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Helping AIMS help you improve
local government in New Brunswick

AIMS Interim Municipal Report Card for New Brunswick



**By Holly Chisholm
& Ian Munro**

Series Editor – Charles Cirtwill

May 2008

Atlantic Institute for Market Studies

The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS) is an independent, non-partisan, social and economic policy think tank based in Halifax. The Institute was founded by a group of Atlantic Canadians to broaden the debate about the realistic options available to build our economy.

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The Institute's chief objectives include:

- a) initiating and conducting research identifying current and emerging economic and public policy issues facing Atlantic Canadians and Canadians more generally, including research into the economic and social characteristics and potentials of Atlantic Canada and its four constituent provinces;
- b) investigating and analyzing the full range of options for public and private sector responses to the issues identified and acting as a catalyst for informed debate on those options, with a particular focus on strategies for overcoming Atlantic Canada's economic challenges in terms of regional disparities;
- c) communicating the conclusions of its research to a regional and national audience in a clear, non-partisan way; and
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW BRUNSWICK**

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INTRODUCTION

Are your municipal taxes too high? Does it take too long for the potholes in the street in front of your home or office to get fixed?

Just as everyone thinks that his or her child is the cutest and best-behaved, we all think that our taxes are too high and that we do not get the level of services we deserve for the amount of taxes we pay to city hall.

But how does anyone know for sure? The AIMS Municipal Report Card project seeks to help New Brunswick citizens and taxpayers find answers to these questions.

The first New Brunswick Municipal Report Card, which we expect to publish within a few months, will allow for comparison of all New Brunswick municipalities across a range of factors, including: governance; taxation; police and fire services; transportation; water, sewage, and waste disposal; economic development; and recreation and culture.

By making available, in a single document, data that are comparable, comprehensive, and easily understood, we aim to provide New Brunswick citizens and taxpayers with a better sense of how well their municipalities are doing. Are they providing the services that are important to you? Are they making good use of your tax dollars?

Putting more information in peoples' hands will help to make municipal governments more accountable. Also, identifying data that are *not* available should provide impetus for the provision of more and better information in the future.

Recognizing that there are differences in the circumstances faced by different communities – larger centres like Moncton and Saint John face different types of challenges than do smaller municipalities like Rogersville and Saint-Quentin, for example – the Municipal Report Card will present a set of statistics that are adjusted for demographic and socio-economic factors so as to provide a more apples-to-apples comparison of municipal performance.

Municipalities' choices in providing services and setting tax rates are influenced by many factors beyond their immediate control. One town may have a highly educated workforce, high average incomes, and a local economy based on a sector enjoying a boom, for example, while another town may be characterized by high unemployment, low incomes, and industries in decline. Our goal in making adjustments is to focus on and compare municipalities' performances "given the cards they've been dealt."

An interim step in this process, however, is to take everything New Brunswick municipalities say about themselves and put it all in one place. We then can have an informed conversation about what we know, what we do not know, and how to fairly yet clearly assess comparative municipal performance. The purpose of this Interim Municipal Report Card is to do just that.

We at AIMS have three goals in mind with this Interim Municipal Report Card:

1. lay out the objectives of our Municipal Report Card project;
2. present the basic data that are available to us and that will be used to generate the results of the full report card in the coming weeks – note that in this Interim Municipal Report Card we are not assigning any form of grades or making any judgements regarding municipal performance; and,
3. seek advice and feedback on our approach as we progress towards the first full Municipal Report Card.

Why a Municipal Report Card?

Making performance data publicly available helps municipalities focus on what is important: the quality of services provided to citizens and the care with which tax dollars are spent. More information means better opportunities for public scrutiny and increased accountability. However, simply making data available is not enough, and that is why AIMS is applying its Report Card approach to the subject of municipal performance. Report card formats are familiar and easily understood. Simply put, when the goal is to get useful and meaningful information into the public's hands, they work.

This type of municipal government performance measurement has been conducted elsewhere in Canada and around the world for many years.

For example, in Ontario, municipalities are required to collect data to measure their performance in twelve core municipal service areas. As noted on the website of the Ontario Municipal Performance Measurement Program (MPMP),¹ “[m]unicipalities report performance measures for services they are responsible for providing. MPMP efficiency measures are based on operating costs for broad service areas. Effectiveness measures provide balance by measuring service delivery quality.”

As another example, in New Zealand 30 municipalities subscribe to a measurement service called “Base Stats with Trendz”² that assesses an individual municipality's vital statistics on a customised comparative basis.

In Scotland, the Accounts Commission (under Audit Scotland) specifies information that municipalities must publish about their performance.³ The Commission then publishes profiles that compare the performance of municipalities over time and across a range of services.

The New Brunswick government does indeed compile and report a variety of statistics on the province's municipalities,⁴ but as discussed further below, within this large volume of data there is very little that sheds light on how effective municipalities are in delivering services.

AIMS' work in developing the New Brunswick Municipal Report Card has been informed not only by similar initiatives in other jurisdictions, but also by the experience gained in our other endeavours in measuring public sector output and effectiveness, most notably our annual Atlantic Canadian High School Report Card project.⁵ The High School Report Card methodology is based on a “grade against expectations” approach in which raw data are adjusted to develop expected levels for schools in similar circumstances; this approach accounts for differences in context that are beyond the control of the individual schools and generates something much closer to a true apples-to-apples comparison. A similar approach will be taken with the Municipal Report Card.

¹ <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page297.aspx>

² <http://www.kauriglen.co.nz/larry/basestats/index.htm>

³ <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/performance/>

⁴ <http://www.gnb.ca/0370/0361/0004/index.html>

⁵ The sixth annual edition was published on April 3, 2008: <http://www.aims.ca/library/RC6Insert.pdf>.

We also recognize that municipal services vary from community to community according to what is demanded by residents. In the context of the High School Report Card, a high mark in chemistry will always be better than a low mark in chemistry. In the municipal context, however, a statistic such as the tax dollars spent by a municipality on some particular service sometimes can be ambiguous: the residents of one town may prefer to pay higher taxes and receive more of that service, while the residents of the next town may prefer to do without the service but also pay less in taxes. In this case there is no better or worse, just different.

What is known?

What Do New Brunswickers Know About New Brunswick Municipalities?

In this section we present two aspects of data that are currently available. First, we present basic demographic and socio-economic data that provide a sense of “what each community looks like.” Second, we present statistics related to a number of municipal services.

Municipal Profile: What Your Community Looks Like

Municipal Profile Documents

- [People and Place](#)
- [Finances](#)
- [Socio-Economic Status](#)

As noted earlier, different municipalities face different circumstances across a wide range of variables, and these varying circumstances to some degree will influence, if not constrain, the policy, spending, and taxation choices that municipal governments will make.

For example, a municipality that receives heavy snowfall each year will have to spend more on snow removal from streets and roads than will a municipality that tends to receive mostly rain in

the winter. A municipality with a high proportion of senior citizens in its population likely will provide a different mix of recreational and cultural services as compared to a municipality that has a high proportion of children and young adults. A municipality with a population composed largely of well-educated and affluent citizens may have different priorities for policing than will a municipality that suffers more from the types of social problems that are associated with crime.

In presenting the data in this Interim Municipal Report Card, we start with an overview of what each municipality looks like in terms of basic demographic, geographic, financial, and socio-economic data: how many people live there? how large is the municipality physically? how much money does the municipal government have to work with? how well educated is the municipality’s population? These data will be used as the “control variables” in our full Municipal Report Card to make the adjustments necessary to account for the differences in municipalities’ starting contexts and thus provide a basis for more apples-to-apples comparisons.

These data are presented in three short documents that include tables as well as brief discussions of what the numbers show.

Municipal Performance: What Have They Done for (or to) You Lately?

AIMS has strived to identify those basic services that generally are provided in all municipalities across the province. These services are categorized and presented in a simple format that generally follows the breakdowns used in municipal budgets:

- Governance
- Taxation
- Safety and Protection (police and fire)
- Transportation
- Environmental Health (water, sewage, and waste disposal)
- Economic Development (including planning and zoning)
- Recreation and Culture

For each category AIMS has identified different indicators that measure both the *efficiency* and the *effectiveness* of the municipality in providing the service.

Efficiency measures focus on the amount of resources required to produce a unit of output. For example, if one municipality can maintain its streets and roads each year for \$100/kilometre and another municipality can maintain its streets and roads to a comparable level of repair for \$50/kilometre, than the second municipality is more efficient at this task.

Effectiveness measures focus on the extent to which a service or policy is achieving intended results. If, for example, two municipalities share the objective of issuing a building permit within 24 hours of an application and one municipality meets this objective 95 percent of the time while the other municipality meets this objective only 60 percent of the time, then the first municipality is more effective on this front.

Once again, the data are presented in short documents that include tables and brief discussions of what the numbers show.

More detailed descriptions of the data and calculations are provided in the [Interim Municipal Report Card Technical Appendix](#).

At this point we do not have data for all our chosen measures. We have selected certain measures because they speak to things that matter to people: citizens care about the safety and health of their communities, the quality of their basic infrastructure and services, and the way in which public officials manage their tax dollars. In addition to this relevance criterion, variables have been selected because experience elsewhere has shown that they can be measured objectively and reported in a meaningful manner. To the extent that data for these measures are not available now, we hope that by highlighting the absence here, citizens will be spurred to demand more and governments will be spurred to do better.

To avoid having an abnormal fluctuation in one year unduly influence the calculations, three-year averages (2005 through 2007) generally are used. For each measure, the provincial average, minimum, and maximum also are reported. Each municipality's rank for each indicator is provided as well. Note that the rankings are provided simply to aid readers in understanding where their communities sit in relation to others. Once we have completed the work of developing context-adjusted measures, grades and scores will be provided in the full Municipal Report Card.

Invitation for Feedback and Comments

We continue to examine possibilities for other important service metrics and factors that would be beyond the immediate control of municipalities but that also would affect their policy, service, and taxation choices.

The choice of any such additional service measure or control variable will depend upon several things: it of course would have to be relevant; it would have to be amenable to quantitative measurement; and actual data would have to be available. We issue an invitation to the public for feedback and comments, with the caveat that any proposed new variable will have to meet this three-part test.

We expect that over time our Municipal Report Card data set will evolve as, we hope, additional information becomes available, and as further analysis leads to the development of new measurement approaches. (As a parallel example, after six years of experience with our *High School Report Card*, we continue to make refinements, such as the inclusion of a new “grade inflation” measure in future editions.)

Our next steps in this project will be to: accumulate, review, and report on the feedback we receive in response to this Interim Municipal Report Card; finalize the choices of measures and data points; conduct the quantitative analysis that will generate the final absolute measures of municipal performance, the final contextually-adjusted measures of municipal performance, and the grades that we will assign to all municipalities; and prepare the full New Brunswick Municipal Report Card document, with expected publication during the summer of 2008.

Municipal Performance Documents

- [Governance](#)
- [Taxation](#)
- [Safety and Protection \(police and fire\)](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Environmental Health \(water, sewage, and waste disposal\)](#)
- [Economic Development \(including planning and zoning\)](#)
- [Recreation and Culture](#)

We look forward to timely and constructive comments and suggestions on the indicators, data, and methodologies that will go into our Municipal Report Card: this is your chance to help us in ensuring that the best possible information goes into and comes out of the process. Forward comments to AIMS@AIMS.ca or write AIMS; 2000 Barrington St. – Suite 1302; Halifax, NS B3J 3K1.

Conclusion

Closing Observations: What We Have Learned So Far

In all walks of life, the promise of greater scrutiny is generally met with some degree of unease by those who will be scrutinized. Our Municipal Report Card project is no exception in this regard. Despite the opposition and doubt expressed by some, though, we are pleased to see an attitude of openness and enthusiasm about this process from many New Brunswick municipalities.

Turning to the data themselves, there are some general observations that can be drawn from what we have collected to date and presented here.

There are wide variances on many of the variables (population, population density, area, unemployment rate, percentage of population with high status jobs, etc.) included in the Municipal Profile documents. This is not surprising given that among the 102 municipalities there are large urban centres with multifaceted economies, mid-size bedroom communities to larger centres, and small, more rural and more remote towns and villages that are based on a single industry (and perhaps struggling because of it).

Looking at many of the operating cost/efficiency measures, it is interesting that smaller communities can be found at either end of the rankings, but, generally speaking, the larger communities tend to be grouped at one end (higher cost per capita). It must be repeated though, that these data have not been adjusted for context or controlled for the level of service provided. It may be that urban residents simply demand a higher level of services and are prepared to pay the price for it. This high cost grouping also may just reflect a market reality that prices for some things (like labour) tend to be higher in urban centres. As another alternative, it may suggest that urban councils are willing to pay more for things because they have more money to spend.

While we can compare how much it costs to deliver services it is remarkably difficult in New Brunswick to determine what citizens get for their money. In contrast, for example, Ontarians enjoy easy access to a comprehensive set of effectiveness measures that allow them to assess their municipal governments' performances in diverse areas such as crime rates, road quality, speed of snow removal, sewer backups, boil water advisories, and provision of recreational services. If New Brunswick wants truly informed judgement on municipal performance, these types of data must be collected and reported.

As AIMS moves towards its first full New Brunswick Municipal Report Card later this year we will be trying to shrink – at least a little bit – that information gap. We hope that New Brunswick municipalities will join us in attempting to find new and better ways to get meaningful information into the hands of New Brunswickers. We hope as well that this Interim Municipal Report Card will stimulate discussion, and we look forward to feedback from interested readers.

Technical Appendix

This appendix describes the basic data that have been collected and their sources. As well, details are provided here on the calculations performed with those basic data to generate the results that are displayed in the *Interim Municipal Report Card*.

General Notes

Most of the basic demographic and socio-economic data that we use come from the 2006 Census. Since the Census occurs only every five years, these are the most recent available. For all values that are reported as “per capita” or “per dwelling”, 2006 Census figures are used as the denominator.

Most other data come from annual statistical reports and here we generally use three-year averages – 2005 to 2007 – to minimize the impact that an abnormal result in a given year may have on the results. In certain cases data are not available for all three years: where data for two years are available, we use a two-year average; we do not report any value for a municipality where we have information for only a single year, except in the case of total monetary loss due to fire because only 2005 data are available. Each column heading indicates the year or years for which data are used in the calculations.

All tables are presented in alphabetical order, but ranks are provided for all measures. The rank order varies between high-to-low and low-to-high; for each indicator we chose the rank order that we felt would be most intuitive to readers.

Municipal Profile

People and Place

The population, area (in square kilometres), and population density (persons per square kilometre) figures for each municipality come from Statistics Canada’s 2006 Community Profiles,⁶ which are based on the 2006 Census.

The age profile is a simple breakdown of the proportion of the population belonging to three age groups: 0-14 years (the young), 15 to 64 years (working age), and 65 years and over (seniors). These data also come from the 2006 Community Profiles.

There are two categories of roads in New Brunswick for which municipalities have responsibility. A municipal road is the sole responsibility of the relevant municipality; responsibility (cost) for a regional road is split 50/50 between a municipality and the Province. The measure for municipal roads (in kilometres) adds the total length of each municipality’s municipal roads plus half the total length of its designated regional roads. For this measure we use a three-year average over the 2005 to 2007 period. The data come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*⁷ that is published by the New Brunswick Department of Local Government.

⁶ <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Index.cfm?Lang=E>

⁷ <http://www.gnb.ca/0370/0361/0004/index.html>

Finances

The total revenue figure identifies how much money each municipality receives from taxes, transfers and grants from other governments, and the sale of services, which includes individual user fees for skating rinks, swimming pools, etc., business user fees for things like building permits, and compensation for services that a municipality may provide for another municipality or for the Province. Separate figures for transfers and grants and for sales of services also are provided.

The outstanding debt figure is based on the municipality's long term debt, defined as a loan(s) with a maturity of longer than one year. It should be kept in mind that such debt can be inherited by a municipal administration from a previous one and/or passed on to a future administration. These figures do not account for any unfunded pension liabilities that may exist.

These revenue and debt figures come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

The total property tax assessment base is the market value of all property in a municipality and is determined on an annual basis. The total is provided by adding the residential and the non-residential assessments. We provide information on the non-residential assessment as well as the total in order to give a sense of the extent to which municipalities rely on business property taxes, as opposed to residential ones. This assessment information is collected by Service New Brunswick and then is given to the municipalities for use in their annual budgets.

Socio-Economic Status

Our socio-economic status (SES) indicators cover a range of subjects, including age profile, employment, education, income, housing, and family structure.

Indicators such as the percentage of adults without a high school diploma and the percentage of families that are single-parent families are self-explanatory.

The dependency ratio is calculated as the sum of the population below 15 years of age and the population aged 65 and older, divided by the total population. It is an indicator of the percentage of the population that typically is not in the labour force, and who therefore may be economically dependent on those aged 15 to 64 who are in the labour force.

The employment rate is the percentage of the population aged 15 and older that is employed. The labour force participation rate is calculated as the number of people in the labour force divided by the total population aged 15 and older. The unemployment rate is calculated as the number of people who are unemployed divided by the number of people in the labour force. The percentage of adults in high status occupations is determined by adding the number of people working in the following categories:

- management
- business and finance
- natural and applied sciences
- health science
- social science, education and government
- art, culture and recreation

and then dividing the total by the labour force.

In the education indicators, post secondary education includes universities, colleges, and trade schools.

Our income indicator is the median household income (pre tax). For each municipality, this is the household income level at which exactly half the municipality's households have a higher income and half the municipality's households have a lower income.

There are two housing indicators: the average residential property value for each municipality and the median monthly cost for rented accommodations (rent and costs of electricity, heat, and municipal services paid by tenant households) for each municipality.

All SES data come from the 2006 Census.

Municipal Performance

Our performance indicators include a mix of efficiency measures and effectiveness measures. Efficiency measures focus on the amount of resources (e.g., money) required to produce a unit of output (e.g., maintenance for a kilometre of road). Effectiveness measures focus on the extent to which a service or policy is achieving intended results (e.g., the percentage of time that a standard is met).

Governance

The governance category captures the basic operations of “city hall” (or town hall, village hall, etc., as the case may be).

To date we have been unable to find comprehensive data for the number of staff employed by each municipality.

The municipal councillors indicator is calculated by taking each municipality's population and dividing by the number of members on its council to provide a sense of the number of people “served” by each councillor. No adjustments have been made for the differences that may exist among councils in terms of full-time/part-time responsibilities, frequency of council meetings, etc.

General government operating costs include such things as staff salaries and the basic day-to-day costs – electricity, supplies, etc. – of managing the municipality and its finances. These figures are obtained from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

Taxation

The average residential tax burden is calculated by dividing each municipality's total residential property tax revenue by the number of dwellings in the municipality.

We also calculate the percentage of each municipality's total property tax assessment that is non-residential, which provides a sense of the municipality's ability to draw on businesses as a source of property tax revenue.

The indicator for municipal debt as a percentage of total property tax assessment is calculated by dividing the municipality's outstanding long-term debt by the total tax assessment figure. This measure gives a

sense of the municipality's debt burden in relation to its ability to raise the revenue needed to pay down that debt.

User fees includes fees charged to individuals for the use of skating rinks, swimming pools, etc., and fees charged to businesses for things like building permits. The own-source revenue figure excludes revenues that come from other governments as grants or transfers. This statistic gives an indication of the extent to which a municipality raises revenues from non-tax sources and also provides some sense of how much the "user-pay" criterion is applied in the municipality.

These tax and financial data come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

Safety and Protection

The fire and police operating cost indicators take the reported operating costs for those items for each municipality and divide by, respectively, the number of dwellings in the municipality (because firefighting is generally associated with homes) and the number of people in the municipality (because police protection is more associated with individual persons).

In addition to fire prevention and suppression, some fire departments also provide emergency services (e.g., search and rescue, water rescue, medical services, etc.). Note also that unlike other New Brunswick municipalities, the city of Fredericton does not include fire trucks or police vehicles in its fire and police operating costs.

Total monetary loss due to fire is the value of the claim paid for damages resulting from a fire; we convert this into a figure per \$1000 of property tax assessment.⁸ The data for this indicator are provided by the New Brunswick Department of Public Safety. Note that only 2005 data are available for this measure. Note also that some municipalities do not have their own fire departments and instead contract the service from other municipalities. Thus, municipalities that receive these fire services from others have no data to report on this measure, and the municipalities that provide these fire services to others do not have this additional work reflected in the statistics reported in the *Interim Municipal Report Card*.

The crime rate per 1000 population, which includes violent and property crimes as well as other *Criminal Code* offences (e.g., prostitution) but excludes traffic incidents, is collected from Statistics Canada's Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.⁹

Note that there are two regional forces represented in the statistics: Codiac Regional Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which operates in Moncton, Dieppe, and Riverview, and the B.N.P.P. Regional Police Force, which operates in Beresford, Nigadoo, Petit-Rocher, and Pointe-Verte. In the absence of municipality-specific data for these communities, we assume that the reported crime rate for each region applies equally to each of its constituent municipalities.

Transportation

Transportation operating costs cover several items. A municipality owns all the streets and roads within its boundaries and is responsible for maintenance and snow removal. The transportation category also

⁸ We would prefer to use measures that focus on fire departments' response times and abilities to effectively extinguish fires and save lives and property, but no such data are available.

⁹ <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=85F0033M&CHROPG=1>

includes the provision and maintenance of sidewalks and street lighting. As well, the cost figures we have obtained include the cost of public transit for those municipalities that provide this service (e.g., Fredericton, Moncton, Saint John). Ideally we would separate the cost of public transit so that all municipalities are being measured on the same basket of services, but at this time we do not have data that allows for such a calculation. Since these transportation operating costs are closely associated with roads, we use the length of roads in each municipality as the basis for comparison.

Note that unlike other New Brunswick municipalities, the city of Fredericton does not include vehicles in its operating costs.

The transportation operating cost data come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

We were unable to find datasets for road conditions and complaints about road conditions.

Environmental Health

The environmental health category covers the provision of drinking water and the management of sewage and solid waste.

The solid waste indicator is the total operating cost for each municipality in managing waste and recycling collection and disposal divided by the number of dwellings in the municipality.

The sewage and drinking water indicators are the average charge per dwelling, calculated as the total dollar amount charged by the municipality for the service in question, divided by the number of dwellings in the municipality.

Data come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

Economic Development

The operating costs for economic development capture funds spent on items such as planning, zoning, tourism, and heritage. These figures come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

Data on building permits and the value of construction data come from the individual municipalities or regional planning commissions. Unfortunately, we were able to access figures for only a small number of municipalities. In our indicators, the latter measure is expressed relative to the property tax assessment base for each municipality to provide a more easily understood basis of comparison: for every million dollars' worth of existing property, how much new construction is occurring?

Recreation and Culture

Recreation and culture operating costs cover services and facilities such as playgrounds, walking trails, rinks, swimming pools, libraries, and cultural events. Data come from the *Annual Report of Municipal Statistics*.

We have been unable to find data for New Brunswick municipalities for the indicators related to hard measures of recreational and cultural facilities (area for indoor recreation space, area for outdoor recreation space, length of trails, and area for indoor cultural space).

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Financing City Services: A prescription for the future by Harry Kitchen

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Traffic Congestion: The Stockholm Solution by Patrick Luciani

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