



Election and spring session in the books

By Tyler MacAfee, AMM Director of Policy and Communications

A budget, an election, a Throne Speech and a spring session of the Legislature – not bad for three months. April, May and June saw a great deal of action at the provincial level. Here is a recap.

April

On April 4, the Province unveiled *Budget 2007: The Building Budget*, which had a number of commitments of interest to municipalities, including:

Education Tax – The Province promises a new 5-year plan to move to increase provincial funding to 80% of total public schools education expenditures. The Budget also increases the education property tax credit from \$400 to \$525 and the farmland rebate to 65% for 2007 and up to 80% over the next four years.

Safe Communities – Budget 2007 commits to 30 new police officers, including 14 in Winnipeg and 2 in Brandon. The budget also doubles its support for Manitoba's Integrated Organized Crime Task Force to tackle gang activity and drug trafficking, and commits new funds to the Province's crystal meth strategy.

Building Manitoba Fund – According to the news release, Budget 2007 provides municipalities a 5% funding increase and a 17% increase in rural community development grants for local priorities such as public safety and infrastructure through the Building Manitoba Fund.

Housing – Budget 2007 commits to a \$104-million, multi-year plan for safe, secure and affordable housing for Aboriginal people, seniors, the inner city and northern Manitoba.

Additional highlights include:

- More spaces for international medical graduates;
- \$12.6 million for transit systems in Winnipeg, Brandon, Flin Flon and Thompson;
- Wind energy and bio-diesel commitments;
- The addition of five communities (Dauphin, The Pas, Flin Flon, Portage la Prairie, and Selkirk) to the Neighbourhoods Alive! Program; and
- Improved access to healthy foods for Northern Manitobans.

While the Budget was positive, there were certainly some areas where the AMM was hoping for more. The AMM would have liked to see a clear, adequate financial commitment to implement the requirements of the Water Protection Act. The Budget *did* commit \$10 million to water initiatives, but more is needed. As well, the \$33 million committed for infrastructure projects is lacking in light of the total needs of communities. Budget 2007 failed to deliver the long-term plan needed to address the province's growing infrastructure deficit.

May

While April showers bring May flowers, this year in Manitoba an April budget brought a May election with Manitobans going to the polls on May 22. The NDP was returned to power, this time with an additional seat. While a few of the players changed, the balance of power remained the same.

Elections are a great time to see where everyone stands on key issues and the AMM spent a great deal of time during the campaign tracking the promises that were made by all three of the parties represented in the Legislature. While the AMM will certainly be holding the NDP to its promises, campaigns always generate good ideas and the AMM will be closely reviewing all of the municipal promises made in the campaign. Some of the good ideas generated in the campaign included:

- 700 new nurses, 100 new doctors and \$1 million for filling rural and northern vacancies;
- A new Watersmart program, along with \$1 million for a biodiesel fund;
- Increases for police budgets, more firefighters; and
- Increased recreation centre funding, highway funding, and funding for libraries.

June

Hot on the heels of the Provincial Election, MLAs were back at work with the House returning on June 6. The mini-Throne Speech delivered to open the session borrowed from many of the commitments already made in the recent election and budget. Highlights included:

- *Moving forward in health care* – with further increases in the training and recruitment of health professionals, and added measures to shorten wait times, along with the expansion of community health options and prevention programs.
- *Moving forward with a cleaner, healthier environment* – with initiatives to further strengthen the protection of our waterways, forests and air quality.
- *Moving forward by making our communities safer* – with the hiring of more police, prosecutors and firefighters; by adding community *Lighthouses* and other options for youth recreation; and by working with the Federal government to introduce tougher consequences for those who break the law.
- *Moving forward by preserving affordability* – with homeowners benefiting from increased property tax credits and a multi-year plan to fund 80% of school costs from provincial revenues.
- *Moving forward with the building agenda* – with the \$4 billion investment in Manitoba road infrastructure.

The Throne Speech also made a commitment to the acceleration of the Treaty Land Entitlement process.

The session ended June 14 with the Throne Speech being passed along with three bills. A commitment was made to reintroduce all 22 bills introduced prior to the election when the house returns on September 25.

All and all, it was a busy spring on the Provincial scene and the AMM looks forward to the start of the September session where things will really get underway. ☘