



Dear Minister Porter,

I am writing to you today to express my concerns with the level of provincial support being made available to municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery period. As you know, municipalities are a critical frontline provider of services to Nova Scotians, and their importance will be heightened in the coming months and years. Public transit, recreational programs, climate change mitigation and planning and development support are some of the municipal functions that our province will need operating fully as we navigate the economic recovery from COVID-19.

Municipalities will face significant revenue shortfalls as a result of the pandemic. The provincial loan program is a start but municipalities will need significant support in the form of grants or pauses in mandatory transfer payments in order to continue providing services and avoid significant tax hikes to make up the shortfall. Municipalities cannot be left to make up the difference through budget cuts and service claw backs. Not only does it not make economic sense to cut staff and needed services in a downturn, we will need municipalities operating at full tilt to help steward our way through the recovery period.

Partnering with municipalities allows them to better support constituents on the ground. For example, NSFMC has asked for the ability to provide targeted commercial tax support to small businesses, but this proposal was rebuffed by your government.

I know that for many municipal partners, the decision to go ahead with elections in the fall is another example of an uncollaborative relationship with the province. They were not consulted on the decision, do not feel that it had input from public health and if the decision is reversed at the last minute, they will be left holding the bag of expenses from setting preparations in motion. Municipalities need a provincial partner who will sit down with them and work together - not a unilateral decision maker.

The time is overdue to address municipal funding mechanisms in order to ensure that Nova Scotia's municipalities are adequately supported. Like so many issues, COVID-19 is exposing what we have long known - in this case, that our municipalities need more robust support from the province.

What tangible supports, other than loans, will your government make available for municipalities through the COVID-19 recovery?



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I would urge you to take this opportunity to set a new path with Nova Scotia's municipalities. We all benefit when our most immediate level of representation is supported to work well and deliver needed services and programs.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kendra Coombes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'K' and 'C'.

Kendra Coombes
MLA Cape Breton Centre
NS NDP Spokesperson for Municipal Affairs