



**WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
Police Advisory Board - Meeting Agenda
April 7, 2021 - 6:00 p.m.**

**In-Person Sanford Council Chambers, 76 Morison Drive, Windsor, NS
(also Facebook (FB) Livestreamed)**

Agenda is subject to change due to additions that may not be able to be reflected until after the meeting.

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Attendance
3. Approval of Agenda
4. Declaration(s) of Conflict of Interest
5. Approval of previous meeting minutes – Jan. 25, 2021
6. New Police Advisory Board (PAB) Member Introductions & Swearing-in
7. Presentation(s) - None
8. Business Arising from the Minutes / Old Business - None
9. New Business
 - a. PAB Training - Outstanding
 - b. Strategic Planning Discussion - Outstanding
 - c. Motor Vehicle Act
 - i. Traffic / Speeding Complaints
 - d. Noise By-law / Peace & Good Order By-law – (Samples attached)
 - e. Outdoor Fires By-law – (Verbal update)
 - f. Safe Exchange Zone – (information attached)
 - g. RAD Report – (information attached)
 - h. Diversity & Inclusion Policy – (information attached)
10. Reports
 - a. Regional Activity Heat Map (to-follow)
 - b. Quarterly Report
11. Correspondence - None
12. Next Meeting/Adjournment



TOWN OF KENTVILLE BY-LAW CHAPTER 85 PEACE AND GOOD ORDER

1. Sections 172 (a), (b), and (d) of the Municipal Government Act provides municipalities with the power to make bylaws respecting the health, well-being, safety and protection of persons, the safety and protection of property, and activities that may cause nuisances including burning, odours and fumes.
2. No person shall use any profane, obscene, lewd or lascivious language or behave in a lewd or lascivious manner in any public place, or at any public gathering or meeting, or in any store, shop, house, building, or in any other place within the Town of Kentville.
3. No person shall challenge any one to fight, nor use abusive or provoking language, taunting epithets or threatening gestures towards any person in any place within the Town of Kentville.
4. No person shall swear or create any disturbance, or be guilty of disorderly conduct in any public place, or in any other place within the Town of Kentville.
5. No person:
 - a. Shall fire any gun, air rifle or other firearm of any kind in the Town, unless that person is a peace officer doing so in the lawful exercise of the duty of the peace officer; or
 - b. Hunt with a weapon of any type or description within the Town.
6. No person shall loiter in or around the entrance or steps of any church, place of worship, hall, public building, store, shop or dwelling in the Town nor in or near any of the streets or lanes nor in any public place in the Town.
7. No person who is not a dweller therein or an inmate thereof shall refuse or neglect without lawful excuse to withdraw from a private house or dwelling or place of business in which he may be after being requested so to do by the owner or person having the control or management thereof nor remain in the said dwelling house or place of business after such request.

8. No person shall without lawful authority wantonly or willfully meddle or interfere with or desecrate, disfigure, destroy, damage or injure any gravestone, tomb, vault or any railing or curbing on a lot or plot for the burying of the dead in any cemetery or burial ground in the Town of Kentville, nor pluck, take away, destroy or damage any flower, plant or shrub of any kind growing, placed or being upon or around any grave, tomb, or vault or in any lot in any such cemetery or burial ground.
9.
 - a. No person, within the Town, shall make any unnecessary noise which is disturbing to other persons
 - b. No occupier of premises within the Town shall permit the making of any unnecessary noise upon such premises, which is disturbing to other persons.
10. No person shall wantonly, or unnecessarily, disturb the good order, peace and harmony of any public meeting held in the Town, whether such person be one of the meeting or not.
11. No person shall encourage dogs to fight in any public street nor in any public place in the Town.
12. No person shall make, publish, post up or exhibit any indecent or immoral placard, picture, drawing, writing or printing in, or near, any public place in the Town.
13. No person shall spit or expectorate, or discard chewing material, such as gum, on any public sidewalk, bridge or crossing, nor in any place of public resort in the Town, except in such place or places as may be provided for such purpose.
14. Every person who contravenes or fails to comply with any of the provisions of this Chapter shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding \$1000.00 for each offence and in default of payment, to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two months.
15. Repeal
Chapters 9 and 54 – Peace and Good Order Bylaw are hereby repealed.
16. Effective Date
Effective upon date of publication of Notice of Passing

Town of Kentville, By Law Chapter 85: Peace and Good Order

Date of first reading:	January 24, 2011
Date of advertisement of Notice of Intent to Consider:	February 1, 2011
Date of second reading:	February 28, 2011
*Date of advertisement of Passage of By-Law:	March 8, 2011
Date of mailing to Minister a certified copy of By-Law:	March 11, 2011

I certify that this Peace and Good Order Bylaw – Chapter 85 was adopted by Council and published as indicated above.



CAO Mark Phillips

*Effective Date of the By-Law unless otherwise specified in the By-Law

TOWN OF BERWICK BYLAW

RESPECTING PEACE AND GOOD ORDER

1. That this Bylaw shall be known as AND MAY BE CITED AS THE “Peace and Good Order Bylaw”.
2. No person shall, on any public thoroughfare or in any public place or at any public meeting or in any store or shop:
 - (a) Use obscene language or behave in an obscure manner;
 - (b) Challenge anyone to fight;
 - (c) Use abusive or provoking language or make threatening gestures;
 - (d) Create any disturbance or behave in a disorderly manner;
 - (e) Encourage dogs, or any other animal, to fight;
 - (f) Throw any fireball, squib, firecracker or firework.
3. No person shall disturb the peace and quiet by discharging an air rifle, a pellet gun or a firearm.
4. No person shall:
 - (a) loiter in, or around the entrance of, any church, place of worship, hall, public building, store, shop or dwelling;
 - (b) play on any musical instrument, sing, shout, or make any loud or unusual noise on any street or in any public place;
 - (c) knock or pound on any door or ring any doorbell;
 - (d) operate or permit to be operated in any public place any stereo system, tape deck, amplifier, public address system, phonograph, radio or other device or apparatus which reproduce, amplify, emit, or transmit sounds that may be heard at a distance of fifty (50) feet or more.
5.
 - (a) No person shall make any unusual noise or unnecessary noise through the operation of a motor vehicle;
 - (b) Motor vehicle in this section means a vehicle as defined in the motor Vehicle Act, RSNS, 1967, Chapter 191, as amended.
6. No person shall allow a dog which is owned by or harboured by that person to bark or yelp or howl so as to disturb the quiet of the neighbourhood and thereby create a public nuisance.
7. Every person who contravenes, or fails to comply with any of the provisions of the Bylaw shall be liable, upon conviction, to a penalty of o less than \$50.00 and not more than \$1,000.00 for each such offence, and in default of payment of the penalty the offender may be imprisoned for a period of time to be not less than five days and not more than ninety days.

8. Bylaw 153 Motor Vehicles and Section 91(b) of the Bylaw respecting animals are hereby appealed.

History of this Bylaw:

Enacted - April 12, 1983

BY-LAW # 28

TOWN OF MULGRAVE

PEACE AND GOOD ORDER BY-LAW

RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Mulgrave that the following By-Law be and the same is hereby enacted and that the Clerk be and is hereby instructed to forward same to the Minister of Municipal Affairs with a request for his approval hereof.

PEACE AND GOOD ORDER BY-LAW

1. No person shall without reasonable cause make any noise by shouting, singing, swearing or otherwise in any street or place or in the vicinity thereof that may be likely to disturb the residents of such street or place.
2. No person, who is not a dweller therein or an inmate thereof, shall enter a private dwelling or place of business within the Town of Mulgrave, and remain therein after being requested to withdraw by the owner or person having control or management thereof.
3. No person shall make any unnecessary noise or disturbance by means of the operation of a motor vehicle.
4. No person shall perform or engage in any stunt or other activity upon a street or place so as to unduly disturb residents of any such street, place or part thereof.
5. No person shall discharge any gun, air gun, pellet gun, or any other firearm in the Town of Mulgrave.
6. No person shall knock or pound on any door or any house or ring any doorbell for the purpose of annoying the inmate thereof.
7. No person shall on any street beat any drum or blow any horn or trumpet or other musical instrument or clang any tamborine, cymbal or shout or sing after being requested by any police officer to desist from doing so.
8. No person shall knowingly meddle, interfere with any grave, tomb or vault in which the dead are interred, or pluck or take away any flowers of any kind growing or placed upon or around any such grave, tomb or vault.
9. No person shall wantonly or unnecessarily ring or blow any fire alarm signal.
10. No person shall wilfully or unnecessarily disturb the good order of any public meeting held for any lawful purpose.

11. No person under the age of fifteen (15) years shall be or remain upon or in any street of the Town after 9:00 o'clock in the evening unless accompanied by one of his or her parents or guardians or some other adult person authorized for such purpose by one of the said parents or guardians.
12. Any such child found on or in any street of the Town unaccompanied as aforesaid in the nighttime after 9:00 o'clock may be taken to his or her home by any policeman, and the parent or guardian of such child be warned by such policeman that if the offense is repeated, the said parent or guardian will be liable to the penalties hereinafter mentioned. Said policeman shall keep a written memorandum of such warnings to whom and the date upon which same were given.
13. Should any child, whose parent or guardian has been warned, in accordance with the provisions of the next preceding section, be found again in or upon any street unaccompanied as in Section 12 set out, the parent or guardian so warned shall be guilty of an offense against this By-Law.
14. Any person violating the provisions of this By-Law shall be liable, on conviction, to a penalty not exceeding \$1,000.00 and in default of payment of such penalty may be imprisoned for a term not exceeding 90 days.
15. The Prevention of Disorder and Improprity By-Law, being Chapter 17 of the By-Laws and Ordinances of the Town of Mulgrave as approved on May 1, 1952, and Section 5(a) of the Firearms and Fireworks By-Law as approved on the 18th day of November 1960, are hereby repealed.

BY-LAW # 28

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED by the Town Council for the Town of Mulgrave that the attached Peace and Good Order By-Law be and the same is hereby enacted and that the clerk be and is hereby instructed to forward same to the Minister of Municipal Affairs with a request for his approval hereof:

I, Harry MacFarlane, Clerk of the Town of Mulgrave, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of a resolution pertaining to a Peace and Good Order By-Law duly passed unanimously by the full Council of the Town of Mulgrave at a meeting duly held and convened on the 4th day of June, A.D., 1984.

Dated at Mulgrave in the County of Guysborough, N.S. this 7th day of June A.D., 1984

Harry L. MacFarlane
Clerk - Treasurer
Town of Mulgrave



Committee of the Whole Excerpts
March 9, 2021

Safe Exchange Zone for Online Buyers/Sellers

Online sales have become common in our communities which involve people meeting in various location to exchange goods and cash. People are encouraged to do this in common areas that are well lit and have surveillance. The Windsor RCMP Office could be a marked as a safe exchange zone so residents could exchange items without fear.

The recommended motion was:

... that staff discuss with the RCMP that the local detachment be used as a safe exchange zone for online purchasers and sellers to exchange items and money and that appropriate signage be made to advertise and promote it. And further, that security cameras provide coverage of the exchange site.



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information <input type="checkbox"/>	Recommendation <input type="checkbox"/>	Decision Request <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Councillor Activity <input type="checkbox"/>
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To: Committee of the Whole

Submitted by: _____
Bob Morton, Councillor District 6

Date: March 9, 2021

Subject: Safe Exchange Zone for online buying/selling

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

N/A

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

That staff discuss with the RCMP that the local detachment be used as a safe exchange zone for online purchasers and sellers to exchange items and money and that appropriate signage be made to advertise and promote it. And further, that security cameras provide coverage of the exchange site.

BACKGROUND

Property <input type="checkbox"/>	Public Opinion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Environment <input type="checkbox"/>	Social <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Economic <input type="checkbox"/>	Councillor Activity <input type="checkbox"/>
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With online sales becoming more common and convenient, police in many municipalities have stressed the importance of not giving out personal information during the discussions nor during the purchase/sale exchange (including personal address). As such, many municipalities and communities have encouraged and promoted a common area that is well-lit and that provides security camera surveillance. In many areas, local police stations are being used.

DISCUSSION

A safe exchange zone is a safe place for online buyers and sellers to exchange items and money. This place would ideally be at the police station clearly marked as a Safe exchange zone and would have cameras pointed in the direction. This gives community members a safe and consistent place to meet and exchange items without the fear of a

stranger coming to their house. This practice is becoming increasingly popular and I believe it would be a welcomed addition to WHRM.

NEXT STEPS

(State what will be done next if anything.)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

(Inform of any financial implications it may have on current or future budgets of the Municipality, or to residents, if anything.)

ALTERNATIVES

(State any option to the recommendation and implication of the options, if anything)

ATTACHMENTS

N/A

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW

I support the intent of the recommendation pending the participation of the RCMP Detachment. In addition we should confirm the presence of a camera or security measures at the detachment in order to satisfy the recommendation. Staff Sgt. David Ferguson is scheduled to attend the COTW meeting and could be approached regarding this matter.

Report Prepared by: _____
Bob Morton, Councillor

Report Reviewed by: _____
Shelleena Thornton, Administrative Supervisor

Report Approved by:  _____
Mark Phillips, CAO



WINDSOR / WEST HANTS

TOGETHER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
FINAL PROJECT REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage for funding this project.

The consultation project was initiated by hard-working staff at the Municipality of West Hants and the Town of Windsor before the consolidation. It was then followed by dedicated help and assistance from current staff members at West Hants Regional Municipality, particularly Ms. Chrystal Remme.

We extend our gratitude to all the community leaders and members who gave us their precious time during the consultation process. They always made themselves available to bring ideas and challenges forward to be captured in this report. They reminded us of the beauty of the region, the magnitude of the challenges ahead, and the great potential of the region that keeps them here and encourages them to show up and give of their ideas, vision, passion, energy, and time to improve their community through incremental efforts that have long-lasting implications.

We hope this report has accurately captured their viewpoints, and that it helps to generate future in-depth conversations, projects, and policy changes, necessary to spark positive change.

INTRODUCTION

On July 19, 2018, the two councils for Windsor and West Hants agreed to a consolidation of their two municipalities. The goal of the consolidation has been to improve the quality of service delivery to residents of the two municipalities, and to position the unified municipality for future investments and growth as a united region. Since the beginning of the process, there has been a communication strategy in place to inform residents of the process, including a region-wide survey, public open houses, and newspaper and Tim Horton's ads. However, given the sensitive nature of this provincially-mandated process, and the fast-approaching deadline of April 2020, a new approach has been cultivated, involving more citizens in the process: this approach includes electoral district mapping, and strategizing around service delivery methods and staffing concerns.

Although resident involvement is a mandated process, this new approach offers a unique opportunity for the united municipality to establish protocols on how to engage its residents not just during the consolidation but in the future. It has the potential to thoroughly engage residents on their aspirations for their regions, and incorporate their visions for community-led projects. It also provides a forum to reach out to community members that may have not been involved in community-planning discussions to date, such as Glooscap First Nation and African Nova Scotian community members, and the youth, among others.

Recognizing these challenges and potentials, in December 2019, RAD Consulting was hired to conduct a comprehensive community engagement about the future of the united municipality. This engagement process acknowledges the socially-dynamic complexity of such an effort, and the need to engage with as many diverse perspectives as possible. Thus, RAD Consulting took a broadly evaluative and qualitative approach by interviewing and listening deeply to various internal stakeholders' perspectives before beginning the comprehensive consultation. The goal of this engagement process was to go beyond addressing merely practical challenges of the consolidation, to identifying new opportunities by tapping into the aspirations of the diverse communities within the region. The following report outlines the various measures taken and the holistic, progressive conclusions reached through this wide-reaching consultation process.

PHASE 1 - GATHERING INSIGHTS

First, we gathered insights regarding the current challenges from municipal staff, politicians and community leaders in the form of workshops, one-on-one meetings, and surveys. This approach aimed to observe, ask, listen, and thereby gain greater insight. Steps in this phase included:

One-on-one interviews with community leaders representing:

- Glooscap First Nation
- African Nova Scotians
- Acadian Nova Scotians
- Youth
- Seniors
- Differently-abled persons
- LGBTQ+
- New Canadians
- Young families

As part of Phase 1, we also conducted a half-day workshop with staff from both Windsor and West Hants. Finally, we also conducted one-on-one interviews with:

- Warden Zebian
- Mayor Anna Allen
- Mr. Mark Phillips, CAO

PHASE 2 - GENERATING SOLUTIONS

For the second part of this project, we will engage the larger community in the region through community meetings. The goal in phase two is to not only to communicate the consolidation process and outcomes, but also to go one step deeper and engage residents on their future aspirations for the new municipality. What are the projects all residents would like to see their community undertake? What are some of the various opportunities the new municipality can undertake to improve their individual qualities of life?

Please note: all community member names in this report are pseudonyms, to protect their privacy, and the opinions expressed by individuals during the interviews do not necessarily reflect those of the entire community.

BACKGROUND

Windsor is a town in the centre of Nova Scotia, surrounded by the region of West Hants. With a combined population of approximately 20,000 people, this is a region with a diverse and storied history. The site of the annual great pumpkin regatta and home to many museums, parks, and community spaces, the vibrance of this area is immediately welcoming.

On July 19, 2018, the two councils for Windsor and West Hants agreed to a consolidation of their two municipalities. The goal of the consolidation has been to improve the quality of service delivery to its residents, and to position itself for future investments and growth as a united region. In October of 2018, the Province of Nova Scotia passed Bill 55 for the consolidation of Windsor and West Hants. As of this Act, the two regions, intrinsically linked geographically, have agreed to consolidate into the fourth Regional Municipality in the province.

To facilitate this transition, a transition committee was created that meets bi-monthly, consisting of a Coordinator, Mayor, Warden, Deputy Mayor and Deputy Warden, representing each region equally. As the committee works their way through the various strategic decisions and planning involved in this consolidation, several clear patterns and goals have emerged.



As part of service quality improvement, there are some practical decisions to be made. These include electoral district mapping, service delivery methods, staffing questions and planning strategies, much of which is already underway via the committee meetings. Details of these studies can be found on the website for the consolidation: strongerregion.ca.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Alongside the practical matters, the consolidation has provided an opportunity and a new priority for the future council to better engage its residents, not only in relation to encompassing issues like voter turnout, but also as it pertains to specific concerns like access to fire services. The consolidation process has underscored the need to conduct this engagement in an equitable fashion. Though it is much smaller geographically, Windsor has a more concentrated population and the rural voice of communities throughout the West Hants region must continue to play a key role in development plans.

As preliminary plans for these changes proceed, they have also been shared through the communication networks established, which include the public consultation "Have your say!", a region-wide survey disseminated via public events, open houses, information booths, and advertisements both in newspapers and Tim Hortons.

The survey reached 1,050 respondents of the total population of over 20,000, just surpassing the committee goal of 1,000. Per the data from this survey, a significant gap exists around youth feedback; the overwhelming majority of respondents were between the ages of 35-65. This generation gap should be rectified in future consultations. Per the received responses, priorities and recurring themes include taxation (re)distribution, governing efficiency, and collaboration and cooperation. Interestingly, these topics were identified both as potential benefits and challenges, though the tone was hopeful and positive when discussing the forthcoming merger. Other key themes included the need for improved public transportation and infrastructure maintenance, and continued hopes for a smoothly-integrated transition.

The feedback from this data is promising, as it aligns strongly with the vision of the transition committee and the proceedings already underway. Per the website, the guiding principles for this consolidation include boundaries that preserve the integrity of the current culture, proportionately distributed taxation and debts, diversified restructuring of administration, regional services and planning that accounts for current assets and existing strengths, transparent and diverse public engagement, and collaborative decision-making in the interest of growth and improvement for the entire community within the new consolidated region.

Overall, it seems that both the government and residents want to considerably contain and preserve their existing culture and traditions, while leveraging their strengths to form a better future, together.

Some questions raised in communications to the committee and feedback from the survey merit further elaboration moving forward. For example, there seem to be significant concerns around continuing conflict between the currently designated Windsor and West Hants, though it presents primarily as a 'rural vs. urban' divide, and manifests as concerns for loss of the rural 'voice,' and unfair taxes – especially an 'urban tax.' Community aspirations do, however, clearly encompass a vastly more efficient government even with a 'smaller budget.' The contrast between these two would be a key topic to raise in conversation, either with those in governance, or the general public.

Other gaps in the data, along with the underrepresented perspective of youth, included input from Glooscap First Nation, African Nova Scotians in the area, seniors, and New Canadians. Other potential groups to consider might be small business owners, the LGBTQ+ population, and differently-abled persons, though further research should be done to determine what percentage of the community these groups represent.

Treating this consolidation as an opportunity for growth and new development that all officials and residents clearly hope it to be means that research should also be put towards potential avenues for regional, provincial, or national initiatives and aid programs that can be taken advantage of through this process. This should be done in conjunction with the themes and specific responses that emerge as the public consultation continues to explore and mine further community aspirations. Community-led projects, design and placemaking, and improvement of quality of life for all residents should fuel ideas as this exciting merger continues.

PHASE 1

GATHERING INSIGHTS

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

A. COMMUNITY LEADERS' INTERVIEWS

GLOOSCAP

1. Sarah: "Take Care of Your Elders, and Keep the Youth Busy"

Sarah, our first interviewee, moved back to Glooscap seven years ago, having been born there. Formerly having worked in Community Health, she is currently a master's student at Acadia University, and described her nation as having a membership of 400, with many members living in the United States and elsewhere, whereas the actual reserve population is roughly 100 residents, 25-30 of whom are youth. Glooscap is located on a 460-acre parcel of land, said Sarah, and approximately one new unit (e.g. home) is built per year.

Sarah, 37, and the mother of three children, spoke candidly and appreciatively about the close, tight-knit community of Glooscap, where the "kids know every house" and there is a lot of overlap between families. Compared to suburbs, Sarah believes a small reserve such as Glooscap, which is relatively young (not an original reserve), allows for more opportunities to know one's culture.

She glowed while speaking of different events the reserve hosts, such as the four-day sacred fire, Pow Wows, and a Mid-Winter feast, as well the lack of traffic congestion, the opportunity for evening walks, youth programming, and more. "This is a great place to be, and not just because I'm from this nation," she said.

Sarah's main suggestions for innovation and improvement in Glooscap was geared toward breaking down isolation (for example, the nearest café to gather for a cup of coffee with a friend is in Hantsport), and the stigma that the reserve is hostile to outsiders, communicating a message of "You're not allowed here, you can't come here." To help encourage non-native visitors to the community, Sarah suggested hosting the Winter Carnival in Glooscap, and inviting non-natives to their trail for snow-shoeing and other recreational activities.

She feels there is "so much potential to benefit indigenous and non-indigenous youth" in Glooscap, but that more facilities and resources are needed in order for this vision to be actualized. Therefore, Sarah's dream project would be a youth center with daily after-school programming. "We really need a spot for our youth." Similarly, she is concerned about improving the lives of elders and seniors in Glooscap—solidarity exists, but could benefit from better connections to surrounding communities. Communication is key, Sarah states, in better connecting Glooscap residents to those of bordering cities and towns—particularly for those residents that do not use the internet and would respond better to a home visit or phone call.

For those who do, Glooscap residents stay connected through a group FB page, where they discuss everything from upcoming events to spontaneous Tim Hortons trips for anyone interested.

While remaining positive throughout the interview, citing the increase in youth, the library, the health center, the growth of Glooscap's infrastructure, and the administrative offices in the former band hall, Sarah did have a number of additional constructive suggestions, and proposed the following beneficial changes, which include:

1. Transportation accessibility, such as a bus, for the population, especially seniors and those without cars. "Without a car here, you're kind of stuck," she said.
2. More public spaces such as parks for the youth to gather
3. A youth center with after-school programming
4. Independent businesses that provide a space for socialization (cafés, restaurants)
5. Road repairs and the implementation of pedestrian walkways
6. Beds allocated at the Hantsport assisted living facility for indigenous people to assist Glooscap's aging population and the aforementioned problems of isolation and transportation
7. Most people in Glooscap have doctors in Windsor, even though there is a Heath Center in Glooscap, Sarah said, so better access to health services would be a benefit to all
8. Better trail maintenance, particularly to make them wheelchair-accessible

Regarding the forthcoming consultations and workshops, Sarah suggested holding a daytime consultation to increase participation, and sending personal invites, or visiting residents in person, at their homes, if possible, as well as providing refreshments at future meetings.

In sum, Sarah's suggestions for improving the life quality for all members of the Glooscap community is summarized by her quip: "Take care of your elders and keep the youth busy!"

2. Marie: "I Want to Know Everything About Everything"

Marie, whose grandmother was the former chief of Glooscap 40 years ago, when Glooscap only had two houses (her grandmother went to the Supreme Court to ask for separation from the Annapolis Valley First Nation reserve), is an energetic senior and self-described "homebody," who, like Sarah, also lived off the reserve for many years, only returning 8 years ago. Beginning and ending with the positive, Marie enjoys living on the reserve for the connection she experiences between herself and other natives. She spends a lot of time on the walking trail, though, like Sarah, also cited a dire need for repairs (e.g. at the present moment, about 100 trees cover the ground, partially barring the path, having been felled by storms).

While not a problem the Consolidation project can solve, Marie shared that she experiences fear going on the trails or anywhere else alone: "When you're indigenous, you hear about all the murders. I know it's not happening a lot here, but you always have to have your guard up. I don't go too many places alone . . . I don't go too far, but I would like to go farther if I could."

When asked about how to bolster community involvement, Marie cited the community garden that was recently created, but lacked the involvement of enough residents to sustain it throughout the year. Marie also lent her labor in the building of the new playground and is an expert basket weaver. She also sews and does hand-beading, often for the reserve members' Pow Wow regalia skirts ("I would have started my own business," she said, "but I didn't want the stress").

Before marriage and children, Marie was involved in the reserve's voting for chief and council. Now her days are busy taking care of her two granddaughters, who are not, to her dismay, interested in basket weaving (they claim it's too difficult), but one of whom enjoys making medicine bags with Marie, who describes herself as wanting to know "everything about everything," from playing the guitar to learning and mastering various other art forms. She is also close to her sister and relatives who live on the reserve, as well as many non-indigenous people, whom she visits in local communities such as Gaspereau.

Rather taciturn on the subject of proposed changes, Marie said she wishes there were more creativity workshops for all, recalling a memorable centerpiece workshop utilizing Christmas cedar recently that was very enjoyable, and a better means of communication between members other than Facebook, which she doesn't check regularly. She would be much more involved, she said, if she knew what was going on, as, "when I'm at home, I'm in my own little world." She suggested letters, phone calls, and a paper newsletter as various ways communication networks could be strengthened. Marie also raised the issue of food accessibility—the local gas station is the only place to buy food in Glooscap.

Knowledge, to Marie, is key, and thus the more knowledge that is communicated to the residents, and the stronger the bonds of communication, the happier everyone will be, particularly in the winter, when life gets more isolating with the onset of colder temperatures.

While she finds the need for food to draw community participation in events disappointing ("Every time they put a project on, it's a failure. The only way to get people out is food") and spoke passionately about our time of devastating ecological collapse ("I don't know if it's too late. I think it is"), overall, Marie's perception of life in Glooscap was redeeming.

"They treat you the way you should be treated here."

3. Joan: "Somebody's got to help me help my kids"

Joan's interview was by far the most emotionally charged of the three interviews at Glooscap. We began with a discussion of what she perceived to be the benefits of living in Glooscap: "I love how secluded it is," she said; she also appreciates the Glooscap First Nation walking group run out of Windsor. Lastly, she was very grateful for the outpouring of support she received from the community when her father passed away over the holidays.

Joan is the mother of a 13-year-old lesbian stepdaughter and 14-year-old transgender son, both of whom have undergone a significant amount of trauma as a result of their sexualities and changing gender identities. Thus, Joan's emphasis on needed change was not just youth programming or a youth center, but support for LGBTQ youth and their families. According to Joan, there is a group for LGBTQ youth in Kentville but it is "clique-y," and there is a parent support group in Sackville on Monday nights, but nothing yet in Glooscap by way of support or services. Joan related the various traumas her children have endured (she has a third son who lives off-reserve but is returning in the fall) since coming out, and transitioning, respectively, including multiple suicide attempts (both children), and her son's rape on a public road while walking home from a Haunted House during Halloween. Her daughter is condescendingly referred to as a "Frequent Flier" at the nearest hospital, where she is regularly admitted for observation, a stress compounded by mounting ambulance bills and the daughter's altercations with local law enforcement. Currently, Joan's home is on "lockdown" because her son was discovered to be carrying a switchblade, ostensibly for the purposes of self-harm (the lockdown entails stripped beds, anything sharp removed, and constant monitoring of her endangered son).

Joan described her own small home as the only refuge for her children and other LGBTQ youth in the reserve, a place LGBTQ youth can come and feel free to be themselves without fear of violence, punishment, or judgment. "There's got to be somebody else," said Joan, describing the strain that her own parenting isolation puts on her, contributing to her own anxiety disorder and manifestly causing her much pain and distress. She was recently admitted into a closed regional FB group for parents of LGBTQ youth, which helps, but is not the final answer. "There needs to be more services for our kids, and more parental supports," said Joan. "There is help, but you have to be lying half-dead in a hospital to get that help."

Thus, Joan's plea was for funding to be made available for mental health and LGBTQ services, organized group sessions for the purposes of education, as well as the establishment of a safe space or spaces other than her home. "It's a hard battle to win trust," Joan said, in relation to seeking support services, because even established safe spaces can be targets for homophobic and transphobic violence, if discovered. A resource center would be ideal, she believes, for the purposes of educating everyone, but specifically adults with generational beliefs that run counter to the wellness of the LGBTQ youth in Glooscap, including that of the chief, whom Joan described as unhelpful in this area. She praised Horton's 9th grade principal Shawn Bennett as a community luminary in this regard, and a personal support to her, as well as the communities of Windsor and Hantsport for having a counselor on the school staff.

Regarding her own health, Joan said an exercise group for plus-sized people would also be beneficial, but her main focus during our interview was implementing the above much-needed services and spaces, to lessen her burden and make her children and other LGBTQ youth feel safe and welcomed in their own skins: "Somebody's got to help me help my kids."

ACADIAN HERITAGE

4. Betty and Florence; “Il faut prévenir les gens”

Please note: This interview was conducted in French, and transcribed in English, yet a few of the quotes are preserved (with translations) in the original French, for accuracy and to preserve the spirit of the interview.

Betty and Florence are very engaged in the Acadian community of Grand-Pré, and maintain the Ste. Famille Cemetery, at 419 Gabriel Rd., Falmouth, NS (West Hants County), a historical site that is overseen by “Les Amis de Grand-Pré,” a group of 23 members, with 12 actively involved.

The history of this cemetery is fascinating by any objective standards: as Betty and Florence described, in the 1600s and 1700s, the native Acadians in the region marked the graves of their beloved dead with wooden crosses, on the spot where the cemetery is now located, but the crosses soon disintegrated, leaving the site unrecognizable as a resting place after the land had been taken over by the British in the 1760s.

Then, in 1996, while excavating for a subdivision, the developers struck upon human remains, and the city ordered a full archeological dig to investigate further. After a thorough exhumation, 300 buried human remains were discovered on the plot, clearly used as a resting place for the Acadian habitants from the first half of the 18th century. The city purchased the land, then turned it into a historical cemetery whose individual graves are not marked on the ground, but, rather, as of 2003, by names inscribed on a brick walkway leading toward the cemetery, now run primarily by Betty and Florence, who chatted openly and freely with us about Acadian history and future prospects for the region.

Unlike other Canadian settlers involved in the fur trade, the Acadians—the first white settlers in Nova Scotia—implemented a sophisticated knowledge of “architectural agriculture” farming techniques (e.g. the construction of huge dykes in the Valley, channeling the salt marshes from the Bay of Fundy) while co-existing peacefully with the Indigenous Mi’kmaq habitants, working with them on the land and, later, on a unified but ultimately failed guerrilla-style resistance to British forces during the Seven Year War (1756-1763).

“The land back then [under Acadian control] was fertile, rich, and beautiful,” Florence said.

Prior to the war, the Acadian and Mi’kmaq populations also intermixed as family units, giving birth to the Métis, an ethnic group native to Canada and parts of the US who trace their descent to both indigenous North American and European settlers.

Also prior to the war, both the English and French had begun colonizing Nova Scotia en masse, taking over the rest of Canada as well and fighting each other for land, during which time the Acadian habitants would neither leave, nor take a side.

As punishment for their resistance, Betty and Florence explained, in a very sincere effort to share as much historical background with us as possible, after the war the Brits deported all the Acadians, and burned down their homes and farms, thus beginning a diaspora, with nearly all Acadians except a few in hiding deported to Morocco, France, and various US states such as Louisiana. Prior to their deportation, the British and French also waged what Betty called “unintentional biological warfare” (though some historians claim it was intentional), introducing infectious diseases into the Acadian population that they had no immunity to defend, thereby perishing.

The British and French also attempted to introduce Catholic conformity and Catholic schooling to the formerly independent Acadian people before their deportation, with little success.

It wasn't until the late 1800s and 1900s, the women explained, that the surviving ancestors of deported Acadians began to return, settling in Cape Breton, the South Shore, and Grand-Pré.

"Le Patrimoine Acadian est bien connu, solide, et ouvert," at least within the region, said Florence ("The Acadian heritage is well-known, established, and open"), relaying an anecdote about a small Acadian group of tourists from Louisiana who recently visited the region, only to be stopped on their exploration of the land by a local Acadian farmer, who welcomed them to his farm for a personal tour and visit.

Regarding the consolidation, as it stands today, Betty stressed the importance of networking, and managing the ease of same: while Grand-Pré is "not a paradise," she joked, it is a wonderful place to live, and there is "always the chance to collaborate with other communities." Phone calls often constitute the primary mode of communication between the town of Grand-Pré and its residents. Perhaps as a result of this relative insularity, and despite the knowledge most Nova Scotia residents have of the area, Betty and Florence mutually spoke of the "unknown history" of the region (as well as other Acadian towns in Nova Scotia, including Clare and Cheticamp) across Canada and its obviation by major national news sources such as Radio Canada.

Thus, our conversation pivoted to potential improvements to the region, with the intention of preserving and disseminating this rich history through historical archives and monuments. There exists "The List of Fort Edward" in the Nova Scotian archives (a list of prisoners held captive), for example, as well as a military fort outside of Windsor, but these two pioneering women hope for more.

Even visiting Acadians, for example, "come to see the names on the tombs" at the Ste. Famille cemetery, but are surprised and moved to hear more details about the history of deportation, a history one would think widely known, especially by Acadians themselves. This important education (which also entails Florence, Betty, and other Acadian community members visiting local schools) requires a bit of a perspective shift, Betty said: "For years, the military history was prioritized: now we are working on incorporating a human element into this military story."

Florence and Betty had two more important suggestions to make regarding the improvement of their community, and they both concerned making Grand-Pré more accessible, approachable, and informative for residents and visitors alike. The first suggestion was to make better road signs, as the current signs, exposed to the elements for years, are faded and hard to read (a), and (b), they are not clear or thorough enough to indicate the way to local destinations and landmarks.

And lastly, Betty, a member of the Acadian Odyssey Commission, proposed that the town of Windsor obtain a large stone monument, like the one along the Halifax waterfront (which includes a description of the city's founding charter, and links to other monuments in Nova Scotia) commemorating the 1,000 Acadians who were deported from Fort Edward by the British.

The only reasons, as they see it, that the Windsor monument hasn't yet been obtained is the cost: \$65,000. However, the women argued that through a fundraising campaign, the money could be at least partly obtained through donations and other fundraising efforts.

"Il faut prévenir les gens," they said ("It's necessary to let people know in advance"), a point also stressed by the African-Canadian community leaders in the subsequent interview: clarifying and implementing a means, timeliness, and consistency of communication, it seems, is this municipal consolidation's greatest challenge and potential strength.

In closing, these women's chief suggestions, concerns, and source of pride, was quite obviously historic cultivation and preservation. A larger network of community engagement, such as what is being proposed by the consolidation, would "help the Acadian community to be known outside of the province, or independent of the province," said Betty. Without this active network, it's easy, as she put it, to "lose the human connection." An enlarged "portrait" of Grand-Pré in the province and surrounding communities ("portrait" in French connotes a painting or photograph of a person) would help them form alliances and work closely with other historical societies such as the West Hants Historical Society, as well as universities and schools (e.g. Université Sainte-Anne). Overall, speaking on behalf of other Acadians, the ultimate dream of their community is to receive more federal funding, thus allowing the municipality itself, rather than the federal government, to govern and protect the unique history of their land and people.

"We have a rich Acadian cultural history here in Windsor-West Hants that is not known, or is only known by certain people, that would be of great value if it were able to be shared more with the general public."

5. Municipality of the District of West Hants: Erica, Dan, and Bill “The elephant in the living room is racism and discrimination”

Our second and last meeting was our largest and most grievous, with Erica Bland, Dan Johnson, and Bill in attendance from the municipality of the District of West Hants.

These attendees, with Erica as their spokesperson, were the most well-prepared of any other interview group, informing us at the beginning of their knowledge, and telling us that they had already prepared a list of questions for us, as well as a background summary description of their municipality and thorough list of concerns they wanted to address.

In sum, Erica and the others’ concerns—all impassioned, informed, and well-articulated—related to their collective feeling of disenfranchisement, discrimination, and disrespect, largely stemming from the complete lack of diverse representation of people of color—to date, none—in their town’s governing bodies and social services (e.g. law enforcement, fire department, council, public schools), despite the fact that black residents constitute 15-16% of the population.

“In the hospital, City Hall, police force, and elsewhere, there is no representation of black citizens—we are not invited to the table, nor invited to hold positions of power.”

Erica began her presentation by defining the term “environmental racism,” and describing the ways in which she believes the black residents in her community are plagued by it, in both overt and covert ways. According to Erica, environmental racism refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color. Examples of environmental racism include racial discrimination in environmental policy making; the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities; the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in those communities; and the exclusion of people of color from leadership in environmental regulations and planning. Other environmental racism practices include redlining, zoning, and colorblind adaptation planning, which many citizens of color have difficulty preventing, historically, due to their low socioeconomic status, and lack of political representation and mobility.

Erica next addressed specifically how the Three Mile Plains area of their community, populated by people of color, has been targeted for acts of environmental racism, whether intended or unintended (the latter through neglect or a lack of municipal intervention), naming specifically the heavily-loaded sewage construction trucks that regularly drive down their streets, creating noise pollution (a pollution that worsens near the sewage pits). “As these trucks begin at 7am, you don’t even need an alarm clock,” she said, and apparently the noise is so loud that it makes sitting on one’s porch during summer unpleasant if not impossible. Their streets, additionally, have no sidewalks or streetlights, an obvious safety hazard for any pedestrian traffic; this lack of a pedestrian walkway and lights often results in people (cars, buses, and trucks) driving onto people’s lawns, and worse, when the area children are waiting for school bus, they have nowhere to stand except in the literal street or on a neighboring lawn.

Despite “repeated talks with community leaders,” according to Erica, nothing has been done to address any of this road neglect except the occasional patchwork repair. “If this was any other community [than the black community], this wouldn’t be allowed to happen,” she stated.

Regarding recreational spaces, Erica explained that their community has one park, but it also is completely neglected by the city, and never maintained: examples of such neglect include their dilapidated basketball court, and swings without seats. Recently, instead, the local volunteer firefighters visited the park to help with needed upkeep and repairs. "More vocal people are needed," Erica said, in helping this issue reach the necessary officials and convincing them to take action. Explaining that there is "zero" communication between the municipality and Three Mile Plains, Erica stated: "We feel neglected by this municipality and the lack of communication from them." This feeling of neglect and avoidance is compounded by the absence of the municipal representative to Three Mile Plains, who doesn't show up for any community events, said Erica.

This breakdown in communication between the municipality and the black community is manifest in the municipality's failure to even attempt to inform the residents about any developments in their own community, said Erica. Council and community meetings are advertised only on Facebook, leaving no paper trail, and the community website is confusing and not user-friendly. No new information is ever uploaded online, in any case, and for those without the internet, no pamphlets or paper notices are ever sent via the mails, either, to alert them to such important information as new tax fees and water shutoffs. Perhaps most alarming, according to Erica, is that there is no disclosure of information prior to their municipal elections, and multiple bylaws about who can begin a new farm, continue maintaining a farm, the number of animals one is required to have on a farm, and more, were changed without warning or notice: it was only by researching the fine print in the bylaw documents online that one citizen was able to ascertain the information and pass it along so that others could avoid penalty or foreclosure.

Along with allegations of environmental racism and little to no communication from the municipality, Erica continued by saying that although the Nova Scotian black community has been here since the 1760's, Black History month (observed annually in February across the world) is nonexistent in their region. There is no proclamation; no mention in the newsletter; and no celebrations or events. Furthermore, there is no public recognition (no historical plaques or museum exhibits, etc.) in Windsor, the birthplace of hockey, or anywhere else of Willie O'Ree, the first black hockey player integrated into an all-white league, who was born in Fredericton, NB in 1935, nor of George Elliot Clark, a Canadian poet, playwright and literary critic born in Windsor in 1960, who served as the Poet Laureate of Toronto from 2012 to 2015 and as the 2016–2017 Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate. One of Canada's most illustrious poets, Clarke is known for chronicling the experience and history of the black Canadian communities of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, creating a cultural geography he coined "Africadia." Additional indignations against the history of the black Canadian communities in Nova Scotia is the disrespect of the black Canadians who served in the armed forces, all of whom were buried and remain in unmarked graves, and the lack of commemoration, also, of the black Canadians who worked in the shipping industry during the 1700s and 1800s, and were responsible for importing all domestic goods to Nova Scotia.

When asked by the interviewers what these three community leaders felt was in their power to do, at the present moment, to change these circumstances and incidences of historical erasure, they said they are trying to use their voices to address environmental racism, silencing, and racist neglect, and are attempting to pressure council to create a fund to "offset the burdens borne by the black population" (such as the broken ball joints on the cars of most of the black community members, caused by the rough and untended condition of the roads), particularly seeing as though the council members themselves access their roads: "If they're going to drive on our roads, they need to fix them," said Dan. Same goes, the leaders expressed, for the regularly broken water lines, as well as public utilities such as telephone and internet wires.

They also mentioned the West Hants Cultural Association, the Three Plains Hall, and their local church basement as meeting places where they can support each other, and form collective agreements and plans of action to address these unequal standards between the white and black communities, as well as other problems that adversely affect the black community, such as the low literacy rates among the elderly black citizens, who at present need not only literary services but an elected official to contact them, as well as the phenomena of black schoolchildren being pressured to take non-academic classes, and to not excel at the academic classes they do take which would prepare them for college.

Apparently, a focus group in the community that includes the presentation of black students was begun in 2019, an intervention Erica praised, but this is only the beginning of what is needed for community-wide equal representation and parity to be achieved.

Regarding legal recourse, sadly, said Erica, they cannot afford to hire a lawyer to file a lawsuit against the municipality for such crimes as charging the black residents a sewer tax, when none of them even have a sewer meter. Despite this, in addition to the various communication issues mentioned, specifically those that relate to the problem of widespread illiteracy, they do have the support and historical experience of the entire black community, including their parents and colleagues (Erica's father, for one, attended segregated schools) to deal with the consequences of racism.

For example, Erica (an RN and nurse manager at the hospital), asserted that the stress undergone by the black community as a result of this institutionalized neglect contributes to the statistically higher health problems endured by the black community, which include higher risk and incidence of stroke, diabetes, lung and heart disease, and breast and cervical cancers, among others. Prevention and treatment are badly needed, said Erica, to improve their quality of lives and overcome their social isolation (many of these residents are likely to stay home and self-isolate because of these health concerns), as are dietician consulting groups and illness prevention classes, offered currently in the city but not their community—to this end, she suggested implementing mobile health clinics, to visit the elderly in their homes.

Innovations are also needed with regard to transportation for growing population of the elderly and others: the Dollar Ride bus that services Three Mile Plains is a full three-kilometer walk up a hill, impossible for many, and many black residents don't drive, let alone have cars.

They also suggested the implementation of other seasonal recreational activities such as snowshoeing events and other community events, especially when the "pit" (the sewage treatment plant) isn't running (which is rare).

These three community leaders are fed up with what they described as the municipality's sugar-coating of these racist deficits and oversights with feel-good posters about gardening, music, community spirit and togetherness (one such poster was hanging in the room of our interview), other forms of colorblind rhetoric and offerings such as the Farmers' Market and the "Happy Community Committee," and racist tokenization, only for the gain of the municipality. Only "if they're going for a big grant, they'll contact us," said Erica, angered by the fact that her stepfather's farm is featured in area tourism literature, yet her stepfather himself is ignored and never contacted otherwise.

The black residents being spoken of today are largely an older population, Erica said in closing, and therefore represent a different style of community that would respond better to paper mail, door-to-door visits, and phone calls, than to website updates and the Facebook page. Their unique history and values are also different: their local church, for example, is one of the oldest black churches in all of Canada, and there remains a serious friction between the town values inherent to rural life (open spaces, agriculture, fishing) and the urbanization values they acknowledge are needed for economic progress. "This province values gentrification," Dan said, with even the provincial logo indicating gentrification and other "urban development crap," and while they seemed accepting, if begrudgingly, of this fact, they are determined to continue to combat the existing unequal social structures: "The elephant in the living room here is discrimination and racism." Therefore, they all urged the council to not both "promise change and follow up with action," so as to reverse and rewrite the traitorous, racist history of the land, wherein the residents of color—all descended from black loyalists—were "promised land and never got it."

YOUTH/STUDENTS

6. West Hants High School Interview: Diana, Laura, and Tom "It's hard to find a space where all kids can go to be accepted"

The final Consolidation interview took place at West Hants High School on February 4th; our interviewees were three West Hants students, all active in their school's activity clubs, and representing varying grade levels: Diana, Laura, and Tom.

When asked to speak about what the students felt were the most beneficial and noteworthy aspects of living in the area, Tom spoke first about the pride he feels in being part of the Nova Scotia coastal region, wherein so much of the local commerce and industry is structured around the ocean—he himself is an ecological activist, within and outside the school—and is home to both native Mi'kmaq and Acadian heritages. He also appreciates that in Windsor, there is an abundance of local food vendors, representing the agricultural richness of the area, and he cited new and established bike routes, reduced carbon emissions, and green initiatives, as progressive, eco-friendly measures the region has recently undertaken to reduce its toll on the environment.

Regarding public spaces and services that need improvement, Tom mentioned the downtown skate park is an issue: "That is where a lot of young people are exposed to bad behavior," he said, such as smoking, fighting, verbal aggression, and other misbehavior.

Laura and Diana both concurred about the dangers of the skate park, while conceding that it is, along with the Hants Aquatic Centre, one of the only public spaces where teens can gather (though the latter is only open for three months out of the year). Laura, a lifeguard at the Hants Aquatic Centre, said that while the pool attempts to provide a safe space for at-risk youth, its closure for the remaining nine months of the year makes this service difficult. "A lot of the kids, they just need to escape their house," said Laura. "We are an accepting community—we embrace all kids, and their differences." For example, she said, the transgendered youth that come to the pool are called by the name the individual prefers or has chosen—and the pool staff and community doesn't tolerate anyone who would treat that person otherwise.

On the subject of public spaces accessible to youth, Laura spoke of the long distances many West Hants students travel to get to school: the school services a 65km radius, and there is only at present one access route. Therefore, many students who do not have parents to pick them up in the evening and who take the after-school bus are prohibited from participating in after-school sports or other extra-curricular activities. Laura cited one recent French exchange student who wanted to participate in track and field, but was too embarrassed to ask her host parents to make the long drive to and from the high school in the evening, so did not participate.

"The main concentration of activities is in Windsor," said Laura. "And in our community, transportation is an issue."

Our conversation then moved to fresh- and salt-water ecology, particularly centering around Lake Pisiquid, formerly known as the Avon River, a potentially fertile body of water for fishing, but currently devoid of fish due to construction oversights with the connected causeway. In 1970, the construction of a flood-control causeway carrying Highway 101 and the Dominion Atlantic Railway across the Avon River closed Windsor off from shipping and has affected navigation in the Avon River downstream from the causeway due to excessive siltation.

Highway 101 is scheduled to be upgraded to a 4-lane expressway in the future, and there have been discussions about replacing the causeway with railroad and highway bridges to improve water flow. Lake Pisiquid, once home to salt marshes and plentiful tomcod catches, is located on the upstream side of the causeway, and is currently obstructed from freely flowing into the Bay of Fundy, due to an implemented sieve. "The causeway wasn't built properly," said Laura. In addition, the lake is drained yearly and residents are told "it helps with breeding," when really, according to the students, the annual drainage process is done to keep the water an attractive color for tourists, as salt marshes are usually a brownish color. "When people go down to the waterfront, they want to see something beautiful," said Diana, explaining the reason.

"The Bay of Fundy is brown, but blowing up with life," Laura added: all the students agreed that the ecological health and viability of the water is more important than its pleasing color.

Salt marshes are a great absorber of carbon, said Tom, and the current plan to double the highway (from a 2 to 4 lane expressway) would eliminate the marshes. Tom instead proposed opening the causeway, to let the tomcod through, and to restock and clean the water.

"Hopefully more voices are being heard that are beneficial to the group mindset," he said.

Dependent, to a degree, on the municipality of Windsor for their social programming and events, the students then spoke of the interconnection and dependence between West Hants and Windsor, both small communities, yet stronger together. For example, Diana referenced how much she looks forward to "Family Days" at the annual Windsor Winter Carnival, a time when she sees people in both the Windsor and West Hants communities she hasn't seen for a long time, and makes new friendships, in a public space where no one argues or complains—where a good time is had by all. Windsor will also soon be home to a new hockey rink, said Tom. As "hockey is big in the Windsor community," the new rink will be a more modern facility, he said, and better heated than the prohibitively cold older rink, a large reason behind the new rink's construction. In addition to the Winter Carnival and the new hockey rink, Laura cited other events Windsor hosts, such as Avon River Days, during the summer, and the West Hants-Windsor Pumpkin Festival, held annually in October, famous for its "Pumpkin Regatta" (wherein local contestants sail down Lake Pisiquid in giant flotation pumpkins).

These kinds of gatherings, said Diana, are essential in helping young residents feel connected and not alienated by their rural surroundings. "I have black, trans, and gay friends," she said. "These events and places help my mental state and those of others . . . If we had a group or a community that was more accepting [of difference], that would be better for our mental health."

Diana, a mixed-race student who spoke openly about her white grandfather's slow journey from racism to acceptance and embracing of his mixed-race grandchildren, went on to say that Hants County (containing both the West Hants and Windsor municipalities) is sometimes a "small-minded, older generation." "They don't have the open-minded concept," she said, especially regarding the technology and media explosion of her generation. "It's hard, given these differences, to be accepted by adults . . . it's hard to find a space where all kids can go to be accepted. If we had an available space with open-minded adults present, that would be helpful for everyone. Let's be honest: a lot of kids suffer from anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and other issues. Respect and understanding are needed, for and by all."

Laura agreed. "I feel like we need more spaces like the pool and the skate park, that are not just open to teens but monitored or supervised by adults." The skate park is free, and the pool charges a minimal cost for admission, she added (the pool also has a "jump start" program to help low-income families afford a seasonal pass and swimming lessons), but both West Hants and Windsor also need, in her opinion, a low-cost or free facility specifically dedicated youth activities and programming, to, as Tom put it, "engage with youth better in the future."

All three students agreed that it's important to bridge the association between having fun, as youths, and participating in their community: such things, they said, should not be opposed.

"When you work with people from an older generation, you realize it can be hard for them to connect with young people," said Tom. "They build a mindset, and that's hard to change. But if you have a group of students or young people working in the community, that helps that group [and their specific concerns] become recognizable . . . then, when the next generation comes, they will have benefitted from those agents of change."

B. STAFF INTERNAL WORKSHOP

Staff were engaged on the following topics and questions, and a summary of the workshop will be provided in the subsequent report.

Challenges

1. In your experience working with either municipality, what are some of the problems that you have seen with the system of operation or related to the work that you do?
2. As the new municipality comes into office, what are the issues that need to be addressed immediately?
3. What are some existing problems that you would like to see addressed through the engagement process?
4. Who might show resistance?
 - What could be their concerns?
 - How can we best address those concerns?

Solutions

1. Looking at some of these themes and challenges, how can they be resolved or mitigated?
 - Who is involved?
 - Who is affected?
 - Why is it important?

Community Engagement

1. How do you engage the residents today?
 - The methods, places, people, and projects through which you engage the public
2. What are some of the methods/processes you have deployed before that have been successful?
3. What are the gaps in the engagement processes today? – give them 2 minutes to think about that
 - Who are the people that you feel are often excluded?
4. What are some ideas you have to close the gaps?
5. Who are the people who have been helpful in your previous engagements?
6. Whom should the new municipality make sure to include in their engagement?

Future Aspirations

1. Let's step outside of your roles working for the municipalities. We now want to ask you some questions as residents of the new municipality: what are your hopes and dreams?

INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Overview

The morning workshop with several members of the WWH staff gave our team the opportunity to capture some of the existing knowledge and expertise of the people who have been a part of the two municipalities in the two regions for many years. In this workshop, we worked through some internal and external challenges staff has faced through the Consolidation process. We also discussed opportunities ahead.

Findings

Overall view of the consolidation

First and foremost, all workshop attendees showed support for the consolidation process. They discussed some of their frustrations with communication from both sides as the town and the region initially came together; however, they support the main goal of the Consolidation that is using finite resources to provide a better quality of service to residents. They mentioned that the influx of resources to help people would allow the infighting between two previously separate regions to stop and allow the community to work more effectively together.

While they recognized the public perception of infighting between the two municipalities, staff has worked together on collaborative projects for many years, including the water tower project. Staff from both municipalities agreed that there could be more proactive planning to ensure that future projects under the new united municipality are better executed. All staff agreed on the importance of clear and sustained communication with members of the public on all fronts.

“This is going to be a learning year. I hope that we can communicate to the public the fact that we are learning together as a big part of this. We want people to be patient.”

CHALLENGES

The following themes emerged from the first part of the workshop:

- **Town/Regional Divide:** see community leaders as ambassadors
- **Work / Life balance:** option to work from home, clarity regarding overtime, hours, resources, and personnel
- **External culture:** reconsider policies and autonomy
- **Internal culture:** regular meetings, provide more autonomy
- **Staff needs:** communication from management, accountability measures, better HR practices
- **Utilities/services:** proactive, long-term planning instead of reactive
- **Transportation:** invest in alternative public transportation, consider Uber

SOLUTIONS

- Working Together: staff has been working on regional plans for several years. Now with the consolidation, departments are growing and adopting new facilities and responsibilities. They asserted that they have to approach these changes holistically to ensure collaboration.
- Providing more information: the community has concerns about debt, and related worries about finances. Given such public misconceptions about the consolidation process, clearer language is needed. Financial security is an important issue to the region's many seniors. Many residents still lack information about the consolidation process, and those that are informed want to know "what's in it for them." Some are also wondering how their taxes will work now.
- Taking Pride in the region: staff has heard positives comments about the process too. There is pride in the rural communities, and people value this region. In Windsor, there is a lack of pride in their own town amongst the younger people, but there are so many people moving into town who are bringing the growth the region is hoping for.

Dominating Topic: Internal and External Communication

In the face of significant stress amongst the staff, managing an uncertain future, they note that communication has not been adequate. Many staff and residents opened their hearts over the previous 4-6 months to the HR consultant who was hired, then she suddenly left. The lack of communication has caused anxiety.

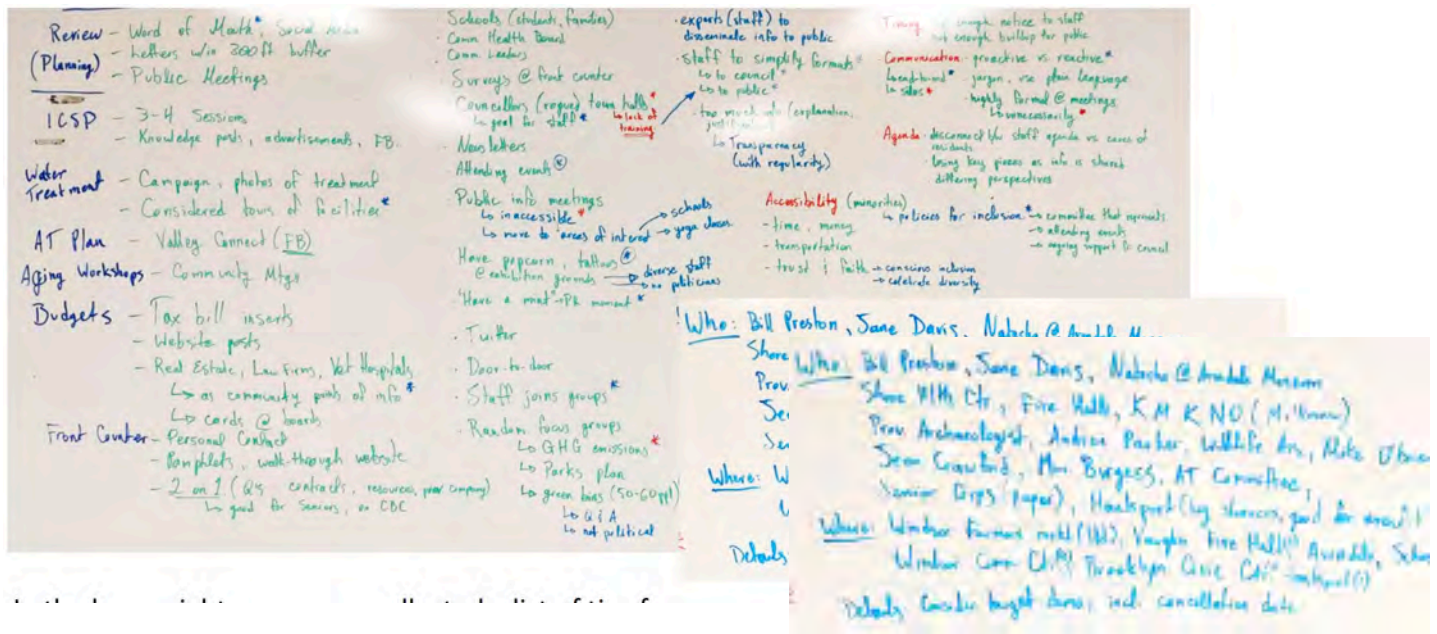
To mitigate this, they were provided key areas for improvement. Chrystal Remme, as the community relations specialist, will be the staff lead on communications moving forward.

1. **Organization design:** designing an internal system that is more reflective of the needs and goals of the organization. Policies and processes should enable and encourage productivity, and refrain from lowering all involved to the lowest common denominator.
2. **Access to information:** all staff, from front desk to the CAO's office, should have access to up-to-date information and material to ensure consistent communication internally and externally
3. **Training and orientation for councillors:** the current orientation materials are not sufficient. Collaboration between staff and the CAO is needed to put together an updated, relevant, and accessible manual for all new councillors.
4. **Collaboration:** elected officials and staff from various departments should maintain consistent communication– both amongst each other and to the public.
5. **Engagement:** The larger community must be engaged in all important decisions on an ongoing basis. Also, various methods of engagement must be deployed to be able to reach a wide variety of community members.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff are genuinely interested in engaging the public in a more meaningful way as they believe in the value such engagement can add to their decision-making process. For that to happen, they said: 'don't make the engagement process political.' There is currently a lack of trust between the public and the politicians. In the past, there have been cases of politicians making promises without coordinating with staff on the feasibility and availability of resources. Staff believes that the discussions will result in more constructive conversation with the public if politics are not brought into it.

The below figure demonstrates the results of a thorough discussion around current engagement strategies. In green, the general strategies and knowledge; in red, problem areas or things to improve; in blue, successful strategies or key priorities moving forward.



In the lower right corner, we collected a list of tips for our own engagement workshops, including key leaders to involve, where to hold them and details to mention to the public.

Some key ideas for improved engagement with the community are:

- Visuals both at events and when spreading the word
- Sharing information on Facebook and the website
- Rather than just hosting townhalls, engaging the public in times and places that is convenient for them, such as farmers market, hockey games, etc.
- Asking what activities the public would like to engage in
- One on one, personal service and relationship-building
 - Go to the spaces the community already gathers (schools, community health board, community events)
 - Surveys at the front desk counter
 - Rejoin community groups as both staff and community members

Some ongoing priorities and areas for improvement were:

- **Timing** of engagements
- **Communication** with target demographics
- **Accessibility** of information and spaces (i.e. – no jargon, wheelchair ramps)
- **Transparency** between those answering questions and those asking
- **Inclusion** to build trust and faith in the administration – both elected officials and staff

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

To conclude, we asked what could be promoted about this region, what did staff as residents valued and took pride in. The list was no small account of an incredible place with an amazing story:

- arts and culture;
- rich history;
- natural beauty;
- open, kind, and friendly people;
- a shift to attracting new families;
- and a place to grow up in or return to;
- birthplace of hockey;
- largest pumpkins;
- fun quirky facts and festivals;
- the waterfront in Windsor;
- the tides on Bay of Fundy.

Staff was also optimistic that a united region will be able to thrive, each community with their own sense of place but as a singular unit.

C. ELECTED OFFICIALS INTERVIEWS & CAO

We conducted one-on-one interviews with the following elected officials and the CAO:

- Warden Zebian
- Mayor Anna Allen
- Mr. Mark Phillips

The questions asked during the interviews were as follows, and the interview summaries will be provided in the subsequent report.

Interview Questionnaire:

What is your role and what are some of your daily activities?

1. How does your role relate to –or is affected by– the consolidation process?
2. What are your wishes for the engagement process?
 - For the staff and residents.
 - What message would you like conveyed throughout the communities?
3. What are some of the current problems that you would like addressed through the engagement process?
4. What is your vision for after the engagement (future-state: vs. current-state)?
 - What would be a successful outcome for this project?
5. Who are the key people we can collaborate with us for us to have a successful outcome?
 - What are their roles, their level of engagement and potential concerns?
6. Who might show resistance?
 - What could be their concerns?
 - How can we best address those concerns?
7. How can we best engage all the staff towards a successful public consultation?
8. What are some potential challenges we might face in the process?
 - With staff or residents.
 - What are the best ways to circumvent these challenges?

WARDEN ZEBIAN - "SOMETIMES, YOU NEED THE OLD MENTALITY FOR CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY."

The Warden listed his day-to-day duties as both the warden and councillor for District 9. He is responsible for answering questions, sharing information, dealing with conflict, and giving the final signature on everything.

He said his job is to know his staff intimately, and to build a stronger appreciation between them. Historically, he said, the crucial role of the warden has been to give staff a space to express their concerns and feel heard, and he acknowledged that this role now involves a greater awareness of how the staff has been thrown into a vortex of uncertainty. The transition committee has been fortunate to have benefited from the professionalism and confidence of the staff, despite initial concerns raised. Over time, however, he continued, there has been attitudinal changes and significant buy-in from them.

Speaking about the consolidation, the warden cited hopes for the elimination of differences, easier planning methods, and more cohesive decision-making. He thinks that right now there is lower resident buy-in than what is needed but believes that this could be changed by bringing to light the pre-existing collaboration between Windsor and West Hants. The political side of the administration has failed with engagement and relations to community groups, he added, but the leadership knows this needs to change. For example, many of the local communities, including African Nova Scotians, Lebanese, Chinese, and others do exist with their own sets of needs and desires. However, they were not being engaged as part of the consolidation process. The warden would like the stance of the municipality to change from being purely reactive to being proactive. The new municipality must take a more active role in engaging everyone. Some ways he suggested making this shift include supporting immigration, intentional inclusion of identified communities, and public education.

Referring back to the staff, he said he realizes that the council can be in-cohesive when trying to communicate. They tend to flip-flop, overwhelm staff, and make them feel underappreciated. There should be a meeting, or several, between staff and councillors to share the scope of their work and to clarify everything that goes into meeting requests from council. This would be a good first step toward better training for councillors as well.

Focused training on policies, communications, relationships, and more, with a clearer structure could be a tremendous help. While there is the potential for issues to arise when dealing with inexperienced of the new councillors, having conversations facilitated by the CAO, the community development officer, and/or the communications office would be helpful. He mentioned the new Community Relations Officer the "glue that makes things work," performing a well-respected and very appreciated role.

Taking things further, the Warden sees a fresh start, and re-prioritizing values going forward could lead to a beautiful, inclusive, happy community. The only way to grow, he said, is to be more welcoming, and to market this region as inclusive. When asked how this representation should happen, whether intentional or naturally driven, he believes in a more organic growth. When it comes to municipal hiring practices, the most qualified person should be hired. There should also be more intention in hiring practices, to attract employees who might need greater assistance in becoming comfortable in the role.

Warden Zebian also said they need to better care for the region's aging population, to increase accessibility for those with no way to downsize their homes. It's under appreciation for seniors to be selling their properties to downsize but then be left without options to stay within the community due to lack of housing.

This will make them feel ostracized after contributing to their community for so long. To honour these older residents and make them feel more valued, the warden proposed looking at alternative transportation systems that would move people through town; an extended trail network for cyclists and hikers; increased pedestrian infrastructure, and more open, safe main streets in each community.

However, changes like these can't be done alone.

Regarding engaging with new and established stakeholders, the warden proposed local youth as a good source of information. Council can easily dismiss the youth as they often don't get involved in politics. And council and staff have the tendency of consulting with the same list every time they need to engage and leaving other groups such as youth out. But the warden called this pattern more a consequence of "divisiveness" -- not only between the Windsor and West Hants populations, but even among specific families. The warden said firmly that when only a handful of certain names or groups are regularly allowed input into process, everyone suffers. He identified as an area that this needs to change.

Counting the success, he mentioned engaging all the residents in Hantsport is simple, because the whole community is cognisant of one another. Similarly, in Brooklyn and the shore, people come together when they need to; decisions are based on everyone's needs and these are thus supportive communities. "Sometimes," he said, "you need the old farmer mentality for close-knit community."

As the consolidation moves ahead, the warden believes the rural staff will happily follow, though the town staff may be more resistant. The agricultural society needs to be brought in – a statement later echoed by the mayor and the CAO. The farmers, business district and council meetings with the community are all common in the county area, but the town needs to become more inclusive. High schools also need to be engaged on every level, not only to foster stewardship, but to ask them what they want to see change in this community. Seniors, as well, should be more inclusively brought on board. No one is going out to Manning, Elms, Dykeland, to date, but they should be asked for their "wisdom and experience and opinion," he said.

The Warden is hopeful the current engagement process will reinforce the needs that are being communicated by the residents, such as improved communications, inclusion policies and practices, and broader internet coverage. Especially important, he said, is the creation of a youth council to "get them involved and identified as key players." Finally, this current process needs to include pointed recommendations for council, confirming the need for strategic improvements like internet communication, but also outlining the importance of listening to community callouts, to improve accountability and begin to strengthen a strong and continuous public engagement and consultation. Citing the previous reticence from council, the warden added matter-of-factly: "It's more work, but it's your role."

Overall, communication is the key in moving forward and improving the quality of life for all. Constant communication with the entire community should include engaging with residents every month, thus opening conversations, and making these intended aspirations a reality.

While council meetings are currently livestreamed, which increases visibility, going out into the communities to visit residents individually and in groups is still a necessity. Participatory budgeting would also be a great development, he said, urging the consideration of discretionary portions for the councillors to use for groups they are representing and to get people involved. This process would also help improve the council's current engagement with local businesses, currently only maintained by individual connections. For example, Avon Chamber of Commerce needs to be engaged further, the Rotary club is localized to the town core, and the shore area has only isolated businesses, he said: thus, there is also a need for a business committee, and a rejuvenation of the chamber of commerce.

The interview concluded with some questions:

- How exactly are these leaders to build relationships with council and staff?
- How can council maintain a more open attitude?
- How can accountability be improved, maintained, and made transparent?

A successful resolution to these questions is crucial to achieve the inclusive, diverse, happy community the warden envisions.

MAYOR ANNA ALLEN – “THIS IS A REGION DRIPPING WITH HISTORY.”

Opening with a question for the interviewers, “did you know we have the first public library in Canada?”, Mayor Allen shows her great pride for her region. The Mayor has 22 years of experience in office and is not running again, though she hopes her two main priorities are carried on by her successor: affordable housing, and women in local government.

She acknowledges an issue in this region: that of division over race. Going into some depth on the incident that occurred during Halloween in October 2019, she described the subsequent community meetings, town halls, staff training and RCMP trainings conducted to try to not only raise awareness of the issue, but to include as many voices as possible along the road to reparations. Even months past the initial incident, there is an ongoing effort to offer inclusion and diversity training to all staff and councillors, including the health board, now as well.

Her principal views on the consolidation, are that the time is now. She and other officials have been “planting seeds for a long time,” she said, gradually including meetings between both the Town of Windsor and the Municipality of West Hants, and intentionally pushing projects that foster collaboration. She stressed that the motives for council members in attendance should be honest, with genuine concern for and understanding of those they represent. Some ongoing issues she hopes to see improved are the low-income status of many residents, and the housing deficit. There is an issue with seniors being either stranded in rural areas, or unable to maintain larger estates that they don’t need, with people of all ages looking to rent instead of own and having no options. The isolation and expenses tied to these issues also translate into problems with food security and domestic violence. The consolidation also opens a space to demand better regulations for landlords, and fixing house maintenance delinquency—a key priority, given that the minister for housing lives in Windsor.

Another desired change stated by Mayor Allen, given the shared resources of a consolidated region is affordable transportation. Hantsport is currently the end of the line for any public transportation, excluding a tremendous amount of the rural population. If people have solid transport and housing, she says, everything else would come along.

Transitioning into a discussion around public engagement, the Mayor had many suggestions. The consultation team can reach out to differently-abled persons through Windsor People First, a home off Chester Road that hires differently-abled persons, encourages voting, and works toward a redistribution of goods and services to meet community needs and foster growth and understanding. To further involve those who may be misunderstood, she says that teachers in elementary and high schools would be able to connect to the LGBTQ+ community and the youth.

The right approach to engagement should have no resistance. It would be easy, in a place so rich with culture, to celebrate it, create space for it, and expose the larger community to better see all of its members. Not only should there be better education about diversity, she said, there should also be subtle structural changes for inclusion practices and policies as well. The private school is currently very diverse, and high schools tend to have many exchange students, so despite kids not always being very kind, they are no stranger to diversity. Taking the time to foster inclusion and understanding in the school system would easily translate into outward ripples of increased community engagement.

This consolidation should also allow for more proactive planning, as opposed to reactive – a sentiment echoed almost unanimously so far. consolidation leads to shared resources, and hopefully more efficient use of their use, as well as the ability to optimize the work of those in governance, to be prepared when issues arise, and to create more openness and resilience as an administration, region and community. As long as there is an intention to raise the standard, it is possible to improve services. The council and staff could work through fire, health, and police, teaching them how to be inclusive and considerate, and implement standardized training and sensitivity guidelines.

How to actualize this plan once the new councillors are elected, the current Mayor states, would entail the CAO taking the lead, and working with the new Mayor to be a champion of the recommendations that come from this consultation process. There is a need for clear council orientation to create unity and encourage sensitivity, and to make that the standard. To simplify this for both the council and the public, according to Mayor Allen, this must be done as the new council comes in, to take advantage of the opportunity for a paradigm shift while minds are still open: “It’s important to get it right from the outset,” she said.

New council takes office on April 1st, and elections are on March 7th. Thus, Mayor Allen encouraged speaking with the new Mayor and the CAO together right after elections have taken place. As they begin orientation, the CAO will lay out the order of business and understanding of processes: the perfect time to clearly articulate expectations and establish what is important moving forward. Getting the new members out of the council chambers environment might also assist with creating a positive team feeling, making proceedings more friendly than formal, she stated. The CAO, while setting the tone, could also rely on experts, bringing in other municipal associations to assist with initiation.

“It would be nice,” Mayor Allen said, “to have a new way of doing things.”

To begin, develop a plan that will first meet community needs – don’t throw out the past, but do prioritize what must be done. Communicate with simple, succinct, clear messages; the council will have a lot to absorb, so making it digestible is key. This is also crucial for communicating with the public. There is a need to create unity between the two regions without compromising their identity, as concern has surfaced from the rural side about losing everything they’ve built.

When engaging with the public, go to their spaces, bring food, and make community meetings and engagements accessible. Also, take the time to communicate more with townspeople as they are less engaged than rural residents. Reach out to the downtown business society, she said, consider Brooklyn as a central location, and remember that Hantsport is very participatory.

Reiterating something from her official council farewell, Allen concluded by saying: “Don’t let fear stop you from moving forward.” Remember the hurdles overcome, she stressed, and don’t let the future hurdles hold you back. It’s important to acknowledge issues, but also to acknowledge successes. That is what will move everyone forward.

CAO MARK PHILLIPS – “LET’S CELEBRATE RICHNESS, CELEBRATE DIVERSITY.”

When asked to describe his role, CAO Mark Phillips describes himself as a facilitator, supporter, and lead. His job, he says, is to make sure staff expertise is matched with resources, departments, and community, connecting with needs. Some of those needs he identifies are economic development – creating an open space for businesses to thrive and the creation of spaces for people to feel connected and proud within their community. He grew up in the region and hopes to put his familiarity with the place and people to good use and be the leader through this change.

His hopes for this consolidation process are to work through several compartmentalized levels of change. “Why would you do this job?” he asks. There can be negativity in the culture here, and ongoing rivalry and community segregation. The historic division has been observed between rural and urban areas of the region, but people are expressing that they are tired of it, says Phillips. They are ready for a change and fresh start as the CAO, he hopes to recognize and understand the division but bring more of a holistic cultural connectivity into the community.

Part of the mandate for the consolidation that he is bringing forward is: communication, connectivity, and consistency. In a formal and informal context, he hopes to establish connections with leaders, manage community expectations and be consistent with meeting with them. Some communities of particular diverse characteristics are Three Mile Plains, Falmouth and our coastal shoreline areas from Summerville to Walton. Creating positions like that of a community relations coordinator is a part of being present and ensuring we stay connected. An example of further support from the Municipality is through the support of events and music festivals, which are growing but are still somewhat isolated within the communities that host them. A simple way to build community would be to support and connect people to these various events.

Speaking further about the two sides of the region, Windsor and Hantsport, as urban areas, have traditionally received higher service delivery and supports as compared to the more rural areas and this is reflected in different tax rates and area rates. The staff and Council role in this, says Phillips, is to support the various communities within the region and to explore uniform municipal service delivery where it is desired and where it is not. The region also has other government jurisdictions responsible for services and they also have a responsibility to help people understand who’s responsible for what.

On that note, the Municipality gets to diversify the staff, which according to Phillips is a priority. A good example of diversity in the workplace is the Apple Store environment where there is a visibly diverse service team. He speaks about the importance of self-identification, affirmative action, which is important not only in hiring but in creating spaces. It is hoped that over time we can create a similarly diverse workforce that is as easily identifiable and celebrated for its diversity.

The sports complex that was just built is primarily seen as a place for hockey and soccer, but there are ways to diversify its use beyond just traditional sports. People should feel welcome in our spaces, he says, through design, people, and policy, considering many different ways to proactively open the doors to other groups of people that may not be at the facility for athletic purposes. It is our goal to address the challenges of a residents who enters the facility and cannot self-identify within the space. There should be not only athletic components but historic, social, technological and spatial components that offer something to everyone. When people do not self-identify or lack the confidence to use the facility they may not come back.

In five years, they hope to significantly improve community connectivity. The new municipality aspires to move past the historic division by improving community signage, working on beautification initiatives that encompass the entire region, more awareness of our world-class assets like Martock, 100kms of shoreline, lakes, community history, improved service delivery efficiencies and a government that serves the entire community beyond the district that they serve. The goal is for sincere, positive impressions of both government and culture within the region. People say now, "good luck getting people to work together," but Phillips refutes that notion, saying: "There is so much to celebrate and people are ready to do this."

At the present, some ongoing issues are transportation, housing, and healthcare. An issue is how to address the remoteness of some residents and their connectivity to services like healthcare and recreation, as housing and transportation are clearly connected. Some residents are economically limited; living in older houses in rural areas and to move to denser areas to alleviate the transportation challenges is not feasible and perhaps not desirable. Additionally, the availability of diverse housing for all populations, but particularly affordable housing, is a challenge in our urban areas. We need to work on this.

A generic "lack of confidence and trust" with government at all levels, and the services they deliver, exists within the region. He hopes all residents, including people from segregated and historically disenfranchised communities will have an open mind and give the staff and new council a chance to respond to the changes underfoot. that is be demanded. Lack of trust is the real problem. The staff need to be in the communities, not just their offices when possible. People can sense insincerity and disconnectivity, Phillips affirms, and he wants to impress upon elected officials and staff the need to be present, connected, to listen and to respond.

He recognizes the traditional differences within geographic areas of the region and the historic identities that exist here. Often generations of families reside within the areas they live, highlighting a rich history worth celebrating as well as an increased sensitivity to the historic divisions or rivalries between communities. This wealth of history and intergenerational awareness can be marshalled for the good, aiding in ongoing efforts to improve life for future generations.

NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, will conduct several community workshops to create a more open space and to foster more in-depth discussions with the general public. These workshops will be dual in purpose. We aim to 1) ensure the residents are aware of the consolidation and has access to further information about it; and 2) allow the public to provide guidance to the future administration for the engagement strategy. There will likely be five or six workshops, to be considerate of those groups who may have different needs. As a preliminary outline for these workshops we have selected:

1. First Nation Workshop: Glooscap Community Centre
2. African Nova Scotian Workshop: Three Mile Plains
3. Rural & Town Community Workshop: Hantsport
4. Urban Community Workshop: Windsor
5. Greater Rural Workshop: Brooklyn or Ellershouse
6. Shore and Rural Workshop: Avondale

The specific dates and times will be arranged based on convenience for those groups and availability of community spaces. We will be bringing in additional team or staff members to meet the facilitation needs for each. There will also be a media engagement and social outreach strategy for each workshop to make sure the targeted populations are aware of them in advance and ensure maximum attendance, considering intergenerational needs and different modes of communication. We are aiming for 30-50 people from the community in attendance for each session.

Finally, we will issue a final report and recommendations to council. This will be completed and communicated to the new council in May or June 2020.

PHASE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Some initial recommendations based on our findings thus far set the expectations for what the council will be receiving from us post-engagement.

Based on our findings so far, there are several initial recommendations for council to incorporate as considerations moving forward through this process. Several specific ideas came up repeatedly from diverse sources, while other recommendations are consistent themes throughout the consultation and engagement to date.

Some crucial infrastructural changes or improvements for a successful region that have been raised are:

1. **Improved public transit** to connect residents to communities and regional services
2. **Strengthened advocacy for physical and mental health services** that encompasses the needs of an aging rural population and other marginalized community members
3. **Targeted education and awareness programs** to draw attention to the region's rich social and cultural history, particularly to address issues of systemic racism
4. **Greater diversity representation and inclusion** in all areas of administration, governance, and decision-making processes
5. **Improvements to community infrastructure such as trails and roads**, including a safer and more expansive trail system, and extended waterfront connections
6. **Affordable housing** for all generations living in the region, including seniors looking to downsize, expanding young families, and young professionals
7. **Creating belonging through community led projects** such as youth centres and rec centres that support the needs and desires of a dynamic, changing population
8. **Ongoing and consistent engagement and relationship building** between politicians, staff, and the public

There are also some guiding themes to revisit throughout every step of the development and restructuring in this consolidation. If properly accounted for and worked towards, each of these values would greatly increase the level of service provided by staff and elected officials alike. The key values for community-building and strengthening are:

- **Communication;**
- **Engagement;**
- **Transparency;**
- **Accessibility;**
- **Collaboration; and**
- **Continuity.**

Many of these values are already clearly prominent in previous communications about the consolidation that have emerged from the council, transition committee, and staff's efforts. Our team will provide a full communication and engagement strategy as well as the sum of our findings to said parties upon completion of our community consultation.

PHASE 2

GENERATING SOLUTIONS

PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

After completion of the interim report on March 16, 2020, we started preparation for in-person consultation sessions as was anticipated in the interim report. However, due to COVID-19 lockdowns, the engagements were suspended until late in the summer. Then in September, in coordination with and assisted by the municipality, we planned a second round of in-person engagement sessions. However, the planned in-person sessions in late November and early December 2020 again had to be canceled due to the second COVID-19 lockdowns in Nova Scotia.

As a result of these delays and the uncertain nature of holding engagements during a pandemic, we decided to move consultation online. The website whrmttogether.com was created. The website provided information related to the previous round of engagements, a downloadable link to the interim report and presentation, and information about the future engagement.

We recognize and acknowledge that the decision of taking the engagement online resulted in limited outreach to many community members, particularly those without access to internet in rural Nova Scotia. To help mitigate this situation, we designed a comprehensive survey around the main objectives of the engagement. The survey was sent out to just under 12,000 households throughout the municipality, to be filled out and sent back by mail, by calling a municipal staff member, or online. We received 135 responses to the survey: a summary and the full responses are provided in this report.

Subsequently, we hosted four Zoom consultation sessions that were advertised through mail notices, Facebook groups, word of mouth, and by contacting community leaders. We also attempted to host two in-person engagement sessions in January 2021; however, the sessions had to be moved online as well, as public health guidelines prohibited businesses and organizations to host in-person meetings during that time.

While these limitations were unavoidable, we feel that the responses provided to the survey and through the online engagement sessions provide a small but truthful representation of the opinions and aspirations of the communities we intended to reach. As we mentioned in all our online sessions, we hope that this project is only a jumpstart to many further and more in-depth conversations with the communities across the region, initiated by the West Hants Regional Municipality. Throughout this engagement, we have heard public officials as well as the municipal staff communicate their ongoing desire to engage the community more deeply and to build trust across all communities. Thus, despite the shortcomings of this engagement due to COVID-19 restrictions, we hope this report serves as a future framework for engagement with all regional residents, with the goal of creating comprehensive plans and tangible solutions to challenges ahead.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

What do you love about your community?

- Rural lifestyle: quiet, natural setting, small, sense of privacy, country living, feeling of safety
- The people and friendly neighbours, and the strong community spirit
- Natural beauty, the tidal river system, the mud, waterfronts and trails
- History and diversity of cultures
- Future potential

What are some of the difficulties you face living here?

- Lack of public transportation, difficulty of getting around
- Lack of access to services, food deserts, car-dependency
- Pedestrian safety in the communities (lack of sidewalks and safe trail system)
- Lack of reliable internet access and poor cell service
- Lack of amenities and community gathering spaces
- Lack of programming for youth and seniors
- High taxes
- Buildings in state of disrepair
- Poor public engagement
- Racism
- Affordable housing

When thinking about the future, what inspires you?

- Potential for community growth,
- Small business growth
- Recreational opportunities
- New people, new ideas, new initiatives
- Becoming a healthy and active community
- Youth moving to the region, growing up and making the community theirs
- New recreation, sports and community centres
- Possibility of more youth and senior services
- Possibility for green and sustainable initiatives

Survey open: December 7, 2020 and January 24, 2021

Total number of respondents: 138
Demographics

Community: number of survey respondents by community

Three Miles Plains: 8 people

Windsor: 29 people

Garlands Crossing: 8 people

Falmouth: 24

Hantsport: 13

Brooklyn: 7

Ardoise: 3

Avondale: 9

Bramber: 1

Burlington: 3

Cheverie: 3

Curry's Corner: 4

Ellershouse: 1

Greenhill: 1

Lakeland: 1

Mantua: 2

Martock: 1

Mount Denson: 1

Newport: 3

Summerville: 3

Scotch Village: 2

Poplar Grove: 1

St. Croix: 1

Vaughan: 1

Wentworth: 2

Gender:

Female: 90

Male: 40

Non-Binary: 1

Other: 4

Age:

20-30: 8

30-40: 23

40-50: 26

50-60: 32

60-70: 22

70-80: 14

80-90: 4

How can the new municipality better serve you and your community?

- Better outreach and engagement
- Job creation and wage equality
- Better transportation services
- Investing in sidewalks and trails
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- More housing opportunities for young families and seniors
- Transparent governance
- Balancing urban and rural investments
- Working together as a regional municipality instead of working to advance one community agenda over another

Community-Led Projects: As part of this consultation process, we would like to identify community-led projects in every community to recommend to Council for consideration. If you could implement any project in your community, what would you do? Who would you involve in these projects? How would these projects help your community thrive?

- Active transportation corridor, connecting multiple communities safely, such as rails to trails
- Transportation services such as ridesharing, shuttle service, public transportation
- Outdoor/indoor rinks and community sports facilities and infrastructure
- Storytelling projects and initiatives to highlight rich history of the region, including Black Nova Scotian, Acadian, and Glooscap communities and cultures
- Initiatives to address racism such as recognizing and celebrating Black History Month
- Investment in beautification of public open spaces and parks
- Empowering communities to undertake smaller-scale projects by themselves
- Better community programming and involving the community's youth

As part of this engagement, we are developing a toolkit for municipal staff on how to engage your community in the future. How has the previous municipality engaged you and your community in the past?

- When answering this question, a vast majority of respondents said that they either have never been consulted, or engagements have been insufficient, or that they feel their input did not result in any meaningful change
- Others indicated councilor's pop-ups in the community, visits by staff and politicians, Mayor's newsletter, townhall meetings, and Facebook posts as ways they have been previously engaged

How would you like the new municipality to engage you and your community in the future?

- Open, direct, transparent and honest communication
- Events and activities (some already existent in various communities)
- Regular newsletters and social media posts
- More surveys and requests for input
- A coordinated quarterly communication campaign with information on important updates, communicated through social media, print media, radio and townhalls in the various communities
- Amplifying and considering voices from marginalized communities and vulnerable populations
- Door to door, business to business, pop-ups
- Using the momentum of the new municipality, and continuing to engage positively and take input seriously

One of the best ways to engage a community is to go where people are. In a non-COVID year, what are some of the weekly, monthly, and annual events in your community? (For example, this could include a weekly community bingo or annual music festival)

- Church service, sporting events, bingo games, museums and libraries, Lion's Club gatherings, schools and school-related activities, senior events, Farmers' Markets
- Hantsport Homecoming Music Festival
- Christmas parade
- The Windsor exhibition
- Avon River Days
- Pumpkin Regatta
- Monday Jam nights at Avondale Hall
- Friday night BBQs at the museum
- Full Circle Festival
- North Along the Shore Jamboree
- Monthly arts and culture events throughout the summer at the museum
- Garlic Festival

As part of Phase 1 of this engagement, we have met with several community leaders from around the municipality as well as the municipal staff. During our conversations, the following priorities for the new municipality and Council have been identified.

- 1. Improved public transit to connect residents to communities and regional services**
- 2. Strengthened advocacy for physical and mental health services that encompasses the needs of an aging rural population and other marginalized community members**
- 3. Targeted education and awareness programs to draw attention to the region's rich social and cultural history, particularly to address issues of systemic racism**
- 4. Greater diversity representation and inclusion in all areas of administration, governance, and decision-making processes**
- 5. Improvements to community infrastructure such as trails and roads, including a safer and more expansive trail system, and extended waterfront connections**
- 6. Affordable housing for all generations living in the region, including seniors looking to downsize, expanding young families, and young professionals**
- 7. Creating belonging through community-led projects such as youth centres and rec centres that support the needs and desires of a dynamic, changing population**
- 8. Ongoing and consistent engagement and relationship building between politicians, staff, and the general public**

Do you feel these priorities accurately represent the aspirations of this diverse and growing region?

Over 90% of the respondents agreed with the priorities listed above. Some expressed their agreement with the goals, but were doubtful of possibility for the new council to address these challenges

What other priorities would you add to this list for the region?

- Celebrating cultures
- Climate change
- More mental health services
- Addressing LGBTQ+ challenges
- Building a new rink
- Equitable taxation
- Internet and connectivity in rural areas
- Affordable housing and energy sources
- Public transit solutions such as commuter train
- Creating more small business opportunities
- Improving quality of natural beauty and resources such as adding a fish passage on the Avon River
- Rural economic development projects
- More fun activities for all ages and communities such as more places for swimming outdoor and indoor, outdoor rinks, more informal gathering spaces within each community, dog-friendly areas and dog parks
- More opportunities to learn from various cultures in the region
- By-laws to improve communities' well-being such as road calming and noise by-laws

Final Comments: Is there anything further that you would like to add?

- Many of the respondents thanked us for the survey and expressed their desire to see the outcomes of the report, as well as actionable items from the report
- Many of the respondents expressed their commitment to bettering the region and their hope that their input will make a positive difference
- Some expressed that while they are encouraged by the effort, they found the online engagement difficult and would prefer more in-person consultations
- Some expressed doubt over whether this survey would make any difference in their lives and whether anyone would take any of the recommended actions

SUMMARY OF ONLINE ENGAGEMENTS

SESSION ONE: GREATER RURAL WORKSHOP

Session one was attended by seven residents, not including moderator Kouros Rad and Community Relations Coordinator, Chrystal Remme, and centered around the topics of senior services, transportation, mental health services and accessibility, communication strategies, current and future event planning, racial disparities in the community, affordable housing, and community-led projects.

The session began with a question by Bill regarding whether Council is fully behind these initiatives being proposed, particularly with regard to seniors; Chrystal assured him that yes, Council is on board and being kept apprised of how to better engage all residents, in as inclusive a way as possible, given the limitations imposed by COVID-19, such as the survey that was recently sent to 18,000 residents.

The conversation then pivoted to the topic of transportation: Bill said that Hantsport residents, located in the “end part of the municipality,” travel back and forth to Windsor, and not King’s County, and that the only bus goes west from the border of Hantsport, affecting those residents and those in smaller communities as well who need access to other areas.

One of the participants agreed. “So many things are so out of the way,” for Hantsport residents, she said, and the road signage is worn and faded. Additionally, there is no signage indicating the way to recreation sites, which would be helpful for visitors and residents.

Date: December 10, 2020 - 6pm
Main topic of discussion: rural challenges in a new municipality

- More comprehensive bus routes and updated road signage needed
- Retain youth in the workforce with viable employment opportunities
- Recognize the value of rural communities and their youth
- Mail communication is ideal in lieu of in person, and municipal funding for community access points in rural communities for public access to internet connection is needed
- Native, Acadian, and Black Nova Scotian heritage markers are needed
- Regulation of landlord/tenant relations and foreclosure/eviction protection needed
- Given the rising price of homes (accessibility/affordability), address restrictive bylaws for non-traditional housing such as tiny houses and for those who want to farm
- Paid museum staff, use museum for townhall meetings, and “find creative ways to share or solicit information” with community members such as interactive museum exhibits

Shifting to the topic of challenges, Caroline discussed the problem of retaining younger residents in the community with viable employment opportunities, suggesting the creation of community groups with access to municipal funding. As one of the curators of the Avondale Museum, she used the museum as an example of how to keep “consistent, funded” staff regionally employed.

On the subject of challenges, Bill also pointed out how COVID-19 has “put a damper” on progress, and, as a result, “it’s hard to take a break from the news.”

Yet regarding how the municipality can better cater to resident needs, Bill mentioned that direct communication can “bring everyone together to try to accomplish something,” and Caroline emphasized that “recognizing the value of rural areas” is a main component in moving forward, specifically “getting resources and people and focus off the beaten track into rural areas,” as “histories to be tapped into,” specifically the multicultural histories in small rural areas, fueled by community-led projects that would benefit the community.

The youth, added Bill, need to be “brought in for their insights.” “They’re looking at things differently . . . it’s something that we need.”

Bill believes the best way to communicate with residents is by mail, because the internet isn’t available to all residents. Caroline agreed, saying that in lieu of in-person contact, mail is the most effective, but she missed the mail notice, and was only able to join because she saw the Facebook post. Caroline also stressed the importance of municipal funding for community access points in rural communities for public access to internet connection as a back-up. Bill suggested pamphlets for residents as well, but Crystal said that wasn’t recommended because of COVID-19 and the sanitary protocols.

With regards to events residents were hoping to see continue or develop after COVID-19, Bill mentioned church, and Caroline, Avondale Museum events. One of the residents suggested that these events be shared through an email list instead of Facebook.

Regarding cultural education and meetups, Bill said it’s not a challenge, but it depends on “where you live.” Caroline, who moved to Hants County from HRM, conversely, said it’s definitely an issue. Wonderful resources, she said, include the Avondale Museum, which has historical displays and ways of sharing native and black history, yet she wishes there were other local institutions that they could collaborate with rather than just having to create their own resources.

There are signs around Hants County about Acadian history and the New England Planters, she said, but they’re “not coordinated,” and the only sign about black history is a sign commemorating Mathieu da Costa, a multilingual translator and explorer of African-Portuguese ancestry and part of the Atlantic Creole generation, and the first free black man to arrive on the territory of today’s Canada as a member of the exploring party of Pierre Dugua, the Sieur de Monts, and Samuel de Champlain that traveled from France to the New World in the early 17th century. “The information hasn’t been out there for residents and visitors,” said Caroline.

Bill suggested setting up an advisory committee of First Nations and Black Nova Scotians, not just Council members, to address these gaps in cultural representation and historical markers.

Regarding affordable housing, Bill said there's not enough municipal control regulating the landlords/tenants relations: "it's a big issue," he said, as are food banks, which build up to a point where no one knows "where to do from here . . . There's no answer for that." Banks are regularly foreclosing properties, and the evicted tenants are "stuck in the middle."

In larger communities, said Caroline, the question is one of accessibility and affordability of housing, yet there is also a lack of housing in farming areas, where the housing prices are rising, and people want to farm, or build tiny homes, but there are restrictive by-laws for non-traditional housing that she encourages Council to address.

On the topic of community-led projects, one resident mentioned the "Happy Communities Project," and Bill, seasonal projects such as tree lighting, and sports, or future town beautification projects to attract people, sponsored by the community.

Caroline said, following the lead of the other municipalities, that consistent, paid staff is needed for the museum, for support and expansion, as they are working on a volunteer basis now. With further support, the museum or library could be used, it was proposed, as a space for townhall meetings. For example, she said, the municipality commissioned a study on flood mitigation and climate change, and the museum created an exhibit to share with community members, placing a clipboard and pencil next to the display to solicit opinions and feedback. "Finding creative ways to share or solicit information would be great," she said.

SESSION TWO: URBAN COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

This session began on the topic of transportation, with Bill stating the difficulty of getting a medical exam because of the limited transit system, which “used to be pretty good before,” with the King’s Transit municipal arrangement that serviced Windsor, Brooklyn, and Hantsport, but now, without a car, it’s a question of getting help from neighbors and taxis, which are expensive.

Regarding mental as well as physical health, Bill said it’s a 45-minute drive to the city (Halifax), and a 15-minute drive to Windsor, thus isolating the marginalized communities, including seniors. “If you have a doctor, you’re very fortunate,” he said, “And you just hope he doesn’t retire or move, or you’re back on the list. Otherwise, the emergency room is your only choice.”

Bill also mentioned the Hantsport Memorial Community Center as a place that “everyone is welcome to join” but that “culture-wise” there aren’t that many more offerings he can think of. Dawn suggested the offering of more events focused on sharing our different cultures, with food.

“Maybe something could be built on that,” said Bill. “You can get everyone together, [but] if it’s not open and truthful . . . you might as well stay home.”

No one in this session was from Windsor, so the topic of affordable housing and community-led projects was limited to West Hants. Bill mentioned the Historical Society, the recreation center, and museums, as other community resources which he said continue to receive funding.

Regarding the engagement process, Bill said internet access is an issue, because West Hants is “further down in the municipality,” and not in the right spot: he painted a provocative image when he said he sees the youth walking through town with their cell phones held in the air, trying to get a secure connection. “Hurry up, Elon Musk,” said Dawn.

Date: December 11, 2020 - 6pm
Main topic of discussion: urban challenges in a new municipality

- Limited transit options make access to mental and physical health services difficult
- Cultural deficits in West Hants
- Poor internet (dial-up rather than high-speed) and cell phone service
- Loneliness for people working from home or not working: people living in “silos” of isolation
- Better promotion and sharing of regional treasures needed (beaches, water access points, trails) and continued celebration of diversity
- Council not included in online community engagement sessions so as to better appreciate “community concerns, ideas, aspirations, and sharing,” without the sessions turning into a political forum
- Fire Department commended for their excellent work

"More people are working from home than ever before," said Bill, but even for government workers and other workers who work from home, it's hard not to miss the companionship.

"People are living in silos," agreed Dawn, on the topic of isolation: "No one knows each other."

"The municipality is doing what it can for employment," Bill said, who spoke eloquently in other recorded sessions about how fair wages must structure the local economy and housing crises. "It'll be interesting to see how things go with the new Council," he said.

When asked her perspective as a resident rather than a staff member, Chrystal said she would appreciate improved internet as well, and to be able to talk on her cell phone inside her house and not have to go outside. Seeing the community come together more is something she hopes for, as a Hantsport transplant from Brooklyn, as the area has "lots of treasures people don't know about. We have so many wonderful things going on, including in this region, so promoting that and being able to share—beaches, water access points, trails and things we don't even know about—could be pretty incredible," she said, emphasizing the importance of celebrating our diversity. "I'm not sure what the solutions are, but I think this is a good start."

Dawn agreed, stressing the importance of "exploring the region together."

After the meeting closed, Bill mentioned that in the spirit of bringing everyone together, "There's one thing I don't see," and that is councilors present at these engagement sessions: "It would have been nice."

Chrystal then explained that she specifically asked them not to join: "It was my choice," she said, because with councilors there, "it becomes a political forum . . . they tend to want to fix problems immediately," with any of the issues coming up, and she wanted these engagements to be focused on "community concerns, ideas, aspirations, and sharing," instead. "We're trying not to have this forum turn into that," she said, with regard to staff participation too (the reason why she is mostly quiet, she stated): "It's not about what we want, but what the community wants."

Bill ended the session with commending the Fire Department: "They're doing a hell of a good job," he praised.

SESSION THREE: RURAL & TOWN COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Climate change emerged as a significant topic in the third, well-attended session, with six attendees, not including Chrystal and Kouros. Barbara, a vocal and articulate participant, said "Climate change is a major factor in need of infrastructure [change]: if things are not addressed, things will get worse." She mentioned the clear cutting of the moose habitat in the Digby area that had recently been in the news, and that there are "sections all over the province," on Crown and private land, where clear-cutting is taking place. Some land owners of wood lots, she said, have owned their properties for 60-80 years, but the properties are often left to children who either don't care about preserving the family home, or who need the money, and that, coupled with the fact that there are no provincial rules about clear-cutting, makes such environmental hazards common, as the forests, she explained, can be properly managed to sequester the carbon.

Paul chimed in to say that forest management is all-important, as their mismanagement is the reason for the flash flooding happening throughout the region: when the forests are cut, there is nothing to retain the water. Council should, he said, work toward policies and guidelines that would help alleviate these crises in deforestation and the resultant effect on the water supply.

Carol shared that there is also cutting go on around the Falmouth Watershed, with forestry and land issues going on at this very moment. "When you lump them [these problems] under 'environment,' oh, that's a luxury," she said, pointing out that people privilege jobs instead.

"But no environment, no economy," she avowed.

Paul agreed with this connection, adding that the amount of farmland being abandoned is vast, and that there are economic opportunities being missed as a result. He called for council to arrange a structure that would work toward utilizing all that abandoned farmland.

"It's a case of priorities," said Carol, when asked about improving public transportation, mentioning that the railway could be reconstituted to connect to Halifax; it's no longer in public ownership, but it could be brought back into public ownership, she said.

Date: December 17, 2020 - 6pm
Main topic of discussion: urban and rural challenges and opportunities

- Climate change is dire: Clear-Cutting and Carbon Sequestering
- "No environment, no economy" (link between jobs and environment)
- Council's support sought with utilizing land, and abandoned farmland
- Low income, health insurance deficits, and transportation issues severely impacting health care (mental and physical) for seniors and general population
- Existent racism and poor minority representation in the local job force
- West Hants Historical Society providing excellent exhibits on race history
- "Overhousing" for senior population and lack of affordable housing for youth and growing families a serious problem
- Province and/or municipality should help regulate rent control
- Community praise for "hands-on" efforts of Council to reach out to individuals and local business owners and be present at Town Hall meetings
- West Hants seniors enjoy more programming activities than in Hantsport
- Disbanded RDA's, Board of Trade, and Arts Council a disappointment
- Vetted "Senior Assistance Group" with annual membership fee proposed
- Support for residential retrofitting needed, as 40% of homes are "energy poor"
- Celebrate "varied, unifying, and holistic" local resources such as gypsum quarries, East Hants caves, lakes, and "rivers the salmon would return to if given the chance."

Again the topic of physical and mental health services for the aging community was brought up, and Bill mentioned that a lack of insurance coverage also plays a significant factor, quoting the average wage in Nova Scotia to be \$21-22/hour, and \$16/hour in Halifax. "Low income cuts off access to health care," Bill said. Health care "involves more than one level of government," said Paul; Carol added that it is a provincial issue. "Seniors often have needs for which services aren't available," said Barbara, calling for a directory or assessment to determine senior needs, particularly after the additional difficulties imposed by COVID-19 are over. The focus should be, said Barbara, on preventing some of these problems; if not, it will only lead to other issues.

"Youth have the greater voice," said Bill, who expressed his concern with older generations "not passing anything on to youth . . . to think about what's coming down the road." On that note, Dawn drew a correlation between mental health issues and internet culture.

The topic then pivoted to that of racism. Carol shared an anecdote about going to the Atlantic Superstore in West Hants recently, and seeing faces she didn't recognize; she left a comment in the comment box asking why there were no native or black people working in the store, and didn't receive an answer. When she asked a clerk, the clerk told her the workers were brought up from Sackville. While saying "Sobeys is a little better," she said the grocery stores "not having members from all communities . . . is not right." Bill agreed. "The municipality should work harder with local business to attract people from different cultures," he said.

Paul said the West Hants Historical Society has an exhibit on the Black Construction Battalion during the war that drew a "favorable response" and suggested that "initiatives like that will help in the direction we're headed." Dawn agreed, mentioning the Avon River Heritage Society as another organization that can help build cultural and historical awareness to the region.

Barbara emphasized that the First Nations Mi'kmaq people practice a type of forestry which leaves enough trees behind so that the land can flourish for the next seven generations: "We should follow their lead," said Barbara, and also what was recommended in the Ivany Report. "I think members of the First Nations show us how this can be done in our forests," she said, encouraging them to take a leadership role.

On the subject of race, Carol said that Windsor has a "long and repeated history" of keeping young people from black communities in school longer, and that there is a "deep level of respect" among older people for Windsor's black communities: "They may not mingle much, but I think that between the various black families, and between the white and black families, there is a level of respect." She cited the Paris family as one particular example of this respect across interracial lines, and African-Canadian poet George Elliot Clarke as another example of a community figure greatly respected by all: Clarke is from Hants County ("though he often doesn't have much good to say about it," she added).

Moving next to the topic of affordable housing, Carol said that she worked with Mayor Allen to get a “co-housing project off the ground,” in an effort to have a land parcel on College Road given from the province to the municipality. It would have been a “nice wedding present” for the two municipalities “joining together peacefully,” she said, but it hasn’t happened yet.

Furthermore, Carol said she believes a significant amount of people are “overhoused” in large, old houses, and a significant number of younger people can’t find reasonably-priced houses to rent or buy. 5 or 6 years ago, she said, the municipality did a big public consultation on housing, and she related a moving anecdote about a young black resident who attended one of the open meetings at Three Mile Plains who spoke poignantly about how he and his pregnant wife couldn’t find decent rental accommodations for themselves and their growing family.

There is land available, and the federal government has money, said Carol, but the provincial government is “not getting it out there: You have go through the most amazing hoops. There is no real interest in getting affordable housing built.” Paul said, in response, that there are four houses in direct eyeshot from his own home that are barely habited: two are vacant, and the other two are only inhabited occasionally.

On the subject, Bill said there is a disconnect between the municipality and the province in this regard. There is no rent control, he said, or “when there is it is in favor of the landlord . . . There should be more restrictions by province.” Barbara joined this topic with her opinion that there should be more low-income housing in the towns where the jobs are: “A lot of these families don’t have long-term income they can count on, on a long-term basis.” Ensuring that all residents have “a safe place to stay” should come first, she said. “It’s all connected,” concluded Bill. “If the wage isn’t there, no one can afford a mortgage, or rent.”

Transitioning then to the topic of communication, Carol said she was “very impressed” with the municipality’s Facebook page, and with Mayor Zeiban getting out into the community and having his picture taken with local business owners: this is “really good hands-on stuff,” she said. Although the Hants Journal has folded, said Barbara, she finds the handouts that Council sent by mail helpful, and just asked that they be sent out earlier.

Paul praised the times Council members came out to meetings to speak and listen, recently on the topic of the West Hants landfill: “They previously spoke to us directly in person,” he said.

On the subject of community-led projects, Barbara said that Dawn has helped organize meals and activities at the Hants Shore Community Center which, said Barbara, has “added a lot.” In addition to the HSCC, Barbara said “there is a surprising amount [of programming] for seniors,” including the Hants County Senior Safety Program, the Gliders Club at the Community Center, and community classes through the Health Board at the Hospital.

Bill said that unfortunately there isn’t really similar programming in Hantsport, at the Hantsport Community Center or elsewhere: “It’s more youth-driven,” he said, but named churches as a unifying force in bringing people, and seniors, “closer together.” Bill said he plans on going to the Windsor Recreation Centre to find community.

In the early 1990s, said Carol, with The Regional Development Associations—part of the RDA with Hants East—there was an “amazing sense of Hants Count coming together with some very good municipal leadership on a staff level.” Community economic development was mandated by the RDA’s, she added, which was “well-practiced and went forward” under the former Board of Trade, which was “sadly disbanded,” having been one of the oldest Boards in North America.

“It was very lively,” she said, also mentioning that these organizations tend to “go in cycles.” Regarding innovating economic and cultural development, Carol also mentioned the concept of an “Eco-museum,” borrowed from France, which brings areas together over projects to identify the strengths and unique features of a given area. Around the time of the Board of Trade, Carol said there was also a working Arts Council (also defunct), which brought forth such activities as the Pumpkin Regatta. Both the Board of Trade and Arts Council were formed to “get the community itself running, with help and staff support,” coordinating what was needed, she said. However, the province of Nova Scotia “killed the RDA’s 5-6 years ago,” she concluded.

Bill mentioned the Hantsport Community Center, the Historical Society, and area churches as vital participants in the effort to maintain and revitalize cultural and community offerings in the region. “The secret is to keep at it,” he said. “Somewhere down the line, there’s a spark.”

Preserving regional cultures, histories, and the ecology of the rivers, said Carol, requires “three levels of government.” And basic necessities such as reliable transportation continues to play a large factor in the residents’ engagement with these offerings. Those present discussed the “Dial-a-Ride” service (on-call community-led transportation), but said they heard it was expensive, and wondered if there could be potential funding for community-led transportation.

Regarding accessibility, Chrystal said she received two phone calls just this week from two senior residents who were also looking for resources. One, a 90-year-old female resident living in Union Corner, was hoping to find someone who could help her with basic household services such as changing a lightbulb, bringing in wood for the stove, or salting the driveway and deck.

Chrystal and Barbara then discussed the possibility of a “senior assistance group,” wherein seniors would pay a monthly or yearly membership fee in return for such needed services. This would, Barbara believes, prevent some of the mental health issues stemming from isolation and frustration over age-based limitations. Another aspect of the senior assistance group, she said, could also be a “vetting process” so that seniors would feel comfortable knowing that the people entering their home were trustworthy. Chrystal said she knows of at least five other residents in the area who could benefit from this group, which could be structured like a food bank or housing cooperative, only it would be toward the interests of senior safety instead.

The final topic of this session was on retrofitting old homes. Barbara wondered if Nova Scotia power would be addressing this issue, as “40% of the population is energy poor.” Carol said her home, built in 1975, is considered “old” by today’s standards, and mentioned a former program, the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (a joint municipal, federal, and provincial) program that could have helped with the process of retrofitting residences.

The session then ended, but a break-out conversation was held after the conclusion, again about eco-museums and the importance of shining a light on regional diversity and strengths. Carol mentioned that the eco-museum concept was begun by Georges Henri Rivière (in 1971), and that the “Gobelin tapestries” (a French decorative art form, made at the Manufacture des Gobelins in France and named after a family of cloth makers and dyers who are credited with founding the dyestuffs business in 15th century Paris) are an example of a locally-made product that bears the imprint of its region: they produced carpets of exceptional beauty and quality, which secured its place as the official supplier of tapestries and woven upholstery to the 17th century court of King Louis XIV. These tapestries were given as gifts to foreign leaders, said Carol, and bore the mark of their region, much in the same way as the walnut trees, walnut oil, geese, and caves bear the mark of Dourdan, France, the region from where they come.

Similarly, said Carol, there is so much to celebrate in the Windsor and West Hants region: gypsum quarries, caves in East Hants, lakes, and “rivers the salmon would return to if given the chance.” West Hants is “surprisingly varied,” she said, and its offerings “quite unifying” and holistic.

SESSION FOUR: AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN WORKSHOP

Date: January 9th from 1-2:30

Main topic of discussion: role of marginalized communities in the future of the municipality

- Question of surveys efficacy given the time constraints: phone calls and text messages suggested in the ongoing and future “rolling engagement”
- Major transportation issues in Three Mile Plains, including complete lack of shoulder or sidewalks, and continual heavy construction traffic Panuke Road, Grade and Pleasant Streets, making pedestrian foot traffic impossible: a prior consultation before construction started would have been appreciated
- Road infrastructure system “inequitable” across region (particular near the water, plumbing, and sewer plants); noise pollution also a problem
- Rails to Trails movement unanimously supported by all present, with a presentation on alternative modes of transportation by Jeremy Cromwell, but the railway owner wants to keep the rails as is in case needed for gypsum transport in the future; other option includes building trails adjacent to rails (\$1.4-1.8 million dollar project, or \$50k/kilometer), but with economic benefit
- Many TMP schoolchildren learning to ride bikes for the first time; additional trails need into town from elementary school, or connected to the high school
- Black History Month needs commemoration and celebration, with a public proclamation and consultation: a Black Lives Matter march was held, but “marches only go so far.” Awareness and structural changes are needed
- Educational assistance and job training programs needed in addition to equal opportunity employment, to help residents gain knowledge and skills, so as to overcome employment barriers: “A conversation needs to happen”
- Equal, balanced representation in job sector and medical sector needed, or else black residents won’t come to town or seek out the services they need because they do not feel represented and fear being misunderstood
- Greater celebration of George Elliot Clark (black Windsor-born poet) needed (along with the Howard Trail and the Windsor Birthplace of Hockey), and African Nova Scotians who were or are pioneers in hockey, the military, and the arts need to be recognized, commemorated, and celebrated
- Too much bureaucratic “red tape” involved in accessing mental health services, particularly for vulnerable populations such as youth, seniors, and LGBTQ+ residents; stigmatization, lack of education, and transportation issues compromise residents’ ability to access mental health services
- Safe spaces for youth such as the skate part also impacted by a lack of transportation services (youth have difficulty getting home once there)
- Juanita Harvey praised the young, educated, Three Mile Plains leaders present during this engagement session: “I’m totally impressed”

Community Park (co-owned by municipality and the African Nova Scotian community) could use funding for updates and repairs, such as greater accessibility (perimeter trails, This session was attended by seven community members, not including a Council member (Debbie), Chrystal Remme with Community Relations, and Consultant Kourosh Rad.

Lisa was the first to speak, asking what strategy was used to target different populations in the consultation survey, as "174 people is a really low sample," out of the 18,000 surveys sent by mail in November (including options to mail it in, or complete it online, on the website).

Chrystal responded by saying that the survey results are "higher than what we'd get with any survey of any type, which is really sad." Either people aren't getting the information, or they are and don't want to participate, she said, as a survey was mailed to every resident. When COVID-19 restrictions dictated that the in-person meetings be moved online, Council was very quick to move forward with the online consultations given these restrictions, she said, resulting in a "comedy of errors." "We did the best we could with the time we had," she explained; Kourosh added: "Our only question was 'how can we get the survey out to as many people as possible.'"

Lisa rejoined that with only a week to fill out the survey, residents were challenged, and a "more direct conversation" in the future would be appreciated, such as phoning households rather than relying on mailing and social media again. She emphasized the importance of "creating space and opportunity for people to have a conversation," even if they are six feet apart during COVID-19, versus a survey, with regard to the engagement, and giving people more time to complete the survey. She also suggested text messaging as a means of contacting people to obtain feedback. "Most people have cell phones at this point," she said, and links could also be sent that way.

Chrystal added that the consultation had to go online because the deadline for the provincial funding for the engagement was at the end of January, and while the consultation framework was framed by these guidelines, the feedback loop will not be closed: on the contrary, Council is considering this a "rolling consultation," with future engagements to occur after the report is presented to Council on January 17th, and this final stage of the engagement is completed.

Shawn said he saw the "social media blitz," but that there was a lack effort made to recruit and seek individuals personally in this consultation process. "The federal and provincial government seeks people out," he said, with direct requests such as "Can you come here on this date to be part of this session"—a more formal invitation than just the open invitation of the engagement, free for anyone to respond to. For example, he said, his dad "didn't even know he was doing this [the online engagement session]," and when Shawn told him, he responded "What are you talking about." His dad grew up and has roots in Three Mile Plains, said Shawn; he might have gotten the survey, but he might not think he's from the community anymore, even though he grew up in the area. "I live here," said Shawn, "And he's just as important a voice to have as mine . . . I'm a younger generation, but his voice has just as much insight into the community."

Kourosh responded by saying that his consultation firm is a small team with limited resources, and again stressed that these online engagements are the start to this conversation, not the end, and that the community members' honest responses will be taken to Council as a launchpad for moving forward. Chrystal added that her direct phone number was included in the surveys, for those residents who preferred to call in their responses and have a conversation instead: she said she received a few phone calls about the survey in her new Community Relations role.

Debbie also spoke about the survey results, saying that it's traditionally always been "hard to get people to participate." When Council went through its recent transition, "as Councilors, we would go to pop-up areas to have people fill them out . . . three out of five, I would say, didn't want to take the time to fill them out," a pattern repeated when they did the Exhibition. "You can't make people do it," she said, and Council has also used a mailed newsletter as a means of communication, with the same results. "These things aren't cheap, and no one would see them," and only a small percentage of people complete the surveys. But Council "still has to do it, and residents deserve it, but people do not get engaged until there's something negative or that will affect them . . . But just to look for information, then it's very hard. Unless you stand there with them and pretty much do it for them, they don't take the time . . . Chrystal has done a wonderful job putting this on our website, and we all share it on Facebook . . . we try to get it out there." The additional restrictions imposed by COVID-19 are important to recognize, she said, but "in the meantime, surveys are tough, they're hard," even when direct phone calls are made, with the request for 15 minutes of a resident's time. If someone calls during supertime, for example, they ask to call back rather than interrupt supper. "It's a tough avenue to reach out to people."

Sarah asked if there had been an effort to connect with high school students at all, as they are a "captive audience," being at school, and Chrystal said they have been in touch with Principal (first name?) Dickey who has directly communicated with students on the Council's behalf. Kourosch then shifted the topic to transportation, asking what challenges the residents feel they are facing in their communities with regard to walking, cycling, or visiting each other's homes.

Lisa said that she has two children (3 and 5 years old) and that there is "no shoulder, let alone a sidewalk" for them to walk on in the evening, and very little lighting, in addition, providing the example of how difficult it would be for a mother to walk with her two young children, holding their hands, while also trying to hold a flashlight. Three Mile Plains is "quite limited in terms of safely walking to the bus stop," she said, posing serious challenges including the fear of falling into a ditch with her children when a truck is coming by. "It's a huge safety concern," she said, to say nothing of the significant challenges this infrastructure problems pose to residents' health and wellness, given their inability to safely walk in their own neighborhood. This also has a "huge impact" in social relations as well, as neighbors can't safely walk to each other's homes.

Being a nurse, she said, she "frames everything from a health perspective": thus, these road concerns also pose problems with regard to physical activity, community connections, and growth: "We're missing a lot of that," she said, and attributes it to a "massive amount of road construction," as an aspect of environmental racism previously brought up in last February's engagement session. The roads have yet to improve, she said, and the pit is used so frequently.

Panuke road isn't the only road in the black community having that issue, she added. Pleasant and Grade streets are "absolutely atrocious": "These are roads that never got repaired," and only after she sent letters to the opposition leader, did someone show up at her door, "but we've already got tears in the road again." "It's easy to keep us quiet for a bit but not improve the road," she said, and particularly given the inability to walk safely, "it's a big problem."

Shawn added to this topic by describing the daily construction traffic (multiple crews) on the back roads of Three Mile Plains that pass by his house, rattling it and taking down the East link line. The Department of Transportation comes up near the veterinary clinic and does a loop to avoid traffic, he said: a "very political tactic."

He reached out to Lloyd because the roads are the provincial responsibility and there wasn't any consultation on what can be done to make the community "safe for people who want to walk to school." "My son's a walker," he said, who walks from home to school at 6 years old, because according to the Department of Education "he's not a bus student": which is "not safe." These safety requests, said Shawn, never come from the municipality, who knew these developments were coming for 3-5 years, to expand these road developments. "It's not going to stop, it's an ongoing issue, but yet a lot of vocal people have consulted people and it's not being addressed provincially or municipally, and everyone's saying it's a request from the municipality to the province, and I don't understand how access community members can have that voice." He said he's happy to see Council and Municipal members and staff (Chrystal and Debbie) on the Zoom conference call, but felt that consultations could have been done before this construction opened up "at this capacity" for the highway.

Kourosh added that transportation issues have a socio-economic dimension, as well; not everyone has a car, making transportation also a matter of "fairness and equity."

Shawn said that in certain areas of Three Mile Plains (particularly the water, plumbing, and sewage areas), the road infrastructure systems have "not been equal to other areas in the municipality," and that this lack of upgrading is "inequitable," as these roads do not have parity with those in other municipal communities, thus impeding residents' access to vital services.

Transit in more populated areas than Three Mile Plains (the valley, HRM) is "probably not a great model for here," said Lisa, "because it won't be utilized." For example, she said part of King's Transit was connected to the area previously but it was "not well-utilized," and that "Other [transportation] options make a bit more sense."

Shawn said the "rails to trails" initiative, if enacted (the repurposing of the defunct railway system through the region into multi-purpose trails) would be "absolutely incredible," as the railroad is "falling apart" (the ties and railbed are decomposing, with spikes everywhere).

The trails would be well-used, and coincides for me with making biking more accessible, he said. Jeremy Cromwell then introduced himself, as the first African-Canadian Snowmobile President in Nova Scotia, and to his knowledge, all of Canada. Jeremy is also the Safety Coordinator for the Snowmobile Association of Nova Scotia, and, as a member of the Hants Snowdusters, he helps maintain and operate 264 kilometers of trails from Ellershouse to Tantallon, but also the over 800 kilometers of clubhouse trails on Elridge Road that hook into the valley's system.

Jeremy said he had a meeting a couple years ago with the owner of the rail line, who leased 66 km of trails from Hantsport to Halifax, coming up to Windsor Junction; he told Jeremy that if the Gypsum Company ever reopens and needs gypsum hauled, Schmitt would spend a couple hundred thousands dollars to fix the railroad. His idea, said Jeremy, is for trails adjacent to the rails, specifying the areas they would traverse, with talk of it continuing to Garland's Crossing and Three Mile Plains, giving space for bikes, walkers, ATV's, and snowmobiles. The permit cost for each registered vehicle would be \$40, said Jeremy, and while the cost of constructing the trails is estimable (between \$1.4 and \$1.8 million, or, roughly \$50k per kilometer), there are snowmobile and other grants available that could be applied for to offset the costs. "But given the economic benefit of those ATV's, etc., to come into town, these businesses would benefit from multi-use vehicle driving into town, but also for walking and biking," he said, speaking of the trail in Burwick (with a speed limit of 20 km/hr) that has been turned into a multi-use trail.

Please note: a few details from the above comments about the trail system, and the fourth online engagement session more generally, are available for hearing and viewing in full online on the website's recorded Zoom conferences, so as to keep the written report as succinct as possible.

Jackie, the physical education teacher in Three Mile Plains and other area schools, who started last year (filling in for another teacher on maternity leave), said she works with students in grade 3 and 4 who were "never able to ride a bike before," and now they can, without training wheels.

Jackie said she hopes for a bike system to go into town, or connect to the high school (or for the high school to come that way), so as to encourage community access and use of the community playground. "This area has a lot of history" about which she is not entirely knowledgeable, said Jackie: "I'm here to learn and to understand."

She received a grant to build a trail around the "big soccer field" at the Three Mile Plains school, as right now "there's no large area for the students to use, for the bike program we had running."

Shawn added that there is a 900-meter radius around the school, creating a further walk to school for busing students. "When you have an old Highway One and that's the only way to access the school, you want to encourage walking, health, and activity," but in safe ways (there is currently no sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, or access. "That's a provincial issue," he said. "At the end of the day there can be collaborations with the province and municipality to represent the needs of the community members to keep people safe in general. He then expressed his happiness over Mr. Cromwell being elected Snowmobile president, and for promoting alternative methods of transportation. "You being at that table," he said, "That's another voice I didn't know existed."

"Our future is important," said Shawn. "You can bike from Allenport to the core of Kentville, then bike all the way down, so why not expand on that: why not put community parking in Newport Station, and that way we can bring more people out from the community?"

The topic then shifted to diversity, representation, and inclusion: how would you like to be engaged, asked Kourosh, and what changes would you like to see afoot (such as more effective engagement and more diverse hiring practices)?

"I think that's a multi-tiered question," said Lisa, referring to Black History Month, about which she's seen nothing yet (as of the date of this engagement session on January 9th), nor did she last year. "I've seen nothing in terms of representation," she said, then provided two concrete suggestions to improve the visibility of the black community: to offer a consultation, driven by the municipality, and secondly, to consider that some people have privileges such as education or upgrading courses that others haven't had. In light of this, while she said it's an "important step" for the municipality to invite black and First Nations community members to apply to jobs, as valuable members of the community, further work is also needed to assist with education and job training. "It's not enough to open jobs and recruit; we also haven't had the opportunity to get the education, so as to [be qualified to] apply for the job."

Sarah agreed with the "education piece": her role, she said, is helping people have access to education programs, and supporting people to receive a formal education (knowledge and skills) so as to apply for jobs.

Shawn also commented on this topic, as an employer. "From an employer perspective, we want to retain employees," he said, and "actually see our community people represented." For example, he said, when he goes into town to pay his water bill, it's "not one of my family members or someone I know who is qualified to be an administrative assistant" working there. It would be a contradiction, he summarized, in concert with Lisa and Sarah's comments, to put forth rhetoric about a "diverse workforce" without investing in "education and employability," which he said would be an investment that would ultimately have a greater community benefit.

These issues are further exacerbated by the distance sometimes kept by black community members from the town itself. In previous years, "You would never be allowed to be in town," he said, and now that racism is at least being addressed, "We don't want to be in town." "People don't understand their perspectives, and where they're at," he said, using the examples of paying a water bill or going to the bank, and having an uncomfortable experience. "It's probably because they don't feel represented," he said. "There's still a barrier in 2020, and there's a reason why that is happening . . . there's people that can't read. And that empathy, and that sympathy, and that understanding, that extra step that needs to happen" is still elusive, he said, perhaps because of these basic misapprehensions. Giving black residents an "equal opportunity to apply" for jobs is "where the conversation stops," he said.

The question of barriers to employment and community participation needs to be addressed, he said: "A conversation needs to happen." Within the municipality itself, "look at the numbers [of people of color being represented]," he said: "That should reflect what the numbers are in 2020," based on not just equal opportunity, but preceding that, educational programs and community support.

One direct way to begin recognizing and celebrating the community's diversity, said Lisa, would be establishing a proclamation for Black History Month, which Truro and Halifax already have. There would also be a flag raising, inviting elders and others in the community to be a part of that proclamation, recognizing that "the black community is part of this community, and we want to work together. If that's not occurring, people aren't seeing the desire from the municipality to work with our community." Lisa also added that there was in fact a "huge turnout" for a Black Lives Matter march in town, but that [marches] "only goes so far," as a march is a "moment in time: if it stops there, then it isn't worth anything: we need to see action from the municipality."

Shawn agreed: "All year, culture should be reflected for all people who live here, and who are going to live here," he said, citing the example of Windsor-born black poet George Elliot Clark, a "great poet from here." But when you compare the lack of celebration or commemoration of Clark, to the Howard Trail and the birthplace of hockey, that's the "perfect example" of such disparities. "They're both equally, predominately important, highly-respected people in the world, but one always takes more precedence when it comes to branding and accountability." Shawn said he understands the need to promote certain aspects of the region's history and legacy that are shared or nationally recognizable, but in the end, he said, "We do have to represent our communities [more fully and accurately], not just certain things we feel are important."

Lisa agreed, drawing out a point she'd made previously, about how members of the regional black community have achieved acclaim for their contributions to hockey, the military, and the arts, but their legacies are rarely if ever represented. "Where are they recognized?" she asked. It's a matter of "awareness and education," she said; the West Hants Historical Society has done "amazing work" around Black History month, and the municipality could learn from them, as they have gathered a significant amount of history from current and past black communities.

Shifting to the topic of other underrepresented communities, specifically LGBTQ+, those struggling with mental health issues, and access to mental health services, Shawn offered a “neutral perspective,” speaking on behalf of the youth he knows. Mental health agencies and services are limited and hard to access directly because of “red tape,” he said. Openness and accessibility of programs continue to be an issue. “Do our youth actually have the opportunity to engage with mental health supports?” he asked. “[Only] if they can get to an actual clinician,” he answered. “However, central intake and other areas are barriers for our community members, and the actual onus and non-education around what is a mental health issue and how it could be supported are barriers as well.”

“And if they are able to access those services,” added Lisa, “the lack of [diverse] representation from the providers in the community” is also an issue, in the context of the larger community. Usually, she said, many of the clinicians come from outside Windsor and the municipality, and thus lack context about specific issues within the community to support youth, or the individuals that they’re treating. Relatedly, on the topic of safe spaces for youth, Lisa said that “even if there were safe spaces, access is an issue, if the youth are not within walking distance of the spaces, to be used for extra-curricular activities and protective measures that assist with mental health and wellness, “because there’s no transportation”: an interrelated problem that needs to be solved. “Some of those protected spaces that could be there can’t be accessed because there’s no way to get back home after that.”

Jackie then re-joined the conversation to say she’s spoken to several former students who were hanging out at the skate park, who told her transportation to and from the skate part is a major issue: “They all talked about it,” she said. Concerned, she said her priority then became how many students she could fit into her car with their scooters, grateful that they had scooters and not bikes, for then it would have been impossible. The question of how to get from a “safe, awesome spot” such as the skate park to home remains an unresolved question, she said.

Transportation access to health services in a rural community is a “big issue” from a women’s health perspective as well, Lisa said: local clinics that offer pap tests and wellness checks are few and far between. “Large black communities have these available for women’s health, and mental health,” she said, and the municipality should “appeal for these services to be offered.”

On the related topic of community-led projects the residents would like to see funded, Kourosh summarized their discussion thus far as relating to trails, safe spaces, and transportation services. Two residents who had just been listening thus far, Juanita and Harley Peters, were invoked, saying of them that they do “all kinds of things for the community that could be supported, and that could use funding.” Juanita spoke compellingly about their work with the community park, as a place for health and fitness, particularly if trails were to be established along the perimeter. Covid, said Juanita, put a damper on their progress: “There’s a lot of things that need to be done that would put something in the community that everyone can use: adults, seniors, and youth. There’s funding out there for it.”

Juanita also took the time to praise and commend the other residents in the engagement session for their efforts. “This panel of young, smart, educated students from the African Nova Scotian communities . . . I am totally impressed with you guys. They’re doing a very good job. These residents demonstrate leadership, highlighting places where the youth are, sharing the education they’ve received, and their willingness to partake in making this a better community in coordination with themselves and the municipality,” she said.

If an Advisory Council were to be formed, these four residents (Lisa, Shawn, Sarah, and Jackie) should be on it, was the consensus, and connect with Juanita and Harley about the park to gather all the information moving forward. Lisa also mentioned that the Volunteer Fire Department has also helped with cleaning up the park; the next step, she said, should be better accessibility, an improved parking lot, and safety and enclosure measures such as fencing and security cameras, and "getting the water fixed up so that it's usable." Someone could also be brought in from the Recreation Department to the community, to activate winter sports activities such as winter snowshoe hikes, said Lisa, particularly given the fact that winter equipment (snowshoes, skis) are freely available for borrowing. "Up until two years ago I had no idea there was kayaking on Pontic Lake . . . these activities are really valuable." And, she said with a laugh, "having trails to actually use the equipment on would be helpful." Jeremy, she added, previously spoke about the cost of snowmobiles or multi-purpose trails, and that's another area that could receive funding in conjunction with the West Hants Snowdusters.

"That's a great point," Sarah contributed. "If the park is established as a safe space for youth, it could be used to bring services into the community, not vice versa [drawing them out]: instead of going to Windsor to access recreation programming," she said, "it could be facilitated out of the park, which would take away transportation barriers." Shawn asked, "Has the municipality even offered to take over ownership of the park, or of Pontic [road] at all?" Lisa responded by saying the park is jointly owned, by the African Nova Scotian community and the municipality, but that it's never been "opened in that sense." She and others (Juanita and Abe) had been "looking into it," she said, when COVID-19 hit and plans were put on hold, Jackie spoke of the importance, at this juncture, of connecting the school's resources to the park. The school, she said, has an abundance of skates and helmets available that are only used once in Three Mile Plains: "The kids go one time," she said. "I fit the kids with skates and helmets who don't have them . . . if I have a request I send out [winter] skates for the season, and lend out the snowshoes we have." Her question is: How can I as a teacher and administrator help support Three Mile Plains or another school—both the students, families, and community members?"

Shawn wondered if the [skating] rink was built near the school, would the school use it? They concluded that there is already an outdoor rink next to Three Mile Plains, but it's "never used anymore." Shawn said its disuse was a financial issue: "We just had the potential surplus of items from the older rink with the municipal rink being built, but some of those items could be repurposed, he said, with an eye toward refurbishing that facility for it to be used temporarily for the winter. "Look at the oval, the Berwing facility," he said: "If we have the materials already, that wouldn't be a lot of financing. The municipality didn't own the old Windsor rink, so we have no surplus there. That was owned by the Exhibition grounds, and most of that has been utilized somewhere also. I do know that rink could be utilized and beneficial there, he said, "but I'm not the one whose land that's on now." Jackie also alluded to this roadblock, saying she found out about the past history with the park and rink being on private, not school, property belonging to someone who doesn't want schoolkids and community members to access it.

"I don't know if that property has changed hands," she said, "but you have to be respectful of that." However, she said, "years have passed, and maybe it's time to start that conversation again, and see where it goes: I would 100% be interested in that, no matter where I'm working."

Jeremy added that he would be willing to help create, built, fundraise, and apply for grants to raise funds to fix the park up, and help to brainstorm ideas.

On that note, what Kourosh called the “communication piece” of the engagement was again brought up, and Shawn brought up a brilliant, novel idea: “A lot of the community members play TV bingo,” he said, and “there’s an opportunity for ads in that. I bet you they would be seeing those ads because they play TV bingo weekly. I don’t know if that’s a good idea or not, but when it’s bingo time, it’s bingo time, and they’re all on that screen” (everyone laughed).

“Shawn hits on something that’s really important,” said Lisa: “going to where community is already gathering . . . that’s a really good way to get people, by going to events where they are” [such as at the Legion]. “I don’t know if bingo will be the same as it was pre-COVID-19 as it will be after,” she said, “but going to places where the community is already gathering together is a good time to include an announcement of what’s happening in the municipality: people aren’t really checking social media, or if they are, they aren’t really seeing things—I don’t have social media, and even if you follow the pages, I’m not seeing the pages [due to how Facebook algorithmically operates], so it’s not a good medium to communicate with the community at all.”

Events such as TV bingo and church events are much more likely to be successful venues for reaching people, she said, in summary, as those are the places where people already gather.

Debbie from Council then said the municipality is hosting a Winter Carnival activity from January 22 until February 5. “I know as Councilor for the area, I’m looking at doing events,” she said, and if anyone has any suggestions for events in that time frame, she encouraged them to reach out. “I’m more than willing to meet with you and come up with something that could get the community involved,” she said, as she is currently working with the Newport Station and Sweets Corner. She is interested in jumpstarting programming with regard to anything we’ve discussed today, she said, so please “reach out to me, and I’d be more than willing to start something. I appreciate everyone taking part today, and I’m happy to see everyone involved.”

Regarding the trails, there have been conversations on the subject at the municipality’s table on those trails, she said, “but there’s more to it than just saying ‘We can do it or build’; obviously, there’s [she mentioned the name of the railway owner]: he controls it, so we’re at his mercy, and sometimes that’s not always an easy thing. And I know Hants County was looking at bringing them out too, and our Recreation Department has been on that. As you know, some things aren’t as easy as they sound, to do. We’re at their mercy as well.” She again thanked everyone for coming, and said to reach out with any questions to her, Chrystal, or Rashid.

Bill, a community member who was listening for the duration of the last engagement session, also thanked everyone for being present and participating. “This one has been a little more active than the others,” he said, and there’s “a lot to do” going forward.

Most of the engagement session’s participants then left, and at the closing of this respectful and lively engagement session, Shawn made one last general comment about Council having been present at the meeting. “It’s great, and Chrystal, I’m happy you’re still on as well,” he said. “But it’s different in some of these sessions having Council members here as well, and I do want to highlight that. I’m not saying it’s a negative, I’m just saying that some people will be more vocal when the Council representative is not there, because they feel that there could be a bias.”

ESTABLISHED CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS

While the final chapter of this report contains many recommendations, the more overarching message of this engagement is the importance in making the first point of contact with many communities across the region, and establishing and maintaining open lines of communication. Through the engagement work, some of which was done remotely out of necessity, many residents across the municipality now know that there is a dedicated staff member that they can reach out to about engagement, communications, project ideas, and suggested improvements/ideas/concepts.

They now know that the municipality is taking steps to improve engagement, recognizing that things have to be done differently in the future, and, lastly, better understands the importance of creating relationships with residents in order to improve the quality of life and services for all residents.

The discussions that were had, whether online, in person, or on the phone, were impactful, as well as far overdue. We have made connections with leaders in our communities that the municipality now knows they can reach out to gather insight, honest opinions and suggestions on how to improve.

The municipality can now use these established networks and connections to continue building relationships across the region, to make connections beyond those that were achieved through this engagement project. This engagement has established a foundation in which the municipality can actively identify problems, develop more effective solutions, and create a dynamic means to involve community members in activities that collectively impact the municipality and will change the way residents live in and experience the region. This is a start to building trust, helping to shape services, connecting people to resources, and identifying community advocates and leaders, that gives the municipality a vital and lasting link to community wisdom. This wisdom and experience is the cornerstone of what has made the region so unique and valuable in the past, and with these powerful voices at the forefront, it is what will continue to spur needed change as the region moves forward, as a united municipality, together.

FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

FEDERAL

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program: COVID-19 Resilience stream

The new COVID-19 Resilience Stream will allow communities to fast-track shovel-ready active transportation projects (and other eligible projects, like school and hospital retrofits), as long as they cost under \$10 million can feasibly be completed by the end of 2021

Canada Healthy Communities Initiative

A project that will provide up to \$31 million in existing federal funding to the organizations selected. CHCI will support projects that create safe and vibrant public spaces, improve mobility options, or provide digital solutions to communities through data and connected technologies. This fund will be managed through a Canadian organization yet to be selected. Please see under page XYZ for details of potential partnering organizations.

Community Spaces Fund

The Community Spaces Fund provides funding to official language minority communities for projects to build new community and cultural spaces and renovate and upgrade infrastructure and multi-purpose spaces in more community centres not attached to educational institutions. These meeting places, conducive to exchanges, will contribute to the individual and social development of the community.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporations (CMHC)

CMHC offers variety of programs for both developing affordable housing strategies, and help finance such projects.

Canada Summer Jobs

Canada Summer Jobs is an initiative of the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, which aims to provide flexible and holistic services to help all young Canadians develop the skills and gain paid work experience to successfully transition into the labour market.

Social Development Partnerships Program - Supporting Black Canadian Communities

This CFP will provide funding for equipment purchases for work or community spaces, including purchase of computers or tablets, desks, work furniture, software, telephone systems, boardroom tables, sound systems, smart boards, kitchen appliances, and more.

Smart Cities Canada / Evergreen Community Solutions Network

Resources, tools and workshops designed to help communities build capacity using data and connected technologies

The Community Solutions Network is a community-centric platform, serving every type of Canadian community: big, mid-sized, Indigenous, black, small and northern. As the project lead, Evergreen is working with Open North and partners to provide valuable information, learning opportunities and advisory services in key areas of data and technology for municipal and community leaders.

Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program (National)

The Projects component of the Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program provides funding for community development, anti-racism initiatives, and engagement projects that promote diversity and inclusion by encouraging interaction among community groups.

Department of Canadian Heritage

Canadian Heritage has a variety of funding programs which help promote culture, the arts, heritage, official languages, citizenship and participation, multiculturalism, youth, sport, and Aboriginal initiatives.

New Horizons for Seniors

Through Social Development Canada, this program provides funding for community-based projects across the country that encourage seniors to continue to play an important role in their community. Calls for applications are issued once or twice a year.

Status of Women Canada

Status of Women Canada (SWC) is a federal government organization that promotes the full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada. They provide funding for women's programs, with an emphasis on economic security and prosperity, leadership, as well as community programs that encourage women to participate in their communities.

PROVINCIAL

Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage

Nova Scotia's culture and heritage contributes to vibrant communities and enriches the quality of life in every part of the province. The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage invites Nova Scotians to experience and participate in their rich cultural expression.

One of the many available resources available through the Department is funding availabilities to assist the municipality prepare a 5-year plan as well as set up a Diversity and Inclusion Committee within the Municipality to help address identified issues such as representation of communities within staff and recognition of initiatives such as the Black History Month.

Other potential funding sources include funding streams relating to public rural transportation and active transportation plans.

Develop Nova Scotia

Develop Nova Scotia is a provincial crown corporation, helping Nova Scotia become one of the world's most irresistible places to live, invest, participate, and visit through developing strategic lands and economic infrastructure across the province. Through their place-making work, Develop Nova Scotia is working on community-led projects across the province, including the delivery of rural internet.

Nova Scotia Low Carbon Communities and Connect2 program

Support is available for transportation, buildings, electricity and other projects that have the potential to reduce emissions. Funding can be used for community planning, feasibility studies, learning by doing, public engagement sessions, program promotion and demonstration projects. There are a number of categories that the municipality may qualify for funding. They include:

- Clean Electricity & Energy Transformation
- Active Transportation Infrastructure & Design
- Clean Fleets and Shared Mobility
- Capacity Building and Community Engagement

ORGANIZATIONS

Cities and Environment Unit

The Cities and Environment Unit enables and empowers communities to shape their own future. They have worked across the spectrum of planning and design. Our services and interests include developing tools and models, urban and rural planning, comprehensive community plans, feasibility studies, architectural design (both housing and institutional), streetscape redevelopment and meaningful public engagement.

The Cities and Environment Unit has on-site capacity to assist the municipality with a variety of tasks including public engagement, design and approval of projects.

McConnell Foundation

The McConnell Foundation is a private Canadian foundation that develops and applies innovative approaches to social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges. They do so through granting and investing, capacity building, convening, and co-creation with grantees, partners and the public.

McConnell Foundation is currently not accepting any new funding requests but is working on a new framework for future funding opportunities.

Canadian Urban Institute

CUI is a national platform that houses the best in Canadian city building – where policymakers, urban professionals, civic and business leaders, community activists and academics can learn, share and collaborate with one another from coast to coast to coast. Through research, engagement and storytelling, their mission is to ensure Canada builds vibrant, equitable, livable and resilient cities.

CUI does not provide direct funding. However, it is connected to variety of organizations and can provide operational expertise in bringing projects to fruition.

FINAL

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 ■ START SMALL, START TODAY

The scale of challenges ahead for the municipality, some of which have been identified in this report, are significant. It is often the case that recommendations provided by reports such as this one become too overwhelming and hard to achieve as the time goes by. As a result, many such studies, regardless of the effort that goes into preparing them on all sides, are shelved before their insights can be implemented. It is therefore important to start small and take preliminary but immediate actions in order to preserve and enhance community relationships built through such projects. Undertaking small, immediate actions will also give internal staff, Council and residents a sense of what is possible and the energy needed to tackle multi-year goals and projects together. Below is a list of small, concrete actions the Municipality can take, starting now.

A. RECOGNITION OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH, FEBRUARY-MARCH 2021

This may be achieved by:

- Allocating more resources from existing municipal budgets;
- Holding an online celebration in February by inviting local representatives of the black community to discuss their history and culture;
- Inviting members of Black Nova Scotian community and/or a black artist/poet to at least one of the upcoming council meetings to talk about their experiences living and working in the municipality;
- Inviting the community leaders identified in this report to provide recommendations for short-and long-term initiatives they see as appropriate to commemorate the Black History Month in 2021 and in the future;
- Establish a municipal “proclamation” similar to that used in Halifax

B. ENGAGE THE YOUTH

Allocate budget resources to inform and engage the youth in the municipality's ongoing projects and initiatives through a Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok campaign. This could also include hiring a summer student through Federal Canada Summer Jobs program. Also, a more tangible way to involve them in shaping their communities would be to connect with the schools, rec centres, and youth organizations. For example, the municipality could host idea sessions for tactical urbanism projects students can actually participate in creating and building, giving youth the opportunity to make decisions.

C. TACTICAL URBANISM

Embracing tactical urbanism, in the spirit of quick and immediate actions as pilots for larger investments, is a way to energize community and learn through trial and error. This spirit can also lead to smart investments on feasible and tested projects into the future. For example, some of the transportation challenges the community faces today are of an urgent nature, and many such problems requires significant planning and funding to overcome. However, small-scale, effective interventions known as tactical urbanism can help the municipality work with local communities to achieve quick results with a limited budget. An example of such collaborations includes 100in1Day, which inspires residents to activate 100 thought-provoking ideas into interventions to transform their city all on one day, to support policy change, innovation and transformation in their cities by scaling temporary actions into longstanding projects.

These kinds of direct-action projects enable residents to improve their communities with short-term but effective interventions, and many such projects, if successful, can later be formalized through larger investments. Examples of tactical engagement projects on the subject of transportation infrastructure and other subjects may include:

- Temporary traffic calming measures such as narrowing main roads using painted concrete blocks. This can also act as a measure to create safe, makeshift sidewalks along the shoulders of main roads in rural and urban communities. The concrete blocks may be installed by the municipality and painted by local organizations and community members.
- Open Street Sunday: opening a major road, or a portion of a major road that connects several communities to pedestrian and cyclists, to encourage active transportation. This would mean not allowing cars onto those roads for a few hours on that Sunday. This low effort, high impact initiative has been tested in many jurisdictions around the world with great deal of success as it encourages people to walk and cycle around their communities, socialize, and get to services. As a pilot, this initiative can be completed every Sunday for a period of one month. The Planning and Design Centre has prepared a Switch Open Street Tool Kit and the experience to help develop this pilot.
- Activating existing public spaces by adding chairs and tables in an initiative known as Chair Bombing. It is as simple as placing chairs and tables in existing public spaces, or unexpected places, to encourage people to use the public space more, or for the traffic to slow down and yield to pedestrians.
- Reallocation of parking to small pocket parks for a day in an initiative known as Park(ing) Day to slow down traffic and create unofficial and intimate public spaces
- Adding colourful LED lights at the start of the main roads in the rural communities to alert drivers at night, and create a sense of belonging for the residents
- Creating crosswalks using 3D paint techniques
- Coordinate a carpool or cooperative rideshare initiative to service West Hants High School students and seniors, using resources that already exist. For example, many rotary and Lions Clubs have buses that are not frequently used, or school buses could be used in-between or after school use
- Beginning construction on sidewalks in such areas as Three Mile Plains for schoolchildren and their parents who wait for public transportation on the street or on their front lawns with large service trucks passing through the area
- Paint Mainstreet or Paint the Park
- Colour and Lights Festival
- Central kitchen in a community centre for groups to use and gather around food



Temporary traffic calming in Chicago



Open Street Sundays Halifax



Pocket Park by VEGA design in Copenhagen

- Short-term beautification or community service projects, such as wreath-making, tree-decorating, “Knit bombing” (knitting, crocheting, or sewing blankets for seniors in assisted living facilities or animals at a local shelter), and arranging for youth to visit homebound elderly or assisted living facilities are a few examples
- Fundraising campaigns to raise money for informational and memorial signage, road-markers, monuments, and plaques (e.g. commemorating the 1,000 Acadians who were deported from Fort Edward by the British; Willie O’Ree, the first black hockey player integrated into an all-white league; or George Elliot Clark, a black poet, playwright and literary critic born in Windsor in 1960)
- Establishing a phone line, staffed by volunteers or paid staff who could help those community members struggling with mental health issues or who need help with basic home repairs (with home visits)
- Forming online or in-person network alliances between identified community subgroups such as youth, seniors, LGBTQ+, craftspeople, retirees, health care workers, young professionals, women in business, trauma survivors, or veterans
- Supporting existing cultural institutions such as local libraries and museums with the curation of exhibits by youth, marginalized communities and seniors (e.g. on local history, national political movements and trends, and/or climate change)



Black-owned businesses and vendors pop-up market, Halifax



CoolGlobes travelling climate change art installation, Vancouver

A few examples of tactical urbanism in other areas of community development such as youth and senior services may include:

- Forming of Youth and Senior Advisory Committees, to discuss the need for larger projects such as a Youth Centre and Senior Centre, conversation around protected safe spaces, accessible services, and other pressing matters that Council may not have the time to get involved in. Recommendations from such committees can make their way to Council for discussion and consideration.
- Shared activities uniting a variety of groups could include a litter Cleanup Day, Ecology Awareness Day, or letter-writing day to area representatives responsible for making policy guidelines on how bodies of water, and private and public woodlands are protected against clear-cutting (which creates flash flooding)



Residents share ideas for the future of their community Bloomington, Illinois

Many of the above suggested initiatives can be produced by encouraging the local communities, youth, and the community leaders, to implement them directly. The municipality can play an active role in achieving such projects by soliciting ideas for tactical urbanism and direct action, providing a small budget, and promoting a specific day (such as Regional Cleanup Day, or 100in1Day) to promote these initiatives.

2. ■ CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN

As it currently stands, there are multitudes of efforts underway in different communities across the municipality. Many of such efforts appear to be disconnected and scattered across the newly formed Municipality. A Comprehensive Community Plan developed through a community-based process would bring many of such pieces together to provide a more holistic view and direction for the region.

It is recommended Council direct staff to continue the engagement efforts and work with communities across the municipality to prepare a create a comprehensive community plan that provides the guiding principles for the entire municipality. Regional organizations such as Cities and Environment Unit (based in Halifax) are able to assist the municipality with preparing such a plan.

3. ■ MAKING PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT MORE VISIBLE

A vast majority of survey respondents indicated that they feel that they have never been engaged by the previous municipality and town, and most expressed their desired to be heard and involved in the future planning of the municipality. It is therefore important to making planning and engagement more visible. This can be achieved through mobile engagement and planning pop-ups during ongoing community events and activities as well as a storefront operation.

4. ■ PREPARE AN INTEGRATED MOBILITY PLAN

One of the largest challenges identified by the community members engaged in this project, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, was lack of access to reliable public transportation and safe active transportation infrastructure. This lack of access to public transportation results in several larger, interrelated issues such as compromised road safety for children and adults, isolation, and challenges accessing physical and mental health services, as well as obtaining basic necessities.

Given the severity of this challenge, it is recommended that Council consider directing staff to prepare a comprehensive public and active transportation plan. A successful example of such a report and its phased implementation is Halifax's Integrated Mobility Plan, which encompasses practical solutions for a municipality with an urban, suburban and rural character.

Locally, it is recommended that Council consider becoming a part of initiatives such as Leading with Transit, which is working towards province wide transit system that could greatly benefit the communities in Regional Municipality of Windsor West Hants.

Provincially, the Nova Scotia Communities, Culture and Heritage organization is providing funding for Kings Transit, Halifax Transit, Transit Cape Breton, Straight Area Transit, Antigonish Community Transit, among others. It is also providing research funding for various municipalities to establish their own transit infrastructure. The municipality may benefit from such funding opportunities as well.

Federally, Infrastructure Canada has several funding mechanisms to help build and strengthen public and active transportation in urban and rural communities. Some of such funding opportunities are included in the next chapter of this report.

5 ■ CREATE AND ADOPT A NEW ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Through this consultation process, we used a framework for engagement that included identification of community leaders, one-on-one interviews with community leaders, politicians, and internal staff, in-person engagement sessions (unfortunately canceled due to COVID-19 lockdowns), online engagement, phone, mail-in and online surveys, and mail-in notices. During these months, we often heard from the residents that they are only now being consulted for the first time, or that they often feel their feedback is not being taken into account when making decisions. The newly formed Windsor West Hants Regional Municipality has the opportunity to reverse those trends and use the momentum created through the consolidation to create and adopt a new engagement framework.

It is recommended that Council designate internal staff members to further analysis the information from this engagement project and solicit internal municipal and external community leaders to implement this proposed engagement framework for the municipality beyond the scope of this initial phase. This extensive engagement framework may then be adopted by Council and be used for all future projects.

Examples of such frameworks that successfully blend rural and urban regions include “Civic Engagement at the City of Victoria” document, “City of Guelph Community Engagement Framework,” and “Rural Municipalities of Alberta Public Engagement Guide.”

Given the scale of challenges ahead, and the importance of keeping the community engaged and informed through it all, Council may consider initiating an open-source platform for engagement. Madrid City Council designed and launched the Decide Madrid platform in 2015. The online platform is part of a new generation of open-source civic technologies which can be used to engage the public in decision-making. Decide Madrid aims to ensure transparency of government proceedings in the city of Madrid and to widen public participation in Council decision-making and spending processes. Initiating such platform may be a feasible goal given availabilities of various tested and affordable technology solutions.

6 ■ FORM AN INTERNAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Given the diversity of the region, and the extensive feedback we received regarding the lack of consultation with diverse communities, and diverse representation in areas of governance, it is important for the municipality to form an internal Diversity & Inclusion Committee to assist staff and Council in identifying areas of improvement, as well as help promote and fund projects throughout the municipality in recognition of the rich cultural history of the region. Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage has funding opportunities available that may assist the municipality in setting up this committee.

7

■ FORM AN EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO COUNCIL

The consultation for this project identified the challenges of representation and inclusion many marginalized communities in the region face. One of the ways to help bridge the gap between the municipality, Council and the communities is an external residence advisory committee to Council. This committee must include representatives from the Acadian, Black Nova Scotian, and Glooscap First Nation communities, as well as youth, seniors, LGBTQ+, and newcomers. The selection process for this committee may include reaching out to the community leaders identified through this project and requesting names to be put forward by them. The selection process could be additionally formalized to include a vetting process through the Municipality's internal Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

It is recommended that Council appoint internal staff and/or an external consultant to assist with preparing a mandate, governance model, targeted responsibilities, and a budget for this committee. A practical guide for forming this committee is "How to Create a functional, effective advisory committee" by Health Nexus, a Canadian bilingual health organization.

8

■ INVEST IN BUILDING NEW MULTI-PURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRES OR ENHANCING EXISTING ONES

The desire for better and more community centres was a consistent need that was expressed throughout in-person interviews, survey responses and online engagements. The essence of such centres are that they provide places to bring people together for recreation, celebration, performance, exploration. These don't always need to be in a central location, but in places where people feel welcome and can easily access. Such spaces can be used for a variety of purposes including targeting at-risk or underserved youth by providing a safe space after school. This was identified as a need in our initial public consultation with the students from West Hants High School, who said the skate park (not always safe for youth), and the Hants Aquatic Centre (not open year-round) are their only options for shared extra-curricular spaces outside of school and the home.

This was also pointed out by a Glooscap parent of LGBTQ+ youth who said her home is the only safe space for her children and their friends to express themselves freely. Such centres would also meet an emergent need in the consultation, which is to provide a space for seniors to share dynamic conversations, host workshops, and engage in craft-based activities. These centres could also be hubs for community activism on the subject of the environment (protecting and preserving forests and water supplies), as this was a topic that the youth and seniors we consulted both felt strongly about, particularly protecting the fresh- and saltwater ecology of Lake Pesaquid, and the Falmouth Watershed area.

It is recommended that Council direct staff to map all existing community centres and activities taking place within them. From there, build a strategy and a phased approach to building new centre and enhancing existing ones, through repairs and programming, with the goal of all communities throughout the municipality having access to such centres.

9. ■ START A SAFE STREETS AND TRAILS INITIATIVE

A challenge facing many rural communities, including those in West Hants, is street safety along the main and side streets, as well as the trail network. Many of the residents we spoke with expressed their desire for safer streets where their children and their parents can walk to school or the bus stop without fearing for their safety, where their elderly can safely walk to a corner store to meet their basic needs, and where the youth can walk or cycle to another community using a connected and safe trail system.

It is recommended that Council consider directing staff to prepare a priority list of renovated or new streets and trails that would vastly improve the quality of life for residents throughout the municipality. This list can be compiled with the help of residents and community leaders in each community using available technology for community mapping. Halifax recently completed such survey by making a map available to community members to report areas where road safety could be improved. From there, Halifax Regional Municipality prepared a list of Traffic Calming Assessment Lists with a phased plan to address the challenges over time.

There are federal and provincial funding and organizations that can assist in preparing this list, and to help with implementation. Some of these improvements can be done through tactical improvements (such as minor repairs and community-led interventions); other innovations will require a multi-year phased implementation plan and budget.

10. ■ ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

A main finding of this report is the need to address systemic racism and environmental racism that has negatively impacted the Black Nova Scotians in the community for decades. It is recommended that Council form a taskforce to strategically address this issue and put together a comprehensive plan for addressing racism, both through internal review of policies, plans and procedures, as well as external education for the general public through initiatives such as commemoration of the Black History Month.

11. ■ ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change poses a serious risk to the quality and way of life of all people living in the communities across West Hants. It is important for Council to put together a plan to both address climate change adaptation as well as outline steps the municipality is able to take to reduce its carbon footprint. Bridgewater's Energize Bridgewater plan that aims at addressing energy poverty and climate change is a good example of such plan that is possible and necessary in a rural context. Another example of that is Halifax's Halifacts 2050 plan that aims at significantly reducing municipality's carbon footprint by 2050.

There are federal and provincial funding available to both prepare such plans, and help implement them, as well as federal and provincial funding to support community-wide and individual implementation of green and green energy initiatives such as composting, mandatory recycling programs, solar panels, low-emission vehicles, and construction of greenhouses.

12. ADDRESS AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Access to affordable housing is a growing concern in the urban, and to a lesser extent rural, parts of the municipality. While some of the forces driving this challenge are outside of municipality's control, there are several tools within Council's power to elevate some of the housing market pressure. These may include providing municipally owned lands for affordable housing, encouraging innovative land use planning by-laws allowing for larger inventories of developable land within complete neighbourhoods, permitting secondary and backyard suites for individual homeowners, addressing energy poverty concerns through retrofit programs (see recommendation number 9), and streamlining the development approval process to reduce housing development costs.

It is recommended that Council direct staff to undertake a comprehensive analysis of these tools that the municipality can introduce to encourage the development and enhancement of access to affordable housing. There may be funding opportunities for such studies through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), such as the National Housing Strategy Research and Planning Fund.

13. LOCAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT

COVID-19 has caused many businesses, particularly small retailers, unimaginable challenges. However, such businesses are the heart and soul of a community's economy. More than ever, 2020 has made residents aware of the importance of supporting local businesses, and most importantly retail businesses in a community's main streets. Expanding on that, given the agricultural nature of the municipality's rural areas, supporting local can mean a stronger regional economy that creates good local jobs and makes the region more resilient.

It is recommended that Council direct staff to undertake a retail mapping study to better understand existing retail stores and also to identify gaps between needed retail services in every community across the municipality. This study can lead to infrastructural investments, such as safe sidewalks and crossings and new trail connections, that would strengthen existing retailers. It may also lead to land use policies that would encourage more retail businesses in areas where such services are needed but are currently lacking.

Pursuant to that, it is recommended that Council direct staff to undertake a mapping exercise of existing agricultural uses in the region. Doing so can allow for comprehensive work that would support a farm to table movement, not just around the municipality but in all of Nova Scotia. Such study was completed by Guelph-Wellington's Canada Smart Cities Challenge Proposal in 2019. Located in an agriculturally rich part of Ontario, the municipality studied the feasibility of increasing access to affordable, nutritious food by 50%, where "waste" becomes a resource, 50 new circular businesses and collaborations are created, and circular economic revenues are increased by 50%. The Region of Guelph's successful submission to Smart Cities Challenges was rewarded with a \$10 million funding from the Federal Government to further implement their plan. For complete details on this study and its implementation please visit foodfuture.ca

14. IMPLEMENTATION

This report provides a comprehensive list of priorities and community-led projects gathered through the engagement sessions. The list is expansive and includes monumental structural undertakings, including addressing climate change, systemic, and environmental, racism, implementing safe active transportation infrastructure, improving employment services, and activating governmental assistance with affordable housing.

It is up to Council to review, analysis, prioritize, and allocate staff and resources into implementation of these projects. This report has also provided an overview of existing national and regional funding opportunities that may be available to the municipality to help bring these short- and long-term projects to fruition. There are also regional and national organizations that can help municipal staff in making some of these projects a reality once Council and the municipality are ready to move ahead with them. Some of these organizations have also been identified in this report.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Throughout this engagement, the municipality has shown a great willingness to engage with the community in hearing their perspectives, and organizing together to undertake the monumental tasks ahead. There have been many positive indications that the consolidation promises a new start for a stronger community, together: this is tremendously encouraging. While the community is currently eager and excited for the possibilities of a new municipality, there are also concerns, as expressed in the engagement sessions and surveys, of the community maintaining tradition, whereby many who have historically been left unrepresented will continue to remain unseen and unheard, real change remaining a mirage. Working with the municipality and residents has been an uplifting experience for our firm that we believe could be a model for community activism and change, and throughout this project, we have only seen continued willingness and openness in both the diverse residents as well as the elected officials and municipal staff to drive innovation forward, and not default back to the status quo. Thank you. We encourage you to realize as many hopes, dreams, and aspirations for increased connectivity and dynamic participation as are expressed in this report as possible. In the words of Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Complete Survey Responses

APPENDIX M

Diversity and Inclusion Committee

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee is to engage the community and formulate action plans to address issues concerning social marginalization, equity, racism, and discrimination within the Municipality. The Committee will also examine issues and barriers in creating a community that is inclusive and welcoming to all.

2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1. In Appendix M,
a) "Municipality" means the West Hants Regional Municipality.

3. COMPOSITION

- 3.1. The Committee will consist of ten (10) voting members and two (2) non-voting members as follows:
- 2 Councillors
 - 4 resident members of diverse race and ethnicity (from the Black Nova Scotian, Acadian, Glooscap First Nation, LGBTQ+ and newcomers communities)
 - 1 resident over the age of 60
 - 1 resident between the ages of 15-19
 - RCMP Representative
 - Provincial Government Representative
 - 2 non-voting staff members appointed by the Chief Administrative Officer

4. ADMINISTRATION

- 4.1. A Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected annually during the November Committee meeting.
- 4.2. All non-Council and non-staff members of the Committee will be provided remuneration in accordance with the Council Remuneration Policy.
- 4.3. Administrative services for the Committee will be provided by the Municipality.
- 4.4. All members must abide by the Administrative Terms of Reference set out by the Committee and reviewed the by Chief Administrative Officer.

WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
MEETING AND COMMITTEE PROCEDURAL POLICY

I, Rhonda Brown, Municipal Clerk of the West Hants Regional Municipality, the Province of Nova Scotia, do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the policy as adopted by the Council of the West Hants Regional Municipality at a meeting duly called and held on the **23rd** day of **March, 2020**.



R. N. Brown
Municipal Clerk

<i>Adoption</i>	
<i>Notice to Council:</i>	March 9, 2020
<i>Approval:</i>	March 23, 2020
<i>Description:</i> Initial approval of the Meeting and Committee Procedural Policy, RCOGE-003.00. Approved by the Co-ordinating Committee of the Region of Windsor and West Hants Municipality.	
<i>First Amendment</i>	
<i>Notice to Council:</i>	October 13, 2020
<i>Approval:</i>	October 27, 2020
<i>Description:</i> Amended Policy to add the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, changed the report form, terminology changes and amend agenda package procedures.	
<i>Second Amendment</i>	
<i>Notice to Council:</i>	February 9, 2021
<i>Approval:</i>	February 23, 2021
<i>Description:</i> Amended Policy to delete the words "and December" from Sections 3.2(b) and 3.3 (b), to enable meetings in December.	
<i>Third Amendment</i>	
<i>Notice to Council:</i>	March 9, 2021
<i>Approval:</i>	March 23, 2021
<i>Description:</i> Amended Policy to remove the Hantsport and Windsor Area Advisory Committee, change the membership of Planning Advisory / Heritage Advisory Committee, and change the definition of "Municipality" within the Appendices.	