



Background Summary

Public Engagement Support Documents

Municipality of the County of Annapolis

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Introduction

C+D Community Design is a local consulting company hired to review the County of Annapolis Secondary Planning Strategy (SPS) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) for the Bridgetown Planning Area. This work includes:

1. Checking the Strategy against the Annapolis County Municipal Planning Strategy (MSP) to be sure the plans match.
2. Keeping important and unique policies from the current Strategy.
3. Making sure the plan meets all provincial rules, with new directives since the last review.
4. Researching land use planning best practices to update policies.
5. **Asking the community for input to reflect their community development needs for today and in the future.**

C+D has provided a report to outline needed changes, key policy themes and community engagement plans. This series of public information reports is a key piece of the engagement.

Background

The Bridgetown Planning Area Secondary Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw were originally developed in 1990 and last updated in 2012. Since then, major shifts, including population changes from the COVID-19 pandemic and national immigration policies; economic trends, and climate impacts, creating new challenges and opportunities. The Bridgetown Planning Area's planning documents, while progressive for their time, need updates to align with modern planning principles and provincial regulations while maintaining the town's historic character and livability.

Although The Bridgetown Planning Area's Secondary Planning Strategy is outdated, it was a very well-written and progressive planning document for its time. Our team feels that its simple approach to zoning, sketches, and environmental protection policies was well ahead of its time and will require minimal updates. We want to re-draw some of the well-done sketches and build on this approach throughout the document as we work to align it with the Annapolis County-wide Municipal Planning Strategy and changes to the Municipal Government Act, as well as incorporating some of the directions received from the province related to short-term rental regulation and discriminatory housing policies. The existing planning documents were written at a time when planning was very much about regulation, keeping different types of land uses apart and restricting certain types of growth. The use of development agreements, and stricter policies around housing design and parking may be hindering economic growth and are tedious for municipal staff to enforce.

The Bridgetown Planning Area Advisory Committee is a group of citizen volunteers and Councillors guiding the review of the Secondary Planning Strategy. After deciding which planning topics are relevant, the Advisory Committee is proceeding with planning focused on the following topics: Housing, Environmental Protection, Highway Development, and Economic Development. They will take the public's feedback and use the data to create land use regulations that support and enhance the community's vision.

Key Reasons for the Update

The main reason for this review is that it is necessary. The Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing requires regular updates to planning documents. The Director of Municipal Affairs and Housing will

assess the final Strategy and the accompanying Land Use By-Law approved by Council for the Bridgetown Planning Area to determine if it meets provincial requirements.

Recently, the County of Annapolis reviewed its Municipal Planning Strategy, which included many updates and significant public input. This new resource supports the Bridgetown Planning Area Advisory Committee and C+D Community Design. While the Bridgetown Planning Area Strategy is a separate document, some parts of the Municipal Planning Strategy are highly relevant and should be considered.

Demographic Changes

- Bridgetown Planning Area's population (970) is growing at a rate of 2.2% with 55% between the ages of 15 and 65, and seniors (33%) requiring age-friendly housing and services¹.
- Younger residents and newcomers need affordable housing and job opportunities to stay in the region.

Housing Challenges & Policy Changes

- Nova Scotia, especially the Annapolis Valley, has a housing shortage. We need long-term plans to make housing more affordable and diverse.
- More people need homes because changes in the economy, people moving out of cities, and higher living costs.
- Homelessness is hard to measure in the region. However, the Province has recognized the Valley as an area in need. There are very few shelter options available. Many people resort to couch surfing or living in tents and recreational vehicles.
- Current zoning primarily favours low-density, limiting multi-unit developments and contributing to the housing shortage. The Bridgetown Planning Area has 470 private dwellings, with 69.1% being single detached houses. Multi-dwelling units and rowhouses account for 14.9% and 10.6% of the housing stock, respectively².
- Short-term rentals are on the rise, impacting housing availability. The province now mandates Short-Term Rental Registration (2024) to address this issue.

Economic & Land Use Shifts

- Historically a commercial and manufacturing hub, today's economy relies on sales, services (26.3%)³ and trades (20%)⁴.
- Farming is limited due to poor soil⁵, making mixed-use and industrial development more viable.

¹ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

² <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

³ <https://www.theBridgetownPlanningAreaofNova Scotia.com/about-the-Bridgetown-Planning-Area/our-history>

⁴ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

⁵ <https://test.dnr.catalogue.library.ns.ca/Record/596911>

- Large Victorian homes are costly to maintain; policies could support repurposing these buildings for modern uses.

Infrastructure & Climate Considerations:

- Aging infrastructure also needs updates to handle future development.
- Climate change is affecting stormwater runoff, soil quality, and flood risks.
- Inflation and rising costs are making new construction more expensive.
- Potential expansion of municipal services to more of the expanded Bridgetown Planning Area.

Council wants to create more types of housing, boost the economy by developing large areas near highway interchanges, and maintain the historic character. These goals aim to ensure that future generations can live, work, and enjoy life in our community. As more people move here, we will need a variety of housing options and more job opportunities.

Adapting to Post-Pandemic Challenges: Housing, Inflation, and Climate Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed daily life, affecting how people shop, communicate, and interact. Combined with rising inflation and climate change, these shifts have created new challenges for communities across Nova Scotia, including the Bridgetown Planning Area.

Key challenges

Rising Costs & Economic Pressure

- Inflation has made building materials more expensive, increasing costs of housing and infrastructure projects.
- The cost of food has surged, making basic needs harder to afford for many residents.

Climate Change & Environmental Concerns

- Increased stormwater runoff, soil degradation, and flooding pose risks to local development.
- Sustainable land-use planning is critical to managing the impacts of these environmental changes.

Housing Shortages & Impact of Short-Term Rentals

- A growing number of homes are being converted into short-term rentals through platforms like Airbnb, Vrbo, and Bookings.com. While these rentals support tourism and provide income for homeowners, they also reduce the available housing for residents.
- The Short-Term Rental Registration Act started on September 30, 2024, but the government is allowing municipalities time to adjust as needed. This law requires all short-term rentals to show proof that they are permitted in their area. A local Development Officer must fill out a form. Therefore, it is important to consider short-term rentals in all planning.

A Balanced Approach to Building the Bridgetown Planning Area's Future

The goal of the new Secondary Strategy and Land Use By-Law is to create tools focused on maintaining community character, encouraging economic growth, protecting the environment, and creating more and more diverse housing options for residents.

Economic development policies will encourage business and industrial growth to build on the easy access to two Highway 101 interchanges which provide strategic connections to Halifax and beyond.

For years, the Council has worked to make areas around the highway interchanges look better and feel more lively. The new Annapolis County Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) continues this work by setting up zones for businesses and industries. These zones encourage mixed-use buildings and business parks near main roads and Highway 101 interchanges.

Guiding Principles for the New Plan

Simplified & Inclusive Planning

- Maintain the Bridgetown Planning Area's charm while allowing for flexibility and modern growth.
- Reduce unnecessary development restrictions that hinder economic progress.
- Mixed-use development will be prioritized over rigid separation of land uses.
- Keep zoning simple and readable, using updated graphics and clear language.

Smart Housing Policies

- Support higher-density housing and diverse housing types to meet demand.
- Encourage heritage building conversions to preserve history while creating income opportunities.
- Limit short-term rentals as-of-right to Downtown & Business Development Zones to balance tourism and housing availability

Strengthening the Local Economy

- Promote non-traditional businesses (breweries, cannabis processing, and tourism-related services) to diversify the economy.
- Encourage food trucks and street vendors to make public spaces livelier
- Allow multiple businesses on a single lot to increase land use efficiency.
- Consider a Comprehensive Development District (CDD) to offer tax incentives for strategic business growth.

Sustainable Growth & Infrastructure

- Align with the Annapolis County Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) for smart land use.
- Target highway interchanges (Highway 101) for mixed-use development.
- Improve stormwater management and climate resilience in new developments.
- Ensure public engagement in planning boundary adjustments.

Key Issues and Policy Direction

You can now find more public reports and summaries on the [County of Annapolis website](#). Each report highlights key areas needing policy changes. We hope you're interested and engaged! Please choose the topics that catch your eye and see the direction your Advisory Committee is taking.

- [Diverse Housing](#)
- [Environmental Protections and Water Quality](#)
- [Economic Development & Community Character](#)

Join us in shaping our future! [Click here](#) to share your valuable feedback through our online survey. Your voice matters, and we truly appreciate your insights!