

Municipality of Pictou County

Our Coast, Our Communities

Pictou County Coastal Policy Discussion Guide



Help shape the conversation about how we plan for Pictou County's coast.

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WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT COASTAL PLANNING?

Nova Scotia's coastline is changing. How we plan for it is changing too.

In 2024, the Province of Nova Scotia released [*The Future of Nova Scotia's Coastline: A plan to protect people, homes and nature from climate change*](#). The plan recognizes that coastal communities face increasing risks from erosion, flooding, storm surge and rising sea levels, and that different communities may need different approaches to respond

A key part of the provincial approach is supporting municipalities in making coastal planning decisions that reflect their own communities. The Province has committed to providing municipalities with information, tools and support for coastal land-use planning, including flood and erosion information and examples of approaches municipalities may consider.

Through the [**Coastal Planning Support Program**](#), administered by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, the Municipality of Pictou County received funding to explore coastal land-use planning, communicate coastal and climate information, support public engagement and consider approaches to managing coastal risk.

The Municipality of Pictou County is using this opportunity to talk with residents before making future decisions about coastal policy.

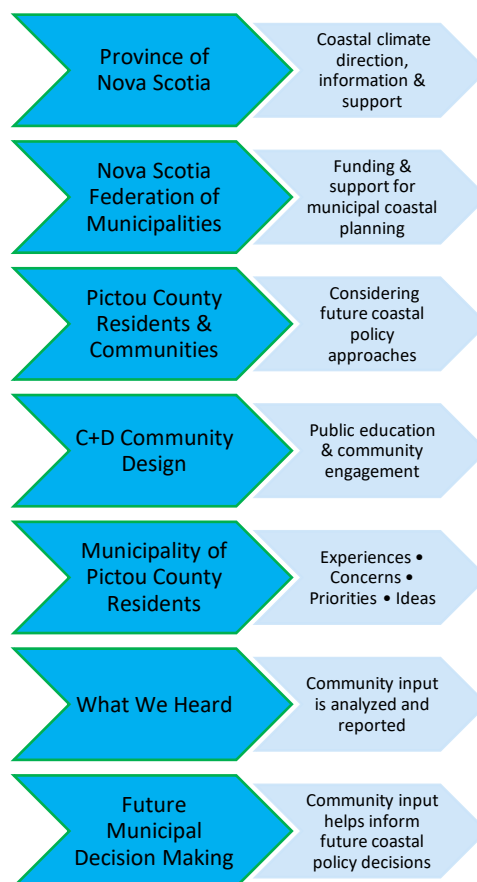


Figure 1 How Did We Get Here

The **Pictou County Coastal Policy Public Engagement Project** is an opportunity for residents and communities to learn about coastal change, explore different approaches to coastal planning, and share their experiences, concerns and priorities with the Municipality.

Coastal policy can involve difficult choices. Different approaches may affect property owners, development, infrastructure, natural areas and communities in different ways. Before considering future policy directions, the Municipality wants residents to have access to clear information and meaningful opportunities to participate.

C+D Community Design is working with the Municipality to provide public education, facilitate community engagement and document what we hear. The results of this engagement will be summarized and provided to the Municipality to help inform future decision-making.

******No new coastal policy is being adopted through this engagement project. ******

This project is about learning, discussing options and hearing from Pictou County residents and communities before future decisions are made.

During this project, we'll work with the community to explore:

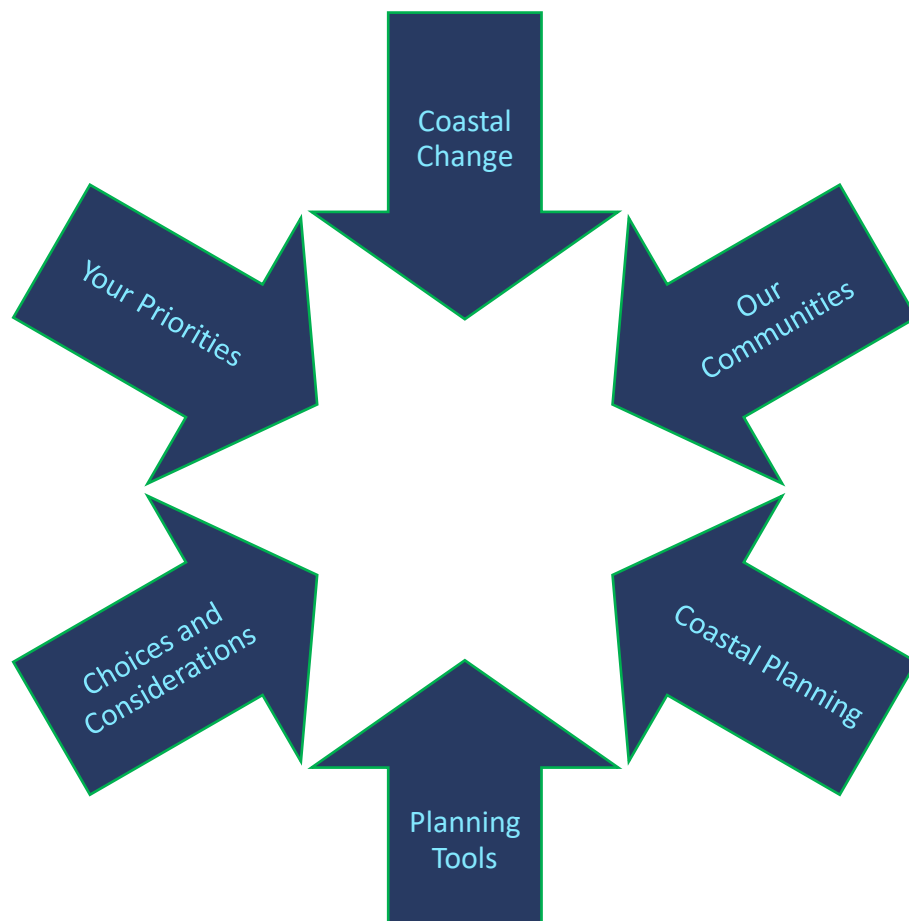


Figure 2 Pictou County Coastal Discussion Guide

UNDERSTANDING OUR CHANGING COAST

Our coastline has always changed over time, but climate change is affecting how quickly and how often some of those changes occur. Rising sea levels, stronger storm impacts, coastal flooding and erosion can gradually reshape shorelines and affect nearby land, buildings, roads and natural areas. These changes do not happen the same way everywhere—some parts of the coast may experience greater risks than others depending on local conditions. Understanding how the coast is changing can help communities make informed decisions about how and where we build, protect important places, and plan for the future.

What is changing?

- Rising temperatures
- More annual precipitation
- Potentially one metre of sea-level rise by 2100

WHY DOES THIS MATTER IN PICTOU COUNTY?

Pictou County is part of a changing coastal landscape along the Northumberland Strait. Its coastal communities, roads, wharves, working waterfronts, beaches, wetlands, estuaries and other valued places are influenced by tides, waves, storms, moving sediment, river water, runoff, drainage and seasonal ice.

These processes are connected. Heavy rainfall can increase runoff and river levels at the same time that high coastal water makes it harder for rivers and drainage systems to release water. Storm surge and waves can cause flooding and erosion, while changes to beaches, banks, dunes and wetlands can affect how water and sediment move along the coast.

Climate change is adding pressure to this system. Sea level is rising, rainfall patterns are changing and some shorelines may have less seasonal ice protection. Higher average water levels also give tides, storm surge and waves a higher starting point.

The effects will not be the same everywhere. Local elevation, shoreline type, slope, sediment, natural features and existing development all influence the level and type of risk. This is why Pictou County needs local knowledge, technical information and community input when considering how to plan for future coastal change.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE MUNICIPALITY HAVE?

Municipal decisions can influence how communities prepare for coastal flooding and erosion. Decisions about where and how development occurs, how roads and drainage systems are designed, and how public infrastructure and municipal lands are managed can help reduce future risks.

There is no single approach that will work everywhere. The most appropriate response will depend on local conditions, including elevation, shoreline type, exposure to waves and storms, drainage patterns, natural features and existing development. Better local information and community knowledge will help the Municipality determine which planning approaches may not be suitable in different areas.

WHAT PLANNING RULES ARE ALREADY IN PLACE?

Pictou County already uses its Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law to guide some development near the coast. Current regulations generally require development to be set back 30 metres from the top of bank along mapped marine shorelines.

In certain circumstances, the Development Officer may approve a reduced buffer of no less than 15.24 metres when a qualified professional demonstrates that the proposed development meets specified elevation requirements and will not increase risks from shoreline erosion or seasonal flooding.

The Municipality also uses shoreline and conservation zoning to limit development density and protect public beaches, protected wilderness areas and other sensitive locations.

These existing rules provide a starting point for the conversation. This project is asking whether they remain appropriate as coastal conditions change, whether additional information or tools are needed, and whether different approaches should apply in different locations.

Earlier municipal engagement found support for protecting natural areas and taking a proactive approach to coastal hazards, alongside concerns about how new regulations could affect property use and development.

WHAT ARE OUR PLANNING OPTIONS?

There is no single way to plan for a changing coastline. Municipalities can use different approaches to help reduce future risk while recognizing that coastal communities are places where people live, work and recreate, and where people have strong connections to the land and water.

Protect Important Places

Use shoreline protection or other measures to help protect particular buildings, infrastructure or developed areas from flooding and erosion.

Accommodate Coastal Conditions

Design buildings, infrastructure and public spaces so they can better withstand occasional flooding or changing coastal conditions.

Work With Natural Systems

Maintain or restore dunes, wetlands, vegetation and other natural features that can help manage erosion, flooding and wave impacts.

Avoid New Risk

Direct new development away from locations where coastal flooding, erosion or other hazards may create unacceptable risks over time.

Plan for Future Change

Consider how vulnerable buildings, infrastructure or land uses could be adapted, relocated or gradually transitioned if risks become more serious.

These are broad approaches to coastal planning. The Municipality could use several specific planning tools to put one or more of these approaches into practice.

Tools that can Support these Approaches

Coastal Planning Approaches

Different approaches can help communities reduce coastal risks, build resilience, and protect what matters most. Municipalities can use different approaches to help reduce future risk while recognizing that coastal communities are places where people live, work and recreate and where people have strong connections to the land and water.



The Municipality could also:

- apply different requirements in different areas based on factors such as elevation, erosion risk, flooding, shoreline type and existing development;
- make coastal-hazard information available so residents and property owners can understand changing conditions and make informed decisions; and
- review requirements as coastal information, climate projections and local conditions change.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Several approaches may be used together, and the most appropriate response will depend on local conditions, community priorities and the type of development or infrastructure involved. An approach may also change over time as conditions and available information change.

The Municipality has not selected a preferred approach. This engagement is intended to understand what residents value, what concerns they have and what considerations should guide future coastal planning.

CHOICES AND CONSIDERATIONS

There is no single policy that can address every coastal hazard or suit every part of Pictou County's coastline. Different communities, properties and coastal environments experience different conditions. The Municipality could continue its **existing approach, introduce new planning requirements or combine several tools.**

The options below are presented for discussion. No decisions have been made.

Continue the Current Approach

The Municipality could continue responding to coastal development through its existing planning rules, permitting processes and available provincial requirements.

Things to consider:

- This would avoid introducing new municipal requirements.
- Property owners would retain greater flexibility.
- Existing rules may not fully account for future erosion, flooding, sea-level rise or changing storm conditions.
- Future residents and the Municipality could face higher costs if development occurs in areas that become increasingly vulnerable.
- A solution that works in one location may not be suitable elsewhere. Decisions should consider shoreline material, elevation, slope, wave exposure, drainage, available space, natural features and neighbouring properties. Hard shoreline protection can change sediment movement and potentially affect adjacent shorelines.

Maintain or Amend Coastal Development Setbacks

A setback establishes a minimum distance between new development and the coast, shoreline or another defined coastal feature. Setbacks can help keep buildings and infrastructure away from areas exposed to erosion and flooding.

Things to consider:

- A standard setback is relatively straightforward to understand and administer.
- One distance may not reflect the different conditions found along rocky shores, beaches, cliffs, wetlands and sheltered coastal areas.
- Larger setbacks may reduce the developable area of some properties.
- Exceptions or site-specific assessments may be needed for constrained lots, existing development and essential coastal uses.
- Changes to the existing setback would need to consider both future coastal risk and the effects on existing lots and development opportunities.

Use Risk-Based or Site-Specific Requirements

Instead of applying the same standard everywhere, the Municipality could require additional information or professional assessment where development is proposed in a potentially vulnerable area.

This could include erosion assessments, flood information, surveys or confirmation that a proposed development can be safely located on the property.

Things to consider:

- Requirements could respond more directly to the conditions of an individual site.
- Professional studies may provide better information about the flooding, erosion and other hazards affecting a property.
- Site-specific requirements may be more flexible than applying the same standard everywhere.
- Professional assessments may add cost and time to a development application.
- Clear standards would be needed to explain when an assessment is required, what it must examine and who is qualified to prepare it.
- The Municipality would need a consistent process for reviewing technical findings and making decisions.

Establish Minimum Building Elevations

Require occupied portions of new buildings in areas exposed to coastal flooding to be constructed above an identified elevation.

Things to consider:

- Building elevation requirements can reduce damage to buildings during coastal flooding.
- The requirement can provide a clear construction standard in mapped flood-risk areas.
- Elevating a building does not protect roads, driveways, wells, septic systems, utilities or emergency access.
- Reliable elevation and flood information would be needed to establish and apply the requirement.

Require Flood-Resilient Design

Require certain buildings to use materials or construction methods that can better withstand temporary flooding.

Things to consider:

- Flood-resilient materials and construction methods may reduce building damage and recovery costs
- Requirements could be adjusted according to the type, location and intended use of a building.
- Flood-resilient design does not prevent flooding or eliminate all risk.
- It may not protect roads, wells, septic systems, utilities or access to the property.

Maintain or Restore Natural Buffers

Maintain vegetation, dunes, wetlands or other natural areas between development and the shoreline.

Things to consider:

- Natural buffers can help manage erosion, flooding and wave impacts while supporting habitat and water quality.
- They can provide space for shorelines and coastal ecosystems to change over time.
- Their effectiveness depends on shoreline type, exposure, available space and local conditions.
- Maintaining or restoring a buffer may reduce the developable area of some properties and require ongoing stewardship.

Improve Coastal-Hazard Information

Provide maps, guidance and other information to help residents and property owners understand coastal conditions.

Things to consider:

- Better information can help residents, property owners and the Municipality make informed decisions.
- Publicly available information may improve awareness before land is purchased or developed.
- Coastal information and projections contain uncertainty and may need to be updated as conditions change.
- Information alone does not prevent development in vulnerable areas or require people to act.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU?

You do not need to be an expert in coastal planning to participate. Your experiences, observations and knowledge of your community can help the Municipality understand what matters most to the people who live, work and spend time in Pictou County.

We want to hear:

- What changes have you noticed along the coast?
- Have coastal flooding, erosion, storm surge or changing weather affected you, your property, your work or your community?
- Which coastal places, services, activities or natural areas are most important to you?
- What concerns do you have about future development or redevelopment near the coast?
- Which coastal-planning approaches do you support, and what concerns do you have about them?
- Should requirements vary according to local conditions and the level of risk?
- How should coastal policy consider existing homes, businesses, working waterfronts and properties with limited development options?
- What effects could new coastal requirements have on housing, property use, affordability, local businesses, public access or the environment?
- What information would help you make decisions about coastal property and changing coastal conditions?
- Are there people, communities or perspectives that the Municipality should make a greater effort to include?

Your feedback will help the Municipality understand community priorities, compare different policy options and identify issues that require further study. Public input will inform future discussions, but no coastal policy decisions have been made as part of this engagement process.

HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

There are several ways to learn about the project and share your experiences, concerns and ideas. You can participate in the way that works best for you.

Complete the Survey Online

Complete the public survey through the link posted on the Municipality of Pictou County's website and social media accounts. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey will be available until November 2nd, 2026.

Complete a Paper Survey

Paper copies of the survey will be available at the Municipal Office and participating libraries. Completed surveys can be returned at these locations or at any of the in-person engagement sessions.

Complete the Survey by Telephone

If you do not have reliable internet access or would prefer to respond by telephone, you can call the Municipal Office at (902) 759-4666. A staff member can read the questions and record your answers for you.

Participate In Person

Four in-person opportunities are planned. Each will offer a slightly different way to learn about the project and provide feedback.

Little Harbour Community Hall

October 15, 2026

1:00–2:00 p.m.

This session will include a short presentation about coastal change, municipal planning and the policy choices being considered. Participants can ask questions, speak with the project team, complete a paper survey or provide written comments.

Merigomish Schoolhouse Community Centre

October 15, 2026

6:00–7:00 p.m.

This session is expected to include a short presentation followed by questions and discussion. Paper surveys, comment cards and educational materials will be available.

River John Library

October 20, 2026

1:00–3:00 p.m.

Drop in during the afternoon to speak with Caroline and Myah about coastal change in your community. They can answer questions, listen to your experiences and concerns, and help you access or complete the survey. No presentation will be required, and you are welcome to stay for as little or as long as you like.

Caribou Fire Hall

October 20, 2026

6:00–7:00 p.m.

This will be an informal drop-in session. Educational materials, posters, comment cards and paper surveys will be available. Caroline and Myah will be available throughout the session to answer questions and record your feedback. There will not be a formal presentation, so you can arrive at any time during the scheduled hour.

Follow the Project

Project information, educational materials, survey links, meeting updates and confirmed event details will be posted on the Municipality of Pictou County's website and social media accounts.

If you require an accommodation or another way to participate, please contact the Municipality in advance. We will work with you to identify an appropriate participation option.

Email: environment@munpict.ca

Phone: (902) 759-4666

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After the survey closes and the in-person engagement sessions are complete, the project team will review all survey responses, comment cards, written submissions and notes from community conversations.

The feedback will be organized to identify:

- Common concerns and priorities;
- Experiences with coastal flooding, erosion and other coastal changes;
- Areas where residents agree or have different perspectives;
- Support for or concerns about possible coastal-planning approaches;
- Differences among communities or participant groups; and
- Questions or issues that may require additional information or study.

The results will be summarized in a **What We Heard Report**. The report will describe how people participated, what the project team heard and any important limitations or gaps in participation. Individual responses will not be attributed to participants without their permission.

The findings will be presented to the Municipality of Pictou County and Council to support future discussions about coastal planning. This engagement will not result in the immediate adoption of a new coastal policy. If Council later decides to develop or amend municipal planning policies, that work would involve further research, policy development and any additional public or statutory engagement required before a final decision is made.

Project updates and the final What We Heard Report will be shared through the Municipality's website and social media channels.