

Part 1: Youth Council Final Report

The Final Report of the Cumberland-Colchester Constituency Youth Council on youth retention and migration in rural Nova Scotia has been released by Bill Casey, MP Cumberland-Colchester. The Council heard from many witnesses, analysed their testimony and made 9 recommendations to government, employers and youth themselves. The Shoreline Journal will reproduce the report in its entirety, but because of its length will do so in two parts. Part 2 will be printed in the August issue.

"This work fits nicely with work that has been done, such as the Ivany Report and the Vital Signs Report in Cumberland County, as well as work ongoing, such as by the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce," says Casey. "These are youth telling us how to turn the tide, attract youth to our rural communities, and I think we should listen and act."

The Cumberland-Colchester Constituency Youth Council is a non-partisan group which meets 4 times a year to discuss, debate and advise on matters of public policy. Membership is open to any resident of the Cumberland-Colchester Federal Electoral District aged 16-25.

The 2016-17 Council members are: Cassie Burbine, Alex Casey, Brandon Casey, Katie Fife, Braedon Gagnon, Gina Grattan, Natalie LeBlanc, Josh Lohnes, Hannah Rushton (C), Brandon Steele, Maddie Tenant, Clare Walker and Cecelia White.

Members of the youth council extend a special thank you to: Mark Austin, Cindy Costin-Fury, Miriah Kearney, Kathleen Kevany, Regan Maloney, Fred Morley, Sacha Siddall and Linda Suo; and to the staff of the Truro Public Library and the staff of the Fundy Geological Museum, for hosting our hearings.

Overview

As young people growing up in rural Nova Scotia, we are aware that our communities are aging, and that the proportion of young people—children and working age adults—is shrinking. We love it here: but, we feel the draw of greater opportunity in urban centres like Halifax, and in Central and Western Canada. As we approach a time of important decisions in our lives, we are asking, Why is it difficult to keep young people in rural Nova Scotia?

To that end, we have convened meetings at which we received the testimony of several witnesses with expertise and experience in this matter. We have set out to understand why young people leave, and what could attract them to rural Nova Scotia.

Mark Austin confirmed for us that youth out-migration is a real problem, and it is not a

new one. According to Fred Morley, Nova Scotia's population has been relatively stable at about 950,000 for a long time, and the blend of urban and rural has not changed significantly in 70 years. About 90% of Nova Scotia's population lives within a one hour's drive of an urban centre like Truro.

But young people make up an ever-smaller share of the population in rural Nova Scotia. Fred Morley notes that public investment in young people tends to stop just as they are becoming mobile: as they leave public school, the support they receive from government and communities comes to an end.

This is a problem for rural communities, according to Kathleen Kevany. Rural communities miss out on much of the human and social capital which young people offer. As a result, many rural businesses struggle to find workers and customers, not-for-profit groups struggle to find new volunteers, and public services become difficult to maintain.

Rural Nova Scotia's Strengths and Weaknesses

When it comes to real estate, money goes farther in rural Nova Scotia than it does elsewhere. Linda Suo told us that for a young public school teacher, buying a home in Vancouver, where she grew up, is not possible. Rural Nova Scotia is also bound to the ocean and is naturally beautiful. While rural areas lack many amenities, people who move here find that they can get by just fine without many of those amenities.

There are also opportunities in small communities which mirror those in cities, but are less difficult to access. Linda Suo noted that her full-time teaching position with the Chignecto Central Regional School Board is the envy of her friends in Vancouver, where a new teacher is far

more likely to spend an eternity on the supply list.

But rural areas of Nova Scotia are less attractive to young people than urban areas and points West, in part, because they offer less "to do." Gazebos and benches abound, but skate parks, splash pads, downtown theatres, good restaurants and wi-fi-enabled coffee shops are harder to find. That is a problem not just for youth, but for young people with new families.

It can also be challenging to find a job in a rural community. It can be even more challenging to find two jobs: one for you, and one for your partner. And if you haven't got a partner, the dating scene in rural Nova Scotia can be a challenge. There are fewer singles in a small community, and fewer places to meet. People can end up driving an hour to go on a date in a community they aren't familiar with.

Building a social network in a small community is hard; and if you aren't "from here," all the more so. We heard, both from the witnesses who had moved to our area "from away," and from those born and raised here, that "locals" too often assume new arrivals have a superiority complex.

Some comments and questions to new arrivals, which may seem insignificant to locals, can be taken as hurtful. New arrivals don't always appreciate being put in the position of having to educate their new neighbours on other cultures and other ways of seeing the world. It can feel, sometimes, like the locals are curious enough to ask, but not curious enough to research other cultures on their own.

Young People Can Succeed in Rural Nova Scotia

Fred Morley told us that education remains the key driver of opportunity and socio-economic mobility, regardless of where you live.

Regan Maloney's training in biology and paleontology is a perfect background for working and living in a rural setting, since most fossils are found in rural and remote areas of the world. Cindy Costin-Fury's training as a Chartered Professional Accountant positions her to serve the small-business clientele which is typical of rural Nova Scotia.

We were reminded that rural areas need many of the same sorts of professionals—doctors, teachers, accountants and lawyers—who practice in urban settings, and in some cases, the opportunities can be greater. Miriah Kearney taught English in Truro for a time, but the desire to have her own business eventually grew too strong to ignore. Her business, My Home Apparel, has been a big success. She feels that starting her company in a rural community was an advantage, because locals rallied behind her idea and wanted the business to succeed.

According to Sacha Siddall, just having a university degree is helpful in seeking a job with government or in the private sector; but she also noted that entrepreneurship is a great strategy. The willingness and resolve to create your own job is an advantage in rural Nova Scotia.

Sacha and Miriah both highlighted the many economic development programs, grants and loan guarantees available to entrepreneurs. Miriah noted that she took advantage of every program she could, and encouraged other young entrepreneurs to do the same.



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