



Region of Queens Municipality Citizen's Advisory Committee

February 6, 2026

Teams / Council Chambers

Minutes

Present:

Christopher Clarke, Chair
Tara Druzina, Vice Chair
Kerry Morash
Pamela Brennan
Velta Vikmanis
Holly McConnel, Staff Liaison
Alex Wilson
Kate Wong, Recording Secretary

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 2:04 p.m.

2. Agenda

The Chair reviewed the purpose of the meeting and outlined a working agenda, including:

- Review of previous meeting notes
- Old business, including:
 - Continued discussion on Deputy Mayor compensation
 - Review of benefits (health, dental, pension)

- Determination of whether a further meeting would be required on February 13, 2026
- Preparation for the Committee's final meeting and reporting to Council

It was noted that staff had asked whether the Committee wished to prepare a separate Committee report, rather than relying solely on a staff report. The Committee expressed a preference to author its own report, supported by staff.

Moved by Tara Druzina, seconded by Velta Vikmanis;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee approve the proposed agenda as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

3. Adoption of Previous Minutes (January 30, 2026)

Moved by Tara Druzina, seconded by Velta Vikmanis;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee amend the wording in Item 7 of the January 30, 2026 minutes by changing "suggests" to "recommends."

MOTION CARRIED

The Committee further clarified that it did not wish to undertake additional reporting related to salary structuring beyond its current mandate.

4. Deputy Mayor Compensation

The Committee continued its discussion regarding whether the role of Deputy Mayor warrants additional base remuneration. Members noted that determining appropriate compensation is challenging due to the absence of a formal job description outlining ongoing responsibilities distinct from those of a Councillor. Questions were raised regarding how frequently the Deputy Mayor acted in the

role of Mayor during the previous year, whether the role had evolved in practice, and whether the Deputy Mayor is routinely involved in additional projects, research, or representational duties beyond those undertaken by other Councillors.

It was observed that the current Councillor orientation materials do not include a defined description of the Deputy Mayor role, and that the Candidates' Guide contains only limited references to the position. While the Guide suggests that the Deputy Mayor may assume additional responsibilities or attend more functions, the Committee noted that these expectations are not clearly defined, measurable, or consistently applied, and may vary depending on the working relationship between the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

The Committee reviewed the relevant provisions of the Municipal Government Act (MGA), which confirm that the Deputy Mayor's authority is not concurrent with that of the Mayor. Rather, the Deputy Mayor is fully empowered only when acting in place of the Mayor due to absence, incapacity, or vacancy. When the Mayor is present and acting, the Deputy Mayor holds no additional statutory authority beyond that of any other Councillor.

Members expressed concern that introducing additional base remuneration without clear statutory authority, defined responsibilities, or historical data on acting service could create inequities or unintended consequences. The Committee therefore agreed that the existing framework, whereby the Deputy Mayor is compensated at the Mayor's rate only when formally acting in that role, remains appropriate and consistent with legislative intent.

Moved by Tara Druzina, seconded by Kerry Morash;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee recommend to the Council of the Region of Queens that the Deputy Mayor receive no additional base remuneration and continue to be compensated at the Mayor's rate only when acting in the role of Mayor.

MOTION CARRIED with four (4) for, and one (1) against.

5. Employee Benefits Overview

Staff provided an overview of the employee benefits currently offered by the Region of Queens, noting that these benefits apply to full-time employees and are not available to elected officials.

The current employee benefits package includes health and dental coverage administered through Blue Cross, as well as a group insurance plan administered through TELUS Health. The TELUS-administered group plan provides coverage for life insurance, accidental death and dismemberment, long-term disability, and dependent life insurance.

Employees also participate in a mandatory pension plan administered by Nova Scotia Pension Services. Under the pension plan, employees contribute 8.4% of pensionable earnings up to the applicable earnings threshold, and 10.9% above that threshold, with the employer matching all required contributions.

Participation in the pension plan is mandatory for full-time salaried and hourly employees.

Staff further explained that benefit coverage and contribution levels vary depending on employment classification. Group insurance premiums are salary-based, while health and dental costs are structured as shared premiums between the employee and the employer.

By way of cost illustration:

- The combined health and dental premium is approximately \$155.29 bi-weekly for a family plan and \$59.92 bi-weekly for a single plan.
- Premium costs are shared equally between the employee and the municipality.
- Group insurance premiums for life, AD&D, and LTD are calculated as a percentage of salary.

It was noted that elected officials are not currently eligible to participate in the employee benefit plans. Staff advised that extending coverage to elected officials could require the creation of a separate policy or plan structure, as existing benefit eligibility is based on employment status and minimum hours worked.

Staff further advised that requests from elected officials to access employee benefit plans have historically been rare, with only limited inquiries from retired Councillors in prior years. It was emphasized that extending benefits to elected

officials could result in significant and variable financial impacts to the municipality depending on participation levels.

6. Health and Dental Benefits for Elected Officials

The Committee discussed whether health and dental benefits should be extended to elected officials, including the Mayor and Councillors. Consideration was given to the financial, equity, and administrative implications of offering such benefits.

The Committee noted that elected officials are currently not eligible to participate in the Region's employee health and dental benefit plans and that individuals seeking election do so with the understanding that benefits are not included as part of Council remuneration. Members expressed concern that introducing benefits midstream could create inequities, particularly where participation would be voluntary and dependent on individual circumstances.

Discussion highlighted several key considerations, including:

- The significant and ongoing financial impact to the municipality should elected officials opt into health and dental coverage
- The variability of costs depending on whether individuals selected single or family coverage
- Equity concerns, as some elected officials may already have coverage through other employment or spousal plans while others may not
- Comparisons with other municipalities, many of which do not offer health and dental benefits to elected officials

The Committee further discussed that extending benefits could result in inconsistent compensation outcomes among elected officials, despite equal access to participation. Members also noted that offering benefits would represent a departure from long-standing practice within the Region.

Based on these considerations, the Committee concluded that extending health and dental benefits to elected officials was not recommended.

Moved by Kerry Morash, seconded by Velta Vikmanis;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee recommend to the Council of the Region of Queens that health and dental benefits not be offered to elected officials.

MOTION CARRIED, unanimously.

7. Pension / Cash-in-Lieu Options

The Committee discussed the feasibility of pension participation or cash-in-lieu alternatives, including:

- Equity considerations across elected officials
- The complexity of dual pension participation
- The importance of presenting Council with clear, structured options

Based on the discussion, the Committee agreed that pension and cash-in-lieu options should be presented as alternatives within the staff report rather than incorporated into the Committee's primary recommendation.

8. Remuneration Options for Council Consideration

The Committee agreed to forward three options to Council for consideration.

Option A – Recommended

Moved by Tara Druzina, seconded by Velta Vikmanis;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee recommend to the Council of the Region of Queens that base remuneration remain as approved by previous Committee motions, that no additional benefits be provided, and that the Deputy Mayor be compensated at the Councillor rate except when acting in the role of Mayor.

MOTION CARRIED, unanimously.

Option B – Alternative

Moved by Tara Druzina, seconded by Velta Vikmanis;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee recommend to the Council of the Region of Queens that no change be made to base remuneration, and that cumulative CPI adjustments for the years 2025–2028 be applied effective November 1, 2028.

MOTION CARRIED, unanimously.

Option C – Alternative

Moved by Tara Druzina, seconded by Velta Vikmanis;

THAT the Citizen Advisory Committee recommend to the Council of the Region of Queens that Option A (the Committee's recommendation) be applied with the addition of an 8.4% pension contribution or cash in lieu thereof.

MOTION CARRIED, unanimously.

9. Mileage and Expense Reimbursement

The Committee discussed mileage reimbursement thresholds, noting:

- Non-Council committee members are reimbursed beyond 10 km
- Councillors are reimbursed beyond 50 km
- The inequality may impact Councillors representing large rural districts

The Committee discussed whether a recommendation to amend the mileage policy should be considered. No motion was brought forward.

10. Candidates' Guide

The Committee discussed the need to review and update the Candidates' Guide, noting that:

- Expectations for elected officials, including the Deputy Mayor role, are not clearly articulated

- Clearer guidance could support transparency and candidate preparedness

No motion was made.

11. Next Meeting

A follow-up meeting was scheduled for Friday, February 13, 2026, from 3:00–5:00 p.m., if required, to review the draft report.

12. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at **3:58 p.m.**