

Business Plan

2024 - 2025





MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR **BENJAMIN SHEARER**



I am pleased to share with you the business plan prepared by our Western Regional Enterprise Network (Western REN) as we enter the third and final year of our current strategic journey.

The strategic actions outlined for Year 3 exemplify a thorough understanding of the economic landscape of South Western Nova Scotia. It is evident that our commitment to elevating the region's prosperity remains steadfast, and the actions set forth for this pivotal year are crucial.

The emphasis on building a robust and thriving private sector is particularly noteworthy. In addition to the continued delivery of our BusinessNow programs, the focus on understanding individual business health and fostering resiliency speaks volumes about our dedication to ensuring the sustainable growth of our region. This strategic approach is well-aligned with our long-term objectives and demonstrates a proactive stance towards economic development.

Furthermore, the attention given to nurturing an investment-ready public sector underscores the comprehensive and holistic nature of our business plan.

It reflects our commitment to fostering an environment that supports the overall development and well-being of our community.

Of particular note is the emphasis on successfully integrating newcomers to our region and further supporting employers with recruitment and retention. Recognizing the critical role that the skills and talents of our people play in our success, the dedication to addressing talent needs and enhancing retention and attraction efforts, is truly commendable.

I am confident that, under the leadership and support of Western REN and with our combined efforts, we will continue to work towards meeting the needs and goals of our region. The impact is a testament to the hard work and dedication of each member of our team.

Thank you all for your continued commitment and hard work. Together, let us make this year a resounding success and continue to elevate South Western Nova Scotia as a leader of economic development.

Warm regards,
*Benjamin Shearer, Board Chair,
Western REN*

FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **ANGÉLIQUE LEBLANC**



As we enter the third and final year of our strategic plan, we are sharpening our focus on the key priorities that will define our success in the upcoming phase. Our commitment to South Western Nova Scotia's economic landscape remains unwavering, and the strategic priorities for

Year 3 will play a pivotal role in achieving our goals.

Supporting the region's private sector remains at the core of Western REN initiatives. In addition to delivering our *BusinessNow* programs, we will focus on understanding individual business health, resiliency and growth potential.

A future focused public sector is equally crucial for the overall development of our business community. Year 3 will see a strategic focus on planning for population growth, placemaking and continued partner collaboration.

Our success is intricately tied to the skills and talents of our community members. In Year 3, addressing talent needs continues to be a cornerstone of our strategy. Supporting employers with their talent retention and attraction efforts will be bolstered, ensuring that South Western Nova Scotia becomes a hub for skilled talent.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Western REN, which is a testament to the relationships, vision and trust amongst all partners involved. Stay tuned for celebrations!

Let's approach this year with continued determination and a collective commitment to making South Western Nova Scotia a forward-thinking, results driven, thriving place to live.

Warm regards,
*Angélique LeBlanc, Chief Executive Officer
Western REN*



WESTERN NS REALITIES

NATURAL RESOURCES

Fisheries: The fisheries industry has seen many changes in the last year, both provincially and regionally.

Lobster

Many offshore fishermen in LFA 34 have been reporting lower catch levels for the past few years. Inshore lobster catches are reportedly lower as well. Thankfully, strong price levels have meant a successful winter season for many. Overall annual catches have been known to fluctuate, with historic peaks of 27 million tonnes in 2014, levelling off progressively after that point. Riverside Lobster, a live holding and processing facility in the Municipality of Clare, was permanently shut down by parent company Champlain Group, indicative of a rough patch in the processing industry.

In addition to supply issues, new regulations increasing the minimum legal size of lobster in the United States will take effect in 2025, allowing more time for reproduction. Given the significant portion of live Canadian lobster exports to the U.S., these measures could result in a 30% reduction in the amount of Canadian lobster available for shipment to the U.S. market.

Red fish

In 2024, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) announced that the redfish fishery in the

St. Lawrence region of the Maritimes and Quebec would reopen after a 30-year moratorium. Nova Scotia received its historical allocation minus 20% allocated to unidentified Indigenous and Gulf of St. Lawrence shrimp fleet. While the date hasn't been set for reopening, it is expected to open later this summer.

Seafood processing license moratorium

Early in 2023, the Provincial Government announced the plan to end a five-year moratorium on new seafood processing licenses. Ending the moratorium on both buying and processing licenses could support industry growth and drive innovation in the sector.

Aquaculture

In 2023, the provincial government completed a review of Nova Scotia's aquaculture regulations. Key recommendations include:

- Increasing efficiencies and effectiveness while reducing regulatory burden;
- Increasing information available and accessible to the public and operators;
- Increasing public input.

The comprehensive recommendations pave the way for a brighter future for aquaculture. Currently, the aquaculture industry employs about 900 people and contributes more than \$80 million per year to Nova Scotia's economy.

Fisheries Enforcement

The provincial government has been lobbying the federal government for more enforcement of existing fishery policy and law due to unauthorized harvesting and its impact on the health of the future lobster stock. In early 2024 the federal government announced its intent to close the elver fishery citing widespread unauthorized harvesting practices, violence, and threats. A timeline has yet to be announced for a new framework to regulate and license the fishery.

Mining

The potential of lithium mining in the Western Region has attracted a lot of interest from around the world. Mining exploration projects can take between 10 and 25 years to come into production if deemed economically feasible. A technical report was released for the Brazil Lake location detailing estimated reserves and resources of the mineral, along with the recent acquisition of 109 mineral claims last year by an Australian mining company.

After releasing a preliminary economic assessment in 2018 on the rehabilitation of the East Kemptville tin-indium project to process tailings, Avalon Advanced Metals states that four contiguous exploration licenses and a Special License require them to secure permission from current landowners to access the closed East Kemptville mine site.

Forestry

Southwest Nova Scotia has earned an 'A' rating in the Bioeconomy Development Opportunity (BDO) Zone assessment. This rating reflects the region's sustainable supply of 550,000 green metric tons annually of sawmill residuals and by-product wood fiber, alongside robust feedstock chains, modern transportation networks, and multiple commercial parks eager to host new ventures. In addition to a sustainable wood supply, the region includes a skilled forestry workforce, proximity to universities and access to the Halifax port, making it an attractive choice for bioeconomy businesses.

Energy

A major wind project in Wedgeport was approved by the Provincial Government in 2023. The project would be the largest in the region, with an expected generating capacity of 80MW. In addition to bringing in approximately \$686K in property tax of revenue to the Municipality of Argyle each year, this would increase wind energy generation capacity in the region to almost 150 MW, or the capacity to provide



electricity to approximately 50,000 homes. The project proponent, Wedgeport Windfarm LP, is also committed to the establishment of a Community Benefits Fund, with a contribution of \$80K per year to support not-for-profit causes in the area.

The end of 2023 also saw funding announcements for clean energy projects by the provincial government. A total of \$281,000 was committed towards 4 projects in the Western Region, including an EV feasibility study and net zero affordable housing plan.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick recently announced plans to pursue a 'modified Atlantic Loop', citing the full plan to build transmission lines linking with Québec and Newfoundland and Labrador as too risky given the potential for cost overruns that could drive up electricity costs. The provinces' scaled-back plan involves improving one transmission line across their shared border.

2023 Wildfires

In May of 2023, the wildfire which started near Barrington Lake in Shelburne County, was the worst in the province's history with over 3,200 homes and 6,700 people evacuated. The fire started on May 26th and raged on for over two weeks until it was declared under control on June 13th. It was not completely extinguished until July 26th, destroying 23,525 hectares- around 235 square kilometers. More than 60 homes and other structures were destroyed. During the same time, a second fire in East Pubnico burned 138 hectares.

ECONOMY

Currency

The Canadian dollar declined in value for the second consecutive year, from \$0.77 USD in 2022 to \$0.74 USD in 2023. A lower Canadian dollar is good for exports, but despite this, Nova Scotia saw a decline of 6.4% in export value in 2023. This decline likely



Wharf Rat Rally | Digby, NS

speaks more to the state of the global economy and high inflation across the globe than to the Canadian currency.

Inflation

Average consumer prices in Nova Scotia were down in 2023, to 4% from an average peak of 7.5% in 2022. Despite this, food and shelter price indices remained relatively high at 7.9% and 5.4%, respectively. Energy prices, on the other hand, declined 3.2%, levelling off from the previous year's hike.

Commodities

Heating oil was down 10% in 2023, while electricity was up 5%. At the pumps, gasoline and diesel were both down, 4% and 17% respectively. Lumber prices were also down, declining 24% from 2022.

DEMOGRAPHY AND EMPLOYMENT

Demography

According to Statistics Canada population estimates released in January 2023, all three counties in the Western Region grew between 2021-22.

Digby County: 2.1%, or 365 people

Yarmouth County: 1.7%, or 413 people

Shelburne County: 1.5%, or 202 people

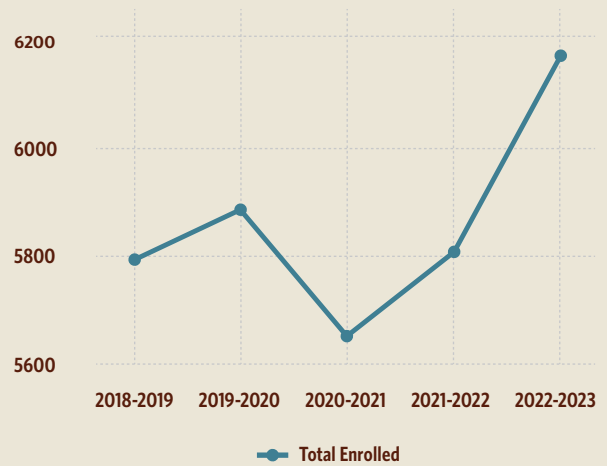
Overall, the population age distribution in this region is older than the provincial average, with 37% aged between 60 and 90+ in our region, compared to 30% at the provincial level.

A bright trend is enrollment in K-12 schools, which has been increasing year over year since 2020-2021.

K12 School Enrollment

Source: Government of Nova Scotia: For the Western Region

Last Updated: October 2022



Employment and Key Industries in the Region

In the region, fishing is the industry that has the most workers (15%), followed by retail (12%) and seafood processing (7%). Fishing and seafood processing employment in the region consist of 39% and 49% of total provincial employment in those industries, respectively.

According to recently published data, four of the seven municipalities in our region were determined to be resource-dependent, with at least 20% of their employment income originating from fishing.

Barrington and Argyle were at the top of the list with 55% and 42% of their total income derived from fishing, respectively.

Tourism

Between May and October 2023, Yarmouth and Acadian Shores saw a decline in accommodation room nights sold of 6% from the same period in 2022 (the province saw a decline of 2% for the same period). The Cat Ferry, ferry between Yarmouth and Bar Harbor, Maine, saw an increase in ticket sales in 2023 of 5.5%, or nearly 2,000 tickets. A provincial economic impact analysis of this ferry service is currently being underway with the final report expected in the fall of 2024.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS 2024-2025

Increasing Investment in the Private Sector

WESTERN REN ACTIONS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Develop or adopt a new business outreach & assessment tool	Tool developed	Improved support of businesses through the <i>BusinessNow</i> program
Continue to deliver Business Retention & Expansion services	100 clients; 75 referrals 4 Local Action Team Meetings	Increased business stability and growth
Continue to deliver the Business Transition Program	10-20 companies participating	Businesses ready for sale and maximising value of sale
Continue to deliver Continuous Improvement Program	10 participating companies	Increased culture of Continuous Improvement among business leaders

Increasing investment in the Public Sector

WESTERN REN ACTIONS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Continue to support access to reliable cell service for business purposes	Information shared	Increased access to reliable cell service in under-served and unserved communities
Through the Western REN led Western Impact Partnership (WIP), provide joint economic development partner communication and engagement	8 meetings per year; 1 event; 10 support activities	Increased understanding of priority issues impacting the region, effective communication channels supporting active partnerships
Deliver regional Get Side-Tracked Program	Route mapped, stops developed, businesses readiness training developed	Increased economic activity building on region's sense of place
Implement Population Growth Plan, focusing on gaps in community infrastructure	Community infrastructure Initiatives being implemented	Needs/gaps in attracting and retaining talent addressed

Addressing Talent Needs

WESTERN REN ACTIONS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Continue delivering the Connector Program	40 Connectors; 40 Connectees; 4 Networking Events	Increased quality employment for youth, newcomers and boomerangers
Implement Population Growth Plan, focusing on issues and opportunities related to HR supports	HR support related initiatives implemented	Needs/gaps in attracting and retaining talent addressed
Coordinate immigration services related to workforce and talent gaps via Local Immigration Partnership	Regional people retention & attraction projects funded	Increased regional population

CORE BUDGET 2024-2025

REVENUE	APPROVED BUDGET April 2024-2025
Municipal Revenue	\$323,012
Provincial Revenue	\$277,250
Other Revenue	\$92,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$692,262
EXPENSES	
Wages and Benefits	\$505,057
Training, governance, and risk management	\$9,000
Travel, meals, and lodging	\$23,150
Conferences	\$4,400
Communications and recruitment	\$22,500
Consulting support/Data management	\$76,000
Office space and supplies	\$49,254
Professional and corporate services	\$23,225
Strategic planning initiatives	\$178,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$890,586
NET INCOME/LOSS	-\$198,324

GOVERNANCE



Liaison and Oversight Committee - Funders and Board Appointment

Municipality of Argyle Guy Surette, Chair	Municipality of Barrington Eddie Nickerson	Municipality of Clare Yvon LeBlanc	Municipality of Digby Matt Ross	Municipality of Yarmouth Patti Durkee
Town of Digby Ben Cleveland	Town of Yarmouth Gil Dares, Vice-Chair		Dept. of Municipal Affairs & Housing Marilynn Hay	

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023-24



Board Chair, Benjamin Shearer
3rd term expires June 2026



Board Vice-Chair, Julie MacLean
2nd term expires June 2026



Board Chair, Nick d'Eon
2nd term expires June 2024



Director, Brenda Francis
2nd term expires June 2025



Finance Committee Chair,
Mary Thompson
2nd term expires June 2024



Director, Charles Surette
2nd term expires June 2025



Board Vice-Chair,
Jamie Symonds
3rd term expires June 2026



Director, Jocelin d'Entremont
2nd term expires June 2026



Director, Dan White
1st term expires June 2026



Director, JoAnn Ranson
1st term expires June 2026

STAFF 2024



**ANGÉLIQUE LEBLANC,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Since August 2014

Possessing natural leadership skills, Angélique brings extensive experience with partnering across sectors to her role. She has a thorough understanding of business and economic development and has built a solid team to implement the work.



**DARSHINI AROGYASWAMY,
BOARD COORDINATOR**

Since February 2022

Darshini brings several years of expertise in Event Management and Customer Service. She has worked with cultural non profits and has experience organising large scale community engagement events in Toronto. Originally from India, she moved to the town of Yarmouth in 2020.



**BRENDA LAGRANDEUR,
PROJECT COORDINATOR** *Since May 2023*

Brenda originally joined the team in 2017 and brings her proven abilities in project management and working with diverse stakeholders to manage regional initiatives from start to finish.



**KEVAL D'ENTREMONT BUSINESS
RETENTION & EXPANSION
COORDINATOR** *Since September 2023*

Keval began her career in the seafood industry, briefly leaving to complete a Bachelor of Commerce Degree at Saint Mary's University. She looks forward to forging strong connections within the business community and promoting growth through the renewed Business Retention & Expansion program.



**ROB STEPHENSON,
BUSINESSNOW LEAD** *Since April 2020*

Rob's nearly 30 years in the private sector, including management and export, provide him with a clear understanding of the issues facing private sector daily. He connects with business people to help them overcome barriers and grow.



**JAKOB POSTLEWAI TE
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR**

Since April 2023

Originally from Cape Breton, Jakob moved to Yarmouth in late 2020 to start his career in journalism before transitioning to communications to work with the Western REN. Jakob brings his writing, social media skills and passion for communicating to the Western REN team.



**HÉLÈNE D'EON, ACCOUNTING AND
FINANCE COORDINATOR**

Since September 2021

Hélène is an NSCC graduate in Business Administration with Accounting concentration, Hélène has with many years experience in the administrative field, most recently in the health care sector.



**JESSICA CHANT
LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP
COORDINATOR** *Since May 2023*

Jessica graduated from Mount Saint Vincent University and the University of Regina with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Bachelor of Social Work. She is passionate about Canadian Immigration and creating a diverse and welcoming space for newcomers in the Western Region.



**MIRANDA MACLEAN, CONNECTOR
PROGRAM MANAGER** *Since April 2021*

Miranda has a Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours in Sociology from Acadia University. Her passion for supporting the community and previous experience in community outreach, program development and management help grow the connector program, and continue to help people build their networks and connect talent with local employers.





Balancing Rock | Digby County, NS



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