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**Item No.**  
**Community Planning and Economic Development Committee**  
December 17, 2015

**TO:** Chair and Members of Community Planning and Economic Development  
Standing Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed by:  
Maggie MacDonald, Managing Director, Government Relations and External  
Affairs

**DATE:** December 8, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Rural Benchmarks & Service Levels

**INFORMATION REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

On December 12, 2013 at Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee, MOVED by Councillor Outhit, SECONDED by Councillor Mason that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee request a staff report regarding establishing benchmarks and researching service levels, competitiveness and taxation in the Agricultural and Rural Shore areas of HRM in comparison to other rural and coastal agricultural counties in Nova Scotia. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

**Halifax Regional Municipality Charter**

**Purpose of Act**

**2** The purpose of this Act is to

- (a) give broad authority to the Council, including broad authority to pass by-laws, and respect its right to govern the Municipality in whatever ways the Council considers appropriate within the jurisdiction given to it;
- (b) enhance the ability of the Council to respond to present and future issues in the Municipality; and
- (c) recognize that the functions of the Municipality are to
  - (i) provide good government,
  - (ii) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality, and
  - (iii) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

## **BACKGROUND**

The CPED motion leading to this report arose from a November 26, 2013 Regional Council motion. That Regional Council meeting minutes show that Council considered three questions to compare Halifax rural areas with other rural areas:

- Are Halifax taxes and services equitable and fair, compared with other rural municipalities?
- Are Halifax rural areas commercially competitive, especially with neighbouring rural areas?
- Are Halifax rural residential taxes and services competitive, especially with neighbouring areas?

This report looks at these questions and at broader rural development issues facing Halifax.

## **DISCUSSION**

Attachment A – **A Portrait of Rural Halifax** (Portrait) defines and describes rural Halifax and situates it in a broader rural context.

### Definition

In this report and in the Portrait, “rural Halifax” means the rural areas to the east of downtown and the suburbs, essentially what the Regional Plan designates “Rural Resource” (the lands and communities along the Eastern Shore) “Agriculture” (significant portions of the Musquodoboit Valley) and “Open Space & Natural Resources”. See Attachment B – Map 2 – Generalized Future Land Use. This “rural Halifax” as defined lumps together areas which have in common a sense of being removed from the core of the municipality.

Other parts of Halifax qualify as “rural” in the regional plan itself, (e.g. the “Rural Commuter” areas or the Open Space & Natural Resources areas to the west of the urban area), or under different definitions of “rural” like the one used by Statistics Canada. Such areas are not the subject of this report.

### Basic Information

The Portrait contains the following key information about rural issues:

- Across Canada and around the world, rural people are moving to cities.
- Statistics Canada defines “rural” as an area with fewer than 400 people per square kilometer living in a community of less than 1000 people. Much of Halifax qualifies as “rural” under this definition.
- Some of Stats Canada “rural” Halifax would be more “suburban” as Halifax uses the term.
- Nova Scotia, still one of the most rural provinces in Canada, is slowly becoming more urban.
- Halifax’s rural population is the absolute largest of Nova Scotia’s counties and municipalities (83,775 – Census 2011) but proportionally smallest (21.5%) of the 18 Nova Scotia counties.
- Halifax’s rural population profile is aging as younger people move to urban areas.
- Small and scattered rural populations challenge all service providers - provincial (e.g. health or education), municipal (e.g. policing, fire, transit, recreation, etc.) and private (gas stations or grocers)

### Rural Halifax – History

Established in 1996, the Halifax Regional Municipality is a recent political creation. Halifax County has a longer history. Many small communities in present-day rural Halifax have long and proud histories. They are where they are because the resources near them attracted the workers and capital needed to develop them. Fish, forests, farmlands and mines brought people to rural areas and sustained them for many years. The scenic beauty of the areas attracted the tourism industry. Servicing the needs of people working in rural industries also brought people to rural communities.

The growth of communities in the “Rural Commuter” zone (defined below) is relatively recent. Suburban development has brought many formerly self-contained communities into the orbit of urban Halifax. Such growth presents its own challenges. These are not the focus of this report.

### Rural Halifax - Geography

The 2014 Regional Plan designates land for different uses in Halifax.

- Urban Halifax includes: Urban Settlement, Urban Reserve and Halifax Harbour designations
- Rural Halifax includes: Rural Commuter, Rural Resource and Agricultural, and most of the Open Space & Natural Resources designations. (Some Open Space – e.g. Citadel - are in urban areas.)

Much of what is called “suburbs” falls in the “Rural Commuter” category. See Attachment B – **Regional Plan: Map 2 – Generalized Future Land Use**

The Rural Halifax designations have two distinct situations:

- “Rural Commuter” areas generally have growing or stable populations. Aging may be an issue but the commuter areas are busy and generally growing economically. The communities are changing as new housing and commercial areas get built. Those changes bring challenges but overall their situations are more positive economically than in the rest of rural Halifax.
- “Agricultural and Rural Shore areas of HRM”, the subject of the CPED motion, are those areas designated as “Rural Resource”, “Agricultural” and “Open Space & Natural Resources” in the Regional Plan. Populations in those areas are decreasing and aging. The population in “Open Space and Natural Resource” designated lands is very low.

“Rural Halifax”, as defined above, does not exist in a policy vacuum. Regional Plan 2014 includes a set of growth and service centres in “Rural Resource” and “Agricultural” land areas:

- Sheet Harbour and Middle Musquodoboit are designated as “Rural Service Centres”.
- Moser River, Upper Musquodoboit, Tangier, and Oyster Pond are “Rural Local Centres”.

In the “Rural Commuter” areas there are also designated centres:

- Musquodoboit Harbour, Porters Lake, River Lakes/Fall River, and Upper Tantallon are “Rural District Growth Centres”.
- Lake Echo, Enfield, Hubbards and Tantallon Crossroads are “Rural Local Growth Centres”.

The Regional Plan (page 72) states

#### **5.3.5 Rural HRM**

*HRM recognizes the value and significance of a vibrant rural economy. Economic opportunities have traditionally come from natural resource development, tourism and the service economy. Advanced telecommunications has also created new opportunities for both home based businesses and retirees which are attracted to the distinctive character of rural communities. The challenge lies in ensuring supporting services and infrastructure are available to realize these opportunities.”*

Halifax, through its planning and development policies, recognizes the importance of successful rural communities. Halifax also recognizes that more can be done. The Planning and Development Business Unit (P&D) will soon identify a group of planners to form a rural planning group. That group will assess the challenges and identify solutions for rural issues, some of which are referenced in this report. The rural planning group will be responsible for both current planning application work and continued policy development. Continuity through both sides of the planning process will allow P&D to address current planning issues in a consistent and holistic manner and identify possible planning problems and solutions before problems become overwhelming.

### State of Rural Halifax – Current Indicators

How is “rural Halifax” doing? How does living in rural Halifax compare with living in the rural parts of counties that border Halifax? What are the answers to the three questions posed at Regional Council?

Several outside organizations regularly benchmark Halifax’s performance compared to other municipalities in a number of areas, including investment, taxation, talent and regulation.

Halifax also rates itself. Annually, the Halifax Partnership (HP) measures the state of the Halifax economy through the **Halifax Index**. Data in four domains – People, Economy, Quality of Place, and Sustainability – give a snapshot of the Halifax situation in absolute terms and relative to a set of comparator municipalities. The Index gets into considerable detail on issues in the four domains. The Index and other benchmarking studies assess Halifax as a whole, not as a municipality with distinct urban, rural and suburban circumstances. They do not provide data specific to rural Halifax.

The Province of Nova Scotia’s “Community Counts” website once made relevant Statistics Canada and other material easily available at the community level. The decision to shut down Community Counts is making getting information on rural Halifax more challenging. P&D, through its renewal process, plans to put resources into getting the data needed to support evidence based decision making on rural issues.

HP also tracks three indicators to determine quickly how Halifax is doing: population growth, employment growth and commercial tax base growth. Rural Halifax does not do well on any of the three indicators. Rural population, employment and the commercial tax base are not growing. Apart from urban Halifax, the same is true for most of Nova Scotia.

Beyond these three indicators, comparing rural Halifax with other rural municipalities is difficult. The council questions essentially ask how rural Halifax services and taxes, both residential and commercial, compare to those in neighbouring municipalities. The Portrait includes much of the available data on rural Halifax. It provides some information in answer to the three council questions but it is hard to draw definite conclusions from the evidence available. “On the one hand...on the other hand” is about as conclusive as the data can be.

Each county that borders Halifax includes several municipalities each with its own council. Each council sets its own tax rates, both residential and commercial. Kings County, one of the more prosperous rural counties that could be used as a comparator, also contains several municipalities. If Halifax is higher than one municipality but lower than another on residential taxes, what does that mean? If taxes are higher but levels of service are too, what does that mean? The following conclusions are, therefore, tentative:

- Rural Halifax is generally competitive on commercial taxes with other rural Nova Scotia municipalities.
- Services to rural Halifax citizens seem to compare well with those available to other rural Nova Scotians. Services to businesses are also comparable.
- On the basis of the information collected so far, rural Halifax should be able to compete with the rest of rural Nova Scotia.

The information collected to date provokes some additional observations:

- Comparing rural Haligonians to people in other rural parts of Nova Scotia may have very limited use.
- Comparing taxes and services for rural Haligonians with their urban and suburban counterparts may be more interesting and productive.
- The information available says little or nothing about what rural residents need, want or expect. Some people who opt to live in rural Halifax do so to avoid urban life and its pressures. Others who have long lived in rural communities stay there and live with the taxes they pay and the level of service they receive.
- What determines how rural residents feel about where they live may depend more on the services provided by the province (education, health care, social services, etc.) or the private sector (gas stations, banking, grocery stores, internet access etc.) than those provided by the municipality. The municipality may want to consider what role it could or should play to help improve the services for which it is not directly responsible.

- In the long term, the fundamental issue may not be about comparisons between rural Halifax and its neighbours but about how rural Halifax stands globally. Given the mix of assets in rural Halifax, is it more or less easy to compete with places outside Nova Scotia?

### Moving Forward

A clear difference between rural Halifax and other rural Nova Scotia areas is that rural Halifax is part of the largest and wealthiest municipality in the province. As such, it may be possible for rural Halifax to access a wider range of services than other rural Nova Scotians.

In some areas, like transit, rural Halifax may already be somewhat better served than its neighbours. In other areas, as the Portrait demonstrates, the situation is not clear.

How could Halifax better support and strengthen its rural areas? Steps to move forward could include:

- Develop a Rural Halifax Index
  - A “Rural Halifax Index” would track rural progress in the areas of people, economy, quality of place and sustainability.
  - It could help identify problems early and encourage development of appropriate solutions. With urbanization in Nova Scotia continuing, the situation for rural Halifax will keep changing. Good benchmarks, regularly updated, could help Regional Council keep aware of rural circumstances and make appropriate policy interventions.
  - While comparisons with other municipalities could be interesting, Halifax should primarily use the Rural Halifax Index to compare rural Halifax against itself.
- Work more closely with the provincial government, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, and rural citizens to identify appropriate service standards for the provincial services that contribute to life in rural areas, like education, health, transportation, housing, and others.
  - Council answered the question for transit in the 2014 Regional Plan with an Urban Transit Service Boundary and policies related to rural transit. How should Halifax do the same for police, fire, waste collection, recreation, libraries, and other services?
- Engage rural Halifax residents in discussions about what they need, want and can expect.
  - The rural planning group being developed in the Planning & Development Business Unit could be used to lead the engagement process.
  - Managing residents’ expectations will challenge any engagement exercise. Past efforts at engaging citizens have often demonstrated that fact. Few Canadian municipalities have Halifax’s combination of urban and rural populations stretched over a large geographic territory. Ottawa is the closest Canadian comparator. The Ottawa Council has an Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. The city has a Rural Affairs Office and held “Rural Summits” in 2005 and 2008.
- Identify the economic and social assets in rural Halifax. The municipality should work with the province, communities and the private sector to build on them. Without an economic base for life in rural areas, the exodus of youth for opportunity and older people for services, especially health, will continue.
  - The diversity of Halifax is one of the assets of the municipality. Capitalizing on that diversity and designing the delivery of services to strengthen it should be a goal of the municipality, for both urban and rural residents.
  - Municipalities do not have formal responsibility for many key economic development sectors but being more active in supporting economic development activities would seem to be in the best interest of municipalities. In rural Halifax there are opportunities in agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, forestry, mining and tourism. How can the municipality play a more active role in exploiting those opportunities?
- Develop a plan to move forward.

- The municipality should set targets for services in rural Halifax and develop appropriate benchmarks to track progress.
- It should consider governance and administrative changes which pay more attention to the needs of rural parts of the municipality.
- It should also use the preparation of the 2017-2021 Economic Strategy to develop clear goals and objectives for rural Halifax.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

While there are no immediate financial implications from this information report, if Council chooses to support the development of a Rural Halifax Index and a more active role in rural Halifax, there will be costs which will show up in future budgets.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No formal community engagement was conducted as part of this report. Taking a more active role in the future of rural Halifax will demand close consultation with rural Halifax residents.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- A – A Portrait of Rural Halifax
- B - Regional Plan: Map 2 – Generalized Future Land Use

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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## Attachment A

# A Portrait of Rural Halifax

15-10-28

*Rural communities are not going to survive by doing things the same way they have been done for generations in the past .... Nova Scotia's resource-based economies are in decline, and as jobs disappear in the woods and on the waters, so do the young people .... Rural communities differ from each other in so many ways that there is no single, sure-fire way to reverse this trend. It has to be addressed from the perspective of residents who know their community and who can determine how to deal with the issues they face.*

From the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia website

## 1 - Introduction

Halifax is the economic and cultural hub of Atlantic Canada. Its estimated population on July 1, 2014 was 414,400. It accounts for almost half the provincial GDP and about one-fifth of Atlantic Canada's GDP. Statistics Canada counts the rural population of Halifax as 83,775<sup>1</sup>, the largest rural population of any Nova Scotia county. At 21.5%, however, Halifax has the lowest relative share of rural population of any county. Some of Halifax's "rural" population live in areas that would be considered "suburban" (see below). Halifax's rural areas constitute 82% of its land area.

Halifax's population grew 8.7% from 2001 to 2011. That growth was in the urban and suburban parts of the municipality, not in rural areas. Halifax's growth lags behind comparable cities such as London, Regina, St. John's and Victoria where average growth was closer to 10%.

Halifax is a commuter city. Over half of Halifax's population commute 6.5km or more to work, ranking HRM 119<sup>th</sup> out of 133 CMAs surveyed.

Given its large area, Halifax faces challenges meeting the diverse needs of its rural, suburban and urban residents. Halifax rural communities' age composition, economic bases, and population densities differ from their urban counterparts. This challenges service delivery and resource allocation due to the distance, cost and logistics involved.

Practical service issues can exacerbate both the physical and psychological distances between urban and rural residents. Finding the appropriate levels of taxation and service provision for urban and rural residents poses political challenges. Rural communities can feel excluded by any focus on developing the urban core. Initiatives in one community may be interpreted as unfairly favouring one area over others.

Amalgamation in 1996 gave the new Halifax Regional Municipality responsibility to provide equitable levels of service to all its residents. The aim of amalgamation was less government, cost reduction, lower taxes, greater cooperation between municipalities in stimulating economic development, and an opportunity for greater regional decision-making and planning on broader issues. Achieving these aims has proved complicated due to obstacles such as lack of accessibility to services, transportation and infrastructure challenges, aging populations, and geography.

This paper sets out where rural Halifax stands now and how it compares to neighbouring counties and communities on key economic indicators like population, employment and labour market measures, skills and education, and income. The paper also highlights some competitiveness factors and, where possible, examines tax rates and service levels for Halifax compared to neighbouring jurisdictions.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 2011 Census Data with rural being persons in areas of fewer than 400 persons per square kilometer and in a community of fewer than 1000 persons. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hlt-fst/pd-pl/Table-Tableau.cfm?LANG=Eng&T=209&CMA=205&S=0&O=D&RPP=25>

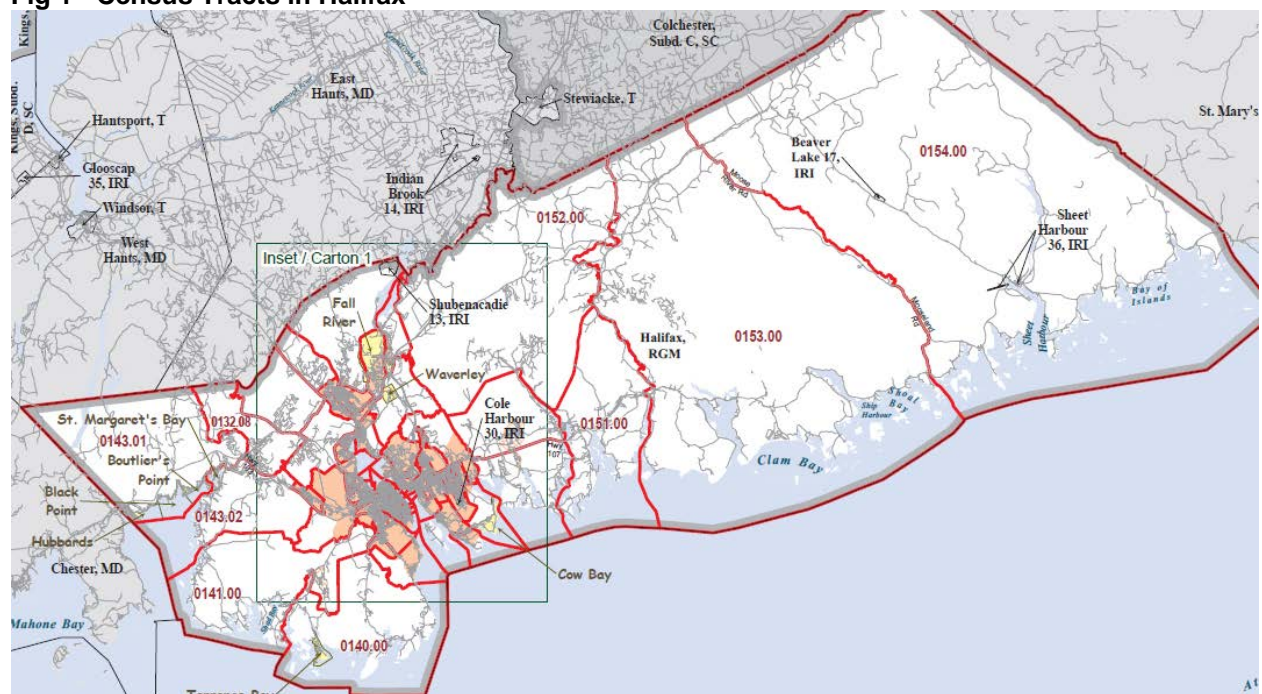
## 2 - Rural Halifax – Description & Definition

Halifax's **Regional Municipal Planning Strategy – October 2014** - designates seven types of land use: (<http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning/documents/RMPS2014.pdf>)

- Urban Settlement
- Urban Reserve
- Halifax Harbour
- Rural Commuter - areas within commuting distance of the Regional Centre
- Rural Resource - lands and communities along the Eastern Shore.
- Agriculture - a significant portion of the Musquodoboit Valley
- Open Space & Natural Resources

See Appendix A – **Regional Plan: Map 2 – Generalized Future Land Use.**

**Fig 1 - Census Tracts in Halifax**



The rural shore and agricultural areas of Halifax could include Census Tracts 140.00, 141.00, 143.01, 143.02, 151, 152, 153 and 154 in Figure 1. The “Rural Commuter” areas to the west of the urban core face quite different demographic and distance situations than the areas to the east. They are generally not included in the analysis which follows. This paper will use “Rural Halifax” to include the areas designated “Rural Resource”, “Agriculture” and “Open Space & Natural Resources” in the Regional Plan or census tracts 151, 152 153 and 154 in Figure 1.

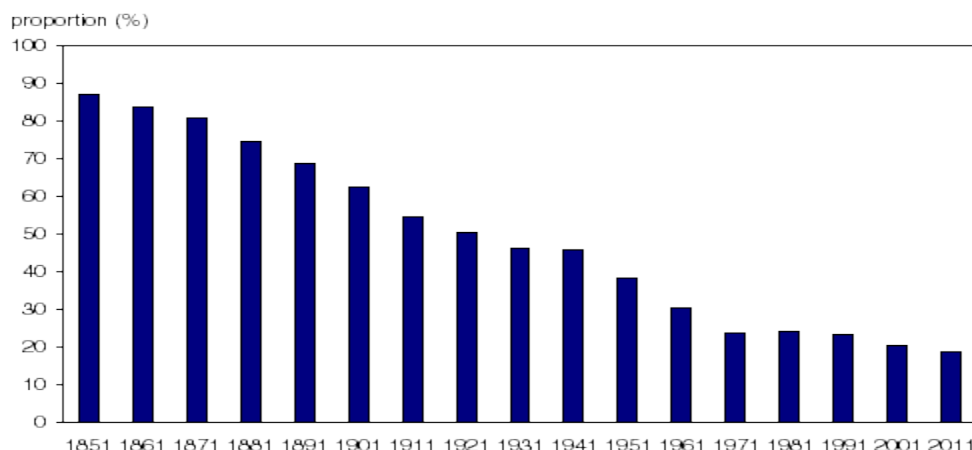
Note that the total population of the eight Rural Resource/Agricultural census tracts is about 40,000 to 45,000 people. The rest of the Halifax rural population live in commuter areas.

## 3 - Population

Urbanization is a world-wide phenomenon. Globally, in Canada and in Nova Scotia, the share of people living in rural areas is declining. (Figure 2)



**Figure 2 - Proportion of the Population of Canada Living in Rural Areas<sup>2</sup>**



Canada has become one of the most urbanized countries in the world..

**Figure 3 - Halifax rural population compared to other NS counties**

Jurisdiction	Rural Population	Total Population	Rural % of total
Nova Scotia	400,389	921,727	43.4%
<b>Halifax</b>	<b>83,775</b>	<b>390,328</b>	<b>21.5%</b>
Lunenburg	35,161	47,313	74.3%
Kings	31,679	60,589	52.3%
Hants	31,625	42,304	74.8%
Cape Breton	27,869	101,619	27.4%
Colchester	27,707	50,968	54.4%
Pictou	21,597	45,643	47.3%
Yarmouth	18,514	25,275	73.3%
Annapolis	17,993	20,756	86.7%
Digby	15,884	18,036	88.1%
Cumberland	15,218	31,353	48.5%
Antigonish	14,505	19,589	74.0%
Inverness	13,194	17,947	73.5%
Shelburne	12,810	14,496	88.4%
Richmond	9,293	9,293	100.0%
Queens	8,307	10,960	75.8%
Guysborough	8,143	8,143	100.0%
Victoria	7,115	7,115	100.0%

In Nova Scotia the rural population has also steadily decreased but Nova Scotia remains one of the most rural provinces, with 43% of residents living in rural areas. Halifax is the least rural part of Nova Scotia

<sup>2</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, [http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/2011003/fig/fig3\\_2-1-eng.cfm](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/2011003/fig/fig3_2-1-eng.cfm)

with little more than 20% of its people in rural areas. (See Figure 3). Even so Halifax remains more rural than Canada as a whole.

Rural residents often live far from markets and services. Distance alone presents problems. A declining share of the overall population and more rapid ageing add to the rural challenges.

The Statistics Canada data referenced above defines rural residents as people in areas of fewer than 400 people per square kilometer and in a community of fewer than 1000 people. The rural shore and agricultural areas of Halifax each have a density lower than 60 persons per square kilometer and represent either a coastal area or an area of relatively high agricultural use or potential.

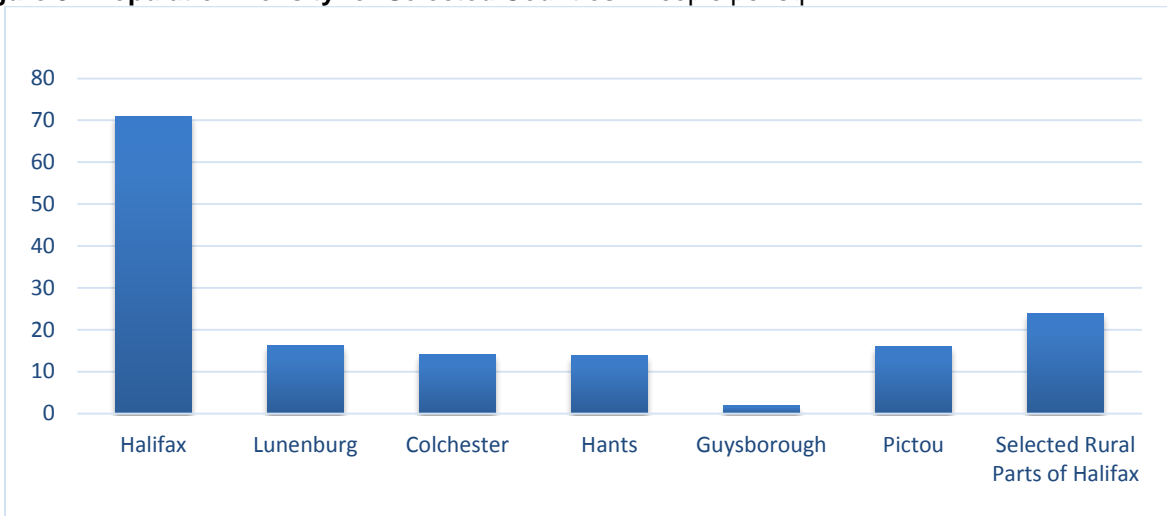
### 3.1 - Halifax Neighbours

Halifax borders the District of Chester, (Lunenburg County), the Districts of West Hants and East Hants (Hants County), the Municipality of the County of Colchester, and the District of St. Mary's (Guysborough County).

**Figure 4 – Halifax Neighbours**



**Figure 5 - Population Density for Selected Counties - People per sq. km.**



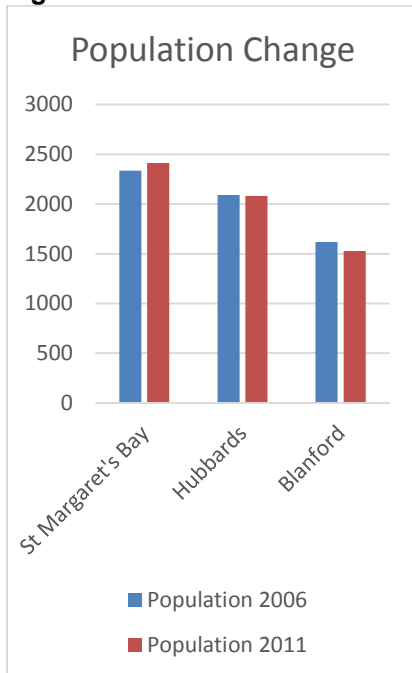
Figures 6, 6a, 6b and 6c provide details on Population Changes in selected smaller communities within, partially within, and bordering Halifax compared against neighbouring communities.

**Figure 6 - Population Change 2006 to 2011**

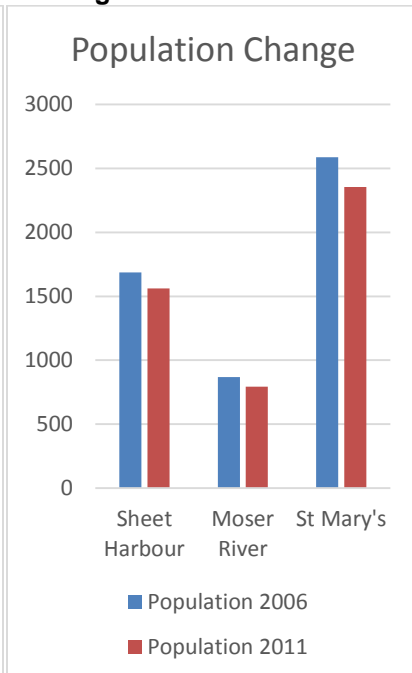


Figure 6 shows small increases in population for all areas represented except Guysborough and Pictou County. The overall increase in the selected rural areas of Halifax was not evenly spread across these areas. Some saw declines in population.

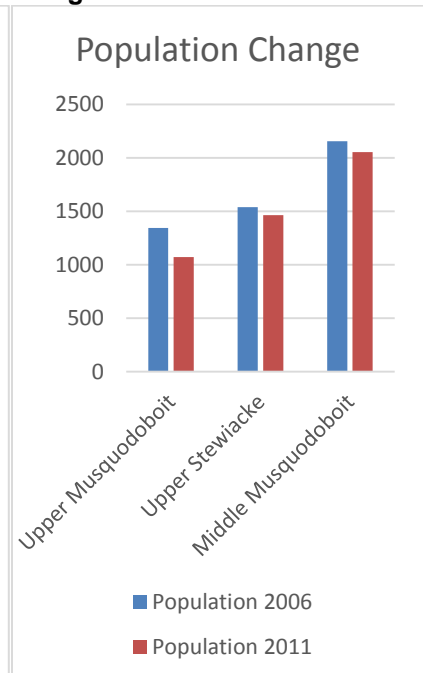
**Figure 6a**



**Figure 6b**



**Figure 6c**



Figures 6a, 6b and 6c break out the population change data for smaller communities in Western, Eastern and Northern Halifax and compare them with neighbouring communities in Lunenburg, Guysborough and Colchester counties respectively

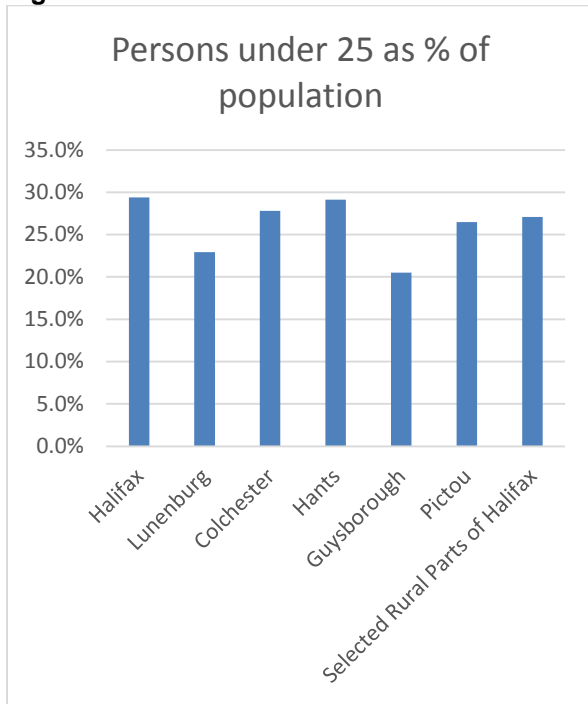
### 3.2 Population – Age Distribution

An aging population challenges both Nova Scotia and Canada. Fewer young people mean fewer workers. Fewer workers mean fewer taxpayers. Governments' revenues suffer when less income tax is collected.

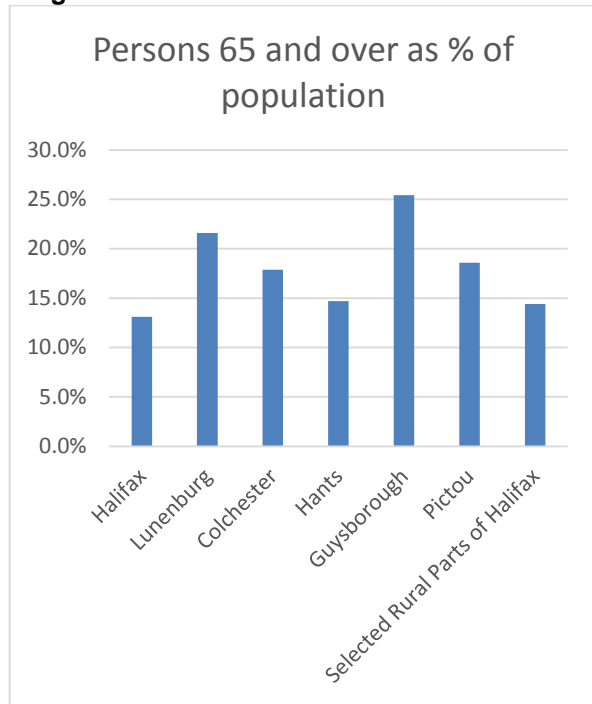
The selected rural parts of Halifax have a higher proportion of older people and a smaller proportion of younger people than Halifax as a whole. Compared to neighbouring jurisdictions the selected rural parts of Halifax are in the middle of the group when it comes to relative ages of the population. Even within relatively small areas, the distribution of the population by age is not uniform.

Figures 7a and 7b provide information on the proportion of younger (under 25 years) and older (over 65 years) people in the population.

**Figure 7a**



**Figure 7b**



Halifax has a higher proportion of younger and a lower proportion of older people than its neighbours.

Figures 7c, 7d and 7e break out the numbers for older people for communities in western, eastern and northern Halifax and compare them with neighbouring communities. Figures 7f, 7g, and 7h break out the figures for younger people in the same communities

Figure 7c

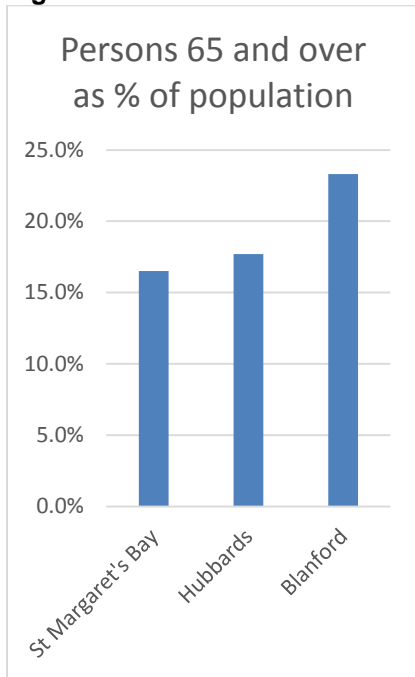


Figure 7d

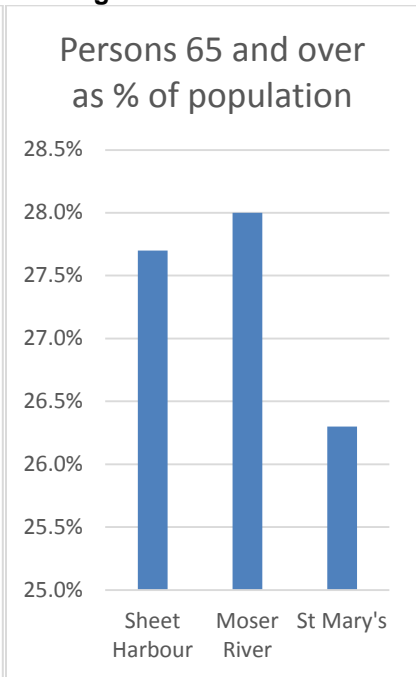


Figure 7e

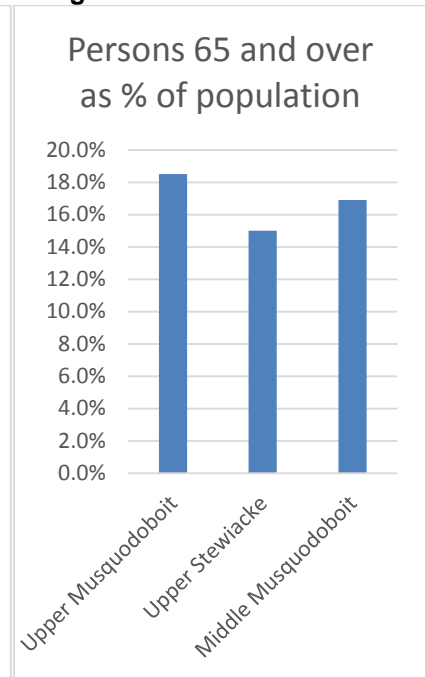


Figure 7f

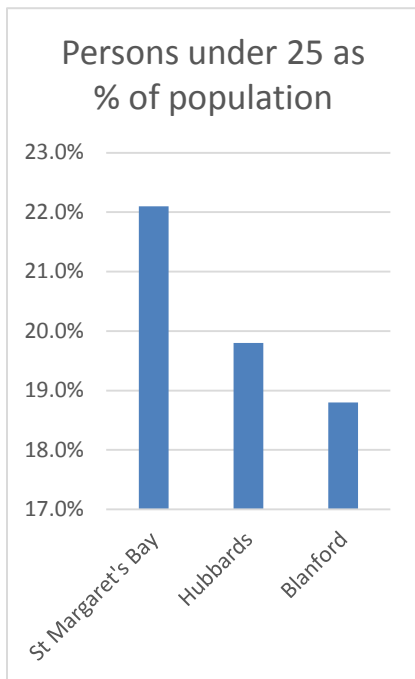


Figure 7g

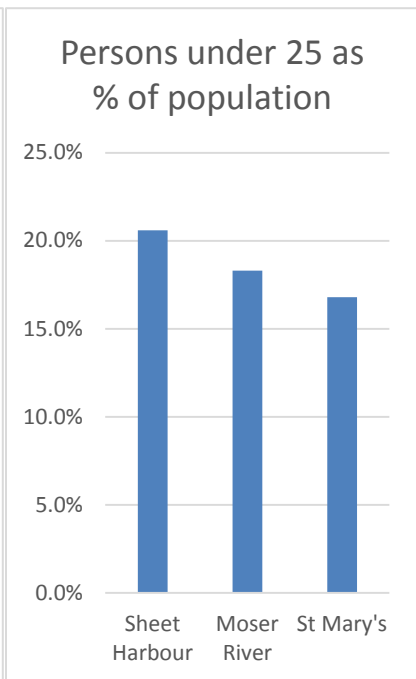
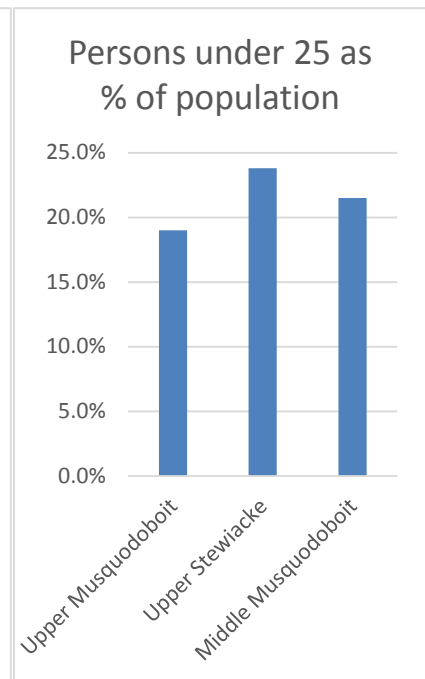


Figure 7h

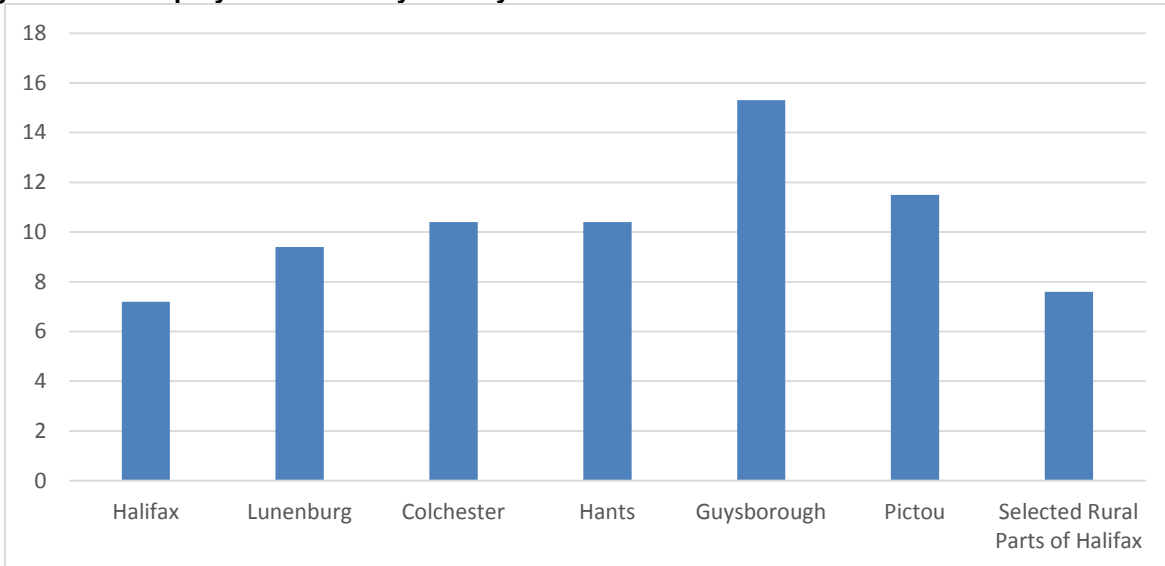


## 4 - Labour Market

### 4.1 - Unemployment

Figure 8 shows 2011 unemployment rates for counties. High unemployment hurts growth in labour productivity and GDP and is linked to higher rates of poverty, homelessness, income inequality, crime, poorer health outcomes, lower self-esteem, and social exclusion.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 8 – Unemployment Rates by County**



Figures 8a, 8b and 8c break out the unemployment rates by community.

<sup>3</sup> See Conference Board of Canada  
<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/economy/unemployment-rate.aspx>

Figure 8a

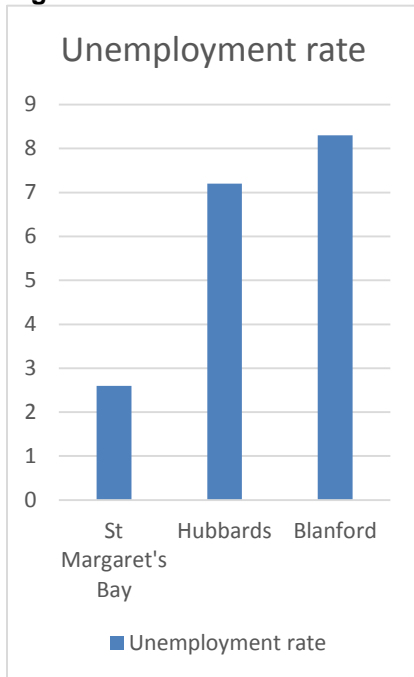
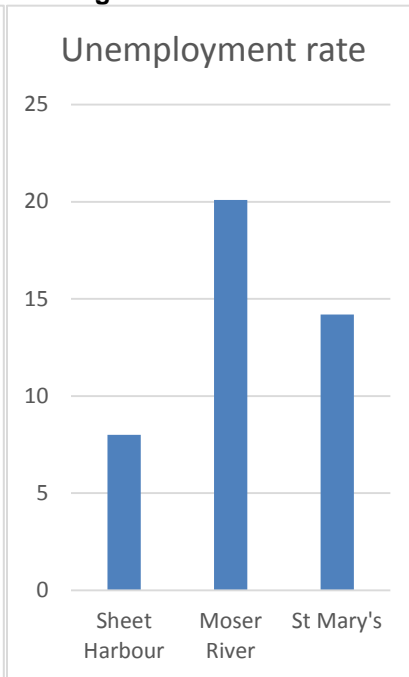
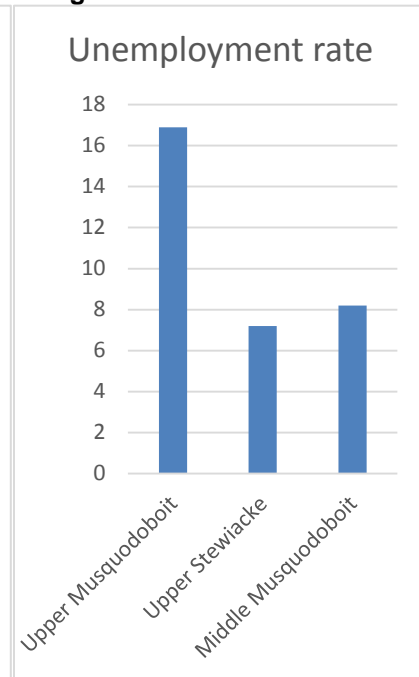


Figure 8b



Figure

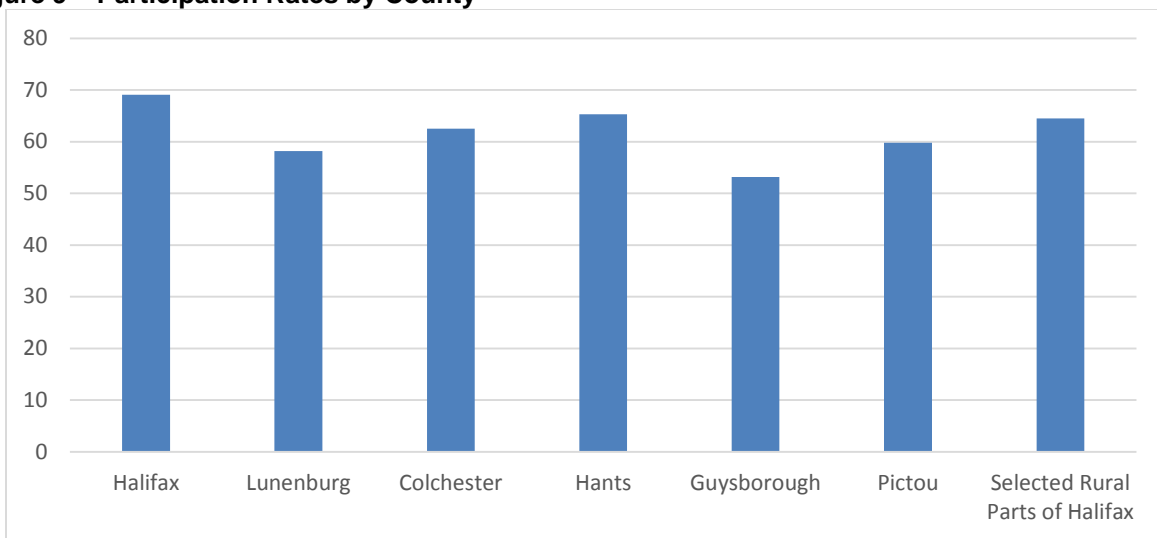
8c



#### 4.2 Participation Rate

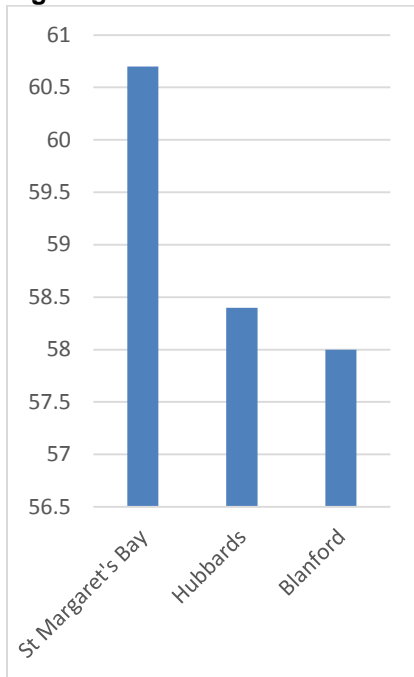
The participation rate signals how well an economy functions. Low participation rates mean underused human resources in the economy. Wage growth and higher education levels are associated with more people joining the labour force. Low participation rates may result from people, unemployed for long periods, eventually dropping out of the labour force altogether.

Figure 9 – Participation Rates by County

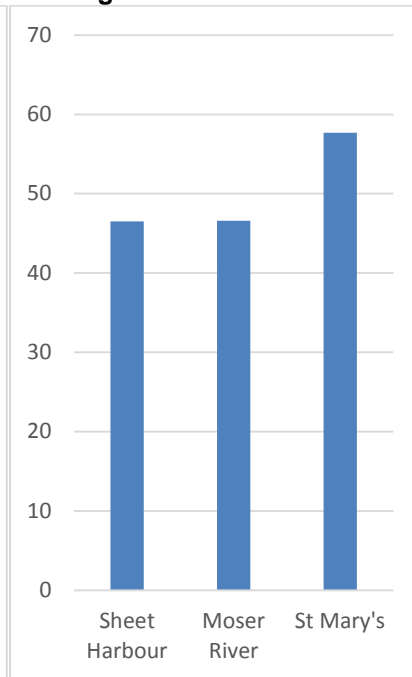


Figures 9a, 9b and 9c show participation rates for selected communities.

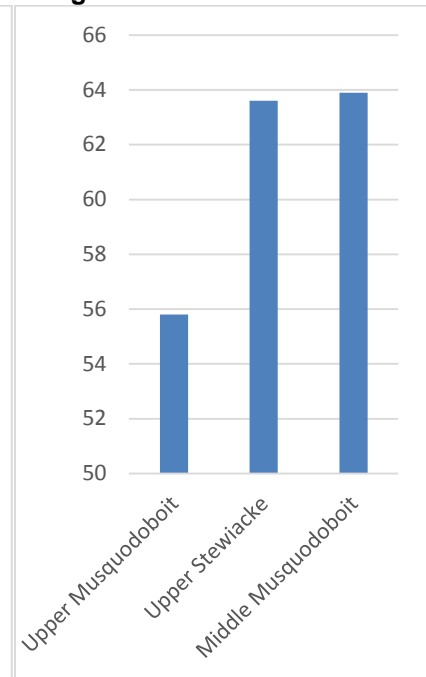
**Figure 9a**



**Figure 9b**



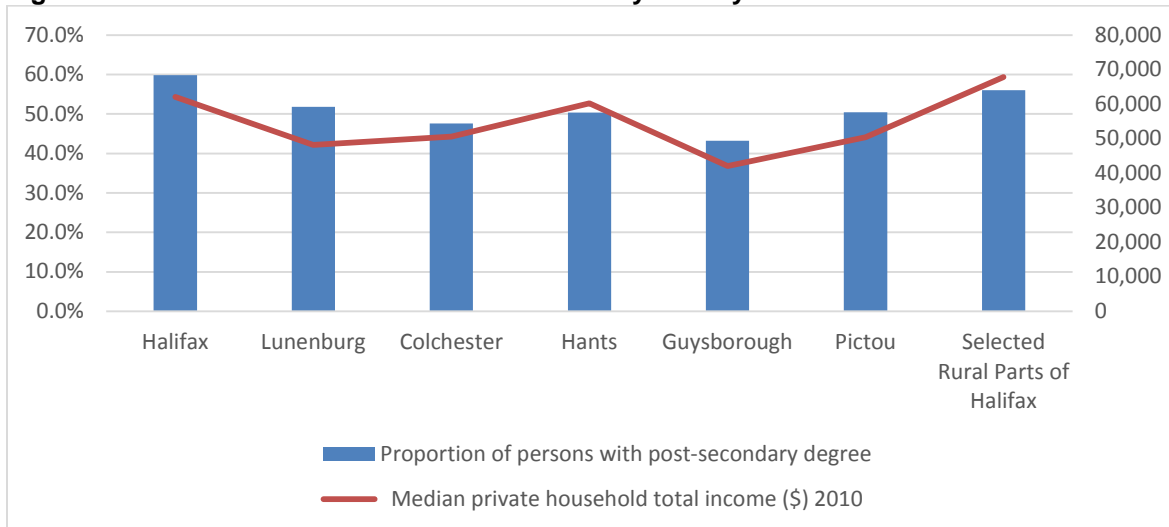
**Figure 9c**



**4.3 - Educational Attainment**

Figure 10 shows the proportion of the population with post-secondary degrees mapped with the median household income for counties and areas within and around Halifax. A relationship between education and income is apparent.

**Figure 10 – Educational Attainment and Income by County**



**5. Competitiveness Factors**

**5.1 - Tax Levels and Rates**



Halifax raises most of its revenue through property taxes, with different rates for commercial and residential properties. Unlike most Nova Scotia municipalities, Halifax has different rates for urban and rural areas. The different rates reflect the variety of community sizes and levels of service required. There are also area rates charged to properties within a certain distance of services that predominantly benefit local residents, such as fire hydrants, recreation, transit and sidewalks. Area rates are used in all municipalities.

**Figure 11**

<b>Tax Comparisons along the Lunenburg and Hants County Lines</b>				
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Typical Resid. Rate</b>			<b>Typical Home Tax (Asses't = \$180k)</b>
District of Chester <sup>1</sup>	\$0.851	to	\$0.876	\$1,554
West Hants			\$0.970	\$1,746
East Hants <sup>2</sup>	\$1.154	to	\$1.214	\$2,131
<b>Halifax<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>\$1.048</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>\$1.206</b>	<b>\$2,029</b>
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Typical Comm. Rate</b>			<b>Typical Comm. Tax (Asses't = \$225k)</b>
District of Chester <sup>1</sup>	\$1.635	to	\$1.660	\$3,707
West Hants			\$1.750	\$3,938
East Hants <sup>2</sup>	\$2.870	to	\$2.930	\$6,525
<b>Halifax<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>\$2.998</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>\$3.008</b>	<b>\$6,757</b>
<i>1 based on rates in Districts 1 and 2</i>				
<i>2 based on rates in Mount Uniacke, Nine Mile River, Enfield, Elmsdale &amp; Milford</i>				
<i>3 based on rates in Hubbards, Black Point, Ingramport, Beaver Bank, Enfield &amp; Elmsdale</i>				

**Figure 12**

<b>Tax Comparisons along the Colchester and Guysborough County Lines</b>		
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Typical Resid. Rate</b>	<b>Typical Home Tax (Asses't = \$55k)</b>

Colchester <sup>4</sup>	\$0.900	to	\$1.030	\$531
St. Mary's			\$1.282	\$705
<b>Halifax<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>\$0.997</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>\$1.052</b>	<b>\$563</b>
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Typical Comm. Rate</b>			<b>Typical Comm. Tax (Asses't = \$125k)</b>
Colchester <sup>4</sup>	\$2.300	to	\$2.430	\$2,956
St. Mary's			\$2.273	\$2,841
<b>Halifax<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>\$2.998</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>\$3.041</b>	<b>\$3,774</b>

*4 based on rates in Cooks Brook, Shubenacadie, East and Upper Stewiacke*

*5 based on rates in Cooks Brook, Elmsvale, Dean, Moser River, Necum Teuch & Ecum Secum West*

Flat fees are included in the overall tax amount and in the “equivalent rate.”

**Figure 13 - Equivalent Rates for Solid Waste and Other Flat Fees**

	Flat Fee	Equivalent Rate	
East Hants	\$205	<b>\$0.114</b>	
Chester	\$110	<b>\$0.061</b>	Equivalent
St. Mary's (solid waste)	\$89.35	<b>\$0.162</b>	Comm'l Rate
St. Mary's (street lights)	\$104	<b>\$0.189</b>	<b>\$0.083</b>
St. Mary's (fire)	\$50	<b>\$0.091</b>	<b>\$0.040</b>

\*\*\*\*\*

**Area Rates**

Rate boundaries remain largely unchanged since 1997, causing inconsistency due to subsequent development across tax boundaries. Much of this was remedied when the rural-suburban residential boundary was eliminated. The number of area rates can cause inefficiency and confusion, such as in the bulk buying of equipment. This was a significant issue prior to the transfer of Fire Services to the general rate around 2003. Some services may benefit a broader section of society than those who live nearby, and those who are paying for local services may not use them. Local services may have a regional component, and few area rate services are not public in nature. There have been several changes to the

rate structure since 1997, including general rating and standardizing fire and streetlight services, introducing a regional transportation and local transit rate and bringing municipal recreation facilities, sidewalk construction, sidewalk plowing and crosswalk guards under the base rate.

Most of the abutting municipalities use area rates, so there is no significant policy difference. In fact, the main difference might be that HRM has fewer area rates, now, than its neighbours.

## **5.2 Service Levels**

### **5.2.1 Planning Services**

Halifax's approach to land use regulation in rural areas for industrial, commercial or resource uses has been largely permissive. In rural areas outside areas specifically designated for residential development or natural preservation, there are no municipal restrictions on resource or agricultural development.

Land use planning is an effective tool to promote structured development in rural areas. This territorial approach contrasts with that of the federal and provincial governments to providing sectoral subsidies, and is the method recommended by the OECD to most effectively support rural development. Halifax's regional plan is an example of a territorial approach to development; land use plans favouring rural growth centres allow communities to grow sustainably, offering economic opportunities for residents that do not involve daily commutes to the city.

### **5.2.2 Economic Development Services**

Current municipal economic development activities and supports in rural Halifax include:

- Halifax Partnership (HP) participation on Sheet Harbour Chamber of Commerce
- HP regional business planning support for the Eastern Shore
- Destination Halifax involvement/promotion of rural parts of Halifax
- Halifax support to Destination Eastern and Northumberland Shore (DEANS)
- Local Initiatives – e.g. Musquodoboit Valley Business Plan

### **5.2.3 Waste Collection Services**

Appendix B provides a snap shot of comparators for Halifax and neighbouring regions. The items are colour coded as they compare to Halifax. Exact comparisons are difficult because of the varying nature of service delivery and complexities even within sub-categories. For example an area may offer some commercial collection however their tip fees are higher than Halifax, whereas Halifax does not offer collections but has a lower tip fee.

Generally Halifax meets or exceeds what other areas do in terms of the residential services - garbage, recycling, organic collection amounts and frequency and household special waste depots for residents.

In terms of the business sector (Industrial Commercial and Institutional - ICI) Halifax does not collect ICI waste. This is done through private haulers. It appears that some other areas provide more service for the ICI sector than Halifax. In addition some areas have higher and lower tip fees for ICI waste.

### **5.2.4 Recreation Services**

A September 17<sup>th</sup> CPED report described the recreation services available on the Eastern Shore. The recreation situation is an example of the challenges of servicing small scattered rural populations.

The area between East Ship Harbour and Ecum Secum includes fishing villages, an industrial park, a hub community with government services such as health, recreation, library, social services and transportation, towns with beach and hiking access and several historic sites. Statistics Canada has documented a steady decline in population, high unemployment rates, and an increase in the proportion of people over 65.

The Library Branch, Parks and Recreation office, and Seaside Fitness Centre are co-located in Sheet Harbour. While there is no specific recreation programming at this location, there is a boardroom available for recreation programming. Programs are currently also offered in other locations throughout the area. These alternative program spaces include church halls, community halls, and local schools. Many are operated by volunteer groups which rely on the income generated by rental of their facilities to support the operating and maintenance costs of the facilities. These facilities provide a level of access that would not be possible if all programs were offered or operated in one centralized facility.

Issues like transportation, travel time, program costs, and on-line registration keep some residents from enjoying the recreation programs currently available. Halifax Recreation tries to identify the appropriate programs for each community, locate instructors and find rental space that coincides with the availability of instructors while ensuring the program times are suitable for the users. This complex equation often challenges the ability to offer relevant timely programming, in such a diverse and spread out area. Halifax uses an alternate service delivery model to provide recreation services through the Facility Lease Agreement program.

The Community Facility Master Plan (CFMP) states "service providers need to be aligned in order to maximize their financial viability, and to minimize competition between service providers. CFMP criteria for Category 1 facilities (community centres) suggest a best-case scenario of approximately 15,000 residents to form a strong population base per facility, along with an expectation of a five to ten minute drive time." Eastern Shore population falls below the CFMP benchmark of 1 facility per 15,000 residents.

Regional geographic realities mean that the benchmark does not adequately address the needs and expectations of rural citizens. An expectation of five to ten minute drive time for access is unrealistic. Citizens generally must drive farther to access services. However, facility provision in these communities exceeds an appropriate expectation for recreation facilities and illustrates a problematic level of complexity and competition for service providers.

The construction of a new consolidated school in the region will create new spaces for community use and allow for new possibilities as citizens of all ages benefit from the standard design features in the new school. The creation of the school gym will provide opportunities for community use outside of school hours and supplement the other recreation service currently offered.

The Recreation Needs Assessment highlighted several issues:

- A steadily decreasing population with the majority of citizens between the ages of 35-54 and over 65.
- Housing costs are lower and the unemployment rate is higher than the rest of HRM.
- Transportation, travel distance, quality/availability of instructors and cost are important in determining the use of recreation facilities.
- Area communities are purposely separate from each other to retain their unique identities but all are experiencing difficulty sustaining their respective facilities.
- Citizen feedback rated the importance of recreation programs as high for a good quality of life.
- Over 95% of citizens and groups that participated in the formal and informal feedback opportunities stated dissatisfaction with the current availability of both indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.
- There are currently more facilities per-capita than recreation standards suggest but there is a clear need to develop a more appropriate model for the delivery of services and programs in the facilities.

### **5.2.5 Police Services**

The RCMP delivers policing services in rural Halifax. Through the integrated policing arrangements between the RCMP and HRP, rurally based RCMP officers have the same radios and computers as HRP and access to the same serious crime support services. Rural Halifax gets urban services tempered by the distances and the geography which can impact response times and the visible presence of the RCMP. The involvement of officers in the communities where they often work and live is important. In the past the RCMP has done rural town hall meetings to strengthen links with the community and feelings of safety.

### **5.2.6 Fire & Emergency Service**

The Fire Services Operational Review report that went to Regional Council in December 2014 included considerable information about how the fire service operates in both urban and rural Halifax. In terms of response times, Fire and Emergency Service has recently begun a review of available data. When that review is complete, it should be possible to analyze response times more completely.

Most HRM rural areas are covered by volunteer stations and MOUs with adjacent volunteer stations in municipalities along HRM's borders. The Operational Review pointed out that some rural stations do not have enough volunteers. It is not clear if the volunteer situation is better or worse in rural Halifax than in neighbouring municipalities. It is therefore difficult to say that being a part of HRM means that rural areas are provided a more effective service.

Since amalgamation, Halifax volunteers have access to the same standardized training and equipment as career firefighters. This was not necessarily the case before amalgamation.

### **5.2.7 Transit & Transportation**

Rural Halifax residents reap some benefits from having the largest transit system in the Atlantic Provinces. Although services in the rural areas are limited, Halifax Transit does offer several traditional, scheduled, fixed transit routes in rural areas. These include the Route 400 Beaver Bank, Route 401 Porters Lake, and Route 402 Sambro. Several other more urban routes currently extend into rural areas, including Purcells Cove, Hammonds Plains, and Middle Sackville. In addition, Halifax Transit operates MetroX, a commuter focused, rural express, service along highway corridors. Existing routes service Park & Ride lots along Highway 102 (Fall River/Airport), Highway 103 (Tantallon/Sheldrake Lake), and Highway 107 (Porters Lake) and bring commuters into the Regional Centre. Future plans include an additional route along Highway 101 (Middle Sackville).

Most of rural Nova Scotia does not have access to fixed route transit. Several other transit agencies offer fixed route service - (Transit Cape Breton, Kings Transit, Antigonish Community Transit, and in the near future, the Town of Yarmouth) - but the service areas are generally focused in small towns or relatively densely populated areas. In addition, there are no areas outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality that have access to an express commuter service that would be equivalent to MetroX service.

The 2014 Regional Plan established an Urban Transit Service Boundary that prevents future investment in transit routes outside of the urban areas (with the exception of MetroX in limited locations). However, the Plan also encourages the development of community-based solutions for transit in rural areas. In 2014, Regional Council approved a Rural Transit Funding Program which provides financial support for community-based organizations that provide transportation to residents. Two community organizations, BayRides (St. Margarets Bay area) and MusGo Rider (Musquodobit Harbour/Porters Lake), which provide door to door, demand responsive services, have been approved under this funding program to date. There are approximately 14 community based transit organizations currently in service in other parts of Nova Scotia, including the Cumberland County Transportation Society, The Municipality of Chester Transportation Society, and Sou'West Nova Transit (Shelburne). At least one service, Transport de Clare, does receive funding from the municipalities it serves to assist with operations. The level of service provided by these organizations varies based on their service model, and number of years in operation.

### **5.2.8 Other Services**

Education, health and social services, including housing, have an impact on the quality of rural life. The province delivers these services. If the working assumption is that provincial service delivery is consistent across rural Nova Scotia, then rural Halifax could face school closures, reductions in emergency room hours, and other cutbacks as has been the case elsewhere in the province.

## 6 Assets & Advantages

People currently living in rural Halifax can choose to remain in those rural areas or move. In recent years, many people, especially younger people, have moved to more urban places, in Halifax or beyond. Some people have moved for educational or employment opportunities not available in rural Halifax. Others have moved to be closer to health care services they need. While it may be possible to improve services and thereby encourage more people to live in rural areas, it is important to recall why people came to rural areas in the first place. The many small communities which make up rural Halifax often began as places where work was available in agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, forestry, mining or tourism. People came to work and stayed on to build communities. As the work available changes, what happens to the communities left behind?

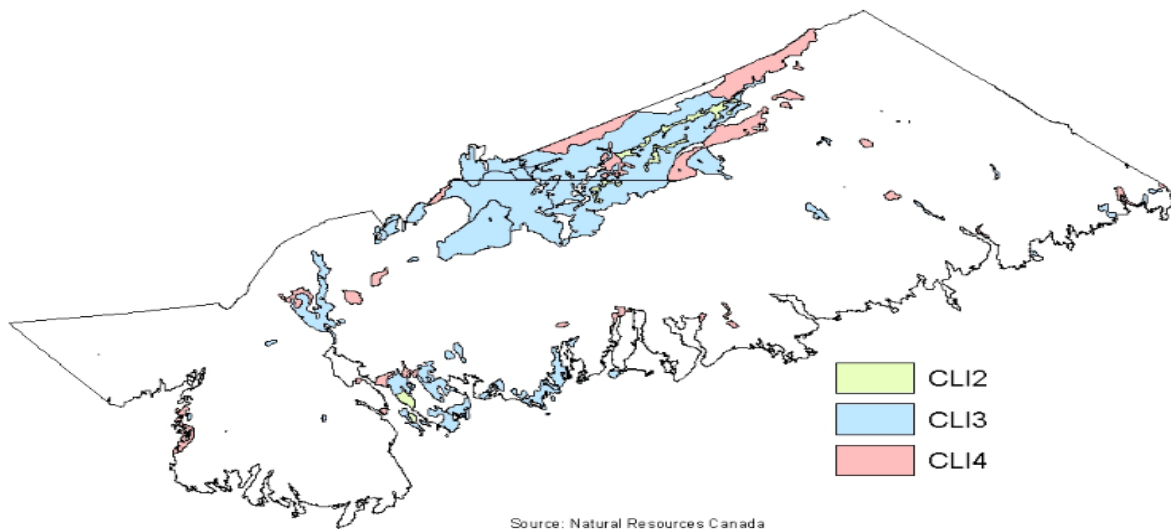
In many cases the “assets” – farmland, fish, trees, minerals and beautiful scenery - remain but the demand for them has changed. In recent years, for the most part, as with the services noted in Sec 5.2.9, the province has played the lead role in facilitating private sector development of the assets in rural Halifax. The Halifax Partnership has been somewhat active in rural Halifax but has put the bulk of its energy into urban areas where the pay off potential is higher. Should Halifax do more to encourage the development of its economic assets? Would such development help retain and attract the population required to justify and pay for better services?

While accepting that private sector investment is required to develop the economic assets and that provincial departments have the mandate to encourage that investment, the following sections look at some possible areas from attention from the municipality in agriculture, aquaculture and tourism. Other sectors also offer possibilities.

### 6.1 Agriculture

In 2011, Nova Scotia was the only Canadian province to show an increase in the number of farms since 2006. The province reported a total of 3,905 farms, up 2.9%. (A census farm is an agricultural operation that produces agricultural products intended for sale.<sup>4</sup>)

**Figure 14 – HRM Agricultural Land**



<sup>4</sup> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2012002/prov/12-eng.htm>

Halifax has approximately 7,500 hectares in agricultural production. This amounts to just over 3% of Nova Scotia land in agriculture. Farming in Halifax uses about 1.5 % of the municipal land area. Land most suitable for agricultural production is used for agriculture in Halifax County at a lower rate than the provincial average. About 8% of suitable agricultural land is used for agricultural production in Halifax compared with 13% provincially.

The 2011 Agriculture Census showed Halifax was home to 4.2% of all Nova Scotia farms, up from 4.1% in 2006. In 2011 Halifax produced \$25.1 million in gross farm receipts, 4.2% of gross provincial farm receipts, making Halifax the ninth largest county in terms of value of agricultural production.

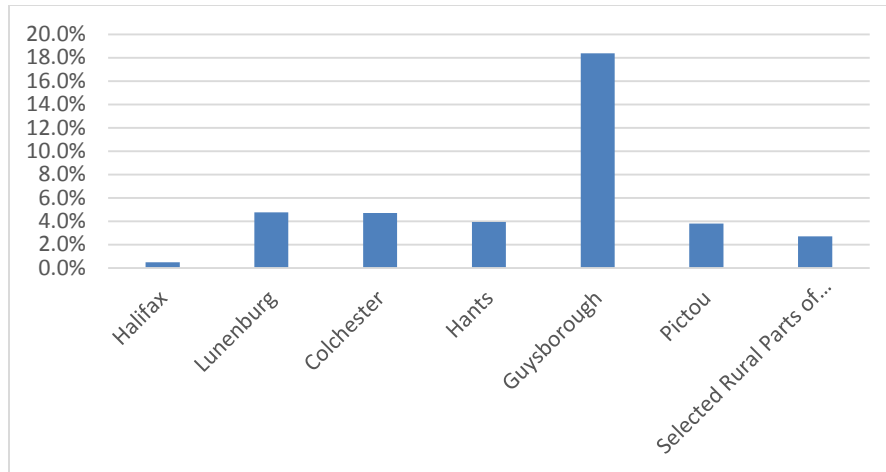
**Figure 15 – Farming in Halifax**

	2006	2011	% change	NS 2011	County/NS
<b>Number of farms</b>	154	<b>164</b>	<b>+ 6.5 %</b>	3,905	4.2 %
<b>Total farm area (hectares)</b>	14,277	<b>15,119</b>	<b>+ 5.9 %</b>	412,000	3.7 %
<b>Average size of farm (hectares)</b>	92.7	<b>92.2</b>	<b>- 0.6 %</b>	105.5	87.4 %
<b>Gross farm receipts*</b>	\$22,773,499	<b>\$25,137,688</b>	<b>+ 10.4 %</b>	\$594,903,481	4.2 %
<b>Average per farm</b>	\$147,880	<b>\$153,279</b>	<b>+ 3.7 %</b>	\$152,344	100.6 %

\* excludes forest products. Data listed in census are from 1 year previous (e.g. GFR data in the 2011 census are actually from 2010)

Agriculture, fishing and forestry represent a small portion of Halifax's overall economy. The three sectors represent 0.5% of overall employment. For some communities these resource industries represent a larger proportion of employment. For Moser River, Middle Musquodoboit and Upper Musquodoboit, the relative share of employment in agriculture, fishing and forestry was 13.2%, 4.7% and 11.2% respectively.

**Figure 16 – Agriculture/Fishing/Forestry as Percent of Employment**

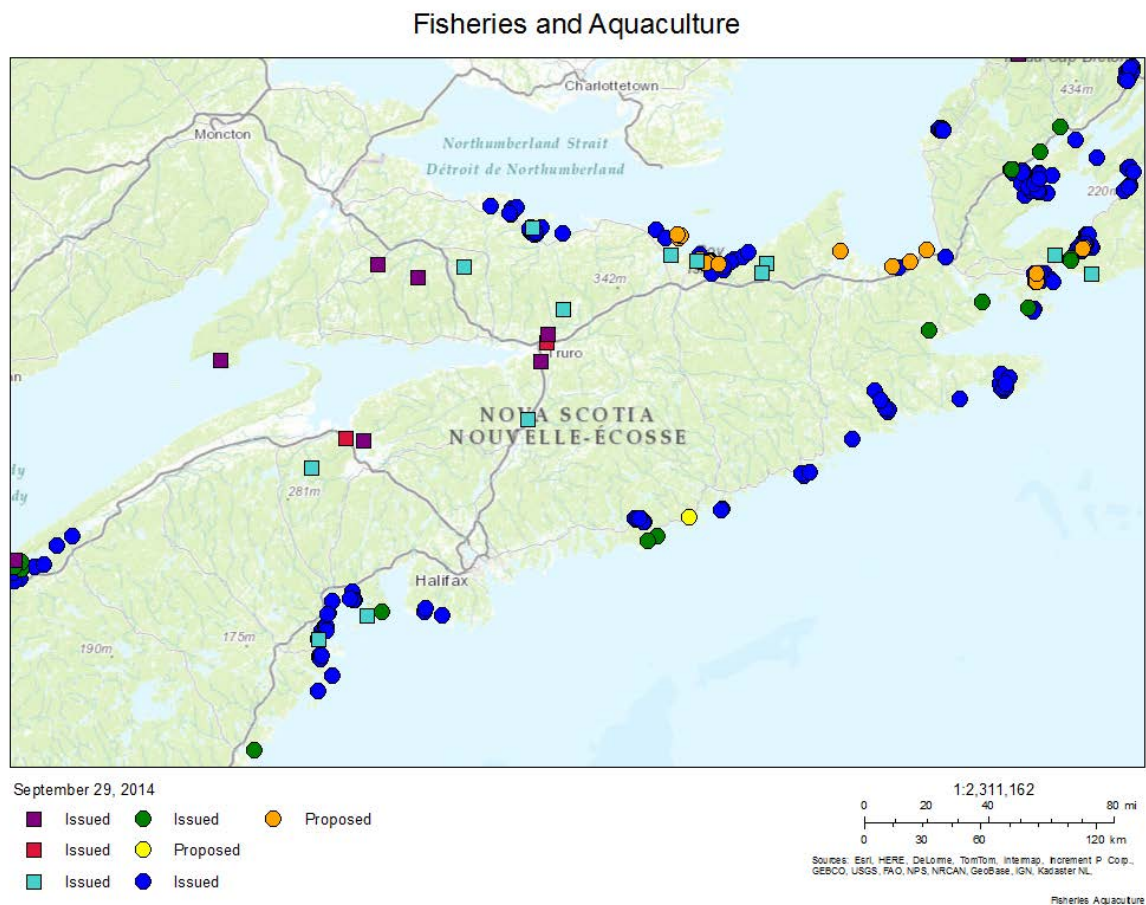


## 6.2 Aquaculture

Nova Scotia represents 5% of national aquaculture output. Aquaculture represents 34% of Canada's total marine value and 14% of total seafood production. The value of aquaculture production has increased by 52% over the last ten years, to \$927 million in 2010 from \$609 million in 2000. Canadian production has increased four-fold over the past 20 years. Atlantic salmon is Canada's top aquaculture export, accounting for a farm-gate value of \$690.9 million in 2010, while blue mussel is the top shellfish export, accounting for \$36.2 million in 2010.



**Figure 17 - Aquaculture sites across Nova Scotia.**



### 6.3 Tourism and recreation

Nova Scotia reports tourism data according to its tourism regions. Tourism as a whole represents just over \$2 billion in direct expenditures in Nova Scotia and \$1.1b in the metro Halifax tourism region. On the Eastern Shore (including some of Guysborough County) direct expenditure was \$29 Million.

One major potential development with respect to tourism in Halifax is the 100 Wild Islands conservation project. This project would see the protection of over 100 islands and 7000 acres of land. While this protection would see traditional residential or industrial development precluded, it represents opportunities with respect to sensitive tourism developments and scientific research opportunities.

### 6.4 Transportation Infrastructure

Rural coastal Halifax is served by the Port of Sheet Harbour, a deep water port, capable of handling multiple configurations of breakbulk and special project cargo.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Rural Halifax faces different challenges than urban Halifax does. Population, employment and the commercial tax base – key indicators of economic success – are not growing. Halifax could help encourage rural development by:

- developing rural benchmarks related to people, economy, quality of life and sustainability

- engaging rural residents in discussions about what they need, want, and can expect
- identifying rural community assets to build upon;
- working with the provincial government and UNSM to develop appropriate provincial service standards
- developing a plan to move forward.