

Amalgamation FAQ's

1. What is being considered?

The three municipal units — the Municipality of the District of Shelburne (MODS), the Town of Shelburne (TOS), and the Town of Lockeport (TOL) — are **exploring the possibility of amalgamation into a single municipal unit.**

No final decision has been made. This is an **exploration phase only.**

2. Is this a consolidation like Windsor–West Hants?

No.

This process would be an amalgamation through the Nova Scotia Regulatory & Appeals Board (NSRAB) under the *Municipal Government Act*, not a provincially directed consolidation.

This means:

- The initiative comes from the municipalities themselves
- NSRAB reviews the application and evidence
- The Province is notified and may participate, but does not direct the outcome

Please see further FAQs below on how the NSRAB process works.

3. Why are the municipalities exploring amalgamation?

Communities across Nova Scotia are facing:

- Rising service delivery costs
- Infrastructure pressures
- Staffing and recruitment challenges
- Increasing regulatory complexity

Amalgamation is being explored to determine whether a single municipal government could deliver services more efficiently, equitably, and sustainably than three separate units.

Exploring amalgamation does **not** mean it is the preferred outcome — it means the municipalities are asking the question.

It should also be noted that on February 3rd, 2026, Kevin Latimer provided a workshop for all three Councils that identified in the eyes of Councillors and Staff what the benefits and challenges of amalgamation could be. The benefits may be interpreted as the reasons for considering amalgamation. The workshop summary can be [viewed here.](#)

Process & Decision-Making

4. Who decides whether amalgamation happens?

Ultimately:

- Each municipal council must decide whether to apply for amalgamation
- NSRAB reviews the application, evidence, and public input
- NSRAB makes a recommendation
- The Province enacts any required legislation if approved

This is a multi-step, public process, not a single vote behind closed doors

5. Is public engagement required?

While the Municipal Government Act does not legally require public engagement before applying, NSRAB has strongly recommended that municipalities engage the public early and meaningfully.

Public feedback:

- Forms part of the evidence before NSRAB
- Helps identify issues that must be studied
- Can influence how (or whether) an application proceeds

Additional details on public engagement sessions are being considered, check back here for updates and specific dates

6. Will there be a plebiscite?

A plebiscite is **not required** under Nova Scotia law.

If held:

- It is **non-binding**
- NSRAB treats it as **one piece of evidence**, not a decision

Past experience in Nova Scotia (including Antigonish and Pictou County) shows that plebiscites can be **highly divisive** and may not resolve underlying concerns

No decision has been made on whether a plebiscite will occur.

7. How much will amalgamation cost?

The three Municipalities have agreed to a cost sharing split based on comparative assessment values. The assessment values and corresponding percentage cost splits are identified below:

- Town of Shelburne: 17.43% (\$128,873,500)
- Town of Lockeport: 6.33% (\$46,814,425)
- Municipality of the District of Shelburne: 76.24% (\$563,589,700)

Based on the presentation by the NSRAB to the amalgamation committee on December 3rd, 2025, the CAO's obtained high level cost estimates for the reports and activities that the NSRAB would require. These estimates are:

- Facilitation & Engagement ~\$75,000 (Estimate provided by Chrystal Fuller, previous engagement facilitator for the Antigonish Consolidation efforts)
 - \$5,000 - Planning out Next Steps presentation by Chrystal Fuller, Brian Smith & Kevin Latimer
 - \$20,000 - Coming up with an engagement plan
 - \$40,000 - \$50,000 - Conducting the public engagement & generating a "What we Heard Report"
 - Note Antigonish spent \$180,000 on public engagement with 26 events
- Financial Report ~\$200,000 - \$250,000 (Estimate provided by Grant Thorton)
- Human Resources Report ~\$72,000 - \$85,000 (Estimate provided by Davie Pier)
- Boundary Report ~\$3,500 (Estimate provided by C&D Community Design)
- Legal Costs ~\$100,000 (This is a guess by the CAO's, but they qualify this estimate by saying that they feel it could be significantly higher based on the Windsor West Hants final costs)

These cost estimates come to a total of ~\$474,000 - \$547,000. It is possible that this estimate is low based on the final costs of the Windsor West Hants consolidation which were approximately \$1,500,000. It is also possible that the amalgamation committee may want to split the financial report into two parts, the first part being a tax strategy report that would identify the various taxation strategies that could be considered in the event amalgamation went forward.

8. Who will pay for the amalgamation?

In a meeting held between the MODS Council and Minister John A. MacDonald (Minister of Municipal Affairs) towards the end of 2025, it was asked if the Province would provide funding towards the possible amalgamation of MODS, TOS & TOL. It was pointed out that the Province previously provided Windsor West Hants \$1,000,000 towards their consolidation costs (a different process than amalgamation). The Minister's response was that the three units would have to apply to the Provincial "Municipal Innovation Program (MIP)" for funding.

Upon investigation, it is determined that MIP is an impractical funding mechanism for an amalgamation process of this magnitude. The program's total annual allocation is approximately \$578,000, funding is limited to 50–75% of eligible project costs, and the program is consistently oversubscribed. Even under the most favourable circumstances, MIP funding would leave a significant and unsustainable financial burden on small municipal units already operating within tight fiscal constraints. In practical terms, the current funding framework presents a material barrier to informed, responsible decision-making. Without full provincial support for the studies required by NSRAB, the municipalities—and ultimately their residents—are being asked to assume costs that are disproportionate to their tax base and capacity. This risks undermining the very objective of encouraging thoughtful, evidence-based regional governance discussions.

Given the lack of meaningful commitment by the Province to support the three Municipalities investigating amalgamation, the Chair person of the Amalgamation Committee, Mayor Derek Amalfa, sent MLA Nolan Young a letter on February 5th inviting Mr. Young to attend the March 4th amalgamation committee meeting to discuss the funding challenges.

It should be noted that the three Councils will consider applying for MIP funding before the final deadline date of March 31st, 2026 and that should funding be awarded that the amalgamation committee would not commit to spending any funds until all three Councils agree to move forward with spending funds.

April 16, 2026 Update – MIP is no longer available, but a request has been made to the Province, and all 3 units are in alignment that we do not want to use taxpayer dollars to fund.

Taxes & Finances

9. Will taxes go up?

At this stage, **no changes to tax rates are proposed or assumed.**

Any amalgamation application would need to include:

- Financial information
- Transition costs
- Long-term sustainability analysis

In other Nova Scotia amalgamations, **tax rates did not automatically increase as a result of amalgamation alone**, but outcomes depend on local decisions and service levels.

As mentioned in the amalgamation cost FAQ, it is possible that the amalgamation committee may want to split the financial report into two parts, with the first part being a tax strategy report. Such a report would investigate the various taxation options that could be considered in the event amalgamation went forward. Early discussions with Windsor West Hants have revealed that they are engaging in a tax strategy over time with the goal of one day achieving taxation harmony across residents.

10. Will rural residents subsidize towns (or vice versa)?

Amalgamation does **not automatically equalize taxes or services**.

Under Nova Scotia law:

- Different tax rates can continue based on services received
- Area-based rates and service exchanges can be maintained

Any changes would require:

- Council decisions
- Public notice
- Formal approval processes

Services & Operations

11. Will services change immediately?

No.

If amalgamation were approved:

- A **transition period** would follow
- Existing services would continue during transition
- Changes would be phased, studied, and publicly communicated

There is **no “day-one” service disruption**.

12. What about policing, fire, and emergency services?

These are **critical issues** that must be resolved *before* any amalgamation is approved.

Specifically:

- Policing costs require approval from the Minister of Justice
- Fire service structures are typically maintained
- NSRAB expects these matters to be clearly addressed in an application

13. Will the schools in Lockeport be closed?

There have been questions about whether municipal amalgamation could result in the closure of schools in Lockeport.

School operations and decisions regarding school openings or closures are not under municipal authority. While municipalities contribute funding to the Province, public education in Nova Scotia is administered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) and delivered regionally by the Tri-County Regional Centre for Education (TCRCE).

As education governance is entirely separate from municipal government, school operations would not be affected by amalgamation. Neither EECD nor TCRCE is involved in the amalgamation process.

Residents seeking additional information or reassurance are encouraged to contact the Tri-County Regional Centre for Education or their local MLA, Nolan Young.

14. Will municipal offices close?

No decisions have been made.

Office locations, service counters, and staffing models would be examined during a transition phase, with an emphasis on:

- Accessibility
- Service continuity
- Operational efficiency

Governance & Representation

15. Will my community lose its voice?

Representation is a **central concern** in any amalgamation.

If amalgamation proceeds:

- New electoral boundaries would be established
- Representation must meet provincial standards
- Community identity and local input remain key considerations

Loss of representation was one of the strongest concerns raised in Antigonish, and is well-documented as an issue that must be addressed explicitly

16. What will the new municipality be called?

No name has been proposed.

Naming would occur **only if amalgamation is approved**, typically through council decision with public input.

Lessons from Antigonish & Other Communities

17. What can we learn from the Antigonish experience?

Key lessons include:

- The importance of **clear, honest FAQs**
- Acknowledging **both benefits and risks**
- Avoiding the perception that decisions are “already made”
- Explaining *why* amalgamation is being explored, not just *how*

These FAQs are designed specifically to address those gaps.

Establishment of ‘guiding principles’ that helped shape discussions

18. Where can I get more information or provide input?

Information will be shared through:

- Municipal websites
- Public meetings and engagement sessions
- Residents can make enquiries by sending the Amalgamation Committee Chairperson a direct email to amalgamationchair@temp.g23.ca

Opportunities for feedback will be communicated publicly and in advance.

Final Clarification

19. Is amalgamation a “done deal”?

No.

Exploring amalgamation means:

- Asking questions
- Studying impacts
- Hearing from the public

A decision will only occur **after evidence, engagement, and formal review**.

Nova Scotia Regulatory & Appeals Board (NSRAB)

20. What is NSRAB?

The Nova Scotia Regulatory & Appeals Board (NSRAB) is an independent, quasi-judicial tribunal.

It is **not** part of:

- Municipal councils
- The Department of Municipal Affairs
- The provincial Cabinet

Its role is to **review evidence, hear from the public and affected parties, and decide whether an amalgamation or dissolution is in the public interest**, based on provincial law.

21. Why is NSRAB involved in municipal amalgamation?

Under the Municipal Government Act (MGA), municipalities that wish to amalgamate must apply to NSRAB.

NSRAB's job is to decide whether the proposed amalgamation is:

“in the best interests of the inhabitants of the area, taking into account the financial and social implications.”

This legal test applies to amalgamations across Nova Scotia

22. What are the main stages of the NSRAB process?

In plain language, the NSRAB process has five main stages, typically taking 9–10 months:

1. Application is filed
2. Preliminary Hearing
3. Studies and reports are prepared
4. Hearing on the Merits (main hearing)
5. Board decision and final order

Each step is public and documented.

23. Step 1: What happens when an application is filed?

An application is filed by:

- The municipalities themselves **or**
- A sufficient number of electors (at least 10% or 100 electors, whichever is greater)

Once filed:

- The Province is notified
- The application is posted publicly on the NSRAB website
- The process formally begins

24. Step 2: What is a Preliminary Hearing?

The Preliminary Hearing is a procedural hearing — not a decision on amalgamation.

At this hearing, NSRAB decides:

- Who can formally participate (municipalities, Province, intervenors, public)
- What studies and evidence must be prepared
- Who pays for those studies
- Timelines for filing evidence
- When the main hearing will occur

This ensures the process is **structured, transparent, and fair** before major work begins

25. Who can participate in the NSRAB process?

NSRAB must hear from:

- The applicant(s)
- Affected municipal units
- The Minister of Municipal Affairs
- Any member of the public or organization approved as a Formal Intervenor

In addition, **members of the public may speak at designated public sessions** during the main hearing.

26. Step 3: What kinds of studies are required?

The studies required are determined by NSRAB at the Preliminary Hearing and often include:

- Financial impacts (including 5-year projections)

- Policing arrangements and costs
- Roads and streets responsibilities
- Fire and emergency services
- Infrastructure and capital costs
- Water and wastewater systems
- Recreation and community services
- Equalization and service exchange impacts

NSRAB can also require:

“any other evidence that the Board may direct”
under the Municipal Government Act

27. Step 4: What is the Hearing on the Merits?

This is the main public hearing, usually held in the region affected and often lasting several days.

During this hearing:

- Municipalities present their case
- Study authors explain their findings
- Formal intervenors participate
- The Province participates
- Witnesses can be cross-examined
- There is an evening session specifically for public input

All evidence becomes part of the public record

28. Does public opinion matter in the NSRAB process?

Yes.

Public input is:

- Entered into the record
- Considered alongside studies and expert evidence
- A key part of assessing “social implications”

A plebiscite, if held, is non-binding, but may be considered as part of the overall evidence.

29. Step 5: How does NSRAB make its decision?

After the Hearing on the Merits:

- NSRAB deliberates independently
- A written decision is issued (typically within 60 days)
- A Final Order is issued

The Board may:

- Approve amalgamation
- Dismiss the application
- Approve amalgamation with conditions

30. If amalgamation is approved, what does NSRAB decide?

If approved, NSRAB's order can address:

- The effective date of amalgamation
- Number of councillors
- Polling district boundaries
- Transfer of assets and liabilities
- Transitional governance rules
- Treatment of boards and commissions
- Financial transition controls

NSRAB may also issue follow-up directions if needed.

31. Do existing by-laws and planning rules change automatically?

No.

Existing:

- By-laws
- Planning policies
- Zoning rules

Continue in force until formally changed by the new council, following public processes required by law

32. Who has the final say?

- **NSRAB** determines whether amalgamation is approved
- **The Province** passes any required legislation
- **The new municipal council**, if created, governs going forward

This is not a political decision made behind closed doors — it is a structured, evidence-based public process.