



**THE TOWN OF WINDSOR**  
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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30 September 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL: [legc.office@novascotia.ca](mailto:legc.office@novascotia.ca)

Honourable Minister Mark Furey,  
Chair of Law Amendments

Dear Members of the Law Amendments Committee:

**Re: Region of Windsor and West Hants Municipality Act – Bill # 55**

I write in support of Bill # 55.

The Graham Commission Report of 1974; the Task Force on Local Government Report of 1992; the Towns Task Force Report of 2012; the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Review of 2013 and, of course, the One Nova Scotia Report by Ray Ivany of 2014 all have one thing in common, a plea that the status quo not prevail.

The Councils of Windsor and West Hants have made a decision to seek Special Legislation to form a Regional Government. This is a bold initiative and as a 42 years public servant who has been through the amalgamation of HRM, and now the CAO of the Town of Windsor since 2006, I have witnessed how our region's growth has been impeded by neighbourly disputes, competition with one another for development and common sense solutions being thwarted over political differences. The administrative staff on both sides have usually been aligned in their thinking.

In Windsor's research when considering amalgamation in partnership with the Avon Region Citizens Coalition (ARCC), we recognized that our efforts were aligned with many studies carried out over the years.

Below is a summary for consideration:

**The "Graham Commission" - The Royal Commission on Education, Public Services and Provincial-Municipal Relations (1974)**

The Graham Commission issued three major recommendations:

- The province should assume responsibility for all general services such as healthcare, education, housing, community services and justice;
- The existing grant structure should be replaced by a provincial equalization grant; and
- The number of rural units should be reduced to eleven and that towns and villages be stripped of almost all responsibilities.

Many of the recommendations contained in that report were implemented but the major reforms to municipal structures were deemed too controversial.

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## **The Task Force on Local Government Report (1992)**

Eighteen years later in 1992, the Province explored municipal restructuring once again. The Province commissioned an independent review of municipal government structures entitled *The Task Force on Local Government Report (1992)*

- The report recommends that the five most populous regions be consolidated into single-tier regional municipalities: Cape Breton, Colchester, Halifax, Kings and Pictou.
- Following this report CBRM and HRM were created through forced amalgamations in 1995 and 1996.

## **Municipal Government Act (1998)**

The MGA was passed in 1998 and was the product of a four year Joint Municipal-Provincial legislative review. The current MGA consolidated the County Incorporation Act, Towns Incorporation Act, Village Services Act, Municipal Affairs Act, Municipal Boundaries and Representation Act, Deed Transfer Tax Act, sections of the Assessment Act and the Planning Act, into a single piece of legislation to guide municipalities.

The new MGA recognized municipalities as a responsible order of government, accountable to the people and provided councils with the broad authority necessary to provide good government within the jurisdiction given to them. It also acknowledged the vital importance of maintaining a good working relationship between provincial and municipal orders of government.

## **Towns Task Force (2012)**

The Towns Task Force was formed in order to make recommendations to the Province and UNSM that address the many challenges facing Nova Scotia towns.

- Challenges addressed by the Task Force included: erosion of many towns' tax bases; rigid boundaries that don't accommodate economic growth; declining population; an uneven playing field where Towns had double the tax rates compared to their rural municipality neighbours; and aging infrastructure.

## **Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Review (2013)**

Municipal restructuring is once again raised in Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Review report 21 years after the Graham Commission report.

Municipalities struggle to maintain existing service levels in the face of rising costs and other external pressures. The Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Review report recommended that:

- The Province conduct comprehensive viability reviews of municipalities that demonstrate three consecutive years of fiscal difficulties as measured by the Financial Condition Index.
- The Province develop incentive programs to encourage municipalities to restructure voluntarily

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- All incorporated villages be phased out. Existing villages should be encouraged to apply for town status, merge with an adjacent town, or dissolve into their encompassing rural municipality.

Again, not all recommendations were adopted but some progress was made.

### One Nova Scotia Report – Ray Ivany (2013-2014)

Goal # 18 in the report begins by stating that ... "the provincial government will immediately initiate a comprehensive review of current municipal government structures and of federal and provincial regional service delivery systems, improving efficiency, cost effectiveness and community engagement."

This is evident from the work DMA has been doing these past months which includes *Municipal Modernization* efforts.

### Dissolutions 2015 / 2016:

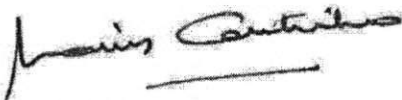
- Towns of Canso, Springhill, Bridgetown and Hantsport opt for dissolution in 2015. They are followed by Parrsboro in 2016.

### "Trustee" Role:

Members of Law Amendments, my final plea for consideration is the **trustee** role of councils to make decisions on behalf of their constituents. All elected officials at every level of government (federal, provincial or municipal) make decisions based on information that they can research, see and read. While it would be advantageous to distribute such volumes of information to all citizens, it is impractical to do so. Democracy is being served as Councils act as trustees in serving their constituencies, contrary to what some may argue. Their role is not simply as a delegate to convey a message; they have the role to act in the public interest. They have exercised that trustee role by the resolutions passed by both Councils.

Nevertheless, both Councils have also committed to ensuring that the public will be engaged in a continuous and responsive way to inform decision-making towards a regional government... and that work will have to be our (my) first priority after the legislation is passed.

Sincerely,



Louis Coutinho  
CAO Town of Windsor

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