



*Stephenville-Port aux Basques
Regional Council of the
Rural Secretariat, Executive Council*

*Annual Activity Report
2006-07*



Message from the Chair

As Chairperson for the Stephenville – Port aux Basques Regional Council, I hereby submit the annual activity report for the 2006-07 fiscal year. On behalf of the council and in accordance with the *Guidelines for Annual Activity Reports for Category 3 Government Entities*, my signature is indicative of the council's accountability for the results and any variances explained herein.

The contents of this report outline the council's activities for the 2006-07 fiscal year.

During the past fiscal year, the council works was guided by two major aspects: the development of a vision for the future of the region and the identification of broad regional priorities. Various stakeholders were and continue to be engaged to further explore the priority areas. Also, a citizen engagement process has been initiated.

Ultimately, through collaboration and cooperation, we hope that over time we can begin to build a sustainable region. Also, we hope to establish information tools and instruments that help to assess the impacts of program and policy changes on rural areas, and, to ensure that regional and rural issues are taken into consideration when policy and programs are being developed.

As a member of the regional council I look forward with anticipation of effecting positive change in the future.

Sincerely,



Robin Davis,
Chair, Stephenville – Port aux Basques Regional Council of the Rural Secretariat

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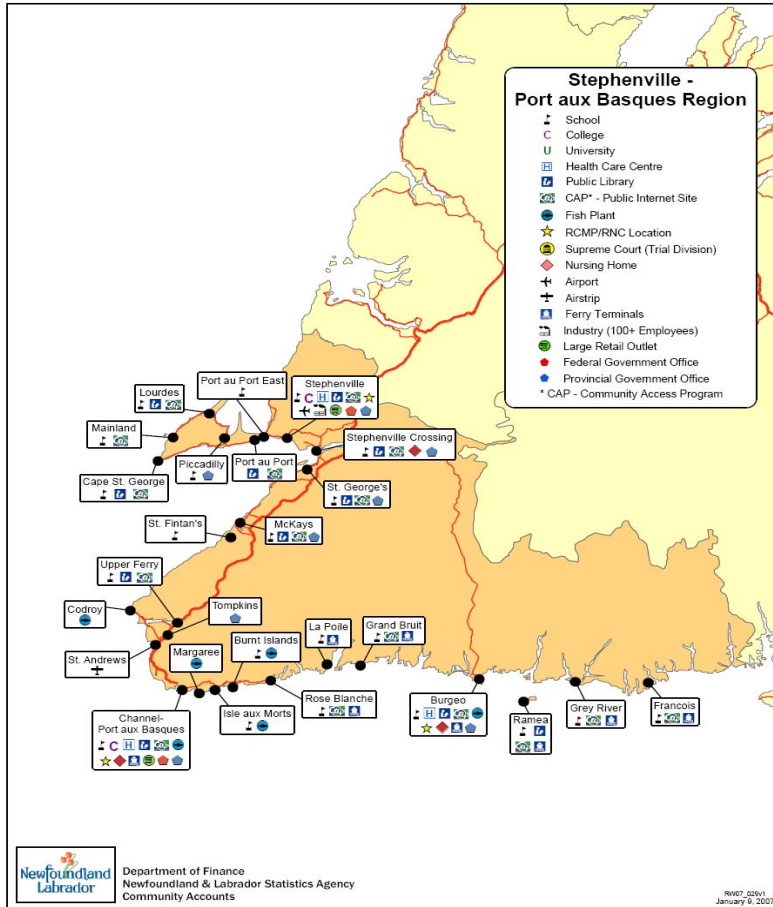
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Regional Overview

The Stephenville – Port aux Basques Rural Secretariat region encompasses the Stephenville, Bay St. George South and Port au Port Peninsula areas extending to Codroy Valley and Port aux Basques area in the south, it also includes communities along the south coast from Isle aux Morts and extending as far east as the community of Francois.



The region consists of approximately 18,000 square kilometers and based on 2001 census data the population was 33,000. The region has a total of 69 communities with only one community having a population of more than 7,000 (Stephenville) and one with more than 4,000 (Channel-Port aux Basques). Over 14,300 or 43% of the region’s population live in communities with less than 1000 people. In 2004 there were a total of 890 businesses in the region. Employment in all industries topped 13,000 and the top three industries by employment are Retail Trade, Agriculture / Fishing / Forestry / Hunting and Health Care and Social Assistance.

The Stephenville – Port aux Basques region, like other regions face challenges (ie. youth retention, fishery crisis, etc.), however, there is an abundance of strengths and opportunities upon which to build. Having a presence of Aboriginal and Francophone cultures, Stephenville Theatre Festival, Art Studios, and other heritage/cultural facilities in the region bodes well for future cultural development in the region. In addition, all these assets contribute immensely to building a strong and vibrant tourism industry in the region. The region is the gateway to the province for vehicular traffic vis-à-vis the Marine Atlantic Gulf Ferries in the Gateway Town of Channel-Port aux Basques. Post Secondary Education is strong here: there are several campuses of the College of the North Atlantic including its Head Quarters, a Private College, and the Safety and Emergency Response Training (SERT) Center of the Marine Institute. As a result,

there is an impressive number of training programs available in the region. This is a very important and attractive asset for existing businesses, new business start-ups, business attraction, and business expansion. The fishery still continues to be an important sector and with the right strategy for recovery and management it will continue to be in the future. The region has a strong history in the agriculture sector with some of the richest sources of soil in the province. It also has some diversity in the sector that includes cranberries, potential for herb and small fruit development, and the meat industry. The Stephenville – Port aux Basques region is also home to one of the largest dairy farms in the country which has the capacity to expand itself into the secondary production of yoghurts and cheeses. This is indicative of the enormous potential for growth and expansion in the agricultural sector in the region. There is considerable activity taking place already with regard to natural resources, however, there is ongoing exploration for more minerals as well as onshore oil. In addition, the region has an abundance of key infrastructures in the region such as a roads network, port facilities, marine infrastructure, airport, education and training facilities, and, health care facilities.

Regional Council Overview

The initial composition of the Stephenville – Port aux Basques Regional Council included fourteen members; eight females and six males. Due to personal and employment reasons there have been several resignations and the current membership level of the regional council is ten; five females and five males.

The council members have a variety of backgrounds and experiences that cut across an array of sectors that include the fishery, health care, social economy, private sector and education.

The council has representation from larger and smaller communities throughout the region:

Name	Community
Allister Hann	Burgeo
Eric Legge	Cartyville
Kelly Tompkins	St. Andrews
Audrey Gracie	Kippens
Margaret Gaudon	Port au Port
Ruth Forsey-Gale	Robinsons
Calvin White	Flat Bay
Michelle Skinner	St. Georges
Susan Fowlow	Stephenville
Robin Davis	Stephenville Crossing

**For an updated listing of council members please visit <http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/regionalmem.asp> .*

Regional council members are committed to meeting four times per year. Their work is focused by three questions:

1. What will your region look like in 15 years?
2. What do you want it to look like (a vision)?
3. What policy and program framework will be required to bridge the gap?

To date, council members have been engaged with discussions around questions number one and two. To assist these discussions, council members have looked at the demographic, social and economic challenges as well as opportunities within the region. A draft vision document was submitted March 31, 2007.

It is through utilization of research and evidence that the regional councils promote discussions on the long-term future of regions. There are many different groups/government departments/organizations that are looking at the short-term requirements and that is extremely important, however, members of the regional councils have been tasked with looking at the longer term and working to ensure we are on the right path. The regional councils promote a shared sense of responsibility between government, communities and industry for the future development of regions. Councils want to share information and challenge people inside and outside government to take a long, hard look at what is happening in our communities and regions. More importantly, councils want to explore where those changes are taking us. This requires a recognition that the status quo cannot be maintained and requires us to start thinking realistically about what our communities will look like in the future. We want to build viable communities within a sustainable region.

There is also a provincial council which has representation from each of the nine regional councils and some at large members. Their role is to advise government on issues and/or concerns with regard to policy and program requirements especially as it relates to advancing social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability within regions and the province. For the mandate of the provincial council please refer to Appendix D.

The Stephenville – Port aux Basques regional council members feel the region will look differently in the future and we need to begin to plan today for future generations.

The Regional Council does not have a budget. Meetings of the council and associated costs are funded through the budget of the Rural Secretariat. The Rural Secretariat also funds a staff position within the region, who among other duties, acts as an information resource for the council and is responsible for the facilitation of the work of the council. The staff person for the Stephenville – Port aux Basques region is Sam Organ. Sam works out of Stephenville.

Mandate

The mandate of the Regional Councils is:

- To develop a common, evidence-based understanding of the social, economic, environmental and cultural realities of a region.
- To review key regional economic and social measures (e.g. education levels, demographic trends, health status, income levels, EI usage, economic diversity) and to reach agreement on the priorities for change over the next five years.
- To identify policies and programs which either advance, negatively impact or need to be developed to encourage the necessary change.
- To advance regional cooperation through the sharing of information on and discussion about economic and social measures and to encourage regional partners to take action on and be accountable for those areas within their mandates.
- To nominate an individual to represent the region on the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat.

Highlights and Accomplishments

During the fiscal year from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007 the Regional Council members were brought together for a total of five meetings. In addition, all regional chairs and provincial council representatives as well as some Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers met in Rocky Harbour for Dialogue Day.

The regional council is only now beginning to address the question of: “What do you want your region to look like (your vision)?” To assist council members with the task of developing a vision for the future, the meetings were developed with content that would help work them through the process. This included content around defining the deliverables for the council – to provide advice to government around any policy gaps that impede or enhance economic development; to develop a vision; and to identify broad priority areas. The meetings also included presentations from departments and/or groups directly involved with economic development in the region such as Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development and Regional Economic Development Boards.

To help keep the council members connected between meetings, the planner for the region continually circulated information on various topics. Council members were also provided a series of probing questions to help them focus their thinking around the vision document. Examples of the questions are listed below:

- What are the priorities?
- What is acceptable? What is the minimum?

- Are there new/different ways of delivering services?
- What are the gaps...is it policy or program?
- What do we need? What needs to happen?
- What is your vision for the region and why do you want it?

Prior to the vision document being completed and submitted to government, Regional Councils identified three critical priority areas for the region and communicated them to government. The three broad based priorities were:

1. Tourism
2. Agriculture
3. Fishery

As a follow up, if requested, the applicable department would make the appropriate level of department officials available to meet with council to provide more information or share any plans that are currently proposed or underway.

During council's preliminary discussions they identified common threads which link across all three priority areas and may at some point in time be considered priority areas also. They include transportation, education and health.

Also taken into consideration while developing the priorities was the Comprehensive Regional Diversification Strategy developed by the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development as well as the strategic plans of the two Regional Economic Development Boards.

Other work carried out by council members was to identify regional strengths and opportunities in the region. The strengths and opportunities have been grouped into categories consisting of the following:

- Infrastructure
- Industrial Base
- Environmental
- Education
- Cultural Diversity
- Social Economy

Community engagement was introduced to council members during the fiscal year. It was introduced as a topic of discussion by using the following questions:

- How do we do it – roundtables, focus groups and mixed groups, kitchen tables, etc.?
- How to identify key persons, groups, etc..
- How long should the sessions be?
- Suggestions on where to hold the sessions...communities and type of venue?
- Council role....Planner role?
- Other considerations?

It was explained to council members that the community engagement process is intended to be a means of sharing information and seeking input. Council members felt it was a topic that would have to be explored and discussed in more detail over time. For example, council wanted to take the time to map out how the process could be linked to the priority areas identified.

Dialogue Day was the first opportunity for the Regional Councils to begin to share the discussions they have been engaged with and also, to share their perspectives with government. The Stephenville – Port aux Basques provincial council representative delivered a short power point presentation during the session. The presentation was broken into the following sections:

What council members have learned?

What they see as the key challenges and opportunities in the region.

What it will require over time to move forward, and,

What do you think the region should look like in the future?

To help highlight the discussions at Dialogue Day, the following is a summarized list of the presentation:

- **What have we learned?**
 - *Planning for long-term is very challenging*
 - *The impacts of demographics*
 - *Important to step back and consider the implications for the whole region*
 - *Understand there are trade-offs associated with decisions*
 - *To appreciate the interdependence of communities*
 - *The benefit of being proactive in managing change*
- **Key challenges / issues:**
 - *Gulf Ferry Service (Marine Atlantic)*
 - *One industry towns*
 - *Creating jobs through diversification and export markets*
 - *Creating an entrepreneurial culture*
 - *Out-migration and youth retention*
 - *Volunteer burnout*

- *Small labour pool*
- *Recruitment of professionals*
- *Public awareness of the issues and challenges (ie. Having a healthy population)*
- **What's it going to take to move forward?**
 - *A shift to shared responsibility*
 - *Community collaboration and cooperation*
 - *Cross departmental integration*
 - *Common boundaries*
 - *Skills development*
 - *Development of our cultural assets*
 - *Export oriented businesses*
 - *Joint management of the fishery*
 - *Community engagement*
 - *Work within the fiscal realities*
- **What do you think the region should look like in the future?**
 - *A diversified economy*
 - *Maximization of our natural resources*
 - *Environmental stewardship is practiced*
 - *Tourism is year-round industry*
 - *Transportation links*
 - *Modern and high quality education and health care*

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Collaboration

Collaboration, as the council defines it, requires a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to make decisions that will maximize benefits for the whole and not just a piece of the whole. This kind of collaboration provides opportunities and benefits that would not otherwise be possible. It also poses a challenge for individuals to step out of their 'comfort zones' and look at issues differently.

Long-term thinking

Long-term thinking will continue to be both an opportunity and a challenge. Thinking long-term, in the context of the work of the council, provides an opportunity to set a shared goal for the region and to, collectively, define the steps required to achieve the goal. Thinking long-term will also be challenging for individuals and groups when there are immediate issues surfacing within regions.

Citizen Engagement

There is an opportunity through this process for citizens to directly influence public policy development. This citizen engagement process will be a purposeful, deliberate process to engage citizens in a two-way conversation with government decision-makers. This process is not limited to the citizens that sit on the councils of the Rural Secretariat, rather there will be a process for the broader citizenship to engage in a discussion about the future policy directions of government. The challenge will be to truly open our minds, listen to each other and discuss issues in a respectful manner.

Vision Development

The vision document that is being developed by the council is not intended to achieve a final form, but rather the intention is for it to continue to be a working document. The vision document will identify what we want to see 15 to 20 years out. Today that time frame is 2022-2027. In five years time, that time frame will be 2027-2032. As priorities are accomplished new priorities will be identified. This will provide an opportunity for us to be informed about what is moving and changing in our regions, where the next opportunity will be and where the next challenge will be. It will also provide a challenge for all involved to have faith in the process and realize that it will take time until these priorities are accomplished. It takes time to make significant change and it is important for this council to remain focused on the future, even in the midst of immediate challenges.

Appendix A

Strategic Directions

1. Title: Regional Partnership Development

Outcome Statement: Stronger and more dynamic regions.

Clarifying Statement: This outcome requires systemic intervention by the Regional Council in the areas of:

- Partnership Development
 - Within regions
 - Between government and regions
- Forum for informed discussion and priority identification that links economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of regional sustainability.

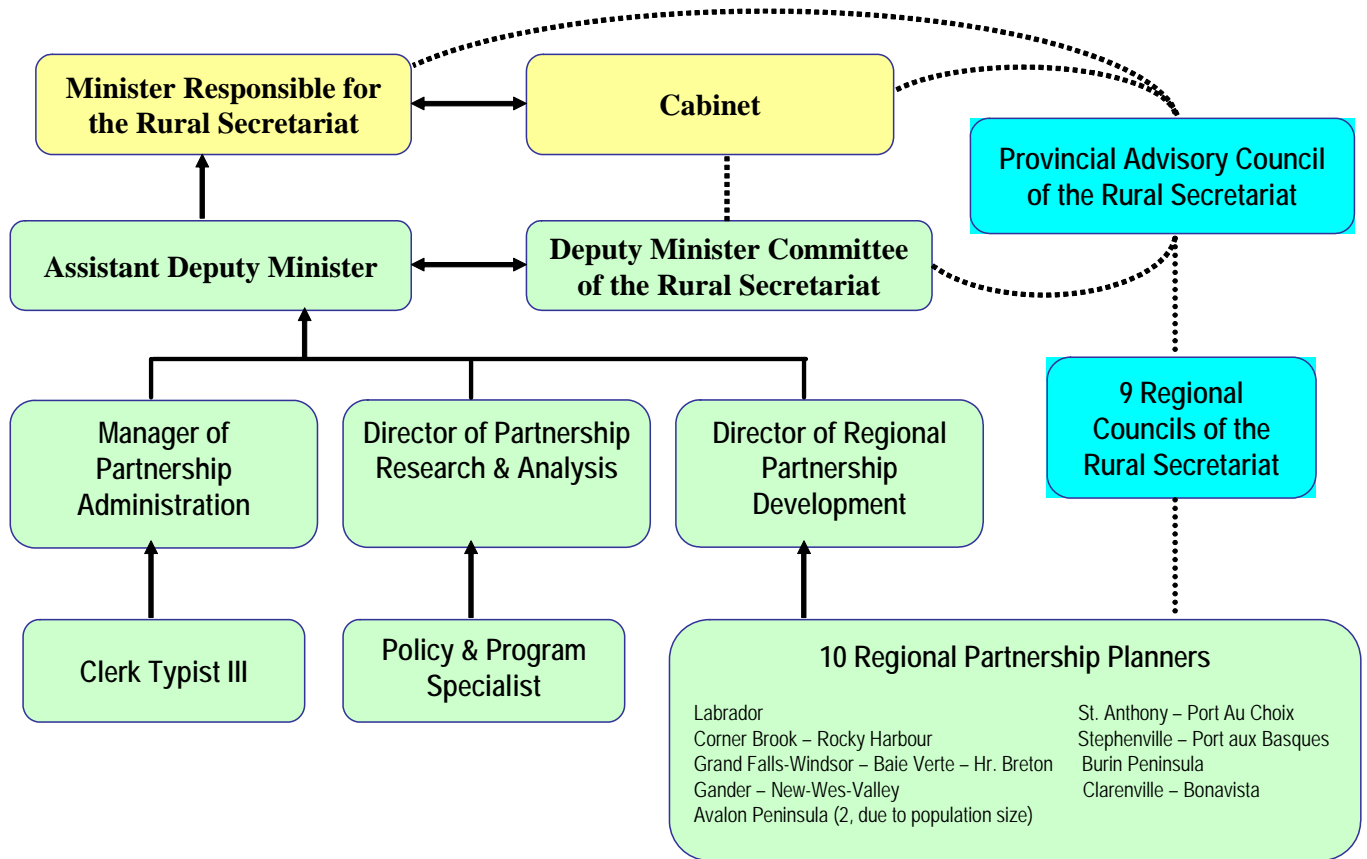
2. Title: Assessment of Policy on Regional Sustainability

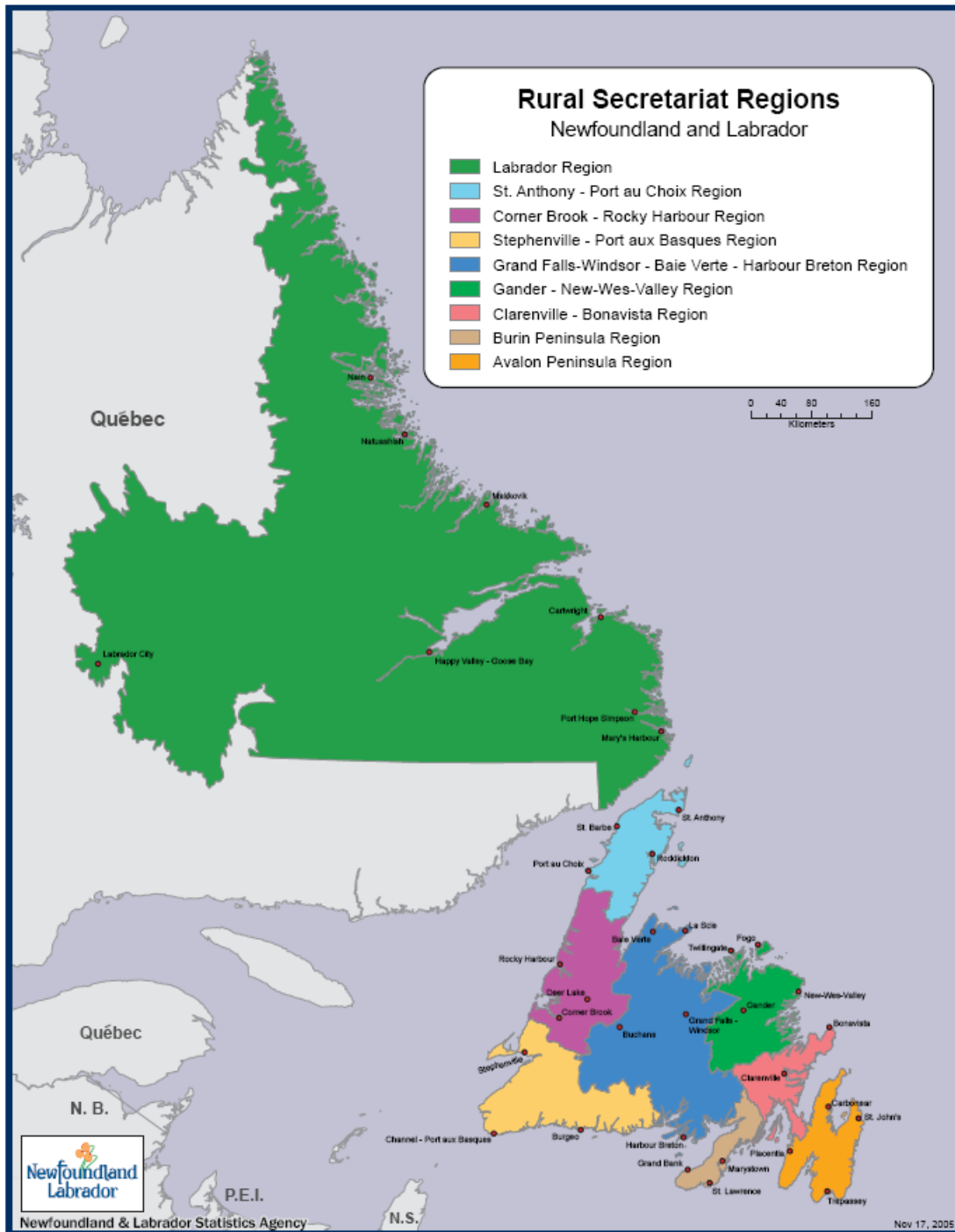
Outcome Statement: Improved Government understanding of and response to significant and long-term regional issues.

Clarifying Statement: This outcome requires systemic intervention by the Regional Council in the areas of:

- Regional perspectives which can inform the development and implementation of public policy.

Rural Secretariat Structure





Mandate of the Rural Secretariat

The Rural Secretariat's mandate is to:

- Promote the well-being of all regions of Newfoundland and Labrador through a comprehensive and coordinated approach to economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of regional development.
- Act as the focal point for government to work with local and regional partners to build strong and dynamic regions and communities.
- Ensure that regional concerns are considered throughout the provincial government and promoted at the federal level.
- Carry out research and analysis of economic and social issues affecting all regions of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Help communities and regions identify and take advantage of growth opportunities.

Mandate of the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat

The Provincial Council's Mandate is to:

- Develop a common, evidence-based understanding of the social, economic, environmental and cultural realities facing the province.
- Review key provincial economic and social measures (e.g. education levels, demographic trends, health status, income levels, EI usage, economic diversity) and to reach agreement on the priorities for change over the next five years.
- Identify and advise government on policies and programs which either advance, negatively impact or need to be developed to encourage the necessary change over the five year period.
- Advance cooperation through the sharing of information on and discussion about economic and social measures, and to encourage government and community partners to take action on and be accountable for those areas within their mandates.
- Meet twice annually with the provincial Cabinet and deputy ministers to advance regional development priorities.
- Serve as an external sounding board for government for the development of strategies, policies, programs and budget issues that will affect provincial and regional sustainability.

Photo Credits:



Seal Brook
Photo compliments of Roger Spencer



Port aux Basques
Photo compliments of Zone 10 Regional Economic Development Board



Stephenville
Photo Compliments of Sam Organ



Rural Secretariat

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