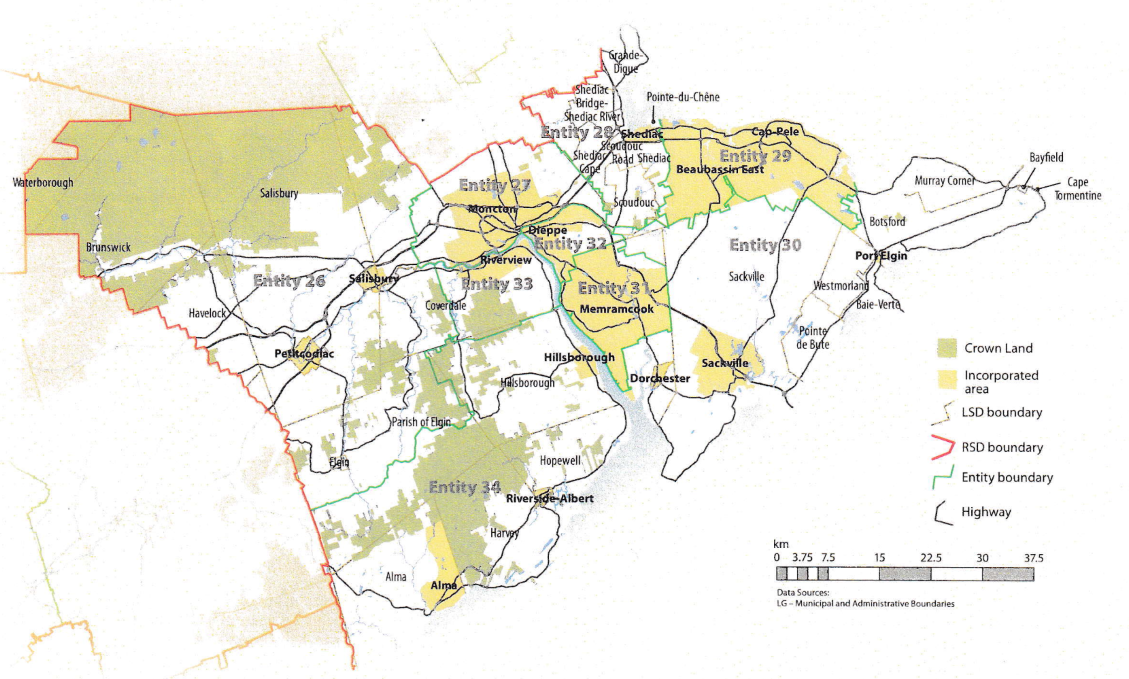
An Image of the Future – Entity 34 and Regional Service District 7

To illustrate the benefits of this new framework, take the example of Entity 34. For the duration of this discussion the municipality shall be referred to as Entity 34, as while the municipality could conceivably adopt the name Albert or Hillsborough, the naming of the 53 municipal entities remains a task for the citizens of each proposed entity.[[1]](#footnote-2) Leaving the name of each entity undetermined is an important measure for the development of sustainable new municipal identities to compliment those of the existing towns, villages, and LSDs.

**Geographic Boundaries**

Entity 34 would be comprised of the Villages of Riverside-Albert, Alma, and Hillsborough, and the Alma, Harvey, Hopewell, and Hillsborough LSD. Most of the entity’s Crown Lands would be concentrated in the geographic centre, straddling historic parish lines.

**Demographic Base**

The total population of the municipality would be approximately 4100 people – a decrease of 5% from 2011. In accordance with the *Official Languages Act*, Entity 34 would be required to operate bilingually because the Francophone minority is less than 20% of the overall population.

As it stands today, 55% of the proposed entity’s population live in unincorporated areas and are accordingly without representative local government. In addition to the lack of democratic institutions, the lack of incorporated municipal entities means that there is no land use planning to coordinate economic development. Amalgamation into Entity 34 would therefore benefit the residents of the affected LSDs by enabling them to use the resources they possess and control this development through local representative institutions.

In addition, amalgamation would benefit the proposed entity’s existing municipalities’ democratic institutions. In the 2012 quadrennial election, Alma reported an impressive voter turnout rate of 75.5%. However, in 2016, Alma was unable to field enough candidates to hold a contested election. Like many other communities in New Brunswick, this pairing of high voter turnout rates and elections by acclamation indicates a contraction in the community’s pool of potential candidates despite a willingness and enthusiasm in the electorate. While less quantifiable than voter participation, if a community cannot sustain a pool of interested, qualified, and dedicated potential candidates for public office, the community’s democratic institutions will suffer.

The proposed entity’s two other existing municipalities do not appear to be affected by this challenge as of yet, indicating that by amalgamating the collective potential candidate pool could be made more sustainable. Riverside-Albert has reported similar voter turnout rates without notable acclamations. Hillsborough has a similar record of contested elections, though the community has a problem with low voter turnout.

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| **Voter Turnout by Existing Municipality** | | |
| **Municipality** | **Voter Participation 20121** | **Voter Participation 20162** |
| Riverside-Albert | 69.09% | 68.40% |
| Alma | 75.50% | acclaimed |
| Hillsborough | 44.74% | 40.29% |
| 1. Elections NB | | |

The solution for the municipalities of proposed Entity 34 is therefore to expand incorporation and suffrage to contiguous LSDs. Expanding the electorate creates a greater competition of interests, leading to better accountability. However, the more immediate benefit for the proposed municipality is the expansion of the potential candidate pool. An example of such a strategy succeeding can be observed in the Village of Eel River Crossing. In 2014, a number of contiguous LSDs voted to join the nearby village, resulting in a 2015 election which was highly contested. Eel River Crossing’s first election saw 8 candidates compete for 4 at-large councillor positions. Of these 8 candidates, 4 were from previously unincorporated areas. The amalgamation of contiguous local governance entities should therefore be considered by the residents of the entities concerned.

**Financial Base**

Entity 34 would have a financial base capable of service provision beyond a simple aggregation of the assessed value of each constituent municipality and LSD. Under the new framework, municipal revenues will come from a combination of equalization payments from the provincial government, municipal property taxes, and other user fees related to services like water and wastewater usage.

Because its population is below 10000, Entity 34 would qualify as a ‘Group A’ municipality. As Entity 34’s assessment base per capita would be greater than the group average, it would not be entitled to an annual equalization grant. Rather, equal opportunity among the 53 municipalities would be guaranteed by its expanded tax warrant. With the tax room transfer from the provincial government to municipal governments included in the proposed new framework, Entity 34’s assessment base of $280,319,500 would be able to yield more revenue than it could under the current local governance regime. Equal Opportunity among municipalities remains a priority in the new framework, but the primary guarantor of said equality is now tax warrants rather than equalization payments.

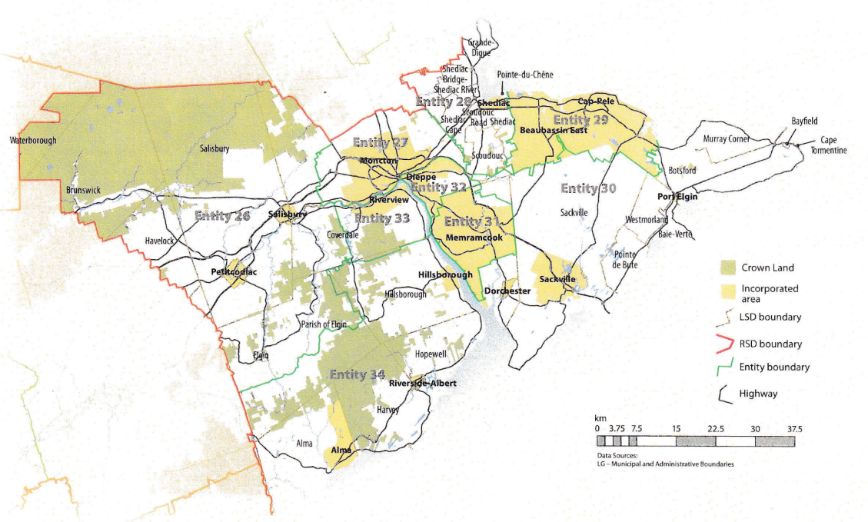
Of course, this tax room transfer does not necessitate that property tax rates will increase by $1.50 per $100 of valuation across Entity 34, nor does it indicate that the entire municipality will operate with one uniform property tax rate. Because Entity 34 would be composed of suburban and rural populations and since the level of local services may vary considerably within the same municipality, existing provisions regarding differentiated tax rates within the same municipality would need to be used. Residents within each municipality should be taxed for the level of services they receive.[[2]](#footnote-3)

As has been seen in many municipalities around the province, municipalities can adopt differing tax rates for different areas under their jurisdiction. For example, while Eel River Crossing’s property tax rate in 2011 was $1.32 per $100, each former LSD had different, lower property tax rates appropriate to their circumstances. Similar situations can be found across the province, with some cities even imposing different tax rates for those inside and outside the urban center. Entity 34 could easily implement a two tiered property tax regime similar to Fredericton and Dieppe where those inside the urban area and those outside are charged substantially different rates.

Overall, then, Entity 34 would have a financial base appropriate to its size and population. With such a financial base, the municipal entity could be as ambitious or cautious in its service provision as its residents please.

**Division of Municipal and Provincial Responsibilities**

In addition to policing, emergency measures planning, fire prevention and suppression, roads, and garbage disposal, a municipality may choose to enlarge its role and provide a great number of other services. Many municipalities also take responsibility for local arts and culture, parks and recreation, public transportation, and more. Whether or not this sort of expansion is done is entirely up to the residents of Entity 34, and the tax rates of the entity would reflect this level of service.

Many of these services, however, would be better served being provided at the regional rather than local level. Rather than leaving some services in the care of the province, the new framework provides Regional Service Districts within which municipalities can collaborate on such basic services as policing, waste management, economic development, and land-use planning. Collaboration on these issues will further reduce cost for services, allowing property tax rates to remain at a reasonable rate.

Entity 34 would belong to RSD 7 along with its neighbors Entities 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, and 33. As with each municipal entity, RSDs could conceivably be named, but this would be left to each to determine for itself. All entities would be partners in the provision of regional services, with each contributing in accordance with their respective demographic and tax bases.

While this region is far too large to be incorporated into a single municipality, the populations nonetheless have a great deal of shared experiences and challenges. RSD 7 covers both the Westmorland and Albert counties, with Moncton as the economic hub. The distribution of commuters in these counties demonstrate the region’s economic interdependence. Not including Moncton proper as a significant majority of the city’s commuters understandably remain within their own community for work, Westmorland county’s municipalities and LSDs report nearly 70% of commuters as leaving their community of origin for work each day while remaining within Westmorland county. Likewise, nearly 60% of Albert county’s commuters travel outside their county of origin in order to work in the economic hub of Moncton. This economic interdependence represents both a need for collaboration in planning and opportunity for collaboration in service provision.

By better enabling municipalities to provide the services their citizens require through cooperation in service provision, the new framework would therefor clarify the distinction between municipal and provincial responsibilities. While today the service provision of roads, animal control, and policing is dependent on whether or not you live in an incorporated or unincorporated local governance entity, in the new framework, all of these services will be provided by the municipal government. When the residents know exactly who is accountable for what, services will improve.

**Summation**

Overall, Entity 34 would allow all residents to enjoy a comparable level of service in correlation with their level of taxation, to feel represented at a local level and have a real say in how their property tax dollars are being spent, and create a municipal entity that is sustainable enough to navigate the demographic and economic challenges of the 21st century.

1. Finn, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Finn, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)