

CUMBERLAND REGION 2021-2026

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



MUNICIPALITY OF CUMBERLAND
TOWN OF AMHERST
CUMBERLAND BUSINESS CONNECTOR
TOWN OF OXFORD



municipality of cumberland

Amherst NOVA SCOTIA

Cumberland Business CONNECTOR

TOWN OF OXFORD
Wild Blueberry Capital of Canada

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SUMMARY

The Cumberland region encompasses the Town of Amherst, the Municipality of Cumberland and the Town of Oxford.

This Community Economic Development Strategy is a collaborative effort between the two towns, the municipality and the Cumberland Business Connector.

Geographically, Cumberland is the second largest county in Nova Scotia, with a population of about 30,000 people. The rural region's largest service centre is the Town of Amherst, which has approximately one-third of the region's population. Another one-third of its citizens live in close proximity to Amherst, with the remainder spread across smaller centers, such as the Town of Oxford, the communities of Springhill, Parrsboro, Pugwash and many rural communities.

The region boasts modern, state-of-the-art, health-care and educational facilities, vibrant retail and cultural sectors, a diverse agriculture industry, excellent manufacturing facilities and high entrepreneurial spirit.

Declining population, low labour force participation, high poverty rates and an aging population are creating challenges and having negative impacts on the Cumberland region. This Community Economic Development Strategy recognizes the importance of healthy residents and a strong economy in order to be a sustainable region. Creating community well-being and pride in our communities, supporting a job ready workforce, providing quality community infrastructure and creating economic opportunities play a key role in attracting new people, new investment and a healthier demographic.

This strategy focuses on four pillars: Economy, Population, Quality of Life and Community Capacity. These four pillars are closely inter-related and evident in the listed goals and objectives. Opportunities are addressed by capitalizing on resources, including tourism, natural resources, renewable energy, immigration and business parks. Working to enhance these resources will have a positive impact on business retention and expansion, population growth and a higher quality of life for citizens.

ECONOMY

Historical Challenges

The Cumberland region has known economic challenges for many decades. Communities, such as Springhill and Joggins, were built around coal mines. They flourished when this industry thrived. After the coal mines closed, these communities experienced a long-term decline that was marked by significant out-migration. Other industries, such as shipbuilding, once played a key role in the economy of coastal communities.

Small, mixed farms have seen their margins squeezed as revenues have not kept up with increasing production costs. However, the region has successfully developed large maple syrup and wild blueberry industries. The beef sector has stabilized and is growing. These industries have continued growth potential, while also being vulnerable to cyclical price declines, especially for farms that are not involved in value added activities.

The changing retail landscape has created both opportunity and challenges. Certain retail businesses have found unique niche products and markets that draw customers from across Atlantic Canada and further afield, while department stores and local malls have faced challenging times. These challenges are partly due to our close proximity to Moncton and its large retail sector, as well as competition from online retailers such as Amazon.

The region's historical challenges led to a declining and aging population, low labour force participation and high poverty rates. In recent years, there have been improvements in some of these indicators.

Current Business Climate

There are more than 1,000 businesses in the Cumberland region. With excellent rail, road, air and sea links, the Municipality of Cumberland, Amherst and Oxford offer easy access to markets across North America and around the world. Cumberland County is located at the center of the Maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, and between two of its largest urban centers – Halifax and Moncton. The CN rail line and the Trans Canada Highway pass through the Cumberland region, making the region a popular location for businesses serving the northeastern United States and Canadian markets.

There is a private jetport along the Northumberland coast in Fox Harb'r, and we are less than an hour's drive from one of two international airports, Halifax Stanfield International Airport and Greater Moncton Romeo LeBlanc International Airport, depending on which part of the region you are located.

Two international ports, in Halifax, N.S., and Saint John, N.B., are also within a two-hour drive and connect us with more than 150 countries. Canada has free-trade agreements with many countries in Europe, Asia, the U.S. and other parts of the world. This allows businesses in the Cumberland region to ship their products across the globe.

Key Sectors in Our Economy

The key sectors in our economy include:

- The goods producing sectors, including manufacturing, forestry, fishing, agriculture and mining as well as construction.
- The service sector has significant employment spread across many private sector businesses. There are many health-care related services, such as dentists, physiotherapists, optometrists, nursing homes, etc. Most of these businesses are in Amherst or in urban communities across the region.
- The public sector is another significant source of employment, with many jobs in the health-care and educational services fields. The Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre and Springhill Institution are among the largest employers in the region.

Our economy is very diverse and resilient. The Cumberland region has the largest agricultural land base in Nova Scotia and a vibrant fishing industry on both the Northumberland Strait and Bay of Fundy. These primary industries support a local agri-food and seafood processing industry. The Cumberland region has a significant strength in food processing, with about 1,000 people working in this sector.

Other natural resource industries include an active mining industry, with two salt mines employing hundreds of workers. We also have many quarries. The Cumberland region has more than 327,748 hectares (800,000 acres) of forest that account for 16 to 20 per cent of the wood cut annually in Nova Scotia. Seventy per cent of Nova Scotia's maple syrup is produced here as well as 50 per cent of the province's wild blueberries.

There are several businesses and organizations with expertise in clean energy manufacturing. The Cumberland Energy Authority's focus is on developing the energy resources of the region. Initially, most of their work centered on the development of geothermal energy in Springhill, as well as the potential around tidal energy in the Parrsboro area. Other areas of interest include solar energy, wind energy and energy from low-grade wood.

The Town of Amherst and the Municipality of Cumberland are participating in the Solar Electricity for Community Buildings Program. Amherst is also a partner in a smart-grid demonstration and deployment project led by Nova Scotia Power and NB Power that will test a suite of distributed energy resource technologies. Primary components of the project in Amherst include a one- to two-megawatt, community-scale, solar installation, battery storage, smart charging for electric vehicle fleets and solar-battery installations on municipal and industrial facilities. The project will help accelerate the affordable adoption of renewable energy solutions on both a regional and national scale.

Our location as the geographic centre of the Maritimes, and the gateway to Nova Scotia, has attracted companies involved in transportation, warehousing, distribution and wholesale trade. The transportation, warehousing and distribution sectors have continued expansion potential. There is room in the Amherst Industrial Park for growth and the new Springhill Geothermal

Business Park is currently being established. The Geothermal Business Park will provide an additional 40 hectares (100 acres) of affordable green, industrial land.

Our Collaborative Spirit

There is a proactive, collaborative spirit in our region. Our three municipalities work together on many enterprises, including economic development initiatives. The Cumberland Business Connector is an independent, business-led, non-profit organization that focuses on economic development across the entire region. The Business Connector is funded by the three local municipalities and the Government of Nova Scotia.

There is a monthly meeting for all stakeholders in economic development in the Cumberland region that keeps everyone informed about the priorities and programs that are available for the area. This informal “Team Cumberland” includes: CBDC Cumberland, the Nova Scotia Community College, the three municipal units, the Cumberland Business Connector, the Chambers of Commerce/ Board of Trade, Nova Scotia Business Inc., Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Nova Scotia Works.

The three municipalities have formed a working task force with businesses in the tourism sector to develop the Cumberland Region Tourism Development Strategy. This strategy is now in the implementation phase.

The same collaborative spirit is evident in our region between businesses. Larger businesses are willing to mentor smaller ones. Farmers and artisans have collaborated to establish vibrant farmers markets. Area artisans have developed creative retail models throughout the Cumberland region and hundreds of businesses are members of Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade. This collaborative attitude strengthens our ability to work effectively. We recognize that working together allows our businesses to accomplish a lot more than any one organization could do by itself.

COVID-19 Impact

As COVID-19 swept across the world and emerged in Nova Scotia in mid-March 2020, life as we knew it came to an abrupt halt. All levels of government and society adapted to a slower pace in order to help stop the spread of COVID-19. As large parts of our economy shut down, the federal and provincial governments scrambled to put emergency programs in place to limit the economic damage. These programs were rolled out rapidly and modified as needed.

This crisis has reinforced the value of teamwork. All local partners involved in economic development have collaborated to support the business community as effectively as possible while avoiding duplication. The initial focus concentrated on connecting businesses with the resources they need to be successful. There has been a proactive effort to summarize and share with individual businesses the relevant supports the federal and provincial governments have put in place to help them survive through this unprecedented crisis.

Municipalities have worked with the Government of Nova Scotia to assist business owners and residents who need help with their 2020 property tax payments. The Cumberland Business Connector has collaborated closely with the Regional Enterprise Networks across the rest of rural Nova Scotia in order to share best practices and resources that can help rural businesses, from one end of Nova Scotia to the other, cope with the pandemic. The Amherst and Area Chamber of Commerce has tapped into resources from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and others to provide resources to the business community. Other economic development partners have shared their resources and expertise to assist businesses at this time.

As sectors emerge from the impacts of COVID-19, our focus is shifting to support their reopening and adaptation to a new way of doing business. From 2020-2022, this will be a key priority as retaining our existing businesses will be critical in order to be able to rebound quickly from the effect of the pandemic.

This crisis has reinforced the value of a diversified economy. We are fortunate to have strong manufacturing and goods producing sectors in Cumberland, Amherst and Oxford. Many of these companies, especially those involved in food production and processing, are expanding and hiring more staff. This is creating opportunities for workers that have been laid off because of declines in other sectors. This helps the Cumberland region mitigate the longer-term impacts of COVID-19.

Forestry Crisis

The Cumberland region, with more than 327,748 hectares (800,000 acres) of woodlands, has a large forestry sector that accounts for 16 to 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's total wood harvest. Up until the end of 2019, Northern Pulp in Pictou County was the largest buyer of wood in Nova Scotia. When Northern Pulp closed in January 2020, it put the entire, integrated forestry supply chain in Nova Scotia into a very precarious situation. More than 40 per cent of the market for wood in Nova Scotia was immediately lost.

Restrictions from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency were already in place to minimize the spread of invasive species such as the Brown spruce longhorn beetle. These restrictions prohibit Nova Scotia from exporting spruce and fir sawlogs and pulpwood to other provinces.

While there are still some markets for sawlogs in Nova Scotia, the sawmills do not have a market for their byproducts of sawdust, shavings and bark. This lack of cost recovery has reduced the price sawmills pay to the landowners for sawlogs. Landowners have also lost their largest market for low-grade hardwood and softwood that is not good enough to be sawn for lumber.

The forestry industry in the Cumberland region has come together and formed the Cumberland Forestry Advisory Committee to chart a path forward through the crisis. The community has developed a practical and comprehensive vision, with strategies to create a more diversified and stronger industry. A lot of work has been done, but a lot remains to do in order to retain the

hundreds of jobs and the businesses that are dependent on this industry. This sector wants sustainable growth moving forward, but needs support to transition the industry.

ECONOMY: GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Increase Business Retention and Expansion

1.1 General support for businesses and services emerging from COVID-19.

1.1.1 Host training workshops, online meetings and webinars to assist businesses reinvent their business model including:
- developing online sales
- social media marketing
- web development
- communication skills

1.1.2 Arrange mentoring and training opportunities for 20 small businesses needing outside expertise. This will include the Cumberland Virtual Advisor Program powered by Boomer's Plus.

1.1.3 Provide up-to-date, accurate information about the support for business coming from various levels of government that will help businesses reopen and grow. Communication with businesses will include email or phone calls, as well as having relevant information posted on the Cumberland Business Connector's website.

1.1.4 Expand the Cumberland Business Accelerator Program to support 20 more companies with high-growth potential, helping them develop their strategic planning skills, implement their growth plans and improve key performance indicators.

1.1.5 Provide affordable or free resources for small businesses to assist in strategic planning and reinventing their business models.

1.2 Support for the forestry sector whose industry has been disrupted.

1.2.1 Support the local forestry industry as it implements their recently created strategic plan by encouraging the development of diverse markets and locally produced wood products in order to retain and grow a skilled workforce.
- Find new markets for 100,000 tons of wood chips and low-grade wood, including having at least two public institutions in the Cumberland region that use wood for energy.
- Develop more value-adding within Cumberland County.
- Lobby and influence all levels of government to allow tenders on new government buildings, bridges and other infrastructure to be built with wood.

1.3 Support for goods producing sectors.

1.3.1 Complete a business mix analysis for key goods producing sectors, such as manufacturing, natural resources, etc., in order to identify supply chain gaps or skilled trades needed in the region.

1.3.2 Based on the business mix analysis create a strategy for business attraction and entrepreneurship development to fill identified gaps.

1.3.3 Offer a training session each year around business transition or succession as a way to retain existing businesses over the long term.

1.4 Support for sectors identified as having significant growth potential, including renewable energy, natural resource industries and construction.

Renewable energy:

1.4.1 Advocate for continued research and development of the Fundy Ocean Research Centre for Energy (FORCE) in order to develop the energy potential of the Bay of Fundy's tides by:

- lobbying other levels of government as needed.
- supporting FORCE to create a power storage facility for testing by advocating on their behalf.

1.4.2 Support the Cumberland Energy Authority.

- Build the roadways and other infrastructure in Phase 1 of the Springhill Geothermal Business Park.
- Prepare business attraction brochures and information targeted to business sectors identified by the Cumberland Energy Authority as having high energy needs.

1.4.3 Support the expansion of wind farms for production of electricity.

1.4.4 Support the use of solar energy for electricity or space heating of residential homes, businesses, institutions and greenhouses by promoting and providing education on available financial supports.

1.4.5 Support the use of wood or wood chips for heating residential homes, businesses, institutions and greenhouses by:

- promoting and providing education on the benefits.
- completing priorities as stated in Section 1.2 above.
- Lobbying the province to offer a rebate on the installation of wood stoves, pellet stoves and wood or wood-chip burning furnaces.

1.4.6 Lobby all levels of government to provide regulatory certainty and support to businesses willing to invest in producing renewable natural gas or bio-char from low-grade wood and wood chips.

Natural Resource Industries:

1.4.7 Support the Maritime Lumber Bureau and the forestry sector's work by lobbying other levels of government to increase the use of wooden bridges like the Roger Bacon Bridge that was built in Nappan.

1.4.8 Increase the amount of farm land in use by lobbying for the removal of the tax exemption currently given to farm land that is no longer farmed.

1.4.9 Lobby to improve the management of forestry resource land by requiring a wood lot management plan in order to continue receiving the low forestry tax rate.

1.4.10 Provide support for business plan development in order to increase the number of provincially inspected abattoirs in the region and meet the increasing demand for locally sourced meat.

1.4.11 Support the continued growth of the agri-food and seafood processing sectors to encourage more value-adding and more exports from this region by providing workshops and connecting businesses with other resources.

1.4.12 Encourage the responsible growth of aquaculture, including shellfish production and on-land aquaculture production, by working with the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture to see how we can best help the aquaculture industry create employment in rural communities.

Construction:

1.4.13 Increase the housing supply by at least 100 units per year with a mixture that includes rental units, moderately priced starter homes and seniors' housing by:

- attracting more trade workers.
- exposing students to opportunities in the construction industry.
- collaborating with the industry to offer training opportunities to businesses and workers presently employed in the construction industry.
- increasing awareness of financial support provided by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to build affordable rental units.

1.4.14 Upgrade existing housing stock to maintain affordable and safe housing by:

- increasing awareness of the PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) program offered by the Town of Amherst and the Municipality of Cumberland.
- attracting more trades people with specialized skills in renewable energy upgrades to the region.

1.4.15 Upgrade commercial properties by:

- promoting programs such as Gritty to Pretty.
- increasing awareness of available accessibility funding.
- increasing awareness of available energy efficiency upgrade programs.

1.5 Focus on business expansion and increase productivity in existing businesses.

1.5.1 Continue to complete formal and informal business retention and expansion programs with businesses to ensure continued responsiveness to ongoing and changing business needs.

1.5.2 Maintain an up-to-date comprehensive business directory to facilitate increased business-to-business sales and buy local initiatives.

1.5.3 Approach Sackville, N.B., and area with the idea of producing a joint business directory by 2023.

1.5.4 Encourage businesses to focus on productivity upgrades in order to improve their global competitiveness and address work force shortages by:

- providing annual workshops on improving productivity to various sectors of the business community.
- ensure the Cumberland Business Accelerator program is available to businesses needing support with productivity.

1.5.5 Provide workshops to encourage small businesses to focus on key performance indicators (KPI's) and focus on improving these indicators more than on revenue growth.

1.5.6 Lobby Nova Scotia Business Inc., the Department of Business and others to allow medium-sized businesses to qualify for the Innovation Rebate Program for productivity enhancing investments of less than $2 million.

1.5.7 Maintain an up-to-date list of industrial buildings and land available for sale or lease in order to be able to respond to enquiries.

1.6 Strengthen connections and partnerships between businesses, educational and research institutions.

1.6.1 Connect businesses to the research capacity of NSCC, Mount Allison University, Dalhousie Agriculture Campus, Ignite Labs, FORCE and other private and public colleges, universities and research institutions.

1.6.2 Work with NSCC Cumberland to have this campus become a Centre of Excellence in Renewable Energy.

1.6.3 Have more customized training programs in Amherst/Springhill based upon the needs of local businesses, particularly in manufacturing.

1.7 Increase the impact of tourism on the local economy.

1.7.1 Implement the Cumberland Region Tourism Development Strategy to increase visitors' length of stay and average spend.

1.7.2 Develop a regional tourism brand, marketing strategy and website.

1.7.3 Conduct a feasibility study and a needs assessment on infrastructure needs for conference and event hosting, including the possible need for additional accommodations.

1.8 Enhance Amherst's role as a regional retail and service centre and communities throughout Cumberland County as local hubs.

1.8.1 Complete a business mix analysis for urban communities throughout the Cumberland region to identify core retail and service sector businesses required to maintain the critical needs of residents.

1.8.2 Attract businesses and focus on entrepreneurship development in order to fill gaps identified in the business mix analysis for urban communities.

1.8.3 Support the continued growth of businesses in the health-services sector to increase the number of good paying jobs, while also increasing the quality of life for local residents by maintaining key services in local communities.

1.8.4 Develop and implement downtown beautification and revitalization projects that include the buy-in of business owners, building landlords, municipalities and Chambers of Commerce or Board of Trade including the:

1.8.4.1 Gritty to Pretty Program

1.8.4.2 Expansion of similar program like Gritty to Pretty in other communities

1.8.4.3 Pugwash Waterfront Development Master Plan

1.8.4.4 Springhill Beautification Plan

2. Increase business attraction and new business startups.

2.1 Attract two additional businesses involved in distribution and warehousing that would benefit from the region's central location and strong transportation networks.

2.2 Expand and promote the availability of affordable industrial land in the Amherst Industrial Park.

2.3 Focus on attracting businesses that have been identified through the business mix analysis as being needed in the region, individual communities or in specific industries' supply chains.

2.4 Recruit and support people interested in becoming entrepreneurs.

2.5 Support the Cumberland Energy Authority's promotion of the Springhill Geothermal Business Park.

2.6 Promote the region to remote workers who value affordable housing and outdoor recreational opportunities. These workers can utilize the region's high-speed internet capabilities while benefiting from the region's amenities.

3. Create a job ready workforce.

3.1 Work with the P-12 education system to address weaknesses in soft skills such as time management, teamwork, conflict resolution and empathy.

3.2 Help connect displaced workers with new employment opportunities and remove barriers by engaging the disengaged workforce.

3.3 Improve student engagement (universities, NSCC, P-12) with local businesses.

3.4 Workforce attraction from outside Cumberland County.

3.5 Develop a part-time, skilled and knowledgeable workforce that can fill employment vacancies in seasonal or project-based work.

POPULATION

From 2001 to 2016, the population of the Cumberland region declined by eight per cent, with a net loss of 2,600 people due to a combination of out-migration and deaths outnumbering births and immigration. Between 2001 and 2016, net interprovincial migration accounted for a loss of more than 600 people from the Cumberland Census Division as out-migration outnumbered attraction of people from other provinces.[1] According to Statistics Canada, there are only 195 immigrants living in Cumberland who arrived between 2006 and 2016. The rest of Nova Scotia saw a per capita immigration rate that was three times as large during the same 10-year period.

Population decline is a concern for many reasons, with significant impacts on the local and regional economy as the customer base shrinks. As a result, businesses become more dependent on export sales and visitor spending. New service-oriented businesses are less likely to start up or survive. From a municipal service viewpoint, declining population has a negative effect on the residential tax base if it cannot grow at a rate needed to keep pace with rising municipal costs. A lack of new construction and a surplus of housing stock mean residential property assessment remains flat or declines.

The shrinking population, paired with low labour force participation and declining unemployment rates, means employers could have difficulty filling vacant positions if the number of job seekers is outnumbered by vacant jobs. Slightly more than 60 per cent of the residents living in the Cumberland region are between the ages of 15 and 64, while 66 per cent of all Canadians are of working age. In the next decade, businesses will have difficulty filling jobs vacated by retiring employees because there will be fewer younger workers available to take their place. This is especially relevant as the 60- to 64-year-old population is currently the largest percentage of our population.

The aging population presents economic opportunities as well. For example, there is an increasing need for construction of suitable housing. There is increasing demand for health and personal wellness services. Older people often contribute a larger share of the GDP than their share of the population. According to a 2016 report by Oxford Economics, people over 50 years of age are only 35 per cent of the U.S. population, but contribute 43 per cent of total U.S. GDP.

Older people are working longer. According to Statistics Canada, nearly one in five (19.8 per cent) Canadians aged 65 and older reported working at some point in 2015. This was almost double the proportion in 1995, with most of the increase coming from part-year and/or part-time work. Older people are also increasingly interested in starting their own businesses. According to a Kauffman Foundation report, the 55- to 64-year-old age group accounted for 25.8 per cent of new U.S. entrepreneurs in 2014, compared to 14.8 per cent in 1996.

[1] Statistics Canada. Table null Population estimates, July 1, by census division, 2016 boundaries.

The negative effects of the shrinking and aging population can be offset by economic development efforts that focus on increasing the population of working-age people, developing the "longevity economy" as noted in the economy section and increasing revenue from exports and tourism.

POPULATION: GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. **Increase the population of the Cumberland region with a significant focus on working-age families.**

1.1 Maintain positive net interprovincial migration.

- **1.1.1** Create a place where people want to live. Invest in "live, work, play" initiatives, such as development of major attractions, community amenities and events, active transportation, culture and recreation and opportunities to enjoy shopping, dining and entertainment.
- **1.1.2** Develop a campaign aimed at repatriating people who have moved away from Nova Scotia.
- **1.1.3** Develop a remote worker attraction program. These workers bring their jobs with them and often have accompanying family members who may be looking for work. They help strengthen and diversify neighbourhoods, frequent local establishments and support the regional economy.
- **1.1.4** Connect with HR managers to co-ordinate relocation opportunities and address barriers for employees moving from other provinces.
- **1.1.5** Work with realtors to promote relocating to the Cumberland region, evaluating year-over-year deed transfer tax will be used to provide an indication of growth in this area.
- **1.1.6** Work with contractors to identify ways to upgrade current housing stock, including financing and labour, evaluating year-over-year number and value of building permits to measure new residential construction and upgrades.
- **1.1.7** Link tourism activity to population recruitment with an emphasis on quality-of-life factors.

1.2 Attract 200 new immigrants to the Cumberland region by 2026.

- **1.2.1** Develop an immigrant recruitment and retention program.
- **1.2.2** Attract graduating international students from Maritime universities to the Cumberland region by connecting them with co-operative education placements and internships.
- **1.2.3** Support the YREACH program in Cumberland to help immigrants integrate and become connected to their new communities
- **1.2.4** Support Immigrant Services of Nova Scotia (ISANS) to match skills and interests of immigrants with employment vacancies and entrepreneurship opportunities in Amherst and Cumberland.

The goals noted in the Economy section and the Quality-of-Life section also contribute to population growth for the Cumberland region.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life refers to the level of health, comfort and happiness experienced by an individual or group. It is highly subjective and is different for every person and group.

Quality of life has traditionally been overlooked in economic development. However, it is becoming increasingly vital as it relates to the ability of a community or an area to attract and retain people and businesses. Quality of life can refer to a wide range of topics from environment, education, health and leisure to culture, living standards, time use and many other topics.

According to Develop Nova Scotia, quality of life is a critical factor in the decision to live and work in a community, especially in the knowledge economy. In this context, the beauty, vitality and accessibility of place is a significant contributor to the creation of a highly livable environment where people want to come together. Great places signal quality of life and quality of life drives the decision to put down roots. In the knowledge economy, industry and investment follow talent. According to Harvard Business Review, "Almost 64 per cent of college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds said they looked for a job only after they'd chosen the city where they wanted to live." (May, 2010) [2]

For the purpose of this strategy, quality of life will focus on improving the following four key contributing factors:

1. Health of residents/Healthy Populations
2. Living standards
3. Community infrastructure and Placemaking
4. Access to technology

Health of Residents/Healthy Populations

Maintaining and improving the health of residents is a major contributing factor to the quality of life within the region. Communities with a higher percentage of healthy people will attract other healthy people and will also attract new business and investment to the community. There are a wide range of factors that contribute to the health of residents, including mental health, level of physical activity, nutrition, obesity, smoking, etc. Many of these factors are being addressed by other organizations and within the health-care field. For the purpose of this strategy, the focus will be on how income levels and adequate access to the health-care system can contribute to the overall quality of life within the region.

According to the Government of Canada, the number one indicator of a person's health is their income level[3]. Therefore, focusing on increasing the average and median household income in the region will be a priority. Adequate access to the health-care system, including maintaining access to a family doctor, access to emergency departments and access to necessary

[2] Develop Nova Scotia, https://developns.ca/about/placemaking/

[3] Government of Canada, https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html

specialists and procedures, impacts the health of residents. For that reason, physician recruitment will be a priority with a focus on recruiting the necessary specialists within the health-care field.

Living Standards

Living standards examine average and median incomes and wealth, distribution of income and wealth, including poverty rates, income fluctuations and volatility. It considers economic security, including labour market security, housing and food prosperity.

Living standards should reflect the capacity to transform economic growth into stable current and future income streams for everyone. Economic growth does not automatically translate into better living standards. A higher average income, for example, may be achieved at the cost of increased social inequality or greater economic insecurity. In contrast, achieving greater job quality, reducing poverty and providing basic affordable housing and food security to individuals and families will raise well-being and living standards for everyone. The Cumberland region seeks to go beyond reaching a basic level of securities in our communities. We will aim for prosperous living standards throughout our communities.

Community Infrastructure and Placemaking

Community infrastructure includes the collection of facilities and spaces provided to residents and communities that generally improve quality of life in an area. This can include libraries, community centres, parks, outdoor spaces, safe walking areas and arenas, among many other facilities and spaces. Having the right mix, including quantity and quality, of community infrastructure is vital to attracting people to visit the region, live in the region and do business in the region. Community infrastructure is an important factor in placemaking.

According to Develop Nova Scotia, placemaking is the planning, development and management of land and infrastructure with and for people. Place has an essential role in economic development. Great places need to be designed with the community and for the community. In placemaking, it is vital to work with the community to discover their needs and aspirations in order to develop a vision for the community.

In the context of tourism, great places attract visitors who are looking for authentic, cultural experiences. The Cumberland Region Tourism Development Strategy focuses on high-yield markets, including authentic experiences, free spirits and cultural explorers. Focusing on placemaking will contribute to the success of that strategy and contribute to achieving the Cumberland region’s tourism goal of extending a visitor’s length of stay and increase the average amount they spend in the region.

Attracting more people to visit, live and work in the Cumberland region is a significant opportunity. The region has unique and spectacular landscapes, access to the coastline and is relatively affordable. All of this positions the region well in its efforts to attract people seeking quality of life. To achieve a strong sense of place, the Cumberland region will focus on

implementing projects and strategies that align with the principles of placemaking and ensuring adequate community infrastructure in the communities throughout the region.

Access to Technology

The “digital divide” is the term used to describe the fact that whole segments of society are split into those “with” and “without” access to high-speed digital infrastructure. From an economic standpoint, those communities with a digital advantage can expect higher small business values and new business formation rates, higher home values, higher quality of employment and generally more economic opportunity for the entire community. According to studies, the overall economic impact is substantial – in excess of 10 per cent in many cases (see World Bank Study*). From a human impact, it means more young adults decide to stay and work in their own communities and can lower rates of poverty and related social issues and businesses that are better able to compete and grow.

Large urban centers have a natural advantage in that their digital infrastructure develops organically based on a communication service provider’s standard design-build economic model. Rural communities can obtain similar results, but they must be much more proactive in order to ensure their success. In light of the rapid pace of technological evolution, it is increasingly vital that they do so.

The Town of Amherst and the Town of Oxford are already well serviced with access to high-speed internet. However, many areas throughout the Municipality of Cumberland are not so fortunate. To address the existence and impact of the “digital divide,” the Municipality of Cumberland has partnered with the Municipality of Colchester to work towards achieving the following vision:

> *The entire geographic area will be served by a state-of-the-art, continuously upgraded, communications network that includes capacity for reliable, affordable, highest-speed internet access, as well as mobile telephone, community Wi-Fi, and internet-of-things uses such as ‘smart agriculture’, 5G and other future applications.*

These two municipalities intend to work towards developing a best practice framework for smart-rural initiatives, which does not currently exist.

High-quality, cost-effective internet services to each home in our communities is considered an “essential service,” a utility no less important than electricity, emergency management services and other municipal residential services. Working through the protocols in place for the COVID-19 response reinforced how important this ability to access reliable internet services is for working and learning from home. Under this vision no one gets left behind.

In addition to being among the most connected rural communities in Canada, the two municipalities also want to be among the “smartest.” This means the digital infrastructure needs to support existing and future smart-agriculture, road safety cameras, water leakage detection, weather collection, vehicle fleet tracking and a whole range of other IoT (Internet of Things) use cases.

QUALITY OF LIFE: GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. **Increase the overall health and living standards of our residents.**

   1.1 **Continue to grow the median household income by a greater rate than the province, to result in the Cumberland region being within 10 per cent of the provincial median household income by 2026.**
      1.1.1 Develop a one-year pilot project to transport Cumberland residents to their workplaces within the Cumberland region.
      1.1.2 Develop and implement training opportunities throughout the Cumberland region.

   1.2 **Support the Nova Scotia Health Authority with job recruitment throughout the Cumberland region.**
      1.2.1 Support the joint physician recruitment committee.
      1.2.2 When requested, assist with area familiarization tours to visiting and resident doctors and other medical professionals that focus on highlighting the area and sense of community.
      1.2.3 Support spouses and family members of health-care workers to find jobs in their field.

   1.3 **Percentage of people living in poverty will be within 2.5 per cent of the provincial average by 2026.**
      1.3.1 Implement training programs and workshops on an ongoing basis throughout the Cumberland region, including Learn2Lead workshop series.
      1.3.2 Connector Program to help match people with jobs in their field.
      1.3.3 Develop training programs that target youth seeking part-time employment to encourage skill development and employability. (Example: offer forklift training for eligible grade 10, 11 and 12 students throughout the Cumberland region.)

2. **Develop community infrastructure to meet the needs of residents to improve their quality of life.**

   2.1 **Town of Amherst:** Support the review of community infrastructure, complete with recommendations to maintain and enhance this infrastructure.

   2.2 **Town of Oxford:** Working through a strategic and comprehensive asset management plan to address infrastructure needs within the community.

   2.3 **Municipality of Cumberland**
      2.3.1 By 2023, define the service level of community infrastructure to be provided within communities throughout the municipality (i.e., to include parks, playgrounds, trails, libraries, community centres, multipurpose space, sidewalks, safe walking areas, outdoor space, etc.).
      2.3.2 Support and encourage the development of community centres in communities throughout the municipality.

2.3.3 Work with the chief librarian of the Cumberland Regional Libraries and communities to provide safe and accessible space for libraries throughout the municipality.

3. Implement projects and strategies that align with the principles of placemaking.

3.1 By implementing the following strategies, the Cumberland region will increase a sense of place in communities and will be better positioned to attract people to visit and live in the region, as well as do business here.

3.1.1 The Pugwash Waterfront Development Master Plan
3.1.2 The Cape d'Or Master Plan
3.1.3 The Cumberland Region Tourism Development Strategy
3.1.4 Springhill Beautification Plan
3.1.5 Mainstreet beautification programs in Parrsboro, Joggins, and Advocate
3.1.6 Oxford Downtown Beautification Program

3.2 To support placemaking and developing sense of place, the municipalities will undertake the following:

3.2.1 Financially support and assist with the development and promotion of the Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark.
3.2.2 Assist communities and community groups, as needed, to develop strategic plans, undertake community initiatives and achieve their visions.
3.2.3 Help community groups network and learn from each other's best practices.
3.2.4 Increase intermunicipal collaboration by continuing regular economic development staff meetings online.

4. Increase access to technology.

4.1 Achieve the vision to make Cumberland (and Colchester) one of Canada's most digitally connected rural areas.

4.1.1 Reach 100 per cent of households in Cumberland County with high-speed internet service (as defined by the CRTC) by 2026.
4.1.2 Provide free community Wi-Fi in a minimum of five communities in the Cumberland region by 2026.
4.1.3 By 2025, the Municipality of Cumberland will have a plan to address cellphone coverage throughout the Cumberland region.
4.1.4 Have a plan in place to use the municipally owned dark fibre that could include investing in digital infrastructure to support existing and future smart-agriculture, road safety cameras, water leakage detection, weather collection, vehicle fleet tracking and a whole range of other IoT (Internet of Things) use cases.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY

By looking at community capacity as a critical mass of people, infrastructure, reasonable availability of programs and services and economic opportunities from a **strategic** perspective, we can focus attention on those elements that are most critical and valued within communities. More importantly, we can encourage local citizens to be engaged in the critical issues that impact their communities. This CED Strategy will identify those communities where there is a readiness for residents to be involved in the future of their communities and to support them in doing so.

Community Capacity encompasses the initial three pillars of the CED Strategy at a community-specific level. Therefore, we will focus our efforts on working with individual communities to create strategies that will impact business development, population growth and increased quality of life in much greater detail. The local strategies will account for community-specific opportunities and establish strategies that best overcome the unique challenges within our communities.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY: GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. **Develop Community/area specific plans and initiatives.**

    1.1 **Facilitate the development of community/area specific plans and initiatives that focus on decreasing economic barriers in our communities and improving the quality of life for our residents using the following schedule**:
        - 1.1.1 Springhill 2019/2021 (in progress)
        - 1.1.2 Parrsboro 2019/2021 (in progress)
        - 1.1.3 Amherst 2021/2022 (Municipal Planning Strategy)
        - 1.1.4 Pugwash 2022/2023
        - 1.1.5 Oxford 2022/2023
        - 1.1.6 River Hebert/Joggins 2022/2023
        - 1.1.7 Wentworth 2023/2024
        - 1.1.8 Advocate 2023/2024
        - 1.1.9 Wallace 2023/2024

REPORTING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Each Municipality and the Cumberland Business Connector will develop their own annual work plans, which will each address priorities related to each organization's individual mandate and capacity. Implementation tables are included in the pages that follow which as a whole identifies each organization's area of focus. A joint mid-term review will happen by year three.

Implementation Tables

ECONOMY: GOALS & OBJECTIVES L = Leading S = Supporting	Business Connector	Municipality of Cumberland	Town of Amherst	Town of Oxford
1. Increase Business Retention and Expansion				
1.1 General support emerging from COVID-19				
1.1.1 Host training	L	S	S	S
1.1.2 Arrange mentoring and training	L	S	S	
1.1.3 Provide up-to-date, accurate information	L		S	
1.1.4 Expand the Business Accelerator Program	L			
1.1.5 Provide affordable or free resources	L			
1.2 Support for the forestry sector				
1.2.1 Support to implement strategic plan	L			S
1.3 Support for goods producing sectors.				
1.3.1 Complete a business mix analysis	L	S	S	S
1.3.2 Business attraction strategy	L			
1.3.3 Annual transition/succession training workshop	L	S	S	S
1.4 Support significant potential growth sectors				
Renewable energy:				
1.4.1 Lobby for continued R&D work (FORCE)	S	L		
1.4.2 Support the Cumberland Energy Authority.	S	L		
1.4.3 Support the expansion of wind farms	S	L	S	
1.4.4 Support the use of solar energy	S	L	L	
1.4.5 Support the use of wood or wood chips	L	S		S
1.4.6 Lobby all levels of government	L			
Natural Resource Industries:				
1.4.7 Support industry re: wooden bridges	S			
1.4.8 Tax on un-used farm land	S			
1.4.9 Lobby to improve management of forestry land	S			
1.4.10 Support on business plan development	L			
1.4.11 Support growth food processing sector	L	S	S	S
1.4.12 Encourage the growth of aquaculture	L	S		
Construction:				
1.4.13 Increase the housing supply	L	S	S	
1.4.14 Increase awareness of PACE		S	S	

ECONOMY: GOALS & OBJECTIVES L = Leading S = Supporting	Business Connector	Municipality of Cumberland	Town of Amherst	Town of Oxford
1.4.15 Upgrade commercial properties	S			
1.5 Business expansion and productivity				
1.5.1 Formal and informal BRE programs	L	S	L	
1.5.2 Maintain Business Directory	L	S	L	L
1.5.3 Joint business directory with Sackville, N.B.	L			
1.5.4 Encourage business productivity improvement	L	S		
1.5.5 Small business workshops with KPI focus	L	S		
1.5.6 Lobby to expand Innovation Rebate Program	L			
1.5.7 Maintain land availability database	L		L	
1.6 Strengthen connections and partnerships				
1.6.1 Connect businesses to research institutions	L			
1.6.2 NSCC as centre for renewable energy	L	L		
1.6.3 Customized training programs	L	S	S	
1.7 Increase impact of tourism on the economy				
1.7.1 Implement the regional tourism strategy		L	S	S
1.7.2 Tourism brand, marketing strategy and website		L	S	S
1.7.3 Infrastructure needs assessment		L	S	S
1.8 Enhance regional retail & service centre/hubs				
1.8.1 Complete a business mix analysis		L	L	S
1.8.2 Attract businesses and entrepreneurship	L			
1.8.3 Support businesses in health services sector	S			
1.8.4 Downtown beautification and revitalization				
1.8.4.1 Gritty to Pretty Program		S		
1.8.4.2 Expansion Gritty to Pretty in other communities		L		
1.8.4.3 Pugwash Waterfront Development		L		
1.8.4.4 Springhill Beautification Plan		L		
2. Increase business attraction and new business				
2.1 Attract two distribution and warehousing businesses	L	S	S	S
2.2 Expand and promote the Amherst Industrial Park.	S		L	
2.3 Attract businesses identified in business mix analysis	L	S	L	S
2.4 Recruit and support entrepreneurs.	L		L	
2.5 Support promotion of the Springhill Geothermal Business Park	S	L		
2.6 Promote the region to remote workers	L	S	L	S
3. Create a job ready workforce.				
3.1 Work with the P-12 education system to address weaknesses	L		S	
3.2 Support connecting displaced workers to new opportunities	L			
3.3 Improve student engagement with local businesses	L		s	
3.4 Workforce attraction from outside Cumberland County	L		L	
3.5 Develop flex workforce to fill vacancies and seasonal/project work	L			

POPULATION: GOALS & OBJECTIVES L = Leading S = Supporting	Business Connector	Municipality of Cumberland	Town of Amherst	Town of Oxford
1. **Increase population of the Cumberland region**				
1.1 **Maintain positive net interprovincial migration.**				
1.1.1 Create a place where people want to live.		L	L	L
1.1.2 Develop a repatriation campaign	L		L	
1.1.3 Develop a remote worker attraction program	L	S	L	S
1.1.4 Co-ordinate relocation opportunities	L			
1.1.5 Work with realtors to promote relocation	L	S	L	S
1.1.6 Identify ways to upgrade current housing stock	L			
1.1.7 Link tourism activity to population recruitment			L	
1.2 **Attract 200 new immigrants to the Cumberland**				
1.2.1 Develop an immigrant recruitment and retention program.	L			
1.2.2 Attract graduating international students	L			
1.2.3 Support YREACH	L			
1.2.4 Support ISANS	L			

QUALITY OF LIFE: GOALS & OBJECTIVES L = Leading S = Supporting	Business Connector	Municipality of Cumberland	Town of Amherst	Town of Oxford
1. Increase the overall health & living standards of our residents.				
1.1 Grow median household income				
1.1.1 Pilot project to transport residents to workplaces	L			
1.1.2 Develop and implement training opportunities	L	S		
1.2 Support the NSHA with job recruitment				
1.2.1 Support the joint physician recruitment committee.		L	S	
1.2.2 Assist with area familiarization tours		L	L	
1.2.3 Support spouses and family members of health care workers	L			
1.3 People living in poverty within 2.5% of the provincial average				
1.3.1 Implement training programs and workshops	L	S	S	S
1.3.2 Connector Program to match people with jobs	L			
1.3.3 Develop training programs to target youth	L		S	
2. Develop community infrastructure				
2.1 Town of Amherst: Review of community infrastructure			L	
2.2 Town of Oxford: Plan to address infrastructure needs				L
2.3 Municipality of Cumberland				
2.3.1 Define standard service level of community infrastructure		L		
2.3.2 Support and encourage the development of community centres		L		
2.3.3 Provide safe and accessible space for libraries		L		
3. Implement placemaking projects and strategies				
3.1 Implement the following strategies				
3.1.1 The Pugwash Waterfront Development Master Plan		L		
3.1.2 The Cape d'Or Master Plan		L		
3.1.3 The Cumberland Region Tourism Development Strategy		L	S	S
3.1.4 Springhill Beautification Plan		L		
3.1.5 Mainstreet beautification in Parrsboro, Joggins and Advocate		L		
3.1.6 Oxford Downtown Beautification Program				L
3.2 To support placemaking and developing sense of place:				
3.2.1 Support and assist with the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark	S	L		
3.2.2 Assist communities and local groups achieve their visions.		L		
3.2.3 Help community groups network and learn from each other		L		
3.2.4 Increase economic development intermunicipal collaboration	L			
4. Increase access to technology.				
4.1 Make Cumberland Canada's most digitally connected rural area				
4.1.1 Reach 100% of households with actual highspeed internet		L		
4.1.2 Provide free community Wi-Fi in five communities		L		
4.1.3 Develop a plan to address cellphone coverage		L		
4.1.4 Develop plan to use municipally owned dark fibre		L		

COMMUNITY CAPACITY: GOALS & OBJECTIVES L = Leading S = Supporting	Business Connector	Municipality of Cumberland	Town of Amherst	Town of Oxford
1. Develop Community/area specific plans and initiatives.				
1.1 Schedule				
1.1.1 Springhill 2019/2021 (completed)	S	L		
1.1.2 Parrsboro 2019/2021 (completed)	S	L		
1.1.3 Amherst 2021/2022 (Municipal Planning Strategy)	S		L	
1.1.4 Pugwash 2022/2023	S	L		
1.1.5 Oxford 2022/2023	S	S		L
1.1.6 River Hebert/Joggins 2022/2023	S	L		
1.1.7 Wentworth 2023/2024	S	L		
1.1.8 Advocate 2023/2024	S	L		
1.1.9 Wallace 2023/2024	S	L		

municipality of cumberland

Amherst
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