

## Editorial: Housing

No matter where your life intersects with the hornet's nest of what passes for housing policy in Canada, within a few days, you are almost always going to want to start screaming. How could something that seems as if it should be straightforward be such a bureaucratic nightmare?

At the *Cooperator*, we've been learning a lot over the last few months about housing, especially about the deep structural conflicts between the provincial government (the Province) and Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) around issues of authority and accountability. The fundamental problem is that the Canadian constitution gives the Province almost dictatorial authority over the operations of HRM, with almost no accountability beyond the erratic blunderbuss of periodic voting.

Meanwhile, HRM has a ton of accountability, especially for land use planning, but no authority. As a result, HRM has evolved into being an incredible bureaucratic mess because without real authority, the only power HRM officials have is the power of No—or at best agonizing delays.

We've seen example after example of how the Province exercises its authority with little attention to its responsibilities to all the people of Nova Scotia. Provincial officials didn't think twice about cutting a backroom deal to sell off irreplaceable provincial park

land to an American billionaire to build golf courses and luxury housing. Provincial officials decided to move a high school into a swamp while shamelessly ignoring their own rules about siting schools, without any consideration of the impact of such a change on the community or on the students who will be completely isolated from any community.

We do not question the criticism of HRM's planning department as being far too slow. We have heard too many horror stories from too many developers and homeowners. So we can understand Premier Houston's impulse to cut this bureaucratic Gordian knot with one mighty slash by centralizing power in a single person, Housing Minister John Lohr. We assume that the Premier took this step only after despairing at the possibility of HRM being capable of changing quickly enough.

In the short run, the Minister will have the power to approve all kinds of projects that HRM's bureaucracy has delayed. But solving this problem by centralizing power smacks of going too far in the other direction. With no requirement for any public participation at all, we are left with nothing but the hope that our officials will all behave like disinterested little angels when the temptation to favour some special interest or another inevitability arise. We have just seen, in Ontario Premier Doug Ford's ill-fated attempt to turn public lands over to developers, what can happen

when there is too little public participation at the outset of the process.

We would also hope that in his haste to speed things up, the Minister does not further compound one of the fundamental problems in the housing arena, that the three levels of government just don't talk to each other about coordinating housing policy. The Premier's decision to put the Minister in sole charge without any meaningful consultation with HRM's elected officials beforehand does not bode well here.

One other thing: Canada once knew how to deal with the raw reality that the private housing market will never produce adequate amounts of housing for all Canadians. According to an April 22, 2022, article in *The Tyee*, "Between 1973 and 1994, Canada built or acquired around 16,000 non-profit or co-operative homes every year. Between 1994 and 2016, that number dropped to just 1,500 homes a year," with the Liberals starting to cut funds in 1993 as they embraced the neoliberal reliance on the market.

The market failed to produce the needed housing. Trudeau's Liberals and Houston's PCs are finally pumping billions into housing. But we remain a long way away from a permanent national commitment to ensuring that every Canadian has an affordable place to live.



The start of All Out Trail Racing's Musquodoboit Mayhem trail race on October 14. Runners took on the 10km Admiral's Lake trail. Afterwards, runners were welcomed at the Musquodoboit Harbour Railway Museum, with food and drink from The Food Truck and Sober Island Brewing. There were prizes for the top 3 finishers in the over 50s, men's, and women's, as well as lots of other door prizes for those who were just enjoying the beautiful trail. AOTR's races require advance registration and fill up fast. See All Out Trail Racing's Facebook page for the schedule of upcoming races.

## Forest Watch Celebrates 25th Anniversary

By Richard Bell

The Eastern Shore Forest Watch Association held its 25th anniversary celebration at the Deanery Project in Ship Harbour on October 22, 2023. District 2 City Councillor David Hendsbee presented a plaque to Board Chair Karen Schlick in recognition of the organization's dedication to preserving and protecting the Nova Scotia environment along the Eastern Shore.

Attendees also participated in a tree planting (see photo on page 4) to honour the late Barbara Markovitz, who led the organization for many years through some of its toughest fights.

In a post-lunch talk, Jamie Simpson, one of the province's leading environmental lawyers, talked about some of the significant environmental victories, some of which he had a hand in. He started with a lawsuit he brought about the failure of the Minister of the Environment to carry out a law which said that the Minister "shall" put a team in place for an endangered species, and develop a plan for saving that species, something that the

...continued on page 17



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## Appointment to Cabinet

In September, I was honoured to accept the position of Minister of Department of Fisheries & Aquaculture. The Eastern Shore is renown for its beautiful coastal communities and strong economic ties to the ocean. As Minister, I am excited to profile and promote Nova Scotia's \$2.6 BILLION annual blue export industry!

Fisheries & Aquaculture related questions or concerns? Contact:

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**Halifax, Nova Scotia**

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## Free High-Dose Influenza Vaccine for Seniors 65 and Older

The high-dose vaccine is now available to Nova Scotians aged 65 years or older for free at local pharmacies and medical clinics. This vaccine contains a bigger dose and is recommended for older Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotia will also be offering updated COVID-19 vaccine to people aged six months and older and regular-dose influenza vaccine for those six months to 64 years old. These vaccines are free, safe and protect against the latest strains of both illnesses.

It is safe and convenient to receive both the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time, and it is recommended that Nova Scotians book them at the same appointment if their provider is offering this option.

Vaccines will be available following this approximate schedule:

- high-dose influenza (65-plus only) – available now
- Moderna's updated COVID-19 vaccine – the week of October 16
- standard-dose influenza vaccine – the week of October 23
- Pfizer's updated COVID-19 vaccine – late October/early November.

Appointments for COVID-19 and influenza vaccines in pharmacies and outreach clinics will be posted online as they become available at: <https://novascotia.flow.canimmunize.ca/en/covid-flu-booking>



Nova Scotians who get their vaccine from a family doctor, nurse practitioner or family practice nurse can book an appointment by calling the clinic directly. Most primary care providers will only be offering influenza vaccines this year.

## New Rules for Off-Highway Vehicles in Effect

Great news for off-highway vehicle users!

New rules announced for off-highway vehicles in Nova Scotia will allow access to trails and services via designated road shoulders and roadways for drivers. This will give drivers safe access to trails while supporting economic development by increasing access to businesses such as restaurants and gas stations.

More information about the announcement can be found at:

<https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20230929001>

## New Public Housing for Nova Scotia

More than 200 new public housing units will be built for Nova Scotians in need.

Provincial Municipal Affairs and Housing and the federal Department Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, announced \$83 million to create 222 new public housing units, including 80 that will be fully barrier-free. The new housing will serve 522 families, individuals, and low-income seniors in rural and urban communities across Nova Scotia.

Many Nova Scotians are struggling to find safe and affordable housing. Increasing the supply of all types of housing is an important part of the solution. The province is investing, innovating, and working to increase supply so more Nova Scotians can have a safe place to call home. Hundreds more Nova Scotians will be given that opportunity with this initiative.

The units will be built on provincially owned land close to existing public housing developments in:

- Bridgewater
- Kentville
- Truro
- Cape Breton (multiple locations)
- Halifax Regional Municipality (multiple locations).



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The province also announced plans for pilot programs aimed at creating more options and opportunities to add housing to existing properties, create mixed-income communities, and transfer some existing public housing units to community-based housing organizations and/or resident ownership.

## Heating Assistance Rebate Program (HARP)

Nova Scotians can now apply for a \$600 rebate on their heating bills this year through the Heating Assistance Rebate Program (HARP).

Eligibility criteria:

You are responsible for your home heating costs, and meet household income requirements:

- Families earning up to \$75,000 or single-income households earning up to \$55,000 are eligible, whether they rent or own.

For information on HARP or to apply online, visit: <https://beta.novascotia.ca/.../heating-assistance-rebate>

Application forms are also available at Access Nova Scotia, Community Services and MLA offices. **Consider applying online to save time and receive your rebate faster.**

## Nova Scotians Benefitting from Your Energy Rebate Program

Most people receive the provincial rebate automatically on their energy bills, primarily for home heating fuel and electricity. The rebate is also available on the purchase of other sources of energy, including propane, natural gas, wood products, coal, and kerosene. All Nova Scotians who pay for home energy are eligible, regardless of their income or whether they own or rent.

People who are not receiving the rebate automatically can apply by saving their receipts and submitting them together with a completed application form. Claims must total at least \$30 or cover a period of a year or more. Nova Scotians must have paid HST on their energy purchases to be eligible.

Application forms are available at Access Nova Scotia centres, online or by calling 902-424-5200 or 1-800-670-4357.

More information on the program, including application forms, is available at: <https://beta.novascotia.ca/programs-and-services/your-energy-rebate-program-verp>



## Seaside Christmas 2023 is Coming!

By Deirdre Dwyer, Co-Chair, Old School Community Gathering Place

The Eastern Shore's best holiday shopping is coming soon, with the 33rd annual Seaside Christmas weekend, Friday, November 17 through Sunday, November 19.

Shops, craft markets, cafes, and other venues, will provide a wide array of Christmas shopping for your family and friends, from Ataraxy Farm in Lawrencetown to Harbour Breeze Daylilies in Salmon River Bridge.

Crafters will be offering handmade blacksmith-ed items, sewing, preserves, handmade books and socks, cat toys, stained glass ornaments, jewelry, pottery, paintings, quilted products, wrapped gemstones, seashell earrings, and mittens.

Crafters will get together at the Old School Community Gathering Place, the Farmers' Market, Harbour Lites, the East Chezzetcook and District Lions Club, the Musquodoboit Harbour & District Lions' Club, the French Duck, and Lupin. The Old School elves will offer candy canes and hot chocolate for kids of all ages, and the Christmas spirit will be alive and jolly.

To think this has been happening for 33 years now along the Eastern Shore!

Margaret Hayes of Old Times, Old Friends, Collectables and Dolls on East Petpeswick is one of the founding vendors who started the event to encourage folks to shop locally. Also involved were Edyth Shuman of Harbour Lites, Marilyn Bennett, and Maria Doyle. Later Paul Nicholl of Dobbit's Bakehouse was coordinator, then June Zilkowsky of the Inn House in Porter's Lake, Alan Banks of Harbour Breeze Daylilies, and Sue Higgs of the Seaside Tourism and Business Association.

This year, the Old School Community Gathering Place is coordinating things. The Old School thanks all these folks and others who volunteered their effort and time. We thank the Seaside Christmas Old School committee (Catherine, Lori, Rosemary, Monika, and Bethana) as well. We all look forward to seeing you on the Seaside Christmas weekend on November 17 to 19!




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