

Executive Summary

Sussex –Sussex Corner Amalgamation Feasibility Study, 2015

It's All About The People – All Generations



Amalgamation is about a better future for all the people of Sussex and Sussex Corner, all generations. We are two strong communities that have a lot to offer each other. Together we can be stronger than the sum of the parts. Amalgamation is a merger of opportunity, not of convenience nor of necessity. That is the conclusion of the Steering Committee whose mandate it has been to study the feasibility of amalgamation.

Executive Summary: This Executive Summary presents only a glimpse at the work of the Steering Committee. You are encouraged to read the Feasibility Study Report which is available online at: <http://www.sussex.ca/> and <http://www.sussexcorner.com/>

The Study Process: The Steering Committee (the Committee) was appointed by Sussex and Sussex Corner municipal Councils and consists of six prominent community leaders along with the mayors of the two communities. Together with the assistance of a Technical Committee and a facilitator, the Committee spent almost three months and countless hours pouring through a mound of documents, dissecting reports, examining facts and figures, and questioning the experts. The Committee met on an almost weekly basis; each member contributing her or his own expertise and unique talents to the study process.

Key Areas: The study focused on six key areas, namely: Finances, Services, Economic, Social, Environmental, and Political. These six factors can be further divided into two separate phases. The first phase may be called the 'due diligence' phase and included a finite examination of finances and services of both the Town and the Village. The second phase may be called the 'impact' phase and included the remaining four factors. This second phase highlighted the human element in the equation. The first phase addressed the question: "Is amalgamation feasible?" The second phase addressed the question: "Is amalgamation desirable?" We will address them in turn.

Due Diligence: In the due diligence phase the Committee found nothing out of the ordinary that would prevent the merger nor needed immediate attention. The finances are in order. The Town is well managed and the Village manages well with its limited resources. Each provides a range of services normally found in comparative communities. As one would expect the Town is in a stronger financial position by the very nature of its size.

The Town's population is triple that of the Village. Its assessment base is almost four times that of the Village with a commercial base of 25% compared to 7% in the Village. Both municipalities have low tax rates relative to communities of comparable size. This favourable tax rate situation is due, in large part, to the growth in the assessment base over the past six or seven years; a trend which is not expected to continue in the short-term.

Contentious Issues: During this phase of the study, two issues came to light which caused some concern and require clarification. The Committee believes they will be resolved in due course. The first issue relates to the requirement for a **capital investment plan**. The Town has one, but it is only partially funded; the Village does not, but will in due course. All municipalities need to renew their infrastructure and assets; growing municipalities need to add to them to meet the needs and desires of their citizens. Municipalities need a multi-year plan to pay for the purchase and replacement of these assets. Whether separately or together the taxpayers of the two communities will pay more taxes to fund the capital investment plan(s). Both communities will benefit from the investment in their assets. With a new amalgamated municipality the benefits will come sooner than later.

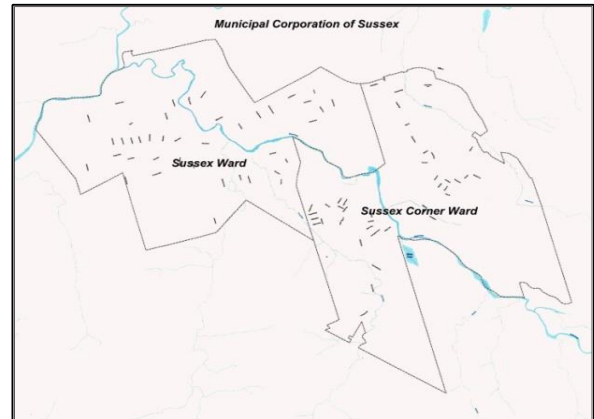
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Protection of Water Supply: The second issue relates to provincial wellfield designation. Both the Town and the Village have excellent drinking water supplies in terms of quality and quantity. The Village Council raised a concern that the Town has not registered its wellfields under the Provincial regulations. The Village voluntarily registered its wellfields. The Town takes all reasonable means to protect its water supply, and its wellfields will be registered in due course. The issue is likely to be moot within a few years as the Province moves to mandatory registration for all municipalities.

New Municipal Model: As the Committee was concluding its due diligence, it was also developing a model for the new municipality. Community identity and the name of the new municipality were the first issues to be addressed. The word “Sussex” had to play a prominent role in the name. The result is the *Municipal Corporation of Sussex*. Present day Sussex and Sussex Corner will retain their community names as electoral wards in the proposed model. Highway and directional signs, road signs and street names will remain the same. Civic numbers and postal codes remain the same. Sussex Corner Elementary School will still be Sussex Corner Elementary School. The Department of Education policies for the placement of students will remain the same. The boundaries of the new municipality will be the same perimeter as the existing boundaries of the Town and the Village. The area will be identical to the sum of the two parts.

Council: The municipal Council would consist of eight elected officials including the Mayor and seven Councillors. The Mayor and three Councillors would be elected across the entire municipality. Two Councillors would be elected in the Sussex ward, and two Councillors would be elected in the Sussex Corner ward. Ward boundaries would be the same as the existing Town and Village boundaries.



The Mechanics of Merger: With the framework of the model in mind, the Committee began looking at how the finances and services of the existing municipalities could be integrated. The Committee also looked at integrating the administration and staff; the assets and liabilities; the by-laws, rules and regulations, etc. When the Committee was satisfied that the mechanics of the merger were feasible, it turned its attention to the future.

Projecting the Future: Again, focusing on the technical issues, the Committee considered three-year budget projections and operational plans for service delivery. The budget projections were based on a series of well-educated assumptions as to what the near future holds. Two scenarios were developed – status quo and amalgamation. As stand-alone communities both the Town and the Village could continue to co-exist and grow slowly.

Potential: The opportunity for meaningful growth is significantly enhanced if the two communities pooled their resources; developed their strategies and action plans together. A united community with a single agenda is an attraction for people and for investment.

Public Participation: As the model for the new municipality was taking shape the Committee turned to the public for its input and feedback. A brochure outlining the essential elements of the proposed amalgamation model was prepared and delivered to every residence in the Town and the Village. The news media kept the public informed of the Committee’s progress. Through a number of informal channels the Committee heard the public views. Two well-attended public open houses were held featuring presentations and displays as well as question and answer sessions. The Committee listened and incorporated the public feedback in its final evaluation and recommendations. It is now up to the Councils to decide whether or not the public will have an opportunity to vote on the question in a plebiscite.

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Evaluating the Impact: Having substantially completed the due diligence phase and having heard from public, the Committee focused on the ‘impact’ phase. In addition to evaluating financial and service delivery, the Committee considered the impact of the proposed model on the economic, social, environmental and political life of the communities. The Committee completed an in-depth analysis of thirty-two objectives and concluded that amalgamation was not only feasible but desirable for both communities. The Committee considered the pros and cons, both for the status quo and for amalgamation.

Pros & Cons: Highlights of the immediate benefits for the village include such things as: gaining access to qualified experienced staff; access to a more diversified tax base with a significant commercial component; having a voice in decision making about governance, public policy and the services provided. Short term benefits include a comprehensive emergency response plan and potential investments in flood mitigation measures. The benefits for the Town are fewer in number and more long-term but are equally important. Having a larger unified population and access to land for development represent greater opportunities for growth. The Committee heard about a number of disadvantages. Most were intangibles such as loss of identity, power and control; and some were grounded in fear of the unknown and mistrust. Undoubtedly there will be growing pains as the merger is implemented and a certain segment of both existing communities will be mistrusting of equal treatment. The Committee is of the opinion that the tangible benefits, both short-term and long-term, clearly outweigh the potential negative impacts. The comments of one member represent the sentiments of the entire Committee:



We need to pull together in the same direction

“The all for one and one for all concept certainly escapes some. An amalgamated community would be just that – a single entity where all are equal. Through shared services, and positive social and recreational interactions, many really view the community as socially amalgamated anyway. An officially amalgamated community would reinforce this in the long run. The combined talents and assets of the two communities would undoubtedly make the whole much more powerful economically.”

Conclusion and Recommendation. We have two great communities each with opportunities to offer one another. The Sussex area is a great place to live, to work, to play and to raise a family. If it is to stay that way we need to attract people and to keep people here, especially our youth. We need employment opportunities, we need business, commercial and light industrial development. Simply put, we need to grow. To do that we need land for development; we need investment in infrastructure; we need the fiscal capacity and a strategy to make it happen. Combining our resources and investing in our assets will better equip us to build a sustainable future for our communities. Together, the two communities are much stronger and better able to achieve that vision. ***The conclusion of the Steering Committee is that amalgamation is both feasible and desirable. The Committee’s recommendation to the Town and Village Councils is to approve a resolution to move the process to the next phase – the plebiscite.***

Respectfully submitted,

September 9, 2015

Jim Andrew, Laura Araneda, Dr. Mark Fleming,
Mayor Steven Gillies, Malcolm McLeod, Eric Nelson,
Emily Palmer, and Mayor Marc Thorne

In the 1850’s opposition to the railway, motivated by self-interest, resulted in the division of the community.



It’s time to officially put that behind us.