



NATURAL ASSETS UNDERPIN ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANNING IN LOGY-BAY-MIDDLE COVE-OUTER COVE, NEWFOUNDLAND

“THE NEED FOR sustainable development was what drove me into local politics,” said Paul Ryan, who was first elected to the Town of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove a couple of years ago. Referred to locally as LBMCOG, the coastal Newfoundland town is a small rural community north of St. John’s, with the expansive Atlantic Ocean to its east. Several years prior to running for council, Ryan became concerned with a new development being proposed that would require filling in marshes and building in a sensitive protected river area. Fortunately, that project went nowhere, but Ryan realized the Town could benefit from being more proactive about managing development and becoming elected was a way to move that vision forward.

Ryan was born and raised in LBMCOG and even though he’s lived in every province from Ontario eastwards except for PEI, he returned back to his roots 20 years ago and has been there ever since. His home town is a tight knit community of about 2,100 people and many families have been there for generations. Most people commute to St. John’s for work, an easy 15-minute drive away. Other than that, the local economy is driven by a spattering of dairy farms, a couple of auto repair shops, a convenience store, and an animal hospital. There’s a school, a church and still no gas station – an amenity that will likely become obsolete in any case as Canada works towards decarbonizing its economy.

The Town has grown rapidly in recent years with new sub-divisions housing mainly younger families. Development has been on hold since 2018 as the town works on a new Town Plan. A recent study of the Town’s water supply showed that it could sustain further development of 1 acre lots, which is what residents who appreciate their rural lifestyle would like to see. Ryan is not opposed to development and would like to see the Town grow as envisioned by its residents, but he wants to ensure that growth is done sustainably, with land use practices that will not do lasting damage. There had been incidents of developers filling in marshes without permits and he was concerned that if these patterns continued, the community could become vulnerable to flooding and lose significant parts of its natural heritage.

LBMCOG is one of the few towns in this area of Newfoundland that maintains a rural atmosphere based on well and septic tank services. One of the first

tasks Ryan set out for himself once elected to Council was to figure out how to protect quality of life the residents have come to know, and that includes healthy wetlands and waterways, essential to a rural life style. Through his own research, Ryan came across the innovative work of the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative (MNAI), a not-for-profit organization that supports municipalities in properly accounting for and valuing the services that natural assets like wetlands, forests and foreshores deliver to communities. Ryan immediately saw both the need and the potential for LBMCOG.

The Town didn’t yet have an inventory of its wetlands or other natural assets or a scientific analysis of the services they were providing to the community, like water purification and retention. Ryan wanted an evidence-based analysis that could be brought forward to developers and the community to show which municipal services are provided by natural assets, and why designated areas should be protected. The Town has embarked on a project with MNAI to build this knowledge and to develop a holistic asset management plan that covers municipal services delivered by engineered and natural assets.

The Town’s work on natural assets was just starting to launch when the opportunity to join AIM Network’s asset management cohort program came its way through an email to Council. AIM Network saw this as a great opportunity to work with a town that could integrate a natural asset inventory into the asset management process along with other built infrastructure. “Natural assets are a very important consideration in asset management planning. When they are recognized and incorporated into planning considerations, it can save a lot of money that might otherwise be spent on building new infrastructure while also enhancing and protecting the natural environment,” said Daisy Foster, Managing Director of AIM Network.



THE RUGGED COASTLINE OF LOGY BAY-MIDDLE COVER-OUTER COVE, NL.
Photo Credit: Darryl Pike

→ (Continued from Page 1) The timing of the cohort program was perfect for the Town, as Council had hired its first ever part-time town engineer, John Barry, just over a year before. Barry is semi-retired with over thirty years of previous experience with the City of St. John's. He had mentioned to Council that while the Town had been well-managed over the years, they would be well-advised to put in place a formal asset management plan that would tell them how much money they'll need to invest in roads and other infrastructure improvements to set themselves up well to meet future needs. Barry left the City of St. John's just as asset management was starting to take off, so he had a good foundation. Ryan suggested that Barry look into the program to find out whether it could provide the additional support needed to put LBMCOG on the right track.

Barry feels the program will provide much needed guidance in getting their asset data organized. LBMCOG doesn't have a large asset base. The Town owns and manages a town hall and a recreational facility, as well as 31 km of roads and some drainage and culverting systems for stormwater management. Residents use wells for their water supply and have independent septic systems. While they have some information about their assets and general condition and have done some mapping, they need a proper system to manage that information and still have some work to do to collect data on their buildings. Barry knows the town hall and facilities are aging and need upgrading, and Council also needs to understand the risks to infrastructure that come with a changing climate to ensure it can withstand the impacts. The work they'll do in the cohort program will help to put all of these pieces together so that Council has the information needed to make the right investments

on a go forward basis.

Ryan is pleased the Town is strengthening its overall asset management system and natural asset management at the same time so that both natural and engineered infrastructure management will be well integrated. Council is unanimous in its support and sees the benefits. MNAI will be collaborating with AIM Network to ensure that the natural asset inventory being developed is built right into the open source software that AIM Network supports, called AIMsoir. When asked if he felt LBMCOG was a leader in the province on this type of integration, Ryan suspected it is. As far as he knows, they are the only ones building natural asset management explicitly into their asset management practices so far. He presented their work at a conference last year and several people from communities with similar challenges approached him to learn how they could do the same.

Ryan is confident that the study being done with MNAI will provide the evidence base needed to protect significant natural assets and to ensure that development progresses sustainably. The town is starting with the inventory and valuation of the natural assets, but the full scope of work to protect assets through policy and to develop asset management plans to maintain them appropriately will be undertaken over several phases. Public consultations will be needed to build an understanding in the community about land use decisions that may affect private landowners. Ryan says the Town has done flood mapping and a ground water study that will help build a general understanding of how climate change is affecting the community. "At the end of the day, our work on asset management is about Council giving priority to the long-term protection of residents, their property, and the whole community."



The Municipal Natural Assets Initiative (MNAI) is changing the way municipalities deliver everyday services, increasing the quality and resilience of infrastructure at lower costs and reduced risk.

The MNAI team provides scientific, economic and municipal expertise to support and guide local governments in identifying, valuing and accounting for natural assets in their financial planning and asset management programs and developing leading-edge, sustainable and climate resilient infrastructure.

MNAI teams up with municipalities to develop resilient, long-term infrastructure alternatives at substantial savings. MNAI employs practical strategies to value nature's ability to provide municipal services and to incorporate this information into mainstream asset management systems. With increasing ease in measuring and valuing natural assets the MNAI approach is straightforward and transferable.

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SEVEN SHIFTS SMALL TOWNS MIGHT MAKE IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

AT ITS HEART, asset management is about sustainable service delivery. It supports local governments in making optimal decisions for communities that best balance the costs, risks and performance of the services the community receives. When COVID-19 hit Canadian communities in March, causing widespread quarantines and closures of businesses, local governments had to make some fast and furious adjustments to how they were operating while ensuring that essential services continued to be delivered to their communities.

Tract Consulting is a multi-disciplinary planning, design, asset management and civil engineering firm operating in Atlantic Canada. Tract wanted to learn how the pandemic was affecting small towns and whether it might change their way of doing business over the longer term. In April and May, Tract's President Neil Dawe interviewed over 40 municipal town managers in Newfoundland and Labrador and its asset management partner LandInfo Technologies interviewed seven more in British Columbia to gain some insights.

Small communities in Canada have their own unique contexts and challenges – some are growing, many are shrinking, some are booming resource or tourism economies and others are suffering from economic stagnation. But they also have a lot in common when it comes to meeting the service expectations of their communities. Tract learned that the town managers interviewed shared quite a few experiences and ideas and pulled together seven key observations about how the pandemic might shift their operations.

1 Communication between Council and management will change.

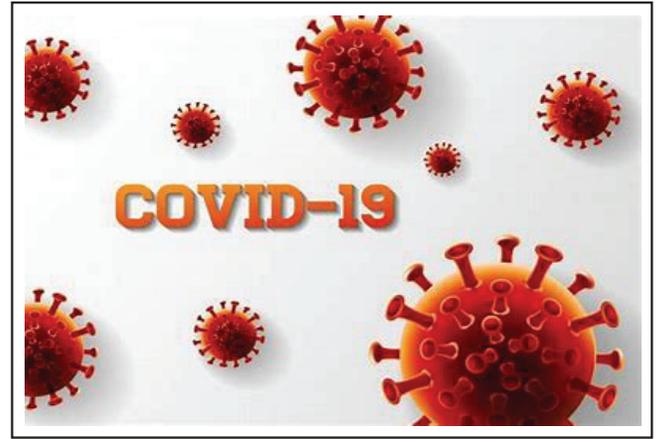
Prior to the pandemic there was no need for Council and management to meet online so the platform wasn't really tested as an effective way to conduct business. But many of the leaders interviewed found that the online meetings being held since March have been more focused and productive than face-to-face meetings. They see potential in continuing to support online meetings as a way for towns to become more efficient.

2 Towns will adopt more digital technology.

Remote working has crystallized the benefits of having access to digitized information that can support communications, create administrative efficiencies and provide more streamlined services to residents. Examples of improvements that could be made include getting digitized information such as maps, a network server for file sharing and retrieval, and the ability to accept electronic payment of taxes. Town managers also felt that provincial ministries could support them by improving digital access to standard municipal policies, RFPs, forms and templates.

3 Town operations will become more efficient.

The pandemic has brought into focus some inefficiencies in how towns have been doing business and the need to do more than meet short-term operational needs. One town manager estimated that using technology to streamline operations could enable them to reassign about 20% of their team to address future town management needs and priorities.



4 Towns will take a longer-term view in planning for the future.

One town manager felt that prior to the pandemic they were “seeing the trees but not the forest”. This echoes how many others are feeling about the need to step back and look at the bigger picture, redefine community needs and set priorities based on a more holistic approach on how to do things.

5 Trails and parks will be more important.

The pandemic has demonstrated the health benefits of being able to recreate outside with more people bike riding, walking, gardening and visiting parks. Town managers have realized they hadn't been prioritizing the social components of community life in their service delivery and that will need to change. Planning of public spaces will be in the forefront so that if physical distancing measures are needed in the future, towns will be ready. They suggested that partnerships could facilitate getting more social infrastructure built.

6 Prioritization of new emergency measures for future pandemics.

Towns were not well prepared for the health and safety restrictions put in place when the pandemic hit and it will be important to develop new protocols for future pandemics. These could include proper sanitary and cleaning procedures, measures to protect those working in confined spaces, and plans to keep residents healthy and safe. That includes determining what services are essential to provide when public health restrictions are in place and what services can be suspended temporarily. Residents may support closure of recreation facilities but will expect services like waste management to be maintained.

7 Knowledge sharing and peer learning will continue to be important.

Town managers regularly consult each other to find solutions on common issues. They see that new challenges like the pandemic reinforce the benefits and the need for these interactions. Towns have received excellent support from their provincial ministries and would be interested in a formal platform to pose questions and share information. Town staff appreciate the value of professional development through webinars and will continue to access online learning opportunities.

To access the full report, contact Neil Dawe at ndawe@tractconsulting.com.

INTRODUCING OUR TWO NEW COHORTS

IN OUR LAST newsletter, we were pleased to announce the launch of our second cohort program to strengthen asset management practices in the Atlantic region, through which participating municipalities will learn and ‘do’ asset management with others in their cohort in a peer-to-peer learning environment over about 15 months. They will be strengthening governance and decision making about infrastructure by incorporating asset management as a strategic, ongoing business process in their organization.

Fortunately AIM Network is able to provide virtual support in these pandemic times. Work has begun with our Nova Scotia cohort and will soon start with our Newfoundland cohort to guide municipalities in putting in place their data foundation so they can progress through the rest of the program. This involves preparing an asset inventory for a major asset group they have prioritized, like the town’s water distribution system, layering that information over a town base map in a geographic information system that shows the location of individual assets (water lines, hydrants, etc.), and summarizing the infrastructure owned, its life expectancy based on age and estimated

replacement cost based on preliminary default values.

Participating municipalities are shown below. Be sure to read our feature article on page 1 on the Town of Logy-Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove (LBMCOOC), which highlights how the Town is taking a truly holistic approach to asset management by incorporating natural asset management into their asset management planning. This is truly innovative work in the region and we’re thrilled that LBMCOOC will be able to share lessons through the cohort program.

<u>Nova Scotia Cohort</u>	<u>Newfoundland Cohort</u>
Municipality of Clare Municipality of Shelburne Municipality of Digby County of Kings Town of Middleton Town of Oxford Town of Kentville	Town of Bay Bulls Town of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove Town of Holyrood Town of Sunnyside

ATLANTIC ASSET MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE GOES VIRTUAL IN 2020



WITH UNCERTAINTY related to the longer-term impact of the coronavirus and public health advice that continues to emphasize the importance of physical distancing, AIM Network has decided to host the **2020 Atlantic Asset Management Conference**

virtually this Fall during the week of November 2nd. While we will miss seeing everyone in person, the Conference Planning Committee is in full swing developing the conference program with some exciting ideas that promise to create a very engaging learning experience.

A highlight of the conference will be a keynote and interactive session on asset management and climate change, with special emphasis on how natural assets can be leveraged to build resilience to climate impacts. We are pleased to be welcoming CAO Emanuel Machado of the Town of Gibsons, BC as a keynote speaker. Emanuel is a pioneer of municipal natural asset management in Canada, demonstrating the value that eco-assets like the pristine Gibsons aquifer, its creeks, forests and foreshores bring to the community. These assets help to

keep municipal service delivery costs manageable and sustainable over the long-term and will be critical in helping the Town to withstand sea level rise and the extreme weather that comes with a changing climate. Delegates will have the opportunity to interact with and learn from other speakers as well.

Stay tuned for email updates as the program evolves and consider sharing your own knowledge. The abstract submission deadline has been extended to July 30th but don't wait – submit an abstract now! See www.aimnetwork.ca/callforabstracts for details on the type of content we’re looking for under the theme *Achieving Lasting Change to Services through Collaboration, Transformational Processes and Implementation Pathways*.

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