

## Presentation

To: the Nova Scotia Electoral Boundaries Commission  
From: The Greater Petite Area Community Association  
Date: January 26, 2019  
Contact: Stacey Godsoe, Chairperson

Good afternoon, Chairperson Dodds and fellow commissioners:

My name is Stacey Godsoe. I'm here today representing the Greater Petite Area Community Association... we're a not-for-profit organization formed two years ago, representing communities in the catchment area of the Petite Riviere Elementary School.

Our mandate focuses on the development and sustainability of cultural, educational and community-development initiatives in the Greater Petite Area of Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia, we have over 100 members and substantial community support – largely because of a successful campaign to keep our local award-winning school open.

This latter campaign not only saved our elementary school, but very much brought our community closer together, enhancing an already rich tradition of collaboration and cooperation.

The communities we represent are Voglers Cove, Cherry Hill, Broad Cove, Petite Riviere, Crousetown, Green Bay, Bush Island, Bell Island, Crescent Beach, New Cumberland, Mount Pleasant and West Dublin.

Many of these communities, while in Lunenburg County, are part of the section you are proposing in **two of your scenarios** to absorb into the provincial constituency of Queens County - moving them out of our current Lunenburg West constituency.

While we genuinely recognize that the commission has an extremely difficult job to balance fairness, representation and riding size, we also know you understand that the issue of voter parity needs to be carefully balanced with **community history** and **community of interest as well as preserving effective representation for all**.

\*\*\*\*\*

Turning to **The Courtney Report**, which you reference in your interim report, and which determined that:

“community of interest is one of the fundamental principles of the electoral boundary readjustment process” and needs to be carefully balanced and considered against efforts to achieve ‘voter parity.’

“citizens naturally identify with communities of interest” and that “electors who identify with a community of interest within their riding are more likely to vote”.

“drawing constituency boundaries according to a district’s communities of interest is seen as a way of ensuring better communication between citizens and their representative and of enhancing the representational process generally.”

\*\*\*\*\*

In our view, Lunenburg County has a history and culture distinct to that of Queens County. Different heritage, settlement patterns, economic activities, experiences and concerns. Our corner of southern coastal Lunenburg county is itself unique, and a **community of interest** that we naturally identify with...

While we can appreciate all the many attributes of Queens County, overwhelmingly - our centre of business, recreation and government reside in the larger towns in **Lunenburg** County.

Particularly Bridgewater – which is also the seat for our municipal government (“the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg”).

As well, many Queens County residents would not prioritize our area or concerns. Justifiably so.

Cutting us out of our natural **community of interest** fails to recognize the key differences of these communities. There is a real risk that our issues will take a back seat to those of a **majority of people** with a totally different community reality and set of concerns.

The fact that there is **no discussion** in your draft proposal of the impacts of lumping part of a Lunenburg County constituency into Queens indicates that you may not fully understand the significance of this action.

Within our region, the Greater Petite Area is known as a thriving microcosm of the county, with numerous young families moving to the area, and many successful new businesses establishing roots. **We are bucking the trend of out-migration and downward population spiral** that many other rural communities are experiencing. We are growing and thriving, and hope to not be cut out of our riding and essentially punished for this resulting growth.

The success of the recent campaign to save our local elementary school has reinforced both our strong community spirit as well as infused a tangible sense of economic optimism among residents.

We are greatly concerned that severing us off from those with more understanding of our **local** experience - essentially means that our key issues will be less understood and potentially acted upon.

\*\*\*\*\*

The issue of **school closures** is a very concrete example of community difference.

Queens County has already undergone the agonizing school closure trend.

Schools have been merged and the local regional council does not face the potential community disruption and expense that more school closures might entail.

That is not the case for our municipal government, where council keenly understands the importance of keeping small schools in operation.

Additionally, an MLA for a Queens County-dominated constituency is less likely to place a priority on school closures as a provincial issue – an ongoing concern for our region that could be lost in the proposed boundary change.

To illustrate... had our school catchment been split - half in Queens and half in Lunenburg West, it is possible that neither MLA would have had the community pressure to advocate on our behalf...50 families of the school population would have been represented by one, and 50 families by another -- in opposing parties

no less. It is highly unlikely that we would have had the dedicated and consistent advocacy of a single MLA who understood our issue completely and had the benefit of hearing from the whole school catchment in their riding, as we did.

\*\*\*\*\*

School closures aside... simply cutting us out of the Lunenburg County community of interest and putting us into Queens has strong potential to **further disenfranchise voters on issues of local concern.**

Without elected representatives who champion their issues of greatest concern, there is a real threat that **voters will feel disconnected and lose interest in the electoral process altogether.**

In a province where we have seen a steady decline in voting, this would be a backstep.

Furthermore - given the distinct community of interest and its historical, cultural and economic ties to **Lunenburg** County, what is the likelihood of anyone from the Greater Petite Area being able to successfully win a nomination to run in an election in the Queens Constituency, much less win.

\*\*\*\*\*

**AND we have seen this all happen before.....**

For ten years, (from 2002-2012), much of this area was lumped into a Queens Constituency – **as you are now again proposing.**

It created confusion at the polls and in communities. We essentially felt disenfranchised and forgotten. Serving to simply add voters to an already very large and expansive riding that stretches from the woods of Keji to the shores of Sable River, exceptional places – but, very removed from our own.

People in our community knew that the decision in 2002 was wrong, and that placing us into the Queens Constituency was ill-founded.

We applauded the report of the Nova Scotia electoral commission in 2012 when it stated:

*(An) "important set of factors in the redistribution process is community history, interest, and identity. Nova Scotia communities have deep historical roots, most dating back to the 18th and early 19th centuries."*

..... “These deeply rooted communities of interest and identity are an important part of Nova Scotia’s heritage as well as its current political reality, and they should be recognized to the greatest extent possible in the boundary redrawing process.”<sup>1</sup>

The report of 2012 indirectly acknowledged that previously placing the Greater Petite Area into the Queens Constituency compromised our long-standing community of interest and failed to respect our coastal area’s **Bridgewater** orientation.

**To put an even finer point on it...** in 2012 before the Commission made the decision to revert our area back to its original Lunenburg West designation....

**Mr Mark Furey** (who is now the MLA for this riding) - in his presentation to the Boundary Review Commission at that time said, and I quote...

“I believe the sustainability of communities of interest is the core and the foundation to the survival of rural Nova Scotia. Communities of interest have to be seen to be supported as a center of activity outside of Halifax Regional Municipality. Declining population and out-migration of rural residents has to be countered by a demonstrated desire to see the sustainability of rural communities around core services and community infrastructure. I see the creation and responsibility of the Electoral Boundaries Commission to be an opportunity to move forward with the submission of recommendations that are in the best interests of all Nova Scotians.”

The Commission at the time did indeed forward the recommendation that we revert back to our Lunenburg West boundary where we remained. Residents celebrated being put back into a constituency that shared our history, our ties, our concerns.

\*\*\*\*\*

Having our communities in Lunenburg West was the right decision in 2012 and it remains the right decision in 2019.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nova Scotia Electoral Boundaries Commission, Toward Fair and Effective Representation, September 24, 2012, p.15, <http://0-nsleg-edeposit.gov.ns.ca.legcat.gov.ns.ca/deposit/b10653107.pdf> (January 21, 2019)

This pattern of shifting us back and forth on a ten-year rotation makes many residents feel like simply numbers. It also begs the question of whether decision makers truly understand the impact of this move.

Please do not repeat the mistake of 2002 that was finally corrected in 2012.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the interests of both **effective representation** and **recognition of the importance of community of interest**, we would humbly suggest that you recommend to the government a scenario that keeps our area intact within Lunenburg West.

\*\*\*\*\*

Thank you for your time and consideration – **and** for your dedication to this important work to ensure fair representation for all Nova Scotians.