

Improving the Regional Service Commissions in New Brunswick

Final Report – Executive Summary

The Regional Service Commission (RSC) model was introduced in 2013 with the coming into force of the *Regional Service Delivery Act*. This new model established the Regional Service Commission (RSC) as a vehicle to provide services and facilitate co-ordination and planning on a regional basis in New Brunswick. It has been four years since the new commissions came into being. The Province of New Brunswick feels that it is timely to take a close look at the Regional Service Commissions with a view to strengthening the model and helping prepare them to potentially take on greater responsibilities and services on behalf of their member communities.

A three-phase consultation process was undertaken which engaged, in total, some 300 elected and appointed officials connected with the RSCs. In Phase 1, Environment and Local Government Minister Hon. Serge Rousselle hosted all the board members of each of the 12 RSCs in discussion workshops to reflect on what can be done to advance the RSC model. Phase 2 involved direct interviews and discussions with provincial government program managers who have regular and direct connections with the Regional Service Commissions by virtue of the programs they manage. Phase 3 entailed a series of six workshops around the province to which a wide range of administrative executives who have some direct or indirect involvement with the Regional Service Commissions were invited. The purpose of the workshops was to “drill down” into the valuable information received from the 12 Minister’s Workshops and come up with concrete and more detailed suggestions for improving the model.

The full report presents a summary and analysis of the feedback received through this consultation exercise, and presents a listing of a number of design features and principles to help frame the next chapter in the evolution of the Regional Service Commission model.

List of Recommendations:

Recommendation #1: It is recommended that the Office of the Fire Marshal, in consultation with RSCs, develop a model for co-ordination of fire services at the RSC level, and that this model become mandatory for all Regional Service Commissions.

Recommendation #2: It is recommended that each RSC establish a Police Advisory Committee to improve communication with police departments in the region, and to advise on public security priorities of communities and the region.

Recommendation #3: It is recommended that the Regional Service Delivery Act be amended to make it mandatory for RSCs to participate in the elaboration and maintenance of regional emergency measures plans.

Recommendation #4: It is recommended that NB Emergency Measures Organization establish uniform, province-wide policies and procedures for the elaboration of regional emergency measures plans, including specifying the role that the RSCs are to play in the development of those plans.

Recommendation #5: It is recommended that the RSCs be established as the Climate Change Adaptation Responsibility Centres, and that Climate Change adaptation plans be required as a component of the Regional Plan.

Recommendation #6: It is recommended that Environmental Trust Fund dollars be earmarked to assist RSCs to develop a framework for adaptation plans as well as development of such plans.

Recommendation #7: It is recommended that a new category of mandated services be added to the Regional Service Delivery Act entitled "Protective Services", and that the above-noted areas be mandatory for all Regional Service Commissions. Costs associated with these new Mandated Services would be shared across all the municipalities, rural communities and LSDs within the RSC.

Recommendation #8: It is recommended that the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture continue to provide and enhance if possible, developmental funding in support of regional recreation initiatives.

Recommendation #9: It is recommended that RSCs at their option, establish Regional Economic Development Teams comprised of a mix of RSC Board members and members of the business community to identify regional and local priorities, opportunities and obstacles. RSC Board membership on the Regional Economic Development Team would be less than the majority of the total Team membership.

Recommendation #10: It is recommended that Opportunities New Brunswick consider a program for provincial/RSC co-funding of regional economic development co-ordinators and, where an RSC has implemented and oversees a Regional Economic Development Team, the co-ordinator, by agreement, would become an employee of the RSC. This service and approach would be optional for the RSC.

Recommendation #11: It is recommended that RSCs continue to discuss and pursue regional tourism co-ordination and promotion on the basis of regional needs and priorities.

Recommendation #12: It is recommended that the Regional Service Delivery Act (or the General Regulation) be amended to establish a two-step process for regional involvement in

financing and managing regional facilities, including mandatory financial participation, if an enhanced, two-thirds/two-thirds majority is achieved.

Recommendation #13: It is recommended that there be a new category of elective services established for RSCs to cover Regional and Community Economic Development and that the above two-step process for funding of regional facilities also apply to the initiation and funding of activities and initiatives under this service area.

Recommendation #14: It is recommended that RSCs undertake a needs assessment of the capacity of smaller municipalities within their region and develop a catalog of service offerings which could be either offered on a fee for service basis by the RSC or by another municipality through an agreement facilitated by the RSC.

Recommendation #15: It is recommended that the working group on the Regional Plan framework finalize its proposal and present it to the RSC Boards and the Province for feedback.

Recommendation #16: It is recommended that the Province proceed as a priority to enact the new Community Planning Act and to develop and enact statements of provincial interest.

Recommendation #17: It is recommended that the Province establish a funding mechanism to encourage and support RSCs in the development and implementation of Regional Plans.

Recommendation #18: It is recommended that the General Regulation under the Regional Service Delivery Act be amended to provide for the selection by Resolution of Council of a second alternate in addition to the deputy mayor, but that the number of times this alternate can sit at the Board table be limited.

Recommendation #19: It is recommended that along with the two year notice period, three additional conditions be applied to the potential withdrawal of a municipality or rural community member from receiving planning services from an RSC as follows:

- 1. Satisfying the Provincial Planning Director that the municipality can provide an acceptable level of service based on standards to be established by the Provincial Planning Director;*
- 2. Payment to the RSC of any costs directly associated with the withdrawal; and*
- 3. Satisfying the Minister that their withdrawal will not threaten the financial and service viability for the remaining communities.*

Recommendation #20: It is recommended that the RSCs come together to explore and pursue the concept of a Single Entry Point for Land Development.

Recommendation #21: It is recommended that the current provisions of the General Regulation under the Regional Service Delivery Act remain as sufficient and appropriate measures to deal with potential boundary changes to RSC boundaries.

Recommendation #22: It is recommended that the Province develop financial assistance programs to encourage a number of the above recommendations, particularly in support of the following:

- ***Development of a model for co-ordination of fire service***
- ***Climate change adaptation***
- ***Regional economic development co-ordination***
- ***Regional tourism strategies and promotion***
- ***Development of regional plans***

Recommendation #23: It is recommended that RSCs undertake a communication evaluation exercise to identify the stakeholder groups most important to the RSC, identify known deficiencies in communication with those groups, and determine what procedures and techniques can be put in place to overcome those deficiencies.

Recommendation #24: It is recommended that RSCs maximize their capacity and expertise by sharing the responsibility to study, pilot and review initiatives through the use of Pathfinder Projects and best practices. Provincial support for such undertakings would be expected as part of Recommendation #22.

Recommendation #25: It is recommended that community leaders, under the umbrella of the RSC, undertake an examination of options to strengthen local communities within their territory with an end game to:

- ***Significantly reduce the number of local government units;***
- ***Strengthen the capacity of smaller communities by joining communities together;***
- ***Reduce or eliminate the amount of territory not covered by an incorporated municipality.***

Recommendation #26: It is recommended that the Province provide technical and administrative support for a broad-based, RSC-driven restructuring exercise including more flexible and permissive legislative options to facilitate restructuring.

Recommendation #27: It is recommended that an enhanced Local Service District model be developed based on the following features:

- *DELG would establish minimum viability thresholds (population, tax base, proven community of interest) for an LSD or groups of LSDs to achieve the “enhanced” status;*
- *Local Service Districts which meet this threshold would have a Chair and Council elected through the quadrennial municipal election process;*
- *The new LSD Councils would take over political and governance responsibilities currently administered by the Minister of Environment and Local Government;*
- *Day-to-day financial and service administration would be provided by the RSC to the enhanced Local Service Districts on a cost recovery basis; they would not be allowed to establish their own administrative capacity;*
- *Revenue sources or taxation room should be made available to the RSC for the assumption of the responsibility for administration of the enhanced LSDs;*
- *Each enhanced LSD would have one seat on the Board of the RSC.*

Recommendation #28: It is recommended that the current provision in the General Regulation under the Regional Service Delivery Act (which outlines the enhanced voting requirement for approval of budget, borrowing and fees) be amended so that each LSD representative would represent a proportion of the population, and if they are not in attendance at the meeting for the above-noted decisions, their share of the population would NOT be re-attributed to the LSD members present.

Recommendation #29: It is recommended, if the above recommendation on an enhanced LSD structure is not implemented, that a Proof of Concept be tested within one or two RSCs where day-to-day responsibilities for LSD administration and management are contracted to the RSC.

Recommendation #30: It is recommended that the Province continue to improve and adjust the property tax system so as to better clarify and illustrate what services taxpayers are paying for in their tax bills, and to better establish the link between taxes paid and cost to provide the service. If there remain inequities in terms of who pays for what, these should be phased out of the property tax system.

Conclusion

In their relatively short existence, the Regional Service Commissions have become an important and integral component of local governance in New Brunswick.

The series of 30 recommendations contained in this report are intended to move the bar to the next level for RSCs. The future success and growth of the Regional Service Commissions will depend on the

combined efforts and commitments of the Province, member communities (municipalities, rural communities and local service districts) as well as the RSCs themselves.