



# Annual Report

2021-2022







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# MESSAGE FROM LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CHAIR PATTI DURKEE



**WHO WOULD** have thought that we would still be battling COVID? We are out and about but still needing to be cautious. Our doors are open, production is ramping up, lobster prices have reached an all time high, construction is in full swing and real estate is booming. We have an influx of folks from Ontario and Western Canada loving the rural lifestyle we have to offer.

The economy is good, but we are at a volatile time in our lives. Inflation is high, a war is going on in Europe, gas prices have shot up and local house prices are increasing. We are dealing with both a housing and employee shortage.

One positive outcome of Covid-19 is that businesses have changed their way of thinking and have allowed staff to work from home. Internet has improved thanks to the hardworking and committed board and staff of the Western REN, who worked with all levels of government. We are not quite finished but do have the commitment to ensure we will be well connected. It has been a long time coming but has made a huge difference to residents and newcomers.

When you look at our regional history, we thrived on immigration in the late 1800's and early to mid 1900's. The Town of Yarmouth is a prime example. Lebanese and

European Jews started as peddlers eventually starting their own businesses on Main Street, making it a very busy downtown. Today, we are starting to see new businesses popping up which are owned by newcomers. Our Western REN is making this possible by offering programs to support bringing people here, helping them settle and get established. The Connector and Immigration programs are vital to our region. Those individuals and families who arrived 100 years ago did not have the support being provided today.

In addition, those wanting to retire and sell their business can use the Succession Program to assist. Just this week I had a local business owner approach me about the service.

In order to fuel, pardon the pun, power in the region, the Western REN has been hard at work finding opportunities and solutions to enhance economic growth in the renewable energy sector.

We thank all seven partners, board, and staff for supporting these projects to move our region forward. We have made significant advancements to put our areas on the map and we certainly aren't finished. Let's continue to make our region a top-notch investment and place to live and do business.

*Patti Durkee*



# MESSAGE

## FROM BOARD CHAIR MARY THOMPSON



**AS I REFLECT** on the last year, I am struck by how my message from last year continues to resonate. From our 2021 AGM report, "to say that 2020-2021 has been challenging would be an understatement. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our region, province, country

and beyond. Yet, we have seen many examples of the resilience of our business community as they have pivoted to change and adapt to doing business during a pandemic."

Here we are in 2022 and we are entering the next phase, living with Covid. The statement above still rings true. As we emerge, we take with us lessons learned on new ways of working and doing business as well as begin to re-introduce coming back together face to face. I am struck by the resilience of our region and am pleased to know that the Western Regional Enterprise Network has played a leading role in supporting and helping businesses to navigate the way forward.

Our WREN has accomplished magnificent work in the last year. We have our refreshed Strategic Plan laying the path forward and a business plan that provides goals and objectives to complete the work. We remain focused on our strategic objectives:

'Increasing investment in Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that engage

- Private Sector
- Public Sector
- Addressing Talent Needs and Gaps

Our WREN has continued to provide programming such as Business Now, Continuous Improvement, Connector Program, and Succession planning. This year we added our new Local Immigration partnership program as a next step up from the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program that finished December 2021. Projects to support infrastructure in our region are ongoing and funding has been secured for energy initiatives. It has been a busy year.

Our CEO and several of the board members participated in the year long MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Accelerator program that has just recently concluded. This work has highlighted the need to work regionally to support innovation and create greater opportunities to work collectively across public and private sector to drive economic development.

This work does not happen without a dynamic staff and our CEO - Angelique LeBlanc. I am so proud of the work that they do on behalf of our region. My term as chair is finishing and I would be remiss in not highlighting the amazing Board of Directors that serve. It has been a privilege to work with these esteemed colleagues.

*Mary Thompson*

# MESSAGE FROM CEO ANGÉLIQUE LeBLANC



**AS WE FOUND** ourselves in the second year of a global pandemic, we have all had to test our resilience. Returning to COVID restrictions was the last thing anyone wanted, but this time, we knew what to do. The Western REN Team

was able to easily adapt our working environment, with virtual meetings introducing efficiencies to our schedules. For service-based industries, this was not an option and weighed heavily on business owners and staff alike.

What have we learned?

We've learned our mental health is important.

We've learned to watch and listen carefully to others.

We've learned to check in and be patient with ourselves.

We've learned to flip everything on its head, to embrace creativity and critical thinking as survival mechanisms, and a bridge to the future.

We've learned diverse perspectives spur creativity and innovation.

We've learned to be better prepared for the unknown.

The underpinning of all we do is guided by our core values: people are our core strength; diversity is crucial to sustainability; creativity drives entrepreneurship & innovation; people living here value rural and small-town lifestyle; partnerships are key to success and natural resources are our regional backbone.

With tremendous gratitude, I would like to recognize and thank Western REN staff and volunteers for the dedication, support, and direction they continue to provide, even through difficult times.

*Angélique LeBlanc*







Belliveau Shipyard Photo: Clifton Saulnier



# 2021-2022 RESULTS

YEAR 3 OF 3 OF OUR STRATEGY

## INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

**5 OF 6**

TARGETS ACHIEVED

## INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR

**5 OF 5**

TARGETS ACHIEVED

## ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

**1 OF 3**

TARGETS ACHIEVED

## OVERALL YEAR END RESULTS

**11 OF 14**

TARGETS REACHED

**= 79%**

# INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

## SUPPORTING THE HEART OF OUR REGION

### Sector Development Activities

- Business Growth Session
- COVID Update for Businesses
- Management and oversight of MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program, Team Western strategy development.
- BDC Path to Recovery Session



### BusinessNow

The Western REN's BusinessNow program helps businesses identify and overcome barriers to success.

It's an ongoing relationship-based model. Referrals could help businesses access capital, staff training, talent recruitment, accessing new markets & business planning assistance.



**291** clients,  
**62** referrals to partners





## Engaging with Chambers & Boards of Trade Across the Region

- Active participation in Regional Economic Development COVID-19 Response & Recovery Group
- Delivery of COVID Workplace Training Program with Yarmouth & Area Chamber of Commerce
- Meetings on Key Priorities



## Preparing Businesses for Transition

Support with complex decisions or valuations is offered through vetted consultants. Of the 10 businesses in the Succession program this year, 1 have sold at the time of publication.



**10** businesses participating, **1** sale

"The Succession Planning Program was a wonderful program that was well worth my time. The project helped me to evaluate the worth of my business in today's market with very little effort." – Chuck Collishaw, Owner of Chuck's Diner

## Continuous Improvement



Continuous Improvement Program Success Story  
Digby Print & Promo

CI projects help companies enhance competitiveness by eliminating waste and training the management team in the CI mindset which results in a highly efficient and competitive operations.

By enhancing productivity, companies are becoming more competitive against firms from both within the region and from far beyond.



**12** companies participated,  
including seafood companies, boat builders  
and agricultural businesses.

## Virtual Advice from a roster of experts

The Western REN's Virtual Advisor Program connects businesses with an experienced business advisor. Through this program the businesses receive one-to-one support from a seasoned professional to help them solve a unique challenge their business is facing.

Many businesses are better able to engage with e-commerce after participating in the REN Virtual Advisor Program



**10** companies matched  
with advisors



"Continuous Improvement Project benefitted the operation directly by improving organization, efficiency, organizational structure and accountability. The Introductory project that was offered through the Western REN improved internal logistics, made us more focused, and reduced waste in time, travel and costs." – Andrew Newell, Owner West Head Boat Builders Ltd.





Honey Bee's Deli & Ice Cream Parlor | Photo: Clifton Saulnier



# INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR

## Regional Opportunities for a Green Future

The Western REN is moving forward with the implementation of the Western Region Energy Investment Plan. This plan identifies multiple actions to strengthen our local economy, create green jobs, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Funding has been secured for a Residential Efficiency Retrofit project, focusing on strengthening energy efficiencies, thereby lowering energy expenditures for residents and businesses.

Other actions focus on local green energy generation and storage, which after short-term timelines can be paid off and generate revenue.

Combined, these actions aim to strengthen the region's energy security, resulting in fewer and shorter power outages.

## Access to Reliable, High-Speed Internet

The Western Regional Enterprise Network continues to work in partnership with the Municipalities of the Districts of Argyle, Barrington, Digby and Yarmouth, Develop Nova Scotia, and Bell Canada to bring fibre-optic service to over 7,000 underserved homes and businesses in Western Nova Scotia.

The project provides residences and businesses with access to Bell's all-fibre network, offering residents download speeds up to 1.5 Gigabits per second (Gbps), the fastest home internet speeds in the country, in addition to television and phone services.

**88** responses

supporting Internet related requests





## Working with Partners

The Western REN leads the Regional Economic Development COVID-19 Response & Recovery Group to align regionally around communications & service delivery to the Business Community. Participants are organisations who offer services to businesses in the Western Region and include Chambers and Boards of Trade, NS Works, Municipal Economic Development Officers, NSBI, CBDC, v, NSCC, Develop NS, YASTA, CDENE and more .

**14** meetings

took place this fiscal, with numerous working groups and initiatives spinning off from the initial group.



## Why Western NS

Western Nova Scotia is a globally renowned fishing region, with a highly developed ecosystem of over 1,100 companies including MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) certified fisheries and niche producers. Unparalleled greenfield opportunities in fisheries are provided, with creative entrepreneurs, innovative boatbuilders, artificial ecosystem development and a world-class R&D network. Rich in opportunities for green energy projects, it is the sunniest region within NS, which provides great photovoltaic potential. As a coastal area, the region also receives a fair amount of wind and has some of the highest performing wind energy locations in our province. Additionally, the Bay of Fundy boasts the highest tides in the world, welcoming testing opportunities for multiple tidal energy generators in the region. Finally, our region's Université Sainte-Anne is considered

the greenest little campus in Canada, with a wood chip-based heating system that offers opportunity for our province's forestry industry, which is currently at a crossroads.

The Western Region also has access to key markets, low business costs, unique Research & Development opportunities and is part of Canada's Ocean Supercluster.



**305** views by  
**169** users

in the past year of [www.westernren.ca](http://www.westernren.ca),  
'Invest in Opportunities'

## Investment Inquiries

When a developer or investor is looking for a location or a business to purchase, they will often reach out to local government offices, or directly to the Western REN.

The Western REN coordinates and streamlines correspondence. Responding to inquiries from a regional perspective demonstrates the full capacity of the Western Region to meet the investor's needs.



**11** inquiries were  
fielded over the past year.

# ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

Attracting and keeping newcomers & recent grads by connecting them to opportunities in our business community.

## Connecting Businesses with Talent

The Connector Program matches community and business leaders (Connectors) with skilled newcomers, local and international graduates, and other qualified local professionals (Connectees) in their industry of expertise.

Connectors are local business and community leaders who have a strong network. They can often be found making introductions within social, cultural, professional and economic circles.

Connectees are job ready newcomers & local and international graduates or underemployed skilled locals who are actively looking to launch their career in the Western Region. The Connector Program also hosts networking sessions throughout the year, such as Empowering Moms through Connections, the Newcomer Photography Project and Get Social Safely.



**41**  
New  
Connectors



**32**  
New  
Connectees



**16**  
Known Jobs Found  
by Connectees



**"THE CONNECTOR PROGRAM** opens so many doors to the workforce, networking with people you may not have known about that will help you with your journey. Never settle for less than you deserve, the Connector Program makes sure you've got the necessary contacts to pursue the career you want, not just a job. " **- Connectee**



## Planning Regionally for Immigration & Population Growth

The Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) established its two primary committees. The Partnership Council includes representation from settlement services, healthcare, education, employment services, social services, economic development and business sectors. The Immigrant Advisory Committee comprises 18 members from 13 different countries and several different immigration pathways.

Three surveys were broadly distributed focusing on Labour Needs, Community, and Immigrants. Results formed a baseline for the region and will inform future projects. They will also be instrumental in guiding how more than 20 organizations can better work together to improve services and living expenses for immigrants in our region.

The 2022-2025 Lip Strategic Plan and the 2022-2023 Annual Action Plans were completed with three identified priority areas:

- Attracting talent to our communities;
- Employer outreach and support;
- Raising awareness.

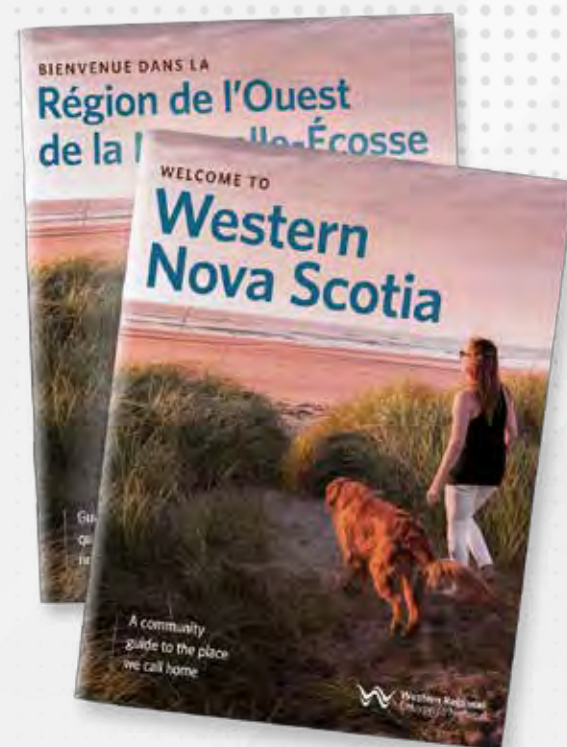
## Making it easier to hire skilled international talent

In its fifth and final year, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP), funded by ACOA and the Nova Scotia Office of Labour, Skills and Immigration, continued to support businesses in hiring internationally trained professionals to fill labour gaps. The Western REN AIP Manager provided support to businesses navigating the designation process and beyond. The Western REN is proud to have helped launch this pilot program in the region. Now that the program is permanent, our provincial and federal partners have resources in place to help businesses navigate the program.

**9** companies became  
designated through working with the  
Western REN by December 2021



**82** companies became  
designated in the Western Region  
since program launch.



# LOOKING FORWARD

## CHARTING THE COURSE

**THE WESTERN REN** has a new strategy; a roadmap for the next three years. It's about continuing to build a strong foundation, allowing Western REN and partners to work together and to be strategic with resources. It continues to create positive community change through a stronger, diversified, and resilient economy.

Strategic objectives focus on increasing investment in Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that engage private sector, public sector, and address talent needs.

As our network expands, so does our collective impact.

We look forward to an even brighter future in Western Nova Scotia!





# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

YEAR END MARCH 31, 2022

Revenues	Fiscal Year 2021-2022
Province of Nova Scotia	\$277,250
Municipal Units	\$278,333
Funded projects - In Support of Core Activities	\$454,255
Other	\$1,361
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$1,011,199</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Wages and benefits	\$417,934
Operational expenses	\$68,944
Consulting support	\$15,359
Professional services	\$14,068
Strategic planning initiatives	\$31,240
Project expenditures	\$446,609
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$994,154</b>
Surplus	\$17,045





## LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Guy Surette - Municipality of Argyle

Eddie Nickerson - Municipality of Barrington

Yvon LeBlanc - Municipality of Clare

Linda Gregory - Municipality of Digby

Patti Durkee - Municipality of Yarmouth

Ben Cleveland - Town of Digby

Derek Lesser - Town of Yarmouth

Marilynn Hay - Dept. of Municipal Affairs

Joe Brown - Dept. Labour, Skills & Immigration

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Thompson - Board Chair

Benjamin Shearer - Board Vice-Chair  
and Committee Chair

Nick d'Eon - Committee Chair

Angie Greene - Director

Jamie Symonds - Director

Brenda Francis - Director

Charles Surette - Director

Karen Enright - Director

Julie MacLean - Director

Joceline d'Entremont - Director

Dr. Kenneth Deveau - Director



## STAFF

Angélique LeBlanc, Chief Executive Officer

Rob Stephenson, BusinessNow Lead

Evan Nemeth, Research Lead

Alyson Duffy, Communications Coordinator

Hélène d'Eon, Interim Accounting and Finance Coordinator

Darshini Arogyaswamy, Board Coordinator

Brenda LaGrandeur, Local Immigration Partnership Coordinator

Miranda MacLean, Connector Program Manager





210 Main Street | Yarmouth, Nova Scotia | B5A 1C8

Tel: 902-881-3008 | Fax: 902-881-2838

wren@westernren.ca | westernren.ca

