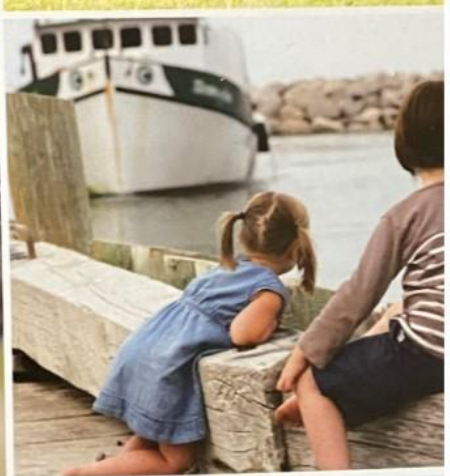




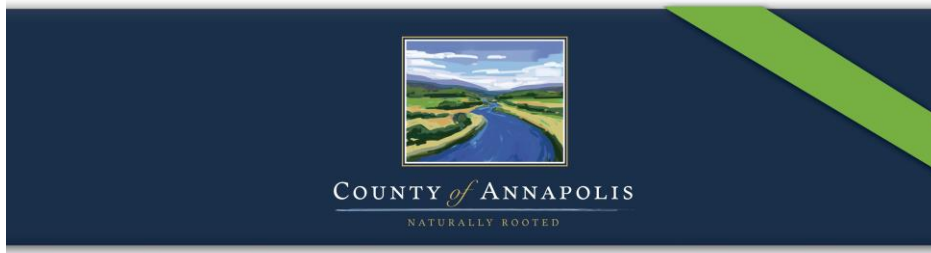
# COUNTY *of* ANNAPOLIS

NATURALLY ROOTED

## 2023-2027 Strategic Priorities

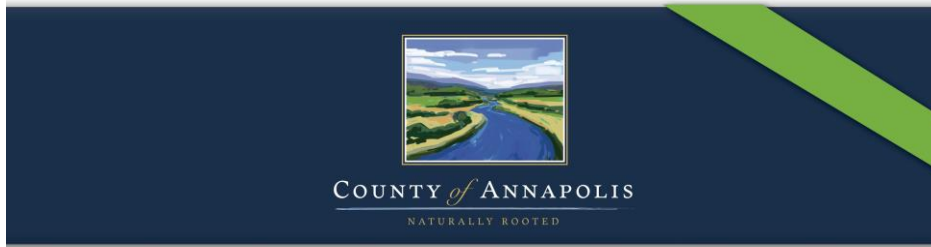






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## MESSAGE FROM THE WARDEN

Our communities expect the Municipality and its Council to lead by example. To do so, we must clearly articulate our community vision and goals while supporting the long-term sustainable needs of our 100+ communities together, and recognize the significant contribution that community members, businesses and citizens play in community success. After many months of informal community input, accompanying Council's wish to grow and development our community, I am proud to share Council's 2023-2027 4-Year Strategic Priorities Plan entitled *VISION 2027*. This plan outlines five areas we believe the people of Annapolis County wish to see the Municipality improve on to make your quality of life, and that of your family and community better.

This plan is designed to make investments in all areas of Annapolis County, from multi-million-dollar infrastructure projects to small community parks and greenspaces. Each of our communities is unique and has something to contribute to ensure a healthy and enriched quality of life for residents. Our plan is about investing in people and communities - big and small, east and west, north and south. We want to provide opportunities for the young and young-at-heart, for people of all abilities, but most of all, opportunities which are free of cost or barriers.

The vision in this plan is to enhance programs, services, and infrastructure in all parts of Annapolis County, with strategic investments in each area based on available resources and community expectations. Our plan acknowledges the Municipality's role in leading, but not always doing. We require your support to make some of these positive community changes happen.

Our goals and plans strive for strong results and accountability to you, our taxpayers. We must be wise stewards of the financial resources that you have entrusted to us. The investments will be both large and small, but concentrated. As our communities continue to grow, we must keep supporting new growth and the retention of our current businesses and residents. To sit still or be idle is to fall behind as others pass us. In order to be successful, we must be more aggressive in seeking external funding sources and more community partners. And, there needs to be less bureaucracy and

red tape which only delays getting results. We must support our local contractors, developers, and businesses more.

In 2021, by percentage, Annapolis County showed one of the highest population growth rates in Nova Scotia. To me, this is a strong indication that there are people from outside of our community who have a strong desire to live and work here because of our quality of life and amenities. The greater our population the more people we have to use our services, and also to help to pay for them.

Our goal is clear - to invest in our communities and people to make Annapolis County a better place to live, work, and enjoy 365 days of the year. And, with over 100 very unique communities, our investments must be catered to each one as closely as possible to avoid a one-size fits all approach.

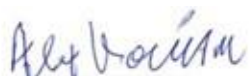
Accomplishing the very ambitious goals in this plan will require patience, great planning and organization, concentrated efforts from the Municipality and communities, a substantial amount of money from all levels of government, focused ambition and belief, tremendous leadership, and a healthy dose of faith. We must continue to support each other, and support the wonderful opportunities and people in each of our communities. However, time is of the essence as we compete with other municipalities, not only across Nova Scotia but across Canada, for funding and project development. We must act now as many of our initiatives will take several years to bring to fruition.

This plan is big. It contains the dreams and goals of our community and council members. We must work together to find cost-effective and sustainable solutions. Our children and grandchildren are depending on us. There is no tomorrow without a prosperous today.

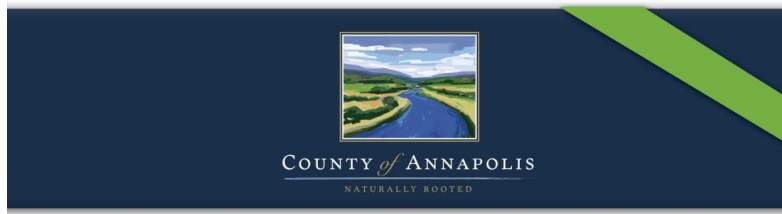
Today is a start. As we work through the finer details of this plan over the next few years, we welcome your input and feedback on how best to accomplish success in your community and other communities throughout Annapolis County. We are stronger when we support each other and work together.

#strongertogether

Yours truly,



Alex Morrison  
Warden



## INTRODUCTION

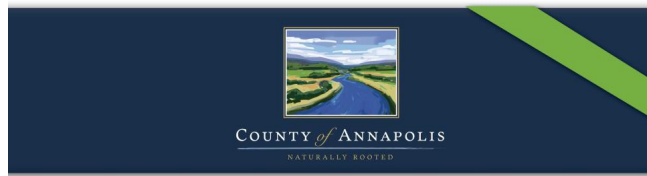
In accordance with the 2021 national census, Annapolis County was home to 21,252 residents, a 3.2% increase from 2016; the second highest percentage increase of all municipalities in Nova Scotia. It is expected that the population is even higher today and will continue to grow in subsequent years with the in-migration of hundreds of new residents from across Canada and internationally. With over 100 diverse and varied communities within 3,183 square kilometres, Annapolis County is experiencing unprecedented growth and development with encouraging signs that this trend will continue over the next four years.

Although a positive forecast, growth without the proper planning will lead to some difficult challenges - an overuse of natural resources, commercial and industrial development in community neighbourhoods, inadequate houses, lack of centralized services, increases in taxes and user rates, as well as the consumption of municipal and community assets without a long term or sustainable replacement plan. To ensure these issues do not arise, the Municipality and community need to make strategic investments over the next four years.

Community investments need to be well thought out and reflect the wants and needs of our communities. No two communities are the same, so developments need to ensure they produce the impacts and results that each community want to have in their own backyard. The priorities include investing in housing, municipal and community infrastructure, community facilities, halls and recreation facilities, and investing in our people. To achieve success, the Municipality will work closely with community partners and be open and accountable to our residents about our decisions and spending.

This plan proposes 5 Strategic Priority areas which Council feels are most needed and will have the greatest impact on our communities in the near future. There are still many other projects and initiatives that will proceed and move forward as well. These proposed initiatives are forward-thinking and well-meaning.

Today, we present a plan to improve and advance our community with commitments for substantial investments. These investments will take place throughout Annapolis County to support the growth and development of all parts of our community. Our plan is based on creating standards for growth and development that can be easily understood by all, and be fair and clear for future municipal investments. This 4-Year Plan is the start to becoming a more diverse, populous, and community-centered municipality; a place where all residents are proud to call their neighbourhood "home".



## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 - INVESTING IN HOUSING AND HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE**

The greatest need in every community in Annapolis County is a need for safe, affordable housing. Having a good stock of all types of housing is critical to growing our community. We need single-family detached houses, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes and larger multi-unit apartment buildings accessible for all ages and family sizes.

According to the 2021 national census, Annapolis County had the second largest percentage increase in population in the province with a 3.2% increase, and a projected increase of another 7% by 2027. Our current housing stock has not kept pace with our population growth. We are averaging 55 new housing units per year, but a recent report on housing needs across Nova Scotia indicates that we will need more than 575 new units each year for the next three years just to catch up to demand from immigration and employment opportunities. With the advent of high-speed internet, people can now work from anywhere, which makes living in rural Nova Scotia with a large property and home, access to high quality health and educational facilities, and low taxes and crime, a very desirable endeavour. There are people moving here for the first time, some are moving back home to start or expand a business, while others are turning summer properties into year-round homes where they can work from home or semi-retire and do part-time work.



Increasing housing stock will require a multi-government and private sector effort from all levels of government, banks, private sector contractors, and developers. The Municipality will take a strong role in leading this effort to increase our housing stock over the next four years by acting as a facilitator of providing access to municipal lands and infrastructure, and supporting ways to help private contractors and developers access available grant funding and low interest bank financing.

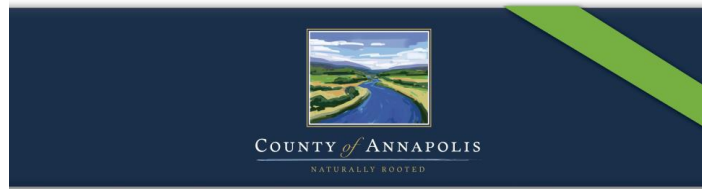
**To achieve success in this priority area, the Municipality is committed to the following:**

1. The Municipality will inventory all its available lands, as well as those privately owned, that can be easily serviced with municipal water and / or sewer services. This information will be made available on our website and shared with local and national developers and contractors. These communities could include Nictaux, Bridgetown, Lequille, Cornwallis Park, Granville Ferry, and Upper Clements.
2. To support the development of new housing throughout Annapolis County, the Municipality will develop a plan of extending water and / or sewer services in various communities with priority given to extending these services first to those areas which will see developers commit to building housing in those areas immediately. Bear River will be the first community in 2024.
3. Support builders, contractors, developers, residents, and businesses, who are willing to invest in Annapolis County today with new housing. We will guarantee a three-day turnaround time for all fully completed building permit applications 95% of the time and we will refund all building and development permit fees if construction is completed within 12 months of initial application.
4. In the fall and winter of 2023-2024, the Municipality will develop a plan to consider the creation of a large-scale housing development on the lands of the former Upper Clements Theme Park (with mixed densities), which will require an investment in new modern roads, water, and sewer infrastructure. If developed, lots will be made available for sale to any person or developer willing to build new housing at a preferred sale price of \$30,000 per serviced lot, with 50% of the purchase price refunded after each house is completed. There is potential for up to 300 new housing units on this land.
5. In the fall of 2024, the Municipality will make available to developers and builders detailed community demographic information and property data at no cost to assist with determining the local needs for housing and residents' ability to pay for various levels of housing in different communities throughout Annapolis County.
6. The Municipality will create a new 10-year Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) for Annapolis County that will allow for accessory dwellings on all appropriately sized lots. This will allow more homeowners to create in-law suites, granny suites, and small housing options on their main home property without the need for a subdivision of lands or the purchase of more lands, while protecting the community character of our neighbourhoods. Additionally, the new plan will allow for more housing development and various types of housing development to be constructed with fewer restrictions and quicker approvals.



7. **The Municipality will continue to work with potential private sector developers to advocate for the establishment of more long-term care, nursing home, residential care, and assisted living facilities in Annapolis County, to allow our residents to continue to reside in their own community closer to family and friends in their later years.**
8. **The Municipality will establish a Federal-Indigenous-Provincial-Municipal-Banking Housing Community Advisory Committee that will meet with interested builders and developers to review available funding programs, provide assistance with completing applications to access funding, and support developer and builder needs with financing options. This service will be available year-round throughout Annapolis County.**
9. **We will begin planning for a streamlined electronic permitting system which will allow for all permits in the future to be submitted on one form (now up to 8 different forms) and provide applicants with real-time access to the status of their application and electronic copies of all permits. It is planned that this new process will be in place in 2024-2025 pending budget approval and external technology support and availability.**
10. **We will work with Annapolis Basin Conference Centre and other non-profit and private sector developers in Cornwallis Park, and other areas, to upgrade, enhance, extend, or install the required public infrastructure such as water and sewer piping to allow for denser and quicker affordable housing.**





## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 - INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure is the large investments that organizations contribute to making communities more enticing to live in - roads and streets, underground water and sewer, parks, greenspaces, trails, and sidewalks, Infrastructure is always very expensive and often is unnoticeable, which is the case with water lines and sewer pipes. Residents don't often seek out tours of sewer treatment facilities.

However, every person requires a core set of infrastructure to meet their basic human needs, whether it be publicly provided or privately offered. In certain instances, the Municipality must be a leader. That is the case in Bear River and Lequille where the Municipality must step up and correct decades-long problems with water quality and system functionality.

The Municipality must also be a leader in ensuring that the current water supply for Granville Ferry, Annapolis Royal, and Lequille is protected against loss of service for extended periods of time and has sufficient storage and redundancy built-in.

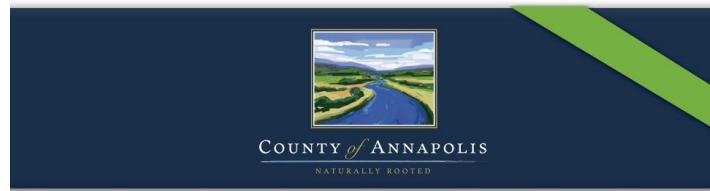


Too often lately, our small communities have suffered from extended power outages without local support. To assist with this issue, the Municipality plans to establish a community hall support program to develop comfort centres which will provide a place for people to go to help all its residents, especially those most vulnerable, during these difficult times

Upper Clements was once a community jewel and has since fallen into disrepair. The Municipality plans to re-establish this property and invest in making this area a community residential hub to support the housing requirements of those most in need.

**To achieve success in this priority area, the Municipality is committed to the following:**

1. We will plan for, design, and work with other levels of government, including Bear River First Nation, Municipality of the District of Digby, and the community of Bear River, to develop and install a new modern public water system in the core of Bear River, along with the ability for residential properties in the area to connect to the system at an estimated cost of \$2.6 million.
2. To provide better quality water, and to increase the current water system pressure, the Municipality will upgrade the water system along Highway 201 between Annapolis Royal and Cape Road (including Hillside Drive) in partnership with Town of Annapolis Royal, with new lines and boosters at an estimated cost of \$600,000.
3. In an effort to ensure the long-term sustainability of the municipal water system in Granville Ferry, Annapolis Royal, and Lequille, the Municipality will first design, then construct a new water tower and water system in Granville Ferry to service the current customer base of about 500 properties, with future growth potential to double this number to more than 1000, at an estimated cost of \$6 million.
4. Loss of power is a regular occurrence and its negative impacts on all of our communities is widespread throughout Annapolis County. To support as many communities as possible, the Municipality will establish a community facility generator program with funding of up to \$2,500 for small facilities and up to \$5,000 for large or regional facilities. The funding can be stacked with other provincial or federal funding to help each community install generators at little to no cost.
5. The County's east end has the greatest and soonest potential for new housing development. In order to advance these private sector developments, and to show our commitment to community growth in the east end of Annapolis County, the Municipality will contract for the creation of detailed water and sewer infrastructure design work in areas adjacent to Kings County like Meadowvale, Wilmot and Melvern Square; as well as those communities adjacent to Middleton such as Nictaux, to plan for future housing growth. And, where commitments are made for substantial new housing projects, to invest in the required infrastructure to support this new housing.
6. The former Upper Clements Theme Park has the potential to be developed into a large residential area with the recent acquisition of 64 acres of land. Council will contract for the preliminary design of this property, carry out public consultations to begin work on the development, and seek funding for a large-scale community project. This could include housing, commercial spaces, recreational lands, and other complimentary community uses.



### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 - INVESTING IN COUNTY-WIDE COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

Annapolis County's brand is "Naturally Rooted", referring to the natural beauty and unspoiled terrain and lands in many of our communities. We are composed of more than 100 communities that host parks and greenspaces, community halls and facilities, forests and trails, and lakes and rivers. Every community has some form of recreation to offer its residents.

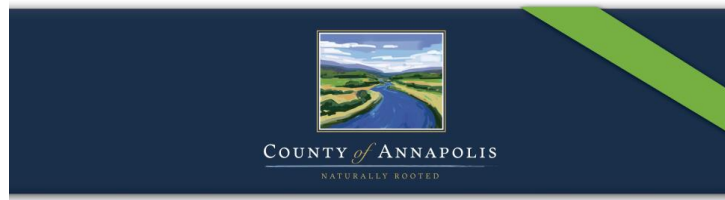
Over the next four years, our goal is to ensure that all areas of Annapolis County have community recreational opportunities identified, clearly signed or marked, and available for community use at little or no cost. Because of the cost or nature of some amenities, there will be some facilities which are best located in regional centres such as Middleton, Bridgetown, Annapolis Royal, Lawrencetown, or Cornwallis Park. Likewise, there will be parks and trail facilities more suited for areas such as Delaps Cove and Upper Clements. And, there will need to be waterfront facilities in areas with rivers and lakes such as Lake Munroe, Hebb's Landing and Lake Pleasant. Each of these facilities or properties provides important physical, passive, and social recreational spaces for people of all ages and abilities in our communities.



Our plan going forward needs to earmark funding for both municipally-owned and community-owned facilities. Funding will be needed to plan for future recreational property developments, acquisition of important recreational lands, improvements to current and future properties related to safety, accessibility, and basic amenities like picnic areas, safe water access points, washrooms, waste receptacles, and parking. Over the next four years, the Municipality will seek opportunities to more fairly distribute its parks, trails, and recreational buildings and spaces throughout Annapolis County, while supporting and funding upgrades and improvements to many of our current community-owned and maintained properties.

**To achieve success in this priority area, the Municipality is committed to the following:**

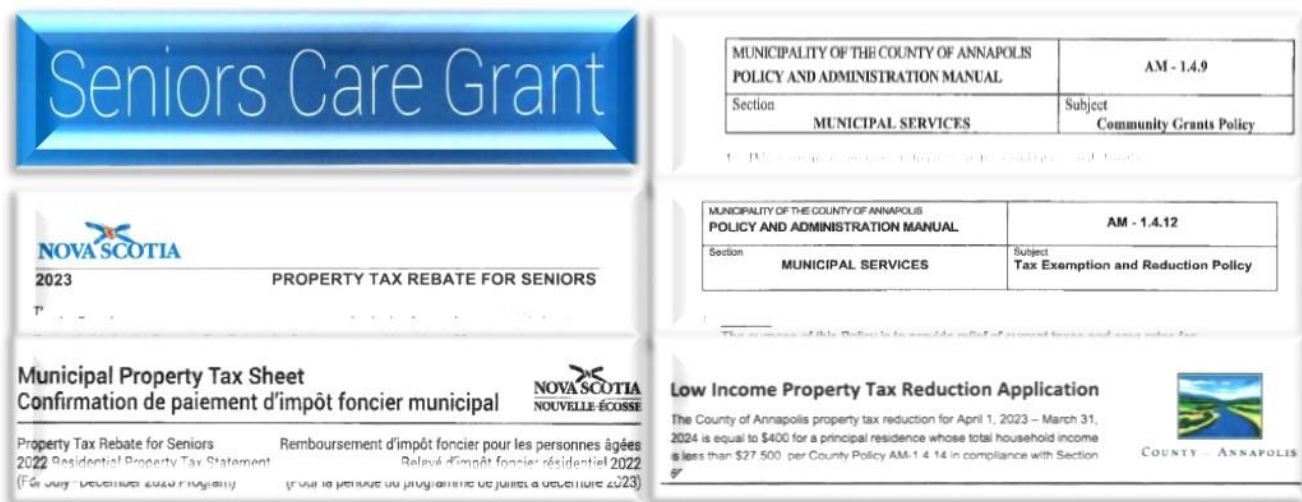
1. Compiling a full inventory of all municipally-owned and community-owned recreational properties and buildings across Annapolis County with a goal of determining where our current strengths are and what geographic areas of the County require more recreational investments.
2. Completing a review of the Municipality's three current recreational grant programs to streamline community recreation grant funding into one simpler Community Recreation Grant Funding Program with increased funding opportunities in terms of both scope and funding amounts, a special focus on underserved areas or communities with few current recreational opportunities in their own geographic area, as well as accessibility.
3. Establishing a core standard of basic infrastructure facilities that should be available in the five core areas of Annapolis County (North, South, East, West and Central) for health, safety, and recreational purposes. After creating the core standard, public consultations in specified areas will take place to ensure developments are consistent with community expectations and future sustainability.
4. Carry out a review of current and potential new active transportation routes for bicycles, pedestrians, and motorized and non-motorized vehicles. Develop a 10-year plan for the re-development of some current routes, and facilitate the process of developing new routes, ensuring accessibility for all. This will be done in conjunction with Nova Scotia Public Works, All-Terrain Vehicle Association of Nova Scotia, Annapolis County Trails Associations, Towns of Annapolis Royal and Middleton, Village of Lawrencetown, and private property owners.
5. During the re-development of all municipally-owned public park areas, install Level 2 (or higher) electric vehicle charging stations at each facility beginning in 2024-2025, with a goal of multiple charging locations in each core area by 2029-2030.
6. Providing the highest quality recreational facilities in the Annapolis Valley through the annual investment of funding for municipally-owned facilities and properties, as well as community-owned facilities, with investment preference given to those properties with smaller populations, fewer recreational opportunities, and increased accessibility.
7. Continue to develop in-house staffing capacity to design, build, and maintain all community infrastructure, like trails and parks, to ensure future sustainability and accessibility of facilities while protecting against future substantial cost increases and unavailability of products, servicing, and labour.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 - INVESTING IN OUR PEOPLE

Our community is strong because of the thousands of volunteers that contribute tirelessly to our various fire departments, service clubs, community halls, arts and culture groups, environmental organizations, and dozens of sports and recreation clubs and teams. Without these dedicated and committed residents, our community would not be growing and developing in all areas.

The Municipality recognizes the tremendous work that takes place both inside and outside of our Municipality each day, and the important work that our staff and community volunteers contribute to its success. It is critical that the future growth of the Municipality and its community organizations and volunteers involve significant financial and human resource investments that are timely, strategic, and result-driven to maximize community benefits.

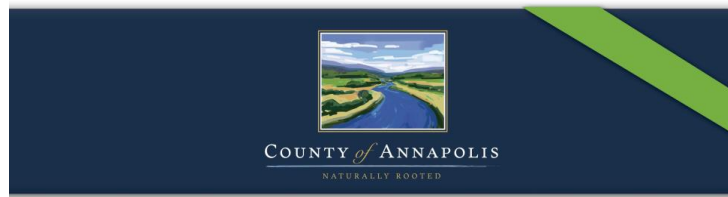


Investing in our people requires the Municipality to work with residents in community organizations, but also with individuals. Both need to be the focus of the municipality going forward with staff time allocated to carry out this important community work. We need to fully understand the needs of our volunteer firefighters and support their financial and equipment needs to ensure they are safely equipped to protect us.

We need to advocate for free parking at health care facilities so that health care can truly be a free universal health care, and not only in certain parts of the province. This needs to be coupled with the development and support for a community committee to better understand and tackle factors contributing to poverty that we can try to help alleviate to better support our residents most in need. And, we need to honour our most outstanding community citizens who are contributing greatly on the local, provincial, national, and international stage.

**To achieve success in this priority area, the Municipality is committed to the following:**

1. The Municipality will undertake a fire services review through an external fire services expert to provide a full assessment of our 11 fire departments and the services they provide to determine if the Municipality is providing enough support and resources to them, and to look for ways for all partners to cooperate more fully to plan for the long-term success of these volunteers.
2. There are numerous funding programs available from all four levels of government for less fortunate or low-income families in our communities. We will hold open houses in different locations in Annapolis County to enroll more eligible residents in these programs so residents can keep more of their money. We will provide assistance with applying for municipal and provincial funding programs.
3. Our Municipality is successful when we have well trained and supported staff. To ensure we are able to provide the best possible services to residents and communities, we will implement a new organizational structure that focuses on providing better and timelier services to residents through investments in our staff, and reducing red tape.
4. The greatest concern for the Municipality today is poverty. Annapolis County has one of the highest rates of poverty in the province and that is unacceptable. To lift families out of this dire situation requires a team effort. To begin this important work, the Municipality will establish an Anti-Poverty Working Group and extend invitations to various education, health, employment, housing, social services, and community leaders to the table to develop a Community Action Plan.
5. Health care is a universal right and it needs to be free. Sadly, some health care facilities in Nova Scotia discriminate against residents by charging a parking fee, while many other health care facilities enjoy free parking. Annapolis County residents must pay to access Soldiers Memorial Hospital in Middleton and Annapolis Community Health Centre in Annapolis Royal. We will advocate for free parking at all health care facilities in Nova Scotia, including Annapolis County.
6. Recognition is important. Outstanding recognition is vitally important to bestow on deserving individuals as it highlights the strong community that individuals came from, currently contribute to, or live in. For that reason, we will establish Nova Scotia's first municipal order, the Order of Annapolis County, to exist alongside the Order of Canada and Order of Nova Scotia.
7. Emergencies are becoming more commonplace and learning about what is happening and what residents need to do to stay safe has been challenging. To help those most vulnerable, we will pilot a landline, texting, cell phone, and email alerting system where people will be able to register for real time alerts.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5 - INVESTING IN PARTNERSHIPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

No municipality or community can grow and develop without the support of others. Municipality of the County of Annapolis is no different which is why it currently has agreements in place with neighbouring municipalities and community groups. These partnerships are vital to strong rural communities and neighbourhoods.

Despite the dozens of agreements now in place, we must look for additional ways to partner with the two towns and the village in Annapolis County; as well as other municipalities in the Annapolis Valley. This will strengthen our programs, services and infrastructure, like solid waste services and economic development, and maximize the benefits to our residents and businesses while exploring ways to reduce cost increases in future years.



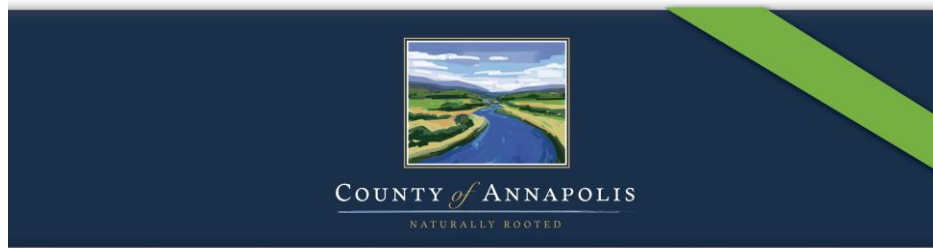
Every government in Canada is being called upon to be more transparent and accountable to their citizens. We must do more to instill confidence in our people and within our current and future business community. Therefore, we need to lead by example and consider joining the local Regional Enterprise Network (REN) to share economic development resources with other valley municipalities. We need to establish a satellite municipal office in the eastern end of the County to support better access to municipal services. And, we need to be a leader in sustainability and environmental stewardship, putting in place plans and policies to reduce or eliminate our greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint for our children and grandchildren.

Now, more than ever, we require more public oversight and clarity around the municipality's finances and financial policies and processes. This will require us to re-develop our Municipal Audit Committee with additional members of the public with strong financial acumen and insights.



**To achieve success in this priority area, the Municipality is committed to the following:**

- 1. We will facilitate the establishment of an Inter-Municipal Working Group including the Town of Annapolis Royal and Town of Middleton to review current working relationships and agreements. This will be done with a goal of working closer together through sharing of staff and resources, streamlining or eliminating unnecessary agreements, and looking for ways to support more efficient infrastructure, programs, and services for all residents of Annapolis County.**
- 2. To work with our neighbouring municipalities to maximize efficiencies in the delivery of similar services. We will strengthen and re-build our relationship with all municipalities in Annapolis Valley and work towards a single, unified solid waste management system with Valley Waste, and continue to support the important work that Kings Transit provides to our residents.**
- 3. Moving forward, we will consider greater investments in economic development and will contemplate joining Valley Regional Enterprise Network (Valley REN) to work more diligently and cooperatively with our business community throughout the Annapolis Valley, especially the Bridgetown Area Chamber of Commerce, to better support our current businesses by leveraging more business retention and expansion support, along with increased marketing efforts.**
- 4. We recognize that Annapolis County is very large geographically and it is not easy for some to access services at our office in Annapolis Royal. We will therefore endeavour to establish a part-time satellite office in Middleton to better service the needs of our residents in the east end of Annapolis County.**
- 5. Climate change and sustainability are important and we need to do more. We will develop a plan for how the Municipality plans to address its own carbon footprint and consider such things as the use of more renewable energy, converting our vehicle fleet away from diesel to more environmentally responsible fuels, advocating for more protection of our old forests, and develop policies that will reduce or eliminate unnecessary negative impacts on the environment.**
- 6. To improve our financial accounting and reporting, we will re-constitute our Municipal Audit Committee with more community representatives, provide a more detailed Terms of Reference and scope, and we will provide more regular updates to the community on our financial status.**
- 7. Accessibility for all must be commonplace moving forward and not seen as an add-on or extra cost. We will continue to promote and advance the requirements for this with community groups and businesses by providing financial support and advice when possible, and be a leader in improving all municipality-owned facilities so more residents can access them without barriers.**



## SUMMARY

Success begins with a vision. Putting this vision into a plan leads to the development of ideas and projects or services, which then, when completed, becomes an asset. Our people and our lands are our greatest assets. When we treat them both with respect, honesty, admiration, and kindness, they will give us back our gifts tenfold.

Success does not come without hard work and the willingness to make difficult decisions. Each member of Council was elected to represent the views and needs of their particular community as well as Annapolis County as a whole, and each staff member was hired with a specific skill set to carry out a job proficiently and safely. When the Municipality works cooperatively with its residents in an open and transparent manner, whether good times or bad, mutual understanding and respect develops and great things happen.

To achieve success, we need strong and sincere direction and objectives so that the Municipality and its citizens can measure success. For the first time ever, the Municipality is establishing five strategic priority areas where it intends to focus its efforts over the next four years. This does not diminish or stop other initiatives or municipal services from continuing to be provided at a high-quality level and at required funding levels. It simply means that the Municipality will focus a majority of its efforts and energy on these five strategic areas as we believe these are the areas where our community wants more investment and development.

Successful projects and initiatives will take time and great effort by many people. It will not happen without sacrifices in other areas and will require significant financial contributions. These investments will require additional revenue from various sources, use of federal and provincial funding programs, long-term borrowing over long periods of time, and delaying other potential projects over the next four years. The Municipality must be a leader in making things happen and advancing our community.

This *VISION 2027:4-Year Strategic Priorities Plan* is a start, not an end. It will require great intestinal fortitude from Council, our residents, and our business community. We believe that by investing in our people and our 100+ communities through these five priorities, we will help establish a strong base for the future growth of Annapolis County and position our communities to be stronger and more sustainable. This plan is not without risks. However, to not take risks is to be happy with the status quo. The time to act is NOW!





***Birthplace of Canada at Port Royal!***