

**Opening Remarks – Warden Ron Baillie for ONE PICTOU COUNTY**  
**Pictou, New Glasgow, Stellarton and Pictou County Amalgamation Hearing**  
**M07050**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Board, my name is Ron Baillie and I am the Warden for the Municipality of the County of Pictou. I have been asked to deliver some opening remarks on behalf of all Applicants including my colleagues in the Towns of New Glasgow, Stellarton and Pictou.

Mr. Chairman, I want to first thank you and your colleagues for considering the application for amalgamation, and thank everyone who is taking the time to participate in this hearing. It is an important part of the process and I want everyone – residents, in particular – to feel that their voices have been heard and will continue to be heard.

Creating a better future for the residents of this county is the main goal of our request for amalgamation. We are pursuing a stronger, more efficient governance and operational structure that is in the best interests of our residents and businesses. We've made a choice to lead change that will make our communities strong and sustainable, rather than being stuck reacting to inevitable challenges.

We can see the writing on the wall, Mr. Chairman. A declining and aging population, lagging economy, flat or declining tax base, and the need to attract investment are critical realities that must be addressed for Pictou County. Not doing so will make it increasingly difficult to provide the kinds of core municipal services that citizens deserve and expect.

Some of us are feeling the effects of these challenges already. Some are insulated for the moment, but will feel them eventually if we don't take action now to create the future we want for our communities and Pictou County as a whole.

To do this, we cannot continue to have separate municipalities competing with each other for scarce resources to tackle these challenges. We can't continue working in isolation to find solutions to problems and making decisions as single municipal units, rather than collaborating with neighbouring municipalities.

As the Ivany Report pointed out, Nova Scotia is just too small for this kind of competition. We can't compete with the world if we are competing among ourselves. We can only go so far on our own. We can go much further together. We have the assets, opportunities and human capital to build a positive future and be a strong economic driver of growth for our province.

That is why the towns of Pictou, New Glasgow and Stellarton and Municipality of Pictou County have come together to apply for amalgamation.

Mr. Chairman, it just makes sense to tear down the borders that separate us and start working as one municipality with the best interest of all our residents at heart. With this new structure,

we can speak with one united voice to residents and businesses, eliminate counterproductive competition, and focus on one vision supported by a regional plan for infrastructure and services.

Amalgamation will result in economies of scale and will bring about efficiencies in the administration of the new municipality that will benefit local residents. There will be a reduction in municipal staff while the service levels will be maintained. There is no doubt that organizational change that would be brought about by the proposed amalgamation is required within Pictou County to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of Municipal Services. The new municipality presents a more financially viable scenario than each municipality continuing with the status quo.

The Provincial government recognizes these benefits. The Department of Municipal Affairs is prepared to invest \$27 million in this effort. It represents a significant investment in a new structure for a strong, sustainable Pictou County. The investment from the Province as reflected in the Letter of Intent will immediately bring infrastructure up to appropriate standards and provide a tremendous opportunity moving forward. In light of the Province's economic position with the recent as well as upcoming dissolutions, the Province is providing a solid platform upon which the new municipality can move forward.

I want to emphasize that we are seeking amalgamation voluntarily. We were not pushed or enticed; this has been a true collaborative effort by willing partners. The province is supporting us because they recognize our local leadership to secure a bright future for our region and communities, and they believe the evidence that we have submitted to the board is compelling.

At the outset, our four municipal councils agreed on a number of pre-conditions that were developed with the best interests of our residents in mind and built on the principle of fairness. These conditions have been met in our plans, and we believe the evidence shows that we are on the right track to deliver the benefits that these conditions secure for residents and businesses through a strong new municipal governance and operational structure.

Reflective of the cooperative approach of the four municipal councils, the application contemplates a reduction in the number of elected officials from 31 to 11. There are efficiencies associated with such a reduction and will allow for a more streamlined decision making process. The change in governance structure will make it easier for the representatives to determine what is in the best interests of the larger community.

Mr. Chairman, we have faith in the fair, transparent process of the Utility and Review Board to carefully consider all the evidence, to provide opportunities to hear directly from residents, and to make a decision that is in best interests of our residents.

We, too, are working hard to be fair and transparent. We've held 35 community consultation and information sessions. Over the coming months, we will continue to create opportunities to present our evidence on the various studies and workplans so that residents are well informed

about the facts. We will also continue to create opportunities for residents to express their feelings about amalgamation. Residents will have the opportunity to express whether or not they favour amalgamation at the upcoming plebiscite scheduled to be held in the participating municipal units on May 28.

In filing reports and studies with the Board to support the argument that amalgamation is in the best interest of local residents, the Applicants drew upon in-house expertise and knowledge base for efficiency and expediency. The Applicants have every confidence in the abilities of their highly qualified staff and to provide top quality analysis.

Mr. Chairman, we understand that the idea of amalgamation is an emotional one for many people. It is a big step, and we recognize that people often feel great concern in taking steps towards change. This is natural and important to acknowledge.

It is equally important to consider all the evidence in order to determine what is in the best interests of the residents in the long term. Looking at the facts that have been compiled through this evidence-based process, there is a clear and compelling case for creating a strong amalgamated governance structure to serve our residents and businesses. We are committed to building a better Pictou County.

An amalgamated governance structure does not mean our existing communities disappear. Stellarton will continue to be Stellarton just as Scotsburn has always been Scotsburn and Hopewell has always been Hopewell. Our communities will maintain their identities and their traditions that make us proud to live here.

What will change is the governance and organizational structure which will bring all our resources together to make strategic plans and investments for a bright future for all of these communities – a governance structure that will make us much stronger and allow us to go much further together.

Again, I thank the Board members for their consideration of our application, and everyone who is participating in this hearing. I am hopeful that we will have a good outcome to ensure healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities throughout Pictou County.

Thank you.