



NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION
OF MUNICIPALITIES

May 29, 2020

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Town of Yarmouth

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County of Colchester

TOWNS CAUCUS CHAIR:

Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton
Town of Port Hawkesbury

The Honourable Stephen McNeil,
Premier of Nova Scotia
Via email: premier@novascotia.ca

Dear Premier McNeil:

RE: Partnership and Working Together

There are three levels of government in Canada and while each has a distinct role in ensuring the most benefit to the people we serve, working together is not only key, it is imperative. We now share our key deliverable which is all about wellness: The physical, mental and economic health of this province.

The tasks of easing restrictions and restarting our economy cannot be done in isolation. Local government provides advice that will ensure the most informed decisions and the smoothest transitions. It is important that each level of government understands the mandates and concerns of the others. To that end, we hope the following points of concern from our members will be received in that manner:

- ❖ **Consultation:** While we understand municipalities are under the mandate of the Province, we are the local experts. To date, consultation has been nearly non-existent and that simply does not serve the people we all represent. We respect things are shifting quickly, however, if we are to govern effectively, and make the most informed decisions, municipalities must be at the table as plans are being made. Our perspective will provide a means of halting the confusion that has come with many of the announcements, ensuring all bases are covered.

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- ❖ Put In Perspective: The Federal government reaches out to First Ministers across the country to seek their counsel and discuss the issues. The same consideration must exist at the Provincial/Municipal level. Imagine the Federal Government rolling out a plan that directly affected the mandate of the Province, without consultation? We know how our municipalities work - from providing water to staffing parks and everything in between. FCM meets with Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and her staff on a regular basis. That regular check-in speaks to the importance of the relationship and the fact that the Federal Government knows who the experts are in municipal government. Imagine what we could do if we worked together like this.

- ❖ Clarity of Announcements: Whether opening parks or allowing open burning, each of our 49 municipal units is guided by its own set of by-laws. A conversation with NSFM prior to making changes that impact municipalities would help inform how and when each step is rolled out and ensure that people understand they must abide by the laws of their individual municipalities. We understand the Province is making the announcements and the importance of confidentiality until the Premier and Dr. Strang advise the public.

- ❖ Restarting the Economy: Municipalities will rightly be expected to help restart the economy – so we need to be part of the planning process. This Herculean task will require not only our consultation but also our joint assistance in creating the program. Every decision that's made is rolled out at the municipal level. From businesses commissions to parks and trails, from recreation departments to fire service. There's a reason why municipal politics is where the rubber hits the road. Our voice must be at the table helping to plan it all.

- ❖ Coordination: NSFM has watched with interest as Deputy Minister Bernie Miller has updated the business community three times a week through business associations. NSFM and the municipalities it represents were not afforded the same considerations and opportunities to provide input until just last week. You outlined Tuesday at your news conference that "Minister Porter has continued to work with his colleagues in municipalities across the province." However, it was nearly 10 weeks into the COVID crisis before Municipal Affairs addressed our

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Members. Comments raised during that meeting have led to very encouraging news that Deputy Minister MacLellan will join our calls on a weekly basis. We appreciate her participation and willingness to listen. The Deputy Minister and her team are also now meeting with the CEO and President of NSFM on a weekly basis to discuss the issues of most importance to municipalities. In two short meetings much has been accomplished, testament to the power of working together. We're hopeful that change starts at the top because currently, our members are telling us that they aren't receiving return calls from their Municipal Advisors in DMAH.

- ❖ Partnership Framework: The definition of partnership underscores the importance of an agreement made by two or more parties to jointly manage and operate a company. We signed one together exactly two years ago that lays out more precisely that joint engagement "is critically important" in decisions that impact local governments. NSFM sent a clear signal in two letters (May 6, May 20) that more collaboration and consultation must happen on municipal issues. And now we stress again the importance of working together.

- ❖ Requests Denied Without Consultation: In the past year, NSFM has worked toward implementing several initiatives on behalf of our members. Each request we made to the Department of Municipal Affairs was met with rejection, and sometimes our proposals didn't even rate a meeting. How can that be? We represent 376 politicians in 49 municipalities and the one million people who call those municipalities home. Our efforts on their behalf include a property tax deferral (which wasn't granted), a Plan B to support the business community (which was denied without meeting with us), and an election date review (on which municipalities weren't even consulted). How can DMAH make decisions about key issues affecting municipalities when the key stakeholders aren't even consulted? The best decisions are only made when all parties are at the table.

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- ❖ Code Of Conduct: NSFM updated the Code of Conduct to reflect the 2017 MGA amendments. Since then, questions have been raised about the value of a Code if there are no consequences for those who act inappropriately. Changes to the MGA or the introduction of new regulations are required to increase options for sanctions. We've been waiting to hear back and need urgent movement on this file.

In closing, Mr. Premier, I want to reiterate the importance of consulting with the local experts. We know we are all in this together. To achieve the best for all Nova Scotians, the 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. We need to pull together to ensure we can jointly roll out the plan to restart our economy and jumpstart our communities.

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: The Honourable Chuck Porter, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing