

# Momentum grows against possible sale of municipally-owned land next to historic Fort Edward

🌐 Web Clip

## Momentum grows against possible sale of municipally-owned land next to historic Fort Edward

MARCH 23, 2022 BY [YVETTE D'ENTREMONT](#)

[LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



Fort Edward National Historic Site. Photo: Parks Canada

The organization representing the province's Acadians says outside momentum against the possible sale of municipally-owned lands adjacent to Fort Edward National Historic Site is growing.

“This has attracted lots of attention. We hear that there is a petition starting from France that is going to be sent to West Hants (Regional) Municipality in support of the preservation of those lots,” Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE) executive director Marie-Claude Rioux said in an interview Tuesday.

“The Société Nationale de l’Acadie is writing a letter of support as well, so we’re having great traction. We’re getting support.”



Marie-Claude Rioux, executive director of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE). Photo: Contributed

At issue are two municipally owned lots adjacent to Fort Edward National Historic Site, located at 67 Fort Edward St. in Windsor.

West Hants Regional Municipality is considering selling abutting lots at 36 and 65 Fort Edward St.

“Fort Edward is intertwined in every major occurrence and the day-to-day life of our region since before recorded history. For centuries, the Mi’kmaq people knew this place as an ideal area for

hunting and fishing,” West Hants Historical Society president Shirley Pineo wrote in a November 16 letter to the mayor and West Hants councillors.

“In the 1600s, the Acadians had a chapel on the grounds that became Fort Edward in 1770. Shortly thereafter, in 1755, over 1,000 Acadians were wrongfully deported from the region and an influx of American Planters ensued.”



View of Historic Site from southern side of Subject Lot



A view of Fort Edward National Historic Site from the southern side of the lot at 65 Fort Edward St. as shown during a March 22 presentation to West Hants Regional Municipality's council.

## At risk of being lost forever

On Monday, the FANE issued [a media release](#) expressing its concerns about the possible sale. In it, the organization noted that important artifacts connected to the former church, its surrounding Acadian communities, and the imprisonment of Acadians during the deportation could be found onsite and are at risk of being lost forever.

“Fort Edward itself is very important for Acadians, but the vicinity of Fort Edward very likely contains Acadian artifacts and pieces of the puzzle that are very significant for Acadian history and Mi'kmaq history and the Planters' history,” Rioux said.

“These two lots that are adjacent to Fort Edward may contain lots of artifacts and remains of what is our common history.”

Rioux explained that Fort Edward was once the site of Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption, a parish church that served Acadians in the area at the time. It stood from 1722 to 1750, when it was demolished to make way for Fort Edward.

Rioux said Acadians were also imprisoned there during the deportation.

“The ruins of the church are right under Fort Edward right now. Also, Acadians used to come and go of course from the little villages to the church, and there was a truck house there too,” Rioux said.

“So in the vicinity of what became Fort Edward after that, there were lots of exchanges between Mi'kmaq, Acadians, and the British troops that were posted there.”

### ‘Part of the story disappears’

Another issue of concern is the potential loss of the view plane from Fort Edward. Rioux said if the municipal land was used for residential development, the view that includes the Avon River and Pisiquid Lake would be lost.

“It’s part of the story that belongs to Fort Edward, because if you want to explain where Acadians were and where the church was, you need to show those places and from Fort Edward you can see where the villages were,” Rioux said.

“You can point. You can even draw a map and say ‘The villages were here and there and here and there.’ If you build something that blocks the view, well, part of the story disappears.”

### ‘Fabric that started Canada’

The issue was first brought to the attention of the FANE about one month ago when Rioux was approached by the West Hants Historical Society. She said that group believed the FANE might have a stake in what happens to the lots.

She's grateful members brought it to her attention and described the potential sale as "heartbreaking."

"Acadian History is part of Nova Scotia history and it's part of Canadian history. And it's not only Acadian history. It's Mi'kmaq history, it's the Planters' history," Rioux said.

"It's really part of the fabric that started Canada that is being erased if we sell those two lots. I don't want to be overly dramatic, but ... these particular lots to me are really worth preserving."

### 'We will have lost a golden opportunity'

A public hearing about the 65 Fort Edward St. lot was held during Tuesday night's [West Hants council meeting](#) in Windsor. Those who addressed the mayor and council members all expressed a desire to see the land preserved.

Following a presentation by West Hants municipal planner Alex Dunphy, West Hants Historical Society president Shirley Pineo was one of four people who spoke.

She pointed to the rich history of the land. In addition to its Acadian, Mi'kmaq, and Planter history, it was also the first site of the [Hants County Exhibition](#) in 1765.

That exhibition is considered the oldest, continuously running agricultural fair in North America.

"This is historical land. We don't need to know if there's any artifacts under the ground. It doesn't matter whether there's anything under the ground. We are more concerned with what took place on top of the ground," Pineo told councillors Tuesday.

"We don't brag ourselves up. We don't let the world know what gems we have here, and if we lose this piece of land, we will have lost a golden opportunity for the future of this municipality."

### 'They'll go on past us'

Pineo also alluded to a conversation she had with Rioux in which she learned about the Acadian World Congress being held in southwest Nova Scotia in 2024.

“Thousands of them (Acadians) will come from all over the world back to Nova Scotia to see where they were deported from. If we don’t have this property at Fort Edward, they’re not going to even stop here,” Pineo told councillors.

“They’ll go on past us, go to Grand Pré and on to Port Royal. Those towns will benefit from all of the people that are coming. I think this is an opportunity. But that’s only 2024, which is just two years away, and all of you seem to keep delaying this.”

In December, the municipality’s Planning and Heritage Advisory Committee turned down a staff recommendation to give first reading and hold a public hearing on the rezoning and sale of the lot.

Instead the committee requested staff reach out to the province for comment regarding requirements of the Special Places Protection Act for the site.

As a result and based on provincial feedback, the municipality pursued Phase 1 of an Archaeological Resource Impact Assessment (ARIA).

### ‘Remarkable how rich this site is’

Saint Mary’s University professor Jonathan Fowler and his Northeast Archaeological Research Inc. team were hired to prepare the report for the properties on Fort Edward Street.

“The report presented evidence that strongly suggests the presence of archaeological resources associated with Fort Edward in the subject lot,” notes a report to West Hants council. “Early maps displayed multiple buildings consisting of a commanding officer’s stable, bullock houses, and soldiers’ huts being located on the subject lot.”

During a March 8 West Hants council meeting, Fowler [presented highlights](#) of his Phase 1 study via Zoom.

“We can document archaeological resources here, we can evaluate them, and given all the connections I’ve just outlined, we can assign to them a very high level of significance,” Fowler said during his presentation to council.

"In fact it's remarkable to me how rich this site is and how multi-textured, multi-layered it is and how it connects each of the major communities whose histories are kind of braided together on this place."

Pointing to its Mi'kmaq, Acadian, and anglo-American dimensions, Fowler added that the site is part of a network.

"Parks Canada's survey of visitors to Fort Edward indicates this, that people visit Fort Edward and go on to visit these other sites that are actually part of the same narrative of events," Fowler said.

"And so I mention that to you in trying to again create a sense of that heritage ecosystem that there is...really great potential for further mobilization of these heritage resources."

### 'Presence of our people simply erased'

On March 9, the day after Fowler's presentation, Rioux sent a letter addressed to the mayor, West Hants Council, and members of the West Hants Planning Committee.

In her letter, she reiterated Fowler's messaging that Fort Edward was important not only as a cultural heritage for West Hants, but for "the entire Acadian diaspora."

"As you are certainly aware, the Windsor-Digby area of the province has a network of historic sites that tell the story of the Acadian people, from their initial settlement through the Deportation and beyond," Rioux wrote.

"Fort Edward is an important part of that chain of our history. Therefore, we are deeply concerned about the proposed sales of PIDs 45049797 and PIDs 45059805."

Noting that Fowler's report found the lots could likely contain important artifacts, Rioux expressed her belief that it would be "premature" to proceed with the sale of the lots without further archaeological investigation.

"Obviously, our Federation fears that, without such investigation, this would result in another instance where the presence of our people on these lands is simply erased," she wrote.

“Fort Edward, its view planes and the surrounding area represent a rich heritage for West Hants Regional Municipality to mobilize heritage resources around the shared experience of our communities.”

On Tuesday night, all but one councillor voted to follow the municipal planner’s recommendation to adjourn the public hearing and postpone second reading until June 28. This is to allow for the completion of a Phase 2 Archaeological Resource Impact Assessment (ARIA) for the 65 Fort Edward St. site.

“As it is likely that the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage will advise the Municipality to pursue a Phase 2 ARIA, staff feel as though adjourning the Public Hearing and postponing the Second Reading to carry out the necessary work for the Phase 2 ARIA is the best course of action to make a fully informed decision,” notes the [March 22 planner’s report](#) presented to West Hants council.

## Subscribe to the Halifax Examiner

Subscription Option	Price	Frequency
Low income /student	\$5	Recurring monthly
Basic (Most popular)	\$10	Recurring monthly
Sustainer	\$25	Recurring monthly

We have many other [subscription options available](#), or drop us [a donation](#). Thanks!

FILED UNDER: [FEATURED](#), [NEWS](#), [PROVINCE HOUSE](#)

TAGGED WITH: [65 FORT EDWARD ST.](#), [ACADIAN HISTORY](#), [ACADIAN WORLD CONGRESS](#), [ACADIANS](#), [ALEX DUNPHY](#), [ARCHAEOLOGY](#), [FANE](#), [FÉDÉRATION ACADIENNE DE LA NOUVELLE-ÉCOSSE](#), [FORT EDWARD NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE](#), [JONATHAN FOWLER](#), [MARIE-CLAUDE RIOUX](#), [MI'KMAQ HISTORY](#), [NORTHEAST ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH INC.](#), [PLANTER'S HISTORY](#), [SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY](#), [SHIRLEY PINEO](#), [WEST HANTS COUNCIL](#), [WEST HANTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY](#), [WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY](#), [YVETTE D'ENTREMONT](#)



