

Meeting of the  
**Association of  
Manitoba  
Municipalities**



**with**

The Honourable Nancy Allan

---

Minister of Labour & Immigration

February 20, 2007

---

# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DEPARTMENTAL ISSUES</b>	<b>6</b>
1. Issues with Centralized 911 Call Centre	6
2. Changes to Funding for Mutual Aid Districts	7
3. Firefighting and Provincial Floor Standards	9
4. Costs of Fires Originating on Crown Land	10
5. Impact of New Workplace Legislation on Municipalities	11
<b>GENERAL ISSUES</b>	<b>12</b>
1. Creating Fiscal Balance	12
<b>APPENDIX A – ACTIVE RESOLUTIONS</b>	<b>16</b>

# Executive Summary

## Departmental Issues

### 1. Issues with Centralized 911 Call Centre

- The Provincial Government must support the expansion of 911 services throughout Manitoba and enable all municipalities to participate in this critical emergency service.
- Municipalities are appreciative of the ambulance enhancements and anticipate faster response time and more efficient dispatch as a result of the centralized services of the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre.
- The centralized system will only function properly if there is enough staff in place to respond to all incoming calls.
- Since improved technology will be available in all Manitoba's ambulances it is necessary for all municipalities to provide 911 service to their residents.

**Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to ensure that all Manitobans have access to 911 services by adequately staffing the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre and by enacting mandatory 911 legislation for all municipalities.**

### 2. Changes to Funding for Mutual Aid Districts

- Each municipality participating in a mutual aid district must offer a certain standard of service in order to enter a reciprocal agreement, which means possessing appropriate equipment and access to trained firefighters.
- Ongoing training is therefore an important investment for municipal fire departments, yet there are insufficient resources at the municipal level to respond to this demand.
- The municipal and provincial investment in firefighter training grants will promote the retention of volunteer firefighters while investing in the quality of fire departments across Manitoba.

**Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to use funding strategically and allow Mutual Aid districts to access funding above the current maximum while ensuring that all districts are able to access funding.**

### **3. Firefighting and Provincial Floor Standards**

- New construction may involve floors that do not have traditional floor joists but use engineered wood products in a method known as silent floor construction.
- There are many positive aspects for using this type of construction method however these joists have significant safety-related problems under typical fire conditions.
- These two types of floor systems are difficult, if not impossible, to identify in a building.
- Firefighters need to maximize their knowledge of a building prior to entering so that they are able to determine the best and safest way to provide aid.

**Therefore the AMM urges the Provincial Governments to make the required amendments to applicable acts and standards to ensure homeowners and builders clearly identify homes with silent floor construction and that this identification be standard across the Province of Manitoba.**

### **4. Costs of Fires Originating on Crown Land**

- Municipalities are working to provide a high level of fire protection services, however the unique nature of these fires requires Provincial involvement and allocation of resources.
- Fires on Crown land tend to occur in remote areas and significant damage can be incurred by the time municipal fire departments are notified and can respond.
- Ultimately, the revenue generated by the Crown land cannot sufficiently cover the substantial costs associated with fighting fires in those areas.
- Municipalities can still incur costs even when the Province takes over the fire suppression effort and does not charge a municipality for the costs, since municipal resources are still utilized.

**Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to conduct a review of the process of charging municipalities for fires originating on Crown land and to recognize the municipal resources that are required by providing financial support for these costs.**

### **5. Impact of New Workplace Legislation on Municipalities**

- The new provincial Employment Standards Code comes into effect April 30, 2007 and includes modifications that represent the most comprehensive changes to the Employment Standards Code in 30 years.
- The extensive changes to legislation and regulations are being implemented to better reflect the realities of today's workplaces.

**Therefore AMM requests that the Department of Labour and Immigration provide a brief update on the impacts that the new legislation will have on municipalities.**

## General Issues

### 1. Creating Fiscal Balance

- Manitoba's municipal governments continue to take on increasingly greater responsibilities. As the importance of local community increases, it is necessary that the roles, responsibilities and resources of municipal government be examined.
- Unclear legislation, such as the Water Protection Act, concern municipal governments because the financial costs in implementing and enforcing this Act are great. Infrastructure needs in municipalities throughout the province are at the top of municipal agendas however the municipal budgets are stretched thin.
- Some options to support municipal governments to serve their communities effectively are removing education tax from property and exempting municipal governments from the Provincial Sales Tax.
- Provincial/territorial municipal associations are developing a cross Canada perspective of municipal responsibilities and finances to inform municipalities of the similarities and inequalities that are currently being experienced nation-wide.

**The AMM urges the Province to work collaboratively with municipalities to create a fiscal balance for all orders of government in Manitoba.**

## **Departmental Issues**

### **1. Issues with Centralized 911 Call Centre**

Efficient access to emergency services can only be achieved if local response teams are dispatched in a timely manner. The process of calling for help must be quick and easy in these stressful situations since time delays can cause tragedies. In rural and remote areas emergency response may take longer due to geographic limitations, therefore every effort should be made to take advantages of potential system efficiencies. In particular, local knowledge has been lost due to the centralization of service and will require increased consideration through clear and succinct communication. The Provincial Government has a role alongside municipal governments since ambulances are managed at the provincial level. Therefore, the Provincial Government must ensure that a centralized 911 call centre enables all municipalities to use this critical emergency service.

The establishment of the new Medical Transportation Coordination Centre (MTCC) has made a significant difference due to the incorporation of advanced technologies, such as global positioning systems (GPS), throughout Manitoba's ambulance fleet. Municipalities are appreciative of the ambulance enhancements and therefore anticipated faster response times and a more efficient dispatch system as a result of the centralized services. This however has not been the case.

The AMM advised the Provincial Government that prior to the operation of MTCC, that two key issues had to be addressed. First, the system can only function properly if there is enough staff in place to respond to all incoming calls. There are gaps in the current service provision whereby callers have been placed on hold or asked to call back at another time. This is unacceptable for an emergency response centre whose purpose is to assist those in an immediate crisis. Media reports indicate that the MTCC will employ 31 staff members trained to handle emergency 911 calls. Municipalities have indicated that the level of service is not yet acceptable. Therefore the Provincial Government should commit to an ongoing evaluation of this staffing level to ensure that all calls are answered in a timely manner. Emergency response is a crucial part of Manitoba's health care system and timely response is necessary in these urgent situations.

Secondly, the improved technology available in all Manitoba's ambulances makes it necessary for all municipalities to provide 911 services to their residents. Efficient emergency response should be occurring in all municipalities regardless of where emergencies occur. A consistent system across Manitoba facilitates the process of accessing assistance and minimizes the time required to call for help.

**Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to ensure that all Manitobans have access to 911 services by adequately staffing the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre and by enacting mandatory 911 legislation for all municipalities.**

## **2. Changes to Funding for Mutual Aid Districts**

Municipalities have established mutual aid districts in an effort to maximize emergency response resources while assisting neighbouring municipalities to protect the safety of their residents. Each participating municipality must offer a certain standard of service in order to enter a reciprocal agreement, which means possessing appropriate equipment and access to trained firefighters. With the growing demands on municipal fire departments, there is also a growing demand for firefighters to be prepared to respond to a variety of emergency situations. Ongoing training is therefore an important investment for municipal fire departments, yet there are insufficient resources at the municipal level to respond to this demand.

Mutual aid districts are formed specifically to respond to large-scale emergencies that a single municipality would not have the resources to address. This could either be an isolated emergency that is beyond the capability of the local fire department or when there are more fire calls or emergencies than the local fire department can attend. Therefore, the nature of mutual aid districts is such that specialized expertise is required. This raises the importance of ensuring that firefighters are prepared to address a range of emergency situations. In addition to basic firefighting skills, it is valuable to have trained firefighters who can conduct vehicle extrication, traffic control, hazardous materials containment and various rescue operations. Extensive training is necessary to ensure that firefighters are skilled in all areas and to avoid liability issues that may arise if their skills are called into question. Based on

these demands, firefighters must be well prepared for any type of situation when they respond to an emergency call and targeted training is crucial.

Part of the difficulty of recruiting sufficiently trained firefighters is that the majority of municipal fire departments rely on volunteers. As a result, volunteers will likely require training in order to be prepared for emergency response responsibilities. These individuals are already offering to risk their own safety and also end up incurring costs such as taking unpaid time off work and replacing damaged clothing. The Office of the Fire Marshal in Ontario states that volunteer firefighters provide a provincial resource estimated to save residents over \$1 billion annually. While the magnitude of the savings in Manitoba may not be a comparable amount, financial savings certainly accrue as a result of the reliance on volunteers to provide firefighting services. To support this volunteer infrastructure it is essential to provide incentives for individuals to continue volunteering as a firefighter. The municipal and provincial investment in firefighter training grants will promote the retention of volunteer firefighters while investing in the quality of fire departments across Manitoba.

The existing annual grant of \$6,500 is greatly appreciated by mutual aid districts and has resulted in enhanced training opportunities for many firefighters. At the same time, the cost of training is growing and the complexity of training needs requires increased support for training purposes. The AMM understands that many Mutual Aid districts are using all of their allocated funding, while others are not reaching the limit. This indicates that a more flexible funding source is needed.

Currently, some municipalities are absorbing a greater share of these training costs, since the existing grant covers only a small portion of the required training. Mutual Aid funding should be increased for districts that require additional resources while maintaining funds for all districts. Municipalities have limited resources to finance training for their firefighters and, as volunteers, it would be difficult for individuals to bear these costs. Along with municipalities and residents, the Provincial Government benefits from the services provided by volunteer fire departments and mutual aid districts.

**Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to use funding strategically and allow Mutual Aid districts to access funding above the current maximum while ensuring that all districts are able to access funding.**

### **3. Firefighting and Provincial Floor Standards**

There has been increased growth in the residential sector over the past few years. These homes are utilizing new building materials and techniques to improve the speed of construction and quality of new homes. However, new construction may involve floors that do not have traditional floor joists but use engineered wood products in a method known as silent floor construction. This type of floor is engineered to minimize timbers natural, strength-reducing defects, such as knots and pitch pockets, reduces twisting, shrinking and other changes in shape, has wider flanges which promote stable floors and uses less material overall to produce the same strength of floor. This seems like a positive use of resources in the construction industry, however these joists have significant safety-related problems under typical fire conditions.

Due to the reduced amount of material in engineered wood products, these floor systems burn much more quickly than traditional timber joists. Traditional joists tend to experience external charring while maintaining their internal strength for a period of time during a fire. Engineered wood products, however, do not have the same mass of material and therefore the external charring causes them to lose their structural integrity quickly when a home is on fire. These two types of floor systems are difficult, if not impossible, to identify in a home. Given that the safety of people within a burning building is of utmost importance, firefighters need to maximize their knowledge of the building prior to entering so that they are able to determine the best and safest way to provide aid.

**Therefore the AMM urges the Provincial Governments to make the required amendments to applicable acts and standards to ensure homeowners and builders clearly identify homes with silent floor construction and that this identification be standard across the Province of Manitoba.**

#### **4. Costs of Fires Originating on Crown Land**

Municipalities agree that in most cases, the local government is the most appropriate level of government to respond to fire-related emergencies. Under normal circumstances, municipalities can manage this responsibility using local resources. However, fires involving Crown land can quickly escalate into situations that municipalities cannot manage alone and for which they should not be solely responsible. For this reason, the AMM believes that the Provincial Government should review the process for charging municipalities for fires that originate on Crown land. Municipalities are working to provide a high level of fire protection services, however the unique nature of these fires requires Provincial involvement and allocation of resources.

For the most part, municipalities are adequately equipped to fight fires within municipal boundaries. Under Section 266 of The Municipal Act, a municipality may enter into an agreement with another municipality for the purpose of providing fire protection services. This commonly occurs through the establishment of Mutual Aid Districts between neighbouring municipalities as they prepare to respond to larger fires or more than one emergency at a time. Municipalities are not attempting to shirk the fire protection responsibilities laid out in The Municipal Act, rather they are seeking the most efficient ways of responding to these emergencies. However, fires on Crown land should be approached in a distinct manner, as compared to other municipal fire responses.

Fires on Crown land are unique since they tend to occur in remote areas and significant damage can be incurred by the time municipal fire departments are notified and can respond. This is true when fires are contained within Crown land and when the fire spreads to municipal or private property. The vegetation in these areas is also a key factor since grass fires spread quickly and peat moss can burn underground for years only to re-emerge and cause additional damage. Furthermore, municipal fire departments often incur major expenses to contain and extinguish fires on Crown land, but cannot make insurance claims, an option that is available when fires occur on private property. Ultimately, the revenue generated by the Crown land cannot sufficiently cover the substantial costs associated with fighting fires in those areas.

These situations are also governed by Section 16 of The Wildfires Act which states that the Crown is not obliged to reimburse a municipality for costs and expenses incurred in wildfire protection operations, but it may reimburse a municipality for costs or expenses in wildfire protection operations made necessary by a wildfire that started on unoccupied Crown land. The determination of cost recovery for municipal efforts would be dependant upon factors such as the location of the fire, if the fire were burning in a permit area and what level of involvement Manitoba Conservation staff had in the incident. This policy is too subjective and should be reviewed to ensure that the Province contributes to fire control when the fire originates on Crown land. Municipalities can still incur costs even when the Province takes over the fire suppression effort and does not charge a municipality for the costs, since municipal resources are still utilized. Appropriate provisions should be established through legislation to ensure that municipalities have access to the resources required to fight fires on Crown lands.

**Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to conduct a review of the process of charging municipalities for fires originating on Crown land and to recognize the municipal resources that are required by providing financial support for these costs.**

## **5. Impact of New Workplace Legislation on Municipalities**

The Employment Standards Code assists employees and employers define and protect their rights and responsibilities in the workplace. The extensive changes to legislation and regulations are being implemented to better reflect the realities of today's workplaces. The new provincial Employment Standards Code comes into effect April 30, 2007 and includes modifications that represent the most comprehensive changes to the Employment Standards Code in 30 years.

**Therefore AMM requests that the Department of Labour and Immigration provide a brief update on the impacts that the new legislation will have on municipalities.**

## **General Issues**

### **1. Creating Fiscal Balance**

Municipal government is playing a more important role in the every day lives of Canadians. No longer is the local council seen as merely the local tax collector and tertiary service provider. Today, municipal governments have greater responsibilities, often playing a leading role in key areas that are not traditionally municipal in nature, such as health care and environmental protection. As the importance of the local community grows, municipal government, as the order of government closest to the people, is becoming more important. Yet, municipal governments do not have the tools they need to meet these new expectations. Many communities are starting to see the decay of key infrastructure and the unfortunate reduction in program delivery as a result of limited resources and increasing responsibilities. Municipal councils are left with the impossible task of delivering all the services expected by both the citizens and other orders of government, while only having access to limited resource streams. This is not sustainable and consequently it is necessary to undertake a major review of municipal government in Manitoba to create a fiscal balance between all orders of government.

Nationally, through the work of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, municipal governments have been able to secure a full rebate of the GST as well as the New Deal for Communities or 'Gas Tax Rebate.' Community issues have become front and centre on the national stage, and the AMM is pleased with the recognition by the federal government of the importance of local government and the need to put resources in the hands of the order of government that delivers key services.

Provincially, municipal government in Manitoba has seen some advances as well. Most recently the Province announced the new Building Manitoba Fund that will link municipal grant money to provincial gas tax revenues. Manitoba is also unique in that the Provincial Government shares a percentage of income tax with municipalities through the previous Provincial Municipal Tax Sharing agreement.

While these initiatives are certainly positive, more is needed. Many of the resolutions currently being worked on by the AMM deal with issues of funding, or more specifically inadequate funding levels. A serious discussion of the resources available to municipalities needs to be undertaken. However for this discussion to be fruitful, it must be raised within the greater context of what are and what should be the responsibilities of municipal government.

Municipal government in this province has embraced taking on additional responsibilities as these have been seen to be for the betterment of the local community. For instance, many municipalities have gone to great lengths to help provincial RHAs recruit physicians. As well, municipalities have undertaken projects to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the environment. Yet there are limits to how much municipalities can do with their current revenue streams.

We have consistently heard from the Province that Manitoba municipalities fare better than almost every other province in terms of funding transfers from provincial governments. However, this discussion is meaningless without a discussion of the responsibilities of these municipal governments. If Manitoba's municipalities are continually expected to take on additional responsibilities it is imperative that new revenue sources are made available.

Provincial and territorial municipal associations are in the process of developing a cross Canada perspective of municipal responsibilities and finances. Manitoba municipalities have heard many times that they receive more resources from other orders of governments than any other province or territory. This report, which is due to be released in May 2007, will inform all municipalities on the similarities and inequalities that are currently being experienced nation-wide and will assist in understanding the issues that need to be addressed within Manitoba.

In Manitoba, a major municipal issue is the financial implications of the recently passed Water Protection Act. While the intent behind this legislation is laudable, the overwhelming lack of detail, especially in the area of responsibilities and finances, has many municipal governments concerned. Municipal governments cannot take on the financial costs associated

with implementing and enforcing this Act. The Municipal budget is already stretched too thin.

The current municipal infrastructure deficit in Manitoba further compounds the need to re-examine the resources available to municipalities. Communities are facing crumbling roads, deteriorating community centres and inadequate water treatment facilities. It is estimated that Manitoba's infrastructure deficit is \$7.4 billion, which includes \$2 billion in rural municipal infrastructure and \$1 billion within the City of Winnipeg. These are staggering numbers when compared to the revenue streams available to these municipalities. When only 7 to 8 cents of every tax dollar goes to municipalities, it is evident there is a lack of resources to deal with this deficit.

This is why the AMM has been advocating for a 5-year plan to significantly reduce the reliance on property tax to fund education. Currently the property tax base is the principal source of revenue for municipalities. However, this tax base is diminished when education tax takes up over 50 per cent. Equally concerning is the continuing increases year after year which force municipalities to seriously re-consider any municipal tax increases, as there are limits to what local residents are able to withstand. The AMM fully supports maintaining and improving the quality of education in Manitoba, however the current system of education taxation is not sustainable and in reality it is hurting local communities by limiting municipal resources.

In addition to the removal of education tax from property, there are other options to provide greater revenue to municipalities. For example, the Provincial Government can follow the lead of the Federal Government with the GST and exempt municipal governments from the Provincial Sales Tax. Not only would this leave more money in the hands of municipalities, but it would significantly reduce the costs of many major infrastructure projects, thereby freeing up valuable funding for other areas of need. This would represent a significant shift away from the current tax and return system toward a new system that allows municipalities to retain resources for community needs.

Strong communities are the foundation of a strong province and a strong Canada. As the Association that represents all incorporated municipalities in Manitoba, we understand this. The AMM has long been advocating for municipal governments to look at ways of improving how they do business to ensure strong, sustainable communities across Manitoba. We also hear firsthand the challenges communities are facing and we see the implications provincial actions are having on municipalities. It is for this reason that we believe it is time to take a closer look at the resources available to municipalities and take stock of the roles and responsibilities of municipal government in Manitoba. It is only through this type of examination that we can truly create fiscal balance in Manitoba.

**The AMM urges the Province to work collaboratively with municipalities to create a fiscal balance for all orders of government in Manitoba.**

## Appendix A – Active Resolutions

### **AMM Resolution 52-2005**

#### **Topic: Provincial Floor Construction Standards**

Sponsor: RM of St. Andrews (Interlake District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Industry Canada

WHEREAS new home construction may involve floors that do not have traditional floor joists but have silent floors;

AND WHEREAS this type of construction does not have the same structural integrity when the home is on fire;

AND WHEREAS a firefighter cannot identify this construction method in a fire situation and may be in danger without knowing;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Federal and Provincial Governments to make the required amendments to applicable acts and standards to ensure homeowners and builders must clearly identify that the home has silent floor construction and that this identification be standard across the Province of Manitoba.

### **AMM Resolution 53-2005**

#### **Topic: Increased Funding to Mutual Aid Districts**

Sponsor: RM of Coldwell (Interlake District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade

WHEREAS the Province has a limit of up to \$6,500.00 for cost sharing of firefighter training in each Mutual Aid District.

AND WHEREAS firefighter training is getting more expensive;

AND WHEREAS firefighters need more training for liability issues;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Provincial Government to increase funding to each Mutual Aid district to \$12,000.00.

### **AMM Resolution 54-2005**

#### **Topic: Staffing 911 Call Centre**

Sponsor: Town of Shoal Lake (Midwestern District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration

WHEREAS 911 is an essential emergency service in all of Manitoba;

AND WHEREAS the City of Brandon hosts the 911 Call Centre for rural Manitoba;

AND WHEREAS citizens had recent incidents where all 911 operators were so busy that emergency callers were instructed to "hold" or to "call later";

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Provincial Government to provide funding to assist with the provision of adequate staffing for the rural 911 Call Centre.

### **AMM Resolution 32-2003**

#### **Topic: Mandatory 911 Subscription**

Sponsor City of Brandon (Western District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Manitoba Health

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Manitoba Municipalities urge the Provincial Government to legislate mandatory 911 subscription within all municipalities in the Province;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the this legislation include a completion date for system implementation of June 30, 2005.

### **AMM Resolution 34-2003**

#### **Topic: Emergency Calls on Provincial and Federal Lands**

Sponsor: RM of St. Andrews (Interlake District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Manitoba Finance

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Manitoba Municipalities lobby the Federal and Provincial Governments to fund emergency responses on Provincial and Federal lands and waters.

### **AMM Resolution 35-2003**

#### **Topic: Review of Costs for Fires Originating on Crown Land**

Sponsor: RM of Kelsey (Northern District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Manitoba Conservation

WHEREAS section 264 of The Municipal Act states that every municipality must provide fire protection services within its boundaries;

AND WHEREAS the Province has the right to take over the responsibility for fire fighting services and charge those services to municipalities;

AND WHEREAS fires on occupied or unoccupied Crown Land have the potential to create huge costs to municipalities for controlling and extinguishing fires;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Manitoba Municipalities lobby the Provincial Government to review the process for charging municipalities for fires, especially when these fires originate on Crown-owned lands.

### **AMM Resolution 82-2001**

#### **Topic: Funding for the Emergency Services College**

Sponsor: RM of St. Andrews (Interlake District)

Department: Manitoba Labour and Immigration

WHEREAS the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) operates the Manitoba Emergency Services College (MESC);

AND WHEREAS the MESC is an educational institution providing valuable public safety training to municipal emergency response organizations;

AND WHEREAS the OFC receives only 52% of its budget from the Fires Prevention Fund levy, a provincial tax on property insurance policies;

AND WHEREAS the OFC is finding it impossible to meet the increased demands of its municipal clients and balance its budget;

AND WHEREAS a recent request to raise the Fires Prevention Fund levy rate in order to provide necessary funding for public safety training for municipalities was recently rejected by the government;

AND WHEREAS the OFC will be forced to reduce services and/or charge fees for service to municipalities in order to balance its budget;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Manitoba Municipalities lobby the Province to provide funding from general revenues to the OFC to demonstrate its commitment to continued municipal public safety training for the Province.