Business survey

Colchester...Looking Ahead

our community ◆ our government ◆ our choices

A Survey of Colchester Businesses on
Municipal Services, Governance, and Future Directions
for the Municipality of Colchester County

March 2003

This survey is being conducted by the Municipality of the County of Colchester
in cooperation of the School of Public Administration, Dalhousie University

Thank you for participating in the ***Colchester...Looking Ahead - Business Survey***. Your contribution to this review of municipal service and governance is very important.

Please answer all of the questions. If you want to comment on any of the questions, please use the **Comments** section at the end of the questionnaire. If a question does not apply to you, write "NA" for not applicable next to the question.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call Mr. Crawford Macpherson at 897-3170. He would be glad to help.

Most of the questions can be answered by just circling the number that corresponds to your choice of response. For others, we need your written comment. Your responses are necessary to make certain the survey findings represent everyone in the County.

Thanks again!

SECTION #1 The Municipal Council at work

Please answer the following questions by **circling the number** that best expresses your assessment or opinion. ❍ ✍

1. Generally speaking, how much attention have you given to the work and decisions of the Colchester Municipal Council in this past year? **Would you say you pay . . .**

   8% A lot of attention
   52% Some attention
   40% Not much attention

2. Council meets twice a month to review issues, develop policies, set budgets and oversee the general direction for the County. **How are we doing?** (*Please circle the number that matches your level of satisfaction with the performance of Council for each item* ❍ ✍)

	Very Satisfied	**Satisfied**	**Dissatisfied**	**Very Dissatisfied**	Unsure/ Don't know
a. Overall performance	**5%**	**58%**	6%	3 %	29%
b. Decisions made by Council	**3%**	**53%**	10%	3%	31%
c. Availability of Mayor to public	**15%**	**43%**	6%	2%	34%
d. Availability of Councillors to public	**11%**	**45%**	7%	3%	34%
e. Speed of response by Council to County issues	**5%**	**40%**	12%	5%	39%

3. Your elected officials are paid an honorarium. The Mayor is paid a total of $28,850 and the Deputy Mayor is paid a total of $16,490 annually. Councillors receive $12,000 annually. These honorariums are adjusted by the rate of inflation on an annual basis.
   Would you say these amounts . . .

	Should be more	**Are about right**	**Should be less**
a. The Mayor's honorarium	14%	71%	15%
b. The Deputy Mayor's honorarium	7%	79%	14%
c. The Councillors' honorarium	6%	77%	17%

4. County Council has 11 elected members and a Mayor who are responsible for the overall governance of the County. Each Councillor represents approximately 2,400 voters. **Should the size of the Council . . .**
   (*Please circle appropriate number*)

   72% remain the same
   7% be larger
   21% be smaller

5. There are three separate municipal units within Colchester: the Towns of Truro and Stewiacke and the Municipality of the County of Colchester – and within the County of Colchester there are the two incorporated Villages of Tatamagouche and Bible Hill. Over the years there has been an on again-off again debate about the possible amalgamation of the existing municipal units into one regional municipality.

Would the creation of one regional municipality improve, worsen or leave the same the following features of our municipal government?

	Amalgamation would improve	Amalgamation would worsen	Amalgamation would leave the same
a. The costs of municipal services	**34%**	51%	15%
b. The amount of services we receive	**22%**	47%	31%
c. The quality of the services delivered	**17%**	48%	35%
d. Our capacity for economic development	**46%**	32%	22%
e. The quality of the decisions made by Council	**21%**	45%	35%
f. Planning for municipal growth and development	**42%**	33%	25%
g. Ability of Council to represent community interests	**20%**	58%	22%
h. Municipal tax rate	**18%**	61%	22%

6. Generally speaking, would you say you **strongly favour, favour, oppose or strongly oppose** the amalgamation of the Colchester municipal units into one regional municipality?

8% Strongly favour
23% Favour

25% Oppose
30% Strongly Oppose

Or, 15% neither favour nor oppose

7. **Are there regional issues not being addressed that should be**?
(Please circle appropriate number)

36% Yes
64% No **[IF no, GO TO QUESTION 9]**

8. [**If yes] what regional issues are not being addressed**?

32% Roads
20% Regional economic development
8% The flood plain
8% Taxes

SECTION #2 Programs and Services

9. **How do you find out about municipal activities**? **Which of the following is most important to you now as a source of information concerning the municipality**? *(Please circle the most important one ❍ ✍)*

44% Newspaper
24% Radio
32% County newsletter
zip County web site (www.colchester-county.ns.ca)

10. **Did you contact any municipal department during the past 12 months either by phone or in person**? (*Please circle appropriate number*)

39% Yes, have contacted a department
61% No, have not **[If no, GO TO QUESTION 12]**

11. **[If yes], how satisfied were you with the service you received in terms of the following?** (*Please circle appropriate number*)

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Time spent waiting	**24%**	**60%**	10%	6%
Time to complete your business	**25%**	**54%**	12%	10%
Courtesy of staff	**35%**	**53%**	5%	7%
Speed of response to inquiries	**23%**	**53%**	13%	12%
Quality of service	**24%**	**54%**	9%	14%
Overall performance	**20%**	**59%**	8%	13%

12. The Municipality is responsible for delivering programs and services on a regular basis. **How are we doing?**
[**Satisfaction percentages only are based on those who have used the service**]

Programs & Services	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Have not used the service
a. Building Inspection Service	**18%**	**69%**	6%	7%	53%
b. CAO, Clerk's Office	**13%**	**77%**	4%	6%	70%
c. Development Control Service	**9%**	**70%**	11%	11	76%
d. Emergency Measures Planning	**16%**	**66%**	13%	5%	79%
e. Engineering, Public Works	**13%**	**55%**	18%	15%	70%

Programs & Services	**Very Satisfied**	**Satisfied**	**Dissatisfied**	**Very Dissatisfied**	Have not used the service
f. Property Information Service	**12%**	**75%**	8%	4%	59%
g. Finance, Tax Office	**9%**	**78%**	7%	7%	49%
h. Land Use, Planning, Zoning	**13%**	**55%**	19%	14%	60%
i. Website	**4%**	**85%**	9%	2%	80%
j. Sidewalk Maintenance & Snow Removal	**13%**	**63%**	14%	10%	51%
k. Recycling/Waste Diversion Program	**15%**	**68%**	11%	6%	31%
l. RCMP Services	**22%**	**69%**	6%	4%	28%
m. Volunteer Fire Service	**48%**	**51%**	0%	1%	38%

13. There are organization that exist to strengthen economic development within our region. We would like to know your level of satisfaction with the performance of the following organizations.

	Very Satisfied	**Satisfied**	**Dissatisfied**	**Very Dissatisfied**	Unsure/ Don't know
a. Colchester Regional Development Agency (CoRDA)	**5%**	**25%**	13%	5%	**53%**
b. Central Nova Tourist Association (CNTA)	**5%**	**37%**	8%	2%	**48%**
c. Colchester Park Development Society - Debert (CPDS)	**3%**	**22%**	5%	5%	**64%**
d. Chamber of Commerce	**6%**	**34%**	8%	3%	**50%**

14. **Looking 10 years into the future, do you see your business:** (*Please circle appropriate number*)

36% Expanding
21% Remaining the same
6% Downsizing
16% Under new ownership
4% Relocating outside of Colchester (**Go to Question 15)**
18% Unsure / don't know

15. [**IF RELOCATING], Why will you be relocating your business outside of Colchester County**

There is no pattern in the 11 responses – 1 for each reason – other business opportunities, Canadian and/or commercial and business occupancy tax, municipal services, zoning problems, not friendly to business, business out of province, closer to customers, municipal department harassment

16. **How would you rank the importance of the following factors as they relate to the continuation and future growth of your specific business?** (*Please circle appropriate number*)

Business Resources:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	Unsure/ Don't know
a.Labour Skills & Education	**46%**	33%	13%	8%
b.Labour Availability – Local	**56%**	24%	13%	8%
c. Labour availability – thru immigration	**8%**	14%	57%	21%
d. Skill Enhancement Programs	**35%**	32%	20%	13%

Services:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	Unsure/ Don't know
e. Central Water	**33%**	20%	37%	10%
f. Central Sewer	**49%**	20%	24%	8%
g. Sidewalks	**32%**	59%	33%	8%
h. Paved Roads	**76%**	19%	2%	3%
i. Natural Gas	**12%**	19%	52%	17%
j. Street Lighting	**41%**	31%	23%	4%
k. Land-use planning, zoning	**42%**	36%	15%	8%
l. Fire Protection	**77%**	19%	2%	2%
m. Police Protection	**78%**	17%	3%	2%
n. Municipal Taxes	**65%**	28%	4%	3%

Location:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	Unsure/ Don't know
o. Highway Access	**66%**	23%	10%	2%
p. Railway Access	**10%**	17%	64%	10%
q. Airport Access	**10%**	25%	57%	9%
r. Visibility	**55%**	27%	13%	5%
s. Close to Population	**48%**	32%	17%	3%
t. Affordable Land & Dev. Costs.	**52%**	25%	19%	5%
u. Availability of Vacant Land	**30%**	27%	36%	7%

Question Cont'd on Next Page

Personal Resources:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	Unsure/ don't know
v. Housing Costs	**55%**	29%	12%	4%
w. Shopping Choices	**35%**	46%	16%	3%
x. Health Care Facilities	**70%**	22%	5%	2%
y. Educational Facilities	**65%**	25%	8%	3%
z. Recreation/Cultural Amenities	**36%**	43%	16%	5%
aa. Quality of Living Environment	**64%**	30%	5%	2%

17. From the point of view of your business, what do you consider to be Colchester County's strengths and weaknesses?

STRENGTHS:	**WEAKNESSES:**
50% - central location, the "hub of NS" 19% – the people, helpful, kind 26% – Economic development 11% – strong base for economic development 8% – population, stable and steady 7% – quality of available workforce	23% – Road conditions 17% – Taxes, occupancy tax 7% – Labour available 6% – Lack of cooperation in development

18 As a community, we want to be in a position to attract new businesses and expand our existing commercial base. **How important are the following programs and services for the continued growth of our business community?**

Capital Works:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	**No Opinion**
a. Regional roadway improvements	**84%**	10%	2%	10%
b. Municipal industrial park development.	**40%**	43%	8%	10%
c. Infrastructure investments				
1. water	**56%**	27%	8%	10%
2. sewer	**60%**	24%	7%	9%
3. road improvements	**78%**	14%	2%	6%
4. sidewalks	**47%**	28%	15%	10%
d. Public transit.	**19%**	37%	31%	13%

Municipal Programs:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	**No Opinion**
e. Increased supply of land zoned commercial and industrial.	**33%**	46%	11%	10%
f. Waste management				
1. garbage collection	**62%**	29%	4%	6%
2. compost collection	**53%**	32%	9%	7%
3. recyclables collection	**56%**	32%	6%	6%
g. Property tax incentive programs.	**43%**	30%	12%	15%
h. Promotional materials and programs.	**26%**	45%	15%	14%
i. Land use controls aimed to preserve Colchester's rural character.	**34%**	41%	13%	13%

Tourism Promotion:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	**No Opinion**
j. Sponsorship of festivals & special events.	**42%**	43%	8%	8%
k. Organizing & coordinating community events.	**37%**	44%	10%	9%
l. Cultural centre/facilities.	**31%**	40%	17%	12%
m. Convention centre.	**32%**	40%	16%	11%
n. Additional tourist information centres.	**32%**	38%	21%	10%
o. Large, multi-purpose, arena complex.	**35%**	34%	21%	11%
p. Campgrounds, parks, and other amenities.	**43%**	41%	9%	8%

Business Support:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	**No Opinion**
q. Development of incubator malls.	**12%**	41%	27%	21%
r. Available commercial buildings/space	**23%**	50%	14%	12%
s. Business development programs.	**36%**	45%	9%	11%
t. Skills development & upgrading programs	**43%**	43%	6%	9%

Community Enhancement Programs:	**Very Important**	**Somewhat Important**	**Not Important**	**No Opinion**
u. Main street beautification.	**47%**	37%	11%	6%
v. Roadside clean-up.	**73%**	22%	1%	4%

Q18: Other factors . . . see appendix, diverse suggestions

19. **Why did you choose to locate your business in Colchester County?**

49% live here, family here, raised in Truro
16% central location, hub of Nova Scotia
9% quality of life
6% lower costs of developing, sustaining business (land, rent, taxes)

20. The Province of Nova Scotia recently enacted smoke-free legislation that sets out minimum standards that apply to all workplaces within the province. **What type of impact has the smoke-free workplace legislation had on your business?**

30% Positive Impact	61% No Impact	4% Negative Impact	4% Do Not Know

21. Presently, County Council is of the opinion that smoking regulations are a provincial matter and any laws ought to be consistently applied throughout Nova Scotia, rather than encouraging municipalities to individually adopt stricter anti-smoking standards. **From the point of view of your business, what statement best represents your thoughts on this topic?**

47% Province should enact stricter uniform standards for smoking in public places, including the work place
38% The present provincial regulations are adequate
9% Smoking in public places is a local issue that individual municipalities should regulate further if they wish
6% Unsure/ don't know

22. **What position, if any, do you think Colchester Council should take on Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs)?**

49% Actions that would ban VLT's completely
27% Actions to further restrict access to VLT's
14% No action
11% Unsure/don't know

23. Over the last decade, there has been an on-again off-again debate concerning Sunday shopping across Nova Scotia. **Would your business benefit or be harmed by extending the shopping week to include Sunday?**

15% Benefit	64% Make No Difference	22% Harm

24. Who do you feel should have the EXCLUSIVE right to regulate Sunday shopping?

54% Province of Nova Scotia
32% Individual municipalities
14% Unsure/don't know

SECTION #3 Financial Matters & Future Directions

25. The Municipality is trying to balance the need and desire to pay off its existing debt with the need and desire to replace and add new infrastructure.

- Our debt load is approximately $14 million
- We reduce this debt by approximately $1 million per year
- The Municipality's debt is well within provincial borrowing guidelines.

In the future the Municipality will have to repair existing infrastructure (e.g. sewer pipes, treatment plants, sidewalks), and consider requests for new infrastructure.
Which statement best reflects your view? *(Please circle appropriate number)*

28%	It is acceptable to borrow money for infrastructure, providing the Municipality does not exceed provincial borrowing guidelines.
7%	The Municipality should not invest in new infrastructure until the money is in the bank, even if this means that infrastructure is not built or replaced for a number of years.
65%	A balance between the first two statements seems reasonable.

26. **Considering the types of services your business receives (ie. infrastructure, tourism promotion, sponsorship of economic development activities, etc.) how would you rank the value of these services relative to the commercial taxes your business pays?** (*Please circle appropriate number*)

	1%	Excellent Value
	14%	Good Value
	37%	Fair Value
	37%	Poor Value
Or,	12%	Do not know.

27. With continued development in Colchester, the Municipality has a budget surplus. **Please rank the following statements in the order which best describes your advice to Council, using #1 for your highest priority.**

	% highest priority/ % lowest priority
a. Lower the tax rate	32% / 28%
b. Hold the tax rate and pay off our debt more quickly	45% / 9%
c. Invest new tax revenues in replacing existing infrastructure	22% / 10%
d. Invest new tax revenues in new infrastructure and core services.	10% / 16%
e. Invest new tax revenues in additional business support programs	9% / 38%

28. **If you think the Municipality should invest in new services or support programs (question #21 d & e) what new services or programs would you suggest?**

- 88% did NOT suggestion any new services or programs. The remaining 12% suggested the following:
- Most suggestions repeated options in previous questions (roads, support local business, promote the area, water)

29. What are the three most important things that you think Colchester County should address over the next 5 to 10 years?

60% ROADS – repair, upgrade, improve, standards, priorize

25% TAXES – hold taxes, cut taxes for local business, reduce commercial taxes, eliminate occupancy tax

24% ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – attract new business, encourage local business, business support program, positive business climate

14% WATER and SEWER

12% TOURISM – county as a destination, more parkland, tourism promotion

9% DEBT – continue to pay off debt

7% GARBAGE and JUNK – garbage removal, clean up roadsides, junk cars

SECTION #4 A Little About You

Information in this section provides us with a general picture of those who responded and will be used for the purpose of interpreting this survey only.

23. Length of time your business has operated in Colchester.	5 years or less – 14% 6 to 10 years – 16% 11 to 20 years – 30% 21 years & over – 40%
24. Would you say the market your business serves is: (*Please circle appropriate letter*)	45% Local (ie. neighbourhood, town, or county) 19% Regional (ie. northeastern Nova Scotia) 20% Provincial/Atlantic Canada 5% National 12% International
26. What is the size of your business?	16% 1 employee 42% 2 to 5 employees 23% 6 to 15 employees 19% 16 or more employees
27. Are you a member of the following organizations?	a. Chamber of Commerce 24% Yes b. Central Nova Tourist Association 11% Yes

28. Identify the Region in which your business is located. (Place ✓ in appropriate box)

15% West Colchester *including:*

Debert	Great Village	Folly Lake	Five Islands	Bass River
Masstown	Londonderry	Economy	Glenholme	

17% North Colchester *including:*

Earltown	Tatamagouche	Kemptown	Denmark	Brule
Nuttby	New Annan	McCallum's Settlement		

12% South Colchester *including:*

Old Barns	Shortts Lake	Middle Stewiacke	Wittenburg	Green Oaks
Brookfield	Shubenacadie East	Upper Stewiacke	Coldstream	

54% Central Colchester *including:*

Onslow(s)	Bible Hill	Valley	Harmony/Camden	Hilden
Belmont	Truro Heights	East Mountain	Lower Truro	Greenfield
North River	Salmon River			

29. Is your business serviced by public sewer?	55% Yes / 45% No

30. Which of the following best describes your type of business? (*Please circle appropriate letter*)	19% Retail, including Department Store 10% Food & Hospitality Service 4% Business, Financial, & Professional Services 1% Communications 5% Transportation 9% Manufacturing & Fabrication 4% Construction & Building 2% Wholesale & Warehousing 12% Automotive Sales & Service 6% Tourism 2% Home Based Business 4% Health Care 3% Personal Service (hair care, tailoring, etc.) 3% Recreation & Leisure 7% Specialized Trades 1% Land Development < 1% Technology 5% Resource (forestry, mining, etc.) 2% Agriculture

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Supplied as an appendix:

In case you have misplaced the return envelope, please return this survey to:
Colchester...Looking Ahead - Business Survey, c/o School of Public Administration, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 3J5 **or** drop it off in person at the County Court House, 1 Church Street, Truro