

January 31, 2018

Municipal Legislation Review
Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment
4th Floor, West Block, Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for allowing for this opportunity to engage on these issues. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I am very concerned about the faith that the general public has in our democracy generally and for the purposes of this letter our Municipal politics.

As you consider what changes you would like to make to the legislation, whether it be the City of St. John's Act, the Municipalities Act, Municipal Elections Act, the Urban and Rural Planning Act etc... I trust you will consider the future of this province and the need for regionalization. The legislation needs to make amalgamating municipalities, sharing resources, costs and responsibilities easy and accessible. While final decisions on regionalization may not be made yet, we should have considerations, mechanisms and opportunities for municipalities to make these decisions easily.

I find it hard to hear about Towns that cannot run a full slate of candidates to fill their Town councils seats, but they are surrounded by Local Service Districts that should be a part of that Town and contributing to its democracy, planning and fees. I understand why people would want to pay fewer fees and live more economically, but it seems that it is often putting an undue burden on the many volunteers and staff who are stepping up to make their communities run as well as possible.

I believe we need to modernize our election process and we need to engage more of our citizens in the election process at all levels of government. As well we need to restore confidence in the election system and this requires a full review. Technology should be utilized and maximized so people can vote from a secure online mechanism or in person or by mail. We need people to vote!

I support the initiatives of the Citizens Assembly for Stronger Elections NL (CASENL) and their report on the 2017 Election process. It is my sincere hope that you will include the Municipal Elections Act in your upcoming review of the Municipalities Act. In particular, 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, then there is a failure in our democracy which is unacceptable.

It is incumbent upon this government to include municipal elections in the current review. 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 any changes which may affect them. Elections require a great deal of planning and time to coordinate and organize. 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.

Overall, we need to make our communities more accessible to all citizens whether that is to attend school, work, recreation, hospitals etc... people need to be able to travel about safely and economically. We need to encourage more physical activity and put at least some focus on travel by bicycle or walking. We also need to encourage our communities to include everyone and that means building projects with accessibility and openness in mind.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers and the employees who step up and make all of the Towns in this province work. Where would we be without your time, experience and dedication to the places we call home. Please open your hearts and minds to the possibility of regionalization to create efficiencies, to having a larger pool of involved citizens, and modernizing how we do things in NL, so that we can all appreciate, preserve and encourage the growth of rural Newfoundland and Labrador for many generations to come.

Best wishes on this undertaking and thank you again for inviting comments.

Sincerely,

Valerie A. Hynes