

Feasibility Report for the establishment of the Upper Miramichi Local Service District (LSD) as a Rural Community

November 2007



**VISION
FOR THE RURAL COMMUNITY OF UPPER MIRAMICHI**

To create the prosperous, vibrant Rural Community of Upper Miramichi where our youth can be educated, employed, live and safely raise their families with pride, honour, and prosperity.

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CURRENT SITUATION OF THE LSD OF UPPER MIRAMICHI

Population

- According to the 2006 Census, the LSD of Upper Miramichi has **2,414** residents.
- The population is aging and the younger generation is moving away for work

Geography

- The existing LSD of Upper Miramichi encompasses the area from the limits of the village of Doaktown to, and including, McGivney.

Economy

- People are locally employed in the wood industry, small local businesses and in the tourism industry, with many local outfitters catering to fishing and hunting (with great potential for growth)
- Urban commute to Fredericton or other areas for the remainder of the workforce.

Tax Base

- The 2007 tax base (combined assessment of all properties within the LSD) is **\$82,061,151**.

Tax Rate

- The 2007 local tax rate is 42.76 cents per \$100 of property assessment. This pays for the local services of fire protection, solid waste collection and disposal, recreation and community services, cost of property assessments, land use planning and a small amount for general LSD administration, all of which are administered by the Province of New Brunswick. Added to this would be the provincial tax levy of 65 cents per \$100 of property assessment for owner occupied residential properties, which covers policing services, as well as road maintenance and animal control. This results in a 2007 combined tax rate of \$1.0776(42.76+65 cents) per \$100 of assessment for residential properties occupied by the owner.

HOW THE RURAL COMMUNITY PROPOSAL CAME TO BE

April 2005- Upper Miramichi LSD Advisory Committee showed interest in the Rural Community option by writing a letter to the Minister of Local Government, requesting that an initial assessment be carried out.

April 2007- Villages of Doaktown and Stanley, and the LSDs of Stanley and Blissfield were invited to take part in the initial assessment, but declined.

April-August 2007- Initial assessment was carried out by the Department of Local Government with assistance of a 14 member Community Round Table Committee, representing residents and businesses of Upper Miramichi LSD.

August 29th, 2007- An Open House session was held as part of the initial assessment to share details with residents and provide an opportunity for input. As well, presentations were made to various groups and organizations from July through October by the Round Table, and details were made available to residents through local newspaper articles (OVERNORTH NEWS).

September, 2007-A petition was signed by over 200 residents requesting the Department of Local Government to undertake a Feasibility Study for Upper Miramichi.

October 2007- A draft of the Feasibility Study was completed by Department of Local Government staff, with the assistance of the Round Table Committee.

October 2007- A summary of the draft Feasibility Study was made available to all residents of the LSD. Two more public Open House sessions were held October 3rd and October 10th as part of the Feasibility Study.

October 2007- Final Feasibility Report submitted to the Minister of Local Government with the recommendation to determine if sufficient local support exists for the establishment of Upper Miramichi as a Rural Community, by way of a plebiscite (a vote) of all eligible voters in the LSD.

RESIDENTS' CONCERNS

Consultations with the community revealed the following concerns:

- The protection of rivers and water supplies.
- Keeping the community's economic and recreational development alive.
- Having a well planned and administered rural plan with proper by-laws to insure the orderly development of the community, and increase the potential for attracting not only businesses or industries, but also new families to this beautiful and central part of the Province.

RURAL COMMUNITY PROPOSAL

Members of the Community Round Table feel it is time for the community to take its destiny into its own hands to maximize its growth potential. They feel this can be achieved through incorporation, having an elected council and permanent staff (Rural Community manager) that would work toward attracting new businesses and new possibilities for the community and region. It is felt that, with the current LSD status, the area has missed several opportunities for economic and community improvements, and that they are not on a level playing field with surrounding municipalities. Since the LSD is not an incorporated entity, it does not have the same access to programs, projects and grants that municipalities qualify for.

BENEFITS OF HAVING A RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Having incorporated status, and establishing a recognized, elected voice representing the Upper Miramichi.
- The Rural Community would be responsible for land use planning services. The Rural Community would adopt a rural plan within two years of its establishment, which would determine proper land use (residential, commercial, recreational, or agricultural), located in appropriate areas corresponding to the desired growth and economic development. The Rural Community would have the option of joining a Regional Planning Commission or establishing its own department.
- The Rural Community would put in place an Emergency Measures Plan that would ensure a coordinated plan in an emergency situation in order to protect life, the environment and properties in Upper Miramichi.
- The Rural Community Council could take responsibility, when it chooses, for other services now provided in the LSD (i.e. fire protection, solid waste collection and disposal, recreation and community services). **Note:** The provincial government would still administer these services until such time as the Rural Community Council decides, through the adoption of a Rural Community by-law, to become responsible for these additional services.
- Have the ability to enact by-laws pertaining to unsightly premises, animal control, public nuisance (noise) and other activities in the community.
- Have an office and permanent staff that could work and assist the community with various issues, projects and grants, as well as business and tourism projects for the betterment of the Upper Miramichi community. The staff could also be a major link in attracting new businesses and development possibilities to the community.
- Have a local office which would provide a regular link with provincial departments (head office and regional), other area councils and Rural Community staff for working on budgets, projects and/or other important issues.
- Have control and decision-making powers over the Rural Community budget for its annual operation, the local tax rate, and most importantly, since the Rural Community is an incorporated body, have the power to borrow funds for various projects and initiatives the Rural Community may undertake. The community would also be able to own properties, land and equipment.
- The Rural Community would be a true and real force (council elected at the same time as the Municipal Elections) equal to any municipal council, and able to negotiate projects with the provincial government (be it local infrastructure projects or regional projects) and discuss possible cost sharing projects and initiatives with other municipalities and LSDs.

COMPOSITION OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

With the creation of a Rural Community, the existing LSD Advisory Committee would be dissolved. To replace this committee, the Round Table has recommended a Rural Community Council composed of a **Mayor (elected at large)** and **four Councillors (one per defined ward/region)** elected every four years at the time of the province-wide municipal elections, beginning with the May 2008 election:

- **Mayor** to be elected at large
- **One Councillor** for Ward 1 covering the communities of Nelson Hollow (from Doaktown village limits to Carrolls Crossing), Storeytown (from Big Hole Brook to the end), Carrolls Crossing, McNamee and New Bandon – approximately 623 eligible voters
- **One Councillor** for Ward 2 which includes the communities of Priceville, Ludlow, Boiestown and Porter Cove – approximately 426 eligible voters
- **One Councillor** for Ward 3 representing the communities of Bloomfield Ridge, Holtville, Rocky Brook and Hayesville – approximately 417 eligible voters
- **One Councillor** for Ward 4 who would represent the communities of Taxis River, Parker Ridge, Astle and McGivney – approximately 554 eligible voters

Please note that with the creation of a Rural Community, **all the existing 9-1-1 communities would keep their local community names and postal addresses.** They would not change. The Rural Community name is simply an administrative designation. All local community names, signs, and maps would stay the same.

DELIVERY OF LOCAL SERVICES

The Rural Community Council would be responsible to offer the services of land use planning, emergency measures and administration of the Rural Community. It is expected that the Rural Community would adopt a rural plan within two years of its incorporation. The Rural Community Council could also appoint a member to the Regional Solid Waste Commission should it take responsibility for this service and, if Council decided to join a planning commission such as the Miramichi Planning District Commission, it would also be able to appoint a member to the Planning Commission.

THE RURAL COMMUNITY NAME

The Round Table Committee members have recommended a familiar name: **UPPER MIRAMICHI.**

LOCATION OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY OFFICE

Since the Central NB Woodmen's Museum is the tourism center of the LSD, and is centrally located, the facility could easily accommodate the Rural Community office. However, this is simply a recommendation, the newly elected Rural Community Council would have the final decision.

EXPECTED CHANGES TO THE LOCAL TAX RATE

It is expected that the formation of a Rural Community for the LSD of Upper Miramichi, with an estimated \$144,000 annual budget, would have **minimal impact, if any**, on the property tax rate (a \$5 to \$10 per year increase for a residential owner-occupied property assessed at \$50,000). Due to the final payment being made on the Fire hall building in 2008 and anticipated increased fire service revenues in the 2008 LSD budget year and beyond, funds could be used to help absorb most of the administration costs for the formation of the proposed Rural Community.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

From the very beginning of the process for considering the Rural Community model, the Round Table Committee members have been **very active**, sharing information with residents of the community. Prior to the Open House on August 29th, members of the Round Table had already made Rural Community presentations to several church denominations and community groups along with supplying newspaper articles, radio interviews and monthly update reports in newsletters distributed to every household in the Upper Miramichi LSD(OVERNORTH NEWS). The Round Table members have continued these presentations to other church and community groups since the initial Open House in August and following the two Open Houses in October, as part of the Feasibility Study. All the while, support for a Rural Community in Upper Miramichi has been very favourable.

DIALOGUE WITH NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

The Village of Doaktown, LSD of Blissfield and the Village and LSD of Stanley were named in the Upper Miramichi letter of interest to the Minister of Local Government in April 2005, as possible partners in forming a Rural Community. The Local Services Manager, Gerald Fournier, met with Doaktown Council on two occasions to discuss the Rural Community option and Local Government staff from Fredericton met with Council separately-at their request, to explain and discuss the steps to form a Rural Community. As well, consultant Doug Pond discussed, answered questions and provided information to the Mayor and Councillors on numerous occasions and each time the Mayor and Councillors indicated the Village was not interested in becoming part of a Rural Community. The LSD of Blissfield, while having no LSD Advisory Committee, was represented by interested residents at the first three information sessions with Upper Miramichi before the initial assessment began and they later indicated they were not interested at this time. After discussion with the Mayor of Stanley, a meeting was held in the village with Council, the area MLA, Local Government staff and the two Local Services Managers for the Stanley and Upper Miramichi LSDs to discuss the Rural Community option. After strong indications to the Upper Miramichi Chair from the Village and some Stanley LSD residents that they would like more information, an individual speaking for the group indicated at the start of the meeting that the Village and LSD were not interested in a Rural Community. After this strong verbal statement, the meeting was adjourned and there was no further dialogue with the Village. A resident from the Stanley LSD indicated some interest later, but after many attempts to have him join an initial assessment meeting with Upper Miramichi, no more interest was shown.

The Chair of the Upper Miramichi LSD Advisory Committee and his co-chair, arranged a meeting with the Minister of Local Government and the area MLA to indicate their strong desire to continue the Rural Community process on their own. Shortly after, they met with the Deputy Minister and Local Government staff and it was agreed to hold one last meeting to invite Blissfield LSD, the Village of Doaktown and the Village and LSD of Stanley to discuss their involvement in an initial assessment of a Rural Community for the area. A meeting was held March 29th, 2007 with only the Upper Miramichi LSD Advisory Committee and the Mayor and two Councillors from the Village of Doaktown in attendance. After much discussion and a question and answer period, the Doaktown representatives stated that they were not interested in any involvement in an initial assessment or continuing discussion about a Rural Community. To quote from the minutes of the meeting: “Doaktown members indicated that Council had voted not to take part in such a study and that it was a good thing that Upper Miramichi wanted to have proper representation and control of their affairs. Doaktown members indicated that once Upper Miramichi is incorporated as a Rural Community, they could work together toward common goals”. After this meeting, the Chair of the Upper Miramichi Advisory Committee was told by a Blissfield representative that the LSD could look at joining the Upper Miramichi Rural Community in the future.

After the March 29th meeting a Community Round table was formed in Upper Miramichi and the initial assessment into the viability of a Rural Community for the area began.

Suggested Wards for Proposed Upper Miramichi Rural Community

