

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF ANTIGONISH

Committee of the Whole Meeting
Tuesday, April 23, 2024, Following Asset Management Council Chambers
Municipal Administration Building
285 Beech Hill Road
Beech Hill, NS B2G 0B4

1. Call to Order – Chair, Warden Owen McCarron
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of April 9, 2024 Committee of the Whole Minutes
4. Business Arising from the Minutes
5. Delegations
 - a. There are no scheduled delegations.
6. Continuing Business
 - a. Community Hubs Update
 - b. Next Steps on Marketing Levy Bylaw & Tourism Strategy
 - c. Continuation of Municipal Boundary Review
7. New Business
 - a. Consideration of e-Voting for 2024 Municipal Election
 - b. NS Access Awareness Week Proclamation
8. Community Events

This item provides Councillors with an opportunity to briefly bring to the attention of Council events that are taking place in their communities.
9. Reports from Inter-Municipal Boards, Committees and Commissions
 - a. Antigonish Heritage Museum Board
 - b. Antigonish Arena Association
 - c. Eastern District Planning Commission
 - d. Eastern Regional Solid Waste Management Committee
 - e. Pictou Antigonish Regional Library
 - f. RK MacDonald Nursing Home
 - g. County Paqtnkek Joint Steering Committee
 - i. Community Navigation & Physician Retention Services Association
10. Additions to the Agenda
11. In-Camera Items
 - a. Personnel matters
 - b. Legal advice eligible for solicitor-client privilege

12. Adjournment

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES CHART (amended October 2022)

COUNCIL PRIORITIES	
<p><u>NOW</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WATER UTILITY DEVELOPMENT <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expansion & Renew Aging Infrastructure b. Securing Long-Term Source Water c. Long-Term Financial Plan 2. DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT AN EVENTS & TOURISM PLAN 3. CONNECTIVITY – CELLULAR AND BROADBAND 4. RENEWABLE ENERGY 5. NEXT GEN SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT 	
<p><u>NEXT</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN: Update & Implementation • ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN: Implementation • COMMUNITY HUBS: Plan & Implementation 	<p><u>ADVOCACY/PARTNERSHIPS</u></p> <p><i>Connectivity Funding (Prov & Feds)</i> <i>TIR Service Provision (Prov)</i> <i>Long-Term Care Facility Funding (Prov)</i> <i>Aging In Place Program (Prov)</i> <i>Accessible/Affordable Housing</i></p>
ADMINISTRATION	FINANCE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CELLULAR & BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY 2. EVENTS & TOURISM 3. ASSET MANAGEMENT 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING: Plan & Implementation - Ongoing
PUBLIC WORKS	RECREATION
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WATER UTILITY DEVELOPMENT 2. NEXT GEN SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION 2. COMMUNITY HUBS
SUSTAINABILITY	PLANNING
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RENEWABLE ENERGY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCC • COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECT 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MANDATORY MINIMUM PLANNING: Development & Implementation 2. EASTERN ANTIGONISH PLANNING STRATEGY & BYLAW: Complete Review

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF
ANTIGONISH

Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes

Tuesday April 9, 2024, 5:30pm
Council Chambers
Municipal Administration Building
285 Beech Hill Road
Beech Hill, NS B2G 0B4

Present were: Warden Owen McCarron
 Deputy Warden Bill MacFarlane
 Councillor Mary MacLellan
 Councillor Donnie MacDonald
 Councillor Shawn Brophy
 Councillor Remi Deveau (by Zoom)
 Councillor John Dunbar
 Councillor Gary Mattie
 Councillor Harris McNamara

Regrets: Councillor Hugh Stewart

Staff Present: Glenn Horne, CAO
 Beth Schumacher, Deputy Clerk
 Shirlyn Donovan, Strategic Initiatives Coordinator

Others Present: Gallery
 Alex Oulton (by Zoom)
 Duncan Roberts (by Zoom)

Call to Order – Chairman, Warden Owen McCarron

The meeting of the Committee of the Whole was called to order by the Chair, Warden McCarron, at 5:30 pm.

In-Camera Items

Moved and Seconded

That the Committee of the Whole adjourn to an in-camera session to discuss Contract Negotiations at 5:30 pm.

Motion Carried

Moved and Seconded

That the in-camera session adjourns at 5:53 pm.

Motion Carried

Approval of Agenda

Warden McCarron called for any additions or deletions to the agenda. The following addition was made: West River Safety Issue

Moved and Seconded

That the agenda be approved as amended.

Motion Carried

Approval of March 26, 2024 Committee of the Whole Minutes

Warden McCarron called for any errors or omissions in the Committee of the Whole minutes of March 26, 2024.

Moved and Seconded

That the minutes of March 26, 2024 be approved as presented.

Motion Carried

Business Arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes.

Delegations

Alex Oulton and Duncan Robertson – Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Ms. Oulton and Mr. Robertson introduced CFIB and outlined some concerns that they would like to see addressed to ensure that it works for small businesses in the community. The concerns raised included additions to the cost of running a small business, with particular mention of credit card fees. A suggestion was made to provide a rebate to offset the cost of credit card fees to operators. Concerns regarding remittance communications, such as reporting requirements, were also highlighted, citing an example of HRM. Suggestions for the remittance process were shared. The floor was opened for questions, and with none coming forward, the representatives from CFIB were thanked for their presentation.

Linda Asselin, Owner – Antigonish Evergreen Inn

Ms. Asselin from Antigonish Evergreen Inn introduced their involvement with the Antigonish Tourism Association and provided some background on the work done by that organization to promote the community and create events to draw more tourism to the area. Comments were shared regarding the description of the proposed levy as

a tax in previous discussions, and the importance of the funds to support local events and marketing were described.

The floor was opened to the Committee for questions. A question was asked about whether the proposed levy would support only year-round operations, or whether seasonal operators would see a benefit as well. Discussion regarding the features and amenities in the community available for those visiting followed. The feedback received from those providing comments on the proposed levy, outlining their concerns, was raised.

Continuing Business

Municipal Government Act Amendments

Mr. Horne provided an overview of the amendments to the Municipal Government Act that were embedded in the Financial Measures Act that was passed during the most recent sitting of the Legislature. Mr. Horne highlighted a few of the changes for the benefit of the Committee. Questions of clarification were asked by the Committee.

Update on Bill 407 - Antigonish Consolidation Act

Mr. Horne provided an update regarding the status of the Antigonish Consolidation Act. He noted that the memo in the package provides closure to the loop regarding the proposal to explore consolidation.

Councillor McNamara proposed a motion to forgive costs awarded to parties involved in legal matters. The motion was noted to be out of order on the basis of no notice of the motion being provided. A request was made to put the item on a future agenda for discussion.

Continuation of the Municipal Boundary Review

Mr. Horne spoke to information received from the Utility and Review Board regarding the continuation of the boundary review process, with timelines. The Municipality is required to file their submission to the UARB on May 14th. The boundary review is at the point where two scenarios will be shared with the public for feedback, in preparation for the final submission.

Questions received from members of the Committee included questions about the timeline for the public meetings, concerns regarding the timing of the proposed open house sessions, and whether the boundary review submission could leave the boundaries as status quo, with further review done after the election. Concerns regarding the timeline for the boundary review process were raised. Discussion followed.

New Business

Tender Award – Bulky Waste Collection

One bid was received in response to a tender issued for the 2024 Bulky Waste Collection.

Moved and Seconded

The Committee recommends to Municipal Council that the tender for the 2024 Bulky Waste Collection be awarded to GFL Environmental for a bid price of \$67,500.00 + HST.

Motion Carried

Antigonish Community Transit Emergency Funding Request

Mr. Horne spoke to a request made by Antigonish Community Transit regarding a request for additional funding due to budget pressure felt earlier in March. Since making that request, they have received word of additional funding from the Province that will relieve that budget pressure, but asked that the request to the Municipality still be brought to the Committee. Staff is recommending that any grant funding provided to Antigonish Community Transit be considered early and released earlier in the fiscal year once approved by Council.

Moved and Seconded

The Committee recommends that Municipal Council Municipal Council approve Option #3 put forward by staff, to consider Community Partnership Grant request for Antigonish Community Transit when approving the 2024/25 operating budget.

Motion Carried

Community Events

- Councillor McNamara shared that the Havre Boucher Fire Hall is looking to host a picnic for community engagement. He also shared that there is line dancing on Monday evenings at the Havre Boucher Community Centre
- Councillor MacLellan shared that the Mother's Day Lobster Dinner will be a take-out dinner this year.
- Deputy Warden MacFarlane shared that a community clean-up is planned to take place in Williams Point.
- Councillor Deveau shared that a community clean-up is planned to take place in Pomquet in May. For the long weekend in May 24, Pomquet athletes are going to Regionals in Dartmouth.

- Councillor Dunbar shared that the Paqtnkek First Nation Powwow will be taking place this weekend in the Millenium Centre at St. FX. On April 19th trivia night will be held at the Heatherton Community Centre.
- Warden McCarron shared that the 4H group in St. Andrews has a community clean-up planned.
- Councillor Brophy shared that in Brierly Brook a community cleanup is also planned.

Additions to the Agenda

West River Safety Concerns

Deputy Warden MacFarlane highlighted a location of safety concern for those canoeing or kayaking on the West River, where erosion along a curve in the river has created an undercut that is creating an undercut that is a hazard to the public. A suggestion was made to do some excavation to realign the river, with armour stone, could be explored to improve the conditions. A request was made to send a letter to DNR to request that alterations be made to improve the safety of the river in that location.

Moved and Seconded

The Committee recommends that Municipal Council write a letter to the Department of Natural Resources to highlight safety concerns with an undercut bank on the West River and ask that it be addressed.

Motion Carried.

Adjournment

Moved

That the Committee of the Whole meeting be adjourned at 7:15pm.

Motion Carried

Warden Owen McCarron

Glenn Horne, CAO

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF
ANTIGONISH

Project Update

TO: MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF ANTIGONISH
FROM: MARLENE MELANSON, RECREATION DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: ***ANTIGONISH COUNTY COMMUNITY HUBS***
DATE: APRIL 19, 2024

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Municipal Recreation Department created the *Communities in Movement: A recreation and physical activity plan for Antigonish County*, which was adopted by Municipal Council. Plan can be viewed at: https://recreation.antigonishcounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Communities-in-Movement_FINAL-PLAN.pdf

The recreation plan was crafted through various means, including surveys and community consultations. Residents highlighted several key areas, such as the necessity for enhanced communication and a dedicated emphasis on our rural communities, among other concerns. In response, a Community Hubs project was launched, identifying twelve specific hubs to tackle these issues. (refer to appendix A)

Objective 4.2 in the Communities in Movement plan aims *“To support community Hubs as ongoing vibrant gathering places, centers of recreation and social development, as well as avenues for the development of new ideas.”*

The department defines a hub as: *“A conveniently located public space that is recognized and valued in the local community as a gathering place for people and as access point for a wide range of community activities, programs, services and events.”*

STATUS UPDATE

In November 2019, the recreation department began work on the Hubs project. Conversations were initiated to gather information on community recreation assets and / or gaps in hopes to build on existing social and physical environments in addition to ongoing communications. Unfortunately, the Hubs project was put on pause for several years due to the pandemic.

This past fall 2023, the Rec department revisited the Hubs project, resumed conversations, and reconnected with our communities. The Make Your Move Antigonish (MYMA) initiative was

also integrated to the Hubs discussion as MYMA is a great way to support and encourage recreation and movement within communities.

The recreation department hosted several meetings throughout the Antigonish County this past fall. The goal of the meetings was to reconnect with the communities and the key individuals and organizations who are the energy behind everything that is happening within.

The meeting discussions were centered on the following goals to guide the conversations:

1. Identify ways to increase movement, recreational opportunities, and social connections within your community.
2. Discuss support and resources for preexisting activities.
3. Improve communication between the Municipality and Community Hubs.

The conversations were enlightening, and it was inspiring to hear the community drive behind all the offerings. The volunteer passion and effort are what supports our communities with recreation and movement opportunities that benefit all aspects of both the community and individual wellbeing.

NEXT STEPS

Following the meetings, the recreation staff organized the information gathered from the discussions into three categories: "Current Activities," "Support Strategies," and "Communication Challenges." This data was then consolidated into two primary focus areas: Communication and Supportive Environments.

Within these areas, several actions were identified for the recreation department to bolster and improve its ongoing support for community hubs. While some actions are relatively straightforward to implement or expand upon existing initiatives, others will require more time and planning. The following paragraphs outline initiatives categorized into short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions, all aimed at bolstering the department's support for community hubs.

Short Term

Short-term focus areas developed from our Hub conversations where the recreation department has begun and will continue to achieve results include:

Communications

- An updated email list has been created that includes current key individuals who are involved with their community opportunities, events, and pursuits.

- Continue to provide further information on Sport Hub Antigonish and how it can support community organizations.
- Continue email communications that provide information to support organizations such as funding grants, trainings, and programs. Additionally, continue to disseminate resources and highlighting opportunities that come to the attention of the recreation department.

Supportive Environments

- Enhance and formalize the Mini Recreation Grant program so opportunities for funding are clearly indicated through different application streams.
- Continue to enhance the Equipment Loan Program and offer opportunities to expand by housing more equipment within the Hubs and their play areas.
- Continue to offer and expand on mobile programming where opportunities are offered several times at different Hubs.

Medium Term

Medium-term focus areas identified to support Hubs include:

Communications

- The development of a comprehensive communications plan to ensure sustainable relationships with our community hubs.

Supportive Environments

- Creation of a mechanism that will allow for ongoing review, and evaluation of the Hubs program.
- Conduct a movement audit to evaluate current recreation and movement opportunities being provided for communities and ways the Rec department can continue to enhance and support.

Long Term

This report primarily focuses on "geographical" community hubs, which serve as pivotal points for community engagement and development, rooted in cultural patterns of living and gathering (refer to Appendix A).

Feedback received subsequent to the release of the recreation department's Communities in Movement plan indicates that many individuals do not associate with a specific community hub but are connected to multiple "communities of interest" unrelated to a particular geographic area or community. Examples of these include the arts, culture, and more.

Once the short and medium-term goals have been accomplished, the department intends to initiate a second phase of the hubs project. This phase would involve engaging with communities of interest and potentially identifying ways in which the recreation department could support their ongoing initiatives, mirroring its support for "geographical" community hubs.

APPENDIX A – Excerpt from Communities in Movement A recreation and physical activity plan for Antigonish County; pg. 21

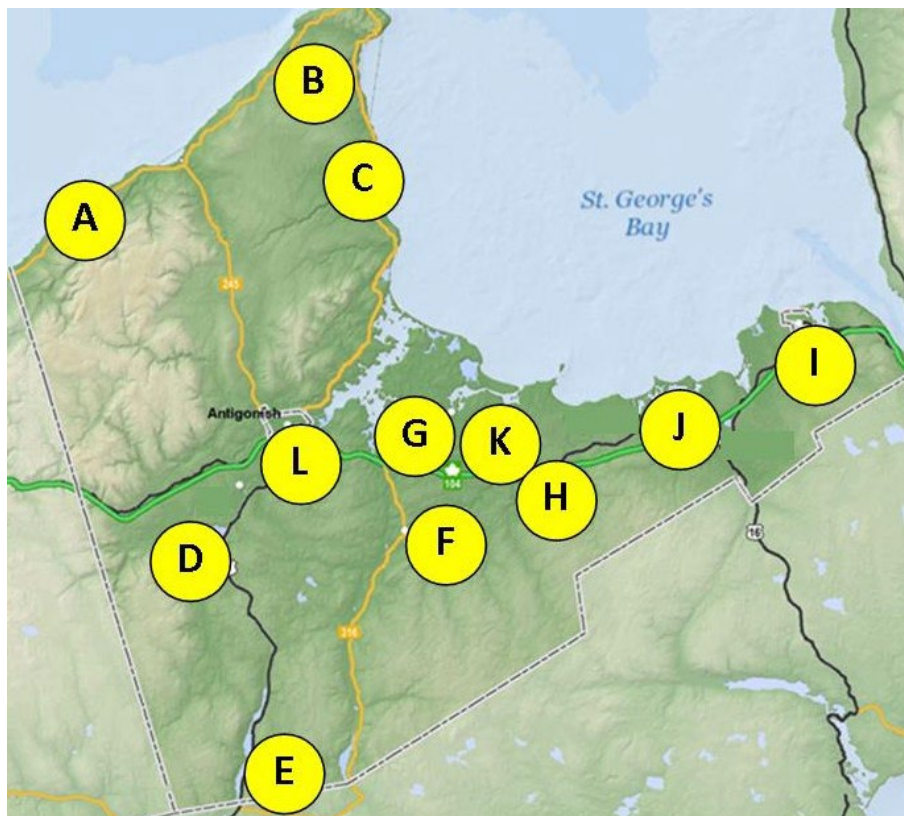
Community Hubs

A community hub is a focal point for community engagement and development, based on cultural patterns of living and gathering, for purposes of work, play, and education. Each hub is as unique as the community it serves.

Support for Community Hubs is an essential element of this plan. Recognizing that rural Community Hubs contribute to overall community wellbeing and can become even more vital to community vitality and citizen health and happiness, this plan proposes to build on and their existing strengths, increase their capacity through volunteer development and support them to be an even greater focal point for community activity as well as share information across communities.

The Antigonish County Recreation Department has identified the following communities as potential areas for a Community Hub. Specific community hubs will be defined in collaboration with local leadership in each community.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| A. Arisaig and surrounding areas | G. Pomquet and surrounding areas |
| B. Cape George and surrounding areas | H. Heatherton and surrounding areas |
| C. Lakevale and surrounding areas | I. Havre Boucher/Linwood and surrounding areas |
| D. St. Joseph and surrounding areas | J. Monastery/Tracadie and surrounding areas |
| E. Lochaber and surrounding areas | K. Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation |
| F. St. Andrews and surrounding areas | L. Antigonish Harbour, William's Point, West River, |



MEMO FOR DIRECTION

TO: MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
FROM: SHIRLYN DONOVAN, STRATEGIC INITIATIVES COORDINATOR
SUBJECT: ***TOURISM MARKETING LEVY BY-LAW***
DATE: APRIL 23, 2024

As of now, Municipal Council has received a presentation on the Tourism Strategy, the proposed Marketing Levy By-Law and several presentations from tourism operators and those involved in the industry. Staff is looking for further direction.

Option 1:

Committee proceed with a decision about the Marketing Levy Bylaw and/or endorsement of the Tourism Strategy (attached with updated appendix for your reference).

Option 2:

Staff could coordinate an information session for late May for operators to attend to hear from Mary Tulle, owner of Tulle Tourism Consulting and the consultant who facilitated the sessions and wrote the Tourism Strategy and provided the recommendations.

Marketing Levy By-Law

1.0 Title

This By-law shall be titled and referred to as the “Marketing Levy By-Law”.

2.0 Definitions

Accommodation – means supplying lodging in hotels and motels in any other facilities required to be licensed under the Tourist Accommodations Act and in a building owned or operated by a post-secondary educational institution where the hotel, motel, facility or building consists of one or more rental units that are offered as lodging;

Council – means the Council of the Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Operation – means a person whose business sells, offers to sell, provides, and offers to provide accommodation in the County of Antigonish

County – means the Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Purchase price – means the price for which the accommodation is purchased, including the value of the services rendered and other consideration accepted by the operator in return for the accommodation provided, but does not include the goods and services tax.

3.0 Application of Levy

- 3.1 A marketing and promotions levy is hereby imposed on the County, the rate of which shall be three percent (3%) of the purchase price of the accommodation.
- 3.2 The levy imposed under this By-law, must be collected at the time of the sale on the total amount of the purchase price and must be remitted to the County at the prescribed times and in the prescribed manner.
- 3.3 If a person collects an amount as if it were a levy imposed under this By-law, the person must remit the amount collected to the County at the same time and in the same manner as the levy collected under this By-law.

4.0 Exemption from Levy

- 4.1 The Marketing Levy shall not apply to:
 - a) A student who is housed in a building owned or operated by a post-secondary educational institution while the student is registered at and attending a post-secondary institution.
 - b) A person who is staying in a room for more than twenty-eight (28) consecutive days; or

- c) A person, and the person's family, while receiving medical treatment at a hospital or provincial health-care centre or seeking specialist medical advice, provided the person provides a statement from said hospital or provincial health-care centre.

5.0 Registration of Operator

- 5.1 Every operator of a facility providing accommodations to which this By-law applies shall apply for and be issued a registration certificate by the County
 - a) Where an operator carries on business at more than one place, the operator shall obtain a registration certificate in each individual place of business.
- 5.2 The registration certificate shall be displayed in a prominent place on the premises.
- 5.3 Where an operator changes their address, they will return their registration certificate to the municipality for the amendment.
- 5.4 Where an operator changes the name of nature of their business, the operator will return their registration certificate to the municipality for a new one.
- 5.5 Where an operator ceases to carry on business that a registration certificate has been issued, the certificate shall be void, and the operator shall return the certificate to the County within 15 days of the date of closure.
- 5.6 Where a registration certificate is lost or destroyed, a request shall be made to the County for a copy of the original.
- 5.7 A registration certificate granted under subsection (1) is not transferable.

6.0 Return and Remittance of Levy

- 6.1 The County may at any time require a return of sales and levy collected by any person selling accommodation; such return to cover any period or periods.
- 6.2 Subject to the provisions of subsection (6.1), unless otherwise provided, all operators shall make separate quarterly returns to the municipality.
- 6.3 A separate return shall be made for each place of business unless a consolidated return has been approved by the County.
- 6.4 The returns by operators shall be made and the levy shall be remitted to the County the 15th day of January, April, July and October.
- 6.5 If an operator during the preceding period has collected no levy, the operator shall make a report to that effect on the prescribed return form.

6.6 Where an operator ceases to carry on or disposes of his business, the operator shall make the return to that effect on the prescribed return form.

7.0 Records

7.1 Every operator shall keep books of accounts, records, and documents sufficient to furnish the municipality with the necessary particulars of

- a) sales of accommodation,
- b) amount of levy collected, and
- c) disposal of levy.

7.2 All entries concerning the levy in such books of account, records and documents shall be separate and distinguishable from other entries made therein.

7.3 Where a receipt, bill, invoice, or other document is issued by a person selling accommodation, the levy shall be shown as a separate item thereon.

8.0 Calculation of Levy

8.1 Where an operator sells an accommodation in combination with meals and other specialized services for an all-inclusive package price, the purchase price of the accommodation shall be deemed to be the price that will be collected for the levy.

9.0 Refund of Levy Collected in Error

9.1 If the County is satisfied that a levy or a portion of a levy has been paid in error, the County shall refund the amount of the overpayment to the person entitled.

9.2 If the County is satisfied that an operator has remitted to the County an amount as collected levy that the operator neither collected nor was required to collect under this By-law, the County must refund the amount to the operator.

10.0 Claim for Refund

10.1 To claim a refund under this By-law, a person must

- a) submit to the County an application in writing signed by the person who paid the amount claimed, and
- b) provide sufficient evidence to satisfy the County that the person who paid the amount is entitled to the refund.

10.2 For the purposes of subsection (1) (a), if the person who paid the amount claimed is a corporation, the application must be signed by a director or authorized employee of the corporation.

11.0 Offence

- 11.1 A person who contravenes a provision of the By-law is guilty of an offence punishable by summary conviction and on conviction is liable.
 - a) on a first conviction, to a fine of not less than \$500 and not more than \$1,000 and
 - b) for a subsequent conviction for the same or another provision of this regulation, to a fine of not less than \$1,500 and not more than \$5,000.

12.0 Administration of By-Law

- 12.1 This By-law shall be administered on behalf of the County by the Chief Administrator Officer and any persons designated by the Chief Administrator Officer.

13.0 Effective Date

- 13.1 This By-law shall take effect from first day of July, 2024.

Date of First Reading:	
Date of Advertisement for Intent to Consider:	
Date of Second Reading:	
Date of Advertisement & Approval:	
Date of Mailing Certified Copy to SNS & MR:	
I certify that this Nuisance Party By-Law was adopted by Council and published as indicated above:	
_____	_____
Chief Administrative Officer	Date

Antigonish

NOVA SCOTIA'S FREE SPIRIT



ANTIGONISH TOURISM STRATEGY

Prepared by:



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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that the Antigonish Region is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. We are grateful to reside in this Region and appreciate the opportunity to welcome visitors. In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge our shared responsibility to both the Mi'kmaw Nation and Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation.

It is important to recognize the valuable contribution of all those who participated in engagement and offered their insight, expertise, and passion for Antigonish.

Finally, it is appropriate to acknowledge the hardships of COVID on Antigonish residents and tourism partners. We are entering a new era of collaboration, and are emerging from these challenges stronger, and as one community.

The Antigonish Tourism Strategy

A Tourism Vision for Antigonish

Nova Scotia's leading non-urban, year-round overnight destination embraced by residents and visitors alike.

Value Proposition

Nova Scotia's leading non-urban tourism destination: renowned for its welcoming, forward-thinking, and dynamic communities that embrace and celebrate diversity – [Nova Scotia's Free Spirit](#).

Strategic Framework

The Antigonish Tourism Strategy framework is organized under five strategic directions – or pillars. Tourism partners were clear in messaging the imperative for strategic ambition and accordingly the strategic objectives will be activated over a three year timeframe.

Strategic Direction #1: Lead and Grow with Purpose

Aligned with the creation of a new DMO and the launch of its inaugural tourism strategy, develop internal systems including governance and administration to support the strategy resourcing and activation.

- Develop a financial sustainability plan – including revenue sources and income generators.
- Establish a 3% marketing levy through Town and County municipal by-laws designating Destination Antigonish as the official marketing agency for the Region.ⁱ
- Refine and formally adopt the Destination Antigonish governanceⁱⁱ structure reflecting leadership from the municipalities, tourism operators, partners, and investors, including mandate focused sub-committees (e.g., Marketing, Communications, Events, Resident Engagement, among others).
- Develop a 3–5-year business plan for Destination Antigonish leveraging the marketing levy as a foundational revenue generator to be supplemented through partner investments for project-based initiatives. The plan will also reflect how Destination Antigonish can grow staffing as the demands of local partners increase.
- Ensure all Destination Antigonish decisions are grounded in research. As a first step develop a tourism measurement and monitoring system to support accountability and responsibility top residents, partners, and investors.

Strategic Direction #2: Foster a Spirit of Collaboration and Partnership

Embrace a collective impact approach to support maximum impact through coordination and collaboration among all partners – including tourism operators, tourism partners, investors, social enterprises, municipalities).

- Foster positive relationships and communication among all Destination Antigonish partners.
- Leverage municipal, provincial and federal initiatives appropriately aligned with Destination Antigonish priorities reflecting tourism as well as focused creative industries and environmental initiatives.
- Promote package development and promotion among Destination Antigonish partners including the Tourism Antigonish Partnership and where beneficial - external partners.

Strategic Direction #3: Positively Impact all Communities

Leverage and strengthen the region’s sustainability leadership on social, environmental, and related matters to grow tourism while enriching the lives of residents.

- Improve the lives of Antigonish town and country residents through tourism while balancing economic objectives (e.g., through tourism business revenues and municipal tax receipts) with social and environmental priorities (including alignment with a net zero ambition).
- Ensure an equity, diversity and inclusion approach is reflected in all Destination Antigonish initiatives.
- Commit to supporting and collaborating with Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation.
- Assess the need for increased municipal leadership around short term rental regulation considering local housing affordability and availability; preserving community character; safety among other factors.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Develop, adopt and implement a locals know campaign to ensure residents 1) Understand the value of tourism to the community and its residents; and 2) Are equipped to help visitors fully appreciate and experience what Destination Antigonish has to offer.

Strategic Direction #4: Marketing and Communications to Position Antigonish as Nova Scotia's Free Spirit

Promote the Region’s compelling visitor value proposition to priority markets.

- Develop a marketing and communications plan.
- Manage and grow the Antigonish brand.
- Grow and manage digital assets.

- Convert more drive-by traffic to visitation.
- Support niche market growth - including in culinary, outdoor and culture, among others.
- Develop and enhance compelling shoulder and winter tourism initiatives for the Region.
- Develop a Destination Antigonish website to support visitor attraction, boosting length of stay and trip planning.
- Develop a corporate Destination Antigonish website to support partner communication and engagement along with network growth.
- Develop a social media plan to boost engagement between and among industry partners and visitors.

Strategic Direction #5: Purposefully Grow the Festival and Event Sector

Grow the region into a year round destination by further strengthening the Region's compelling value proposition around event hosting to achieve its full potential.

- Coordinate and consolidate event bidding, planning, and hosting resources to boost competitiveness.
- Develop a mechanism to dynamically coordinate and profile festivals, events, and related activities.
- Identify a sustainable funding source to support sector investment including for bidding and hosting.
- Foster relationship and partnership building with Events Nova Scotia.
- Develop an inventory of event related assets.
- Identify local leaders and influencers potentially positioned to lead bids with both confidence and a competitive advantage.
- Develop an event tool kit that supports local bid groups and enables them to bid with confidence and customize as needed.

1 Background and Context

The Destination Antigonish Work Group is comprised of partners including Destination Eastern and Northumberland Shores (DEANS), Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation, St. Francis Xavier University (StFX), the Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish. **The Destination Antigonish Working Group oversaw the development of the Destination Antigonish Tourism Strategy.** The Group ATN team was commissioned to develop a tourism strategy for the region to increase tourism activity and visitor yields while supporting tourism operators in growing their capacity.

1.1 Project Objectives

The Destination Antigonish Tourism Strategy assignment encompassed the development of an integrated tourism strategy reflecting strategic directions, sustainable sources of revenue, and governance. Related deliverables (under separate cover) focused on the development of a brand, logo, and related digital assets.

1.2 Methodology

Multiple lines of research were employed to underpin the strategic analysis inherent in the development of the Antigonish Tourism Strategic Plan. A critical element of the strategic planning process was robust outreach and engagement. This engagement was bolstered by research into tourism trends, best practices, relevant initiatives currently underway or under consideration, and related secondary research.

The multiple lines of research and engagement undertaken in this work provide a strong foundation for the strategy. Robust engagement with respect to the development of the strategic plan and subsequently to its activation is a critical success factor. This approach reflects the fundamental importance of engagement not only being done well but also being seen to be done well. Engagement is a critical component of a strategy that will leverage collective impact to optimize success involving diverse partners.

The outreach and engagement process for the tourism strategy was carried out in three distinct stages. Stage one consisted of 13 virtual interviews with key officials and tourism stakeholders in the Antigonish Region. These in-depth interviews lasted an hour on average. (The supporting Outreach and Engagement Plan was delivered under separate cover.)

Building on the bilateral interviews, the second phase of the engagement process involved facilitating five community listening / working sessions, with three of these structured as in-person events, with the remaining two held virtually. At these sessions, participants were given a brief

presentation providing details on the project as well as selected research findings. The community sessions focused on the following key questions:

- What is your vision for Destination Antigonish in 2033?
 - What does success look like?
 - What might the community look like?
 - What is the Antigonish tourism draw?
- What are the strategic priorities for Destination Antigonish?
 - Short-term focus?
 - Key partners?
- What are the key tourism assets for Destination Antigonish?
- What are your thoughts on the current Antigonish brand? How should the brand evolve?

The final stage of the engagement process consisted of an online survey available to all Antigonish Region tourism stakeholders and residents. This survey was promoted during the community engagement sessions, as well as through Town and County social media channels. Engagement input was bolstered through this widely shared survey that generated 215 responses. (Detailed survey findings are available under separate cover.)

Engagement findings provided critical insights into the creation of the Antigonish Tourism Strategy.

2 Summary of Findings

This section presents a summary of findings from the research, strategic analysis, and engagement.

2.1 Research Context

The following situation analysis for the Destination Antigonish Tourism Strategy outlines the planning context through online research, document reviews, inventories, and tourism activity statistics. The analysis reflects the national, provincial, and local context for tourism strategic planning in support of the Destination Antigonish Tourism Strategy. (Detailed research findings are available under separate cover.)

2.2 National Context

In 2019, prior to the onset of the pandemic, the Canadian tourism industry experienced record-breaking tourism revenues. This was then immediately followed by the onset of the pandemic, resulting in tremendous losses and challenges for the industry as borders closed and travel restrictions were adopted globally.

However, despite these significant losses and the persistence of COVID, the Canadian tourism industry is showing promising signs of recovery with the lifting of travel restrictions and the release of pent-up demand into the sector.

According to releases from Destination Canada, interest in visiting the country has seen spikes even higher than in 2019 across multiple key global markets. Web searches related to Canadian tourism from the US, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific regions surpassed 2019, particularly following the removal of pre-arrival testing requirements.

Reports suggest the tourism sector nationally is rebounding from its pandemic-induced downturn, with moderate revenue growth expected to continue into 2023 as operators adjust pricing and return to 2019 visitation.

Despite encouraging signs of resilience, there is lingering uncertainty in the sector. Business travel has been impacted by pandemic uncertainty. Global recovery in business travel has been slower than the leisure sector, with current predictions suggesting global business travel spending will not reach 2019 figures until 2025 or 2026. The slower recovery for business travel has been attributed to the increased use of virtual meeting tools by businesses around the globe and the elevated risk of business trip cancellations.

Other industry challenges influencing the recovery of Canadian tourism include:

- A lack of access to transportation, both air and ground (e.g., car rental availability).
- Higher overall costs for travel.
- Quality assurance concerns; and
- Reduced access to capital and limited liquidity.

Despite these factors, Canada's tourism industry continues on the road to recovery, albeit at uncertain rates. Destination Canada has predicted that even under a fully realized worst-case scenario, international tourism to Canada will still likely fully recover by 2026. The 2022 revenue growth is expected to continue into 2023.

As the industry continues to recover, new market trends are expected to influence the industry, including the following:^{iv}

- A greater desire for frictionless travel, with increased use of digital technology and smoother travel experiences.

- Increasing domestic travel, as Canadians avoid uncertainty overseas and seek to make up for lost time with friends and family, additionally causing an increase in demand to traditionally less-travelled areas of the country.
- A greater focus on the socio-environmental elements surrounding the impacts of tourism, with increased emphasis on minimizing its environmental impact.
- This shift away from an overriding economic imperative to more socially responsible tourism also includes a greater emphasis on resident well-being, safety and overall community quality of life.
- A need to further support Indigenous-led and operated tourism to fully take advantage of a growing demand among domestic and international travellers.
- A surge of travellers looking to experience Canada's natural offerings by visiting nature-based destinations and taking part in nature-based activities.
- A growing segment interested in travelling for physical and mental wellness.
- Pent-up demand among high-yield travellers.
- Increased leisure time among some travellers; and
- Extended destination stays enabled by remote work.

Nova Scotia Context

Much like Canada as a whole, Nova Scotia's tourism sector has experienced both significant disruption and promising recovery. The province's tourism industry showed a strong recovery in 2022, welcoming an additional one million visitors compared to the previous year. Accommodation sales in all regions of the province surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

Nova Scotia welcomed 1.9 non-resident visitors in 2022. While a significant improvement over 2021, visitation did not return to pre-pandemic levels, ending the year with a decline of 18% compared with 2019. Atlantic Canada continued to account for the highest share of visitors. However, regional visitation didn't recover to the same extent as other markets, like Ontario, which was up 1% over 2019.^v

The disproportionate growth in room nights relative to out-of-province visitation suggested that resident travel within Nova Scotia is strong.

Overall, Nova Scotia is highly regarded by Canadian travellers, with a solid majority of domestic travellers endorsing the province's many offerings. Some of the most cited attributes include the province's outdoor appeal, charming towns/communities, and its relaxing/leisurely appeal. Concurrently, while Nova Scotians became apprehensive of tourists entering the province during the pandemic, this hesitation has significantly decreased since 2022.^{vi} Tourism Nova Scotia

identifies three priority market segments for the province using Explorer Quotient market segmentation as summarized below.^{vii viii ix x}

Table 1: Tourism Nova Scotia's Priority Market Segments

	Authentic Experiences	Cultural Explorers	Free Spirits
Traits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneous • Discrete • Ethical • Eco-Conscious • Independent • Open-Minded • Curious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive • Open-Minded • Curious • Risk-Taker • Flexible • Easy-Going • Energetic • Creative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-Minded • Ambitious • Enthusiastic • Fun-Loving • Adventurous • Curious • Social
Ideal Attractions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Reserves • World Heritage Sites • Hiking Trails • Museums • Homestays • Campsites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Sites • Cultural Events • Museums • Festivals • B&Bs • Hostels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luxury Hotels • Tourism Hot Spots • Top Restaurants • Night Clubs • Group Tours
Travel Values:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about places, times, and cultures • Enjoying vast Natural Settings and Wonders • Prefer integrating into the local culture • Personal Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers travelling with like-minded people • Enjoying ancient history and modern culture • Learning about places, times, and cultures • Always planning for their next trip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys experiencing a bit of everything • Always planning for their next trip • Prefers travelling with like-minded people • Seeks the best they can afford

Tourism Trends

Room sales across Nova Scotia followed a similar path of recovery, with sales dropping significantly with the onset of the pandemic while seeing significant growth and renewal by 2022.

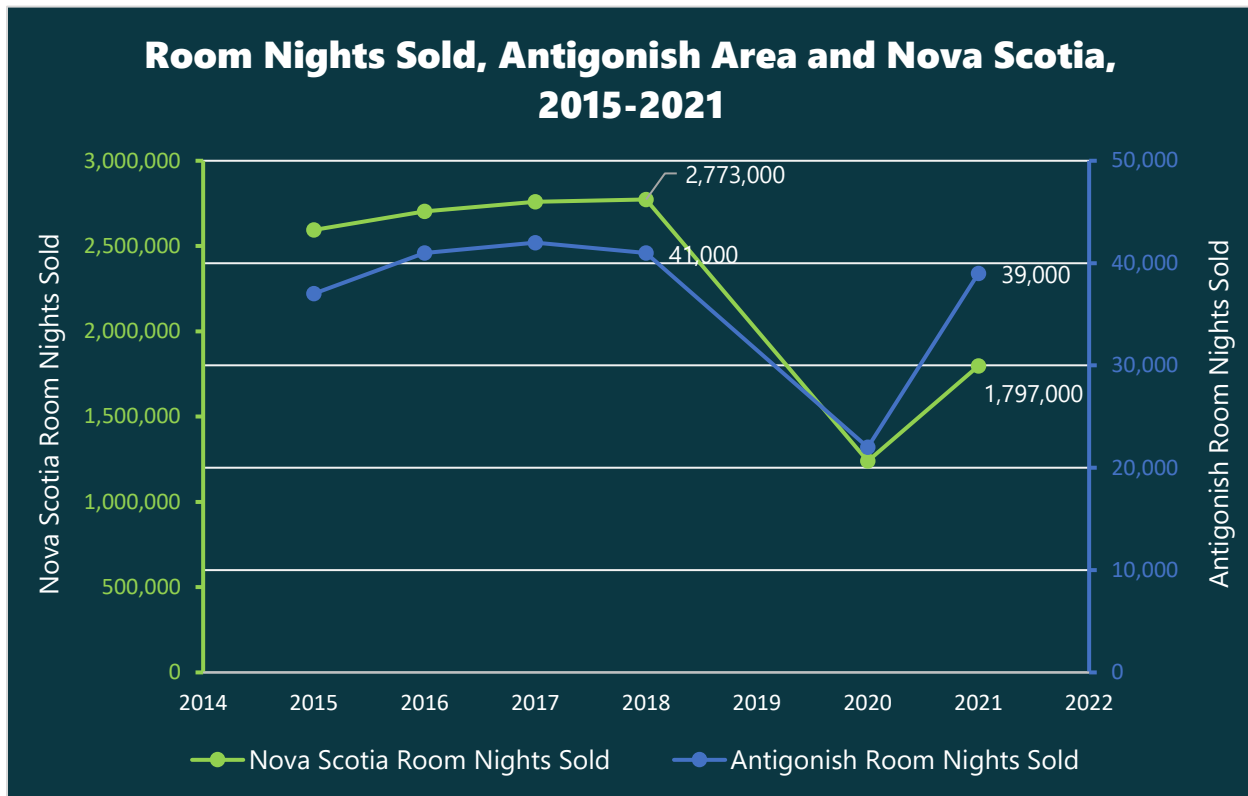
Despite the sector's promising recovery, several challenges remain for Nova Scotia attracting Canadian travellers. As of 2022, Canadian tourists perceived the cost of travel to Nova Scotia as high (34%), the distance being too great (25%) and one in five (20%) noted a lack of familiarity with Atlantic Canada.^{xi}

Antigonish Context

Room night sales in Antigonish provide insights into the scale of tourism and related trends compared to the rest of the province. As shown in the following chart, Antigonish room sales generally followed the same trends as the rest of the province. As can be seen in 2020 room sales data, while Antigonish experienced a significant loss compared to pre-pandemic figures, this loss

was less severe than was experienced by Nova Scotia as a whole. Antigonish managed to maintain over 50% of its pre-COVID room sales.

Figure 1: Annual % change of Room Nights Sold for both Antigonish County and Nova Scotia



Preliminary room sales estimates for Antigonish suggest that this general trend continued through 2022, with Antigonish room night sales continuing to increase.

3 Strategic Alignment

The tourism plans adopted by several Nova Scotia entities provide valuable context for developing the Antigonish Tourism Strategy. These plans were analyzed to identify opportunities while ensuring strategic alignment between tourism initiatives, which will support efficiencies and leverage partnerships throughout the province. The following tourism strategies are profiled:

- Antigonish Regional Economic Assessment - addresses tourism, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and positioning Antigonish in the broader Nova Scotia tourism context.
- Paqtnekek Tourism Strategy - highlights opportunities related to Paqtnekek's heritage and natural assets, while considering increasing interest in Indigenous cultural tourism.

- DEANS Tourism Strategy - identifies four foundational pillars: destination marketing, visitor services, partnership development and events.
- Nova Scotia Culture Action Plan - outlines priority themes regarding the protection, promotion, and development of Nova Scotia's culture.
- Destination Canada's Tourism Vision outlines a Canada-wide approach to support post-COVID touristic recovery between 2022-2025.
- Nova Scotia Tourism Strategy (currently in development).
- The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) Strategy focuses on post-COVID tourism recovery.
- Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Enterprise Network (NSITEN) recognizes the importance of strengthening partnerships and attracting new investment; and
- The Cultural Tourism Strategy for the Mi'kmaw of NS - highlights the importance of experience development – particularly post-COVID.

Considering these plans will ensure strategic alignment while acting as a force multiplier for Destination Antigonish. (More detailed strategic analysis is available under separate cover.)

4 What We Heard

Through engagement efforts with Antigonish officials, residents, and tourism operators, valuable insights into the strengths, perceived gaps, and opportunities for Antigonish as a tourism destination emerged. These insights are explored in this section.

Regional Cooperation

Throughout the engagement, participants stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination across the Antigonish tourism sector.

Participants suggested a central tourism body would reduce or even eliminate instances where tourism initiatives were fragmented or duplicated. Greater coordination would help bolster

"We need to work together, or the strategy will never succeed."

resources available to a collective effort. Some participants believed past efforts fell short of expectations for these reasons.

Importantly, increased coordination would help to ensure partnership opportunities were more effectively communicated – opening up valuable resources to Antigonish tourism operators. As an illustration of this point, some operators only became aware of opportunities through the outreach and engagement process associated with this initiative.

Further, many engagement participants believed that a key step in addressing this issue would be through a unified vision for Antigonish. This perspective offered a compelling endorsement for the development of the Tourism Strategy.

A commonly cited objective was to move the region away from its current status as a brief stop for visitors travelling to and from Cape Breton by positioning Antigonish as an overnight or even multi-day destination.

A related benefit of a unified approach to tourism for the region would ensure greater profile and recognition of the industry's considerable value for the region - particularly in the context of more visible industries in the region.

"They can see the university, they can see the hospital, but they can't see the impact of all the tourism businesses in the Region."

There was also a strong belief that greater coordination would also unlock new investment in regional tourism – including from the private sector. Stakeholders recounted how a lack of multi-year budget commitments for past projects resulted in promising and important tourism developments being curtailed when they required more than a year to demonstrate success.

Nature-Based Experiences

When discussing the tourism draws Antigonish currently has established, the region's natural beauty and outdoor experiences were often cited as significant resources for future efforts to build off from. Of the many options available, two which were repeatedly singled out were Antigonish's beaches, and the Keppoch Mountain site.

"Let's promote our community to younger families and target outdoor enthusiasts on their way to Cape Breton."

Beaches

When asked what Antigonish had to offer visitors, its beaches were often the first attribute mentioned by participants. Further, many stakeholders cited the region's warmer water compared to other areas of Nova Scotia.

However, stakeholders also identified a number of constraints currently preventing beaches from realizing their full tourism value. The first of these was accessibility. Stakeholders suggested that public beach access is becoming increasingly difficult - particularly for those beaches near the Town. Much of this diminished access was attributed to private property owners restricting passage to public beaches. It was noted that, this challenge could be partially mitigated through improved visitor signage and wayfinding for alternative public pathways. On a related matter, beach cleanliness was raised by multiple participants with several examples of beaches marred by litter and fishing debris.

While the beaches remain a compelling natural asset, engagement suggests that promotion and protection will be necessary to unlock their full tourism potential.

Keppoch and Hiking

Keppoch Mountain and its associated amenities were also frequently mentioned in the context of Antigonish's most important tourism assets. Participants noted Keppoch's appeal to visitors in general as well as niche markets such as biking enthusiasts. Some participants also pointed to Keppoch's potential leadership around packaged tourism experiences and the Keppoch team's sophisticated understanding of tourism development.

Some suggestions were offered regarding how to further improve Keppoch as a tourist draw. These included working to connect the Keppoch trails to other regional networks and developing resources to help visitors plan and prepare to get the most out of their stay at the mountain.

"Nature has provided us with great scenery and beaches that should be preserved."

Hiking - both at Keppoch and the region as a whole, was also commonly cited as a significant visitors draw. This aligns with the ongoing ambitious efforts to further develop the region's active transportation network.

Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation

Throughout the engagement, the importance of continued cooperation on tourism-related matters between Antigonish and the Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation was enthusiastically endorsed. Participants universally acknowledged the importance and value of the partnership between Paqtnkek, tourism operators, governments, and the community at large. The contemporary significance is amplified within the context of Reconciliation. Overall, there was a strong desire among all partners for authentic and respectful cooperation in the tourism sector.

The growing interest in authentic experiential Indigenous tourism among both residents and visitors was acknowledged. Several opportunities for cooperation were identified. For example, the StFX University community and diaspora – including international students, were highlighted for their interest in learning more about the Nation, its history, and its traditions.

Arising from the discussions was a communication opportunity to build a greater understanding among non-indigenous locals and visitors regarding the option of attending Paqtnkek Nation events. Considering the success of the Paqtnkek powwow hosted by StFX in April 2023, there is great optimism around further building cultural awareness and confidence among non-community members.

Several critical points from the Paqtnkek perspective were shared during the engagement. Overall, Paqtnkek is highly motivated to develop Mi'kmaw tourism, while cooperating with Antigonish partners to ensure their story is appropriately told. An ongoing dialogue between the Paqtnkek and the Town and County regarding the implementation of Mi'kmaw signage was referenced as an important waypoint in this journey.

Engagement participants were mindful of the imperative of Mi'kmaw cultural tourism being led, developed, and delivered by Paqtnkek. This includes evolving and strengthening the Mi'kmaw narrative currently reflected in Antigonish. For example, it was felt that the story and history Antigonish currently shares with visitors provide insufficient attention to the Paqtnkek perspective, and the importance of the nation as the Region's first inhabitants.

A Rich History Combined With a Vibrant Present

"I have been visiting Antigonish since early 1990s. I love its authenticity."

Throughout the engagement process, Antigonish's rich multicultural history was described as foundational to the region's identity and its tourism value proposition. The Antigonish region is steeped in the stories rooted in the diversity of its residents – including as the ancestral home of the Mi'kmaq People and the compelling story of the Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation. While the region's Scottish history was frequently mentioned along with the annual Highland Games, participants recognized the imperative to promote the stories and heritage reflecting the region's

rich diversity, including African Nova Scotians and, more recently, refugees from the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine.

This multicultural history has evolved into a contemporary source of pride for the region. This pride has been further elevated by the region's international success stories such as the journey of the Hadhad Family as Syrian refugees who settled in Antigonish and established Peace by Chocolate.

A spirit of welcoming and inclusion is core to Antigonish's identity, some stakeholders firmly advocated for further efforts to address exclusion. While most residents were described as welcoming, there are opportunities for improvement. Some newcomers described feeling like an outsider despite living in the region for some time. In some cases, this was exacerbated by frustration that this experience was not acknowledged.

Another key aspect of the region's identity is its general acceptance and safety. Participants frequently expressed the importance of Antigonish being seen as welcoming and safe to all – both during the day and night.

"We have it all - we just need to put it together."

Culinary Related Offerings

Antigonish's significance as a hub for high-quality diverse dining and food options was highlighted by many stakeholders including:

- A wide range of restaurants offering diverse culinary options.
- A popular farmers market supporting a strong local food movement and providing easy access to high quality, locally grown foods, and related goods; and
- A robust craft brewery and artisanal alcohol sector, catering to the growing demand for related experiences.

A noteworthy historical influence on Antigonish's unique culinary strengths arose from the Dutch settlers' field to fork ethos post WWII. Other food-related offerings discussed, such as Peace by Chocolate, provide high-quality visitor offerings and a deeper connection to the town's social and cultural fabric.

Events

Engagement participants were enthusiastic about Antigonish's potential as an event hub. Much of this excitement stemmed from the signature annual events Antigonish currently hosts on an annual basis, as well as major one-time events Antigonish had hosted in the past.

The most cited event, in terms of both past success and future tourism potential, was the Antigonish Highland Games. Participants often directly connected the games with the cultural and historical aspects of Antigonish and its Scottish history, with those who believed said heritage

should serve as a pillar of Antigonish tourism moving forward always including the promotion and expansion of the Highland Games within their vision. While most participants praised the Highland Games as a cultural and tourism asset of great importance, some opportunities for further development were also noted. Connecting with the previously raised issue of remaining alienation, some participants expressed a belief that the intense focus placed on the Highland Games resulted in those not interested in the Games feeling further excluded or left without things to do while the event took place. Others, even those who professed significant affection for the Games, believed that the cost of entry to the event was no longer reflecting the value of the event itself, especially at specific times when vendors were closed, and only certain events were ongoing.

While the Highland Games were the most cited event throughout the engagement process, both the Antigonish Jazz Festival and the Nova Scotia Summerfest were similarly referenced by multiple engagement participants as important success stories and opportunities for further growth. Similarly, Antigonish's hosting of the 2018 Summer Special Olympics was commonly referenced as a point of pride for the region, and as proof of the region's potential as a major event host and hub.

Scheduling was noted as an opportunity for the Antigonish Region to grow as an events hub. Stakeholders noted that, in the past, some of Antigonish's largest events were scheduled for similar times – even overlapped at times. An opportunity for a more coordinated impactful schedule of events was frequently noted. This coordination further aligns with a desire for the Antigonish Region to develop into a year-round destination with events hosted in all seasons. Year-round events would open new markets while strengthening demand outside the traditional tourism period. While there are many advantages to flattening the seasonality curve, it is also important to note that this squarely aligns with the Nova Scotia tourism strategy.

Tourism Infrastructure

The potential for enhanced accommodation options was noted during the engagement. For example, increased accommodation supply would enable Antigonish to host more and larger sporting events. While the Region is bolstered by existing sporting and recreation infrastructure, there were some concerns that the room supply was insufficient for players, families, spectators, and officials. Additional accommodation capacity would also open further growth opportunities for established events. Other participants noted that Antigonish's accommodations offerings were not always aligned with the requirements of Tourism Nova Scotia's priority market segments.

"We need to adapt to evolving visitor expectations."

Participants shared considerations for updating and expanding the accommodations offered throughout Antigonish. StFX University's capacity and potential to grow as an accommodations provider was recognized. At the same time, there was a widespread recognition of the importance

of a level playing field for traditional accommodation operators. Several participants also noted the option of bolstering sharing economy opportunities, such as Airbnb and VRBO. However, others reflected on the importance of aligning this and other decisions with resident preferences, social considerations, and access to housing for current and prospective residents.

Attraction of New Residents

While the majority of engagement input focused on attracting first-time and return visitors to the Antigonish Region, some participants also noted the important role memorable tourism experiences and related amenities can play in enticing individuals to relocate to Antigonish permanently or for a remote working hiatus.

Additionally, by strengthening Antigonish's position as a full-day, or multi-day, tourism destination, as opposed to a simple stop on the way to other Nova Scotian destinations, there will be a greater opportunity for tourists to experience and witness the deeper and more everyday benefits of life in Antigonish. These include the community's friendliness, safety, multiple dining, beverage and recreation options, housing, and education offerings, all of which are far more difficult to ascertain during a visit of less than a full day in length.

Marketing and Communication

Engagement participants offered suggestions on marketing approaches. Several opportunities were identified for how Antigonish may best market itself as an attractive tourist destination, and how the region's offerings and activities may be best communicated to both visitors and residents.

During the various stages of the engagement process, participants were asked to describe what they believe Antigonish's current tourism brand was, or what it should be moving forward. The following themes emerged for the Antigonish Region:

- A diverse, accepting, and safe place with something for everyone.
- Small community feel with big city amenities.
- Home to StFX; and
- A hub of events, outdoor adventures, and culinary experiences.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there is a diversity of perspectives on the Antigonish identity. The engagement uncovered an opportunity to create a more compelling and focused identity for the region. This would have the added benefit of addressing challenges that visitors and prospective visitors have expressed in researching travel-related information for the Region.

Another area of possible development which was raised during the engagement efforts was that of centralizing information regarding activities and services, for the benefit of both visitors and

operators. It became evident during engagement that tourism partners were not always aware of the tourism partnership programs and resources available to them. A related example that was raised during engagement was the opportunity to consolidate a comprehensive resource in support of hiking and walking trails throughout the Antigonish Region.

Engagement participants also noted the opportunity to educate locals about Antigonish's activities and offerings. By ensuring *locals know* and appreciate available tourist offerings in the Region, residents will be better able to provide detailed information and recommendations to visitors. This approach would offer the added benefit of further boosting Antigonish's image as a friendly and welcoming destination.

Partnerships

Tourism partnership opportunities were mentioned as a rich opportunity. Many of the examples shared involved event hosts and tourism operators. A practical example was improved communication and coordination of events to ensure restaurants were prepared for the potential influx of patrons. Another opportunity was co-branding tourism offerings with events to leverage cross-promotion potential. Each of these examples connects to the larger opportunity for Antigonish's tourism operators to better unify and cooperate under a shared goal. Participants embraced an approach where operators were competitively cooperating to grow the tourism market for Antigonish.

Discussions with operations throughout the region also identified significant opportunities and interest in tourism packages. By improving partnerships between the region's various tourism operators, Antigonish's activities, experiences, and services for visitors could be combined into convenient, marketable travel packages.

5 Endnotes

ⁱ The levy will apply to all short-term tourism rentals (regardless of size) including traditional tourist accommodation (e.g., hotels, motels, inns, cabins, designated university accommodation, etc.) and sharing economy platforms (e.g., Airbnb and VRBO) registered with the Nova Scotia Tourist Accommodations Registry.

ⁱⁱ Research and the experience of others affirms that governance will be critically important. As one of the first steps in strategic activation, recruiting the right leadership and development of a focused, streamlined governance structure for Destination Antigonish will be critical to its success. It is expected that governance will continue to be refined and clarified in the formative stage of the strategy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Best practices research is grounded in the recognition that regulatory considerations vary by community. Some communities may have a greater motivation to contribute to tourism accommodation supply, while others may have a greater focus on affordable housing supply.

^{iv} Destination Canada, "[Tourism's Big Shift](#)"

^v tourismns.ca/news/intouch-blog/strong-tourism-recovery-2022

^{vi} Destination Canada, "[Resident Sentiment October 2022](#)"

^{vii} Tourism Nova Scotia, "[Traveller Segmentation](#)"

^{viii} "[Traveler Type: Authentic Experiencer](#)"

^{ix} "[Traveler Type: Cultural Explorer](#)"

^x "[Traveler Type: Free Spirit](#)"

^{xi} Tourism Nova Scotia, "[Atlantic Canada 2022 Travel Study](#)"

APPENDIX: Antigonish County Tourist Destinations

This will be living document, open to continuous updates and additions.

Beaches

Pomquet Beach Provincial Park
Bayfield Beach Provincial Park
Arisaig Beach
Cribbon's Beach
Mahoney's Beach
Malignant Cove Beach
Livingstone's Cove Beach
Ballentyne's Cove Beach
Dunn's Beach
Cape Jack Beach

Trails

Fairmont Ridge
Cape George Hiking Trails
Antigonish Landing
Keppoch Mountain Recreation Area
Pomquet Acadian Trails
Mahoney's Beach Trail
Linwood Heritage Nature Trail and Picnic Park
Beaver Mountain Provincial Park
Arisaig Provincial Park
Bethany Gardens
Trails system for ATVs and Snowmobiles

Attractions

Riverside International Speedway
Ch Deslaurier
Cape George Heritage School Museum
Antigonish Heritage Museum
Ballentyne's Cove Bluefin Tuna Interpretive Centre

Arisaig Lobster Interpretive Marine Life Centre
Bethany Centennial Garden

Art Galleries

Old Barn Galleries, Gardens, Décor and Antiques

Tours and Charters

Giant Bluefin Tuna Charters
Scotia Tuna Charters
Boyd's Bluefin Tuna Charter
MacDougall Bluefin Tuna Charter
Hooked On Bluefin Tuna Charters

Venues & Entertainment

Festival Antigonish
Steinhart Distillery
Half Cocked Brewing
Below the Salt Distillery
Bayside Travel Centre
Antigonish Golf and Country Club
Highlander Curling Club
Snow Queen Leisure World
Pins Bowling Centre
Pomquet Cultural Centre

Waterfalls

Arisaig Falls
Black Brook Falls
James River Waterfall

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF
ANTIGONISH

MEMO FOR DECISION

TO: Committee of the Whole
FROM: Glenn Horne, CAO
SUBJECT: ***MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY REVIEW***
DATE: April 19, 2024

Following the recommencement of the County's Municipal Boundary Review, the attached correspondence was received from the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (the Board) on Thursday, April 18. It requests a decision be made to continue the boundary review process and apply by the deadline of May 14, set by the Board in its April 5 correspondence, or defer the boundary review until after the 2024 municipal election as offered in its April 18 correspondence.

As reported earlier this week via email, we have coordinated the continuation of our electoral boundary review with the NSUARB and Stantec. Please see information below re: the final phase of public consultation:

- The online survey is now open and can be accessed here: <https://forms.gle/o5Nn6tyCio8THZb4A>
- The website has been updated and can be viewed here: <https://www.antigonishcountyelectoralboundaryreview.com/>
- The public consultation sessions have been coordinated and will be as follows:
 - Sunday, May 5
 - Municipal Office 6:30pm (this session will be broadcast virtually as well)
 - Monday, May 6
 - Mini Trail Community Centre 3:00pm
 - St. Andrews Community Centre 6:30pm
 - Tuesday, May 7
 - Tracadie Fire Hall 3:00pm
 - Heatherton Community Centre 6:30pm

Ads have been placed and will run in the Casket and the Reporter this week; notice has already been posted to our website and social media.

The specific request made by the Board is for Council to support or decline the formal request to delay the boundary review's comprehensive public consultation process until after the October 2024 municipal election, and that that process be held in 2025.

If so, the Board would contemplate the receipt of a summary application by the Municipality requesting the status quo for the October 2024 municipal election, and suggesting a timeline for a public consultation process and application to the Board in 2025. In such an instance, subject to the receipt of comments from the public in an

expedited paper hearing process held by the Board, and after reviewing the updated variances from the average number of electors per district, the Board could consider issuing an Order approving the status quo for the October 2024 municipal election and making a formal direction that the Municipality file a new study and application by a fixed deadline in 2025.

If not, the boundary review process would continue as currently directed by Council and an application for boundary adjustments made to the Board by May 14, 2024.

Staff will either continue with this process or cancel these arrangements and based on the Committee's direction.

April 5, 2024

glenn.horne@antigonishcounty.ns.ca

Glenn Horne
Chief Administrative Officer
Municipality of the County of Antigonish
285 Beech Hill Road
Beech Hill, NS B2G 0B4

Dear Mr. Horne:


M10417 - 2022 Municipal Boundary Review - Municipality of the County of Antigonish (MB-21-01)

The Board notes the Province's announcement yesterday that Bill 404 to consolidate the Town and Municipality will not be proceeding. Accordingly, the Board now requires the Municipality to file its municipal boundary review application. As you are aware, this application has been due since December 31, 2022.

The Board understands from prior correspondence that the Municipality has retained Stantec Consulting Ltd. to facilitate its required boundary review study and that public consultation is underway. The Board directs that the Municipality's application be filed no later than **May 14, 2024**.

The date of **Tuesday, June 18, 2024**, starting at 9:00 a.m. and continuing into the evening, if required, has been reserved for the hearing, and a public session, as well as **Wednesday, June 19, 2024**, if required. The Board has reserved conference rooms for the hearing at the Charles V. Keating Centre, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

Yours very truly,


Bruce Kiley
Chief Clerk

cc. John A. Lohr, Minister of NS Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Owen McCarron, Warden, Municipality of the County of Antigonish
Nick Barr, Director Governance & Advisory Services, NS Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

April 18, 2024

glenn.horne@antigonishcounty.ns.ca

Glenn Horne
Chief Administrative Officer
Municipality of the County of Antigonish
285 Beech Hill Road
Beech Hill, NS B2G 0B4

Dear Mr. Horne:

M10417 - 2022 Municipal Boundary Review - Municipality of the County of Antigonish (MB-21-01)

Further to the Board's letter dated April 5, 2024, the Board has received numerous emails and telephone calls from residents concerned about the timeline for the Municipality's boundary review process, and completion of the Board's hearing process and the release of its decision, in the context of the upcoming municipal elections to be held in October 2024. These concerns include the Municipality's ability to conduct an effective public consultation process before the application is made to the Board.

The Board has received a formal request dated April 16, 2024 (attached) from Ms. Anne-Marie Long, a resident of the Municipality, asking that the Board adjourn the municipal boundary review for the Municipality of Antigonish until after the October 2024 municipal election. She proposes that the review be deferred until 2025. A similar request was received from Councillor McNamara.

The *Municipal Government Act* requires a municipal boundary application to be filed by the Municipality no later than the end of December 2022. As you are aware, the Municipality requested several extensions to deal with the potential consolidation process for the Municipality and the Town. These adjournments were granted by the Board. While the Municipality is required to file an application to be dealt with by the Board in advance of the October 2024 municipal election, the Board has in the past approved the status quo in similar circumstances, with a direction that a full public consultation process be held and an application be filed by the municipal unit within a prescribed timeline after an impending municipal election: see, for example, *Cape Breton Regional Municipality (Re)*, 2007 NSUARB 154, and *Municipality of Clare (Re)*, 2016 NSUARB 37.

As noted in paragraph 19 of the Board's *Municipality of Clare* decision (attached), the Board considered that the impending regularly scheduled municipal elections would cause undue confusion for the electors and "the quality of the study and public consultation could be

compromised by the relatively short timeline which is available before preparations commence for the 2016 municipal election. Given the level of debate on this topic, the process should be given sufficient time to be conducted properly, without the pressure of an impending municipal election”.

The purpose of this letter is to request the Municipality’s position on Ms. Long’s formal request to delay the comprehensive public consultation process until after the October 2024 municipal election, and that the process be held in 2025. If the Municipality is inclined to look favourably on Ms. Long’s request, the Board would contemplate the receipt of a summary application by the Municipality requesting the status quo for the October 2024 municipal election, and suggesting a timeline for a public consultation process and application to the Board in 2025. In such an instance, subject to the receipt of comments from the public in an expedited paper hearing process held by the Board, and after reviewing the updated variances from the average number of electors per district, the Board could consider issuing an Order approving the status quo for the October 2024 municipal election and making a formal direction that the Municipality file a new study and application by a fixed deadline in 2025.

The Board requests the Municipality’s response to Ms. Long’s formal request as soon as possible. Failing the Municipality’s agreement to Ms. Long’s formal request, the Board notes its prior direction that the Municipality’s current application be filed no later than May 14, 2024.

Yours very truly,



Bruce Kiley
Chief Clerk

Enclosures (2)

cc. John A. Lohr, Minister of NS Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Owen McCarron, Warden, Municipality of the County of Antigonish
Nick Barr, Director Governance & Advisory Services, NS Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Ms. Anne Marie Long
Councillor Harris McNamara

DECISION**2016 NSUARB 37
M06640****NOVA SCOTIA UTILITY AND REVIEW BOARD****IN THE MATTER OF THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT ACT****- and -****IN THE MATTER OF AN APPLICATION** by the **MUNICIPALITY OF THE DISTRICT OF CLARE** to confirm the number of councilors and to alter the boundaries of polling districts**BEFORE:** Roland A. Deveau, Q.C., Vice Chair
David J. Almon, LL.B., Member
Murray E. Doehler, CPA, CA, P.Eng, Member**APPLICANT:** **MUNICIPALITY OF THE DISTRICT OF CLARE**
Nicole Pothier, Counsultant**INTERVENOR:** **CLARE CIVIC ASSOCIATION**
Gerard Theriault, Chairperson
Kristanne Chandler, Director**HEARING DATE:** March 1, 2016**DECISION DATE:** **April 4, 2016****DECISION:** **Application approved for eight councillors and revisions to the polling districts. The Municipality is directed to file another study no later than February 28, 2018.**

I INTRODUCTION

[1] This is a Decision of the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board ("Board") respecting an application by the Municipality of the District of Clare ("Municipality"), which has applied under s. 369 of the Municipal Government Act, S.N.S. 1998, c. 18 ("Act" or "MGA"), to confirm the present number of councillors at eight, and further, to alter the boundaries of the polling districts. Section 369 requires the council of every municipality to conduct a study every eight years and make an application to the Board to confirm or alter the number of councillors and the boundaries of the polling districts.

[2] The Municipality filed its original application on December 23, 2014. The Board held a hearing at Municipal Council Chambers at Little Brook, Nova Scotia, on September 10, 2015. In a Decision dated October 7, 2015, [2015 NSUARB 232], the Board concluded that the Municipality had not conducted an appropriate public consultation in advance of its application. It remitted the matter back to the Municipality to reconsider the matter and re-submit an application to the Board.

[3] In its Decision, the Board outlined the difficulties with the Municipality's public consultation:

[23] During the hearing, the Board heard compelling submissions from the Clare Civic Association and members of the public about what they believed was inadequate public consultation. In their view, the consultation conducted by the Municipality was consultation in name only, in that it occurred with little notice and appeared to be carried out in a way to support a pre-conceived result, i.e., maintaining the current number of councillors and polling districts.

[24] The Board has no reason to find that Council had any improper intent behind the consultation process it adopted. However, it does concur with the public's submissions that the consultation was not carried out in a way that encouraged meaningful and insightful input from the public.

[25] Based on its review of the evidence and the submissions, the Board concludes that the primary difficulty with the Municipality's consultation process was that the public received little or no notice about the public meetings held by the Municipality. For meetings held on November 24, 26 and 27, 2014, the advertisement appeared once in

the Clare Shopper published on Thursday, November 24th. Moreover, the Board heard that those meetings occurred during a stormy week, which limited attendance.

[26] The Board also accepts the evidence that an overwhelming majority of the public who did attend the open meetings were opposed to maintaining the current Council size. Despite those views, the Municipality stated in its application that there was a “lack of public opposition” to maintaining eight councillors. In the Board’s view, if public consultation is to be carried out in an effective and reasonable manner, the application must fairly present the input received from members of the public in its sessions and address the issues accordingly. If Council does not accept the public’s views on the matter, it must clearly explain why it chooses not to.

[27] Finally, a misunderstanding appears to have arisen about what could be canvassed in the public meetings. The advertisement appeared to suggest that only the current size of polling districts would be discussed. For public consultation to be meaningful, any advertisement should clearly state that the public is requested to present their views on the appropriate Council size. Such a discussion should be open and free. It is unfortunate, as the Board was advised during the hearing, that some members of the Clare Civic Association did not want to be publicly identified for fear of reprisal.

[28] Accordingly, the Board remits the application back to the Municipality to conduct an appropriate public consultation, with adequate notice of public meetings and a meaningful opportunity to discuss the appropriate number of councillors for its Council.

[29] However, the Board does not consider it necessary to restart the entire process from the beginning. Specifically, the Board considers that Ms. Pothier’s report dated December 17, 2014, provides a useful analysis of the issues to be canvassed in this proceeding and its conclusions can be challenged by the public as part of the public consultation, if they feel it appropriate to do so.

[30] Following the consultation, Council is to reconsider the matter and re-submit an application to the Board. The application must be filed no later than December 4, 2015. The Board will then schedule another public hearing to consider the application.

[Board Decision, 2015 NSUARB 232, paras. 23-30]

[4] Following the release of the Board’s Decision, the Municipality conducted a second round of public consultation, as described more fully below. However, the Board received a complaint from a member of the public that the consultation was still not being properly conducted. In response to an advertisement posted by the Municipality, the Board wrote to the parties on October 30, 2015, as follows:

The Board does not usually become directly involved in the public consultation process during a proceeding. However, given the Board’s original decision in this matter, the Board would have expected the ads would make specific reference that the Third Option could include public input on the size of council in conjunction with any comments or submissions on boundaries or polling districts. The Board would have also expected the ads would indicate both options put forward by council, together with any options proposed by the public, would be presented at public meetings.

This said, the Board will keep an open mind as to any arguments surrounding the contents of the public advertisements.

[Board letter, October 30, 2015, p. 1]

[5] After being granted an adjournment by the Board to allow the later filing of its Application, the Municipality re-filed its Application on December 18, 2015. The application was, in effect, the identical application as the original application, with an additional explanation of the process it followed to carry out the further public consultation directed by the Board.

[6] The Board held a further hearing in the Municipality at the Clare Veterans Centre, in Saulnierville, Nova Scotia, on March 1, 2016. The Municipality was represented at the hearing by Nicole Pothier, a consultant who was engaged by the Municipality to assist in its review of municipal polling districts and boundaries. As noted in the Board's prior Decision, the Clare Civic Association ("Association") was granted formal standing in this proceeding. Its Chair, Gerard Theriault, and one of its Directors, Kristanne Chandler, appeared at the Board's public hearing on behalf of the Association.

II EVIDENCE AND SUBMISSIONS

[7] On behalf of the Municipality, Ms. Pothier confirmed that the Municipality had conducted a second round of public consultation as directed by the Board in its earlier Decision. She also confirmed that the Municipality was maintaining its request to confirm the number of councillors and polling districts at eight, and that it was requesting the same changes to its polling district boundaries as contained in the original application.

[8] The re-filed application described the second round of public consultation, together with the reasons for maintaining its identical request for confirming the number of councillors and the revisions to the polling district boundaries:

> On October 7th, 2015, the NSUARB remitted back the Application to the Municipality of Clare. The Board concluded that the public had not received enough notice of the upcoming public meetings and were concerned that the ad did not clearly indicate that the Municipality would consider any proposal put forward by the area's residents or associations.

> The Municipality of Clare organized a second round of public consultations on November 9th, 12th and 16th, 2015. The public consultations were advertised in the October 22nd and November 5th issues of the Clare Shopper in both official languages. It was also advertised in both official languages on the Municipality's website and in French in the Courier de la Nouvelle-Ecosse.

> In total, 61 residents came to the public meetings, 41 to the session in Saulnierville, 19 in Salmon River and 13 in St. Bernard. The total is 61 because some of the residents did assist [sic] more than one meeting.

> The Municipality of Clare asked for written submissions from residents on their opinion regarding the future number of polling districts and the boundaries of the polling districts. The submissions received by November 9th, 2015 would be presented at the public meetings. The Municipality received 11 submissions requesting the lowering of the number of polling districts. Ten of the submissions were from residents, one signed by two people, and one was from an association. The Municipality also received 4 submissions favouring keeping the present 8 polling districts (2 from local associations, 1 from a local company, and 1 from an individual).

> The Municipality of Clare also accepted submissions from individuals and groups until November 18th, 2015, a couple of days after the public consultations ended. The Municipality received an additional 6 submissions (1 supporting a decrease in the number of polling districts and 5 keeping their number to the present 8).

> Given the requirements of the NSUARB, the low level of public participation in the consultative process and the lack of a clear choice by the public, the Council opted to recommend keeping 8 polling districts with the boundaries changes described in this application.

> On December 15th, 2015, the Council approved a motion maintaining the existing number of polling districts (8) with the boundaries of the Municipality of Clare with slight changes to the polling district boundaries in order to be within the 10% target variance of electors in 7 of its 8 polling districts as recommended by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board.

[Application, Exhibit C-11, pp. 9-10]

[9] Mr. Theriault and Ms. Chandler testified on behalf of the Association. They maintained their view that the Municipality had not appropriately consulted the

public during the second round of consultation, despite the Board's directions. In their view, the Municipality had still not allowed the public to suggest a different sized council.

[10] As evidence that the public consultation was not properly conducted, the Association pointed to the need for the Board to intervene on October 30, 2015, to provide further direction to the Municipality with respect to its advertisement for the second round of consultation sessions. Moreover, the Association submitted that during the sessions themselves, the meetings only consisted of the Municipality presenting its own options (i.e., eight councillors with the current district boundaries versus eight councillors with revised district boundaries) and the reading aloud of any letters received by the Municipality. The Association submitted that there was no meaningful discussion of council size options.

[11] In its submissions at the hearing, the Clare Civic Association concluded:

So here we are, after two rounds of meetings, still unconvinced that the Municipality either understands or has the skills to meaningfully conduct public consultation. With elections looming, the clock is running out.

We believe we have sufficiently proven that proper self-administered review and electoral reform is, at present, impossible in Clare. If we assume that as per the Board's 2007 report, 1993 was the last time the public had an opportunity to comment on, and be apprised of, the changing demographics and needs of Clare, then waiting for the next Periodical Review translates into 30 years without input. That is more than a quarter of a century. That is unacceptable. With proper intent and planning on Council's part, this entire situation was totally avoidable. Simply ordering the Municipality to do better next time is also, in our minds, unacceptable.

It is our conclusion therefore, that a reputable outside agency is required to conduct a comprehensive, independent, up to date, multi-scenario report, complete with proper public polling and consultation. As this will probably take an extensive period of time (which we don't have) to accomplish, we are dealing with an extraordinary situation, and we would ask the Board to consider an extraordinary course of action in response.

Due to the lack of time remaining before the next election, and more importantly in the interest of civic harmony, we ask that the Council's present submission be accepted, but only for a period of 4 years. Under the authority of the [MGA Rules, s. 4] ...we believe you have the authority to order a Special Interim Boundary Review to be completed by the Municipality in time for the 2020 election.

This Special Review would include an independent report submitted to both Council and the public under the provisions noted above, as well as a regular reporting schedule to

the Board for the ensuing deliberation process, and perhaps the appointment of an Individual as overseer. The terms of this Special Review would have to be specific and itemized so as to provide a very clear understanding of what is required. We have seen in the Board's previous decisions that suggestions and general directions are either overlooked or misinterpreted.

In so ordering this Special Interim Review now, all candidates for 2016 Council will be aware of the undertaking to take place during their tenure, and their responsibility for it. There would be no misunderstanding the extent of the exercise, and no ability to simply let the clock run out.

Far from being punitive, this Special Review would enable the Municipality to have continuity and stability into the near future, but still have direct guidance through an unfamiliar process to plan for the future.

We believe this solution is the best way forward for both those who support the status quo, and those who support change. ...

[Exhibit C-14, pp. 15-17]

[12] The Municipality did not provide any response to the Association's suggestion of an independent review of the municipal polling districts.

III ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

[13] The Board's prior Decision outlines the requirements for setting the number of councillors and polling districts. As noted, section 368(4) of the *MGA* sets out the factors to consider in setting the polling district boundaries.

[14] The Board commented at length in its prior Decision about the Municipality's failure to appropriately consult its residents. In the Board's view, these concerns remain. While further consultation was conducted, it happened in name only, not in substance. For whatever reason, the Municipality did not engage with its residents on the important issue of municipal council size. This is disappointing when there was a strong indication by a significant number of residents that such a governance discussion should occur. In effect, the Municipality ignored these clear signals from its citizens that council size should be seriously canvassed.

[15] The Board might have been able to overlook some deficiencies in the Municipality's review process if there had been no public opposition to the application, or strong support for the present structure. However, where there is significant public concern with an application, the Board must ensure that there is a transparent and effective study of the municipal council size and the polling district boundaries, as required under s. 369 of the *Act*. On this point, the Board refers, again, to the excerpt from its Decision in *Town of Canso*, 2007 NSUARB 68, which was quoted in its first Decision in this proceeding at para. 22.

[16] To be clear, the Board does not accept the Municipality's submission, as noted in its applications, that there was a "lack of public opposition to the scenarios presented" or that there was a "low level of public participation in the consultative process". A total of 61 different residents attended three separate public meetings held in the second round of consultations held by the Municipality, as directed by the Board. Several letters of comment were filed with the Board. About 30-35 persons attended each of the Board's public hearings into the Municipality's first and second application. In the Board's experience in conducting similar hearing proceedings in municipalities and towns across the Province, the level of participation in Clare was significant compared to typical levels in other regions.

[17] While the Municipality is correct that there may not have been a clear consensus about the appropriate council size, that was not a sufficient basis to simply default to the current council size. The Municipality should have further engaged its residents on the heart of the issue which was a concern to many who expressed a view, i.e., what is the appropriate size of council for the Municipality of the District of Clare?

[18] The question now for the Board is how it should deal with the present application to confirm the number of councillors and polling districts, given the deficient public consultation process and time constraints due to the coming municipal election. At this point, the evidence is inconclusive on the issue of the appropriate council size for the Municipality.

[19] In the Board's opinion, the solution offered by the Clare Civic Association is a very reasonable course of action, which the Board will adopt. To remit the matter back to the Municipality for a second time, with the impending regularly scheduled municipal elections to be held in October 2016, would cause undue confusion for the electors in Clare. Further, the quality of the study and public consultation could be compromised by the relatively short timeline which is available before preparations commence for the 2016 municipal election. Given the level of debate on this topic, the process should be given sufficient time to be conducted properly, without the pressure of an impending municipal election.

[20] Accordingly, in the circumstances, the Board approves the application in its present form. The number of polling districts is set at eight, each electing one councillor. The Board also approves the proposed changes to the polling district boundaries. Six of the eight proposed polling districts fall well within the $\pm 10\%$ variance guideline applied by the Board. The two polling districts that exceed the $\pm 10\%$ standard only exceed it marginally, District #6 at 12.72% and District #8 at -10.43%. The Board accepts the Municipality's submission that these proposed district boundaries reflect communities of interest in the affected areas.

[21] The Board also directs the Municipality to conduct a proper study regarding the fairness and reasonableness of the number of councillors and polling districts, and district boundaries, consistent with the requirements in ss. 368 and 369 of the *Act*. The study is to be filed with the Board no later than February 28, 2018. This will allow for this matter to be dealt with by the Board before the next regular municipal election in October 2020.

[22] The study shall be conducted by an independent consultant or firm, at the expense of the Municipality. The final selection of the independent consultant or firm is subject to approval by the Board. The Board will retain jurisdiction over this matter to provide any necessary directions as to the selection of the independent consultant or firm, and regarding the consultation process. The study must be accompanied by appropriate public consultation as outlined in the Board's Decision in *Re Halifax Regional Municipality*, [2004] NSUARB 11, at paras. 106 to 111 and para. 115.

[23] There is precedent for remitting matters back to the municipalities to conduct a further study. The Board refers, for example, to a similar matter referred back as described in the Board's decision of October 30, 2007, in *Re Cape Breton Regional Municipality*, [2007] NSUARB 154.

[24] Further, the Board notes that the circumstances in this matter are distinguishable from those that existed in the Board's recent *Richmond* Decision: see *Municipality of the County of Richmond*, 2015 NSUARB 139; affirmed on appeal, 2016 NSCA 11. In *Richmond*, the Board concluded that the Municipality's application, in terms of the variances for relative parity of voting power, did not comply with the *MGA* in that several polling districts greatly exceeded the $\pm 10\%$ standard applied by the Board.

Further, the Intervenors in that proceeding had adopted a proposal for council size and polling district boundaries, developed by an independent consultant, that did comply with the *MGA*. The Board notes that in this proceeding, the Municipality of Clare's application does appear to comply, on the surface, with the statutory requirements of s. 368(4) of the *Act*, except for the fact that the public consultation carried out by it was woefully deficient.

[25] The Board expects to be kept apprised of the progress of the study and consultation process throughout and will invite comments from both the Municipality and the Association as appropriate.

[26] An Order will issue accordingly.

DATED at Halifax, Nova Scotia, this 4th day of April, 2016.

Roland A. Deveau

David J. Almon

Murray E. Doehler

From: Anne-Marie Long <ginger1352@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, 16 Apr 2024 at 13:36
Subject: Re: Antigonish County Boundary Reviews
To: Kiley, Bruce A <Bruce.Kiley@novascotia.ca>

Dear Mr Kiley.

Please consider this email my formal request for you to adjourn the boundary reviews for Antigonish County until after the October municipal election. A preferable time would be sometime in 2025.

As you know, the Municipality expected to consolidate the town and county, since October 2022, and with that view they requested several delays or extensions past the December 2022 legislated deadline for these boundary reviews. I often attend the meetings at the county municipal office and was present for Stantec's updates. I know that despite the wishes of the people for 10 districts and councillors, Stantec came back with other ideas from the CAO for 8. There was opposition to the 8 and the process became rushed in December 2023. Our councillors were not happy that they could not meet individually with Stantec. There was a rushed decision in December to pass a motion to get the process to the public.

The affected residents expected to have a say in meetings scheduled with Stantec for January 29, 30, & 31, 2024.. These were abruptly cancelled on January 29, 2024, after the Warden & Mayor received a January 24, 2024, letter from Minister John Lohr, who asked that they have another vote on whether they wanted the province to consider their request for special legislation, to consolidate the town and county. Minister Lohr gave them a month to hold the vote; however, the councillors were notified on January 26, 2024, of the request from Minister Lohr, and that a decision was made to hold an emergency, zoom meeting on January 30, 2024, for that vote.

You should know that there is significant controversy over the latest boundary changes proposed by Stantec. I believe that this process could be completed much more smoothly if you permit sufficient time for the councillors to work with Stantec before bringing these revisions to the public. At last week's county council meeting, it was clear that many of the councillors believe that they can work out equitable changes if they are able to work together first. The CAO was adamant that they had voted to go forward with the boundary reviews in December 2023, and he was not about to allow them to work together. at this time. Additionally, the Warden now has a much smaller district, under the proposal as it stands, and there is controversy over that issue also.

For the above reasons, I'm requesting that you exercise your authority to postpone the boundary reviews until sometime in 2025 to allow sufficient time for this process to be done with agreement among the councillors before it is presented to the affected residents.

Respectfully,

Anne-Marie Long, CPA (retired)
9524 Tracadie
Monastery, NS, B0H 1W0
902.863.8969

From: Harris McNamara <harris.mcnamara@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, April 17, 2024 8:25 AM

To: Kiley, Bruce A <Bruce.Kiley@novascotia.ca>

Subject: Antigonish County Boundary Review

You don't often get email from harris.mcnamara@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

**** EXTERNAL EMAIL / COURRIEL EXTERNE ****

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Mr. Kiley;

My name is Harris McNamara, Councillor for District 9 of the Municipality of Antigonish County. Attached is a letter I would request in support of deferment of the Antigonish County Boundary Review for consideration by the "Board". I will be mailing the letter today to have a signed original for the Board.

Harris

COUNCILLOR JAMES HARRIS McNAMARA,
Municipality of the County of Antigonish,
District 9
harris.mcnamara@gmail.com
902-318-8333

April 15, 2024

Re: **Antigonish County Boundary Review**

Mr. Kiely

I am writing to request a deferment of the Antigonish County Boundary Review until 2025 as the rush to get it done will not result in a thorough review and further questionable results and controversy. The Boundary review was to be done by December 2022 according to the Utility and Review Board (UARB) but extensions were requested and given to our CAO Glenn Horne a number of times. The reason given to the UARB was Antigonish Town & County were going to “consolidate”.

In December 2023 there was a rushed decision by County Council to pass a motion to get the public process going. Many on the council wanted the contractor “Stantec” to come down and meet with individual councillors to get their input, but it fell on deaf ears, we needed more clarity. Meetings were scheduled for January 29, 30 and 31, 2024 with much controversy about times of the session as residents work and evening sessions were identified as better option, again rushed. The sessions were CANCELLED after Councillors had distributed material and maps to residents on January 29, 2024 after the Mayor and Warden received a letter from Minister Lohr (Minister of Municipal Affairs) requesting another vote by Council to make the government comfortable with consolidating Antigonish Town & County. The results were five (5) Councillors for and 4 Councillors against. Bill 407, the Antigonish Consolidation Act was introduced and had second reading in the legislature, but as a result of Premier Houston listening to the residents, the Bill was stopped in its tracks.

The residents of Antigonish Town and County have been through much in the past two- and one-half years. The UARB has the opportunity to start the healing process by deferring the boundary review until 2025. We must get the residents’ trust back in my opinion and the vast majority of residents. A proper Boundary review, taking the time to do it right would go a long way to regaining the trust of residents.

If you or the Board require any clarification or more information, please contact me.

Yours Respectfully

Harris McNamara

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF
ANTIGONISH

MEMO FOR DECISION

TO: Committee of the Whole
FROM: Glenn Horne, CAO
SUBJECT: ***E-VOTING IN 2024 MUNICIPAL ELECTION***
DATE: August 28, 2023

Summary

October 19, 2024, is the next municipal election in Nova Scotia. Council must decide if electronic voting will be used in this election. Information is provided in this memo to facilitate that decision.

Background

The *Municipal Elections Act* permits municipalities to hold municipal elections using alternative (electronic) voting (e-Voting). As required by the Act, in 2016, Municipal Council approved a [bylaw that outlines how e-Voting would be conducted](#) if permitted during a municipal election. Through e-Voting, a ballot can be cast over the telephone or internet. In 2016 and 2020, Municipal Council chose to conduct municipal elections in those years via paper balloting only.

Proposals from the two e-Voting service providers in Nova Scotia, Intelivote and Sequent, have been solicited to confirm pricing, availability and processes used.

Considerations

Since e-voting was first permitted in the 2008 municipal elections, there has been a steady increase in the number of municipalities choosing to use it. Several municipalities continue to permit only traditional paper elections, like our neighbors in the District of Guysborough. Several municipalities have moved to exclusively electronic elections, like our neighbors in the District of St. Mary's. Yet others offered hybrid elections by permitting both in-person paper ballots and electronic voting options, including the Town of Antigonish.

Based on an informal straw-poll, most municipalities are conducting their elections either fully electronic or hybrid (electronic in advance and paper on election day). During the 2020 municipal election, Municipal staff receive feedback from the public regarding the use of only paper ballots, asking that consideration of electronic voting be given for future municipal elections. The reasons most commonly cited in those requests were accessibility and the ability to make it to the polling station.

A few further notes for your consideration:

- E-Voting can improve accessibility of elections, providing an alternative for those who are challenged to get to a polling station.
- E-Voting can be completed by internet or phone, mitigating the challenges associated with rural internet.
- While service providers have put in place robust systems to mitigate security concerns, elector credentials can be gathered or shared allowing an individual to cast multiple votes.
- [Following a review of e-Voting in Ontario municipal elections since 2000](#), there is limited evidence to suggest e-Voting has a significant affect on voter turnout.
- Risks of human error and fraud are virtually eliminated by e-Voting. However, risks of human error and fraud are very low in municipal elections given the relatively small number of electors and system of scrutiny that is applied by both the Returning Officer and candidates.
- E-Voting can enhance environmental sustainability as paper ballots and vehicle travel associated with traditional polling stations is reduced or eliminated.
- E-Voting can be unfamiliar and complicated for older voters or those unfamiliar with the process.

This list is not exhaustive but speaks to many of the most common considerations associated with e-Voting.

Options

Option #1 – Paper Voting Only

Based on historic costs and anticipating an election in all ten districts, an election using traditional paper voting is estimated to cost approximately \$35,000. This amount includes all expenses associated with holding an election.

Option # 2 – Electronic Voting Only

Based on the lowest cost proposal submitted, an election in all ten districts using e-Voting only would cost \$30,000 for e-Voting services, and \$22,000 for election officials and associated expenses, for a total of \$52,000.

It is assumed that if an election were held using only e-Voting, there would be no polling stations in advance or on election day. If polling stations were deployed in all ten districts on election day this amount would be increased by \$16,000 for the necessary hardware (computers) at polling stations, facility rentals and supplies, for a total of \$68,000.

Those computers could then be repurposed for regular use by the elected councillors and staff after the election.

Option #3 – Hybrid Paper & Electronic Voting

A hybrid option would see the County use e-Voting in advance of election day and traditional polls and paper ballots on election day. In that instance the County would incur all costs associated with Option 1 (\$35,000) plus the e-Voting service fees (\$30,000) for a total of \$65,000.

Recommendation

Given the considerations above, the demographics of our community and the significant change associated with the introduction of e-Voting, it is recommended that Municipal Council support Option #1 or Option #3. Either can be implemented for the 2024 election without significant foreseeable challenges.

PROCLAMATION
Access Awareness Week
May 26 – June 1, 2024

WHEREAS, the week of May 26 – June 1, 2024 is recognized as Access Awareness Week; and

WHEREAS, Access Awareness Week aims to celebrate achievements made both by and for persons with disabilities in the areas of accessibility, transportation, housing, employment, recreation, education and communication; and

WHEREAS, This is the 38th year that this public awareness initiative has taken place in Nova Scotia; and

WHEREAS, The theme for 2024 Access Awareness Week is Communities for All: Taking Action on Access Awareness; and

WHEREAS, Accessibility barriers are many and interconnected, removing and preventing them is challenging and complex; and

WHEREAS, The foundation of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act is to provide, support, and protect the rights of persons with disabilities to full inclusion and accessibility by the identification, prevention and removal of accessibility barriers; and

WHEREAS, Access Awareness Week promotes the inclusion of all Nova Scotians with disabilities as full citizens within our communities; and

WHEREAS, Through public awareness, community partnerships and education, this campaign aims to foster an environment of equal participation for persons with disabilities within Antigonish County.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that I, Warden Owen McCarron, on behalf of the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, do hereby proclaim May 26th – June 1st, 2024 as "Access Awareness Week" in Antigonish County.

Warden Owen McCarron

April 23, 2024, at Beech Hill, Antigonish County