

March 4, 2024

To the Law Amendments Committee, Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly

Re. Bill 407, Antigonish Consolidation Act

I wish to express a number of points mainly regarding the process with respect to the Antigonish Consolidation initiative. These comments are based on my experience as a resident of both town and county for the past 20 years, and of a working career in government and in universities for over 40 years. I am retired as Professor of Political Science at St Francis Xavier University, where for many years I taught students the fundamentals of Canadian government and democracy.

1. To recap the background to this issue as I see it, since 2021 there has been considerable debate and discussion on consolidation within the two municipal councils of the Town and County; there has been a series of public meetings including a public consultation process managed by a third party, and a lot of information provided in general.
2. The Antigonish councils did not hold a plebiscite. This was not required by law for the specific process followed by the Councils, as now confirmed by the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.
3. However, it is misleading and plainly incorrect to claim that the process has been "undemocratic". Rather, it has been following the basic precepts of our well-established system of representative democracy.
4. In representative democracy municipal councilors, just as members of the provincial legislative assemblies and the federal parliament, are elected based on their experience, knowledge of the issues, reputation in the

this time is that both the town and county councils are of the same view as to how to proceed (albeit, not a unanimous vote, but if that were required nothing would ever get done). They can't enact consolidation themselves, which is why you are meeting today.

10. As you know well, we have had some controversial paths to municipal "mergers" in the recent past, notably the creation of the Halifax and Cape Breton Regional Municipalities. And we have had at least a couple of more harmonious ones in Queens and West Hants. The two councils in Antigonish are calling their initiative a "consolidation" and I get their point. It is the culmination of a lot of on the ground cooperation over the past 20 years and a realization that a single government is the next step. It will be their choice, not one imposed by the Province. Most people would likely now acknowledge that the major amalgamations in Halifax, Cape Breton and elsewhere have did provided much more effective governance, especially given the many economic social and environmental challenges we face.

11. As pointed out in the recent Supreme Court judgement, the purpose of the Municipal Government Act is "not only to provide good government but also to provide necessary services and facilities, and to develop safe and viable communities". In my view the request of the councils for special legislation to consolidate is a carefully considered decision to ensure the best future for local government, and for the communities it serves, in a period of significant change and uncertainty. Making such decisions is what our councils were elected to do.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Douglas M. Brown

Antigonish