

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties

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Check against delivery

Strong communities are places where you fix things, even if you didn't break them, where you ask for help when you need it and where you offer help when you can.

Strong communities have deep roots and the citizens stand by each other through thick and thin.

These are the values our forefathers lived by as they helped build this province, and established our foundations and our government.

They have handed to us the responsibility of its preservation and improvement.

To fulfill that responsibility, we need to continue to recognize that our communities extend beyond municipal boundaries.

Strong communities are the building blocks of a strong province.

We must shape our decisions and actions for the betterment of our province.

The recent, unprecedented MSI funding has helped some municipalities to thrive and others to survive.

Some municipalities – our urban neighbours among them - continue to struggle.

Since I have been the Minister, we have dealt with more than 60 villages, towns and summer villages requesting special assistance well beyond the normal advisory support.

New requests are coming in nearly every week.

We've provided special grants, we've mediated, and in the more extreme cases, we have had to step in and initiate municipal inspections, corporate reviews, and appoint official administrators.

Before you sit back and think, well, he's obviously not talking about me, think again.

Their problems are your problems.

The citizens in our rural municipalities rely on amenities provided in nearby towns and villages.

In turn, small businesses in those towns and villages rely on you to shop at their stores and use their services to help drive the local economy.

Sounds simple, but in reality, this urban - rural inter-dependence is severely strained.

Because many urban municipalities are now struggling to provide basic services such as safe drinking water; wastewater removal; fire services; recreation; and libraries.

They are being forced to increase mill rates beyond what the residents can bear to meet basic needs; to balance their budgets; and to provide basic services – services you all benefit from.

This is the reality for many, if not most of the towns and villages in your municipalities.

This is the reality for the heart of your communities, where your residents gather to shop, go to church, and play sports.

Urban and rural municipalities each contribute to the others' quality of life.

As one community, neighbours take part in festivals, savour the taste of local produce, and visit libraries and museums.

It comes down to this: you are them and they are you.

And they are in trouble.

You are leaning heavily upon the services they provide and perhaps without even knowing it, you are adding to their burden.

When you develop around the edges of their towns, you are adding to their burden.

When you keep low mill rates while theirs must remain high, you are adding to their burden.

When you use their recreation and culture facilities without contributing to their upkeep, you are adding to their burden.

This needs to stop.

What I am asking you to do is simple.

Pay for what you use.

Find a solution to share your resources and strengthen your communities.

I am proud to be able to use my own constituency as a positive example for you.

The County of St. Paul is contributing \$175 thousand of its MSI money to help improve the fire hall in the Town of St. Paul.

Also, the Municipal District of Big Lakes is contributing \$100 thousand to help build a new skating arena in the Village of Kinuso.

These are two examples of municipalities working together to strengthen their communities.

I want to see more of it.

But this is the bare minimum of what may be required.

This type of resource sharing may correct the imbalance we are seeing in municipalities.

In the short term, it may not be the easy way, but it is the right way.

The majority of rural Albertans - good people with good judgment - are ready to do what they must to preserve the future of Alberta's rural communities.

Call on them to do that.

They have proved that they can come together time and again when they are in a crisis.

We need to come together now.

As Minister of Municipal Affairs, I am giving you this advice.

Advice that I hope will help you help yourselves.

None of us here today knows what the future may hold.

Decisions made by members of the AAMDC over the past 100 years, have helped shape this great province.

But, solutions that have worked in the past, may no longer be relevant for our future.

We owe it to all Albertans to do everything in our power to establish strong foundations that will help see us through unsettled and uncertain times.

As leaders, you have a greater obligation than to think only of your local political interests.

You must think about the effects of your decisions on the next generation to come.

You have before you a tremendous responsibility for the long-term viability of your communities.

I have always believed that when you work together, you will achieve a better result than if you'd attempted it on your own.

Divided, there is little you can do.

United, there is little you cannot do.

Sitting back and watching as one by one of your urban neighbours fall into debt and disrepair is not an option.

To position yourselves for the future, to ensure your sustainability and self-sufficiency, you must work together like never before.

I know I've said this before, but I want to emphasize this point:

The Premier believes that strong communities are a key ingredient to a strong Province.

This philosophy shapes my ministry in everything we do.

The Premier has made strong, sustainable communities a priority for this province.

As such, it is my priority to find a way to support the development and long-term sustainability of Alberta's municipalities.

The recent economic instability being experienced around the world has made us all stop and think about where we are, where we are going, and what actions we will need to take to remain competitive.

Alberta is well accustomed to the ups and downs of the global marketplace... we have been dealing with volatile resource revenues since the 1970's.

And we know it is in times like these that we need strong communities.

You've been talking about how to make your communities stronger, and we've been talking about how to make your communities stronger.

We don't have the solution yet...

But one thing we all know is that the status quo isn't an option.

In the meantime, here is what you must do:

Lead by example.

Help carry something heavy.

Share your skills and your resources to invest in strong communities because they are the building blocks of a strong province.

These are the same values past leaders of the AAMDC lived by as they established our province's foundations over the last century.

As today's leaders, I challenge you, to make the decisions you must to leave as your legacy a stronger Alberta.