

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, I am pleased to present the 2008 Annual Report. This past year was the tenth in AMM history and reflects the many activities and accomplishments of our organization over the past year.

Our lobbying activities were largely devoted to two main

issues – fiscal balance and water. Movement has been made in both areas and in terms of the Department of Water Stewardship's discussion document, *Framework for the Future*, the movement has been positive. Last December, the release of this document raised alarm bells for municipal leaders throughout Manitoba and as a result, the AMM raised concerns with the implementation of this strategy at every Provincial Cabinet Minister meeting and at the 2008 Lobby Days.

The major concerns were not the high goals and visions proposed for the conservation district (CD) program, but how the Province intended to move forward to reach these goals. The suggestion of increased requirements for CDs with little additional funding caused concern, as did the threat of erosion of existing local authority. However, the Province has since shown a willingness to ensure the strategy addresses the issues raised by the AMM, and invited municipalities to submit their concerns. In addition, a facilitated process between the AMM, the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association, and Manitoba Water Stewardship has begun with an aim to reach consensus on a vision for CDs in Manitoba. This process has been encouraging, as has been the willingness to work together shown by all parties, and the AMM looks forward to continuing on this path.

Late 2007 also raised alarm bells on the fiscal balance front, with the release of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) report *Danger Ahead – The Coming Collapse of Canada's Municipal Infrastructure*. This shocking report pointed to the \$123 billion national municipal infrastructure deficit, a figure that had doubled from four years earlier. The Province has shown a willingness to review the municipal roles, responsibilities, resources and relationships (4 Rs) to develop new approaches to municipal financing. The recent signing of the Building Canada Fund framework agreement for Manitoba, and other municipal programs, will provide additional help. But as we all recognize, much more is needed. In fact, the majority of Canadians surveyed by FCM (68%) would have preferred the Federal Government had left the GST at six per

cent and used the remaining funds to help municipalities improve their local infrastructure. And the AMM's own member survey of last spring points to infrastructure being the top concern of our members, with more than half (53%) rating infrastructure as their biggest issue.

A more recent AMM poll of 1,000 Manitobans was even more telling. The vast majority of Manitobans felt that infrastructure projects should receive either the highest (27%) or high (67%) priority from municipalities. Only just better than one-third, however (35%) felt that their municipality could pay for its own infrastructure needs, while more than half (55%) were convinced that their municipality could not afford to cover these projects. And over half (54%) of those surveyed reported they would support the idea of an additional one per cent municipal tax dedicated exclusively for infrastructure renewal projects. We have listened to these concerns and the coming months will see the AMM make a concentrated, unrelenting effort for additional funding and resources for municipalities to tackle their infrastructure needs.

While these issues are significant and time-consuming we also raised dozens of other issues throughout the course of the year. These issues were discussed during our individual meetings with 17 Provincial Cabinet Ministers, with Premier Doer and members of Cabinet in November, and during Lobby Days in April. The coming year will see many more issues raised, as the number of resolutions coming to our Convention this year more than doubled the number the previous year. Clearly, we have much work to do!

On that note, our work would not have been possible without the support of the rest of the Executive team, Vice-Presidents Shirley Kalyniuk and Doug Dobrowolski, and Executive Director Joe Masi. Thank you also to the rest of the Board for their dedication and hard work throughout the year. I would also like to welcome our newest director, Councillor Karen MacKinnon from the City of Flin Flon, who was elected to the second Northern district seat.

I reserve my most heartfelt thanks, as always, for our membership. Your support, encouragement, and belief in our abilities over the past year is truly appreciated and is the driving force behind our efforts. As the title of our history book suggests, speaking "with one voice" is much more rewarding than speaking with many, and our voice is indeed strong and clear, thanks to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Bell".

Ron Bell
President