

Alberta Urban Municipalities Association

Edmonton, Alberta

Friday, October 3, 2008

Check against delivery

Strong communities are where neighbours know each other, where values are shared, and where safety and security are a given for everyone.

For three days you have been talking about your future.

Together you have learned, shared best practices and discussed solutions for your success.

I too have been looking at what lies ahead.

Our Premier told me to make it my priority to support the development and long-term sustainability of Alberta's municipalities.

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

And I want you to know that this philosophy shapes our ministry for everything we do.

It is why we introduced the predictable, long-term funding program last year.

MSI is about our commitment to you – providing significant, long-term funding to allow your municipalities to meet demands of growth.

The economic instability that is being experienced by other countries and even in other provinces, serves as a reminder of our good fortune in Alberta.

But our prosperity can be credited to more than just good fortune.

The economic strength of our province has been developed by the capacity to do what has to be done when we know the course is right.

It would be naïve of us to believe that the future of our province is secure to us because the past has been so successful.

Everyone in this room shares a responsibility to do what it takes to build strong communities because they are the building blocks of a strong Alberta.

Alberta's recent economic leadership has led to an unprecedented level of prosperity.

And believe me, I know...

Demands and expectations also grow in times of prosperity, but basic fundamentals must remain at the forefront of everything we do and plan for.

Certain services are essential for every community, such as fire services; safe drinking water; wastewater removal; and libraries.

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

This commitment by our Premier to communities has given you a rare opportunity to take responsibility for the long-term viability of your communities.

Choose your projects wisely.

Money wasted is opportunity wasted.

I will not defend non-essential spending by municipalities when I know this province could use the money to put more police on the streets.

Make decisions that will enhance the quality of life for your neighbours.

Position yourselves to embrace changing economic times so the citizens living in your communities will continue to receive the basic fundamental services they need.

Leave as your legacy a significant and lasting impact on the self reliance of your municipality.

Strengthening municipal sustainability is the reason the Premier introduced MSI.

I need to stress to you that MSI is the province's response to municipal financial needs.

The funding is unprecedented in Canada, both in amount, and in the length of the commitment.

There is no intention to provide any further new funding once the MSI is ramped up to its full \$1.4 billion per year.

Despite this unprecedented funding, some municipalities continue to struggle.

In the past 18 months, Municipal Affairs has dealt with more than 60 municipalities requesting special assistance well beyond the normal advisory support.

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

Obviously the challenges facing municipalities are complex.

But we have before us a great opportunity.

As the Premier said yesterday great communities don't happen by accident – they are the result of civic leadership thinking boldly about building for the future: The partnership between governments, business and the community.

So, one of my fundamental beliefs is that when you work together, you achieve a better result than if you'd tried to cope on your own.

I toured Alberta last year to discuss the Municipal Sustainability Initiative with you.

Your input resulted in important changes that helped us deliver the successful program we have today.

I toured the province once more this summer to discuss two fundamental questions with you:

1. What are the biggest challenges facing your community?
2. What changes are needed today so communities can still be strong 50 years from now?

We had nine meetings and in some ways each one was unique, but there were also a number of common themes.

I consistently heard a need for greater regional co-operation and communication, for more long-term regional planning, for access to quality water, to attract and retain skilled staff, from planners to CAOs.

I have heard many of these concerns re-iterated right here at this convention: the need to work together to make the most of the upcoming MGA review in 2010, the importance of engaging the public in discussions of municipal reforms.

As your representative to government – and not as government’s representative to you – the conversations we share are critically important.

And while we may not always agree, I do listen.

I have heard you and will draw from it as we move forward to forge an environment where municipalities will thrive and support strong, healthy, effective communities that Albertans are proud to call home.

I think it’s clear to all of us that maintaining the status quo is not an option.

There are 360 municipalities in Alberta. And taking a “one size fits all” approach is not working.

That is a challenge we’re going to have to continue to address.

We share a common goal to do what it takes to maintain our legacy of communities – the building blocks of a strong Alberta.

We must ensure that Alberta remains a place where people live in strong, safe, vibrant communities.

Within strong communities, families settle and nurture the children of our future as they develop into the next generation of our province’s leaders.

So let’s do what needs to be done.

Let’s work together to determine the right course to secure a strong future for our children and grandchildren and ensure they inherit strong, prosperous municipalities.

As I said before, leave as your legacy a significant and lasting impact on the self reliance of your municipality.

