

Municipal observer

The Magazine for the **Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities**

**Nova Scotians
Showing Leadership
When it Matters Most**

**Steady Leadership,
Strong Connections:
NSFM Spring Conference 2026
Wrap-Up a Great Success!**

SUMMER 2026



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Cover Photo – Southern Shore, Nova Scotia



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Cheryl Kane
Senior Vice President
(902) 456-9633
cheryl.kane@hubinternational.com

Janine McInnis
Associate Vice President
(902) 474-3293
janine.mcinnis@hubinternational.com

Brad Wilson
Senior Consultant
(902) 233-7384
brad.wilson@hubinternational.com

Sean Muir
Senior Consultant
(902) 401-0915
sean.muir@hubinternational.com



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Contact NSFM at:
Ph: 902-423-8331
Suite 1500, 1809 Barrington St.,
Halifax, NS B3J 3K8
www.nsfm.ca
info@nsfm.ca



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info@nsfm.ca

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Municipal Leadership in Action

By David Mitchell NSFM President

This summer edition of the *Municipal Observer* highlights something that deserves recognition: municipalities are not waiting for change — they are leading it.

Across Nova Scotia, councils and staff continue to demonstrate that local government is where innovation meets action. The projects featured in this edition reflect what is possible when strong leadership, thoughtful planning, and strategic partnerships align.

We are proud to share a success story supported through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund. Investments like these help municipalities reduce emissions, improve infrastructure, and build resilience — while protecting taxpayers and strengthening communities. Access to federal tools that are designed with municipal realities in mind remains critical, and we will continue advocating to ensure Nova Scotia communities can leverage every available opportunity.

The Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund continues to demonstrate what provincial–municipal collaboration can achieve. The Halls Harbour project stands as a testament to forward-looking climate adaptation. Projects like this are not simply about infrastructure — they are about protecting local economies, preserving heritage, and ensuring long-term viability in the face of coastal and climate pressures.

This edition also turns our attention to the growing risks associated with extreme heat. Insights from the Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation underscore the practical steps municipalities can take now to reduce vulnerability

and safeguard residents. Climate adaptation is no longer a future consideration; it is a present responsibility. Whether addressing coastal erosion, stormwater management, or heat mitigation, municipalities are on the front lines.

The work is complex. The pressures are real. Yet the commitment to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities never wavers.

Equally important is the strength of our leadership tables. Research led by Rebecca Wallace at St. Francis Xavier University explores women's retention in municipal politics across Nova Scotia. Representation matters — not only for equity, but for the quality and diversity of decision-making that shapes

our communities. Ensuring municipal governance remains welcoming, sustainable, and supportive for those who serve is essential to long-term success.

Taken together, these stories reflect a broader truth: municipalities are problem-solvers. We operate closest to the people we serve, and we respond with pragmatism and determination. But we cannot do it alone. Continued collaboration with provincial and federal partners, academic institutions, and community stakeholders will remain vital.

As President, I am consistently inspired by the leadership I see at council tables across this province. The work is complex. The pressures are real. Yet the commitment to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities never wavers.

Thank you for your leadership, your innovation, and your dedication to public service. Together, we are shaping a stronger future for Nova Scotia. ■



Equipping Municipalities for What's Next

By Juanita Spencer, Chief Executive Officer

Municipal leadership today is defined by constant change. Communities are evolving, expectations are growing, and the challenges facing local governments are becoming increasingly complex. In this environment, success depends not only on responding to immediate needs, but on preparing thoughtfully for what lies ahead.

Across Nova Scotia, municipalities continue to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a deep commitment to the people they serve. Local governments remain the level of government closest to residents, translating broad policy goals into practical action that shapes everyday life — from infrastructure and land-use planning to public safety, community well-being, and economic sustainability.

The work of municipalities today reflects an important shift. Long-term thinking is no longer optional; it is essential. Decisions made at council tables increasingly consider future risks, changing demographics, environmental pressures, and evolving service expectations. This requires balancing fiscal responsibility with innovation — ensuring communities remain both sustainable and competitive while protecting quality of life.

Collaboration has become one of the most important tools available to municipal leaders. Strong partnerships between municipalities, provincial and federal governments, academic institutions, and community organizations help expand capacity and unlock new opportunities. By sharing knowledge and working collectively, municipalities are better positioned to address challenges that no single community can solve alone.

At the same time, effective governance remains

foundational to municipal success. Healthy council dynamics, respectful decision-making environments, and inclusive leadership strengthen public trust and support better outcomes for residents. Supporting elected officials and staff with the tools, training, and resources they need is critical to maintaining strong local institutions.

Climate resilience, infrastructure renewal, and community sustainability continue to shape municipal priorities, but these issues are ultimately about people. Preparing communities for changing conditions — whether environmental, economic, or social — means ensuring residents feel safe, supported, and connected. Municipal leadership plays a vital role in creating communities that are not only prepared for challenges, but positioned to thrive.

As the municipal landscape evolves, so too does the role of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. Our focus remains on advocacy, collaboration, and capacity-building — ensuring municipalities have access to reliable information, strong partnerships, and a unified voice. By working together, we can advance solutions that reflect the realities and priorities of local governments across the province.

What continues to stand out is the dedication of municipal leaders. Every day, elected officials and staff make decisions that shape the future of their communities, often navigating competing pressures with professionalism and care. That commitment is the foundation of strong local government.

Together, we will continue building municipalities that are resilient, inclusive, and prepared for what comes next. ■

Together, we will continue building municipalities that are resilient, inclusive, and prepared for what comes next.



Nova Scotians Showing Leadership When it Matters Most

By Rebecca Bligh, Past President of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities

From towns to small villages, municipalities across the country, including those here in Nova Scotia, have been busy over these last few months. So much has happened that it can feel hard to be optimistic given the current state of the world.

An ongoing trade war, high cost of living, and a housing crisis are putting unprecedented pressure on businesses, families, and workers across the province.

During my time as President of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), I have spent time engaging with mayors, councillors, and wardens from across Canada on a range of issues, from climate adaptation, public safety, and the need for more investments from the federal government to upgrade local infrastructure.

What stood out for me most was not frustration, but leadership. It has been a privilege and honour to represent over 2,000 municipalities from coast-to-coast-to-coast, including here in Atlantic Canada.

That leadership has renewed my optimism. Local leaders across Nova Scotia and Canada are doing their best to address these challenges, but we are dealing with an outdated fiscal model: receiving only eight to ten cents of every tax dollar while managing 60% of Canada's public core infrastructure.

The federal government must match the pace and scale we are seeing on the ground, as local infrastructure is the economic engine that keeps this country moving forward. The community stream of the Build Communities Strong Fund is the bedrock for essential infrastructure funding. With the budget scheduled for this fall, it will be an opportunity to build on this momentum to ensure projects move forward as quickly

as possible, in time for the 2027 construction season.

Consider the issue of housing. From rural communities to Halifax Regional Municipality, the lack of affordable, social, and modular housing is a barrier for families and the most vulnerable. Municipalities of all sizes are implementing key solutions, such as fast-tracking approvals, updating planning rules, investing in infrastructure, and partnering with non-profit and private builders. But they cannot solve this crisis alone.

It will take all orders of government working together

"It has been a privilege and honour to represent over 2,000 municipalities from coast-to-coast-to-coast, including here in Atlantic Canada."

to solve these crises. The federal government's Build Canada Homes is a step in the right direction, but only when paired with sustainable and predictable investment and collaboration. As FCM marks its 125th anniversary this year, we will keep fighting for municipalities. With FCM's crucial advocacy work, we have shown repeatedly what we can accomplish when all governments come together. ■

Steady Leadership, Strong Connections: NSFM Spring Conference 2026 Wrap-Up

By Charlene Fekeshazy, Communications Advisor, Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities

From April 29 to May 1, municipal leaders from across the province gathered in Yarmouth for the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities' 2026 Spring Conference, hosted at the Rodd Grand Hotel. Set against the coastal backdrop of the Yarmouth & Acadian Shores region, the conference delivered a focused and forward-looking program grounded in collaboration, innovation, and resilience.

This year's agenda reflected both the opportunities and pressures facing municipalities today. A

recurring theme throughout the conference was the growing challenge of maintaining respectful, productive public discourse. Elected officials and staff alike acknowledged the increasing prevalence of vitriol in civic spaces, and the strain it places on local leadership. Sessions and informal discussions reinforced the importance of fostering constructive engagement, supporting one another, and upholding a culture of professionalism in municipal governance.

Despite these broader challenges—and an



Municipal leaders and partners came together in Yarmouth for NSFM's 2026 Spring Conference to connect, collaborate, and celebrate the strength of Nova Scotia's municipal community.

unexpected power outage during the conference—the event itself remained a strong example of adaptability in action. Notably, the host event, organized by the Yarmouth and Acadian Shores Tourism Association (YASTA), proceeded seamlessly. The evening was widely praised by delegates, offering a warm and memorable showcase of local hospitality, culture, and community pride.

Programming highlights underscored the breadth and depth of municipal work underway across Nova Scotia. Municipal Success Stories that Make a Difference spotlighted tangible examples of innovation and leadership, reinforcing the impact of local solutions in addressing complex issues.

Targeted sessions exploring municipal priorities drew strong engagement, with discussions on the West Hants Drought Program, Dark Skies and Astro Tourism, and Stormwater Strategy illustrating how municipalities are responding to environmental pressures while advancing economic and community development.

Public safety remained a key focus, with an update on the Nova Scotia Policing Review providing insight into ongoing efforts to shape policing services that better reflect community needs and expectations.

Government partners also played a central role, with updates from the Departments of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage; Emergency Management; and Environment & Climate Change; and Natural Resources offering valuable perspectives on provincial priorities and areas for continued collaboration.

Looking ahead, sessions such as Harnessing AI for Better Local Government and the Strong Cities Summit Panel explored how municipalities can leverage technology and innovation to enhance service delivery and strengthen decision-making in an increasingly complex landscape.

As delegates departed Yarmouth, the collective takeaway was clear: while

municipalities are navigating a period of heightened challenge—whether through shifting public dynamics, infrastructure demands, or unexpected disruptions—the strength of the municipal sector lies in its ability to adapt, collaborate, and lead with purpose.

The 2026 Spring Conference reaffirmed that, even in uncertain times, Nova Scotia’s municipalities remain committed to building strong, connected, and resilient communities. ■

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Extreme Heat is an East Coast Issue: What Nova Scotia Communities Can Do Now to Prepare

By Dr. Blair Feltmate, Head, Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation, Faculty of Environment, University of Waterloo

Extreme heat has been seen as a threat affecting Canada's largest cities and western provinces, however that perception is changing. Nova Scotia and communities across Atlantic Canada are already experiencing hotter summer weather, more frequent heat warnings, and warmer nights that provide little relief. Recent summers in Nova Scotia (2024-2025) have seen intense heat waves, with temperatures reaching the low-to-mid 30s C, made worse by high humidity and record-breaking August heat ([Global News, Jul 15, 2024](#); [CTV News, Aug 12, 2025](#)). As climate warming accelerates, extreme heat is becoming a serious public health risk for the region, especially for older adults, people with chronic illness, and those living alone or in homes without cooling.

Climate models indicate that Nova Scotia will continue to warm in the coming decades. The summer temperatures will be above average, with 14 days per year above 30C expected by the 2050s and about 32 days per year above 30C expected by the 2080s (this compared to two days per year in the 1990s) (Nova Scotia's Changing Climate, 2026). This will present a solid month of very hot temperatures. The number of heat waves that Nova Scotian's will experience will increase to 3 per year, by mid-century (2051-2080) – See Figure 1.

Unlike regions of Canada where extreme heat has claimed lives and promoted focused action, such as the Vancouver coastal area and Montreal, many east coast communities may be less prepared for this growing risk. Historically, air conditioning has been less common – for example in 2021 approximately 43% of Nova Scotia households had air conditioning, which was below the national average of 64%, and in 2023 air conditioning prevalence rose to 71% of all households in Nova Scotia, compared to the national average of 77% (Statistics Canada, 2025). Housing stock in the east coast and Nova Scotia is generally older, and residents are not used to recognizing heat as a health threat. These factors combine to create quiet and dangerous risk.

Exposure to extreme heat can lead to illness, and

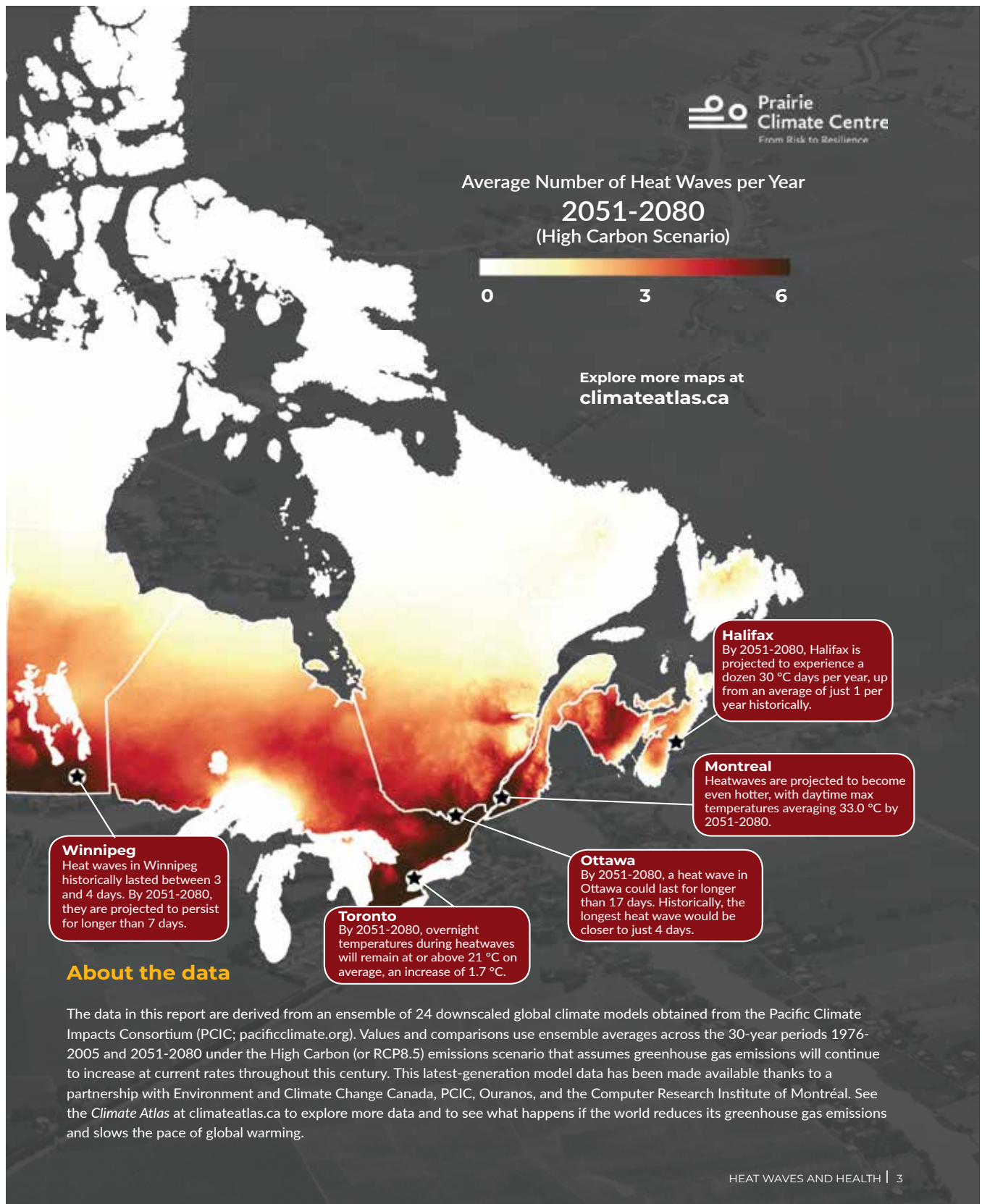
even death, if left untreated. In fact, extreme heat is Canada's deadliest weather-related hazard. It is responsible for more illness and fatalities than floods, storms, or other extreme weather events combined (Health Canada, 2024; Heath Canada, 2025). The good news is that these health impacts are largely preventable. With proactive planning and targeted community action, municipalities can significantly reduce heat-related risks and protect health and wellbeing of residents.

Municipal governments play a critical role in reducing this risk. Importantly, **many effective actions do not require large budgets or new programs**, but rather a heat-aware lens applied across responsibilities, and **action that is coordinated across municipal departments and with external partners** such as public health, community organizations, provincial/territorial governments, and the private sector. To support greater resilience, the Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation at the University of Waterloo published a study: [Irreversible Extreme Heat](#), outlining national guidance to combat heat risk. The guidance includes simple, practical actions that communities and municipalities can take to lower heat risk for residents – See Figure 2. Actions are organized under three categories: non-structural (planning and behavior change); green infrastructure (working with nature); and grey infrastructure (improving buildings and public infrastructure).

One of the most immediate steps municipalities can take is **planning for heat as an emergency**. Heat events should be treated with the same seriousness as storms or flooding. Clear, heat-alert protocols, coordinated messaging and outreach to heat-sensitive residents, and advanced planning to provide relief and cooling amenities, such libraries and community centres, free public transit passes, and free access to pools and splash pads, can make a difference during a heat wave.

Protecting heat-sensitive residents is another important measure for effective heat preparedness. This includes identifying neighbourhoods with more

Figure 1 – Heat Waves of the Future in Eastern Canada



urban heat and groups at higher risk, such as seniors living alone, those with preexisting health conditions, and people experiencing homelessness, and working with community organizations to conduct check ins during heat waves. The NCCEH provides a [guide for conducting health check-ins](#). Simple measures, like wellness phone calls conducted by volunteers, or door to door visits, can save lives.

Looking beyond emergency response, municipalities and their partners can reduce heat risk through **planning and design decisions**. Increasing tree canopy in city centres, enabling development that protects green spaces, adding shade to playgrounds, transit stops, and sidewalks, installing permeable pavements that absorb rainwater and provide a cooling effect, and promoting light-colored, cool roofs and building materials all help lower neighbourhood air temperatures. These actions not only reduce heat exposure but also improve livability, air quality, and community wellbeing.

Housing also plays a central role. While municipalities may not control building interiors, they can advocate for heat resilient housing standards, support retrofits such as external shading on windows, ventilation improvements, and energy-efficient heat pumps for cooling, and working with provinces/territories and federal partners to ensure that new developments (both buildings and the properties they are situated on) are designed with heat-resilience in mind.

Finally, **public awareness matters**. Many residents still underestimate the dangers of heat, particularly in regions where heat has not been an issue in the past. Clear, consistent, and culturally sensitive communication about heat risks, including information provided in appropriate languages, can help people recognize symptoms, take precautions, and check on neighbours during heat emergencies.

Extreme heat is no longer a distant concern for Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada. It is very real and growing local challenge—but also one for which **proactive, community level action** can make a big difference in protecting the health and wellbeing of residents now,

and well into the future.

The Intact Centre for Climate Adaptation is an education partner of the NSFM Municipal Insurance Program.

Author Contact Information:

Dr. Blair Feltmate

Head, [Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation](#)

Faculty of Environment, University of Waterloo

Email: bfeltmate@uwaterloo.ca

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Figure 2 – Actions by Communities to Reduce Heat Risk for Residents



Actions by Communities

Non-structural (planning and behavioural changes)	Green Infrastructure* (working with nature)	Grey Infrastructure (improving buildings and public infrastructure)
<p>COM-1 Assess and map vulnerability to extreme heat</p> <p>COM-2 Use education and outreach campaigns to encourage preventive action</p> <p>COM-3 Set up community support programs for vulnerable populations (e.g. underserved communities)</p> <p>COM-4 Require heat-sensitive urban planning, infrastructure design, and operation</p> <p>COM-5 Provide incentives to increase passive cooling and reduce “waste” heat (e.g. by subsidising tree planting or home retrofits)</p> <p>COM-6 Develop extreme-heat emergency plan</p>	<p>GI-1 Plant and maintain trees (including in urban forests, green corridors, and urban parks)</p> <p>GI-2 Expand vegetated areas and water bodies and absorb more water (forming a blue-green infrastructure network)</p>	<p>BI-11 Adapt community infrastructure to extreme heat (e.g. transport, utilities, water supply)</p> <p>BI-12 Reduce vehicular traffic</p> <p>BI-13 Install “cool” reflective or permeable pavements</p> <p>BI-14 Expand artificial shade (e.g. using canopies or shelters)</p> <p>BI-15 Install water-based cooling systems (e.g. ponds and sprinklers) and drinking fountains</p>

* In places at risk of wildfire, particularly at the wildland-urban interface, the use of green infrastructure must be considered alongside FireSmart guidance.³

Cybersecurity: Protecting Municipal Data

By Mike Tobin, Group Relations Specialist (Atlantic Canada), BrokerLink Inc.

Municipalities manage large volumes of sensitive information, from resident records and payroll data to financial systems and operational infrastructure. As services become increasingly digital, cyber threats continue to grow in both frequency and sophistication, putting municipal operations and public trust at risk.

Phishing: A leading threat to municipal staff

Phishing remains one of the most common ways cyber criminals gain access to municipal systems. These scams often arrive as emails, text messages, or phone calls posing as trusted organizations such as financial institutions, vendors, or even government agencies. Messages typically create urgency, request immediate action, or include links and attachments designed to capture login credentials or install malware.

Municipal employees should be trained to identify red flags such as unexpected requests, unfamiliar sender addresses, poor grammar, or links that do not match official websites. When in doubt, verification should always happen through a known, trusted channel—never directly through the message received.

Protecting information in a digital workplace

Many municipal staff use online tools, cloud platforms, and remote access systems to deliver services efficiently. However, sharing too much information online, whether through social media or unsecured platforms, can increase exposure to cyber incidents.

Limiting access to personal and municipal data, using role-based permissions, and reviewing privacy settings regularly can significantly reduce risk. Employees should also be cautious about accepting connection requests or emails from unknown individuals, as these may be attempts to gain internal access.



Practical steps municipalities can take

While no organization is immune to cyber threats, proactive measures can help reduce exposure:

- Use strong, unique passwords and update them regularly
- Enable multi-factor authentication on all critical systems
- Install antivirus and anti-malware software and keep it updated
- Apply software and system updates promptly
- Provide ongoing cybersecurity awareness training for staff

Managing the risk

Cyber incidents can disrupt services, create financial strain, and damage public confidence. Alongside strong prevention practices, municipalities may consider insurance solutions that help manage the financial and operational impacts of a cyber event as part of a broader risk management strategy.

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Implicit Bias in the Workplace

By Darcy Michaud, MA, CHRL, Chief Services Officer, HR Covered

We live in a time where hatred is generated as a means of buy-in. A time where you can point your finger at a particular group of people and say, 'they are to blame for all your troubles,' and that is encouraged.

It is the responsibility of all to stand up and do our part to ensure that hatred and racism are not acceptable. For employers, especially municipal employers, this is a responsibility that cannot be cast aside.

Awareness and Identification

Racism is embedded in the processes and unknown biases that we foster even today. Being aware means knowing the different ways racism manifests itself and acknowledging its existence in its different forms. "Implicit bias" or "subconscious bias" are two terms used to describe individuals' subtle racist and/or discriminatory tendencies, before they develop into explicit examples of racial discrimination. They are the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our decisions; the inherent bias from which our workplace policies and practices have been written and implemented. They exist. Before employers can implement any policies or processes, they must first understand this point: you must acknowledge that implicit bias and racism exist and identify where they manifest themselves in your organization, even if that means looking in the mirror.

Define your Commitment

Most municipal organizations have developed formal written commitments and policies around equal opportunity, anti-racism, and accessibility. Formalizing your commitment provides for rules and guidelines that are to be followed. Defining your commitment and making written rules to follow mitigates the influence implicit bias has on your outcomes.

Remember to engage employees in the process. Encourage minorities in the workplace to take the lead and talk about what they have experienced. You may not like what you will hear; it may make you feel uncomfortable. However, it will make you aware of the reality and help you to take the necessary steps going forward.



Be Accountable

It is not enough to say the words; put the plan in place and proclaim you are doing your part. Accountability and results are required. It is expected that municipal organizations will have a process in place to track and measure progress, and communicate it back to all workplace parties, including members of council.

Standing behind what you say and the efforts you implement means ensuring they are effective. Otherwise, you will appear to be untrustworthy and disingenuous. There is no need for shame or guilt if your results are not glowing or if progress is not as swift as envisioned. What has been given years to take root will not be unearthed overnight.

Whatever your role in your municipality, you have a responsibility to combat racism in the workplace and in your community. It is not acceptable to stay quiet or sit this one out nor is it acceptable to suggest that you are doing so because your constituents are not ready to step into this century. You have a responsibility to lead, to do what is right and necessary, especially when it is the most difficult thing to do. That is my definition of leadership.

[HR Covered](#) is a program partner of NSFM. Reach out to the advisory team if you need more information on this item, as well as many other great HR resources offered at no-charge to municipal units in NS. More info: partnerships@hrcovered.com ■

Green Municipal Fund: What 69 Nova Scotia Projects Really Show

By NSFM Staff



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Since 2001, Nova Scotia municipalities have accessed FCM's Green Municipal Fund (GMF) for a total of 69 projects. Those projects have attracted approximately \$13.1 million in direct grants and over \$48 million in low-interest loans. The work spans energy retrofits, wastewater treatment, solar financing, brownfield remediation, and affordable housing, with about 31 of 49 NSFM member municipalities represented.

The 31-of-49 figure looks strong on its own. Factor in

the 13 additional municipalities that have completed asset management work through FCM's separate Municipal Asset Management Program, and 44 of 49 municipalities have engaged with FCM funding in some form over the past 25 years.

The balance of that participation, though, is worth examining. When analyzing the 69 GMF projects by type, a pattern emerges.

	Count	Share
Feasibility Studies	33	48%
Plans	12	17%
Monitoring & Analysis	2	3%
CEF Program Evaluation Study	1	1%
Pre-Implementation Total	48	70%
Capital Projects	13	19%
Pilot Projects	7	10%
CEF Capital Program	1	1%
Implementation Total	21	30%

Roughly, two in every three GMF projects in this province produced a study, a plan, or a monitoring exercise. About one in three resulted in something constructed, installed, or operational.

The County of Kings illustrates what a strong planning record looks like at the municipal level. Kings has five GMF projects on record, more than any municipality in Nova Scotia outside of HRM and CBRM. All five are feasibility studies, totaling approximately \$218,000 in grants, spanning energy, transportation, and brownfield sectors. These projects include a net-zero

Roughly, two in every three GMF projects in this province produced a study, a plan, or a monitoring exercise. About one in three resulted in something constructed, installed, or operational.

operations centre study, a rural transit feasibility assessment, and a former-landfill-to-solar-farm conversion analysis. Research on initiatives, such as these, are beneficial in the long term. It provides the kind of foundation that tends to make the next step, a capital application, considerably stronger.

A few municipalities in the province have already taken that next step. Roughly two-thirds of all direct municipal GMF grant dollars in Nova Scotia flow to five municipalities. What stands out about this is how differently each municipality has approached the move from planning to implementation.

New Glasgow, population 9,470, completed a GHG pathway study across 18 municipal buildings, then applied to GMF for a \$4.7 million capital retrofit of 11 facilities, projecting a 43% reduction in energy consumption and \$442,000 in annual savings. Study first. Then implementation. One application informed the next.

Colchester, population 51,480, built a municipal financing model instead of a municipal building. Solar Colchester is a PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) program that finances solar and efficiency upgrades for homeowners through property tax, with no upfront deposit, targeting 100 homes per year. The \$10.6 million program, supported by \$2.8 million in GMF grants and \$5.6 million in loans, was the first rural PACE program in the province.

Argyle, population 7,870, went straight to capital, constructing a net-zero administration building after determining it would cost the same as retrofitting the old one. Lumber was sourced from a nearby First Nations mill. Energy use was reduced by 52%.

Three municipalities. Three different paths. Each one used the Green Municipal Fund to move from planning to a result.

The feasibility studies and asset inventories

What the numbers also tell us is that municipalities that achieved these results were not always the largest or the best-resourced. This means there are GMF dollars available for every municipality that is willing to take the next step

completed across the province over the past decade represent a foundation that can support the next round of applications; that next round being capital investment. What the numbers also tell us is that municipalities that achieved these results were not always the largest or the best-resourced. This means there are GMF dollars available for every municipality that is willing to take the next step. ■



Recreated illustration of damage from Halls Harbour flood in July 2024. (Communications Nova Scotia)

The Future in Fundy: Resilience in Halls Harbour

By NSFM Staff

In Nova Scotia, the coastlines are a part of our identity. Halls Harbour, a small coastal community on the north shore of the Annapolis Valley, is known for its coastal sunsets along with tidal changes courtesy of the Bay of Fundy. However, to the people of this community, the waterfront is more than just a scenic view, it is a critical economic engine and a source of deep local pride. As climate change accelerates, the infrastructure that supports this way of life is under immediate pressure.

Facing the Tide

The urgency in Halls Harbour has been building. Residents have watched storms wash out the bridge at the south end of the harbour twice in the last decade. The community's wharves reached a breaking point, with sections that are beginning to sink and split. Despite these challenges, there are members of the community who seek solutions that not only save the backbone of the community but strengthen it.

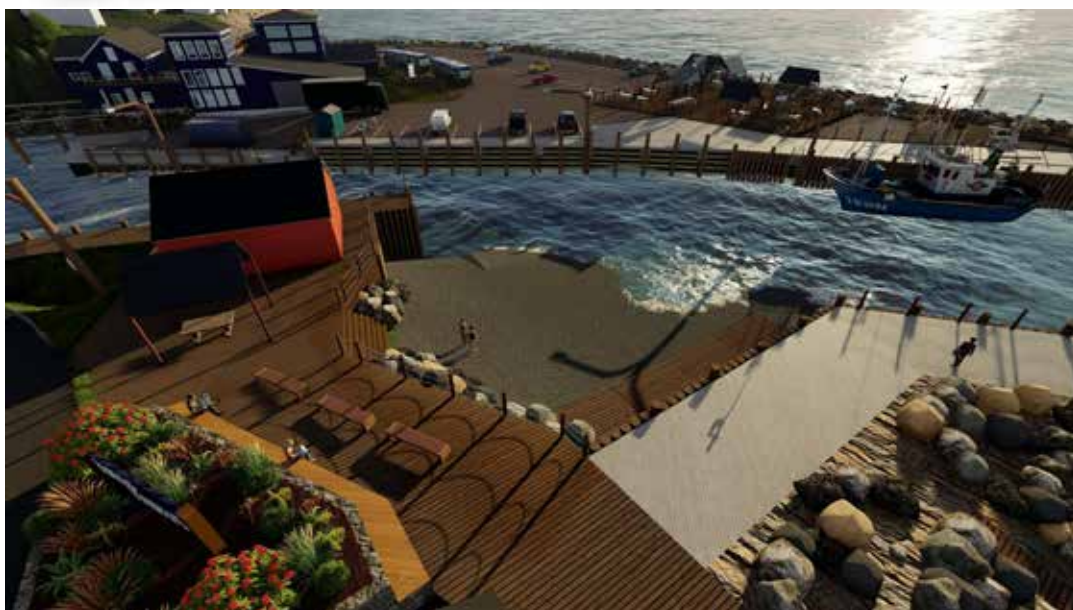
"Halls Harbour is beautiful, and I feel extremely fortunate to live here," says Bernard Miles, President of the Halls Harbour Community Development Association. "We owe it not only to ourselves, but to future generations to ensure the community is sustainable".

A Vision for Sustainability

To meet these challenges, the Halls Harbour Community Development Association launched its waterfront revitalization project, envisioning a renewed and resilient waterfront. Supported by **\$833,144** from the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, this step of the project focuses solely on the **essential engineering and planning** required to make the waterfront "shovel-ready".

The comprehensive plan goes beyond simple repairs. It envisions a future including:

- Rehabilitated and expanded wharves that separate commercial fishing activities from tourist traffic, providing local fishers with dedicated space and additional parking options
- A new, higher seawall designed to protect the car park while preserving the harbour's unobstructed views
- Exploration of innovative energy opportunities, including tidal and solar power generation
- Enhanced community spaces, including a reconstructed boardwalk to connect the east and west wharves



Renderings of a reconstructed boardwalk in Halls Harbour (Halls Harbour)

The Path Forward

For small, aging communities facing the pressures of urban migration, infrastructure is the key to sustainability. While the process of securing funding and navigating complex engineering studies is demanding, Miles believes the collective effort is what truly strengthens a community.

“Since COVID, our sense of community has shifted from ‘We’ to ‘Me,’” Miles reflects. “This is a way to bring communities together. The engagement process is often more important than the end result”.

By moving from understanding coastal risk to taking practical action on the ground, Halls Harbour is ensuring that its heritage as a working waterfront and a premier destination remains intact for the next generation. This story serves as a roadmap for other Nova Scotian communities: while the challenges of a changing climate are significant, they also offer a powerful opportunity to build a more connected, resilient future.

To learn more about the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund and the projects it supports, please visit www.nschallengefund.ca. ■

Beyond the Ballot: Rethinking Women’s Inclusion in Municipal Politics

By **Rebecca Wallace**, Mila Mulroney Research Chair in Women and Politics Assistant Professor, and **Hailey Murphy**, Assistant Professor, Political Science, St. Francis Xavier University

In the fall of 2022, the mayor of the Town of Antigonish, Laurie Boucher, faced an onslaught of harassment amidst a controversial decision to amalgamate the municipality with the surrounding County of Antigonish. While she received visceral calls, emails, and social media posts threatening herself and her family, her counterpart in the County of Antigonish,

Warden Owen McCarron, fielded far fewer complaints and less personal attacks (Ryan 2022).

Mere months later, Cape Breton Regional Municipality Mayor Amanda McDougall-Merrill indicated that she, too, would not seek re-election after facing a firestorm of online hate and threats of violence.

Describing much of her time in office as “just surviving,” she noted that the online vitriol is something that “you can’t unhear, you can’t unsee, you can’t unknow what you do know” (Mott 2024).

The stories of these women mayors, and many others in recent years, are not anomalies. Preliminary research



Hailey Murphy (on the left) and Rebecca Wallace (on the right) | Anna Zuschlag, Brian Mulroney Institute of Government.

suggests there seems to be a “revolving door” when it comes to women’s tenure in Canadian political life. Research has identified that women legislators in Canada are leaving federal and provincial office years earlier than their male colleagues (Wallace and Goodyear-Grant 2024). This is concerning when we consider that longevity in politics matters.

Improving women’s representation is not simply a function of getting more women elected; rather, it is also about ensuring that they have a fair shot at staying in

counterparts? Do women re-offer at the same rates as men on their councils? If not, what are the factors that affect their decisions to leave politics?

While we are presently working with a team of undergraduate research assistants through the GAP Lab at St. Francis Xavier University to tackle these questions, we are running into challenges with accessing electoral data in a number of municipalities. We are asking that if any readers have electoral information on municipalities dating back to the 2008

government, the cultures they encounter within councils, and the expectations placed upon them by constituents. A meaningful dedication to inclusion must be all-encompassing, ensuring that women are not only present, but supported, heard, and able to remain in office long enough to shape their communities. This is central to fostering stronger communities across Nova Scotia through the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in local decision-making.

We are grateful to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities for their continued support in this work. Their partnership helps to enable efforts to improve women’s experiences in municipal politics, as well as the broader health and vitality of communities across the province.

Contact Information:

Rebecca Wallace (rwallace@stfx.ca)
Hailey Murphy (hmurphy@stfx.ca)

References:

Mott, S. 2024. “Cape Breton mayor looks back at ‘four difficult years’ as she prepares to leave office.” CTV News, 6 May.

Ryan, H. 2022. “Amid local tensions, threats against Antigonish mayor reported to RCMP.” CBC News, 31 October.

Wallace, R. and Goodyear-Grant, E. 2024. “Are political exits gendered?” Presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, 14 June.

[Cape Breton mayor looks back at ‘four difficult years’ as she prepares to leave office](#)

[Amid local tensions, threats against Antigonish mayor reported to RCMP](#) ■

We are also conducting confidential interviews with women who have left office. Our hope is to learn more about how their experiences with councils, constituents, and the demands of political officeholding may have affected their careers and departures from office.

office long enough to learn the ropes, build relationships, move into leadership positions, and mentor newcomers along the way.

Our ongoing research, funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada in partnership with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, explores women’s political careers in Nova Scotia’s municipalities to better understand how we can improve women’s representation at the local level. We are currently collecting electoral data on all municipalities to understand women’s political trajectories and time in office. Primarily, we are asking: Do women leave office earlier than their male

election, please contact us as we would greatly appreciate the input.

We are also conducting confidential interviews with women who have left office. Our hope is to learn more about how their experiences with councils, constituents, and the demands of political officeholding may have affected their careers and departures from office. If any women who have left local office wish to connect to share their insights and experiences, please reach out.

Addressing women’s representation in municipal politics requires a commitment that extends beyond recruitment and election. It requires sustained attention to the conditions under which women

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Nova Scotia Power's Grassroots Grants: Supporting Communities Where We Live and Work

Volunteers and community organizations are the backbone of communities across Nova Scotia. Every day, non-profits help create stronger, safer places where people feel connected.

At Nova Scotia Power, our team lives and works in communities in every corner of the province and sees this impact firsthand. That's why we launched the Grassroots Grants program last fall – a program created to bring initiatives that support community well-being and development to life.

From equipping a local fire department with a new life-saving AED (automated external defibrillator), to a non-profit organization looking to install a community fridge, the creation of a community garden, or funding to support accessibility upgrades, the program supports the initiatives that matter most to local communities.

In its first year, Nova Scotia Power is investing \$200,000 in grants to support 18 organizations. These projects reflect the diversity and strength of communities across Nova Scotia, ranging from food security and youth programming to infrastructure improvements and community health initiatives.

Strong Response and Expanded Investment

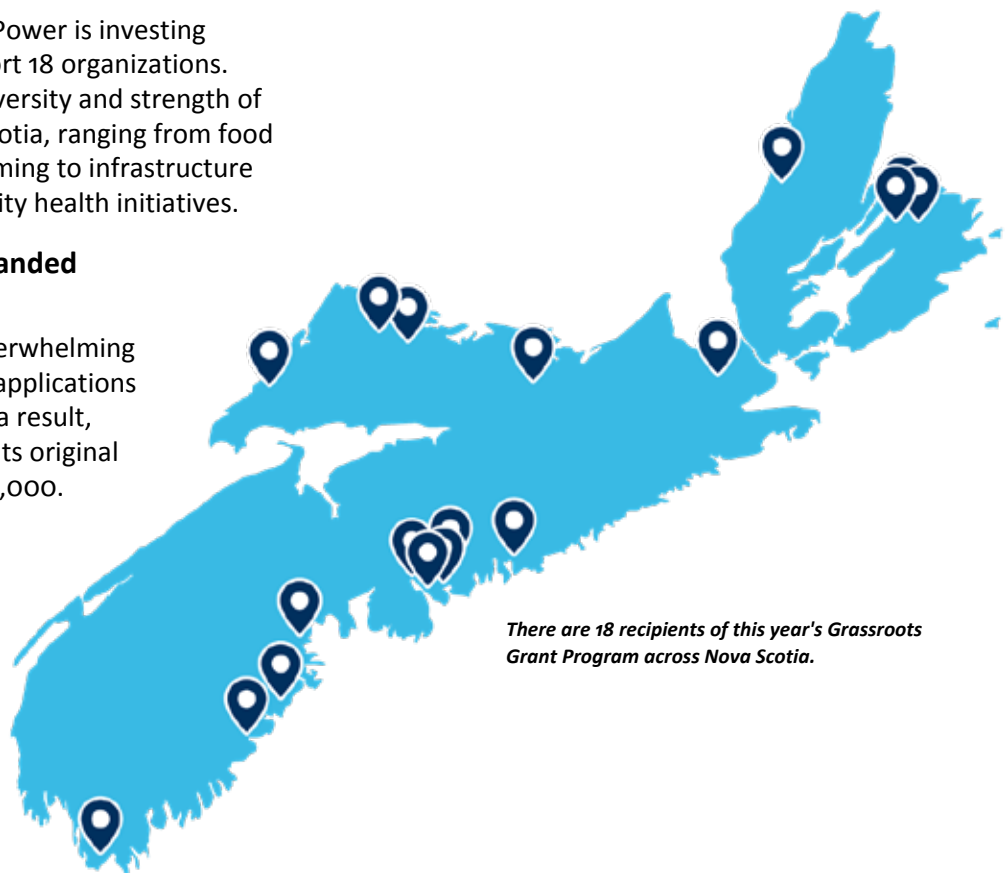
The program received an overwhelming response, with hundreds of applications from across Nova Scotia. As a result, Nova Scotia Power doubled its original planned investment to \$200,000.

“The response to this program has been incredibly inspiring,” said Vivek Sood, President and CEO of Nova Scotia Power. “We heard from so many groups doing important work—improving community spaces, supporting seniors and youth, and keeping community kitchens going. We're thrilled to support the people and projects that help our communities thrive.”

Recipients were selected by an independent external committee to ensure a fair and transparent process.

Thank you to all community volunteers who are committed to creating positive, lasting changes for our neighbours, family and friends – and congratulations to this year's Grassroots Grant recipients!

For more information about the recipients and their impact, visit nspower.ca/grassrootsgrants. ■



There are 18 recipients of this year's Grassroots Grant Program across Nova Scotia.



Grassroots Grants

Supporting the places where we live and work.

Volunteers and community organizations are the backbone of communities across Nova Scotia. Every day, local non-profits are helping create stronger, more connected communities.

That's why we've launched the Grassroots Grants program, helping fund initiatives focused on food security, wellness, recreation, culture, and community connection across the province.

Congratulations to the 18 recipients of this year's program.



Balls Creek, NS

"An AED at our community hall and an electric vehicle emergency plug will help our volunteers respond faster and more safely when every second counts. In a small community, we look after each other, and this support helps us continue to protect our friends, families, and neighbours."

- Frenchvale Fire Department



Westville, NS

"This funding will help us expand our program offerings, break down barriers in our community, and increase access to entrepreneurship opportunities, knowledge and skill-building workshops, and food insecurity supports. With this support, we can better serve our community and create more meaningful opportunities for growth, connection, and resilience."

- Alma-Westville Community Program Society



Lake Charlotte, NS

"Our on-site wood shop has long been an important but under-utilized resource –this support allows us to take a major step forward, growing it into a Woodworking Hub that advances our goals of hands-on education and community resilience."

- The Deanery Project



Lunenburg, NS

"We Feed Lunenburg is more than a service; we are a vital strand in a wider web of community connection and support. This funding helps solidify that web we weave together, allowing us to extend selfless care to our neighbors and ensure a resilient, well-fed community for everyone."

- We Feed Lunenburg



Learn more about the recipients and impact at nspower.ca/grassrootsgrants

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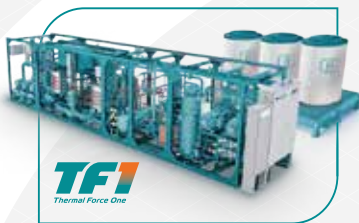
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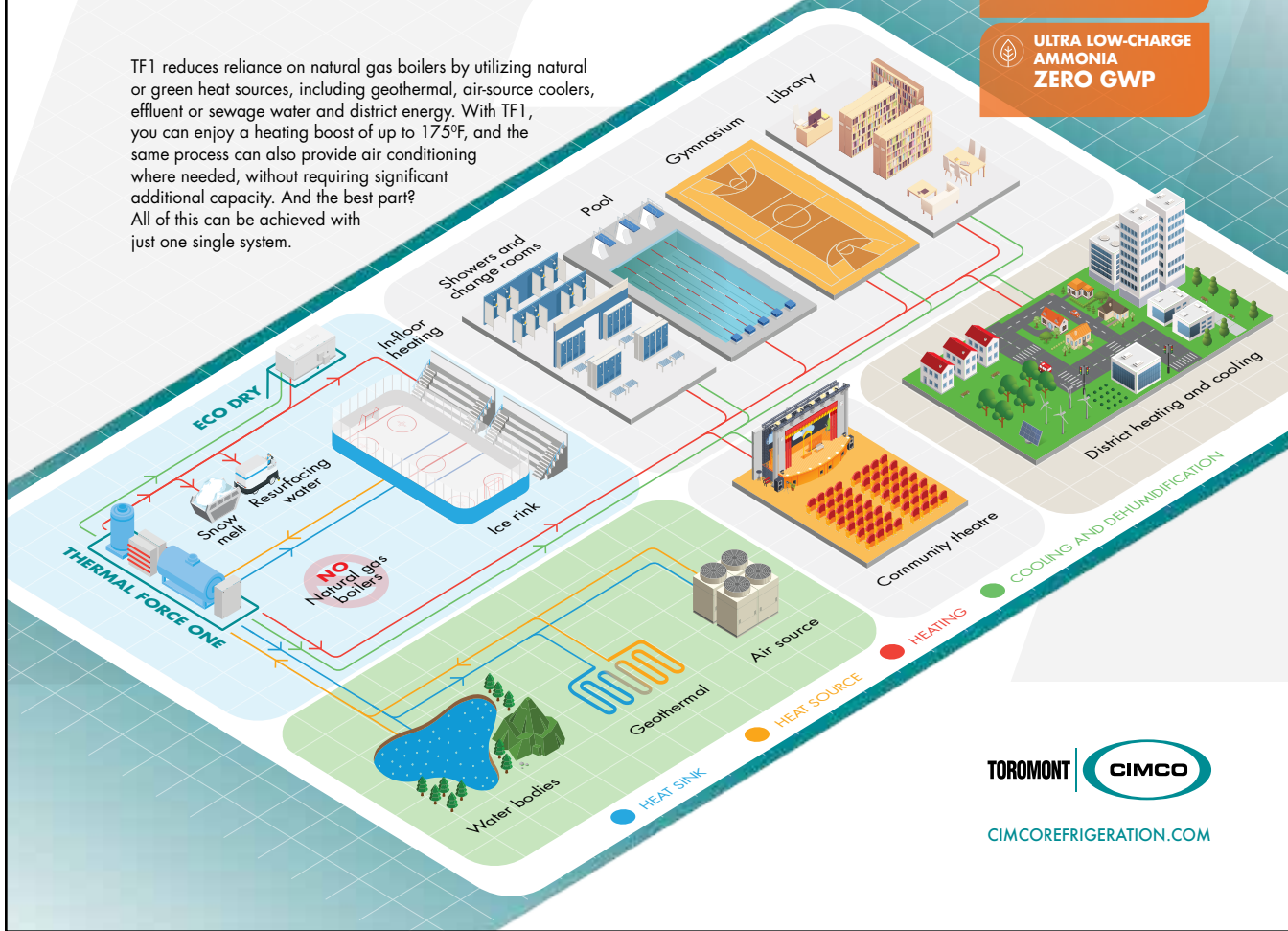
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