



Municipality of the District St. Marys

# What We Heard & Final Recommendations

Land Development Committee

## Introduction

The What We Heard and Final Recommendations Report is a summary of feedback, opinions and concerns collected from key stakeholders and perspective sharers which have been integrated into final recommendations from the Land Development Committee. The Land Development Committee's purpose is to provide recommendations to Council regarding strategic planning and development for municipal owned land; to provide recommendations or best practices to achieve the desired priorities with consideration of valued perspectives. The Stakeholder feedback was requested based on the Land Development Committee Policy section 5.2 Perspectives for Consideration.

### Background

The purpose of the Land Development Committee is to provide recommendations to Council regarding strategic municipal land planning and development, guided by the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law in accordance with St. Mary's 2026 A Ten-Year Strategic Plan. Land planning initiatives on municipal land shall aim to be cohesively connected with Active Sherbrooke Plan, Climate Change Action Plan, Sherbrooke Streetscape Plan, Source Water Protection Plan, and the St. Mary's Active Living Strategy.

### Purpose and Process

The purpose for requesting feedback and perspective is to ensure the Committee provides recommendations considering multiple priorities with the intent to maximize combined community and economic benefits on any municipal owned property developments.

Feedback and perspectives were gathered during in person and online sessions at regularly scheduled Land Development Committee meetings plus an online survey for the local business community. Verbal information gathered and presentation materials were collected and recorded in the Land Development Committee meeting minutes.

## Summaries of Feedback Received

### Perspective of Home Builders Community

The construction industry faces challenges with labour shortages and project risk due to interest rate sensitivity. Developers and contractors need a strong business case and mature partnerships, with positive public feedback. Affordable housing groups requiring capacity and experience to access funding and partnership opportunities. 'Clearing the runway' before bringing in developers is essential including incentives and instruments, with financial penalizations removed. Renovations and refurbishments depend on many factors and have inherent risk. Funding from federal and provincial governments can attract development attention, with investment in partnerships and underrepresented groups.

### Feedback from Key Stakeholders in the Business Community

#### Strait Regional Centre for Education

SRCE Representatives identified housing and childcare as primary needs in St. Mary's. With 50%-75% of teaching staff commuting from Antigonish, and 25%-50% live local. SRCE has partnered with associations and private groups to create co-hosted childcare facilities within existing schools. Retrofitting childcare spaces costs approximately \$700-800K, and operational decisions are managed by an association or board.

### Sherbrooke Village

The Executive Director identified several needs in St. Mary's, including housing for staff and visitors, childcare, specific skill sets for full-time positions, food options, and entertainment. Shared cost accommodations and housing projects were discussed as potential solutions. The need for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) and Accessibility are priorities moving forward, with ongoing work on Accessibility by the Municipality being recognized and supported.

### Small Business Community

The first set of responses from business owners with respect to needs/gaps for their current business included requests for childcare, seasonal accommodations, stricter regulations for Main St., Sherbrooke, better signage, and the installation of basic infrastructure like rest areas and garbage cans. The second set of responses focused on improving tourism in St. Mary's, including the need for better roads, sidewalks, public washrooms, restaurants, lodging, and recreational activities like hiking trails and waterways. Housing was identified as a crucial need in both cases.

### Perspective of the Agricultural Community

Recognizing agriculture as an economic driver, the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) requests that land development decisions and the Municipal Planning Strategy consider proper setbacks and neighboring use. Agriculture creates job opportunities and enhances food security. Farm businesses are facing a gap in materials and labor, but NSFA programs offer support for farms of all revenue levels and an accelerator program for small businesses.

### Feedback and Perspective from the Sustainability-Climate Change Community

#### Nature Nova Scotia

The President of Nature Nova Scotia highlights several environmental concerns regarding Nova Scotia's forestry industry. These concerns include the disappearance of 30 million birds in Nova Scotia due to forest practices, insufficient protection for the Mainland Moose and Wood Turtle habitats, and the failure of Acadian species to return on the industry-driven 40-year rotations. Nature Nova Scotia suggests the need for legislative protection of core habitat areas, longer forestry rotations, and connecting wildlife corridors. Protection of the watershed and preliminary work that can be done include the development of harvest management requirements and land exchanges with Nova Scotia Nature Trust.

#### CLIMAtlantic

The summary of five key climate change findings are as follows: 1) It's getting warmer. 2) Changing precipitation patterns. 3) More frequent and intense storms. 4) Sea levels are rising. 5) Our oceans are changing. CLIMAtlantic and its Climate Services Specialist provide information and assistance to Nova Scotians about climate change. Weather and climate are different, with climate being the average weather patterns over a longer period of time. Carbon emissions cause climate change, and models help predict future climate. RCP 2.6 and RCP 8.5 are low and high emission scenarios respectively, with RCP 8.5, unfortunately, being the most likely.

#### AREA Municipal Energy

AREA is a municipal corporation that is owned by and has delivered significant value to the towns of Antigonish, Mahone Bay, and Berwick through electrical savings and utility management. The company is niche in that their

sole focus is municipally owned renewable projects in Nova Scotia, and they have a track record with municipalities to develop successful solar and wind energy projects. AREA was invited to provide a municipal perspective, particularly the financial and physical requirements for a municipality to consider moving forward on renewable projects. AREA stresses that community and indigenous engagement are a must for successful projects.

### Perspective of the Coastal, Ocean and Fisheries Community

The Nova Scotia coastlines are experiencing the effects of climate change, sea level rise, and subsidence due to Glacial Isostatic Adjustment (GIA). Extreme weather events are causing erosion and loss of beach access, but Coastal Adaptation Resources, including nature-based solutions, are available to maintain infrastructure. Key ecosystems such as Kelp Reef Beds, Saltmarsh, and Eel Grass protect against storm surge and support local fisheries while also serving as carbon sinks equivalent to tropical rainforests. Peat is a similar ecosystem to the key three in terms of coastal protection and carbon sink. Data collection and permits are required for development on and near coastlines, but Living Shoreline Projects can be used to restore and build up coastlines.

### Perspective of the Affordable Housing Community

The Build Together II Project aims to create a coordinated voice for Nova Scotia non-profit housing associations. Working groups have been formed to create pathways for Programs and Services, Partnerships and Collaborations, Capacity Building, Research, Policy Development and Advocacy, and Communications. The Guysborough County Housing Network was established to gather information in 2019 and has received funding for research that has captured housing needs for eastern Nova Scotia. Affordable housing across the entire housing continuum is required in Guysborough County. This need is intensified due to factors such as COVID-19, tourism, aging, and declining population. Seniors require suitable housing to age in place, and wrap-around services are also essential for those experiencing mental health and addiction issues.

### Perspective and Feedback from the Health and Wellness Community

St. Mary's Memorial Hospital, Hospital Society, and Eastern Health representatives have identified several gaps and needs in the community, including housing, storage, childcare, food establishments, mental health supports, and community engagement. Possible solutions for housing include partnerships with local groups and organizations to provide temporary or short-term accommodations for locum staff. The hospital is in need of storage due to unfavorable basement storage conditions and asbestos abatement in the attic. Childcare services with extended hours to cover 12-hour shifts are needed. Food establishment options and hours accessible after a 12-hour shift are limited. In-person mental health support is needed in addition to existing virtual care options. St. Mary's Memorial Hospital Society has requested the consideration of municipal land to locate a new hospital facility due to the current facility nearing the end of its life, difficulty attracting new staff, limited space for expansion and increasing flood risk to the only access road due to climate change.



## Ranking Process

Qualitative and quantitative factors should be considered in the decision-making process for any land development. A multi-criterion rating system for the purpose of determining multilayered benefits via ranking system will be used by Staff to determine optimal community benefit. Each quantitative and qualitative factor seeks to answer a question. The Multilayered Benefits Analysis Tool has been developed for the purpose of evaluating land development options for municipal owned lands in the Municipality of the District of Saint Mary's.

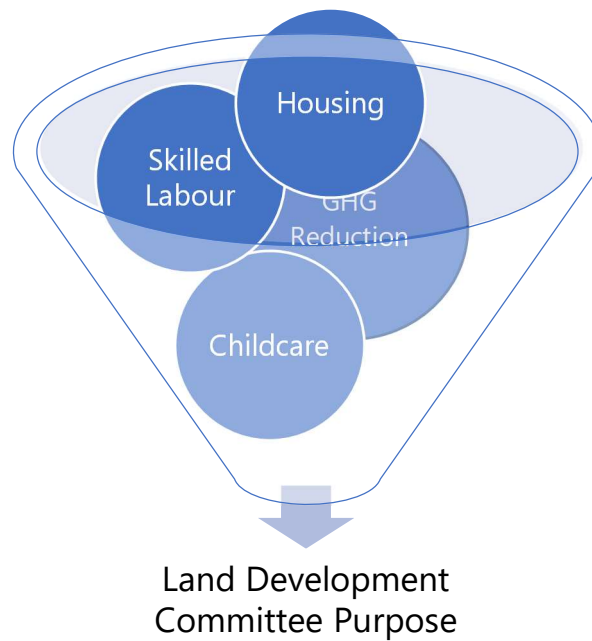
Quantitative factors are numerical outcomes from a decision that can be measured. These factors are usually found in decision making processes for evaluation including financial feasibility, market demand, infrastructure availability, environmental impact, local business community, and land use bylaw and permitting requirements.

Qualitative factors are those that cannot be easily quantified or measured. Subjective knowledge, understanding, observations, research, interviews, surveys, and case studies are all sources of qualitative data. Factors that are considered in this ranking process include location, community and social impact, aesthetic appeal, sustainability and climate change and health and wellness.

The above factors will be ranked and weighted based on the relative importance to the specific development project being considered from the recommendations from the Land Development Committee. A scoring system can then be used to evaluate each potential land development option, taking into account both qualitative and quantitative factors. The option with the highest overall score would then be considered the best choice for land development.

The Land Development Committee used a Filter Tool and an Action Pathway to provide Council recommendations which will direct Staff on priorities to further investigate via the Multilayered Benefit Analysis Tool.

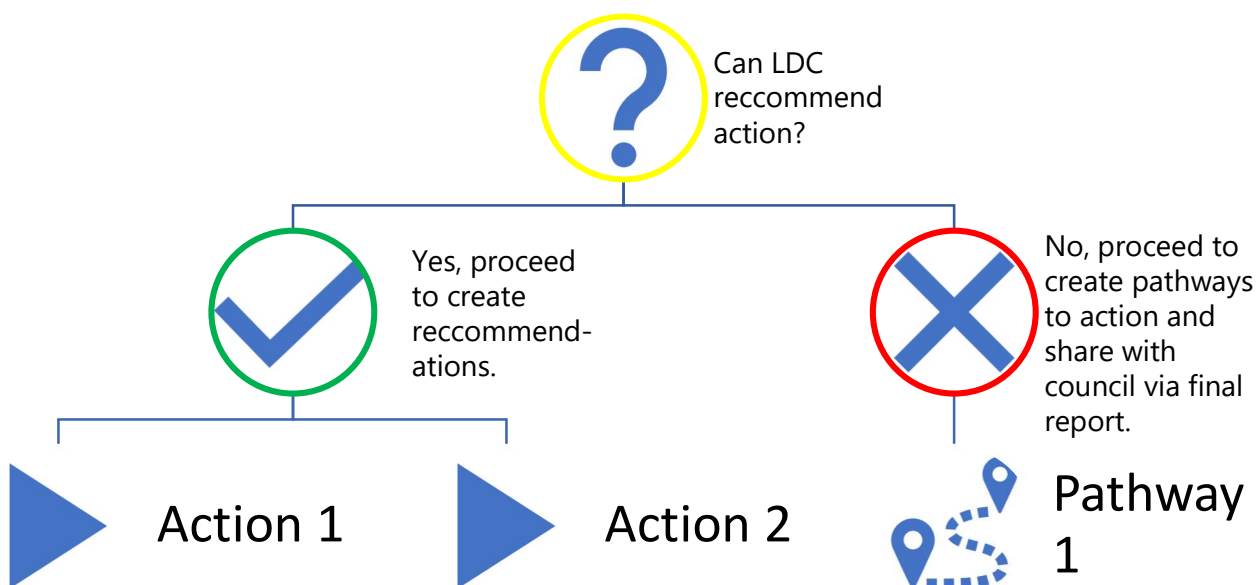
First the Committee determined if the action is within the scope of the Land Development Committee which is to provide recommendations to Council regarding strategic planning and development for municipal owned land; to provide recommendations or best practices to achieve the desired priorities with consideration of valued perspectives. If it is within the scope, a formal recommendation will be created. If the action or issue is not in the scope, Council will still receive the information via pathways to action and the background report to ensure that valuable stakeholder information is communicated.



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The purpose of the Land Development Committee is to provide recommendations to Council regarding strategic planning and development for municipal owned land; to provide recommendations or best practices to achieve the desired priorities with consideration of valued perspectives.

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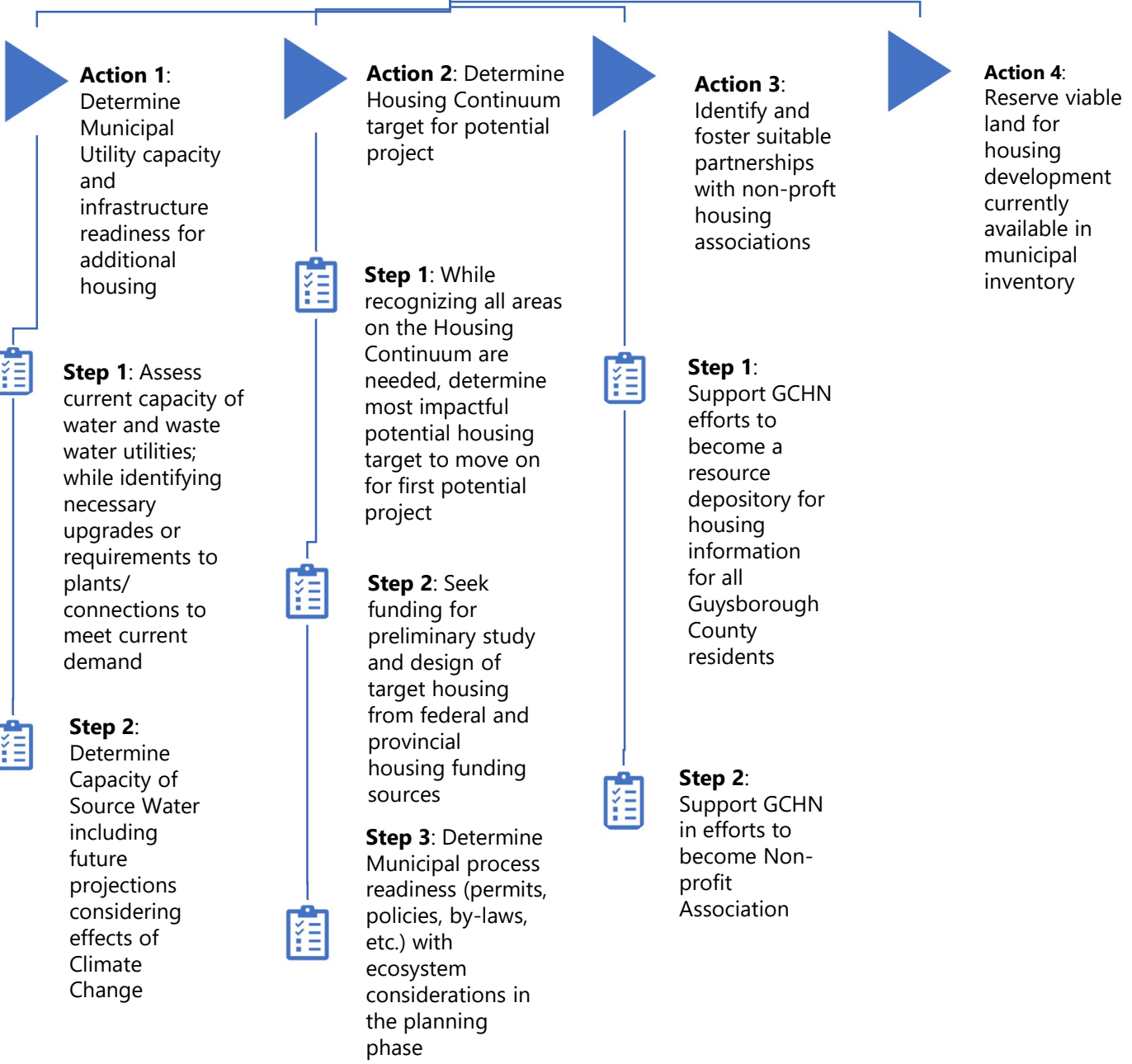
**PRIORITY 1: HOUSING**



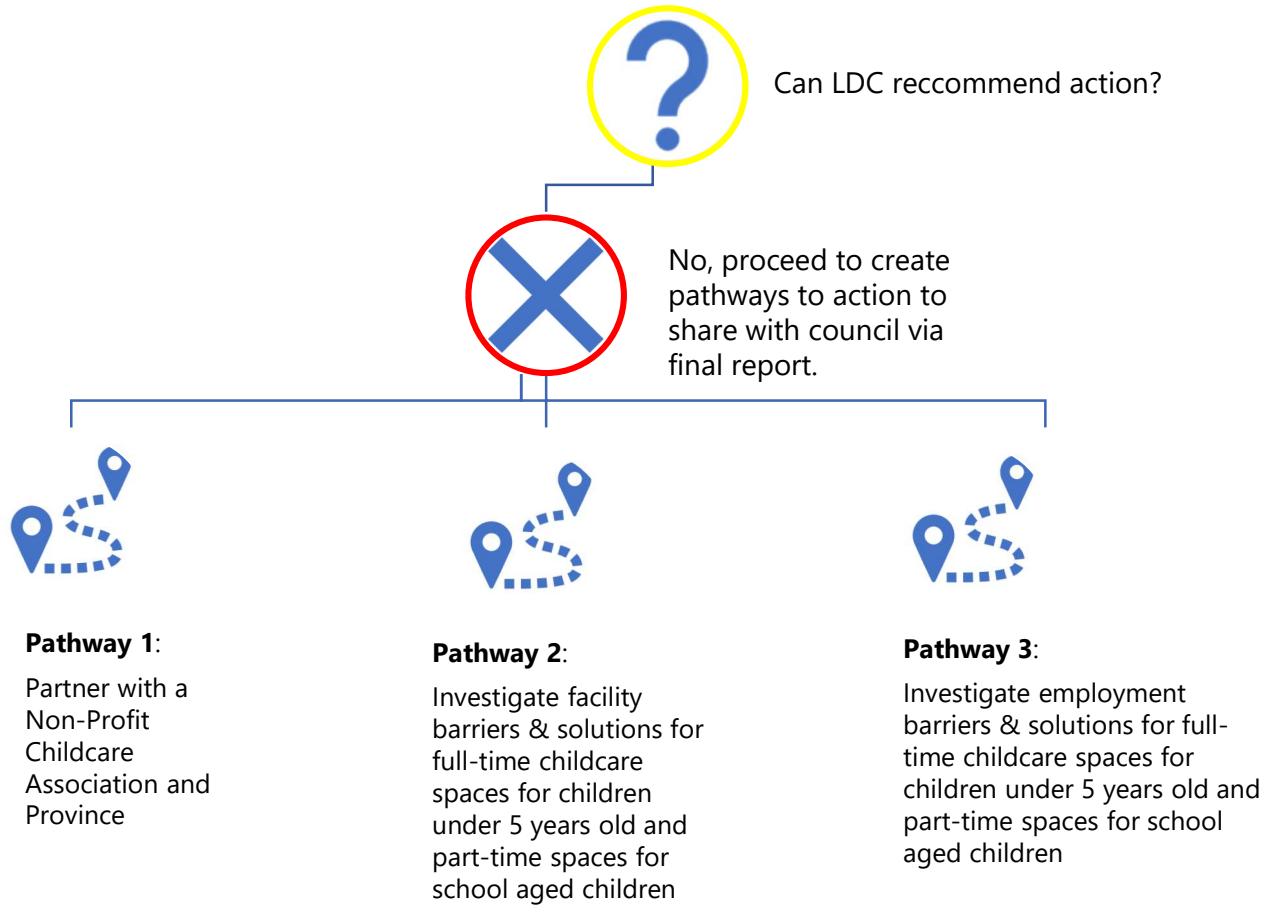
Can LDC recommend action?



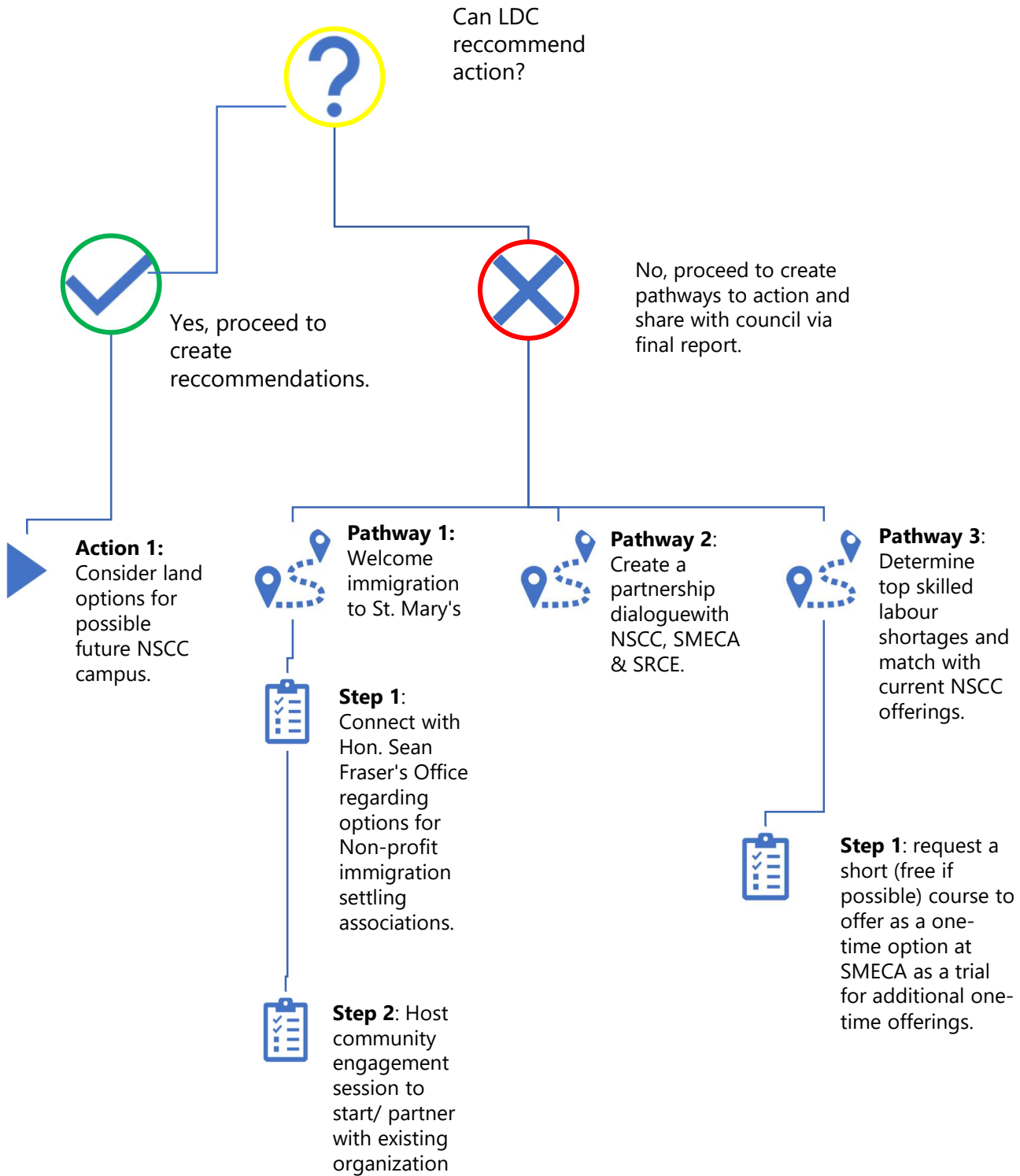
Yes, proceed to create recommendations



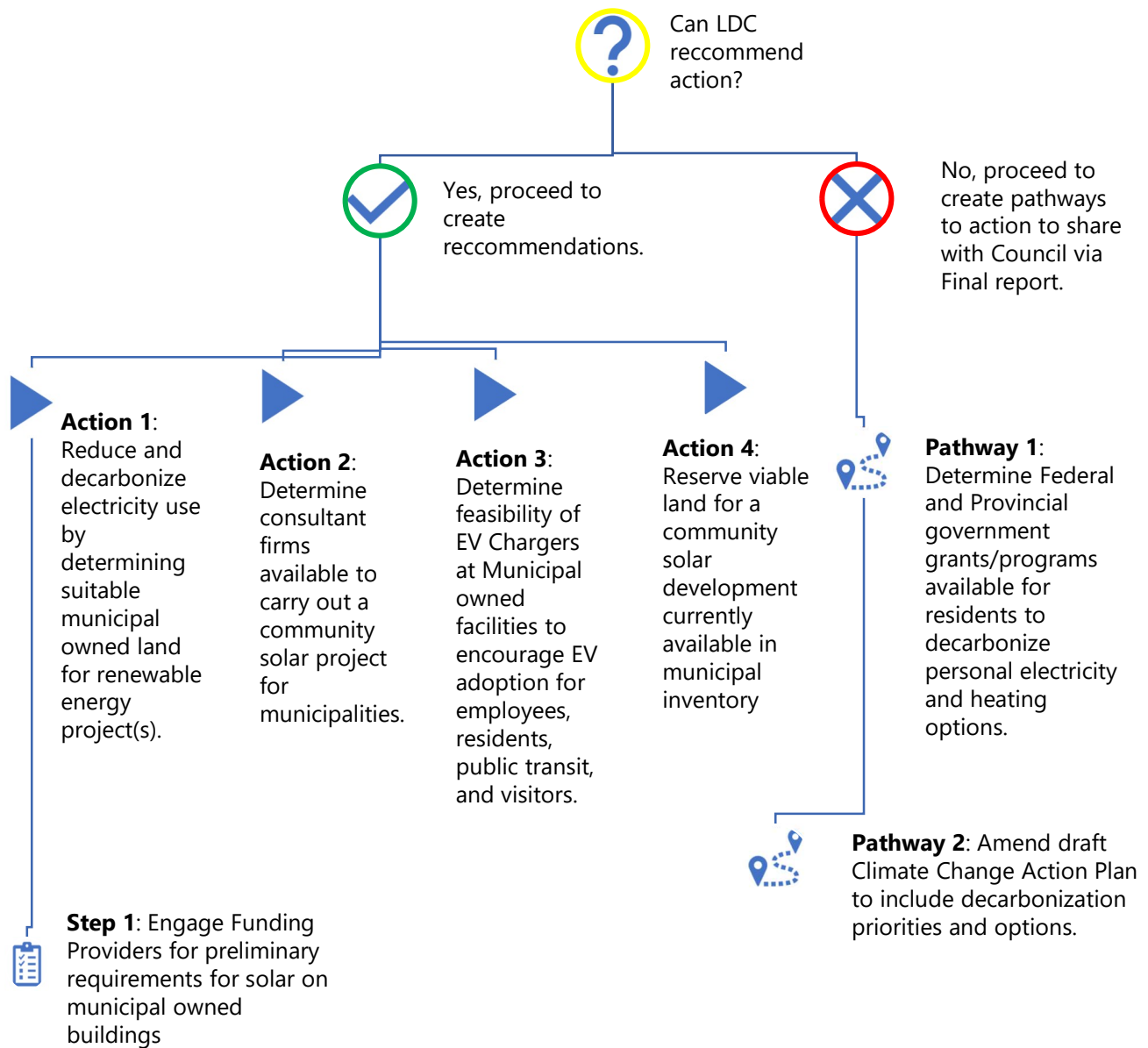
**PRIORITY 2: CHILDCARE**



**PRIORITY 3: SKILLED LABOUR**



**PRIORITY 4: GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION**



## Conclusions

### Key Findings from Feedback

The **home building/** construction industry faces challenges with labour shortages, and project risks due to interest rate sensitivity. **Affordable housing** groups require capacity and experience to access funding and partnership opportunities to create sustainable housing. **Agriculture** creates job opportunities and enhances food security but is facing a gap in materials and labour. The **coastal, oceans and fisheries** community is experiencing the effects of climate change and needs coastal adaptation resources, including nature-based solutions, to maintain infrastructure and fish stock nurseries. The **health and wellness** community has identified several gaps and needs, including housing, storage, childcare, food establishments, mental health supports, and community engagement. The **business** community has also identified housing, childcare, skilled labour, food establishments and entertainment as current gaps and needs. The **sustainability and climate change** community expressed concerns about the environmental impact of the forestry industry and the need for legislative protection of core habitat areas, longer forestry rotations, and connecting wildlife corridors. Changing climate brings repercussions from rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and sea level rise. Renewable energy projects are solutions worth investing in from both sustainability and financial viewpoints.

## LDC RECOMMENDATIONS AND POTENTIAL PATHWAYS TO ACTION:

### Housing

Recommendations from LDC:

1. *Recommend Council request Staff to report Municipal utility capacity and infrastructure readiness for additional housing, including the identification of necessary upgrades or requirements to plants/connections to meet current demand and current source water capacity with future projections considering effects of climate change for St. Mary's.*
2. *Recommend Council determine the housing continuum target for potential first project and request Staff outline federal and provincial funding options that fit the housing continuum target while determining Municipal process readiness (i.e. policies, by-laws, permits) with ecosystem considerations in the planning phase.*
3. *Recommend Council identify and foster suitable partnerships with non-profit housing associations. This includes support for Guysborough County Housing Network (GCHN) in becoming a non-profit housing association and an information resource depository for housing and related services for all of Guysborough County by adding an annual budgetary line item for 'Housing' from which regular funds can be provided along with other financial instruments available under the Municipal Governance Act (MGA).*
4. *Recommend Council reserve PID # 37501095 Sherbrooke for a potential housing project.*

## **Childcare**

Pathways to action for Council's consideration:

1. Partner with a non-profit childcare association, the Province and Strait Regional Centre for Excellence to create childcare spaces.
2. Request Staff to investigate facility barriers & solutions for full-time childcare spaces for children under 5 years old and part-time spaces for school aged children.
3. Request Staff to investigate employment barriers & solutions for full-time childcare spaces for children under 5 years old and part-time spaces for school aged children.

## **Skilled Labour**

Recommendations from LDC:

1. *Recommend Council consider land options for possible future NSCC Campus.*

Pathways to action for Council's consideration:

1. Welcome Immigration to St. Mary's by connecting with Hon. Sean Fraser's office regarding partnering options for Non-profit immigration settling associations and hosting a community engagement session with a potential immigration settling association.
2. Recommend Staff create partnership dialogue with Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), St. Mary's Education Centre/ Academy (SMECA) and Strait Regional Centre for Excellence (SRCE).
3. Recommend Staff determine top skilled labour shortages in St. Mary's and surrounding areas, match with NSCC offerings and request related short courses be held in St. Mary's as a trial for future post secondary education opportunities.

## **Greenhouse Gas Reduction**

Recommendations from LDC:

1. *Recommends that Council reduce and decarbonize electricity use at every possible opportunity including requesting Staff to determine suitable municipal owned land for renewable energy projects.*
2. *Recommend Staff determine consultant firms available to carry out a community solar project for municipalities.*
3. *Recommend staff to determine feasibility of EV Chargers at Municipal owned facilities with parking areas to encourage EV adoption for employees, residents, public transit, and visitors.*
4. *Recommends that Council reserve PID # 37546447 Trafalgar for a potential community solar project.*

Pathways to action for Council's consideration:

1. Engage funding providers to determine preliminary requirements for solar on municipal owned buildings.
2. Determine and communicate current grants and programs available for residents to decarbonize personal electricity and heating options.

3. Install EV Chargers at Municipal owned facilities to encourage EV adoption for employees, public transit, and visitors.
4. Amend draft Climate Change Action Plan to include decarbonization priorities and options.

## **General**

Recommendations from LDC:

1. *Recommend Council add annual budgetary line items for each priority to ensure matching funds are available for funding and grant opportunities along with other funds from financial instruments available under the Municipal Government Act (MGA).*
2. *Recommend Staff to add the lens of biodiversity and climate change to municipal business and project practices and processes.*
3. *Recommend PID# 37541844 Fishermans Harbour undergo a shoreline assessment and sensitive ecosystem assessment prior to land development decisions.*
4. *Recommend Council foster relationships with the perspective sharers that were heard during the Land Development Committee 2022-2023 including requesting additional presentations for Council and sending a copy of the What We Heard and Final Recommendation Report for their review.*
5. *Recommend that the Land Development Committee's What We Heard and Final Recommendation Report be sent to Council for discussion, approval, and adoption in its entirety.*

## **Mid Future (3-10 years) Land Considerations**

1. Future site for new hospital
2. Future site for potential NSCC campus

## **Appendices**

[Appendix A -List of Consultation Participants](#)

[Appendix B - Qualitative Data](#)

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Land Acknowledgment**

We acknowledge that we are working in Mi'kmaqi the traditional unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

### **Stakeholder Acknowledgment**

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's would like to sincerely thank each stakeholder for their preparation, valuable input, and attendance (virtual and in-person). Stakeholder perspectives have been captured in this report and will drive the best possible outcomes for the community with respect to developments on municipal owned properties. Integrating stakeholders' input promotes transparency and trust in municipal government and fosters community involvement in the development process.

### **Committee Acknowledgment**

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's would like to share their gratitude and appreciation for the time, dedication and determination put forth by all members of the Land Development Committee. The members carefully considered many hours of stakeholder feedback and perspective sharing presentations to skillfully craft the best possible outcomes for the community with respect to developments on municipal owned land.

## APPENDIX A

### List of Consultation Participants

Strait Regional Centre for Education

Regional Executive Director of Education, Paul Landry

Acting Director of Operations / Director of Finance, Chris Grover

<https://www.srce.ca/about-us/departments/office-of-the-regional-executive-director>

<https://www.srce.ca/about-us/departments/operations-department>

St. Mary's Education Centre/ Academy Principal, Trevor MacIsaac

<https://smeca.srce.ca/>

St. Mary's Memorial Hospital Society Chair, Heather Laybolt

St. Mary's Memorial Hospital, Facility Manager, Lindsay Stevens

<https://nshealth.ca/locations-details/>

Nova Scotia Health Director of Integrated Rural Health- Eastern Zone, Andrew Heighton;

Nova Scotia Health Executive Director of Integrated Rural and Community Health- Eastern Zone, Glenn Cox.

[Nova Scotia Health Authority \(nshealth.ca\)](https://nshealth.ca/)

Nova Scotia Non-Profit Housing Association; St. F.X. Coady Institute's Community Housing Program

Development Lead, Pauline MacIntosh

<https://coady.stfx.ca/community-housing-program/>

Guysborough County Housing Network; O'Regan Project Services, Nancy O'Regan

<https://www.facebook.com/GuysboroughCountyHousingNetwork/>

Ecology Action Centre

Coastal Adaptation Coordinator, Will Balser;

Marine Campaign Coordinator, Simon Ryder-Burbidge

<https://ecologyaction.ca/about-us/our-team>

Nature Nova Scotia

President, Bob Bancroft

<https://naturens.ca/about/>

CLIMAtlantic,  
Climate Services Specialist (Nova Scotia), Alex Cadel  
<https://climatlantic.ca/about/team/>

Knowledge and Development Associates, Ltd.,  
Director, Ramzi Kavar (former Director, Greening & Sustainable Business Practices at Housing  
Nova Scotia, Government of Nova Scotia)

Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture,  
Executive Director, Carolyn Van Den Heuvel  
<https://nsfa-fane.ca/about/nsfa-staff/>

Construction Association of Nova Scotia,  
President & CEO, Duncan Williams  
<https://www.cans.ns.ca/about-cans/cans-board-of-directors/>

AREA  
Operations Manager, Aaron Long  
<https://www.areans.ca/contact/>

## APPENDIX B

### Qualitative Data

The following qualitative data has been extracted directly from the Land Development Committee minutes where each stakeholder and perspective holder shared their information.

#### **Business Community Perspective:**

*Key Stakeholder: Strait Regional Centre for Education*

- The SRCE Team stated they are pleased with the current relationship and shared spaces with the Municipality and are open to exploring new ones.

#### **Gaps / Needs Identified:**

- SRCE Representatives identified Housing as a need in St. Mary's, particularly for substitutes and casual staff. 50%-75% of the teaching staff commute generally from the Antigonish area with Pomquet currently the farthest. 25%-50% of staff are local. SRCE Representatives noted they have a strong staff and support staff and being located locally and in the community is best.
- SRCE Representatives identified childcare as a need in St. Mary's SRCE Representatives stated that SRCE has partnered with associations and private groups to create co-hosted childcare facilities within existing schools. SAERC, Bayview, East Richmond, and Wycocomagh Education Centres currently have retrofitted spaces. Chedabucto Education Centre is in the RFP stage and there is currently interest in both Antigonish Education Centre/ Academy and Canso to create childcare space in their facilities.
- SRCE Representatives estimate the cost for childcare facilities retrofit is 700-800K including in-kind donations from SRCE partnership including project management, financing, and shared operational services (i.e., custodial, security, heat, power, etc.). Retrofitted spaces can typically host 20-35 children with operational decisions such as hours of operations being managed by an association or board.

#### **Current Capacity and Enrollment SMECA:**

- SRCE Representatives affirmed that the capacity of the school is currently at 48%-50% and is ready to receive more students, which would require more full-time teachers and support staff. SRCE welcomes an increase in enrollment and will facilitate any necessary hiring.
- The Principal of The St. Mary's Education Centre/ Academy announced that the school is now fully open to resume community booked events saying staff is capable to meets the needs required to host.
- SRCE Representatives shared that the Enrollment Trend for 2021-2030 originally curved in decline but since Covid the trend has leveled out and the 2022-2023 numbers are above 2018 enrollment at 262 students.
- SRCE Representatives did not have data at hand (but can acquire it) regarding distribution trends in each community of St. Mary's. This data is requested in relation to areas of growth which can be determined with bus routes and transportation planning.

- **Business Community Perspective:**

*Key Stakeholder: Sherbrooke Village*

Executive Director, Sherbrooke Village, York Lethbridge

- The Executive Director stated that Sherbrooke Village, part of the Nova Scotia Museum, is a village with its 25 original buildings that visitors can experience life as it is along the St. Mary's River before the 1900s. Visitors can hear tales about the village as costumed interpreters bring history to life, watch sparks fly as the blacksmith's hammer hits the anvil and see weavers at the loom.

Gaps / Needs Identified:

- The Executive Director identified Housing as a need in St. Mary's as it's a barrier to attract Full-time positions and short term for seasonal staff during peak months as well as for visitors to make Sherbrooke Village a destination. Sherbrooke Village currently has one, on-site, hostel-like house to provide accommodation for large groups and one on-site suite for visiting artists. Its unique funding policies do not allow for profits to be returned to Sherbrooke Village but directly back to NS Government therefore Air B&B/ Short-Term-rentals on site would not be feasible. There are limitations on investing in businesses at museum as profit must be reinvested in the same fiscal year and any remainder goes back to the province. Housing could help extend the season thereby increasing hours and money to attract more summer staff. This would also need a significant increase in funding from NS Heritage. Anderson Cottage Respite Centre will require significant funding to be achieved. Another factor that must be considered is that the Operational fund since has not increased since 2008.
- The Executive Director and Land Development Committee members discussed potential solutions including shared cost accommodations and housing projects for seasonal staff and for visitors. Most visitors use Sherbrooke Village as a day trip as opposed to a destination.
- The Executive Director identified Childcare as a need in St. Mary's as it's a barrier to attract full-time positions.
- The Executive Director identified Specific Skill sets as a gap in local population. There are currently 5 full-time positions open which can't be filled by the local population so far. Currently, St. Mary's has an aging population and not enough younger members of the community are willing to learn and hone the skills needed for operation of Sherbrooke Village as a living museum.
- The Executive Director identified Food Options as a gap in St. Mary's, particularly for varied options and increased hours which is also a barrier to attracting full-time positions.
- The Executive Director identified Entertainment as a gap in St. Mary's, specifically, food and arts/entertainment which is also a barrier to attracting full-time positions.
- The Executive Director notes that Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) and Accessibility are priorities moving forward. The ongoing work on Accessibility by the Municipality is recognized and supported as are the continued Municipal Summer Day Camp Visits

## **Health and Wellness Perspective:**

### *St. Mary's Memorial Hospital*

- The Facility Manager from St. Mary's Memorial Hospital has stated that St. Mary's Memorial Hospital is approximately 25,000 ft<sup>2</sup> and is built in 1949 (with an addition in 1981). The hospital employs 50 Staff including RNs, LPNs, CCAs, Diagnostic, EKG/ECG and lab Technicians, Site Lead/ Facility Manager, Two (2) full time Physicians. Support teams are also employed at the hospital including Environmental, Dietary, Health Support, Maintenance, Administration, Medical Records, Foot Care Clinic, Door Screeners, and Physiotherapy. In Palliative Care there are Continuing Care Nurses and a Care Coordinator while the attached medical clinic employs two (2) administration staff, Family Practice Nurse, Diabetic Clinic, and a Dietician. Outpatient services include Mental Health Clinicians, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapy, Social Worker. Virtual Care for Urgent Mental Health is available in St. Mary's. The Facility Manager stated that Emergency Room visits in the last fiscal year totaled 1600 visits. As of November, numbers are already higher with over 4 months left in this fiscal year. This increase is due to a combination of surrounding hospitals with ER Closures, increased sickness in the population, and more people without access to a family doctor.

### Gaps / Needs Identified:

- The representatives from St. Mary's Hospital, St. Mary's Hospital Society, and NS Health -Eastern Zone have identified several gaps and needs in St. Mary's.
- Representatives have identified *Housing* as a need in St. Mary's, particularly for locum staff which require temporary or short-term type accommodations. Housing solution examples for doctors in NS include a housing project in Yarmouth in which the local Chamber of Commerce teamed up with the local credit union for a 0% interest on loan to create a 5-unit building specifically for locum doctors. Another example is near Neil's Harbour Hospital where a house was made available for doctor rental for 1 year and the doctor ended up staying in the area. New or retrofitted hospitals that are built with private or association partners to co-locate seniors housing create greater efficiencies by sharing services (i.e. laundry, food, parking, etc.)
- St. Mary's Hospital Society stated they are not currently looking for a house at this time but is however open to housing solutions with partners and groups within a 10-minute travel time from the hospital.
- Representatives have identified *Storage* as a need for St. Mary's Memorial Hospital as the basement no longer has conducive storage conditions due to elements exposure and the attic requires asbestos abatement.
- Representatives have identified *Childcare* as a need in St. Mary's, including extended hours that would cover 12-hour shifts.
- Representatives have identified *Food Establishments* as a gap in St. Mary's, including the selection and hours accessible after a 12-hour shift.
- Representatives have identified *Mental Health Supports/Resources* as a need in St. Mary's even though virtual care options exist, in-person options are preferable for care.
- Representatives have identified *Community Engagement* as a need for St. Mary's; specifically, regarding services, needs for the future, and priorities.

Current Request:

- The St. Mary's Memorial Hospital Society Chair, in consultation with St. Mary's Hospital, have requested land to locate a new hospital facility. The current facility is nearing its end-of-life which due to its age and condition is difficult to attract new staff. The hospital site does not allow for expansion due to private property surrounding the current parcel of land. Also of concern is the road that only provide one way in or out on a road that is prone to flooding and increasingly so with climate change.

Succession Planning:

- Facilities across Nova Scotia are currently under a physical assessment which will provide data for end-of-life and succession plans for St. Mary's Memorial Hospital. Currently, there is no succession plan for the hospital nor physicians at St. Mary's Hospital.

Meeting Request:

- NS Health – Eastern Zone representatives would like to meet with Council 1-2 times per year going forward, starting with NS Facilities Assessment results in Spring 2023.

**Affordable Housing Perspective:**

*Nova Scotia Non-Profit Housing Association*

- Build Together II Project from Coady Institute, St. F.X. University held a meeting with various Nova Scotia non-profit groups, associations, and networks in October where it was resoundingly agreed that a coordinated voice for the province was needed. It was proposed that regional housing networks across the province create pathways for Programs and Services, Partnerships and Collaborations, Capacity Building, Research, Policy, Development & Advocacy and Communications with a provincial Non-Profit Housing Association. Working groups have been formed with April 2023 is the aim for first Nova Scotia Non-Profit Housing Association meeting.

*Guysborough County Housing Network*

- The formation of Guysborough County Housing Network began in 2019 when the network was established to gather information. In 2021 funding was received from CLARI and a research project was started. The final report is currently in development.
- The Housing Continuum used by CHMC (see graphic in attached presentation) describes the basic types of housing.
- Affordable Housing is defined by CMHC as housing that is adequate (in good repair), suitable (large enough for its household occupants), and costs (rent and utilities) less than 30% of the household's pretax income.
- Factors Impacting Housing in Guysborough County include COVID 19- Increased construction costs, Increase in Tourism Short Term Rentals, Real Estate Boom, Inflation – Fuel and Heating Costs, Food Insecurity, Aging, and Declining Population. These factors are affecting new health care professionals moving to the area.
- Affordable housing has diverse needs. For example, individuals and families can be impacted by a sudden loss of income. Currently 1 in 4 residents are living in poverty in Guysborough County. Interviews and surveys with landlords reported very little turnover in rental units, lots of demand, and very limited rentals available.

- The graph District of St. Mary's Population Changes 2016- 2021 in the attached presentation shows ages 19 and under has decreased while ages 70-80 increased which indicates both a declining population and an aging population.
- There is 33.3% of the population is over age of 65 which indicates St. Mary's will soon require suitable housing to age in place.
- As of 2016, 59% of seniors are paying rent that is more than 30% of their income on housing. This would be considered in "core housing need". Most likely this number is higher now in 2022.
- Aging in Place is not as simple as it sounds as not all seniors want to or are willing to move to larger centers to age in place. Individuals may be making tough decisions that are leaving them in unsafe or unsuitable situations.
- Mobility, food security, access to trades are current challenges for seniors to maintain safe and suitable housing.
- The 2016 Census says 45% of residents pay over 30% of their income and 13% of residents spend over 50% of their income in Guysborough County on housing & utilities. 56% of single female led families spend over 30% income on rent & utilities.
- Eastern Mainland Housing: 146 affordable housing units in Guysborough County, 126 for seniors and 20 for families, with the rural /native category having 28 but it is unclear on their design ie. If the units are for families or seniors.
- The Eastern Mainland Housing Authority has an office in Antigonish and in Guysborough but is currently undergoing changes as per the recent provincial government announcement to amalgamate the housing authorities and create a crown corporation.
- Early results from the 2021 Census shows that Canada including NS continues to urbanize with exponential population growth around urban centers versus rural. St. Mary's shows a decrease by 3.2% in population which is less than the projected 4.5%.
- Guysborough County Housing Network is exploring creating a non-profit housing organization which can coordinate support services, develop a housing website, increase collaboration amongst stakeholders and hire a community-housing specialist.
- The Presenter noted that that current housing crisis has come about after 30 plus years of lack of support (and funding) for people in need which means there is no quick or easy fixes. This includes 30 plus years of deferred maintenance on existing housing stock.
- The Committee calculated that a resident working full-time at minimum wage (\$13.60/hr) in St. Mary's would be considered working poor and on the line between community housing (of which none is available in St. Mary's for individuals/ families) and affordable housing (which is less than 30% of pretax income on housing and utilities which equal less than \$663-1326 total for both).
- Wrap around services are required for people experiencing mental health and or addictions. These services include support to assist in maintaining affordable housing as stable housing may not be enough. A

Community Navigator is an example of one such support. Being co-located or near health services is another example.

- The Committee would like to capture data on the secondary residents in St. Mary's. Staff will apply filtering and sorting to tax data to obtain an approximate number as there is currently no direct way to capture this data. The recently rescinded provincial tax on secondary homes would have helped capture the numbers. This data has been requested from PVSC in the past and has been denied.
- The Committee asked what Community Housing for Families looked like in other areas of Guysborough County to which the Presenter replied that they are mostly duplexes in a state of great disrepair.
- The Guysborough County Housing Network meets virtually once per month and is open to new members. The network is a place of information gathering and sharing with the next meeting being held February 15, 2023, at 10am. The Co-chair is Nancy O'Regan who can be contacted at [nancy@oreganprojects.com](mailto:nancy@oreganprojects.com)

### **Coastal and Marine Perspective:**

#### *Ecology Action Centre*

- Climate Change and Sea Level Rise (SLR) is affecting and will continue to affect Nova Scotia coastlines. Nova Scotia is also undergoing subsidence (sinking) at approximately 15-30cm per century due to Glacial Isostatic Adjustment (GIA) which furthers the effects of SLR.
- The frequency and intensity of extreme weather is noticeable and will only continue to increase with Climate Change. Due to our ocean locale, Nova Scotia does not have a land mass to buffer southern storms arising and traveling north. This leaves coastal access points susceptible to increased rate of erosion and loss of beach access.
- Coastal Adaptation Resources are available, and the new NS Coastal Protection Act is expected this year. Living on and near the shoreline/ coastline is a Nova Scotia experience and the EAC is a proponent of working with nature and the use of nature-based solutions to maintain infrastructure such as lighthouses and municipal infrastructure.
- There are three (3) key ecosystems that protect against storm surge and are carbon sinks equivalent to tropical rainforests: Kelp Reef Beds, Saltmarsh, and Eel Grass. Their structure protects against the force of the waves, provides nutrient input and nursery habitat. All three support the health of local fisheries. EAC recommends getting a good sense what ecosystems properties hold as part of decision-making process for municipal lands due to the triple positive effects.
- Currently the data collection is scattered across federal, provincial, and local (St. Mary's River Association, Country Harbour, etc.) sources. Future data collection for land recommendations, specifically at Fishermans Harbour, can range from consulting firms with monitors and modeling to simpler data collection such as shoreline surveys with pre-set transects captured via go-pro camera on canoe or via snorkeling with volunteers lead by the EAC. Cost estimates vary from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. EAC suggests oceanographic, water quality and biodiversity surveys for informed decisions.
- Fishermans Harbour is known to have peat that was harvested years ago. The Committee questioned if peat was a similar ecosystem to the key three. EAC confirmed, yes, while in general a different ecosystem it behaves similarly with respect to coastal protection and a carbon sink.

- The Citizen Representative suggests delving further and assigning a value for nature infrastructure and requested EACs insight on No Development vs Low Development vs Development with the purpose of Climate Protection. EAC responded that it depends on the type of development i.e., recreation would have much lower impact than a golf course or an industry with respect to risk exposure from SLR and storms. Staff also provided input that the Federal and Provincial permits have requirements for development on and near coastlines. EAC mentioned Living Shoreline Projects and that permits are also required to restore and build up coastlines.

### **Sustainability- Biodiversity Perspective:**

#### *Nature Nova Scotia*

- Mr. Bancroft started as a Provincial Regional Biologist in 1972 is a woodlot and landowner and the current President of Nature Nova Scotia.
- Nature Nova Scotia has outlined that the St. Mary's River Watershed has good examples of trees from the Acadian Forest, both Yellow Birch and Sugar Maple can be found at Crow's Nest where the east and west branches of the St. Marys' River meet. On the map displayed, the beige areas indicate clear cuts. There have been 5 major cuts of Nova Scotia forests since the 1700s that have been removed and as a result soil level has suffered. Nature Nova Scotia and economists such as Mark Carney have brought awareness to the short-term economic benefits have been traded off for wildlife.
- The Mainland Moose needs a 50-60m buffer of forestry near water's edge, but the forestry industry leaves only 20-30m which is not suitable. Both the Mainland Moose and Wood Turtle habitat is suffering as well due to lack of legislative protection of identifying and or designating core habitat areas. As per the attached paper the Maritime Forest practices alone are responsible for the disappearance of 30 million birds. One third of the birds in NS are gone since 1970s. Salmon are starting to suffer with increased temperatures by both suffocating and acquiring fungal infections at around 25°C.
- Acadian species are not returning on the industry driven 40-year rotations as the time is too short for pioneer species. The optimum time for Acadian Forest species to return is 155 to 175 years which provides the optimum 50%-50% balance of tolerant hardwood and softwood. There are lichens in Nova Scotia that only exist on trees that are 200 years and older. Hurricane Fiona has quickly shown how weak current logging practices are.
- HRM is connecting corridors for wildlife, a process Nature Nova Scotia says can work in St. Mary's. When viewed on the map the green areas are accumulating nutrients while orange shows a distinct lack. Connecting and protecting the green areas provides pathways of connection for wildlife.
- The Committee asked there are buffers or radius boundaries that we should be concerned for the protection of the watershed. Nature NS stated that when 60% of a watershed has been cut the ecosystems start to fall apart. Select cutting methods are preferred in watershed which maintain their health. Current practice is too much too fast and has been going on for too long. What is done in the forests affects the oceans, it's all connected.
- The Committee asked what preliminary work can be done to which Nature NS stated the municipality can develop harvest management requirements and work with the province.

- When asked if Nature NS has experience in land exchanges, they replied with exchanges are possible although not common and can be a lengthy process. Other options include, [Nova Scotia Nature Trust](#) which is recommended over giving to the province due to changing governments and priorities vs a stable mandate.

### **Climate Change Perspective**

#### *CLIMAtlantic*

- The purpose of CLIMAtlantic and specifically a Climate Services Specialist is to provide assistance for Nova Scotians to access and understand information about climate change.
- Weather is what is experienced when stepping outside on any given day. In other words, it is the state of the atmosphere at a particular location over the short-term. Climate is the average of the weather patterns in a location over a longer period of time, usually 30 years or more.
- Greenhouse Gases: CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations have been quite stable until a few hundred years ago around 265ppm CO<sub>2</sub>. A large increase began a couple of hundred years ago with industrialization. The current CO<sub>2</sub> reading as February 6, 2023, is 420.06ppm.
- Climate change won't stop until GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions stop; every bit of carbon emitted today stays in the atmosphere for many years with future consequence for generations to come.
- Models help predict the future climate. These models help us understand long term patterns to help understand and plan for uncertainty. Future climate concerns are vast for both built and natural systems.
- Modeling with RCP pathways allow for different views of emissions scenarios and ask, "what if?" questions to help plan for the future.
- RCP 2.6 is the low emissions scenario where human caused climate change is limited. Carbon emissions peak almost immediately and then reduce to near zero before the end of the century. It would mean an average global temperature increase of 1°C by the end of the century and 1.8°C in Canada (compared to a baseline period of 1986-2005). This is roughly compatible with the goal agreed to in the Paris Agreement.
- RCP 8.5, the high emissions scenario, shows a future where there are few restrictions on emissions. Emissions continue to increase rapidly through this century, and only stabilize by 2250. In Canada, RCP 8.5 would mean an average temperature increase of 6.3°C by the end of the century (compared to a baseline period of 1986-2005). RCP 8.5 looks like the 'worst case' scenario on the chart but in reality, it's looking like the 'most likely case' scenario.
- MODSM getting warmer brings concerns of summer days and nights becoming more uncomfortable. Winters are warming rapidly with less extreme cold and more temps above freezing. Warming also increases risks of hazards such as heat waves, wildfires, and droughts. Annual high temps will increase from the current high of 29.1 degrees Celsius to 32 degrees Celsius by the 2050s and 34 degrees Celsius by the 2080s. Heat warning days will increase as will the need for cooling centres. Warming will also contribute to a longer frost-free season which presents opportunities with respect to agriculture and growing season length. Heeding that a longer frost-free season will also allow an increase in pests.
- Precipitation is changing. MODSM experiencing precipitation change will bring concerns that go along with more rain and less snow. There will be more total precipitation but more of that water will evaporate into warmer air or runoff in more intense downpours. As temperatures warm in the winter more precipitation will

- fall as rain instead of snow. The trend is towards more intense rainfall events which will also increase the risk of flooding.
- More frequent and intense storms. MODSM's storm projections will include more intense storms that bring more powerful and destructive storm surges. Warming oceans will enable tropical storms to travel further north before weakening with peak wind speeds projected to increase by 4 to 7 kilometres an hour by 2100. MODSM and Nova Scotia will likely see larger and stronger storms as climate change continues. This is why Fiona was able to track so far north and cause the damage it did and cause record breaking storm surge. Hazards from increases in more frequent storms include flash flooding, mud slides, erosions, dangerously high waves and destructive and damaging winds.
  - Sea levels are rising. Today's storm surge is tomorrow's high tide. MODSM is predicted to experience approximately 80 centimeters of sea level rise which is not factoring in tides or storm surge. not only will hazards impact people, homes, infrastructure, assets they will also negatively affect well water with saltwater intrusion and impacts on coastal ecosystems.
  - Oceans are changing. Ocean temperatures are increasing which not only create problems with how far north storms can travel, but it decreases marine oxygen levels which can be detrimental for many species. The ocean is also becoming more acidic which is an incredible challenge for any sea creature with a shell, as an acidic environment prevents proper shell formation.
  - The summary of five key climate change findings are as follows:
    - 1) It's getting warmer.
    - 2) Changing precipitation patterns.
    - 3) More frequent and intense storms.
    - 4) Sea levels are rising.
    - 5) Our oceans are changing.
  - The Committee questioned how other greenhouse gases (GHG) other than CO<sub>2</sub> are trending. Mr. Cadel confirmed other GHGs are presenting the same increasing trends. With the world eating more beef than ever, the Committee asked is methane worse than CO<sub>2</sub>? Mr. Cadel confirmed while methane is less abundant it is more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> by approximately 300 times and also confirmed yes, livestock is part of the equation, as are other sources such as the off gassing of methane when wetlands are destroyed.
  - RCP or Represented Concentration Pathway represents the concentration of carbon that delivers global warming at an average of 8.5 watts per square meter across the planet.
  - The Committee asked if there was a piece missing pre 2010 in the chart of data with respect to how MODSM is trending verses the beginning of the pathway. Mr. Cadel will provide a chart from 1950s on, and reiterated the RCPs are in line with what should be used in the near future for decision making.

### **Sustainability (at the intersection of Housing/Energy) Perspective**

*Knowledge and Development Associates, Ltd (former Director, Greening & Sustainable Business Practices at Housing Nova Scotia, Government of Nova Scotia)*

- Mr. Kawar presented three (3) different Sustainable Site Planning Options: LEED ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighbourhood Development), Ecological Districts (Ecodistricts) and Pocket Neighbourhoods.
- The LEED-ND rating system integrates *Smart Growth* (including well-planned development that protects open space and farmland, revitalizes communities, keeps housing affordable and provides more

transportation options), *New Urbanism* (which emphasizes compact, walkable neighborhoods, mixed-use urban form, highly connected street networks, sufficient density, building design that emphasizes human-scale and a range of housing to serve diverse populations) and regional planning with a focus on *Green Building & Infrastructure* (which includes sustainable building techniques to reduce energy use, water use and stormwater runoff, and improve indoor air quality and support locally-sourced materials).

- The three (3) imperatives of Ecodistricts include *Equity*, *Resilience* and *Climate Protection*. Equity ensures a community can meaningfully participate, lead, and thrive. Resilience addresses resilience with a broad lens that prepares for social, economic, and environmental shocks and stresses. Climate Protection builds a pathway to carbon neutrality.
- The six (6) priorities of Ecodistricts are Place, Prosperity, Health & Well-being, Connectivity, Living Infrastructure, and Resource Restoration. Place creates inclusive and vibrant communities. Prosperity supports education and economic opportunities that build prosperity and accelerate innovation. Health & Wellbeing nurtures people's health and happiness. Connectivity builds effective and equitable connections between people and places. Living Infrastructure enables flourishing ecosystems and restore natural capital. Resource Restoration moves towards a net positive world.
- The three (3) implementation phases of Ecodistricts include Formation, Roadmap and Performance. Formation builds the necessary leadership, collaboration, and decision-making conditions to support effective action. Roadmap assembles a comprehensive action plan of performance targets, feasible strategies for achieving the targets, and a schedule and resources for implementation. Performance implements the Roadmap, reports progress towards targets, and uses results to strengthen performance and transfer lessons learned.
- Mr. Kavar had attended a summit in Portland, Oregon in 2013 on Ecodistricts emphasizing in agriculture which highlighted the six (6) priorities. Several other examples of Ecodistricts can be found in North America including East Harbour Industrial Brownfield Redevelopment in Toronto, Ontario.
- Pocket Neighbourhoods Small are clusters of houses in urban, suburban, or rural arranged around a common space in which the closeness encourages interaction among neighbor and a stronger sense of community. Houses are designed to ensure privacy with parking located away from the individual house. Environmental considerations play an important role in the creation of Pocket Neighbourhoods. Adsum women's shelter was designed with low cost, energy efficiency by Passive Design Solutions in Halifax. A new development in Musquodoboit Harbour would like to model the same design.
- Sustainable Building Standards include National Energy and Building Codes, LEED for Buildings, Passive House Standard, Zero Carbon Building- Design Standard and the Living Building Challenge.
- The National Energy and Building Code has the new energy code which looks at minimum code constructions design, which is not applicable to farm buildings, less than 600 sq m or less, nor 3 stories or less and has energy provisions. These codes provide the very minimum standard for buildings. LEED for Buildings uses a points system whereby points are earned for green building strategies across multiple categories so when totaled provides a rating system of Platinum, Gold, Silver or Certified. Mr. Kavar was the lead architect for a long-term care facility Digby that reached the rating of Gold.

- Passive House Standards focuses on minimizing heat loss by optimizing thermal performance of the building envelope through superinsulation, maximising air tightness, high performance windows and doors, minimizing thermal bridges with a high efficiency heat recovery ventilation. Truro, Amherst, and Yarmouth Community Centres have been renovated into lower market affordable housing using this standard.
- Zero Carbon Building is a design standard for achieving zero carbon operations. Projects must report operational carbon, embodied carbon, avoided emissions values then model a zero-carbon balance. This includes upfront carbon, use stage embodied carbon, end of life carbon plus direct and indirect emissions minus avoided emissions like exported green power and carbon offsets. Items that need to account in the carbon calculation include the production of materials and non-combustion heating technology. The case study in Dartmouth, NS where a warehouse located at 355 Wilkinson Avenue is the first industrial building in Canada to achieve net-zero.
- Living Building Challenge projects create buildings that generate more energy than they use, capture, and treat all water on site, and are made using healthy materials. Performance areas or “Petals” include place, water, energy, health & happiness, materials, equity, and beauty. VanDusen Botanical Gardens ([link](#)) is the first building to apply for the Living Building Challenge.
- Possible Funding Sources (include possible Task Force for identifying project areas) are Housing Nova Scotia, Efficiency Nova Scotia (an MOU with Efficiency NS can have an energy manager embedded to support sustainability within the organization), Federation of Canadian Municipalities (one of the easiest sources of funding as they cover the planning, studies, Pilot Projects, Retrofit capital projects, and New-build capital projects).
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation currently has five funding streams including Affordable Housing Innovation Fund, Housing Supply Challenge, Innovation and Research, National Housing Co-Investment Funding, and The Rapid Housing Initiative. When Mr. Kavar was Director, Greening & Sustainable Business Practices at Housing Nova Scotia, Government of Nova Scotia, he had submitted to all of these sources as cost-sharing has been barrier. He was part of the team that submitted a proposal for net-zero tiny house (in HRM) but hadn't heard back before retirement.

- Housing Nova Scotia's current Programs and Services include:
  - Community Housing Acquisition Program
  - Community Housing Growth Fund
  - Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit
  - Affordable Housing Development Program
  - Land for Housing
  - Down Payment Assistance Program
  - Housing Programs for Persons Living with Disabilities
  - Housing Programs for Seniors
  - Financial Assistance and Grant Programs for Homeowners
  - Housing Programs for Landlords
  - Shelter Enhancement
- A Committee Member asked Mr. Kawar for more details about human scale in LEED for Neighbourhood development to which the reply was the concept of creating the ability for people to interact which is similar to the Pocket Neighbourhood with their front porches. An example is a development on Robie St. in Halifax which is co-located on a mainline for transportation giving people access to each other and transportation networks.
- The Committee asked Mr. Kawar for recommendations for identifying and prioritizing where to begin, since the Committee is currently looking at municipal land sites; where is the best entry point on such a big need? Mr. Kawar recommended Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) as they have many different streams and they can fund a research piece, consider multiple scenarios with a consultant or in-house which can provide a funded period of planning. Housing crisis study could help identify priorities and which projects are feasible. Mr. Kawar recommends starting with a study. He also recommends opening a dialogue with FCM as they also do wastewater and energy.
- The Committee asked Mr. Kawar what type of partnerships he has seen work, and what the advantages and disadvantages are. Mr. Kawar shared that he has had very good experience with Clean Foundation, as they have a knowledgeable team and experience. Clean has managed buildings and understand sustainability. Efficiency NS does not implement Projects. NSCC can be a useful partner, Mr. Kawar has previous experience NSCC and renewable energy namely with a solar farm feasibility study. Private consultants are slightly less recommended followed by non-profits as they may not have the capacity.
- The Committee asked about funding with respect to having demonstrated experience, NSDNRR & NSCC has a solar program coming online but no firm dates yet. There are NGOs that have experience and AHANS has a new director The Committee should reach out to as they have been successful in receiving rapid housing funding from Canadian Mortgage and Housing (CHMC).

### **Agriculture Perspective-**

#### *Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture*

- Ms. Van Den Heuvel has passion for both agriculture and community development and is originally from Antigonish, NS
- Ms. Van Den Heuvel stated that agriculture is not just about the farm as a business but producing food and products for Nova Scotian communities. Agriculture supports food security and other community enhancements.

- In the new Municipal Planning Strategy there are pieces around protection of agriculture. Ms. Van Den Heuvel requests that there be consideration of agriculture around land when making Land Development decisions with respect to proper setbacks and with interactions of neighbouring use.
- There are opportunities when recognizing that agriculture is a rural economic driver in the community, with job creation, agriculture is the full picture. The resource industry is backbone of rural communities in Nova Scotia
- Ms. Van Den Heuvel recommends looking at opportunities for food security as Nova Scotia has highest rate of food insecurity across Canada right now. She suggested St. Mary's ask how can the community share spaces such as community gardens, community share fridges/ pantries/ cupboards be enhanced. With Agriculture and shared community spaces there is real opportunity to increase food security while increasing job opportunities.
- The Committee asked if there is funding for community gardens? NSFA focus is the farm business position but there is funding via NS Community, Culture, Tourism and Heritage funding. The provincial department of Agriculture has an interest in food security via provincial funding.
- Ms. Van Den Heuvel stated that currently farm businesses are facing a gap and supply issues with both materials and especially labour. Farm and workforce development strategies are in progress that would include applied learning on farms and seasonal opportunities for farms in St. Mary's who are connected with NSFA.
- The Committee asked how big a farm must be before you can register for NSFA programs. NSFA responded that a farm under \$30 000 to over 1 million in revenue can apply. Farms are required to provide a statement of farming income on their taxes. Even at \$5000 level there is a small accelerator program later this year which can supply business and support operations.

### **Home Builders Perspective:**

#### *Construction Association of Nova Scotia*

- Mr. Williams stated that residential specific construction is done by some members focusing on single dwellings, but most do major developments in communities with major and mixed-use projects.
- Mr. Williams followed the questions raised by the Committee as speaking points starting with partnerships. There are no specific partnerships that jump out for housing solutions with the construction industry. The current models and trends are working with not-for-profit organizations which are not usually geared to take on large projects due to the risk and mitigation efforts required.
- Labour has been the biggest challenge in the construction industry lately. Currently the need is for 3000 vacancies to be filled just to keep current projects moving. There is momentum with the province on immigration to help fill these positions. CANS has radio ads running in Alberta as the tug of war for labour continues between east and west. Rural communities outside of Halifax is feeling the thinning resources even more so.
- With an aging population urgent development is needed. Communities need to make the process as easy as possible i.e. What do by-laws say and what are the deterrents? Does your community have a long process for approval or high fees? The creation of the wild west is not necessary but there are bad contractors and processes can filter them out.

- Mr. Williams recommends efficiency in project planning with reasonable fees and structures including community input to shovels in ground. Interest rates are outside of community control, but it is a fact that when rates go up then shovels go down. Profit margins are that thin. Then heavier (than regular times) risk factors are layered on all adds up to low bidding rates due to risk.
- According to CMHA \$1000 per month as rental is national rate of affordability benchmark which would vary outside of cities. In Halifax, \$1000 and below would be older stock and not up to par. Building units that rent for \$1000 per month is doable but difficult and would require constraints on the project i.e., smaller units, basic units, basic finishes, height is higher. The deed transfer taxes would have to be eased and deed fees removed for units 600 sq ft or less which is still a stretch.
- The Citizen Representative asked if 30% of annual pre-tax income comes up in affordability discussions? Mr. Williams says the CANS follows CMHA numbers, but reality could be different and that possibly Statistics Canada will confirm more accurately what affordable is. The market is still supply and demand and mobilization costs will dramatically go up.
- Mr. Williams recommends starting with industry locals if the community has capacity i.e. small contractors. Private developers may have a few units in their current developments as opposed to complete developments. Developers have an increased interest in and challenge in pairing up agendas and interests. Government funding can help bridge gaps in agendas.
- With respect to the Incentives and instruments availability question, Mr. Williams shared that investment from federal and provincial governments dried up 25 years ago, which has caused lost stock that is derelict and requires decommissioning. Folks that need now weren't even around when this funding happened last. Funding will attract development attention and will bring help like financial incentives which allows cost constraints to be more manageable. Developers and contractors could be assisted and aided i.e.; a noise by-law is currently cutting 7.5 hours of noise which is 15% increase on end users. Mature partnerships are preferred. Developers will not come teach new organizations, muscle memory with experience is preferred along with a strong business case as profit is essential for healthy industry. The annual average is 4.65% profit; therefore, risk mitigation is essential. If all the risk is on contractor, then they will walk away or cut corners.
- More dedicate funding from federal government just last night for approximately 3 billion per annum. Funding applications will most likely partner with underrepresented and non-profit groups with history/ experience. Public low-income housing groups requiring additional capacity could do a joint application with federal government.
- Options to increase new buildings should include making way and doubling down on making your community welcoming for businesses, listen to feedback from developers and contractors i.e., nature of procurement; RFPs using industry standards (CANS and other associations can help create that).
- It can be very expensive to pursue a development for example a municipality had put out an RFP but didn't have the 50K secured funding. An RFP is a contract in good faith. Upfront work is essential like easements, utility locates, etc. Be creative when the opportunity presents itself like Cape Breton did many years ago with a land for work measures exchange.

- Issues the construction industry is currently facing are 1.) Labour: in the next 7-10- years is very tight so a community must make its region as attractive as possible. 2.) High Project Risk: projects are extremely sensitive to interest rates. Usually when rates increase then people roll back on salary increases but the industry currently doesn't have enough people to use that tactic. 3.) Consumer Spending: consumers are currently halting spending completely as opposed to redirecting.
- There is some project slowing in Nova Scotia with a few projects that have been shelved but it is expected that this summer should start to open again with project flow increasing.
- Supply chains have improved somewhat but timelines have been stretched to way longer than they used to be i.e., simple HVAC units now take 18 months, steel is about 9 months and global economic conditions will continue to be volatile for some time. Volatility will continue until Russia's war on Ukraine ends as Russia plays a big part in the commodities market.
- To have a project at the shovel ready stage will take a minimum of 18 months lead time. Bring developers in but clear "the runways" first. Mitigate against the barrage of development. If a developer feels the project is a non-starter they will walk away. I.e., the current Lunenburg housing development. Development that hasn't been well planned out or enough public engagement/ buy-in will receive backlash then will impede or cancel a developer's participation.
- Remove financial penalizations i.e., a reserved right to award up to 90 days later then if not complete damages are liquidated. A beautiful development will sit idle because of no bidders. A fixed date with short turn around i.e., 10 days to hold prices, timelines, permits, etc. they will still have risk unless biggest risk is you then will walk.
- On the topic of new projects/ new builds vs renovations/ refurbishments, Mr. Williams says the potential problems are a hindrance. It depends, old historic property cost comparison would have to consist of what's under and in the structure to determine whether to keep undisturbed or clear out. Renovations and refurbishments will depend on many factors as the abatement process is like a cracker jack box, never know what you will get, therefore inherent risk. There is definitely an opportunity but depends on last retrofits (if ever) and the buffer available to make the project happen. If there is an established relationship with the developer a contingency would be added but other clients (without relationship in good standing) would have additional buffer added on to cost.

### **Sustainability (Renewable Energy) Perspective:**

#### *Alternative Energy Resource Authority*

- Mr. Long has provided an overview of collaboration as a municipal corporation under Section 60 of the MGA with Antigonish owning 66.66%, Berwick owning 23.3% and Mahone Bay owning 10%. AREA has delivered over \$20 million in value to the towns of Antigonish, Mahone Bay, and Berwick through electrical savings and utility management this includes \$18 million in dividends while saving millions by managing portfolios as they can participate in open market.
- AREA led the development of the Ellershouse Windfarm, consisting of 10 wind turbines (23.5MW). AREA has also recently worked with Potentia to win an RFP bid to expand the windfarm (+66MW).

- In the past five years, AREA has worked with municipalities to develop 20 successful Solar Energy for Community Buildings (SECB) projects (1.5MW total). AREA has taken three utility-scale solar energy projects (9MW) from development through to construction.
- AREA's key features are core competency is its ability to navigate the entrepreneurial-municipal spectrum. AREA only develops municipally owned renewable projects in Nova Scotia. AREA has a proven ability to secure public funding and council approvals while maintaining a below-market project management rate.
- Other municipalities are eager to copy these successes. For example, the Village of Canning solar project on the fire hall, which has achieved cheaper overall commercial operations.
- AREA has had to move projects with fatal flaws highlighting their entrepreneurial spirit inside municipal operations. Lenta Wright is one of the most experienced in the creation of renewable projects including solar gardens. AREA has been invited to present about solar garden projects by Canadian Brownfield Network.
- Sites of current projects are complicated and not generally developable. The project AREA is working on with Berwick is too wet for agriculture, but all project lands have challenges.
- There is a profit to be made and it should be via municipalities have a rightful share in public purse, to obtain a rounded-out portfolio.
- The Province of NS is now expanding upon the solar electricity for community buildings (SECB) program and providing municipalities with the opportunity to develop community shared solar. With AREA's guidance, municipalities that engage in the Shared Solar Program will produce \$3 million in net present value and will reduce carbon emissions in their communities by 3000 tonnes per year. This is equivalent to providing power for 700 homes in District of St. Mary's, which is also equivalent to planting about 150 000 trees. From an entrepreneurial perspective, AREA can help integrate into community, policies and rules, with a proven ability to procure funding and success.
- There is a dichotomy of municipalities competing. AREA is municipal owned working for municipalities, there are possible overlaps, partnerships and AREA can navigate these processes.
- AREA has a track record of PPAs and funding acquisition along with below market project management rate. The more municipalities get into renewable energy the more funding federal government will carve out.
- Since the province is getting more local actors into solar capped at 75kW they have now expanded wattage to 5-10MW (\$30,000 to \$12-\$20 million projects). There are ways to manage ownership profiles especially where a 5 MW level system will generate profits every year for 30 years. As the province unfolds programs, they will be looking for collaborators and partnerships. AREA can help with municipal focus particularly with stakeholder engagement and community acceptance regarding the project and/or location.
- AREA follows a 3 -phase methodology to take the customer municipality from the concept of community shared solar to commercial operations. Throughout the process, items within the following 'Risk Circle' (including the Municipality and their physical assets at the centre surrounded by financing, community and stakeholder engagement, site control, permitting, annual energy production report, grid integration, BOP contractor, operations, and technology are managed by AREA.
- Phase 1 is Project Development Until Program Application. This phase includes site selection, granted interconnexion feasibility study, geotechnical study, preliminary engineering, budget and finance model development, community an First Nations engagement, an program application drafting. This phase is comprehensive and if the municipality were aiming or a project by September, an EOI would be required by

the beginning of summer. Mr. Long has stated a a municipal site under consideration is within the required 3km of an NSPI substation or 3 phase power.

- Phase 2 is Project Development After Program Review. This phase includes grid system impact and facility study, detailed engineering, municipal permits, procurement plan, and securing project funding.
- Phase 3 is the construction. This phase includes site preparation, site control, civil work, solar and electrical equipment installations, utility installations, inspections, community, and First Nations engagement.
- Mr. Long has shared that the average size lot of land which is max 5 acres per MW. The Provincial programs are going to want to spread permits around with 5MW projects being prime candidates. Antigonish is a 2MW project due to constraints both electrical and site related. He recommends looking for sites that are approximately 25 acres, located within 3km of substation or 3 phase power, preferably on land owned by a municipality and already cleared of vegetation. Projects can not be on wetlands.
- Food vs Energy site selections seem to come up often. With respect to trees, previously deforested is better narrative. With respect to Agrivoltatics, AREA hasn't investigated this technology yet as there wasn't a site appropriate for research in this area.
- District of St. Mary's can utilize the competitive procurement exercises that have already been conducted by AREA during the recent solar garden developments in Antigonish, Mahone Bay, and Berwick. AREA has already released Request for Standing Offers (RFSO) for development services related to solar projects (Surveying, Electrical Engineering, Geotechnical, Owner's Engineer, Preliminary Site Design). Contractor procurement is in house so RFPs for every project not required, AREA is happy to share responses and short list and how funders are seeking stability and experience.
- Common issues include Geotech surveys as they can significantly change costs on entire projects and can uncover surprises. Community and indigenous engagement is a must. Projects that are not welcome by the community will cause project timeline issues.
- AREA is not fly by night operation extracting profits, which brings communities comfort that they are not going anywhere.
- Phase 4 is the Operational Phase which is the making money phase. This phase also has the operating and maintenance budget. These items include panel maintenance, bolts, thermal temperature readings, vegetation management.
- The provincial Shared Solar Program is driven by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables (DNRR). Julia Lindsey is the main contact for this program.
- If a municipal site is available that meets criteria, it would be best to pursue. Alternatively, if the Municipality were able to make purchases to meet criteria, this would also be acceptable. AREA does not recommend leasing property for such long-term projects.
- The realistic timeline for a community solar project is 1 year for development of concept followed by one year for construction.
- If the next provincial application stage is September 2023, AREA will need 6 months to be construction ready, followed by 1 year of construction, with another 18 months to commercial operations with PPA in places.
- Renewable energy has been a bit boom and bust so pacing to reduce costs is recommended but there is still urgency for carbon reductions.

### **Business Community Perspective:**

A two-question survey was emailed to approximately 66 local business owners, with 9 responding, and remained open for 10 days to receive anonymous feedback on the following questions:

1.) What gaps or needs in services, amenities, infrastructure, etc., would you like to see considered in municipal land decisions that would support YOUR business?

Responses included:

- Childcare
- Medium-term/seasonal accommodations; evening entertainment and food service establishments
- None it's ok as it is.
- A place that sells Stihl chain saws and related products
- Provide a rest area, washroom/ outhouse, garbage cans on Highway 211.
- Stricter rules/regulations/by-laws for Main St. including no vacant buildings (Westville adopted this), R2 zoning for all of Main St. Businesses on the Main St should be retail/tourism driven. The core of Sherbrooke should be a designated historic district and strict restrictive covenants be in place (Lunenburg/Truro etc has this). We need to make it building code that all power lines be buried. Sidewalks need to be installed up to the Sherbrooke Village Inn.
- Better signage. Our business is not on Main Street, yet we are vital to the community. How do we get people to travel over the bridge on #7. Main Street beautification is great but what are we doing to support business over the bridge? There is no where in this community to purchase gifts, clothing, simple basics, fresh flowers on a regular basis. Giant Tiger or such would be welcomed by many.
- N/A
- No idea

2.) What gaps or needs in services, amenities, infrastructure, etc., would you like to see considered in municipal land decisions that would support TOURISM in St. Mary's?

- Sidewalks, bicycle lane on Highway 7 and 211, public washrooms near Port Hilford beach
- Evening food service or entertainment; multi-day experiences
- None, we have all we can afford now. Possibly if the population increased by 4 times we might need more. As it is now, we have all we need or quite frankly can afford our one and only advantage is lower taxes. If they were to increase to say Antigonish levels, then moving to another higher populated area would be our best option.
- First and foremost a restaurant that is open 7 days a week until at least 10pm. Then lodging and housing. You can't bring people to the area if they have nowhere to live and nowhere to eat.
- Create a waterway from Nimrods Campground to Port Hilford Beach. Lakes are connected but channels between them need to be cleared of fallen trees. Would create a great kayak, canoe day trip. Bringing tourists in, which would also benefit businesses with accommodations, food options, and supplies.
- Hiking trails, maps of trails in the area.



- Sidewalks need to be installed up to the Sherbrooke Village Inn. The core of Sherbrooke should be a designated historic district and strict restrictive covenants be in place (Lunenburg/Truro etc has this). More installation of bike racks in various parts of the district. Proper way finding and directional signage for the district. Community kiosks for residents and tourists that show events, places, contacts in various parts of the district. BETTER ROADS. The DOT needs to have more pride on dirt roads; ditches are a mess and covered in gravel. Stricter by-law enforcement for unsightly premises in the district. We need a website for tourists to go. We need programs to educate tourism operators. We need REAL action and no talk. Increased support for tourism operators.
- Restaurants/places to eat.
- We need to draw tourists to Sherbrooke. Expand recreation services such as paddle boat rentals on the river, longer Season for Sherbrooke Village Museum, Better support for the Motel and Restaurant. Too many home kitchens that don't seem to be regulated with inspections, permits etc.
- Housing is crucial.