

**President Russell Walker's Report to Delegates**  
**UNSM Spring Workshop**  
**May 9, 2013**

I want to welcome all of you to wonderful Yarmouth for the UNSM Spring Workshop. I hope you had productive caucus meetings last night.

I want to speak with you today on some key initiatives UNSM is working on—both financial and non-financial—which we see as opportunities to improve the state of municipal government in Nova Scotia.

On the non-financial side, the UNSM wants to work with the Province on an MOU that will improve and enhance the working relationship between both orders of government. This is coming out of the work of the Fiscal Review.

We all know municipalities are facing increasing regulation demands from the provincial and federal orders of government—including water and wastewater standards, LED streetlights, solid waste management targets, climate change adaptation, and fire services to name a few. At the same time municipal funding sources

are not changing—we still rely on property taxes for the bulk of our revenues.

In future, we want to ensure that the Province consults with the UNSM and municipalities on any proposed policies or legislation that will financially impact municipalities. We would like to discuss the possibility of instituting a policy whereby any provincial regulations impacting municipalities be discussed from the beginning to ensure the regulations are achievable, effective and manageable by municipalities. This consultation would also involve, at a minimum, annual meetings between the UNSM, AMA and various provincial departments to work on joint priorities. We view this MOU as moving well beyond the one-year notice letter to a more collaborative process among the Province, UNSM and municipalities.

Another aspect of this MOU we would like to see is an expanded timeframe to comply with the provincial regulations. We know that municipalities will be challenged to meet these unreasonable timelines given the exorbitant costs associated with the new standards, especially as we have the federal wastewater regulations to contend with.

On another non-financial support, we are working with SNSMR to streamline our resolutions process. SNSMR will appoint a staff person to coordinate all provincial resolutions on behalf of UNSM. All provincial responses from the various departments will be sent to SNSMR where they will be compiled in a single document which will be sent to the UNSM office upon completion. This will improve the response rate from all provincial departments.

As you are aware, last year the membership endorsed the recommendations in the Towns Task Force Report. These recommendations will provide important legislative changes and tools to improve downtowns and urban areas of rural municipalities. These recommendations will also provide alternative ways to encourage municipalities to work better together on shared services.

To address these recommendations, a coordination committee has been established comprised of municipal and provincial officials along with a series of sub-committees including economic development, land-use planning, regional service delivery, and municipal indicators. Each of these sub-committees will address specific recommendations in the report. We anticipate

each subcommittee to complete their workplans over the next two months.

The other big initiative the UNSM is working on is the Fiscal Review. For the first time, UNSM and AMA have been meeting with several deputy ministers from various departments to discuss the current state of affairs facing municipalities. The review has provided a comprehensive analysis of the various provincial programs provided to municipalities as well as the current financial state of municipalities. While this work is not complete, results thus far indicate financial challenges ahead for a number of municipalities.

The Province has indicated there is no new money to support the recommendations of the Fiscal Review. However, we feel that because municipalities made significant sacrifices to the Province in getting them "Back to Balance"—to the tune of \$50 million when the MOU was axed—it is time that they provide additional revenue to municipalities beginning in the 2013-14 fiscal year. We see this as an opportunity to create a new financial MOU to address payments to education, corrections and housing. We would also like to see additional provincial dollars to assist towns with roads.

Speaking of education, the Province in its Spring Budget announced that municipalities will pay an increase of \$12.2 million in contributions to public education. So a new MOU to address skyrocketing education costs cannot come too soon. The budget also announced that municipalities will start paying for DNA testing to the tune of \$1.1 million per year. This represents a new download which was formally paid for by the Department of Justice.

As you all know, the Federal Government in its recent budget announced a new infrastructure program. A great deal of effort on behalf of FCM went into lobbying the Federal Government to ensure municipal interests were represented as the program develops. These negotiations are ongoing.

One of the key recommendations coming out of the FCM lobbying efforts, in conjunction with the municipal associations, is that the majority of funds be allocated to municipal projects. Also, because the bulk of these dollars could go towards meeting the federal and provincial wastewater regulations, it was recommended that a separate fund be created solely for this purpose. FCM, the UNSM, other municipal associations and

municipalities will be pushing hard to ensure these items are addressed in the development of the new program.

Over the next year we are anticipating that the Province will form a committee with the UNSM and AMA to review the *Municipal Elections Act*. A number of issues have been raised by returning officers working in the 2012 elections. We also heard concerns raised by a number of our elected officials through a recent UNSM email survey. We hope to resolve these issues prior to the next municipal elections in 2016.

Over the long term we have requested that the Province conduct a review of the *Municipal Government Act* which has not been reviewed since its inception in 1999. We would also like to see a review of the Halifax Charter.

The UNSM, together with AMA and SNSMR, has put together an excellent training plan for 2013. SNSMR held a series of workshops on various aspects of municipal government. The UNSM will be hosting a municipal law workshop on June 7. Facilitated by UNSM Solicitor Kevin Latimer of Cox and Palmer, I would encourage both newly elected and experienced councillors to attend. It will be an excellent session.

As a result of hearing from our members, we are also offering a series of regional workshops hosted by the PVSC. The main purpose of these sessions is to provide clear explanations of how properties are assessed. We have scheduled five sessions across the province in September. As these sessions become finalized, registration information will be sent out to the membership.

The UNSM office is always looking for ideas for training sessions. So if there is specific training you would like to see, I encourage you to contact our UNSM staff with your suggestions.

With the Federal Government eliminating operating funding for RDA's, economic development has been high on the agenda of UNSM and municipalities. RDA's in their existing form have either wound down or will be winding down shortly. To be frank, the new Regional Enterprise Network model has met with mixed views among municipalities. Some units will move ahead as proposed; others will have different configurations while some units will choose to go it alone.

I want to thank UNSM Executive Director Betty MacDonald and Past President Deputy Warden Jimmy

MacAlpine for working with the Province in communicating municipal concerns and providing valuable information to municipalities in the RDA transition process. This has not been an easy task for municipalities, including HRM.

On the broader topic of economic development, the Province has put together the Commission on Building Our New Economy chaired by Acadia President and Vice-Chancellor Ray Ivany. The Commission is going around the province to solicit valuable input on the future of economic development, particularly in rural areas. I am pleased to report that Mr. Ivany will be speaking to the UNSM delegates at the upcoming Fall Conference in November. Part of this session will also be to engage the delegates on new ideas for economic development.

As we all know there will likely be a provincial election called by the end of 2013. The UNSM wants to be prepared when the writ is dropped by preparing a series of questions to send out to each of the three parties. Key questions will include support for a financial and non-financial MOU, education costs, infrastructure program and reviews of the MGA and Halifax Charter to name a few.



In 2012 we began Advocacy Days where UNSM board members met with as many MLA's as possible over a two-day period to discuss key municipal issues. This was a successful event as we met with over 40 MLA's including the Premier and several ministers.

Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty of the impending election, Advocacy Days has been put on hold for this year at least until the Fall. I was however fortunate to meet with Premier Dexter on May 2 who indicated his willingness to entertain the idea of reopening the MOU.

In June the UNSM will be hosting a series of regional meetings similar to last year. These meetings were very successful and we look forward to continuing this tradition. The regional meetings provide an important opportunity to bring together regionals, rurals, and towns in the same geographic area to discuss issues of mutual concern. We are still looking for a municipality or two adjacent municipalities to serve as meeting hosts. If there are municipalities who would like to host the annual regional meeting, please speak to myself, other UNSM board members or staff during the workshop.

If you have other issues or questions, feel free to speak to me directly during the workshop.

I wish you a very successful workshop over the next few days.

Thank you