

Consultation on New Protected Areas Begins

Nova Scotians are invited to share their thoughts on 16 proposed new or expanded wilderness areas and nature reserves. Designating these sites will be one more step in helping Nova Scotia protect 20 per cent of its land and water by 2030. Locally, two areas in Cumberland County will be part of the consultation process. The two areas are:

Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area (addition, 434 hectares) and Diligent River Nature Reserve (addition, 31 hectares), Cumberland County

"Nova Scotians cherish natural areas for the many benefits they provide," said Timothy Halman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. "We committed, in law, to protect 20 per cent of our land, water and wetlands by 2030 and are working

hard to achieve this goal and maintain Nova Scotia's reputation as a national leader in conservation. We are now inviting Nova Scotians to share their thoughts with us on 16 proposed new designations, which will protect an additional 1,820 hectares of nature."

The Department launched an online survey on July 19. Public input will be accepted until September 20. The survey is available at: <https://www.novascotia.ca/nse/protectedareas/>

The proposed new designations are: Antigonish Nature Reserve (new, 48 hectares), Antigonish County; Beaver River Nature Reserve (new, 97 hectares), Digby County; Bonnet Lake Barrens Wilderness Area (addition, 53 hectares), Guysborough County; Canso

Coastal Barrens Wilderness Area (addition, 59 hectares), Guysborough County; Caribou River Nature Reserve (addition, 40 hectares), Pictou County; Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area (addition, 434 hectares), Cumberland County; Diligent River Nature Reserve (addition, 31 hectares), Cumberland County; Eigg Mountain-James River Wilderness Area (addition, 345 hectares), Antigonish County; Five Bridge Lake Wilderness Area (addition, seven hectares), Halifax Regional Municipality; Fourchu

Coast Wilderness Area (addition, 255 hectares), Richmond and Cape Breton counties; Middle River Wilderness Area (addition, 22 hectares), Inverness County; Quinn Meadows Nature Reserve (addition, 151 hectares), Shelburne County; Roseway River Wilderness Area (addition, 150 hectares), Shelburne County; Ship Harbour Long Lake Wilderness Area (addition, 66 hectares), Halifax Regional Municipality; Toadfish Lakes Wilderness Area (addition, 41 hectares), Halifax Regional Municipality and Toy Makers Marsh Nature Reserve (new, 24 hectares), Digby County.

Down Payment Assistance Program Changes

Enhancements to the Province's Down Payment Assistance Program mean more homes in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and the Municipality of East Hants qualify and first-time homebuyers can receive more financial support. People using the program can now purchase homes in those areas that are priced up to \$570,000, up from \$500,000. The change also raises the maximum loan available through the program to \$28,500, up from \$25,000.

"The Down Payment Assistance Program helps Nova Scotians who pre-qualify for an insured mortgage to buy their first home by providing a loan of up to five per cent of the purchase price to assist with the down payment. There is a cap on the purchase price that varies by region. Recent Nova Scotia Association of Realtors MLS Home Price Index data showed that the average sale price of a home in HRM and East Hants was \$565,485, which is higher than the original program cap for those areas.

The research also showed

that the program's price caps for other areas of the province were in line with average prices and do not require adjustment at this time. The other purchase price caps are:

- \$375,000 in West Hants Regional Municipality, Annapolis Valley (Kings, Annapolis and Digby counties) and the South Shore (Shelburne, Queens and Lunenburg counties); the maximum loan eligibility in these areas is \$18,750.
- \$300,000 in Yarmouth County and northern and eastern regions (Cumberland, Colchester, Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough counties and Cape Breton); the maximum loan eligibility in these areas is \$15,000.

To be eligible for the program, an applicant's total household income must be less than \$145,000. Since 2021, 604 first-time homebuyers have received assistance under the program. The Department will continue to monitor home price data and use that information to inform future program adjustments, if needed.



5 Corners Housing Agreement Being Developed

By Paul Smith

(The following is the first of several parts presented elsewhere, in this issue, of an overview of activities in the Community Development Department since January 2024, which was presented to Council committee by Paul Smith, Director of Community Development on May 16. This section includes Smith's analysis of Inspection Services.)

COMMUNITY PLANNING

County-wide Plan: Upland Planning Studio and Colchester staff held a meeting with the agricultural sector in March 2024 to gather feedback on the proposed land use by-law. Staff have been reviewing both the planning strategy and land use by-law with a view to organizing a number of additional community engagement sessions over the next two months.

A website has been developed to provide details on engagement activities, share reports, and access the community survey (<https://www.colchester.ca/plan-it-colchester>). The Province introduced Bill 58 in 2019 requiring all municipalities in Nova Scotia adopt a comprehensive plan for all areas of the province by the end of 2024.

Tatamagouche Plan Review:

The draft Tatamagouche plan review has been completed and will be reviewed by the Tatamagouche Planning Advisory Committee shortly. In the interests of time and convenience and considering the fact the county-wide plan is well underway, land use policies and requirements specific to Tatamagouche will be incorporated into this document.

Salmon River School Property:

The Municipality received one response to a Request for Proposals that was issued in November 2023 for the former Salmon River School property. The proposal outlines a conceptual plan for a residential development located on approximately 8 acres of the 16+ acre site. Council will receive an analysis of the proposal together with a recommended approach on how they may wish to proceed.

Forest Management Plan:

Consultants working on the Forest Management Plan met with staff in March to finalize the document. The Plan together with recommendations will be presented to Council in mid-May with the hope Council will be able to approve the document and begin to implement its recommendations.

Planning Activity:

Planning staff have initiated a couple of changes to the Central Area planning documents and the Land Lease Development By-law that aim to make more housing options available across Colchester. Staff are also in the early stages of developing a draft agreement and working with infrastructure stakeholders for the 5 Corners housing and mixed-use project in Bible Hill.

Two development applications are currently being processed; one involving the conversion of the former St. David's Church in Bible Hill into 30 residential units and, the second involving a rezoning of lands owned by Saywood & Groves at Valley Crossroads that will enable a mix of low to high density housing.

Paul Smith is Director of Colchester Community Development Department



Colchester
be centred here.

Fire Inspection Service to Expand

By Paul Smith

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INSPECTION SERVICES

Building Inspection: Fire inspection services capacity will be expanded by enrolling an additional building official in the fire inspectors' professional studies program. Fire inspections resumed in the Fall of 2023 but additional resources are needed to address a backlog accumulated over the last few years. Staff are currently working on residential inspections which are on a five-year cycle as per the Municipal Fire Inspection Policy.

Two building officials continue to advance training towards level two certification which will enable them to carry out plans' examinations, issue permits and carry out field inspections for all buildings regardless of size or use. Since the certification process require 120 field inspections, the County has partnered with the Town of Truro Building Department to accelerate the process.

Animal Control:

The SPCA continues to carry out animal control services for the County and have recently hired two new ACO's to assist with by-law enforcement. The Animal Control Officer keeps the Municipality updated with monthly reports and is quick to respond with any questions or concerns that may arise.

Unsanitary Premises: The number of dangerous and unsightly complaints continues to grow, especially during the Spring period when derelict properties become more obvious.

Construction Value: 2023 was a record year for building with a total of \$118 million in construction value. Indications appear that it will be another favorable year with \$56.2 million in construction value for the first quarter of 2024.

Facilities Maintenance Coordinator: An individual with a background in engineering started his role as Facilities Maintenance Coordinator in early April. This is a new position that will be responsible for the coordination of maintenance to all municipal facilities.

Paul Smith is Director of Colchester Community Development Department

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