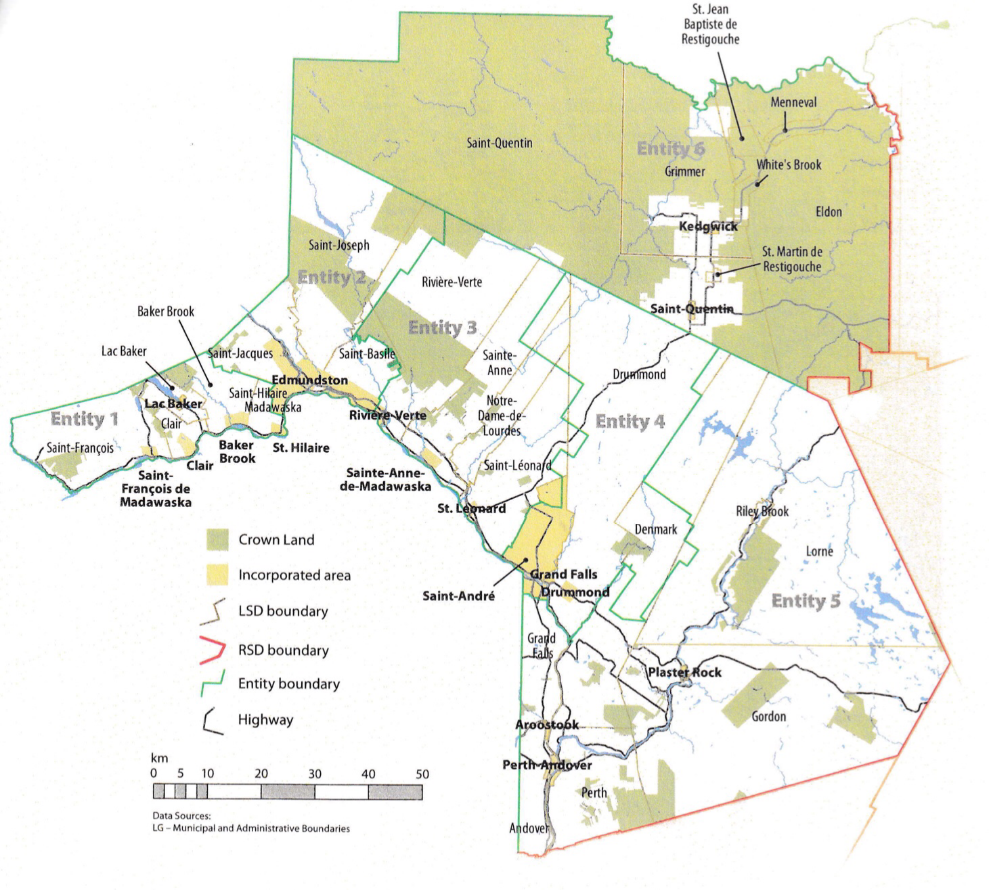
An Image of the Future – Entity 6 and Regional Service District 1

To illustrate the benefits of this new framework, take the example of Entity 6. For the duration of this discussion the municipality shall be referred to as Entity 6, as while the municipality could conceivably adopt Restigouche, Saint-Quentin, Kedgwick, or any other name, the naming of the 53 municipal entities remains a task for the citizens of each 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 6 would be comprised of the Town of Saint-Quentin, the Rural Community of Kedgwick, and the Saint-Quentin, Eldon, St. Martin de Restigouche, White’s Brook, St. Jean Baptiste de Restigouche, and Menneval LSDs.

The municipal entity would span the Western flank of Restigouche county, with its Northern border being Quebec, its Southern border being the county line, and its Eastern border running parallel to the historical Addington parish line. The majority of the entity would be Crown land.

**Demographic Base**

The total population of the municipality would be approximately 6400 people. The decrease in population since 2011 has been negligible with the growth in the Saint-Quentin Town and parish offsetting population decreases in other areas. In accordance with the *Official Languages Act*, Entity 6 would not be required to operate bilingually because nearly 93% of the residents are Francophones.

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| **Voter Turnout by Existing Municipality** | | |
| **Municipality** | **Voter Participation 20121** | **Voter Participation 2016** |
| Kedgwick | 78.2% | 73.7% |
| Saint-Quentin | 61.4% | acclaimed |
| 1. Elections NB | | |

The unification of the region’s population would improve the state of local democratic institutions. As it stands today, the vast majority of the proposed entity’s landmass has no representative local government, and accordingly, no local land use planning. The state of democratic institutions in the proposed entity’s two incorporated areas, Saint-Quentin and Kedgwick, show very different levels of political engagement and democratic health.

Having recently amalgamated with the surrounding LSDs, Kedgwick had a remarkable voter turnout rate in the previous quadrennial municipal election. Kedgwick’s 73.69% voter turnout rate is the highest among Rural Communities, but even with the outliers of Hanwell and Campobello included, the average voter turnout rate of Rural Communities is ten points ahead of the provincial average. Kedgwick’s success is therefore indicative of the benefit and necessity of extending representative government not previously unincorporated areas.

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| **Status of By-Elections for Mayors and/or Councillors** | | | | |
| **Municipality** | **2017 By-Election(s)** | | **2018 By-Election(s)** | |
| **Mayor** | **Councillor** | **Mayor** | **Councillor** |
| Kedgwick | N/A | 2 Acclaimed | N/A | Acclaimed |
| Saint-Quentin | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 1. Elections NB | | | | |

Saint-Quentin, on the other hand, represents a common trend across the north of the province. On average, northern communities’ voter turnout rates are higher than the provincial average – when there are enough candidates to actually contest an election. In the 2012 quadrennial municipal election, Saint-Quentin reported a turnout rate of 61% or 15 points higher than that cycle’s overall average. However, one candidate withdrew from the election. In 2016, there were not enough candidates to contest the election, so the councillors were elected by acclamation, but even then only 4 of the 5 seats were actually filled. Rather than hold a byelection, the municipality chose to eliminate the position, reducing the size of the council to 4. Taken together, these two election cycles clarify the problem facing Saint-Quentin and the north of the province more generally: voters are engaged and are willing to turn out in high numbers, but there is simply not a big enough pool of candidates to sustain healthy democratic institutions.

The new framework we propose would address this issue by expanding the demographic base available to each municipality. By combining the area’s municipalities and incorporating the various LSDs, Entity 6 will both enfranchise the 2200 inhabitants of currently unincorporated land and provide a new pool of willing and capable potential candidates. A similar outcome has been witnessed 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.

**Financial Base**

Entity 6 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 6 would qualify as a ‘Group A’ municipality, but its assessment base per capita would be significantly lower than the group average. Accordingly, the estimated annual revenue for Entity 6 from equalization payments would be $537,479 annually. With the tax room transfer from the provincial government to municipal governments included in the proposed new framework, Entity 6’s assessment base of $385,385,800 would also 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 6, nor does it indicate that the entire municipality will operate with one uniform property tax rate. Because Entity 6 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. As the communities within Entity 6 move forward together, it is entirely possible that each former local governance entity maintain their own respective property tax regimes, though strict adherence to such a scheme would fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered by their amalgamation.

Overall, then, Entity 6 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 6, 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 6 would belong to RSD 1 along with its neighbours Entities 1 to 5, 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 community 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%). It is clear, therefore, that economic hubs such as Edmunston and Grand Falls are important sources of employment for the region as a whole, and such economic interconnection requires collaboration in land use planning and economic development policy.

Entity 6, however, is far more economically insulated than some of its neighbours. Given that the communities in the proposed entity are in a different county than the rest of RSD 1, rather than looking for those commuting to a different community within the same census division to gage the level of economic integration between Entity 6 and the rest of the RSD, we need to look for those commuting outside their own census division. In the case of Entity 6, this is only about 4% of the population. The remainder are generally split between those commuting within their own communities and those traveling within their own census division.

However, Entity 6 would benefit from shared service provision. Given that its financial base will be weaker than its neighbours, sharing the burden of service provision will allow the municipal entity to better address its own affairs. In part, this need for sharing services is why Entity 6 is part of RSD 1 rather than RSD 2 with the rest of Restigouche county. RSD 1’s five other municipalities will be able to sustain an additional more rural community better than RSD 2 as the region’s financial base is better overall.

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 6 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)