The Town of Alberton is located in Western Prince Edward Island in Prince County on the north shore approximately 130 km west of Charlottetown.

The population is 1,081 with the median age of the population at 44.8 years. In 2009 the commercial assessment is $4,714,900.00, non-commercial assessment is $34,824,600.00 and the total market value is $39,539,500.00. It has been stated in the New Brunswick report, that in order to qualify for municipal status, a municipality must have an assessment base of $200,000,000.00 and population of 4,000.

Statistically, seniors within the town population have been increasing as shown; in 1956 the 65 and over age group represented 10.8%, 1966 it was 12.6%, 1976 it was 15.5%, 1996 it was 19% and 22.2% in 2006 while the Provincial average of this age group was 14.9%. It is this influx of seniors which has led to the increase in seniors housing. The lack of young adults is no doubt explained by a lack of local employment opportunities and post-secondary education facilities. Our young adults are leaving the Town.

The total private dwellings are numbered at 504 and there are 224 apartment units. Alberton is a service centre for a rural area of approximately 5,000 people. Currently the town has two financial institutions, an elementary school, gym, arena, horse track, bowling ally, hospital, manor, seniors housing and mental health clubhouse. It also has a range of commercial services and businesses. Alberton encompasses a total area of 1,117 acres with 753 acres being rural, agricultural, or forest. The surrounding region is primarily a farming area with major fishing activity based in Northport Harbour. It is also the only town west of Summerside.

What is local governance? Within the 1979 Official Plan for the Town of Alberton, it describes local government as having;

“…a responsibility to promote the public health, safety, convenience, amenity and general welfare of the citizens in connection with the laying out of subdivisions, streets, roads and the use and development of land for building and other purposes.”

This is true, but the Province holds responsibilities within the municipality as well. The Province needs to be responsible to oversee the major aspects of the environment, health, education, and roads. The regulations and protections of each of these must be the same throughout the Province.

Environment

Our environment must be protected whether it is in the City or in a rural setting. Pollution is an ongoing concern. Air emissions, waste, chemical… they are a concern everywhere and thus, must be controlled under one law, meeting one standard. These must also be enforced. In Alberton, farming is conducted within 10 feet of subdivisions and homes. Because of this, it is a serious concern that standards are met. Multiple enforcement Officers placed by the Province throughout the Island would ensure that enforcement of strict, straightforward laws and regulations would be followed, otherwise persons would be prosecuted.
Currently there is nothing to protect our water resources in the Town. For future success of the Town, this is essential for long term sustaibaility. We must call upon the Province to set up and deal with this as a whole, for the entire Island.

**Health**

This, in turn brings us to health. Each Islander is entitled to the same care as any other regardless if they live in Souris, Summerside, or Alberton. Again, one standard for all is needed. Providing the essentials to all and then defining where additional equipment, specialties, and such are needed is a major undertaking. Ensuring the staff pool is adequate for each municipality is an on-going issue that should be overseen by the Province. This goes hand-in-hand with education. By providing the education needed for the professions required here on the Island may ensure a secure future for our hospitals throughout the Province.

**Education**

The education of our children is our future. Providing the best possible schooling is essential, and in addition, available secondary education on the Island can entice our next generations to stay. The Province must take responsibility to provide above average standards throughout the island to prepare our youth for the future. Trade schools, post-secondary education and GED courses available within reasonable daily travel distances ensure that Islanders have learning possibilities here, as opposed to leaving the province. The Province can accomplish this by identifying the locations where education opportunities are needed so that they are available throughout the entire Island and not just in Charlottetown and Summerside (post-secondary, trades and upgrading). Providing a first-rate standard of learning across the Province guarantees our Island youth are prepared for their future.

**Roads**

With the exception of Charlottetown and Summerside only six other municipalities maintain some portion of their streets including Montague, Georgetown, Borden/Carleton, Souris, Alberton and Kensington. 69 municipalities do not do any roadwork.

Municipalities that maintain their own streets receive a grant in the amount of $6,250.00 per km. The town has a total of approximately 9.1 km of streets to maintain and receives a grant of approximately $56,875.00 per year. The current price for one km of pavement is $125,000.00 and a km of ditching costs $10,000.00. Our last snow removal contract was $169,060.00 for 3 years and this year is $143,850.00. The total yearly budget for streets was $184,439.00 and the total budget is $562,660.00. There is street work that needs to be done but we do not have a large enough budget to do it. This is a huge percentage of our budget and our neighbouring communities such as Tignish and O’Leary do not pay street costs.

Tourism provides income throughout the Island. Our roadways are essential to all. The upkeep of them must be done in a manner which ensures longer life expectancy. The Province can provide the appropriate machinery and expertise to accomplish this.
Farm Regulations

The broad spectrum of regulations that must be followed with agriculture requires an expert. This must be provided by the Province to ensure that standards are met to guarantee that our Province stays in the safe guidelines to protect health and safety of farmers, farm workers, and residents of the Province. Again, these laws and regulations must be enforced. Provincial enforcement officials must provide security to all by following through with inspections and follow up with inquiries, complaints and regular visits to farms. Additional meetings with farmers to keep them updated with standards and regulations should be a requirement.

Staffing of Enforcement Officers

The Province must ensure that staff is spread throughout the Island to enforce all laws and regulations under their responsibilities. By appointing Provincial Officers throughout the Island, this ensures that individuals are reprimanded when standards and regulations are not met. They can also provide frequent checks to make certain that laws are being followed. Human resources are very limited. Municipalities are too small to have a planner, lawyer and other resource staff needed to properly serve the municipality. Alberton currently has one full time, permanent maintenance staff employed. This one person is responsible for the upkeep and beautification of landscaping owned by the town, repairs needed with town owned equipment and assets (i.e. lawnmowers, service trucks, snow removal machine, street lamps, sidewalks, benches…) as well as sewer. Additional staff would be vital to the best interest of the town. Eliminating the expense of law enforcement officers would provide adequate funds for additional wages needed to meet this need. The RCMP provide service to the outlying communities such as Northport and Elmsdale. We subsidize these surrounding communities by paying for and providing these services. It should be a fair and equitable tax rate for all Islanders. It will be beneficial for the Province to oversee the Policing for all municipalities. This then loosens constrains for other costs within the municipalities. One rule for the amount of policing staff per capita would be beneficial to all Islanders.

The size of the footprint of Alberton restricts us to the pool available for assessment dollars which reflects on taxation, Council members and committees. Regarding the municipal boundaries, my recommendation is that the fire districts or the electoral boundaries form the new municipal boundaries. The additional population will also create a variety of individuals with different interests and professions that can play an important role in decision making with the future vision of the Town of Alberton. A greater diversity can help to look outside of the box. This would also benefit other services such as recreation; the rink, library, curling club, ball parks, and soccer fields.

The development by the government of the tax-free zone in Bloomfield, added to the lack of growth of municipalities in the West Prince area of Prince Edward Island. There is a huge loss of tax revenue due to all of the development on the outskirts of town limits. These home owners enjoy the benefits of the town and pay much less taxes. These residents also want to have input on the decision making of council.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation.
LOCAL GOVERNANCE MODEL

It is impossible to examine the long term sustainability of the Town of Alberton, or any other community in Prince Edward Island, without giving consideration to the problems caused by the current local governance model. While the traditional pillars of economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social and cultural sustainability have obvious relevance for Alberton, the burdens imposed by the flaws in the current local governance system are so severe that they tend to consume most of the energies of Council.

It has been acknowledged for many years that the current local governance model in Prince Edward Island is seriously flawed. The vast majority of currently incorporated municipalities are far too small and too poorly funded to be able to effectively and efficiently deliver their mandated services to their residents. Large areas of the province still remain unincorporated while the balance of the province is fragmented into a very large number of largely non-viable communities.

While land use issues have been generally well regulated and controlled in the larger municipalities, there is currently no control over conflicting land uses and no zoning in the unincorporated areas of the province and in those municipalities without Official Plans. There is also a highly inequitable situation in terms of taxation and service fees. Those residents and landowners within the boundaries of the larger municipalities pay for local services through real property taxes, user fees and utility rates. Many people outside these municipalities use municipal services and benefit from the infrastructure which is required to support them, but they do not contribute to their cost. User fees for fire protection and recreation fees help to cover some of these costs but major inequities remain.

The policies and actions of the Provincial Government are entirely to blame for these problems. Municipalities are the creation of the Provincial Government and are forced to operate within the local governance model established by the Province.

Not only has the Province of Prince Edward Island been negligent about addressing the many inequities and inefficiencies inherent in the current system, the Province has acted to compound these problems and speed up municipal decline. Actions such as
locating regional schools in unserviced rural areas together with other strategic public investments have served to greatly undermine established communities. It is evident that uncontrolled residential and non-residential development in rural areas contributes to issues such as: loss of prime resource lands; strip development; greatly increased road maintenance costs; higher school bussing costs; negative impacts on the rural landscape; and a range of related environmental costs. Rather than putting in place a taxation regime which penalizes this form of development or at least passes on the real public costs, the Province has instead created real taxation incentives encouraging this form of development to flourish.

Fortunately, the Provincial Government has now responded to the long standing complaints from both urban and rural residents about the current system and has appointed a Commission on Land Use and Local Governance. Given the Provincial Government’s unwillingness or inability to respond to the recommendations of previous commissions there is a great deal of skepticism about the new Commission. This is one of the few opportunities, however, for municipalities to be able to present their case to an open and unbiased body.

The assumption of many has been that local politics are at the heart of the reason for lack of provincial action to address these issues. Prince Edward Island retains a legislature which is significantly biased toward the rural interests in the province. Historically, rural residents have strongly resisted any controls over land use and development. Skeptics would also suggest that the lack of land use controls in large portions of rural Prince Edward Island serves the Provincial Government’s narrow interests by making it easier to locate contentious land uses such as compost plants, C&D sites and large wind farms.

Such developments together with a wide range of nuisance developments such as race tracks, mushroom plants, intensive livestock operations, etc. have started to increasingly alarm rural residents. The level of protection they expect for their investment and the peaceful enjoyment of their home simply does not exist in most parts of Prince Edward Island. Concerns are also growing about the impact of uncontrolled development on ground and surface water resources and rural landscapes.

There a number of clear options facing the new Commissioner. The Prince Edward Island Federation of Municipalities is demanding the incorporation of all rural lands into municipalities. The number and size of these new municipalities will be the
subject of much debate. Some form of regional government whether in the form of new regional municipalities or the regionalization of certain functions such as land use planning is an alternative option. Another option would be the selective expansion of a number of the larger municipalities together with consolidation of rural incorporated and unincorporated areas. The long standing separation of Alberton and its harbor (Northport) should be resolved on a priority basis. It simply makes no sense in terms of local governance.

At the end of this process it is evident that there needs to be a smaller number of more sustainable municipalities. All property owners need and deserve an equitable level of protection from conflicting land uses. The inequities in the current tax system need to be addressed and all municipalities would argue that the province needs to more fairly redistribute various tax revenues so that municipalities can better fund vital local services.

Various options exist as a template for any revised municipal boundaries. Many would favour revised jurisdictions based on watersheds. This is by far the best planning unit for addressing environmental issues. The province’s fire districts have established a well accepted basis for regional co-operation. Current municipal boundaries are often based on former school districts but these boundaries have little relevance today.

At the outset one fact is unescapable. Any restructured system of local governance for Prince Edward Island must recognize and be founded on the protection and enhancement of the larger, well established municipalities. Most of these are the province’s current and former Towns. Many of these Towns are over 100 years old and represent the historic economic foundation of the province. The Town of Alberton, for example, was incorporated in 1913 and was incorporated as a village in 1878.

Most of the Towns were located on the former railway and have strong historic economies. Most of the Towns have schools and churches and several have courthouses. Several have had their own police forces and most if not all have their own fire companies.

The province’s newest Towns are Cornwall and Stratford. While these are both dormitory suburbs of Charlottetown, they have strong population and assessment bases and are starting to develop fledgling local economies. The Town of Borden has been consolidated with the Community of Carleton and lost its Town
status. The remaining Towns of Souris, Montague, Georgetown, Kensington and Alberton have much in common.

None of these municipalities have seen any major expansion of their boundaries since their incorporation. All suffer from very limited amounts of vacant land. All these Towns have seen significant loss of development and population growth due to relatively uncontrolled development on their periphery. Alberton is a particularly good example of this phenomenon.

Given the small population and assessment bases in these older Towns, they tend to share challenges in funding required services and human resources for councils, service clubs and other volunteer groups are quite limited. Population also tends to be aging with many younger families choosing to locate beyond the municipal boundaries, largely due to the incentives offered by the current taxation system.

There is a considerable volume of research and literature on sustainability thresholds for municipalities. Estimates range from as low as 2,000 people to well over 5,000. It is also hard to project a fiscally sustainable, full service municipality with less than 100-150 million dollars in assessment. Currently, the Town of Alberton has just over $34 million in residential assessment and just under $5 million in commercial assessment. If the entire service area for the Town of Alberton (including the fire district, school districts and trade area), the population would be well over 2,000 and the assessment should be close to $100 million.

If the Commissioner does address the badly needed expansion of the boundaries of Alberton, and the other older Towns, there will need to be a strong case made to the affected rural residents pointing out the many benefits involved. Concerns over dramatic tax increases can be mitigated by the adoption of an “area rate” tax system whereby property owners see a graduated tax rate based on the level of services available to their property. Any required tax increases could also be phased in over time.