



NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION OF MUNICIPALITIES

May 6, 2020

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Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton
Town of Port Hawkesbury

The Honourable Stephen McNeil
Premier of Nova Scotia

Dear Premier McNeil:

RE: Consultation and Collaboration with Municipalities

The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities fully supports the Province and appreciates its leadership in this time of real crisis. Our joint focus is always on how we can make things better for the people we serve – the people who elected all of us.

Our provincial-municipal system sometimes delineates our mandates into two distinct roles. But today, it must be our collective responsibility to get Nova Scotia up and running when COVID-19 has loosened its grip.

That is why NSFAM must be at the table when the Province creates the plan to reopen Nova Scotia. We must rebuild our province together and it's clear that the work that needs to be done will be in our local communities.

The Province's decision last Friday to reopen parks illustrates the importance of collaboration and consultation. Allowing people to return to parks and trails was a great decision for the mental health of all Nova Scotians and another example of a provincial government capably working during unprecedented times.

However, municipalities had not been alerted in advance. As a result, many were caught off-guard by the sudden arrival of people at park gates and trails and struggled with the fallout.

The decision to reopen parks may seem simple, but it was far from simple for municipalities forced to swiftly carry out its execution. Municipalities had no time to prepare and there was a great deal of turmoil created at 3:30 p.m. on Friday in suddenly communicating the facts around openings.

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Many municipal parks go without winter maintenance and the State of Emergency declared March 22 extended that directive. That was evident in the District of Lunenburg, where parks are closed until May 16. To ensure parks are safe for residents, the municipality needs to get their staff back to work to clean up and repair uprooted trees, washed out trails, and debris.

The result in Halifax was more dire. The Public Gardens – a National Historic Site and one of most visited tourist sites in the city – was vandalized Friday when HRM was unable to meet Friday’s announcement with an adequate complement of security guards.

In East Hants, snow fences that went up over a two-week period in March and April were suddenly expected to come down immediately. This necessitated significant labour and financial costs - a situation experienced by many of our members.

These are only three examples of the many reported to us. In addition, I fielded far too many calls from concerned local leaders over the lack of communication with us on this decision. We need to work together as partners – and ensure that going forward, any changes and decisions come to municipalities through NSFM as again, it is at the local level that these changes will have to be made.

We need to ensure our members are aware of the coming changes, so let us help you by giving them a heads up and granting them the ability to plan accordingly. We are very concerned about next steps: If the Province takes the same approach with a multi-step plan to reopen the province, then municipalities won’t just be caught off guard – we will be unable to comply and unable to help get Nova Scotians going again. It’s going to take a team effort to start the economic engines and drive forward to get the province where it needs to be.

This week, the Nova Scotia business community - through the Halifax Chamber of Commerce - was given a high-level overview of the Province’s plans to reopen. It’s disappointing that the business community would be kept more up to date and informed in advance of another level of government. These businesses are in our communities. We care about them and it is imperative we are part of the plan to get them up and running.

I believe the lack of heads up on Friday was the result of an oversight, but need to make absolute certain that going forward, we are at the table, helping inform the decisions that are going to get us through this.

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I also feel it is important that you know how this affected us. We are the local experts, and I hope a trusted, valued partner. In a state of emergency, that partnership needs to strengthen. As we have heard so many times, we are in this together and together is how we will get through it.

The lack of consultation calls into question the effectiveness of the Partnership Framework between the provincial government and NSFPM signed in 2018. We need to make sure our municipalities stay strong while so much is on hold and so much is unknown.

To achieve that, Nova Scotia's municipal and provincial governments need to work together in the best interest of the people we both serve, to ensure we stay strong, viable and healthy. Nova Scotians should expect nothing less from all of us.

I look forward to working together on the plan that will start our economic engines and propel us forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P Mood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mayor Pam Mood
President, Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities

CC: Minister Chuck Porter, Department of Municipal Affairs