

LAND AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE: LAND USE PLANNING ON PEI

SATYA SEN

Executive Director

Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities



FEDERATION OF PEI MUNICIPALITIES

The Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities is a membership-based, non-profit political organization serving and representing incorporated municipalities across Prince Edward Island.

ROLE AND MISSION

FPEIM's mission highlights four core purposes:

- Promote effective, efficient, and accountable municipal government across PEI.
- Present a strong, unified voice for its member municipalities.
- Guide and assist municipalities in enhancing their operations and decision-making.
- Influence and improve provincial and federal legislation, programs, and policies affecting municipal interests

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES?

Municipalities are LOCAL GOVERNMENTS of local communities. Depending on the size and capacity, a municipality may provide planning services, fire services, emergency services, police services, transit services, public works/roads, water and sewer utilities, arts, and cultural and recreation services and facilities. A municipality also strives to achieve local economic development and well-being of its residents.

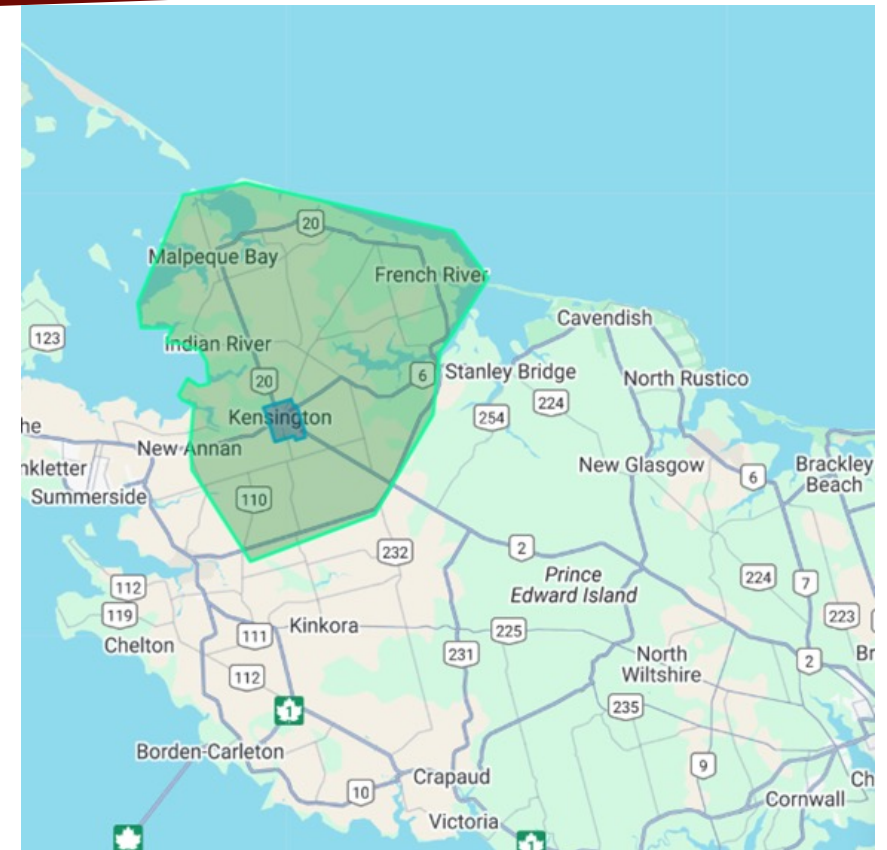
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

THE STATE OF PEI MUNICIPALITIES

- 57 municipalities cover about 35% of PEI's area. The remaining 65% of the Island is unincorporated.
- PEI's municipal boundaries are largely based on school districts from the 1800s.
- 22 municipalities have an area smaller than 5 sq km, and 33 municipalities have a population of fewer than 400 residents.
- The absence of local taxation and local decision-making in unincorporated areas is almost unique in Canadian Provinces.
- With limited revenue, small towns and rural municipalities often struggle to manage services.
- Municipal residents in urban and rural service centres are paying municipal taxes for services that benefit a much larger area.

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY VS. SERVICE AREA

- The boundary of a municipality defines the area within which it can collect revenue, primarily through property taxation.
- A service area represents the region where a municipality delivers services. Residents outside municipal boundaries may still access services.
- Due to the relatively small size of PEI municipalities compared with those in other provinces, the local tax base is often insufficient to fully fund municipal services.

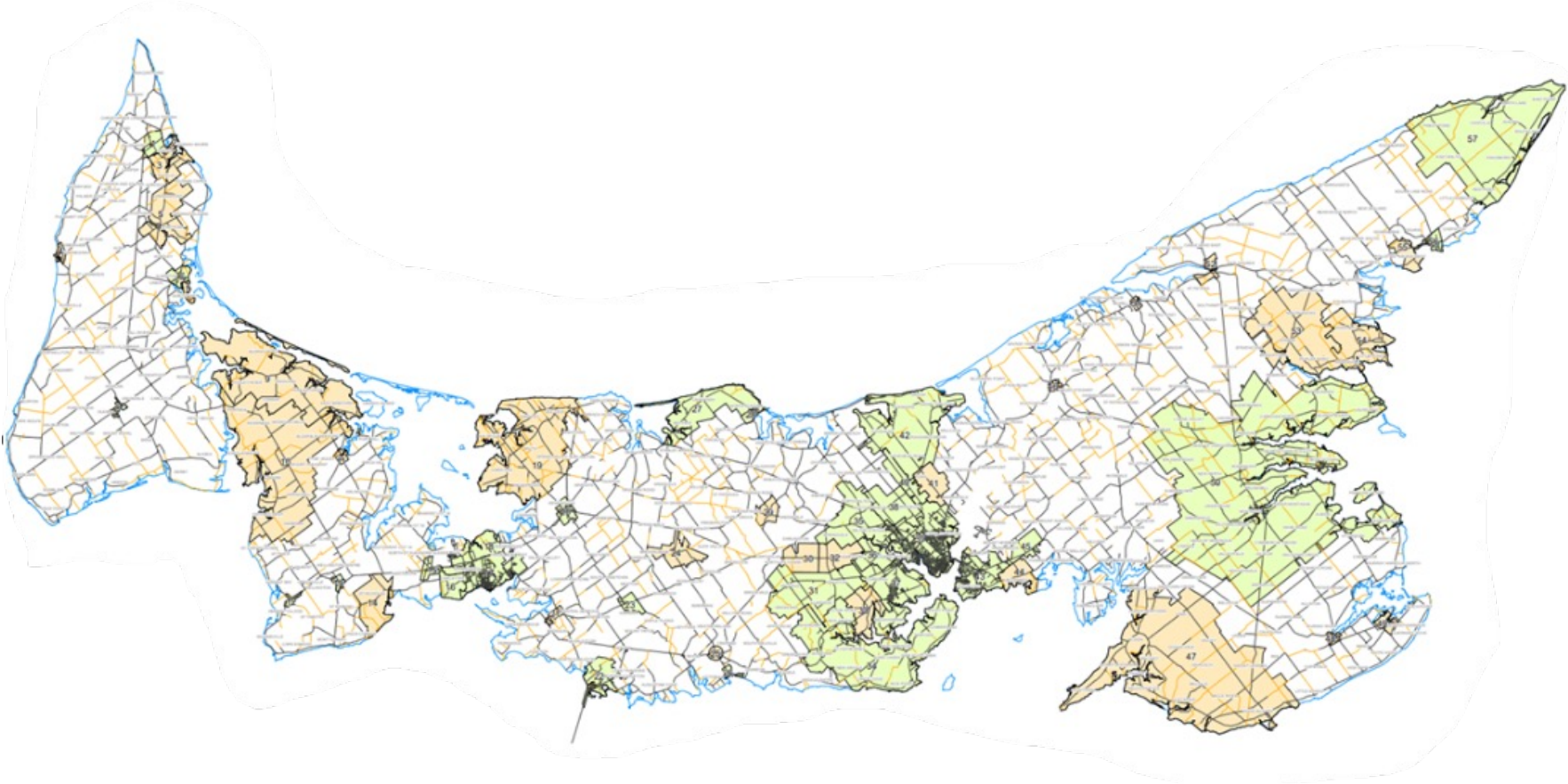


Blue Area – Municipal Boundary Example
Green Area – Service Area of Municipality Example

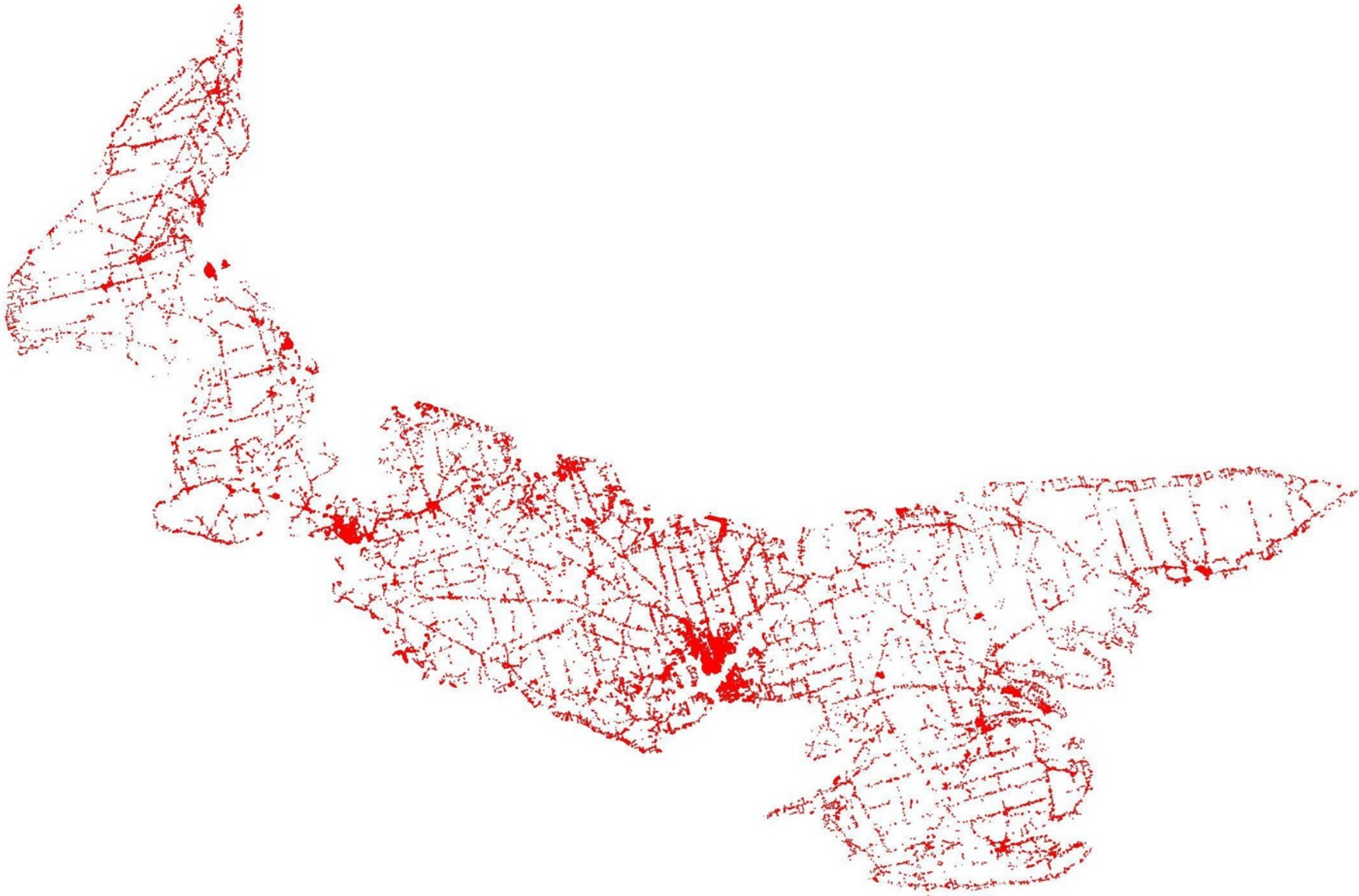
THE STATE OF LAND USE IN PEI

- Approximately 20% of PEI is covered by municipal land use plans.
- 29 municipalities have official plans and land use bylaws.
- Weak provincial land legislation fails to adequately protect remaining areas of the province. Few limitations on development create an incentive for sprawl. The effects of sprawl include the following:
 - Higher costs of public infrastructure and services
 - Higher greenhouse gas emissions
 - Deterioration of the landscape that attracts visitors to PEI
 - Loss of PEI farmland (39 acres per day from 2016 to 2021)
 - Increase in land use conflicts
 - Loss of natural and wildlife habitat

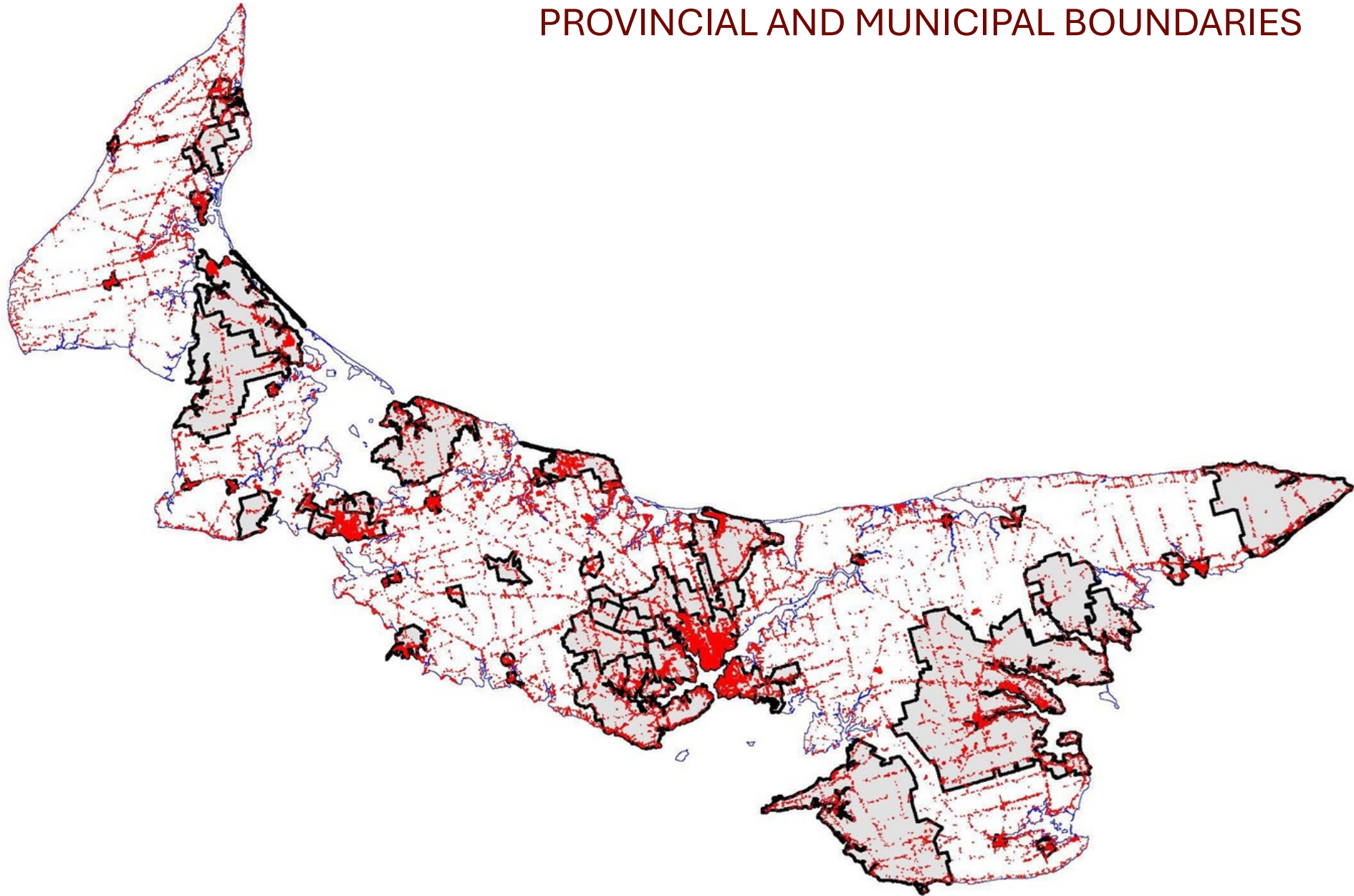
THE STATE OF LAND USE IN PEI



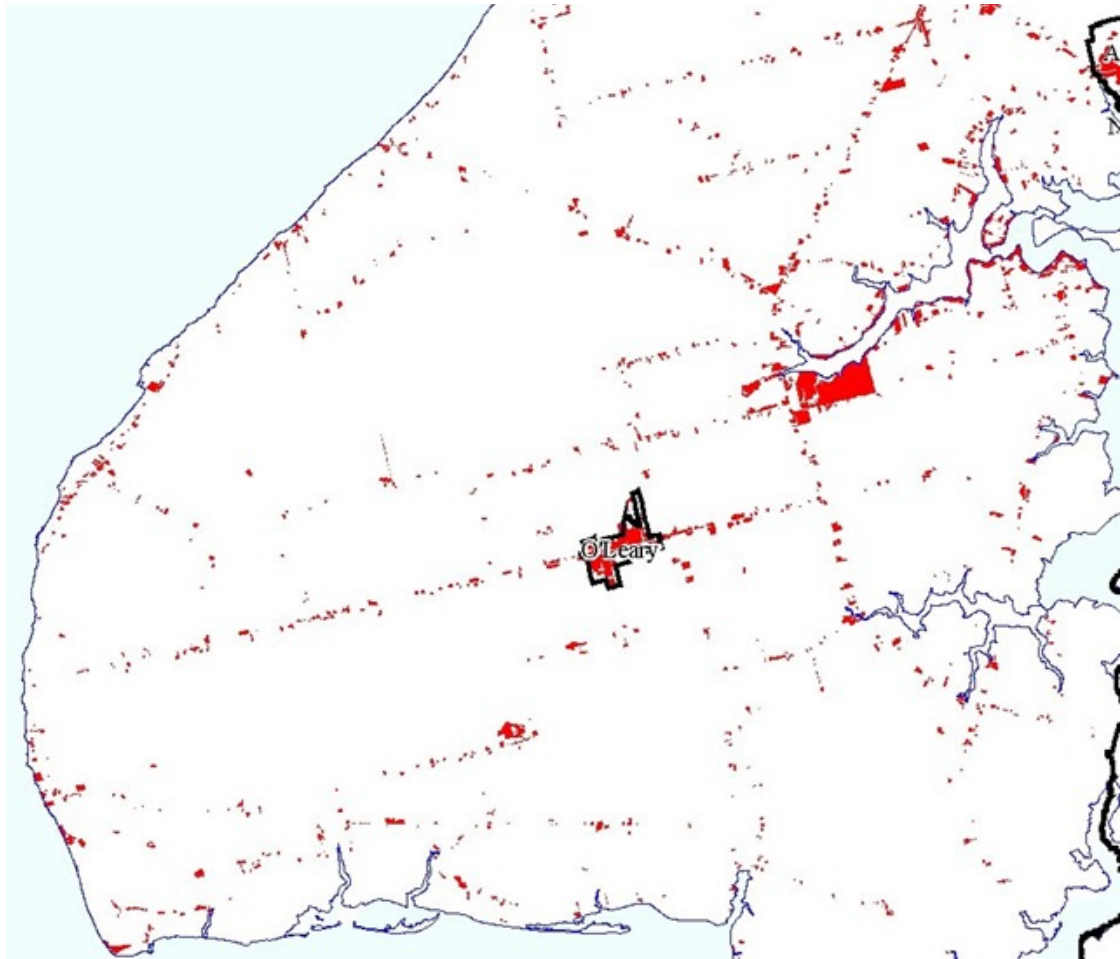
DEVELOPED LAND



DEVELOPED LAND:
PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES



MAP OF DEVELOPED LAND IN THE O'LEARY AREA

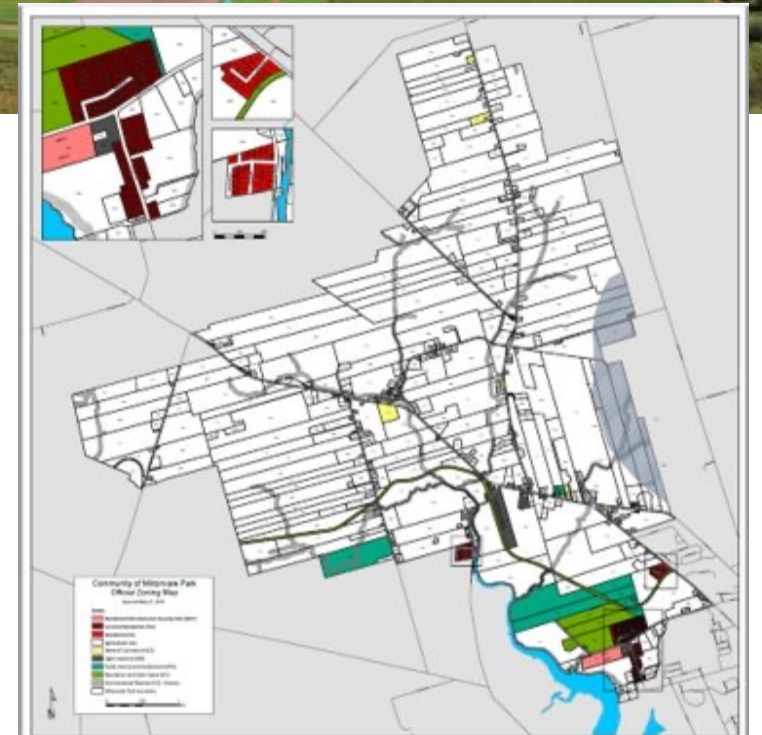


PEI IS THE SMALLEST
AND MOST DENSELY
POPULATED PROVINCE.

MUNICIPAL LAND USE
PLANNING IS NOT A
LUXURY – IT'S A
NECESSITY.



Town of Cornwall



LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING IN PEI

- **Planning Act:** sets the foundation for provincial and municipal planning.
- **Provincial Interests (s.2.1):** protect resource lands, avoid fragmentation, protect ecological systems, direct growth to serviced areas, and support climate adaptation.
- **Provincial Authority:** includes land use policies, minimum development standards, subdivision and development regulations.
- **Special Planning Areas (SPA):** provide higher-level controls in sensitive/growth areas; municipal permits must comply with SPA rules.
- **Municipal Role:** Official plans and zoning bylaws must be consistent with provincial policies and interests.
- **Enforcement and Override:** Cabinet may nullify municipal bylaws that conflict with provincial standards; Minister may assume planning authority if needed.
- **Appeals:** IRAC acts as the independent appeal body for planning decisions.

REPORTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Royal Commission on Land Ownership and Land use (1973)

Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship (1997)

Commission on the Lands Protection Act (2013)

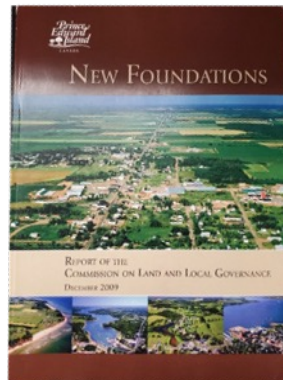
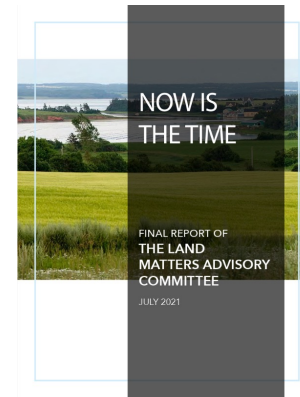
Land Matters Advisory Committee (2021)

State of the Island Report (2025)

Royal Commission on the Land (1990)

Commission on Land and Local Governance (2009)

Task Force on Land Use Policy (2014)



2021: NOW IS THE TIME REPORT

Recommendation #6

That the provincial government leverage nearly 50 years of study on the subject of land use to adopt a province-wide land use planning framework, prioritizing resource land and coastal land.

Recommendation #8

That the provincial government immediately implement province-wide interim regulations to further regulate subdivision and development in areas without an official plan until a province-wide land use planning framework is adopted.



2021: NOW IS THE TIME REPORT

Recommendation #9

That the provincial government engage a team of Registered Professional Planners in the development, implementation, and administration of a province-wide land use planning framework. If internal planning staff and capacity is not currently sufficient, then the provincial government should obtain external planning support to complete the work.



2025: STATE OF THE ISLAND REPORT

23
24

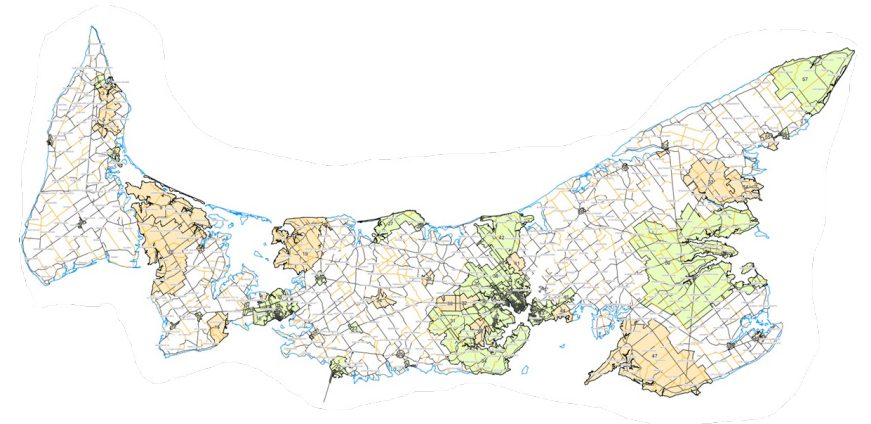


Future focus: municipal planning reform, coordinated infrastructure investment, managing growth at the edges of municipalities, balancing affordability and growth.

Key future direction: protect farmland, support farm viability, diversify markets, manage seasonality, and plan for climate and land-loss risks.

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY RESTRUCTURING FOR LAND AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- It is time to restructure and introduce a system of municipal governments across PEI, from tip to tip.
- Through municipal planning and zoning bylaws, restructured municipalities will have a vital role in the province-wide land use plan and protect provincial interests, including farmland.
- Local planning and decision-making will help build communities – rural and urban.
- Restructuring will build municipal capacity (a larger revenue base from sufficient population and assessment) for improved local governance, economic development, infrastructure, and service delivery.
- Water and sewer system management, fire services, emergency measures, and planning can be delivered with public accountability.
- Local climate adaptation and natural asset protection will help the Province achieve its net zero and sustainability goals.



PEIFA AGM 2024

"Whereas the 2021 census in Canada calculated PEI farmland loss at 12% over 5 years.

Whereas the PEIFA has advocated for a province-wide land use plan with resource land managed under provincial jurisdiction.

Whereas the PEIFA has advocated for interim measures limiting development in unincorporated areas of the province.

Whereas to date there has not been meaningful progress on a provincial land use plan since the release of the Land Matters Committee report, 'Now is the Time' in 2021.

Whereas the Federation of PEI Municipalities shares common interests and advocates for common solutions with the PEI Federation of Agriculture, but also including increasing the size of Island municipalities to encompass more of the province.

Therefore, be it resolved that the PEIFA strategically align itself alongside the FPEIM to advocate for provincial Land Use planning and policy."

IMPLEMENT INTERIM MEASURES

FPEIM continues to call on the Government of Prince Edward Island to immediately implement interim measures to control development and protect the AGRICULTURAL land and SCENIC landscape of the Island while the government develops a province-wide land use plan.



Adopt a provincial land use plan that sets non-negotiable, Island-wide rules (farmland, settlement, hazards) and expand/merge municipal/local planning boundaries so every acre is under a local plan that must be “consistent with” the provincial plan.

THE BIG IDEA

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: ONTARIO

ONTARIO PLANNING FRAMEWORK



Planning Act

Primary legislation governing land-use planning

Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)

Province-wide policy direction all municipalities must follow



Provincial Plans

(Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan)

Municipal Official Plans & Zoning

Must conform to the PPS and applicable provincial plans



Purpose of the System

Ensures coordinated growth, infrastructure investment, and protection of resources such as farmland and natural heritage systems

ONTARIO GREENBELT: OVERVIEW

GREENBELT AREA



ONTARIO GREENBELT: WHAT IS IT?

- Established under the Greenbelt Act, 2005
- Protects 2 million+ acres of farmland, forests, river valleys, and natural systems
- Includes:
 - Protected Countryside
 - Specialty Crop Areas (e.g., Niagara tender fruit and grape lands)
 - Urban River Valleys
- Purpose:
 - Limit urban sprawl
 - Protect agricultural systems
 - Maintain ecological and hydrological health
- Municipal planning decisions must conform to the Greenbelt Plan.

ONTARIO GREENBELT: AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION BEST PRACTICES

- Mapped Prime Agricultural Areas (Class 1–3 soils and specialty crop lands)
- Firm boundaries preventing sprawl into farmland
- Agricultural system approach (farms + infrastructure + rural economy)
- Strict controls on non-farm uses and fragmentation
- Large minimum lot sizes and limited severances to maintain farm viability
- Provincial–municipal conformity requirements ensure consistent protection

LESSONS FOR PEI: AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION

PROVINCIAL LAND USE PLAN

- Map Prime Agricultural Areas across PEI.
- Make agricultural protection legally binding in provincial law.
- Establish firm rural/urban growth boundaries around settlement centres.
- Align with the Lands Protection Act to minimize fragmentation and preserve farm viability.
- Tie provincial infrastructure funding to compliance with farmland protection policies.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND ZONING

- Adopt strong agricultural zones with large minimum lot sizes.
- Limit rural residential sprawl; direct growth to clusters or hamlets.
- Allow severances only for bona fide farm needs.
- Protect contiguous farm blocks and maintain viable field sizes.
- Require municipalities to monitor and report farmland conversion annually.

FPEIM STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Provincial Land Use Consultation

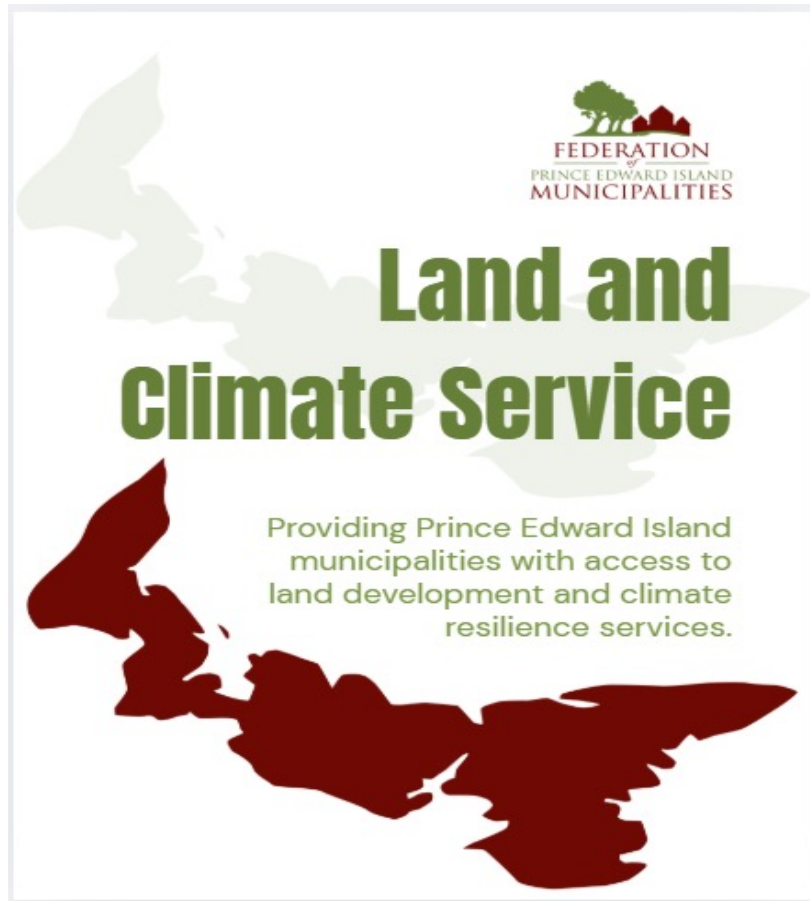
Ensuring that municipalities are an integral part of every stage of the provincial land use plan development.



Shared & Member Services

Supporting FPEIM members through shared services and new programs, including Land & Climate Services, PACE in a Box, Policy and Legislative Services, IT Shared Services, and Asset Management.

FPEIM (PROPOSED) LAND AND CLIMATE SERVICE



What?

- Support for municipal land use planning through a shared services model and helping municipalities make professional decisions on zoning, subdivision, and development based on sound planning principles

Why?

- Lack of professional planners and development officers
- Lack of municipal capacity in developing plans and administering and enforcing bylaws, and integrating climate expertise, data and adaptation measures into planning process



Photo by Scott Anderson

CBC Photo

We cannot restore the scenic landscapes that we have altered or bring back farmland that we have lost. We cannot turn back the clock, but we can do things differently in the future.



Satya Sen

Executive Director

ssen@fpeim.ca

 info@fpeim.ca

 (902) 566-1493

 FPEIM.ca



FEDERATION
of
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
MUNICIPALITIES