

Spring Sitting SYNOPSIS



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Things were hopping on Broadway again as MLAs returned to session on April 9 with the tabling of Budget 2008. The AMM was hopeful that this year's budget would address two of the biggest areas of need – infrastructure and water. While this year's budget helped municipalities in some ways, it missed delivering on these top two areas.

BUDGET 2008 – “A LITTLE BIT HERE, NOT ENOUGH THERE”

Budget 2008 did introduce new initiatives for community centres and sports groups to purchase equipment and supplies. It also added almost \$1 million to the Community Places Program, plus additional funds for the Neighbourhoods Alive! Program. Since Budget 2008 the Province has committed \$9 million to enhance and upgrade recreation facilities, as an extension of the Rural/Northern Municipal Recreation Fund.

Budget 2008 also increased the Building Manitoba Fund, and municipalities should see on average a 7% increase. Budget 2008 invests an additional \$5 million in child care to provide more spaces, a new training and recruitment fund and higher wages. In the area of healthcare, Budget 2008 provides an additional \$3 million to increase the number of nurses, health-care aides and allied health-care workers for personal-care homes in Manitoba. It also invests in a \$4 million nurse practitioner and doctor recruitment and retention pilot program, and invests another \$7.2 million to educate and hire more doctors. Budget 2008 also provides funding for 20 more police officers and 2 more Crown prosecutors. There is also \$1 million in additional funding for youth corrections.

As mentioned, the budget did fail to deliver any long-term commitment to the growing municipal infrastructure deficit in Manitoba, and failed to meaningfully increase funding for water initiatives. The overall increase of 3% for water steward-

ship initiatives raises the question of whether this is really a priority. Water use licensing received minimal increases and the increase to \$5.3 million for conservation districts is nowhere near enough.

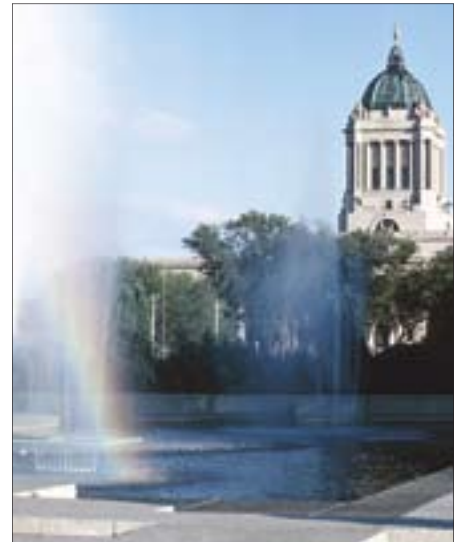
LEGISLATION

This session also saw a number of bills introduced, and while it wasn't heavy on bills that directly impact municipalities, many of the bills will have some indirect implications that we will be tracking.

Perhaps the most obvious bill of interest was the amendment to the *Municipal Act – Bill 36*. While the bill merely moves the timeframes for the assessment cycles to regulation, what it really means for municipalities is that we will now be moving to a two-year assessment cycle. This benefits municipalities as it will smooth out some of the shocks in the current four-year system and make the primary revenue source for municipalities (property tax) more predictable, something we have asked for in other revenue sources, like the gas tax agreement. The AMM is also pleased to see in *Bill 36* the ability for the assessor and taxpayer to come to an agreement on changes to a property's assessment prior to the start of the board of revision process. Finding workable solutions for all parties without having to move into a formal process not only will save time and money, but will benefit community relations.


Other bills of note this session include:

- *Bill 8 – Phosphorous Reduction Act* places greater restrictions on the use of phosphorus, which is good for municipalities since this will help on the front-end, rather than forcing municipalities to undertake expensive infrastructure upgrades.
- *Bill 13 – The Highway Traffic Amendment Act* deals with damage to infrastructure (such as bridges) and provides another avenue for municipalities to be compensated when damage is caused.



- *Bill 17 – The Environmental Amendment Act* places a ban on building or expanding hog facilities in certain designated areas of the province.
- *Bill 28 – The Strengthening Local Schools Act* places a moratorium on school closures and addresses the length of time students should be on buses.
- *Bill 37 – The Lobbyist Registration Act* puts greater restrictions on lobbying groups. This bill will not have any direct impact on municipalities, as by the definition of this act, municipalities and AMM are not considered lobby groups.

The end of this session saw a flurry of committee hearings to move these bills through the process. In the end 36 bills were passed, with another 7 held over for consideration when the Legislature resumes sitting in September. Of the bills highlighted above, Bills 8, 13, 28 and 36 were passed, with Bill 17 and 37 being held over.

As always, the AMM will continue to track those bills left on the table and any new bills introduced by government. 

* To view the AMM's submission on these or any bills, go to www.amm.mb.ca/pol_leg.html.