

STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2021

KENT REGIONAL SERVICE COMMISSION

DECEMBER 2016

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1. Introduction and executive summary

The Kent Regional Service Commission decided, last September, to embark on a strategic planning effort in order to focus its vision and priorities so that everyone would work in the same direction during the next few years.

In order to complete this task, the Commission decided to use the services of a consultant to be a guide throughout the exercise and to accomplish the main activities of consulting and writing. Relying on extensive reading from numerous documents, the consultant started by establishing an Organizational history and profile of the Commission. Afterward, in constant communication with the Executive Director, he met with municipal general managers of the different municipalities and the local services manager with the Department of Environment and Local Government during a half-day plenary session. The consultant also held one-on-one meetings with Commission staff. Furthermore, he met with the Chair and Vice-chair before facilitating a planning day with the Board of Directors.

Keeping in mind the purpose of the Commission to advocate and improve the quality of life of citizens through regional cohesion, the different meetings made it possible to create an awareness of the different lessons learned from history during these four years of operation. The assessment is very positive and reveals that the Commission executes well its compulsory mandate linked to planning and solid waste management. As far as its mandate of regional policing collaboration, regional emergency measures planning and regional recreational and cultural infrastructure planning, the process is well under way, starting with the submission of the report, next January, of a ten year recreational master plan as one section of a regional plan. Furthermore, discussions and deliberations indicate a deep intention to move forward in other sectors, mainly in community economic development, tourism, public safety and protection.

2. Vision statement, Mission statement and values

Vision statement

Our vision is the development of a region where its people see the possibilities and take charge of its destiny. This empowerment will be determined by the community through consultation and the sharing of information.

Mission statement

Our mission is to advocate and improve the quality of life of our citizens through regional cohesion.

We provide a planning service, a solid waste disposal service and a forum to discuss regional initiatives and issues.

Values

We believe that these services and these cooperative actions must demonstrate the will of the community to take charge its destiny in a spirit of transparency, equity, sustainability, respecting the differences in the communities.

3. Organizational History and Profile

The Kent Regional Service Commission started its operations on January 1 2013. Pursuant to the *Regional Service Delivery Act*, the RSCs are required to provide six services. These mandated services include regional and local planning, solid waste management, regional policing collaboration, regional emergency measures planning, recreational and cultural infrastructure planning and cost-sharing.

During its four years of operation, besides an adjustment period, the efforts of the Commission have focused mainly on planning services and solid waste management. Thus, the Commission was successful in securing collection contracts for all the LSDs and four of the six municipalities and in adopting an optimized collection system. Also, a new 3-stream recycling program was

adopted and successfully implemented. According to early data collected by the Solid Waste Department, Kent residents are participating fully in the program. These accomplishments are considered as a real success since the service has been greatly improved while realizing large scale savings. As far as planning is concerned, the same is true. The staff expertise and the service quality have greatly improved. The Planning Department has become victim of its own success. Indeed, the LSDs realised very quickly the benefits of planning. The demand exceeds the capacity to provide requested services. Many requests from those communities are waiting and municipalities would like to have their plan upgraded more rapidly.

As far as regional collaboration, a major breakthrough took place during the current year in the recreational and cultural infrastructure planning. A ten year recreational master plan will be presented to the Board of Directors in January 2017. Regarding regional policing and emergency measures, discussions are well under way within the *Public Safety Committee* to provide more extensive training and to expand the mandate of the Committee. Already, significant progress has been achieved in identifying other ways to coordinate and share resources in case of emergency.

In the area of Governance, a culture of regional collaboration and accountability is progressively taking place. Thanks greatly to the Information Exchange Forum, the elected officials have quickly identified concerns that extend beyond the six mandates prescribed by law, especially regarding a moratorium on shale gas and economic development.

With regard to corporate affairs, staff as assumed a very important supportive role for the new Rural Community of Cocagne as well as ensuring interim management of its operations.

The 2016 operating budget of the Commission was \$3 353 302. Governed by a Board of Directors of 17 people, it is managed by eleven full time employees. The territory has a total land area of 4 886.20 square kilometers and counts

33 216 inhabitants. The region has six municipalities, one Rural Community, twenty local service districts including six taxation authorities and three First Nation communities.

To summarize, it can be said that the Commission has experienced success in the fulfillment of its official mandates as prescribed by the Act. Already we are witnessing the benefits of regionalisation and cooperation. Of course there is room for improvement and growth in these sectors. As far as expanding the fields of action, work is already under way and should grow during the coming years. Even if a regional plan is already under construction, we will not see its completion before at least five years. Until then, this plan can be used as a guide and roadmap.

4. Critical issues and recommended strategies

Taking into consideration all the ideas and suggestions put forward during the different meetings with staff, municipal administrators and the Commission's elected officials, completed by extensive reading; it was possible to draw a list of nine critical questions that should be addressed by the Commission during the coming years.

1. How do we respond to the absence of a concerted effort in community economic development?

Since the abrupt closing of Kent Enterprise in 2012, the arrival of a leader in community economic development is long overdue. The Commission tried really hard to fill in the gap, especially in a genuine effort to stimulate regional collaboration. With the support of community and economic organizations, the Commission came really close, in 2014, to set up a community development department. However, having failed to secure adequate funding from the department of Regional Development Corporation and Opportunities NB, the Commission had to step back. Since then, it is legitimate to ask ourselves if the local communities have the will and the capacity to fund such a service. Well aware of the importance of economic and social development in the area, but

convinced of the value of sustainable development under control by the local communities, the leaders who participated in this exercise, not wishing to rely on major corporations which often are only interested in exploiting natural resources and hoping to find cheap labor until the end of government grants and tax credits, prefer to build a strategy and an action plan in partnership with community-based organizations. Furthermore, keeping in mind that the territory is mostly rural, they realize that it is urgent to take positive action in support of social and rural economic development.

Recommended strategy

It is recommended to take the required steps with the different communities to obtain their approval in order to receive the necessary funding for a community economic department. This would cost approximately \$200 000, an increase of about one cent on the property tax. This money would make it possible to create two full time positions: An economic development officer and a rural development officer. The economic development officer would support and accompany local economic organizations, like the Chambers of Commerce, which cannot rely on staff for their operations. The officer would also support local businesses and encourage the start-up of new ones, and even take part in a tourism strategy. The rural development officer would work mostly with LSDs to support, motivate and mobilize rural communities and stimulate the emergence of projects and initiatives in the social, economic, community and cultural sectors of the rural communities.

This department could also examine crucial issues like the enhancement and marketing of local products, the return in the region of youth and families, literacy, employability, public transport, as well as welcoming and supporting new immigrants.

- 2. Making good use of the presence of The New Brunswick's Cultural Coast whose mission is to « promote and market the various wonders of our region » should we consider the possibility of building a partnership in order to improve the regional tourist product and to promote the area as a destination?**

Since the creation of the Regional Service Commissions, it seems that some leaders are considering restructuring tourism within their jurisdictions. In the Kent and South-East region, the Cultural Coast is the main tourist organization. Since many regional commissions are considering establishing their own tourism strategy within their territory, it is possible that the Cultural Coast will be restructured. Instead of extending from Kent North to the far end of Westmorland, the territory could be delimited according to the region looked after by the commissions. Therefore, now could be the perfect opportunity to consider a partnership with the Cultural Coast. Furthermore, in order to build on other successful efforts in regionalisation, it might be a good idea to focus the energy and available resources on a few tourist projects that would meet consensus and be put in place rather rapidly.

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended to put in place, in partnership with the Cultural Coast, circuit tours centered on a chosen theme and a well-defined route. Whether it's the discovery of the three cultures inside the territory, spending the night with a family in the Rogersville area that experiments with agri-Food, a boat tour on one of the magnificent rivers that flow in the county, a visit to an oyster farm or even picking apples in the Cocagne area, the region has so much to offer that it is possible to put in place enough circuits to satisfy the different tastes and wishes of the tourist population. This job could be given to the new community economic department. A project like this can be set up with a minimum of resources and even financed by the private sector.

3. In order to enhance the pooling of municipal resources, should we regionalize some municipal services?

How do we avoid duplication and how do we maximise cost effectiveness in the purchasing and the use of heavy equipment, including fire trucks? How do we reduce the cost of preliminary estimates, preparing specifications and site supervision with regards to major municipal projects? How to we extend this service to the rest of the region?

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended to put examine to put in place the necessary tools regarding the sharing of services between municipalities but also the LSD's. At first glance, we can state that such a project could be put in place without any financial input by the Commission. A considerable amount of money is spent by municipalities and LSD's to purchase equipment, and offer services. A feasibility study could be undertaken under the supervision of the Executive Director with an input from the municipalities. If the study is conclusive, the Commission could mandate the Executive Director to pursue the project.

4. How do we respond to request of better collaboration in matters of emergency measures?

Some concerns were voiced with regard to what was perceived as a lack of coordination and concerted effort in matters of safety and protection. These concerns were as much about the purchasing of firefighting vehicles and equipment as about the responsiveness to situations that call for coordination and team effort, and even about the need to update some emergency plans. Some people also wondered if the community was ready to respond properly to dangerous situations due to climate change. As far as the last concern, it was mentioned that the present legislation does not allow all communities to take

action in this matter. As far as updating emergency plans, we were made aware that, thanks to the regional coordinator, the correction is well under way.

The actual coordination involves the development of regional emergency protocols, assistance and maintenance of local emergency measures plan and facilitation of training initiatives for regional and inter-regional emergency responses. At the early stages of its operations, the Commission developed a partnership with the Office of the Emergency Measures Organization and a decision was made to offer two emergency measures training sessions in the region on an annual basis. Six Regional emergency Management Coordinators have been given the responsibility for one or more of the twelve Regional Service Commissions. Any concern can be brought to the attention of the Public Security Committee.

In spite of all those different measures and since flaws relating to emergency situations can result in tragic consequences, any possibility of shortfall require immediate attention from the Commission.

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended that the Commission establish an ad hoc committee as soon as possible to shed light on the situation. The mandate of the committee would be to examine ways to enhance a greater collaboration with regard to emergency situations and to draw an action plan.

5. How do we increase the political influence and advocacy for the region?

The fact that a positive outcome resulted from the political stance that the Commission took on certain issues like Shale gas made the leaders realize that they held a real political weight. The issue encountered great success because it was well documented. A few situations that require political lobbying were brought to our attention. The question of health services, especially in regard to

the vulnerable situation of the Stella-Maris-De-Kent hospital and natural resource management are some examples that require political intervention. The accumulation of waste alongside the coastal area would require the intervention of the department of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. It just happens that the Minister is also the Member of Parliament for the area.

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended that the Commission identify, prioritize and document the issues that require political lobbying. The Commission would then build a calendar to set up regular meetings with the Ministers, Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly to discuss these issues.

6. Should we try to identify a governance model for the region?

The Information Exchange Forum that took place these last years has greatly contributed to better communication and understanding between the different communities. Collaboration and the working together are never easy and require a lot of work. In spite of the efforts deployed, the easing of misunderstandings between communities and the progress achieved in collaborative efforts, a clear vision of a governance structure for the region is still in the waiting. Opting for a progressive approach toward regionalization by a gradual accomplishment of collective projects could be a possibility. Opting for full municipalisation could be another possibility. Even if these options exist, the initiative must come from the communities themselves. Furthermore, the Province must create more favorable conditions for regrouping. Meanwhile, the Commission must work in partnership with the communities that want to have a stronger governance approach.

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended that the Commission continue to facilitate and accompany those communities that want to alter their governance structure.

7. How do we extend the recycling program and reduce the amount of waste?

The main priority of the Commission rested with the Solid Waste Department. Rightly so, everyone is proud of the results achieved and the success encountered. Substantial savings have been realised and the service has been greatly upgraded. Thanks greatly to a successful communication strategy aimed at public awareness and Education, the recycling programs are getting great cooperation.

Although compulsory recycling is limited to family residences, we have to keep in mind that an important volume of solid waste is produced by businesses and therefore not recycled.

In spite of a very efficient awareness and education program and even if substantial success has been achieved in reducing solid waste, it is legitimate to want to do more. It is very possible that the public want to do more, but need help to do so.

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended to create a pilot project to extend the recycling program to businesses on a voluntary basis. With the help of a working group representing Chambers of commerce and facilitated by the Solid Waste Department, it would be possible to identify the strengths and challenges of such a project, as well as the different actions needed to help interested businesses to join in the recycling program.

As far as increasing the number of citizens using composters, we need to develop and offer more tools to make it friendlier. An easier access to such tools would also help to motivate and encourage the public. Workshops on composting and the availability of composters at a reduced cost would surely be an asset.

8. How do we respond to the increasing demand in planning?

The Commission is no less proud of the planning department. Indeed, interest for planning is growing every day and requests for rural and municipal plans are increasing to a point where it is not possible to respond in a timely manner.

Also, when we met with the municipal CAO's and staff of the Commission, we identified a number of situations that need to be addressed.

- Planning data is still documented on paper instead of computerized. Furthermore, clients at the Richibucto office can only pay their service by check or cash.
- While approving building or subdivision permits, variation in ways of seeing things between municipalities and the Commission can emerge. This variation can create problems for municipalities that are left with dealing with the consequences.

Recommended Strategy

It is suggested :

- To review the status of human resources in order to determine if changes are needed in task assignment and work set up so that the waiting list and the time period to receive services would be reduced.
- To fully computerize the service
- To clarify and spell out in writing procedures and mutual responsibilities between the planning department and municipalities when issuing building or subdivision permits.

9. How so we improve communication with the citizens and greater public?

It is often said that we can never communicate too much. It is true that awareness-raising campaigns that have been held on new services have been successful. As an example, we can cite the promotional blitz for the arrival of the three-stream recycling program. But can we do better in having the general public become more aware of new services envisioned and of discussions surrounding different governing models? We could make use of different media that are already being circulated in the area or even the Web Site. However, we can wonder if these means are really reaching out to the general public.

Recommended Strategy

It is recommended to publish and circulate a newsletter throughout the region a few times a year. Such an endeavor could be financed from advertisements provided by different businesses and be tendered to a communication firm. It is also recommended to increase our presence on social media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to thank the Commission for your trust by letting us work on such an important project. It has allowed us to acknowledge the enormous task that rest on your shoulders and the professionalism that you have demonstrated. We were deeply touched by the generosity and enthusiasm shown by staff, whether from municipalities or from the Commission itself as well as by the Board of Directors. A special thanks to the Executive Director for his expertise and availability. We are hopeful that the results will be helpful and worthwhile.

Léon Richard