

GRAND PARADE

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caption Mayor Andy Fillmore in a scrum with media in 2025.
credit Matt Stickland

The austerity hypocrisy of mayor Andy Fillmore

by M. Stickland

Cuts for thee, but not for me, argued Andy (hypocritically) during last week's budget committee.

Halifax is debating severe cuts this budget season as mayor Andy Fillmore keeps pushing austerity to grapple with past city councils keeping taxes low.

For those just tuning into budget season, the city's operational budget this year is \$1.2 billion. Thanks to keeping taxes low by deferring maintenance and by deferring the construction of critical infrastructure, the city is now \$3 billion behind in paying for the HRM's infrastructure needs. Unfortunately, due to council's heavy debt and reserve spending in past years to keep taxes low, the city no longer has strategic reserves or debt to pay for our much-needed infrastructure. And since council seems to want to continue keeping taxes low

instead of raising fees to make the city sustainable, the city can only afford \$1.8 billion of the \$3bn needed for the city's critical infrastructure. A desire to keep taxes low and not to invest in the needed infrastructure for the city seems to be what is driving mayor Andy Fillmore and why Fillmore has been leading the charge to find cuts, repeatedly saying that everybody needs to "do more with less."

Everyone except him.

At the committee, the mayor's chief of staff Joanne Macrae, age 45, explained that as the city has grown and the world has changed, the mayor's office needed to reorganize and modernize. This modernization and its \$192,800 price tag is mainly for a comms person to make social media posts and answer emails. This drew criticism from councillors

like District 2 councillor David Hendsbee who said that this comms person "may get you another code of conduct issue from time to time if you disagree with the consensus of council and stuff like that after the fact." Hendsbee was referencing Fillmore's Instagram reel on Jan. 30, 2025, where Fillmore publicly disagreed with council, which appeared to contravene Clause 16(1) of the Municipal Code of Conduct and earned Fillmore a formal investigation into his conducts as mayor.

This was the first of several code of conduct complaints lodged against Fillmore, back when the public was still allowed to lodge code of conduct complaints.

Councillors expressed concern that the mayor's office staff positions were political and could cause issues for the city. As Hendsbee noted, Fillmore is already making posts that explicitly go against council's decisions; like the Jan. 30, 2025 reel, or the social media campaign urging council to kill Halifax Forum repairs after already awarding Pomerleau construction company a contract to start fixing the Forum.

"We need to rein in spending and **reduce the tax increase**" and "I'm working with my council colleagues to **bring that number down**," (emphasis in original) are phrases from Fillmore's Instagram that work against the mayor when he's trying to hire more staff to his office, which will **increase taxes and bring that number up**.

Councillors like Nancy Hartling were also concerned that since this would be public money going towards political staff, these mayoral staffers would become publically paid campaign staff at election time. And Macrae, the mayor's current chief of staff, first started working for Fillmore in 2015 when she helped him beat Jhoanna Miners in a

contested nomination to see who would be the candidate for the Liberals in Halifax's federal riding back in 2015. And again in 2019. And again in 2021. And again for his mayoral run in 2024.

Macrae told the committee that the increase to the mayor's office was fine because it was so small, saying that "the mayor's office budget represents 0.1% of the overall municipal operating budget." District 12 councillor Janet Steele pointed out that council debated the city's bike lane spending for "days, hours, evenings, meetings, meetings, meetings." The city's bike lane spend this year, (\$900,000) is to the capital budget as the mayor's budget (\$1.1 million) is to the city's operational budget, a similarly insignificant portion of the overall budget.

The mayor also undercut his arguments later in the meeting. When council was debating cutting \$8,000 from Engage Nova Scotia's funding in this year's budget, some councillors criticized it as being a bit too nickel and dime-y, even for this time of self-imposed austerity. But Fillmore argued that big players like Engage Nova Scotia and Discover Halifax were big players and understood that in these hard times people in positions of leadership need to be leaders. They need to demonstrate, as leaders, that the belt tightening applies to everyone, even if it's only saving three cents a year on the average tax bill. And Fillmore argued that "this isn't about finding the three cents on the tax bill. It's about applying the rule fairly" to everyone.

Everyone, that is, except him.

Then, on Friday, after defending his new office hire, Fillmore proposed sweeping cuts of up to 7% of the city's employees. The cuts were to exclude front-line workers and, of course, the mayor's office.

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\$13,000 on speech is new spending

by M. Stickland

On Thursday Feb. 19, 2026, the HRM's Budget Committee met to talk about the Mayor's budget. During that debate, the Mayor's chief of staff, Joanne Macrea, told councillors about the \$13,000 Fillmore's office spent on

the annual state of the municipality speech that the mayor gives at a luncheon hosted by the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. The luncheons are put on regularly by the chamber and have an admission fee. The mayor's speech in 2025 cost \$109.95 for Chamber members to attend and \$139.95 for non-members. This is higher than the normal luncheon price charged by the Chamber.

During last week's budget debate, the public learned that this \$13,000 speechwriting contract was directly awarded by the mayor's office and was not a competitive bidding process. According to the Canadian Freelance

Guild, the appropriate compensation for a freelance speech writer is \$500 to \$8,000 per speech. District 9 councillor Shawn Cleary wanted to know why the mayor's office needed a speech writer. Cleary noted the previous mayor's chief of staff, Shaune MacKinlay, wrote the speeches which were then edited by then mayor Mike Savage. But Fillmore's chief of staff, Joanne Macrea, told the committee that "this was a practice that mayor Savage used in preparing his state of the municipality speeches as well. So we were continuing that practice."

But in an email to Grand Parade the office of the Lieutenant Governor

confirmed that Cleary's understanding of Savage's speech-writing process was correct and that the annual state of the municipality speeches were written by the mayor's chief of staff and edited by the mayor. When a speech writer was hired, like for Savage's address to the Toronto Economic Club, the writer was hired by The Halifax Partnership, and was not paid for by the taxpayer.

Grand Parade asked the mayor's office to clarify what Macrea meant when she told the Committee that Fillmore was "continuing" to hire speech writers when that was something Savage did not do, but did not receive a response prior to deadline.

Landlord's astroturf campaign

by M. Stickland

Mayor Andy Fillmore tried to decimate the city's staffing levels last week, but was outvoted by the rest of his peers. Fillmore put forward a motion at last week's Budget Committee meeting to slash the city's employees by up to 7%, and even though he failed in his effort to ruin the city, two questions remain. 1) Why is Fillmore so embarrassingly bad at his job? And 2) is his office running an astroturf campaign for the city's landlords?

The first question concerns how Fillmore attempted to decimate the HRM. Fillmore told the Budget Committee that he worked with staff on his motion, but both of the Committee's liaisons to staff, CFO Jerry Blackwood and CAO Brad Anguish, denied that they worked with the mayor on his motion. The CAO, Brad Anguish, later clarified that the mayors chief of staff, Joanne Macrea, asked Anguish on a Friday if cuts were possible and Anguish said he needed more details to answer that question. Then about a week later, Macrea dropped a note in Anguish's lap that read: "don't open in front of people. Private. Hoping to discuss. Follow-up to Friday conversation," and

that private note, according to Anguish, was a motion to reduce city staffing by 7%. Making major staffing cuts this large would be a huge undertaking for the city and it would take months to cut so many people without bringing the city to it's knees. In short, by trying to make cuts via secret note to the CAO, the mayor and his team let everyone know they are amateurs who would be cut from a bush league hockey team.

The second question that persists is why does the mayor want these cuts?

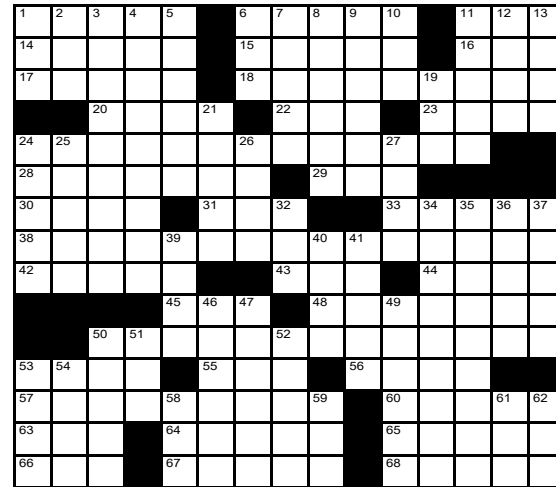
After getting trounced by Budget Committee for attempting one of the stupidest cuts ever seen at city hall, the mayor put out a press release that explains why he did it. The release reads that "a recent survey found that 74% of residents want to limit tax increases - and 71% support cuts to staff positions to accomplish that."

That study, paid for by Kevin Russell's landlords' lobby group, Rental Housing Providers Nova Scotia, was done by a company called Crestview Strategy. Crestview Strategy lists a man named Dale Palmetter as a senior consultant, and Palmetter used to work with one Joanne Macrea for premier Iain Rankin's brief tenure. Macrea and Palmetter were chief of staff and principal secretary, respectively. All of this begs the question: is the landlord's astroturfing campaign to wreck the city with lower taxes being championed by the mayor's office, thanks to the incestuous, circular, patronage appointments of Nova Scotia's political elite?

Job Sharing by B. Olson

Across

- 1 Toothy reptiles, for short
- 6 "He ___ changed a bit"
- 11 Identifying as one's given gender
- 14 Library division
- 15 "... woman who lived in ___"
- 16 AC/DC record label
- 17 Gag app for suds drinkers
- 18 Courtroom judge?
- 20 Felon-on-the-loose alerts
- 22 Yiddish "yuck!"
- 23 Chow
- 24 Polygraph technician?
- 28 "The Sopranos" fiancée who gets offed
- 29 Brand prefix with Cat or Cone
- 30 Spinks in the ring
- 31 Mary and Joseph's first accommodation choice
- 33 Test type you do with buds
- 38 Fishing tour guide?
- 42 Surname of a certain crossword creator :)
- 43 Van. summer fair
- 44 Havana home
- 45 Oil extract from marijuana
- 48 Globe shapes
- 50 Marine biologist?
- 53 French boyfriend
- 55 "You're oversharing, pal"
- 56 "The Bells ___ Mary's"
- 57 Personnel manager, at times?
- 60 Stymies, as a scheme
- 63 Monastery address
- 64 Spanish "sir"
- 65 Bombeck's "Aunt ___ Cope Book"
- 66 Red Chamber mem.
- 67 A black cat named Lucky, for example
- 68 Purple-haired people, say



© ClassiCanadian Crosswords

Down

- 1 "Avatar" technology: Abbr.
- 2 Yank's foe in the Civil War
- 3 Reply to "What was your first clue?", maybe
- 4 Entered on tiptoe
- 5 Neighbour of Croatia
- 6 Leaf's longtime hockey rival
- 7 At ___ distance (far enough away)
- 8 Mean guitar riffs
- 9 Reply to "S'appenin'?", maybe
- 10 Pipe dividing joint
- 11 Roofing shakes wood
- 12 "How ___ Your Mother"
- 13 Knights' titles
- 19 New-sounding role for Keanu
- 21 ___-law (relative)
- 24 Actress Edie of "Nurse Jackie"
- 25 Perfectionist's aim
- 26 Da ___ (port of Vietnam)
- 27 Piece of carry-on
- 32 Political party letters in orange, often
- 34 Helper in a heist
- 35 9:00 a.m., for many workers
- 36 "... giftie gie us, ___ ourself as ithers ...": Burns
- 37 Shake an Etch A Sketch
- 39 Move (ahead) slowly
- 40 The "I" of CNIB: Abbr.
- 41 Printing dupe
- 46 "Oh, poo!", to Pooh
- 47 Brand logo on a pizza box
- 49 Played the Big Bad Wolf, at times
- 50 It's a wrap
- 51 Stick on the wall in a pool room
- 52 Use as a bed
- 53 Totes tight pals
- 54 James Joyce's homeland
- 58 Long-running crime series
- 59 Overdo the tanning
- 61 "Knot's Landing" actress Park Lincoln
- 62 Sound from Kipling's Kaa

Notes: