

October 20, 2022
For immediate release

Antigonish Town & County Council Vote to Move Forward with Consolidation

Antigonish, N.S. – At two Special Council Meetings held on Thursday, October 20, 2022, both Town and County Councils voted to move forward with consolidation. Both councils passed a motion that stated: *Municipal /Town Council requests the provincial government consolidate the Municipality of the County of Antigonish and the Town of Antigonish into one municipal unit through special legislation.*

In September 2021, both councils voted unanimously to participate in an exploration of consolidation. The vote was four in favour and three against the motion for the Town. At the County, the vote was five for and three against, with two Councillors having to abstain from the vote due to a conflict of interest.

“We began this process to explore consolidation, with the intent to determine if residents, businesses and the overall community will be better served if the Town and County become one municipal unit. I truly believe the answer to that question is yes,” says Owen McCarron, Warden for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish.

“I wholeheartedly believe this is the right move for our community,” says Laurie Boucher, Mayor for the Town of Antigonish. “Looking ahead five, 10, 20 years I am confident of the positive impact this will have on municipal service delivery, infrastructure investment, and enhancement of rural and urban areas of our community. Both municipal units are financially strong, and we have tremendous staff. This is an opportunity to work together on our terms, to build a municipality to grow right along with our community.”

Both Councils endorsed the community engagement process as part of the exploration of consolidation. The community engagement phase started in the Spring and included 24 public engagement sessions hosted in-person and online. Two community mailouts were sent to almost 10,000 households, a special phone line was created along with a designated website and email address where 170 messages were received, and an online discussion tool was available which received almost 2,000 unique visitors and more than 3,000 total visits.

“We absolutely wanted to engage with our residents to hear their thoughts and concerns,” says Warden McCarron “At the end of the day, it was a proactive approach and I believe we gave residents sufficient opportunities to share their views. We listened and heard many different opinions throughout the engagement process. The Mayor, myself and members of both councils heard from residents on both sides, as well as those who just wanted to ensure we had community interest at the heart of our decision.”

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“No one came to their respective decision lightly. I am proud of our Councils for remaining committed to the process,” says Mayor Boucher. “This is a step forward. We are removing our borders, owning our vision of removing barriers for the community and increasing our capacity to better serve Antigonish.”

On September 12, 2022, the County and Town issued a joint release announcing that if both municipalities were to dissolve and a new consolidated municipal unit was formed, it would result in an increase of \$1 million a year in policing costs. By keeping the name, Municipality of the County of Antigonish, there would be no change in the funding formula. There will be a new organizational structure, created in partnership with equal representation from the County and the Town. Employees from both municipal units will be given equal opportunity to be part of the new structure.

“We have seen tremendous value in partnering with the County on a variety of projects and initiatives over the last couple of years. Our strategic directions are already closely aligned. By pooling our resources, not only will be able to accomplish more, but we will also be able to better serve our community,” says Mayor Boucher.

Now that there has been a decision from both councils to move forward with consolidation, special provincial legislation will be drafted and presented during the Spring sitting of the Nova Scotia Legislature. This legislation will guide the Town and County through the transition process. A transition committee will be formed once the provincial legislation is passed.

The work of the transition committee will include hiring a CAO and designing a new administrative structure for the consolidated municipality. The committee along with current Councils and the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board will undertake another community engagement phase to identify new electoral boundaries. The consolidated municipal unit would plan to begin operation April 1, 2025.

During this transition phase, current Councils will remain and continue to oversee operations for the existing municipal units. Staff will remain in their current positions while the new organizational structure is determined.

“There is a lot of work to be done,” says Warden McCarron. “We are prepared for the task before us, and we will do it together.”

“This is a historical moment for our community, and one we believe will create a stronger community for all,” says Mayor Boucher.

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Media Contact:

Shirlyn Donovan
Municipality of the County of Antigonish
902-863-1117
shirlyn.donovan@antigonishcounty.ns.ca

Shannon Long
Town of Antigonish
902-318-9245
shannon.long@townofantigonish.ca