



NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION
OF MUNICIPALITIES

Antigonish: History on Hold

Nova Scotians know how to work together. The issue at hand may be one of triumph, such as our mutual efforts to grow this province beyond one million people or collaborating to get better results on health care and housing. Or the matter may be devastation, such as the many air, land, and nautical disasters that have created heartbreak over the years. We know how to come together for common benefit. Nova Scotia is strong but challenged.

The collegiality and potential of the province's 49 municipalities is inspiring. As the official representative organization of these municipal units, the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities sees this from the front seat. Our towns, regional, and rural municipalities are working together to address issues such as climate change, development, health care, housing, infrastructure renewal, and policing. These are issues we are all concerned about and concerns that need solutions based on vision.

Antigonish provides us with an interesting example of forward thinking. The councils representing the town and county unanimously voted, in September 2021, to embark on a journey to explore what a merger could look like *for* Antigonish. This self-initiated process provided an opportunity to have meaningful discussion about the past and the future, especially one that is focused on addressing the serious aforementioned issues.

By doing this both parties realized they have much more that unites than divides. Is that not true of all Nova Scotians? Aligned priorities, shared services, a trusting relationship, bold leadership, and community conversations pointed to an established path: consolidation. This method of merger between equals has been successful in Queens and West Hants.

When self-directed, as is the case in Antigonish, a benchmark for municipal merger is established; one in which the municipal units participating control their future. Consolidation is the result of a collaborative process that consists of research, consultation, and decision-making in the best interests of the people being represented. Both municipal councils voted to request special legislation to merge into one. To accomplish this requires special legislation and that is where the Province comes in. The Province needs to recognize the right of municipalities to make the decisions necessary to govern themselves.

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NSFM is committed to the belief that municipalities must be enabled to modernize, be that consolidation or other forms of collaboration, in order to meet the future head on. Equally important is strengthening the ability of municipalities to select the kind of direction that works for them. Duly elected municipal officials must have the autonomy to enact a vision for their communities and to self-determine what is in their best interests. Therefore, the Province needs not to be a *barrier* in this process, but rather an *enabler*.

The objective is to build upon our quality of life for the benefit of all and to deliver solutions to our problems. Consider that consolidation may be an effective way of reaching our potential. Province, kindly release the pause button.

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The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities is the collective voice of municipalities in the province. We are a non-profit organization that represents 375 municipally elected officials and 49 municipalities.

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