the Department of Tourism, in preparation for this and upcoming tourism and tourism business initiatives.
- Dealing with the Department of Transportation regarding issues like: snowmobile access, Selkirk Road access, possible Transit Route connection, etc.
- Dealing with the Federal Government, the Province, the Eastern Chamber of Commerce, on the ongoing Ferry Issue to help ensure a sustainable two-ferry service at Wood Islands.
- Working with the Federation of PEI Municipalities and the Association of Municipal Administrators on all the issues listed above.
- Working with the Belfast Rural Fire Department to help find funding for a Firehall Expansion.
- Administering the Canada Community Building Fund – specifically aiding with the Firehall Expansion.
- Feed and monitor RMB Website, Facebook site and Belfast Newsletter copy information.
- Succession Planning with new Sub-Committee to replace the CAO.
- Preparing for, training and staffing for, doing the public call for, and running the upcoming Municipal General Election in November.
- Training and orientating the New Council after the November Elections.
- RMB Events, like the Christmas Tree Lighting and Decorating, and others.
- And, much much more.

Amendments:

AMENDMENT 1.

An amendment to accept or amend the 2026/2027 Community Grants Allocations, as discussed and approved/amended in Item 11 above.

Moved by **Councillor Bryson** and **seconded** by **Deputy Mayor Docherty** to approve the 2026/2027 Community Grants Allocations from Item 11 above as agreed by Council.

Votes for: **5** Votes against: **0** Result: **Carried Unanimously**

AMENDMENT 2.

In approving the Community Grants allocations as recommended by the Community Grants Committee, there will no longer be a need for a \$0.01 increase to the mill rates. Therefore, unless there are other amendments affecting the Budget bottom line, an amendment is required to strike the \$0.01 increase from the Budget, as listed in the February 10, 2026 Draft Budget.

Moved by **Councillor Bryson** and **seconded** by **Councillor Gamble** to strike the listed \$0.01 mill rate increase, which would leave RMB with NO mill rate increase for the 2026/2027 fiscal year.

Votes for: **6** Votes against: **0** Result: **Carried Unanimously**

AMENDMENT 3.

To achieve a Balanced Budget for the 2026/2027 Fiscal Year, a slight adjustment of \$76, removed from the “e3 – Office Supplies” line item is required.

Moved by **Councillor Carter** and **seconded** by **Councillor McGivern** to adjust the “e3 – Office Supplies” line item, by reducing the line item by \$76 for the 2026/2027 fiscal year to achieve a Balanced Budget.

Votes for: 6 Votes against: 0 Result: **Carried Unanimously**

No further amendments were requested.

Having had 1st Reading of the 2026/2027 RMB Budget, Financial Plan and Capital Plan, and having had the acceptance of the Amendments above; the 2026/2027 RMB Budget, Financial Plan and Capital Plan is now ready for 2nd Reading and Final Approval.

Moved by **Councillor Carter** and **seconded** by **Councillor Kinnee** to give 2nd Reading to the Rural Municipality of Belfast 2026/2027 Budget, Financial Plan and Capital Plan and give Final Approval.

Votes for: 6 Votes against: 0 Result: **Carried Unanimously**

14. **New Business Items** (*per Agenda Item 3 above*): **Ferry Panel Advisory – Committee Update** (*Councillor Carter*) Northumberland Ferries Limited – Operations & Infrastructure Update. Northumberland Ferries provided an update on vessel readiness and infrastructure work ahead of the upcoming sailing season. Vessel Updates: The MV Confederation is currently in dry dock in St. John's undergoing extensive maintenance and upgrades. Improvements include modernized alarm and monitoring systems, updated navigation equipment, and enhancements to safety and mechanical systems. Additional work includes sewage system replacement, vehicle deck system upgrades, installation of rescue boats, and steering gear control panel replacement. The MV Holiday Island (noted in the update as remaining in Pictou) is also undergoing scheduled maintenance, including: Thruster emergency drive upgrades, navigation system replacement, enhancements to integrated automated systems. Infrastructure Work: Dredging operations at Caribou and Wood Islands aim to increase channel depth to improve vessel access. Work at Caribou is nearly complete, while Wood Islands has experienced delays due to ice conditions. Full completion is expected by May 1st. Service Outlook: The ferry service is scheduled to resume on May 1st, aligning with the completion of both vessel readiness and dredging work.

15. **Next Meetings:**

- a) **Regular Council Meeting** – Wednesday, April 15, 2026: 7:pm – Upstairs Meeting Hall, Wood Islands
- b) **Regular Council Meeting** – Wednesday, May 20, 2026: 7:pm – Upstairs Meeting Hall, Wood Islands

16. **Adjournment** – As there is no further business...

Moved by **Councillor Carter** to adjourn the meeting at: **8:12pm**

Ashley/Bob