

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and committee members. First let me thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Bill 407-Antigonish Consolidation Act. My name is Laurie Boucher, Mayor of the Town of Antigonish.

In the time I have been allotted I will speak to the extensive consultation process our councils have undertaken before we made the decision to ask the provincial government for special legislation to consolidate The Town of Antigonish and The Municipality of the County of Antigonish.

My colleague and friend, former Mayor Carl Chisholm, has spoken to the past relationship of our municipalities and how we arrived to where we are today so I will not repeat his words.

When Warden McCarron and I were contemplating bringing the idea of exploring consolidation to council we agreed we should gather some information to make sure it was a journey worth exploring. This is when we reached out to the mayors of Windsor/West Hants and Queens/Liverpool for their advice. Mayor Norman and Mayor Zabian both agreed that their municipalities are better off since they consolidated. Next, we reached out to Municipal Affairs to get some insight into the process before we broached the subject with council.

You may hear today that these were "secret meetings", when in fact we were seeking the advice of our colleagues so to learn from their experiences. This is not uncommon in local government; we are a very supportive group of like-minded community leaders.

On September 13th, 2021 at two separate council meetings, both the town and county voted unanimously to explore consolidation. We rolled up our sleeves and got to work to find out if residents, businesses and the overall community would be better served if the Town and County became one municipal unit.

With the help of Brighter Communities, we conducted one of the most extensive, accessible, and comprehensive municipal public engagement process our province has ever seen.

The engagement consisted of the following:

From March to October 2022, we took part in

- 24 public engagement sessions hosted in-person and online
- Two community mailouts sent to almost 10,000 households
- a dedicated phone line that received voicemails that staff responded to directly
- A dedicated email address that received 170 messages
- An online discussion tool that saw more than 3,000 total visits.

In total we had over 15,000 touch points with residents. I personally attended every single one of these sessions.

In addition to this, the 17 elected officials between the Town and County have had thousands of discussions with residents both privately and in public. There is no-one more familiar with thoughts and perspective on consolidation among the people of Antigonish than the elected councils who have asked for consolidation. We listened intently, understood the decision before us and made the decision that we were elected to make.

You have heard and may hear again the numbers from two Mainstreet Polls that Let Antigonish Decide has commissioned. I would like to take an opportunity to point out some serious flaws with these polls.

On two occasions Mainstreet Research issued apologies for their polling in elections. One being a Calgary municipal election where MR predicted Bill Smith leading Nenshi by 9-17 points, Nenshi won this election by 8 points.

“There was nearly a 25% deviation between Mainstreet’s pre-election poll and the actual outcome.”

-CBC, December 11, 2017

The other case is a byelection in Nanaimo, B.C. in January of 2019. MR predicted a Liberal win, at the end of the day the NDP held the seat with 49% of the vote.

In both polls, as with the LAD poll, Mainstreet used IVR-Interactive Voice Response or more commonly known as Robocalls.

“Critics of this method say IVR has a low response rate and tends to over-represent older, more conservative-leaning voters.”

-CBC News December 11, 2017

This is blatantly true in the results of the LAD poll conducted in Antigonish.

Poll #1 March 2023

5000 calls

344 responses

6.9% Response Rate

The youngest demographic, 18-49 is significantly under-represented by 71% while the oldest demographic, 50 and older is significantly over-represented by 78%.

Poll #2 February 2024

5000 calls

441 Responses

8.8% Response Rate

Better than the first poll but still below industry standard

Representation in the poll

18-49 is 10% of the responses while in Antigonish 18-49 is 40% of the population.

65 and over is represented by 65% of the poll while in Antigonish 65 and over is 24% of the population.

This poll

I am not saying this was done intentionally but speaks to the validity of the poll and the problem with polling in general. We witness this federally and provincially, just look at the prepoll from our last provincial election and the actual results.

Experts say even though cell phones are used in IVR they are not reliable because people use regional numbers but may not live in that area and it challenging to create a reliable data base.

I understand that change is difficult, but change is inevitable. I wholeheartedly believe this is the right move for our community. Our councils are looking ahead five, 10, 20 years, I am confident of the positive impact this will have on our municipal service delivery, infrastructure investment, and enhancement of urban and rural areas of our community.

To finish I would like to read a synopsis from a book by Doug Griffiths:

13 Ways to Kill Your Community

Chapter 8 - Live in the Past

The world is always changing, and it always will. Successful communities find ways to adapt to the change or adapt the change to them. Those that fail often do so because they choose to ignore, deny, resist, or hide from inevitable change. The fear of adapting to change drives people and communities to live in the past, or at least to hold onto it until their last dying breath. That fear breeds anger, and anger is always evident in those who live in the past. They are angry about something that happened 20 years ago, or about something in their world that is about to change. It is always unjustified, however. Mistakes are part of the past, solutions are only found in the future, and inaction is the biggest mistake you can make. Inaction means your community is unprepared for what is coming and that means your community will change, but not the way you want it to. Living in the past will ensure your community becomes part of the past.

Thank you for your time- Questions?

Supplement to Antigonish Fact Sheet #2

Additional Information About Commercial Tax Rate Trends

A. Bridgetown and Annapolis County Commercial Tax Rate Trend

	2012	2013	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bridgetown	\$3.79	3.90	3.93	3.93	3.40	3.40	3.39	3.39	3.39	3.39	3.39
County	\$1.18	1.18	1.18	1.18	1.18	1.18	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80

B. Springhill, Parrsboro and Cumberland County Commercial Tax Rate Trend

	2012	2013	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Springhill	\$5.53	5.53	5.53	5.53	4.81	4.81	4.81	4.81	4.96	4.96	4.96
Parrsboro	\$4.17	4.15	4.13	3.99	3.85	3.85	3.80	3.93	3.97	3.97	3.97
County	\$2.63	2.63	2.63	2.63	2.63	2.63	2.63	2.76	2.78	2.78	2.78

C. Windsor, Hantsport, West Hants Commercial Tax Rate Trend

	2012	2013	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Windsor	\$4.08	4.08	4.08	3.99	3.99	3.99	3.99	3.95	3.95	3.91	3.90
Hantsport	\$3.69	3.85	3.85	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.81	3.80
County/RM	\$1.60	1.68	1.68	1.75	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.79	1.78

Bolded Tax Rate Figures indicate the last year a town issued separate tax bills, and the first year the County/Regional Municipality issued a combined tax bill for the town tax areas. The mergers have not created an increase in commercial tax rates, although some municipalities like Cumberland have raised rates subsequently because of other issues (increasing capital reserve funds in the case of Cumberland County).

Representation, Council Size and District Boundaries

1

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

Introduction

When discussing the potential merger of the Town and County, questions arise about the possible changes in representation, the size of a new council and the impact on existing District Boundaries.

Guiding Principle

6. Ensure fair representation for urban and rural residents

When are these things decided?



Representation, Council Size and District Boundaries are important questions, and there is a well-established process in Nova Scotia to determine these and regularly review them through the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (UARB). *This work would be done by a Joint Transition Committee in preparation for the election of a new regional council. This will only happen after a decision to consolidate has been made.*

The Transition Committee would consult with all of the communities involved, develop options and propose the size of Council and the geography of district boundaries and explain their decision to the UARB. The UARB would also consult with the public as part of its review of the proposed Council size and boundaries.

Mayer of Town of Antigonish

Balanced Representation

The UARB has established a general concept of balanced representation – everyone's electoral vote will carry the same weight, regardless of where they live and uses a guideline that the number of electors in each district should be within 10% of the average for all districts. Exceptions can be made to reflect things like travel distances and communities of interest.



10%

guideline for the number of electors in each district

There are two main issues when considering Council size.



1 Council Size

1. Council Size

How many Councillors are needed to effectively represent citizens and to govern the municipal unit? Currently, the Municipality of the County of Antigonish has 10 Councillors, one of whom is chosen by their peers as Warden. The Town of Antigonish elects 6 Councillors at large plus the Mayor.

In terms of relative size, the County has a population (2021) of 15,473 and the Town has 4,656.

In recent years, Nova Scotia municipal councils are smaller. The Province has created a process through the UARB where municipalities have to review their size and boundaries on a regular basis. The County currently undergoes this process every eight years. The Town does not because councillors are elected at large.



2 District Boundaries

2. District Boundaries

The review and consultation process for establishing each district must consider several factors listed in the Municipal Government Act (Section 368 (4)):

Number of electors

Relative parity of voting power

(the 10% plus or minus guideline)

Population density

Community of interest

Geographic size

The typical approach for establishing municipal boundaries involves the preparation of maps showing the proposed changes and consulting with the communities involved before making a decision.

Current Councils will not be able to determine any new district boundaries or size of a new Council before the decision about consolidation is made.

Recommended Approach

We believe that electoral districts should foster a balance between rural and urban communities. This would require some blending of urban and suburban areas around the Town with their surrounding communities, and adjustments across more distant districts to reflect these changes. This same concept was used in Queens Regional Municipality, and it has worked well to balance rural and urban interests when making decisions for the whole municipality.

Summary: Should the Town and County decide to consolidate, there are clearly established procedures to ensure balanced representation for all voters in a new municipal unit to determine the number of councillors required for accessible and effective decision-making, and for deciding on the boundaries of new electoral districts.

Property Taxation and Potential Consolidation

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

During consolidations, taxpayers have concerns that property taxes would increase.



Guiding Principle

4. Continue fair taxation and user pay approaches

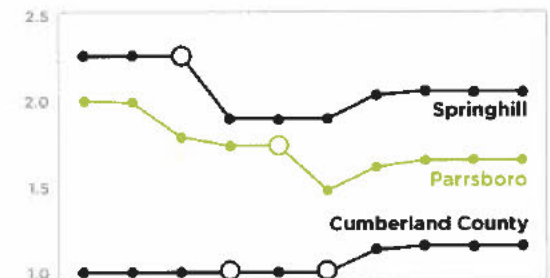
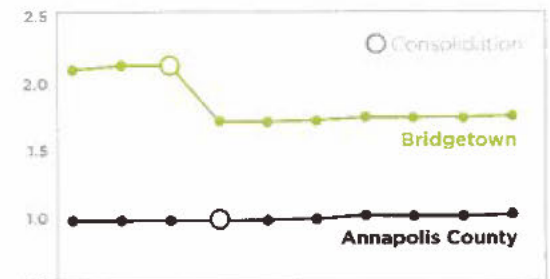
When are tax rates for a merged unit decided?

Should the Town and Municipality decide to consolidate, a Joint Transition Committee would prepare a combined operating and capital budget in preparation for the launch of a new municipal unit. Typically, the first year in a merged municipality sees very little change in existing services, fees and tax rates. History shows us that municipal mergers in other parts of Nova Scotia have not created property tax rate increases in the years following a merger.

History with other mergers

These graphs demonstrate the impact of other mergers in Nova Scotia on tax rates.

Residential Tax Rates for Merged Rural Municipalities and Towns
\$ per \$100 of assessment



2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

What do these graphs mean? County tax rates did not increase because of these municipal mergers. Town tax rates remained the same or were reduced. Similar conclusions should apply to commercial tax rates before and after a merger.

How will tax bills change in a consolidated municipality?

Typically, a merged municipality will establish a base tax rate for services across the new municipality, and supplement this with "area tax rates" in parts of the municipality where service levels are different. This is identical to the approach used in the County of Antigonish now to support fire protection, hydrants, streetlights and water.

Forecasting Future Tax Rates with Consolidation

It is far too early to forecast future property tax rates in a consolidated municipality for the Town and County, but a few facts are known now:

- ✔ Both the Town and County are in good financial shape going into a possible merger.
- ✔ Population and development trends are generally stable – property assessments are not in a state of decline for either municipal unit.*
- ✔ Municipal infrastructure, capital replacement planning and reserves are in good overall shape in both municipalities.
- ✔ Water rates and electrical utility rates are regulated by the UARB, and these would not be impacted by consolidation of the municipal service provider
(See *Fact Sheet 5 on Water, Electricity and Energy Leadership for more information*).



(*) For more detailed statistics about both municipalities, check out the *Municipal Profile and Financial Condition Indicators Reports, 2019-20*, for both the Town of Antigonish and County of Antigonish, published online by Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Recommended Approach

Residents and businesses should be taxed fairly, based on services and infrastructure provided to each community. Property tax rates and municipal debt should utilize existing Town and County user pay and area rate models.

Summary: Should the Town and County decide to merge, a Joint Transition Committee would prepare the first operating and capital budget in advance of the election of a new Council. The evidence suggests that municipal mergers in Nova Scotia have not resulted in increased taxes for either the County or Town governments involved. Tax bills will likely include a base rate plus area rates, following the current County model. While actual future tax rates can't be predicted, the two units are going into a possible merger without significant risks for tax increases which are often caused by declining revenues or failing infrastructure.

The Consolidation Process

3

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

Introduction

In September 2021, both Councils approved the exploration of a possible merger. As a result, they began a process with a few important steps.



Guiding Principle(s)

1. Take a regional approach to municipal services
3. Communicate regularly about progress and decisions
5. Value our existing municipal staff
7. Enhance environmental sustainability

When would the potential consolidation of Town and County be decided?

Town and County Councils are researching the possibility of consolidation. As part of that research, both Councils would like to conduct a thorough community engagement process. After obtaining funding from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Town and County hired Brighter Community Planning to develop and implement an engagement and communication project to ensure as many people and businesses as possible have the opportunity to provide their input.

The community consultation process will take place in April and May with a final report going to the Municipalities summarizing the findings from the engagement to be made available in late May. **Town and County Councils will make a decision to move ahead or maintain the status quo in Summer 2022.** Before this important decision is made, both Councils are committed to a wide ranging community consultation process.

What is the objective of the consultation process?

“

For Councils to decide if residents, businesses and the overall community would be better served if the Town and County became one municipal unit.”

Brighter Community Planning will use a variety of online, print and in person approaches, respecting public health guidelines, to talk, listen, respond to questions and to identify important themes and issues coming from residents in all parts of the Town and County.



How can I take part in the consultation?

There will be lots of opportunities to provide your comments, to meet with Council and Staff, and to get questions answered:

- ✔ Basic information about the consultation process became available in March on **Antigonish.ca**.
- ✔ A special Antigonish Consolidation Consultation and Engagement website, called Howspace, launched in February. This is a place to share information, ask questions, provide comments and take part in discussions.
- ✔ For those who prefer to receive information on paper, the April issue of County Connect was distributed in all communities and included a special insert on the consultation process and possible consolidation.
- ✔ Community information sessions are being planned for April and May, subject to any health restrictions, to provide a face-to-face opportunity to learn about a possible consolidation, ask questions and have them answered.
- ✔ You can also contact **info@antigonish.ca** or call toll free **1-833-563-2786** or **1-833-563-2787** and staff will respond to you directly.

What happens, if Councils want to move forward with consolidation?



The following is a partial list of what would need to be done if both Town and County Councils vote to move forward with consolidation:

- ✔ Work with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to obtain special Transition Legislation and funding for the consolidation process.
- ✔ Transition Legislation would provide for:
 - Creating a Joint Transition Committee (Mayor, Warden, Deputy Mayor and Warden, CAO's) to establish the new Municipality.
 - Hiring a Transition Coordinator to direct the consolidation process with a target date of April 1, 2024.
 - Guiding the Transition Committee and CAO's in establishing a consolidated organization, creating the new administrative structure.
 - Recruiting a CAO for the new municipality.
 - Developing combined financial, taxation and debt policies and first budget.
 - Transferring all existing municipal by-laws, policies and contracts to the new municipal unit.
- ✔ Complete an electoral boundary review study and seek approval from the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board.
- ✔ Organize the first election of Mayor and Council for the combined municipality.
- ✔ Complete the joint transition process by April 1, 2024.

Summary: Town and County Councils have begun a process to consider whether consolidation would better serve residents, businesses and the broader community. They have created a joint Steering Committee and have retained Brighter Community Planning to lead the consultation and engagement to take place in April and May. Public input will help Councils make a decision on whether it will proceed with consolidation.

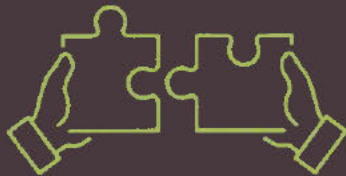
Community Identity and Potential Consolidation

4

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

When municipalities in Nova Scotia have merged, people and business wonder if they will lose their community's unique sense of identity.



Guiding Principles

2. Build vibrant individual communities.

6. Ensure fair representation for urban and rural residents

When are these things decided?

Community identity is not something that is decided by anyone except its residents, businesses and organizations that live in a community. A sense of place is about a lot of things, and the name or type of local government doesn't impact that perception and familiarity.

But there are things that a merged municipal government could do to ensure communities across the larger area benefit from the joint organization.

Build on Existing Strengths

Both the Town and County have activities and programs in place to support individual organizations and communities. These would be the basis for recognizing and supporting community driven initiatives in the future.

- ✔ Organizations have an opportunity each year to apply for assistance to the Town's Community Grants Policy or the County's Community Partnership Grants Policy.
- ✔ The appointment of citizens to committees such as the Planning Advisory Committee or the Accessibility Committee is an opportunity to reach out and engage community representatives.
- ✔ The County has encouraged the expansion of broadband services, most recently upgraded in the areas of Lochaber and Malignant Cove. This new infrastructure will improve opportunities to communicate with and promote local communities using websites, social media and communications partnerships.
- ✔ Both the Town and County have well established programs to support volunteer fire departments.
- ✔ The Town and County support tourism initiatives that attract people and business to the communities and build local economic activity.
- ✔ Councillors would continue to serve as critical local community advocates through a Council Agendas.
- ✔ There would be continued support for the history, culture and talent of the community.

Drawing on Other Municipal Examples

There are many examples of municipal mergers that support the identity and vibrancy of local communities. As an example, Queens Regional Municipality provided several highlights recently, taken from over twenty-five years' experience as a merged organization.

Be deliberate in spreading infrastructure projects across numerous communities.

Draw citizen appointees for municipal committees from all parts of the region.

Promote local communities with signage and tourism partnerships.

Develop a strong Community Investment Fund and policy.

Establish a single Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-Law with one set of rules for development.



Recommended Approach

A municipal consolidation process will not determine anyone's sense of place or community identity. If someone lives in Havre Boucher, or the Town, they will continue to see themselves as living in their home community. Your community will always be your community. We would follow the example from Queens Regional Municipality, which suggests that regional decision making should be seen as benefiting local assets and services, and enhancing overall community.

Summary: Protection of Community Identity is an important consideration in a municipal consolidation process. The form of local government has very little to do with determining one's sense of place. Both the Town and County have tools in place to support local communities, their volunteers, meeting spaces and events. It would be important to use the same tools effectively in a consolidated municipal organization.

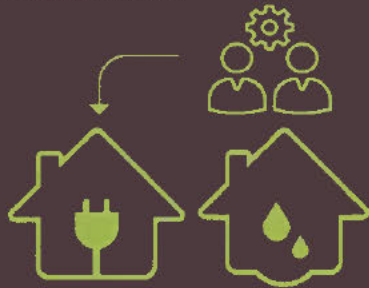
Water, Electricity and Energy Leadership

5

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

Both the County and Town operate utilities. How would these services be impacted by a possible consolidation?



Guiding Principle(s)

1. Take a regional approach to municipal services
4. Continue fair taxation and user pay approaches
7. Enhance environmental sustainability

Water in Town and County

In Nova Scotia, water supply and distribution systems are carefully regulated by both the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (UARB). The Town has a water utility that draws its supply from the James River watershed and is distributed to Town Residents and some County users. There are approximately 1,600 connections to the Town's water utility.

The County water utility provides water in the fringe area surrounding the Town, and to Lower South River, St. Andrews and St. Josephs. In 2020 the County amalgamated all of its water systems into one utility and harmonized rates for all 1,640 water utility customers.

Both the Town and County water utilities regularly review their operations and rates

to ensure they are current and appropriate. Water utility rates are approved by the UARB after a periodic rate study and review process.

In Nova Scotia, water supply and distribution systems are carefully regulated by both the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board.

Although there may be opportunities in the future to combine the two existing water services, initially the utilities, their environmental permits and UARB rate orders would remain unchanged. In a consolidated municipality, there would not be any additional demand on one utility or the other to supply water to existing customers.

Electricity in the Town

Town residents and businesses also have their own electrical utility, regulated through the UARB. The utility purchases electricity from Nova Scotia Power (NSP), and the approved rate structure is tied closely to changes the NSP rate structure. The administration, maintenance and operation of the utility is integrated with the Town organization, in the same way as the water utility.

While there are opportunities to achieve efficiencies and share knowledge in a larger municipal unit, the Antigonish Electrical Utility and its rate structure would have to be treated as a regulated operation to benefit its existing subscribers.

Renewable Energy Leadership

Both the Town and County have demonstrated real leadership in addressing climate change and alternate energy, and this leadership should be recognized and advanced in any possible municipal consolidation process.

The County has installed a total of 97kWh in solar PV, starting with a roof mounted system (25kWh) in 2016 and a ground mounted (72kWh) solar array in June 2021. Both have long term agreements with NSP. The County recently completed a Low Carbon Community feasibility study to explore new energy initiatives with Paqtneq Mi'kmaw Nation (PMN) and will continue to plan next steps together, building on our Anku'kamkewey Peace and Friendship Accord signed on May 5, 2018. Currently the County and PMN are installing EV chargers in partnership with the Town. In 2021, the County approved a five-year Energy Management Plan that looks at efficiency, renewables and partnership as important components of responding to climate change and providing long term energy options.



The Town is also demonstrating concrete leadership in the development of alternate energy and reducing the community's carbon footprint, through the Alternative Resource Energy Authority (AREA), a partnership between the towns of Antigonish, Berwick and Mahone Bay. The revenues, expenses, assets and liabilities are shared between the AREA's municipal

partners based on the share of the power generated. AREA has future plans for more initiatives, including the installation of automotive EV Chargers and a community solar gardens.



AREA provides significant financial, economic and environmental benefits, which would be maintained in a potential consolidation.

Summary: The Town and County provide important municipal services through long established and regulated utilities, for water and electricity. These services would be included in a possible consolidation, but they have unique regulatory and ownership characteristics that would have to be recognized in any merger process. In addition, there are significant leadership responses to climate change/alternate energy issues in both municipalities that would require special consideration to grow the opportunities that will exist with a larger organization and protect assets and revenues that have been created by each municipal unit and its citizens.

Guiding Principles for Potential Consolidation

6

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

Experience with other municipal mergers has shown that it is important to be clear at the outset about the reason to consider a merger and to set in place some Guiding Principles for key decisions. Councils for both municipal units sat together early in the exploration process and developed these Guiding Principles to reflect what is important to our community. They also provide insight into what is top of mind for Councillors.

Objective for the Potential Consolidation of Town and County

Consolidation is being considered to explore the creation of a stronger local government and a unified voice to improve municipal services, community development, economic opportunities, and the quality of life for everyone in Antigonish.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Take a regional approach to municipal services:** Work creatively, deliberately, and visibly to improve municipal services, economic development, tourism, culture, and community infrastructure for all residents and businesses in the Antigonish region.
- 2. Build vibrant individual communities:** Promote community identity in rural, urban and First Nations communities, so the whole municipality will be stronger.
- 3. Communicate regularly about progress and decisions:** Communications with residents, businesses, councils, and staff should be frequent, transparent, and inclusive.
- 4. Continue fair taxation and user pay approaches:** Residents and businesses should only be taxed for services and infrastructure they have access to. Property tax rates and infrastructure debt should utilize area tax rates and utility fee approaches that exist today wherever possible.



- 5. Value our existing municipal staff:** The blending of Town and County employees will recognize the value, knowledge and dedication of our current staff and every effort will be made to retain staff and to provide new opportunities.
- 6. Ensure fair representation for urban and rural residents:** District boundaries should ensure every voter has the same electoral power as every other voter, balance rural and urban interests, and recognize local communities of interest.
- 7. Enhance environmental sustainability:** Ownership of the Antigonish electric utility is central to expanding green energy options and reducing our carbon footprint. Build upon the success of initiatives and partnerships with the Alternate Energy Resource Authority and the Municipality's Energy Management Plan.

Summary: The Town and County are exploring a possible merger to one new municipal unit. They have developed a clear objective for this process, and some Guiding Principles to provide a transparent framework for consolidation.

Antigonish Volunteer Fire Departments and Possible Consolidation

7

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

There are 9 volunteer Fire Departments located within the Town and County. They play an important role in fire protection and emergency services. They are also important community partners and organizers.



Guiding Principle(s)

1. Take a regional approach to municipal services
2. Build vibrant individual communities
4. Continue fair taxation and user pay approaches

The Town of Antigonish Volunteer Fire Department is funded directly by the Town and the County-based volunteer fire departments are funded through an Area Fire Levy. As the discussions continue about the potential for consolidation, there may be questions about what might change around fire service if a municipal merger should take place.

A history of strong municipal support for volunteers

The Municipal Government Act provides local governments with the ability to provide fire service directly or to support external volunteer organizations that do so. The Town has funded a volunteer fire department for many years, and these costs are included in the annual operating and capital budget.

In 2021-22 the Town operating budget for fire protection was about \$300,000. The Town supports the volunteer Chief and the Department, but the Chief is not an employee of the Town. Operating within annual budgets, the volunteers determine what the organization of fire services looks like on a year-to-year basis.

These critical emergency and community organizations are organized in response to the needs of their communities.



For the volunteer departments serving the County, there is also a history of long-term financial support to each volunteer organization through the mechanism of Area Fire Levies. The County paid approximately \$1,094,000 to County Fire Departments.

Departments

Antigonish County Volunteer Fire Department

North Shore Volunteer Fire Department

District 2 - Town Fire Department

Four Valley's Fire Department

Pomquet Emergency & Rescue Services

Tracadie Volunteer Fire Department

St. Andrews & District Volunteer Fire Department

Auld's Cove Volunteer Fire Department

Havre Boucher & District Volunteer Fire Dept.

Area rates are also provided for external departments in St. Mary's and Merigomish.

These critical emergency and community organizations are organized in response to the needs of their communities. The County collects and remits the Area Fire Levy to assist these groups, but it does not impose standards and procedures. The volunteer fire departments further support one another through the Strait Area Mutual Aid Association.

Will the relationship between municipal governments and volunteer fire services change?

Changes to funding and the operation of volunteer fire departments is not a part of any discussions on consolidation. The Town and County will only discuss changes to volunteer fire services during this process if a request is made by the fire departments.



Summary: Volunteer Fire Service is important to all communities in both the Town and County. Whether operated directly in the Town or funded by Area Fire Rates in the County, these volunteer organizations understand their community needs and respond accordingly. They do not operate in isolation and have lots of experience through in their communities and support one another through mutual aid. It is important for municipal funding of volunteer fire service to be continued in the same manner. There is no reason to change this system because of a possible municipal consolidation.

Consolidation or Amalgamation?

What is the difference?

8

ANTIGONISH
Our Community

The Town and County are looking into “Consolidation” of their two organizations. The following outlines the differences between Consolidation and Amalgamation.



So you’ve been hearing a lot about “Consolidation” but what is it and how does it differ from “Amalgamation”?

Consolidation is a newer approach to municipal mergers that is more collaborative for the municipal partners. Amalgamation generally happens when a municipality is forced to merge with another partner. The key difference is that Consolidation is voluntary and municipal partners have much more control over the process.

With Consolidation, the Province would create special legislation to empower a “Joint Transition Committee” that represents both municipal units. The Joint Transition Committee has the authority to determine what the new Regional Municipality would look like.

	Consolidation	Amalgamation
Examples	Windsor West Hants	Halifax Regional Municipality Cape Breton Regional Municipality
Overview	Municipal Leadership “Bottom Up” Process	Provincial Leadership “Top Down” Process
Legislation	Special Legislation for each merger Joint Councils make the merger decision. Councils request special legislation	Municipal Government Act, Part XVII UARB Reviews Municipal proposals, Cabinet issues merger order
Structure	Joint Transition Committee Joint Committee recommends Coordinator Joint Committee develops organization Staffed with municipal staff, consultants Joint Committee hires first CAO Boundaries reviewed by UARB Joint Committee organizes first election	Independent Coordinator Cabinet Chooses Coordinator Coordinator develops organization Staffed by experts, consultants Coordinator hires first CAO Boundaries reviewed by NSUARB Coordinator organizes first election

Mayor of Town of Antigonish

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

Dear Residents of the Town and County of Antigonish

In September 2021, the Councils of the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish unanimously voted to explore the possibility of consolidation. Why? Consolidating may be a more efficient use of existing resources to provide a high level of service to residents living in all our communities. Many of the issues facing our communities, such as climate change, economic development, infrastructure planning, accessibility and housing, require or would benefit significantly from a regional approach.

We are a progressive region and the Town and County have been working together for a long time with great success. We have seen the benefits of working together with examples like hosting the National Special Olympics, Regional Emergency Management, and Physician Retention just to name a few.

You've elected us to do what's in your best interest and part of our job is to explore opportunities like this. In this case, our decision needs to be informed by your input. We are asking everyone who has an interest in Antigonish's future to take part in the community engagement around a possible consolidation. Here's how:

- Take part in one of our on-line or in person sessions throughout April and into May. See the public engagement schedule on the back of this letter.
- Visit Antigonish.ca to view the Frequently Asked Questions and click on "Participate Now."
- Call us toll-free at 1-833-563-2786 or 1-833-563-2787 and leave a voicemail for staff, who will follow up with you. This is a great option for those who want to remain engaged but are hesitant to come to a public session, are not comfortable with technology or may have unreliable Internet service.
- Email your questions and comments to info@antigonish.ca.
- Fill out our survey between March 21 - April 8 at <https://antigonish.in.howspace.com/survey-questions>

You care about our community, and we care about what you think and want to hear your feedback. Your input will help us decide if residents, businesses, and the overall community will be better served if the Town and County became one municipal unit.

Thank you in advance and we look forward to your participation.



Laurie Boucher
Mayor
Town of Antigonish



Owen McCarron
Warden
Municipality of the County of Antigonish

Community Engagement Schedule

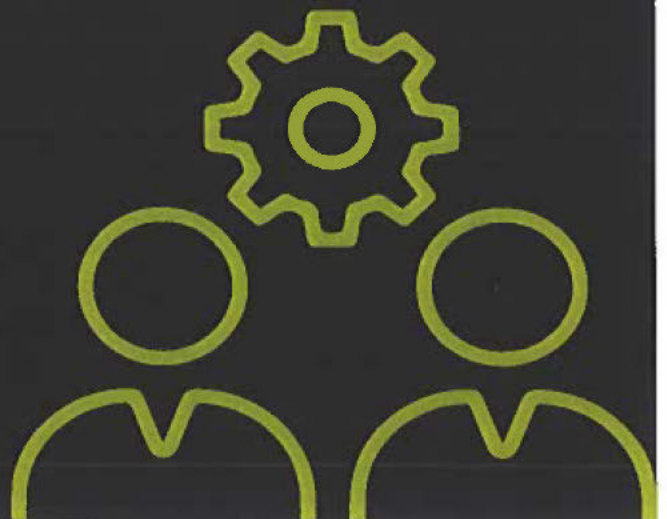
A total of 17 community engagement sessions have been arranged so that as many people as possible can attend. To make it even easier for busy parents and caregivers, sessions are child friendly - Town and County recreation staff will be on hand with fun activities for the kids. Sessions are organized in an open house format and are "drop in." Feel free to pop by during the times indicated below.

Monday, April 11	1:00PM - 3:00PM	The Peoples Place Library Community Room
Monday, April 11	7:00PM - 9:00PM	St. Joseph's Lakeside Community Centre
Tuesday, April 12	3:00PM - 5:00PM	Online Session. Register in advance at https://bit.ly/3i3Pczc
Tuesday, April 12	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Lakevale Mini Trail Community Centre
Wednesday, April 13	11:00AM - 12:30PM	The Peoples Place Library Community Room
Wednesday, April 13	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Arisaig Parish Hall
Monday, April 25	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Havre Boucher Community Centre
Tuesday, April 26	11:00AM - 1:00PM	Antigonish Legion/CACL
Tuesday, April 26	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Antigonish Legion/CACL
Wednesday, April 27	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Lochaber Centre
Thursday, April 28	6:00PM - 8:00PM	St. Andrews Community Centre
Monday, May 2	12:00PM - 3:00PM	The Peoples Place Library Community Room
Monday, May 2	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Heatherton Community Centre
Tuesday, May 3	5:00PM - 8:00PM	St. Andrew Junior School (Appleseed Drive)
Wednesday, May 4	6:00PM - 8:00PM	Tracadie Fire Hall
Monday, May 9	6:00PM - 8:00PM	Pomquet Fire Hall

* A session is being planned with Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation that is still TBD

ANTIGONISH
Our Community

Invitation to join the
Consolidation
Discussion



ANTIGONISH

Our Community

*Mayor of Town
of Antigonish*



Exploring Municipal Consolidation.

Your Guide to
Community
Engagement.

As the Councils for the Town and County of Antigonish explore the possibility of consolidation, we have scheduled an extensive community engagement process. This is your guide to participating.

Message from Mayor and Warden



To the Antigonish Community;

In September 2021, both Town and County Councils unanimously voted to explore consolidating the two municipalities into one unit. You might be wondering why now? Or why at all?

We believe that the Town and County have done some progressive work together already. We have seen the benefits from collaborating with examples like hosting the National Special Olympics, Regional Emergency Management, and Physician Retention – just to name a few.

Both the Town and the County are in a good financial position, which is the best time to be looking at the benefits of consolidation, instead of being forced to do so because one needs help.

You've elected us to do what's in your best interest and part of our job is to explore opportunities like this. Your input will inform our decision and help us decide if residents, businesses, and the overall community will be better served if the Town and County become one municipal unit.

This guide is designed to answer some of your questions and let you know how you can take part.

Thank you and we look forward to your involvement.

Laurie Boucher
Mayor
Town of Antigonish

Owen McCarron
Warden
Municipality of the County of Antigonish

As we look at possible consolidation, we have carefully and purposefully created some important principles that will guide us. The Guiding Principles provide insight into what is top of mind for Councillors and will help guide discussions as we head into the community engagement sessions.

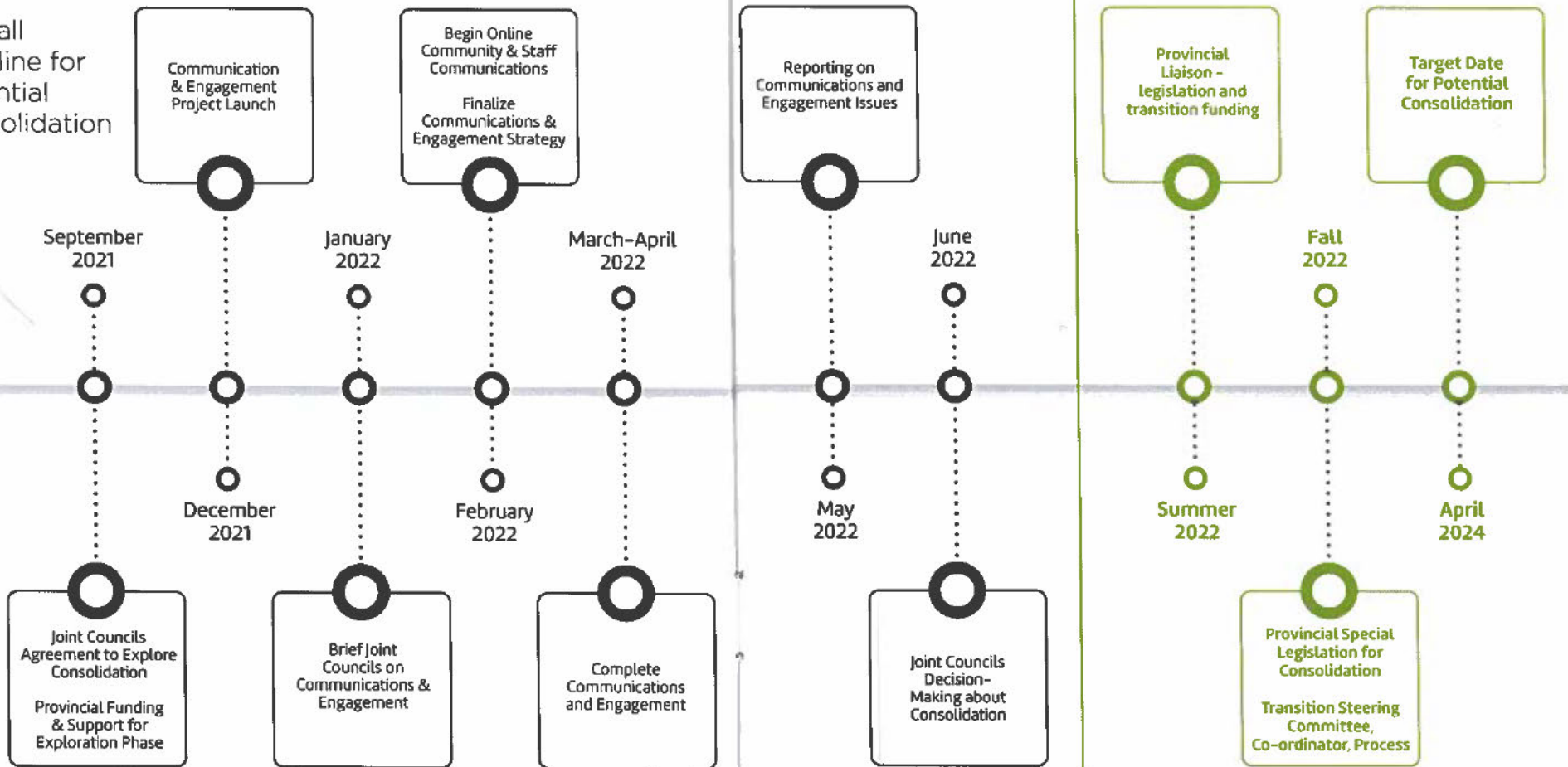
Guiding Principles for Consolidating Antigonish Town and County:

- 1. Take a regional approach to municipal services:** Work creatively, deliberately, and visibly to improve municipal services, economic development, tourism, culture, and community infrastructure for all residents and businesses in the Antigonish region.
- 2. Build vibrant individual communities:** Promote community identity in rural, urban and First Nations communities, so the whole municipality will be stronger.
- 3. Communicate regularly about progress and decisions:** Communications with residents, businesses, councils, and staff should be frequent, transparent, and inclusive.
- 4. Continue fair taxation and user pay approaches:** Residents and businesses should only be taxed for services and infrastructure they have access to. Property tax rates and infrastructure debt should utilize area tax rates and utility fee approaches that exist today wherever possible.
- 5. Value our existing municipal staff:** The blending of Town and County employees will recognize the value, knowledge and dedication of our current staff and every effort will be made to retain staff and to provide new opportunities.
- 6. Ensure Fair Representation for Urban and Rural Residents:** District boundaries should ensure every voter has the same electoral power as every other voter, balance rural and urban interests, and recognize local communities of interest.
- 7. Enhance environmental sustainability:** Ownership of the Antigonish electric utility is central to expanding green energy options and reducing our carbon footprint. Build upon the success of initiatives and partnerships with the Alternate Energy Resource Authority and the Municipality's Energy Management Plan.

Exploring Consolidation Process

Town and County Councils have begun a process to consider whether consolidation would better serve residents, businesses and the broader community. They have created a joint Steering Committee that has retained Brighter Community Planning to lead the consultation and engagement to take place in April and May. Public input will help Councils make a decision on whether it will proceed with consolidation.

Overall Timeline for Potential Consolidation



The Town and County are using different methods of community engagement to reach as many citizens as possible to understand opportunities and concerns.

Your Questions

We have taken your most common questions and have created a series of fact sheets for you to consider as you think about a possible merger. Additional information on each of the topics below can be found on Antigonish.ca, just click on the "Participate Now" button to access Anitgonish's HowSpace site, where these fact sheets can be found. We will also have copies of them at the in-person drop-in sessions.



How will my input be used?

Your comments will be recorded and put into a report for Councils. This report will be considered as Councils look answer this key question:

Will residents, businesses and the overall community be better served if the Town and County became one municipal unit?

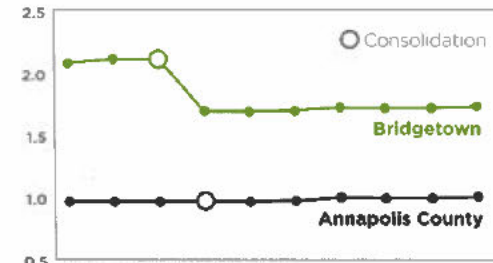
A final report outlining the key themes from a thorough consultation process will be shared with Councils in June. Along with other reports being prepared by staff, Councils will decide in the summer on whether to consolidate.

Property Taxes

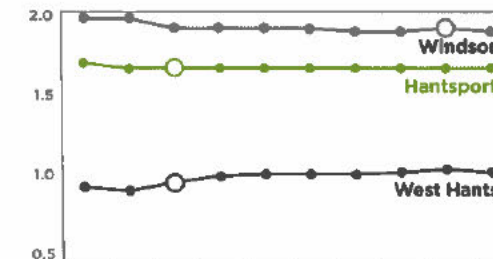
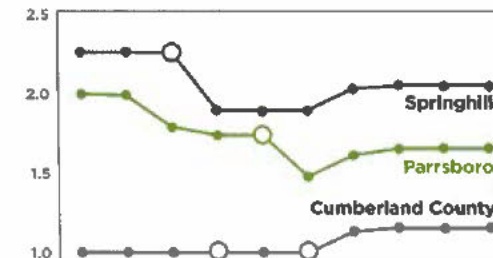
One of the most common concerns expressed when municipal mergers have taken place in other parts of the province is whether consolidation will have an impact on property taxes. History shows us that municipal mergers in other parts of Nova Scotia have not created property tax increases in the years following a merger.

The following graphs show the impact of mergers on tax rates:

\$ per \$100 of assessment



Residential Tax Rates for Merged Rural Municipalities and Towns



While actual future tax rates can't be predicted (future tax rates are set by future Councils) the two units are going into a possible consolidation without significant risks for tax increases which are often caused by declining revenues or failing infrastructure.

Water, Electricity and Energy Leadership

The Town and County provide important municipal services through long established and regulated utilities, for water and electricity. These services would be included in a possible consolidation. They both have unique regulatory and ownership characteristics that would have to be recognized in any merger process. Any future changes to water or electricity rates have to go through a review process and be approved by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB).



Both the Town and County have demonstrated real leadership in addressing climate change and alternate energy. This leadership should be recognized and advanced in any possible municipal consolidation process.

Representation, Council Size and District Boundaries



Council Size



District Boundaries

Representation, Council Size and District Boundaries are important questions, and there is a well-established process in Nova Scotia to determine municipal boundaries. The work to determine where new boundaries would be would only happen after a decision to consolidate has been made. If the decision is to consolidate, a Transition Committee would be created, which would consult with all the communities and Councils to decide on the size of Council and the geography of the district boundaries. The recommendation made by the Transition Committee would be submitted to the NSUARB for review. The NSUARB can make adjustments on the recommendation if required and then final approval would be made on the new districts.

Currently, the County undergoes a District Review process every eight years. This is done to ensure balanced representation in the current districts. The Town does not currently go through this process because Councillors are elected at large.

Community Identity

Maintaining community identity is an important consideration when exploring municipal consolidation.

The way your local government is formed will not change your community's identity. The smaller communities you call home will not change and that is what makes Antigonish such a great place to live.

There are many examples of municipal mergers that support the identity and vibrancy of local communities. As an example, Queens Regional Municipality provided several suggestions from more than 25 years as a merged organization.

Support Community Capacity

Both the Town and County have activities and grant programs in place to support individual organizations and smaller community-based initiatives. These grants are an important source of support as well as means for Councils to support citizen involvement in making their communities a stronger place to live, work, and play. A potential consolidation would not create sudden changes in how community organizations receive their grant funding. There are mechanisms in place to fund and provide services to organizations that are vital to the Antigonish community.

Drawing on Other Municipal Examples

There are many examples of municipal mergers that support the identity and vibrancy of local communities. As an example, Queens Regional Municipality provided several highlights recently, taken from over twenty-five years' experience as a merged organization:

Be deliberate in spreading infrastructure projects across numerous communities.

Draw citizen appointees for municipal committees from all parts of the region.

Promote local communities with signage and tourism partnerships.

Develop a strong Community Investment Fund and policy.

Establish a single Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-Law with one set of rules for development.



Fire Services

There are nine volunteer Fire Departments located within the Town and County of Antigonish. They play an important role in fire protection and emergency services. They are also important community partners and organizers. The Town of Antigonish Volunteer Fire Department is funded directly by the Town and the County-based volunteer fire departments are funded through an Area Fire Levy. As the discussions continue about the potential for consolidation, there may be questions about what might change around fire service if a municipal merger should take place.



Volunteer Fire Service is important to all communities in both the Town and County. Whether operated directly in the Town or funded by Area Fire Rates in the County, these volunteer organizations understand their community needs and respond accordingly.

They do not operate in isolation and have lots of experience through in their communities and support one another through mutual aid. It is important for municipal funding of volunteer fire service to be continued in the same manner. There is no reason to change this system because of a possible municipal consolidation.

Consultation Schedule

We have designed the consultation to be as open and accessible as possible, with options for in person, online, phone and email. Choose how you'd like to participate:

- ✓ Take part in one of our on-line or in person sessions throughout April and into May. See the public engagement schedule on the following page.

- ✓ Visit Antigonish.ca and click on "**Participate Now.**"

- ✓ Call us toll-free at 1-833-563-2786 or 1-833-563-2787 and leave a voicemail for staff, who will follow up with you. This is a great option for those who want to remain engaged but are hesitant to come to a public session, are not comfortable with technology or may have unreliable Internet service.

- ✓ Email your questions and comments to Info@antigonish.ca.

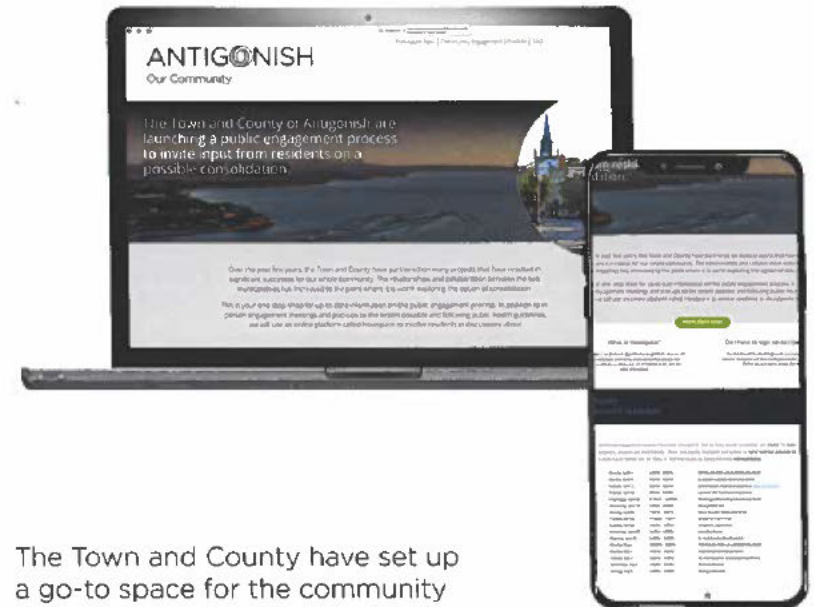
Community Engagement Schedule

A total of 17 community engagement sessions have been arranged so that as many people as possible can attend. To make it even easier for busy parents and caregivers, sessions are child friendly - Town and County recreation staff will be on hand with fun activities for the kids.

Sessions are organized in an open house format and are “drop in.” Feel free to pop by during the times indicated below.

Monday, April 11	1:00PM - 3:00PM	The Peoples Place Library Community Room
Monday, April 11	7:00PM - 9:00PM	St. Joseph's Lakeside Community Centre
Tuesday, April 12	3:00PM - 5:00PM	Online Engagement Session
Tuesday, April 12	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Lakevale Mini Trail Community Centre
Wednesday, April 13	11:00AM - 12:30PM	The Peoples Place Library Community Room
Wednesday, April 13	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Arisaig Parish Hall
Monday, April 25	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Havre Boucher Community Centre
Tuesday, April 26	11:00AM - 1:00PM	Antigonish Legion/CACL
Tuesday, April 26	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Antigonish Legion/CACL
Wednesday, April 27	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Lochaber Centre
Thursday, April 28	6:00PM - 8:00PM	St. Andrews Community Centre
Monday, May 2	12:00PM - 3:00PM	The Peoples Place Library Community Room
Monday, May 2	7:00PM - 9:00PM	Heatherton Community Centre
Tuesday, May 3	5:00PM - 8:00PM	St. Andrew Junior School (Appleseed Drive)
Wednesday, May 4	6:00PM - 8:00PM	Tracadie Fire Hall
Monday, May 9	6:00PM - 8:00PM	Pomquet Fire Hall

* A Session is being planned with Paqtnekek Mikmaw Nation that is still TBD.



The Town and County have set up a go-to space for the community engagement around a possible consolidation.

Visit **Antigonish.ca** today and click on the “Participate Now” button to take part in the discussion online. See page 14 for all of the ways you can participate.



How can I take part?

We have created a plan that allows residents to be engaged in different ways. A series of public drop-in meetings are scheduled as well as online options, phone and email. See the Consultation Schedule on page 12 for more information.

For ongoing online engagement throughout the consultation phase, we are using Antigonish's HowSpace. This is an all-in-one digital facilitation platform. Here we will host workshops and events, there will be Frequently Asked Questions, and you can interact directly on topics that are of interest to you and see what others are saying.

Visit Antigonish.ca and click on the "Participate Now" button. You will be asked to provide your name and email address. The system will then send you a confirmation email and the link you can use to access the site.

We look forward to your participation! If you have questions, please email info@antigonish.ca.