

DRAFT BILL 340 LAW AMENDMENTS NOTES:

The Town of Port Hawkesbury has been following Bill 340 as it is being debated in the Nova Scotia legislature.

I am speaking today on behalf of our Council to support this bill.

There is a great deal at stake for municipalities should this bill fail.

Today I'm going to talk about how the bill will benefit the Town of Port Hawkesbury.

Let me start by saying that I can certainly understand the challenges of negotiating a new MOU with 49 Municipalities, many of whom are different types - like towns regionals and rural municipalities - all of whom have different geographies, varied populations and sometimes, unique circumstances.

One thing that unites all municipalities - is in the fact that the MOU we have now is three decades old. We all know this. And we all can agree that we need a new MOU to ensure that municipalities, and ultimately the people we represent, are better served by local and provincial orders of government.

I want to remind the law amendments committee that we - municipalities- have been asking for a new MOU. And I want to commend this current government - and Premier Houston - for committing to this Mandate under the leadership of Minister Lohr and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing!

Another thing I would like to commend this government on, is the commitment to collaborate. There was an "ask" of Minister Lohr and his department. That ask was for direct collaboration with municipalities. And the answer to that ask was "yes".

I want to also acknowledge and thank all members of the advisory committee who worked with Minister Lohr's department for more than 18 months. These advisory committee members included representatives from NSFM, elected officials, and municipal administrators. This was a heavy lift - and numerous hours of time and dedication.

Then many of these advisory committee members worked with the province to consult with municipalities in August. I understand there was a lot of engagement- which is great.

So, what we learned is that a new MOU is a huge negotiation job that will need to be done in phases. For this phase there is a new municipal financial capacity grant formula, changes for corrections and housing transfer payments, changes for obsolete schools, as well as roads and infrastructure programs.

What does this all mean for the Town of Port Hawkesbury?

Eliminating the requirement for municipalities to cover deficits for housing and corrections will save our Town annually; freeing up funds means we can reinvest in our communities - and we all know that municipalities face major infrastructure challenges - and we need new revenue streams to tackle these!

Additionally- we can take these savings and leverage it in the new 50-50 cost-sharing infrastructure program being proposed. For example \$15 million is a significant amount to earmark for municipal infrastructure at 50 cent dollars. I can share that the Town of Port Hawkesbury is excited to potentially participate because we want to be proactive with housing - and to do that we need to make sure we are development ready. We can't do that alone - so having a program like this can make a big difference!

Although the Town of Port Hawkesbury does not see any immediate benefits from changes to the MOU for the Province to take over obsolete schools built prior to 1981 - we can certainly benefit from application to the roads program for trunks and collectors for Towns.

The MOU also includes changes to the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant.

The Municipal Financial Capacity Grant is a critical piece of the MOU because it helps bridge some of the gap for the financial sustainability of municipalities.

The Town of Port Hawkesbury is one of the municipal recipients of this grant - and under the unfrozen and newly proposed formula - we will receive additional funds for a new total of nearly \$300,000. This capacity grant boost will be greatly appreciated- as every year we sit down together as a council for budget deliberations- and having this extra funding means we can get more work done without raising taxes.

The Town of Port Hawkesbury's support for Bill 340 also lies in the next phases of MOU negotiations. We know this is only one step and that much more work is needed on important files of mutual interest- like mandatory education transfers, policing and more.

We believe Bill 340 is an important piece of legislation- because it will start us on a pathway that will modernize service exchange MOUs that will not only benefit all 49 municipalities - but also all the communities and people we serve.

Lastly, we thank this government for listening to the collective input of Nova Scotian municipalities. Bill 340 and continued work on modernizing the MOU will have great value to the Town of Port Hawkesbury- as well as other municipalities and citizens in Nova Scotia.

Thank you for your time on behalf of the Port Hawkesbury Town Council.