



Meeting with
The Honourable Nancy Allan
Minister of Labour & Immigration

February 12, 2008

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Executive Summary

Departmental Issues

1. Mandatory 911 Subscription

- The AMM continues to hear concerns with services provided to 911 callers and action is required to further improve emergency response in Manitoba.
- The AMM appreciates the opportunity to participate on the Provincial 911 Committee to explore improvements to Manitoba's 911 system.
- In sparsely populated areas, access to an emergency network becomes increasingly important due to the additional time required for emergency responders to attend the incident. Therefore, the consistency of 911 access across the province is essential.
- Municipalities continue to raise concerns with the timeliness of responses, therefore the Province must conduct ongoing evaluations of response efficiency to determine whether the MTCC is staffed sufficiently.
- Since the MTCC handles dispatch for all rural and northern medical services, the system must be equipped to route cell phone calls to the appropriate call centre.

Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to enact mandatory 911 legislation for all municipalities and to ensure that sufficient staff and technical resources are available at the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre.

2. Update on Changes to Fire Inspections

- The recent amendments to *The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act* increased the inspections to be carried out by local authorities.
- While the AMM supports measures that keep Manitobans safe and prevent fires, these increased responsibilities must not overburden local fire departments.

Therefore, the AMM is seeking an update on the implementation of changes to fire inspections as outlined in *The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act*.

3. Impact of Changes to Building Codes for Municipalities

- The Province recently announced changes to *The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act* that will enhance fire prevention and detection, as well as increase insulation for new home construction.

Therefore, the AMM is seeking information regarding the municipal impact of the changes to Building Codes under *The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act*.

4. Provincial Floor Construction Standards

- While there are undoubtedly advantages to using silent floor construction, there are also significant safety concerns when emergency situations arise.
- Firefighters have no means of identifying the type of floor system prior to entry, yet they are at a greater risk of encountering structural issues in homes with silent floor construction.
- The AMM is seeking a consistent, province-wide method of identification for homes with silent floor construction to enhance the safety of firefighters.

Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to respond quickly to the need for amendments to applicable acts and standards to ensure homeowners and builders clearly identify homes with silent floor construction.

General Issues

1. Water Issues

- Water management is one of the most important issues facing Manitoba today and we believe it is important that all Ministers understand the significance of the current direction to municipalities.
- Municipalities certainly agree with the Province on the high level goals and visions laid out so far. However it is how the Province is looking to move forward in arriving at these goals that has raised concerns for municipalities.
- Conservation districts (CDs) have become the delivery mechanism of choice for water initiatives in Manitoba, however the funding for CDs has never been equal to the expectations that have been placed upon them. The *Framework for the Future* document advocates for a scenario where the Province will provide little additional funding, while increasing the expectations for CDs.

- There is real concern that the proposed changes to the funding mechanisms will seriously erode the importance of local priorities, ultimately leading to the erosion of local authority.
- By being forced to use the vast majority of the CD budget on provincially directed initiatives, there will be nothing left to deal with local priorities.
- We are also very concerned with the approach taken by the department in trying to gain feedback on the document. The questionnaire is misleading in that it does not deal with these fundamental issues, and instead focuses on support for the very general goal statements.
- We are hopeful that although the Province has moved forward unilaterally on this initiative, there is still opportunity to find a workable solution that benefits everyone.

Departmental Issues

1. Mandatory 911 Subscription

In emergency situations, a timely response is invaluable and the AMM has been working to ensure that efficient access to emergency services is available across the province. There have been barriers to achieving this goal, even with the implementation of targeted Provincial initiatives in recent years, including the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre (MTCC) and ambulances upgrades. The AMM continues to hear concerns with services provided to 911 callers and action is required to further improve emergency response in Manitoba.

The recent reinstatement of the Provincial 911 Committee is a key step in this process. The AMM appreciates the opportunity to participate on this committee to explore improvements to Manitoba's 911 system. Of particular concern for the AMM is the consistency of 911 access across the province. Although the Province has estimated that 90 per cent of Manitoba's population has access to emergency service through 911, this does not mean that service is available in all locations. In sparsely populated areas, access to an emergency network becomes increasingly important due to the additional time required for emergency responders to attend the incident. Prompt response should not be constrained by an individual's lack of familiarity with emergency procedures in certain parts of the province. Rather, Manitobans must be assured that a consistent mechanism is in place regardless of where they reside or where an emergency occurs. The AMM looks forward to seeking solutions to such gaps in 911 service through this committee.

Another concern for municipalities is the recent centralization of 911 services to the MTCC in Brandon. The MTCC was expected to greatly enhance service provision in terms of more efficient dispatch and faster response times. Yet municipalities continue to raise concerns with the timeliness of responses. The Province must conduct ongoing evaluations of response efficiency to determine whether the MTCC is staffed sufficiently. Emergency services will only be effective if a full complement of staff are available to answer calls to 911. The AMM anticipates this issue will also be examined by the Provincial 911 Committee.

Since the MTCC handles dispatch for all rural and northern medical services, the system must be equipped to route cell phone calls to the appropriate call centre. In areas near Winnipeg, some cell phone callers have been routed to the Winnipeg response centre rather than MTCC. This creates delays in emergency response by increasing the time required to call for help. The Province must seek a solution to this situation since any delays may have serious consequences.

Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to enact mandatory 911 legislation for all municipalities and to ensure that sufficient staff and technical resources are available at the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre.

2. Update on Changes to Fire Inspections

Municipal fire departments provide an indispensable service, therefore they should be equipped with the financial and technical resources required to keep communities safe. The recent amendments to *The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act* increased the inspections to be carried out by local authorities. While the AMM supports measures that keep Manitobans safe and prevent fires, these increased responsibilities must not overburden local fire departments. Municipal budgets are under significant pressure and although fire prevention and protection are important priorities, increasing responsibilities may over-extend these budgets. The Province must ensure that sufficient resources are available to meet the requirements of the new legislation, both in terms of financial resources and the training necessary to meet these requirements.

Therefore, the AMM is seeking an update on the implementation of changes to fire inspections as outlined in *The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act*.

3. Impact of Changes to Building Codes for Municipalities

The AMM is supportive of efforts to improve the safety and energy efficiency of homes across Manitoba. The Province recently announced changes to *The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act* that will enhance fire prevention and detection, as well as increase insulation for new home construction. These new regulations will benefit new homeowners in times of emergency and through the long-term advantages of energy efficiency. The AMM is concerned about the implications for Manitoba's municipalities regarding these new regulations since many communities are engaging in extensive new home construction. As well, given the October 1, 2008 implementation date, municipalities must be advised of any preparations they are expected to undertake well in advance.

Therefore, the AMM is seeking information regarding the municipal impact of the changes to Building Codes under *The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act*.

4. Provincial Floor Construction Standards

An increasing number of housing starts in recent years has led to the widespread use of new building materials and techniques that improve the speed of construction and the quality of the final product. Among these new features, the use of silent floor construction is gaining popularity due to its strength and efficient use of materials. This type of floor uses engineered wood products to minimize the natural, strength-reducing features of timber, including: knots and pitch pockets, twisting, shrinking and other changes in shape. As well the wider flanges promote stable floors and use less material to produce the same strength of floor. While there are undoubtedly advantages to using this type of construction, there are also significant safety concerns when emergency situations arise.

Of particular concern to municipalities is the safety of firefighters who enter burning homes with silent floor construction. When these homes catch fire, the floor systems burn faster than traditional timber joists. Additionally, engineered wood products lose their structural integrity quicker during a fire since they do not have the same mass of material and therefore burn at a faster rate. Firefighters have no means of identifying the type of floor system prior to entry, yet they are at a greater risk of encountering structural issues in homes with silent floor construction. Making this critical information available prior to entry would greatly reduce the risks to firefighters and the people they are assisting.

The AMM is seeking a consistent, province-wide method of identification for homes with silent floor construction to enhance the safety of firefighters. The AMM is aware that the National Research Council (NRC) of Canada is conducting a study of fire-load tests on silent floor joists that will be released later this year. When the NRC report is available, the Provincial Government must be prepared to move forward to enact any changes required to Provincial legislation, in order for a consistent identification system to be created in a timely manner.

Therefore, the AMM urges the Provincial Government to respond quickly to the need for amendments to applicable acts and standards to ensure homeowners and builders clearly identify homes with silent floor construction.

General Issues

1. Water Issues

Each year the AMM includes a top issue as a general agenda item for its meetings with all individual Cabinet Ministers. This year the AMM Board is taking municipal concerns with the current Provincial direction on water-related issues. The reason we are taking this issue to all Ministers is to let each Cabinet Minister know the importance of this issue to municipalities and our primary concerns. We believe this is one of the most important issues facing Manitoba today and we believe it is important that all Ministers understand the significance of the current direction to municipalities.

The AMM has always been a willing partner on water initiatives whenever asked. The AMM was one of the most vocal advocates for the creation of a single department to deal with water initiatives. The AMM has also participated on a number of provincial direction-setting initiatives, including the Manitoba Water Strategy. Municipalities know firsthand the importance of properly managing water and have always been willing to do what is needed. Clean drinking water, safely managed wastewater, and proper drainage and water management are all priorities for municipalities, just as they are for the Province.

Municipalities certainly agree with the Province on the high level goals and visions laid out so far. However it is how the Province is looking to move forward in arriving at these goals that has raised concerns for municipalities.

Throughout the last number of years municipalities have been raising concerns with how all of the new directions announced by the Province will be funded. Most recently the Province released *Framework for the Future*, a discussion document on the future of conservation districts in the province, which is most alarming. Conservation districts (CDs) have become the delivery mechanism of choice for water initiatives in Manitoba, however the funding for CDs has never been equal to the expectations that have been placed upon them. This document advocates for a scenario where the Province will provide little additional funding, while increasing the expectations for CDs.

One of the greatest strengths of CDs is that they are locally driven, with boards comprised of local residents making decisions based on local priorities. However there is real concern that the proposed changes to the funding mechanisms will seriously erode the importance of local priorities, ultimately leading to the erosion of local authority. This new proposal is to link limited provincial funding with provincial priorities, taking away a local CD's ability to use provincial funding for locally decided priorities. By being forced to use the vast majority of their budget on provincially directed initiatives, there will be nothing left to deal with local priorities. While we certainly expect there to be similarities between provincial and CD priorities, any flexibility in addressing local priorities will be lost.

These are very fundamental issues that need to be discussed and dealt with in order for the CD program to work in Manitoba. However we are very concerned with the approach taken by the department in trying to gain feedback on the document. The questionnaire is misleading in that it does not deal with these fundamental issues, and instead focuses on support for the very general goal statements. We feel the information gained from the questionnaires will only provide part of the picture, while many of the more fundamental issues are not addressed.

The AMM has a long history of working together with the Province, and over the last few years we have worked closely on numerous issues. While often we have differing opinions about what is best, we have been able to work together to find solutions to challenges and with the end result being what is best for all Manitobans. We are hopeful that although the Province has moved forward unilaterally on this initiative, there is still opportunity to find a workable solution that benefits everyone.

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 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.