

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?

The three municipalities are exploring whether a single municipal government could deliver services more efficiently, equitably, and sustainably than three separate municipal units. Exploring amalgamation does not mean it is the preferred outcome. It means the municipalities are examining the question and gathering the information needed to make an informed decision.

On February 3, 2026, Kevin Latimer facilitated a joint workshop with the Councils and staff of all three municipalities to identify the potential benefits and challenges of amalgamation. Several key themes emerged, including:

- Rising service delivery costs
- Aging infrastructure and future capital requirements
- Staffing, recruitment, and succession challenges
- Increasing regulatory and administrative requirements
- Opportunities for stronger regional planning, service coordination, and advocacy

The workshop also identified important challenges that would need to be addressed, including taxation, debt, infrastructure, staffing, representation, community identity, and transition costs.

The workshop summary can be [viewed here](#).

4. Are other options being explored?

Yes. Amalgamation is not the only form of municipal collaboration or restructuring being considered.

The Municipality of the District of Shelburne, Town of Shelburne, and Town of Lockeport are also participating with the Municipality of Barrington and Town of Clark's Harbour in a *Joint Services Board Exploration Committee* to identify additional opportunities for municipal cooperation and shared service delivery.

The Steering Committee also received a presentation from Chris MacNeill examining lessons learned from previous municipal amalgamations and dissolutions in Nova Scotia, including Queens County, Springhill, Bridgetown, and Parrsboro. The purpose was to better understand different approaches to municipal restructuring, their benefits and challenges, and the lessons that may apply locally. A summary of the lessons learned presented to the Committee can be viewed [here](#).

The presentation does not mean that any of the three municipalities has decided to pursue dissolution. Its purpose was to ensure the Committee considered a range of municipal restructuring experiences as part of its broader review.

Process & Decision-Making

5. 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

6. Is public engagement required?

Public engagement is not legally required before the municipalities decide whether to submit an amalgamation application. However, public input is an important part of the process and would form part of the evidence considered by the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board (NSRAB) if an application proceeds.

The Steering Committee is committed to providing opportunities for residents to learn about the process, ask questions, and share their views. Committee meetings are open to the public, and upcoming meetings will be rotated among the three municipal units to allow the Committee to engage directly with residents and better understand the unique realities and concerns of each community.

Additional public engagement opportunities would be developed as the process advances. Public feedback can help identify issues that require further study and inform the decisions ultimately made by each municipal Council.

7. 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.

8. How much will amalgamation cost?

The total cost of pursuing amalgamation is not yet known.

Earlier in the Steering Committee process, preliminary estimates were obtained for a range of financial, human resources, public engagement, boundary, and legal work that was believed could be required. Those estimates ranged from approximately \$474,000 to \$547,000.

Since then, the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board (NSRAB) has provided additional guidance confirming that not all of those studies would necessarily be required. The Board has indicated that much of the information needed for an application can be prepared using existing municipal information and staff-led analysis.

The NSRAB would normally require information including three-year operating and capital projections, current financial statements, assessment and taxation information, service and cost-sharing arrangements, staffing assumptions, governance information, and other supporting documentation. The Board may require additional information depending on the application.

There will still be costs associated with the process. These may include legal services, public engagement, financial analysis, specialized professional advice, and the cost of a consultant retained by the NSRAB to review the municipalities' financial projections.

The Steering Committee is continuing to determine what work would actually be required, what can be completed internally, and what outside professional support may be necessary before a reliable total cost can be established.

9. Who will pay for the amalgamation process?

The final cost-sharing arrangement has not been determined.

From the beginning, the Steering Committee has been clear that the three municipalities need good information before deciding whether amalgamation makes sense. That includes information about finances, infrastructure, staffing, taxation, services, and other impacts. The Committee also believes residents and Councils should have this information before being asked to make a final decision.

For that reason, the Committee has been asking the Province to help pay for the studies and analysis needed to properly assess amalgamation. Provincial funding has been provided in previous municipal restructuring processes, and discussions are continuing with the Province and MLA Nolan Young about what support may be available here.

The Province has said it is not prepared to commit funding until the three municipalities first decide whether they want to formally pursue an amalgamation application. This creates a challenge because the Committee believes much of this information should be available before Councils are asked to make that decision.

The Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board has since confirmed that some of the information needed for an application can be prepared by municipal staff using existing records, while other work may still require outside professional support.

The Committee's goal is to understand what information is needed, what it will cost, and what support the Province may provide so that residents and Councils can make an informed decision based on reliable information.

Taxes & Finances

10. 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.

11. 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

12. 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**.

13. 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

14. 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.

15. 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

16. Will my community lose its voice?

No decisions have been made about how communities would be represented if amalgamation moves forward.

The Steering Committee has not yet discussed the number of councillors, electoral districts, or how communities would be represented. Those discussions would only happen if the three municipal Councils decide to move forward with an amalgamation application.

If the process continues, a proposed Council structure would need to be developed and electoral boundaries would ultimately need approval from the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board.

Making sure residents in Lockeport, Shelburne, and communities throughout the Municipality of the District of Shelburne continue to have a meaningful voice would be an important part of that work.

17. 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.

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

Information about the amalgamation process will continue to be shared through municipal websites, Committee meetings, and other public engagement opportunities.

Residents can ask questions or provide feedback by contacting the Amalgamation Steering Committee Chair at amalgamationchair@temp.g23.ca.

Committee meetings will also be rotated among the three municipal units to provide opportunities for the Committee to meet directly with residents and better understand the unique realities, priorities, and concerns of each community.

Details about upcoming meetings and other opportunities to participate will be shared publicly in advance.

Lessons Learned from other Municipalities

19. What can we learn from other municipal restructuring experiences?

The Steering Committee received a presentation on lessons learned from the Queens County amalgamation and the dissolutions of Springhill, Bridgetown, and Parrsboro. The presentation was delivered by Chris MacNeill, who has been directly involved in each of these municipal restructuring processes and was able to provide practical, first-hand insight into what worked, what did not, and what communities learned along the way.

While every community and restructuring process is different, several common lessons emerged:

- **Plan for infrastructure early.** Aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance can become much more expensive if they are not understood and addressed before problems become urgent.
- **Understand the financial picture.** Taxation, debt, reserves, service costs, and future capital needs should be clearly understood before major decisions are made.
- **Staffing and municipal capacity matter.** Small municipalities can be vulnerable when important responsibilities and knowledge are concentrated among a limited number of employees.
- **Protect community identity.** Concerns about losing local identity are common, but the experiences presented showed that communities can continue to maintain their identity, organizations, volunteers, and traditions after municipal restructuring.
- **Representation needs careful consideration.** How communities are represented within a new municipal structure should be considered early and designed fairly.
- **Communication and public engagement are important.** Residents need clear information about what is being considered, why it is being considered, and how changes may affect them.
- **Transition takes time and can be complicated.** Staffing, buildings, services, policies, technology, taxation, and other systems cannot simply be combined overnight.
- **Regional cooperation can create opportunities.** The Queens County experience showed that working as one municipality can support larger regional infrastructure investments and reduce the need to manage services through multiple agreements and committees.

These real-world experiences provide valuable insight into the issues the three municipalities should consider as they decide whether amalgamation is the right path forward.

A summary of the lessons learned presented to the Committee can be [viewed here](#).

Final Clarification

20. Is amalgamation a “done deal”?

No.

No decision has been made to amalgamate the three municipalities.

Each municipal unit must independently decide whether it wants to move forward with an amalgamation application. The Municipality of the District of Shelburne, Town of Shelburne, and Town of Lockeport would each make that decision through their own Council.

If all three Councils decide to proceed, an application would then be submitted to the Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board (NSRAB) for review.

Until those decisions are made, the Steering Committee’s role is to gather information, understand the potential benefits and risks, hear from residents, and help each Council make an informed decision.

Nova Scotia Regulatory & Appeals Board (NSRAB)

21. 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.

22. 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

23. 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.

24. 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

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. Step 3: What kinds of studies and information are required?

The Nova Scotia Regulatory and Appeals Board (NSRAB) has provided more detail about the information it would normally need to review an amalgamation application.

Much of this information can come from existing municipal records and work completed by municipal staff. Separate consultant studies are not automatically required for every issue.

The information would normally include:

- Three-year operating and capital budgets for the proposed municipality
- Recent audited financial statements from all three municipalities
- Current assessment values, tax rates, population and housing information
- Existing shared services and cost-sharing agreements
- Information about staffing and the proposed municipal structure
- A preliminary idea of the size and structure of the new Council
- Information about services such as policing, roads, fire protection, public works, planning, waste management and recreation
- Information about debt, reserves and transition costs
- Confirmation from the Province about policing, roads, grants, equalization and other funding arrangements

The NSRAB may also ask for additional information after reviewing an application.

The Steering Committee has been clear that Councils and residents need good information before deciding whether amalgamation makes sense. In some cases, that may mean gathering more information than the NSRAB requires for an application. The Committee is working with the Province to determine what additional studies or professional work may be needed, what that work would cost, and what provincial funding may be available so that any future decision can be based on reliable information.

28. 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.

29. 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.

30. 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

31. 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.

32. 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

33. 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.