CASE STUDY | CS-09

The Community Action Plan Model (Beechville, NS)

NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION OF MUNICIPALITIES

Context

Beechville is a historic African Nova Scotian community founded by Black refugees who escaped slavery in the United States during the War of 1812. Approximately 1,200 hectares of land near Halifax's Northwest Arm was given to those refugees who fought with the British army. Over time, the community's boundaries shrank due to land expropriation, development, and lack of clear land title.

The Challenge

Over two centuries, municipal expropriation, highway construction, and industrial expansion reduced Beechville's boundaries from roughly 1,200 hectares to approximately 200 hectares. The Bayers Lake Business Park introduced contaminated stormwater runoff, the 1994 Lakeside Industrial Park bisected the neighbourhood, and the nearby Otter Lake Landfill faced allegations of surface water violations. Together, these infrastructure pressures have posed environmental and health risk, accelerated out-migration, and threatened the fabric of the historic community.

The Response

To address deeply rooted inequities, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) established the African Nova Scotian Community Action Program (ANSCAP), using the Beechville Community Action Plan as a foundational pilot. Since 2019, HRM has partnered with residents to build trust, bypass standard zoning, and implement custom, community-led solutions, including:

- **Historic Boundary Restoration:** In 2024, regional council approved expanding Beechville's boundaries from roughly 200 back to over 1,400 hectares to reflect its cultural and historical footprint.
- **Environmental Protection:** Safeguarding local water bodies and natural habitats from industrial stormwater runoff and mapping targeted infrastructure upgrades.
- **Community Land Ownership:** Expanding parkland and placing municipal land under direct community control.
- **A Scalable Framework:** Using Beechville's success as a collaborative model to consult and empower other African Nova Scotian communities.

Key Insights

The Beechville model demonstrates the necessity of moving away from standardized zoning in communities shaped by environmental racism in favour of localized community-led infrastructure and land-use planning. These changes allow community to have greater control over how land and water (including but not limited to stormwater) is managed in community for decades to come.

The success of this equitable approach is significant: HRM has formally mandated that the Beechville Community Action Plan model will serve as the exact blueprint used to address municipal service and infrastructure gaps in other historic Black communities, including Lucasville and Upper Hammonds Plains.

LEARN MORE: View the full Guidance Document at FloodAdaptNS.ca

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