



**To: Town of Parrsboro Residents and Taxpayers**

**Notice RE: Town of Parrsboro UARB Application for Dissolution**

In August 2015, the Parrsboro Town Council voted to apply to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board to dissolve the Town's existing local government and join the County of Cumberland. Many residents and taxpayers have questions about this decision and the process to follow, and how it will impact themselves and our community. The Parrsboro Town Council would like to communicate as much information as possible to its residents about the potential changes ahead, and answer any questions they may have. This document is a summary of steps that have already happened, future actions planned, and the most common questions that have been raised thus far. The Town Council encourages residents to read over this information, and feel free to contact the Town Office for more information at 902-254-2036 or [town@town.parrsboro.ns.ca](mailto:town@town.parrsboro.ns.ca)

**Key Messages**

- The Town of Parrsboro has applied to the UARB to dissolve the town as a step toward ensuring a healthy, vibrant community for years to come.
- We need to adopt an efficient, affordable governance model for the future, and we believe this is the right time to make this change while our finances are strong and our community is united.
- Merging with the Municipality of the County of Cumberland will support long-term sustainability of our community.

- While the town is currently in good financial shape, challenges in the near future include rising infrastructure costs and a shrinking tax base due to a decline in population.
- Town council voted on August 26 to apply for dissolution after careful thought and consultation with area residents, including two community meetings over the summer.
- The application for dissolution was submitted to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board on October 5.
- Parrsboro will work with the Municipality of the County of Cumberland to develop an agreement to become part of that municipal government.
- The process to dissolve a town is outlined under the Municipal Government Act, and requires approval by the Utility and Review Board.
- We encourage area residents to participate in the opportunities for further public input through the Utility and Review Board's process.
- We are committed to keeping everyone updated on progress.
- The application for dissolution is available for viewing at Parrsboro Town Hall and on the Utility and Review Board website at [nsuarb.novascotia.ca](http://nsuarb.novascotia.ca).

## Q&As

### **Why is the town dissolving when it's in good financial shape?**

Our finances are strong now, but there are challenges in the near future including rising infrastructure costs and a shrinking tax base due to a declining population. We need a municipal governance structure that will ensure area residents continue to get the services they need without unduly increasing their tax burden. We believe merging with the County of Cumberland will now – rather than down the road when the situation could be more challenging – keep our community stable, healthy and vibrant.

### **Do residents of Parrsboro agree with this approach?**

We have heard from many residents who support this approach. Of course, there are some who disagree, but we believe the community overall is strongly in support of a new governance structure that will ensure sustainability for the future.

### **Did the Town consider other options?**

The Town has reviewed its options including more shared services. We feel we have exhausted all of our available opportunities for more shared services. The remaining opportunities for shared services would need to include engineering services, finance services or administration like a shared CAO. Neither Cumberland nor Amherst have the capacity to take on these roles for more than short-time frame and the Town needs these skills in the long-term.

### **Does Cumberland support your decision to apply for dissolution?**

Yes. Cumberland clearly understands that the One Nova Scotia reports talks about the need to reduce the size and number of governments in Nova Scotia. Parrsboro Town Council wants to lead the future outlook for its community and not wait until it is in a financial crunch to ask others for assistance. Cumberland worked extremely hard and was very fair with Springhill during their dissolution. We expect no less from Cumberland with our application and future programs and services.

### **How will Parrsboro ensure it is fairly treated by Cumberland during the transition process?**

As part of this process, Cumberland and Parrsboro will form a Transition Committee comprised of equal representation from both councils to build a new governance model. This Transition Committee will be chaired by a Transition Coordinator appointed by the Province, with input from the two councils. In the case of a tie vote on an issue before the committee, the Transition Coordinator will cast the deciding vote. In the Springhill dissolution, the Transition Coordinator did not have to ever vote on any issues as the Committee came to a consensus on every issue.

### **Are services going to continue as they are now?**

Council's decision to apply to the NSUARB was based on the community's desire to continue receiving the same services they do today, or have them improve. We know we cannot do this without raising taxes, so this is our community's best option to continue to be a strong, vibrant cultural community.

### **Will Parrsboro lose its identity?**

Absolutely not. In fact, the new consolidated Municipality will continue to promote those activities, events, festivals, history, and culture that are unique to Parrsboro and its residents. In previous consolidations in Nova Scotia, communities and residents have not lost their identity, history, heritage, or culture. Residents of consolidated communities continue to associate with their home towns. Springhill, Liverpool, Sydney, Louisburg, Canso, Dartmouth, for example, continue to maintain their names and identity.

### **What are the next steps?**

Parrsboro Town Council has made the decision to apply for dissolution of the town. The process begins with an application to the Utility and Review Board (NSUARB) with the goal of becoming part of the Municipality of the County of Cumberland at the next municipal election in the fall of 2016. NSUARB will host a meeting in Parrsboro later this fall (called a Preliminary Hearing) to consider issuing a Preliminary order which outlines certain procedural matters moving forward, the requirement for the Town and County to carry out numerous studies and reports, consider applications from interested parties to become Intervenors, as well as receive public input on the process and reports required. This meeting will be publicly advertised and all are welcome to present at the meeting or simply attend and listen.

### **Can you guarantee that Parrsboro residents will be better off after dissolution?**

There are no guarantees, but we believe this is the right decision for the long-term sustainability of the community. Our goal is to ensure that residents receive the same or better services as a result of this decision and that you will see infrastructure improvements that the community needs and wants. The dissolution studies and reports will provide residents with clear factual evidence about the benefit or drawbacks from dissolution. We know that the status quo is not sustainable with current tax rates.

### **Will Cumberland have Parrsboro's best interests in mind?**

Cumberland will have the best interests of all residents of Cumberland County in mind, regardless of location. With less red tape for business through the streamlining of applications and permit processes, a coordinated marketing and economic development strategy and improved infrastructure and financial planning, Parrsboro and Cumberland will both gain through economies of scale and efficiencies.

### **Will the public be kept informed about the discussions and decisions?**

This entire process is transparent and public. All documents, correspondence, evidence, reports and studies will be posted on the NSUARB website as they are received. As well, we will keep residents and those in Cumberland County, and our municipal partners aware of the progress.

### **Who decides whether the town is dissolved or not?**

Council has made the decision to apply for dissolution but the final decision will be made by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB). The Board ensures that the interests of both

municipalities and its citizens are considered. The Board's process will include public hearings and individuals and organizations will have an opportunity to present their opinions at those hearings. The NSUARB employs lawyers, engineers, and accountants, to provide oversight and make decisions on dissolution applications.

**What will happen to the Parrsboro Fire Department?**

We will continue to have uninterrupted fire services for our community. Cumberland presently funds approximately 50% of Parrsboro's Fire Department operations and vehicles. Parrsboro's Fire Department will be treated the same as other Cumberland Fire Department's after dissolution.

**Will I have to travel out of Parrsboro to pay my bills?**

As part of the dissolution process, all programs, services and infrastructure of the Town will be reviewed. In Springhill, the former Town Hall not only maintained its presence in the community, but expanded and now provides services to all Cumberland County residents benefitting both Springhill and Cumberland.

**What will happen with Town Hall?**

All buildings and properties will be inspected and assessed as part of an Infrastructure Study during the dissolution process. This study will be made public when filed with the NSUARB.

**How many people will represent Parrsboro?**

The decision on electoral boundaries and community representation is one of the issues that the NSUARB will require a report and recommendation on. The public can also provide its feedback any time during the process on this issue. Keep in mind that every person on Cumberland Council represents every citizen when they make decisions, even though they are elected in only one district. Pugwash which is represented by one councillor just received \$15 million for a new water treatment system. This was agreed to by the entire Cumberland Council. Two years previous to that, Maccan received a significant investment by Cumberland in a new water and sewer system. This area is also served by one councillor.

**What will my taxes be next year?**

We cannot tell you what the tax rate will be after dissolution, as this will be a decision of the municipality which will include Parrsboro. But we see this as an opportunity for residents to have a lower tax rate and to invest in infrastructure and the community. As part of the evidence that will be filed by Parrsboro and Cumberland to the NSUARB at the final hearing, potential tax rates will be proposed.