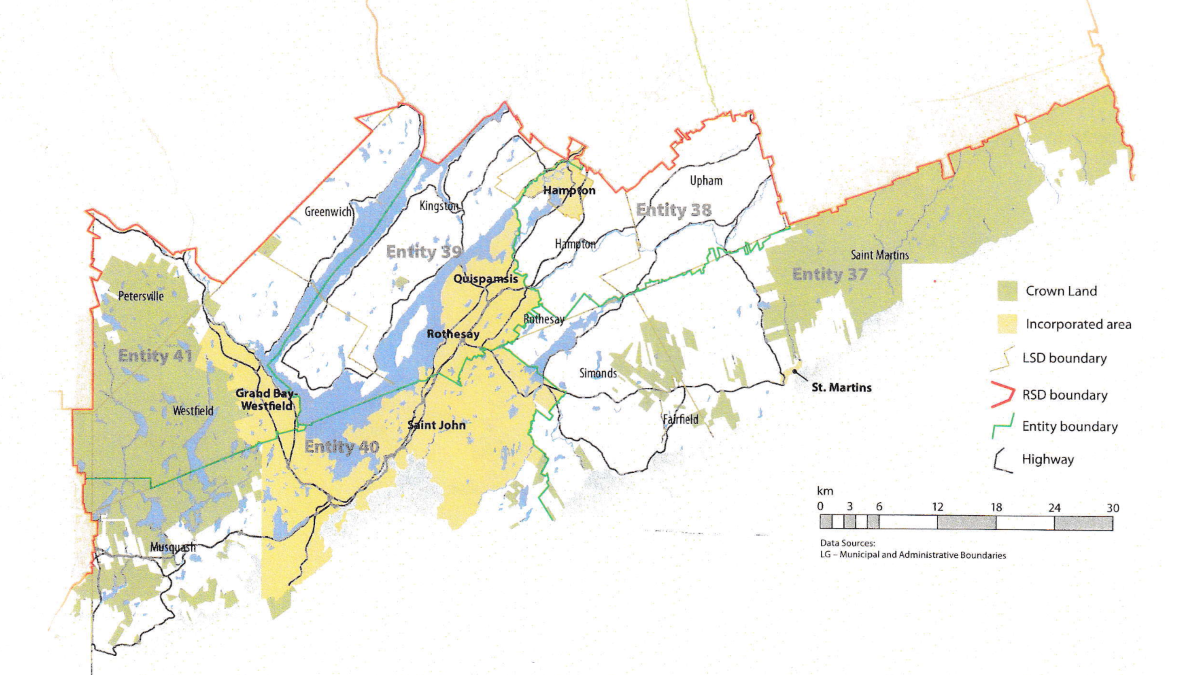
An Image of the Future – Entity 41 and Regional Service District 10

To illustrate the benefits of this new framework, take the example of Entity 41. For the duration of this discussion the municipality shall be referred to as Entity 41, as while the municipality could conceivably adopt the name Westfield, Grand Bay, or Greenwich, 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 41 would be comprised of the Town of Grand Bay-Westfield and the Westfield, Greenwich, and Petersville LSDs. The majority of the included portions the Westfield and Petersville LSDs would be Crown Lands, with the inhabited areas being primarily concentrated around the main regional roads.

**Demographic Base**

The total population of the municipality would be approximately 7300 people – a population which has decreased by 3% since 2011. In accordance with the *Official Languages Act*, Entity 41 would not be required to operate bilingually because the Francophone minority is less than 20% of the overall population.

As it stands today, 31% 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 41 would therefore benefit the residents of the effected LSDs by enabling them to use the resources they possess and control this development through local representative institutions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Voter Turnout by Existing Municipality** | | |
| **Municipality** | **Voter Participation 20121** | **Voter Participation 20162** |
| Grand Bay-Westfield | 39.70% | 53.19% |
| 1. Elections NB | | |

In addition, amalgamation would benefit the proposed entity’s existing municipalities’ democratic institutions. While Grand Bay-Westfield’s most recent voter turnout rate was well above the provincial average, the previous quadrennial election saw far fewer voters participate. Expanding the electorate would foster a greater competition of interests, leading to better accountability and incentivize more regular voter turnout. As has been witnessed in many Rural Communities, voter turnout among previously unincorporated populations is reasonably high, indicating that the inclusion of contiguous unincorporated populations can improve voter turnouts in existing municipalities.

**Financial Base**

Entity 41 would also 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 41 would qualify as a ‘Group A’ municipality. As Entity 38’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 38’s assessment base of $577,994,000 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.

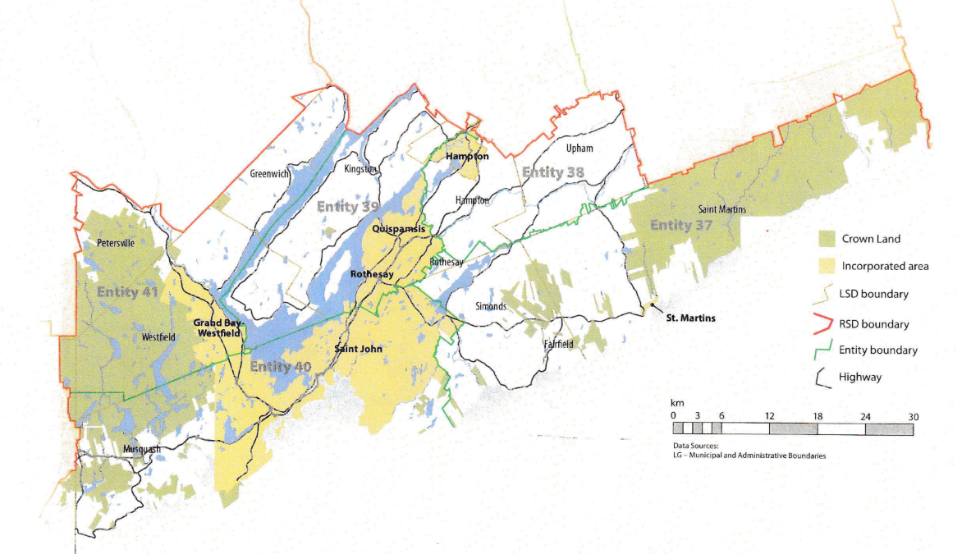
Of course, the tax room transferred from the provincial government does not necessitate that property tax rates will increase by $1.50 per $100 of valuation across Entity 41, nor does it indicate that the entire municipality will operate with one uniform property tax rate. Because Entity 41 would be 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. If created, Entity 41 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 41 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 41, and the tax rates of the entity would reflect this level of service.

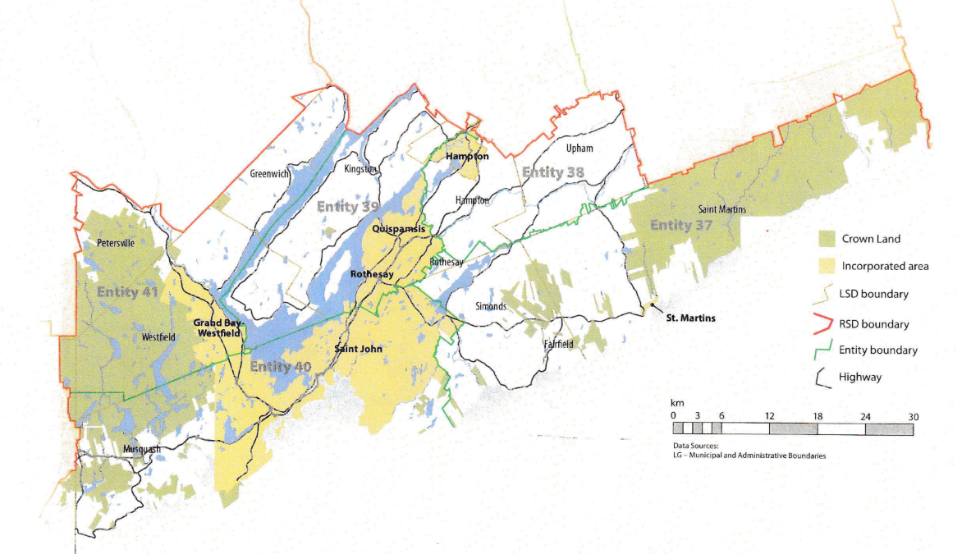
Many of these services, however, would be better served being provided at the regional rather than local level. Rather than leaving some services in the care of the province, the new framework provides Regional Service Districts within which municipalities can collaborate on such basic services as policing, 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 41 would belong to RSD 10 along with Entity 41, 39, 40, and 41. 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 perhaps too large to be incorporated into a single municipality, the populations nonetheless have a great deal of shared experiences and challenges. RSD 10 covers portions of both Kings and Saint John counties and the distribution of commuters reflects the economic interdependence within these areas. In Entities 38, 39, and 41 – the proposed entities included in Kings County – the vast majority of commuters are travel outside Kings county to work in Saint John. While 71% of commuters in Kings County travel outside their county of origin, 76% of Entity 41’s commuters leave their own communities but remain within Saint John County. Furthermore, 91% of Entity 40’s commuters work within their own community.

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.

Alternatively, the communities included in RSD 9 could be amalgamated into a specialized Regional Municipality. While not advisable anywhere else in the province, the communities in the greater Saint John area could conceivably be combined into one larger entity considering their pre-existing collaborative service provision and integrated economies.

This hypothetical Regional Municipality would need to be organized in such a way as to offset the dominance of the existing City of Saint John while working to use the collective resources available to the region for the benefit of all. The RM’s population would be nearly twice that of Saint John, with the total population of all other included local governance entities being nearly the same as that of Saint John proper. Accordingly, as with the administrative boundaries proposed in the rest of the new framework, the administrative and ward boundaries of a potential RM of Saint John would need to disregard existing or historic boundaries. Like other contiguous but administratively independent communities around the province, the differences between the communities of the greater Saint John area are exacerbated by the narcissism of minor difference. When attempting to reorganize the wards or administrative subdivisions of the potential RM then, it is important to re-examine which populations actually have the most in common regardless of anachronistic administrative boundaries. For example, the populations of Grand Bay-Westfield and western Saint John along the Westfield Road are far more similar than the populations included in Saint John’s broader “West side.” Organizing new wards and administrative subdivisions along these lines will allow for the creation of new and harmonious community identities and importantly for the populations of the existing communities other than Saint John would help decrease the population center’s dominance of the region’s representative institutions.

**Summation**

Overall, Entity 41 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)