



# Annual Report

2020-2021





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# MESSAGE FROM LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CHAIR PATTI DURKEE



**THIS LAST YEAR** has been a learning experience for all. COVID-19 continues to provide us with a crystal-clear example of the benefits of working together as the Western region

saw some of the lowest infection rates in the country. A sharp increase in real estate activity in the region shows that people are recognizing another value of more rural living. The benefits of an increased population will be with us for some time to come.

Although we have witnessed the demise of businesses in our region, the rate of business closures in Western NS has also been lower than in other places. Western NS businesses have demonstrated their commitment to the community by adhering to public health protocols and they have also shown great resilience

by adapting to the quickly changing landscape of doing business. I am proud of our population – both business-owners and customers – for the tremendous efforts to buy local during this time.

Having the Western REN bringing programs and services directly to businesses during the pandemic has made all the difference for many. With the surge in work-from-home arrangements, the Western REN's groundwork made possible the fast roll-out of internet projects that would otherwise have taken years more. I applaud the Western REN CEO and Staff, as well as the seven municipal partners who have seen the need for regional cooperation. May our recovery in a post-COVID world be swift.

*Patti Durkee*

# MESSAGE

## FROM BOARD CHAIR MARY THOMPSON



**TO SAY THAT 2020-2021** has been challenging would be an understatement. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our region, province, country and beyond. Yet, we have seen many examples

of the resilience of our business community as they have pivoted to change and adapt to doing business during a pandemic. As Chair, I am proud of the work done by our Western REN in providing support and leadership to inform and connect our business community. Early in the pandemic, our CEO convened a regional Economic Development Response/Recovery group. This team, made of business development partners across the region, still comes together regularly, sharing ideas and pitching in support for the hard-working business community.

Looking for innovative ways to reach out, we saw our BusinessNow program continue to grow. A new project, the Local Immigration Partnership, fosters population growth and provides newcomers and provides pathways for entrance to the labor market and new entrepreneurs. Our “Win this Space” contest facilitated new business start-ups for our area as entrepreneurs pitched their plans for a chance to secure space and business services.

It has been a very busy year and I predict the upcoming year will be just as busy as we now begin to move more into recovery. A special thanks goes to the REN board, CEO Angelique and the tremendous staff who make things happen.

*Mary Thompson*



# MESSAGE FROM CEO ANGELIQUE LeBLANC



**THE LANDSCAPE** has certainly shifted this past year. With health and safety at the top of everyone's mind, a close second was economic and business stability.

The Western RENs strategy is a long game, and we have been setting down tracks to be ready for recovery. Access to reliable, high-speed Internet is an example of the Western REN focusing efforts on an issue that requires long-term effort, but is critical to economic development. Our region is now on track to be fully connected by the end of 2023. The Western REN supported our municipal partners in identifying gaps in their municipalities, combining efforts to achieve maximum coverage, and getting the best value out of public tax dollars. We're also rolling out the Western Region Energy Investment Plan, which is positioning us to benefit from a green future.

Our BusinessNow program became the vehicle for increased outreach to our business community throughout the COVID crisis. We've continued programming, including our Continuous Improvement Program and a newly introduced Virtual Advisory Program. We also continue connecting business and talent, and have begun planning regionally for immigration and population growth.

I see a bright future for Western Nova Scotia, and would like to thank the Board, Liaison and Oversight Committee, partners and staff for their dedication to the important work that we do.

*Angelique LeBlanc*



Town of Yarmouth Heritage District | Photo: Yarmouth & Acadian Shores Tourism Association







# 2020-2021 RESULTS

YEAR 2 OF 3 OF OUR STRATEGY

## INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

**6 OF 6**  
TARGETS ACHIEVED

## INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR

**4 OF 5**  
TARGETS ACHIEVED

## ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

**1 OF 3**  
TARGETS ACHIEVED

## OVERALL YEAR END RESULTS

**11 OF 14**  
TARGETS REACHED

**= 79%**

# INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

## SUPPORTING THE HEART OF OUR REGION

### Sector Development Activities

- Seafood By-Product Session
- Win This Space Competition
- Management of MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program, Team Western
- Virtual Summit on Economic Recovery



### BusinessNow

The Western REN's BusinessNow program helps businesses identify and overcome barriers to success.

In Q1, the program shifted entirely to COVID-19 crisis response by proactively reaching out to the business community to help navigate funding program announcements and criteria.



**333** clients, **300+** referrals



## Engaging with Chambers & Boards of Trade Across the Region

- Active participation in Regional Economic Development COVID-19 Response & Recovery Group
- Regional support on Grid capacity issues
- Partnering on Win This Space & Annual Summit with Yarmouth & Area Chamber of Commerce



## Preparing Businesses for Transition

Of the 20 businesses in the Succession program, 3 have sold at the time of publication. Listings remain active for a period of three years.



**20** sellers, **7** buyers

## Continuous Improvement

- In business, time is money. Wasted time is wasted money. This program helps identify and reduce wasted time, energy, materials and more.

Results include doubling production line capacity without the addition of equipment or personnel and reducing invoice-processing time from over 30 days to less than three days.



**18** companies participated, including fish processors, lobster companies, boat builders and heavy equipment repair shops.

## Virtual Advice from a roster of experts



The Western REN's Virtual Advisor Program connects businesses with an experienced business advisor. Through this program the businesses receive one-to-one support from a seasoned professional to help them solve a unique challenge their business is facing.



**14** businesses matched with advisors

Many businesses are better able to engage with e-commerce after participating in the REN Virtual Advisor Program





West Head Wharf | Photo: Municipality of the District of Barrington



# INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR

## **Regional Opportunities for a Green Future**

The Western REN worked with Sustainability Solutions Group to create the Western Region Energy Investment Plan. This plan identifies multiple actions to strengthen our local economy, create green jobs, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Some of these actions are focused on strengthening energy efficiencies, thereby lowering energy expenditures for residents and businesses. Other actions focus on local green energy generation and storage, which after short-term timelines can be paid off and generate revenue. Combined, these actions would aim to strengthen the region's energy security, resulting in fewer and shorter power outages.

## **Access to Reliable, High-Speed Internet**

The Western Regional Enterprise Network worked in partnership with the Municipalities of the Districts of Argyle, Barrington, Digby and Yarmouth, Develop Nova Scotia, and Bell Canada to bring fibre-optic service to over 7,000 underserved homes and businesses in Western Nova Scotia.

The project will provide residences and businesses with access to Bell's all-fibre network, offering residents download speeds up to 1.5 Gigabits per second (Gbps), the fastest home internet speeds in the country, in addition to television and phone services. Work on this segment of the project is expected to be completed by the end of 2023, though some areas may be completed sooner.



## Working with Partners

The Western REN leads the Regional Economic Development COVID-19 Response & Recovery Group to align regionally around communications & service delivery to the Business Community. Participants are organisations who offer services to businesses in the Western Region and include Chambers and Boards of Trade, NS Works, Municipal Economic Development Officers, NSBI, CBDC, ACOA, NSCC, Develop NS, YASTA, CDENE and more .

**25** meetings

took place this fiscal, with numerous working groups and initiatives spinning off from the initial group.



## Why Western NS

Western Nova Scotia is a globally renowned fishing region, with a highly developed ecosystem of over 1,100 companies including MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) certified fisheries and niche producers. Unparalleled greenfield opportunities in fisheries are provided, with creative entrepreneurs, innovative boatbuilders, artificial ecosystem development and a world-class R&D network. Rich in opportunities for green energy projects, it is the sunniest region within NS, which provides great photovoltaic potential. As a coastal area, the region also receives a fair amount of wind and has some of the highest performing wind energy locations in our province. Additionally, the Bay of Fundy boasts the highest tides in the world, welcoming testing opportunities for multiple

tidal energy generators in the region. Finally, our region's Université Sainte-Anne is considered the greenest little campus in Canada, with a wood chip-based heating system that offers opportunity for our province's forestry industry, which is currently at a crossroads.

The Western Region also has access to key markets, low business costs, unique Research & Development opportunities and is part of Canada's Ocean Supercluster.



**172** views by  
**118** users

**in the past year of [www.westernren.ca](http://www.westernren.ca),  
'Invest in Opportunities'**

## Investment Inquiries

When a developer or investor is looking around for a location, they will often reach out to local government offices. In many instances, the inquiry is to determine whether the community is a good fit for their business.

The Western REN provides support to our local government partners through coordinating and streamlining the correspondence. Responding to inquiries from a regional perspective demonstrates the full capacity of the Western Region to meet the investor's needs.

**6** inquiries were  
fielded over the past year.



# ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

Attracting and keeping newcomers & recent grads by connecting them to opportunities in our business community.

## Connecting Businesses with Talent

The Connector Program matches community and business leaders (Connectors) with skilled newcomers, local and international graduates, and other qualified local professionals (Connectees) in their industry of expertise.

Connectors are local business and community leaders who have a strong network. They can often be found making introductions within social, cultural, professional and economic circles.

Connectees are job ready newcomers & local and international graduates or underemployed skilled locals who are actively looking to launch their career in the Western Region. They are highly skilled individuals, proficient in English and/or French, legally entitled to work in Canada, and a graduate of a post-secondary program.



**37**  
New  
Connectors



**28**  
New  
Connectees



**11**  
Known Jobs Found  
by Connectees

**“THE CONNECTOR** for me was my breakthrough. I found that the connector program connected and created a network that I could not create myself. It allowed me to not only just connect to get a job, but it made it possible to understand the town itself and how to operate in a new environment. It allowed me to know the different areas and different places I need to go to get my kids and wife settled.”

**- Connector, Newcomer to the Western Region**

## Planning Regionally for Immigration & Population Growth

Upon receipt and review of the Western REN's feasibility study on the establishment of a new Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) for the Western Region; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has approved 5 years of project funding. Stakeholders were broadly consulted, with the study indicating strong support for the concept of a LIP.

There is consensus that the focus should be retention. Respondents enthusiastically offered a wide range of opportunities and challenges that could be addressed through a LIP. The employers spoken to provided concrete examples of how their businesses would grow, often in export markets, with greater access to an immigrant workforce. The project launched as expected on March 1st 2021 with the hiring of a LIP Coordinator.

## Making it easier to hire skilled international talent

Now in its fourth year, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP), funded by ACOA and the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and Population Growth, continues to support businesses in hiring internationally trained professionals to fill labour gaps. The Western REN AIP Manager provides support to businesses navigating the designation process and beyond.



**21** companies referred to Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and Population Growth to proceed with the designation process

**15** companies became designated through working with the Western REN by fiscal year-end

**“The AIP Program is advantageous, it’s a means to attract qualified individuals to our firm”**

**– Jeremy Sanford, Owner  
Sanford & Associates**



# LOOKING FORWARD

## COVID-19 CURVE BALL HAS IMPACTED OUR ACTIONS

**ALTHOUGH OUR PRIORITIES** for the region have not changed, we are seeing accelerated opportunities. This will impact our actions by weaving in support for disruptive innovation to build further resilience. We will adapt, innovate and work together to support our private and public sectors, as well as address local talent needs.

As we reflect on building a strategy for the next three years, we recognize the need to move quickly,

in partnership with the private sector, government, academic and financial institutions. We're beginning to see population growth, and along with it, a more diverse community. Young people are seeing more opportunities closer to home, which means they don't have to leave home to pursue a career. We want to ensure this trend continues.

We are excited for what the future holds for Western Nova Scotia.



# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

YEAR END MARCH 31, 2021

Revenues	Operating Budget Fiscal Year 2020-2021
Province of Nova Scotia	277,250
Municipal Units	277,500
Funded projects - In Support of Core Activities	393,827
Other	2,052
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$950,629</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Wages and benefits	391,588
Operational expenses	109,158
Consulting support	11,256
Professional services	12,115
Strategic planning initiatives	114,026
Project expenditures	423,090
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,061,233</b>
Deficit	(\$110,604)

Based on Board approval, \$220,883 from the current Surplus was allocated to Strategic Initiatives to identify and implement top Energy Opportunities and the Win This Space Competition. The recorded deficit of \$110,604 is in large part to those projects rolling over into the next fiscal year, but also savings resulting from lower expenses related to the pandemic.





## LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Guy Surette - Municipality of Argyle  
Eddie Nickerson - Municipality of Barrington  
Ronnie LeBlanc - Municipality of Clare  
Linda Gregory - Municipality of Digby  
Patti Durkee - Municipality of Yarmouth  
Ben Cleveland - Town of Digby  
Derek Lesser - Town of Yarmouth  
Marilynn Hay - Dept. of Municipal Affairs  
Joe Brown - Dept. Labour & Advanced Education

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Thompson - Board Chair  
Benjamin Shearer - Board Vice-Chair  
and Committee Chair  
Nick d'Eon - Committee Chair  
Angie Greene - Director  
Jamie Symonds - Director  
Brenda Francis - Director  
Charles Surette - Director  
Karen Enright - Director  
Julie MacLean - Director  
Joceline d'Entremont - Director  
Dr Kenneth Deveau - Director

## STAFF

Angelique LeBlanc - Chief Executive Officer

Keval d'Entremont - Accounting Clerk & Office Manager

Brenda LaGrandeur - Local Immigration Partnership Coordinator

Rob Stephenson - BusinessNow Lead

Evan Nemeth - Research Lead

Erika Rolston - Board Liaison & Executive Support

Kathleen d'Entremont-Mooney -  
Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program Manager

Alyson Duffy - Communications Coordinator

Miranda MacLean - Connector Program Manager







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