



ST. PETER'S MAIN STREET & VILLAGE CONCEPTUAL PLAN: FINAL REPORT

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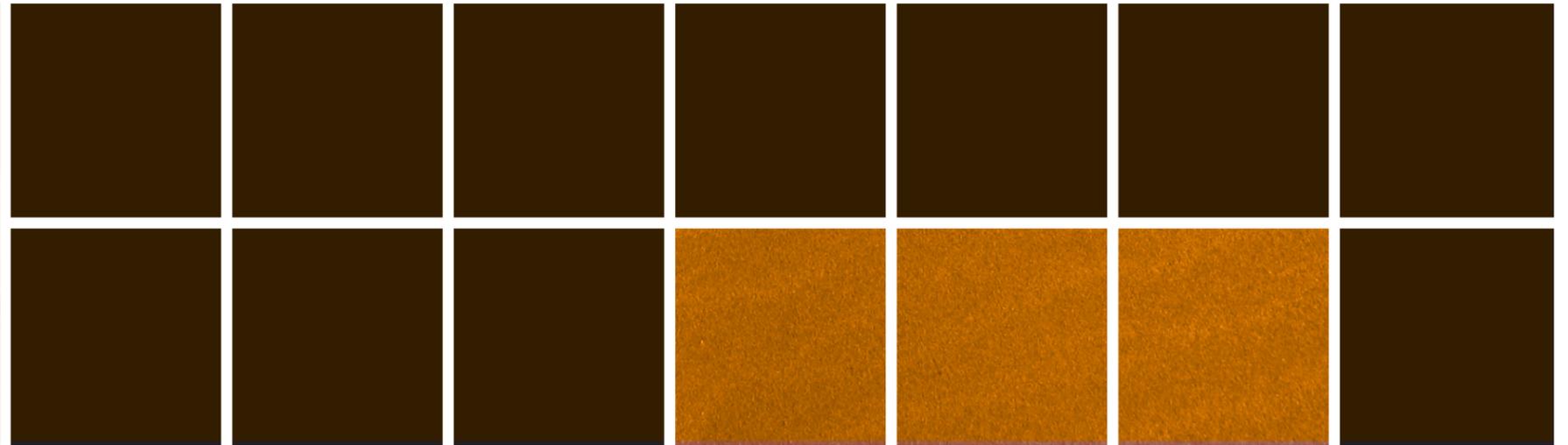
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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

St. Peter's is a village rich in cultural and historical heritage. Long before European settlement, the Mi'kmaq used the isthmus as a portage route between the Atlantic Ocean and the Bras D'or Lakes. The village of St. Peter's was first settled by French merchants in the 1630s and became a "haul over road" for shipping into the Bras D'or Lakes. The subsequent construction of the St. Peter's Canal completed in 1869, made St. Peter's a natural treasure as the historic link between the Atlantic Ocean and the Bras D'or Lakes.

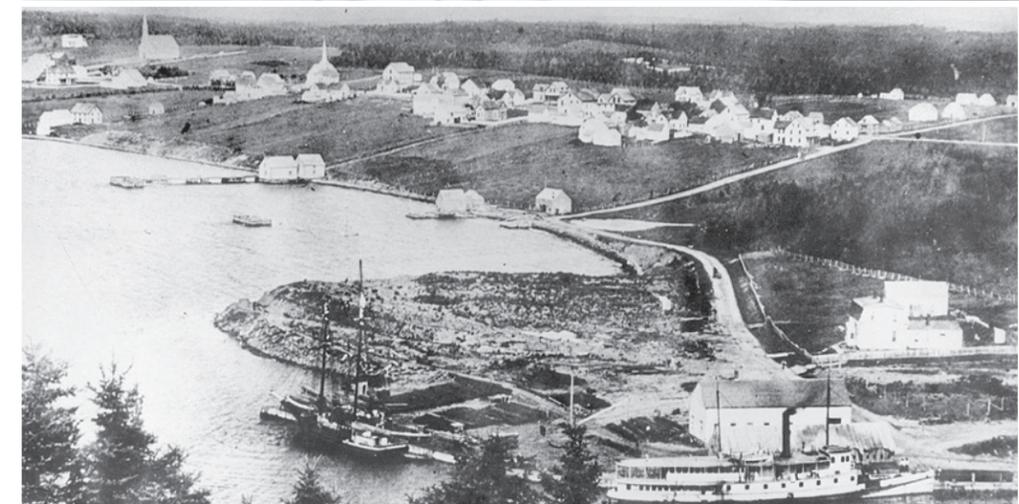
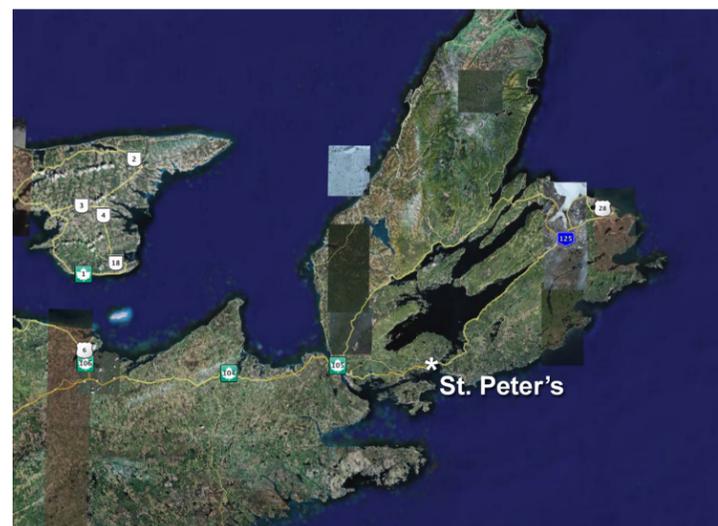
St. Peter's has been positioned as a popular tourist destination with the existing St. Peter's Canal, a National Historic Site, and Battery Provincial Park that incorporates the sites of historic French and British fortifications. As the Gateway to the Bras D'or and with Nicolas Denys Days Festival, St. Peter's is not only the tourist centre of Richmond County, but also the commercial centre. With a population of over 800, the Village provides a range of services, including accommodations, camping, restaurants, coffee shops, grocery store, gift and craft shops, pharmacies, bank, liquor store, service stations, museums and recreational facilities.

The St. Peter's Economic Development Organizations (SPEDO) is a not-for-profit group registered as a society in November of 2006. It is a volunteer organization and independent from government, however, it does have ex-officio representatives from Richmond County Council and Strait-Highlands Regional Development Agency (SHRDA). SHRDA and SPEDO have been charged with overseeing this

plan. This St. Peter's Development Plan has a broad mandate to realize a community branding and positioning concept, a main street facade theme, a streetscape revitalization and overall conceptual community development plan for the Village of St. Peter's. The plan was developed over a 6 week period from mid February 2008 to March 2008.

The intent of this study is to investigate the community development ideas and to work with the various stakeholders, including the steering committee, area business, and the public, to identify a range of potential solutions, and then prepare a conceptual plan that communicates their vision in a clear and exciting format. The plan must also provide specific project descriptions linking to the strategic plan and budget estimates for the implementation of the plan.

Site Location Plan





EXISTING CONDITIONS
2004

1.1 STUDY BACKGROUND

In May of 2006 of 2007, the SHRDA and the Eastern Nova Scotia District Planning Commission (ENSDPC), completed a Strategic Plan for St. Peter's which outlined a framework for community economic development in the town. The St. Peter's Economic Development Organizations (SPEDO) is a not-for-profit group created as a result of that plan. SPEDO updated the strategic plan in November of 2007.

During the planning process, SPEDO realized they had a need "to conceptualize a larger plan that consolidates and communicates a community vision and economic development plans; to develop a branding and positioning concept; and to provide a useful planning tool for community planning."

The strategic plan outlined the need to:

1. Develop a branding and positioning concept for the Village;
2. Create a conceptual development plan for the Village;
3. Suggest a main street development and building façade theme and design;
4. Propose streetscape improvements for the Village;
5. Suggest appropriate areas for commercial and residential expansion;
6. Create a waterfront development plan, and
7. Mesh all of the above with Village recreational development plans.

This plan is a direct outgrowth of the Village of St. Peter's Strategic Plan. While the scope and timeline for this report was too limited to investigate any of the items in the Strategic Plan in great detail, this report will provide the framework for more detailed implementation projects in the future (facade improvements plans, signage and wayfinding strategy, streetscape plan, marketing plan).



Lake entrance to St. Peter's Canal, St. Peter's 1924

Site History

St. Peter's can trace its history to the 1630s when a small fortified settlement named "Saint Pierre" was built by merchants from La Rochelle, France on the isthmus. In 1650, La Rochelle merchant Nicolas Denys took possession of Saint Pierre and encouraged the fur trade with local members of the Mi'kmaq Nation who used the isthmus as a canoe portage route between the Atlantic Ocean and Bras d'Or Lake. In addition to establishing a fur trading post, Denys later used the isthmus as a "haul over road" for portaging small sailing ships from Bras d'Or Lake to the Atlantic and vice versa.

When France lost possession of present-day Nova Scotia to Britain in 1713, Port Toulouse was created near the 17th century location of the fortified community of Saint Pierre as a logistics base and supply centre for Fortress Louisbourg. To protect Port Toulouse, France built another fortification on the shore. The fort at Port Toulouse and settlements in the area were destroyed by the British in 1758 following the fall of Fortress Louisbourg and the rest of Acadia became a British

colony. At this time, Britain sponsored settlers to move into the area of Saint Pierre/Port Toulouse. Britain also built Fort Dorchester on the summit of Mount Granville, a hill overlooking the isthmus.

The village of St. Peter's was founded early in the 1800s. Local residents rehabilitated Denys's old "haul over road", laying wood skids for portaging small sailing ships across the isthmus. The route through Bras d'Or Lake was considered a much shorter and safer voyage to Sydney than traveling around the exposed southern coast of Cape Breton Island. In 1825 a feasibility study into building a canal was undertaken. Construction of the St. Peter's Canal began in 1854 and took 15 years of digging, blasting and drilling through a solid granite hill 20 m (65 ft) high to build a channel 800 m (2,600 ft) long with an average width of 30 m (100 ft). The canal opened in 1869 at the dawn of the industrial age on Cape Breton Island.

The walls of the canal were lined with timber planking and locks were installed at each end. Modifications to the canal

and lock continued until 1917 and the canal saw moderate to heavy use by small coastal steamships and barges, particularly during the First and Second World Wars when coal from the Sydney Coal Field was transported on this sheltered inland route to avoid U boats. A marble quarry on the western shore of Bras d'Or Lake at Marble Mountain also generated some shipping traffic. The canal was designated a National Historic Site in 1929 and the federal government took over its operation. Parks Canada is now the government agency responsible for its maintenance and operation and, today, the canal is almost exclusively used by pleasure boats.

Previous Studies Summary

Village of St. Peter's Strategic Plan,

SPEDO, Strait-Highlands Regional Development Agency and Rural Cape Breton District Planning Commission
November 2007

The Village of St. Peter's Strategic Plan objective is to "maintain and enhance the natural surroundings, community health, safe environment, standard of living, and economic sustainability of St. Peter's while building on the community's assets and welcoming character to expand the residential, business and tourism base." As part of the process of creating a Development Plan, there are a number of Strategic Initiatives outlined in the Strategic Plan that are important to consider in the Development Plan process:

Initiative 1.5: Improve Parking Capacity

1.5.2: Increased Village parking Capacity

- Possibly approach Sobeys requesting community parking use of area between Liquor Commission and Foodland. Could propose combined parking & street vendors.

1.5.2.1: Encourage employee & locals to park in rear parking spaces

Initiative 1.6: Improve Community Signage



1.6.1: Signage By-laws - Review and modify.

1.6.2: Marina Community Signage Plaza

Develop signage plan through St. Peter's Main Street and Village Conceptual Plan and erect community signage plaza at St. Peter's Marina through streetscape program funding.

1.6.3: Directional signage - the placement and improvement of directional signage to facilities - Lions Hall, the marina, businesses, hiking trail.

1.6.4: Update Community Signage Welcome Sign - Insert update of "years" on community welcome sign every five years

1.6.5 Signage Hardware - Coordinate and see light poles fixed with hardware for community signage and advertising (banners) for festivals

Initiative 1.9: Main St Improvements

1.9.3 Main Street Program

Initiate Main Street Conceptual Plan building on the Main Street improvements over the last 10 years, access any programs or funding, to partner with business to continue to enhance the main character and develop Main Street them (Facade and Street Scape Program).

Initiative 3.1 Marina Expansion

Resubmit funding applications with broad community support of Marina expansion by raising awareness of the project through an "open house" or meeting.

Initiative 3.2 Board Walk Development

Continue dialogue with stakeholders on the potential boardwalk development along both the lakeshore and the ocean shore.

Initiative 3.4 Condo Development

Investigate models and facilitate condo development stakeholder roundtable discussions.

Initiative 4.1 Develop Housing Options Plan

Determine if there is a need for diversified housing options: high density housing, apartments, starter homes, and condos based on present and future demand.

Initiative 6.3 Develop Year-Round Recreational Activities

Facilitate community and business interest in establishing new services and activities such as bowling, curling, cinema, library, cross country skiing, skating, walking, hiking, shopping, specialty shops, bookstore, health food store, European style cafe shop/gift shop, cyber cafe, skate board park, cycling, green spaces, welcome wagon, rock climbing wall, etc

Nicolas Denys Fort Development Study

Village of the Canal Association (VOCA)

August 26, 2004

This development study investigated the feasibility of reconstructing Nicolas Denys' Fort in St. Peter's as an additional tourist attraction. The concept was to create another tourist site that would increase the visibility of St. Peter's as a tourist destination and extend the amount of time visitors stayed in the community to take advantage of other economic spin-offs for St. Peter's businesses. The study made the following recommendations:

the preferred site for the reconstructed fort would be the former Texaco bulk plant property. An alternate site was identified on a parcel of land controlled by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources.

it was estimated the reconstructed fort could attract up to 7000 visitors per year after its fifth year of operations.

the total cost of construction for the fort was ~\$250,000 (2004 dollars), excluding any land purchase/leasing/rental costs.

St. Peter's Lions Club Marina Expansion Proposal, Version II, St Peter's Lions Club

December, 2004

This report was completed by the St. Peter's Lions Club to investigate the need for expanded facilities at the existing

marina in St. Peter's. The St. Peter's Lions Club Marina has a long history in the community and an expansion was completed in 2001 that added a new club house, docks, and expanded the services and infrastructure available to recreational boaters. However, the marina is currently only used seasonally and it is believed an additional expansion could create a year-round marina that would attract commercial businesses to St. Peter's. The following points were the key observations of the 2004 expansion proposal:

- the infrastructure of the marina should be improved to include a wharf structure to accommodate a 35 ton Marine Travel Lift
- land should be cleared to accommodate a boat storage yard
- equipment should be purchased to facilitate the hauling and launching of boats
- a storage building should be purchased
- the total cost (2004 dollars) for the expansion was estimated to be \$1,451,675.
- this expansion is necessary to attract commercial businesses to the marina site.

Workshop Outcomes

A community workshop was hosted by the consultants and steering committee on February 27, 2008. About 25 people (business owners and residents) turned out for the event. The group was divided into four tables to work on individual master plans for the area. The groups were asked three questions:

- Identify the three most visible areas in the Village.
- Locate opportunities and constraints on the plan and suggest ways to make the Village better for residents, tourists and businesses
- Comment on the proposed open space network (provided) and suggest improvements

There was a great deal of consensus amongst each of four individual plans produced by the groups. The following summary outlines the findings and suggestions.

Top Three Most Visible Areas of the Village:

1. Downtown St. Peter's
2. the Marina
3. the Locks

Opportunities:

- Connecting pedestrian trail network around the Village and connecting residential areas to the downtown.
- St. Peter's is a crossroads for vehicles, boats and walkers and a regional hub for residents, businesses and tourists.
- Good pedestrian sidewalks and lighting from downtown to L'Ardoise Road.
- The old High School property will become a tremendous asset to the community in the future when the school closes. What will be the highest and best use of this site in the future with its close proximity to the downtown?
- High quality waterfronts (ocean and lake) surround the Village. Waterfront uses have not yet been realized.
- The Village has significant cultural and natural heritage opportunities that have yet to be realized. The Lock and Nicolas Denys Museum are real opportunities.
- Opportunity for Richmond Discovery Centre to service regional tourism.
- Good commercial growth potential in the downtown if there were space for it.
- Past streetscape enhancements (sidewalks, street lights, on-street parking) have been well received and are a good starting point.
- The marina is a tremendous asset that should be expanded. A trail linking the marina to the downtown should be constructed.
- There is all kinds of high quality land in the Village for residential expansion.

Constraints:

- Lack of easily accessible downtown parking is a big concern.
- Existing trails are high quality but need better connections to make the network continuous.

- No land for commercial expansion in the Village. Commercial areas are maxed out.
- Commercial building facades are not coordinated and in some cases are in poor quality
- Lack of coordinated signage and visual image for the Village.
- No recognizable theme for the Village which can be used to brand the Village.
- Highway billboard signs coming into the Village are an eyesore.
- Locks are a major opportunity but are not readily visible from the main road. Difficult for tourists to see them in operation.
- Visibility of the downtown for boat traffic is not maximized (boaters view the backs of buildings with no sense of scale for what the downtown offers)
- Waterfront uses have not been realized. The waterfront surrounding the Village (lake and ocean) are real assets which have been marginalized.
- Overhead powerlines and power poles detract from an otherwise high quality downtown.
- Sidewalk only on one side of the road through the downtown.
- Lack of high quality street furnishings (benches, trash, banners, planters, etc.)
- Need for more outdoor recreation facilities for Village residents.

Ideas for Future Consideration

1. Plan and construct a new waterfront commercial street between the highway and the ocean to provide additional commercial space and project a high quality image of the Village for boaters. Buildings on this street should be designed to face both the street and the ocean (double sided facades). The location would be in the area of the current walking trail. Sidewalks on this new street should be generous to ensure the trail continuity through the Village. End the street at the Nicolas Denys Museum overlooking the locks to create greater visibility for the museum (bring the road to the museum instead of bringing the museum to the road).
2. Continue streetscape enhancements on both sides of

the street. Consider moving powerlines and overhead services behind existing properties.

3. Create a community brand strategy for the town and market the Village's tremendous potential to tourists, residents and businesses.
4. A municipal parking lot should be constructed in the back of the Royal bank area between Main Street and the High School. Several properties will need to be purchased to consolidate the land for this lot. This would provide an easily accessible parking opportunity for most of the downtown.
5. Old school property is an opportunity in the future (concerts in gymnasiums, town recreation facilities)
6. Investigate opportunities for skating on the locks in the winter.
7. Create a large historic mural on the blank retaining wall in front of the Catholic Church coming into the Village.
8. Farmers Market might work in the Village.
9. Opportunity for a recognizable icon for the Village (one suggestion for the world's largest dime with Denys photograph unofficially on the dime).
10. Implement a facade program for businesses in the downtown.
11. Possibility for a countdown clock around the Village to notify people when boats are going through the locks.
12. Lakefront residential development on the Lions property should be developed and a road constructed to connect the Marina directly to the downtown.
13. Expand the cenotaph park and make it a major focus for the downtown.



