

# Community-based Enterprise

The Story of the Old School  
in Musquodoboit Harbour, NS



# Musquodoboit Harbour...



- ❖ Is part of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) - but it is 45 minutes east of 'downtown' Halifax
- ❖ Is considered a regional growth centre for the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia under the HRM Regional Plan
- ❖ Was the first rural community in HRM that participated as a pilot project in a new community visioning initiative under a new Regional Planning Process



# The Vision...



- ❖ In 2006, the community association at the time partnered with the city to be part of this new community visioning process
- ❖ This resulted in a report with action plans for 10 key areas approved by HRM council in 2007
- ❖ After consultation, primary means of implementation was to encourage those who were most passionate about exploring and acting on particular goals to go ahead and do so



# The Old School as an Asset...



During the visioning process, the community identified the community's P-2 elementary school which was supposed to close soon as an asset that should be retained for community purpose, re-developed and protected as a heritage property.

The school was built in 1924, and considered a great example of one of the first craftsman style buildings in the area.



# Getting Started...



To get started, a core group of 4-5 people identified several other goals in the vision that they thought the Old School would be well suited for.

These included:

- Protecting the building as a heritage property
- More arts and culture opportunities for the community
- Engaging with youth, and creating more employment for youth
- FREE! meeting space for non-profits with limited resources



# The Vision as a Base...



This provided a base to start developing a proposal to ask the city for permission for the community to take over the school.

In the end, it took about 3 years to get that permission.



# Challenges...



Some of the challenges the group faced included:

- First, waiting for the school board to determine if they had a use for the building – which took about a year. Then the city had to review potential uses for the building, which took another year.
- All this time, the building went unheated and with no one looking after it – and staff were against the proposal saying the building was too old to be of use, and the new community group working on the proposal would not be able to keep it up.
- Last, in order to take on the building, the group had to raise money for legal fees, etc.



# The Good News...



- With the community vision in hand, the working group was able to persuade community members on the municipal grants committee to sell them the school for \$1 – and give them a chance.
- And then 60 other community members stepped up with \$100 each to buy lifetime memberships to raise the funds needed for legal fees, etc.
- The bank also agreed to loan the group \$30,000 for initial renovations to take care a host of problems resulting from the building being ignored for almost 3 years.



# Learnings...



- ❖ The community vision identifying the Old School as an asset in the first place was a very valuable tool for getting the building, and for fundraising for it ever since.
- ❖ Obstacles can be overcome with persistence and creativity.
- ❖ You don't need a big group to get started, and everyone can play different roles at different times.



# 10 years later...



- The Old School provides space and support for over 50 community groups dealing with everything from mental health to building entrepreneurship in the community to municipal issues,
- It is a thriving home for music, art and culture,
- It has employed several youth providing them with a range of leadership opportunities,
- And it is protected as a municipal heritage site.

