



NOVA SCOTIA
FEDERATION OF
MUNICIPALITIES

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OP-ED

WAYE MASON: Now Is Not the Time for Partisan Politics

The **Grant Thornton** study released last week about the future viability of CBRM could be about almost any municipality in Nova Scotia.

CBRM's challenges, rooted in outmigration and the rising cost of municipal services, are affecting many of the province's towns and communities.

As the representative of all 50 Nova Scotia municipalities, the **Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM)** supports CBRM in their call for immediate action from the province on the report's 20 well-reasoned recommendations.

These recommendations overlap with NSFM's own resolutions, established by consensus and approved by our members in November 2018, which call for action on five municipal priorities.

These are:

- Removing the CAP on property assessment
- Implementing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for printed paper and packaging
- Addressing inadequacies in funding levels and the formula for Municipal Funding, including freezing mandatory education contributions, increasing the capacity grant, 50/50 cost share on accessibility projects, and a 25% share of cannabis excise
- Acting to bring legislation to enable Municipal Modernization including new governance and collaboration models
- Funding for Roads, including equitable funding for towns and former towns for shared arterial and collector roads, and increased funding for J-Class roads

Without a doubt, CBRM faces the most dire situation of any municipality in Nova Scotia, but many are not that far behind.

Given the programs and services that CBRM, and all our members, provide their communities, they need and expect the support of all MLAs - inside and outside of government - to see their resolutions acted on fully and promptly.

The issue of increased capacity grants and a new funding formula that better supports CBRM, and other municipalities with similar issues, is not new.

The issue has been studied again and again by successive governments, with new formulas and funding levels proposed. But to date, no government has made new funding available.

In fact, it has been over a decade since Nova Scotia's municipalities have received new funding from the Province to assist operating costs; costs that are often increasing due to new provincial and federal regulatory pressures.

At the same time, municipalities have been paying more and more to the province every year for housing, corrections and education.

In the face of the challenges, municipalities have one tool: raising property taxes, and as the Grant Thornton viability study shows, continued tax increases will drive people away. Without action from the Province, CBRM will not be the only municipality to reach a state where it is no longer viable.

Our proposal is modest, simple, and effective – increase the Municipal Capacity Grant by \$6.6 million a year for three years, and target the new funding at CBRM, towns, and rural municipalities that operate town infrastructure, for a total of \$20 million.

Now is not the time for partisan politics. Our members and the citizens we all represent require swift, decisive, and non-partisan action. NSFAM calls on the Province, and all political parties, to support immediate action to address our resolutions in the House in the fall and in the next budget.

Waye Mason is a Halifax city councillor and President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.