



**NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION
OF MUNICIPALITIES**

April 7, 2020

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Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton
Town of Port Hawkesbury

The Honourable Chuck Porter
Minister, Municipal Affairs and Housing
P.O. Box 216, Halifax, NS B3J 2M6

Dear Minister Porter:

RE: COVID-19 and October 17, 2020 Municipal Election

Epidemiologists have described COVID-19 as the most dangerous pandemic in our lifetime. There are few aspects of our daily lives that have not, in some way, been changed by this virus. It is of utmost importance to NSFAM and our members to protect the safety of our residents and follow the direction of Dr. Robert Strang.

The province is currently under a State of Emergency, and municipalities are doing their best to carry on with usual business in these extraordinary times. But as current cancellations push further out into the summer, the NSFAM Board of Directors has come to question whether Nova Scotia will be able to uphold a fair and democratic election on October 17th.

COVID-19 has already forced Nova Scotia's municipalities to adapt. Municipalities have taken measures that include holding virtual meetings, revising budgets in anticipation of decreased tax revenues, and developing new staffing plans, all while maintaining essential services. To prepare for an election under these conditions will increase the already considerable operational burden on municipal staff across the province.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) and the Conference Board of Canada (CBOC) have both developed scenarios where the current distancing measures remain in place through August. But even supposing that the current distancing measures are relaxed this summer, municipalities will still face serious difficulties in preparing for an October election.

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Minister Chuck Porter
Page 2
April 7, 2020

Enumeration is not possible in this current COVID climate, nor is canvassing; candidates can't go door to door. Polling stations will be hard to book and staff, and voter outreach efforts will be complicated. The March 15 date by which Municipalities were to have returning officers has passed and money is being spent based on an upcoming October election. Returning officers, election staffers, deposits for polling stations – all come at a cost for municipalities and the sooner we can ascertain whether there will be an election in October or not, the sooner municipalities can make financial plans in response to that.

The scenarios developed by the PBO and CBoC are revised weekly, and there are many others besides. But for every projection or scenario you can find, a protracted recovery period is projected, with serious economic and social implications.

It seems reasonable to expect that returning to regular operations will take many weeks, and it is hard for me to imagine an election running smoothly this October. It is even more difficult to envision the difficulties that would be experienced by new councils going through orientation in October, only to be plunged into budget deliberations a few short months later. Staff will be focused, as will the elected, on all measures that will return us to "normal" as quickly as possible. Picking up the pieces will be time and labour intensive and will require all hands – those who have been in the trenches during this crisis - on deck.

Minister, we both agree that at the moment it is health and safety first, absolutely. But now is also the time for considering options regarding the election matter that is before us. You know I welcome any insight you and your staff may be able to provide on this matter.

I look forward to hearing from you. Stay healthy and safe!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Mood', written in a cursive style.

Mayor Pam Mood

President, Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities