An Image of the Future – Entity 53 and Regional Service District 12

To illustrate the benefits of this new framework, take the example of Entity 53. For the duration of this discussion the municipality shall be referred to as Entity 53, as while the municipality could conceivably adopt Florenceville-Bristol or any other name, 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 53 would be comprised of the Town of Florenceville-Bristol, the Villages of Centreville and Bath, and the Lakeville, Wilmot, Wicklow, Upper Kent, Peel, Glassville, Aberdeen, and Kent LSDs. The municipal entity would be bordered by Victoria and York counties, as well as the United States. The only significant expanses of Crown Land would be in the Kent and Aberdeen areas.

**Demographic Base**

The total population of the municipality would be approximately 9400 people. Since 2011, this number had declined, but remained relatively stable. In accordance with the *Official Languages Act*, Entity 53 would not be required to operate bilingually because 96% of the residents are Anglophones.

As it stands today, the democratic health of the proposed entity is deteriorating. Over half of the inhabitants of the proposed Entity 53 currently live in unincorporated areas and are accordingly without local representative government. While Centreville has seen consistently high voter turnout in the previous two quadrennial elections, the proposed Entity 53’s largest municipality, Florenceville-Bristol is in crisis. In the 2012 quadrennial election, both Bath and Florencville-Bristol reported voter turnout rates in the high forties. Since then, however, Florencville-Bristol has become the single worst municipality in terms of voter participation.

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| **Voter Turnout by Existing Municipality** |
| **Municipality** | **Voter Participation 20121** | **Voter Participation 2016** |
| Bath | 46.6% | acclaimed |
| Centreville | 58.7% | 56.8% |
| Florenceville-Bristol | 49.2% | 13.1% |
| 1. Elections NB |

In 2016, Florenceville-Bristol reported only 13% of its population as having cast a ballot, the largest drop in voter participation across the province. Following this 73% drop in voter turnout, two council positions were vacated, necessitating byelections. Because the candidate pool is so small, however, these byelections were not able to be held because no candidates submitted their names for consideration. While the two positions were filled the following year in contested elections, the fact that not one but two positions went unfilled for a year is a cause for alarm. Whats more, the frequency of these byelections may inadvertently increase voter apathy. It is unlikely that Florenceville-Bristol will report a second turnout rate comparable to 2016, but the limited pool of potential candidates may nonetheless diminish any potential recovery in voter participation.

By amalgamating into the proposed Entity 53, the size of the electorate and candidate pool would increase significantly. 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. Because the population of these LSDs represent just less than half of the proposed entity’s total population, enabling their participation as both voters and candidates will give Entity 53 a better chance at developing healthy and sustainable democratic institutions.

**Financial Base**

Entity 53 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 below 10000, Entity 53 would qualify as a ‘Group A’ municipality. As Entity 53’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 53’s assessment base of $676,028,700 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.

Beyond this unconditional grant, however, Entity 53 will have additional revenue raising power. Of course, this tax room transfer does not necessitate that property tax rates will increase by $1.50 per $100 of valuation across Entity 53, nor does it indicate that the entire municipality will operate with one uniform property tax rate. Because Entity 53 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. Edmundston currently has a single property tax rate, but if the proposed entity was created, Entity 53 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 53 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 53, 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 53 would belong to RSD 12 along with its neighbours Entities 51 and 52, covering Carleton county and the western portion of York county. As with each municipal entity, RSDs could conceivably be named, but this would be left to each to determine for itself. All 3 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. 63% of commuters travel out of their own community every day, but remain within their own county, indicating a high level of economic interconnectivity in RSD 12. Likewise, in the four local governance entities which are located in York county, commuters who travel out of their own county and into another is the largest demographic, indicating these communities’ connection to Carleton county rather than the expansive York county.

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 53 would allow all residents of the province’s northern panhandle 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)