



POLICY & LOBBYING

Legislative Overview

Each year, the AMM monitors proposed legislation introduced in the Manitoba Legislature. During this year's session, the AMM presented or submitted comments to legislative committees or ministers responsible for the following bills:

Bill 22: The Water Protection Act — September 13, 2004

Last September, the AMM made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs around Bill 22: The Water Protection Act.

The AMM's presentation on this bill stressed its many positive attributes, including the focus on watershed based planning, the creation of a water council, and the development of watershed quality management zones. The AMM was also pleased that Bill 22 includes a clause guaranteeing that there will be consultation in the development of the regulations for this act.

The AMM did note that the bill is visibly vague and there is a lack of detail as to how it will be implemented and who will finance the implementation.

As of September 1, 2005, the regulations around Bill 22 are still being refined and the bill has not received Royal Assent. The AMM will continue to follow any amendments and continue to participate in the consultation process.

Bill 36: The Courts Administration Improvement Act — May 31, 2005

On May 31, 2005, the AMM attended the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs to make a presentation on Bill 36: The Courts Administration Improvement Act.

In this bill, the section of most importance to municipalities is the changes to the Summary Convictions Act. Municipal governments are charged with the responsibility of administering local affairs

through by-laws, and for these by-laws to be effective they must be enforceable.

The AMM participated on a stakeholder committee that explored the options available to municipalities. The committee found that removing the initial stages of the by-law enforcement process from the court system will greatly reduce the cost associated with enforcement. The AMM is pleased that Bill 36 proposes to change the Summary Convictions Act to allow municipalities to appoint screening officers to oversee the initial stages of the process, which will greatly reduce the costs of enforcement and free up criminal courts to deal with criminal matters.

Copies of all of the AMM's presentations to the Legislative Standing Committees are available on the AMM web site at www.amm.mb.ca

The AMM trusts that the changes brought about by Bill 36 will address many of the inadequacies of the current system and will allow municipalities to enforce by-laws in a

cost-effective manner. (*Bill 36 received Royal Assent on June 16, 2005*).

Bill 25: The Workers Compensation Amendment Act — June 2, 2005

June 2, 2005 saw the AMM attend the Standing Committee on Human Resources to present on Bill 25: The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

Manitoba municipalities have for years urged the Provincial Government to review how volunteer firefighters are treated under the Workers Compensation Act. The primary concern is that part-time, volunteer firefighters are not treated equally under the current legislation when it comes to diseases caused by providing firefighting services. In many communities, it is the part-time firefighters that provide the firefighting services and face the



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hazardous situations. For this reason, the AMM urged the Provincial Government to add part-time firefighters to the coverage offered to full-time firefighters, and was very satisfied to see coverage extended under this Bill. The AMM has begun discussions with the Provincial Department to look at the costs associated with extending coverage and the best ways to balance the costs for municipalities.

The AMM is also pleased to see that Bill 25 includes the allowance for private top-ups of WCB benefits for part-time firefighters. Many municipalities simply cannot afford full-time fire departments and in these cases, they rely on volunteers to provide local fire-fighting services. Bill 25 also proposes to remove the maximum earnings clause and the AMM supports this as well, as this will help attract volunteers and guarantee that those who make a commitment to the community will not be penalized financially should an accident occur.

Volunteers are the life-blood of many communities and it is important that they are compensated to the fullest should an accident occur. The AMM is pleased to see measures in place that extend compensation for occupational diseases to part-time, volunteer firefighters and that allow for private top-ups above WCB coverage for volunteer firefighters. (*Bill 25 received Royal Assent on June 9, 2005*).

Bill 33: The Planning Act — June 6, 2005

On June 6, 2005, the AMM made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs on Bill 33, The Planning Act, a crucial piece of legislation for municipalities.

While Bill 33 incorporates many of the key issues municipalities had raised with the Province, the AMM did raise a number of concerns during their presentation. One of the biggest issues the AMM stressed is to have the Provincial Government available and accountable for the environmental decisions it makes. The AMM made it clear to the Province that when technical questions arise, it is more appropriate for Department of Conservation staff to

respond since it is an explanation of Provincial environmental regulations that is required. The Provincial Government must be accountable for its environmental regulations and ensure the transparency of the process by attending public hearings, just as municipal councils are present to defend their decisions.

With the exception of the key issues noted during the AMM's presentation, the AMM is generally supportive of Bill 33 and looks forward to many of the improvements to long-term planning that will be achieved by this legislation. (*Bill 33 received Royal Assent on June 16, 2005*).

Bill 29: The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act —

June 6, 2005

The AMM, along with the Manitoba Municipal Administrators Association (MMAA), the City of Winnipeg and others, participated on a review committee that explored alternatives to the current, antiquated Act. Bill 29 is the result of the work of this committee. The new Bill brings the Act into the 21st century and allows municipalities greater flexibility in administering elections. The language in the Bill is easier to understand and will make the election process easier and less cumbersome for municipalities. (*Bill 29 received Royal Assent on June 16, 2005*).

Other bills passed during this session of interest to the AMM included Bill 8: The Manitoba Council on Aging Act, Bill 35: The Capital Region Partnership Act, Bill 37: The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act, and Bill 44: The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act 2005 — of particular interest to municipalities as it creates the new Building Manitoba Fund.