

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – JUNE 2010 STAFF WORKING STRATEGY 2010 & BEYOND

ASSETS

The Region of Queens Municipality (RQM) has much to be proud of and much to attract the potential investor, resident or visitor.

Investors benefit from such advantages as:

- Our location with 100-series highway access, ice-free ports, 1 1/2 hours from Halifax and 2 hours from Digby-St.John ferry.
- Very competitive commercial tax rates
- Broadband
- Moderate climate
- New water treatment plant, second generation landfill & secondary sewage treatment plants
- Active Chamber and Board of Trade
- Serviced commercial land available at competitive price

New Residents are attracted by:

- Queens Place recreational and community facility
- Hospital services and full complement of GP's, plus other health services
- Schools and adult education opportunities
- Library
- Marina
- Golf Course, Curling Rink, Tennis Courts, & various ball fields
- Astor Theatre
- National, provincial and municipal Parks
- Ocean, lakes, rivers, forests and beautiful white sand beaches
- Quiet roads
- Safe communities
- Attractive price of residential property
- Competitive residential taxes
- Cultural centres, including museums, genealogical centre
- Heritage homes constructed as early as 1760

In addition to the above, visitors are attracted by:

- Our location at the mid point of the South Shore, between Halifax, Yarmouth and Annapolis Valley
- Festivals & Events
- Lighthouses and small fishing villages
- Museums, galleries and gift shops
- Activities such as surfing, canoeing, kayaking, snow shoeing and cross country skiing
- Full range of accommodations – a fully appointed resort, cottages, inns, hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, cottages, hostels and camping – private RV campground, backcountry and wilderness camping, Provincial and National Park camping
- The Trestle Trail and Privateer Park

These are just a few of the reasons to be proud of our county!

BACKGROUND

The Council of the Region of Queens Municipality (RQM) expressed a desire to provide vision and direction to the Economic Development Department of the Region in the fall of 2009. This plan was developed in conjunction with the two new-to-role staff members (the Director and the Economic Development Officer), the Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Finance.

Eight years after the previous strategic document, “A Working Plan for Queens”, it was time to create a new vision and plan for the future. Ongoing actions from that Plan have been incorporated into this new document and the implementation of them continues to be monitored. Economic times have changed and continue to change on a daily basis. The recession of 2009 seems to be abating, but recovery is predicted to be protracted. The primary industries, in particular forestry and fishing, have experienced a downturn and global economic forces have resulted in increased competition and, in some cases, unsustainable markets. Tourism continues to present a challenge, as disposable income has decreased, border requirements have increased and vital infrastructure has been lost (namely The Cat ferry link from Yarmouth to Portland & Bar Harbor, USA). On the agricultural front, the extremely low blueberry revenue in 2009 has put a strain on that industry, too.

In common with most of the developed world, we are seeing the effects of population decline, as the community ages, birth rates decrease and youth outmigration continues.

However, all is not lost! Queens is still well-situated to position itself as the hub of the South Shore, with North Queens as the centre of South-West Nova Scotia interior. Our quality of life continues to be a draw to those from more urban locations. Broadband is widely available, providing connectivity to the world. Opportunities exist to develop more secondary processing, in order that our natural resources are not sold as raw materials from which others profit. There are opportunities for tourism products to be developed to create lucrative unique experiences for a global market. The new Queens Place recreation facility, which is surrounded by serviced land known as Queens Crossing and located with easy visibility and easy access from the main highway, will generate huge interest and investment opportunities. These factors will demonstrate our Region to be a “happening place” to live and do business.

Another part of strategy implementation maximizes the Region’s economic development partnerships to ensure each plays the most appropriate role to get the job done. Those partners include the Lunenburg Queens Regional Development Agency (LQRDA), South Shore Opportunities, Nova Scotia Economic and Rural Development, Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Nova Scotia Business Inc. (NSBI) and Destination Southwest Nova Association. In addition, engaged and forward-thinking community organizations will be possible partners for future projects and initiatives.

In addition to this Strategy, the staff has responsibility for the ongoing management of various facilities. This includes budgeting, staffing and maintaining the Fort Point Lighthouse Park, the Liverpool Visitor Information Centre, the South Shore Regional Airport, street beautification for the Christmas season and Region-owned tourism signage.

Note: The Sectors are listed in alphabetical order. Action/Implementation Plans mentioned throughout are the initial stages of implementation, which will be reviewed and added to in light of future outcomes and/or economic changes. This is a living document!

SECTOR: AGRICULTURE

Background:

Agriculture was once a thriving economic sector in North Queens. Most of the cleared land has either reverted to forest or been developed as Christmas tree farms. The blueberry operation continues to be successful, despite low market prices in 2009 for blueberries generally and the competition from high bush blueberries. Nevertheless, the juice product continues to receive high acclaim. The area has been identified as having potential for grape growing

Strategy:

It is a goal of the Economic Development Department to assist the agricultural industry by being “the eyes and ears on the ground” and by, in turn, ensuring that industry concerns are properly relayed to regional agencies and higher levels of government. While the impact of this department is extremely limited, with the global market forces involved, we strive to remain vigilant in seeking out new opportunities, for example investigation and promotion of niche industries like grape growing, etc.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Investigate an alternative location for the Farmer’s Market in Liverpool and determine whether the structure is able to be cost effectively moved. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Investigate potential for grape growing, in conjunction with government departments and agencies. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Also investigate the possibility of a partnership between Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and the NS Agricultural College to undertake some work on the terrain and climate profile of Queens County to determine suitable agricultural uses. **Timeline: Summer 2010**

SECTOR: AIRPORT

Background:

Years of investment in this facility has not proved to be fruitful for a number of different reasons. It is now unmanned, with no runway lights, fuel provision or winter maintenance. The Nova Scotia Drag Racers Association has a very good working relationship with the Region and has succeeded in attracting thousands of people to the area through usage of the airport facility as a drag car strip.

Strategy:

The Economic Development Department aims to maximize opportunities to utilize the airport for both air and ground-based activities. It works with potential users to encourage development of the facility to maximize its economic viability, as directed by Council.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Investigate year-round uses for the airport, as a longer term priority. **Timeline: Ongoing**

SECTOR: COMMUNITY PRIDE

Background:

Community pride underlies everything we stand for in the Economic Development Department and is something we would like to foster in all residents of the Region of Queens Municipality. As was stated after the recent Winter Olympics, nobody 'on high' commanded Canadians to be proud of Canada, they just felt it and displayed it in a very open and visible way. The same applies at the local level. It is essential to create a welcoming community and a place where people want to remain to live, work and play. In addition it is important to make Queens a place that will be appealing for others to bring their families, invest and make their home. A place that celebrates individual and group achievements, shares the sense of pioneering spirit, creating the sense of "We love this place, so we are going to pitch in to build, retain and grow our community."

Strategy:

As was identified in the 2002 "A Working Plan for Queens", "positive attitudes and teamwork create successful communities". To this end, our strategy is to work with those who already display positive attitudes to the community and enlist their help as ambassadors. Overcoming the sometimes negative and apathetic attitudes among others will be the goal. Very often perceived negativity is just a fear of change. Once a new development has occurred, people often accept and embrace the results. To quote again from the 2002 Economic Development Strategy, "We must believe and invest in ourselves or no one else will". Our Council also recognizes their role as community ambassadors and is committed to enthusiastic leadership by new, but responsible, initiatives.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Research other communities who have undertaken community pride initiatives. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Design a campaign to create a loyalty to Queens. Initially brainstorm ideas and start phase 1. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Involve other municipal departments in this process so they can incorporate in their activities. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Council will play a role by being seen as proactive, engaged, imaginative and committed to moving the community forward. **Timeline: Ongoing**

SECTOR: EDUCATION**Background:**

Attempts to lure further education opportunities have been tried in the past. In particular, a partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University to run local courses met with very little support from the local community. With Nova Scotia Community College having campuses in Bridgewater and Shelburne, Queens County residents struggle to access courses, unless they have transportation or are able to take courses online.

Strategy:

Our strategy is to work with government and agency partners to find a unique position (learning need), relevant to the needs of our community, which could realistically be offered locally by the Nova Scotia Community College, with the intention of working together to bring it to fruition.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Continue to strive for a Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) presence in Queens or failing that encourage them to reintroduce transportation for students from all areas of Queens County. **Timeline: Spring 2010**

- Work with government agency partners to improve job training opportunities throughout Queens to assist families at or near poverty line. **Timeline: Spring 2010**
- Council will lobby to retain and improve our school services.

SECTOR: FILM INDUSTRY

Background:

The film industry is a relatively young industry in Nova Scotia. The Province continues to offer production companies incentives to film here. Interestingly the Region of Queens seems to be attracting a critical mass of people with experience in this industry, so there is potential for future attraction using their knowledge and contacts or indeed spin-off businesses.

Strategy:

Queens County has the opportunity to capitalize on the trend to produce movies in Nova Scotia. To this end we will ensure that Location Managers are aware of the infrastructure and assets the area has to offer and do everything we can to work with them, should a production come to fruition.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Continue to work with movie Location Managers to attract film makers to Queens. The Film Guide has already been produced in-house at minimal cost and circulated to Location Managers. A scheduled familiarization tour was offered, however, this has been postponed at the request of the Location Managers. The Guide is easily updated. Little further effort is required on staff's behalf, apart from a bi-monthly follow-up call. **Timeline: Ongoing**

SECTOR: FISHING

Background:

Global market conditions have seriously affected the fishing industry in recent years. It is essentially federally regulated, the province filling a support role. Traditional lobster, scallop, shrimp and ground fish prices have been low, as the world markets are saturated with products. There is some secondary processing activity and companies like Blue Wave and Mersey Point Fish Products have established some niche markets. Aquaculture has been successful in Liverpool Bay, but has received great opposition in Port Mouton Bay. Overall the Municipality has little influence in this industry.

Strategy:

It is a goal of the Economic Development Department to assist primary industries by being “the ears on the ground” and by, in turn, ensuring that industry concerns are properly relayed to regional agencies and higher levels of government.

While recognizing that the current state of these industries is of grave concern, the role of the Economic Development Department is limited by the scope of the underlying issues. All of these industries are undergoing global change; therefore the impact of this department is extremely limited.

That being said, we strive to remain vigilant in seeking out new information and opportunities, acting as a conduit of information between higher levels of government, regional agencies and the members of industry. We remain committed to engaging in active discussions with all parties to assist in any way we can.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Investigate why there is no secondary processing of lobster, by talking to relevant government agencies (NSBI/Industry Canada) and industry associations. **Timeline: Fall 2010**

SECTOR: FORESTRY

Background:

Our forestry sector has been suffering in light of economic issues in the United States for a while now. There are signs of improvement in lumber demand, although the high Canadian dollar presents yet another challenge. Opportunities for secondary processing of our forestry products have always been identified as a possibility for our area.

Strategy:

Forestry is one of the traditional industries in Queens. Our strategy will be to investigate potential opportunities which may be suited to the area, whilst doing everything possible in our sphere of influence to retain the businesses we already have.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Continue to investigate secondary processing options, as a longer term priority. **Timeline: Winter 2011**
- Lobby the Province to introduce Pro-Wood Construction legislation, using wood in construction, rather than steel and concrete.

SECTOR: HEALTH CARE

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Council will lobby to retain our health care services and advocate this, as and when appropriate.
- Council will support Queens General Hospital plant improvements and expansion of services.

SECTOR: HOUSING

Background:

There have been some recent developments of affordable housing, apartments above retail stores and subdivisions. There is an outmigration of seniors, who are reluctant to leave their home area, but nevertheless are unable to find the appropriate level of accommodation to suit their needs locally.

Strategy:

To attract and encourage developers to build housing to meet the needs of our current and future demographic needs. This will take place in conjunction with business development attraction.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Research the type of facility most needed for seniors, by visiting different examples in neighbouring counties, etc. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Continue to support private/public sector partnerships. **Timeline: Ongoing**

- Research communities who have successfully branded themselves as a retirement community, e.g. Elliot Lake, ON. **Timeline: Summer/Fall 2010**
- Work with developers to determine what role RQM could play in the development of senior's housing, e.g. loan of land. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Research the developers of up-scale apartments, modern apartments and single family dwellings, who might be interested in the area. **Timeline: Summer/Fall 2010**
- Accelerate the attraction process once Queens Place is built. **Timeline: Fall 2011 onwards**

SECTOR: IMMIGRATION

Background:

Our community has many "people from away", some of whom just happened upon the area. Whilst to those that found it, part of the joy is the discovery, it is nonetheless time to be more aggressive and open about what we have to offer to the world. There is certainly a long list of attributes which make our Region attractive to those seeking a more balanced lifestyle and improved quality of life. For the purposes of this document, we are using immigration in the broadest sense of the word, to incorporate other Nova Scotians and Canadians as well as people from beyond our national borders.

Strategy:

Working in co-operation with the Lunenburg Queens Regional Development Authority, the Department will provide assistance to attract and retain new immigrants to the Region. We will meet with the prospective new immigrants and develop a relationship that welcomes them, recognizes their contribution and encourages them to stay in the area. This item is very much linked to the community pride initiative mentioned previously to foster a welcoming community and to maximize the opportunity to thrive.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Interview new immigrants to determine what attracted them to the area, what their expectations were, if they have been met and the challenges faced. This information will be used to determine how RQM can effectively attract and retain immigrants. This is a long term strategy, with immediate start-up. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Work in conjunction with the Lunenburg Queens Regional Development Agency (LQRDA) to welcome newcomers to our community. The LQRDA is playing a valuable role in directly working with the Nominee Program candidates and also has a person dedicated to settlement and retention of immigrants in the two counties. Our department needs to complement this role, rather than attempting to duplicate their activities. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Participate in initiatives resulting from the Population Forum held in February 2010. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Develop a web site presence and downloadable brochure to attract immigrants. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Where appropriate, maximize other promotional opportunities by including a resident attraction component, e.g. Saltscapes Expo consumer show each April in Halifax. **Timeline: Spring 2010 & ongoing**

SECTOR: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Background:

The advent of broadband certainly provides opportunities for information technology (IT) businesses, as part of the creative, knowledge-based economy. Whilst the in bound call centres have been successful, their expansion has been hindered by lack of available workforce.

Strategy:

Whilst working to retain the IT businesses we have, we will also maximize the opportunity to encourage the development of this sector within the Region. We are able to offer the IT telecommuter an outstanding quality of life while earning their living.

Implementation Plan:

- To incorporate IT business opportunities in conjunction with immigrant attraction initiatives. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Initiate opportunities whereby local IT entrepreneurs speak to our youth to highlight success stories and encourage them to stay or return to the area to pursue careers in electronic media. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Research into cell phone coverage for Central and North Queens. **Timeline: Spring 2010**

SECTOR: MANUFACTURING

Background:

Our manufacturing sector has been very hard hit over the past couple of decades. Employment at Abitibi Bowater has been considerably reduced, Steel and Engine Products has gone, along with some local manufacturing workshops. As a result many skilled workers have been forced to leave the area.

Strategy:

As manufacturing is traditionally the heart of the economy, our strategy is to work with investors who are keen to locate a manufacturing operation in the area. We will investigate potential opportunities which may be suited to the area, whilst doing everything possible in our sphere of influence to retain current businesses.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Continue to investigate manufacturing industry options, as a longer term priority. **Timeline: Winter 2011**

SECTOR: NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Background:

Whilst retention of our existing business base is desired, there are also opportunities to attract new businesses to the area. There is serviced land availability adjacent to Queens Place. A monthly inventory of available commercial space is also produced.

Strategy:

Our strategy for new business attraction is to actively seek out potential developers and approach them with a comprehensive, tailored proposal on the opportunities that exist in the area. We aim to respond professionally to all development opportunities in a timely fashion, with the required information readily at our fingertips. We will also work in co-operation with our government and agency economic development partners to ensure a co-ordinated and logical approach.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Continually build and update our economic development “toolkit”, including such things as:
 - Statistical figures on the Region’s population, demographics, etc. (as up to date as possible)
 - Continually research and explore available funding opportunities, creatively coming up with possible ideas for projects to maximize funding
 - Lists of our USP’s (unique selling points) for different audiences, e.g. investors, tourists, immigrants.
 - An enhanced web presence for Economic Development on the Region’s web site to show we are open for business and to highlight the quality of life
 - BizPal
 - Monthly listing of available Business Properties for sale or lease
 - A Business Directory
 - **Timeline for all of the above: High Priority and Ongoing**
- Prepare an online lure/sales brochure for Queens Crossing to promote the investment opportunity. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Meet with relevant Nova Scotia Business Inc. industry specialists to learn more about global opportunities for our area, either for expansion of markets for existing businesses or new business attraction. **Timeline to work on presentation to NSBI: Summer 2010, and to meet: Fall 2010**

SECTOR: RETAIL

Background:

Liverpool traditionally has two separate retail communities, divided by the river. Some corporate brands market themselves extensively, but past efforts to encourage the smaller retailers to promote themselves have not come to fruition, mainly due to lack of time and resources. The community still mourns the loss of the Canadian Tire store, which burned in 1996. There is also a disbelief that advertising pays among some businesses. There is now cleared, serviced land available around Queens Place, known as Queens Crossing. Adjacent to highway 103, this presents the opportunity to attract new retail development. In addition, there are some notable empty rental spaces on Main Street and a general trend (in rural communities and towns generally) for professionals to occupy places where stores once were. Caledonia also has its fair share of retail challenges, but continues to retain vital services which provide opportunities for joint promotion and maximization of its proximity to the National Park.

Strategy:

It is the goal of the Department of Economic Development to facilitate the creation of a more vibrant retail sector, through direct initiatives, creation of partnerships, improved infrastructure where funding permits, and provision of marketing advice. This will utilize the South Queens Chamber of Commerce/North Queens Board of Trade and government agency partners, as appropriate. Main Street and the Waterfront in Liverpool serve as important focal points for residents and visitors. The connectivity of these two areas is important in creating a more cohesive and pedestrian oriented district. Connection also needs to be made between the Exit 19 commercial cluster and the downtown. We are one retail community and we need to work

together. Other communities in Queens also contain some stand-alone, but unique, retail establishments that can be brought into the mix for promotional partnerships and packaging. Again there are links to Community Pride, in encouraging the community to 'Buy Local'.

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Conduct an online shopping habits survey for Region of Queens residents to establish shopping patterns, market opportunities and issues, which can be analyzed and shared with the retail community. **Timeline: Spring 2010**
- Promote urban regeneration and attractive cores by encouraging the beautification and renovation of downtown buildings in Caledonia & Liverpool. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Encourage retailers in all of Queens to work together. In addition, encourage retailers to maximize opportunities to work with tourism businesses and the festivals and events. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Continue our efforts to fill vacant retail and commercial properties in the area, by maintaining a monthly listing of available space for purchase or lease, promoting it on our web site and with agency partners. Also using knowledge of retail opportunities/niches, encourage entrepreneurs to pursue the viability of such undertakings to achieve a critical mass of interesting stores in the area. **Timeline: Ongoing**

SECTOR: TOURISM

Background:

A Tourism Strategy for Queens was undertaken in 2003, as a direct result of the "Working Plan for Queens 2002" report. A committee of industry stakeholders worked together with a staff person to participate in the process. Many of the recommendations from that strategy have been implemented and the industry has continuously evolved since that time.

The Region also participated by completing the Tourism Destination Area Workbook created by the Province as a tool to determine tourism readiness within an area. It also created partnerships with Shelburne County, Bluenose Coast, as well as Parks Canada and the Town of Annapolis Royal/County of Annapolis.

Strategy:

Our strategy is to assist local tourism operators transition their individual strategies to be better in line with global trends. Recent evidence is showing that today's tourism is about the "me". People strive to find a personal connection when they travel and they seek out "experiences" rather than destinations.

In order to attract the "me" in potential visitors, we must put a face on the Region. We need to develop market ready revenue generating experiences. In addition, the tourist of today is the resident of tomorrow!

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Review and update the Tourism Strategy from 2003, in consultation with the Growing Tourism Together initiative of the Chamber of Commerce. **Timeline: Summer 2010**
- Develop a Marketing and Advertising Plan to reach key visitation sectors. **Timeline: Spring/Summer 2010**
- Facilitate the marketing and packaging of festivals and events, as part of the area's attractions. Attend or partner to create a presence at strategic consumer and trade

shows, e.g. Saltscapes Expo in Halifax. Continually review and improve content on Queens tourism web site. **Timeline: Ongoing**

- Work with experience providers and tourism operators to foster an understanding of experiential product and profit opportunities. Following on from that, advise them of strategic and cost effective methods to market these products. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Continue as a resource for tourism business partnerships, e.g. South Queens Chamber Tourism Committee & North Queens Board of Trade. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Aggressively pursue opportunities with the federal, provincial governments and Destination Southwest Nova for featuring and promoting Queens County in its tourism-based promotions, including the attraction of travel writers and familiarization tours.
- Continue to engage with such organizations as the UNESCO South West Nova Biosphere Reserve and Destination Southwest Nova Association to maximize partnership opportunities. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Participate in the newly rekindled Keji Scenic Drive initiative and the Watchable Wildlife initiative. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Investigate the installation of Keji Scenic Drive (or appropriate signage) signs on route 8, at the Park exit to direct people to Caledonia, at the Liverpool end to promote Caledonia and before South Brookfield corner to promote Liverpool. **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Encourage tour operators to explore the natural and historic wonders of our region **Timeline: Ongoing**
- Review the level of services and advertising information provided in Caledonia & Liverpool VIC's in order to identify marketing gaps and to keep products current. **Timeline: Ongoing**

SECTOR; TRANSPORTATION

Action/Implementation Plan:

- Council will continue to lobby for twining and improvements of highway 103.
- Council will continue to press for a continuation of Yarmouth/US ferry service and Bay of Fundy service
- Council will continue to lobby for Improved quality of secondary roads to assist tourism, forestry and fishing industries

June 10, 2010