

# Toward Vibrant and Sustainable Communities



Rob Nolan  
MNL CEO

As I reflect on my second year leading Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, I am filled with gratitude, pride, and optimism. I am grateful for the hard work of the MNL staff team, our Board of Directors, and our municipal membership, who are all dedicated to making our communities vibrant and sustainable.

In 2024, municipalities continued to face significant challenges: inflationary pressures on budgets, aging demographics and declining tax bases, more frequent and intense adverse weather events, forest fires, and increasing demands on municipal services. Despite these growing pressures, mayors, councillors, and staff across the municipal sector have consistently risen to the occasion. MNL staff and our Board stand ready to support you and walk beside you in this important work.

I am proud of what we have accomplished over the past year, as well as the progress we continue to make as we look to the future. In 2024, for the first time since before the COVID-19 pandemic, we held a full schedule of Regional Meetings: Avalon/Eastern in Clarenville, Central in Grand Falls-Windsor, Northern/Western in Cow Head, and Labrador in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We also hosted two successful Urban Municipalities Committee meetings, in Pasadena and Conception Bay South.

Our advocacy efforts in 2024 resulted in several key wins: the Municipal Training Financial Assistance Fund was doubled, fire department funding was increased, and requested legislative changes were incorporated into the new Towns and Local Service Districts Act. Our programming for members has expanded as well, most notably through our housing capacity-building program, which now employs two staff working directly with municipalities to assist in securing funding for infrastructure and housing. Additionally, MNL has strengthened internally, with updated policies, a performance measurement framework, and governance improvements, including the recruitment of three new Board members to be presented at this year's Annual General Meeting.

As we look toward 2025 and beyond, I am optimistic about the future of our municipal sector. While the challenges we face are significant, the dedication of the people on our councils, in our communities, and within the MNL team inspires confidence. 2025 will be a pivotal year, with new municipal legislation for the first time in 25 years, municipal elections in September (alongside upcoming provincial and federal elections), a new CCBF Agreement, and new federal infrastructure programming. At MNL, we remain committed to helping your communities become and stay as strong as possible.



## Sector-Leading Solutions

Over the past year, we have developed new programming and enhanced existing initiatives to support our members. In May 2024, we launched the Housing Capacity-Building Project, supported by ACOA and the Department of Immigration, Population Growth, and Skills. Through this program, we have employed two regional housing capacity-building officers to work directly with municipalities, helping them access programming and funding that supports housing growth in their communities. So far, our Housing Capacity-Building Officers have made over 120 touchpoints, met with more than 50 municipalities, and will have helped submit more than 10 proposals by the end of 2024, two of which have already resulted in funding for projects in our towns. In the spring, we launched a high-interest savings account in partnership with CIBC, offering our members more than 5 percent interest on a liquid account. Our Canoe Procurement Program also saw record participation this year, marking five successful years since its introduction.

As part of our strategic plan, we leveraged partnerships to strengthen our programs and organization throughout 2024. Earlier this year, we partnered with Business and Arts NL to launch the Our Creative Home Project, supported by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This project is supporting 12 towns across the province in hosting public artwork to celebrate their communities, including indoor murals and artists-in-residence. We also continue our work on regional economic development through the Regional Economic Development (RED) Partnership alongside the NL Association of CBDCs, Community Sector Council, Harris Centre, and Economic Developers Association of NL.

At this conference, we are excited to launch the Tomorrow's Towns program, focused on placemaking and supported by the Sustainable Development Goals Grant from Employment and Social Development Canada. This initiative, which replaces the beloved Tidy Towns program paused in 2018, uses placemaking principles and the Sustainable Development Goals to guide participating communities through one of five streams: heritage and arts, healthy built environment, food security, environmental stewardship, and climate action. To execute the Tomorrow's Towns program, we are working with a wide range of partners, including Food First NL, Landscape NL Horticultural Association, Stewardship Association of Municipalities NL, Choices for Youth, Business and Arts NL, Conservation Corps NL, Heritage NL, COD-NL, Community Sector Council, and more.

By the end of 2024, MNL will have signed memoranda of understanding with both of Newfoundland and Labrador's public post-secondary education institutions. In October, we renewed our MOU with College of the North Atlantic, continuing our strong collaboration. Soon, we will sign our first MOU with Memorial University, formalizing and enhancing our long-standing relationship. These partnerships support labour force development, economic development, research, and other initiatives that directly benefit the municipal sector.





Another significant initiative is the Municipal Financial Support Program, which helps towns become more fiscally sustainable. Supported by the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, this project assists towns in meeting provincial financial reporting requirements, addressing barriers, and ensuring compliance to improve financial sustainability across municipalities.

## Seat At The Table

2024 was another impactful year for MNL's advocacy efforts. Out of the 11 advocacy resolutions passed at the 2023 AGM, we have already achieved progress on seven, including wins related to support for fire departments, increased funding for municipal training, and the taxation of vacant properties. A significant milestone this year was the Royal Assent of the Towns and Local Service Districts Act, marking a major legislative success after years of advocacy for new, enabling legislation.

In response to the three fire and emergency services resolutions passed at the 2023 AGM, we held multiple meetings with the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, resulting in increased funding for fire department responses outside municipal boundaries and funding for research into fire services. The data from this research will help shape future policy changes to better support fire departments and improve community safety.

While we've had many advocacy wins in 2024, our work is far from over. Since the Cabinet shuffle this summer, we have been meeting with newly appointed Ministers to raise challenges and propose solutions on behalf of our membership. In addition to the housing-related work done through the Housing Capacity-Building program, we are advocating for policy changes that will empower municipalities to address the housing crisis. We have also heard loud-and-clear from our members that harassment of staff and councillors is growing, and we are working on a related advocacy campaign. We also continue advocacy related to the Municipal Conduct Act and ATIPP to ensure towns meet the legislated requirements while not facing undue hardship. With another set of advocacy resolutions being voted on at this AGM and many policy and program conversations still ongoing, our advocacy team will continue to have a busy agenda for 2025.

## Strengthening Our Organization

Ensuring that MNL remains a strong and sustainable organization is a key pillar of our strategic plan. In 2024, we made several important steps toward enhancing the governance and sustainability of our organization.

The governance improvements we've been working on since 2022 culminated in the addition of three new positions to our Board of Directors, based on recommendations from our Governance Review. These positions—focused on legal, human resources, and



finance—were approved by our membership in 2023, and we are pleased to present three candidates for these seats at this year's AGM.

We have also worked closely with MNP Financial Services to improve our financial practices. MNP provides quarterly financial updates and a multi-year financial forecast, helping us plan for the long-term financial health of the organization. This work has informed the proposed 5% membership fee increase for 2025 and has driven changes in MNL operations to improve efficiency.

## Looking Ahead

As we move into 2025, there are many exciting opportunities on the horizon. First and foremost, the new Towns and Local Service Districts Act will be proclaimed, modernizing municipal governance and operations for the first time in 25 years. This legislation includes new tools for municipalities to pursue economic development and improve fiscal sustainability. Over the next year, MNL will play a critical role in supporting municipalities as they adapt to this new legislative framework.

2025 also brings municipal elections in September, alongside provincial and federal elections, which will create an opportunity to renew our relationships with government partners. At the same time, the Provincial and Federal Governments recently signed the new Canada Community-Building Fund (CCBF) Agreement and we anticipate new federal infrastructure programming, both of which will provide additional resources to support municipal infrastructure needs.

Internally, we will continue to strengthen our organization's capacity, focusing on incorporating the performance measurement framework we developed this year into all aspects of our operations. This will ensure that we are tracking our progress and making data-informed decisions to improve services for our members.

Looking ahead, we also see tremendous potential for our Regional Economic Development Partnership, as we work closely with regional partners to support community-driven economic development initiatives. Our housing and climate action programs will also remain a priority, providing municipalities with the support they need to address pressing challenges in these areas.

With all this activity, MNL remains committed to advocating for our members, helping municipalities navigate these new opportunities, and ensuring that communities of all sizes across Newfoundland and Labrador are empowered to thrive.

As we prepare for the busy year ahead, we remain focused on making sure our members have the resources, support, and advocacy they need to succeed. I look forward to working together with all of you as we continue building stronger communities and a brighter future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

