

## Consolidation – History and the Benefits

### **Studies re: Municipal Governance/Structure**

- Angus L. Macdonald Provincial-Municipal Conference (1947)
- Reorganization of Provincial-Municipal Relations in Nova Scotia aka Rowat Report (1950)
- Local Government in the Changing Economy of Industrial Cape Breton (1968)
- Pictou County Municipal Coordination Study (1969)
- The Evolution of Municipal Government in Nova Scotia 1749-1973 (1973)
- Graham Commission Report (1974)
- Task Force on Local Government (1992)
- Towns Task Force (2012)
- Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Review (2013)
- Now or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians aka OneNS/Ivany Report (2014)

### **History of Consolidation in Nova Scotia**

- CBRM – forced amalgamation (1995)
- HRM – forced amalgamation (1996)
- RQM – voluntary amalgamation (1996)
- Canso – dissolution (2012)
- Bridgetown, Hantsport, Springhill – dissolution (2015)
- Parrsboro – dissolution (2016)
- Windsor/West Hants – voluntary consolidation (2020)
- No failed consolidations in NS history

### **Symposium on Municipal Structure (2016)**

- Mayor Savage – Cooperation has replaced competition and we now have the ability to control the levers of economic development.
- Mayor Clarke (Queens) – Don't ignore or delay dealing with difficult issues; these issues must be dealt with upfront. Doing the right thing will earn the public's respect.
- Mayor Clarke (CBRM) – The statistics for CBRM are not as positive as those for HRM and the Region of Queens but the reality is that without amalgamation, those statistics would be much worse.
- All mayors agreed that consolidation was a positive decision for their communities.

### **General Benefits of Consolidation**

- Economies of scale
  - It is anything but a given that regionalization will result in savings or tax reductions, but that does not mean that there are not advantages that come with increased scale.
  - Such advantages include standardized service levels, which usually leads to increased service levels for some residents, usually at marginal cost.
- Tax base strength and stability
  - A larger and broader tax base is more insulated against shocks from large businesses or even industries that may become challenged or even fail.

- In the event of such a challenge, the municipality will not only have a stable revenue source, but they may even be in a position to try to moderate the impact, or pivot to refocus on new opportunities.
- Increased human resources capacity/opportunity – a “deeper bench” and “room to grow”
  - Extends to attraction of CAO, senior director positions, as well specialized staff such as building inspectors, engineers, and planners, among others.
- Regional resources to support a regional focus and the investment in regional assets
  - Includes things such as airports, sports/entertainment facilities, urban centres, marine terminals, and major tourist attractions
- Opportunities to cooperatively develop and pursue regional priorities and strategies leading to better services, outcomes and opportunities for residents and businesses alike
  - In particular, unity of focus is important for economic development, land-use planning, business park management, immigration support, and recreational facility citing, among others.
- Improved influence and – possibly – responsibility when working with neighbouring municipalities
  - Important for citing of regional assists such as libraries, and provincial facilities
- Strength and unity of voice when advocating to and working with Nova Scotia or Canada
  - Important for negotiating special legislative amendments or greater autonomy, securing pilot project opportunities, coordinating investments in the regional hospital, and otherwise advocating for priority issues.

### **Specific Benefits of Consolidation**

- Emergency Management (EM)
  - Consolidation rationalizes the business model and creates efficiencies. Ideally, these efficiencies can allow limited EM resources to be deployed to maximum benefit.
  - Additionally, the reduced number of entities in place makes it easier to encourage and operationalize consistent processes. A significant number of our municipal partners have already gone down this road from an EM perspective by operating as Regional Emergency Management Organizations (REMO).
- Fire Services
  - Consolidation presents a great opportunity to revise and revitalize regional fire services resulting in both cost savings and better efficiency/effectiveness.

### **Specific Examples of Consolidation Success**

- Canso saw service levels increase and taxes and fees decrease
  - Water rates dropped
  - Minimum tax was eliminated
  - Low-income rebate program was introduced
- Bridgetown, Springhill, Hantsport and Parrsboro saw no tax increases and increased infrastructure investment
- RMQ saw cost reductions as a result of amalgamation, of about \$750,000/year
  - Harmonized bylaws ad polices
  - Increased efficiency of RCMP servicing

- Unity of vision
  - Urban tax rates decreased
- Windsor and West Hants – have seen Provincial investment of time and money leading to:
  - A comprehensive asset inventory
  - Redeveloped organizational structure and HR plan
  - Optimized municipal structure with appropriate resources and plans in place