GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY, AND PUBLIC TRUST

Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities

November 2026



Agenda

The changing municipal environment

Good governance in action

Strategy and decision-making

Public engagement and trust



As the pace of change increases, councils face difficult choices and competing expectations.

- **Good governance** clarifies who decides and how.
- **Clear strategy** helps council weigh options and set priorities.
- **Transparent leadership** helps people understand decisions and hold council accountable.



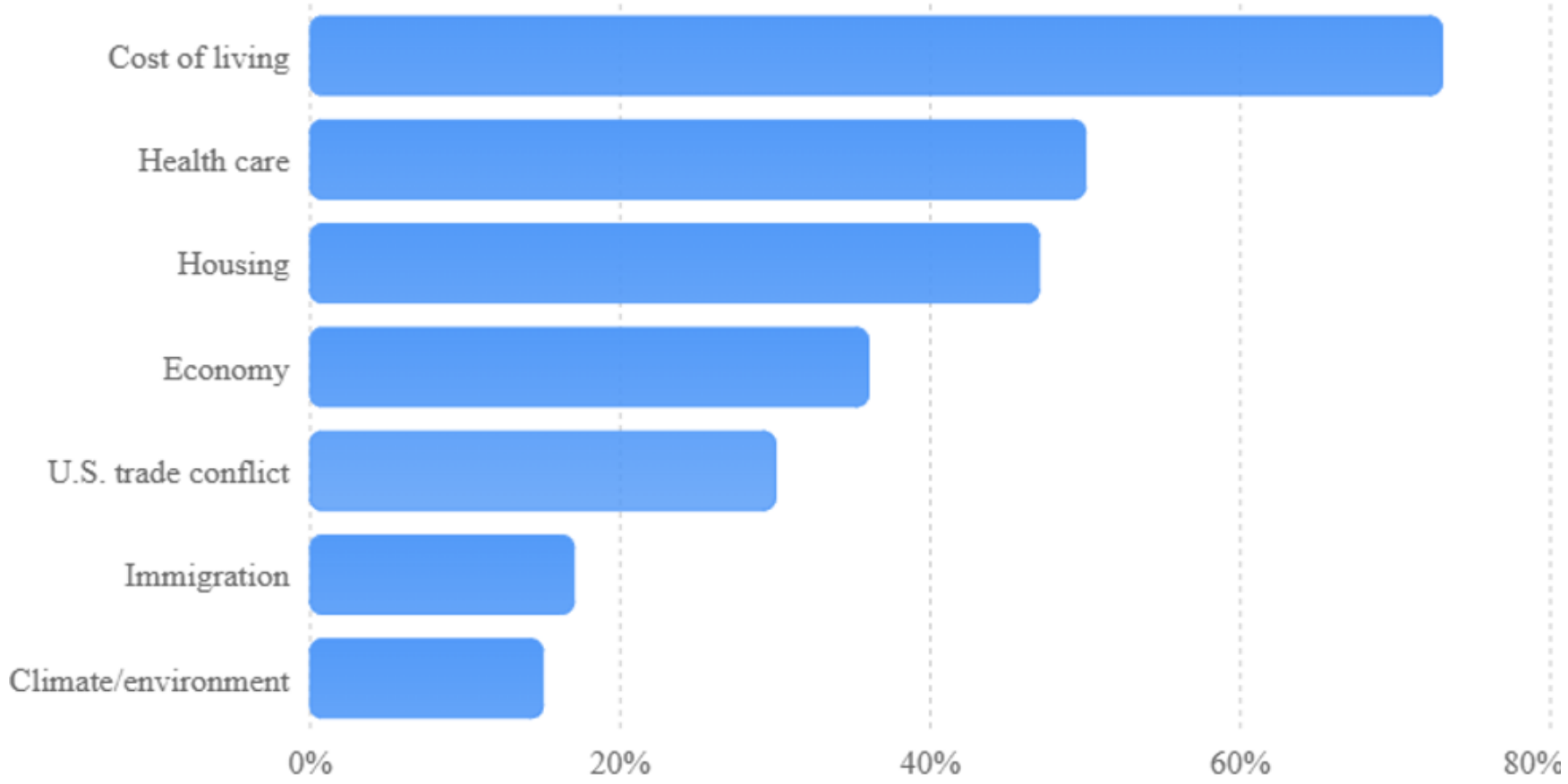
WHERE WE ARE: THE CHANGING MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT

A changing environment for municipalities

- **Provincial priorities:** Accelerating economic growth and development
- **Housing:** Greater provincial involvement in local planning decisions
- **Energy and defence**: National priorities with local consequences
- **Infrastructure:** Growing needs and financial pressures


Federal & Provincial Priorities
Housing, infrastructure, energy, defence, economic growth
Municipal Councils
Strategic direction, local services, community interests, financial stewardship
Community Expectations
Affordability, transparency, participation, fairness, quality of life

What Nova Scotians are telling us



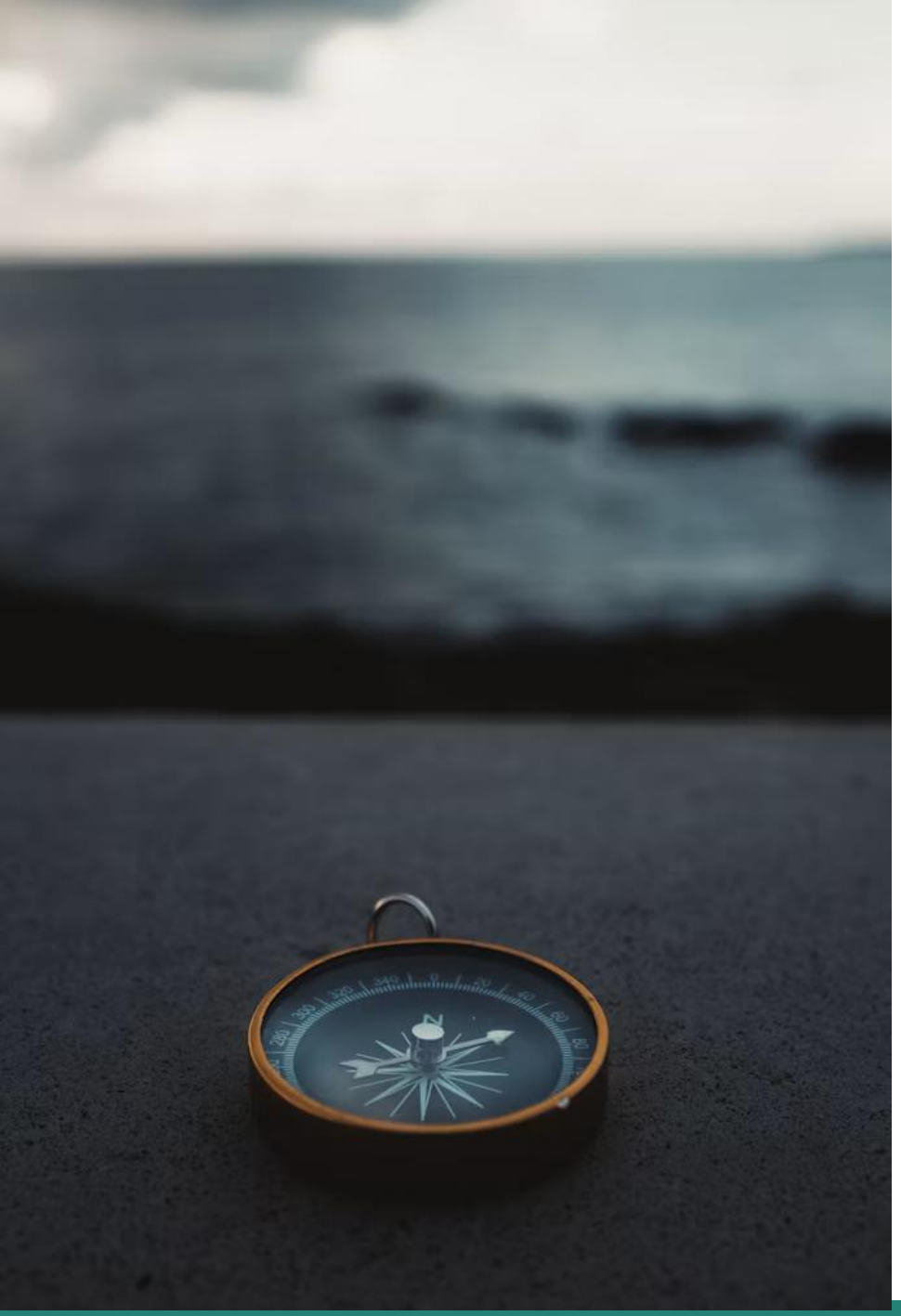
Source: Abacus Data, September 2026.

What does this mean for council?

- Growth brings opportunities, costs and competing demands.
- Council cannot fund or do everything at once.
- Decisions by other governments can change local plans.
- Residents want to be heard and understand the reasons for decisions.



GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ACTION



Governance is…
how council sets direction, makes decisions and holds the municipality accountable for results.

Good governance means…
clear roles, informed decisions, fair processes and follow-through.

Role	Core responsibility
Council	Individual councillors bring concerns forward. Council sets direction collectively, makes decisions and provides oversight.
Mayor / Warden	Chair fairly, encourage constructive debate and represent council appropriately.
CAO	Provide professional advice, lead administration and implement council direction.
Staff / Administration	Provide expertise and carry out approved policies and decisions.

Effective Municipal Meetings

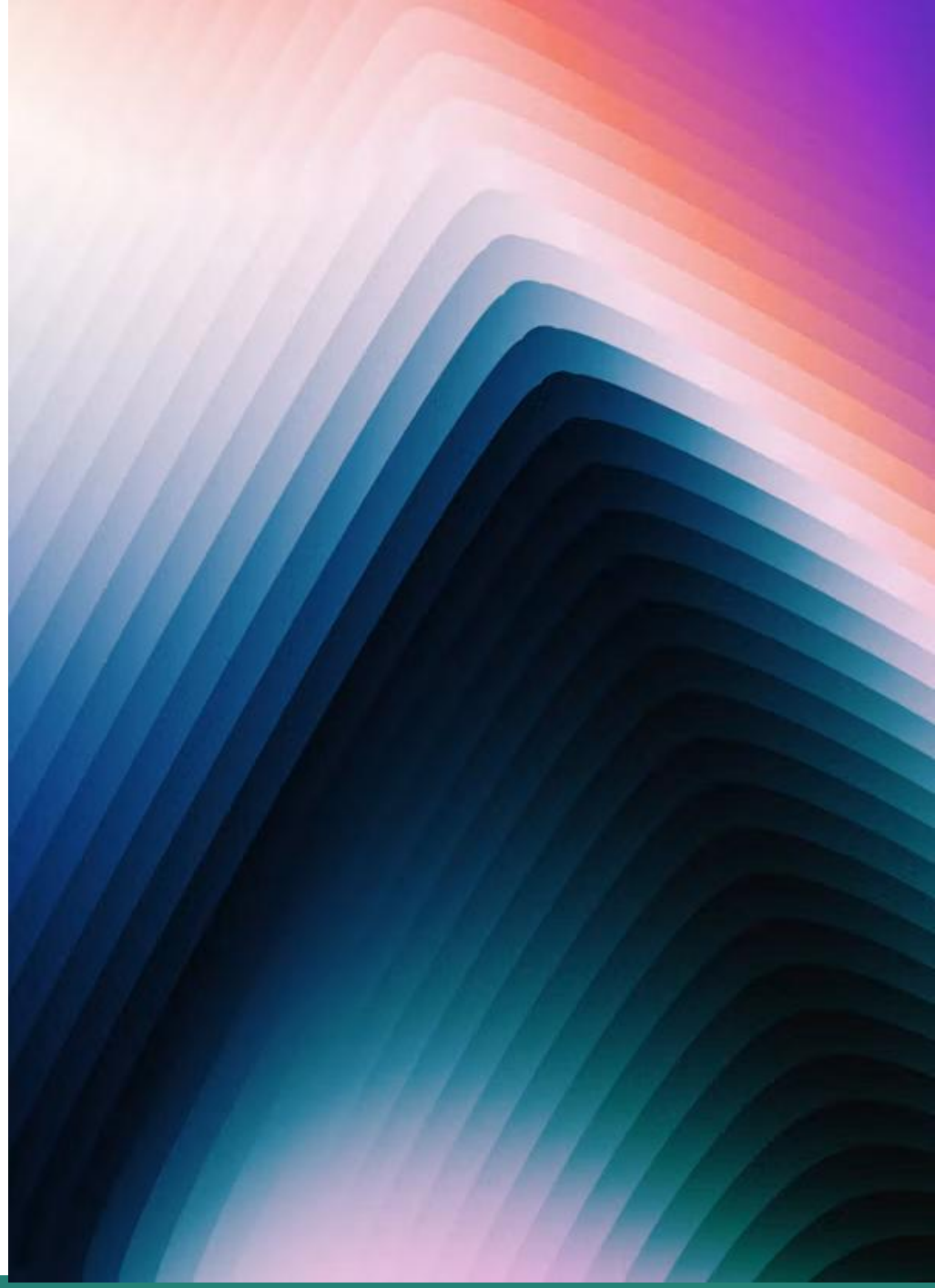
Clear purpose

Clear roles

Strategic focus

Fair and respectful process

Clear decisions and follow-through



How strategy guides council's work

Council's work	How strategy helps
Setting priorities	Decide what matters most.
Approving budgets	Fund priorities and assign staff time.
Considering proposals	Test options against priorities and evidence.
Making trade-offs	Decide what proceeds and what waits.
Providing oversight	Check progress and results.

Questions before a major decision

Purpose: What will this achieve, and which priority does it support?

Authority: What can council decide, and what depends on others?

Options: What could we do, including waiting or doing nothing?

Trade-offs: What will it cost, what are the risks, and what would wait?

People: Who benefits, who bears the costs, and whose voice is missing?

Results: How will we know it worked?

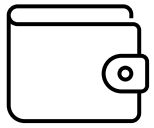
A Clear Plan Helps Council Make Choices



What are our priorities?



What principles guide our decisions?



What are the costs and trade-offs?



How do we consider community interests?



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, CONDUCT & TRUST

Hearing from Residents

How does your municipality hear from residents?

- Question periods at council meetings
- Scheduled presentations and delegations
- Public hearings and formal consultations
- Open houses, surveys and community meetings

Does your approach give residents a meaningful opportunity to be heard?



Explaining decisions and reporting back

- Explain what council decided and why.
- Describe the options and trade-offs.
- Explain how council considered public input.
- Clarify what council controls and what remains uncertain.
- Explain next steps and when to expect an update.
- Acknowledge delays or mistakes and how you'll address them.







Five take-aways

1. Use your priorities to guide choices.
2. Understand your role.
3. Make room for public voices.
4. Make decisions fairly and explain them clearly.
5. Protect public trust through your conduct.


Thank you
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