

# A Community in Decline: Citizen Engagement and the Whites Point Quarry and Marine Terminal Project, Digby, Nova Scotia

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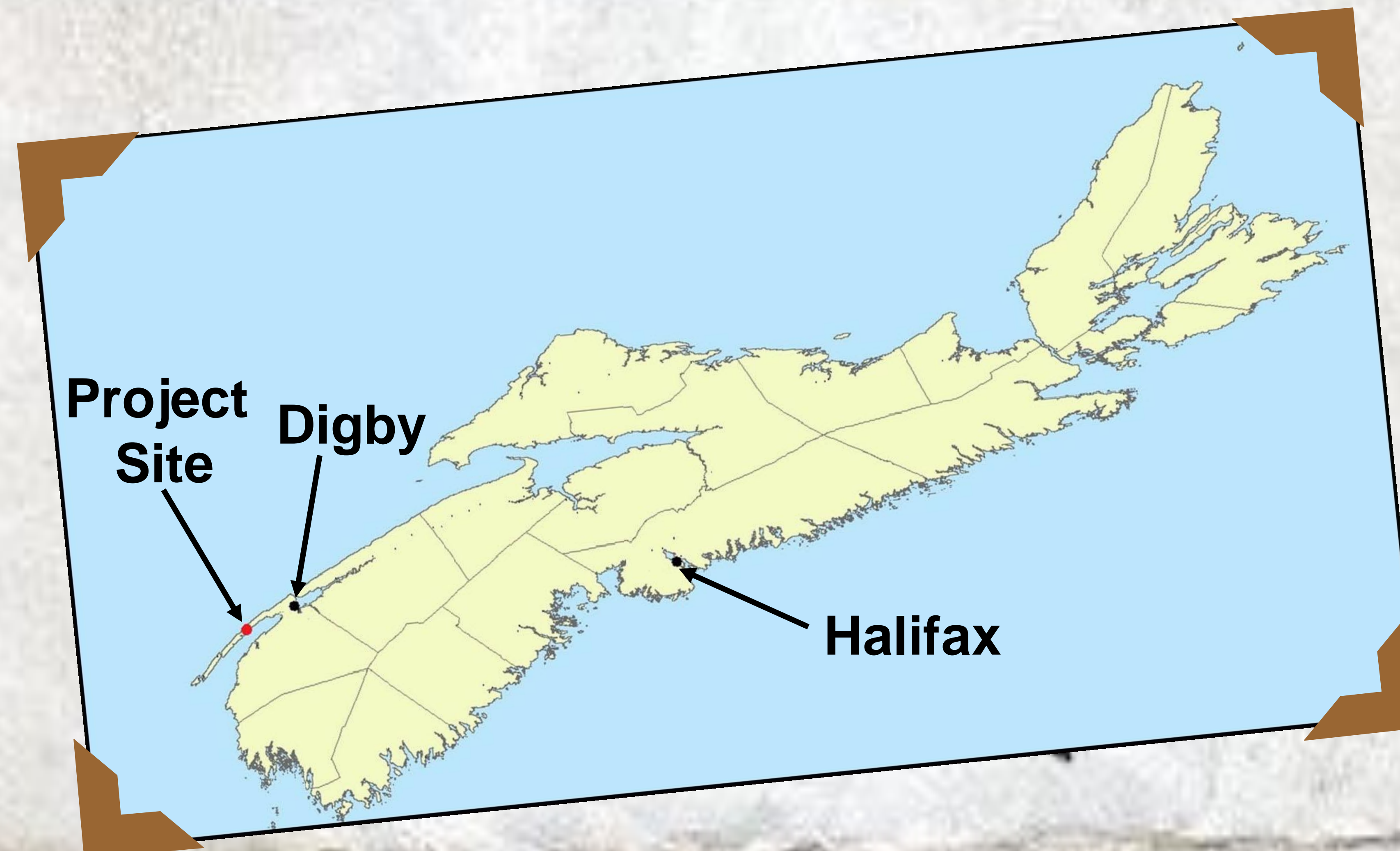
## Citizen Engagement

Citizens are increasingly reluctant to engage in electoral processes while treating authority figures with a strong sense of mistrust (Goodlad, Croft, Burton 2005; Masuda et al, 2008; OECD, 2001).

Citizen engagements have been adopted extensively within environmental policy through giving a direct voice to citizens (OCED, 2001; Masuda, McGee, Garvin, 2008; Goodlad et al., 2005).

Citizens “actively engage in the policy making process” where they have a defined role in “proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue” (OCED, 2001, p. 2).

*“Interdependent, self-reliant and  
connected to the sea”*



## Vision 2000 and Adaptive Management

The Digby Neck area established complex knowledge networks over time. These networks (“social mechanisms”) were designed to adapt to conflicts and make decisions based on long-term and short-term gains.

The Digby Neck community constructed a comprehensive vision of the its future: *Building Tomorrow -- Vision 2000: Multi-year Community Action Plan for Annapolis and Digby Counties*.

The residents of the Digby Neck area found alternate routes to communicate their diverse beliefs and collective vision, which included The Partnership for the Sustainable Development of Digby Neck and Islands Society.

*“A narrow peninsular of a basalt mountain  
between two highly productive bays”*

Fournier et al., 2007, p.69.

## A Failed Engagement

“Over-simplified assumptions and misconceptions of ‘community’” is the central factor contributing to failed citizen engagements (Mulrennan, Mark, and Scott 2012, p. 244).

Bilcon’s documents depicted a fairly homogenous community with a shared focus and understanding of the project’s significance.

Treating the community of Digby Neck as a monolithic entity with a singular economic focus (“a community in decline”) while dismissing opposing opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints undermined the engagement process.



Ecology Action Centre, Digby Sand Mining

## Conclusion and Further Research

The Digby Neck community escaped the strict confines of the public consultations and found a space to express the desires, knowledge sets, and beliefs.

A more effective citizen engagement process would stress a multi-dimensional approach towards comprehending and accommodating shifting goals, desires, and histories.

Further research could explore:

- Other external groups and interests involved within citizen engagement
- The influence of federal laws and regulations in impacting the autonomy and direction of municipalities and their communities.

### References

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- Mulrennan, M. E., Mark, R., & Scott, C. H. (2012). Revamping community-based conservation through participatory research. *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien*, 56(2), 243–259.