



Working together with our community

Budget Committee Meeting – January 21, 2026

Subject: 2026 Levy Operating Budget – Discretionary Items Additional Information
Report Number: CS-26-004
Division: Corporate Services
Department: Finance
Ward: All Wards
Purpose: For Decision

Recommendation(s):

That the Report CS-26-004 2026 Levy Operating Budget – Discretionary Items Additional Information be received as information; and

That Council direct staff to include/exclude a contribution to the Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice in the 2026 and 2027 Levy Operating Budgets; and

That Council direct staff to include/exclude Artificial Intelligence tools in the 2026 Levy Operating Budget; and

That Council direct staff to include (option #__)/exclude Security Guards at County Administration and Gilbertson Buildings in the 2026 Levy Operating Budget; and

That Council direct staff to include/exclude the Norfolk County Public Library NBI for a FT Manager of Programming and Outreach in the 2026 Levy Operating Budget; and

That Council direct staff to include/exclude the Norfolk County Public Library NBI for PT Training and Development Coordinator in the 2026 Levy Operating Budget; and

That Council direct staff to include/exclude the Norfolk County Public Library NBI for four (4) PT Library Assistants and Extended Library Hours in the 2026 Levy Operating Budget; and

That Council direct staff to include/exclude Haldimand Norfolk Housing Corporation's request for a FT Project Manager in the 2026 Levy Operating Budget; and

That Council provide direction to staff to continue/discontinue membership with SCOR; and

That Council provide direction to staff to continue/discontinue membership with WOWC.

Executive Summary:

Throughout the year, requests may be referred to a Budget Committee meeting to supplement Council with additional budgetary information that assists in decision-making. The purpose of this report is to summarize the seven (7) requests which were referred throughout 2025 and to facilitate additional discussion.

These items are being brought forward for Council's consideration along with the 2026 Levy Operating Budget following discussions at Budget Committee, Council-in-Committee, Social Services and Housing Advisory Committee and Council meetings, as directed.

The contribution request for the Hospice has been incorporated into the 2026 draft budget. All the other requests have not been incorporated into the 2026 draft budget.

Discussions:

Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice

A deputation was presented by Andrea Binkle of the Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice (NHCH) at the Budget Committee meeting held on October 16, 2025. NHCH was founded and incorporated in 2019 and has served over 450 people since inception. In 2024, they received a donation of land and in 2025 Ontario Health awarded operating funds for 4 end-of-life beds. NHCH has now initiated the process to construct a facility that will house 10 residential beds and provide expanded programming from diagnosis through bereavement.

The Hospice has requested a \$750,000 contribution from Norfolk County toward the construction of this facility.

To accommodate this request, if approved, staff recommend that Council commit to the full \$750,000 contribution, funded in two phases:

- \$500,000 in 2026
- \$250,000 in 2027

This approach maintains continuity with the prior Norfolk General Hospital commitment while spreading the financial impact across two budget years. The prior annual commitment of \$500,000 to hospital funding concluded in 2025. As a result of the request from the Hospice, staff have left this allocation in the draft budget for Council's consideration.

It should be noted that this would be a conditional commitment. No funds would flow to NHCH until the project is confirmed with full funding and construction is underway. The County's contribution would be set aside and reserved until such time, ensuring accountability and alignment with project readiness.

This recommendation provides Council with the opportunity to support a significant community health initiative while safeguarding municipal resources until the Hospice project is fully secured.

Artificial Intelligence Tools

Staff presented Report CAO-25-084 Artificial Intelligence (AI) at the September 9, 2025 Council-in-Committee meeting. The report provided information on AI and requested approval for the implementation of an Artificial Intelligence Policy for internal staff. Additionally, the report recommended that staff proceed to provide information regarding the financial impact of the County's AI needs as part of the discretionary budget process.

Staff have reviewed the current level and type of use of AI across the Corporation. The assessment shows that the majority of staff needs can be met with the version of Microsoft Copilot that is included with the County's existing Microsoft 365 enterprise (corporate) license. For deeper research needs and image generation, staff recommend that 50 licenses for an upgraded version of Copilot be purchased, the cost of which is \$41.00 per user per month, equating to a total budget request of \$25,000 for implementation. Staff have initiated a cross-departmental strategic task force led by our Deputy CAOs to continue to explore how and when AI tools will be rolled out throughout the organization. Throughout the year, staff will continue to assess the use of AI and determine whether the number of upgraded licenses needs to be adjusted in advance of the 2027 budget.

Security Guards at County Administration and Gilbertson Buildings

Report OPS-25-014 Pilot Project for Security Guards at County Administration Buildings and Grounds was presented and received for information at the April 8, 2025, Council-in-Committee meeting. A report and request for continued security at Talbot Gardens was presented at the November 13, 2025 Council-in-Committee meeting. As part of the discussion, Mayor Martin requested that staff bring back information regarding security at the County and Gilbertson Administration buildings. Staff have drafted a business case, included as Attachment A, to this report. The business case highlights growing challenges related to public safety, social issues, homelessness, and heightened political tensions, emphasizing that ensuring the security of municipal facilities, staff, and the public is of paramount importance. Security guards serve as a visible deterrent to criminal and unwanted activity, reducing incidents of vandalism, theft, or disorderly behaviour.

There are three options in the business case for Council's consideration:

Option #1 – As proposed with the listed cost of \$151,000 (0.11% impact on the levy). This option would provide the same level of service at both administration buildings and offer extended hours daily to ensure a safe environment for staff and residents when the buildings open at 8:30 am. On Council meeting days the extended hours could be adjusted to provide service past 5:00 pm, for example 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Option #2 – Adjustment of the number of hours of service per day to 9 hours, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. This adjustment would provide a half hour of service before and after regular business hours to assist in ensuring that the building and grounds are safe when the buildings open and when staff and residents or customers are leaving at the end of the day. This adjustment would reduce the overall cost by 10% to a total cost of \$135,900 (0.10% impact on the levy).

Option #3 – Reduce the number of guards from 2 to 1. In this option Council could choose to have the 1 guard rotate their patrols throughout the day between CAB and GAB or could focus the one guard at CAB due to the increased prevalence of issues on the CAB property versus at GAB. This option would reduce the cost in half to a total cost of \$75,500 (0.06% impact on the levy).

Norfolk County Public Library

At the October 16, 2025 Budget Committee meeting Julie Kent, CEO of the Norfolk County Public Library made a presentation that included three (3) new budget initiatives: a full-time Manager, Programming and Outreach; a part-time Training and Development Coordinator; and four (4) part-time Library Assistants for a total request of \$403,800 or 0.30% potential levy increase.

As part of the presentation to Budget Committee, Ms. Kent noted that the additional Library Assistants would allow for increased hours at branches resulting in consistent operating hours at all the branches. The business case has been updated to include the additional utility costs anticipated for the extended hours. The following requests are being made at this time:

- 1 FTE - Full-time Manager of Programming and Outreach (\$138,400) position
- 0.5 FTE - Part-time Training and Development Coordinator (\$53,000)
- 2.34 FTE - Four part-time Library Assistants and Extended Library Hours (\$226,500)

Details for these three requests are included in Attachment B.

As noted in report CS-25-136 Proposed 2026 New Budget Initiatives, these initiatives were not reviewed or considered by the Senior Leadership Team. They have not been prioritized or ranked against other initiatives and County pressures.

The total impact of these revised initiatives is \$417,900, resulting in a net levy increase of 0.31%, if approved.

Haldimand Norfolk Housing Corporation

Matt Bowen, CEO of the Haldimand Norfolk Housing Corporation (HNHC) made a presentation at the December 15th, 2025 Health and Social Services Advisory Committee meeting. As part of the presentation, Mr. Bowen requested an additional

FTE for a Project Manager. A business case was provided, and staff presented a discretionary report to the Committee included with this report as Attachment C.

Report CS-25-176 – 2026 Budget – Discretionary Request, included a number of risks and uncertainties and a couple of potential benefits of the Project Manager position. It was staff's recommendation that the position approval be deferred until additional analysis could be completed, as noted in the report. Additionally, it is noted that capital and operating budgets have increased significantly over time; a large portion of the increase is in direct relation to the rise in costs for services and supplies, and not solely driven by an increased number of projects.

The Committee approved the following recommendations:

Resolution

That report CS-25-176 2026 Budget – Discretionary Request be received as information;

and That the Health & Social Services Advisory Committee recommend the Haldimand-Norfolk Housing Corporation's budget request for 2026; and

Further that the request is included in the list of discretionary budget items presented at Norfolk County Council's 2026 Budget Committee meeting on January 21.

The total impact of the additional FTE would be a \$115,000 increase, resulting in potential levy increases for Haldimand County of \$39,200 and Norfolk County of \$75,800 (rounded), based on the cost sharing agreement. The overall potential impact for Norfolk County would be 0.06% on the net levy requirement.

Changes in staffing require unanimous shareholder consent. This means that both Haldimand County and Norfolk County must approve the addition of any new staff prior to HNHC proceeding. If either county does not approve, the position will not be included. This initiative will be pending until both municipalities finalize adoption of their 2026 operating budgets.

South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation Membership

The South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR) aims to provide planning and coordination for regional issues, implement regional economic development priorities, identify funding sources, partner with other levels of government, and act as a regional catalyst for investment.

SCOR attended the October 16, 2025 Budget Committee meeting, and provided a deputation outlining the annual update on regional economic development activities.

During the past number of years, continuing membership with SCOR has been discussed by Council. If Council were to provide direction to end its membership, notice is required to be given one year in advance. The impact if membership was ended,

would affect the 2027 Levy Operating Budget and result in a net levy savings of \$30,000. As demonstrated in Table 1, there would be no impact on the 2026 Budget.

Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus Inc. Membership

The Western Ontario Wardens Caucus Inc. (WOWC) serves as a unified voice for the 15 upper and single tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, advocating for their collective interest. Through collaborative efforts, WOWC works to address the unique challenges faced by rural and small urban communities, playing a pivotal role in shaping policies and initiatives that positively impact the region's 1.6 million residents.

If Council were to provide direction to end its membership, notice is required to be given one year in advance. The impact if membership was ended, would affect the 2027 Levy Operating Budget and result in a net levy savings of \$25,000. As demonstrated in Table 1, there would be no impact on the 2026 Budget.

Communications Tool

Report CS-25-143 – 2026 Budget Engagement Campaign Results was presented to Budget Committee on October 16, 2025. As part of the discussion, Councillor Veri, asked “if there was a way to engage residents better digitally? And how to provide staff funding to invest in a tool?”

In response to Council's request for staff to investigate adding an online interactive budget engagement tool, Engage Norfolk will be relaunched in 2026 on a new community engagement platform called Social Pinpoint. This platform includes “Fund It,” an online participatory budgeting tool that lets residents allocate funds across a project or annual budget, helping them understand trade-offs, set priorities, and see the impact of their choices in a gamified, interactive format.

Fund It will help build awareness of cost constraints, inform residents about the budget process, and provide valuable insights to staff and Council. Adopting this new platform and feature requires no additional funding, and Social Pinpoint's other engagement functionality, including surveys, polls, and forums will enable robust online engagement.

Finance Comments:

The initiatives noted in this report CS-26-004 have been presented as discretionary items, therefore it is important to note that these have not been included in the Draft 2026 Levy Operating Budget at this time. The financial impact of each item is noted in the above discussion and will increase the net levy requirement for 2026, if approved.

As seen in Table 1, the total impact on the 2026 Levy Operating Budget if all the discretionary items are to be included would be \$669,700 (0.49%). Approving the HNHC request will require an increase for Haldimand County's budget to fund their portion of the increase.

Table 1 – List of Discretionary Items

Item	Description	Net Levy Impact	
		(\$)	(%)
1	Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice – Donation*	-	-
2	AI Tools – 50 Upgraded Licenses	25,000	0.02
3	Security at CAB and GAB	151,000	0.11
4	NCPL – FT Manager of Programming and Outreach	138,400	0.10
5	NCPL – PT Training and Development Coordinator	53,000	0.04
6	NCPL = 4 PT Library Assistants & Extended Hours	226,500	0.17
7	HNHC – FTE Project Manager – Norfolk Increase	75,800	0.06
8	SCOR Membership Continuation**	-	-
9	WOWC Membership Continuation**	-	-
	Total	669,700	0.50

*Should Council approve use of the Legacy Fund interest, there would be no levy impact for the contribution of funds.

**Should Council provide directions to give notice to SCOR and/or WOWC, the levy impact reduction of \$30,000 and/or \$25,000 would be realized in 2027.

Consultation(s):

Through review of the Haldimand-Norfolk Shared Services (Social Services and Housing) budget for 2026, staff in Finance and Housing and Homelessness Services discussed the request for an additional FTE for a project manager from HNHC with Haldimand County staff. It was noted that at this time, sufficient information or justification has not been provided to support the need for the additional position.

Strategic Plan Linkage:

Building Norfolk - Develop the infrastructure and supports needed to ensure complete communities

The discretionary items represent targeted investments that strengthen community infrastructure, enhance quality of life, and respond to emerging local needs.

Attachment(s):

- Attachment A: 2026 Discretionary Business Case - Security
- Attachment B: 2026 NCPL New Budget Initiatives
- Attachment C: 2026 Budget – Discretionary Request CS-25-176

Approval:

Approved By:

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