

***The Hants Advantage Initiative
Project Summary***

August 2004

Prepared by:

The Hants Regional Development Authority

Contact: Amy Melmock, Executive Director

Phone: (902) 798-0016 or (902) 883-3338

email: amelmock@enterprisecentre.info

Table of Contents

Project History & Participants.....Page 3
Purpose of the Project & Positioning Statement..... Page 4
Project Results..... Page 5

Research Analysis

- Document Review
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Compiled Results of Stakeholder Interviews
- Collection and Analysis of Socio-Economic Data
- Investment Attraction Marketing
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats
- Emerging Themes

Communications Audit

- Audit Objectives
- Process
- Top Line Findings
- Interpretation and Recommendations
- Communications Plan
- Building the Hants County Brand
- Audiences
- The Positioning Statement
- Key Messages

The Communications Approach..... Page 22

Communications Strategy & Framework

- Building Brand Confidence
- Media Relations Program
- Government Relations
- Visual Identity
- Ambassador Program
- Online Communications
- Success Stories Campaign
- Brand Champions
- Toolkit
- Stakeholder Database
- Summary

List of Sources Page 26

Project History and Participants

This project summary is intended to provide an overview of the **Hants Advantage Report** produced in May 2004, and to discuss the next steps that will arise as a result of this report.

During an inaugural meeting in January 2004, facilitated by the Hants County Regional Development Authority, **representatives from all four municipalities reached an agreement that there was a need to create a unified vision of the County** – a vision that highlighted the region’s *unique characteristics, its economic attractiveness and the opportunities and methods for achieving sustainable growth*.

The goal of the Hants Advantage Initiative became a process of looking at how municipalities in Hants County could best work together to create regional economic advantages.

Following this first meeting, a **Steering Committee** made up of the four municipal Mayors and Wardens (or their designates) was officially formed to guide the progress of the *Hants Advantage Initiative* under the administration of the Hants RDA. The members of the original Steering Committee included:

Anna Allen	Mayor, Town of Windsor
Paul Beazley	Councilor, Town of Windsor
Gary Cochrane	Deputy Mayor, Municipality of West Hants
Richard Dauphinee	Warden, Municipality of West Hants
Wayne Folker	Mayor, Town of Hantsport
Tim Lynch	Community Development Officer, Town of Hantsport
Lloyd Matheson	Warden, Municipality of East Hants
Amy Melmock	Executive Director, Hants Regional Development Authority
John Patterson	Councilor, Municipality of East Hants
Lee Steeves	Chair, Board of Directors, Hants Regional Development Authority

In February 2004, the Steering Committee contracted the services of **Davidson-Greenwood Communications Ltd.** to develop **Phase I** of the Hants Advantage Project. The key components of the project, as defined in the *Phase I Terms in Reference*, included the creation of an **Economic Competitive Analysis**, a **Communications Audit**, a **Positioning Strategy** and a **Communications Framework**. It was anticipated that Phase II of the study would see the development and implementation of a full Communications Plan, including the creation of Marketing Materials.

The **Hants Advantage Report** was released to the Steering Committee in **May 2004**. Amy Melmock, Executive Director of the Hants RDA, then gave presentations to all four municipalities to update them on the status of the *Hants Advantage Initiative*, and a copy of the report was forwarded electronically to each municipal Chief Administrative Officer in the County. Since May 2004, the Hants RDA has also actively sought federal and provincial support to initiate the production of a full-scale **Communications Plan and Marketing Materials**, stemming from the Phase 1 Report.

Purpose of the Project & Positioning Strategy

The purpose of **Hants Advantage Report** was to create **an accurate and up-to-date portrait of how Hants County perceives itself**, based on the economic and competitive advantages the County has to offer.

To create this portrait of Hants County, the consultants sought the input of **key stakeholders** in the region -- by conducting extensive interviews with political, government and corporate representatives. The consultants also reviewed a wide variety of **written materials** dealing with the County that have been produced during the past decade. These materials included municipal planning documents, the strategic plans of various community development groups, and socio-economic data collected by the Hants RDA, Human Resources Skills Development Canada, Stats Canada, and Nova Scotia Business Incorporated (NSBI).

Through the surveys and research that was conducted, the report has offered:

- An overview of the economic base of Hants County
- A historic analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Hants County economy.
- The audiences that are available to both hear and promote the messages about Hants County.

Positioning Statement

The *Hants Advantage Report* determined that the marketing messages that are delivered surrounding Hants County must be clear and concise, yet flexible enough to adapt to a variety of audiences.

One of the key **positioning statements** that arose from the report, and that has been adopted by the *Hants Advantage Steering Committee* is as follows:

*“Strategically located within minutes of Halifax Regional Municipality, **Hants County** is open to business, offering residents a quality lifestyle in an ideal community.”*

This positioning statement will form the basis of the **Communications Plan and Marketing Materials** that are being developed as a result of the report. Other key messages that will be reinforced include:

- A diverse and sustainable economy exists and is continuing to emerge in Hants County.
- Hants County offers its residents a safe, high quality rural life style that is within close proximity to the amenities found in Atlantic Canada’s largest urban centre.

Project Results: The Research Analysis Component

The **research components** that were detailed in the *Phase I Hants Advantage Report* included a **document review, stakeholder interviews, a collection and analysis of socio-economic data and an analysis of strengths and weaknesses in Hants County.**

Document Review

During the course of their document review, the consultants examined more than **66 strategic planning documents** that have been produced regarding Hants County during the past decade. They also examined more than 100 web sites for information on the county.

The documents considered within the review were provided through the Hants Regional Development Authority and the four Hants County municipalities. They covered a range of issues, ranging from tourism and marketing trends, to municipal recreational plans, community economic development reports and opportunities for growth within the business, cultural, and heritage sectors. (Please see List of Sources on Page 26.)

The information taken from reviewed documents was used to:

- Identify community values and principles.
- Identify community stakeholders, strategic partners and trends.
- Identify the community and economic development initiatives that have been realized in the past decade, and those which have lost relevance or momentum.

The document review indicated that while significant milestones have been reached within Hants County during the past decade, many opportunities still exist to improve the social, economic and physical infrastructure of the region. **The document review was used to form the basis of the stakeholder questionnaire, and to identify the economic development advantages and opportunities and the strengths and weaknesses that are inherent in Hants County.**

Stakeholder Interviews

All told, a representative sample of **55 community stakeholders** were interviewed and surveyed regarding their perceptions of community values, municipal services, current development opportunities and the economic momentum that exists within the County. Interviews were conducted with political and government representatives, business and industry spokespeople and community and non-profit representative on both sides of the County.

LIST OF INTERVIEWED STAKEHOLDERS:

Bob Bona, President, Scotian Homes
Lynn Davis, Director of Planning, Windsor West Hants
Harold Irving, Program Director, Economic Development, East Hants
Richard Dauphinee, Warden, Municipality of West Hants
Pat DeCoste, Manager, Links at Penn Hills
Vince Upshaw, Chair, WHAAA
Ken Mounce, Chair, Avon River Heritage Society
Al Rauba, General Manager, Sepracor
Pat Gould-Thorpe, Community Development Officer, Hants RDA
Neal Conrad, Manager of Rural and Community Development, N.S.O.E.D
Mitch Brison, Brison Developments
David Howell, Brison Developments
Wayne Folker, Mayor, Town of Hantsport
Tim Lynch, Recreation and Community Development Coordinator, Town of Hantsport
Scott Brison/Dale Palmetter, Member of Parliament, Kings Hants
VanEssa Roberts, Community Development Officer, Town of Windsor
Karen Kittilsen, Hants Regional Development Authority
Hugh Roddis, Founder and General Manager, Orion Electronics
Brian Soper, Labor Market Economist, HRDC
Michelle Savoie, Statscan Economist
Harold Rennie, Statscan Researcher
Dr. Michael Cherry, N.S. Natural Resources Industrial Minerals Specialist
Duncan Bayne, Lands Coordinator, Nova Scotia Nature Trust
Marsden Anthony, Kennetcook Businessman
Danny Dill, V.P Howard Dill Enterprises
Joe Lord, V.P. Finance Minas Basin Pulp and Paper
Jeff Redden, Manager/Owner, Windsor Home Hardware
Elaine Harvey, CKF Packaging
Margaret Johnson, Community Representative East Hants
Irene Wotherspoon, Community Representative East Hants
Robin Wilbur, Owner, Elmsdale Lumber Company
Downey Thompson, Elmsdale Lumber Company
Darlene Ashley, Manager, Royal Bank, Elmsdale
Steve Wells, Owner/manager, Mason Apples
Theresa Buckland, Labor Market Development Officer, WHAAA
Paul Innes, HRDC, Windsor
Anna Allen, Mayor, Windsor
Sara Lee Lewis, Mermaid Theatre
John Woodford, Planning Director, East Hants
Pam Kinsman, Signature Glass
Ed MacDonald, Nova Scotia Textiles
Heather Boylan, Ski Martock
Elwood Dillman, Titanium Corp
Doug Corkum, Saint Famille Wines
Debra Donovan, Scotia Slate
Barb Bagell, Rainbow Farms
Richard Gordon, Etruscan Resources
Garth Vaughan, Windsor Hockey Historical Society
Reese Morash, Windsor Chamber of Commerce
Charlene McCulloch, East Hants Tourism Association
Pat Mills, National Gypsum
Earl Caldwell, New Air Ventilation
Marc Peterson, Destination Hants Shore Association
Tanya Sanford, Job Resource Centre

The **compiled results** of the stakeholder interviews produced the following observations:

- **Living, working and investing in Hants County: *Lifestyle:*** People value the County's safe rural environment, and the access to local services and urban amenities. ***Business:*** lower cost of land, labor and taxes, proximity to Halifax and other economic regions, proximity to economic development agencies.
- **Unique attributes of the County:** Its proximity to Halifax and central location within Nova Scotia, the County's unique history and geography, the combination of market forces and location that are contributing to the County's growth cycle.
- **Rating of municipal/provincial services: *Three highest ranked services:*** Recycling, garbage collection, and the provision of the 100 series highways. ***Three lowest ranked services:*** land use planning services, water and sewer, secondary roads and streets.
- **Opportunities for Improvement in the County:** Business park use and development in Windsor/West Hants, policing in downtown Windsor, bus service and public transit in the County, planning regulations and customer service throughout all municipalities, recreation and health facilities, local retail mix, secondary roads, water and sewer provision for commercial development.
- **Community Values that Should Remain Constant:** Preservation of the environment, sustainable land use, protection of watercourses, rivers, salt marshes, support for local business development, country living with an urban flair.
- **Community Aspects that Should Change:** More municipal support for business, more resources and better customer service for planning departments, improved access to health, recreation and government services.
- **Perceptions of the largest and most significant private sector developments taking place in the County: (Windsor/West Hants)** Super 8 Motel, Sepracor Expansion, Fundy Gypsum Loading Dock, Armoyan subdivision in Windsor **(East Hants)** Links at Penn Hills, Scotian Homes Panelized Plant, Sobeys and Superstore Developments in Elmsdale, Chalet Village, Gladys Manning Retirement Community.
- **Perceptions of the largest and most significant public sector developments taking place in the County: (Windsor/West Hants)** Hockey Heritage Centre, Imperial Theatre Renovation, Windsor Library, Windsor Pool, West Hants Landfill, Adult Learning Centre **(East Hants)** East Hants Resource Centre, South Maitland Interpretive Centre, East Hants Water tower, Nursing Home Development, East Hants Sportsplex Expansion.

- **Opportunities for greater municipal cooperation within Hants County:** *Increased communication with residents, combined services, more regional services and fewer boundary restrictions, greater cooperation between councilors*
- **Potential for public and private development opportunities:** *Three highest ranking responses: Small business, accommodation development in Windsor/West Hants, further development of the Fundy Shore Drive* **Three lowest ranking responses:** *Information technology, call centres, reclamation of the Avon River*
- **Advantages of doing business in Hants County:** *cost of land, housing, labor, proximity to metro marketplace, strong rural work ethic, rural lifestyle, loyal clientele, excellent transportation infrastructure.*

Collection and Analysis of Socio-Economic Data

The *Hants Advantage Report* noted that Hants County has its own measurable *Gross Economic Product (GEP)* that is reflected in the individual and collective wealth of its residents. Based on this GEP, the report recommended that in order for Hants County to continue to grow and prosper, it should:

- Diversify products and services, and pursue specialty products and services for sale to markets outside the County's borders.
- Identify and measure purchases made by residents and businesses outside County borders, and seek opportunities to have business people provide these products and services internally.

In order to better understand the economy of Hants County, the report recommended:

- that a **comprehensive database of socio-economic information** about the County be consistently maintained, monitored, and studied.
- that **strategic planning by sector and forecasting of investment**, growth and employment opportunities be developed and maintained at the Hants RDA and municipal level.

The report offered the following examples of meaningful competitive analysis information that could be developed and maintained by the County:

- **Location quotients**, which use industry labor force statistics to measure changes in employment over time. This information helps identify the ways in which employment is specialized within industries.

- **Shift Share Analysis**, which uses labor force statistics to measure changes in the composition of the industrial base of the community by examining variations in local employment. This information details the way that the region's economic base is changing over time and what competitive advantages and market forces are influencing this change.
- **A Retail Pull Factor Analysis**, which combines the estimated retail sales in Hants County, compared to provincial averages. Based on this type of analysis, the report estimated that \$140 million in retail spending is lost annually to the local economy in Hants County by residents making purchases outside the County.

The *Hants Advantage Report* recommended that a custom search of Statistics Canada data could be conducted to provide in-depth labor force statistics that are specific to the various regions of Hants County. The report estimated that this would require an investment of approximately \$5,000 to provide an analysis of information during the past five years, and an annual investment of \$1,000 to keep the information current.

Investment Attraction Marketing for Hants County

The Hants Advantage Report recommended that the four municipal partners and the Hants RDA can better position the Hants County "product" (its communities, people, infrastructure, and attractions) by encouraging the following:

- The continuous development of community and physical infrastructure
- The enhancement of the skill sets available to the local labor force
- The creation of distinctive local attractions
- The development of companies and industries that are compatible with the local economy and with local objectives and values.

The report also noted that **investment marketing** traditionally involves promotion of the region's natural resources and available raw materials, the size of a region's population, and the cultural context and lifestyle the region can offer. **Evolving factors in business location** also include proximity to larger markets, access to technology, labor market development and analysis and the health of the regional economy.

Investment inquiries stem from direct inquiries to municipalities or the Hants RDA by potential investors and real estate agents, provincial and federal referrals from economic development partners, or site selection consultants working on behalf of clients. To respond effectively to these inquiries, the *Hants Advantage Report* recommended:

- An enhanced **community profile** and **economic investment profile** on the Hants RDA website, that would include detailed information on recent capital infrastructure investments, transportation and communications infrastructure, available commercial, retail, business park and downtown sites, and the available human resources.

- **Increased advertising and public relations efforts, and improved levels of customer service** at all levels.
- A **partnered system** to document inquiries, track contacts, and note follow-up actions.

The report also noted that research into **best practices in investment marketing** has identified the following six maxims:

- 80 to 90 per cent of business growth will come from existing businesses
- 70 to 85 per cent of new foreign investment in Canada comes from firms who have already invested in the region.
- Every community has more opportunities to pursue that its resources will allow.
- Targeting investment prospects based on competitive advantages for sectors is crucial.
- Personal contact is the best way to communicate with a potential investor.
- A referral from a trusted source is the most effective access to a decision maker.

Strength, Weakness & Opportunities Analysis

Strengths

Based on the research and stakeholder interviews that were conducted, the *Hants Advantage Report* identified the following **strengths** within Hants County:

- **People:** *The County has 41,000 residents and is continuing to grow, its residents realize that they sit adjacent to an \$11 billion urban economy, the employment rate of 63 per cent exceeds the provincial average, and there is a labor market of 350,000 within a 35 minute commute.*
- **Social Infrastructure:** *Quality of life is high with new schools, low crime statistics, a growing number of recreational opportunities, a strong social fabric, and the availability of self-employment and entrepreneurial training resources.*
- **Transportation Infrastructure:** *Hants County is served by 100 series highways, Halifax International Airport, rail access to North America, Port of Hantsport, Port of Halifax.*
- **Location:** *Hants County is adjacent to major market areas in Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada and northeastern United States.*
- **Culture and History:** *Wealth of Acadian, First Nations, and African Nova Scotian culture and heritage, strong shipbuilding and agricultural heritage, internationally renowned artistic community with strengths in amateur and professional theatre, visual arts, and community festivals.*

- **Environmental Features & Resources:** *World's highest tides, fossilized geological remains, 100 species of native and migratory birds, wind generated energy potential, strong mineral resources sector (gypsum and slate)*
- **Business and Industry: (Small Business & Entrepreneurship)** *Services provided through Kings Hants BDC, Hants RDA, Windsor Enterprise Centre*
- **Agriculture:** *Hants County produces 25 per cent of Nova Scotia's agricultural product at a value of \$55 million annually, beef industry is 15 per cent of Nova Scotia's total, dairy industry (Shubenacadie) produces 20 per cent of provincial total, 36 green house operations account for 25 per cent of provincial total, vineyards represent 25 per cent of Nova Scotia production. Hants County is also home to the oldest Agricultural Fair in North America (Hants County Exhibition, established 1765) and Howard Dill's giant pumpkins.*
- **Mining and Energy:** *Hants County has a 100 year history in gypsum production; \$20 million was recently invested in new industry infrastructure. Hants County slate is finding new export markets, a provincial energy company focused on wind driven production is headquartered in Windsor, Heritage Gas is 25 per cent Hants County owned.*
- **Forestry:** *An estimated 80 per cent of the County land base is recognized as productive forest, forestry creates significant employment in Hants County.*
- **Manufacturing and Construction:** *Hantsport is home to CKF Inc, Minas Basin Pulp and Power, Fundy Gypsum, Windsor has two life sciences firms, and a military electronic components manufacturer, East Hants has a concentration of construction related firms including Shaw Industries, Scotian Homes and Elmsdale Lumber.*

Weaknesses

Based on the research and stakeholder interviews that were conducted, the *Hants Advantage Report* identified the following **weaknesses** within Hants County:

- **Organization:** *No common understanding of economic development priorities or strategy for the County between the four municipalities.*
- **Public Infrastructure/Municipal Issues:** *Imbalance in commercial tax ratio verses residential tax base creates pressure on infrastructure, developers question planning priorities of municipalities and level of customer service, limited capacity of some infrastructure to support growth is evident, lack of available commercial and industrial lands in Windsor/West Hants.*

- **Social Issues/Community Services:** *Public reluctance toward growth and change, illiteracy rate of 25 per cent within the workforce, access issues related to health and government services in the East Hants Corridor and Windsor.*
- **Business & Industry:** *Retail loss to Halifax and Annapolis Valley of \$14 million annually, lack of tourism infrastructure and profile, dependency on resource based industries, perceived dependency on large corporate interests in some regions of the County.*

Opportunities

Based on the research and stakeholder interviews that were conducted, the *Hants Advantage Report* identified the following **opportunities** within Hants County:

- **Municipal Structure:** *Greater municipal cooperation is required in central water and sewage systems, regional land use planning, business park expansions, and land use annexation. Amalgamation could establish the County as the province's third largest regional municipality and could improve the County's leverage when negotiating for provincial and federal support.*
- **Public Infrastructure:** *Opportunities exist to expand the Windsor/West Hants business park, the Kings Transit Service to Hantsport and Windsor, commuter service to Halifax from Windsor and Elmsdale, to develop a West Hants growth centre with Hantsport, Kings and the Glooscap First Nation, and to expand recreational opportunities throughout the County.*
- **Human Resource Development:** *Opportunities exist to expand literacy and life skills training, trades and apprenticeship and entrepreneurial training. In-migration of skilled immigrants from HRM, and residents from Atlantic Canada and beyond exists.*
- **Halifax/ Corridor Marketplace:** *Hants County is on the doorstep of the eighth largest urbanized centre in Canada – the Halifax Regional Municipality. At the same time, the Halifax Moncton Growth Corridor represents the 10th largest marketplace in Canada.*
- **Residential Growth Strategy:** *Hants County can grow its population by attracting HRM residents, and focusing on highly-skilled immigrants tied to specific Hants County industry and employer needs. The HRM residential alternative market could be tapped by encouraging local real estate companies to position their product in the Halifax market.*
- **Retail Sector Growth Strategy:** *Awareness should be increased that the retail mix in the County is expanding to serve regional consumers, information on retail market opportunities should be conveyed to internal and external entrepreneurs, developers, and others.*

- **Alternative to Halifax Business Parks:** East Hants has made recent and ongoing investments in the expansion of their business parks. Windsor-West Hants Business Park is essentially full with no formal plans for expansion, but efforts are currently underway to determine the availability of adjacent lands and to fund infrastructure development. Both sites present viable and competitive alternatives to Halifax Business Parks.
- **Innovative Growth and Threshold Firms:** These firms have an orientation toward international markets and are committed exporters who make a contribution to building the intellectual capital necessary to make communities globally competitive. In Windsor/West Hants these firms include Bio-Medica Diagnostics and Sepracor, Orion Electronics, Scotian Windfields and Renewable Energy Services, Fundy Gypsum and in the cultural sector, Mermaid Theatre.
- **Agriculture:** While agriculture is widely viewed as a “sunset” sector, there are interesting opportunities for expansion and growth in Hants County. East and West Hants municipalities have demonstrated tremendous support for this sector, and they acknowledge its future growth potential. As an industry, agriculture includes food production, processing and marketing, and the sub-sectors of resource management, livestock and crop technology and business management. The Hants County agriculture sector is extremely diversified, with concentrations in dairy, beef, and field crops, and specialized operations in fine herbs, wines, organic and whole foods, berries, and fruit. Some specific opportunities in agriculture include:
 - **The potential relocation of Farmers Dairy to East Hants** and the potential to develop value added milk products for export.
 - **Further development of organic, heritage grain, biodynamic and community share agriculture markets** and farms such as Oakmanor Farms and Sun Root Farms.
 - **The production of niche dairy foods with distinctive nutritional qualities** is currently the subject of a \$10 million research project at Nova Scotia Agricultural College.
 - **The growth of greenhouse developments** to substitute produce currently imported to Nova Scotia. Hants County already has a concentration of greenhouse operators, excellent transportation links to major markets, and established business relationships with distributors.
 - **Agri-tourism** such as farm stays, u-picks, and the Dill Pumpkin.
 - **The expansion of refrigerated warehousing** to serve the agricultural sector.
 - **A revitalized agricultural exhibition and farm open house days.**

Agricultural processors and manufacturers require up-to-date information regarding the amount of and suitability of lands for primary production, the volume of local products, and the availability of agricultural training. **This information could be incorporated into revised investment profiles and targeted marketing materials.**

- **Forestry:** Bowater and Elmsdale Lumber own considerable forested lands in the south-east region of the County, and are undertaking ground-breaking watershed and environmental sustainability research. Opportunities exist for small-scale value added production with hardwoods and attracting prefabricated builders to the County as part of a construction industry cluster. Opportunities also exist to create a major forestry demonstration project and complimentary recreational park developments adjacent to a major urban area.
- **Mining:** Current mining operations in Hants County include the extraction of gypsum, clay, peat, slate, silica sand and gravel. New opportunities for mining and energy include small scale gypsum and specialty gypsum mining to produce agricultural fertilizers and alabaster gypsum for carving, further exploration at historic gold and barite mining operations, and the growth of the titanium industry. Limestone is also abundant in the County and could be mined for use in agricultural lime, cement and other building stone. High quality kaolin is found with clay deposits and could be used for industrial coatings, paint filler and ceramics.
- **Downtown Development:** Opportunities exist to enhance the downtown core of Windsor with the development of the Hockey Heritage Centre, the Mermaid Theatre and the continued revitalization of the waterfront. The Hantsport retail mix is incomplete, and its tourism potential is largely unexplored. Elmsdale is the established focal point for retail and business parks in the East Hants corridor.
- **Tourism Development:** Although tourism is a favored form of development among local residents, the County's tourism profile remains weak. If this market can be successfully developed, it opens up subsequent markets for the cottage and craft industries. Opportunities for growth also exist in the following areas:
 - **Enhanced cultural and historic interpretation** of the Shubenacadie and Glooscap First Nations heritage, the Acadian heritage, the Planter heritage, and the architectural heritage in Windsor, Maitland, Hantsport and Mount Uniacke.
 - **Enhanced interpretation of well-known historic figures** such as Haliburton, Frances Da Silva, Robert Pope, Alma and Ernest Lorenzen and others.
 - **Enhanced interpretation of traditional industries**, and the region's connection to hockey heritage.
 - **Environmental interpretation** of the world's highest tides, migratory bird species, and geological formations.
 - **Winter tourism markets** such as downhill and cross-country skiing, winter carnival development
 - **Cruise industry excursions** to Hants County from HRM with potential partners such as DRL Coach Lines, Jarvis Roberts, and the Atlantic Canada Cruise Association.
 - **The enhancement of the Shipbuilding Trail** extending from Hantsport to Maitland.

- *Fundy Shore Drive* tourism packaging development, focusing on the shipbuilding, Acadian, First Nations, and World's highest tides.
- **Film Location Marketing:** *Develop a relationship with the Nova Scotia Film Development Corporation and industry producers to promote the region's farms, dyke lands and tidal flats, rivers and valleys, heritage downtowns and rural village centres, and its ski hill locations.*
- **Avon River Reclamation:** *The impending twinning of Highway 101 through the Windsor area has raised the issue of the original construction of the Avon River Causeway. While there does not appear to be any real economic rationale for the removal and reclamation of the Port of Windsor, the arguments center around cultural and environmental themes.*

Threats

Based on the research and stakeholder interviews that were conducted, the *Hants Advantage Report* identified the following **threats** within Hants County:

- **Lack of administrative identity** in the delivery of services such as those offered by Human Resources Development Canada, Access Nova Scotia.
- **Fragmentation of services** delivered by regional school boards, health boards, tourism associations, municipal planning departments.
- **Residential growth** is increasingly less a function of Hants County's own economic base and the effect is disparity in the commercial to residential tax ratio.
- **The commercial tax base that does exist is resource and agricultural based** and not fully accessible for tax generation purposes.
- **Increasing competition** for land use between traditional agricultural and forestry industries and new residential, commercial and industrial developments.
- **A pervasive reluctance** to reduce competition between municipal units, and combine resources for land use planning and industrial tax sharing.
- **Marketing Challenges** exist in identifying a single marketing or tourism theme for Hants County
- **Access to specialized trades people** is limited within the County, and the local labor market is struggling to provide specialized medical and technical staff, agricultural workers and retail and clerical staff.
- **The risk exists of attracting the least desirable industrial park tenants** from HRM.
- **External threats** include the centralizing of provincial and federal government services in Kentville and Halifax during the past decade, and the out-migration of the workforce to HRM.
- **Competition exists from HRM** in the proposed development of Aerotech Parks with rates similar to those in East Hants business parks.
- **The public perception exists** that Highway 101 is not a safe highway.

- **Water resource challenges** include the financial and technical resources available to municipalities to deliver high quality, cost effective water and waste treatment systems. Localized challenges to replace aging systems exist in urban areas, while in rural areas, the co-location of agricultural and human and industrial development place a strain on the small, localized water resources.
- **Geological and Hydro-geological environments:** A better understanding of the geological and hydro-geological environments in Hants County is needed, to improve the basis for land-use planning decisions and to help reduce conflicts in emerging growth sectors.

Emerging Themes

Marketing messages to Metro Halifax could include:

- Hants County is 15 to 30 minutes away from HRM when establishing an alternative residential or business address.
- The region is 30 to 60 minutes from HRM in terms of offering scenic countryside and the tourism opportunities along the Bay of Fundy.
- Business parks in the County are 50 to 75 per cent less expensive than in HRM
- Residential housing costs are 10 to 25 per cent lower than in HRM
- Hants County offers a rural lifestyle with urban amenities.

Marketing messages to Business could include:

- Hants County is less than hours from a \$1 billion marketplace, one hours from a \$15 billion marketplace, and two hours from a \$20 billion marketplace.
- Hants County is within close proximity to international transportation routes
- More than \$250 million in infrastructure development to enhance service to business is underway.

Follow-up strategies are recommended in the following sectors and industries:

- Residential development and construction
- Business park development
- Downtown business development
- The expansion of retail, personal, business and tourism services
- Alternative agriculture production
- Innovative growth firms, including avionics, medical diagnostics, pharmaceutical research, and alternative energy production.
- Forestry-related expansion, including recovered wood-fiber processing

The development of a **Social Systems** report could consider all social service resources and the gaps in social service delivery. A **Cultural Systems** report could collect and evaluate information on the priorities and strategies for development within the sector. The development of an **Environmental Assets** map could clearly identify areas for protection.

Project Results: Communications Audit

Audit Objectives

The objectives of the audit included:

- To provide a quick, qualitative assessment of stakeholders' opinions of Hants County.
- To determine stakeholders' insight and perceptions of Hants County's position in the province.
- To determine how government, industry, and residents can raise awareness and perceptions of Hants County.
- To determine what economic opportunities Hants County should seek.

Process

The *Hants Advantage Steering Committee* forwarded a letter to participants outlining the audit objectives and requested participation, in advance of the call from the project consultants. Participants were encouraged to be candid and forthright with their answers. No names or companies are attached to responses. Communication Audit respondents were asked the following questions:

1. What is the nature of your relationship with Hants County?
2. How would you describe Hants County?
3. How would a visitor describe Hants County?
4. In your mind, what are the major challenges/threats (or issues) facing Hants County?
5. What are the major opportunities relating to Hants County?
6. What forms the basis of your opinion or perception of Hants County?
7. What are your general impressions of recent economic activity in Hants County?
8. What industries are initiating or leading growth in Hants County?
9. How do you think Hants County should be positioned or perceived by the public?
10. What are the key messages it should be sending?
11. What are the obstacles to sending out these messages?
12. What sets Hants County apart from other areas or regions?
13. What community/municipality should Hants County try to model itself after?
14. How do you think the public (visitors) actually perceives Hants County? (Perceived strengths and weaknesses.)
15. To what degree do existing perceptions of Hants County help or hinder economic development?
16. Are there any communication tools that would be useful to help you talk about the benefits of Hants County?
17. What could industry or companies be doing to help raise awareness and perceptions of Hants County?
18. Who are the most credible and influential people and organizations to speak for (or on behalf of) Hants County?
19. As you know, many regions attempt to convey a consistent, strong message to their constituents. What, if any, theme/or message should Hants County communicate?
20. What economic opportunities should Hants County seek?
21. Is there any further information you would like to add?

Top Line Findings

The following perceptions are the **top line findings** from the audit:

- Residents and business owners alike have a love for their community and want to see it grow and prosper without losing its rural appeal.
- Hants County is generally described as a rural community that is diverse in what it has to offer and a great place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Half of the respondents said visitors would describe the County as a beautiful place with lots to do, while the other half suggested that visitors would think that there wasn't much to do.
- The County's proximity to HRM is seen as both a challenge and an opportunity, and respondents are curious as to how the municipal governments will manage the influx of both residents and businesses.
- There is a general feeling that the four municipalities should be working as one with both the provincial and federal governments, along with businesses leaders and developers.
- The County should be looking to its past for future growth. The County is rich with heritage and people feel that the County should be promoting this to its fullest extent.
- There is a sense that the County, as a whole, has to better promote itself from within, accompanied by a perception that a lot of the residents don't know everything the County has to offer. If residents were better informed they could transfer the knowledge to visitors and potential businesses.
- There is a feeling that the County must do a better job of attracting big businesses, (manufacturers in particular) to create a more sustainable long-term economy.
- There is a perception that the County does a good job of encouraging small businesses and entrepreneurs. The County must continue to do this while trying to attract big business, and must provide the same incentives to both groups.
- People believe that Hants County has a lower tax rate than the HRM and therefore is a more economical choice for both business and residential development.
- There are mixed perceptions of recent economic activity in Hants County. Some respondents perceived an upswing in the past year, while others believe that nothing is being done to attract business.

Interpretation and Recommendations

- Stakeholders have a love and passion for their specific communities and municipalities in Hants County. Respondents had different viewpoints on economic growth within the County depending on which area they lived or worked in.
- There is a new mindset among local businesses, governments, and communities. They believe Hants County has a lot of potential and want to see the County continue to grow and prosper. Stakeholders believe that Hants County is a beautiful, clean, safe place to live, work, raise a family, and play.
- The four municipalities can work together to tell the story of Hants County. The messages can start from within and spread to external markets.
- Hants County's proximity to the Halifax Regional Municipality is seen as both a challenge and opportunity for Hants County. The County should work together to grow and benefit from its proximity to a major urban centre while keeping its rural appeal and celebrating its rich heritage.
- Audit respondents believe the best people to talk about or on behalf of Hants County are Hants RDA and/or municipal government representatives.
- Business and community leaders also have a role to play in representing the County and can do their part to create a positive perception of the region. Those who have experienced the positive aspects of rural living can spread the word about the benefits of living and working in rural areas.

Communications Plan

Based on the **Communications Audit**, the *Hants Advantage Report* recommended that municipalities work as a cohesive unit to further educate and influence internal and external stakeholders. The **Communications Plan** that derives from this collective effort should focus on:

- Building the perception among internal and external audiences that economic activity in Hants County is positive and is growing.
- Building the perception among internal and external audiences that Hants County is a good place to live, work and raise a family.
- Developing specific communication tools that will help send consistent, cohesive messages

Building the Hants County Brand

The **branding process** for Hants County needs to be sustainable, consistent and ongoing, and should translate into customer preference, loyalty and financial gains for Hants County. Successfully building on the Hants County brand will assist the county’s businesses and organizations to deliver a coherent, consistent message that communicates the high quality of life, workforce capacity, competitive business climate and the diversity of products and services resident within the County.

The Hants County brand will compete with other brands and other areas of Nova Scotia for market share, therefore it will be important to determine **what makes Hants County unique in the eyes of potential residents and businesses**. Once Hants County builds on its brand and demonstrates internal pride, more people from outside the County will be attracted to live and work here.

Within the communications audit, the following descriptors were used to define the attitudes, attributes and benefits of Hants County:

The attitudes and attributes that position Hants County as a good place for businesses and residents alike :	The key benefits that Hants County offers business and residents alike :	The major opportunities available to Hants County :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Positive • Friendly • Openness • Enterprising • Cooperative • Entrepreneurial • Integrity • Quality • Lifestyle • Flexible • Accessible • Determined • Untapped potential • Natural beauty • Heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to HRM • Good transportation infrastructure • Stable traditional industries • Emerging high growth industries • Concentration of construction related industries • Rich social, cultural, and environmental context • Major infrastructure underway or planned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New residential development • Business park expansion and management • Human resource and labor force development • Tourism • Agriculture – specialized dairy production, greenhouse production, and specialized markets • Forestry – resource management and hardwood processing. • Innovative Growth and Threshold Firms

Audiences

As the **Communications Plan** evolves, it will be important to stay focused on key audiences with whom relationships have already been established, and to build new audiences. Communications efforts should therefore be approached from both an **internal** and **external** perspective.

- **Internal audiences** include the *Hants Advantage Steering Committee, residents and the general public, small business stakeholders, community leaders, business leaders, the Hants RDA staff and board, and municipal, provincial and federal stakeholders.*

- **External audiences** include large and small scale businesses, site locators, visitors, the media, expatriates from the region, real estate agents, residents of HRM and others.

Messaging

Given its varied audiences, Hants County should consistently deliver concise key messages to meet the needs of each audience. Through its **key messages**, Hants County should **reinforce its commitment to building a stable economy, demonstrate that it is open to new, non-traditional industries, and show how the County provides people with a safe, relaxed lifestyle that is within close proximity to a major urban centre.**

Other **key messages** drawn from the communications audit include:

Messages targeted to business audiences:

- We have fast and easy ocean and air access with a great location for business in Europe and North America.
- We have a skilled workforce, supported by excellent education, training and research institutions and organizations.
- We have good transportation links with an abundance of space for residential, commercial, and retail development.
- We have an entrepreneurial business community and offer a competitive cost of doing business.

Messages targeted to Hants County residents:

- Hants County has been experiencing positive economic development that is driving growth in the region.
- The Hants County economy is in transition from one that relied on traditional industry and government support to a self-reliant, growing, and sustainable one.
- The four municipalities will work as one to build the Hants County economy.
- Hants County is made up of skilled, motivated, and dedicated individuals who are willing to learn new skills to grow our economy.
- Hants County is planning for long-term growth and sustainability.

Messages targeted to internal departments, agencies, and partners:

- The *Hants Advantage* is a collaborative effort that will deliver solid returns and provide long-term benefits for Hants County.
- The *Hants Advantage* brings together the intrinsic values of the four municipalities, its people, place, and products.
- The *Hants Advantage* will translate our strengths into a vibrant, forward-looking image. The project will share with the world the stories of our people and their many successes.

- The *Hants Advantage* encourages the government to work with the private sector to develop a consistent brand across our industry sectors.

Communications Approach

Communications Strategy

The *Hants Advantage Report* recommended the following approach developing a **Communications Strategy**:

- Communicating to the Hants County public that there is a long-term plan, and that they are the most important asset in attracting new business and growing a sustainable economy in Hants County.
- Creating a portal of information that will act as the communication hub so that stakeholders have one point of access to share and disseminate information about Hants County and its successes.
- Helping identify opportunities for business leaders to articulate their success.
- Reinforcing the public's commitment to growth, entrepreneurial spirit, and skills development.
- Continuing to promote and explain the benefits of doing business in Hants County.
- Continuing to gather research that will determine the degree of understanding and support for the County and public appetite for confidence building.
- Using key events to give information to the media.

Communications Framework

The *Hants Advantage Report* suggested the following tactics to increase awareness and build confidence in Hants County's ability to develop a sustainable economy, to seek out opportunities to improve the perception of Hants County, and to motivate businesses to find out more about expanding or relocating to Hants County.

Building Confidence

The project research indicated that the biggest obstacle facing Hants County is the attitude or entrenched perception some people have towards rural Nova Scotia. Communication audit respondents believed that many people think that the region doesn't have the resources to sustain a strong economy. There also appears to be a lack of confidence in Hants County's internal ability to generate a stronger economy without the catalyst of outside business investment.

Communication of the *Hants Advantage* plan is necessary to ensure that all Hants County residents are aware of and "buy-in" to the region's future and their role in building it. Hants County must provide stakeholders with the tools to build people's confidence to stay in Hants County and/or to consider starting a business in the region.

Media Relations Program

One of the most cost effective ways to build corporate reputation and general awareness is through the media. A timely and coordinated media relations program will help elevate Hants County's rapport with reporters and build on the foundation of media activities that have already occurred.

Media relations will play an important role in helping to change perceptions and to communicate the positive news occurring in Hants County. Outreach to local publications might include the following **themes**, with examples and testimonials that change that is taking place in the region:

- Evidence of positive changes in the economy
- Testimonials from corporate leaders, union leaders, and workers on the positive contribution of the Hants County workforce and its economic benefits.
- New economic and community developments
- Skills and training opportunities
- The long-term vision for the County's economy

Government Relations

Developing a positive relationship with all levels of government is an important part of Hants County's external communications efforts. Through regular discussions with government leaders on economic development, the County can build trust and establish confidence in its organizational capacity.

Visual Identity

A strong visual identity program can sum up the character of Hants County, act as a seal of marketing leadership and instantly identify the source of many materials produced by Hants County for internal and external audiences. A clear visual identity can also create a compelling new image for Hants County.

The development of a **visual identity program** will help accomplish the following:

- It will introduce a cohesive approach to the communications efforts
- It will establish a Hants County logo and typography that demonstrate a meaningful image of the region.
- The visual identity will be transferable to various products, services and industries in the region.

Ambassador Program

The success of a brand depends on the ability of the brand's leadership. Visible leadership will help build consistent messaging and show commitment that the Hants Advantage is a high priority. Endorsement from community leaders will also help secure the cooperation and involvement of representatives of business, government, the arts, education, and the media.

Hants County's mandate and messages should be integrated in the communications efforts of all government departments. It is important for all business, community, and government leaders to use the messages at appropriate events including industry meetings, community meetings and media interviews.

Online Communications

Brands can communicate their personality through their website, and the brand that exists on paper should be consistently reflected online. The Hants County web site should offer an efficient and effective way to communicate with stakeholders and serve as an introduction to *Hants Advantage* for prospective clients.

The goal of the Hants County web portal should be to provide a hub of communication for Hants County. Customized information provided on the web site can highlight the successes of Hants County and the benefits of doing business in the region. The web site should also respond to the specific needs of individual municipalities, while acting as a communication tool that connects all Hants County stakeholders.

Success Stories Campaign

This campaign will seek out opportunities to collaborate with associations, government departments and partners to develop a campaign to promote select Hants County success stories-- examples of individuals and organizations that reflect the county's attributes and confirm brand positioning. Target industries and sectors will be the initial focus of the success stories, while the overall theme will support the Hants County brand.

Brand Champions

Brand champions are storytellers who spread the brand idea. The use of traditional advocates such as celebrities or opinion leaders and non-traditional advocates, including loyal users and company employees, can be effective ways to distinguish and enhance brand image. Identifying and motivating key individuals to become “champions” of the Hants Advantage will be the key to the success of the project. Champions will be asked to go out into their communities and into other markets to put a face and a story to the momentum and the Hants County brand. Champions should be armed with the tools to consistently and effectively spread brand messages in their travels.

Toolkit

Stakeholder and brand champion support would be greatly aided by the creation of a *Hants Advantage* toolkit, consisting of a booklet of case studies, information about existing advertising, research data, provincial and national marketing resources, and any *Hants Advantage* updates. The toolkits can be specifically designed for economic developers, site locators, and for *Hants Advantage* stakeholders.

Stakeholder Database

Hants County’s brand identity will be strengthened by the development of a database to track stakeholders contact information, their feedback/input, and their involvement with the *Hants Advantage*.

Summary

The **Communications Plan** developed in the next stage of the *Hants Advantage* will help Hants County develop a more proactive, consistent, and positive strategy to communicate with the general public and to build relationships with key stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to improve Hants County’s ability to communicate the right messages to the right people at the right time. By implementing the programs discussed in this report, more stakeholders will be aware of -- and be better informed about the Hants County business climate -- and they will demonstrate their interest in pursuing investment opportunities.

List of Sources (Research Audit)

During the course of the research audit, the following documents were reviewed:

East Hants Open Space Study – 1999 – Dillon Consulting
Redevelopment of the Windsor Waterfront – 1988 - TUNS
Equestrian Industry Study – 1991 – Kathryn Barry/Elisabeth Davies
Windsor West Hants Tourism Development Study – 1990 – Economic Planning Group
Future of Literacy Programs in Hants County – 2001- Chaytor Consulting
East Hants Tourism Strategic Growth Plan – 2001- East Hants Tourism Association
Recreation Trails around Lake Piziquid - 1993- Lionel Morrell - NSCAD
East Hants Residential Market Analysis – 1999 – East Hants Planning Department
South Maitland Village Park Master Plan – 2000 - EDM
Hants County Labor Market Profile – 2003 HRDC
Hants County Business Case – NSBI - 2003
West Hants Community Health Plan – 1997- West Hants Community Health Board
Hockey Heritage Museum Feasibility Study – 1998- Economic Planning Group
Agriculture in Windsor West Hants – 1988 – Holleman/Davies/Connelly
Hants RDA Business Plans 1999 – 2005 – Hants County RDA
NSARDA – Business Plan – 2003-2004 - NSARDA
A Cultural Tourism Concept for Kennetcook Corner –1999 – ATI Consulting
West Hants Recreational Trails Report - 2000 Hants RDA
Handmade in Hants – Market Feasibility Study - -2000- Wendy McNulty
Forest Resources of Hants County – 1999 – Cameron Forestry Consulting -
Fixed Roof Accommodations Feasibility Study – 1999-SGE
East Hants Socio-Economic Profile – 2003 –Hants RDA
Hants County Marketing Strategy – SGE Group – 1998
Manufacturing in Windsor West Hants – 1988 – Blaine Wile
Business Pulse Hants Survey – 1998 – Corporate Research Associates
Opportunities in the I.T. Sector for the Greater Windsor Area – Knowledge Navigators
East Hants Socio-Economic Study –1999 – Municipality of East Hants
Voice of the People, CED in Hants County – 1995 - Angela Scammell, Pat Gould-Thorpe
Windsor Community Action Plan – 1995- TUNS
Windsor West Hants Culture and Recreation Master Plan –1991 – Delta Four Associates
N.S. Tourism Plan 2004 – N.S. Tourism Partnership Council
Halifax International Airport 20 Year Master Plan – 2003- Dillon Consulting
Town of Hantsport – Strategic Framework – 2004 – Peter Moore/Tim Lynch
Hantsport Memorial Community Centre- Recreational Plan – Ratcliffe/Griffiths Muecke
Downtown Hantsport Redevelopment Study –1987-HERCOM
Medmira Laboratories Appraisal Report – Hantsport – 1997- MacKay Real Estate
Hantsport Municipal Planning Strategy – 1991- Town of Hantsport
Rebuilding the Idea of a Town – Windsor – Faculty of Architecture - TUNS
Redevelopment of the Windsor Waterfront – 1989- TUNS
Downtown Windsor Development Strategy – 1990-UMA Group/MacFawn & Rogers
Architects/DHI Consultants Inc
Town of Hantsport – Downtown Revitalization – 1987- HERCOM

Summary of the Hants Advantage Project
Prepared by the Hants Regional Development Authority

Hantsport Downtown Database Survey – 1990 – N.S. Dept of Small Business Dev.
East Hants Strategic Economic Development Study – Terms of Reference - 2004
East Hants Strategic Economic Development Study – SGE Proposal - 2004
West Hants Subdivision Bylaw – 2002 - West Hants Planning Dept
Windsor Subdivision Bylaw -1993
Upper Falmouth Municipal Planning Strategy - 1989
Falmouth Municipal Planning Strategy – 1986-2002
Town of Windsor Municipal Planning Strategy 1991-2002
West Hants Area 1 Municipal Planning Strategy – 1991-West Hants Planning Dept.
West Hants Area 1 Land Use Bylaw - 1991
West Hants Areas 2 and 3 Municipal Planning Strategy - 2003
Windsor-West Hants Agricultural Profile –2002 – Windsor West Hants JPAC
West Hants Mining Profile – 2003 - Windsor West Hants JPAC
East Hants Official Community Plan - 2000
Windsor Plan Review – Concepts and Principles – 2003- Windsor West Hants JPAC
West Hants Statistical Profile – 2002 - Windsor West Hants JPAC
Hants County Socio-Economic Profile – 2003-Hants RDA
Rural Nova Scotia Means Business – 2002 -CFIB
A Strategic Plan for CED in Hants County – 1998- Angela Scammell
Hants RDA Action Plan – 1999-2000 –Hants –RDA
Trade & Commerce - Halifax Moncton Growth Corridor – 2004 – Kate Brooks
Minas Basin Working Group- 2002
Community Economic Development in West Hants – 1993 – Windsor Board of Trade
A Study of Windsor-West Hants Tourism – 1987 – Penelope Taylor
A Plan to Revitalize MainStreet – Windsor Mainstreet Image Committee - 1986