

## **Reeve Kam Blight, President AMM Speaking Notes**

### **AMM Successes, Budget 2021, COVID-19 Municipal Support**

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- Good Morning and Welcome Everyone, it is great to be here today.
- I have been looking forward to today's meeting, especially since we did not get the opportunity to hold this major event last spring.
- As we continue to adapt to this environment, I want to express my gratitude to all municipalities and municipal officials.
- It has been a long year for all of us and for that I am proud of each one of you for your dedication and commitment to your communities, particularly in the face of new challenges due to the ongoing pandemic.
- I want to remind everyone here today that we are all in this together – and as always, the AMM is here to help.
- AMM staff have been constantly adapting and working hard to ensure the new virtual format is a pleasant and informative experience for everyone here today.
- While I miss networking and attending events such as this one in person, I am pleased that we are still able to gather in a virtual setting. I am of course hopeful that by this time next year, we will all be physically together again.
- With that said, despite the global pandemic, we were able to see some positive developments this last year due to our ongoing advocacy efforts.
- In my remarks, I would like to briefly speak about some of these successes we have helped shape.

- For instance, over the past couple of years, the AMM has expressed several concerns regarding the Federal Grade Crossings Regulations and Grade Crossings Standards.
- The AMM consistently advocated for an extension to the November 2021 compliance deadline due to inconsistent information sharing by railway companies with municipalities as well as the need for increased long-term funding under the Rail Safety Improvement Program (RSIP) to help make compliance upgrades.
- In direct response to the concerns raised by our members, the AMM welcomed the proposed tiered, risk-based approach to changing the federal Grade Crossings Regulations and Grade Crossings Standards.
- We know that municipalities are facing increased pressures due to the pandemic and so an extension to the 2021 compliance deadline using a risk-based approach will allow your communities to adequately budget for rail crossing improvements.
- As more information becomes available, we will certainly keep you all informed.
- This year we also saw the Government of Canada table Bill C-21, legislation that would potentially allow municipalities to ban handguns through by-laws.
- Given municipal concerns about the federal government's newly proposed firearms measures, the AMM endorsed a motion calling for further study of this legislation at the national Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) meeting.

- We strongly believe that the federal government must adopt a nationwide approach to improving public safety and so we were pleased to see our motion unanimously carried during the meeting.
- Due to our advocacy efforts through the Strategic Collaboration Working Group – which is a group between the AMM and the Province of Manitoba, we also saw the launch of the Municipal Service Delivery Improvement Program (MSDIP).
- The provincial government committed up to \$5 million over the next 4 years to provide third party reviews to improve municipal services without raising taxes.
- This program is completely voluntary, and any potential savings will be reallocated back toward your municipal priorities.
- A friendly reminder that Manitoba Municipal Relations will be holding a webinar to explain the MSDIP application process in greater detail on April 19.
- Next, I would like to touch on some COVID-19 successes as well as opportunities for additional municipal support moving forward.
- Since the start of this pandemic, the AMM immediately called on both the provincial and federal governments for greater economic and financial assistance.
- Due to our advocacy efforts, the Province of Manitoba has committed to flowing 75% of operating grants to municipalities upfront, with the remaining 25% in the fall, for the **SECOND** year in a row.
- Flowing these funds will help your municipalities stabilize and proactively respond to any potential new threats posed by emerging COVID-19 variants.
- Due to the pandemic, the Province also increased infrastructure investments by an additional \$500 million to help restart Manitoba's economy with \$50

million under the Manitoba Restart program dedicated to water and wastewater projects.

- While \$10 million was flowed in 2020, the remaining \$40 million will be rolled out throughout the year – which was announced in Budget 2021.
- Later in the proceedings we will have Vice President, Chris Ewen, discuss some further highlights of Budget 2021.
- From the federal government, \$106 million was provided to municipalities as part of the Safe Restart Agreement while the Federal Gas Tax Fund transfer was provided up-front to help ease municipal operating finances – we were also pleased to hear the federal government’s plan to double the Gas Tax Fund in 2021/22.
- The economic slowdown has increasingly highlighted the digital divide between communities. As more of us look to work from home and access online learning or health resources online, better broadband connectivity is now more critical than ever.
- As this pandemic has unfolded, we have repeatedly called on the Government of Canada to accelerate funding and the application process under the Universal Broadband Fund. We were quite pleased to see the \$1.75 billion investment officially launched.
- Though these are positive first steps, we know based off our COVID-19 survey that 85% of our members indicated that code-red restrictions have financially impacted their municipalities.
- In fact, 71% of survey respondents noted the single largest financial hit has been due to the closure of community recreation centres --- this certainly didn’t

come as a surprise as we have seen provincial restrictions shutter recreation facilities for months.

- When asked how long it will take to financially recover to pre-crisis COVID-19 levels, the majority indicated more than two years, with some responses indicating as long as 5 to 8 years.
- Your feedback on our surveys is invaluable. Local insights allowed us to clearly depict to senior provincial staff the gaps and fiscal pressures that COVID-19 has caused in your municipalities.
- We continued this discussion in our recent op-ed provided exclusively to the Winnipeg Free Press, which focused on the fiscal reality of Manitoba municipalities.
- The op-ed was released just before Budget 2021 and focused on our core asks.
- We would like to see the Province build off the Safe Restart Agreement, especially since Manitoba did not formally match federal funds – contrary to other neighboring jurisdictions.
- Also, given the push for greater e-services, the AMM continues to call on the province to expedite its overall broadband strategy.
- Lastly, we certainly do not want to miss another construction season. We want to see funding flow under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program (ICIP) so your local communities can move forward with shovel-ready growth projects.
- Municipalities are in the best position to determine local infrastructure priorities and we should be empowered to meet those priorities to ensure growth continues.

- We will continue to work hard to help find solutions that ensure municipalities receive the necessary supports to continue delivering critical services during and after this pandemic – including increased funding to offset operating losses and expedited approvals for shovel-ready infrastructure projects.
- Thank you very much.

## Mayor Chris Ewen, Vice-President AMM Speaking Notes

### Budget 2021, Modernizing Education funding/Phase out of Education property taxes

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- Hello Everyone, I have really been looking forward to today's meetings and having the opportunity to speak to you in my new role as Vice-President.
- Even though I am new to this position, as the Mayor of the RM of Richot, I have seen first-hand how challenging it can be to juggle day to day municipal duties coupled with a global pandemic.
- Last week, we saw the Province of Manitoba unveil Budget 2021.
- While we recognize that this last year has been unique due to the ongoing pandemic, we appreciate that the municipal operating basket funding has not been decreased as an outcome of the pandemic.
- Budget 2021 maintains municipal operating and public safety grant funding at **2016** levels.
- The AMM will continue to advocate for increased municipal operating funding moving forward, as this **five-year freeze** does not recognize inflationary increases and puts greater financial and administrative pressures on municipalities.
- We know that inflation, added responsibilities, and tight budget constraints, coupled with COVID-19, puts you all in a very difficult position.
- Next, I would like to take some time to focus on positive highlights tabled in Budget 2021.

- We are pleased to see \$5.6 Million in funding for the Building Sustainable Communities Program – which includes a one time top up of \$3 million and expands applications for large projects up to \$300,000.
- The AMM certainly commends the Province for providing these investments to help build stronger communities.
- During a time of economic uncertainty, this program is vital to help promote greater economic development and thriving local communities across Manitoba.
- Also, for the second year in a row, the Green Teams Program will be doubled. I encourage you all to take advantage of these two important programs.
- Additionally, as many of you are aware the AMM has long called for increased funding for watershed districts. We welcome the Province of Manitoba allocating nearly \$6 Million to mitigate against flood and droughts and protect water quality under the watershed districts program.
- Another long standing AMM ask has been the need for increased funding for public library services.
- This pandemic has shown just how critical libraries are for fostering community relations and partnership throughout our local communities.
- Therefore, we are pleased to see up to \$700,000 of new funding allocated for these services. Once we receive more details regarding this announcement, we will disseminate this information as it becomes available.
- The Province has also committed to providing \$10,000 per each community that participates in the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program (MDTP) to help offset costs for PPE, per km rates, funding for drivers, etc.



- Perhaps the largest highlight in Budget 2021 is the provincial commitment to phase out Education Property Taxes, to begin effective immediately.
- The AMM welcomed this announcement since a new sustainable long-term funding model to reduce school division reliance on property taxes is long overdue.
- The Province will reduce property taxes by 50% to residential and farm property owners over the next two years – 25% this year and 25% next year.
- With these changes we anticipate your ratepayers will be eager to contact your municipal offices to gather more information about this process.
- Please be assured that the Province has committed to providing an explanatory insert in all tax bills mailed out to ratepayers. This insert will outline instructions along with contact information as the Province has committed to fielding all questions related to this initiative.
- While this announcement is still relatively new, we know there are concerns with the provincial decision to mail out cheques rather than adjusting taxation bills.
- Let me be clear – we hear your concerns, and we will continue to bring these forward to departmental staff to find an approach that works for everyone and reduces red tape.
- In these discussions, the AMM continues to also appeal for the \$5,000 cap on the Farmland School Tax rebate to be lifted as it negatively impacts agricultural producers and the vibrancy of local communities.
- As there was no cap in place when the rebate was first introduced, we continue to call on the Province to revert to their original layout of the rebate.

- Given the COVID-19 pandemic and fiscal pressures your municipalities are facing, we continue to call on the provincial government to provide an update on the plan to phase out Education Property Taxes **in its entirety**.
- As the phase out could potentially take up to ten years, it is vital that a plan to ensure the needs of taxpayers and services provided through property taxation is developed in close consultation with municipalities.
- The AMM has repeatedly called on the provincial government to establish a provincially-endorsed multi-stakeholder Task Force to comprehensively review opportunities and options concerning the modernization of the education funding model.
- The government has announced that they plan to have a new educational system in place by July 2022, so the AMM will work hard to have renewed discussions with departmental staff to ensure changes are reflective of municipal concerns.
- Thank you very much for your attention.

## Reeve Brad Saluk, Vice-President AMM Speaking Notes

### Bill 37

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- Hi everyone, though this meeting looks different this year I have really been looking forward to today.
- I would like to first touch on issues pertaining to Bill 37: *The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act*.
- The AMM has been closely monitoring Bill 37, as the proposed legislation continues to identify several negative implications for municipalities.
- As most of you are aware, Bill 37 officially received second reading on March 25, 2021.
- First, let me be clear, the AMM understands that private sector development plays a significant role in job creation and building sustainable local communities here in Manitoba.
- We continue to support and welcome an approach that fosters economic development and streamlines approvals for growth projects through efficient and transparent processes.
- Everyone here knows that municipalities fuel economic development in Manitoba and we all continue to explore ways to streamline approvals for growth projects.
- Manitoba municipalities are achieving landmark levels of growth, contributing over \$16 billion to the provincial economy. We help fuel Manitoba's economy.
- Looking back, the first changes that the government made to turn Bill 48 into Bill 37 were made in September and October of 2020, when the AMM had the

opportunity for direct discussions with Ministry staff to walk through our concerns in detail.

- After Bill 37 was introduced, engagement with our association has increased, which we have welcomed. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the multi-stakeholder Bill 37 Working Group to bring forward and discuss municipal concerns.
- Some of those concerns have been addressed and so we do want to give credit where credit is due.
- Due to our advocacy efforts, the Province brought forward amendments that reduced a lengthy window for appeals from 90 days to 30 days, includes a mandatory three-year review, and gives the right to be consulted if new regional planning districts are created.
- These amendments are certainly positive, but our position has fundamentally remained the same from the beginning.
- We continue to believe the Manitoba Government should follow the examples set by other provinces by specifying the scope and parameters of appeals in legislation rather than regulation.
- It is vital that standards are designed to try to keep the process speedy, fair and most of all, democratically respectful.
- The AMM continues to hammer this point at every working group meeting that we have attended over the last couple of months.
- Especially because we know first-hand that Ontario made appeals too easy, which led to a massive backlog, with delays of eighteen months or even two years to get a hearing.

- Over time, the Ontario government publicly admitted the backlog was holding up approvals on tens of thousands of new homes.
- If appeals will become possible, we want to see the government require anyone filing an appeal to state their reason for appealing in the filing, limit permissible grounds and the scope for appeals, further reduce appeals timelines to align with other provincial standards and impose accountability measures on the Manitoba Municipal Board in the event that delays in hearing or closing appeals cause a backlog.
- The argument from the beginning is that Bills 48 and 37 were simply a matter of copying best practices from other provinces.
- If this is in fact the case, all we are asking the Province to do is to remain consistent with that claim.
- We anticipate that the bill may be referred to the legislative standing committee very soon, possibly even this week.
- I encourage all municipalities to consider sending your Council's views in writing to the Minister's office as well as register to speak or send a written submission for the upcoming Committee.
- We are committed to ensuring the needs and concerns of our members continue to be heard and addressed. The AMM will continue to emphasize municipal concerns during our oral presentation to the Legislative Committee.
- Thank you very much for your attention.