

# TOWARD PROSPERITY

## Queens County Roundtable

June 15, 2000

### Notes:

#### Opportunities in Queens County:

- C Queens County is a good place to live, we have a clean, unpolluted environment.
- C We have some good infrastructure - the roads are okay but need repair. We could attract good quality people to the area if we had the jobs.
- C In Queens we have two communities - North Queens and South Queens. South Queens contains the major industries. We must look for smaller businesses and grow these. Do not have the population to sustain another major business.
- C We are halfway from Halifax to Yarmouth.
- C Our people are our key resource.
- C We have a good shoreline and a good tourism industry.
- C Liverpool has an open harbour.
- C The Bowater wharf - is there a possibility to use this? Government's role could be to provide possible tax relief to Bowater to open a facility and promote community development.

#### Obstacles in Queens County:

- C We lost the railroads and this is a detriment to business expansion.
- C We must develop better highways and trucking must become more competitive.
- C Inland freight to Halifax is too expensive thus making our location a problem.
- C Air freight is a large problem in the region. There is no commercial rate to Boston so must depend upon the trucking industry. At certain times of the year exporters must use charter flights to Europe for air freight. If the current carriers cannot supply commercial freight rates, we should allow other people to do this.
- C Education cuts are hurting the area. Funding is based on the number of students. With declining student numbers there are fewer teachers. Special needs youth will not get assistance and will drop out. This becomes a problem since the Nova Scotia Community Campus requires Grade 12 for entry. Youth unemployment is close to 30%.
- C Transportation for students to Community College is a problem. Buses were dropped several years ago.
- C Many industries will hire younger people, but many of them cannot read or write properly. The issue is where do we get a trained workforce?
- C If we have an unemployed labour force, they should be willing to do any work. The problem is they will not work, they want to rely on the system.
- C Two other businesses commented that they have good employees who are more than willing to work and accept new responsibilities.

- C Young adults are leaving and going west to where the jobs are. There is no work to keep the youth here. We must get industry here to employ people for the new economy - focus on Information Technology (IT) and export companies.
- C People want to stay here or to return once they have left. They leave to get the kinds of jobs they are trained for. This creates skills gaps in the community - not only among the youth, but adults as well.
- C We can only participate in IT if we are wired as well as any other community. We have lost private sector companies because the necessary infrastructure is not in place. New Brunswick is far ahead of Nova Scotia. The government should assist in getting all of Nova Scotia wired.
- C Government could have a role in infrastructure development by giving a tax credit. Outright grants are gone and did not work. A company must perform to get the credit.
- C Funding for community projects is gone. There is a concern about how projects will be developed without provincial money.

### **What can government do to improve economic growth?**

- C The major problem in rural Nova Scotia is where to get the funding to start or expand a business. Government does have a role to play. Possibly as a lender of last resort. Larger banks are leaving rural Nova Scotia and do not care about smaller communities. Government should be more proactive with credit unions and allow them the flexibility to lend to small business.
- C Government departments must learn to work together. There are often many different interpretations of government regulations, especially building codes.
- C There must be a reduction in government red tape - there are too many regulations. The private sector, if trained, should be allowed to do the work. Government's role would be to do spot inspections.
- C Government loan approvals and other approvals take too long. Governments talk every 5 years about reducing red tape - there is no credibility. Bureaucrats do not understand the urgency of getting approvals.
- C Government must get its act together on eliminating red tape. There are too many rules that appear unnecessary. Occupational Health and Safety is too strict. If a company is not in compliance, there is no compromise. A small business will be shut down. Bureaucrats change and rules and interpretation change. Even regulations in the same department are not enforced/interpreted consistently (e.g. Fire Marshall/Health and Safety).
- C The highway system needs to be improved. We should not start twinning the highway system until the 100 series highways have been completed. Government has a continuing role in infrastructure development.
- C Government is still centralizing - need to be decentralizing more. They are too concerned with the short term vision. What will save \$10 today will cost \$100 over the next few years.
- C Government must look beyond the 100 kilometer market from Halifax e.g. a justice facility built in Liverpool could serve Lunenburg, Queens and Shelburne Counties. We need to keep needed jobs such as lawyers and clerks in the rural areas.
- C There is difficulty in that government and the regulations do not allow businesses to be creative and grow. Municipal zoning and bylaws are a problem. We must revisit the regulations to see if

they should be changed. Must be more flexible and initiate a cooperative relationship between the people and government to solve problems.

C More training for government employees is needed.

C Economic development agencies should have larger budgets and more staff so that they can work on long term projects in the province with more teamwork with communities and get away from doing the day-to-day things.

C The strategy should be more long term. It should outlast the government and should be at least a 10 year plan.

C There seems to be a “post-Westray attitude” now. Some departments require a senior-level signature on all paperwork. Westray created a problem regarding liability. People in the field will either not take responsibility or are not given the necessary authority.

### **Vision:**

- Something should be put in the vision about our lifestyle and clean environment. We must preserve what we have. The sewage situation must be addressed, if people buy older homes they must upgrade the septic system - no grandfather clause.
- Another possible vision is to provide an environment in which all Nova Scotians can achieve their goals in the global marketplace by working together within their communities.
- The vision must be valid. It must be a goal that can be reached.

### **Business Climate:**

- Must also make things more user friendly for small businesses.
- We must do public relations to prove that Nova Scotia is not “the poor cousin”. Our economy is vibrant and alive and Nova Scotia is a good place to invest. We must believe in ourselves first, then promote ourselves to the rest of Canada and the world. This should be an Atlantic Provinces Strategy.
- We should look at the possibility of giving tax breaks to certain sectors. The public perception is that business is getting the breaks again. There is a benefit to the economy if additional jobs are created. Any tax breaks should be structured so that they occur once business produces the desired result.
- Access Nova Scotia (Access NS) was set up for one stop shopping - this is not happening. It seems that Access NS has been changing.
- Government must understand that business has certain deadlines and cannot wait. There should be one committee of both provincial and federal representatives that can approve projects.
- We need to strengthen small business. Most of the money spent by small business stays in the local area. Government should be more supportive. The future is small business.