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From: Carole Gillies [REDACTED]
Sent: March 7, 2024 11:49 AM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Re: Bill 407 gives massive power to an unelected transition team.

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I was unable to present to the committee as my internet is down.

Please consider my submission:

1. Nova Scotia prides itself as the home of Joseph Howe and Responsible Government in Canada. It's astonishing that the Government of Nova Scotia is being asked to remove the democratic right to responsible government from Antigonish.

2. For many reasons, these decisions concerning the Town of Antigonish should be deferred until after the Municipal Elections of 2024.

Both municipalities state they are in a stable financial position. There is no crisis.

3. The current councillors did not campaign or run for office on this issue. It was disturbing to see Councillor Cormier (Town) say he has been working on this plan for four years (before the 2020 municipal elections), essentially, planning to deceive voters.

4. These councils have no mandate from Antigonish voters to make this major change to our local governance.

5. The consultation sessions arranged by the proponents were poorly designed and not helpful. Yes, people attended because they were interested to know about the proposed changes. In no way were the public asked if they supported consolidation. I was one of the attendees.

The "information" was copied from a brochure we had been mailed earlier. There were no speakers. We were told to note any questions and the Communication staff wrote the questions down. My questions received this response: "We don't know."

These sessions were no measure of support and should not be assessed as such.

The "consultations" began in early 2022, shortly after the "StFX Outbreak" of Omicron. After December 3, 2021, most people in Antigonish were sick with Covid. Businesses were closed. Residents were reluctant to attend public meetings. At least one meeting was a Covid spreader event.

7. Two surveys (other presenters gave details of the survey) contacted 14,000 and 15,000 residents and found the majority felt they had not been provided with enough information on the issue.

8. 4200 residents signed a petition objecting to the consolidation process in the current circumstances. It's regrettable the legislature was unable to accept the petition on a technicality.

9. I spent my career in business, and would require much more information before making or recommending such an important business decision.

Because of the secretive nature of the present councils, the untested procedure set out in this process, and the pressure to put this all in motion before the upcoming municipal elections, we have lost trust in these council members.

10. There are questions about the legitimacy of the council votes. In Antigonish County, two councillors were disqualified from voting.

Even so, the Council vote was essentially a tie vote, requiring votes by the chair (Warden). The vote in Town was similarly a tie, requiring a vote from the chair.

11. In these sessions before the Committee, Mayor Bouchie was dismissive of the surveys.

She has since received a Cease and Desist letter from the polling company, warning her that she has made false allegations before the committee and public.

12. Yet, Bill 407 sets up a transition team of current councils and gives them exceptional powers. The Act states that a coordinator is to be appointed along with a transition team. The Coordinator and two others are empowered in s. 8 (3):

(3) The Transition Committee may enter into contracts, sue and be sued, acquire real and personal property, engage officers and employees, prescribe a seal, make expenditures and do such other things as are required for the orderly dissolution of the Town and the transition to the Consolidated Municipality.

These are massive powers, and should not be left in the hands of a few, who will quite possibly lose their seats and be unelected, members of the transition team. Members of the legislative assembly should reflect on this power grab, and the reasons why the proponents are so desperate to avoid responsible government to control this process.

Please vote to defeat this bill, let Antigonish Town and County have their municipal election, and let informed, councillors make the necessary decisions.

13. A legal challenge is still before the Courts. Defer the legislation until the legal appeal issue has been settled. The government already ruled once that they would not introduce legislation while the legal process was before the Courts.

This new untested process will affect Antigonish residents for many years. The units are stable now. Ask yourselves: What's the rush? Why the pressure? What are the proponents hiding?

14. This is an untested process. Antigonish should not be a testing ground.

Yours truly,
Carole Gillies