

JULY 2024

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

A Policy Agenda for Nova
Scotia Municipalities that
Leaves No One Behind



Kyle Buott
Christine Saulnier
Kenya Thompson



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
NOVA SCOTIA OFFICE



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kyle Buott owns Red Shire Farm, a small permaculture farm in West Hants. He is also a former chairperson and treasurer of CCPA-NS, a leader in labour and social movements in Nova Scotia, and a former political staffer.

Christine Saulnier is the Nova Scotia Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. She has a PhD in Political Science from York University. She leads the living wage calculations for communities across Atlantic Canada, coordinates the alternative budget, and co-authors the child and family poverty report cards.

Kenya Thompson is a PhD student in Political Science at York University and Coordinator of Nova Scotia's chapter of Child Care Now, Canada's national child care advocacy organization. A scholar and activist, her research investigates care policies, and social movements advocating their importance. She is also a Research Associate with the CCPA-NS, and Junior Member of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research.

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We acknowledge the CCPA-NS office is located in K'jipuktuk in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded, unsurrendered ancestral land of the Mi'kmaq people. We recognize we are all treaty people and have responsibilities to each other and this land. We also recognize the 400+ year history of communities of African descent and the 50 African Nova Scotian communities throughout the region today. We commit to actions that will move the work of truth, reconciliation, justice and equity forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Many people in our community are struggling right now. The cost of living is way up. Grocery bills remain out of control, and people cannot afford healthy food. Rental rates have sky-rocketed. More people have lost their housing or are very insecurely housed. Nova Scotia Power continues to hinder economic growth and prosperity with electricity rates among the highest provincial rates.[1] The average worker's wages are barely keeping up with inflation. Most low-wage workers' wages have been eroded by inflation; income that was inadequate is even more so.

There is tremendous wealth in Nova Scotia; our GDP has never been higher, but many people are being left behind. We have seen real GDP growth, but have the lowest employee compensation per capita.[2] While many cannot afford the basics—food, rent, and utilities—corporations are recording profits[3] that have reached figures unimaginable before the pandemic.

Against this backdrop of social and economic malaise, Nova Scotia will hold municipal elections on October 19th, 2024. These elections present an opportunity to elect new progressive champions to municipal councils across the province.

Nova Scotia needs people who will turn the values of social and economic justice

[1] Urban, R. (2023). *Electricity Prices in Canada 2023*.

[2] Nova Scotia's real GDP grew by 2.9% in 2022, following a 5.9% increase in 2021: Nova Scotia Department of Finance (2023). Provincial GDP by Income and Expenditure Accounts 2022.

https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive_news.asp?id=19370&dg=.2&df=&dto=.1a&dti=36

[3] Macdonald, D. (2022). *Corporate profits capturing more of economic recovery compared to any recession in last half century*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/newsroom/news-releases/corporate-profits-capturing-more-economic-recovery-compared-any-recession>

into concrete policy realities to improve their lives. We need municipal representatives who will demand climate action and help build local resilience. We need elected people who prioritize addressing rising hate that is increasingly directed at anyone who is deemed to be different. We need people who will work for the majority of people, not an elite few.

Municipalities are primarily responsible for providing services and infrastructure that greatly affect our everyday lives—from when we get up in the morning, turn on the water tap, and use bathroom facilities, to when our garbage and recycling are picked up. Our local government funding and decision-making affect whether you have access to public transit and, if you do, its reliability and affordability. Municipalities are largely responsible for whether we can safely walk places, safely ride our bikes, or drive our cars on snow-cleared and pothole-free roads. Municipal governments are also primarily responsible for community parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and recreational programs. How well-lit is your street? Do you have sidewalks? Can you access pedestrian-friendly or bike-friendly streets? Is there a recreation centre or library near your home?

“Nova Scotia needs people who will turn the values of social and economic justice into concrete policy realities to improve their lives.”

Frequent adverse weather events, including fires and floods, Post-Tropical Storm Lee in 2023 and Hurricane Fiona in 2022, are red flags for municipalities. They need to put in place plans to ensure they can respond quickly and clean up after weather and climate-crisis-related events while working to mitigate and prevent further damage. Is your municipality climate-ready and prepared for emergencies?

What critical municipal policies and initiatives are needed to create the foundation for socially, economically and environmentally just, inclusive and sustainable communities?

This report provides some answers and options for how things could be different. It is not an exhaustive list of issues. We want these ideas to become part of the debate around the municipal elections in the Fall. We want residents to use this

report to ask their candidates essential questions. We want municipal council candidates to pledge their support for these ideas and for newly elected councillors and councils to run with them.

This report's chapters are framed by six fundamental principles drawn from the Social Policy Framework for Nova Scotia[4], including:

- 1 Public Provision
- 2 Universality
- 3 Decent Work and Wellbeing
- 4 Climate Justice
- 5 Democratization
- 6 Fiscal Fairness

This report also highlights the need to ensure decisions are evidence-based and use an intersectional lens. It includes some specific analysis of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), the two largest municipalities in the province. It contains examples of progressive municipal policies across Nova Scotia and those implemented in different areas of the country and worldwide. Each chapter ends with recommendations for change. Some of these recommendations touch on different levels of government, not just municipalities. All chapters also end with specific questions that residents of Nova Scotia can ask of their municipal candidates.

Intersectional Lens

Municipalities must respond to the diversity of needs they serve. They must consider how each service, program, or policy's potential impacts the most vulnerable members of society by applying gender-based and intersectional analyses. To ensure meaningful, inclusive, and effective participation, communities need the capacity to engage and shape decision-making that affects their everyday lives—from municipal budgets to taxes to services and infrastructure.

[4] Findlay, T., Saulnier, C., Hébert, M., and O'Keefe, J. (2020). *Creating the future we all deserve: A social policy framework for Nova Scotia*. CCPA NS Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/the-future-we-deserve>

An intersectional lens is more than just an analytical tool. Undertaking analysis using an intersectional lens requires a willingness to disrupt power relationships and create institutions that no longer exclude based on the dominant sex, race, sexual orientation, ability, or other markers of privilege and power in our society. Using this lens for a gender-based analysis, for example, means unearthing discrimination based on gender stereotypes about women's skills, abilities, aptitude, and gender roles in our society. It is to re-design from an understanding that the barriers that need dismantling are often intersecting and compounding.

Background: The Challenges for Municipalities

As of 2021, Nova Scotia has forty-nine municipalities: four regions (Halifax Regional Municipality, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Region of Queens Municipality and West Hants Regional Municipality), twenty-five towns, and twenty county or district municipalities.[5] Municipal government is the level of government closest to the people. Municipalities in Nova Scotia provide many of the services you rely on every day, including:

- Community Planning
- Compost, recycling, and solid waste collection
- Construction and Maintenance of streets and roads
- Economic Development
- Environmental Stewardship
- Fire and Emergency Services
- Library
- Parks, Active Pathways and Trails
- Policing
- Recreation and Cultural Programs
- Regulatory and Compliance Services
- Transit
- Water and Wastewater

[5] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Statistics Annual Report 2021-2022*. Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1352/municipal-statistics-annual-report-2021-2022-en.pdf>

The reality of climate change is starting to set in for most people, and the impact on municipalities is significant. For Nova Scotia, it means bigger storms more frequently, higher temperatures, less snowfall, and more powerful storm surges in coastal areas.[6] The last few years have seen drought and dry wells,[7] floods leading to record-setting \$170 million in damages[8], wildfires where hundreds of houses burned to the ground and tens of thousands of people had to evacuate[9], and coastal erosion. Fiona alone resulted in massive and prolonged power outages, damaging homes and public infrastructure.[10] All the science says the situation will only continue to worsen.

Nova Scotia's municipalities are particularly vulnerable to climate change, especially as sea levels rise. The provincial government's failure to proclaim the Coastal Protection Act after it was passed with all-party support by the legislature has shifted the burden for mitigating coastal climate change entirely onto municipalities. Most municipalities in Nova Scotia do not have the capacity to address these coastal development issues, and the financial burden of the provincial government's failure will hit municipalities hard.

Despite needing to provide all these critical services, municipalities have limited ability to raise new revenue, as their only taxation power is property taxes. Property taxes are inherently regressive, as they do not consider individuals' ability to pay. As discussed in the chapter on Fiscal Fairness, there are different ways to increase revenue, which some municipalities already use here and elsewhere.

[6] Information on Nova Scotia's changing climate can be found here: <https://climatechange.novascotia.ca/changing-climate#:~:text=Risingpercent20seapercent20levels,sensitivepercent20coastalpercent20speciespercent20andpercent20ecosystems>

[7] Donovan, M. (2023). *After years of drought and wells running dry, this Nova Scotia community is looking to the sea*. CBC News Nova Scotia. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/after-years-of-drought-and-wells-running-dry-this-nova-scotia-community-is-looking-to-the-sea-1.7062357>

[8] Pangilinan, M. (2023). *Historic Nova Scotia floods lead to millions in insured damages*. Insurance Business. <https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/ca/news/catastrophe/historic-nova-scotia-floods-lead-to-millions-in-insured-damages-457523.aspx>

[9] Cooke, A. (2023). *N.S. wildfires: Province 'on edge' as thousands evacuated, states of emergency declared*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9729502/halifax-wildfire-state-of-emergency/>

[10] CBC News (2022). *Fiona smashes into Atlantic Canada, washing away homes and knocking out power*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/fiona-has-arrived-in-atlantic-canada-time-to-stay-inside-1.6594245>

Sometimes, municipalities outsource or privatize vital public services like garbage or snow removal, claiming it will reduce costs.[11] These decisions hollow out the municipality's capacity to react quickly during a crisis, dealing with multiple contractors and contracts that were likely not written to have the flexibility needed to act fast. This report looks at how public services can be significantly improved through public delivery and universal service provision (see chapters on Public Provision and Universal Access).

Recent data shows that every county in Nova Scotia (though not every municipality) experienced population growth last year,[12] meaning municipalities should have somewhat increased financial capacity in the next few years. In addition to increased revenue, the rapid population growth experienced in Halifax Regional Municipality and Cape Breton Regional Municipality comes with a series of challenges. Tens of thousands more cars are on the roads across the province, leading to increased traffic and pollution. The pressure on housing prices has been well documented, making our municipalities more expensive.

Many people have questions about how quickly the province's population is growing. These concerns are sometimes framed in a xenophobic way by blaming immigrants for joining our communities. Still, most people have legitimate concerns about whether our province's social fabric, public services, and infrastructure are ready or equipped to deal with this kind of population increase. Failing to address these legitimate concerns, or attempting to frame everyone thinking this way as xenophobic, or even racist, will lead to further social division. The tears in our society's social fabric due to population growth and underinvestment must be fixed.

“Public services can be significantly improved through public delivery and universal service provision.”

[11] Ayers, T. (2023). *CBRM considering contracting out garbage, recycling services*.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cbrm-considers-contracting-out-garbage-and-recycling-1.6868480>

[12] Nova Scotia Department of Finance (2024). *Nova Scotia Population Estimates by County and Census Subdivision - July 1, 2023*. https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive_news.asp?id=19934&dg=&df=&dto=.6f&dti=3

Municipal governments in Nova Scotia may be described as not having the appropriate taxation powers, infrastructure, or capacity to effectively deliver the services their residents require and demand, as they are considered “creatures of the province”.[13] While it is the case that municipalities are named under provincial jurisdiction (section 92 of the Constitution Act),[14] this should not be used to deflect the democratic accountability municipalities have to their residents. “Nevertheless, municipalities’ current status is insecure because their boundaries, institutions, and division of power can be altered by ordinary provincial legislation.” [15] Many municipalities would contend that they lack autonomy from the Nova Scotia government, citing the most recent overruling of municipal process around housing.[16] However, this example is less a confirmation that municipalities lack autonomy and more a signal that we need ways, including using provincial laws, to protect municipal autonomy and democracy better while also allowing the province to implement changes “if a strong consensus develops that provincial intervention in municipal affairs is warranted to achieve important legislative objectives”?[17]

We do recognize municipalities face challenges, including jurisdictional ones. Certainly, a lingering one being felt is the most recent effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Municipalities also face insufficient funding from other levels of government to meet the increasing demand for services. Despite these constraints, we strongly contend that



[13] For an excellent review and backgrounder on municipal government in NS, see: Hobson, P. Cameron, D. and Locke, W. (2005). *Final Report: A Question of Balance—An Assessment of the State of Local Government in Nova Scotia: A discussion paper prepared for The Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities as part of their Fair and Equitable Funding Project.* <https://capebretonspectator.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Fair-and-Equitable-Funding-Report.pdf>




[14] Good, K. (2019). *The Fallacy of the Creatures of the Provinces Doctrine.* University of Toronto, Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/mfg/wpaper/46.html>

[15] Good, K. (2019). Op. cit.

[16] Cooke, A. (2022). *Proposed legislation would let N.S. housing minister override Halifax bylaws.* Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9216377/ns-legislation-overrule-hrm-bylaws/>

[17] Good, K. (2019). Op. cit.

it is still possible to move forward and begin implementing a vision for change. This vision includes:

-  Ensuring all residents share in the wealth in our communities,
-  Making municipal services fully accessible to all
-  Protecting the environment, while seeking economic and social well-being for current and future generations

FISCAL FAIRNESS

How Municipalities Can Equitably and Sustainably Fund Services

To fund high-quality, affordable, and accessible public services, municipalities must be willing to transform their taxing and spending based on the principle of fairness, considering individuals' ability to pay, and seeking to address income and wealth inequality and insecurity. Canada has seen a decline in the progressive nature of our tax system, which has allowed income inequality to grow.[18] This progressivity has been eroded over time by tax cuts favouring top-income earners and corporations, and tax credits that have meant some forms of wealth and income (such as capital gains, inheritances/bequests) are untaxed or lightly taxed sources. More importantly, this loss of progressivity represents forgone revenue that could have otherwise been invested in public services.

Decisions to cut or restrain taxes are gendered. Applying a gendered intersectional lens shows us that women and lower income earners—especially new immigrants/migrants, those with disabilities, and racialized persons—benefit less from tax cuts and are disproportionately negatively impacted by reductions or restraints on services that result.[19]

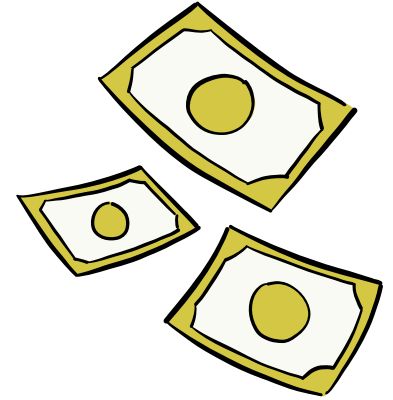
[18] Lee, M. and Cochrane, D. T. (2024). *Canada's shift to a more regressive tax system, 2004 to 2022*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/canadas-shift-more-regressive-tax-system-2004-2022>

[19] Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia and Women's Action Alliance for Change Nova Scotia (2015). *Nova Scotia Budget Watch 2015: Through a Gender Lens*. CCPA-NS Office. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Novapercent20Scotiapercent20Office/2015/04/NS_Budget_Watch_Gender.pdf

Exploring Revenue Options for Nova Scotia Municipalities

The Province's most recent report on municipal finances in Nova Scotia found one region and three towns to be "high risk" regarding financial health.[20]

Municipalities have raised concerns about the weighting of the indicators and challenges facing municipalities, including a lack of sufficient provincial funding. Nonetheless, this report provides some insights into municipal budgets. The main concern for HRM is that the "municipality's tax base is not keeping up with the cost of municipal services and programs." [21] This concern was also raised for CBRM.



Property taxes are the primary source of funding for municipalities, though the amount of revenue from this source does vary. For example, net property taxes in the 2021-22 fiscal year comprised 65 per cent of operating revenue for CBRM, and 81 per cent in HRM. The average across all municipalities is 63 per cent.[22] Each municipality determines property tax rates, but the crown corporation determines the property's value based on market housing values (with a two-year lag, i.e. the 2024 assessment is based on 2022 market values).[23] Property taxes are flat tax rates set by each municipality, not based on the ability to pay. There is a Nova Scotia property tax rebate for low-income seniors for 50 per cent of the previous year's property taxes, up to a maximum of \$800.[24] Property taxes are also capped. Since 2007, the Capped Assessment Program (CAP) limits the amount the taxable assessment for eligible residential property can increase year over year to the Nova Scotia consumer price index; it applies to all properties except for commercial properties (including apartment buildings), new construction, non-owner-occupied condominiums, properties that have been purchased from a non-family member within the last year, and properties that are majority owned by

[20] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Statistics Annual Report 2021-2022*. Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1352/municipal-statistics-annual-report-2021-2022-en.pdf>

[21] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Report: Cape Breton Regional Municipality*. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/documents/municipal-profile-and-financial-condition-indicators-report-2021-cape-breton-regional-municipality>

[22] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Statistics Annual Report 2021-2022*. Op. cit.

[23] Information on the Property Valuation Services Corporation can be found here: <https://www.pvsc.ca/about-pvsc>

[24] Nova Scotia (2024). *Apply for a property tax rebate: Property Tax Rebate for Seniors*. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/apply-property-tax-rebate-property-tax-rebate-seniors>

out-of-province residents.[25]

Other municipal funding sources are user fees such as transit fares, recreation class fees, community centre rental fees, and so on. These are also regressive, meaning they are the same no matter your ability to pay. While some municipalities provide subsidies for some of these programs, there are still barriers to access, including geographic proximity. The need for low-income people to constantly divulge private information to receive a subsidy is an unnecessary burden that adds to administrative costs. Our chapter on Universal Access explains why decreasing fees should be the goal and provides a plan to eliminate as many fees as possible.

For most municipalities, relying so heavily on property tax revenue has put them in a fiscal straitjacket.

Much discussion is often made about the particularity of Nova Scotia's municipal property tax cap. Many people point to elements of unfairness in who the CAP protects and who it causes to pay higher taxes. Given the significant increase in the consumer price index and housing value, a large portion of the value of housing is not taxed in Nova Scotia. Is it time to ease off the CAP?[26] The impact of removing the CAP at this point would be devastating to thousands of families in the province; Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities has proposed a 13-year phase-out plan. That said, the CAP was brought in for a reason, namely that people were being forced out of their homes as the value of their homes was rising rapidly, well above increases in people's incomes. These conditions continue to exist today. The CAP was an imperfect solution at the time, and it is an imperfect solution today. The CAP is a symptom of a larger problem that can be addressed. Municipalities are overly dependent on property taxes—diversifying municipal revenue sources is the solution. It is the only

“For most municipalities, relying so heavily on property tax revenue has put them in a fiscal straitjacket.”

[25] Information about the Capped Assessment Program can be found here: <https://www.pvsc.ca/understand-your-assessment/capped-assessment-program>

[26] Sullivan, D. (2024). *Nova Scotia's property tax problem grows*. Deny's Substack. <https://deny.substack.com/p/nova-scotias-property-tax-problem>

solution that will help achieve fairness in the long run. The impact of removing the CAP at this point would be devastating to thousands of families in the province.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Nova Scotia (CCPA–NS) has published recommendations to move away from property tax to funding municipalities through income tax, a more progressive tax.[27] In Manitoba and many American states, income taxes partially fund municipalities.[28] This allows more flexibility in raising the necessary revenue to cover public services and should be considered in Nova Scotia either provincially or federally. The most recent Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report on municipal taxes investigated how municipalities could decide to implement a local income tax if the federal government directed the Canada Revenue Agency to collect municipal personal income taxes. For example, a one per cent tax on the richest could raise tens of millions of dollars to pay for public services and infrastructure. For HRM, using a broader tax base—a one per cent point of municipal tax on incomes over \$56,000—would provide additional revenue of approximately \$45 million.[29]

The Municipality of the County of Guysborough also has an innovative model, with the single largest source of its municipal revenue coming from municipally-owned businesses and investments, including the Canso Seaside Manor and Milford Haven Corporation.[30] Guysborough draws on net property tax for 20 per cent of its operating revenue. The town of Antigonish owns an Alternative Resource Energy Authority; 21 per cent of consolidated revenue is from property tax and 60 per cent is sales of service; property tax is 61 per cent of

[27] Bradfield, M. (2013). *Policy Points: An alternative to property taxes*. CCPA NS Office.

<https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/policy-points-alternative-property-taxes>

[28] Bradfield, M. (2013). Op. cit.

[29] Macdonald, D. (2024). *A Modest Proposal: A plan to give municipalities access to personal income taxes*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

<https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Nationalpercent20Office/2024/03/Modestpercent20proposal.pdf>

[30] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Report: Municipality of the District of Guysborough*. Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1362/municipality-district-guysborough-municipal-profile-and-financial-condition-indicators-results-2021-2022-municipal-report-en.pdf>

operating revenue, and government transfers make up 7 per cent.[31]

Bridgewater similarly stands out for having the lowest portion with net property tax representing 24 per cent of consolidated revenue and sales of services at 51 per cent, transfers are 22 per cent.[32]

This conversation needs to include a few elements:

- 1 Shifting some municipal revenue toward income and corporate taxes, not just property taxes
- 2 Shifting property taxes and fines to be more progressive by linking them to income.

To ensure fairness, this conversation must happen at the local, provincial and federal levels.

While these big questions get sorted out, there are other revenue streams that municipalities could be exploring based on efforts in other cities. There are two potential revenue streams that municipalities in Nova Scotia should consider today, including:

- 1 A new per-kilometre levy on ride-sourcing companies like Uber, delivery companies like SkipTheDishes, and online retailers like Amazon
- 2 Explore new municipally-owned business opportunities in green energy production[33], telecommunications and internet services[34], and planned and publicly-owned office and retail spaces

[31] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Report: Town of Antigonish*. Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1339/town-antigonish-municipal-profile-and-financial-condition-indicators-results-2021-2022-municipal-report-en.pdf>

[32] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Report: Town of Berwick*. Nova Scotia Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1346/town-berwick-municipal-profile-and-financial-condition-indicators-results-2021-2022-municipal-report-en.pdf>

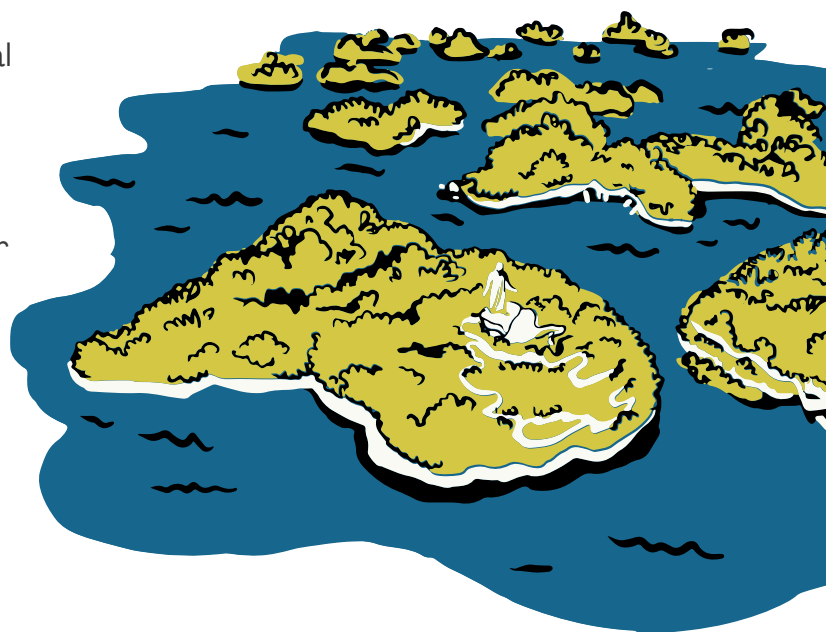
[33] The Town of Berwick, for example, owns its own electric utility and others. The municipalities of Guysborough and West Hants own green energy projects that generate revenues.

[34] Information on the Pictou County Internet project is available here: <https://mopcfirsthome.ca/>

Advocating for Increased Equalization and Government Transfers

Another essential part of the funding discussion is transfers from other levels of government, which make up a range of portions of municipal budgets. Government transfers represent 4 per cent (3 per cent conditional and 1 per cent unconditional, \$22.6 and \$11.6 million) of operating revenue for HRM, for example. For CBRM, 22.7 per cent of its general operating budget is from government transfers.[35] As previously shown by CBRM staff, the system that is designed to equalize capacity to fund standard expenditures “represents only a fraction of total actual municipal service responsibilities, and the government of Nova Scotia has consistently under-funded the equalization system so that the annual grant is consistently well below the total defined entitlements.”[36] Water and wastewater services and infrastructure are not considered standard expenditures in the Municipal Grants Act.[37] These services are mostly, if not exclusively, paid for by user fees; they are not funded by general tax revenue and do not qualify for equalization funding.

The provincial government should look for ways to increase the provincial equalization budget, allowing smaller and more rural municipalities to offer similar services. Creating some targeted revenue stream to fund this equalization, rather than funding it from general revenues, may provide municipalities with more stable, upward funding.



[35] Nova Scotia (2022). *Municipal Report: Cape Breton Regional Municipality*. Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1340/cape-breton-regional-municipality-municipal-profile-and-financial-condition-indicators-results-2021-2022-municipal-report-en.pdf>

[36] Cape Breton Regional Municipality (2010). *Final ICSP Report: Cape Breton Regional Municipality Integrated Community Sustainability Plan*. <https://laserfiche.cbrm.ns.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=10601&dbid=0&repo=CBRM-Laserfiche>

[37] Nova Scotia Legislature (2023). *Municipal Grants Act*. [https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/municipalper cent20grants.pdf](https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/municipalper%20grants.pdf)

Halifax Regional Municipality Budget

In April 2024, HRM Council passed a \$1.3 billion budget for the municipality.[38] Property tax revenue makes up approximately 71 per cent of this budget.[39] There is a 6.3 per cent increase of revenue from property taxes— “not an increase to the tax rate, which is expected to land at over 0.7 (an increase of over one per cent).”[40] The budget also increased transit fees to \$3, about a 10 per cent increase, which runs counter to the need to encourage more usage as part of a responsive climate action plan. Based on their conversations and which areas received new funding this year, the council's biggest priorities were policing and a ferry terminal in Bedford, with some funding added for climate change adaptation.

HRM has grown by just over 52,000 people since the 2021 census.[41] This rapid population growth has the municipality bursting at its seams. Rental and housing costs have skyrocketed, traffic congestion has increased, schools are overcrowded, and more than 82,000 people[42] in the Central Zone do not have a family doctor. There are also alarming increases in homelessness in HRM and elsewhere in the province.[43]

[38] Halifax Regional Municipality (2024). *Budget and Business Plan 2024/25*.

https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/budget-finances/budgetbook_2024-25_final.pdf

[39] Ettinger, L. (2024). *Halifax approves \$1.3-billion budget, 6.3 per cent tax bill increase*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-budget-approved-2024-25-1.7182380>

[40] Taplin, J. (2024). *HRM property tax bill increase nailed down to 6.3 per cent*. Saltwire. <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/hrm-property-tax-bill-increase-nailed-down-to-63-per-cent-100953133/>

[41] 2021 Census population was 439,818; the current 2023 estimate is 492,000:

https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive_news.asp?id=19934&dg=1,2&df=&dto=.6f&dti=6

[42] Nova Scotia Health (2024). *Nova Scotia Action for Health - Public Reporting*.

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/nova.scotia.health/viz/ActionforHealth-PublicReporting/Overview>

[43] Leviten-Reid, C. (2023). *Lack of affordable housing in Nova Scotia requires urgent action*. Monitor Mag.

<https://monitormag.ca/articles/lack-of-affordable-housing-in-nova-scotia-requires-urgent-action/>

Failure to solve these problems will lead to further social and economic issues. Rather than continuing to increase the number of police officers, the HRM should, for example, prioritize investment in community-led, civilian-delivered programs and invest “in social structures and organizations and creating separate, new models of safety based in communities and their concerns.”[44]

[44] Ajadi, T., Critchley, H., Jones, E., and Rodgers, J. (2022). *Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM*. Board of the Police Commissioner. <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/220117bopc1021.pdf>

Cape Breton Regional Municipality Budget

In March 2024, the CBRM Council adopted a \$178 million budget for 2024-2025.

[45] This budget included a small tax decrease for many homeowners due to provincial housing and education funding changes and a switch toward a user-pay model for sewage and wastewater. Councillors generally saw this year's budget as good news after three years of tough financial discussions in the CBRM.

CBRM's financial difficulties are well documented, and the shift towards a more positive fiscal outlook has occurred partly because the population decline in CBRM halted, and property values have risen. Last year, CBRM was one of Canada's fastest-growing municipalities— a dramatic swing away from the status quo for the past several decades.[46] This population growth is led by a large increase in the international student population and is largely a temporary increase, especially given the cap on the numbers permitted recently imposed by the federal government.[47] Many in Cape Breton have suggested the critical goal of government policy on the island should be to stabilize the population. CBRM's population has been declining since the 1961 census. That this population decline has reversed, even temporarily, is cause for celebration.

However, the retention or further attraction of people to Cape Breton will be short-lived if problems with housing, services, infrastructure, and local economic development for good jobs are not addressed. The housing situation in the community is now to the point where some students at Cape Breton University

[45] See the full 2024 CBRM budget here: https://cbrm.ns.ca/images/PDF/2024-25_Operating_Budget_Summary.pdf

[46] Nova Scotia Department of Finance (2024). Nova Scotia Population Estimates by County and Census Subdivision – July 1, 2023. https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive_news.asp?id=19934&dg=&df=&dto=.6f&dti=3

[47] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2024). *Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024*. Government of Canada.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2024/01/canada-to-stabilize-growth-and-decrease-number-of-new-international-student-permits-issued-to-approximately-360000-for-2024.html>; see also:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-universities-international-students-permits-1.7158383>

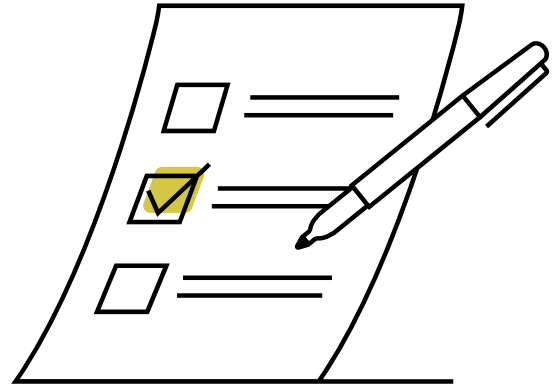
are unable to find housing or jobs in CBRM; they live in Halifax and regularly make the lengthy commute to their classes.[48] In addition, newcomers (and other tenants) sometimes find themselves living in housing in disrepair and/or failing to meet safety standards.

After CBRM added social inclusion as a key priority, alongside economic development and population growth, CBRM Council appointed a task force to develop recommendations focused on social inclusion. Many of the report’s recommendations—including a discussion on free public transit, a new central library, and a call for the province to build 1200 new public housing units in CBRM—are progressive and could represent a significant step forward for the municipality.

[48] Pyne, M. (2024). *Some Cape Breton University students are commuting 5 hours to get to class.* CBC News Nova Scotia. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cbu-international-commute-1.7219345>

Developing Progressive Budgets

For decades, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has published alternative budgets that show how to achieve fiscal fairness: to make strategic investments to advance social and economic justice, create jobs, reallocate resources, expand the economy, and broaden our progressive revenue base. We need fiscal fairness, where those who have more do their part, and our governments collect sufficient revenue to move us from austerity to social investment.[49] These alternative budgets are participatory and collaborative, involving diverse stakeholders, community partners, academics, labour representatives, front-line service providers, activists, and advocates. As outlined in the chapter on Protecting and Enhancing Democracy, these principles should infuse municipal budgetary decision-making and decision-making more broadly.



Most of CCPA-NS' alternative budgets have focused on the provincial government, except for one.[50] *A Sustainable Vision for our Community: Alternative Municipal Budget for the Halifax Regional Municipality*, published in 2012, contained 65 action items and estimated costs for revenue-raising capability.[51] It recommended that “serious investments in housing, transit, jobs, public services and the environment are necessary to ensure everyone benefits from the hoped for economic growth,” identifying light-rail, public transportation, and active transportation as key sources of investment. As this budget shows, it is possible to both help those in need now and ensure a solid foundation for our future, people, communities, and environment.

[49] Findlay, T. and Lord, S. (2015). *A New Economy Needs Child Care*. CCPA NS Office. https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Novaper_cent20Scotiaper_cent20Office/2015/04/New_Economy_Needs_Childcare.pdf

[50] See all alternative budgets produced by CCPA NS here: <https://policyalternatives.ca/projects/nova-scotia-alternative-budget>

[51] CCPA NS (2012). *A Sustainable Vision for Our Community Alternative Municipal Budget for the Halifax Regional Municipality*. CCPA NS Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/sustainable-vision-our-community>

RECOMMENDATIONS

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1 Will you advocate for a more progressive municipal tax system that diversifies municipal revenue sources and reduces reliance on property taxes?
- 2 If elected, will you support creating municipally-owned businesses capable of generating revenue to support the services people need?
- 3 Will you ensure sufficient staffing and expertise to fully consider budgetary decisions that apply fiscal and social impact analysis?



Make the tax base more progressive, including shifting some of the municipal revenue base toward income and linking the property tax and fines to income;



Diversify the municipal revenue base to include new municipally-owned business opportunities, such as green energy production, telecommunications and internet services;



Improve the fairness of municipal equalization funding by considering the full range of service needs and ensuring reasonably comparable services at reasonably comparable taxation levels, with a special focus on rural and remote municipalities.








Publish more transparent information—including analyses using an intersectional lens of budgetary spending and tax decisions—to produce more equitable and responsive policies, programs, and services.

PUBLIC PROVISION

How Municipalities Can Provide Quality Services

The current approach to municipal services relies heavily on the private sphere to meet our needs. Contracting out, subcontracting and outsourcing are all forms of privatizing services that do not align with the fundamental principles of the most effective, efficient, equitable, responsive, sustainable, and inclusive provision of services. Public provision of services is superior to for-profit contracted-out services for at least five key reasons:

-  Improved quality of services
-  Equitable access for users and decent working conditions for providers
-  Accountability to community members
-  Ability to respond quickly to emergencies
-  More efficient, with no profit-maximizing behaviour^[52]

In many municipalities across Nova Scotia, snow removal and waste collection and processing are the largest contracted-out services. Other outsourced work

[52] Findlay, T., Saulnier, C., Boyd, M., O'Keefe, J. (2020). *Creating the Future we all deserve, A Social Policy Framework for Nova Scotia*. CCPA-NS Office. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/the-future-we-deserve>

includes grass mowing, landscape services, and custodial services. For example, HRM contracts for-profit companies for solid waste, custodial and janitorial, snow and ice management, and security. In July 2021, Halifax Regional Council awarded eight contracts for solid waste collection, covering five years and worth \$75.9 million, that were not subject to the living wage provisions because staff had already issued the call for proposals before Council made the decision.[53] New and renewed contracts will be subject to living wage and social value requirements. There is also an opportunity to begin discussing whether remunicipalization is possible and prevent further services from being privatized and contracted out. The international estimate is that public provision can provide net savings of more than 4% in almost every case. HRM could save just over \$3 million by bringing just services in-house. More on this below.

CBRM still owns some garbage trucks operated by municipal staff, but private for-profit contractors serve some routes. Though the municipality owns a recycling facility, it contracts out its operations.[54] If all waste removal services were contracted out, they would amount to \$5 million annually. Their plan could mean \$125 million worth of contracts over 25 years or a 25-year very lucrative contract. Council discussion suggested the municipality—or some Councillors at least—thought contracting out these services would be a cost-saving measure. Evidence, however, suggests otherwise and points to it being at least \$5 million less expensive to keep them in-house. Fortunately, since no tenders were awarded for the system, there is still time for reconsideration.[55]

Since 2017, there have been more than 50 new cases of (re)municipalisation in Canada's water, waste, transport, telecommunications and health care sectors. [56] Examples of re-municipalization in local government specifically include housing, parking, security, police station construction, and recreation



[53] Woodford, Z. (2021). *Halifax council awards \$75.9 million in waste collection contracts with no living wage requirements*. Halifax Examiner. <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/government/city-hall/halifax-council-awards-75-9-million-in-waste-collection-contracts-with-no-living-wage-requirements/>

[54] Ayers, T. (2023). Op. cit.

[55] While a Request for Qualified Proponents was issued for the CBRM Waste Management System, a CBRM procurement officer confirmed in an email that no further steps were made since it was issued, and that “the path forward hasn’t been decided as of yet.” See here: https://procurement-portal.novascotia.ca/tenders/CBRM_PQ01-2023

[56] See database of initiatives here: <https://publicfutures.org/en/cases>

services.[57] Reasons for undertaking de-privatization initiatives to ensure more services are under public control include “increasing costs and declining quality for service users, worsening conditions for workers and virtually non-existent accountability, transparency and democratic control.”[58] In Winnipeg, for example, serious concerns were raised about outsourced waste collection jobs that were insecure, paid less than when collection remained in-house, and for which the occupational safety and health standards were insufficient and non-adherence to regulations.[59] Some decisions to remunicipalize in other countries have been driven by “fiscally conscious municipal managers who decide to bring services back in-house because it is cheaper to do so (by removing the costs of monitoring and tendering as well as eliminating profit-taking by private firms).”[60] An older study of reasons for bringing work back in-house in Canada included “local control, cost, problems with contractors, increased local capacity.”[61] The remainder of this chapter explores some of these reasons for remunicipalization.

Ensuring Cost-Effectiveness

Privatized services cost more than publicly provided services. While it may seem obvious that the profit margin alone adds cost to a contract, profits are only one significant way that expenses are higher. When the additional financing costs are added to the operating expenses maximized for profit, Nova Scotia’s experience with public-private partnership (P3) schools and highways resulted in hundreds of millions in overpayment. These partnerships involved private-for-profit consortiums, building, financing, owning and operating the infrastructure using lengthy, complex contracts. The additional P3 costs represented a significant amount of taxpayer money that could have been invested into more custodians, educators, and road service, but instead went into subsidizing the profits of for-

[57] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. “Introduction,” in Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*. Transnational Institute (TNI): Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-future-is-public-democratic-ownership-of-public-services>

[58] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. “Introduction,” Op. cit.

[59] Smirl, E. (2018). *Trashed: How Outsourcing Municipal Solid Waste Collection Kicks Workers to the Curb*. CCPA Manitoba Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/trashed>

[60] McDonald, D. A. (2024). *Landscapes of Remunicipalization: A Critical Literature Review*. Urban Affairs Review. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874241233535>

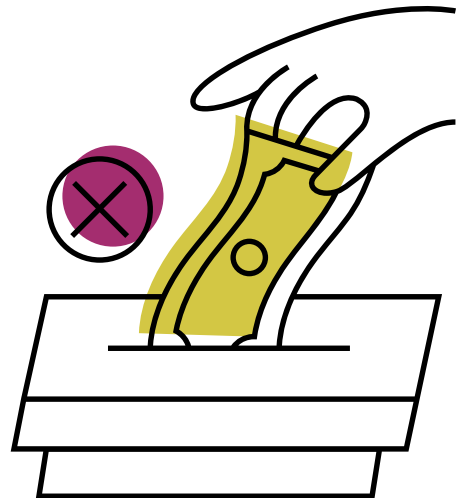
[61] Reynolds, K., Royer, G. and Beresford, C. (2016). *Back in House: Why Local Governments are Bringing Services Home*. Columbia Institute. https://columbiainstitute.eco/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Columbia_Back_in_House_2016_English_web.pdf

profit companies, many of whom are not local.[62]

Remunicipalization Examples of Cost Saving

There is mounting evidence that substantial money—anywhere from 4 per cent to 62 per cent—is saved when services returned to being publicly managed. Some examples can be found in Nova Scotia:

-  In 2013, when contractors provided snow removal for Port Hawkesbury, the budget was \$350,000 and growing. In 2014, Port Hawkesbury dropped its primary contractor, dropping the cost to \$216,000—a 62 per cent decrease in costs! In 2015, the remaining private contracts were phased out,[63] and the municipality reported a surplus in the snow-clearing budget, which could then be invested where needed and not simply to subsidize profits.[64] The municipality also brought road patching services back in-house, and reported plans to bring waste management and other services back in.[65]
-  In 2017, the HRM returned parking enforcement to in-house delivery, projecting a \$100,000 yearly savings, or about 8 per cent.[66]



[62] Saulnier, C. (2020). *Many Dangers of Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) in Newfoundland and Labrador*. CCPA NS Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Novapercent20Scotiapercent20Office/2020/10/HiddendangersofP3s.pdf>; also: Majka, C. *Highway Robbery Public Private Partnerships and Nova Scotia Highways*. CCPA NS Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/highway-robbery>




[63] See Port Hawkesbury's snow removal policy: https://townofporthawkesbury.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Winter-Control-Policy-TOPH_FINAL-1.pdf

[64] Smith, Y. (2015). *Port Hawkesbury may record surplus in snow removal budget*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/port-hawkesbury-may-record-surplus-in-snow-removal-budget-1.2984947>

[65] Patil, A. (2016). *Snow removal cheaper in-house: Port Hawkesbury mayor*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/contract-in-house-snow-removal-port-hawkesbury-1.3619079>

[66] Davie, E. (2017). *Halifax ends contract with parking contractor, brings service in-house*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-ends-contract-with-parking-contractor-brings-service-in-house-1.4376154>

Other examples from across Canada include:

-  Paradise, Newfoundland and Labrador decided to end contracting out snow clearing and waste removal services and estimated they could provide the services cheaper—as much as half less than the waste removal contract valued at \$2 million annually;[67]
-  Since the town of Conception Bay South, Newfoundland and Labrador stopped contracting for solid waste collection, they estimated a \$230,000 cost savings annually;[68]
-  The town of Taber, Alberta, decided to end a contract with a for-profit company to finance and upgrade the town’s wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and operate and maintain its water and wastewater systems. Renegotiating the loan alone saved them \$1.4 million over 10 years, allowing them to complete the upgrades at a lower cost, avoid rate hikes for residents, and employ 10 per cent more unionized staff.[69]

Many other examples can be found worldwide, including:

-  Since 2011, London’s Islington Council has taken back contracts for cleaning, building and grounds maintenance, and waste management services worth £380 million, saving about £14 million, or 4 per cent;
-  Seoul, South Korea, stopped contracting out cleaning services and saved 5 per cent despite the higher labour costs because of other fees associated with the private for-profit contract;[70]

[67] CBC News (2017). *Contractors out as C.B.S., Paradise bring services in-house*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/contractors-out-as-c-b-s-paradise-bring-services-in-house-1.1108307>

[68] Jordan, K. (2017). *When private goes public – community wins*. Canadian Union of Public Employees. <https://cupe.ca/when-private-goes-public-community-wins>

[69] Ramsay, R. (2020). “Canada: Local insourcing in the face of a national privatisation push,” in Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. *The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*. Transnational Institute (TNI): Amsterdam, The Netherlands. https://www.tni.org/files/futureispublic_chapter_3.pdf

[70] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. “Conclusion,” Op. cit.



Kragerø, Norway found that remunicipalized waste collection was more effective and cost-efficient, resulting in a 14 per cent reduction in resident fees. Though they faced higher labour costs for wages and pensions, they saved money by “avoiding expensive tendering processes and benefited from having its own full-time employees in waste collection who could also carry out duties in other areas of responsibility for the municipality.”^[71]

There is mounting evidence that contracting out costs more. Unless the decision to continue is political, why are more municipalities not re-considering these contracts? In a staff report to the Halifax Regional Council about awarding a contract for snow removal services, staff said that while the Council could choose to cancel contracts, there is “security of a known fixed cost regardless of weather conditions.” They also raised the additional expense and challenge of securing operators. ^[72] There was no

^[72] Halifax Regional Council (2019). *2019/20 Winter Snow and Ice Control Contract Awards*. <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/190604rc1514.pdf>

Why Privatized Services Cost More

- 1 Corporations must generate profits and pay dividends to their shareholders and parent companies;
- 2 With privatisation comes extra complexity and costs, including substantial fees to consultants and lawyers who design the contracts;
- 3 Public authorities lose control over service costs, as private operators tend to outsource some of the work to other companies, which often comes at a high price;
- 4 Private operators lack a long-term vision regarding financial management;
- 5 Public bodies typically pay lower interest rates than private entities, making their borrowing costs lower

Summary drawn from: Kishimoto, S., Steinfors, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*. Op. cit.

specific and fulsome analysis that weighed the benefits, including social value components, quality, and service flexibility. Examples that showed or projected cost-savings of even a modest net of 4 per cent is still significant and show cost-efficiency. Cost saving is only one reason to prioritize public services.

Improving the Quality and Responsiveness of Services

Publicly managed services are best trusted to uphold the public interest, improving quality and responsiveness. There are lessons to be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricane Lee, Post-Tropical Storm Fiona, and the recent floods and wildfires Nova Scotia has faced. These events have demonstrated how critical public services—and the workers who provide them—are to a healthy, functioning society. These services will likely be increasingly needed as we face mounting climate and public health emergencies. For these services to be most effective and responsive, they must be sufficiently funded and under public control. Publicly managed services are better able to comply with regulation changes, with a view of upholding the public interest in mitigating the emergencies in the first place.

One study of how P3s affect a service provider’s ability to provide services in the public interest finds this model “often works at cross purposes with the people trying to ensure the day-to-day functioning of these public institutions.”[73] The turnover of workers in contracted companies also often results in a lack of institutional knowledge and training.[74] A central concern raised by workers was the “pervasive sense of uncertainty and confusion over who was ultimately responsible for a certain task or job duty” when certain services of municipality workers are done by contractors, often in the same building or area of the community for the same tasks such as snow removal. The result is inefficiency, with the public sector often back-stopping because the contracts can never predict all that is needed nor accommodate the necessary flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges. Another example of the need for public control in Nova is that septage haulers cannot dispose of waste.[75]m a lack of institutional knowledge and training.[74] A central concern raised by workers was the “pervasive sense of uncertainty and confusion over who was ultimately responsible for a certain task or job duty” when certain services of municipality workers are done by contractors, often in the same building or area of the community for the same tasks such as snow removal. The result is inefficiency, with the public sector often back-stopping because the contracts can never predict all that is needed nor accommodate the necessary flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges.

Privatization also poses risks to the public interest, including bankruptcy. There are many examples of this worldwide. In Norway, in 2017, one of the largest companies providing waste collection services went bankrupt, surprising most municipalities. However, the outcome was ultimately positive—though initially left scrambling, this resulted in 100 municipalities bringing the service back in-house, lowering user fees and providing better pay and working conditions for workers.[76]

Privatization has also been found to exacerbate racial injustice. A recent report found privatization came “at the direct expense of Black, Indigenous and racialized workers who work in contracted-out services, or who depend on these services.” [77] Once services were privatized, these workers experienced worsening working conditions, including lower pay and benefits, and racial discrimination and harassment, all of which also negatively affected the quality of the services they were able to provide.

Conversely, bringing work back in-house could help advance racial justice and improve working conditions. Port Hawkesbury's mayor said the following about their remunicipalized services: "It was trial and error, but it wound up that the people are proud of them, the streets are done much better, and it's transparency at its highest. They're dedicated and happy with their work.”[78]

Similarly, HRM's impetus for bringing its parking compliance enforcement service back in-house was the company's poor performance and complaints about it.[79] Notably, this company had been brought in to replace another in which three employees were charged after submitting thousands of forged parking tickets.[80] After terminating the contracts, HRM planned to hire nine compliance officers to enforce parking bylaws, and they would also enforce other minor offences as required by the municipalities' needs.

[76] See: Monsen, N. and Pettersen, B. (2020). “Norway: Bankruptcy sparks more than 100 cases of Remunicipalization,” in Kishimoto, S., Steinfors, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*. Transnational Institute (TNI): Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

https://www.tni.org/files/futureispublic_chapter_1.pdf

[77] Karim, A. and Sánchez, J. (2024). *The Colour of Privatization: A CUPE Report on the Impacts of Privatized and For-Profit Services on Indigenous, Black and Racialized Workers and Communities*. The Canadian Union of Public Employees.

https://cupe.ca/sites/default/files/colour_of_privatization_report_en.pdf

[78] Patil, A. (2016). Op. cit.

[79] Davie, E. (2017). Op. cit.

[80] Pearson, H (2016). *3 men face charges after submitting thousands of forged parking tickets*. Global News.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/2500781/3-men-face-charges-after-submitting-thousands-of-forged-parking-tickets/>

Promoting Democratic, Equitable, and Sustainable Services

Publicly provided services are more democratic, allowing for more explicit promotion of socially and economically just and environmentally sustainable services.

It is easier for community members to hold publicly managed services to account for meeting environmental or other social or economic objectives overseen by elected officials, and to provide more meaningful input into these services (see our chapter on Enhancing Democracy for more on this). Where is the incentive for a private, for-profit company to reduce waste in locked-in 25-year contracts? What the CBRM may need in the year 2049 will likely be very different than what it needs today, as all levels of government will be focused on preventing the further warming of the planet and decreasing greenhouse emissions. Publicly managed services are better positioned to prioritize long-term ecological concerns over short-term financial considerations”[81] (see chapter on Climate Justice). As the Transnational Institute’s study on remunicipalization shows, “procurement, employment and investment decisions can bring ecological and equitable economic development.”[82]

Municipalities should consider deprivatizing services and commit to protecting essential public services from being captured by private for-profit interests in the first place. Water and sanitation are vital parts of this commitment. The Blue Communities campaign is a good example. [83]

“Municipalities should consider deprivatizing services and commit to protecting essential public services from being captured by private for-profit interests in the first place.”

[81] Kishimoto, S., Steinfors, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary - The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*. Transnational Institute (TNI): Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-future-is-public-democratic-ownership-of-public-services>

[82] Kishimoto, S., Steinfors, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary*. Op. cit.

[83] See here: <https://canadians.org/bluecommunities/>

As publicly provided services, they are more democratic, and municipalities can better ensure the best quality of public services and the broadest access, as the chapter on Universality outlines. These services must, however, ensure community members can contribute their input and control not just at municipal elections every four years but rather in meaningful opportunities for inclusive, bottom-up, transparent decision-making (see the chapter on Enhancing Democracy for more examples of this). It is also critical to consider the user experience and working conditions of those providing current public services and improving both in efforts to remunicipalize. As the cases of those who have re-municipalized have shown, “workers achieved more protection and better conditions than in the private sector – especially the most vulnerable.”[84] How are women and racialized communities impacted by the return of services to public hands? Are Indigenous voices given meaningful input into and control over these decisions? Could co-managed and owned models, designed in partnership with First Nations communities, be considered?

Smaller municipalities may consider partnering with others to share resources under regional publicly managed services, building relationships based on transparency and accountability to users, workers, and communities. Research on the thousands of (re)municipalization examples show that when essential services are publicly owned and democratically organized, they can effectively strengthen community wealth, localize the economy and fulfil people’s collective needs.”[85] Public ownership can also take different forms, such as the collaboration with grassroots citizens’ and workers’ cooperatives [86] or co-ownership shared between a public authority and a not-for-profit association.

“When essential services are publicly owned and democratically organized, they can effectively strengthen community wealth, localize the economy and fulfil people’s collective needs.”

[84] Kishimoto, S., Steinfors, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary*. Op. cit.

[85] Kishimoto, S., Steinfors, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary*. Pg. 28. Op. cit.

[86] Hemingway, A. and Pek, S. (2024). *Expanding democratic employee ownership in Canada: Policy options*. CCPA BC Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BCper cent20Office/2024/04/CCPA-BCper cent20employeeper cent20ownershipper cent20240418.pdf>

In summary, we must move away from an approach that uses public money to guarantee the profits of private entities that promise to absorb risks when, in reality, they too often introduce different ones, like bankruptcy. In contrast, municipal finances are more effectively, efficiently, and equitably used for publicly-managed and -provided services. This results in:



Lower costs

The municipality does not have to pay for contract tendering and monitoring or the companies' higher expenses, including financing at higher interest rates and profits, which might support lowering fees for service users;



More accountability and democratic control

The public has more input into how the service is provided, allowing more swift and less costly changes as needed without being locked into contracts with no flexibility;



Less risk

Services provided by a private company that can declare bankruptcy or engage in practices that compromise the services;






Better quality, decent jobs, and equitable access to services

Public services are of higher quality and can be designed to support decent work and well-being and ensure universal access. Alternatively, the lowest bidders seeking to maximize profits can result in a patchwork of poorer-quality services and working conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1 Will you protect publicly-managed municipal services from being contracted out?
- 2 Do you support a plan to decrease the public funding provided to private, for-profit services and remunicipalize services?
- 3 Will you propose that your municipality sign on as a Blue Community^[88] and commit to recognizing water and sanitation as human rights, banning or phasing out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events, and promoting publicly financed, owned, and operated water and wastewater services?

-  If outsourced currently, bring contracted-out services back to publicly managed, including snow, waste removal and waste processing, grass mowing and landscape services, and custodial services;
-  No publicly managed work currently performed by municipal staff shall be subcontracted, transferred, leased, or otherwise outsourced.
-  Recognize water and sanitation as human rights, phase out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events, expand public water access, protect publicly owned and operated water and wastewater services, and provide more public fountains and washrooms that are also accessible and gender neutral. ^[87]

[87] Lowe, L. (2018). *Lezlie Lowe: Why public bathrooms are actually highly politicized and exclusionary spaces*. Quill and Quire. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/lezlie-low-why-public-bathrooms-are-actually-highly-politicized-and-exclusionary-spaces/>

[88] See here: <https://canadians.org/bluecommunities/>

ENHANCING DEMOCRACY

How Municipalities Can Build Healthy Engaged Communities

There is a major rise in far-right authoritarianism worldwide, and Canada is no exception.

Politicians like Trump in the United States, Modi in India, Le Pen in France, Putin in Russia, Farage in the UK, and some political commentators and elected officials in Canada, have allowed the entire political discourse to become increasingly hostile and violent. These politicians scapegoat people to fan fear and anger at the social and economic malaise in our society.

In Canada, this has recently taken the form of far-right anti-LGBTQ demonstrations—over 100 were held across the country in September of 2023, [89] and 3 Conservative Premiers have passed new laws or policies restricting the rights and freedoms of LGBTQ+ people.[90] These Premiers are scapegoating LGBTQ+ people to deflect from their failures to fix their broken health care and education systems.

Authoritarian politicians and governments seek to undermine democracy, bending it to their will or their party's will—concentrating power in the hands of a select few and minimizing opportunities for diverse communities to have a say in how

[89] Richardson, J. (2023). *Right-wing groups are planning transphobic demonstrations across Canada this week*. Xtra. <https://xtramagazine.com/power/politics/right-wing-protest-september-20-1-million-march-256870>

[90] Tasker, J. P. (2023). *Conservatives approve policies to limit transgender health care for minors, end race-based hiring*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-policy-convention-transgender-1.6961991>

things are done.[91] If authoritarians succeed in gaining power, having alternative centers of power capable of challenging far-right policies becomes more crucial than ever.

Municipalities can and should act to protect their residents from authoritarian leaders. We've often seen municipalities lead progressive change, and municipal council resolutions can be effectively used to challenge conservative rhetoric. This rise in authoritarianism is only possible because liberal democracy has increasingly failed to deliver what the majority of the population needs. As the profits of the one per cent have skyrocketed since the pandemic, the share of the pie for working people has gotten even smaller. Add a housing crisis—and a climate crisis that governments are failing to address—and it is no wonder trust in democratic institutions is on the decline.

The best way to challenge authoritarianism is through more and better democracy.

Instead of expanding democratic opportunities, however, the government of Nova Scotia has increasingly curtailed forums for democratic discussion. In 2018, the provincial government eliminated English-language elected school boards, removing critical community voices in education and school decision-making.[92] More recently, the provincial government eliminated community hearings and consultation from the development process in the HRM, putting the power to make development decisions into the hands of a Cabinet Minister instead of local communities.[93] They also dissolved the regional public housing authorities,

“We must challenge attempts to restrict democratic opportunities in our communities while enhancing existing ones.”

[91] Buxton, N. (2017). *Understanding and challenging authoritarianism*. Transnational Institute. <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/understanding-and-challenging-authoritarianism>

[92] Laroche, J. (2018). *Nova Scotia to dissolve elected school boards in favour of advisory council*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-school-boards-dissolve-1.4501414>

[93] Campbell, F. (2022). *Nova Scotia bill would amend HRM charter to support faster approvals for housing developments*. Saltwire. <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/nova-scotia-bill-would-amend-hrm-charter-to-support-faster-approvals-for-housing-developments-100715367/>

creating the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency instead.[94] The Utility and Review Board's 2012 decision to reduce the number of elected municipal councillors in HRM by seven resulted in larger municipal districts than provincial districts, reducing communities' say over what happens at Council.[95]

Not so long ago, New Brunswick had elected health boards to oversee their hospital systems and had actual decision-making power in this critical public service.[96] Today in Nova Scotia, volunteers are involved with Community Health Boards that do great work to support their communities' health needs. However, while focused on community planning, these bodies have no control, or say, over the operation of health care in their communities. Park Boards have long been elected bodies in British Columbia, providing residents a say over recreational spaces in their communities.[97] We know a more robust democracy is possible in Nova Scotia. We must challenge attempts to restrict democratic opportunities in our communities while enhancing existing ones.

There are two critical ways to consider how democratic an institution is: “the function and mission that the elected government gives to public industries and how they are managed” and “the extent of openness to citizen participation in, and awareness of, the decision-making of public industries.”[98]

In terms of the first, one consideration is the integration of an explicit mission to achieve social benefits in its procurement and investment. For example, in September 2020, the Halifax Regional Council voted to adopt a Supplier Code of Conduct, incorporating living wage requirements and a Social Value Framework, which came into effect in April 2021 and impacted outsourced labour when contracts were being (re)negotiated going forward.[99] These were necessary

[94] Gorman, Michael. (2022). *N.S. government unveils details of new housing agency*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/n-s-government-unveils-details-of-new-housing-agency-1.6623933>

[95] Halifax Regional Council (2012). *Support Models for Council*. <https://legacycontent.halifax.ca/boardscom/SCadmin/documents/120326esc711.pdf>

[96] See here: <https://capa-acam.ca/advocacy/news/alberta-health-services-restructure-2023-11-08>

[97] See here: <https://bcparks.ca/>

[98] Wainwright, H. (2020). “Transforming the state: Towards democracy-driven public ownership,” in Kishimoto, S., Steinfort, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*. Transnational Institute (TNI): Amsterdam, The Netherlands. https://www.tni.org/files/futureispublic_chapter_14.pdf

[99] Halifax Regional Council (2020). *Fair Wage/Living Wage and Social Value Framework*. <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/200922rc11123.pdf>

steps to strengthen the procurement process and ensure contractors are not chosen based on the lowest bids; moreover, they must show, as outlined in the Social Value Framework, considerations of community impact, workforce and training potentials, inclusion, environment and other social factors.[100] A scoring weight for Social Value criteria is between 10 and 30 per cent, ensuring the Municipality’s efforts appropriately impact decision-making.[101] This appears to be an improvement over previous weighting, wherein the contract cost is not even considered unless the contractor scores 75 per cent on the other criteria.[102] Other municipalities should follow HRM’s lead and consider including those provisions. Still, more can be done: all municipalities must remove exemptions for contractors and institute a requirement to pay their own employees a living wage (see this report’s chapter on Strengthening Communities). However, municipalities must also consider the evidence and positive effects of re-municipalization as a step toward democratization, as outlined in the Public Provision chapter.

“Service design and policy decisions must be less top-down and bureaucratized to prevent community members from becoming unconnected and uninformed about the services provided to them.”

Merely bringing a service back in to be publicly managed—as we recommend in the chapter on Public Provision—or the fact that a service is public does not alone guarantee these services are more democratic, beyond allowing elected officials to be more easily held to account at the ballot box. Too often, services are detached from the reality of the people they serve. Service design and policy decisions must be less top-down and bureaucratized to prevent community members from becoming disconnected and uninformed about the services provided to them.[103] Contracting-in is more likely to expand collective bargaining, thus providing more worker participation in decision-making and better protection of freedom of speech.[104]

[100] Halifax Regional Council (2020). *Fair Wage/Living Wage and Social Value Framework*. Op. cit. Appendix B

[101] Halifax Regional Council (2024). Procurement Manual.

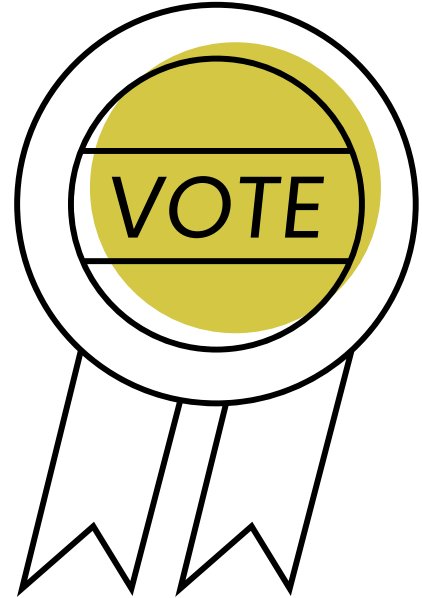
<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/business/doing-business-halifax/procurement-manual-updated-jan-17-2024.pdf>

[102] The final awards are posted; however, the authors were unable to find an example of how bidding criteria was weighted for a specific contract. See here: <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/morning-file/halifax-needs-a-living-wage-ordinance-morning-file-monday-september-26-2016/>

[103] McDonald, D. A. (2024). Op. cit.

[104] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary*. Op. cit.

A more democratic service design and delivery model involves communities and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working collaboratively with the municipality to build capacity and knowledge about public services and share their approach to public services with local authorities. These models work best if they are structured and “regularized, long-term arrangements between state agencies and groups of citizens, NGOs, and other formal or informal non-profit groups” where all can contribute substantially to decision-making and service delivery.[105]



There are many ways to work towards ensuring our communities are more robust democracies—from strengthening mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and information disclosure to more participatory governance for service users, to sharing decision-making powers, to public ownership.[106] More engaged initiatives could involve establishing committees and councils wherein a third of seats are reserved for workers and another third for users to create policies and programs collaboratively. Other models allow residents to take a step toward a better understanding of issues and how to shape solutions, like Portsmouth Listens,[107] which uses ‘dialogue to action’ study circles to allow citizens to examine local issues and bring forward recommendations for action. Community-led, they have often collaborated with local government to address issues facing municipal government. Given the dominance of top-down bureaucratic models, there is work to be done to start shifting culture, values, and ways of engaging to more active ways. One example is the Edmonton community leagues, which support more participation and voice in municipal affairs.[108]

[105] McDonald (2024) Op. cit.

[106] Participatory Budgeting Project (2024). *Tools for Participatory Democracy: Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/tools-for-participatory-democracy-spectrum-of-community-engagement-to-ownership/>

[107] More information on Portsmouth Listens can be found here: <https://portsmouthlistens.org/>

[108] Urbaniak, T. (2020). *TOM URBANIAK: Turning your community around*. Saltwire. <https://www.saltwire.com/cape-breton/opinion/tom-urbaniak-turning-your-community-around-422292/>; see also: <https://efcl.org/>

Enhancing Community Engagement and Public Ownership

Establish Democratic Assemblies

Municipalities could establish citizen assemblies^[109] or mini-publics. These initiatives could be critical for particularly contentious issues such as housing and homelessness where there is a “growing recognition that the current system of public engagement on land-use decisions is unrepresentative and inefficient. This system is failing on democratic grounds by amplifying the interests of only a subset of the population, as well as contributing to the severe housing crisis and shortage.”^[110] Fundamental differences exist between these more democratic forms of participation and public hearings where participants self-select. These more deliberative models aim to ensure that they are a more representative group, for example, if this is about renters, including a percentage that better includes them. These models often also include a learning phase, in which “participants can read balanced briefing materials and hear from and question expert and stakeholder witnesses. With the aid of trained facilitators, participants can have honest conversations with each other in both small-group and plenary sessions to make sense of this information in light of their own experiences.”^[111]

Energy Democracy

Municipalities could also consider public ownership models as another source of revenue, as outlined in the fiscal fairness chapter or to increase democratic control of energy. There has been a 20 per cent increase worldwide in municipally owned energy companies, addressing emissions while reducing fees.^[112] For example, Robin Hood Energy is a municipal energy supplier and a living wage employer in Nottingham, England, created in 2015 to fight energy poverty; they offer guaranteed price transparency, banning director bonuses and excluding private shareholders.^[113] While it may not be possible for municipalities to take on Nova Scotia Power, could municipalities not create new public energy companies that invest in energy efficiency projects and generate local solar and wind energy? More ideas like this can be found in our Climate Justice chapter.

[109] More information on citizens’ assemblies can be found here: <https://participedia.net/case/4228>

[110] Hemingway, A. and Pek, S. (2023). *To break housing gridlock, we need to democratize unrepresentative public hearings*. Policy Note. <https://www.policynote.ca/democratize-public-hearings/>

[111] Hemingway, A. and Pek, S. (2023). *Democratize Public Hearings*. Op. cit.

[112] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary*. Op. cit.

[113] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary*. Op. cit.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is an alternative type of decision-making where “residents don’t just receive and comment on staff proposals; they directly propose and decide what will happen in their neighbourhoods.”^[114] It entails a power shift in which residents are provided with more budgetary information and are also given opportunities to consult and respond to priorities, perhaps through a survey or by presenting to Councils (often during regular working hours). The process should be driven by and grounded in the principles of democracy, equity, access, community participation, fairness, education, and transparency.”^[115] To be impactful, it should involve a significant portion of the municipal budget, which ranges from 20 per cent in the first location of Porto Alegre (Brazil) to 1-10 per cent.

Each district in Halifax has a budget of \$94,000 for a District Capital Fund, for permanent projects in the community that “provide widespread community benefit” (in an election year, the budget is slightly less). In 2013, HRM Councillor Wayne Mason started using participatory budgeting for his district’s Capital Fund. The process allows non-profit organizations to pitch projects for funding for which residents in the district vote. The “big projects” category funds up to \$10,000, and the “small project” category funds up to \$5,000 or less. Mason initiated the process “to provide equal access to the Councillor’s district capital fund and make the decisions on funding in public.”^[116] In 2024, 180 people voted for projects totalling just over \$56,000.^[117]

Many other districts in HRM have since adopted full or partial spending of their District Capital through a participatory budgeting vote, including Councillors Lindell Smith^[118] and Sam Austin.^[119] The voting allows everyone in the district to participate—regardless of age or immigration/migrant status, for example—which engages those not allowed to vote in regular elections and have a say in their community. Participatory budgeting could be incorporated into the larger



[114] Flynn, A. (2016). *Participatory Budgeting – Not a One-Size-Fits-All Approach*. Public Sector Digest. <https://www.osgoode.yorku.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Flynn.pdf>

[115] Flynn, A. (2016). Op. cit.

[116] Mason, W. (2024). *D7 Participatory Budgeting*. Wayne Mason, Councillor. <https://wayemason.ca/pb/>

[117] Mason, W. (2024). Op. cit.

[118] Smith, L. (2024). *Participatory Budgeting*. Lindell Smith. <https://lindellsmithhfx.ca/pb/>

[119] Austin, S. (2024). *Participatory Budgeting 2024 Projects*. Sam Austin Dartmouth Centre. <https://samaustin.ca/participatory-budgeting-2024-projects/>

municipal budget process for HRM, and it and other municipalities should “empower and support community members to design and convene participatory budgeting processes on their own terms.”

The roots of the participatory budget process were about building consensus. Thus, voting should happen only after a process supporting community-building and allowing priorities to be collectively identified. It is also crucial to note that some projects funded by Capital Funds fill gaps that should be provided by the provincial government, such as basketball nets or playground equipment for an elementary school. Public services should not compete for municipal funds—communities should come together to reach a consensus based on wider community assessment and ideally have funding to support mobilization and education to ensure a wide array of community members participate.



Participatory budgeting could be infused into the larger municipal budget process for HRM, and it “should empower and support community members to design and convene participatory budgeting processes on their own terms.” [120] Ultimately, participation needs to be improved to ensure that budgetary priorities better reflect community needs and priorities. For example, Montreal’s participatory budgeting process involves more funding allocated city-wide with specific priorities, investing \$10 million in its first year for projects requiring an investment of at least \$500,000 and, at most, \$3,000,000.[121] Once initial ideas are presented, a committee of city staff and civilian representatives helps develop eligible ideas to formulate projects. As a report on this project describes, “at this stage, special consideration will be given to the population and territories targeted by these projects, in a spirit of equity and inclusion, and in order to meet the most pressing social and environmental needs.”[122] In its second edition, more than 650 ideas were submitted, and more than 17,000 people voted for 31 projects;

[120] Ajadi, T., Kaya, Y. Jones, E., and Maass, K. L. *Opportunities for Participatory Budgeting in HRM*. [PowerPoint slides]. <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/221102bopc831pres.pdf>

[121] Montréal (2021). *Rethinking Montreal: Charter of the first edition of the participatory budget of Montreal (2020-2021)*. https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/charte_budget_participatif_mtl_ang.pdf

[122] Montréal (2021). Op. cit.

five projects were awarded funding. [123] In its third year of participatory budgeting, Montreal earmarked \$45 million, and 850 ideas were proposed.[124]

The principles of participatory budget could also be used for broader community initiatives that work to revitalize neighbourhoods. CCPA Manitoba's *State of the Inner City* reports have shown that "including community voices in budgeting, policy, and program development is key to effecting real change." [125] Ensuring democratizing initiatives centre residents historically marginalized by municipalities and other systems in the community requires a level of investment that values their voices and community organizations supporting them. We must all work to ensure the biases and assumptions of those designing and managing services are transparent, so as not to impact disproportionately negatively those who have not been, or are not at, the table or in the office.

In summary, communities need the capacity to engage and shape public policy to ensure meaningful, inclusive, and effective participation. We all could benefit from new ideas, more diverse voices, and different ways of thinking that make municipal policies and services more inclusive and evidence-based. To open more democratic spaces and ensure more people have a say in policy design, those who face barriers to participating must be supported in meaningful and concrete ways.

Strengthening Elections

Election Financing Reform

Across all municipalities, election financing rules should be strengthened. The only provincial law for candidates during municipal elections is that "contributions which exceed \$50.00 that have been received since the previous election (either in 2020 or since the last special election in the polling district) need to be disclosed." [126]

[123] Montréal (2023). *Montréal's participatory budget: Report on the second edition (2022-2023)*.

<https://montreal.ca/en/articles/montreals-participatory-budget-report-second-edition-2022-2023-60238>

[124] Making Montréal (2024). *Montréal's participatory budget: Third edition*. https://www.makingmtl.ca/participatorybudget?tool=news_feed#tool_tab

[125] Cooper, S. and Schon, M. (2024). *State of the Just Transformation*. CCPA Manitoba Office.

https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitobaper_cent20Office/2024/06/MBper_cent20SICper_cent20Justper_cent20Transformationper_cent202024.pdf

[126] Nova Scotia (2024). *Candidate's Guide to Municipal and*

School Board Elections. <https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/1-1420/candidates-guide-municipal-and-csap-elections-en.pdf>

HRM has strengthened its electoral regulations and includes the following restrictions: no contributions can be accepted from corporations, trade unions, non-profit groups, associations or partnerships or from individuals who are not ordinarily residents in Nova Scotia. An individual's total contributions per election cannot exceed \$5,900—up to \$1,200 per councillor candidate or \$3,000 for mayoral candidates. There is a \$5,900 cap on self-financing; a candidate for councillor cannot spend more than \$30,000, and a mayoral candidate cannot spend more than \$300,000.[127] Even these caps and limits may be too high, providing an advantage for those with higher incomes and easier access to others able to contribute substantially to their campaigns.

Expand Who Can Vote

Municipalities across Nova Scotia should be looking for opportunities to expand democratic functions within their municipal powers and advocating for them at the provincial and federal levels. An important example is ensuring permanent residents can vote in municipal elections.[128] New Brunswick is on track to be the first province in Canada to allow permanent residents to vote in municipal elections in 2026.[129] HRM has repeatedly asked the Province to change the legislation to allow permanent residents to vote, as has the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party (NDP), but no government has agreed.[130] Allowing permanent residents to vote strengthens our municipalities and contributes to their public engagement and connection to their communities. Moreover, funding should be invested towards strategies to increase engagement among youth in municipal elections (lowering the voting age to 16 is one example), as well as racialized minorities, persons with disabilities, and all those who have been under-represented in municipal elections. The Cape Breton Local Immigration Partnership and Cape Breton Island Centre for Immigration have launched a survey to measure public opinion on expanding municipal voting rights to permanent residents and to lower the voting age to 16, with excellent background material

[127] Halifax Regional Municipality (2018). *By-Law Number C-1100 Respecting Campaign Financing*.

<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/legislation-by-laws/By-lawC-1100.pdf>

[128] Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia (2021). *Municipal Voting Rights for Permanent Residents*.

<https://isans.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Municipal-Voting-Rights-August-2021.pdf>

[129] Poitras, J. (2022). *Municipal voting rights for permanent residents likely coming in 2026*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/nb-permanent-residents-non-citizen-voting-rights-1.6468599>

[130] Ryan, H. (2022). *Halifax boundary changes renew calls to allow permanent residents to vote*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-boundary-changes-renew-calls-to-allow-permanent-residents-to-vote-1.6683536>

summarizing the evidence supporting both.[131]

Using an Intersectional Lens: Even Snow Clearance is Not Neutral

Using an intersectional gender lens means understanding how decisions can exacerbate inequalities. Even decisions many would assume would be gender or otherwise neutral can negatively affect a particular group. As one town in Sweden learned, applying this lens to snow-clearing decisions reveals how such decisions can disproportionately impact women.[132] Snow-clearing plans typically prioritize plowing major roads and highways first, particularly those leading into and out of town, followed by smaller local streets. These plans need to consider men's and women's distinct driving patterns and caregiving duties. In most Western countries, while men mainly commute to and from work, women drive all over to run errands and care for elderly family members. Women also walk and take transit more than men and are more often the ones dropping kids off at school.

Nova Scotians spend 221 million hours providing unpaid care each year, and the vast majority of these caregivers are women.[133] More women are likely walking on side streets to get to schools or child care centres. Snow-clearing decisions that do not prioritize clearing sidewalks can more obviously negatively affect women and persons with disabilities (more women have disabilities than men), those less likely to own a car and lower-income residents (women have higher poverty rates and are less likely to own cars), and new immigrants/migrants.[134] Combined, “women are disproportionately vulnerable to poorly maintained sidewalks and intersections, especially when it comes to slippery conditions.”[135]

[131] A live survey on these issues—that we encourage Cape Bretoners to take—can be found here:

<https://expandthevote.ca>; see also: <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/cape-breton-group-hopes-municipal-voting-age-can-one-day-be-lowered-to-16-years-old-100968575/>

[132] Criado Perez, C. (2020). *Invisible Women*. Penguin Books. <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/435554/invisible-women-by-perez-caroline-criado/9781784706289>

[133] Peddle, S. (2022). *Project aims to gain information about how to care for caregivers in Nova Scotia*. Saltwire. <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/project-aims-to-gain-information-about-how-to-care-for-caregivers-in-nova-scotia-100783312/>

[134] Roach, N. (2022). *Snow Clearance isn't Gender Neutral*. Women in Urbanism Canada. <https://www.womeninurbanism.ca/words/snow-clearance-gender>

[135] Roach, N. (2022). Op. cit.

After reversing their approach to snow-clearing, the Swedish town saw a reduction in the number of people admitted to emergency centers, particularly women—79 per cent of pedestrian injuries occurred during the winter months. Women made up 69 per cent of those who had been injured in incidents that did not involve others and experienced more severe injuries). Due to lower healthcare costs, this decrease also had a corresponding economic impact. [136]

“Using a gender intersectional lens must be accompanied by a commitment to change the status quo by implementing policies, programs, and decisions seeking to achieve equitable outcomes.”

Using a gender intersectional lens must be accompanied by a commitment to change the status quo by implementing policies, programs, and decisions seeking to achieve equitable outcomes. To democratize decision-making, employing this lens must work towards explicitly including those who have not been the dominant or default decision-makers historically. Practically speaking, this means providing child care and/or compensating participation, holding events at different times and on other days (including evenings and weekends) to accommodate atypical schedules, and otherwise intentionally taking notice of who is not in the room and engaging them in their own spaces. For example, were Indigenous peoples’ rights, priorities, concerns and ways of life considered? Have you promoted a









safe and inclusive environment for those in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community? Are people across the spectrum of diverse needs and abilities included, and are their needs accommodated? Were parents and children welcome?

[136] Criado Perez, C. (2020). Op. cit.

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1 Will you speak against the rise of far-right violence and hatred in politics?
- 2 Do you promise to defend people who experience racist, sexist, and homophobic attacks?
- 3 Will you support strengthening election finance rules?
- 4 Do you support enhancing voter/resident engagement to improve voter turnout, including allowing permanent residents to vote and lowering the voting age?
- 5 When designing policies, programs, and services, will you consider whether sufficient data was used to ensure decisions consider different experiences and outcomes and do not negatively affect certain groups?
- 6 Will you seek to institute participatory forms of decision-making in your municipality, like participatory budgeting?
- 7 How will you explicitly include those who have not been the dominant/default decision-makers?
- 8 How will you ensure budgetary priorities better reflect community needs and priorities?
- 9 Will you consider strengthening ways for residents to understand Council decisions and hold Council accountable? Will you be as transparent as possible and seek to disclose more information regarding Council decisions?

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Ensure that any planning, design or implementation reflects the intersectional diversity of a municipality's individual, household and community service users' needs and priorities, and meaningfully involves workers and service providers;
-  Use a multiplicity of data that considers different identities and roles, including gender, disability, race, immigration status, and Indigeneity, when analyzing options and designing policies, programs, services and engagement;
-  Enhance the transparency and responsiveness of municipal budgets by instituting meaningfully participatory forms of resident involvement that are not merely hierarchical consultations;
-  Provide more accessible information, with sufficient time to allow for participatory decision-making (especially during municipal budgeting processes) to ensure municipal decision-making needs are open and transparent;
-  Adopt participatory budgeting for a significant enough portion of the budget;
-  End contracting out of services because it moves power to for-profit operators and away from the public interest;
-  Strengthen election finance rules to ensure there is no unfair advantage based on income or wealth status;
-  Allow permanent residents to vote in municipal elections, and lower the voting age to 16.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

How Municipalities Can Promote Climate Readiness and Environmental Stewardship

In recent years, Nova Scotia has experienced unprecedented environmental devastation, which was a wake-up call about the urgency of responding to the effects of the climate crisis in our local communities.

Hurricane Fiona made landfall in Atlantic Canada as a post-tropical storm in September 2022, bringing torrential rain and winds exceeding 100 kilometres per hour.[137] Flooding and downed trees destroyed homes, businesses, roads, parks, and other infrastructure in communities across Nova Scotia.[138] Over 415,000 customers—representing nearly 80% of the province—lost power, many for several days.[139] Many lives were lost, including a senior citizen in Lower Prospect.[140] Having faced the brunt of the storm’s impact, CBRM declared a local state of emergency; the Province also requested military assistance and federal disaster assistance to support recovery. Costing more than \$385 million in damage to Nova Scotia, post-tropical storm Fiona proved to be the most expensive extreme weather event in Atlantic Canada’s history and, at the time, ranked as the tenth most costly natural disaster in Canada as measured by insurance payouts.

2023 was a year rife with extreme weather activities in Nova Scotia. Winter

[137] The Canadian Press. *Post-tropical storm Fiona most costly weather event to ever hit Atlantic Canada, new estimate says*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/fiona-atlantic-canada-insured-damages-660-million-1.6621583>

[138] Smith, C. and Lau, R. (2023). *One year later, the ‘terrifying’ impact of Fiona still being felt in N.S.* CBC News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9960998/hurricane-fiona-anniversary-cape-breton/>

[139] Insurance Bureau of Canada. (2022). *Hurricane Fiona causes \$660 million in insured damage*. <https://www.ibc.ca/news-insights/news/hurricane-fiona-causes-660-million-in-insured-damage>

[140] Frisk, A. (2022). *Missing 81-year-old N.S. man believed swept out to sea during Fiona*. CTV News. <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/missing-81-year-old-n-s-man-believed-swept-out-to-sea-during-fiona-1.6084831>

conditions in recent years have also proven unprecedented and perilous to local communities. The most recent 2023/2024 winter season proved historic, as a snowstorm spanning multiple days hit the Atlantic region—over 150 centimetres of snow fell across parts of Nova Scotia, devastatingly impacting our local communities, especially the eastern region.[138] Cape Breton Regional Police received more than 550 calls for service and reported 30 car accidents; many motorists, unable to traverse the perilous conditions of local roads, were forced to abandon their vehicles and seek emergency assistance. Emergency vehicles were unable to reach residents in need. Unable to keep up with the heavy snowfall, CBRM declared a local state of emergency lasting seven days and urged residents to shelter in place and stay off the roads to make way for emergency vehicles. Eskasoni First Nation in Cape Breton also declared an emergency, as they had exhausted their resources to clear snow in their community.[139] A thousand households across the province were without power for days, and restoration was delayed as power crews faced impassable roads; 70 flights were grounded at Robert Stanfield International Airport, and over 12 vehicle accidents were reported across the municipality.[140] Premier Tim Houston petitioned the federal Minister of Emergency Preparedness for help; the federal government ultimately aided with snow removal in Cape Breton, plus portable fuel storage to help replenish equipment as local supplies dwindled, and air transportation to help with delivering supplies and support the evacuation of isolated and at-risk peoples.[141]

On May 28, a major wildfire broke out in the Hammonds Plains and Upper Tantallon communities within HRM. Over 16,000 residents were displaced, some for nearly two weeks, and hectares of forests were burnt.[1] Substantial infrastructure—including homes, businesses and community facilities—was lost. One of the largest evacuations and emergency responses on record, HRM estimates costs relating to

[141] Thomson, A. (2024). *N.S. digging out after historic snowfall drops 150 cm in some areas*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-digging-out-after-historic-snowfall-1.7104869>

[142] Local Journalism Initiative Reporter (2023). *Eskasoni First Nation declares local state of emergency*. Saltwire.

<https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/eskasoni-first-nation-declares-local-state-of-emergency-100935524/>

[143] CBC News. *Cleanup continues in Nova Scotia after massive multi-day winter storm*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/snowstorm-cleanup-tuesday-feb-6-1.7106008>

[144] Cooke, A. (2024). *N.S. storm: Province requests federal aid after 'massive' winter snowfall*.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10272586/ns-storm-cape-breton-impacts-emergency/>

[145] Halifax Regional Council (2023). *Upper Tantallon Wildfire Lessons Learned*.

<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/231017rci05.pdf>

the wildfire are approximately \$11.7 million.[146] However, the wildfire resulted in, as of October 2023, an estimated \$275 million USD in economic damage.[147]

Then, in late July 2023, came what meteorologists have identified as one of the highest-impact flash floods in Canada's history, with nearly 10 inches of rain hitting Nova Scotia within 24 hours.[148] Tragically, four people (including two children) were killed.[149] HRM announced a State of Emergency on July 22nd, which lasted two weeks. Damage across Nova Scotia was extensive, especially in the municipalities of Halifax, East Hants, West Hants, and the counties of Lunenburg and Queens. Five hundred sections of roadway were damaged, and many bridges washed out: 7 needed to be replaced, 29 required extensive restoration, and 19 minor needed repairs.[150] The only train line connecting the Port of Halifax to the rest of Canada was damaged, with a section nearby Truro being washed out entirely. According to the Q3 Global Catastrophe Recap report, the total economic loss from this flood was \$200 million USD.[151]

The impact of these environmental disasters on our local communities has been profound, underscoring the need for climate readiness strategies that ensure municipalities can respond swiftly to their communities' needs, restore critical community infrastructure and resources, and work towards mitigating (if not preventing) further damage.

Environmental stewardship—care and respect for the natural world through conservation efforts and sustainable practices—is a crucial responsibility of municipalities and is key to ensuring economic and social well-being for current and

[146] Halifax Regional Municipality (2023). *Upper Tantallon Wildfire: After-Action Report*. Community Safety. <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/231017rci05.pdf>

[147] AON (2023). *Global Catastrophe Recap First Half of 2023*. <https://assets.aon.com/-/media/files/aon/capabilities/reinsurance/global-catastrophe-recap-1h-2023.pdf>

[148] Coleman, N. (2023). *Year in Review: Nova Scotia's deadly flood catastrophe*. The Weather Network. <https://www.theweathernetwork.com/en/news/weather/severe/2023-year-in-review-nova-scotia-july-floods>

[149] Lombard, N. (2023). *Body of teenager who went missing in Nova Scotia flood believed to have been found*. CTV News. <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/body-of-teenager-who-went-missing-in-nova-scotia-flood-believed-to-have-been-found-1.6503663>

[150] Armstrong, L. (2023). *'Crews are working around the clock': N.S. has so far repaired 500 sections of roads damaged by torrential rain storms*. CTV News. <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/crews-are-working-around-the-clock-n-s-has-so-far-repaired-500-sections-of-roads-damaged-by-torrential-rain-storms-1.6496581>

[151] AON (2023). *Q3 Global Catastrophe Recap*. <https://www.aon.com/getmedia/7107985e-43d8-412b-a674-7722112cc2b0/20231018-q3-2023-catastrophe-recap.pdf>

future generations. Moreover, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has identified that “municipalities have influence over roughly 50 percent of the nation’s GHG emissions.”[152]

Is your municipality ready to take this on?

Ensuring Readiness to Address the Climate Crisis

There are several steps municipalities must take to address the climate crisis, plan to mitigate its effects and promote sustainable practices within their communities in the years to come. A strong climate readiness plan centres people, communities, and connections. Climate justice demands the brunt of the negative impact of climate change and its mitigation not to fall onto marginalized communities by ensuring these communities benefit as much.

Creating Climate Readiness Strategies

Local environmental organizations have applauded HRM for its ambitious climate action plan.[153] HalifACT 2050: Acting on Climate Together, informed by consultations with community members, outlines the actions required to respond to the climate crisis in homes and communities across the municipality to “build a more resilient and healthy future in Atlantic Canada while preparing for current and future climate impacts.”[154] Measures include retrofitting buildings, expanding public transit, protecting infrastructure from flooding, and dramatically cutting emissions to achieve a net-zero economy by 2050.[155] The report, released in 2020, was followed by substantial investment

“A strong climate readiness plan centres people, communities, and connections.”

[152] Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2022). *Building a Legacy of Local Climate Action The Municipalities for Climate Innovation Program (2016–2022)*. <https://fcm.ca/en/resources/mcip/building-legacy-local-climate-action>

[153] Ecology Action Centre (2020). *Ecology Action Centre urges HRM Council to support and begin implementation of its Climate Action Plan*. <https://ecologyaction.ca/resources-media/press-releases/ecology-action-centre-urges-hrm-council-support-and-begin>

[154] Halifax Regional Municipality (2020). *HalifACT 2050: Acting on Climate Together*. https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/about-the-city/energy-environment/HRM_HalifACT_vNewpercent20Logo_.pdf

[155] Halifax Regional Municipality (2020). *HalifACT 2050*. Op. cit.

in the municipal budget in 2022/2023 towards climate action. However, budgets have not reflected a commitment to following through. For example, in its most recent budget, HRM increased transit fares which results in an increased dependence on vehicles amongst commuters. This move thus contradicts lowering personal vehicle usage—a critically necessary part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate readiness strategies are only as effective as their enforcement. Municipalities must democratically develop these strategies with an open and transparent collaborative process to ensure they are responsive to diverse communities and do not perpetuate environmental racism so they can be held to account by residents to meaningfully implement them.

Developing Municipal Energy Investment Plans

Municipalities have a crucial role in addressing energy poverty—when residents cannot afford or access the energy levels needed to fulfil their everyday needs and maintain safe and healthy temperatures within their homes year-round.[156] Addressing energy poverty is crucial to ensuring the health and well-being of communities, addressing the climate crisis and promoting climate readiness. There is a worldwide movement for democratizing energy systems and supporting the development of clean energy as well. Nova Scotia municipalities have begun tackling this issue through, for example, its Community Solar Program.[157] As the Sierra Club defines it, energy democracy is based on community ownership, which can “take the form of a municipal electric utility or citizen- and worker-owned energy cooperatives, with lots of room for collaboration between the two,” like for example, ones in Antigonish, Berwick, and Mahone Bay.[158]

In 2014 and again in 2018, Bridgewater was awarded the Efficiency Nova Scotia Bright Business Award for “excellence in energy management, solidifying its reputation for engaging businesses and residents alike to find new ways to be

[156] Riva, M., Kingunza Makasi, S., O’Sullivan, K.C. et al. (2023). *Energy poverty: an overlooked determinant of health and climate resilience in Canada*. *Can J Public Health* 114, 422–431. <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-023-00741-0>

[157] More on Nova Scotia’s Community Solar Program can be found here: <https://energy.novascotia.ca/renewables/community-solar-program>

[158] Sierra Club Canada. *Energy Democracy – Beyond Climate Promises*. <https://beyondclimatepromises.ca/energy-democracy/>

energy conscious and to live more responsibly.” Bridgewater received the 2018 GLOBE Climate Leadership–Small Municipal Trail Blazer award for its ground-breaking Community Energy Investment Plan. In 2019, the Town became a Smart City Canada Challenge winner (\$5,000,000 grant) with Energize Bridgewater, a ground-breaking community-based proposal to lift its residents out of energy poverty.[159]

Energize Bridgewater aims to reduce energy costs for Bridgewater’s homeowners, tenants, landlords, businesses, and households facing energy poverty.[160] It also strives to reduce the area’s energy poverty rate by 20 per cent by 2026. Initiatives for homeowners include Energize Bridgewater Home Upgrades, which combines no-cost upgrades with grants, incentives, and financing options to ensure home energy upgrades have the maximum impact at the lowest possible cost to homeowners. Likewise, the Clean Energy Financing program enables homeowners to access low-interest financing, regardless of income level, without a credit check. In partnership with the South Shore Open Doors Association (SSODA), the Coordinated Access program connects households in Bridgewater and neighbouring Lunenburg and Queens Counties to housing, energy, and other social supports to support people experiencing poverty. The Affordable Multifamily Housing initiative incentivizes landlords to invest in multi-unit rental properties for the long term by offering rebates on energy-efficient upgrades, such as improvements to space and water heating, replacements for windows or doors, and insulation.

Energize Bridgewater offers an innovative model for sustainable energy investment that municipalities across Nova Scotia and nationwide can replicate to enhance communities while working towards a just transition and achieving climate readiness goals.

There is no shortage of examples of municipalities taking climate action. You can learn from them and implement models that work in your local community.

[159] Town of Bridgewater. (2024). *Fiscal 2024-2025 Operating & Capital Budget*. Town of Bridgewater. <https://www.bridgewater.ca/document-library/finance/previous-town-budgets/2749-2024-25-annual-budget-document-approved-april-8-2024/file>

[160] More information on Energize Bridgewater is available here: <https://www.bridgewater.ca/town-services/energize-bridgewater>

Working Towards a Just Transition

A just transition policy must ensure initiatives towards environmental sustainability and stewardship have equitable benefits across communities—that is, they do not negatively affect those who have not largely been responsible for environmental degradation. We know, for example, that the bottom 50 per cent of households in Canada produce 8 tonnes of emissions per capita, versus 28 tonnes for the top 10 per cent of households and that more women than men have incomes in the top 10 per cent of households.[161] We also know the energy sector is the most significant source of emissions (about 81 per cent), and that of jobs in this sector 72 per cent are filled by men and 28 per cent by women.[162] The other major sector is transportation—women account for about 34 per cent of mileage driven, and almost all of these occur in passenger vehicles. Passenger vehicles emit fewer GHGs than trucks, especially big trucks, which males almost exclusively drive.[163]

A just transition relies on addressing environmental racism—where “colonialism and capitalism have decreased [marginalized peoples’] ability to protect their communities and identify their future needs.”[164] Environmental racism is not a product of the climate crisis, but a product of the historical neglect of and indifference to these communities’ health, well-being, and ways of life in municipal planning and policies. Amidst the current climate crisis, environmental racism merely exacerbates these issues. Municipalities must, therefore, develop plans that forefront racialized communities and Indigenous communities’ ability to address the climate crisis and respond to ensuing extreme weather events.

Expanding Public Transit and Active Transportation

All residents have the right to access their local communities. All levels of

[161] OXFAM International (2020). *Carbon emissions of richest 1 per cent more than double the emissions of the poorest half of humanity*. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/carbon-emissions-richest-1-per-cent-more-double-emissions-poorest-half-humanity>

[162] Griffin-Cohen, M. (2014). *Gendered Emissions: Counting Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Gender and Why it Matters*. *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research*. <http://www.alternateroutes.ca/index.php/ar/article/view/20595/16990>

[163] Griffin-Cohen, M. (2014). Op. cit.

[164] Lane, P. and Waldron, I. (2023). *When it comes to environmental racism, Ingrid Waldron knows what needs to change*. *Canada’s National Observer*. <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2023/02/06/opinion/ingrid-waldron-interview-environmental-racism>

government have a crucial role to play in supporting residents' ability to access basic needs and essential amenities within their community and between communities while also prioritizing environmental goals. As the level of government responsible for sidewalks, trails, and public transit, municipalities are often left to do the heavy lifting—including stabilizing and subsidizing transit options within and between communities.[165]

Residents across Nova Scotia should be able to travel between and across communities with a convenient, reliable inter-community public transit system, minimizing dependence on private vehicles. Communities should be accessible by fixed-route transit for those living in rural and remote regions with more dispersed populations, and accessible door-to-door transportation should be available for all those who need it (more detailed recommendations for public transportation are provided in the chapter on Universal Access).

With the reality of the climate crisis and rising costs of fossil fuels, collective transportation options that reduce emissions are increasingly critical. Though hybrid buses represent a crucial investment in sustainable public transit infrastructure—an investment HRM has prioritized—even a single diesel bus is better for the environment than several dozen private cars. Increased investment in public transportation returns in spades to the communities it serves. Still, municipalities across Nova Scotia have yet to make this a reality.

As demonstrated by Halifax Transit's ferry crossing cancellations,[166] buses being pulled from operation due to staffing issues, poor transit service within and between communities in Cape Breton,[167] and challenges meeting increased demand,[168] public transit is underfunded in both HRM and CBRM. Investments towards expanding the reach, quality, and frequency of public transportation increase the number of people willing and able to use it; growing ridership opens up



[165] Canadian Urban Transit Association (2021). *A blueprint for permanent transit funding*. <https://cutaactu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Issue-Paper-A-blueprint-for-permanent-transit-funding.pdf>

[166] Sampson, A. (2024). *More relief staff needed to keep Halifax ferry service reliably afloat, says union*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/lack-of-relief-staff-leading-to-halifax-ferry-cancellations-1.7244670>

[167] Common Good Solutions (2021). *Bridging the Gap / Transportation Innovation Lab Phase 3 Pilot: Final Evaluation Report*. https://www.unitedwaycapebreton.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TIL_BTG-Evaluation-Report-Final-.pdf

[168] Latimer, E. (2022). *Transit Cape Breton can't deal with soaring number of bus passengers, leaves riders stranded on the street*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cape-breton-bus-shortage-1.6621504>

new economies of scale, making public transit more effective and efficient and easier for communities to maintain.[169] More investment means better service, and vice versa—a virtuous cycle that reaps benefits not only for residents but also for the climate as the need for private cars is reduced.

Among the fundamental principles outlined in Halifax Transit’s sweeping decades-long plan, HRM includes increasing funding to improve service quality and reliability. [170] These investments, however, must be made swiftly in communities across the province and include funding to enhance the wages and working conditions of the workers who administer them.[171] Municipalities must take action to incentivize public transit for commuters to reduce emissions and achieve climate justice.

To ensure your municipality makes decisions that support everyone to be more active in their community while promoting sustainable transportation, it is important to consider who walks, bikes, takes transit, and why or why not. One study of cities worldwide found that, in all cities, “females are more likely than males to walk and, in most cities, more likely to use public transport. This relationship reverses among cyclers, with females being less frequent users than males. In cities with many cyclers, both genders are equally likely to rely on bicycles as their main mode of transportation.[172] To take these factors sufficiently into account in municipal policymaking, municipalities must collect and make decisions informed by disaggregated data that considers community members of intersecting identity categories and diverse communities.

Transit represents crucial infrastructure for those living in poverty, enabling access to employment, housing, and community support. Ensuring comprehensive disaggregated data inform public transit routes is critical to the health and well-being of Nova Scotia’s communities and all those who live there.

[169] Kirk, S., Cleveland, T., Caldwell, H., Stickland, M. and Soucy, A. (2023) *A Tale of Two Cities and Cycling: Halifax, Canada versus Seville, Spain*. *Active Travel Studies* 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.16997/ats.1509>

[170] Halifax Transit (2015). *Moving Forward Together Plan*. <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/transportation/halifax-transit/MFTP%20-%20PlanOnly.pdf>

[171] Tattrie, H. (2020). *Halifax transit workers are fighting for a better public transit system*. Spring. <https://springmag.ca/halifax-transit-workers-are-fighting-for-a-better-public-transit-system>

[172] Goel, R., Oyeboode, O., Foley, L. et al. (2023). *Gender differences in active travel in major cities across the world*. *Transportation* 50, 733–749. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11116-021-10259-4>

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1 Would you support a climate readiness plan?
- 2 How will you work to redress the impacts of environmental racism on our community?
- 3 Would you support increased investments in public and active forms of transportation?
- 4 How might your municipality reduce its energy use while supporting residents' efforts to do so and making energy more affordable?

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Develop climate action plans with targets and timelines, and follow through meaningfully on their implementation;
-  Develop Community Energy Investment Plans that include leveraging green technologies to address energy poverty and work towards environmental sustainability;
-  Invest meaningfully in public and active transit, ensuring these systems are informed by disaggregated data;
-  Establish a risk reduction committee to plan for adverse weather events and ensure better protection for the most vulnerable, including seniors and people with disabilities;
-  Ensure public transit routes are informed by disaggregated data.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS

How Municipalities Can Ensure Equal Access to Needed Services

Universality should be the guiding principle for all municipal services. This means ensuring all residents have comparatively equal access to the services they need on similar terms and conditions. In communities across Nova Scotia today, this is not the case—instead of a universal approach, there are often multiple tiers of access to municipal services, fostering exclusion, inequality, and disharmony as opposed to inclusive citizenship, equality, and social and economic solidarity. Public transportation, housing, and libraries—three critical services within municipal jurisdiction—represent key areas where addressing universal access is currently most pressing.

Promoting Free and Universal Public Transportation

Public transit—through buses, trains and ferries—must be expanded in communities across Nova Scotia, providing universal access for residents to move around and between cities and communities across our province. Municipality-owned and operated transit systems have increased their reach in Nova Scotia over the past few years. Until recently, only HRM and CBRM had public transit systems—thankfully, today, communities in the Annapolis Valley, South Shore, and Pictou County also offer various fixed-route public transit options.

CBRM has implemented some of the most successful workarounds to promote universal and free public transit. In the summer of 2016, CBRM launched a pilot project providing transit free of charge that was “successful beyond anyone’s

imagination,” increasing ridership by 200 per cent to 300 per cent.[173] A recent report to the CBRM Council highlighted the importance of free public transit, urging the municipality to work towards making public transit free at least some of the time.

Throughout its history, HRM has provided some limited free transit options. Free Rides Everywhere Downtown (FRED) was a free bus service used by residents and tourists that covered Halifax’s downtown core, though it was eliminated over a decade ago. In the summer of 2022, buses and ferries were free in the HRM every Friday. In recent years, however, the HRM Council has unfortunately focused on raising transit fees—a move that has received pushback from some councillors and public transit advocacy groups alike—rather than expanding access to and affordability of this critical service to all those who need it.[174]

Increasing fares to fund public transit is inherently regressive, shifting the costs of transit systems onto users and failing to acknowledge benefits to everyone (and, as explored in the Climate Justice chapter, the environment) if more people rely upon public transit instead of private vehicles for their daily commutes.

Municipalities cannot be expected to shoulder the hefty financial costs of developing, administering, and maintaining public transportation systems. Provincial and federal governments must step up to ensure we have an effective public transit system everywhere it is needed. Canadian transit systems tend to be underfunded by governments, even compared to the United States— while in the United States only 39 per cent of funding for public transit came from fares, in Canada over half (51 per cent) of transit authorities’ revenues come from fares. [175] Though the federal government announced the Permanent Public Transit Fund in July 2023—a \$3 billion investment annually in “in reliable, fast, affordable, and



[173] Cape Breton Regional Municipality (2016). *Free transit trial exceeds expectations*. <https://cbrm.ns.ca/free-transit-trial-exceeds-expectations.html>

[174] Ryan, H. (2024). Halifax Transit adds and cuts routes, looks to raise fares in September. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-transit-adding-new-routes-looks-to-raise-fares-in-september-1.7128820#:~:text=The%20budget%20includes%20a%20proposed%20%240.25%20fare%20increase,nine%20per%20cent%20for%20passes%20and%20other%20fares>

[175] Canadian Urban Transit Association (2023). *Fare Recovery*. <https://cutaactu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/FareRecoveryIssuePaper.pdf>

clean public transit”[176]—funds will not begin flowing to municipalities until 2026. Advocates say these delays produce infrastructure funding gaps that compromise long-term public transit planning across the country, which are increasingly important as Canada’s population grows and governments work to address limited housing supply and reach climate action goals.[177]

While providing public transit free of charge is by far the most progressive option to address both traffic and equity issues in transportation, this must be accompanied by adequate financing to ensure transit authorities can sustain transit options in the years to come. This funding needs to come from provincial or federal sources, which can raise the revenue to fund free public transportation through progressive tax options. Proper funding is essential, as the current public transportation systems are less than ideal. Many routes do not make sense or take too long, and many communities still do not have any bus routes. Additionally, there are staffing challenges as bus and ferry workers continue to face difficult working conditions, harassment, and staffing shortages.[178]

“Providing public transit free of charge is by far the most progressive option to address both traffic and equity issues in transportation.”





[177] Infrastructure Canada (2023). *Building Canada's public transit future: Healthy and sustainable modes of transportation for all*. Canada. <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/transit-transport/index-eng.html>

[178] Canadian Urban Transit Association (2023). *Public Transit Reps Renew Call for Federal Government to Move Up Permanent Transit Funding*. <https://cutaactu.ca/public-transit-reps-renew-call-for-federal-government-to-move-up-permanent-transit-funding/>

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1** In HRM and CBRM: Do you support free public transit?
- 2** In the Annapolis Valley, Pictou County and the Town of Bridgewater: Will you support expanding community transit options?
- 3** In all other municipalities: Will you support creating fixed-route public transportation in our community?

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Increase the number of free fare days offered by municipal transit system;
-  Lobby the provincial and federal governments for increases in dedicated funding for public transit, specifically to remove fares and make some of the system free to users;
-  Call on Nova Scotia to work with municipalities outside of HRM and CBRM to expand public transit options to more communities;
-  Freeze transit fares for 20 years.

Assuring the Right to Housing

Nova Scotia is currently in the midst of a housing crisis. Too many people are experiencing homelessness in our communities—an issue that represents a fundamental break in the social contract in this country—and too many pay too much for the basic right to have a roof over their heads. The simple idea that every person in our society should be able to afford a home is now a lost dream for too many. Due to the rising costs of rent, too many families do not have stable and reliable housing nationwide; as the CCPA reported, there is no province where workers earning minimum wage can afford to rent an apartment.[179] Rather than promoting productive investments into our local economies that support our communities, the rising rental economy creates a false economy where hefty funds are spent on these as ways to turn a profit. Today, the simple idea that every person in our society should be able to afford a home is a lost dream for too many.

There are several reasons why the housing crisis is as severe as it is. As the former United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Housing stated: “the housing crisis is marked by gentrification and displacement, fueled by the financialization of the housing market.”[180] The recently commissioned report by the Federal Housing Advocate defined the critical role of the financialization of housing as “the growing dominance of financial actors in the housing sector, which is transforming the primary function of housing from a place to live into a financial asset and tool for investor profits. The financialization of housing is recognized as a trend that is undermining the realization of the right to adequate housing.”[181]

Short-term rentals are an example of financialization—the purpose of housing becomes to extract as much profit as possible from the unit or building that otherwise would be available to rent to a tenant or sell to a new homeowner. The recent needs assessment done for the province of Nova Scotia identified a 43%

[179] Macdonald, D. and Tranjan, R. (2022). *Can't afford the rent: Rental wages in Canada 2022*.

<https://monitormag.ca/reports/cant-afford-the-rent/>

[180] Farha, L. *United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing*. <http://www.unhousingrapp.org>

[181] August, M. (2022). *The financialization of housing in Canada: A summary report for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate*. Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission.

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/ccdp-chrc/HR34-7-2022-eng.pdf

increase in short-term rentals across the province between 2018 and 2022. The data they use are outdated, but the authors reflect that at the time they analyzed information (so 2022), 1% of all housing stock in the province was potentially being used as short-term rental housing. [182] Some municipalities have housing stock that is particularly and negatively impacted by short-term rentals – in Victoria County, for example, up to 6.5% of the municipality’s housing stock was used as STRs in 2021.[183] A lack of provincial leadership on short-term rentals (in contrast to the province of BC, which has restricted STRs to owner-occupied dwellings, with some exceptions) means that decisions to limit STRs are placed on municipalities. [184]

CCPA-NS’s *Housing for All* report provides 95 interconnected recommendations to address the province’s affordable housing and homelessness crises. First, for more than twenty-five years, very little non-market (public, non-profit, co-operative) affordable housing has been built because of a lack of funding and leadership from all levels of government. Second, even existing affordable housing has been neglected, or lost altogether to private for-profit developers and financiers. Third, the gaps in our social safety net have left many Nova Scotians living in deep poverty—whether because the income supports provided to them by the government are intentionally below the poverty line or because labour laws (including the regulated minimum wage) leave people without sufficient income. People are struggling because the cost of other essentials to live and work—including food, utilities, child care, health care, and post-secondary education—takes up a greater portion of household budgets than ever.

It is critical to consider how the housing crisis affects populations differently to develop responsive policies and ensure universal access. It is also essential to take urgent action to address the lack of housing options for people with disabilities whose rights are too often violated when they have no choice but to live in institutions.

[182] Turner Drake & Partners Ltd. *Nova Scotia’s Provincial Housing Needs Assessment Report*. Nova Scotia. <https://www.novascotia.ca/action-for-housing/docs/provincial-housing-needs-assessment-report.pdf>

[183] Turner Drake & Partners Ltd. (2023). *Municipality of the County of Victoria: Municipal Housing Needs Report*. Nova Scotia. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/24178219-final-moc-victoria?responsive=1&title=1>

[184] Nova Scotia (2024). *Registration for Tourist Accommodations Extended*. *Municipal Affairs and Housing*. <https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2024/03/21/registration-tourist-accommodations-extended>; see also this advocacy campaign for Nova Scotians affected by short-term rentals more information: <https://www.neighboursspeakup.com>

What of addressing the legacy of colonialism, racism, and enslavement?[185] Housing solutions need to be grounded in reconciliation to address the historical and violent dispossession of land and property by colonial governments from Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities. Recently, the African Nova Scotian (ANS) North End Halifax Community Land Trust asked Halifax Regional Council to secure a land parcel within the Cogswell Redevelopment Project,” to provide African Nova Scotians with affordable housing solutions.[186]

[185] Housing for All Working Group (2021). Keys to a Housing Secure Future for All Nova Scotians. CCPA NS Office. https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Novaper_cent20Scotiaper_cent20Office/2021/05/CCPAHousing2021FinalNS.pdf

[186] This correspondence can be found here: <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/standing-committees/240516cped1031.pdf>

Solving the housing crisis would mean everyone has a safe, healthy home they can afford to live in long-term. *Housing for All* outlined the ten principles required to find meaningful solutions to the housing crisis:

1 Ensure Universal Access

Affordable housing solutions must ensure access is a right and not based on one’s ability to purchase housing in the market. It is critical to ensure there is no discrimination in accessing safe, permanently affordable, and adequate housing on any basis, whether race, ethnicity, immigration status, social class, ability, religion, age, parental status, family composition, gender or sexual orientation, conviction and/or arrest history, eviction history, and credit score, or any other factor.

2 Forefront Public Provision and Community Control

We need to move away from the current approach to housing, which relies heavily on the market to meet residents’ housing needs. Time and time again, as the proportion of the population who are unhoused swells, we witness its failure. Public, non-market affordable housing—funded by the government using general revenue—must be quality, green, and safeguard equitable access. Housing solutions must be developed and implemented in partnership with residents within the community and other community stakeholders.

3**Promote Interconnectedness**

A preventative approach to addressing homelessness and housing insecurity must be pursued, promoting upstream solutions that work across policy silos to address the root causes of these crises. Otherwise, we will constantly react to crises with emergency solutions that inevitably stop-gap at best.

4**Respect, Protect and Promote Social Inclusion**

Affordable and inclusive housing solutions must address deeply rooted systemic barriers to tackle how race, gender, class and ability compound to prevent residents from equitably accessing housing and housing supports.

5**Redress the legacies of colonialism, racism, and enslavement**

Housing solutions need to be grounded in reconciliation and reckoning to address the historical and violent dispossession of land and property by colonial governments from Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities.

6**Address Climate Justice**

Housing solutions must incorporate evidence-based greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and climate justice. They must also draw from disaggregated data to consider the effects of climate change and environmental racism on different communities, and the disproportionate impact of some proposed climate change policies on marginalized groups.

7**Develop Decent Work and Well-Being**

Addressing housing and homelessness crises must advance economic justice by ensuring those who build and maintain housing—as well as those who provide housing-related support services—are paid a living wage and provided with decent benefits and support for their well-being and that of the broader community.

8**Support Democratization**

Addressing the housing and homelessness crises must involve more open decision-making processes that safeguard non-market housing from the influence of corporations and business interests and instead enable stakeholder, resident, and tenant engagement within local communities.

3 Require Accountability: Affordable housing solutions must be part of a systematic plan that includes clear lines of accountability, with strong targets and timelines for measuring progress, including by which level of government.

4 Ensure Fiscal Fairness: Without transforming taxing and spending, high-quality, green, affordable, and accessible non-market housing will not be possible. To ensure the investment at the necessary scale, considerations should be given to specific tax measures that could support paying for the necessary funding based on the ability to pay while addressing income and wealth inequality.^[1]

[187] Housing for All Working Group (2021). Op. cit.

Governments often attempt to pass responsibility for the housing crisis to another level of government, rather than meaningfully solving the crisis. While all levels of government have a role to play—and must urgently take action to ensure people are housed, lower the costs of renting, and halt the use of housing as a financial asset—safeguarding access to affordable, accessible housing falls with provincial jurisdiction. Municipalities have a key role to play in ensuring provinces invest sufficiently to address this issue, and use legislative powers to address the housing and affordability crises. Critical changes are needed to provincial legislation, including, for example, transforming the current rent cap into a vacancy control system, ending fixed-term leases, and creating a landlord licensing system where none already exists while ensuring annual inspections.

Housing for All recommends the construction of 30,000 new non-market affordable homes in which tenants pay no more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. The NS Action Coalition for Community Well-Being also has a campaign called Housing is Health,^[188] which has six specific calls. These include regulations

[188] ACORN (2024). *ACORN Halifax Municipal Platform Launch*. <https://acorncanada.org/news/acorn-halifax-municipal-platform-launch/>. For more on the right to housing in Nova Scotia, see: <https://www.housing-is-health.com/>

that will end fixed-term leases, address fees tenants face, including pet and appliance fees, and prevent landlords from requesting personal information used to discriminate against tenants.

In 2024, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) released a municipal elections tenancy pledge for HRM, highlighting key issues relating to housing issues. Developed by tenants, the pledge calls for all new developments to have 30 per cent of units be affordable (defined as tenants spending no more than 30 per cent of their income on housing costs); to pass bylaws that prevent tenant evictions; and to ensure there are sufficient municipal heating and cooling places during extreme weather events, while passing regulations to ensure buildings have adequate cooling and heating for tenants.[189] They also call on candidates to pledge to create a municipal rent bank for tenants and under-housed people to access low-interest loans and grants towards rent, rental deposits, or utility arrears, which could be funded provincially and administered municipally. This pledge could be applied to other municipalities to address the housing crisis province-wide.

“Municipalities must take action to help solve the coinciding crises faced by too many individuals and families within our local communities.”

Municipalities must take action to help solve the coinciding crises faced by too many individuals and families within our local communities.

[189] See ACORN's tenancy pledge here: <https://acorncanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/HRM-ACORN-Platform-May-2024-.pdf>

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1 Will you support the call for building 30,000 new, non-market, affordable homes and approach housing as a human right?
- 2 Will you advocate for permanent vacancy control?
- 3 Will you support ACORN's pledge for tenants?
- 4 Will you limit short-term rentals to dwellings that are owner-occupied?

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Declare a housing emergency within your municipality and commit to an approach to housing that respects it has a human right for all;
-  Call for massive provincial and federal investment;
-  Commit to strengthening municipal bylaws to better protect tenants from being evicted, and from living in poor-quality, unsafe, unhealthy rentals;
-  Restrict short-term rentals to owner-occupied dwellings.
-  Advocate for legislative changes in Nova Scotia to address the housing crisis: namely, establishing a vacancy control system with a tenancy board; protecting renters and their right to organize into unions; ending fixed-term leases; creating landlord licensing systems; and ensuring annual inspections of all rental units.

Supporting Public Libraries

Libraries represent one of the most vital elements of social inclusion infrastructure within any community, providing a free, safe social space for all ages. Nova Scotia's communities are no exception. More than 5 million visits are made to the over 80 libraries around the province each year.^[190] Most libraries provide public computer and internet access to those who would otherwise not be able to access these, as well as a breadth of programming responsive to distinct community needs.

Libraries need to be protected, cherished, and invested in to meet the needs of the communities.

While some provincial funding is earmarked for libraries in Canada, most funding comes from municipal budgets. In Nova Scotia, Halifax Public Libraries is the best-funded library system and, by far, the most utilized in the province. Half the population of HRM has a library card; in other municipalities, under a third of the population regularly

Public Libraries offer many key services to communities

- Destinations for readers
- Free high-speed Internet access
- Authoritative online information
- DVDs and CDs
- Online access to library collections and services
- Downloadable eBooks and audiobooks
- Literacy and tutoring services
- Health information
- Free WiFi hotspots
- Access to materials from other libraries
- Programs for people of all ages
- Accessibility software on all public computers
- Summer reading clubs for children
- Spaces for lifelong learning
- Community gathering places
- Friendly, helpful staff.^[191]

[190] Nova Scotia (2017). *Nova Scotia Public Libraries Annual Report 2016-2017*.

<https://library.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/inline/documents/Annual-reports/annual-report-2016-17-en.pdf>

[191] See a full list of services offered by public libraries in Nova Scotia here:





<https://library.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/inline/documents/Annual-reports/annual-report-2016-17-en.pdf>

use their local libraries. With increased budgets for outreach and programming, libraries outside HRM should be able to attain similar usage numbers, providing the critical services and spaces libraries offer to their residents.

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1 Will you support increased funding for libraries in our community?
- 2 Will you support a campaign to increase the number of people in our community with a library card?

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Increase funding for libraries to expand social inclusion programming and opportunities;
-  Set goals to increase the percentage of the population with a library card, setting a target of 33 per cent of the population by 2028, and 50 per cent of the population by 2030. Specifically, Halifax Public Libraries should set a goal of having 60 per cent of the population have a library card by 2028 and reach 70 per cent by 2030;
-  Aim to increase the number of library cardholders who regularly take advantage of library services;
-  Call on the provincial government to fund the proposed new central library in CBRM.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

How Municipalities Can Support Decent Work and Well-Being

Communities are more than their physical features and are not contained within their geographic boundaries—instead, they are comprised of their people and the connections that exist between them. Though undoubtedly important, municipal councils must think beyond planning based on a neighbourhood or community's physical requirements—accessible sidewalks, roads, parks, trails, and other infrastructure—to supporting residents' sense of belonging and engagement in the development of their community, ensuring they are optimized for their health and well-being.

Investing in Community Economic Development

Many place-based initiatives embody community economic development principles. The City of Edmonton, for example, employs neighbourhood Resource Coordinators and Community Development Social Workers.^[192] Community Development Social Workers use their familiarity with their local communities to “reducing poverty through community economic development, reducing social isolation, and working to help ensure programs and policies are inclusive and easy to access.”^[193] There are many lessons to be learned from the advancement and challenges of community economic development in Winnipeg, as the city works to

[192] City of Edmonton (2024). *Neighbourhood Revitalization*.

https://www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/communities_neighbourhoods/neighbourhood-revitalization

[193] See here: https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/for_communities/community-building-social-workers

improve social well-being while addressing poverty and social exclusion.[194]

Municipalities can be part of the solution to developing community economic initiatives, including improving the conditions of precarious, low-waged work. The quality and accessibility of services depend upon the working conditions of those employed within them, with cascading impacts on families, communities, and users. [195] For example, evidence shows “the impacts of privatisation hit groups that are already marginalised the hardest, especially those who face discrimination in the labour market and have lower incomes.”[196] Contracting out has been shown to worsen working conditions and is “a powerful driver of precarious work;” as a result, the remunicipalization of these services represents a straightforward means to strengthen services offered by local governments. In addition to de-privatization or (re)municipalization, municipalities must improve their in-house working conditions, ensuring any procurement supports both worker and community well-being.

“The quality and accessibility of services depend upon the working conditions of those employed within them, with cascading impacts on families, communities, and users.”

Developing Social Procurement Policies

In 2020, the Halifax Regional Council passed a Social Procurement Policy that included paying a living wage as part of the criteria for evaluating bids—a crucial step forward for low-wage workers in the municipality.[197] Staff reported wages paid to contractors in 2019 were as low as \$12.69 per hour for custodians, \$17.44 for snow clearing, and \$14.37 for waste removal.[198] Low-wage workers struggle in many ways, including working multiple jobs and often sacrificing family time to meet their basic needs. The significant gap between the minimum wage of \$15.20 and the regional living wages (\$26.50 for Halifax; \$22.85 for Cape Breton; \$25.40 for Annapolis Valley; \$24.30 for

[194] Lozley, J. (2003). *The State of Community Economic Development in Winnipeg. CD/CED in Winnipeg: Maintaining the Momentum.* https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/sites/ccednet-rcdec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/state_of_ced_in_winnipeg.pdf

[195] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary.* Op. cit.

[196] Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., & Petitjean, O. (2020) *Executive Summary.* Op. cit.

[197] Halifax Regional Council (2020). *Procurement Administrative Order.* <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/business/doing-business-halifax/2020-004-ADMper cent20Procurementper cent20Policy.pdf>

[198] Halifax Regional Council (2020). *Fair Wage/Living Wage and Social Value Framework.* Op. cit.

Northern; \$25.05 for Southern) speaks volumes to the unaffordability of living costs, and the level of income needed to improve workers' ability to make ends meet meaningfully.[199] Though HRM's 2020 Social Procurement Policy required some private contractors to pay a living wage, but there were many gaps, and some exemptions.[200] For example, the Nova Scotia Construction Labour Relations Association spoke to the Council, challenging the exemption of construction workers from living wage requirements. As the spokesperson said: "Now contractors must compete on safety, quality and the ability to deliver the project on time and on budget." [201] Paying a living wage is essential to level the playing field by ensuring companies do not just bid based on which contractors can pay the lowest, but at least partially consider working conditions.

Ensuring Municipalities are Living Wage Employers

Municipalities should pay all their employees a living wage, including part-time, casual, and seasonal workers. Though contracting in or out has financial implications, municipalities must also weigh the social implications. When workers cannot afford nutritious food and quality housing, and are constantly stressed about bills, it takes a tremendous toll on their health and no doubt impacts their productivity. There is mounting international evidence of the benefits to employers, such as higher retention rates, fewer sick days, better work quality, and productivity increases.[202] Associated health expenditures, income supports, and other social programs needed to bridge the gaps for low-wage workers represent a hefty societal cost. There is mounting international evidence of the benefits to employers, e.g., higher retention rates, fewer sick days, better work quality, and productivity increases.[203] The right thing for municipalities to do is to pay a living wage to workers and local communities. Nova Scotia's municipalities would show tremendous leadership by making this investment, providing a model

[199] Saulnier, C. (2023). *Living Wages in Nova Scotia 2023 update Working for a living, not living to work*. CCPA NS Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/living-wages-nova-scotia-2023-update>

[200] More information can be found here: <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/business/doing-business-halifax/supplier-code-of-conduct.pdf#:~:text=Suppliers%20and%20their%20subcontractors%20must%20comply%20with%20all%20legal%20and,requirements%20regarding%20the%20management%20of>

[201] See the full Council session here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEjC2lsMvHM>

[202] Barford, A., Gilbert, R. Beales, A., Zorila, M. and Nelson, J. (2022). *The Case for Living Wages: How paying living wages improves business performance and tackles poverty*. Business Fights Poverty, University of Cambridge

Institute for Sustainability Leadership & Shift. https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/files/the_case_for_living_wages_report_2022.pdf

[203] Barford, A., Gilbert, R. Beales, A., Zorila, M. and Nelson, J. (2022). Op. cit.

Municipalities must also address inequities and discrimination as part of creating decent jobs for all. The first time its Social Value Framework was used—and specifically the first time HRM made diversity a requirement in a contract—the contractor was required to set targets that 10 percent of all apprenticeships and 20 per cent of all labour were provided by members of equity-seeking groups.[204]

Buy-Local Provisions

Another way to improve procurement is to support local businesses through import replacement and buy-local provisions, instituting community benefits agreements, and encouraging diversifying suppliers. In HRM, the Social Value Framework procurement call for proposals required contracts to set a 10 per cent target for all subcontracts for goods and services to go to businesses “owned, managed and controlled by persons from equity seeking groups.”[205] A 2018 study found that such a shift to locally produced goods and services from those currently imported to the Atlantic region could support the creation of over 43,000 jobs, with \$2.6 billion in new wages, and generate \$219 million in new tax revenue. [206]

[204] Halifax Regional Council (2021). *Award – Tender No. 21-003, Cogswell District Project*.

<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/210914rc1116.pdf>





[205] Halifax Regional Council (2021). *Cogswell District Project*. Op. cit.

[206] Cervelli, R., Heming, G., Foster, K., Shuman, M. H. (2018). *Import Replacement: Local Prosperity For Rural Atlantic Canada*. Centre for Local Prosperity. <https://centreforlocalprosperity.ca/import-replacement/>

QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

- 1** Do you support your municipality becoming a living wage employer, ensuring all its employees and contractors pay a living wage?
- 2** Do you support passing a Supplier Code of Conduct that holds contractors to ethical, environmental, and other standards, including paying a Living Wage?
- 3** Do you support setting a 10 per cent target for all subcontracts for goods and services to go to local businesses?

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Ensure all municipal employees and contracted staff are paid a living wage, according to the wage rates updated annually by the CCPA-NS.
-  Adopt a Social Values Framework for procurement that evaluates bids by considering community impact, workforce and training potentials, inclusion, environment and other social factors, in addition to cost.
-  In the next budget cycle, integrate paying a living wage into a Supplier Code of Conduct that applies to the municipal procurement policy, ensuring it is weighted as one-third of the evaluation criteria.
-  Shift 10 per cent of procurement of imported goods and services to locally produced goods and services.

CONCLUSION

Municipal elections are important. Municipalities make decisions that impact our daily lives—from when we turn on the tap for clean water, or to when we need to get to work, or when we access public facilities such as libraries or community centres. Moreover, municipal services are funded by taxpayers' dollars—municipalities spend a significant amount of public money each year, and residents should have more say over how these dollars are spent. Residents should have more say over how these services are designed and accessed within their communities.

Municipalities are critical for ensuring no one is left behind in our communities. To achieve this vision, we must ensure that our local governments make efficient, effective, and equitable decisions. This means investing in universal public services and infrastructure to enable everyone to access the necessary services without barriers. Additionally, municipalities must prioritize community engagement and support meaningful ways for more voices to be heard and represented in decision-making processes.

This report considers six fundamental principles and makes recommendations for incoming municipal councils to consider in each area. It also includes critical questions for residents to ask the municipal candidates when they knock on their doors this Summer and into the Fall about their values and priorities and how they would shape the future of their communities should they be elected to office. We hope those who are elected will find ways to build more engaged, stronger, and inclusive municipalities, where more residents are encouraged to be involved in their communities and reach out to their neighbours.

Working together is how we build healthy, thriving, and welcoming communities. To achieve this vision, we must ensure that our local governments make efficient, effective, and equitable decisions. This means investing in universal public services and infrastructure to enable everyone to access the necessary services without barriers. Additionally, municipalities must prioritize community engagement and

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