



*Department of Fisheries and Communities
Rural Communities Council*

ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022



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Council Overview

The Rural Communities Council (RCC) is an advisory group that provides advice to government on a wide range of policies, topics and themes such as people, communities, wellness and environment.

The RCC will examine, discuss, and review Government policies and strategies through a Rural Lens that will identify potential rural impacts of policies and decisions. Another way of describing the Council is it endeavors to “rural proof” government policies and strategies.

The RCC is a natural evolution from the four Regional Economic Advisory Councils, formed in 2017, and RCC discussions began by examining the issues and recommendations from the four REACs.

The RCC engages with industry, academia and government partners to understand the complex issues of rural PEI and is supported by the staff from the Department of Fisheries and Communities.

The Council is composed of twelve individuals, including two co-chairs, and achieve a regional and gender balance within the membership. Members applied and were selected through Engage PEI.



Co-Chair's Message - Annual Report - June 2022

The members of the Rural Communities Council held four meetings since our last annual report. We participated in seven (7) presentations that are relevant to rural PEI, noted below:

- Climate Action Secretariat Presentation
- Municipal Act Information Session
- Canada Games Information Sheet
- National Building Code Presentation
- Housing Strategy
- Climate Change Adaption Focus Group

Feedback from Council members were synthesized into “position statements” providing the various presenters with feedback and advice viewed through a “rural lens.”

The Council have planned the following topics for next year:

- Rural Health Care Strategies
- Labour Challenges and Opportunities on PEI
- Education
- Rural Economic Development
- Population Growth Strategy
- Land-Use Planning and Unsightly/Derelict Properties
- Rural Statistics as a Data Analysis Policy Tool, Prince Edward Island Statistics Bureau

The Council is sharing a communications strategy designed to introduce Islanders and government about its role while inviting the public to offer their ideas and concerns.

The Co-Chairs will be meeting Fisheries and Communities Minister Fox and Deputy Minister Michele Koughan to discuss the Council’s progress to date. We also are looking forward to a proposed meeting with Premier King to brief him on the Council’s activity and insights.



Council members embody many parts of our rural communities; small business, rural industries, municipalities, First Nations, etc. We are a very committed and engaged group. Council members' life and work experiences in rural PEI bring valuable contributions to the dialogue. Members look forward to continuing this process.

The Council wants to thank the support and guidance afforded to it by the committed team at Fisheries and Communities.

Sincerely,

Co-Chairs: Gerry Gallant and Elmer MacDonald



Activities

During the year, the *Rural Communities Council* met on the following dates to discuss topics listed below:

Meeting Date:	Meeting Topics or Presentations:
October 13, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate Action Secretariat Presentation
December 8, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Municipal Act Presentation• Canada Games Information Sheet
March 9, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Building Code Presentation• Housing Strategy Presentation
April 6, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate Change Adaptation Focus Group• Rural Job Initiative Focus Group

During the year, the Council's *Co-Chairs* met three times to plan meetings and discuss future presentations.

Also, on September 16th, the co-chairs had a meeting with the Minister of Fisheries and Communities, Honorable Jamie Fox and his Deputy Minister Bob Creed to discuss the RCC's past and upcoming topics of discussion.



Summary of Deliberations to Date

Position Statements - Municipal Act

Equity for all

The Rural Communities Council recognizes and supports the need for collaborative dialogue about the varied needs of rural islanders to achieve equality within rural municipalities. Understanding our rural past and present by including Indigenous History and First Nations, while incorporating the legacy of early settlers and modern-era newcomers, will support collaborative leadership. Achieving equality will involve looking at our future differently than our past and rural municipalities can take the lead, if we empower and encourage them to do so.

Information

The Rural Communities Council seeks to be a trusted source of information for rural islanders by ensuring that local governance roles are clearly understood, supported and enabled by their community residents, elected municipal leaders and local municipal staff. This involves fact-based conversations that favour outcomes and common ground over differences as the foundation for community building. Council members seek opportunities to collaborate with rural municipalities, municipal staff and elected officials and would welcome opportunities to promote shared understanding, common goals and collaborative approaches to problem solving (opportunities exist for new and less-heard voices to play a strong catalyst role in ensuring effective and inclusive engagement).

Land Use Planning

The Rural Communities Council seeks to support government in the need for land use planning for current and future needs of rural islanders and includes the recognition of the need to change our approach to be both forward-looking and strategic. This involves consideration of not only individual land-owner priorities, but also community-based needs and goals, to balance the competing interests from many sectors and segments of the population. More public engagement is needed to understand the choices we can make for long-term sustainability.



Knowledge

The Rural Communities Council encourages rural islanders to become informed citizens for the future of our communities and supports the provincial government efforts to coordinate rural governance. The challenges ahead for rural PEI's infrastructure and services involve partnerships and planning that will rely on change management skills, effective resourcing and engagement expertise to enable robust consultation processes between local and provincial government. The Council endorses the efforts of those civic-minded groups, individuals and organizations to reimagine how the community is organized, managed and empowered.

Position Statements - Climate Action Secretariat

Climate Change

The PEI Provincial government's coordination of the Climate Change Action Plan and associated activities are endorsed by the Rural Communities Council. Rural islanders seek to foster a strong partnership with the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Change to ensure rural communities, including Municipalities are well represented, informed and empowered. An action plan addressing the unique needs for rural communities specifically, is a recommended next step for the Provincial Government to provide.

Affordability

Affordability in relation to climate action is a key driver of change for many Islanders. The Rural Communities Council is encouraged by the many programs available but wants to ensure awareness is increasing as evidenced in utilization and program participation metrics. Some of the impactful opportunities for change the Council supports include programs that are inclusive of lower and moderate-income levels (some recent examples are heat pump rebates and availability of rural transit at a reduce fare).

Public Awareness

Public Awareness is the key driver of behavior change for climate action requirements that are urgently needed within PEI. The Rural Communities Council supports the need



for rural communities to be equally aware of climate action as they are in relation to other civic duties that the island is known for. Rural industries and rural communities alike could be the leaders in climate change strategy with coordination through Provincial government policy and leadership

Rural PEI

Rural PEI is uniquely positioned for climate change action. The Rural Communities Council supports the strategic leadership of the Provincial government's Climate Change Action Plan as a foundational policy directive, and challenges other NGOs to participate by showing evidence of awareness and metrics that support changes made. Rural islanders are poised to be leaders in making an impact to all Islanders.

Position Statements - Housing presentation

Innovation

The Rural Communities Council encourages the continued implementation of innovative solutions relating to the housing security needs within rural communities through partnerships and strategic investments. The Council recognizes the importance of safe, sustainable, inclusive and affordable housing for all Islanders within the current unprecedented and predicted future housing climate. The inventory of housing options in rural communities should align with rural PEI's growing population and diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Labour Development

The Rural Communities Council endorses the expansion of the government's collective efforts related to economic and labour force development. Overcoming the current housing supply challenges requires expansion of training and trades delivery within the Island's construction sector, particularly in markets that will positively impact the availability and affordability of housing.



Collaboration

The Rural Communities Council supports collaboration at all levels of government to create effective solutions and policies related to the Island's housing crisis within rural communities while embracing supportive land-use planning. The Council recommends continued alignment and future alliances among the governing branches leading to long-term housing solutions for the unique rural environment of Prince Edward Island.



Looking Ahead

The following topics were identified by the committee, to date, for discussion in the coming year:

People and Communities
Rural Health Care
Education
Rural Statistics (for data and policy analysis)
Rural Economic Development
Land Use planning and Derelict properties
Population Growth Strategy
Labor Market and Opportunities

Important to note that the co-chairs are planning to organize a meeting with Premier King in the fall 2022 to discuss the results of the RCC to date and the plans moving forward.



Appendix A: Positioning Statements

RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL
Position Statements
Topic: Climate Change and Climate Action
Fall 2021

Climate Change

The PEI Provincial government's coordination of the **Climate Change Action Plan** and associated activities are endorsed by the Rural Communities Council. Rural Islanders seek to foster a strong partnership with the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Change to ensure rural communities, including Municipalities are well represented, informed and empowered. An action plan addressing the unique needs for rural communities specifically, is a recommended next step for the Provincial Government to provide.

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Rural PEI is uniquely positioned for climate change action. The Rural Communities Council supports the strategic leadership of the Provincial government's Climate Change Action Plan as a foundational policy directive, and challenges other NGOs to participate by showing evidence of awareness and metrics that support changes made. Rural Islanders are poised to be leaders in making an impact to all Islanders.

Seeing the dedication of this Council lead to the evolution of practical and effective communication strategies is exemplary. We encourage other stakeholder groups to find alignment with the Rural Communities Council and the Department of Fisheries and Communities on these important position statements.

*Hon. Jamie Fox,
Minister of Fisheries and Communities*

As Co-Chairs of the Rural Communities Council, we are pleased to offer ongoing engagement and discussion around climate change challenges to further amplify the varied lived experiences of rural PEI.

*Co-Chair Elmer MacDonald
and Co-Chair Gerry Gallant.*

The Department of Communities and Fisheries will continue to evaluate existing and new policy with a climate change lens. We thank the Rural Communities Council for shining a spotlight on the unique needs of rural Islanders in relation to climate action and encourage strong partnerships and collaborations around these themes and calls to action.

*Bob Creed,
Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Communities*






RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

Positions Statements
Topic: **Municipal Governance**
Winter 2021

Equity for all



“The Rural Communities Council recognizes and supports the need for collaborative dialogue about the varied needs of rural islanders to achieve equality within rural municipalities. Understanding our rural past and present by including Indigenous History and First Nations, while incorporating the legacy of early settlers and modern-era newcomers, will support collaborative leadership. Achieving **equality** will involve looking at our future differently than our past and rural municipalities can take the lead, if we empower and encourage them to do so.”




Information


“The Rural Communities Council seeks to be a trusted source of information for rural islanders by ensuring that local governance roles are clearly understood, supported and enabled by their community residents, elected municipal leaders and local municipal staff. This involves fact-based conversations that favour outcomes and common ground over differences as the foundation for community building. Council members seek opportunities to collaborate with rural municipalities, municipal staff and elected officials and would welcome opportunities to promote shared understanding, common goals and collaborative approaches to problem solving
(opportunities exist for new and less-heard voices to play a strong catalyst role in ensuring effective and inclusive engagement).”

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Knowledge

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Much has been achieved to chart our future on the island and the Department of Fisheries and Communities is committed to providing engaging and informative resources for municipal and rural governments to design their own destiny as distinct, local, and proud islanders, whether by birth or choice.”
*Bob Creed,
Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Communities*

Municipal and rural governments are the backbone of rural island culture and we applaud the Rural Communities Council for their leadership and calls for collaboration on the future of rural islanders. Within the Department of Fisheries and Communities, we are proud to continue the conversation with them and on their behalf.
*Hon. Jamie Fox,
Minister of Fisheries and Communities*

Rural Communities Council Co-Chairs endorse the Government of Prince Edward Island efforts to ensure high-quality local service delivery, strategic planning support, governance training and assistance to municipal governments supporting Islanders living and working in rural municipalities in PEI.
*Co-Chair Elmer MacDonald
and Co-Chair Gerry Gallant.*



RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

Positions Statements
Topic: Housing
Spring 2022

Innovation

"The Rural Communities Council encourages the continued implementation of innovative solutions relating to the housing security needs within rural communities through partnerships and strategic investments. The Council recognizes the importance of safe, sustainable, inclusive and affordable housing for all Islanders within the current unprecedented and predicted future housing climate. The inventory of housing options in rural communities should align with rural PEI's growing population and diverse socio-economic backgrounds."

Labour Development

"The Rural Communities Council endorses the expansion of the government's collective efforts related to economic and labour force development. Overcoming the current housing supply challenges requires expansion of training and trades delivery within the Island's construction sector, particularly in markets that will positively impact the availability and affordability of housing."

Collaboration

"The Rural Communities Council supports collaboration at all levels of government to create effective solutions and policies related to the Island's housing crisis within rural communities while embracing supportive land-use planning. The Council recommends continued alignment and future alliances among the governing branches leading to long-term housing solutions for the unique rural environment of Prince Edward Island."

Council Mandate

The Rural Communities Council provides advice and makes recommendations to Government regarding rural topics related to the themes of people, communities, the environment and wellness and explore opportunities for development in rural PEI.

- o Examines, discusses and reviews Government strategies through a rural lens to identify the potential rural impacts of Government policies and decisions.
- o Identifies opportunities to enhance rural population growth and recommends ways to improve inclusiveness within rural PEI communities.

The Department of Fisheries and Communities will continue to work collaboratively with different levels of government and communities to look at various mechanisms to address the housing challenges across the Island.

Michele Koughan,
Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Communities

The Rural Communities Council Co-Chairs encourage the provincial government to give priority attention to attain more viable housing options in rural PEI.

Co-Chair Elmer MacDonald
and Co-Chair Gerry Gallant.

Housing challenges are happening right across the country including in rural communities. I am pleased that Rural Communities Council has endeavored to learn more about this topic as it relates to Prince Edward Island.

Honourable Jamie Fox,
Minister of Fisheries and Communities



Appendix B: Committee Members

June 2021 – June 2022 Members: The initial Council was comprised of 12 individuals from across Prince Edward Island. The Council is geographically, and gender balanced with two co-chairpersons.

Name	County	Term Start	Term End
Elmer MacDonald - Co-Chair	Prince	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2022
Gerry Gallant - Co-Chair	Kings	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2022
Blake Bernard	Prince	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Patricia Bray	Kings	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2022
Vacant	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Vacant	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2022
Jason Ramsay	Prince	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Terry Nabuurs	Kings	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Mitch Jollimore	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Michelle Pineau	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2022
Kelly Shea Rayner	Prince	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2022
Maria Smith	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023



Appendix C: Terms of Reference

MANDATE

To provide advice and make recommendations to Government regarding rural topics related to the themes of people, communities, the environment and wellness and to explore opportunities for development on PEI.

KEY OBJECTIVES

Duties of the Rural Communities Councils will include:

- Examine, discuss, and review Government strategies through a rural lens to identify potential rural impacts of policies and decisions.
- Identify opportunities to enhance rural population growth in each region and recommend opportunities to improve inclusiveness within rural PEI communities.
- Engage with industry, academia, and government partners to understand the complex issues related to people, communities, wellness, and the environment in PEI.
- Provide regular advice on complex issues identified by the Regional Economic Advisory Councils including (but not limited to): education, healthcare, housing, labour market, aging population, out-migration of PEI youth, etc.
- Collaborate with communities, stakeholders, and groups such as Partnership for Growth, Development Corporations, Rural Action Centre's, and Youth Futures Council to promote community development opportunities that support regional growth.

MEMBERSHIP

The Rural Communities Council will be composed of eight to twelve individuals, including two co-chairs, representing each region (West, Central, and East) equally. Members will apply through Engage PEI.



SUPPORT

The Rural Communities Council will be supported by staff from the Department of Fisheries and Communities, however, other government departments will often be called upon to provide information or support on issues that relate to their mandate.

Support is defined as meeting and engagement readiness, meeting management processes and formal communication channels, but not limited to:

- **Agenda:** formal agenda setting with Co-chairs; supporting research and/or meeting content;
- **Minutes:** formal minutes prepared for Council approval at next scheduled meeting, with draft sent to Council members within 2 weeks of previous meeting;
- **Reports:** Year End Reports on Council activities and positions
- **Recorded Information Management:** all recorded information to be stored per records management policy
- **In-Meeting Facilitation:** meeting facilitation support to co-chairs, as required;
- **Communications:** creation of formal communication inputs to, and outputs from, Council meetings, per government communications policy and in conjunction with Council's Co-Chairs for final draft approvals (i.e., Position Statements, Presentations to Council Members using Rural Lens) and designed to foster collaboration with islanders around issues identified as important to rural Prince Edward Island by RCC members.
- **Facilities:** meeting logistics including locations, equipment, etc.

TERMS OF OFFICE

Appointments will be for two years, renewable once. Some initial appointments may be made for three years. Meetings will be held at least four times per year and members are expected to attend the majority of these meetings annually to maintain membership. Quorum for meetings is 50% plus 1. Meetings will be held centrally with



teleconference options available. Decisions will be achieved by consensus; if consensus is not achieved, dissenting views will be reflected in the record of the meeting.

REPORTING

The Rural Communities Council will maintain records of meetings and will provide quarterly updates to the Deputy Ministers Panel (DMP). The Co-chairs will make a formal presentation to the Minister's Council once annually. The DMP will deliver formal responses to the advice provided by the RCC at least two times each year.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

The Rural Communities Council will discuss agenda items with an open style that ultimately results in key points that can be effectively communicated to decision makers on behalf of rural Islanders. Consensus decision making might be required to identify key issues from complex topics and broad-based discussions. Consensus is defined as consensus-minus-one whereby more than one member in disagreement will lead to further discussion and/or a choice suspend the discussion point indefinitely.¹

Fisheries and Communities staff will support Council Co-Chairs and members to achieve consensus.

ENGAGEMENT

The Council Co-chairs will meet with the Premier and Minister once per year in addition to regular council meetings.

High-level Council activities and outcomes will be posted to government website for Islanders to engage with Council, per government policy and/or communications protocols.

¹ American Heart Association. (n.d.). Consensus-Based Decision-Making Processes. https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@mwa/documents/downloadable/ucm_454080.pdf.



Appendix D: Public Relations

June 9th, 2022 - Press release: “You gain more then you give”:



Anytime you want to know what’s going on in rural Prince Edward Island, you talk to a rural Islander.

And when government wants to understand how its policies and decisions affect rural Islanders, they can turn to the Rural Communities Council.

“I call it rural-proofing,” says Gerry Gallant, co-chair of the Rural Communities Council (RCC).



“In other words, if the Province comes up with a major decision or policy change, there should be somebody saying, ‘Is this rural-proofed?’”

That includes asking decision-makers questions like: ‘How is this impacting rural PEI? Positively or negatively? Did someone look at this through a rural lens?’

“That’s really our role,” says Gallant. “Giving them feedback.”

Now, with more people moving to rural PEI, that feedback is more important than ever.

“The rural-to-urban population migration of the past is changing. This is a very important and strategic shift.”

And policymakers in government need to be aware of that, he says.

“Transportation is a good example,” says Gallant. “A number of people were thinking about rural PEI when they made the public transit policy.”



“I always wanted to be involved in the community,” says Gerry Gallant, co-chair of the Rural Communities Council. “It’s giving back. It’s thinking, ‘Maybe there’s something I can contribute.’”



It's that kind of collective decision-making the Rural Communities Council appreciates and works hard to support.

"These are the things that build communities," says Elmer MacDonald, who also serves as co-chair for the RCC.

If you're going to attract young people and young families to the community, you have to consider their needs, he says.

MacDonald would like to see more young people become involved in municipal government and community councils.

"They are the future," he says. "And I have all kinds of faith in the future."

Having diverse representation on the Council helps provide the best feedback to government, says MacDonald. Regardless of age, race, or gender.

"If you're a member of the council, I'm interested in your point of view as an individual." That's how people learn from one another, he says.

And that's how the Council helps inform and guide decision-makers.

"We haven't seen sensitivity to rural issues before like we do now," says Gallant.

He says the perceived urban-rural divide is quickly becoming a thing of the past.

"We've all figured out that if rural PEI doesn't prosper, urban PEI doesn't prosper."

That's why the mandate of the Rural Communities Council encompasses many of the same issues that affect urban PEI – the environment, residents, wellness, development, and economic opportunities.

We want to leave PEI better than how it was when we came, says MacDonald.

He cares about his neighbours, his community, and rural PEI – which is why he considers it "an honour" to be co-chair of the RCC.

"It's a good place to live. And it's a wonderful opportunity to be a part of things that are going on."

As a council member, you learn a lot through meeting and listening to others, he says.



“Most of the time, you gain more than you give.”

Both MacDonald and Gallant encourage anyone with an interest in their community to consider applying for the [Rural Community Council](#) or other [municipal councils \(link is external\)](#).

“If you’ve got good ideas about rural PEI, about rural development and rural sustainability, come to the table,” says Gallant.

Everybody on the council is there for right reasons, he says – for rural Prince Edward Island.

“Because it’s important.”



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