



Item to be added to the Agenda:

Late Agenda Item Submission

Submitted to Municipal Clerk promptly for dissemination to Council or ABCC and the public.

Request from the Floor Submission

A unanimous motion from Council or a majority vote for ABCC is required for acceptance. The late agenda item will be posted to the public the following day.

1. Meeting & Date

- Regular Council Meeting February 24, 2026
- Committee of the Whole Meeting _____
- Other Meeting _____

2. Item:

Destination Cape Breton Briefing Note, Re: Announced closure of Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre

Background: Define/Explain

The Nova Scotia Government announced the closure of the Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre. Terry Smith, CEO, Destination Cape Breton, has provided an evidence-based assessment of the decision and outlined the role the facility plays in the tourism economy of Cape Breton – Unama’ki.

Outcome Requested:

Review the briefing note for discussion and a possible response.

3. Motion for consideration:

To be determined by Council.

Submitted by:

Date: February 23, 2026

Fw: Announced closure of Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre

From Shelley David <Clerk@richmondcounty.ca>

Date Mon 2/23/2026 8:43 AM

To Shelley David <Clerk@richmondcounty.ca>

 1 attachment (270 KB)

Destination Cape Breton Briefing re Closure of NS VICs.pdf;

From: Terry Smith <terry@visitcapebreton.com>

Sent: Friday, February 20, 2026 1:13:22 PM

To: Bonny MacIsaac <bonny.macisaac@invernesscounty.ca>; Cecil Clarke <mayor@cbrm.ns.ca>; Brenda Chisholm-Beaton <Brenda.Chisholm-Beaton@townofporthawkesbury.ca>; Jackie Organ <jackie.organ@victoriacounty.ca>; Lois Landry <Lois.Landry@richmondcounty.ca>; terrypaul@membertou.ca <terrypaul@membertou.ca>; Leroy <leroy@eskasoni.ca>; johnlbernard@waycobah.ca <johnlbernard@waycobah.ca>; norman.bernard@wagmatcook.com <norman.bernard@wagmatcook.com>; chiefwilbert@potlotek.ca <chiefwilbert@potlotek.ca>

Subject: Announced closure of Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre

Good afternoon Mayors, Wardens and Chiefs,

Please see the attached briefing note from Destination Cape Breton regarding the Provincial Government's announced closure of the Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre. We would greatly appreciate you bringing this issue to your respective councils at your next meeting for discussion and a possible response.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Thanks,
Terry

Terry Smith, CDME
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Cape Breton
Island
your heart will never leave.

BRIEFING NOTE

Re: Announced closure of Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre February 20, 2026

1. PURPOSE

To provide an evidence-based assessment of the Government of Nova Scotia's decision to close the Port Hastings Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and to outline the critical role this facility plays in the estimated \$700+ million tourism economy of Cape Breton Island - Unama'ki.

2. DATA ANALYSIS: THE SURGE IN COUNSELLING DEMAND

While general long-term trends showed a decline in VIC traffic since 2009, recent post-pandemic data reveals a significant and accelerating rebound in the demand for in-person counselling that far outpaces general visitation growth:

- **Growing Demand for Personal Guidance:**
In 2025 (January–September), while overall visitation to the province increased by 1%, the number of visitors seeking counselling at provincial VICs increased by 13%, reaching 235,000 visitors counselled.
- **A Multi-Year Trend:**
This follows a 14% increase in visitors counselled in 2024, even as general visitation growth was down 1%.
- **The "Conversion" Reality:**
This data confirms that modern travellers use digital tools for initial booking but increasingly rely on high-touch, in-person hospitality to curate their on-Island experience, discover hidden gems and navigate real-time conditions.

3. THE ECONOMIC "MULTIPLIER" OF THE FRONT DOOR

The Port Hastings VIC is not merely an information booth; it is a critical piece of economic infrastructure located at the Island's primary road entry point.

- **Cape Breton's Economic Punch:** The Island attracts 20% of all Nova Scotia visitors despite having only 13.6% of the population.



- **Higher Impact Per Dollar:**

Every \$1 spent by a visitor in Cape Breton generates \$2.62 in total output for the local economy – a significantly higher impact than the \$2.20 generated in the rest of the province.

- **The Power of Referrals:**

The single greatest lever for growing the tourism economy is increasing the length of stay. Adding one day to the average trip has the potential to add \$125M annually to the Cape Breton Island – Unama’ki economy. The Port Hastings VIC is the primary referral engine that encourages visitors to explore all areas of the Island, particularly into many rural communities that lack high-visibility marketing budgets.

4. STRATEGIC RISKS OF CLOSURE

A. **The Dispersal Crisis**

Almost every vehicle entering the Island crosses the Canso Causeway. The Port Hastings roundabout is the only point where visitors can be influenced to take the Ceilidh Trail, Highway 4 or the Trans-Canada Highway. Without this "front door" intervention, visitors will likely default to the primary highways, starving many rural small businesses and of traffic.

B. **Brand Erosion**

The Cape Breton Island – Unama’ki brand is built on authentic hospitality and personal connection. Removing the first human welcome point sends a message of disinvestment to visitors. A closed building at the "Front Door" of the Island weakens the very identity Destination Cape Breton strives to promote.

C. **Rural Economic Sustainability**

Staff at Port Hastings act as rural concierges, directing visitors to local accommodations, craft shops, independent restaurants and other small businesses. In-person staff are essential for achieving a balanced tourism industry that supports resident well-being across the entire Island.

5. FISCAL CONTEXT vs. ECONOMIC LOSS

The seasonal operating cost (May–October) of the Port Hastings VIC is estimated at \$144,000 – \$193,000 for five full-time equivalent staff.

While the need to cut costs is understandable in the current fiscal situation for the province, **losing even 1% of the Island’s \$700+ million tourism GDP due to poor visitor dispersal or shortened stays would result in a \$7 million loss to the provincial economy – far dwarfing the savings to the Government of Nova Scotia from the closure.**



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Advocate for Reversal of Decision:**
Request the Province pause the closure of the Port Hastings VIC.
- **Collaborative Funding:**
If a pause is not possible, explore a co-management or co-funding model between the Province, Destination Cape Breton, municipalities and Mi'kmaw communities to maintain this essential "Front Door" service.
- **Emphasize the Critical Value of Human Interaction to the Nova Scotia Brand:**
While Destination Cape Breton and Tourism Nova Scotia are both investing in AI-driven trip planning tools, these MUST be viewed as supplements to, rather than replacements for, the high-conversion human touchpoints that drive rural tourism spending. Human interaction is within the DNA of our brand and is expected by visitors, as evidenced by the growing numbers using the VICs.

