

CAO's Response to Public Feedback Received Regarding Hartz Point and Highway 103 Properties

I respectfully but unequivocally disagree with the assertion that the Municipality had “no plan” when acquiring the Hartz Point and Highway 103 properties.

The criticism reflects a misunderstanding of what constitutes a *plan* versus what constitutes a *vision*. Those are not interchangeable concepts, particularly in municipal governance and economic development strategy.

Vision Precedes Plan

Council did not purchase these properties in the absence of direction. Council purchased them because it had a clear and deliberate vision.

A vision defines *where you intend to go*.
A plan defines *how you will get there*.

When Council acquired Hartz Point, it did so with a publicly articulated vision: to secure a rare and strategically significant waterfront asset as part of a long-term strategy to strengthen and diversify the Municipality's economy. This was not speculative or vague. It was explicitly framed as an opportunity to attract thoughtful, sustainable development that complements the natural beauty and character of the area while creating investment, employment, and recreational opportunities. Large-scale industrial operations were expressly excluded from that vision.

That is direction. That is intent. That is strategy.

Hartz Point: A Generational Asset

Hartz Point comprises 558 acres located at the confluence of the two branches of Shelburne Harbour — one of Nova Scotia's most strategic natural harbours. It is directly across from the Town, commands uninterrupted views down the length of the harbour, and represents the largest undeveloped waterfront holding of its kind in the region.

Opportunities of this scale and location are generational. When they become available, leadership requires decisive action.

Council recognized that waiting until every architectural drawing, market study, and engineering detail was complete would have meant losing the opportunity altogether. Securing control of the asset was the first strategic step. Detailed planning follows ownership — not the reverse.

Highway 103 Property: A Different Vision, Same Strategy

The Highway 103 lands serve a different but equally strategic purpose. Positioned along the south side of Highway 103 near Exit 25, and connected historically to the Town of Shelburne, the property sits on a high-visibility transportation corridor between Yarmouth and Bridgewater.

The vision here is to create a commercial district that serves both local residents and highway traffic — similar in function to Exit 12 in Bridgewater. This is about capturing economic activity that currently passes by without stopping. It is about expanding the commercial tax base and strengthening long-term financial sustainability.

Again, that is a vision rooted in geography, economics, and opportunity.

The Proper Sequence of Development

Critics suggest that because detailed engineering, surveys, and marketing initiatives appeared in the budget months later, this represents a shift from “no plan” to active development.

In reality, this reflects a standard and responsible sequence:

1. **Identify strategic opportunity.**
2. **Secure control of the asset.**
3. **Undertake technical studies and site preparation.**
4. **Position the property for appropriate development.**

No prudent individual hires architects and engineers to draft full development plans for a property they do not yet own. The same principle applies municipally. Vision drives acquisition. Planning expenditures follow ownership.

Strategic Investment in a Changing Economy

Council’s actions must also be understood in context. The Municipality’s traditional economic foundation — particularly the fishing industry — is facing decline. Commercial assessments are softening. Standing still is not neutrality; it is gradual erosion.

Strategic land acquisition is one of the few tools available to a rural municipality to influence its economic trajectory. These purchases were not impulsive. They were forward-looking investments intended to expand and diversify the tax base, reduce dependence on any single industry, and create new avenues for growth.

Yes, budgets are constrained. Yes, priorities must be weighed carefully. But investing in assets that can generate long-term economic resilience is not discretionary in the casual sense — it is foundational to reversing slow economic decline.

In Closing

The narrative that Council acted without direction does not align with the public record or with the clearly articulated intent at the time of acquisition.

There was — and remains — a vision:

- Protect and leverage a rare waterfront asset at Hartz Point.

- Develop a strategic commercial gateway along Highway 103.
- Diversify the Municipality's economy.
- Strengthen long-term fiscal sustainability.
- Exclude incompatible large-scale industrial uses.
- Attract thoughtful, sustainable investment.

Planning is now proceeding in alignment with that vision.

Leadership sometimes requires acting when opportunity presents itself — not waiting until every detail is drafted. Council did not purchase these properties without direction. It secured them precisely because it had one.