

ANTIGONISH

Our Community

TO: MUNICIPAL & TOWN COUNCILS
FROM: MUNICIPAL & TOWN STAFF
SUBJECT: CONSOLIDATION: COMMUNITY IDENTITY
DATE: OCTOBER 7, 2022

SUMMARY

Community identity is defined as the collective identity that indicates the particularity and distinguishing features of the community.

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 many things, and the name or type of local government doesn't impact that perception and familiarity. There are things that a merged municipal government could do to ensure communities across the larger area benefit from the joint organization, such as:

- Community identification signage,
- Community based tourism partnerships,
- Support community organizations through municipal grants,
- Ensure all communities are represented when considering various types of infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, recreation).
- Council and committee representation.

It has been made clear that it is essential that the culture and identities of both urban and rural communities are retained in a consolidated municipality.

DISCUSSION

Both the Town and County have tools in place to support local communities, their volunteers, meeting spaces and events. These include but are not limited to:

- Organizations have an opportunity each year to apply for assistance through 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
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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 Council Agendas.
- There would be continued support for the history, culture and talent of the community.

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. Community Identity is determined by the people who live there and the features and uniqueness of the community. This fact is supported by history: in all areas of previous municipal mergers the former towns and communities continue to identify themselves as they always have.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Before community engagement began, Municipal and Town Councils framed the following Guiding Principles related to the decision-making process as it related to community identity:

2) Build vibrant individual communities: Promote community identity in rural, urban and First Nations communities, so the whole municipality will be stronger.

Based on feedback from the community, it appears these guiding principles are still appropriate and should be considered reflective of the community's perspective and expectations as council's consider their decision.

NEXT STEPS

Councils are invited to reflect on the information contained in this memo as it relates to its principal question: "Would the residents, businesses and the overall community be better served if the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish became one municipal unit?"

Councils are further invited to discuss and provide feedback on this information. Additional information may be obtained based on specific questions of councils. Otherwise, councils are invited to consider this information in its decision making related to consolidation.