

THE TOWN OF
ANTIGONISH

Strategic Priorities Report

2025-2029

June 3, 2025



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Introduction

The Town of Antigonish stands at a pivotal moment—one shaped by deep community roots, a spirit of collaboration, and a shared vision for a sustainable and inclusive future. With a newly elected Council in October 2024 and a strategic plan last updated nearly a decade ago, the time was right to chart a renewed course forward.

This strategic plan is more than a document—it is a reflection of the voices, values, and aspirations of the people who live, work, play, and visit our town. It was shaped by what Council members heard on doorsteps during the 2024 municipal election, by the lived experiences of those who call Antigonish Town home, and by the input of Town staff who work every day to serve the community.

Through workshops with Council and senior staff, a survey to rank priorities, and collaborative dialogue, five strategic priorities emerged—each grounded in the realities of today and the promise of tomorrow. These priorities are not abstract goals; they are practical, people-centered commitments that will guide our decisions, investments, and actions over the next five years.

This strategic plan is intended to document and present the identified strategic priorities to Council, staff, and residents so that all stakeholders are aware of the Town’s priorities for 2025 thru 2029.

Executive Summary

The Town of Antigonish’s 2025–2029 Strategic Plan outlines a forward-looking vision to guide municipal decision-making and investments over the next five years. Developed through a collaborative process involving elected officials and senior staff, this plan identifies five strategic priorities that reflect the Town’s commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience.

1. **Asset (Infrastructure) Management**

- Ranked as the top priority by both Council and staff.
- Focus areas of sewer and water systems, electric utility, streets, and flood mitigation.
- Emphasis on coordinated upgrades to aging infrastructure to support growth.

2. **Fiscal Sustainability**

- Aims to ensure long-term financial health through increased revenue, balanced budgets, and updated inter-municipal agreements.
- Strategic reserve building (capital and operating) is prioritized to support future investments.

3. **Environmental Sustainability**

- Reinforces Antigonish’s leadership in climate action with a focus on achieving Net Zero.
- Key initiatives include renewable energy expansion, energy efficiency, district heating, and waste management reforms.

4. **Strategic Supports**

- Enhances the Town’s operational capacity through improved communication, collaboration with the County, modernized software systems to support operations.
- Supports transparent governance and efficient service delivery.

5. **Social Sustainability**

- Promotes equity, accessibility, and community well-being.
- Priorities include affordable and available housing, accessibility improvements, and the implementation of the Town’s first Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism Plan.

Message from Mayor and Council

Residents, business owners, community partners, and all who work, play, and visit the Town of Antigonish, we are proud to present the Town of Antigonish’s 2025–2029 Strategic Plan—a roadmap that reflects our shared values, aspirations, and commitment to building a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable future for our community.

This plan is rooted in the lived experiences of those who call Antigonish home. It draws from what we, as your elected representatives, heard while campaigning in the fall of 2024, from conversations at kitchen tables and community events, and from the insights of our dedicated municipal staff. It reflects the hopes and concerns you shared with us—and a promise that we are listening.

The five strategic priorities outlined in this plan—**Asset (Infrastructure) Management, Fiscal Sustainability, Environmental Sustainability, Strategic Supports, and Social Sustainability**—represent the foundation upon which we will build a stronger Antigonish. These priorities are not just goals; they are commitments. Commitments to maintaining and upgrading the infrastructure that supports daily life. Commitments to sound financial stewardship. Commitments to climate leadership, operational excellence, and a community where everyone feels they belong.

We believe that by focusing on these five areas, we will not only meet the needs of today but also prepare our Town to thrive for generations to come. This plan is a living document—one that will evolve as we grow, adapt, and continue to engage with you, our community.

Thank you for your trust, your input, and your continued partnership. Together, we will shape a future that honours our past, embraces innovation, and ensures that Antigonish remains a place we are all proud to call home.

Mayor and Council
Town of Antigonish
(2024-2028)

Vision and Mission

Vision and mission statements serve as the foundation of an organization's strategic planning. They define the overarching purpose and direction of the organization. A vision statement outlines the long-term aspirations of the organization; essentially, what it hopes to achieve or become in the future. Meanwhile, a mission statement describes the core objectives, values, and the approach it takes to reach those goals, focusing on its present operations.

Together, these statements provide clarity and alignment, ensuring that everyone within the organization understands its goals and priorities. They also guide decision-making, inspire stakeholders, and serve as a touchstone for evaluating progress. By articulating a clear vision and mission, the Town can maintain focus and adapt to changes while staying true to the foundational principles that will allow us to achieve our desired future state.

During the strategic planning workshop Council took the time to review the current vision and mission for the Town of Antigonish and decided to update these core tenants to help inform the strategic planning process.

Vision

“Antigonish is a welcoming, inclusive, safe, sustainable, and thriving community that celebrates its origin and heritage while embracing the future.”

This vision speaks to how Council views the Town of Antigonish in its ideal state. A community that is welcoming and inclusive to all; is safe to live, work, and play; is sustainable and thriving economically and socially; remembers and celebrates the origins of the community from the Mikmaw to the Acadians and Gaels who molded this region and our rich cultural heritage while simultaneously embracing the future – from the next generation of locals to the next generation of immigrants and ABCs (Antigonishers By Choice) that move here from across Canada or the world – those who will build upon the vibrant community and culture established by those who came before us.

Mission

“We strive for accountability, financial sustainability, environmental stewardship, and high-quality services to enhance the social well-being of all who live, work, and visit our town. Rooted in our rich history and strong community spirit, we strive to create a welcoming and progressive town for future generations.”

This mission speaks to how the vision will be achieved and serves as a beacon to all who wish to support the Town of Antigonish. In everything Council and staff does they will pursue with a commitment to being accountable and financially sustainable with a commitment to also being good environmental stewards. When delivering services, they will be targeted to enhance the wellbeing of all stakeholders whether resident, employed, or visiting. You may note the mission continues to be grounded in the past to continue building the foundation for the future.

Strategic Priorities

After identifying personal priorities of elected officials and staff, the five strategic priority themes that emerged are:

- 1 Asset (Infrastructure) Management
- 2 Fiscal Sustainability
- 3 Environmental Sustainability
- 4 Strategic Supports
- 5 Social Sustainability

Asset (Infrastructure) Management

Asset management is taking a strategic approach to the asset life cycle from acquisition to disposal. In terms of the Town the most significant assets requiring robust management is the infrastructure, including water, sewer, roads, electric grid, sidewalks, buildings, recreation facilities, and equipment including vehicles and machinery.

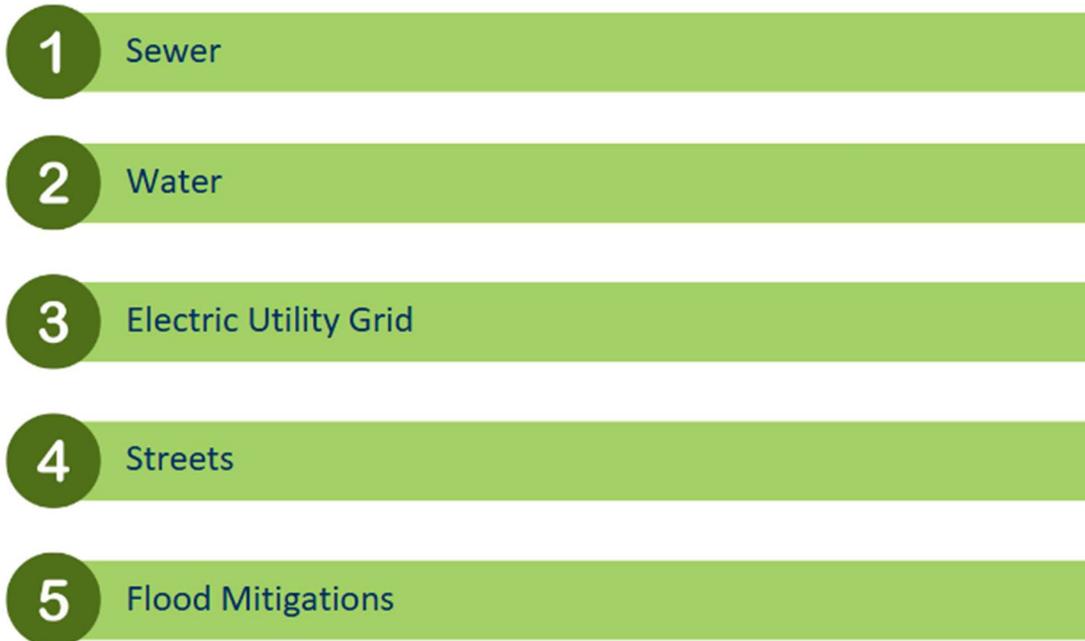
Asset management was ranked first on a scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2) by both elected officials (1.7 out of 2.0) and staff (2.0 out of 2.0). When presented with an absolute ranking of the five strategic priority areas it also ranked first by elected officials (4.7 out of 5.0) and staff (4.6 out of 5.0).

Several priority areas within the category of Asset Management were considered and ranked. This was done to provide some direction as to where the Town believes the most pressing attention is needed for strategic investments in infrastructure. Various infrastructure assets were presented to assess level of agreement with the item as a priority, on a five-point scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Then items were presented for an absolute ranking by elected officials and staff.

Both water and sewer capacity were ranked number one by elected officials (1.9 out of 2.0) and staff (1.8 out of 2.0). The next strongest agreement was for water and sewer lines, followed by roads. Electric utility grid and flood mitigations rounded out the infrastructure with the highest amount of agreement by respondents.

When asked to rank the priority of strategic infrastructure investments, elected officials prioritized Sewer, Water, Streets, Electric Utility Grid, Sidewalks, then Flood Mitigations. Staff prioritized Water, Sewer, Electric Utility Grid, Northern Collector, Flood Mitigations, then Recreation Facilities. Netting all the evaluations on a ranking scale 1-9 and the priority for strategic investments will be Sewer (7.5), Water (7.4), Electric Utility Grid (6.3), Streets (5.3), Flood Mitigations (4.4), and Sidewalks (4.3).

The top five asset (infrastructure) management priority themes that emerged are (Council & Staff Combined):



Sewer

The priority infrastructure area of sewer covers both sewer lines and sewer system capacity, through the lines and at the sewer wastewater treatment facility. The summer of 2024 resulted in significant odour from the sewer wastewater treatment facility’s lagoon and drew attention to the need for infrastructure investments to sustain the existing system and expand its capacity for future growth in the Town and County of Antigonish.

Some examples of projects that may be pursued over the next five years include the front end screening system, which was announced in the early summer of 2024 and is scheduled to begin in 2025. This screening system can increase efficiency and capacity of the treatment facility by keeping inorganic items out of the treatment facility’s lagoon ensuring the equipment and biological elements of the lagoon operate at maximum efficiency. In addition, there may be continued efforts to reduce external water source infiltration into the sewer lines, this results in reduced inflow into the sewer treatment facility of storm or other non-sewage water sources that would not require treatment, but which volume counts against operational capacity. This could include projects such as repairing and replacing sewer lines or disconnecting storm drains from sewer lines.

Water

As with the infrastructure priority Sewer, the Water priority encompasses both water lines and water system capacity. The Town’s water supply is treated by a water treatment facility built in 2006. The facility continues to operate well and has operational capacity to treat significantly more water,

however water lines from the water source to the treatment facility and from the facility to the Town are aging and should be evaluated for potential upgrades or replacement in the coming years. Some water lines within the Town date back over a hundred years. This aging infrastructure has resulted in more frequent water main breaks causing disruption to water customers, residents of the Town and County of Antigonish as well as commuters traveling through the Town.

In addition to upgrading and replacing water lines, sufficient water source capacity to service the growing needs of water customers serviced by the Town's water utility, is a concern of Council. With continued forecasted growth within the water utility's service area, ensuring sufficient supply of water to meet growing demand and pressures of climate change is a priority. It should be noted that in the past few years the Town of Antigonish has had to initiate water conservation measures, mandatory and voluntary, largely driven by warmer summers with less precipitation resulting in lower water levels at the water source. While conservation measures have allowed the community to meet critical demands on the water system until fall precipitation recharged the water source, it is prudent for the Town to pursue additional water sources to meet the anticipated demands of climate change and population growth.

Electric Utility Grid

With increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events resulting in increased number and duration of power outages, it is a priority for the Town of Antigonish to modernize the electric grid and maximize service reliability to customers.

The Town of Antigonish has already established, and secured funding for, a multi-year upgrade and modernization to the utility's electricity grid. The project has received a commitment of almost \$10 million in federal funding announced in July 2024. This funding will help modernize the grid in Antigonish to support the integration of more renewable energy sources and improve the overall reliability of transmission. Work began upgrading transformers in the fall of 2024 and will continue in 2025-2026 with additional work replacing sub-stations with a new upgraded sub-station connecting to a more reliable NS Power (NSPI) line.

This modernization project's later phases include upgrading utility meters to the modern "smart" meter technology. This allows for near real-time communication with all endpoints for the Town's electric utility, opening numerous opportunities for new options for time-of-day discount pricing for customers and earlier detection of power disruptions. This technology has been operational across Canada for almost two decades and has already been rolled out by NSPI. Several other municipal electric utilities across the Maritimes have either already begun this transition or are considering the same. Once completed the Town's core electric utility grid infrastructure will be substantially refreshed to meet modern system demands and challenges.

Streets

One of the most observable infrastructure assets within any town are streets. Residents and visitors drive, bike, or walk along our streets and experience or observe the challenges of rough surfaces due to years of patching spring potholes or dug locations to complete water or sewer line repairs.

Council has identified streets as a priority for infrastructure investment and are committed to making smart strategic investments – that is to make every effort to align water and sewer line upgrades and street repaving projects whenever possible. This ensures that once repaved there will be a lower risk

of having to dig up the road to repair or maintain water and sewer lines, resulting in patches along an otherwise new stretch of paving. Residents should be aware that proceeding with projects tackling three priority infrastructure areas, water, sewer, and streets, at the same time comes with an increased demand on the Town's capital budget and that there will be disruptions during the upgrades. That said, it is a smart strategic approach to ensure the best use of capital investments in the short and long-term.

Flood Mitigations

With climate change comes increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including heavy precipitation resulting in flooding. The Town of Antigonish exists in a valley with several rivers and as such many areas exist within or next to known flood plains. When making capital investment decisions, for new or updated infrastructure Town Council has identified the strategic importance of considering flood mitigations as part of those investments.

Two examples include the current design of front end screening system for the sewer wastewater treatment facility being designed to enhance the facility's ability to handle extreme volumes triggered by heavy precipitation events and the design of work for the East Main / Bay Street project proposed for 2025-2026. The project has been designed to raise East Main Street to decrease the risk of being impassable in heavy rain events. This is an important consideration due to this street being critical access point to the regional hospital.

Fiscal Sustainability

Fiscal sustainability is taking steps to ensure that the Town maintains a strong fiscal foundation; that budgets remain balanced, and we operate and live within our means rather than tie future generations to fiscal and infrastructure deficits limiting their ability to make strategic decisions and contribute to the continued growth of the town.

Fiscal sustainability was ranked number one on a scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2) by both elected officials (1.7 out of 2.0) and staff (2.0 out of 2.0). When presented with an absolute ranking of the five strategic priority areas it ranked second by elected officials (4.0 out of 5.0) and staff (3.8 out of 5.0).

Several priority areas within the category of Fiscal Sustainability were considered and ranked. This was done to provide some direction as to where the Town believes the most important elements are when pursuing fiscal sustainability. Various fiscal initiatives or priorities were presented to assess level of agreement with the item as a priority, on a five-point scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Then items were presented for an absolute ranking by elected officials and staff.

On the agreement scale elected officials ranked Balanced Budgets and Updated Inter-Municipal Agreement with the County highest (1.9 out of 2.0). Staff also strongly agreed with the priority of Balanced Budgets (1.8 out of 2.0) but ranked Increasing Revenue highest (2.0 out of 2.0), which was third ranked by elected officials (1.4 out of 2.0).

When asked to rank the priority of financial sustainability initiatives, elected officials prioritized Update Inter-Municipal Agreement with the County, Balanced Budgets, Increase Revenue, Build Capital Reserves, and Build Operational Reserves. Staff prioritized Increase Revenue, Balanced Budgets, Procurement Controls, Inventory Controls, and Build Capital Reserves. Netting all the

evaluations on a ranking scale 1-9 and the priority for fiscal sustainability will be Increase Revenue (7.3), Balanced Budgets (6.9), Updated Inter-Municipal Agreement with the County (6.6), Build Capital Reserves (5.6), Build Operating Reserves (5.1), and Procurement Controls (4.6).

Among the nine options presented to respondents, Maintaining Low Tax Rate was ranked eighth overall (2.8 out of 9) with a combined level of agreement on the Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2) scale at 0.1. For Council it ranked sixth (3.9 out of 9), with the level of agreement by at 0.6 out of 2.0. For staff this ranking was ninth (1.2 out of 9) with the level of agreement at -0.6 out of 2.0.

The top five fiscal sustainability priority themes that emerged are (Council & Staff Combined):

- 1 Increase Revenue
- 2 Balanced Budgets
- 3 Update Inter-Municipal Services Agreement with County
- 4 Build Reserves (Capital)
- 5 Build Reserves (Operating)

Increase Revenue

Recognizing the priority Council has placed on investing in town infrastructure, it is not surprising that increasing revenue ranked highly under fiscal sustainability. Although ranked third by Council staff, recognizing the need for increased revenue to delivery on the infrastructure priorities of Council, ranked it first. Infrastructure is expensive, whether water, sewer, or roads. Residents expect when we turn on the taps fresh, clean, safe drinking water will flow and when we flush wastewater will go and be treated. What may people often do not think about is how that water is delivered to homes and businesses and wastewater taken away. There is extensive infrastructure of water and sewer pipelines running throughout the town, often beneath the streets, some of which was built in the early 20th century – a hundred years old and prone to failure – to avoid frequent water or sewer line breaks requires replacement of the oldest sections of these lines, and that is expensive running between \$600,000 and \$2,000,000 per km. The Town’s been investing about \$500,000 per year over the past number of years to upgrade infrastructure, short of what is needed.

In order to increase investments in infrastructure it is clear increased revenue will be required. As with most municipalities the primary source of revenue is generated through property taxes. Revenue through property taxes increases in one of three ways:

1. Assessment value of properties increase – property tax revenue will increase;

2. Properties are sold, and the provincial assessment cap resets increasing taxable assessment value – property tax revenue will increase; and
3. Tax rate increases – property tax revenue will increase.

Other revenue sources for the Town include revenue from utilities (electric, water, and sewer services). Water and electric utilities are regulated and as such there is limited opportunity to increase revenue beyond anticipated increases in expenses. That said, much of the infrastructure services these utilities and if presented to the regulator may be approved to retrieve the cost from rate payers.

Finally, the Town may pursue new or alternative revenue sources. For example, the Town entered a joint-venture with the towns of Berwick and Mahone Bay about ten years ago and established a company called AREA. AREA established a wind farm and sells the electricity produced to the municipal electric utilities. There may be opportunities to leverage AREA to explore new revenue generating ventures resulting in profitable operations which can be shared with the municipal owners by means of a dividend payment. These dividend payments are not regulated and every dollar received by the Town is a dollar that can be invested in infrastructure or services to support residents.

Balanced Budgets

Sections S65 and S65A of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) outline the operating and capital budget requirements for municipalities in Nova Scotia. In short, budgets are expected to be balanced. As part of the fiscal sustainability priority of Council, the importance of balanced budgets are recognized as a leading priority, surpassed only by increasing revenue. Recognizing that increasing revenue for the municipality increases the flexibility to deliver services and capital investments within the Town while maintaining a balanced budget, that is reasonable.

It is the responsibility of the CAO and staff to prepare a budget that reflects Council's priorities, while ensuring that the expected revenue sources are available to cover operating and capital expenses incurred to deliver on those priorities. Once the budget is adopted, or approved, by Council it is the responsibility of the CAO and staff to oversee and deliver the implementation; delivery of services and capital investments.

Update Inter-Municipal Services Agreement with County

In the mid 1990s an inter-municipal services agreement (IMSA) was established between the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish to outline the parameters for sewer / wastewater treatment by the Town on behalf of the County and the distribution of costs associated with capital maintenance and enhancements related to the sewer treatment system (sewer lines and treatment facility). In short this agreement allocated 1/3 of the costs to the County and 2/3 to the Town.

Recognizing the expansive growth within the County of Antigonish, especially in areas serviced by the Town's sewer treatment system, the Town Council recognized the importance of opening the IMSA to reflect the current and future system utilization and to update the cost allocations accordingly. At a joint meeting of the Town and County councils in early 2025 there was a consensus that it would be appropriate to pursue such an initiative.

Having an updated IMSA to ensure cost allocations for the sewage wastewater treatment reflects the utilization and expansion demands of the system will provide confidence for both municipalities that the cost allocation and service and investments in sewer infrastructure are appropriate for current and future system demands; ensuring appropriate funding will be provided by each municipal unit.

Build Reserves (Capital)

To properly manage capital infrastructure over time resources should be allocated to ensure resources are available to repair and replace when needed. When organizations set aside money in advance it is called a reserve. The capital reserve is the account money is set aside for future capital maintenance or replacement projects.

In the prioritization of financial sustainability initiatives building capital reserves was identified as a top five priority. Given the limited capital investment in core municipal infrastructure (water, sewer, and roads) over many years the demand for investment in these priority areas makes it difficult to direct surplus funds to future capital initiatives, when the infrastructure needs are immediate.

As a strategic priority this is where Council's intent is; to focus on rightsizing the Town's capital infrastructure investments, as identified as the number one strategic priority, with the medium long-term objective of building capital reserves when resources allow.

Build Reserves (Operating)

As noted above, reserves are where funds can be set aside for future use. Within the municipal environment balanced budgets are the obligation when a given year may otherwise result in a deficit (in year revenue is less than in year expenses) a draw on operating reserves to bring the bottom line to balance. In the event a municipality would otherwise run a surplus (in year revenue is greater than in year expenses) the additional revenue is allocated to reserve to bring the bottom line to balance.

As with the fiscal priority to build capital reserves it is desirable for the Town to build operating reserves, which provides a buffer to allow for unexpected expenses and fiscal shocks. However, with a substantive capital plan commitment the ability to retain revenue for building operating reserves is an objective most likely for medium or longer term.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is taking steps to ensure that the Town maintains commitment to recognize the importance of our environment and the responsibility of the municipality to make decisions that will contribute to the long-term viability of our local and global environment.

Environmental sustainability was ranked on a scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Elected officials ranked it third (1.3 out of 2.0) and staff fourth (1.6 out of 2.0) out of five strategic priorities. When presented with an absolute ranking of the five strategic priority areas it ranked third by elected officials (2.4 out of 5.0) and fourth by staff (2.0 out of 5.0).

Several priority areas within the category of Environmental Sustainability were considered and ranked. This was done to provide some direction as to where the Town believes the most important elements are when pursuing environmental sustainability. Various initiatives or priorities were presented to assess level of agreement with the item as a priority, on a five-point scale from Strongly

Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Then items were presented for an absolute ranking by elected officials and staff.

Waste Management By-Law and Waste Management transition to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) were ranked first (1.3 out of 2.0) and second (1.0 out of 2.0) by elected officials when considering the level of agreement that they are priorities for environmental sustainability. For staff, Waste Management By-Law ranked second (0.8 out of 2.0) and EPR sixth (0.4 out of 2.0) out of seven initiatives. Staff ranked Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources) first (1.4 out of 2.0) on this scale.

When asked to rank the eight environmental sustainability initiatives identified, elected officials ranked Waste Management By-law first (6.7 out of 8), Waste Management EPR second (6.1 out of 8), Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources) third (5.9 out of 8), Net Zero (Energy Efficiency) fourth (4.9 out of 8) and Net Zero (EV Charging Infrastructure) fifth (4.1 out of 8). Staff ranked Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources) first (7.6 out of 8), Net Zero (Community District Heating) second (6.4 out of 8), Net Zero (Energy Efficiency) third (5.8 out of 8), Net Zero (EV Charging Infrastructure) fourth (4.8 out of 8) and Waste Management EPR fifth (4.6 out of 8).

Netting all the evaluations on a ranking scale 1-8 and the priority for environmental sustainability will be Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources) (6.6), Waste Management By-Law (5.6), Waste Management EPR (5.5), Net Zero (Energy Efficiency) (5.3), Net Zero (Community District Heating) (4.6) and Net Zero (EV Charging Infrastructure) (4.4). Net Zero (Town Fleet EV Conversion) (2.8) and Dog Waste Management (2.3) were the lowest rated items from the strategic planning survey.

The top five environmental sustainability priority themes that emerged are (Council & Staff Combined):

- 1 Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources)
- 2 Waste Management EPR (Blue Bag) Transition to Circular Materials
- 3 Waste Management By-Law
- 4 Net Zero (Energy Efficiency)
- 5 Net Zero (Community District Heating)

Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources)

The Town of Antigonish has previously identified a strategic priority of becoming the first Net Zero Town in the Country. The Town has taken many positive steps towards this end including establishment of AREA in partnership with the towns of Mahone Bay and Berwick. AREA developed

a windfarm that now provides 40% of renewable energy to the Antigonish Electric Utility. The Town's Solar garden is project which has been generating power since commissioning testing around December 2024 is nearing final substantial completion milestone, which will see the Town take over control of the site. This renewable energy source is expected to contributed about 1.5-2% of the Town's electric utility's energy requirements.

The Town continues to work closely with AREA and the larger Maritime Municipal Electric Utility Alliance (MMEUA) to identify industry trends and innovative opportunities, including for new renewable energy sources that benefit the environment and electricity rates. AREA continues to explore new opportunities for cost effective renewable energy sources to support the partner municipalities' electric utilities.

Waste Management EPR (Blue Bag) Transition to Circular Materials

The Province of Nova Scotia has implemented legislation and regulations respecting Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). EPR is a mandated program whereby producers of packaging are responsible for the waste stream generated by the packaging. Whereas municipalities are responsible for residential waste management (Organics, Blue Bag(s), and waste (garbage)) the provincial EPR program assigned responsibility for recyleable packaging (blue bags in the Town of Antigonish) to producers. By 2024 all municipalities in the province opted in to the program, which would transfer responsibility for the recyclable waste stream (aka blue bags) to producers. Producers responsible for delivering EPR in the province by December 2025 in turn have engaged Circular Materials to manage the program.

Circular Materials has engaged municipalities that may wish to continue to process the blue bag waste stream, on behalf of producers. The Town of Antigonish has considered the proposal and determined it would not be in the best interests of the residents, so a priority will be to support the transition to Circular Materials who are mandated by the province to manage the blue bag waste stream effective December 1, 2025.

The Town will continue to be responsible for traditional waste (clear bag) and organic waste streams, even after EPR begins and Circular Materials takes over the blue bag stream.

Waste Management By-Law

The Town Council's Waste Management advisory committee has put significant effort into developing updates to the Town's waste management by-law. By-laws require provincial approval for implementation; Municipal Affairs to authorize the by-law and Department of Justice to authorize summary offence tickets (SOTs).

It is a priority for Council to see the waste magement by-law updates through to implementation, including authorization for the updated SOTs.

Net Zero (Energy Efficiency)

The Town's commitment to achieving Net Zero goes beyond just greening the grid and increasing the supply of renewable energy flowing through the electric utility. Energy Efficiency can reduce the dependency on electricity and other fuel sources.

Town Council recognizes the value that energy efficiency can contribute to lower operating costs of Town buildings and residential homes, while reducing the overall carbon footprint for our community.

The Town will continue to seek opportunities to renovate Town properties to be more energy efficient to reduce operating costs and greenhouse gas emissions. There was an energy audit of Town buildings, efforts will now turn to pursuing funding opportunities that will support the necessary energy efficiency upgrades.

Net Zero (Community District Heating)

One of the most significant contributors to climate change is greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and efforts to reduce those emissions will have a positive impact on reducing the effects of climate change. In cooler climates, like Canada, heating is a significant contributor to GHGs; heating with fossil fuels is a greater contributor than with more efficient energy sources, especially if the energy sources come from renewable (wind, solar, etc..) sources.

Recognizing the Town's electric utility's efforts to increase renewable energy, in partnership with AREA, electric heating sources will be a contributing factor in reaching Net Zero throughout the Town. The Town of Antigonish has two significant anchor organizations, StFX University and St. Martha's Regional Hospital – each taking up large footprints with significant heating requirements. A study was completed in early 2025 on the merits of a Community District Heating solution that and how it could leverage the greener grid of the Antigonish Electric Utility to heat these anchor organizations and other homes and businesses within the community. This report is available on the Town's website.

Pursuing partnership opportunities to implement an electrified community district heating solution within the Town of Antigonish is recognized as a means of contributing to the pursuit of Net Zero efficiency, as part of the commitment to the environmental sustainability priority.

Strategic Supports

Strategic supports represent those priorities that support the strategic objectives of the Town. Some examples include staffing levels and ensuring staff have the appropriate tools to efficiently and effectively deliver on the operational and project priorities needed to achieve the strategic objectives established by Council.

Strategic supports were ranked on a scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Elected officials ranked it fifth (1.1 out of 2.0) and staff third (1.8 out of 2.0) out of five strategic priorities. When presented with an absolute ranking of the five strategic priority areas it ranked fifth by elected officials (1.9 out of 5.0) and third by staff (3.0 out of 5.0). As a combined ranking between elected officials and staff Strategic Supports ranked third (2.3 out of 5).

Several priority areas within the category of Strategic Supports were considered and ranked. This was done to provide some direction as to what supports should be prioritized when pursuing the strategic priorities of the Town. Various initiatives or priorities were presented to assess level of agreement with the item as a priority, on a five-point scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Then items were presented for an absolute ranking by elected officials and staff.

Elected officials identified most strongly with Communications and Engagement (1.9 out of 2.0) and Collaboration with County (1.7 out of 2.0) as strategic support priorities. Staff had much lower level of agreement (1.2 out of 2.0) for these items leaving them tied at sixteenth of nineteen items being evaluated. Staff most strongly identified the need for software systems (Finance, Inventory, and Payroll and Time Management) (2.0 out of 2.0). Elected officials ranked these systems sixth (Payroll and Time Management) (1.0 out of 2.0) and seventh (Finance and Inventory) (0.9 out of 2.0). Combined level of agreement prioritized Communication and Engagement (1.6 out of 2.0), Collaboration with the County (1.5 out of 2.0), Year End Director’s Report and Payroll and Time Management Software (1.4 out of 2.0), with Inventory Software and Financial Chart of Accounts (1.3 out of 2.0) rounding out the top five.

When asked to rank order ten of these priorities, resulting in a maximum score of ten, elected officials ranked Communication and Engagement first (8.3), Collaboration with the County (8.0), Council (Modernize Meetings) (7.3), Finance (Chart of Accounts) (6.0), and Software Systems (5.6) as the top five priorities, with Council (Reduce Committees) coming in at sixth (5.3). Staff ranked Finance (Chart of Accounts) first (8.2), HR Initiatives (7.4), Software Systems (7.2), Communications and Engagement (6.8), and Finance (Year end Director’s Report) (6.4), with Collaboration with the County (5.6) ranking sixth. Netting out the combined priorities of elected officials and staff, Communication and Engagement (7.7) ranks first, Collaboration with the County (7.0), Finance (Chart of Accounts) (6.9), Software Systems (6.3), Council (Modernize Meetings) (5.3) as top five. Finance (Year End Director’s Report) (5.2) and HR Initiatives (5.1) followed closely for sixth and seventh. Council (Reduce Committees) and Housing (Permitting Modernization) tied (3.9) at eighth and Housing (Policy Modernization) (3.8) was tenth.

The top five strategic supports priority themes that emerged are (Council & Staff Combined):

- 1 Communication & Engagement
- 2 Collaboration with County
- 3 Finance (Chart of Accounts)
- 4 Software Systems
- 5 Council (Modernize Meetings)

Communication and Engagement

Town Council spoke with a unified voice, reflecting what they heard engaging residents of the need for improved communication and community engagement. This has been recognized as a priority focus to support the implementation of all strategic initiatives identified.

Based upon this priority of Council the Communications team will move from the Department of Community Development to Administration, reporting directly to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). Steps will be taken to improve the proactive communication and engagement with community members respecting Council priorities and operational projects. An example of this work includes a recent town hall to engage residents on the topic of Active Transit (AT) trails and Council's recent motion to implement live streaming of Council meetings.

The Town of Antigonish will continue work to identify a strategic plan to best communicate and engage with the residents and other stakeholders to ensure a shared understanding of Town priorities and activities.

Collaboration with County

Several strategic initiatives outlined above intersect with the Municipality of the County of Antigonish. For that reason it is recognized that continued positive collaboration with the County remains a priority for the Town, as a support to achieving these many shared strategic priorities.

Council will continue to build upon the collaborative Joint Council meetings, regular meetings between the Mayor, Warden, and CAOs, as well as maintaining open dialogue and supportive working relationships between the staff across the municipal units.

Finance (Chart of Accounts)

A chart of accounts is the list of accounts tracked by the accounting system to record transactions in accordance with accounting standards. The director of Corporate Services identified an historic chart of accounts as a barrier to more efficient and effective financial reporting. Recognizing that over the course of many years the current chart of accounts has evolved and expanded to track financial transactions as required, the Director recognized the opportunity of a strategically designed modern chart of accounts to most efficiently and effectively meet the needs of both accounting standards and the operational and strategic reporting needs of the Town.

In short, with a modernized chart of accounts staff will be able to more efficiently track and report on financial activities within the Town, resulting in more efficient operations and better recommendations and support for Council in their evaluation and decision making.

Software Systems

The identified strategic priorities identified above will require Town staff to operate even more efficiently than they have been. Currently the Town either has no software system (ie. HR, Safety, Procurement, Inventory, Time Tracking, Scheduling, Document Management, etc...) or a very dated system (ie. Payroll and Accounting/Finance).

To ensure optimal efficiency of Town operations, to increase the probability of successfully achieving strategic priorities, modern IT systems to streamline manual efforts, reduce reliance on paper, increase security and efficiency will play an important role.

Council (Modernize Meetings)

Town Council has recognized that modernized Council meetings will be required to ensure residents are suitably informed and engaged on the decisions of Council. In light of turbulent political environments across the globe increased engagement and accessibility to residents was deemed an important step in ensuring buy-in and support for the direction and decisions of Council.

Council has already taken steps to modernize meetings including the re-institution of Committee of the Whole meetings (the first Tuesday of the month) and a motion to begin live-streaming Council meetings online. These steps will help keep the public informed and engaged in Council decision making.

Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is a focus on the social, or rather societal, aspects of the community, such as community spirit, social inclusion (anti-racism/anti-hate), accessibility, recreation, etc....

Social sustainability was ranked on a scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Elected officials ranked it third (1.3 out of 2.0) and staff fourth (1.6 out of 2.0) out of five strategic priorities. The combined agreement of elected officials and staff resulted in ranking of third (1.4 out of 2.0). When presented with an absolute ranking of the five strategic priority areas it ranked fourth by elected officials (2.0 out of 5.0) and fifth by staff (1.8 out of 5.0). The combined ranking was fifth (1.9 out of 5.0).

Thirteen priority areas, within the category of Social Sustainability, were considered and ranked. This was done to provide some direction as to where the Town believes the most important elements are when pursuing social sustainability. Various initiatives or priorities were presented to assess level of agreement with the item as a priority, on a five-point scale from Strongly Disagree (-2) to Strongly Agree (+2). Then items were presented for an absolute ranking by elected officials and staff.

Elected officials' strongest level of agreement, within the thirteen social sustainability priorities presented were Accessibility (Community), Equity and Belonging (Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism), Library (Provincial Advocacy), Planning (Maintain Aesthetics), and Recreation (Teenagers) all tied (1.4 out of 2.0), Staff's level of agreement with these five priorities a little differently. Accessibility (Community) was ranked first (1.8 out of 2.0) tied with Housing (Stock/Availability). Equity and Belonging was third strongest agreement (1.6 out of 2.0) for staff with Recreation (Teenagers) ranking seventh (1.0 out of 2.0), Library (Provincial Advocacy) landing eleventh (0.8 out of 2.0), and Planning (Maintain Aesthetics) at thirteenth (0.0 out of 2.0). Accessibility (Town Hall) (1.4 out of 2.0) ranked fourth and Recreation (Children) (1.2 out of 2.0) fifth for staff. The combined level of agreement between elected officials and staff was strongest for Accessibility (Community) (1.6 out of 2.0), Equity and Belonging (1.5 out of 2.0), Housing (Stock/Availability) (1.3 out of 2.0), Recreation (Children) (1.3 out of 2.0), and Recreation (Teenagers) (1.3 out of 2.0). Housing (Affordability), Library (Provincial Advocacy), Recreation (Family) and Recreation (Seniors) were all tied (1.2 out of 2.0).

After rank ordering eight key areas under Social Sustainability, elected officials top priorities were identified as Housing (Affordability) (6.1), Accessibility (Community) (6.0), Housing (Stock/Availability) and Planning (Maintain Aesthetics) tied (4.7), and Library (Provincial Advocacy) (4.4). Staff's priorities were identified as Accessibility (Community) (7.0), Housing

(Stock/Availability) (6.2), Accessibility (Town Hall) (6.0), Housing (Affordability) (5.4), and Equity and Belonging (4.6). When elected officials and staff rankings were combined the resulting priorities under Social Sustainability are Accessibility (Community) (6.4), Housing (Affordability) (5.8), Housing (Stock / Availability) (5.3), Accessibility (Town Hall) (4.5), and Equity and Belonging (4.2). Recreation was rated eighth of eight overall (2.6) as a strategic priority within social sustainability.

The top five social sustainability priority themes that emerged are (Council & Staff Combined):

- 1 Accessibility (Community)
- 2 Housing (Affordability)
- 3 Housing (Stock/Availability)
- 4 Accessibility (Town Hall)
- 5 Equity & Belonging (Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism)

Accessibility (Community)

Town Council recognizes the importance of accessibility so that all residents and visitors may participate fully with the Town of Antigonish. To that end the Town approved an updated Accessibility Plan on March 26, 2025. This update outlines the Town's progress since 2023 and reaffirms our commitment to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to participation for persons with disabilities. The plan was developed through community engagement, committee input, and internal evaluation, and sets a clear direction for advancing accessibility in the Town.

Council also recognizes that an accessible community is not limited to municipal infrastructure. We need to encourage individuals and organizations within the Town to also take steps to be more inclusive and accessible for all our residents, employees, customers, and visitors.

Housing (Affordability)

Council recognizes the challenges of housing affordability. Although the primary responsibility for housing rests with the provincial government, Council recognizes the challenges with housing affordability across the province and the strategic value of maintaining affordable housing within the Town.

Housing (Stock/Availability)

One of the driving forces increasing the cost of housing is demand. With increased demand the past number of years housing stock or availability of housing has decreased. Town Council recognizes the

importance of supporting housing stock growth to ensure availability of housing for all residents and potential future residents. They also recognize that as the availability of housing aligns with demand that pricing will stabilize and improve affordability over time.

Council also recognizes that increased housing stock can contribute to increased revenue for the Town to invest in priority infrastructure projects and community programs.

Accessibility (Town Hall)

As mentioned above, improved accessibility throughout the Town to ensure all residents, employees, and visitors to the Town of Antigonish can fully participate within our community. Council recognizes that it is important to lead by example, and that Town infrastructure, including Town Hall, needs to evolve to meet accessibility standards. The Town will be exploring design options to modernize Town Hall to improve accessibility for residents and employees.

Equity and Belonging (Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism)

Accessibility has been recognized as a critical step to ensure residents and visitors can fully participate within our Town. Council also recognizes the importance of ensuring equitable access and the need to tackle hate and racism within the community so that all feel safe living, working, and visiting our Town.

On March 26, 2025 Council approved the Town's first Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism plan. The plan was built around four key commitments:

- Engaging underserved communities through intentional listening, dialogue, and action.
- Dismantling systemic discrimination by reviewing and improving municipal policies, services, and decision-making frameworks.
- Building an anti-racist and anti-hate community through ongoing education, awareness, and inclusive programming.
- Maintaining accountability through public reporting, advisory committees, and regular plan reviews every three years.

The plan outlines over two dozen action items to be implemented between 2025 and 2028, across six areas: community engagement, internal policy and infrastructure, public awareness, equity in service delivery, support for community initiatives, and evaluation.

Conclusion

In the fourth fiscal quarter of 2024-2025 the Antigonish Town Council embarked on a strategic planning exercise with senior staff. The exercise identified five key priority strategic areas of focus, asset (infrastructure) management, fiscal sustainability, environmental sustainability, strategic supports, and social sustainability. Within each of these key priorities council further identified top priority initiatives to be the focus over the next five years.

This strategic plan sets the direction and priorities for the Town of Antigonish. It will inform the priorities pursued by Council and implemented by staff. The commitments will be reflected in budget and operational decision making and execution over the next four years.

Appendix A: Strategic Priorities Summary Chart

1st (4.6/5.0) Asset (Infrastructure) Management

- 7.5/9.0 Sewer
- 7.4/9.0 Water
- 6.3/9.0 Electric Utility (Grid)
- 5.3/9.0 Streets
- 4.4/9.0 Flood Mitigations

2nd (3.9/5.0) Fiscal Sustainability

- 7.3/9.0 Increase Revenue
- 6.9/9.0 Balanced Budgets
- 6.6/9.0 Update Inter-Municipal Agreement with the County
- 5.6/9.0 Build Reserves (Capital)
- 5.1/9.0 Build Reserves (Operating)

3rd (2.3/5.0) Environmental Sustainability

- 6.6/8.0 Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources)
- 5.6/8.0 Waste Management (Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR))
- 5.5/8.0 Waste Management (By-Law)
- 5.3/8.0 Net Zero (Energy Efficiency)
- 4.4/8.0 Net Zero (EV Charging Infrastructure)

4th (2.3/5.0) Strategic Supports

- 7.7/10.0 Communications and Engagement
- 7.0/10.0 Collaboration with the County of Antigonish
- 6.9/10.0 Finance (Chart of Accounts)
- 6.3/10.0 Software Systems
- 5.3/10.0 Council (Modernize Meetings)

5th (1.9/5.0) Social Sustainability

- 6.4/8.0 Accessibility (Community)
- 5.8/8.0 Housing (Affordability)
- 5.3/8.0 Housing (Stock / Availability)
- 4.5/8.0 Accessibility (Town Hall)
- 4.2/8.0 Equity & Belonging (Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism)

Appendix B: Strategic Priorities Summary Graphs

Image 1: Strategic Priorities Scores

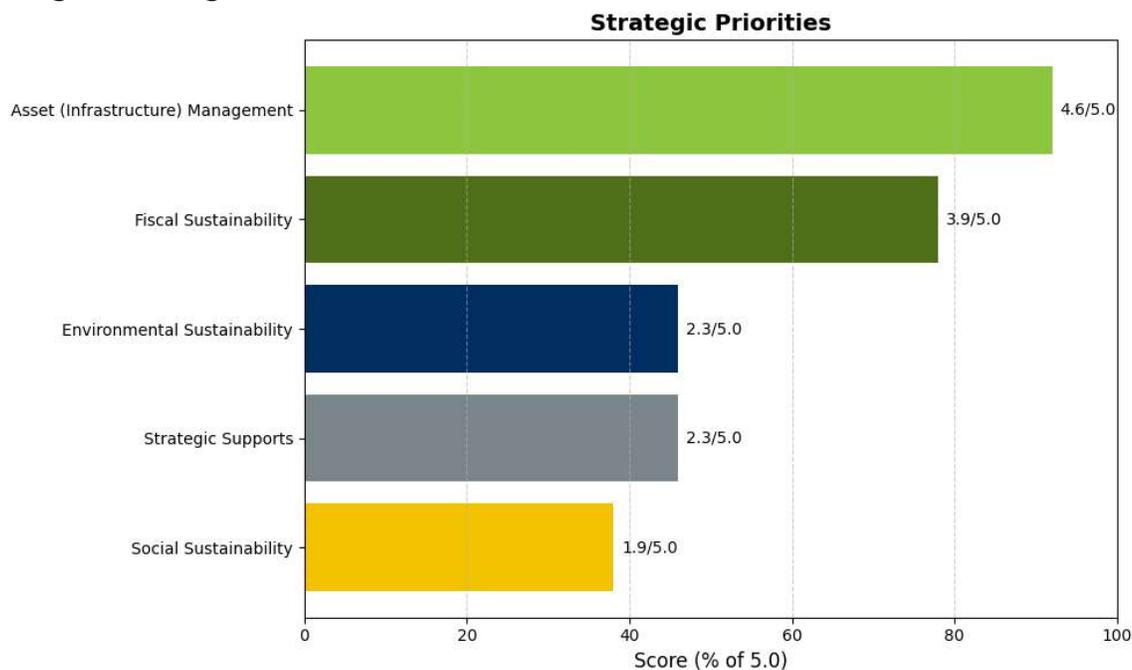


Image 2: 1st (4.6/5.0) Asset (Infrastructure) Management

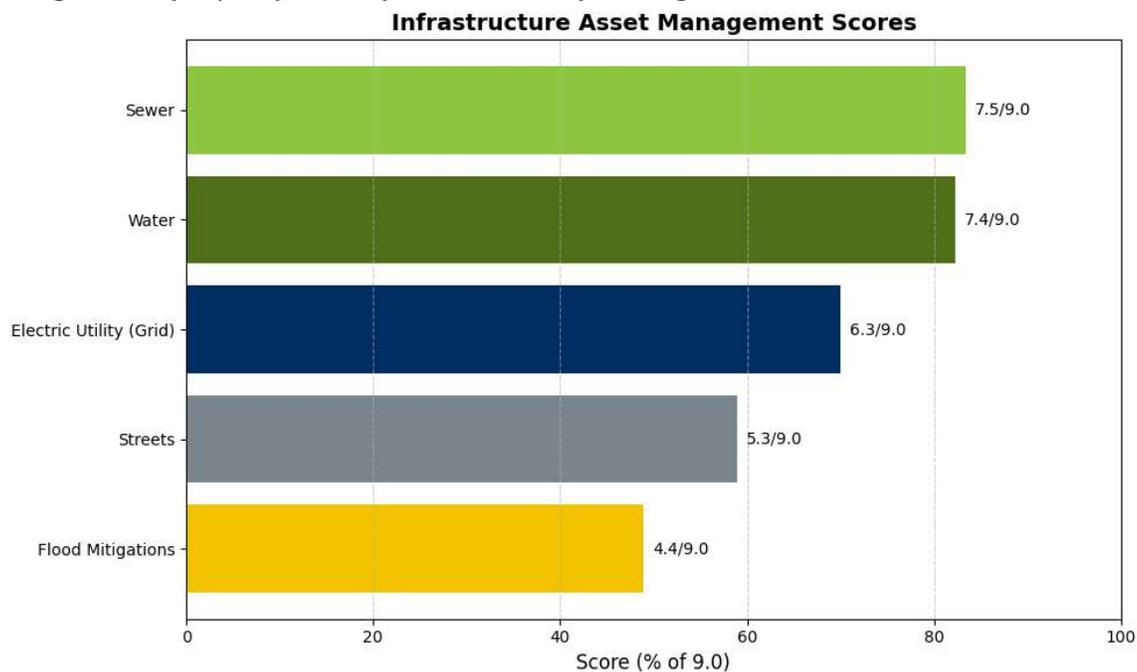


Image 3: 2nd (3.9/5.0) Fiscal Sustainability

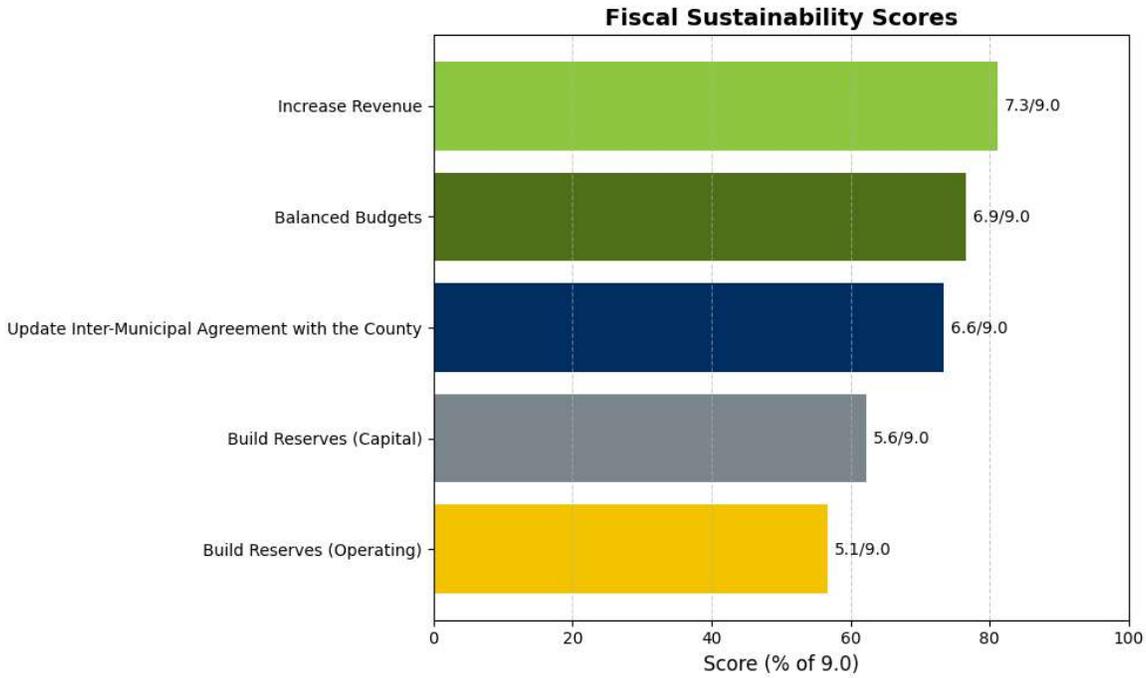


Image 4: 3rd (2.3/5.0) Environmental Sustainability

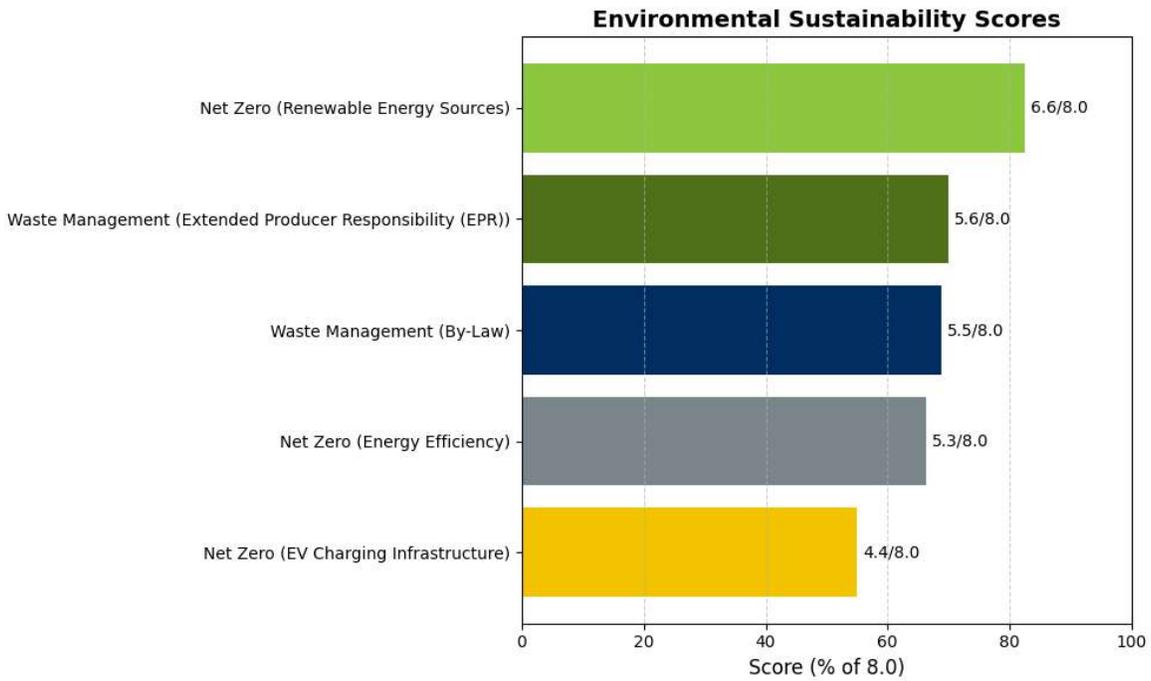


Image 5: 4th (2.3/5.0) Strategic Supports

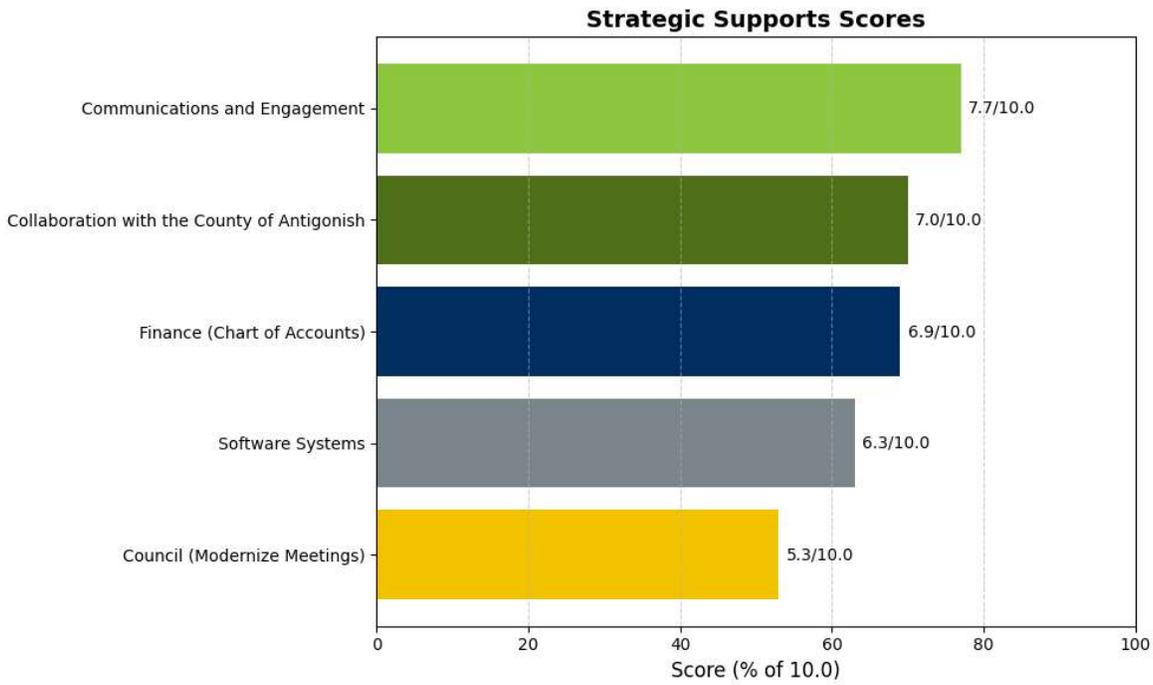
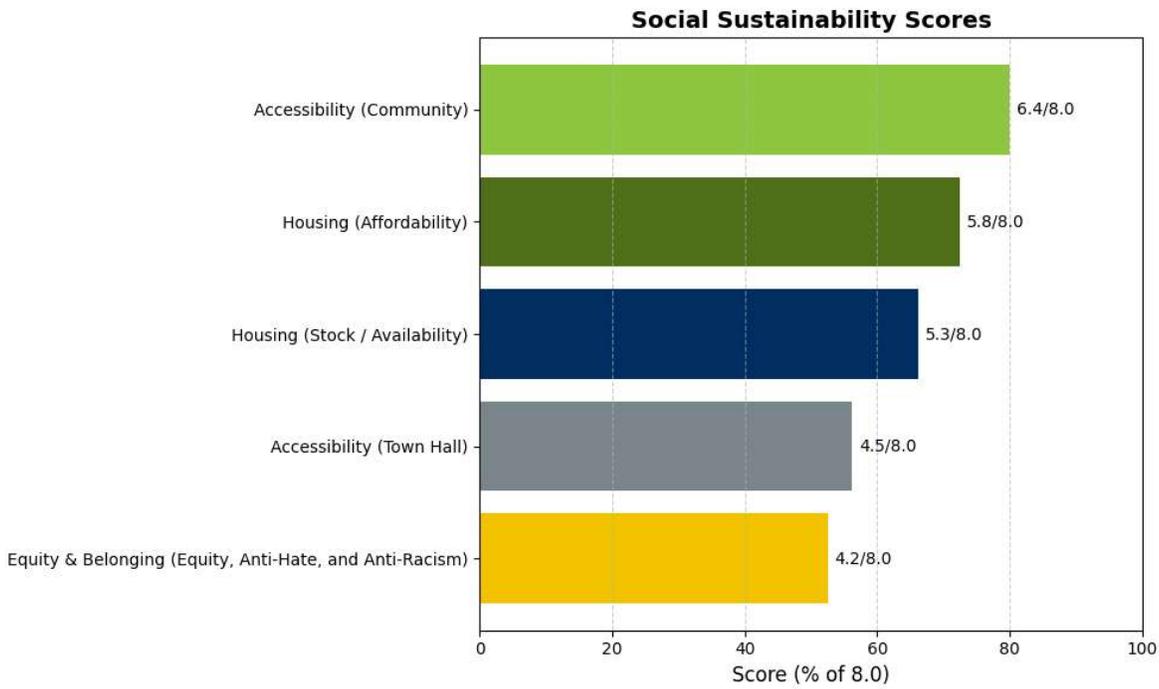


Image 6: 5th (1.9/5.0) Social Sustainability



Appendix C: Council & Staff Priorities Breakdown

Image 1: The Top Five Strategic Priority Themes (Council & Staff Combined):

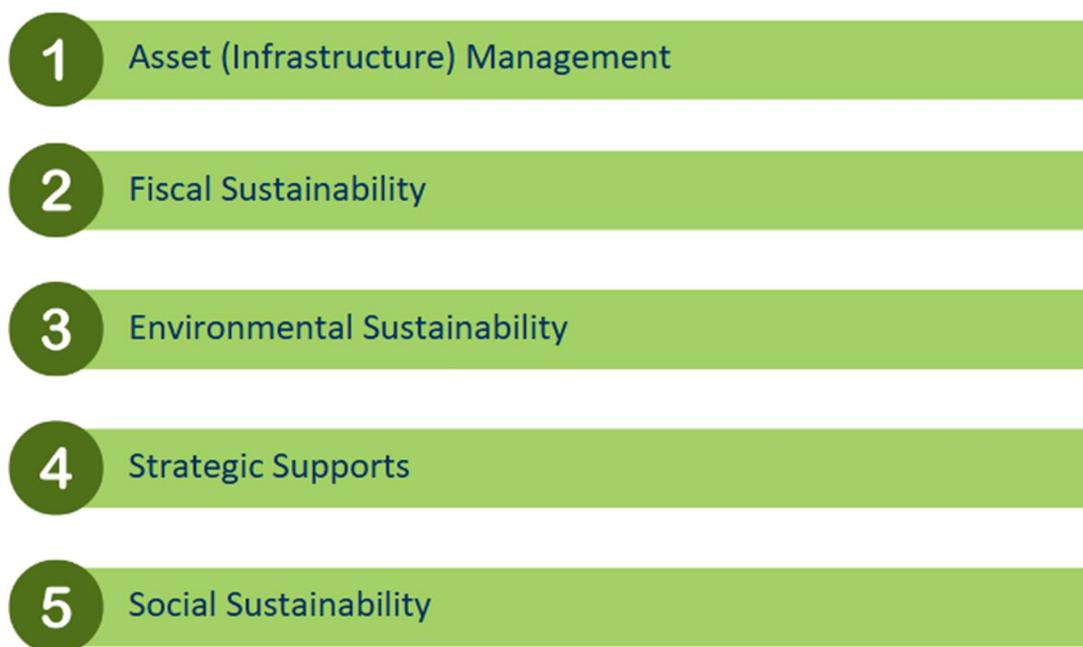


Table 1: Council & Staff Strategic Priorities Breakdown

Rank	Council	Staff
1	Asset (Infrastructure) Management	Asset (Infrastructure) Management
2	Fiscal Sustainability	Fiscal Sustainability
3	Environmental Sustainability	Strategic Supports
4	Social Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability
5	Strategic Supports	Social Sustainability

Image 2: The Top Five Asset (Infrastructure) Management Priority Themes (Council & Staff Combined):

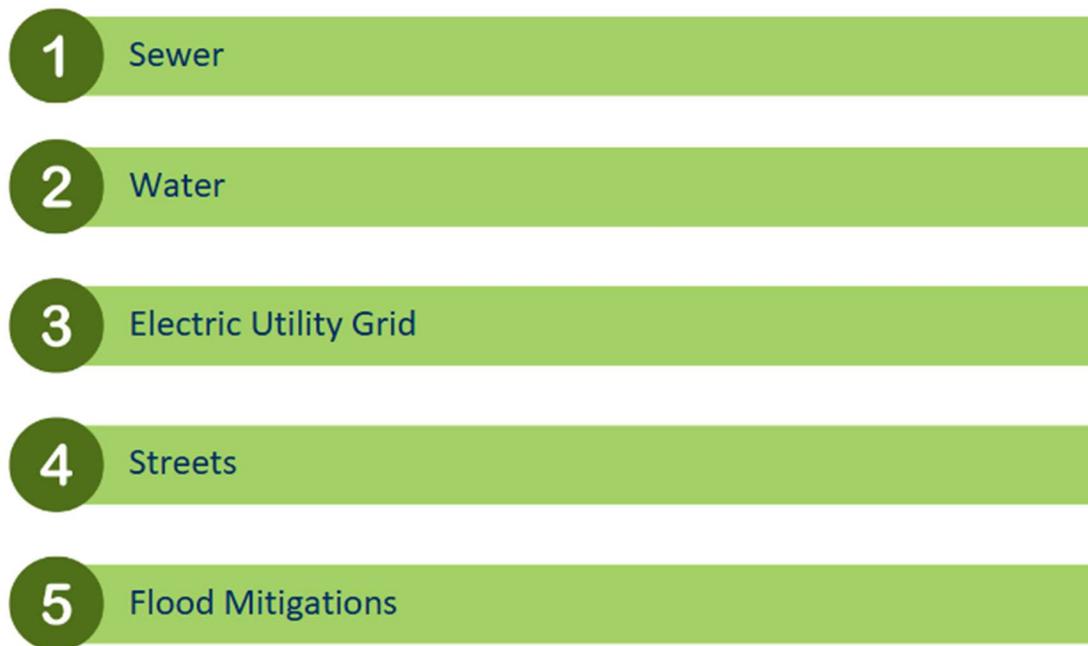


Table 2: Council & Staff Asset (Infrastructure) Management Priorities Breakdown

Rank	Council	Staff
1	Sewer	Water
2	Water	Sewer
3	Streets	Electric Utility Grid
4	Electric Utility Grid	Northern Collector
5	Sidewalks	Flood Mitigations

Image 3: The Top Five Fiscal Sustainability Priority Themes (Council & Staff Combined):



Table 3: Council & Staff Fiscal Sustainability Priorities Breakdown:

Rank	Council	Staff
1	Update Inter-Municipal Services Agreement with County	Increase Revenue
2	Balanced Budgets	Balanced Budgets
3	Increase Revenue	Procurement Controls
4	Build Reserves (Capital)	Inventory Controls
5	Build Reserves (Operating)	Build Reserves (Operating)

Image 4: The Top Five Environmental Sustainability Priority Themes (Council & Staff Combined):



Table 4: Council & Staff Environmental Sustainability Priorities Breakdown:

Rank	Council	Staff
1	Waste Management By-Law	Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources)
2	Waste Management EPR (Blue Bag) Transition to Circular Materials	Net Zero (Community District Heating)
3	Net Zero (Renewable Energy Sources)	Net Zero (Energy Efficiency)
4	Net Zero (Energy Efficiency)	Net Zero (EV Charging Infrastructure)
5	Net Zero (EV Charging Infrastructure)	Waste Management EPR (Blue Bag) Transition to Circular Materials

Image 5: The Top Five Strategic Supports Priority Themes (Council & Staff Combined):

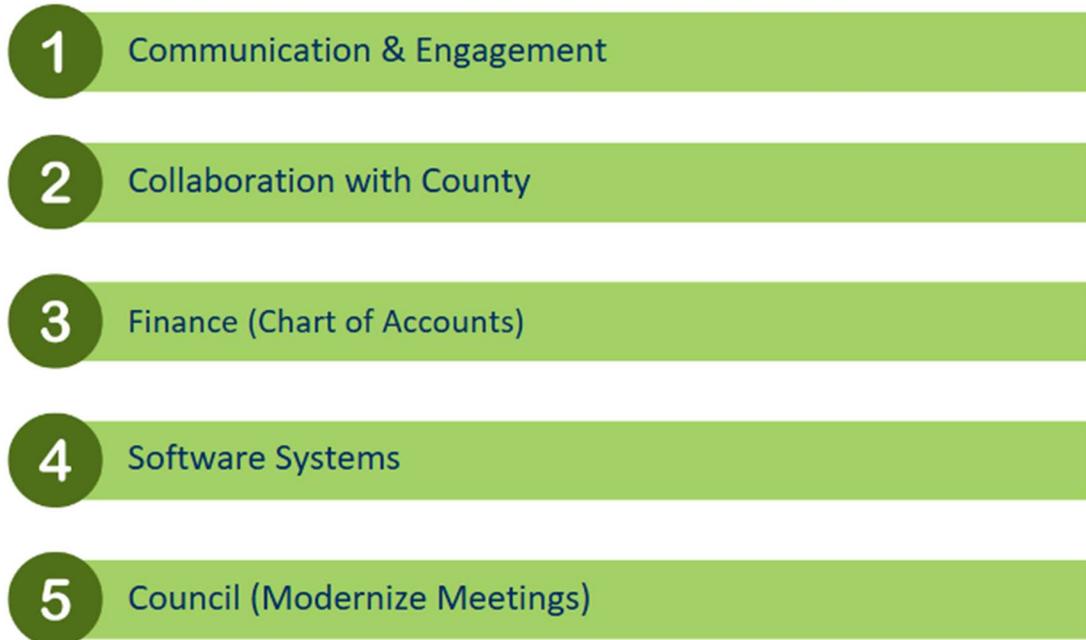


Table 4: Council & Staff Strategic Support Priorities Breakdown:

Rank	Council	Staff
1	Communication & Engagement	Finance (Chart of Accounts)
2	Collaboration with County	HR Initiatives
3	Council (Modernize Meetings)	Software Systems
4	Finance (Chart of Accounts)	Communication & Engagement
5	Software Systems	Finance (Year End Director's Report)

Image 6: The Top Five Social Sustainability Priority Themes (Council & Staff Combined):



Table 6: Council & Staff Social Sustainability Priorities Breakdown:

Rank	Council	Staff
1	Housing (Affordability)	Accessibility (Community)
2	Accessibility (Community)	Housing (Stock/Availability)
3	Planning (Maintain Aesthetics)	Accessibility (Town Hall)
4	Housing (Stock/Availability)	Housing (Affordability)
5	Library (Provincial Advocacy)	Equity & Belonging (Equity, Anti-Hate, and Anti-Racism)