



Kentville
A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Strategic Priorities Plan 2025-2029

“Investing in Kentville’s Future Today”



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Message from the Mayor

Kentville is on the verge of rapid growth in terms of housing, recreation, and commercial developments. These developments are happening all over Kentville and will continue to increase with the extension of water and sewer services to currently undeveloped parts of Town. We must plan now for these changes so that they become part of a "sustainable development" strategy/approach that considers the Town's long term and future needs related to stormwater, traffic, and infrastructure loads.

We cannot prepare for growth without first addressing our current facilities and infrastructure, and planning for the re-development or replacement of this ageing infrastructure. Change is sometimes hard, and almost always expensive, but the alternative is to stand still, become complacent, and fall further behind other communities and our neighbours in supporting Kentville as a great place to live, work, and play. We must invest in ourselves first and the time is now.

I am pleased to provide our residents with our 4-Year Strategic Priorities Plan as adopted by Council. It contains investments in infrastructure, growth and development, people, inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, partnerships, accountability, and communications that every resident will benefit from either directly or indirectly. Each one is critical to the future of Kentville's growth for residents and future generations. Many of these areas are intertwined and require support from businesses, community groups, and the public working together.

It is a four-year plan so some initiatives will take place each year. Council will need to budget wisely in order to be able to accomplish so much within our available financial resources. This Council will prioritize being financially prudent, plan accordingly, and spread our work out over several years to be able to finance and put these great ideas into action in a fiscally responsible way.

Now is the time for Kentville to shine, and Council requires support and collaboration from our citizens and businesses to make this plan a success. We look forward to your initial and ongoing feedback as we hold ourselves accountable for its implementation.

Sincerely,

**Andrew Zebian
Mayor**

Introduction

If you subscribe to the adage that “the future is now”, then we have some catching up to do. We have heard loud and clear from residents that we need to have a plan, and act on it now! We need to make serious investments in our infrastructure, from roads and streets to stormwater management, and to our recreation infrastructure. We need to start taking a careful and thoughtful approach to asset management. In the past few years we have protected our tax rates, while reducing government operations in some areas and expanding in other areas without a clear vision for the future. This plan will provide a clear and focused approach to the execution of our strategic priorities over the next 5-10 years

With the release of this 4-Year Strategic Priorities Plan, we will move away from an ad hoc approach to managing and operating Kentville. This plan requires collaboration with citizens, neighbourhoods, businesses, and governments at all four levels. This plan requires thoughtful and prudent financial decision making over the long term, looking into the future and aligning our resources accordingly. We must care about and give compassion to ALL residents of Kentville. We must all be more aware of the full needs in our community and work towards a more supportive and inclusive community where all citizens have a fair chance to succeed on their own terms and be personally successful and happy. We must acknowledge our systemic problems and address them each day with a lens of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

Our plan is about growing and developing Kentville for the future, now. It will require smart planning and development with community input, strong leadership from council and staff, a strategic focus with an achievable plan that is properly costed and financed, a commitment to a larger Kentville population, as well as a strategy to guide these changes through wise use of taxpayers' money.

The plan writing was easy. Implementing it will be hard. Despite the difficulties ahead with US / Canada relations, pressure from big box stores and retail giants, as well as on-line shopping portals, we know the hearts of Kentvillians remain local. We must think globally and act locally. We need to support our local businesses and entrepreneurs. Businesses need to support our residents with accessibility improvements and great marketing to showcase their products in-store and on-line.

Council is up for the challenge. Are you? Let's all be brave and start the future now.

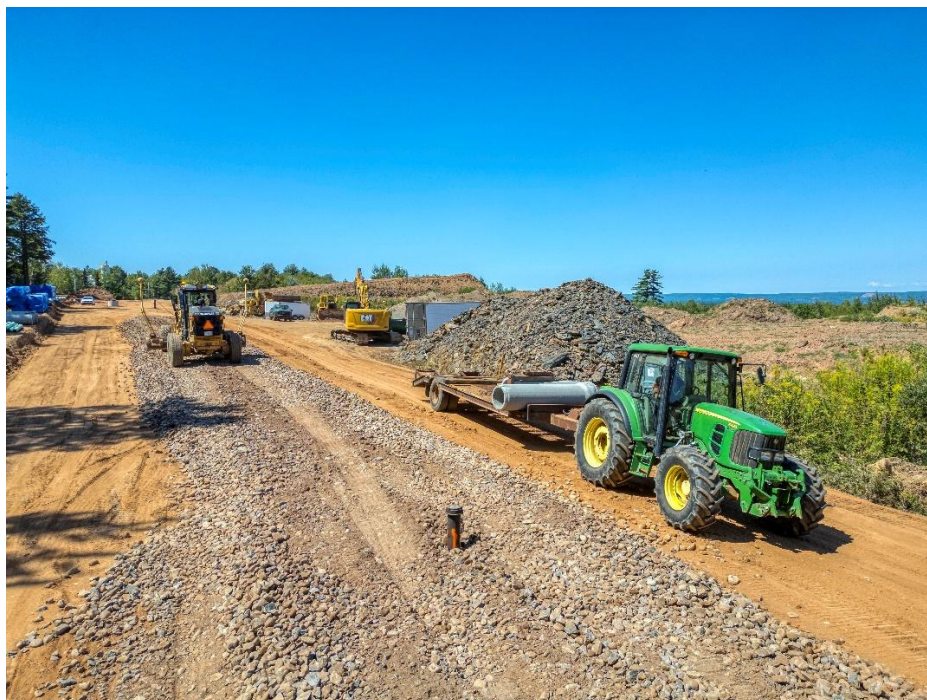


Strategic Priority One: Investing in Infrastructure

There has been no greater feedback from the public concerning what our future plan needs to reflect more than, “Kentville must have a plan to better maintain, upgrade, and fix its current infrastructure before it starts to take on more infrastructure projects and work”. We continue to hear this message each day and recognize that our infrastructure, like our arena and stormwater systems, have not kept pace with public expectations or good asset management planning with the required financial investments.

This strategic priority plan sets the stage for the initial 5-year plan of prioritizing our current infrastructure and making the required financial and human resource investments that are needed to lead with intention and follow through on our promises. This is just the beginning, and as we did not get into this situation over a 5-year period, we therefore will require much more time to address our current challenges and shortcomings. This initial 5-year plan will begin the process and prove our commitment to change, sustainability, strong fiscal planning, and accountability.

Our biggest cost driver and investment will be in infrastructure, focused on implementing many of the recommendations contained in our recent consultant report on stormwater, replacing our arena with a new modern facility, upgrading our buildings and properties to make them more accessible, efficient, and climate resilient, and being more strategic in our investments related to beautification, street paving, sidewalk work, and future water and sewer pipe extensions. The work has already begun so now we need a plan to continue our sustainable development.



Town of Kentville is committed to Investing in Infrastructure with the following strategies and plans:

1. We will develop a 10-year plan to upgrade, replace, remove where practical, and develop new culverts, drainage ditches, retention ponds, gabion rock and permanent walls, storm drains, and other fiscally responsible and safe approaches to mitigate future stormwater damage to properties throughout Kentville, especially the west end, with work starting immediately.
2. Kentville will work with its neighbouring municipalities to plan for, design, build, and oversee the operation of a new modern, fully accessible, Kings County Regional Recreation Facility which will include an aquatic facility and arena that will provide opportunities for people of all abilities, ages, and incomes to participate in recreation and social activities of their choosing.
3. As we work to improve our road networks for reliability and safety, we will develop a 20-year asphalt renewal program that will see all major routes and streets with completely new asphalt and a plan to continue this renewal in 20-year cycles thereafter, with full street width and length paving, as well as a new program for annual asphalt preservation to prolong the current life of more subdivision streets.
4. We will finalize and complete a full asset management plan for Town of Kentville reflecting current infrastructure asset conditions and life expectancies, along with a detailed, costed plan for upgrades or replacements in the future with impacts on the long-term sustainability, financial health and well-being of Kentville and its future growth and development potential.
5. Kentville is growing and so is the demand for public transportation. We will continue to invest strongly in public transportation with new more energy efficient busses, strengthen our investment in its drivers, employees and technology to improve reliability and timing, and work with our partner municipalities and other governments to enhance services while keeping public fees affordable.
6. Supporting our residents with environmental sustainability and leading through corporate responsibility is a must today and therefore Kentville will work with Valley Waste Resource Management to support increased residential and business diversion efforts with bi-weekly pickup of all items, including large and bulky items year-round beginning in 2026, to improve diversion rates and support more local re-cycling and re-use of materials to avoid permanent disposal.



Strategic Priority Two: Investing in People and Accountability

Communities do not grow and prosper and work does not get done effectively and efficiently without people and their knowledge and talents. Kentville has one of the most educated workforces in Nova Scotia and this extends to the Town as well. To ensure the future positive prosperity and development of Kentville, we must invest in our people and ensure that public reporting of our successes and challenges are included to ensure accountability.

We must invest in our staff, council, and our volunteers, and this must be an ongoing process. These investments must relate to technical training, code of conduct and ethical behaviours, rules of order, diversity and accessibility, our youth, and our volunteers like neighbourhood and community event organizers. We must be prepared to take the time to invest in ourselves for the betterment of our Town and community organizations.

While a vast majority of our meetings are held in public, there are many activities that take place outside of meetings or in closed sessions. Public reporting of Kentville operations must be prioritized to become more commonplace. This accountability reporting must come from many places and times which will evolve over time.

To assist with this, we will require more public involvement with Town committees and will regularly seek public feedback on programs, services, and infrastructure such as through our annual citizen survey. We need an engaged and interested public that is positive and progressive, and not simply complaints based. We need to hear from those that genuinely want to see positive, sustainable, and fiscally responsible local government year-round.



Town of Kentville is committed to Investing in People and Accountability with the following strategies and plans:

1. Kentville will develop a comprehensive strategy and plan for the future training of staff and council members in all areas of management, leadership, and governance including diversity and inclusion, cooperation and teamwork, research and report writing, communications, indigenous awareness and knowledge, accessibility, social and green procurement, as well as council / staff relations.
2. The great work of Kentville often takes place in the detailed meetings held each month with community members often as active participants on various committees. To support community members in these roles, including chairperson training to build capacity and confidence, we will plan for and offer biennial training for new committee members, and current members or chairpersons who wish refresher training.
3. Financial accountability is paramount to the public's trust in local government. To support this need strongly, Kentville will establish a more robust and enhanced Finance and Audit Committee to oversee more of the Town's financial operations and internal controls with increased public involvement.
4. We are committed to growing and developing our next cohort of community leaders and will establish and offer an annual Youth Council program which will provide educational training on local roles and responsibilities, a behind the scenes look at departments, opportunities for training, mentoring and volunteering, as well as provide opportunities for input into Council's annual budget priorities related to youth involvement in the Town.
5. Supporting residents with the ability to stay in their home longer and maintain a sense of pride and dignity is important. Council will continue to increase the income amount and tax rebate amount for low-income home owners to ensure more residents can stay in their own homes longer, and more affordably.
6. To be an effective Town, we must have relevant and up-to-date policies and bylaws to ensure our Town operations are operating well and our regulation of residents' activities are consistent with community values. A comprehensive review and re-write of our bylaws and policies will take place with a focus on repealing redundant policies and bylaws to reduce Kentville regulations of residents and businesses.
7. Receiving and following up on public complaints or concerns is important. To ensure proper tracking and follow-up, Kentville will promote and provide regular updates to Council and the public on the number, nature, and clearance rates of submissions to its E11 public feedback reporting system.

Strategic Priority Three: Investing in Growth and Development

The only thing that can be known for sure is that change is constant. When we sit still, we fall behind others that are growing and developing their people, their neighbourhoods, their infrastructure, and their communities. We must find ways to balance the growth of Kentville, while also protecting our current culture, heritage, local environments, and public infrastructure, like our parks and green spaces.

As Kentville grows and develops, it is critical that community planning take into account the need for community spaces like parks, road networks where pedestrians have safe places to walk alongside vehicular traffic, and where accessibility is constantly part of the regular discussion and not a future add-on or seen as a burden. Access for all must be a basic premise of future developments.

Another part of community development is the way future lands can and should be developed considering current and future community and resident needs. Therefore, it is critical that a new Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw be developed and reflect today's public expectations, while allowing for future sustainable development. Without growth, the population will be stagnant and total assessment values will increase at levels less than inflation, leading to an increase in taxes without upgraded or new infrastructure or services. We need a balanced approach to growth. However, much of the growth in Kentville is being driven by private developers and demands for more new housing for our community and residents. We can either embrace it wisely or see the growth go to other communities.



Town of Kentville is committed to Investing in Growth and Development with the following strategies and plans:

1. Kentville will begin the process of reviewing and updating its 2019 Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw to bring it up to date to current legislated Nova Scotia planning requirements, as well as update the plan for sustainable development including housing, water, sewer and stormwater requirements, subdivision standards, parking, signage, and opportunities for future expansion of commercial and industrial areas with more development as-of-right.
2. With initial provincial and federal government funding commitments, Kentville will develop the lands designed as the future Donald Hiltz Connector Road to connect it to the MacDougall Heights subdivision and eventually Prospect Avenue, with a goal of increasing our housing stock by 500 units by 2035.
3. To support development in all parts of Kentville, Council is committed to extending water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure to parts of Kentville where private developers are committed to investing in new housing immediately, with the Town being open to cost-sharing in infrastructure costs for designated affordable housing projects.
4. With a goal of increasing housing and commercial efforts, beginning in 2026, Kentville will refund the building permit application fees for any new housing permit or commercial building applications where the housing unit or units, or new commercial space, are completed within one year of the permit being taken out, subject to an application by the permit applicant for the refund.
5. Ask anyone in Nova Scotia what Kentville is known for and inevitably, the vast majority of people will say the quality and quantity of its recreation facilities. We must ensure that we keep up with the maintenance and upgrades to our parks, trails, playgrounds, and facilities to ensure they continue to meet community needs and expectations. To plan for this, we will invest in consulting on and creating a 10-year Recreation Master Plan.
6. Community enhancements are an important part of Kentville's development and pride of place, and therefore Council will support a free Town-wide tree planting program to support more greening of yards, parks, and business areas to support climate change, reduction in erosion, and more pleasing neighbourhoods through the planting of various native species.
7. The heart of community is in its people and much of that is done through the efforts of volunteers and community groups. We will support the work of current groups like the Oakdene Park Community Garden Group and others to continue to grow and develop positive neighbourhoods, community festivals and events, while strengthening social connections and supporting safety and sustainability.

Strategic Priority Four: Investing in Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA)

Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) are terms used by many despite not having a great knowledge of what they mean and how actions to implement these ideas can change the lives of many people in our community without any extra efforts on the Town's or residents' parts. We all must do more to learn, to educate ourselves, and be better neighbours, governments, and businesses; individually and together. We must lead by example. And lead by example we will.

Council is committed to beginning the process of developing a plan for the conversion or updating of its facilities to make them more accessible. We recognize that we cannot make every part of every building, park, or green space fully accessible, but we can work towards much better access for all. This work will be guided by the first voices of community members on our new IDEA Committee.

IDEA will require not only investments by the Town, but also investments by other governments, businesses, non-for-profit societies, and individuals. To support these changes, Kentville will develop and offer a business rebate program to support businesses implementing accessibility measures to support more access to their business as a priority.

And to support more IDEA voices in Kentville's decision making, we will establish a first voices citizen advisory committee to share ideas and hopes for a better future so that everyone can live their best life.



Town of Kentville is committed to Investing in Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) with the following strategies and plans:

1. To lead by example, Kentville will re-design Town Hall so that it is physically accessible for all Council meetings by the public by moving the council chamber to the first floor if possible and renovating the building so everyone can enter safely and access services, including an accessible washroom.
2. In order to support local businesses becoming inclusive and accessible, Kentville will establish a grant program for businesses to allow them to apply for municipal funding to make their business more physically and visually accessible, as well as opportunities to create more welcoming and diverse meeting spaces.
3. Kentville takes great pride in being a provincial leader in recreational parks, trails, and fields throughout the Town. Many of these spaces, however, are only partially accessible or not accessible at all. Kentville will develop a go-forward plan to ensure all future buildings and public spaces are accessible as greatly as possible and will begin work to develop plans to begin upgrading current facilities and active transportation routes to make them more accessible for all members of the public to use to the greatest extent reasonably possible.
4. There are currently many committees of council that provide advice on various Kentville issues from finance to water protection, and accessibility. It is critical that committees that are meant to represent and support those marginalized or at risk in our communities are able to meet together and make independent recommendations to Council and staff, in a safe and supportive environment. For that reason, Council is committed to ensuring that its IDEA committee is comprised only of people with lived experiences or are direct family or support workers for those that are.
5. The relationship between law enforcement and at-risk communities is often tenuous and fragile. More work needs to be done to support a more positive and healthy sharing of ideas, community meetings, focus groups, and one-to-one face to face meetings with members of our African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq and other marginalized communities. Council will work with Kentville Police Service's Board of Police Commissioners to listen to and work together for positive solutions, so each person feels safe and supported in their own neighbourhood.
6. Community development requires Kentville to support all needs in our community from public safety, to health, employment, social programs, accessibility, and social opportunities. To improve community relationships with people disengaged because of social status, lacking employment, in need of housing, or access to needed programs, we will facilitate the creation of a Mayor's Roundtable on Social Development to listen for ways to support those most in need and develop Action Plans to put these words and ideas into action.

Strategic Priority Five: Investing in Communication and Partnerships

Communications and working together as a community (partnerships) are two of the most basic fundamental things we can support as a Town. Communications can take many forms from websites, social media, mass mailing lists, newspapers, radio, newsletters, posters, public meetings, and the list goes on. Despite the many opportunities for communicating with the public, Council must find the best way to do so effectively for each issue that arises and requires consultation or communication. It is not possible to consult on most issues, as it would slow down already cumbersome government decision making processes. It is therefore important that citizens follow Kentville's website, meetings, and notices, or stay in regular communications with the mayor or councillors if they have a special interest in a topic.

The second part of this priority is partnerships. Local governments are very good at some things, and community groups and citizens are much better at other items. We must all work together to make the best use of our collective strengths. Council is committed to finalizing a new long-term funding and operating agreement with Kentville Fire and supporting efforts by Kentville's Board of Police Commissioners to engage with and support residents' needs to feel safer in their own neighbourhoods and downtown. Additionally, we must continue to work cooperatively with our adjacent towns and municipalities, as well as the other three levels of government to advance projects that will benefit Kentville like stormwater improvements and a new Arena.

Not only must we be effective at communications and partnerships, we are committed to being better at making our citizens aware of our work, successes, and challenges on a regular basis.



Town of Kentville is committed to Investing in Communication and Partnerships with the following strategies and plans:

1. Kentville will develop its first ever comprehensive Communications Strategy to improve communications with staff, general public, businesses, and community groups. This will involve working with the community to develop the best and most effective means of communicating including methods, timing, and evaluation to ensure it is working as hoped.
2. The value we place on our emergency first responders cannot be underestimated, and developing strong, clear, and open relationships with these agencies and departments is critical to the health and safety of our neighbourhoods and downtown. To that end, Kentville will finalize a new long-term funding and operational agreement with Kentville Fire Department that supports and prioritizes volunteer recruitment and retention, public safety, and efficient use of taxpayers funding for a sustainable fire service.
3. A large part of public safety involves Kentville Police Service having the ability to support positive public relations and community awareness. To increase public awareness and education of the roles and responsibilities of community policing, and how the community can contribute to a safe Kentville, Council will support the Board of Police Commissioners in the hosting of public regional police meetings and focus groups each year on critical issues such as hate crimes.
4. Climate change mitigation and adaption requires the work of many partners and agencies with a focused approach. We will work with our community, federal, provincial, and indigenous governments to lead our community in becoming more resilient and prepared, such as work on controlling the Hemlock Woolly-Adelgid insect from Kentville to protect against increased flooding.
5. Our downtown business core and industrial park businesses are the driving forces for local employment and require our support. We will develop and implement a Kentville business marketing campaign and new façade program, including employee advertising campaigns to bring attention to our many employment opportunities and retail businesses offerings so residents can shop more locally.
6. Much of our communications with the public now is through our on-line presence. We are committed to improving these communications channels with a new website, as well as more consistent messaging for emergency measures, infrastructure projects, and ongoing council initiatives and priorities.
7. We will create and produce an annual report of all town operations to summarize our successes and challenges during the year along with our planned work and activities for the upcoming year to increase communication and promote greater accountability for the use of taxpayers' money.

Summary and Next Steps

Planning is hard and being accountable for the results is even harder when much of the success is outside the scope of the Town of Kentville specifically. But we must lead with enthusiasm and hope, and not be scared of the hard work ahead or the challenges we will face. The only way to avoid criticism is to do nothing, and to do nothing is to fall behind. We must be bold and act bravely, now.

Change requires council support, citizen support, business support, as well as support from community groups and other governments. Change is easier when we are prepared and this plan sets out the arduous work ahead for council and staff to become more prepared. Some initiatives will cost millions of dollars, while others will cost very little other than a great investment of time and commitment. All are equally important and need to work harmoniously together and not in silos competing against each other.

To support this ambitious plan is the requirement for reporting to keep us on track and accountable. Council will publicly report annually on its progress with these strategic priorities and more often during each year for specific projects. This will keep us focused, but also allow an opportunity to make small or big changes as our community needs change and opportunities arise. We must be nimble and efficient.

There may be skepticism that this will simply be another report or plan with great platitudes without any push for implementation or the fortitude to move forward. Council is committed to making sure that is not the case and that positive changes noted in the plan are prioritized and evaluated. We know that the plan cannot all be accomplished immediately, and that is why it is a 4-year plan. Some strategies will happen in year 1 while others will not occur until later years. We ask for your patience as we work through the priorities based on timing, staff capacity, and financial resources.

Kentville is poised for positive change and significant growth if we embrace and plan for it wisely. Our children and grandchildren deserve the opportunity to be successful and live in a great community to live, work, recreate, and raise a family. Now is the time to act and make them proud.

Let's all take a deep breath of fresh air and get on with the important work ahead, together.



