

Introduction

Good afternoon, Minister Johns and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill 329. My name is Brenda Chisholm Beaton, Mayor of the Town of Port Hawkesbury. I'm speaking today in my capacity as President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. NSFM is the legislated voice of all 49 municipalities in Nova Scotia.

I would like to share some comments and concerns on behalf of the NSFM Board of Directors. I will also pose some questions that we as an NSFM board hope you will contemplate before Bill 329 goes to 3rd reading. My remarks will focus on three areas that municipalities deem critical to their success and essential to helping find solutions to the many significant challenges facing our province, and indeed our country:

1. Municipal Autonomy,
2. Collaboration, and
3. Consultation.

Municipally elected officials are leaders in their communities. They are decision makers in the level of government of proximity to the people and they have been elected by the same people that voted for you, our provincial MLA's.

The MGA and Halifax Charter give municipalities a mandate to make decisions in the best interests of their communities. They are the experts; from ongoing consultation, from the design and implementation of localized strategies and plans, and all with guidance and advice of experienced professional Municipal staff.

Unfortunately, Bill 329 ignores all of this; it will enable the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to bypass public and municipal

consultation and it will centralize authority to one person, essentially overriding the wishes of the public who voted Municipal council in, and the work and experience of Municipal Council and staff.

This should be cause for concern for absolutely everyone. Bill 329 is a major step backwards for Municipal autonomy.

Of course, we understand the urgency around the need for more housing across the housing spectrum! Municipal elected officials get calls daily. We know better than anyone the impact the housing crisis is having on this province – and on people – people who are here and people who want to be here.

I believe people are one of the most important resources in our Province, and growing our population is certainly key to our economic growth and our future. Further, meeting our current and future housing needs will require “all hands on deck,” from all orders of government, from all stakeholders, and of course, from the people themselves.

Many of you will be familiar with the One Nova Scotia Report. It came together at the request of the Government of Nova Scotia with a mandate to develop a 10-year plan to help achieve the ambitious goals set out in the report of the Commission on Building Our New Economy – commonly known as the Ivany Report.

The fundamental message of ONE NS is that we all need to work together! We must work together to reverse population trends and to generate higher levels of economic growth. We are making progress and isn't it wonderful that our population in Nova Scotia is growing. Part of these growing pains are challenges with housing among other things. Again, following this fundamental message of

One NS – solutions lie in our shared responsibility to work together, collaboratively.

To be successful, we need positive working relationships between our Municipal order of Government and the Provincial order of government.

Unfortunately, Bill 329 does not fit within the fundamental principles of collaboration nor is it reflective of the spirit of One Nova Scotia. This Bill was not created in collaboration with HRM Council. In fact, HRM and NSFM learned the details of this Bill only after it was introduced in the Nova Scotia legislature.

For NSFM, this is a step backwards in a relationship we felt was strong and getting stronger. Having spent almost two years working in very close partnership with the province on a new Memorandum of Understanding we are disappointed to not have been consulted on this Bill.

Premier Houston once said, “don’t come to me with problems, come to me with solutions”. NSFM and our municipal members WANT to be part of the solutions - including housing - BUT you need to bring us to the table because we have a great deal to offer.

Thus, as far as Bill 329 is concerned, NSFM sees it as an override of municipal autonomy, as a Bill that was written without consultation which is a requirement of the Halifax Charter, and lastly, as a Bill that was written without collaboration.

So, we are left to ask a few questions in our effort to understand what happened and to help steer this relationship in the right direction –

- 1) Will the government commit to proper consultation before introducing any Bills that impact Municipalities, such as Bill 329 with HRM?
- 2) How do we ensure future legislation is drafted in collaboration with municipalities?
- 3) How do we ensure municipal autonomy is respected now and into the future for HRM and for all Municipalities?
- 4) Will the government work with NSFM to determine a better path forward to strengthen the critical relationship between our two governments – especially when that relationship is challenged?

To close my remarks, I want to say very simply that we are all on the same team – as One Nova Scotia – working on behalf of the same people who elect us.

We are all united in our desire to build the best province possible with thriving inclusive communities that meet everyone’s needs, regardless of age, level of ability, or socioeconomic status.

As your teammate, we ask that you respect our autonomy as local governments, we ask you to consider the value to be had in working as partners, and finally, that you see value in consulting with and collaborating with Municipalities as well as other stakeholders.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before law amendments.