

**Memorial University of Newfoundland**  
**Geography 3350: Community and Regional Planning & Development**

**Examining the Socio-Economic Planning Process in Lewisporte Area**

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The case study region discussed in this report is a multi-community cluster that includes several communities. The largest community is Lewisporte, with a population of 3,308 in 2006, together with the smaller surrounding communities of Campbellton, Brown's Arm, Porterville, Stanhope, and Port of Embree. These communities are located within Newfoundland and Labrador in the provincial political district of Lewisporte and the Gander-New-Wes-Valley Rural Secretariat Region. In this report we will be identifying the barriers and success factors in moving from a multi-community planning stage to plan implementation in the Lewisporte area. In order to evaluate these success factors and barriers we have reviewed and analyzed Lewisporte's Report on Findings (2003), Opportunity Identification Study, Strategic Development Plan, and Strategic Action Plan Report (2007). We have also conducted five interviews with various individuals associated with the planning process, including a local municipal leader, representatives of *Young Consulting*, Lewisporte and Area Chamber of Commerce, and Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD).

Based on our evaluation, we will be recommending steps that can be taken by the community, the council, and the senior government actors involved to maximize the benefits and minimize the problems associated with these planning processes. We will also be including information about the four planning documents, the leadership involved, the process, actors involved, history, connection to other plans in the area, and demographic and economic conditions of Lewisporte.

## **1. Description of the Planning Process:**

According to one representative the process of planning for economic development in Lewisporte and area began with the Report on Findings that was created in 2003. The planning process was further developed in 2007 with the development of the Strategic Action Plan Report and the Strategic Development Plan. A number of individuals and organizations identified the need for a planning process. This included the Lewisporte Town Council, Town of Lewisporte Transportation Committee, Town of Lewisporte Economic Development Committee, Lewisporte and Area Chamber of Commerce, and Lewisporte Area Development Association (L.A.D.A).

Some of the factors that led to the decision that a planning process was needed were the changing demographics of the area and concerns about the economy. Representatives identified these factors as including the anticipated closure of the Labrador ferry and the closure of *Atlantic Wholesalers Ltd.* in Lewisporte in 2007. The Labrador ferry is operated by *Labrador Marine Inc.* and serves as an auto and passenger ferry which can carry 250 passengers and 80 auto vehicles between Lewisporte and central and northern Labrador. The ferry service has operated for over 50 years. An estimated 70-80 jobs were lost as a result of the closure of *Atlantic Wholesalers Ltd.* in Lewisporte in March 2007. All of the representatives interviewed described this planning process as proactive however, because they were creating this planning process in anticipation of future changes.

According to one representative, the process involved multiple communities because there are 15 communities within the region. Lewisporte acts as the hub of the area and as a service centre for the region. The Town of Lewisporte felt that this would be a more effective way of getting the plan and funding approved by the government. Another interviewee stated that the reason for involving multiple communities was because they felt it was not a good idea to plan in isolation because the communities are interconnected. Furthermore, because all the communities would be affected by the aforementioned economic changes they needed to be represented on the planning committee. This led to the formation of the Lewisporte and Area Economic Development Committee. Committee Chairperson Reverend Arthur Elliott explains, "Our underlying philosophy is that Lewisporte is dependent upon the other communities in the area as the other communities are dependent upon Lewisporte... So any economic development initiatives we undertake should be done with the cooperation and the partnership of the whole area."<sup>1</sup>

The economic development planning process was initially structured through the Town of Lewisporte Economic Development Committee. The provincial government was then responsible for appointing the first Lewisporte Area Economic Development Committee in April 2007, which became the steering committee for the planning

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<sup>1</sup> Wells, K. 2008. "Regional Perspective: Economic Development Committee welcomes new members from neighbouring communities". The Pilot Dec. 31, 2008: <http://www.lportepilot.ca/index.cfm?sid=205914&sc=375>

process.<sup>2</sup> One of the first steps the committee took was the engagement and hiring of a consultant. A provincial economic development officer was also assigned to work with the Town and the Committee.

The groups and stakeholders involved in the process included the Lewisporte and Area Chamber of Commerce and other members of the business community. The key issue in the plan was the creation of port infrastructure and the trigger of this idea came from the announcement that the ferry would not be running anymore. Various businesses wanted to be able to use the port for economic purposes after the ferry closed. A variety of other groups and stakeholders were involved, such as: the Town of Lewisporte Transportation Committee, Kitiwake Economic Development Corporation (KEDC), and provincial and federal levels of government, including Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD). These groups worked in partnership with the Town, local service authorities, Economic Development Committee and other local bodies.

Some of the methods that were used to involve these stakeholders were public meetings, meetings with individual groups, a website, newsletter, committees, and external research in terms of opportunity exploration. Additional methods included monthly committee meetings, articles in a local newspaper called "The Pilot", face-to-face meetings with individuals, and the use of press releases. One representative said they believed that the small communities needed to be more involved and have more

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<sup>2</sup> Cooper (2007) <http://www.lportepilot.ca/index.cfm?sid=50519&sc=375>

representation. Another said that the Chamber of Commerce could have been more involved.

*Young Consulting* was responsible for coordinating and writing the Opportunity Identification Study, Strategic Development Plan, and Strategic Action Plan Report.<sup>3</sup> Other representatives credited the town council and INTRD for their involvement in the coordinating and writing of the plan.

One representative stated that the planning process initially cost around \$80,000 but that the estimated cost is now in excess of one million dollars. The breakdown of these costs was not discussed. According to one representative, this cost has been paid by the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development and the Lewisporte Chamber of Commerce. Another representative said that the provincial government was responsible while, yet another identified Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and INTRD as the funding agencies with 10% of the consultant's fee paid for by the Town of Lewisporte. The documents do not state who the funding agencies are, leaving confusion as to who the financial supporters of the process have been.

In part this is because there have been many steps (and plans and studies) in the process. In 2008, for example, The Town of Lewisporte began to develop a five-year business plan for development and promotion of the local marina, with \$13,500 in

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<sup>3</sup> According to both an interview respondent and Wells (2007) „Opportunities Identified’: <http://www.lportepilot.ca/index.cfm?sid=50539&sc=375>

support from the provincial government, building on earlier reports and strategies.<sup>4</sup> According to one respondent, a marine consulting firm was responsible for creating a marina plan. A series of plans and reports have been completed on the Lewisporte Marina, beginning with "Proposed Park Port Development" prepared by the Town of Lewisporte in June 1990.<sup>5</sup> Also in 2008, *AMEC Earth and Environmental* produced a report assessing the possibilities identified for the community and a business, investment and attraction strategy project was launched with financial support from ACOA, INTRD and the Town of Lewisporte.<sup>6</sup> ADI Ltd. and the Newfoundland and Labrador Consulting Engineers completed a Lewisporte Downtown Redevelopment Study in 2009.<sup>7</sup> Each of these was subsequent to the 2007 planning documents reviewed.

Specific strategies, projects and initiatives identified in the 2007 Strategic Development Plan and Action Plan Report included: skilled-trade industry, labour market development, port development, downtown core development, and develop to attract a great amount of businesses. One representative stated that the highest priority was the development of the port. Another representative said that the town council and steering committee dictated what projects were priorities. They added that the consultants would suggest what should be prioritized but that the suggestions of consultants were not necessarily followed.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2008/intrd/0930n06.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://lewisporteyachtclub.com/history.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dailybusinessbuzz.ca/2009/04/21/marina-commercial-port-good-for-business-in-lewisport/>

<sup>7</sup> Wells (2009): <http://www.dailybusinessbuzz.ca/2009/07/16/nl-developmenttourism-lewisporte-floats-beautification-project/>

One interview respondent states that the process is connected to broader regional plans and planning processes such as the Kittiwake Strategic Economic Plan, because the whole marina development is related to tourism. These local and regional plans complement each other because they are interconnected. Another representative said that these plans did not conflict but also did not necessarily complement each other, while yet another said that the KEDC regional plan was connected because they had been involved in the plan and that there was no conflict between these plans.

A municipal representative added that the process was connected to individual town plans and planning processes and that the Town of Lewisporte had incorporated it into their planning. These plans complement each other, for example, the Town of Lewisporte's plan to develop the downtown. A different respondent said that the marina plan includes Botwood and that this is again complementary to Botwood's own planning process.

## **2. Moving from Planning to Implementation:**

A representative observed that there are several aspects of the economic/socio-economic plan being implemented. They have consulted and things are slowly beginning to happen. They report that 30 more docks have been built in the marina and 38 electrical sites have been added to the Woolfrey's Pond Park since 2007. The town is also buying houses on the waterfront so that they can tear them down and further develop the area, which is part of the Downtown Revitalization project that aims to



promote business development around the harbour. Another representative said that they have begun to implement recreational boating in the marina. A different representative said that all the plans were in process, at various stages of completion, and that everything is moving along.

The Lewisporte Town Council and Lewisporte Area Economic Development Committee are taking the lead in implementing the plan, with most respondents indicating that primary responsibility lies with the Economic Development Committee. Some of the steps that have been taken to move from planning to implementation include: formation of sub-committees and securing funds. The Economic Development Committee was given a timeline of five years to implement the 2007 plan and the committee meets monthly to oversee its implementation and discuss the development of plan.

One respondent suggested that the Town is very proactive. Another stated that the Committee chair acts on behalf of the committee, the mayor, and the town council. Responsibilities have been assigned for each priority initiative, with sub-committees formed for the marina, downtown, and port projects. Sub-committees report back to the Economic Development committee. Another representative said that the port development is directed by the town council while skilled trades development is headed by an individual. Interview respondents did not indicate that there were any established timelines related to specific initiatives, however the Strategic Action Plan Report stated

timelines for completion of primary priorities. These included, first, marina development and Notre Dame Bay Cruising Marketing. Second, targets for Year 1 included increased dockside maintenance, for Year 2 the creation of a Small Yacht Cruise Homeport and Seismic Vessel Crew Changes, followed by Labrador Ferry Service Extension after 3 years. Secondary initiatives were also assigned timelines for completion.

Success in achieving these objectives has been limited to date but the Committee has been actively pursuing shipping seafood straight from Lewisporte rather than from Halifax first. Another representative said that the steps they have taken include consulting (as discussed above) and looking for finances. Obtaining consulting expertise, and more generally appropriate human resources, was identified as a key step because the area has a lack of specialized expertise and functional business groups. Out-migration is a contributor because educated and specialized residents are leaving for more lucrative areas.

The human resources are being provided by the town manager and volunteers. According to one representative, volunteers are the main human resources used to implement the plan, with experts coming in to help when assistance is needed. A different representative identified individual members of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, Kittiwake Economic Development Committee and Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency as being used to help implement the plan.

All representatives said that monitoring and evaluation were part of the plan. The town council plays an important role in monitoring and evaluation, giving updates and tracking progress with charts and success indicators.

### **3. Outcomes to Date:**

The groups discussed above have achieved various outcomes and benefits from the planning process, including work being done on the port and marina development, an increase in tourism to the marina, and downtown development which made the area more user and service friendly for boaters.

One representative stated that the intended outcomes were very broad as they mainly focused on bringing in economic opportunities. Another stated that the outcomes that are in the process of being achieved are expansion of the marina and the repairs and development of the dock. They have received a final report on the Downtown Revitalization project, which aims to build a boardwalk around the harbour, promote tourism and business development in the downtown area, and build front entrances on waterfront businesses to face the harbour. A skilled trades initiative is also underway.

Some of the benefits obtained from the planning process that were not expected include excellent relationships within Lewisporte and the individuals and groups involved in the planning process. People are very supportive in general and they have

learned about the planning process from the consultants. Another representative indicated that jobs were created and they learned more about specific aspects of the plan as well as how to implement the plan and obtain funding. “It was an opportunity to learn about ourselves as a community, to understand and assess our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats” explains one member of the planning team.

Another respondent mentioned that there was more regional cohesiveness, building and strengthening relationships with neighbouring towns as well as creating more cooperation. All representatives indicated that the benefits were achieved because the planning process involved multiple communities in the Lewisporte area.

#### **4. Key Factors in Implementation Success (or Lack of):**

Some of the key factors that have facilitated plan implementation include dedication and strong commitment of the people involved, especially the town council, as well as achieving mutual benefits by reaching out to multiple communities. One representative stated that teamwork, establishing partnerships with various groups and dedication to the mandate contributed to the plan implementation. Another stated that money, good relationships and chaotic, yet motivating, economic situations (for example the anticipated closure of the Labrador ferry) are key factors in plan implementation as well as having leadership to drive the plan, willingness and interest to participate.

The biggest and most important challenge is access to funding. A representative mentioned that in the early stages initiating programs was problematic but more recently the state of the global economy has been seen as the greatest challenge because the recession is affecting the availability of funding programs. Time is also an issue because completing projects are taking longer than originally anticipated. Although there are some challenges in implementing the plan one representative felt that Lewisporte is ahead of other communities because of the leadership and drive in the community.

Most of the representatives stated that there were no particular challenges associated with the multi-community planning process because regional support was inclusive and involved others thinking collectively and working together towards common issues. Only one representative said that collaborating with other communities was difficult due to varying opinions and objectives among the communities. One caution was offered about planning in general: "Plans control the agenda" and this "sometimes prevents us from taking advantage of immediate opportunities, recognizing changes in the environment."

##### **5. Removing Barriers and Addressing Challenges:**

Most representatives indicated that to overcome challenges persistence and keeping focus ("staying on task") are keys to success. Utilizing political agencies and developing partnerships were also mentioned to be critically important. One

representative stated that flexible funding would help overcome challenges. Implementation should also be based on a clear action plan and understanding of what resources are required.

The provincial and federal governments could help by giving more definitive answers and speeding up the process by reviewing the proposals faster, thus helping to move from planning to implementation more quickly. Other representatives indicated that the government should provide more funding. The communities involved also need to realize that regionalism is the most important factor now and that more volunteers are needed.

Some lessons learned about the multi-community planning process include the benefits of being more regionalized and also the benefits of contacting municipal leaders from other towns (face-to-face contact) that could help with the planning process. Another representative indicated that doing an inventory of peoples' skills on the committee proved helpful when delegating different tasks for each person based on their expertise.

**Conclusion:**

During our research we found there are conflicting opinions about the status of the planning process, which groups were responsible for funding the process, who coordinated and wrote the plan, and who is providing the human resources to

implement the plan. Therefore clear information and shared understanding is one barrier to the planning process. The major obstacles to implementation of the process that we have identified are time, funding, availability of human resources, out-migration, amount of community involvement, and collaboration with smaller communities. In order to overcome these barriers to implementation we suggest that timelines should be established in order to keep the planning process progressing. Also, to recruit more community involvement we suggest that the committee allow community members to voice their opinions and to be more involved in the decision-making process. This could be achieved by holding a vote on all major decisions so that the community can give their input on the planning process. In order to decrease the amount of out-migration that is occurring we suggest that a greater variety of educational programs, specifically trades, be offered at the Dietrac Community College because the development of the port will create numerous trades-oriented job opportunities. This will help to keep more residents in the area because they will be able to be educated and find employment in the area rather than having to relocate to larger cities. This will also benefit the community because it will generate more revenue for the region. In order to increase the collaboration between communities we suggest keeping other communities up to date by sending bi-weekly newsletters or emails in order to keep all of the involved parties aware of the progress of the plan and any new developments. The biggest obstacle to plan implementation is the lack of adequate funding. One option here is to petition the government for a speedier response time to funding applications.

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