

Town of Dalhousie, NB
2010 Willis Award for Innovation
(Population under 20,000)
Open Governance Aids Community Transition

The Town of Dalhousie, NB has experienced monumental changes in recent years, both in its economic base and mode of governance. The permanent closure of the AbitibiBowater paper mill and the Olin Chlor-Alkali chemical plant, in 2008, necessitated significant changes to municipal operations.

Dalhousie's Town Council and senior administration staff recognised the need to involve the public in municipal affairs like never before, as fundamental changes were required to deal with the economic transformation of the community. The Town embarked upon a multi-faceted approach to become more open to the public.

This process began with the creation of a committee to examine options to diversify the economy. This resulted in a Community Action Plan for the region. Dalhousie also redesigned its municipal website to be used as an information dissemination tool that included Town bylaws and Council minutes.

These changes were complemented by procedural changes to ensure that council and committee meetings were more open to the public and that there was more opportunity for people to give their input prior to decisions being made.

Dalhousie then embarked on a very public process to plan and adopt its 2010 budget, which resulted in a transitional budget that was unanimously passed by Council. All of these processes have provided focus for Council and the administration staff to continue the transformation of a former industrial town into a vibrant coastal community with a very high quality of life.