

Monthly Departmental Report

Planning & Strategic Initiatives

April 2023

The attached report shows development activity over the month of March 2023, as well as a year-over-year comparison for that month.

A Public Hearing was held April 12th to consider applications for two development agreements and a zoning map amendment, including:

1. Development Agreement for 9 North Adelaide Street to permit the conversion of an existing six-unit apartment building into an eight-unit building;
2. Development Agreement for 52 Hickman Street to permit a garden suite on the second floor of a garage.
3. A rezoning of 36/38 Beacon Street from General Residential to Open Space.

After Council's approval in March, development agreements for 3,4,5,7 Robie Street to permit the change of a non-conforming use, and 264 Church Street to permit a 98-bed care facility, are currently in the appeal period until April 19th. Assuming no appeals are submitted, the agreements will be executed and permits can be issued.

Regarding the proposed apartment building at 155 East Victoria Street, following the PAC's negative recommendation in February, and at the applicant's request, Council deferred a decision on first reading and sent the application back to the PAC to review a revised proposal. The applicant is currently working on proposal revisions and it is anticipated that this application will be ready for the May PAC meeting.

Staff and the PAC have reviewed the new MPS and LUB drafts and are communicating with the consultant to address the feedback. The revised drafts are intended to be ready for further review in May.

The Community Centre Feasibility Study is currently developing functional space programs based on the information and consultation completed so far. A steering committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 20th.

With regard to business development initiatives, organizing continues for the 2023 NS Works Job Fair at the Amherst Stadium on May 17th. The TOA is a sponsor of this event and will be participating in the tradeshow. The Job Fair was a huge success in 2022 with many employers hiring new employees during and after the show.

The Town, Cumberland Business Connector, and CBDC are sponsoring the 'Dream Business Entrepreneurship Program' hosted by Mashup Labs that started on March 23rd. Due to demand, the Connector organized and sponsored a second cohort of 15 participants and the two programs are running simultaneously. The programs are halfway complete with positive feedback to date. In both cohorts approximately a third of the participants are from the Town of Amherst.

Work continues on the organization of the 'Earn Income – Rent Your Space' event on May 11th. Town staff, with the Cumberland Business Connector and NSCC, are organizing a public information session for Amherst residents to learn how to convert space in their homes to rent to students and young professionals seeking temporary housing. This event is the first of its kind offered by NSCC and the outcome is hoped to be a model used across the province

The Amherst Downtown Business Association's met on April 13, 2023.

The Cumberland Chamber of Commerce hosted a 'JoinUsInCumberland' campaign aimed at enticing skilled workers from all over the world to relocate to the area. Their website JoinUsInCumberland.ca compiles data on where web traffic generates for future targeted marketing programs.

The Cumberland Chamber of Commerce has the assistance of a community coordinator for the next 7 months to evaluate if small and micro businesses will participate with the Chamber to build our region's economy through knowledge and networking. Using this information, a working committee will be formed to merge the Chamber and the Board of Trade making a single Chamber representing business in the Cumberland Region.

The Cumberland Chamber of Commerce is holding its AGM on the evening of April 27th at the Dr. Carson & Marion Murray Community Centre in Springhill. The keynote speakers will be a panel addressing students leaving the Region immediately following graduation. Hailey Tattrie Ph.D. candidate at Mount Saint Vincent University, leading the Cumberland Pathways to Resiliency research project, will be included in the panel.

A breakfast workshop on mental health in the workplace focusing on area business owners and their employees was held on April 12th at the YMCA. The guest speaker was Stephanie Allen of the Soulful Leader Podcast.

The Business Connector is organizing career fairs at all high schools in Cumberland County and invites local businesses around each school to promote their different fields of work and inform students of potential local job opportunities. The Career Fair at the Amherst Regional High School will be held at the start of the 2023/2024 school year.

The Connector met with Town and County Mayors, CAOs and staff to present their 2023 Strategic Plan and get feedback. The Connector will be finalizing their strategic plan with their Board and will present to their municipal supporters in April.

The Connector continues offering the Business Accelerator Program targeting businesses with high growth potential. The Accelerator assists businesses identify gaps in strategic plans and acts as a business coach as they progress through their challenges. They aim to provide this assistance to over 20 Cumberland region businesses per year.

The BDO continues to investigate the organization and impact of introducing an area Hotel/Marketing Levy. Conversations have been held with other regions in the province that have implemented a levy to gain perspective on what the impact has been on their area. The regions highlighted the importance of a local independent tourism association that would manage these funds.

Town staff is actively planning the industrial expansion project with a focus on the lands south of the Racetrack Road. In addition to these growth plans, staff are working on projects for the promotion of the park. Staff have met with Invest NS to discuss research assistance and available certification programs to raise the profile of the park and the Town.

Year 3 of the NS Dept of Environment and Climate Change (NSDECC), Nature Challenge Funding closed on March 31st, 2023. The appraisals of the two prospective properties in the North Tyndal Wellfield Protection Zone were completed before the fiscal period closure but no property acquisitions were completed. Recently, one of the properties has been taken off the market but staff continues pursuing the second. The continuation agreement renewal with NSDECC was executed with an allocated fund of \$338,470 for the Apr 1, 2023 – Mar 31, 2024 fiscal period. Our land agent, hired to assist with the program, has confirmed new opportunities for this upcoming fiscal period.

The BDO is coordinating with Clean Foundation of NS on a 2023 area promotion of the Town of Amherst, Clean Energy Financing Program. Utilizing the Town's 2022 Tax and Water Bills to residents, a promotional advertisement will be printed on these bills. Using the Town's social media platforms a monthly advertising campaign is being planned for the 2023 construction season.

Task Updates:

Task: LED Proposal for new 'Smart LED Streetlights'

Update: The FCM program administrator advised that the project is not eligible for FCM funding. LED Roadway Lighting are currently looking at alternative sources for funding. If none are found, staff will investigate alternative options regarding maintenance for the existing lights and will report back to Council in due course.

Task: Blaine Street and Ottawa Avenue Acquisitions

Update: A draft Agreement of Purchase & Sale for the Blaine Street property is complete and being reviewed by the purchaser. Progress on this item is stalled due to title issues with the property vendor.

Status: Ongoing

Task: Hotel Levy Report

Update: Staff have met with County staff to discuss a potential levy in the Cumberland region. There was agreement to further investigate how other non-urban levies have been established in the province, including how they are structured and managed.

Status: Ongoing

Task: Recognition of Local Businesses

Update: A memo was on the March COW agenda. Staff received direction to plan an event during Small Business Week in the fall and potentially sponsor a business award given out by the Chamber. A detailed plan for the event is being developed and will likely be on the May COW agenda for review.

Status: Ongoing.

Task: Transfer of 8/10 Prince Arthur Street to Cornerstone

Update: The Agreement of Purchase and Sale is being executed.

Status: Ongoing.