

## Community Meeting Re: Amalgamation of Entity 42 (Fundy Albert)

Friday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at the Steeves House Museum Egypt Room

### Attendees

#### **Province of New Brunswick**

Deputy Minister Ryan Donaghy  
Facilitator Chad Peters

#### **Village of Hillsborough Municipal Government**

Administrator/Clerk Kim Beers  
Councilor Melody Land  
Mayor Robert Rochon

#### **7 Community Members**

### Commencement: 2:30pm

Councilor Melody Land welcomed all guests to the meeting and established a roundtable process wherein each attendee would have the opportunity to offer one question for discussion at a time, follow-up remarks, and then open the floor for comments, follow-up, and debate related to the topic. This was to ensure all community members had an opportunity to speak directly with Deputy Minister Donaghy and Facilitator Peters. Once all attendees had the opportunity to offer a question, the floor would be open for further questions.

All in attendance were given the opportunity to introduce themselves, in what capacity in which they were attending the meeting, and any opening remarks. Deputy Minister Donaghy gave opening comments.

### **Question & Answer Period**

*Note: Questions and responses may be edited or paraphrased for length/clarity.*

**Q1: As a resident, I am concerned with the lack of information, and am hearing a lot of the same issues from other community members and leaders involved in the amalgamation process. Specifically, the issues centre around lack of clarity, lack of transparency, and over-handedness from the government/facilitator. How are you dealing with these issues and what specifically are you doing to address them?**

**Response:** We are trying to be as open as possible and have been regularly communicating as best we can by conducting community meetings, mail-outs, and keeping the website up to date. Mail-outs were distributed last March, although because of postal challenges some areas received incorrect, or conflicting, information. There will be additional mail-outs the third week of September and Elections New Brunswick will do additional promotion that is able reach each household specifically. Elections New Brunswick is the only entity that can access each individual mailing address. We can only use postal codes for general distribution.

We have heard a lot about transparency but not clear as to what specifically is missing. If there is

something not on the website, ask and we will update it. Because of the summer months, things have been quieter.

**Q1 Follow-up:** How are you dealing with the conflicts that are arising and the fact that the power [of decision making] is resting above them [community/Transition Group]?

**Response:** Consensus. [The province] has only had to intervene a few times. Thus far, everything has been worked out at the Transition Group level. In this region there has been a case where people changed their mind after the fact and there was some conflict.

**Q1 Follow-up:** Villages have opportunity for strong opinion but not a lot is coming from, or to, the Local Service Districts (LSDs).

**Response:** By the end of September there will be a 2-page flyer distributed and online updates at the end of this month [August]. There are representatives from the LSDs on the Transition Group.

**Q2: Once this new entity is up and running, how will things run regarding who pays for what services? For example, necessary services like water, or other frills like community beautification? With less representation, there is a lot of concern with lack of access to people in your area on council. What happens if someone on council refuses to support/fund some of these services?**

**Response:** Water is based on user-pay. If you don't have access to village water or sewer you won't be paying for it. The future council will decide who is responsible for all these systems. I have never seen a councilor refuse to pay for water or sewer, and one person can't get around the entire council.

Some elements of the budget will remain local (the funds for those expenses will come from the tax out of the region using those services) and some will be regional. There will be tax rates based upon where you live within the region and what services you have access to. Council can change those rates in the future.

**Q2 Follow-Up:** What model is being used for the tax rate? Graduate scale, shared, or not? Who is making that decision/the budget?

**Response:** The facilitator is creating the budget with the input of the municipalities, their clerks/administration, and Transition Group. By mid-October the first number of the budget will be completed, the tax rates will be released around the start of November, and the approved budget will be out on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The new council working in the new year will need to work within that budget. Future budgets will be created by the council. Different locations within the new municipality will have different tax rates.

**Q3: Has there been a fixed date for the election? How long will the term be?**

**Response:** Elections will be held November 28, 2022. It will be for a 3.5-year term, and in 2026 elections go back to being held in May.

**Q4: There has been a lack of information from councils. When amalgamated, what will be the greatest advantages, aside from elements of scale for Fredericton/Ottawa?**

**Response:** There have been some councils who have released information in advance. Each council has representatives in the Transition Group and are able to distribute information as they learn it, or as it is developed.

I hope there will be many benefits. There may be some benefits regarding purchasing power. For instance, being able to buy materials for things like water system in bulk. There will be less redundancy, for instance, employees being able to work together more collaboratively. I feel confidently that this region will have some additional amazing benefits. At a regional level there can be significantly more impact for things like strategy and advocacy, tourism for instance. When all the budgets are combined on a regional level the impact can be greater.

**Q5: What is the government website address? What does the new structure look like?**

**Response:** [www.gnb.ca/vibrantnb](http://www.gnb.ca/vibrantnb)

There is a new name for the region, but addresses are not changing. You are still from Hillsborough. Hillsborough just doesn't exist as a legal entity.

The new system is ward based. There are 6 wards, and one councilor is elected from each ward. The new council will be made up of 6 councilors and one mayor, who will run at large.

The wards were determined by the Transition Group with input from municipal staff and Elections New Brunswick. First, decisions were made whether it would be a ward or hybrid structure. Second, how many wards would be needed. Third, the equal population of constituents in each ward. Considerations were given to population/geography, particularly in the more rural regions, and some changes were made early in the mapping process to best reflect natural divisions and property.

**Q6: There has been a lot of referral to websites. In this region, most people can't access internet or don't have access to computers. How do you plan to stimulate these groups to learn about what is happening? In particular, around elections?**

**Response:** It will be up to Elections New Brunswick and candidates to engage with voters, as usual.

Before amalgamation, 30% of New Brunswickers have been unable to vote in municipal elections. Now only 5% will not be voting.

We cannot send mail to specific addresses because we do not have access to electoral lists. Elections New Brunswick is the only entity that legally can have access to personal addresses. We can only send mass information to postal codes. However, we can send additional flyers to try and reach more individuals as best we can. We will include a flyer with a map of the new region/wards on one side and information on the other.

**Q7: What percentage of time is our facilitator Chad Peters allocated to this region and what is the wage?**

**Response:** What was planned is that Chad allocates one day per week per project. In reality, it depends on the week and what is happening. This region is between 1 and 1.5 days per week, or a bit more, because of more complexities integrating multiple municipal units.

The facilitator is paid by the province. His wages do not come out of municipal budgets.

**Q8: Will there be any changes to agreements between local community groups/organizations and the new municipality in regards the use of Village assets? For example, the Steeves House Museum building and grounds are owned by the Village of Hillsborough but Heritage Hillsborough Inc., runs the museum.**

**Response:** There will be no agreements broken in 2023. However, if there are any agreements that are handshake agreements, be sure to write them down and have them formalized or updated. Any present written agreements will be carried over to the new entity. This includes budgeted items.

Reminder, that all the facilitator and Transition Group influences is the 2023 year. Moving forward, it will be up to the new council to continue or amend any agreements between the entity and individual groups/organizations. Any agreements that are for the 2022 budget only must be met within the 2022 year. Those do not carry over.

After the region is amalgamated, any property or assets of Hillsborough will belong to the new entity, the Village of Fundy Albert.

**Q9: Where will the municipality head office be, where will the new council meet, as of January 1, 2023?**

**Response:** That will be up to the new council. [The Deputy Minister's] suggestion is that to maintain the three council buildings and move the council meetings between them for a time. The first meeting location will be decided by the Transition Committee and the subsequent locations will be decided by the new council.

**Q10: I don't see how this is going to be cheaper in the long run. Is it going to be more accessible to Province of New Brunswick?**

**Response:** There should be cost savings within the first few years in relations to cost sharing and collaboration. Advocacy should be stronger.

**Q11: What is happening with municipal employees?**

**Response:** The instruction given to the facilitator is that there should be no job losses. Some jobs may look different. Every effort is being made to avoid job loss.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) position was an open competition. The CAO position will hire clerk/treasurer and other personnel.

**Q12: How will amalgamation help our growth?**

**Response:** The region could come together and have more power strategically with a regional approach. This of course may take time, but the opportunity is there if there is collaboration. There is tremendous opportunity, and the capacity of the new council is much wider with regional representation and resources.

**Q12 Follow-up:** With all due respect, our regions have traditionally worked quite well together. Government inattention is the biggest reason we have struggled. For instance, our road conditions. Communities that feel worthwhile may be more supportive and engaged in this process. In the present

situation, our communities have not felt worthwhile and are not able to take away an honest positive or negative perspective.

**Response:** There were engagement opportunity and meetings for community members to take part. There are further meetings, such as this, for community to take part in. Community members are always welcome to contact us with feedback. Many have. What we heard was that this community did not want to join Riverview and we made decisions based on that feedback and what made sense. Are all the changes made community base? No, but we have heard criticisms. One is on timeline. However, an aggressive timeline means this process is going to get done and not drag on.

**Q13: For the special election, will candidates have access to any additional information?**

**Response:** There will be information on the Elections New Brunswick website, and the information provided on the [www.gnb.ca/vibrantnb](http://www.gnb.ca/vibrantnb) website. We will distribute additional flyers [mentioned above]. There will not be documentation provided to candidates. As always, it is up to candidates to access and distribute information in their own campaign.

**Q14: What decisions are left to make within the Transition Group/Facilitator/Province?**

**Response:** Hiring the CAO is in process, grants [established September 6 – October 4), budgets, and tax rates.

**Q15 Follow-up:** Communication must be a higher priority.

**Response:** If by end of September we haven't done enough, let us know and give us specific ideas.

**Q15 Follow-up:** From my experience [community member], Deputy Minister Donaghy has been responsive and has follow-up to my questions even when our other provincial representatives and facilitator have not.

Councilor Melody Land asked if there were any additional questions or comments before wrap-up. Given none, the meeting was adjourned.

**Adjournment:** 3:42pm