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Incivility in local
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Presidential Addresses



Bruce MacDougall
President, FPEIM

As Prince Edward Island heads toward general municipal elections on Monday, Nov. 2, the Federation of PEI Municipalities hopes to see strong participation across the Island. At the same time, we recognize that municipal leaders – like many elected officials – increasingly face harassment and, in some cases, threats while carrying out their roles.

In this *Atlantic Municipal Magazine*, we raise these issues in collaboration with our colleagues at the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, the Union of Municipalities of New Brunswick, and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. Together, we look at the effects of harassment on individuals and participation in local government and highlight resources that can support municipal leaders.

We hope these articles contribute to understanding and thoughtful discussion, as we continue to support those who work to build their communities.



Amy Coady
President, MNL

Across Newfoundland and Labrador, municipal leaders and administrators are doing great work. These are dedicated, caring, and knowledgeable individuals working to improve their communities with tools and resources they have available.

Unfortunately, systemic problems persist, adding significant challenges to the work of local government officials and staff. When the system is the climate, it requires a change in approach, with a focus on adaptation and mitigation, rather than solving the issue.

To help our members overcome these challenges, MNL launched Climate Ready NL, a project that assists towns in identifying climate risks and hazards, as well as providing support for building and strengthening emergency plans and natural asset management plans.

The problem of bullying and harassment in the municipal sector, both from the general public and among councils themselves, is a systemic issue well within the scope of possible change.

It's not all gloomy – there are many positives in municipal work, and we continue to work toward a future of vibrant, sustainable communities where all residents can feel welcome and supported.



Brittany Merrifield
President/Président, UMNb

The Union of Municipalities of New Brunswick (UMNB) is proud to partner on this 2026 edition of *Atlantic Municipal Magazine*. As municipalities prepare for New Brunswick's municipal elections this May, regional collaboration between Atlantic provinces is more important than ever.

Local governments across Atlantic Canada continue to face shared challenges, including the harassment of elected officials, climate change, and growing infrastructure pressures. This issue highlights key Atlantic advocacy efforts, along with a New Brunswick article summarizing an upcoming report on the harassment and intimidation of elected officials.

L'Union des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick (UMNB) est fière de s'associer à l'édition 2026 du magazine *Atlantic Municipal Magazine*. Alors que les municipalités se préparent pour les élections municipales du Nouveau-Brunswick en mai prochain, la collaboration régionale est plus importante que jamais.

Les collectivités de la région de l'Atlantique continuent de faire face à des défis communs, notamment le harcèlement des responsables électoraux, les changements climatiques et les pressions croissantes sur les infrastructures. Ce numéro met en lumière les principales initiatives de défense des intérêts de la région atlantique, ainsi qu'un article résumant un rapport qui sera bientôt publié sur le harcèlement et l'intimidation des élus au Nouveau-Brunswick.



David Mitchell
President, NSFM

Across Nova Scotia, municipal leaders are navigating growing complexity — from strengthening governance practices to preparing coastal communities for a changing climate. In this edition, you'll read a first-person reflection from Mayor Pam Mood that highlights the human impact of code of conduct expectations and the importance of respect, accountability, and resilience in public service.

You'll also see how municipalities are advancing practical climate adaptation through coastal protection, trail restoration, and nature-based infrastructure, supported by strong partnerships and targeted funding.

NSFM's work is guided by focused advocacy, financial continuity, transparency, responsiveness, and collaboration. These principles shape how we support members and advance municipal priorities. By working together with purpose and discipline, we strengthen local leadership and position our communities for long-term success.

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Politicians of all stripes, including Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston (left), Yarmouth Mayor Pam Mood, and Senator Allister Surette (right) have had to face harassment. *Photo: NSFM*



This article was contributed by Mayor Pam Mood, Town of Yarmouth, and past president, Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM). Communications support was provided by Charlene Fekeshazy (cfekeshazy@nsfm.ca), NSFM communications advisor.

Serving under fire

Harassment, mental health, and the future of municipal leadership

As I write this, I'm an elected official three weeks into a peace bond issued for the protection of not only myself, but more distressing, my children and grandchildren.

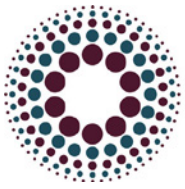
Ironically, the threat to set my house on fire with me in it was based on the false accusation that I had "directed" the Province of Nova Scotia to put a halt on public code of conduct complaints against elected officials. Sorry folks – no such powers here. But I had "stopped democracy" in its tracks and I would pay for it.

I know, I know. Sounds like a trailer for a Netflix limited series. Unfortunately, it's very real, and my third outright death threat as mayor, each based on assumptions far removed from

facts, and each threat more explicit than the last.

Death threats, insults, harassment, abuse, body shaming, and outright lies about my life – both personal and professional – are frequent. Yet it's the first time I've felt the need to seek help from the judicial system, for many reasons.

That the mantra "politicians signed up for this" is something too many people believe – which was shocking to me. I thought folks were joking. And yet, for the life of me, I do not recall signing the document that said, "I accept abuse, harassment, death threats, and anything else thrown at me as part of the job". Anyone else? Thought not. Not only is it ridiculous, but given today's political climate, it's dangerous.



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ABOUT US

NSFM is in its 120th year. A non-profit organization that helps municipalities tackle issues that are pressing for their communities.

NSFM helps all municipalities in the province through:

ADVOCACY – bringing municipalities together and working on solutions to their shared issues

COLLABORATION – facilitating collaboration amongst municipalities, connecting them with other levels of government, other provincial associations, and other organizations.

EDUCATION – sharing best practices, finding creative solutions, and introducing municipalities to new opportunities

SUSTAINABILITY – helping municipalities prepare for the future so they can rise to all challenges, not only environmental but also organizational



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1. We commit to focused advocacy, passionately championing the causes and issues that align with our vision and mission.
2. We commit to continuity rooted in the belief that financial stability is essential to achieving our mission and making a lasting impact.
3. We commit to honesty, transparency, and ethical behaviour in all our interactions and decisions.
4. We commit to being responsive in all our interactions and operations.
5. We believe that collaboration is essential for achieving our best outcomes.

My experience reflects a growing concern shared by municipal leaders across Atlantic Canada.

“Municipal politics should never come with fear for your personal safety or the well-being of your family,” said Bruce MacDougall, president, Federation of PEI Municipalities. “We’re deeply concerned about increased harassment and threats. These incidents take a real toll on municipal leaders and staff – affecting their health, their families, and their willingness to serve. These issues can also discourage others in the community from even considering a municipal role. We should be encouraging participation, not creating conditions that drive good people away.”

Further, if the declaration “You work for me!” is indeed fact, it should result in a lineup of elected officials filing harassment-in-the-workplace complaints. And yet we can’t, because there are next to zero protections for elected officials, the very people who step up and give their all to make the lives of others – including the abusers – better. More irony.

Why a Code of Conduct Became Essential

Back to the code of conduct-based threat. I’m in my 14th year as mayor of the Town of Yarmouth, past president of NSFM, and served as president during the COVID-19 pandemic as well. Being at the table to help inform decisions, policies, and legislation is important.

So, when the province asked if I would be part of a working group to develop a municipal code of conduct, I said yes before they finished the question. “Let’s get ‘er done!” I screamed. My colleagues and I had seen enough. Public harassment was one issue. But some of the antics from our own tables had to be addressed.

The idea of a province-wide municipal code of conduct came about as a result of many of my colleagues seeing the same behaviour repeatedly by the same individuals, with no recourse. With no teeth in our own municipal codes, we were in dire need of a dentist. It was brought to NSFM who took the lead in working with the province to get us to the actual development of the code.

In a world where we must be of adult age to run for election, adult behaviour is the expectation at the table. And yet, as difficult as it is to say, just as we write bylaws that protect the public, a code had to be written to protect elected colleagues, staff, and the public from some of our own. Let that sink in.

My passion and desperation for a code deepened with each incident I experienced and with each discussion with others regarding their experiences. Screaming during meetings, ugly accusations, grandstanding at events, alcohol before meetings, mistreatment of colleagues and staff, misuse of municipal equipment and spaces, and much more.

There was no shortage of examples on which to base the work to be done. If we as politicians are all painted with the same brush, please, don’t let it be this one.

Human Cost of Public Service

My CAO taught me within my first week to ask why. In the case of public abuse incidents, the answer comes partially from a lack of understanding, not knowing or seeking the facts.

For example, when our much-loved YMCA was going to close, the town purchased the building. We had committed to



Taking part in community events is important for all political figures, including Municipality of Barrington CAO Chris Frotten (left), Yarmouth Mayor Pam Mood, and former prime minister, Justin Trudeau. Photo: NSFM

a \$40-million new build and wanted to ensure continued community access to the services so it served as a bridge to the new build. A huge win for community. Two days later, F*CK PAM appeared in bright red spray paint across the front of the building. I chalked it up to lack of understanding and moved on – after we scrubbed the paint off. That’s one of many public incidents.

At the council table, although I know the why of behaviour runs deeper in many cases, it could also be lack of information and understanding of what’s acceptable and indeed, legal and/or ethical in some cases. To that end, we need more training: mandatory, consistent, and reviewed periodically. Accountability matters.

Serendipitous moment: As I write this, a friend sends me a quote: “Just because someone carries it well, doesn’t mean it isn’t heavy.” She said it reminded her of me.

My friends have been keeping an eye on me lately. They are 100 per cent sure I have what is referred to as courageous integrity. They’re correct. I’ll do the right thing for the right reason despite knowing the often-ugly consequences. I sleep at night. My friends also know that while I don’t show it, it’s weighing on me. I’m human. Giving your life to public service

to help the very people who attack mercilessly can cause one to question their choices. I don’t. But I say this because I fully understand why others do. Fully.

Protecting Leaders, Protecting Democracy

If I were to impart some final thoughts from hard-earned experience, I’d first repeat to always seek to understand why people behave as they do. You will often find underlying issues. Not everyone wakes up wondering who they can abuse today.

Second, stand up and be counted. Bully-victim-bystander. You’re one of three. No abstention at the table of public life.

Do whatever you must to ensure the council table is a safe space for everyone.

Intentionally listen to your gut. You’ll know when you’ve crossed from fearing repercussions for standing up to knowing what you’ve experienced cannot be ignored. That is power. Own it. Use it.

Know the general public is also impacted. They choose to stay quiet for fear of being targeted. Their mental health is worth more. Rightfully so.

More tips? It’s not personal. They don’t know you.

Surround yourself with people you trust. Don’t lose who you are through

any of this – at the council table or otherwise. Keep your convictions and values intact. People don’t have to like us for us to do our job of making their lives better. And we don’t have to agree at the table. Sharing of our opinions is vital.

I could go on for 100 pages, but I’ll end by sharing what hit me most around the abuse and code realm.

First, the number of women of all ages who share they would love to be in public office, but have watched what I go through, say they would never touch it. “It’s not worth it,” they share. They’re mortified. That breaks me.

My answer is always “but oh, it is worth it. I wouldn’t trade what I do for anything.” And I mean that. I hear the same from the elected: “I don’t know how much longer I can handle this.” We are losing some great leaders. In today’s world, and for our future, that should be of grave concern for all of us.

I tell my story as a way to shed light on the hundreds of others going through the same, and worse, with no concrete recourse. We’ve created the Code of Conduct here in Nova Scotia to cover us and the public.

Time for Next Steps

It’s now past time for next steps: legislation that protects elected not from differing opinions or free speech, but from the crossing into abuse, harassment, and threats.

If you’re elected, at any level, protections are needed. The world is not as we knew it. If we’re all in it together, we can get it done and protect our individual mental health, the professionalism of our vocation, and our future. Who’s in?

Experiences like these underscore why many municipal leaders view a strong, enforceable code not as a constraint, but as a foundation for effective governance.

“Fair, clear, and enforced standards of conduct matter. They protect not just individuals, but the integrity of local government itself,” said Mayor Brittany Merrifield, Town of Grand Bay-Westfield. “A code of conduct isn’t about limiting debate. It’s about setting a baseline of professionalism so elected officials can do their jobs effectively. Respect and accountability are not barriers to strong leadership. They are the foundation of it.” [AMM](#)



Coastal communities and the climate frontier

From shorelines to trails, Nova Scotia communities are adapting



This article was contributed by Gab LeVert, communications and engagement officer, Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund. Communications support was provided by Charlene Fekeshazy (cfekeshazy@nsfm.ca), NSFM communications advisor.

Nova Scotia's coastline has always been central to how communities live, work, and connect across our pocket of the world. These places support local economies, outdoor recreational spaces, and a strong sense of pride.

But the climate is changing, and so are our coastlines. Rising sea levels, accelerating erosion, and increasingly frequent and intense storms are putting pressure on infrastructure and natural spaces that were never designed for these conditions.

Coastal communities are feeling those impacts today. Flooded roads, damaged wharves, eroding shorelines, and washed-out trails are becoming more common. The consequences can be immediate and costly. It can mean a longer commute due to flooding, a local seafood operation forced to slow or stop because of a damaged wharf, or a visitor unable to explore some of Nova Scotia's most breathtaking scenery because a storm has washed out a local trail.

While these impacts continue to grow, communities are also finding ways to respond. They're adapting existing infrastructure, rethinking how new projects are designed to better withstand future conditions, restoring natural buffers, and seeking innovative solutions to evolving challenges.

To support this work, the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change launched the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, with the goal of helping communities plan for and respond to climate impacts. The fund – administered by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) – is awarding approximately \$18 million to 71 projects across the province in its first three rounds.

In addition to administering the fund, the NSFM supports municipalities in strengthening coastal resilience through planning and coordination. This work includes expert guidance on coastal planning and bylaws, along with funding that helps municipalities bring in



Digby's Port, Working Waterfront Project. Photo: NSFM

expertise to understand risks, engage communities, and move plans forward.

Together, this work aligns with the province's Coastal Protection Action Plan and helps communities move from understanding coastal risk to taking action on the ground. Reflecting this approach, Round 3 of the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund prioritized coastal protection projects, supporting communities as they translate planning and policy into practical climate adaptation solutions.

Three projects – supported by the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund – show what climate adaptation looks like for coastal communities.

Living Shorelines in Mahone Bay

In Mahone Bay, the harbour sits along Edgewater Street, where higher seas and stronger storms have made flooding and erosion a reality for residents. To address this, the Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation is taking a nature-based approach to shoreline protection.

In November 2023, the province announced \$770,604 to support the organization's efforts to create a living shoreline. The project builds on earlier conceptual work from a Flood Prevention and Shoreline Enhancement

Plan and aims to reduce flood risk while stabilizing eroding coastline.

Rather than relying solely on hard infrastructure, the living shoreline uses a hybrid design: rock sills set parallel to the shore to reduce wave energy and storm surge; a tidal wetland planted with native species to filter stormwater runoff and absorb energy; and a vegetated bank to hold soil in place and reduce erosion. Together, these elements treat the shoreline as a system that can protect homes and roads while also supporting coastal habitat.

The project is expanding. A federal announcement in 2025 confirmed additional funding to support the extension of the living shoreline along 100 metres of Edgewater Street, building on earlier pilot work and strengthening long-term protection for the area.

A Resilient Waterfront in Digby

For many coastal communities, the climate adaptation conversation quickly comes back to infrastructure. In Digby, it centres on a working harbour that supports both livelihoods and local identity.

The port – managed by the Digby Harbour Port Association – serves as a gateway for commercial fishing fleets, ferries, and seasonal visitors. As one of

Nova Scotia's most accessible, ice-free, deep-water ports, it plays a critical role in the region's economy. Protecting this infrastructure means protecting the seafood industry and the jobs tied to it.

In January 2026, the province announced \$600,000 in funding to support climate adaptation planning for the port. The funding will help prepare the harbour to better withstand rising sea levels, stronger storms, and shoreline erosion.

"The Port of Digby is a major infrastructure asset in a fishery that lands more than \$100 million in seafood annually," said Edwin Chisholm, CEO, Digby Harbour Port Association. "The Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, combined with support from other contributors, will help bring the Port of Digby project to a shovel-ready state for future remediation."

The project centres on an engineering study to assess how climate impacts are affecting wharves and seawalls and to develop costed design plans for future protective work tailored to Digby's unique tidal environment. The planning will also consider nature-based solutions, such as native grasses, shrubs, and trees, alongside traditional infrastructure approaches.



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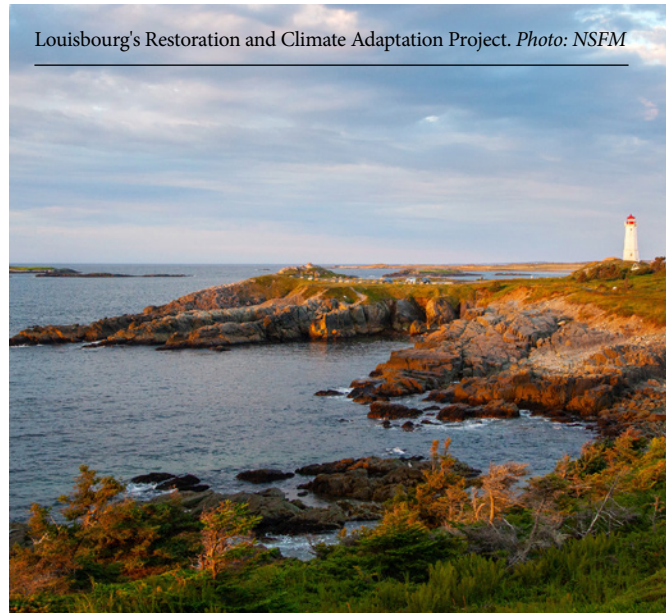


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Louisbourg's Restoration and Climate Adaptation Project. *Photo: NSFM*



These planning dollars represent an important step toward ensuring the harbour can continue serving the fishing economy, local workforce, and tourism industry well into the future.

Restoring Access in Louisbourg

For communities like Louisbourg, climate adaptation is about more than protecting infrastructure, it's also about preserving the places that matter to people.

The Louisbourg Lighthouse Coastal Trail winds along a beautiful stretch of coastline, offering a well-used and beloved outdoor space for residents and visitors. Managed by the Coastal Connections Trail Association – a community organization – the trail is cared for by local volunteers, often seen pushing gravel-filled wheelbarrows along the coastline.

Because of its proximity to the ocean, the trail has become increasingly vulnerable to erosion, storm surge, and extreme weather. That vulnerability became clear in 2022, when Hurricane Fiona caused significant damage across the trail.

In August 2023, the province announced \$158,400 to support restoration and climate adaptation work. Since then, sections of the trail have been relocated farther from the shoreline to reduce exposure to future storms and erosion, while damaged areas have been rebuilt to better withstand harsher conditions.

The project demonstrates that building climate resilience often requires rethinking where infrastructure is located, how it's built, and how it interacts with the surrounding environment. In Louisbourg, that creative approach means the trail can continue offering access to coastal landscapes – while adapting to the realities of a changing climate.

A Shared Path Forward

Together, these projects in Mahone Bay, Digby, and Louisbourg highlight how Nova Scotia communities are responding to climate impacts in ways that are practical, locally driven, and sustainable.

With continued support from the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, this momentum can grow, helping more communities plan ahead, protect what matters most, and build resilience into the heart of coastal life. [AMM](#)



Harassment and threats toward municipal officials have intensified to the point that many question whether continuing to serve – or running at all – is worth the personal toll. *Photo: Adobe Stock*

Harassment and the decision to serve



Lori Mayne (lmayne@fpeim.ca) is the communications and member services officer with the Federation of PEI Municipalities.

When Coun. Katherine Bryson agreed to chair a municipal committee looking into amalgamation, she expected spirited public discussions.

She didn't expect angry Islanders to pile into one of the usually quiet committee meetings of the Rural Municipality of Belfast in Prince Edward Island. She didn't expect anyone in the room to make "cheap shots" about her gender and age. And she didn't expect to receive intimidating social media comments and emails from someone in her community.



Coun.
Katherine Bryson

"It was very scary and stressful," she said, noting that anger over the issue seemed directed at her personally.

With the emails from one resident escalating in tone, Bryson sometimes worried about

being home alone with her children. "You don't know if someone is just on

a keyboard or if they'll show up at your house," she said.

Bryson called the RCMP for advice, a move supported by her municipal administration. In the wake of the public anger and opposition, the municipality also decided not to move forward with its amalgamation research.

Though public anger soon dissipated, Bryson debated whether she should stay on council. "There were a lot of discussions at home – Do I continue? Do I resign? Is this worth it?"

Harassment, Threats a Deterrent to Running

Other potential municipal leaders will face similar questions in the lead-up to the next general municipal elections in P.E.I. on Monday, Nov. 2. The increase in public harassment and threats has become a real deterrent to running.

Bryson said she will decide whether to reoffer for a second term based on personal reasons — balancing her career, education, and family. Still, the harassment took its toll, both on her and the municipality.

“I entered municipal politics very naively,” she said. “I didn’t understand how public you become or how entitled people feel to judge everything you do.”



Summerside Mayor
Dan Kutcher

Dan Kutcher, Mayor of the City of Summerside, found himself reaching out to police in 2024 after receiving online threats. A resident started to send him aggressive messages that escalated to the point

of threatening the mayor and his family.

“When it turned into specific, tangible threats against me and my family, that’s when it crossed another line,” Kutcher said.

In deciding to go to the police, he reached out to other politicians who had experienced such issues and he obtained legal advice.

Stepping Back from Social Media

While he put threats of violence in a different category than harassment, he said repeated harassment also wears on people in public office. Kutcher previously stated that he planned to reoffer. But he had also taken the approach to “step back” from social media and use it less.

“We live in a really good community where people are generally warm and welcoming, but we’re not perfect,” he said. “There are days when you see your name dragged through the mud.”

Kutcher said female politicians face particular risk of harassment, and he agreed it could deter potential candidates.

“You don’t get involved in municipal politics for fame, money, or power,” he said. “You do it because you want to make a difference. But when people write unfounded and sometimes defamatory things, you wonder why you would put yourself through it.”

Mayor Debbie Johnston has pondered that same question as she deals with public harassment in the Town of Three Rivers.



Three Rivers Mayor
Debbie Johnston

Mayor Debbie Johnston has pondered that same question as she deals with public harassment in the Town of Three Rivers.

Issues related to land use and ownership have resulted in controversy and public vitriol — often stirred up through people posting on social media.

Social media posts have targeted Johnston and the council, such as accusing them of being “on the take.” Further, threatening posts and comments caused the municipality to move a few public meetings online for safety reasons.

Johnston herself received a large volume of email from one resident — who included references to seeing her at specific places in the municipality. “References like that almost make you feel like somebody’s keeping tabs on you,” she said.

Johnston said she’s seen a dramatic rise in public harassment and threats over her 15 years in office.

She was first elected to the former Town of Montague council in 2011 and then continued with the Town of Three Rivers after an amalgamation process. She found a marked difference in public discourse after COVID-19.

“We had a few rough meetings in Montague in the seven years I was on that council,” she said. “But nothing compared to the last four years here. Nothing.”

She said issues of harassment play a large role in her thought process about reoffering.

“My family doesn’t want me to,” Johnston said. “It really bothers them, all this harassment online. But I have great affection for the town. I have a great loyalty to it.”

The Harassment Conversation

The Federation of PEI Municipalities (FPEIM) has been working to raise the issue of harassment through public conversation, presentations at its meetings, and municipal elections training.



Satya Sen, FPEIM
executive director

Earlier this year, Satya Sen, FPEIM executive director, discussed the impact of harassment in an interview on political participation.

“Why are people not running for office? Is it even worth running for office when all you’re

getting is online harassment and bullying for doing your job?” he told the CBC.

As part of its efforts to support potential municipal leaders, FPEIM has partnered in a municipal elections training series being delivered by the PEI Coalition for Women’s Leadership. The series aims to educate and support aspiring candidates from underrepresented groups, including youth, women, gender-diverse individuals, and BIPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members — many of the same groups who face greater risk of harassment.

The series will include discussions on harassment, online safety, and protective strategies to consider.

“Democracy is strongest when people from many backgrounds feel able to put their names forward,” Sen said. “Harassment and bullying make that choice more difficult and limit who feels able to participate. We need to take a hard look at these barriers and how we can better support those who run for municipal office and serve their communities.” [AMM](#)

Advice from the Interviewees

- If you experience harassment, don’t hesitate to reach out to your administration, other politicians, the police, or mental health professionals.
- Document any incidents of harassment or threats. Screenshot any social media posts, and save any emails.
- Don’t hesitate to step away from social media.
- Know that what happens online does not represent the real world.
- Try to focus on the positive and your why for serving your community.

Municipal resources are available online through:

- Telus Health
- PEI Coalition for Women’s Leadership
- Government of Prince Edward Island

Planning Prince Edward Island's future



The Federation of PEI Municipalities sees effective land use planning as key to preserving Prince Edward Island's iconic views, protecting its natural resources, supporting its economy, and promoting sustainable development. *Photo: Bruce MacDougall*



Lori Mayne (lmayne@fpeim.ca) is the communications and member services officer with the Federation of PEI Municipalities.

When Bruce MacDougall, president of the Federation of PEI Municipalities (FPEIM), has some spare time, he loves exploring his home province. He'll kayak the rivers, scan the beaches for driftwood, and snap photos of shorelines and fields.

But sometimes he's shocked by what he sees on his adventures.

"Our Island is changing in profound ways," he said. "Subdivisions are carving up our countryside and stretching down to our rivers. We need development and housing on P.E.I., but we cannot continue to build anywhere and everywhere."

Since 1973, a host of respected reports have called for a provincial land use plan for P.E.I.

"We can't afford to wait any longer," said MacDougall. "We have too much to lose."

Canada's smallest province is also its most densely populated, and recent growth has put incredible pressure on the land. From 2018 to 2023, P.E.I.'s population increased 14.1 percent – the highest growth rate of all provinces and territories over that five-year period.

At the same time, P.E.I. lacks the regulatory measures to ensure development happens in a sustainable way.

Province Growing Without a Plan

About 80 percent of the province has no land use planning; 65 percent of the province remains unincorporated. The other 35 percent is home to the Island's

57 municipalities, but just over half of those have land use planning. As a result, the majority of P.E.I.'s land falls under provincial planning legislation.

"The Planning Act and related regulations are outdated," said Janice Harper, a consulting planner with the We6 Planning Group. She described the provincial legislation as minimum standards, which address things like lot size in relation to septic systems.

"Planning looks at the surrounding area and how things fit together," Harper said. "It has a vision. It articulates where we're going and what we're looking to achieve."

The current provincial government began the process of a provincial land use plan by commissioning the *State of the Island Report* in 2023 and releasing it in 2025. Its observations back up what MacDougall witnesses on his day trips – most subdivisions on P.E.I. are being developed in unincorporated areas.

Residents in unincorporated areas do not pay municipal taxes. As a result, P.E.I. incentivizes development outside municipal boundaries – where no real land use planning exists.

The resulting sprawl drives up infrastructure and service costs, increases emissions, harms natural areas, and consumes more land.

As the *State of the Island Report* observed, "The lack of province-wide municipal governance has significantly influenced land use planning and sustainable development in P.E.I."

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Bruce MacDougall, president of the Federation of PEI Municipalities. Photo: Bruce MacDougall

Why Land Use Planning Matters

FPEIM continues to press the provincial government to take the next step and create the long-awaited provincial land use plan. The federation also advocates for interim measures to regulate subdivision and development outside service centres until the plan is in place.

The provincial plan would set Islandwide rules, working in conjunction with municipal plans that would comply but tailor planning to reflect the needs of communities. Planning could direct development to municipal service centres with existing infrastructure. Not only would this approach reduce the impact on land; it would provide more tax revenue for local governments to invest in their services – everything from emergency response to recreation.

Harper added that planning also supports the P.E.I. economy. She noted investors feel more confident when they know what’s coming. Further, a provincial land use plan could help protect the views so important for tourism, the harbours so valued for fishing, and the land so needed for farming.

“You can put housing in many places, but you can’t put a safe harbour or prime farmland anywhere,” Harper said.

Donald Killorn, executive director of the PEI Federation of Agriculture, described protecting farmland as the main policy concern for his organization.

From 2016 to 2021, P.E.I. lost 12.3 per cent of its farmland. At that pace, half of the Island’s agricultural land could be gone by 2050.

“That trend cannot continue,” said Killorn. “It is a profound threat to Prince Edward Island’s largest industry and the livelihoods and rural communities that it supports.”

The PEI Federation of Agriculture has aligned with FPEIM to advocate for provincial land use planning and policy.

Killorn said current provincial legislation allows the conversion of agricultural land into other uses without the oversight needed to protect it. Like FPEIM, he sees land use planning as key to the province’s future.

“The success of agriculture and the success of our communities and the success of our people depends on prioritizing land uses and maximizing the economic and social and environmental benefit that we can squeeze out of this beautiful little sandbar.” [AMM](#)

Harassment and bullying are real and present problems, as seen by the vitriol aimed at councils across not only Newfoundland and Labrador, but everywhere. Photo: Adobe Stock

Incivility in civic government

Addressing harassment and bullying in the municipal sector



Tobias Romaniuk (tromaniuk@municipalnl.ca) is the communications and marketing officer at Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador.

Bullying. Harassment. Council's heavy-handed use of penalties in the *Municipal Conduct Act*. These are real and present problems, as seen by the vitriol aimed at councils and towns on social media and the dysfunction in municipal council chambers across not only Newfoundland and Labrador, but across Canada.

The town of Victoria, N.L.'s council was disbanded in December by the province's Department of Municipal Affairs, due to harassment and bullying problems among the council. The town of New-Wes-Valley had a delayed municipal election due to harassment-related staffing problems. And there are many other examples.

When talking about harassment in the municipal sector, the conversation tends to focus on three main areas: harassment from the public, both in person and on social media; harassment and bullying amongst council members; and problems related to the *Municipal Conduct Act*.

A 2021 Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL) resolution passed at the organization's annual general

meeting "respecting such matters as conflict of interest, harassment, discrimination and ethical conduct..." called for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to enact a municipal code of ethical conduct.

The *Municipal Conduct Act* came into effect in September 2022. At the time, a VOXM news article stated, "The president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador is applauding new legislation that comes into effect today that provides clear guidelines for municipalities to develop their own codes of conduct."

From MNL's perspective, the act was intended to, among other things, address longstanding issues of harassment and incivility in the sector. Unfortunately, it has had the near opposite effect in some instances, as penalties outlined in the legislation have been used with a heavy hand by some councils and the act has been weaponized by members of the public and council members.

The option for a three-month suspension, for example, is sometimes used in instances where a less-severe penalty would have been more appropriate.

A Rigid Act in a Nuanced World

Dale Colbourne is the mayor in St. Lunenburg, which sits on the tip of the Northern Peninsula in Newfoundland and Labrador.

From where she sits, speaking as mayor but knowing that she represents the entire Northern Peninsula as northern region director on the MNL board, Colbourne sees the problems with the act as stemming from a lack of nuance.

Citing an instance in her own council, Colbourne says that something like a conflict of interest doesn't necessarily need to result in a three-month suspension.

As outlined in the act, councillors must not vote on matters that could directly benefit themselves or family members. When exactly that happened in Colbourne's council – a councillor voted on a matter that would benefit a family member – nobody on council noticed at the time. Upon later reflection, Colbourne realized the councillor was in a conflict of interest. While she could have brought the matter before council and had the councillor suspended for three months, she says that would benefit no one and would disproportionately harm the councillor.

Instead, Colbourne called the councillor, explained the problem, and during the next council meeting the motion was rescinded by the councillor and redone.

It was a gentler approach, more in tune with the situation. The approach is in line with Colbourne's conviction that the *Municipal Conduct Act* is too rigid and does not allow for a nuanced approach. It is, she says, too black and white. There needs to be more room for the grey areas.

Old Habits, New Expectations

Problems with provincial legislation aside, there are widespread, serious problems with the behaviour of some council members.

It is partly a generational problem – older folks on council still act as if it's the 1980s, when casual misogyny

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and strong-arm tactics were the norm. That behaviour is no longer acceptable, but change can be difficult for some. And some people just aren't great at being team players, instead choosing petty squabbles and pointless power struggles instead of cooperation and teamwork.

In far too many council chambers there is still the heavy-handed, bullying approach that Colbourne has often seen across the province during her 12 years on the MNL board of directors.

In St. John's, harassment has long been a problem. Years ago, conflicts in city council meetings were so heated they made national news. But that was a different mayor, known for a combative style. Today's council is far more cooperative, says St. John's Mayor Danny Breen. While his current council works well together, he is familiar with issues in other municipalities, and he notes that incivility is negatively impacting the work of local government.

"It's impacting whether people go to work in municipalities. It's impacting whether people run for municipal councils. It impacts the decision making," Breen says, referencing toxic social media posts aimed at town staff and officials, as well as incivility in council chambers.

The solution may be to lead by example, Breen says.

"I think one of the jobs we have today as leaders, as mayors and deputy mayors, is to make sure that people are speaking in an open and a very inclusive environment when we're having discussions. We need to make sure that everybody is getting an opportunity to have their say," he says. "And, also, that requires sometimes being patient and working with people to make sure that they get to a point where they're comfortable in speaking and asking questions."

When Debate Crosses the Line

Disagreements are common in council chambers, and healthy debate is vital to a healthy democracy – but there is a line crossed when debate, or constructive arguments, becomes harassment. That line often comes with personal attacks or name calling, says MNL president Amy Coady, who is also a councillor in Grand Falls-Windsor.

At that point, Coady says, it's time for someone to stop the conversation, allow everyone a moment to cool down, and to identify the reason or frustration point that led to the escalation.

People – all of us – like to think that, in a disagreement, we are correct, and that our words are a reasonable means to the end of making our point or winning the disagreement. But also, we need to take a moment – especially when a discussion gets heated – and ask ourselves, "Am I part of the problem?"

Sometimes the answer is yes.

It's important to ask yourself, Coady says, "Am I a part of this escalation? Are my words and expressions fuelling this? Should I step back or do I need to reframe my conversation so that I'm not coming across as being aggressive?"

Many workplaces offer conflict resolution training, and there are online course options available for individuals. This sort of training is not mandatory, but in Coady's experience, it is useful knowledge to have.

"I would absolutely recommend that councils seek out that training," she says. [AMM](#)

Accelerated bluff erosion, such as seen in Dover last October, is affecting many coastal properties. *Photo: MNL*



Dealing With Disaster

How MNL's Climate Ready NL Project is helping small towns prepare for emergencies



Tobias Romaniuk (tromaniuk@municipalnl.ca) is the communications and marketing officer at Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador.

Driving into town to present a Climate Ready NL workshop, Dr. Kathleen Parewick and her team of regional adaptation coordinators are already at work, making observations of climate impacts like coastal erosion, potential fire risks, and other environmental factors.

Later in the day, they'll listen to town residents talk about the weather-related changes they've seen in the area, taking note of climate risks and hazards, writing down observations from community members, and marking a map with locations of noted observations. All this information collected by the Climate Ready NL team – the notes, the map, the observations – are left with the community.

“The amount of information they accumulated for us was amazing,” says Triffie Parsons, town manager at Hare Bay, previous town manager at Indian Bay, and councillor in Centreville-Wareham-Trinity.

The Climate Ready NL team's work identified vulnerable spots in the community and infrastructure affected in the past that could be at risk in future weather events. Getting that history down and showing the difference was truly amazing, says Parsons. “Kathleen and their team did an absolutely phenomenal job.”

Parsons began with Hare Bay in April 2025, a few months before the Climate Ready NL team visited. When she heard about this project, which helped in updating emergency plans and identifying climate risks, she knew that Hare Bay needed assistance. The town's emergency plan was due for an update. For example, it still had mentions of schooners. The town council, fresh off an election in October, realizes the need for an update, and Parsons says she has their support to do the much-needed work.

When Emergencies Hit Close to Home

A few hundred kilometres away in Holyrood, Mayor Laura Crowley says the town council is just about to approve an updated emergency plan after a summer that gave the town its first forest fire within town boundaries in recent memory. The fire prompted an evacuation of the town's south side as the fire came dangerously close to homes.

On the day of the evacuation order, Crowley looked around her home, making the final decision of which items to take with her and which to leave. Other homeowners in the evacuation area spoke of ashes falling on their driveways. Not having a home to return to, should the wind shift, seemed like a real possibility. Thankfully, the wind kept the flames away and no homes were lost in Holyrood.

That experience really brought home the reality of the emergency, says the mayor. But it was the return after the evacuation order was lifted that prompted revisions to the emergency plan. Looking at what happened in the Kingston fire further up the coast – and then at home in Holyrood – Crowley says they realized that extended periods without power, combined with nobody being away, led to problems such as spoiled food and other issues related to extended, unplanned absences.

Ensuring a safe return after an emergency – and planning for it – will now be part of Holyrood's municipal emergency plan.

Small Town Gaps in Emergency Planning

In Holyrood, where the town office has directors, departments, and staff with dedicated roles, this work is spread across desks and is manageable. But in a town like Hare Bay, where the town office staff consist of Parsons as town manager and another person taking on receptionist duties, there isn't the same capacity to do the necessary work of updating an emergency plan. This gap is exactly what Climate Ready NL was designed to fill.

The Climate Ready NL project is focused on municipalities with populations under 500 – about half of all municipalities in the province.

These towns, often with a single staff person in the town office, are most in need of the project's assistance.

Newfoundland and Labrador, with a population of over 549,700, is one of the only provinces without a formalized regional structure. The province's nearly 300 municipalities are left to self-organize, forming inter-community relationships that ebb and flow with the personalities of councils during any given term.

Emergencies are handled in much the same way that regional cooperation has been handled – the people of the community work together, pitching in where needed. When there's an emergency, people get to work, doing everything they can to help, including towns sharing firefighting resources, public works equipment, and more.

But these relationships are built person to person, with no formal structure or agreement, leaving the fate of communities to rely on the efforts and personalities of community-minded staff and residents. While the ad-hoc system works in the Kittiwake Coast area, it's not exactly ideal public policy – and it largely depends on the people involved. A written emergency plan documents critical information – who to call, where to gather, what to do next – that can be accessed by anyone who needs it when an emergency strikes.

Preparing for Climate-driven Emergencies

Those emergencies increasingly take the form of flooding rivers and storm surges wreaking havoc on homes and municipal infrastructure, or forest fires that cause mass evacuations with little warning and can now happen virtually anywhere with a forested area.

While municipalities can't change the weather, through projects like Climate Ready NL, local governments are afforded the chance to prepare for emergencies through identifying risks and upgrading emergency plans.

Municipalities with populations under 500 are encouraged to join the Climate Ready NL program by emailing MNL Community Collaboration Officer Kathleen Parewick at kparewick@municipalnl.ca.

Climate Ready NL is funded by FCM's Green Municipal Fund. [AMM](#)

As reports from New Brunswick and across Canada increasingly show, incidents of incivility, harassment, and intimidation directed at people in public life are rising, and municipal officials often bear the brunt because they are the most accessible order of government.
Photo: Adobe Stock

Protecting local democracy

A strategy for respect and safety in New Brunswick municipal government



Craig Pollett is the Vice President, Atlantic for Strategic Steps Inc.

Municipal politics in New Brunswick has always been close to home – literally. Elected officials are neighbours, parents at the rink, volunteers at the fundraiser, and familiar faces at local businesses. That proximity is a strength in local democracy, but it also makes municipal leaders uniquely exposed when public debate turns hostile.

As reports from New Brunswick and across Canada increasingly show, incidents of incivility, harassment, and intimidation directed at people in public life are rising, and municipal officials often bear the brunt because they are the most accessible order of government.

Although targeting of municipal officials for harassment broadly has increased, some officials, particularly

women, racialized minorities, and 2SLGBTQ+ and non-binary officials, are dealing with the most intense harassment, often based on their gender, race, or sexual orientation. This harassment often takes on a more personal character, based in stereotypes, appearances, and personal identifying information. Clearly, different people experience harassment differently, making combatting harassment and incivility significantly more complex.

In response, the Union of Municipalities of New Brunswick (UMNB) and the Association of Francophone Municipalities of New Brunswick (AFMNB) have partnered with the provincial government to develop a strategy that will help municipal elected officials deal with increasing harassment and intimidation.

The goal is practical: build a clear, actionable set of recommendations, close to 50 in total, aimed at strengthening the systems that prevent harassment, improving the day-to-day tools people rely on to respond, and ensuring support is available when harassment occurs.

“When the tone changes, it doesn’t just affect council chambers, it follows you to the grocery store and home,” said

Hampton Coun. Kim Tompkins. “We need a plan that recognizes that reality.”

Why a Strategy Now?

This strategy is being developed at a moment when political discourse is becoming more polarized and more emotionally charged in societies around the world. New Brunswick is not immune. Declining trust in institutions, the effects of global financial disruption, the COVID-19 pandemic, and broader geopolitical instability have all contributed to a fraying social contract.

These societal shifts have increased citizen activism and brought positive pressure for transparency and accountability. But they have also, in some cases, generated more aggressive behaviour, especially in online spaces where misinformation, rapid escalation, and anonymity can amplify threats. Because the issues are local and personal, municipal politicians often become a direct target.

A credible strategy in this environment has to do two things at once:

- Protect democratic participation by reinforcing norms and consequences to encourage respectful civic engagement.

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- Protect elected officials and staff by improving prevention, response, and recovery supports.

“We can’t recruit the next generation of leaders if we normalize intimidation as ‘part of the job,’” said Tantramar Mayor Andrew Black.

How the Strategy was Developed

The foundation of the strategy is evidence gathered from multiple perspectives and methods. A jurisdictional scan was completed to learn from approaches elsewhere. A survey of municipal elected officials across New Brunswick gathered direct experience of what harassment looks like, how often it occurs, and where officials feel gaps in support.

A key milestone was the Symposium on Harassment in Fredericton (Nov. 14–15, 2025), which brought together 115 attendees for nearly two full days of sharing experiences and discussing solutions.

The strategy team also conducted interviews with municipal stakeholders, plus focus groups with representatives from the Department of Environment and Local Government (DELG) and the Local Governance Commission (LGC).

This work was guided by a steering committee comprised of representatives of UMN, AFMN, AMAN, and DELG ensuring the project remained anchored to municipal realities and to implementable changes.

What the Work Surfaced

While the final report will summarize findings at a high level, it draws on four key inputs: the jurisdictional scan, the survey, the symposium outcomes, and the interviews. Together, these sources helped to identify:

- Where harassment happens most (public meetings, social media, direct messages, community events, workplace interactions).
- How it escalates (repetition, targeting families, doxxing, threats, coordinated campaigns).
- What systems fail first (unclear rules, inconsistent enforcement, limited training, limited support pathways).
- Where capacity gaps exist (smaller municipalities often lack staff, policies, security protocols, and legal supports).

This is why the strategy doesn’t focus on a single fix. It aims to align policy clarity, practical training, and credible enforcement so officials and staff are not left to improvise.

“The hardest part isn’t just one incident, it’s not knowing what the next step is, or who is responsible for what,” said Tracadie Mayor Denis Losier.

Strategic Framework Leads to Action

A strategy with dozens of recommendations can become hard to implement unless it is organized in a way that helps decision-makers prioritize and coordinate. The draft strategy uses a “3-D” Intervention Map that classifies recommendations by:

- Intervention target
 - Provincial government
 - Municipal associations
 - Municipal governments
- Intervention tier
 - Systemic interventions
 - Operational interventions
 - Individual interventions

Intervention stream

- Standards and Clarity - Have the Rules
- Training and Capacity - Know the Rules
- Enforcement and Delivery - Use the Rules

This structure matters because harassment is not only an individual problem (“someone said something awful to me”). It is also a governance problem (“our rules are unclear”), an operational problem (“we don’t know how to respond in the moment”), and a systems problem (“accountability and enforcement are inconsistent”). A strategy that treats harassment only as a personal resilience issue risks blaming victims and ignoring the conditions that enable repeat harm.

What Good Recommendations Look Like

This strategic approach recognizes that different actors have different levers:

- Provincial government can clarify roles, set baseline standards, enable consistent enforcement mechanisms, and ensure provincial systems support municipalities.
- Municipal associations can coordinate training, templates, shared tools, and peer supports across communities.
- Municipal governments can implement meeting protocols, local policies, staff supports, and practical response procedures.

The most impactful recommendations will also be written so that implementation is realistic: who leads, what changes, how it’s resourced, and how success is measured. In many municipalities, the difference between “policy on paper” and real improvements is training, repetition, and clarity in the moment.

“Consistency is key,” said Bathurst Mayor Kim Chamberlain. “If every municipality has a different approach, the worst behaviour just moves to where the rules are weakest.”

Building Toward Adoption and Durability

A municipal harassment strategy is not a one-time product; it is an operating model. To last, it needs:

- Common language (shared definitions and thresholds for conduct).
- Clear pathways (what to do first, next, and when to escalate).
- Support infrastructure (peer networks, wellness supports, and expert advice).
- Accountability and learning (tracking incidents, sharing best practices, improving tools).

Crucially, the strategy should also support municipal democracy itself: encouraging participation, ensuring meetings can function, and protecting the legitimacy of local decision-making.

What’s Next

A strategy on paper is an excellent first step; the next one is implementation. Putting into practice the recommendations outlined in the strategy will be essential to ensuring local governments in New Brunswick will have the dedicated, capable, and transparent public servants they need, while those that put their names forward to serve their communities have access to the same protections, and the same recourses as any other workplace in the province.

As we all collectively work through these recommendations, know that each is part of a whole that is working to bring greater civility to the world of local government to create a sustainable sector for everyone. [AMM](#)

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Bruce MacDougall Photo



Comme le démontrent de plus en plus divers rapports, du Nouveau-Brunswick et de partout ailleurs au Canada, les incidents impliquant de l'incivilité, du harcèlement et de l'intimidation à l'endroit de personnalités de la vie publique sont en hausse. Et les élus municipaux, parce qu'ils représentent le niveau de gouvernement le plus accessible, en sont souvent les premières victimes. Photo: Adobe Stock

Protection de la démocratie locale

Une stratégie visant le respect et la sécurité pour le gouvernement municipal du Nouveau-Brunswick



Craig Pollett, vice-président, Canada atlantique chez Strategic Steps Inc.

La politique municipale au Nouveau-Brunswick a toujours été très près de nous – littéralement. Les représentants élus sont des voisins, des parents présents à l'aréna, des bénévoles œuvrant lors de levées de fonds, ainsi que des visages familiers entrevus dans des entreprises locales. Une telle proximité constitue

une force en démocratie locale, mais elle fait aussi en sorte que les dirigeants municipaux sont tout particulièrement exposés lorsque les débats publics versent dans l'hostilité.

Comme le démontrent de plus en plus divers rapports, du Nouveau-Brunswick et de partout ailleurs au Canada, les incidents impliquant de l'incivilité, du harcèlement et de l'intimidation à l'endroit de personnalités de la vie publique sont en hausse. Et les élus municipaux, parce qu'ils représentent le niveau de gouvernement le plus accessible, en sont souvent les premières victimes.

Alors que le harcèlement ciblant les élus municipaux s'est généralement accru, certains dirigeants, et plus particulièrement les femmes, les minorités racisées, ainsi que les élus

non binaires et faisant partie de la communauté 2SLGBTQ+, font face au harcèlement le plus intense, qui se base souvent sur leur sexe, leur race ou leur orientation sexuelle. Ce harcèlement revêt souvent un caractère encore plus personnel, en s'appuyant sur des stéréotypes, des apparences et des données d'identification personnelles. De toute évidence, des personnes différentes expérimentent le harcèlement différemment, ce qui rend le combat contre le harcèlement et les incivilités d'autant plus complexe.

En réponse à cela, l'Union des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick (UMNB) et l'Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick (AFMNB) se sont jointes au gouvernement provincial pour élaborer une stratégie visant à aider les élus

municipaux à faire face à l'augmentation du harcèlement et de l'intimidation.

Le but est concret : établir une série de recommandations claires et réalisables, près de 50 au total, visant à renforcer les systèmes qui empêchent le harcèlement, à améliorer les outils habituels auxquels les gens ont recours pour y répondre et à s'assurer de la disponibilité du soutien nécessaire dans les cas de harcèlement.

« Lorsque le ton change, il n'y a pas que la salle du conseil qui est touchée, cela vous suit jusqu'à l'épicerie et jusqu'à la maison. », a déclaré Kim Tompkins, conseillère de Hampton. « Nous avons besoin d'un plan qui reconnaît cette réalité. »

Pourquoi établir une telle stratégie maintenant?

Cette stratégie est en préparation à un moment où le discours politique devient de plus en plus polarisé et chargé en émotions dans toutes les sociétés à travers le monde. Et le Nouveau-Brunswick n'est pas immunisé contre cela. Le déclin de la confiance dans les institutions, les effets de la perturbation financière mondiale, la pandémie de COVID-19 et l'instabilité géopolitique généralisée ont tous contribué à l'effritement du contrat social.

Ces changements sociétaux ont fait croître l'activisme citoyen et ont généré une pression positive en matière de transparence et de responsabilité. Mais ils ont aussi, dans certains cas, entraîné des comportements plus agressifs, tout particulièrement dans les espaces virtuels, dans lesquels la désinformation, l'intensification rapide et l'anonymat sont susceptibles d'amplifier les menaces. Et parce que les questions qu'ils traitent sont de nature locale et personnelle, les politiciens municipaux deviennent souvent des cibles directes.

Une stratégie crédible pour cet environnement doit accomplir deux choses à la fois :

1. Protéger la participation démocratique en renforçant les règles et les conséquences afin d'encourager une participation citoyenne respectueuse.

2. Protéger les représentants élus et le personnel en améliorant la prévention, la réponse aux menaces et le soutien au rétablissement.

« Nous ne pourrions pas recruter la prochaine génération de dirigeants si

nous normalisons l'intimidation comme si faisait partie de notre travail », a déclaré le maire de Tantrammar.

Comment la stratégie a été élaborée

Cette stratégie est fondée sur des preuves amassées à partir de perspectives et de méthodes multiples. Une analyse des juridictions a été réalisée afin de connaître les approches utilisées ailleurs. Un sondage mené auprès des représentants municipaux élus à la grandeur du Nouveau-Brunswick a recueilli des expériences directes indiquant à quoi peut ressembler le harcèlement, quelle est sa fréquence et quels sont les manquements ressentis par les élus au niveau du soutien.

Le Symposium sur le harcèlement tenu à Fredericton (14-15 novembre 2025), qui a rassemblé 115 participants qui ont partagé leurs expériences et discuté de solutions possibles pendant presque deux jours complets, a constitué une étape importante du processus.

L'équipe responsable de la stratégie a aussi mené des entrevues avec des intervenants municipaux, ainsi que des groupes de discussions avec des représentants du ministère de l'Environnement et des Gouvernements locaux (MEGL) et de la Commission de gouvernance locale (CGL).

Ces travaux ont été supervisés par un comité directeur composé de représentants de l'UMNB, de l'AFMNB, de l'AAMNB et du MEGL pour s'assurer que le projet demeure ancré aux réalités municipales et à des changements applicables.

Ce qui est ressorti de ces travaux

Le rapport final, qui résumera les constatations à un niveau élevé, repose sur quatre intrants majeurs : l'analyse juridictionnelle, le sondage, les résultats du symposium et les entrevues. Ensemble, ces sources ont contribué à déterminer :

- Où le harcèlement a lieu le plus souvent (rencontres publiques, médias sociaux, messages directs, événements communautaires, interactions sur les lieux de travail).
- Comment il dégénère (répétition, ciblage des familles, doxxing, menaces, campagnes coordonnées).
- Quels systèmes font défaut en premier (règles floues, applications

incohérentes, formations limitées, voies de soutien limitées).

- Où il y a des lacunes en matière de capacité (les plus petites municipalités manquent souvent de personnel, de politiques, de protocoles de sécurité et de soutien juridique).

C'est pourquoi la stratégie ne se concentre pas sur une correction unique. Elle vise à harmoniser la clarté des politiques, la formation pratique et les applications crédibles afin que les élus et le personnel ne soient pas obligés d'improviser.

« La partie la plus difficile n'est pas un seul incident, c'est de ne pas connaître la prochaine étape, ou qui est responsable de quoi. », a déclaré Denis Losier, maire de Tracadie.

Cadre stratégique conduit à l'action

Une stratégie comprenant des dizaines de recommandations peut devenir très difficile à mettre en œuvre, à moins qu'elle soit présentée de manière à aider les décideurs à établir des priorités et une bonne coordination. La stratégie préliminaire utilise un plan d'intervention « 3-D » qui classe les recommandations selon les éléments suivants :

1. Cible de l'intervention :
 - Gouvernement provincial
 - Associations municipales
 - Gouvernements municipaux
2. Genre d'intervention :
 - Interventions systémiques
 - Interventions opérationnelles
 - Interventions individuelles
3. Niveau d'intervention :
 - Normes et clarté – Disposer de règles
 - Formation et capacité – Connaître les règles
 - Application et exécution – Utiliser les règles

Cette structure est importante, parce que le harcèlement n'est pas seulement un problème individuel (« quelqu'un m'a dit une chose horrible »). C'est aussi un problème de gouvernance (« nos règles ne sont pas claires »), un problème opérationnel (« nous ne savons pas comment répondre sur le coup »), et un problème de système (« la responsabilisation et l'application sont incohérentes »). Une stratégie qui traite le harcèlement seulement comme une question de résilience personnelle risque de blâmer les victimes et de passer sous silence des conditions favorisant les récidives.

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À quoi ressemblent de bonnes recommandations, en pratique

Cette approche stratégique reconnaît que des acteurs différents ont des leviers différents :

- Le gouvernement provincial peut clarifier les rôles, établir des normes de base, rendre possibles des mécanismes d'application cohérents et faire en sorte que les systèmes provinciaux soutiennent les municipalités.
- Les associations municipales peuvent coordonner les formations, les modèles de base, les outils partagés et le soutien des pairs à travers les collectivités.
- Les gouvernements municipaux peuvent mettre en œuvre des protocoles de réunions, des politiques locales, ainsi que des procédures de soutien pour le personnel et des réponses pratiques.

Les recommandations les plus percutantes seront aussi écrites afin que leur mise en œuvre soit réaliste : qui dirige, qu'est-ce qui change, d'où provient le financement et comment le succès est mesuré. Pour plusieurs municipalités, la différence entre des « politiques sur papier » et des améliorations réelles passe par la formation, les répétitions et la clarté immédiate.

« La cohérence est primordiale. », a déclaré Kim Chamberlain, mairesse de Bathurst. « Si chaque municipalité a une approche différente, les pires comportements ne sont que déplacés là où les règles sont les plus faibles. »

Bâtir en fonction de l'adoption et de la durabilité

Une stratégie municipale sur le harcèlement n'est pas un produit à usage unique; c'est plutôt un modèle de fonctionnement. Pour durer, il lui faut :

- Un langage commun (définitions et seuils de conduite communs).
- Des étapes claires (quoi faire en premier, quoi faire ensuite et quand intensifier les actions).
- Une infrastructure de soutien (réseau de pairs, soutien émotionnel et conseils d'experts).
- Un volet responsabilité et apprentissage (suivi des incidents, partage des meilleures pratiques, amélioration des outils).

Fondamentalement, la stratégie doit aussi soutenir la démocratie municipale elle-même : encourager la participation, s'assurer que les rencontres puissent fonctionner et protéger la légitimité de la prise de décision locale.

Quelle est la prochaine étape

Une stratégie sur papier constitue une excellente première étape; celle qui suit est la mise en œuvre. Il sera essentiel de mettre en pratique les recommandations mises de l'avant dans cette stratégie pour s'assurer que les gouvernements locaux du Nouveau-Brunswick puissent avoir les fonctionnaires dévoués, compétents et transparents dont ils ont besoin, et que ceux et celles qui posent leur candidature pour servir leurs collectivités aient accès aux mêmes protections et aux mêmes recours que dans tout autre lieu de travail dans la province.

Au moment où nous travaillons collectivement à la mise en œuvre de ces recommandations, il faut savoir que chacune fait partie d'un tout qui s'efforce d'apporter une plus grande civilité dans le monde des gouvernements locaux, et ce, dans le but de bâtir un secteur durable pour tout le monde. [AMM](#)

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