

# Mayor Blair's June 4<sup>TH</sup> Breakfast Address

The following is Mayor Christine Blair's remarks at the Mayor and Chief Breakfast sponsored by Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce on June 4th at Legends Bingo Facility, Millbrook.

Good morning, everyone:

It's a pleasure to be here with you to provide an update on some of the things we are working on at the municipality of Colchester. This is an event I look forward to each year and appreciate the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce for their dedication in hosting events such as this to not only keep us up to date, but to bring us all together.

On April 25th, after much thoughtful debate and deliberation, council approved its annual operating budget. I am pleased to say that this was the sixth of the past seven years that we have managed to keep both our residential and commercial tax rates the same, with just a half cent increase being required in 2019.

Costs for education went up \$973,000 this year while policing went up \$670,000. These contributed to the mandatory payments to the province which totalled \$17.3 million of our \$42-million budget, 42 per cent, a cost which is out of our control.

However, I do want to recognize the work of the RCMP and the value for service they provide. In addition to the 36 officers, we are fortunate to receive a variety of additional and specialized services that are included as part of our agreement, services often billed as extras to municipal police forces.

Our budget increased from \$37.8-million last year to just over \$42-million this year. We were fortunate that an 8 per cent increase in tax revenue from residential development and 14 per cent increase from commercial development helped us accommodate the larger budget without rate increases.

Development in the municipality experienced another banner year in 2023 including new businesses, expansions, and a record year for construction with a value of \$115 million. In comparison, 2022 building value totalled \$84.5 million.

Development permit applications and subdivision plans, were up one percent and five percent respectively over the previous year. In the last four years, development permit applications have increased over 26 per cent, and subdivision applications have nearly doubled. We expect the trend of increasing development to continue throughout this year.

It would appear private developers are attempting to address the housing shortage in Colchester. The municipality is doing what it can as well. Staff are currently working with a developer on piloting a 10-unit affordable housing pocket community on a small portion of municipal land in Debert. The municipality also received a nearly 75 per cent funding contribution from the investing in Canada's Infrastructure program that will go towards the \$7 million infrastructure improvements needed to service county-owned land that is earmarked for residential development. Much of this infrastructure work will take place this year.

A request for proposals was issued for the development of the former salmon river school property which is owned by the municipality. The aim will be to develop the property as 40 per cent residential and 60 per cent park/green space.

Capacity reviews for all of our water/sewer systems are currently underway to determine what is required to support future housing development potential throughout the county.

Among the municipality's many priorities is the completion of our county-wide municipal planning strategy (MPS) and land use bylaw (LUB). This is now mandated for all municipalities in the province and will be a guide to our future development. Much of the community engagement for "plan it Colchester" took place in 2023. The next step will be to share the draft strategy to gain public input to ensure the resulting document meets the needs of both businesses and residents. I encourage you all to participate.

In association with this, staff, with input from our business park advisory committee, have completed mapping and planning exercises to produce a 10-year development plan for the Debert business park.

The Debert airport remains a significant asset to the county, particularly with proposed plans to develop the transportation logistics sector. Council recently received an update on ScotiaPort. I believe the airport can be an important part of this plan. However, considerable infrastructure upgrades

including runway resurfacing are required. Staff are now working with the province and federal government to determine if funding can be secured to assist us.

Recent changes to provincial legislation made the process to implementing a tourism levy attainable for municipalities. A 3 per cent tax on visitors who stay at recognized accommodation providers in the region has been implemented throughout the county. Collection of the levy began April 1, 2024.

We are in the process of developing a regional tourism strategy in partnership with the towns of Truro and Stewiacke and Millbrook First Nation and with the support of ACOA. STEP, which stands for sustainable tourism expansion plan - is a comprehensive process which enables Atlantic Canadian communities to create a long-term vision for tourism development. The regional strategic plan will be used to help guide the formation of a tourism organization or similar structure, its governance model, and develop key actions for this organization to carry out over the next 3-5 years.

A great achievement of 2023 was the return of many wonderful events to Colchester including Airshow Atlantic, the World Jr.A Hockey Challenge and a variety of concerts featuring well-known artists. We look forward to new events this summer such as the Nova Scotia Stampede, and those returning like the Not Since Moses run along the ocean floor in five islands.

Last summer Colchester and Cumberland partnered to host evaluators from France and Germany in a process to renew the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark's UNESCO global geopark status, as is required every four years. The UNESCO designation is critical to marketing our region as an international tourism destination.

I also attended the UNESCO Global Geopark conference in Morocco last fall where a twinning agreement was signed with the host country's M'goun UNESCO global geopark. The agreement celebrates our unique geological connection as Nova Scotia and Morocco were once attached 250 million years ago before the supercontinent Pangea broke apart and formed the continents as we know them today. While in Morocco, I also had the unique experience of surviving a significant earthquake - but that's a story for another day!

As a strategic gateway to the geopark, the Fundy Discovery site continues to experience increased year-round visitation.

A new picnic shelter will soon open to the public and a tidal viewing platform and trail connection to the Cobequid Trail will be initiated there this summer.

Plans to begin construction on an active transportation bridge at the site have yet to come to fruition. Last year bids came in considerably higher than expected, so we had to rethink our approach. We went back to the drawing board to explore ways the project could be done more affordably. We retendered earlier this year but unfortunately, the bids again far exceeded our originally anticipated budget. Staff continue to explore other more affordable options to consider. The bridge would not only provide a critical active transportation link in Colchester but has the potential to be an iconic landmark for tourism in our region.

We saw several other park and trail enhancements throughout the county including upgrades to the great village elementary school playground, the reconstruction of bridges, boardwalks and stairs along the Mi'kmawey Debert Interpretive Trail. We celebrated the completion of Heart's Haven Memorial Park in Debert. This initiative involved both the community and our recreation services staff and is in memory of victims of the 2020 mass casualty, Heather O'Brien, Kristen Beaton and her unborn child.



Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce President Eric Tanton, along with Executive Director Sherry Martell, paused for a photo at the organization's annual Mayors and Chief's Breakfast with Colchester County Mayor Christine Blair, Town of Truro Mayor Bill Mills, Millbrook First Nation Chief Bob Gloade, MLA Dave Ritcey (Millbrook-Truro-Bible Hill-Salmon River) and Stewiacke Town Mayor George Lloyd. (Contributed)

The Portauisque buildup project and new community hall had its grand opening May 31 followed by an open house on June 1. This project has been an incredible feat of community collaboration and resilience. Along with his honour the Honourable Arthur LeBlanc, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Premier Tim Houston, Minister Sean Fraser, I was proud to represent Colchester as one of the four speakers at this opening. This once humble property has become a beacon of resilience, a triumph of good over evil, and a statement of what this community is truly all about. It will help heal our hearts.

We also continue to work within the province to identify a central memorial site for all victims of the mass casualty and will continue to offer our support in any way we can within our capacity.

We have made significant headway on several of our carbon-free Colchester sustainability initiatives including the relaunch of our cozy Colchester and solar Colchester programs, installation of several electric vehicle charging stations throughout the county in Debert, Upper Stewiacke, Fundy Discovery site, Brookfield, Tatamagouche and our municipal office. And securing of \$1.4 million in funding through the Investing in Canada infrastructure program to install solar panels at the Tatamagouche library, the central Colchester wastewater facility, the west Colchester united arena and the North Shore recreation centre.

As well, our fire brigades and first responders in Colchester, over 500 volunteers strong, are training to familiarize themselves with solar, electric vehicles, EV charging stations to keep up to date on all the new technology. We are blessed to have these volunteers, supported by their families and by their employers in our communities.

The fixed wireless portion of our rural broadband internet project was also completed which now services the majority of Colchester County with fixed wireless internet services. Work has now begun to deploy the majority of the fibre to homes associated with this project.

As many of you know, 2024 is a municipal election year. This year an option to vote by phone or internet will be introduced for the first time in our municipality. This will be in addition to a traditional paper ballot option on election day.

On that note, I congratulate Chief Gloade on his re-election. A special thank you to Mayor Mills and Mayor Lloyd for their years of public service as I understand neither is reoffering this year. I am happy to announce that I am running once again for the position of mayor of the municipality of Colchester.

## Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change



### Protected Areas Public Consultation

We are asking Nova Scotians for comments on proposed protected areas including additions to existing Wilderness Areas and Nature Reserves, and new Nature Reserves. This work supports Nova Scotia's goal of protecting 20% of land by 2030.

The sites are as follows:

- Antigonish Nature Reserve, **Antigonish County**
- Beaver River Nature Reserve, **Digby County**
- Bonnet Lake Barrens Wilderness Area (addition), **Guysborough County**
- Canso Coastal Barrens Wilderness Area (addition), **Guysborough County**
- Caribou River Nature Reserve (addition), **Pictou County**
- Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area (addition), **Cumberland County**
- Diligent River Nature Reserve (addition), **Cumberland County**
- Eigg Mountain-James River Wilderness Area (addition), **Antigonish County**
- Five Bridge Lake Wilderness Area (addition), **Halifax Regional Municipality**
- Fourchu Coast Wilderness Area (addition), **Richmond and Cape Breton Counties**
- Middle River Wilderness Area (addition), **Inverness County**
- Quinn Meadows Nature Reserve (addition), **Shelburne County**
- Roseway River Wilderness Area (addition), **Shelburne County**
- Ship Harbour Long Lake Wilderness Area (addition), **Halifax Regional Municipality**
- Toadfish Lakes Wilderness Area (addition), **Halifax Regional Municipality**
- Toy Makers Marsh Nature Reserve, **Digby County**

To learn more, and tell us what you think, visit [NovaScotia.ca/ProtectedAreas](https://NovaScotia.ca/ProtectedAreas)



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