



*Department of Fisheries and Communities*

*Rural Communities Council*

# ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021



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## Council Overview

The Rural Communities Council (RCC) is an advisory group to provide advice to government on a wide range of topics and themes such as people, communities, wellness and environment.

The RCC will examine, discuss, and review Government strategies through a Rural Lens that will identify potential rural impacts of policies and decisions.

The RCC is a natural evolution from the four Regional Economic Advisory Councils, formed in 2017, and RCC discussions began by examining the issues and recommendations from the four REACs.

The RCC engages with industry, academia and government partners to understand the complex issues of rural PEI, and is supported by the staff from the Department of Fisheries and Communities.

The Council is composed of twelve individuals, including two co-chairs, and achieve a regional and gender balance within the membership. Members applied and were selected through Engage PEI.

## Co-Chair's Message

The members of the Rural Communities Council began deliberations in the middle of the COVID 19 pandemic in September 2020. At the outset, members were determined to fulfill their important role, while staying compliant with the COVID protocols. To date, five meetings were held with ten presentations on a wide variety of relevant rural topics. Feedback from members on these presentations had a common theme; that is government policy should always avoid a centrist approach that can negatively impact rural communities in many ways.

Viewing policy and programs through a “Rural Lens” was the central focus of the Council. This approach advocates the Government be committed to “rural proofing” provincial policies to ensure that policy makers are aware of the impacts on rural communities.

As we move into the second year of the Council's mandate, we will continue to identify specific issues, undertake research, consult, and provide feedback. We have identified the following for Council's agenda over the next year:

- Rural Public Transportation
- Rural Health Care
- Derelict properties
- Rural Broadband Internet
- Strengthening Sustainable Rural Industries and Rural Economic Development
- Land Matters and Land Use Policy
- Highlighting Rural Statistics
- Community Amalgamation
- Climate Change
- Other issues to be identified

### LOOKING AHEAD

The Council would also like to undertake best practices research of successful rural development and public service models here and elsewhere. A budget to conduct identified research should be considered. As COVID 19 restrictions are removing, the Council should also consider holding consultations with interested community councils, organizations, and others to identify, discuss and validate issues.

Given the breadth and depth of topics discussed within the first year, Council members can feel very accomplished, and we wish to thank all of you for your service to Islanders and your valued commitment to this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Co-Chairs: Gerry Gallant and Elmer MacDonald

# Summary of Deliberations to Date

## **Communities**

### **Rural Broadband, Rural Transit:**

- There is still much work needed to deliver affordable high-speed internet to many rural businesses and homes. High-speed internet supporting the growing trend to home based workplaces is an opportunity to create positive rural economic impacts, strengthen rural communities and reduce environmental effects of commuting. The council notes progress is being made and stopgaps are helping (e.g., hubs in community spaces).
- The Rural Transit Feasibility Study is of great interest. The Council stressed the importance of rural transit to support employees of rural businesses to improve access to employment opportunities.

## **Wellness**

### **Rural Health Services: Mental Health; Women's Health; Physician Recruitment and Retention:**

- All these aspects of Rural Health Services were highlighted throughout the Council's deliberations.
- The Council is looking forward to Health PEI's strategic and human resources plans that has creative, customized approaches to the delivery of rural health services. Partnerships in health service delivery are important (e.g., involvement of pharmacies)

## **Environment**

### **Land Matters Project; Water Act: Environmental Protection; Land Use; Population Growth, Rezoning; Municipal Governance, Land Purchase/Sale, Agriculture Use:**

- These were all topics of discussion. The Council is concerned that many of these issues tend to bring wildly diverse opinions from Islanders. Thus, Islanders need to be well informed and engaged in these matters and participate in planning.

## **People**

### **Rural Statistics; Rural Lens as Enabler:**

- Data collection is not sufficient for rural PEI. Specific rural economic, community, and social data is important for knowledgeable and constructive policy development impacting rural communities.

# Activities

During the year, the *Rural Communities Council* met on the following dates to discuss topics listed below:

<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Meeting Topics or Presentations:</b>
September 16, 2020*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land Matters PEI Project Presentation</li> </ul>
October 28, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership for Growth Presentation</li> <li>• Rural Broadband Project</li> <li>• Rural Statistical Analysis</li> </ul>
February 10, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Health Service</li> <li>• Rural Lens (tool for policy decisions)</li> <li>• Roundtable Discussion</li> </ul>
April 7, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Transit Feasibility Study</li> <li>• Premier’s Council for Recovery and Growth Report</li> <li>• Youth on Board Pilot Project</li> </ul>
June 2, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of Year One / Round Table</li> </ul>

\*Introduction Meeting, conducted via WebEx.

During the year, the Council’s *Co-Chairs* met three times plan meetings and to discuss future presentations.

## Looking Ahead

The following topics were identified by the committee, to date, as topics for discussion in the coming year:

<b>People</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>Wellness</b>	<b>Environment</b>
Population Growth Strategy	Municipal Act (revised)	Healthcare and Physician Recruitment	Water Act (revised)
Labor Challenges and Opportunities	Provincial Housing Strategy	Education (Department Report)	National Building Code (new, impact to Rural PEI)
-	Rural Statistics (for data analysis)	Shared Services and other partnerships	Climate Change
-	Canada Winter Games	-	-
-	Libraries (role in Rural PEI)	-	-
-	ACOA; Innovation PEI	-	-

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