Breadalbane Community Council
From a community deliberation, June 3, 2009

Breadalbane is very small as municipalities go. From research that our council did in 2006 we have 86 occupied homes and somewhere between 170 residents (2000 census) and 250 residents (our estimate based on the household survey). Our limited tax base allows a volunteer council to maintain minimal community infrastructure. There is no municipal plan, no official services and only one bylaw (no discharge of firearms), for which there is no enforcement capacity. There have been occasional problems of vandalism of property and break-ins in the community but the most common problem faced by Council is that of roaming dogs. Being a Municipality we are expected to do dog control, so the Humane Society cannot be called to pick up a straying or dangerous animal. But, we have no capacity for animal control.

Like other rural communities on PEI we face challenges that include an ageing population, out-migration of youth, rising fuel costs, a lack of public transportation, distance from government services and health care, environmental problems especially polluted groundwater, a limited and over-extended volunteer base and a shortage of services for children, teens and seniors. On the other hand, we have a diverse small business community, a library that recently celebrated its 70th birthday, a CAP site with excellent computer equipment (now no longer staffed owing to federal funding cuts), a small public recreation area/playground, nature trails including the Confederation Trail, a daycare, one small store, several active volunteer groups and many talented residents who are concerned about the future sustainability of the village.

Our Municipal Council is made up of 7 volunteers. Because seats are rarely if ever contested, many Council members have served multiple terms. We manage to do a lot with the small amount of taxes that the province collects on our behalf, and we are proud of the village facilities that we have built up: the community hall that houses our library, CAP site and kindergarten, and offers space for meetings and events; the park in the centre of the village with its trees and flowers, sports court, gazebo and playground; the annual Christmas lights contest and the community Christmas event in the park, which brighten up December; and the youth programs and improvement projects we have managed to do with provincial and federal grants.

While it is great to have local projects, it is also a significant burden on our small volunteer council to manage the village’s resources and keep infrastructure maintained, grants coming in and programmes running. Often we think about the many people who live outside municipal limits who use our facilities but pay no taxes to Breadalbane to help with the upkeep. The following are some of the challenges that we are facing, and our thoughts on how they might be addressed.
1) Our income is too small to support the hiring of support staff, so everything depends on volunteer service of Council members.

People outside our boundaries who use our facilities should help pay for them. However, we can’t collect fees and donations - only some would respond so to be fair, it would have to be done through taxes.

We could expand our boundaries to cover surrounding rural areas that lack facilities. This would be acceptable to the Breadalbane Council as long as the extension provided sufficient increased income to provide at least a salary for a part time administrator and facility janitor. We would also greatly benefit from a program coordinator, especially to serve the needs of youth and seniors.

Another option would be extending boundaries further to merge with an adjacent village such as Emerald, whose infrastructure is complimentary to ours. Again, the expanded municipality would have to be the right size to collect enough taxes to maintain all the various community buildings and services. A significant challenge would be whether/how to support rural infrastructure such as old one-room schools that are seldom used but important to both the landscape and cultural integrity, and are currently supported by groups of volunteers who are not community councils.

2) If municipal boundaries are going to change, what would be best for Breadalbane? Should we ask for an expansion of our boundaries to cover, say, a 10 mile radius? Or should we be part of a much larger, regional municipality, within which we could share administrative services, programming for seniors and youth, land use planning, bylaw enforcement and other functions that are far beyond the capacity of a volunteer council? If we were part of a large regional municipality - for instance one that covered central Queens, or the Dunk River watershed - how could it be developed so that we maintained control over our village hall and park, while benefiting from sharing resources and services with surrounding villages and towns?

We are concerned that in a larger municipal unit we would not get the grants we need to do village development projects, provide services and keep up our facilities. The larger towns would have the most power and might get most of the money.

Peter Llewellyn, former mayor of Georgetown, is a wise man. He says if rural villages don’t hang together we will hang separately. Breadalbane Council recognizes the need to work cooperatively with other villages but we also need to ensure that local needs are met. Historical villages and small municipalities would have to have some guaranteed allocation of adequate grants from any future regional municipality. We would also need a guarantee that services that are duplicated elsewhere such as the library and CAP site would be maintained. Having LOCAL services accessible to people who do not drive (eg children, seniors), is important to our long term viability and to attract new residents, especially families with small children, to the village.

One benefit of a regional municipality would be the ability to have youth workers, administrative
services etc shared with other villages. This would be an attractive selling point for Island-wide municipalisation, provided service points in existing villages were maintained and easily accessible to all rural residents.

Addendum - from Councillor I Novaczek

People must build housing in clusters to allow for future provision of services to protect public health and the environment (sewage treatment, water supply, local renewable energy installations, village planning). Charging more taxes to people who live inside current municipalities and use such centralised infrastructure makes sense on one level, but differential tax rates also provide a perverse incentive for sprawl along all our roads - a threat to landscape and cultural values as well as being grossly inefficient.

Perhaps people who settle inside compact residential areas should receive an incentive or reward? At minimum, we need planning and zoning that sets out which areas are to be residential, and recognise the great privilege it is for families to occupy country estates or to have immediate access to main trunk roads. Perhaps taxes should be higher for homes that are outside village limits, on land that would otherwise be productive woodlot or farmland? Or should taxes be highest for homes build immediately beside the main roads? Or on prime coastal land with especially scenic views? Or, do we simply need strict land use rules prohibiting strip development, especially on prime farm and forest land; and strictly limiting homes and other structures that block coastal views and otherwise interfere with or degrade scenic landscape values?

Islanders hate to be told what to do “on their own land” so public education, starting in elementary schools, is needed to instill a more cooperative ethic. We need to evolve towards a society that recognises that land ownership comes with responsibilities to safeguard the Island's cultural and ecological heritage for all Islanders of today as well as for future generations and other species.