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(Cover Photo - Spring Conference returns to White Point Beach Resort)



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**Cheryl Kane** Senior Vice President  
Office: 902-474-3282  
Mobile: 902-456-9633  
cheryl.kane@hubinternational.com

**Janine McInnis** Associate Vice President  
Office: 902-474-3293  
Mobile: 902-789-3003  
janine.mcinnis@hubinternational.com

**Brad Wilson** Consultant  
Mobile: 902-233-7384  
brad.wilson@hubinternational.com



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The NSFM is a not-for-profit organization mandated to represent the interests of municipal governments across Nova Scotia. Total membership is 376 elected officials representing all 49 municipalities.

**Contact NSFM at:**  
**Ph: 902-423-8331;**  
**Suite 1304, 1809 Barrington St.,**  
**Halifax, NS B3J 3K8**  
**www.nsfm.ca**  
**info@nsfm.ca**



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info@nsfm.ca

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# Breaking Barriers

By President Amanda McDougall

We've seen a great deal of change at the municipal level of government in the past decade. Shifting priorities, shifting boundaries, and perhaps most notably—a shift in the makeup of who has been called to serve their communities. Nova Scotia has had an immense increase in the number of women who now sit on councils from tip to tip across the province, and it's all thanks to changes and advancements in the culture of municipal politics.

I think the “why” behind choosing to run for local office is obvious. Ask myself or anyone else why they want to represent their area on council, and you'll probably hear the following: because I love where I live, I want to contribute to my community in a tangible way, or even the occasional “it's the right thing to do”. You generally come to these positions for a love of community and investment in the powers of the process. It's difficult and at times painstaking work, but we all feel the drive to make our communities shine.

That's the thing to recognize here: people are drawn to serve their communities through that love of progress and process. It doesn't matter who you are, when you're bitten by that particular bug, you want to start becoming involved. Recently we've seen an uptick in women and BIPOC who are adding their name to the ballot to step forward for their communities. We're creating opportunities to elect individuals that represent the increasingly diverse makeup of our communities—and it's been a long time coming.

We can certainly celebrate the progress that our latest election has shown—15 women in places of municipal leadership, one of the largest percentages of women serving on elected councils in the country,

and members who have broken barriers—like Iona Stoddart in Halifax becoming the first Black woman to have a seat on council. However, we can't stand here and pat ourselves on the back for doing a great job solving the problem of equity and access.

I think the key to the future of a movement like this isn't in sitting and celebrating what we've accomplished—it's staring ahead at the future to look at what we might yet become. All over the province, members are making strides toward improving equity for women and other traditionally underrepresented groups. Our Vice-President, Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton is taking great steps toward action in truth and reconciliation, Halifax regional council has achieved gender parity, and educational sessions sponsored by NSFM on issues like Indigenous engagement and women in local government, are continuing to develop in frequency and scope.

We've come such a long way, and there are many steps still ahead. I think based on what we've built and the momentum we carry, this journey won't be as arduous as expected. I'm continually surprised by the willingness of our members to have those hard talks and open themselves to examination when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

As public figures, frankly, we've become subject matter experts on complex problems. I am humbled and extremely pleased to see the number of elected officials willing to make the important changes needed to make municipal governments representative of all Nova Scotians.



# Changing NSFAM

By CEO Juanita Spencer

Change means something a little different for everyone. When the Board of Directors and staff set out in December for two days in Truro, we knew changes needed to be made at NSFAM, but we weren't quite clear on all the details or possibilities.

What followed was a deep examination of how we do business, what we've been hearing from our members, what we know about other levels of government, and what we really want to achieve for communities across the province. As most of you have seen, the proposed changes the Board decided on encompass almost every aspect of the Federation. We're creating guiding principles to better articulate what NSFAM stands for, and we're proposing resolutions be replaced with a process that allows our advocacy to be fluid and take advantage of changing political landscapes. We're challenging the concept of separate caucuses – recognizing that different geographic areas across the province have both intersecting and separate issues.

The key to this process has been membership participation and communication. Throughout the winter and early spring, the Board and staff presented proposed changes to elected officials who helped further refine concepts with their feedback. We met online and, in some instances, we had the refreshing opportunity to meet in person. Thanks to ongoing engagement and input, we have certainly shored up what NSFAM needs to do to enhance our impact.

NSFAM was formed in 1906, we've been around for a very long time and we're proud of our history. We also recognize that adaptation is necessary to survive – and to grow. We've come together as an organization to redefine and reinvigorate our commitment to elected officials, municipalities, and Nova Scotian communities. Thank you to everyone who has

listened, provided their insight, and shared in our excitement – you make change possible.

In addition to the prospective changes to our organizational structure – NSFAM will be leading significant advocacy work during the provincial/municipal Service Exchange Agreement Renegotiation and MGA Review (SERMGAR). We've put together a team of municipal leaders who will be engaging with the broader membership and advising the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing on long-standing municipal issues. Stay tuned for updates.

Finally, we are expanding into a new area of service delivery: provincial grant administration. We are incredibly excited to have been selected by the Province of Nova Scotia to work with municipalities, academic institutions, non-profit organizations, First Nations Bands, and Tribal Councils to develop and administer the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund (SCCF).

Since 2015, NSFAM has supported our members to fulfil funding requirements for green infrastructure projects and we've celebrated the environmental advancements of our membership through the Climate Change Leaders awards. SCCF will provide an opportunity for applicants to propose projects that lower greenhouse gas emissions as well as those that help communities build the adaptive capacity needed to anticipate and respond to climate change. The Fund will launch this Fall and more information will be coming soon.

They say a change is as good as a rest. At NSFAM we have been fortunate enough to experience the many new opportunities we've embarked on with our membership as rejuvenating. Here's to how far we've come and to the future we're creating together.



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The **Municipal Wellness Program** supports Nova Scotia Municipalities to create healthier workplace cultures. The program offers workshops and activities, challenges, fitness membership discounts, and many other resources that encourage municipal employees and elected officials to get involved. The programs are focused on five priority areas, identified through consultation with external partners, the Municipal Wellness Committee, and informed by research: Physical; Mental; Workplace; Financial; Social.

**Changing the Workplace Culture - It's Okay Not to Be Okay**

The last two years have brought unprecedented challenges that have impacted the mental health of our community, and now more than ever, it is vital that we support one another in learning to thrive.

Promoting mental health literacy, reducing stigma, creating supportive workplace cultures, and ensuring our employees and elected officials have the resources to help them understand mental health issues are important for everyday living, learning, and working well!

Fostering and maintaining mental health is a year-round pursuit. We are excited that seven Nova Scotia Municipalities have partnered with the Municipal Wellness program to roll out a Nationally recognized program called Not Myself Today® (NMT). This program is an evidence-informed mental health initiative that helps employers support mental health and wellbeing at work. In addition, it helps employers work towards the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. The NMT has three main goals:

- build greater awareness of the importance of mental health in the workplace
- reduce stigma
- foster a safe and supportive workplace culture

The participating municipalities include:

- Town of Truro
- Town of New Glasgow
- Region of Queens Municipality
- Town of Annapolis Royal
- Municipality of Chester
- Municipality of the County of Kings
- Municipality of East Hants

**Feel like you're running on empty?**

Have you reached your max? Are you concerned about your ability to sustain your current work level and wellbeing? We are pulled in so many directions that it can leave us feeling exhausted and detached in today's world. To help you to avoid getting burned out, disengaged, or feeling forced to move on, here are some small yet impactful tips for preventing further burnout:

- Take a piece of paper and write down everything you feel you need to do, and have a friend or loved one help you prioritize. Focus on that first.
- Get your sleep and prioritize it at all costs.
- Engage in simple activities, ideally outside. You don't need to get caught up in news updates, and you need to go for a walk.
- Turn off phone notifications.

- Look someone in the eye and tell them thank you.
- Eat some protein.
- Ask for help.
- Redefine success.

**It is Time to Celebrate!**

In 2019, the Province of Nova Scotia proclaimed May 23 to be Municipal Wellness Day. Creating this province-wide municipal workplace wellness day sends a message to municipal employees and future employees that our government is serious about employee health and wellbeing. With the ongoing success and popularity of Municipal Wellness Day, this year, we plan to celebrate for the whole month of May! Wellness Thrive Month will be a time for all municipalities to come together to learn and explore ways to strengthen our health and wellbeing. The last two years have brought extraordinary challenges that have impacted our mental and physical health. Now more than ever, it is important to support the health and wellbeing of our staff, colleagues, and councillors. Key elements of the 2022 Wellness Thrive Month:

- Promote health and wellbeing initiatives;
- Offer learning opportunities;
- Create supportive workplace cultures, and;
- Ensure everyone has the resources needed to foster and maintain their health and wellbeing.

This May, we encourage all municipalities to participate in Wellness Thrive Month. Whether you want to host an event, share resources, or simply help spread the word that the health and wellbeing of everyone matters, we will be creating a variety of engaging events, activities, and resources that will happen throughout May. More information will be shared on the [nsmunicipalwellness.ca](http://nsmunicipalwellness.ca) website in the coming month.

**Wellness in the News**

If you would like to stay up to date on the latest news, upcoming learning opportunities, and health and wellbeing resources offered through the Municipal Wellness Program, please contact Rebecca Kolstee, Manager of Wellness and Professional Development Program, Association of Municipal Administrators, NS.

Sincerely,  
 Rebecca Kolstee  
[rkolstee@amans.ca](mailto:rkolstee@amans.ca)



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# Growing rural communities through innovation, partnership, and the digital economy

Scott Ferguson, CEO  
Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network

In the fall of 2021, I was fortunate to accept the role of CEO at the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN), at a time when regional economic development is emerging as a major opportunity for Nova Scotia. I was first attracted to the Pictou County region because of its lifestyle and beauty. After taking the position, I learned about the rich history and the determination to grow the local economy.

The first few months in the role at the PCREN focused on learning about the local economy and connecting as widely as possible with municipal, businesses, and community leaders. I was interested in understanding where support and resources are needed and how the PCREN can be a practical investment for progress.

My observations show that for a region to thrive, we must embrace the possibility of working together and aligning our visions and resources. Innovation can be the driving force behind this work, which leads to partnerships and advancements in the digital economy.

## Innovation

Do we all agree on what ‘Innovation’ means? The PCREN knows that “innovation” is not widely well understood. It can be daunting and may potentially seem only linked to technology. Although innovation is commonly associated with technology, it is not a requirement. The PCREN believes that we need to start with a better understanding of ‘innovation’.

Innovation is an idea or way of doing something new or better. The PCREN is considering how to develop initiatives for rural business leaders and managers. These programs will increase their awareness of types of innovation, how to develop an innovation project, how to best fit innovation into their company, the skills needed for innovation, ways to collaborate with another company or start-up using innovation, and how to move innovation forward. Our organization believes that understanding “innovation” is the first building block in the process from which partnerships and the digital economy can emerge.

## Partnership

When we consider partnerships, it has several aspects. Leaders and managers of local businesses must consider ways to grow their businesses through business-to-business connections.

For businesses to be successful, organizations like the PCREN must align and be a business connector to municipalities, government departments, other support groups, and higher education. It can be challenging for business owners and leaders to understand and navigate support programs available at various levels of government, departments within each, and not-for-profit organizations. Helping businesses to navigate the system is a crucial role played by the Regional Enterprise Networks across the Province.

At the PCREN, we believe it is critical to partner with businesses ready to expand. We know that mid-size

# Partners in Rural Economic Growth.

Nova Scotia's Regional Enterprise Networks (REN) guide and navigate regional economic development while providing support to businesses, operate as a connector among economic development partners, support business growth and retention, and provide regional leadership on economic priorities.

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ValleyREN.ca  
jtufts@valleyren.ca  
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info@capebretonpartnership.com  
902-562-0122

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WesternREN.ca  
aleblanc@westernren.ca  
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companies, those with annual revenues in the \$1-5 million range, are most likely to expand, create more jobs, and have an outsized impact on economic development than other organization groups. In Canada, 2% of medium-sized companies grow to become larger businesses. Yet those that do are more likely to grow and diversify revenue streams, create more jobs, and engage in export trade. Neglecting to support the growth of established businesses in all sectors is a missed opportunity to spur significant job creation and economic growth for rural communities.

## Digital Economy

It is no surprise that the digital economy is advancing so rapidly. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the importance of operating online and has accelerated rural businesses that had not yet embraced online platforms to get online. However, more and more businesses must invest in their online presence – website, e-commerce, social media platforms, and digital ads.

COVID-19 has also accelerated the gaps in the local labour force in all sectors, which will require a technological lens to refit businesses as one solution to labour market gaps. Our community must seek opportunities and partner with the NSCC and local businesses to develop a skilled digital and technology-minded workforce to embrace the jobs of today and tomorrow. Business leaders will need to re-think production and learn how to use technology to transition their

business to attract the incoming tech-based workforce.

The PCREN believes that strengthening the digital economy in Pictou County will have a long-lasting impact and will position the community for the future of work and workers.

Innovation, partnership, and the digital economy are three areas that will prominently show up in the PCREN work throughout the next year and into the future to grow the economy in Pictou County. These are some of the areas in which RENs across the Province are working to grow our rural communities in Nova Scotia.

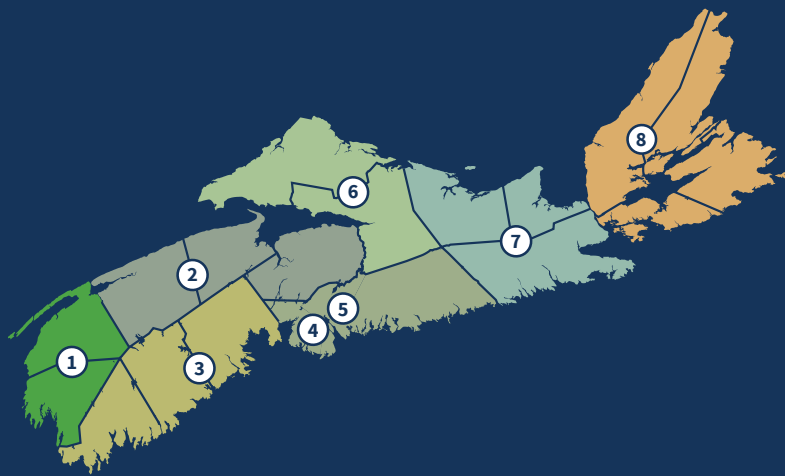
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## Hants, Kings, and Annapolis Counties

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e: [scochrane@nsbi.ca](mailto:scochrane@nsbi.ca) t: 902.790.2372

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## Queens, Lunenburg, and Shelburne Counties

**MALINDA MATCHETT**

e: [mmatchett@nsbi.ca](mailto:mmatchett@nsbi.ca) t: 902.523.5137

4

## Halifax Regional Municipality Halifax & West

**ROB BLACK**

e: [rblack@nsbi.ca](mailto:rblack@nsbi.ca) t: 902.402.3250

5

## Halifax Regional Municipality Dartmouth & East

**BETH MCCORMACK**

e: [bmccormack@nsbi.ca](mailto:bmccormack@nsbi.ca) t: 902.456.5047

6

## Cumberland and Colchester Counties

**DAVID COPUS**

e: [dcopus@nsbi.ca](mailto:dcopus@nsbi.ca) t: 902.324.1265

7

## Pictou, Antigonish, and Guysborough Counties

**LYNN COFFIN**

e: [lcoffin@nsbi.ca](mailto:lcoffin@nsbi.ca) t: 902.759.8708

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## Inverness, Richmond, Victoria, and Cape Breton Counties

**WANDA MACLEAN**

e: [wmaclean@nsbi.ca](mailto:wmaclean@nsbi.ca) t: 902.227.7144

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# Municipal Governments: A Unique Cybersecurity Risk

## Cyber-attacks are emerging as a priority for local governments

Even before the onset of the pandemic, cyber attacks were having a growing impact on local governments across Canada and the United States. Municipal governments have been a soft target for highly sophisticated hackers. The onset of the pandemic and the ensuing need for remote work options for workers significantly increased the attack vectors available to hackers. Over the past two years there has been a notable increase in the frequency of cyber attacks on municipal governments and on utility infrastructure.

On May 1st of 2020, a joint statement was issued by the U.S. and the U.K. warning various organizations about possible attacks from nation-states looking to steal information about COVID-19 for their national interests. The U.K.'s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the US Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency issued a stern caution regarding the likelihood of increased attacks.

Ransomware is currently the cyber-attack of choice and is considered by many as public enemy number one. Ransomware locks down systems and blocks access to data until a ransom is paid. Ransomware attacks result in seriously disruptive downtime, lost data, and damaged reputation.

The increased impact and scale of ransomware operations from 2019 to 2021 has been largely fueled by the growth of the Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) business model, by which developers sell or lease

ransomware to other cybercriminals. These affiliate schemes provide skilled attackers with the ability to distribute ransomware campaigns, with the developer behind the ransomware receiving a percentage of each victim's ransom payment.

Known ransom payments, after increasing rapidly from 2019 to 2020, appear to have stabilized around \$200,000 in 2021, down slightly from 2020 levels. At the same time, in 2021, the global average total cost of recovery from a ransomware incident (i.e., the cost of paying the ransom and/or remediating the compromised network) has more than doubled this year, increasing from \$970,722 CAD in 2020 to \$2.3M CAD in 2021.

In the first half of 2021, global ransomware attacks increased by 151% when compared with the first half of 2020. 2021 was marked by the highest ransoms and the highest payouts.

In Canada, the estimated average cost of a data breach, a compromise that includes but is not limited to ransomware, is \$6.35M CAD

Cyber attackers are typically looking for single unsecured points of entry. By exploiting a single opening, they can gain access to the entire network and move laterally from one area to another causing disruption throughout the entire system.

Security breaches associated with infrastructure utilities and municipal governments are often headline-grabbing news stories because of the impact to so

many constituents. Events like the cyber-attacks on the City of Saint John, New Brunswick in November 2020 illustrates the impact that breaches can have on the relationship amongst everyone connected to them including the organization and its clients. There are real cyber security risks that need to be addressed including the concern that local government institutions can be exposed to a complex and extensive attack surface.

Given the current state of the cyber security environment, it is more important than ever to have a plan. Making sure that defences are up to the challenge of today's most sophisticated threat actors is critical. Knowing the threat landscape, implementing key network security protections, and purchasing cyber insurance, to address key exposure/liabilities, are all aspects of an effective cyber-risk management plan. Here is a suggested list of priorities:

### 1. Review your network security and privacy policies

There is a myriad of network security measures that all organizations should adopt and if one were to ask 5 different IT security specialist what to do you would probably have 5 different answers. Nevertheless, it is likely that all would suggest a focus on certain elementary concerns: implementing multi-factor authentication (MFA) across all business email accounts; having a comprehensive data management strategy in place, such as segmenting data and storing it across multiple servers; using endpoint detection and response (EDR) tools to continuously monitor the network; backing up data regularly; and having a proper network patching cadence.

### 2. Train your people

Train employees, staff, vendors and all key constituents to recognize and delete suspicious emails without opening them. Cyber criminals are clever and sophisticated in their approaches and so everyone must always remain vigilant. This critical step cannot be the sole responsibility of the IT department. It requires a top-down organization-wide culture of security.

### 3. Prepare an Incident Response Plan

An incident response plan is a comprehensive plan for addressing network security and/or privacy liability threats and attacks. The plan provides a kind of roadmap or "playbook" with guidance and steps to be taken such as who to call, what to do, when to do it, etc. An IRP helps organizations to best document all the critical steps it needs to take from the time of the suspected breach to post-incident response and closure.

### 4. Practice your Incident Response Plan with a Tabletop Exercise

A cyber tabletop exercise is a simulated cybersecurity scenario exercise where participants (ideally members of senior management) must act, think, and make decisions as if the cyber incident were real. It places the attendees in a life-like situation and can expose any weak links in the incident response plan and in an organization's communication and collaboration framework. Under intense pressure those with decision-making authority are forced to make choices in a worst-case scenario. Should a real incident take place, participants in the TTX will have had a chance to consider options and practice making the best decisions they can under the circumstances. It is a cost-effective way to heighten an organization's security protocols without disrupting the business.

### 5. Purchase cyber liability insurance

While organizations will have a variety of insurance policies put in place to cover risks such as damage to property and interruption to their business due to named perils or crime, these traditional insurance policies will exclude or provide limited coverage for cyber-related exposures. Most importantly, cyber liability insurance coverage will provide access to critical resources and experts to help mitigate loss from a cybersecurity incident.

# A Look Back at Consolidation

An interview with Mayor Zebian  
Kyle MacKay, Communications Advisor, NSFM



Change is inevitable. It's one word some people dread hearing, and yet it's the one you're most likely to encounter while seated in council chambers. When councillors from Windsor and West Hants started considering the idea of making one of the biggest changes in recent municipal memory—amalgamation—they also felt the weight of staring down change in their own chambers.

However, as Mayor Abraham Zebian explains, it was excellent research, diligent work, and open lines of communication that helped Windsor and West Hants navigate their way to municipal modernization.

The process began with selling each other on the idea.

“There was the atmosphere of council pre-decision, and the atmosphere post-decision,” began Mayor Ze-

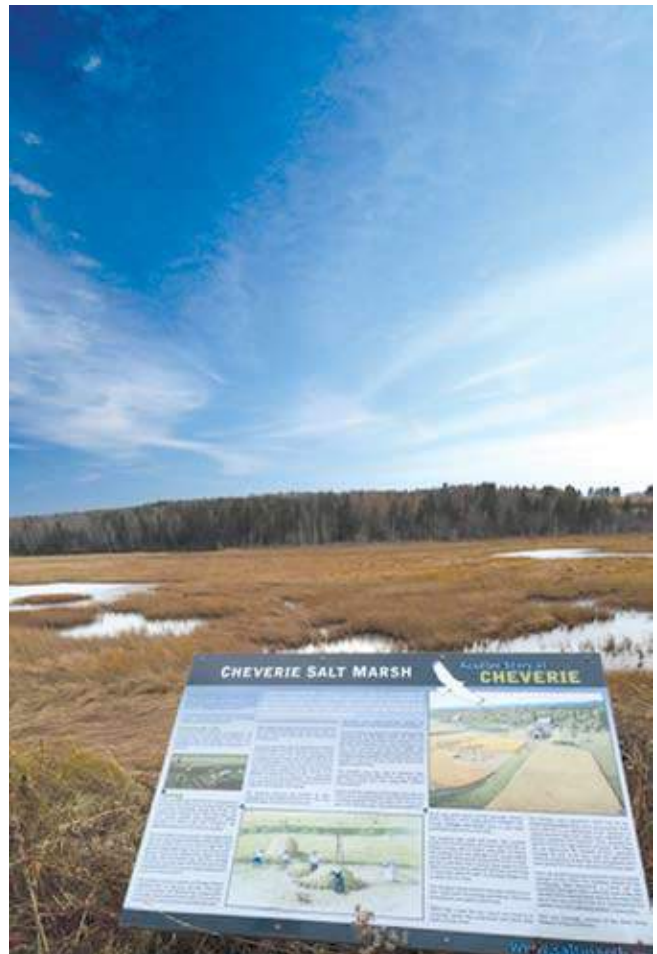


bian. “It was night-and-day between the two councils. The former Windsor council were set 100 per cent that amalgamation was the way to go. For West Hants council, however, it was a little bit of a harder sell. It took many sessions of sitting down, discussing, and running through positives and negatives to see where it all wound up.”

A decision like amalgamation isn’t to be made lightly. Like any other shift in organizational thinking, the background work is where it all pulls together. For Windsor and West Hants, this entailed checking their own data, scrutinizing their own decision-making processes, and frequently stopping along the way to ensure that the process was still working in the best interest of everyone.

Successful change relies on preparation. Some of which is all about choosing the proper time to make your move.

“A major factor was the election of Fall 2016,” said Zebian. “West Hants saw seven brand new councillors elected in, and three returning councillors for their second term—two of which were coming from the former Town of Hantsport that dissolved into West Hants in 2015. Their experience in having navigated a similar change was quite helpful with this process.”



With the idea solidified in both chambers, next came the at-times grueling process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding about service agreements, and all the other considerations that must be made when two large operational bodies join.

“Whenever we would make a decision together in joint council, it was 100 per cent,” said Zebian. “As soon as we got off to our respective council tables to ratify the decision—it always failed. We had to start thinking about who is going to do what, and how we can do this in a way that best benefits our residents.”

To help move the whole process along, the Department of Municipal Affairs was present, providing mediators to help massage the sticking points between the councils. They also created open lines of communication between the chambers to freely discuss and hash out details. By frequently looping in as many stakeholders as they could, they were able to initiate the change they both sought.

“I’m quite proud of it,” said Zebian simply. “I love good news stories, and I love that we can lead the way for other municipalities. We weren’t afraid of change, we just wanted to be sure that we were doing the right thing and we crossed all the T’s and dotted all the I’s. We asked all the hard questions, we did many sessions with DMA, with local businesses. We went out into the community with community sessions. It was about ensuring that we heard as many voices as we could to get all of the facts.”

While this was a fact-finding mission with an end-goal, the two councils were very aware of the optics and the human element. Deciding early on to refer to the process as “consolidation” as opposed to “amalgamation”, due to how the latter term usually conjures negative associations.

“We wanted to get rid of the ‘a-word,’” explained Zebian. “We didn’t want people to make their decisions based on emotions—we wanted to work with facts.”





Let's do the studies, let's look at stuff and let's see if this is really going to be the best move for all of us."

Zebian's advice for anyone else in his shoes, staring over the ledge at change? Stay the course, trust your gut—and always put your residents first.

"It became more and more clear that the only way to do this the right way was to eliminate the politics in the decision-making in all of it," he said. "We achieved that. It's been quite rewarding for us."

"I wouldn't change a thing," said Zebian when asked what advice he'd give himself before beginning this process. "You don't have to second-guess yourself. It's like making any other decision in council chambers: ask yourself first 'What's best for our residents?' and the rest will follow."



# Q & A

## Q&A: Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton, Town of Port Hawkesbury

When it comes to Municipal Success Stories, NSFM members have many things to boast about. Recently elected Vice-President Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton is no different in that regard. Her work with the Town of Port Hawkesbury sets the standard for Indigenous engagement with local governments across the province.

The Municipal Observer recently sat down with Brenda to discuss these successes.

**Port Hawkesbury has been putting a lot of rubber to the road in terms of Indigenous engagement and meaningful action. What does it mean for you and your council to increase that engagement? How could other councils increase their involvement?**

Cape Breton Island's original name is "Unama'kik" and the island has a perfect balance of five First Nation Communities (Membertou, Eskasoni, Potlotek, We'koqma'q, and Wagmatcook) and five municipalities (Inverness, Victoria, Richmond, CBRM and Port Hawkesbury). When I first became Mayor in 2016, it was the fifth year that all municipal units were getting together to share updates about their communities and to talk about common challenges and also to collaborate on common opportunities.

In November of 2017, we held a One Cape Breton/ One Unama'kik Leadership Summit - the first of its kind in the history of our Island. We planned it together. Chief Rod Googoo from We'koqma'q First Nation co-hosted the event with me in Port Hawkesbury. This event was hosted again in 2019 in Membertou by Chief Terry Paul.

I don't really have access to a "playbook" for how to engage and act meaningfully in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, although I suspect that several municipalities are working with Indigenous Consultants and Elder guides to create plans for Truth and Reconciliation and some action plans for allyship.



**Port Hawkesbury has been taking steps in service of reconciliation such as adding Unama'kik to the Causeway. How does your municipality identify initiatives like these? What has been the reaction from residents?**

Adding "Pjila'si Unama'kik" (means Welcome to Unama'ki/Cape Breton) was added to the Causeway this past summer - and it was one of the clear action items that came out of the first "One Cape Breton/ One Unama'kik" Gathering in 2017. This was a huge victory on a couple of fronts. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that this idea came from We'koqma'q Elder Magit Poulette who attended our 2017 gathering as our Elder guide. She asked all the Island leaders to work together to ensure that the original name of the Island was added to the Causeway entrance as a small act with big impact in the spirit of truth and reconciliation. This was first and foremost a victory for Magit (who is also a Residential School survivor and much beloved by pretty much everyone she meets) this was also a victory for truth and reconciliation.

Before speaking to Council regarding other initiatives, I spoke to many of my friends from Unama'kik to ask for some knowledge regarding what would be meaningful for them and how best to do it. Based on advice, I asked Council to support an "Orange Ribbon Ceremony" and a "Blanket Exercise" that we hosted in September of 2021. Many leaders and members of the Unama'kik communities attended, along with members from Cape Breton communities.

We re-learned the harsh history of colonization through the lens of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. It was also very moving and meaningful. Many community members have requested that we do this again in the future so more people can have these experiences and grow their understanding around truth and reconciliation.

**Have you taken advantage of any training opportunities like Treaty Education sessions, or engagement with Indigenous elders? Any advice on how other members could do so?**

For me, my learning journey really began in 2016 when we identified that not all our Island leaders were at the table. Warden Morrison and I made that commitment to do more than simply “invite” the First Nation Councils. We went to see them to talk about what it might look like if we were to plan a gathering together, and that is what we did. We planned an

event that was meaningful for both Unama’kik and Cape Breton leaders.

Since that time, I’ve attend the Unama’kik Summer games, events in the neighboring communities, and volunteered for various programs and activities when I could. In 2018 I co-founded a women’s equity group with community leader Karen Bernard of Eskasoni First Nation called Government FOCUS (Female Objectives Cape Breton Unama’kik Strait) and we’ve worked together with many women from across eastern Nova Scotia from all six First Nation Communities and 10 municipalities to encourage and celebrate women’s leadership, not just in government but in the community.

The best way I can think of to inspire other Municipal elected leaders is to share the words of Councillor Steven Googoo of We’koqma’q First Nation from our 2017 inaugural One Cape Breton - One Unama’kik



Gathering. Steven Googoo talked to us about the importance of “ships”, and how everything starts there. Leadership was in the room, creating opportunities for partnerships, developing relationships, and even building friend-ships.

He asked us to see Cape Breton/Unama’kik as a big “ship,” and how we all need to be on that ship working together and rowing in the same direction.

**To pivot slightly – there has been a big shift in municipal politics in Nova Scotia. We’re approaching gender parity in municipally elected officials, we’re seeing increasingly diverse candidates – What does diversity, representation, and inclusion mean for Municipal Politics?**

Electing more diverse voices to decision making tables is going to translate into better representation across our Province. The work I’ve been doing with Karen and Government FOCUS has brought together women who haven’t gathered in the past. For example, I recall one of our FOCUS municipal members saying at our very first FOCUS meeting that it was the first time she had the opportunity to work with First Nation women. The work we’ve done has really built bridges that link our communities together in new and wonderful ways.

Getting more diverse voices and better gender balance at our decision-making tables are important goals to continue to strive towards.

**Because this is the “change” issue: What would you say to members who are apprehensive about coming forward with positive changes they’d like to see?**

There is a reason that I have equated change with “working within communities” because there are so many wonderful community leaders who are



happy to work with councils to come up with change plans. Our communities have an abundance of leadership - especially if you re-imagine what leadership looks like and seek it out in purposeful ways through the lens of diversity and gender equity.

What I would say to NSFAM members who might be on the fence about change is simple: Don’t be afraid to get down to the grass roots and lead by example with and from within your communities. Don’t be afraid to reach out to others from neighboring communities to begin cultivating relationships and friendships. Just don’t wait—do it. At the end of the day, as elected officials, I think we need to transcend the status quo, and work within our communities to explore how change can bring about positive growth.





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# NSFM Welcomes the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund

Kyle MacKay, Communications Advisor, NSFM

Much like the adage that it takes a village to raise a child, creating solutions for climate change will have to involve the many and varied communities across Nova Scotia. The Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund (SCCF) is a \$15 million dollar fund created by the Province of Nova Scotia to address the impacts of climate change over the next three years. The Fund is being designed and administered by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM).

NSFM CEO Juanita Spencer and Debbie Nielsen, Lead Program Manager for the SCCF, shared some thoughts on how it will assist cross-sector organizations to implement their climate projects. “We’re incredibly excited to have been selected by the Province of Nova Scotia to lead this Fund,” said Spencer. “While we’re a municipal association, and municipalities have an important role in climate resilience, we also have strong ties to other community stakeholders who will play an equal part in better preparing us for a changing climate.”

Nielsen adds that the Fund is going to “put financial support in the hands of the communities that are doing the climate change work. NSFM always says that municipalities know their communities best – I think that goes for all [the stakeholders] that are eligible to apply. By making these funds available, communities are going to be able to create some local climate change responses that are meaningful and relevant.”

The SCCF is banking on the creativity and ingenuity of Nova Scotians - from tip-to-tip of the province - to step forward and share their project concepts. “The really nice thing about the fund is that it will encourage local action,” said Nielsen. “Responding to climate change is huge, and it’s going to take initiatives from all kinds of different communities and types of organizations.”

While one focus of the SCCF is on community-based projects, Spencer notes there is also opportunity for large-scale collaborations. “We’ve engaged Deloitte to provide some initial technical expertise in Fund

administration and to advise on complex climate projects. Their insights have the potential to assist applicants who may have very specialized projects.”

“Climate change doesn’t know boundaries,” Nielsen added. “This fund encourages people to think outside of traditional communities, do some collaboration or regional partnerships. By creating opportunities where organizations that are more experienced with responding to climate change [can] partner with organizations that have never tried —there’s knowledge exchange and exciting new perspectives that can be shared.”

SCCF plans to open for applications this coming fall.



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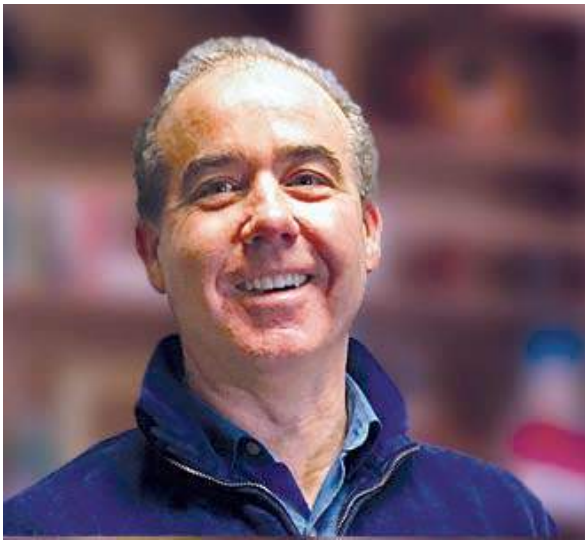
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# Catching Lightning in a Bottle

## Municipal Modernization and the COVID-19 Pandemic

By John MacKinnon, P.Eng, President, AMANS

The old adage that government changes at a snail's pace was certainly debunked in March 2020 when municipal governments had to adapt, shift and adjust in ways, that just several weeks before, we never thought possible. Some of these changes had, in fact, been discussed at length, but they were concepts grouped in a "modernization" bucket that still seemed far out of reach.

Although we are well on our way to going back to some semblance of normal, many changes made during the past two years will be with us permanently. Most municipal operations responded effectively to changing circumstances; however, some also became proactive in creating new and improved processes that will serve well beyond the pandemic.

Adoption of technology is an area that changed very quickly at the onset of the pandemic. IT departments became creative and flexible, finding ways to allow virtual meetings without compromising security. Council and staff quickly learned how to use virtual platforms like Zoom and Microsoft

Teams. Along with that came the learning curve of chairing a virtual meeting versus an in-person one. The realization that municipal government can meet virtually and should continue to have a mechanism to do so, has led to changes in Section 19A (for municipalities) and 408C (for villages) of the MGA which gives the authority to have a procedural policy of council to allow the use of technology to meet.

Throughout the pandemic the need for continuous and consistent communication became apparent. Again, technology allowed municipal staff teams and councils to stay connected and informed. For associations like AMA and NSFM, it enabled us to stay in touch with our members, communicating and sharing important information and sharing ways in which we were handling the challenges of the pandemic. The pace at which participants became comfortable with this format was commendable. It was incredible to see municipalities offer virtual participation, but for so many citizens to respond by participating in these very different ways was equally as impressive. That said, nothing can replace in-person democracy, but municipalities have managed to keep community

engagement going; however, in some cases, there are very practical reasons why virtual membership gatherings and meetings have become a permanent practice.

The way we work has also changed. For two years many of us have worked from home, proving that remote and flexible working arrangements are not as inefficient as they were thought to be, but rather should be accepted as a tool to be used when appropriate. Many municipalities have created processes to ensure accountability and performance measures are in place for employees working in a flexible workplace. Moving forward, recruiting qualified staff will be difficult without this new flexible work environment.

While there is no question that the pandemic exacerbated mental health challenges, even for people who were on solid footing before, it also created an unexpected opportunity for more open and supportive conversations between human resources, senior leadership and employees. Now, more than ever before, employers are prioritizing the mental health of their employees by looking critically at their benefits to ensure that resources are appropriately matching the need.

Municipalities faced a wide variety of public pressures as they navigated how to respond to this pandemic. Residents now have higher expectations of municipal services and municipalities are beginning to redesign and optimize services by putting residents at the centre of the transformation and focusing on how to serve them better. The demand for on-line services and accepting alternative payment methods will continue to grow as will the public's demands for advancements in these areas.

The pandemic resulted in a significant departure from past practices and municipalities across Nova Scotia displayed tremendous resiliency in meeting COVID-19's many challenges. Transformative change, embraced out of necessity, redefined municipal service delivery and modernized municipal operations throughout NS. These innovations, much like the coronavirus, have become endemic. As we all begin to recover from a tumultuous two years, municipalities will continue to work to provide residents with service excellence.

Photo by Afshin Taylor Daran

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## 2022 Spring Conference a Hit!

NSFM returned to in-person meetings with the 2022 Spring Conference, held at White Point Beach Resort in early May. While some things have changed, the conversation and comradery remained the same as the Conference registered a significantly higher than usual number of first-time Conference attendees.


Those who were able to make the trek down to Liverpool were greeted by a keynote speech from Buhle Dlamini about Unleashing your Greatness, we heard from Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister John Lohr—who also went out of his way to make himself available to members for the duration of his stay—and attendees got to take in many interesting and in-depth sessions on topics like developing understanding with others, to tweet or not to tweet, and diversity and inclusivity in municipal politics.

The shift back to in-person events from Zoom was certainly a welcomed change as members enthusiastically engaged with the content of the sessions and

networking opportunities. NSFM looks forward to being joined by our members again this fall as our Fall conference and AGM returns to in-person in downtown Halifax.





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### REGISTRATION DESK HOURS

|                                |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Wednesday, May 4 <sup>th</sup> | 2:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  |
| Thursday, May 5 <sup>th</sup>  | 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  |
| Friday, May 6 <sup>th</sup>    | 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. |

The desk will be closed during the Luncheon

# Don't Miss Our Fall Conference!

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Spring Conference Keynote Speaker Buhle Dlamini



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# November 2 - 4

Halifax, NS

# Province launches Public Education Campaign on Blue-green Algae

By the Department of Environment and Climate Change

Nova Scotia is experiencing an increase in blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, in the province's lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. Blue-green algae is a public health risk and the Department of Environment and Climate Change is running a spring and summer education campaign to help Nova Scotians know what to look for and better mitigate the risks associated with it.

Building awareness among Nova Scotians is vital considering there are over 10,000 lakes and ponds and 249 major river systems in Nova Scotia, some very remote. Municipalities can help get the message out to their residents of what to look for to keep themselves, their families and pets from harm.

Blue-green algae are naturally occurring microorganisms that flourish during periods of hot, dry weather that are followed by a heavy rainfall. It's becoming more common because of the warmer weather temperatures and more intense storms associated with climate change.

Nova Scotians have done this before – the presence of ticks and risk of Lyme disease is a good example. We take precautions when outdoors and do tick

checks, and we also have to scan the shore and the water before we take part in water activities.

Blue green algae is a nuisance, but it is a reality in a changing climate. Knowing what to look for helps people to be alert and make informed decisions. The campaign includes an educational video, new website and fact sheet.

With information of what to look for and what to avoid, Nova Scotians can enjoy the province's outdoors and water-related activities safely, while protecting themselves, their families and their pets from harm.

Blue-green algae can:

- be turquoise, green, brown, red, white, or mixes of these colours
- look like fine grass clippings in the water, spilled paint, pea soup, or a thick scum on the surface
- smell musty or grassy when healthy and like ammonia when decomposing
- form algae mats that look like clumps of vegetation, appearing black, brown, or dark green at the bottom of lakes and rivers, and brown or grey on the shoreline.



*A medium-density bloom of blue-green algae species in Nova Scotia, near the shoreline of a lake.  
(Photo: Department of Environment and Climate Change)*

Municipalities can help to get the message out for residents to be alert and stay safe by sharing our campaign materials and information. It is important for Nova Scotians to know:

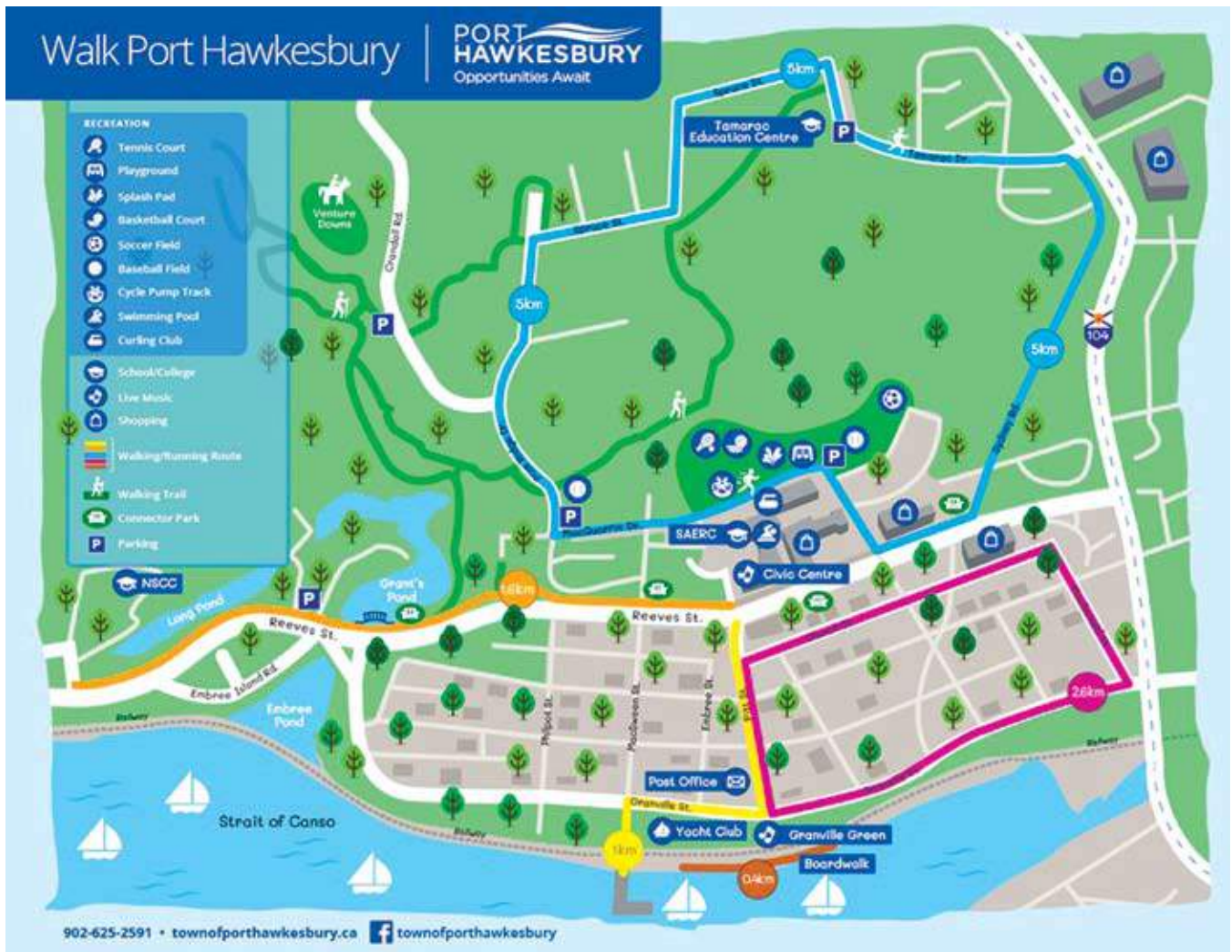
- to always scan the water and shoreline before entering the water or letting children or pets play in it
- swimming in contaminated water can lead to itchy, irritated eyes and skin
- swallowing or inhaling the water can cause headaches, fever, diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting
- pets may be attracted to the smell of algae mats and ingestion could be fatal
- surface water is not recommended as a water source for people's homes because it can get contaminated more easily than groundwater. Nova Scotians can report algae by calling their local environment office at 1-877-936-8476. The department's public education campaign materials include:

- a web page with provides photos and descriptions of what to look for, as well as links to all the campaign's resource materials: <https://novascotia.ca/blue-green-algae/>
- a fact-based poster that can be downloaded and printed by municipalities, recreation facilities, clubs, schools and posted in high-traffic areas: <https://novascotia.ca/blue-green-algae/documents/Blue-Green-Algae-Poster.pdf>
- an educational video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWNUkbfOH2Q>
- a social media campaign on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that our partners can support by reposting.

Building awareness and spreading the word by sharing these materials will help ensure that Nova Scotians safely enjoy everything the province has to offer during our warmer months.



*A low-density bloom of blue-green algae species in Nova Scotia, near the shoreline of a lake.  
(Photo: Department of Environment and Climate Change)*



Canada Community building fund project highlight

# Town of Port Hawkesbury Macquarrie Community Park Improvements

Project category: Recreational infrastructure

National objective: Strong communities

Canada Community-Building Fund contribution  
to project: \$81,474

Total project cost: \$81,474

Year: 2019

The Town of Port Hawkesbury is committed to building and improving its main recreation area – the MacQuarrie Community Park - through incremental investments supported by the Canada Community-Building Fund. Centrally located near community facilities, such as a high school, seniors' residence and the Civic Centre (a multi-purpose, state-of-the-art event and sport facility), the Town is strategically creating a hub for physical activity to encourage outdoor play, exploration and active living.

One of the latest additions to the Town's community recreational park is a pump track, which provides a continuous undulating loop that users can ride by pumping their upper and lower bodies to move around the track without peddling. It provides a fun and safe environment for those of all skill levels to be active on their bikes, in-line skates and scooters. The pump track is located near a trailhead, so it and the other park amenities can be accessed by foot and other active transportation modes.

Through its continued investment in recreational infrastructure, the Town of Port Hawkesbury is demonstrating its commitment to supporting healthy, active living and providing diverse opportunities for residents to connect with others and be outdoors. The availability of the federal Canada Community-Building Fund has been instrumental in creating these amenities that contribute to the Town of Port Hawkesbury's vibrancy and sustainability, while enriching the quality of life in the community.

There's more great work happening at the Middleton Campus of the Nova Scotia Community College where we have installed the first bidirectional charging station. This pilot is the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada and among the first in the country. This cutting-edge technology will allow customers to charge their electric vehicles and use their EV battery to power their home or business during an outage. The pilot will help demonstrate the potential to reduce the overall electricity demand of the building and leverage the vehicles battery to power certain loads of the building.

The results from these types of pilot projects help us better understand and quantify the benefits the technology can provide both customers and the grid. The learnings will help inform future programs and how we make these technologies more accessible to customers across Nova Scotia, providing opportunities to save money and reduce emissions.

These projects would not be possible without partners like you. As the utility, we see ourselves as an enabler and accelerator for a clean energy future. However, we can't do it alone. Your partnership, whether through a municipality or First Nation, is key to our success. As we look around the province, we see innovative ideas taking shape. Together we are leading the way and creating a path toward an innovative, green economy.



# Creating Smarter Homes and Greener Communities - Together

After two years of pandemic protocols and gathering limits, it is great to be back out into communities, meeting with Nova Scotians at Home Shows. You may have visited us in the past to learn about our heating solution programs including heat pumps, electric thermal storage and water heaters. This year we are excited to show up a little differently, inviting you into our PowerBox – a display that allows you to experience how innovative technology can put you in control of the energy in your home and help you reduce your carbon footprint. In addition to home heating solutions, customers have told us they're interested in learning more about battery storage, electric vehicle chargers and community solar. Our customers, your constituents, are looking for more options and we are excited to deliver. We will continue our strong partnership with qualified contractors across the province to help connect customers with the professionals in your communities and help those local businesses grow. We will also continue working with other industry stakeholders including Efficiency One. We've partnered on a demand response pilot program, aimed at shifting electricity demand to off peak times, and work together on promoting electrification through their various rebate programs.

These sorts of partnerships are key when it comes to achieving our climate change goals. We know it will take all of us working together - stakeholders, government, communities and First Nations - and we continue to see some great work as a result of this collaboration. Take electric vehicle (EV) charging stations for example. We were joined by municipalities right across Nova Scotia interested in installing EV chargers which contributed to a federal program application by Clean Foundation. The organization in turn received funding from Natural Resources Canada for up to 250 Level 2 EV chargers that will soon be installed throughout Nova Scotia. A timely addition given how fast we're seeing interest in EVs grow. Electrification is key to our clean energy future. We are supporting electrification initiatives that will help municipalities meet their climate objectives, such as Halifax Regional Municipality's plan HalifACT 2050.

We have been providing support as Halifax Transit works to convert its transit fleet of buses to electric and are having similar conversations with municipalities across the province as they look to convert their fleets as well.

The work being done in communities not only helps move municipal climate initiatives forward, it helps customers learn more about the benefits of new technologies and makes solutions more accessible. Thanks to these partnerships, we are sharing energy advice with municipalities like Lunenburg and Shelburne and helping educate and raise awareness about new innovative technology. Our experts are participating on advisory boards and in working groups in communities across the province, like Bridgewater, where team members are providing assistance in exploring emerging energy technologies, affordability, and better outcomes for the environment and community. We have worked with Guysborough to review green infrastructure opportunities, participated in the consultation process for the Greenhouse Gas Reductions Plan in West Hants and attended focus groups with the Western Regional Enterprise Network and worked on energy efficiency programs for some municipal buildings.

Along with increasing awareness about new technologies, together, we're also testing it in communities across the province. Our Smart Grid Nova Scotia project is a great example of that. The four-year pilot is aimed at looking at how we can effectively and efficiently add more renewable energy to our grid to benefit everyone. This includes the province's first Community Solar Garden in Amherst, launched at the end of 2021. In partnership with the town of Amherst, we are able to offer local residents and those across Nova Scotia, another renewable option and the opportunity to be part of our clean energy transition. This is about providing easier access to renewable energy, no matter where you live.

*continued on page 33*



# Smarter homes, greener communities.



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[nspower.ca/innovation](http://nspower.ca/innovation)





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