



Department of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture

Rural Communities Council

ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023



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Co-Chair's Message - Annual Report - June 2023

This year the Rural Communities Council formally participated in four presentations relevant to rural PEI, noted below:

- Rural Healthcare
- PEI Population Strategy
- PEI Vital Signs Project
- Labour

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

In addition, the Council was invited to participate in a Digital Health Consultation with the Department of Health and Wellness and a Potato Sector Adaptation Workshop.

The Co-chairs had a productive meeting with Hon. Premier Dennis King to discuss priority topics identified by the Council. The presentation provided and notes from this meeting can be found in Appendix A. The new Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture, Hon. Cory Deagle also met with the Council and discussed numerous topics that were tabled at the Premier’s meeting.

The Council have planned the following topics for next year:

- Land-Use Planning and Unsightly/Derelict Properties
- Education
- Rural Economic Development
- Rural Statistics as a Data Analysis Policy Tool

The Council is also planning to share a communications strategy designed to introduce Islanders and government to its role while inviting the public to offer their ideas and concerns. Council members embody many parts of our rural communities including rural PEI businesses, nonprofits, municipal government, and Indigenous and Francophone communities. We are a very committed and engaged group. Council members’ life and work experiences in rural PEI bring valuable contributions to the dialogue. Members look forward to continuing this process.



The Council wants to thank the support and guidance afforded to it by the committed team at Rural and Regional Development.

Sincerely,

Co-Chairs: Gerry Gallant and Elmer MacDonald



Activities

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

Meeting Date:	Meeting Topics or Presentations:
September 21, 2022	Rural Healthcare Department of Wellness and HealthPEI
November 30, 2022	PEI Population Strategy Economic Development and Consultants
January 18, 2023	Labour SkillsPEI
May 10, 2023	PEI Vital Signs Conversation UPEI, Institute of Island Studies Meet and Discussion with Hon. Cory Deagle, Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture

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

The co-chairs also met with Premier Dennis King on January 18, 2023 to discuss key issues raised and discussed by the Council. A summary of the discussion points can be found in Appendix A.

Pictured from left to right: Co-chair Elmer MacDonald, Hon. Premier Dennis King, and Co-chair Gerry Gallant





Summary of Deliberations 2022-23

Below are the key takeaways from Council meetings in 2022-23.

Topic	Key Take-aways
Rural Healthcare*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers that prevent rural populations from accessing healthcare services need to be addressed by government. Examples of rural-specific barriers include the limited amount of emergency healthcare services in rural PEI and the lack of reliable internet or technology services in some areas that prevent individuals to access virtual care or contact emergency services. • To help address healthcare recruitment and retention issues in rural PEI, the Council encourages organizations to develop rural PEI-specific plans that involve community members who can welcome new healthcare professionals into their communities, help them adapt to the realities of rural PEI, and develop means of support that encourage them to stay and practice in the community. • The Council encourages Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness to engage with the public to inform about advancements, knowledge and opportunities in the PEI healthcare system. This includes information about initiatives such as the Patient Medical Homes and Electronic Medical Record system. • The Council is supportive of new and expanded healthcare initiatives that result in more streamlined and expanded access to healthcare across PEI. This includes expanding the Patient Medical Homes model, Electronic Medical Record system, and MAPLE.
PEI Population Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council participated in a focus-group like exercise with the Department of Economic Growth and their consultants as part of the upcoming PEI Population Strategic plan. A few key points coming from discussion included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding rural vs urban population statistics is important for understanding trends and for future planning. ○ Population growth is putting pressure on existing services such as healthcare and housing. Planning is needed to make sure all of PEI is well serviced and may need regional approaches. ○ Population growth is linked to labour force needs. Understanding who can come to help fill jobs is important.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Strategic action points on population growth need to consider PEI's current assets, such as the province's natural beauty This includes the impact of population growth and climate change.
Labour*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To increase and sustain labour force participation, the Rural Communities Council recommends SkillsPEI continue to find opportunities, such as awareness campaigns, that educate the public about the dynamic labour market, the value of working on PEI, and the variety of support programs available to employers and employees.● Considering the labour shortage faced by all sectors on PEI, the Rural Communities Council encourages SkillsPEI and other provincial and federal government agencies to implement innovative policies that incentivizes existing sources of labour on PEI to join or re-join the labour force. The council specifically recommends that SkillsPEI and other labour force agencies take the following actions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Create incentives that encourage retirees to fill flexible employment vacancies (seasonal, part-time, etc.) considering the high number of retirements faced by multiple sectors.○ Create stronger links for students to enter into the workforce and greater incentives that encourage students to stay working in rural PEI workplaces.○ Advocate and collaborate with federal and provincial counterparts to adjust policies and regulations that prevent immigrants or temporary workers from entering and staying in the Canadian workforce, particularly for jobs that are hard to fill.
PEI Vital Conversations: Quality of Life and Well-Being on PEI after Fiona	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The PEI Vital Conversations is part of the Institute of Island Studies at UPE research on well-being on PEI and a partnership with the Community Foundation of PEI. These conversations are specifically focused on what people living on PEI feel is important for their well-being and quality of life, especially as they emerge from the uncertainties of a pandemic and the aftermath of post-tropical storm Fiona. Council members were asked a series of questions including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What does belonging mean to you?○ To what extent does your experience living on PEI match your sense of belonging?



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How did your experience of belonging here on PEI help and or hinder you during and after Hurricane Fiona?○ What does inclusivity mean to you?○ In your experience, what structures/systems reflect inclusivity on PEI?○ Where do you see opportunities for growing inclusivity in these structures and systems?○ Thinking of family, community and workplaces, what are some of your successes living here on PEI? What is working well?○ What is not working with family, community and workplaces?○ What are some ideas you have for a better supporting vitality on PEI?○ What can you do personally to foster belonging, inclusivity and community vitality on PEI? |
|--|--|

*Positions Statements created for these topics. Full statements can be found in Appendix B.



Looking Ahead

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

- Land-use planning
- Education
- Rural Statistics (for data and policy analysis)
- Rural Economic Development

The Council also looks forward to continuing to meet with the Hon. Cory Deagle and the Premier to update on progress made by the Council and identify key rural PEI issues.

The Council will also be actively recruiting for more members to be part of the Council in 2023-24. Five members ended their three-year terms, with two renewing for another three. At the end of 2022-23, four vacancies exist.





Appendix A: Premier Meeting Handout and Meeting Notes



Rural Communities Council: Meeting with Premier King

Council Mandate: The Rural Communities Council (RCC) is a volunteer advisory group, representing rural PEI businesses, non-profits, municipal government, and Indigenous and Francophone communities. It provides advice to government on a wide range of topics and themes such as people, communities, wellness, and environment. The RCC examines, discusses, and review-Government strategies through a Rural Lens identifying potential rural impacts of policies and decisions.

Topics Discussed to Date:

- Rural Health Care Strategies
- Climate Change / Climate Action Secretariat
- Municipal Government/Act
- National Building Code
- Population Strategy
- Housing
- Canada Games
- Land Matters Project
- PEI Project Partnership for Growth
- Rural Broadband Project
- Rural Statistical Analysis
- Rural Transit Feasibility Study
- Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth Report
- Youth on Board Pilot Project

Highlighted Observations and Recommendations to Government

Rural Healthcare

- Engage the public through a robust communications strategy that educates Islanders about positive health care strategies.
- Examples of positive and sustainable initiatives are the Patient Medical Homes and Electronic Medical Record.

Affordable Housing

- Rural affordable housing strategies needs to be specific to the unique rural environment of PEI.
- Innovative strategies such as the Municipal Infrastructure Fund and supportive land-use planning are encouraged.

Climate Change

- Rural PEI uniquely positioned to act on this issue.
- An action plan creating climate change strategies involving rural communities and municipalities is welcomed.

Rural to Urban Divide

- Perceived urban-rural divide is decreasing on PEI
- Issues that affect urban PEI also affects rural PEI.

Land-use Planning

- Rural Municipalities are challenged by the need for land-use planning and need to develop strategic plans.

The role of the RCC is to "rural-proof" policies and strategies. If the Province comes up with a major decision or policy change, there should be somebody saying, "Is this rural-proofed?"

Topics to be Discussed: The Council plans to discuss the following topics next year

- Labour Challenges and Opportunities
- Education
- Rural Economic Development
- Land-Use Planning and Unsightly/ Derelict Properties
- Rural Statistics as a Data Analysis Policy Tool

DG-1258



Meeting Notes with Hon. Premier Dennis King - Jan 10, 2023

Attendees:

Hon. Premier Dennis King

Adam Ross, Principal Secretary

Michelle Koughan, Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Communities Amie Swallow

MacDonald Director, Fisheries and Communities Elmer MacDonald, Co-Chair, Rural Communities Council

Gerry Gallant, Co-Chair, Rural Communities Council

The meeting's primary objective was to brief the Premier on the RCC's agendas and position statements. Also, the RCC Co-Chairs took the opportunity to solicit the Premier's feedback on the various position statements and to hear his views about rural PEI matters.

Co-Chair Elmer opened the meeting providing an excellent overview of the mandate and activities of the council. He also made it clear this was not a meeting to table "problems," but to expand on the Council's pursuit of "solutions" with respect to Rural PEI issues. The Premier welcomed this approach as he indicated many of his meetings were tabled with problems and issues, and not always positive in nature.

Co-Chair Gerry expanded on the Council's structure and mandate noting that its membership is from all parts of PEI, gender balanced, with Francophone and First Nations participation. Gerry noted that Council's role was to "Rural Proof" provincial policies and strategies from many presentations made by numerous PEI government department and agencies followed by "Position Statements" viewed through a "Rural Lens."

Gerry began with a review of the tabled (attached) one page "Highlighted Observations and Recommendations to Government" prepared by the Council. Gerry observed that the historic Urban/Rural divide that has traditionally been a factor in PEI was diminishing, and there is increasing recognition by all residents that rural success brings urban success. Gerry tabled a one-page statistical review showing how rural populations over



the past census years have been growing in pace with urban population growth, and the historic rural to urban migration seems to be in decline. (attached) He mentioned that population statistics are only one indicator of rural socio- economic status. There is a need for a more robust analysis of rural verses urban economic, demographic, and related data to better measure rural socio-economic conditions, and to provide a basis for measurement of strategic directions and policy by government. He noted the economic impact of rural industries, agriculture, fisheries, and tourism are strong underpinnings of the total provincial economy.

The Premier agreed with these observations, reflecting on his past work experiences with the historic urban/rural divide and the value of the rural industries.

Elmer reviewed the Council's rural health care position statements and articulated about his own community's challenges with health care services after the retirement of their long serving doctor. The community's efforts establishing a "clinical facility" was lauded by the Premier. This led to a discussion about Islanders preoccupation with the family doctor waiting list and the planned Patient Medical Homes strategy. We reiterated the Council's strong recommendation that the government engage the public through a robust communications strategy that educates Islanders about positive health care plans that include the Patient Medical Homes that should relieve the lack of family doctor crises. We also explored finding other creative solutions to health care on PEI. The fact that PEI is a microcosm of many larger populations with similar challenges, we discussed the opportunities surrounding using PEI as model laboratory or pilot to pursue more innovative solutions.

We discussed Rural Affordable Housing strategies that needs to be specific to the unique rural environment of PEI. The issues around land use planning and its interrelationship with housing was discussed at length. Elmer explained how his long- time agricultural livelihood is being negatively impacted by the lack of a comprehensive land use planning that protects agriculture lands and the industry. We both encouraged the Premier that notwithstanding the political risks and historic challenges, the province should be aggressively tackling the issue of a comprehensive province wide land use plan. Climate change was the next topic of discussion. As noted in the RCC document, Rural PEI uniquely positioned to act on this issue. We further discussed how rural PEI is on the



front lines of climate change due to its vast coastlines and climate exposure to fishing ports, coastal communities, forests, and agriculture lands. The Premier noted that rural PEI is on the climate change battle ground frontline with the UPEI School of Climate Change and Adaption in St. Peters, and other rural initiatives. He advised us that there is strong federal government interest to further invest in climate change research and initiatives in PEI. We again discussed the value of undertaking these initiatives here due to the “laboratory/pilot” environment we offer in Prince Edward Island.

As the meeting was ending, the Co-Chairs asked the Premier if he had any specific requests to the Council. He responded with an observation that he feels rural PEI needs a series of regional development corporations that could be enablers to facilitate increased investment to improve community and regional assets. He feels there is a gap in funding and related support for much needed community-based initiatives.

Discussion among the group revealed that his assessment was accurate and not only was there funding gaps in community-based needs, but also increased provincial funding support targeted to the regional development corporations could stimulate the local economy that allows businesses to grow and/or remain competitive.

Gerry offered to send a discussion document he prepared to further deliberate on this proposal.

The meeting concluded with thanks to the Premier for his interest in and support to the Council. Deputy Minister Michelle Koughan and Director Amie Swallow MacDonald also applauded the Council’s work and commitment.

Prepared by:

Gerry Gallant, Co Chair



Appendix B: 2022-23 Position Statements

RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

Positions Statements

Topic: Rural Healthcare
Fall 2022

Equitable Access

Barriers that prevent populations from accessing current and new healthcare services should be identified and addressed by government in order to increase uptake of improved health services and to achieve an equitable, PEI-wide healthcare system. Examples of rural-specific barriers include the limited amount of emergency healthcare services in rural PEI and the lack of reliable internet or technology services in some areas that prevent individuals to access virtual care or contact emergency services. The council is supportive of the work of Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness to introduce and promote services that begin to address these issues, such as Maple virtual healthcare services, however encourages that equity issues like affordability and access to sufficient technology required to using these services be considered when promoting and rolling-out new or adapted health services across PEI communities.

Recruitment and Retention Strategies

The Rural Communities Council supports the collaboration of private, public and municipal organizations in developing recruitment and retention strategies that attract healthcare professionals to practice on PEI and that provide access to the necessary supports they require to keep them practicing on PEI long-term. The council specifically encourages organizations to develop rural PEI-specific plans that involve community members who can welcome new healthcare professionals into their communities, help them adapt to the realities of rural PEI, and develop means of support that encourage them to stay and practice in the community. These plans can be strengthened by applying lessons-learned from other rural-jurisdictions who are successfully recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals, and by collecting feedback from current and past healthcare professionals who have left or continue to practice in rural PEI.

Public Outreach

The Rural Communities Council encourages Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness to engage with the public to inform about advancements, knowledge, and opportunities in the PEI healthcare system so that Islanders can access health services more readily and efficiently. The council seeks to ensure that the potential for new initiatives and programs that work to improve the health-care system, such as the new Patient Medical Homes and Electronic Medical Record programs, garners wide-spread public support so that they can be rolled out across all PEI communities. This requires implementing a robust communication and education plan that informs the public about new health services and initiatives that streamline and provide greater public access to healthcare services, clarify processes for new or modified health services and publicize ways in which these services are resulting in positive outcomes.

Expansion of Services

The Rural Communities Council is supportive of new healthcare service initiatives that result in more streamlined and expanded access to healthcare across PEI. The council encourages Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness to continue to roll-out initiatives such as the Patient Medical Homes and Electronic Medical Record programs and recommends exploration of new opportunities that will result in health-care efficiencies. The council specifically supports new initiatives that expand health care services into rural communities which would prevent rural residents from travelling long distances to access necessary health care services.

"We are pleased the Council has learned more about emerging plans designed to improve Prince Edward Island's rural healthcare system. Our consultations revealed that Islanders should be more aware of the positive, developing healthcare strategies. We look forward to the continued efforts to provide rural Islanders with quality healthcare."

Co-chairs: Elmer MacDonald and Gerry Gallant

"Having high quality rural healthcare is essential for our Island. I am pleased that the Rural Communities Council is part of these discussions and providing input into ways Island rural communities can help improve rural healthcare services now and in the future."

Hon. Jamie Fox,
Minister of Fisheries and Communities

"The Department of Fisheries and Communities will continue to work with government departments, agencies and other important stakeholder to ensure the voice of rural islanders is provided in rural healthcare programs and plans."

Michele Koughan,
Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Communities



RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

Winter 2023

Positions Statements on Labour



A sustainable, reliable, and skilled workforce is critical to the success of rural PEI's labour-intensive industries. The Council encourages Government give high priority to address the current labour shortages faced by rural PEI businesses. Proactive leadership to provincial and federal partners, businesses, and citizens seeking innovative solutions is necessary to tackle the labour shortages.

Co-chairs: Elmer MacDonald and Gerry Gallant

Education

To increase and sustain labour force participation, the Rural Communities Council recommends SkillsPEI continue to find opportunities that educate the public about the dynamic labour market, the value of working on PEI, and the variety of support programs available to employers and employees. This could include creating awareness campaigns that encourage employers to be responsive and flexible to the needs of employees and continuing to promote services SkillsPEI offers employees and employers.

Recruitment

Considering the labour shortage faced by all sectors on PEI, the Rural Communities Council encourages SkillsPEI and other provincial and federal government agencies to implement innovative policies that incentivizes existing sources of labour on PEI to join or re-join the labour force. The council specifically recommends that SkillsPEI and other labour force agencies target the following groups to achieve this goal:

Retirees: The Council recommends incentives be created to attract willing and skilled retirees to fill flexible employment vacancies (part-time, casual, seasonal, etc. This approach recognizes there is a significant demographic shift with larger numbers of people retiring earlier across Canada and a significant flux of retirees moving to PEI in recent years.

Students: The council commends SkillsPEI for their work in implementing programs and incentives that have been successful in linking students into the labour force. However, the Council recommend more be done with these programs to encourage students to stay and work in rural PEI. This could include removing barriers, such as transportation issues that prevent high school students to participate in seasonal employment opportunities, engaging with students before and immediately after they graduate from high school so they can be introduced to potential employment opportunities, and creating incentives, such as retention bonus contracts, which could attract recent college or university graduates to commit to long-term work on PEI.

Immigration/Temporary Workers: The Council encourages SkillsPEI to continue to advocate their provincial and federal government counterparts to adjust policies/regulations that are preventing immigrants or temporary workers willing to work full time in meaningful employment on PEI. Additionally, the Council recommends that changes be made to policies/regulations to allow agencies like SkillsPEI to support employers through its programs to recruit and retain PEI immigrants and temporary workers for jobs that are hard to fill, particularly those in rural PEI.



Appendix C: Council Members – June 2022 – June 2023

Below is a list of Council members for 2022-23. The council has room for 12 members. In 2022-23, there were 10 members with two vacancies. The Council aims to be geographically, and gender balanced with two co-chairpersons.

Name	County	Term Start	Term End
Elmer MacDonald - Co-Chair	Prince	August 23, 2022	August 22, 2024
Jason Ramsay	Prince	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Kelly Shea Rayner	Prince	August 23, 2022	August 22, 2024
Blake Bernard	Prince	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Gerry Gallant - Co-Chair	Kings	August 23, 2022	August 22, 2024
Patricia Bray	Kings	August 23, 2022	August 22, 2024
Terry Nabuurs	Kings	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Mitch Jollimore	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023
Michelle Pineau	Queens	August 23, 2022	August 22, 2024
Maria Smith	Queens	June 30, 2020	June 30, 2023



Appendix D: Terms of Reference

MANDATE

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

KEY OBJECTIVES

Duties of the Rural Communities Councils will include:

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

MEMBERSHIP

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



SUPPORT

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

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

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

TERMS OF OFFICE

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



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

REPORTING

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

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

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

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

ENGAGEMENT

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

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

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



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