

# CEO Report

## Strategies for a Sustainable Future

Rob Nolan



2023 was the beginning of a new chapter for Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and for myself.

I began my tenure as Chief Executive Officer of this wonderful organization in December 2022, a little over 11 months ago, and hit the ground running. Before I even started in the position, it was abundantly clear to me that the MNL team – staff, board, members – is passionate about our communities and dedicated to a successful and sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador's municipalities. This became even clearer as, in my first week on the job, I attended a vibrant urban municipalities committee meeting in St. John's and a Board of Directors meeting. My pride for leading this organization and my confidence in our team has only continued to grow over the past 11 months.

The municipal sector is full of committed and hard-working leaders, and MNL is here to support you. I am grateful to all who have welcomed me into this organization and sector, and I'm inspired daily by so many of you; from veteran mayors, councillors, and staff who lead by example to newcomer mayors, councillors, and staff who will carry the torch for the next generations of our communities. We are all working together to help the communities we love to flourish. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work alongside you, and I take the role of CEO of MNL very seriously.

### Challenges and Opportunities

In addition to the opportunities on the horizon, there are also great challenges ahead. Our communities are experiencing more extreme weather events more frequently than ever before. Coastal erosion is now a threat at our doorsteps as we see homes at risk of being lost. This is on top of aging infrastructure for which our municipalities need long-term planning and reliable funding sources. Many communities have water and wastewater infrastructure in need of maintenance or replacement at costs our municipalities cannot bear alone. Yet it is increasingly difficult for our municipalities to reach on funding and programming opportunities from other orders of government. In addition to the responsibilities that municipalities have traditionally held, many of you are being required to respond to is-



sues that are outside of municipal jurisdiction and are often complex and challenging. Our communities are navigating through a physician shortage and a healthcare crisis. We are facing a housing affordability and homelessness crisis across our province and across Canada, exemplified by our neighbours living in tents across the road from the Confederation Building. These challenges are conflated with aging and declining populations and declining economies for many of our communities. Again and again, our municipal leaders are at the forefront of supporting our most vulnerable neighbours. Through all of these challenges, MNL is here to support you.

## Advocacy

We've had a busy year at MNL. There is no shortage of issues to advocate for on your behalf, nor a lack of challenges through which we can help you navigate. On the advocacy front, we kicked off 2023 with an advocacy campaign that led to the Provincial Government increasing Municipal Operating Grants by 27% and resulted in much-needed but much-delayed funding from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program making it to your communities. We also advocated for the Provincial Government to provide us with their plan on regional government. While we did not get the answer we wanted – the Provincial Government announced in April that they are not moving forward with a regional government structure – we continue to push for action that will foster and support regional approaches across the province. Whether we are responding to infrastructure challenges, preparing for the effects of climate change, or supporting economic development, we are all better off when we work with our neighbouring communities.

In addition to the strategic advocacy pillars of sustainable municipal infrastructure, a regional approach, and municipal fiscal sustainability, we continue to advance our advocacy pillars of equity, diversity, and inclusion; community health and safety; and climate resilience. During 2023, we have strategically deepened existing partnerships and started new partnerships with organizations acting in fire and emergency services; housing and homelessness; mental health and wellness; anti-racism, truth and reconciliation; and climate change mitigation and adaptation to ensure we are providing you the resources you need as well as making sure we are advocating for you with the strongest voices in the province. Our advocacy efforts never stop. In October alone, we have met with Premier Furey, Minister Pike, Minister Haggie, and Minister Abbott to advocate on your behalf.

2023 has also been a busy year for our programs and services. Canoe Procurement Group has seen a significant increase year-over-year in usage by our members. Many of you have told us that you are able to procure the items you need in a shorter timeframe at a lower cost because of our partnership with Canoe. We continue to offer third-party membership benefits that save you money and time such as municipal general insurance through Cal Legrow, Home Auto and Travel Insurance through Johnson Insurance, travel discounts through LeGrow's Travel and PAL Airlines, and more.



## Programs and Services

We also continue to grow our program offerings based on your needs. In response to challenges that municipalities are experiencing in acquiring auditing services as well as ever-increasing costs of auditing and bookkeeping, we are working with Community Sector Council to offer a bookkeeping support program for municipalities. This bookkeeping program should reduce the cost and time associated with financial management throughout the year, as well as the costs associated with annual auditing. We have recently partnered with TxtSquad, who you will see at our Trade Show, who will offer discounted rates for automated community texting services. In early 2024, we expect to acquire partners in human resources, finance, and IT to offer membership supports in those areas. We are also working with CIBC to launch a high interest savings account that members will be able to invest with to acquire high rates of return.

## Membership

Throughout 2023, we've also been busy with membership events. We held our first two virtual small towns roundtables, which had excellent engagement and invigorating discussions. We also held our two meetings of the Urban Municipalities Committee – in Portugal Cove-St. Phillip's and Bonavista – at which representatives from our largest 23 municipalities held discussions, heard from experts on a variety of subjects, and shared common opportunities and challenges. In early September, we reinvigorated our regional meetings for the first time since 2019 with a very successful Northern/Western Regional Meeting in Deer Lake, at which members shared common excitement and frustrations, heard from a variety of presenters, and even made time for trivia! And, of course, we have held our two main events – our Symposium in May and our Conference in October. All of MNL's events offer unique opportunities for members of our sector to come together and to learn from each other and invited presenters, while providing the important opportunity for the MNL team to hear directly from our members.

2023 also saw the launch of MNL's much-anticipated 2023-25 Strategic Plan. My vision for this plan is to spend the next two years, leading up to our 75th anniversary in 2026, focusing the work of MNL and building upon the already strong foundation of our organization to ensure we continue to support a sustainable and successful municipal sector in Newfoundland and Labrador for the coming decades.

## Strategic Planning

The 2023-25 Strategic Plan has three strategic pillars: Strengthening Our Organization, Seat at the Table, and Sector-Leading Solutions. The first pillar, Strengthening Our Organization, aims to build on the already excellent foundation set by the first 75 years of our organization to ensure we are sustainable and effective in meeting members' needs for the next 75 years. Priority areas under Strengthening Our Organization include Governance; Evaluation; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Organizational Sustainability; and Leveraging Partnerships. The revised By-Laws being presented at this annual general meeting are the first step in advancing governance for MNL, and it will be followed by efforts to modernize our Board of Directors and



internal governance processes. We are undertaking a review of internal policies and developing a performance management framework to advance our organization and enable us to monitor our progress toward strategic goals. Over the next two years, we will also be advancing strategic partnership to help us support your needs.

Under the strategic pillar of Seat At The Table, you will find our strategic advocacy goals: sustainable municipal infrastructure; a regional approach; municipal fiscal stability; equity, diversity, and inclusion; community health and safety; and climate resilience. These strategic goals encapsulate the important conversations occurring at the community level and between orders of government, and MNL continues to work hard to amplify the voice of municipalities in our province. Our objectives under this pillar in the strategic plan lay out a multi-year plan toward advancing the conversations in these crucial areas.

Under the third strategic pillar of Sector-Leading Solutions, we are focused on providing the programs, services, and events that respond to the needs and the challenges of municipalities. In addition to the growth and development of programs noted above, our priority areas under this pillar include: Labour Market Analysis and Development, to help your municipalities enable much-needed economic growth; Sector Capacity, responding to capacity constraints of municipalities by providing you with programs and services to bridge those gaps; Knowledge Sharing and Best Practices, offering opportunities for leaders across the municipal sector in NL to share experiences and best practices at our events; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, enabling more people to join and thrive in our municipal sector; Climate Resilience, working with you and partner organizations to help municipalities to respond to and mitigate the increasingly harmful effects of climate change; and Local Democracy, ensuring our local governments and elections are strong.

As I finish my first year as CEO of MNL, I look forward to the horizon. With a strong team in our organization, a passionate Board of Directors, and a membership of unwavering community champions, I am confident we will weather the storms ahead together.

