

CHARTING THE COURSE TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



Councillor Amy Coady
President

I am pleased to bring forward the 2024 President's report. This year, we have made significant progress in advancing the municipal sector through new projects, ongoing advocacy work, and the strengthening of relationships with our partners. We have made progress, but there is still much work to be done.

The work that MNL does often happens beyond the glare of the public spotlight. We instead prefer to focus that light on the results of our work, rather than the process. This approach is enabled by the foundational work we have done to build strong relationships with government staff and elected officials, and an evidence-based approach to advocacy. Doing this work prior to meeting with ministers, deputy ministers, and government department heads allows MNL to enter each conversation with a clear understanding of the problem, its root causes, and potential solutions that will benefit all municipalities.

This approach, combined with a collaborative, rather than adversarial, attitude is a cornerstone of our advocacy success. And there have been several notable successes in the past year.

Budget 2024 saw further increases to municipal operating grants, improvements to fire services support, and a doubling of the Municipal Training Fund. These gains were a direct result of MNL's advocacy work.

Fire departments across the province, as you are well aware, face increasing pressures as they are called to an increasing number of highway calls, in addition to increasingly serving as first responders for medical emergencies. Without corresponding increases in funding to fully support these services, municipalities must bear the burden of increased costs. Work resulting from resolutions put forth by members in 2023, has led to an increase for fire services funding in the 2024 provincial budget, along with a commitment to fund research work to determine the needs, gaps, and available resources within fire departments across the province. This research work is well underway, and we look forward to bringing the results forward to you, our members. The success of MNL's advocacy efforts is a testimony to the effectiveness of our relationships within government.

MNL's relationship-building work with the Federal Government has led to enabling our communities to have a direct impact on the ongoing housing crisis. Traditionally, housing has not been a municipal responsibility in Newfoundland and Labrador. Yet the housing crisis – rising rents, the unavailability of suitable housing, rising costs that make home ownership effectively unachievable for many first-time homebuyers – has made it a municipal issue, as the impacts are felt throughout our communities. Thanks to a commitment from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), MNL has hired two Housing Capacity Building Officers to assist with funding applications and sourcing housing solutions.

Speaking of capacity building, MNL is embarking on a new project to provide support to



municipalities in meeting their legislative requirements for financial reporting. The Financial Support Program will provide select municipalities with the additional resources they so desperately need. And, like much of our work, this does not happen without the support and co-operation of our partners – in this case, the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

We have much to celebrate as an organization and as community leaders. Recent successes have improved the municipal landscape, and the future is, for the most part, filled with potential and promise.

But there are still problems within the sector. Most disturbing among these is the erosion of civil behaviour, leading to fractious councils. To put it bluntly, this behaviour is unacceptable. Abuse and harassment have no place within the work of municipal governance. The fallout from this behaviour can be seen in the empty seats of council chambers, in byelections unable to attract a single candidate, and in news stories detailing the unnecessary drama of combative councils.

Differing opinions and the right to voice those opinions through debate are a core principle of a functioning democracy. But these conversations must remain civil and respectful. It is with deep regret, and a certain amount of shame, that I must admit our sector has more than its fair share of people unable to voice differing opinions in a reasonable and rational manner.

We, the council members elected to lead our communities, must look within, and ask ourselves: are we behaving in a manner befitting community leaders? Are we entering the conversation with respect, compassion and understanding? We must lead by example. For those unable to abide by this simple requirement, ask yourself: are you the right person to lead your community?

This need for civility is all the more important as we strive to inspire civic engagement ahead of the 2025 municipal election. We must be ambassadors for the municipal sector, and model the behaviour we wish to see in others.

MNL has been doing advocacy work to this end, and

remains committed to solving the problem of councillor harassment and mistreatment. In the meantime, we continue to work with Lifewise to provide mental health services for those impacted by negative behaviour or dealing with the stresses that come with being a municipal council member.

Alongside the critically necessary advocacy and programming work being done by MNL staff, under direction of the board, we continue to bring forward projects to enhance your communities. At the 2024 Municipal Symposium, we launched the Our Creative Home project in partnership with Business and Arts NL and Year of the Arts. This program provides funding for murals and artist residencies in 12 towns across the province. With more than 50 project applications from communities across the province, it is safe to say there is a desire for increased public arts funding among municipalities.

Artful displays of municipal governance come in many forms, as do community enhancement projects. The much-loved Tidy Towns program quietly set below the horizon in 2018. Rising from the memory of this program is the new Tomorrow's Towns program, which is proudly being launched at the 2024 Conference. This new program expands the breadth of possibility for creating vibrant and welcoming communities across the province.

We can do great work together. We will continue to do great work. And, through compassion, listening, research, and action, we can find a path forward as we navigate a course to a sustainable future.



Municipalities

Newfoundland and Labrador

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