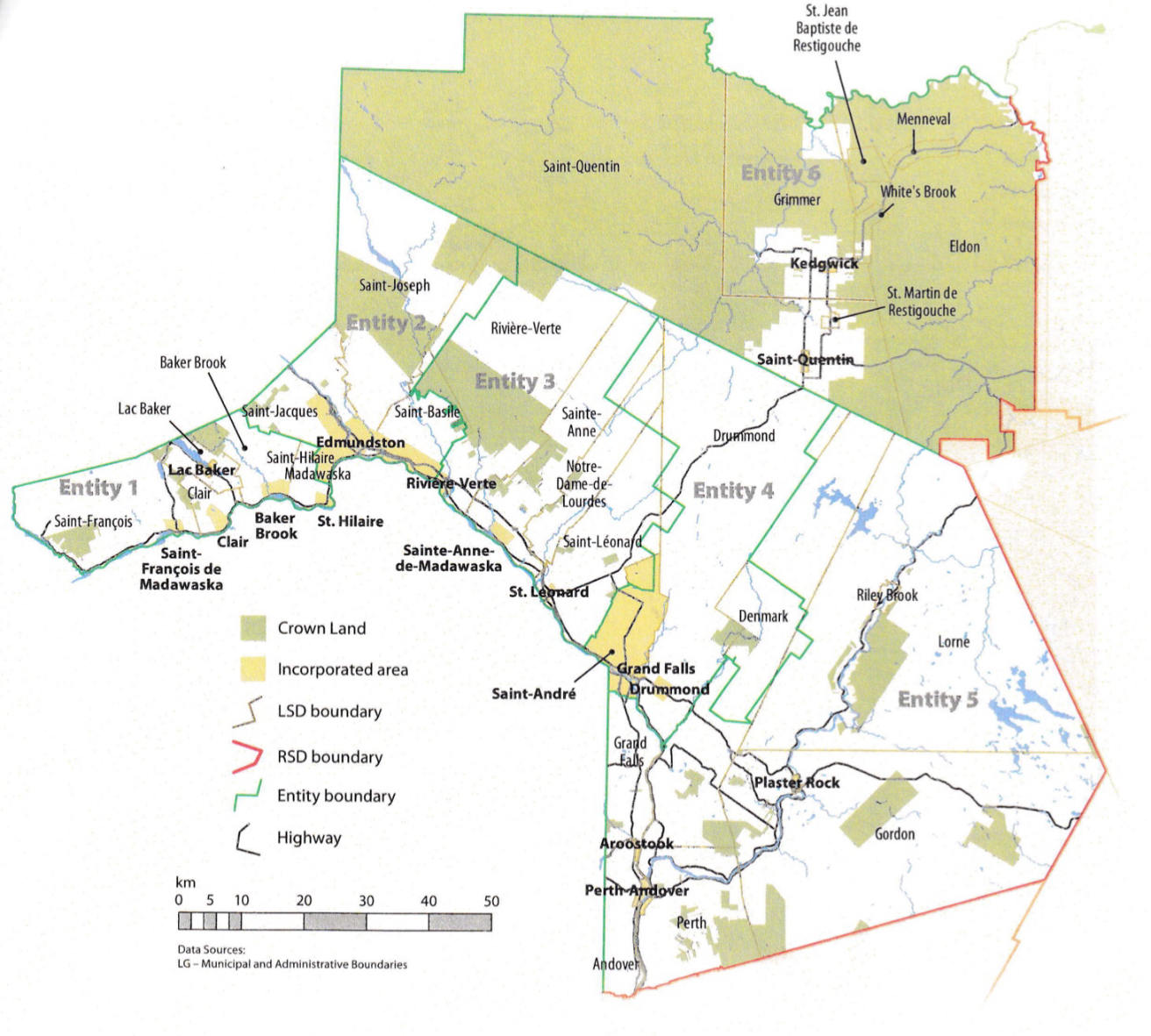
An Image of the Future – Entity 5 and Regional Service District 1

To illustrate the benefits of this new framework, take the example of Entity 5. For the duration of this discussion the municipality shall be referred to as Entity 5, as while the municipality could conceivably adopt Plaster Rock, Perth-Andover, Lorne, or any other name, the naming of the 53 municipal entities remains a task for the citizens of each proposed entity.[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 5 would be comprised of the villages of Aroostook, Perth-Andover, and Plaster Rock, and the Denmark, Grand Falls, Andover, Perth, Gordon, Lorne, and Riley Brook LSDs. The municipal entity would stretch across The bottommost corner of Madawaska county. Notably the boundaries of the proposed entity would not correlate with the old parish lines meaning the population estimates for the following have included only the LSDs and municipalities with a significant portion of their area included in the proposed Entity 5 as the census data is still divided along existing administrative boundaries.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Voter Turnout by Existing Municipality** | | |
| **Municipality** | **Voter Participation 20121** | **Voter Participation 2016** |
| Aroostook | acclaimed | 44.0% |
| Perth-Andover | 55.0% | 61.5% |
| Plaster Rock | 74.3% | 75.5% |
| 1. Elections NB | | |

**Demographic Base**

The total population of the municipality would be approximately 9400 people. Since 2011 the proposed entity has lost about 7% of its population, or 700 people. In the original 2008 Finn report, this municipal entity was conceived of as being a Group B municipality with a population of 10000 to 40000. Given the population decline in the intervening years, it is now possible that the area needs to be expanded further. In accordance with the *Official Languages Act*, Entity 5 would not be required to operate bilingually because 84% of the residents are Francophones.

As it stands today, the democratic health of the proposed entity deteriorating. While Plaster Rock and Perth-Andover have reported above average voter turnout for the last two quadrennial elections, Aroostook has seen one election by acclamation and another with a voter participation rate below the provincial average. Furthermore, in 2018 it had to hold two separate by-elections because of Mayoral acclamations and subsequent resignations. Aroostook represents a fusion of the two largest threats to local government in New Brunswick: voter apathy and shrinking candidate pools. The rest of the proposed Entity 5 – representing over half the total population – reside in unincorporated areas and so have no elected representation at the local level.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Status of By-Elections for Mayors and/or Councillors** | | | | |
| **Municipality** | **2018 By-Election(s)** | | **2019 By-Election(s)** | |
| **Mayor** | **Councillor** | **Mayor** | **Councillor** |
| Aroostook | 2 Acclaimed | Contested | N/A | N/A |
| Perth-Andover | N/A | N/A | N/A | Acclaimed |
| Plaster Rock | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 1. Elections NB | | | | |

All three of these problems can be addressed with the new framework. Being reorganized as Entity 5, the electorate will be significantly expanded allowing for more competitive elections. The mixture of suburban, and rural populations will allow for a great diversity of interests further incentivizing voter participation. Mass voter turnout in formerly unincorporated areas has been reported in the relatively novel Rural Communities, which on average report voter turnouts of 10-20 points above the provincial participation rate.

The most important benefit of incorporating the existing LSDs, however, is that these new sections of the electorate will create a sustainable pool of potential candidates. While there have not been uncontested elections in either Perth-Andover or Plaster Rock in the last two election cycles, the three municipalities in the proposed Entity 5 are seeing their populations decrease far more quickly than the unincorporated areas. Because the population of these LSDs represent over half of the proposed entity’s total population, enabling their participation as both voters and candidates will give Entity 5 a better chance at developing healthy and sustainable democratic institutions.

**Financial Base**

Entity 5 will 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 above below 10,000, Entity 5 would qualify as a ‘Group A’ municipality. As Entity 5’s assessment base per capita would be lesser than the group average, the entity would be entitled to an annual equalization grant of $921,738. With the tax room transfer from the provincial government to municipal governments included in the proposed new framework, Entity 5’s assessment base of $556,189,500 will 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 5, nor does it indicate that the entire municipality will operate with one uniform property tax rate. Because Entity 5 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-2)

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.

Overall, then, Entity 5 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 5, 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 5 would belong to RSD 1 along with its neighbours Entities 1 to 6, covering all of Madawaska county and a portion of Restigouche county. As with each municipal entity, RSDs could conceivably be named, but this would be left to each to determine for itself. All 6 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. The commuting population of RSD 1 is relatively evenly split between those who commute to work within their own community (46%) and those who commute to a different community within the same county or RSD (40%). Entity 5 has comparable commuter rates, with 46% remaining in their own communities and 48% travelling to a neighbouring community.

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 5 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-1)
2. Finn, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)