

Colchester's Community Development Department Report

By Paul Smith

(The following is an overview of activities in the Community Development Department since May 2024, which was distributed to councillors in their package for the November 14th council committee meeting).

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Plan It Colchester - County-wide planning:

- Upland Planning Studio and Colchester staff have continued their work on the draft planning strategy and land use bylaw. Several community engagement sessions are being held around the county this month. The "Plan It" website provides details on engagement activities, shares reports, and has an interactive draft zoning map for residents to see what the proposed zoning will be on their property. There's also an online form available for comments and questions (<https://www.colchester.ca/plan-it-colchester>). As a reminder, land use policies and requirements specific to the Village of Tatamagouche will be incorporated into this document, as will several other by-laws including the Wind Turbine Development, Land Lease Community, Antenna Siting and the Commercial Dog Care and Kennel Facility By-laws.
- The Province introduced Bill 58 in 2019 requiring all municipalities in Nova Scotia to adopt a comprehensive plan for all areas of the province by the end of 2024. Colchester, among others, was given a Ministerial extension until March of 2025 for completion.

Salmon River School Property:

- Staff received direction from Council in August 2024 to execute a Memorandum of Understanding with Pinnacle Construction for the construction of a multi-unit residential development. Having determined the property to be surplus and recognizing a sharp decline in housing supply, the Municipality issued a Request for Proposals in November of 2023 for a housing development (with an affordable housing component) on approximately 7 acres of the 16-acre site.

Planning Activity:

- Staff continue to work through a draft development agreement and meet with infrastructure stakeholders for the 5 Corners housing and mixed-use project in Bible Hill.
- Two development agreement applications are currently under review: one involving a lot on College Road in Bible Hill for 16 residential units and, the second involving lands on Vimy Road for three apartment buildings totaling 162 units.
- Inquiries from prospective developers remain steady for a variety of locations across the County.
- Staff has met proactively with a representative from the Regional Centre for Excellence to discuss the impacts on schools resulting from proposed developments, particularly in suburban areas. Traditionally, the RCE has responded to growth in a reactive manner and it is hoped a coordinated approach will help a more efficient and effective response to the provision of educational facilities.
- Recent amendments to the Colchester Subdivision By-law will be receiving Ministerial approval shortly.

SUSTAINABLE COLCHESTER

Solar PV on Municipal & Community Buildings:

- The solar panels at the Tatamagouche Library have been generating clean energy since installation finished in January. Installation of the ground-mounted solar farm at the Central Colchester Wastewater Treatment Plant in Lower Truro began in October and will wrap up in December 2024.

EV Charging Stations:

- All EV charging stations have finally been installed and are operational. Twelve charging stations have been installed at 7 locations across Colchester: Five Islands Lighthouse Park, Debert Business Park, Fundy Discovery Site, Courthouse, Don Henderson Sportsplex in Brookfield, Upper Stewiacke Co-op, and Tatamagouche Library. After the final disbursement, the Municipality will have received \$81,261 from the EV Boost program and the Province of Nova Scotia, equal to about 45% of the total project cost.

QUEST Net-zero Communities Accelerator Program

- Colchester recently began participating in QUEST's Net-zero Communities Accelerator (NCA) program. The goal of the NCA program is to equip communities in Atlantic Canada with the

tools and knowledge to develop and implement community energy & emissions plans and initiate projects, programs, or policies. Since Colchester already has an energy and emissions plan, QUEST will be supporting the Municipality to move from plan to implementation. Colchester Council will be invited to participate in an Implementation Workshop with QUEST in December or January to jumpstart implementation. More information will be included in the workshop invitation.

Solar Colchester / Cozy Colchester:

- Staff have ramped up program marketing this Fall with the RetroFIT campaign! During the promotion, homeowners that participate in the Cozy Colchester program will receive a free family or individual membership to a local fitness centre, pool, or club, or receive free season passes to the Truro Bearcats hockey games. Facilities participating so far include the RECC, the Truro Curling Club, Scotia Pool, the Cougar Dome, and Stronger Together Athletics.
- Colchester's participation in FCM's Community Efficiency Financing program is coming to an end. All grant and loan funding from FCM must be used by March 2026. Over the next year, staff will be increasing marketing efforts and planning the transition to alternative funding sources. Staff have begun seeking proposals from consulting firms to identify, evaluate, and recommend new financing models for Cozy Colchester and Solar Colchester. A partnership with the Town of Truro will also be explored as part of this research to optimize operational efficiencies and accelerate emissions reduction in the residential sector across the region. The Town is interested in partnering with Colchester to offer efficiency financing program, as is highlighted in the Town's new Community Energy & Emissions Plan, approved in September 2024.

INSPECTION SERVICES

Building Inspection

- The Municipality will be expanding its fire inspection capacity by enrolling an additional building official in the fire inspectors' professional studies program and are working towards a Level 1 certification. Fire inspections are carried out in accordance with the Municipal Fire Inspection Program Policy with a current concentration on residential occupancies.
- Two building officials continue to advance training towards Level 2 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. One should complete the certification this year and the other in 2025.
- The 2020 National Building Code will be adopted by the Province on April 1st, 2025. Mandatory code change training will be provided to Municipal Building Officials prior to this date.

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. The current contract with the SPCA is due to expire at the end of January 2025 at which Council will be asked to consider a renewal.

Unightly Premises:

- The number of dangerous and unsightly complaints continues to grow, especially over the summer months when derelict properties become more obvious.

Construction Value:

- 2023 was a record year for building with a total of \$118 million in construction value. The first three quarters of 2024 has resulted in \$126 million of construction value.

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

- The Development Officer continues to be occupied with increases in permit applications and subdivision plans over previous years. Inquiries from prospective developers / public as well as bylaw enforcement have grown significantly and form a large part of day-to-day activities.
- A recruitment process is underway for an Assistant Development Officer which was approved in the 2024 Operations Budget. It is expected the position will be filled in late November which will offer much needed help, especially when the county-wide plan becomes effective in the spring of 2025.

PROPERTY INFORMATION / GIS SERVICES

Electronic Permitting System and Digital Data Maintenance:

- Staff training and live testing for the new system is complete and

have officially begun using the system for recording incoming permit applications and tracking inspection services. E-payment integration has been completed, and historic data migration is still in progress. Next steps include introducing the online portal to select users while continuing to work through any remaining technical adjustments, then full promotion of the online portal to the public with a target go-live date of January 1st, 2025. Users will be able to submit applications and documents digitally, reducing time spent on telephone and in-person interactions, and greatly reducing paper usage. On a related note, staff are investigating best practices and options for digitizing and organizing an extensive archive of paper-copy historic records.

Enterprise Geospatial Data Portal:

- This system serves as a secure, internal-use-only, spatial data and web mapping hub. Following the recently completed system architectural review, plans are now in place to complete further hardware upgrades and software reconfigurations, to accommodate future growth of GIS capabilities and compatibility. In addition to existing content designed for Public Works and Economic Development, staff are developing new specialized web-based mapping services for Community Development, to replace the old ones which were accessed via the old permitting system software, which will be retired in a few months' time.

Ongoing Projects:

- Staff have been supporting various departments with mapping, spatial analytics, and statistics, and assisting other Community Development staff with file processing and data entry tasks as needed. Recent project subject matter has included Municipal Election mapping and addressing, sanitary system capacity mapping, flood zone analysis, spatial logistics for Fundy Geopark signage, and various map products for Solid Waste, Sustainability Planning, and Recreation Services. Civic address data administration has been quite busy the last few months, as we have seen increased volumes of new buildings and developments, along with ongoing NSCAF data quality control checks, and working with provincial GIS officers to make any necessary corrections or adjustments.

RECREATION SERVICES

Recreation Services

- The 2024 Art Purchase Program will feature 32 pieces displayed at the NSCC McCarthy Hall until November 29. The art show booklet will be available on November 12 (opening) and available until end of November.
- Sport Hub is an online registration portal that is used by the Municipality and various other organizations for registration and promotion. The program is run by Sport NS and continues to grow in Colchester as more sport programs are opting to utilize this online tool.
- The CCRCE afterschool program is operating in various areas in Colchester East Hants. Colchester will be restarting the afterschool program in a couple local schools however there have been some hurdles to find some staff willing to work during the afterschool time-period. Also, the BAP (Before and After Program) will be pi-

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