

UNDERSTANDING COASTAL PLANNING

APPROACHES AND TOOLS

Coastal planning can involve different approaches and tools. An **approach** describes the general direction a community could take, such as avoiding new risk or working with nature. A **planning tool** is a specific policy, requirement or action used to support that approach.

Pictou County already has some rules that guide development near mapped marine shorelines. The Municipality is now asking residents whether its current approach should stay the same or change as coastal conditions evolve and new information becomes available.

No new coastal policy has been selected through this engagement project.

WHAT CAN MUNICIPAL COASTAL POLICY DO?

Municipal coastal policy can guide decisions about how land is developed and how municipal property and infrastructure are managed. Within the Municipality's legal authority and based on the information available, coastal policy could:

- direct new development away from higher-risk locations
- establish setbacks, buffers or minimum building elevations
- require additional information or development standards in certain areas
- provide different requirements for different shoreline conditions
- guide decisions about municipal roads, drainage systems, public spaces and infrastructure
- support the protection or restoration of natural coastal features
- make coastal-hazard information available to the public
- provide a consistent process for considering flooding, erosion and changing coastal conditions

What Can Municipal Coastal Policy Not Do?

Municipal coastal policy cannot:

- prevent every flood or stop all coastal erosion
- guarantee that a property or building will be safe
- predict exactly when or where a coastal event will occur
- eliminate the risks associated with choosing to build or remain near the coast
- replace professional engineering, environmental or geotechnical assessments when they are required
- control weather, tides, waves or other natural coastal processes
- regulate matters that fall outside municipal authority
- provide one solution that will be appropriate for every shoreline or community

Maps, studies and climate projections can support better decisions, but they have limitations. They should not be treated as exact predictions for individual properties.

Planning Approaches

The Municipality has not selected a preferred approach. Coastal planning may involve one or more of the following:

Protect

Use engineered or natural measures to reduce the effects of flooding or erosion on important buildings, infrastructure or community assets. Protection measures must be carefully assessed because they may affect nearby shorelines or natural processes.

Accommodate

Design buildings, infrastructure and public spaces so they can better withstand, recover from or continue functioning during coastal events. Examples include building elevations, flood-resistant construction and improved drainage.

Work With Nature

Maintain or restore coastal buffers, wetlands, dunes, beaches and vegetation that provide space for natural processes and may help reduce flooding or erosion.

Avoid New Risk

Direct new development away from locations where coastal hazards may create unacceptable risks. Tools could include setbacks, limits on certain uses or different requirements for higher-risk areas.

Plan for Future Change

Consider how buildings, infrastructure or community assets could be adapted, relocated or used differently if they cannot be safely or reasonably maintained over the long term. Any such decision would require evidence, careful planning and community discussion.

What Planning Tools Could Be Used?

Municipalities can use different tools to support coastal planning. These could include:

Coastal setbacks

Require new development to be located a minimum distance from the shoreline, top of bank or another defined coastal feature.

Site-specific assessments

Require additional information or professional assessment when development is proposed in a potentially vulnerable area.

Minimum building elevations

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

Flood-resilient design

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

Natural buffers

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

Different requirements for different areas

Apply different standards according to elevation, flooding, erosion risk, shoreline type, existing development or other local conditions.

Coastal-hazard information

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

These tools can be used individually or together. The appropriate tool will depend on local conditions, the type of development or infrastructure involved, available information and community priorities.

Approaches Can Be Combined

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. A community might protect an important public facility, accommodate occasional flooding in a park, maintain a natural buffer and direct new development away from a nearby higher-risk area.

The most appropriate approach will depend on local conditions, the people and assets affected, environmental impacts, cost, fairness and the length of time the decision is expected to last.

No single approach or tool will be appropriate everywhere. The Municipality wants to hear which options residents consider appropriate, what concerns they have and what local conditions should be considered.