

January 29, 2018

Good day,

I respectfully request the inclusion of the Municipal Elections Act, the Urban and Rural Planning Act, and respective municipal taxation acts in your upcoming review of the municipal legislation. The omission of these pieces of legislation would represent a glaring oversight and a missed opportunity to strengthen our democracy, improve the wellbeing of our residents, and to appropriately plan for the future of this province.

With regard to the review of Municipal Elections Act, I encourage you to act upon the calls to action of the Citizens' Assembly for Stronger Elections. Elections are integral to our democratic system; if they are not carried out in a manner that is transparent, fair, and accessible to all, there is a failure in our democracy which is unacceptable. This failure in turn means that the needs of those who live in this province are not adequately addressed. Should the review of the Municipal Elections Act be postponed and addressed following this review, it will not leave sufficient time for the municipalities to prepare for changes which affect them. I believe there are many ways in which the election process across Newfoundland and Labrador can be improved, and it is crucial that these improvements be addressed now.

In addition to a review of the Elections Act, I feel strongly that it is necessary to undertake a review of both the Urban and Rural Planning Act and the municipal taxation acts affecting municipalities across NL. Opening a review of this legislation will offer an opportunity to allow municipal governments to more strongly represent their constituents and to shape their communities for the future. With greatly shifting economic and demographic realities, it is paramount that municipalities be permitted the strength and flexibility to creatively and proactively support our residents through design, development, fiscal finance. Updates to the planning act are crucial to the development of more sustainable communities across our province. As we begin to discuss regionalization of services and governance, we must also consider how we design our communities for the future of our province. In relation to taxation, the time has come to have a province-wide discussion around whether our current form of municipal taxation allows our communities to succeed. With a pending decline in housing prices across the province, it is likely that municipalities will be left with only one mechanism to balance budgets: raising mil rates unilaterally. Having this as the only mechanism for affecting change in revenue disadvantages municipal governments and their constituents.

This review is a wonderful opportunity to affect real change that can benefit current and future generations of this province. It is therefore essential that this review is comprehensive.

Thank you for this opportunity,
Rob Nolan
Chair, Happy City St. John's

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