



**PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

First Session
Fiftieth General Assembly

**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on
Social Services**

June 7, 2021 - Issue 4

Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Assembly
Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs

Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Joedy Wall, MHA

Members: James Dinn, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Paul Pike, MHA
Scott Reid, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Mark Jerrett

Appearing:

Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs

Hon. Krista Lynn Howell, MHA, Minister
Bren Hanlon, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs
Jacqueline Howard, Director of Communications
Ted Lomond, Deputy Minister
Randy Simms, Executive Assistant
Bonnie Steele, Departmental Controller

Also Present

Hon. Lisa Dempster, MHA, Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation
Hon. Sarah Stoodley, MHA, Minister of Digital Government and Service NL
Hon. Bernard Davis, MHA, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Paul Lane, MHA
Perry Trimper, MHA
Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Caucus
Darrell Hynes, Director of Legislation and Policy Affairs, Official Opposition Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, substitutes for Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Bernard Davis, MHA for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

The Committee met at 9:04 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Order, please!

All right, good morning, everybody. We're here for the Estimates of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

Before I start this morning, it would be remiss for me not to mention the loss we had over the weekend. George Murphy was a friend and a colleague to many of us here and he was an icon to Newfoundland and Labrador. I would just like to say before we start: Rest in peace, George.

Today, we have, as I just noted, the Estimates of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

Do we have the previous minutes? Okay, we do. We have the minutes from Meeting #3 of the Social Services Committee. If I can ask – does everyone have those – if there's anything that needs to be amended and if I can have a mover for those minutes, please, from the Committee?

J. DINN: So moved.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, thank you.

Those minutes have been adopted.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: So we'll see where we're to around – yeah, probably around 10:30 we'll check with everybody and probably have a quick 10-minute break at that time.

Today's substitutes are – let's have a look. Okay, for the Committee Member for Mount Pearl North, MHA Stoyles, we have Minister Stoodley substituting; for MHA Pike, Burin - Grand Bank, we have Minister Davis substituting; and for St. George's - Humber, MHA Reid, we have Minister Dempster substituting.

I just want to remind you all to identify yourselves for Hansard and to wait until your tally light comes on.

We'll start by everyone introducing themselves and then we'll give the minister a couple of minutes to speak. So we'll start here on my left with Ted Lomond.

T. LOMOND: Hello everyone, Ted Lomond, Deputy Minister.

K. HOWELL: Krista Howell, Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

B. HANLON: Bren Hanlon, Assistant Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs.

J. HOWARD: Jacqueline Howard, Director of Communications.

B. STEELE: Bonnie Steele, Departmental Controller.

R. SIMMS: Randy Simms, EA to the Minister.

D. HYNES: Darrell Hynes, Director of Research and Legislative Affairs with the Opposition Office.

J. WALL: Good morning, Joedy Wall, MHA Cape St. Francis.

J. DINN: Good morning, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

P. TRIMPER: Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

B. DAVIS: Bernie Davis, MHA for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party caucus.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Just to let you know, you can remove your masks when you're speaking also. Sorry, guys in the back.

L. DEMPSTER: Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair. It is Monday, Madam Chair, it's okay.

S. STOODLEY: Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Minister, we'll start with you.

K. HOWELL: Good morning, everyone. I'm glad that you could be here on this Monday morning to participate in our Estimates for the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

Municipalities and towns throughout the province are certainly a priority for this government. This is reflected in the fact that we now have this stand-alone department dedicated solely to the concerns and priorities of municipalities and towns and to ensure that communities across the province are sustainable and have every opportunity to grow and thrive.

Municipal issues are clearly a priority for me, as my background would indicate. I know that there are Members opposite that also have that same passion and experience. I've lived and breathed municipal and community government for the last seven years. I'm sure that we all have an appreciation for the challenges as well as the opportunities that exist in those areas. I know how important our municipalities and towns are to the overall growth and strength of the province.

Despite the province's many fiscal challenges, funding for municipalities has been maintained. Over \$147 million is allocated for communities across the province to improve services. This funding falls under the Canada Community-Building Fund, which was formerly known as the Federal Gas Tax program. Even in that capacity, I think, we have a new name and we have a new reflection of how important it is. We're not just talking about gas tax anymore; we're building a community here.

The provincial Special Assistance Grant programs, the Community Enhancement Employment programs and our Municipal Operating Grants, which have been maintained this year – that was very encouraging – as we work forward and work together on maintaining work in our communities.

A major focus for this department this year is regionalization and shared services. There's been considerable work done. A lot of consultation has occurred with communities across the province, as well as with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the Professional Municipal Administrators. We will be moving forward with this work to develop a plan that will allow communities to realize the many benefits of coming together.

I've said it before – and it's been kind of coined in my own district – we're stronger when we're together. We have access to regional economic development opportunities, fire services, land use planning, improved water systems, roads, just to name a few of the top of the trees.

I'll take this opportunity to let each of you know that I am interested in working with you. As I said, I know that a lot of you probably have more experience in your municipalities than even me, so if there's something that you want to add, by all means, please. My door is always open; give me a call. I mean that sincerely. I do like to hear from other perspectives as well.

One final note, specific to the Estimates, you'll notice that there are a few changes in almost all of the salary categories this year. There are two factors that are causing that. One is the removal of the 27th pay period, which was required in '20-'21 due to the timing of the payroll runs. Secondly, there is a 2 per cent negotiated salary increase included this year. That will become evident as we work through again.

Other than that, I'm good to get into it, and thank you.

CHAIR: Okay.

I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping.

CLERK (Jerrett): 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive carry?

MHA Wall.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before we begin, I'd just like to take the opportunity on behalf of the Official Opposition to recognize the loss of one of the staff, but more importantly one of our friends. I've known George for quite a number of years. It was truly a shock to us all. I believe the province has, indeed, as you said, Madam Chair, lost an icon. On behalf of Mr. Brazil and the Official Opposition, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize him, the loss to the province and our deepest condolences to you and to his family. Thank you.

Minister, good to be here today. I'm excited for this opportunity.

First of all, before we get into the line items, can we obtain a copy of your briefing following this?

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Thank you.

I have some general questions, Minister. With respect to the attrition plan, is that still being followed? If so, what are the changes for last year and this coming year?

Can we leave our masks off for the duration?

CHAIR: Yes.

J. WALL: Thank you.

K. HOWELL: There is a current attrition plan for fiscal 2020-2021. One position is required to be abolished and the department has submitted their response to the plan identifying that position.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

How many people are currently employed in your department, Minister?

K. HOWELL: Our total departmental staff complement is 68.

J. WALL: Sixty-eight.

Thank you.

Any retirements over the past year?

K. HOWELL: There was one retirement.

J. WALL: Any vacancies that are not filled currently within the department?

K. HOWELL: We have five vacancies.

Am I correct in reading that?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

K. HOWELL: Six vacancies, sorry.

J. WALL: Six vacancies.

K. HOWELL: Six vacancies.

J. WALL: What would those positions be, Minister?

K. HOWELL: We have two organizational budget analysts, two program and policy specialists and a Municipal Affairs analyst. And then there's one that I am missing.

B. STEELE: There is one vacant position in Local Governance and Land Use Planning. It's an analyst position.

J. WALL: Was that Local Governance and Land Use Planning? Is that what it was?

B. STEELE: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Thank you.

Minister, were there any layoffs that occurred in your department in the last year?

K. HOWELL: There were 33 positions that had completed their required employment that were not extended.

J. WALL: Okay.

Any new hires?

K. HOWELL: One new hire, it was a clerical position.

J. WALL: Minister, how many contractual and short-term employees do you have currently in your department?

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Take your time.

K. HOWELL: I have four contractual – I have to double-check; making sure I’m saying it right. I have four contractual positions in our department.

J. WALL: Okay, and short-term?

K. HOWELL: Bonnie, I’ll refer to you.

B. STEELE: We have nine temporary positions.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Minister, has your department received any funds from the COVID fund over the past year? If so, what was that for?

K. HOWELL: There is significant work with the COVID fund in our department, but I will let Bonnie speak to that if you don’t mind.

B. STEELE: Under the federal Safe Restart Agreement, the department received \$27.4 million that was allocated to support the municipalities. This program was partnered with the feds and provincially and distributed to all of the municipalities based on their population.

We also are putting out some COVID-19 stimulus for small-scale community projects. That was \$10.7 million. Provincially, we sent out \$600,000 to the municipalities that have arenas and pools. That was funded as well.

J. WALL: \$600,000?

B. STEELE: Yes.

J. WALL: So the remainder of the COVID funding for municipalities from \$27.4 million, what’s remaining? If it all wasn’t disbursed to municipalities.

B. STEELE: It is being disbursed to municipalities.

J. WALL: Currently?

B. STEELE: Yes.

J. WALL: Thank you.

K. HOWELL: I think it was a two-year process, so the remainder of the COVID stimulus is carried over to this year as well.

J. WALL: Okay.

Any issues with the municipalities during that rollout?

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Okay.

Has COVID impacted your departmental service delivery in any way?

K. HOWELL: I think the same is true for most of the departments. Everybody had to accommodate and make adjustments for COVID. As we work through, you’ll see some of that reflected in our numbers: some of our employees working from home, reduced travel and making accommodations for that.

J. WALL: Okay.

There are no backlogs occurring within the department from any of the municipalities’ requests? Nothing at all?

K. HOWELL: To my knowledge, nothing is outstanding. Not as a result of COVID.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Did the department receive any funds from the contingency fund? If so, what was that for?

K. HOWELL: I’ll defer that one to Bonnie as well.

B. STEELE: No, we did not.

J. WALL: Okay.

Minister, has your department taken or done any analysis on the applicable Greene report recommendations for your department?

K. HOWELL: Do you want to speak to that one, Ted?

T. LOMOND: Yes, we have a copy of the report. We are reviewing the report, I guess, as everyone is. There are no decisions made on the report. Of course, public consultations are under way, but just in terms of being prepared, we are familiarizing ourselves with that report.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Minister, of course, being a former municipal leader as well, as we both can appreciate, what analysis has been done by your department with respect to the costs or benefits of taxing the unincorporated areas? This is a topic that is highly in discussion.

K. HOWELL: Certainly, it is very much part of our plan, but the numbers this year won't reflect that. We are still working through what that looks like. We're examining a number of models that exist to see which one is best fit for the different regions of this province. That will be more reflective in next year's budget.

J. WALL: So over the next year that work will be currently going on?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: We will look forward to that –

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: – this time next year. Okay.

With respect to analysis on potential revenue from the taxing of secondary residences.

K. HOWELL: Similar response. It is still a process that we're trying to determine which model – evaluating models. We want to make sure that when we do finally get to a place where we can put it into action, it yields the best results for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Regardless of what the plan looks like, we want to see increased access and improved services.

J. WALL: With respect to both those questions I had, with respect to the Greene report recommendations and unincorporated areas, you have a sufficient number of staff in order to do this extra work going forward over this next year as well? You don't foresee any issue going forward with that?

K. HOWELL: I think that we have been working through this. We have our regional planning committee that has been doing a lot of great work on that. I think that for now it is our understanding that we are able to conduct that with our current level of staff.

J. WALL: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, what is your department's position right now on the taxing of land transfers? Again, another topic for discussion.

K. HOWELL: Again, I'll start off by saying that is not a conversation that we've had at this point since I came into this role. I'm sure that it will come up, but for now, it is not something that I've had a conversation about.

J. WALL: Nothing. Okay.

Can you please give us an update today on the municipal legislation review?

K. HOWELL: Yes, it is a big piece of our mandate in this department and it is a work-in-progress, as you can appreciate.

J. WALL: I do.

K. HOWELL: There are so many different, complex pieces that we're putting together. It is rolling out and we're doing a lot of work on it. Hopefully, it will be ready for the fall.

J. WALL: Okay. As I said in the House some weeks ago with respect to the municipal councillor training, I hope you are taking that into consideration as well under the review.

K. HOWELL: Yes, that is part of the municipal legislative review is a code of conduct and implementing that for people who are interested in participating in municipal government.

J. WALL: Yes, we all know that's important. I've had numerous municipalities reach out to me in my short time here, I'm sure you can appreciate, with respect to code of conduct. Not all councils, as you know, are cohesive.

K. HOWELL: No, exactly.

J. WALL: It's difficult enough to serve on council when you are a unit of seven or five or whoever you serve on your council. When you don't have that together, it makes it all the harder. Anyway, I look forward to that review. That's going to be exciting. I'm looking forward to that for sure.

Minister, can you provide an update on the gas tax disbursements over the last year?

B. STEELE: Last year, we disbursed \$31.5 million to the various communities that applied for their projects.

J. WALL: Okay.

How many projects were included for that?

B. STEELE: We had 257 projects approved.

J. WALL: Okay.

How many were submitted? How many projects were submitted?

B. STEELE: I don't have that number on me, but we can certainly provide that.

J. WALL: Okay. I would appreciate that, thank you.

Minister, with respect to the public tender act, what is your department's role in ensuring that all municipalities are following the public tender act?

K. HOWELL: It's my understanding that that's the responsibility of the Public Procurement Agency. Do you want to speak to that, Bren?

B. HANLON: Our municipal support division does provide guidance to all municipalities on public tendering. They might give us a call if they're not sure or if we see instances where municipalities may not be sure of the exact

guidelines, we'll walk them through what the proper guidelines are through our regional staff.

J. WALL: Okay.

Because, again, I've had several municipalities reach out to me with respect to public tender act. Of course, being in that position for 7½ years, you are quite familiar with how that operates. You would provide support to municipalities who reach out to your department for that?

B. HANLON: Yes. We will provide guidance. As well, we provide financial training to municipalities through our municipal support team as well. Through the training and guidance, we try to provide support as it comes in from different municipalities.

J. WALL: I know it's a very short time, Minister, but how often do these requests normally come in?

B. HANLON: Our municipal support divisions get dozen of calls every day about a number of different items, but a lot of it is related to financial-type questions or governance-type questions. We wouldn't be able to tell you exactly how many PPA-type questions we get, but safe to say it's quite a large number.

J. WALL: Very good. Okay, I appreciate that.

Mr. Simms would appreciate this one: With respect to the NEAR plan, is there any update that we can have? I know that we spent a lot of time around the table, Randy and I, discussing, on a municipal level, with respect to the NEAR plan. Is there any update on that or is that even on your agenda, Minister?

K. HOWELL: Actually, last week, I had a memo about that. We're working to get a meeting now to make sure that that's a reality.

J. WALL: Okay. With all the stakeholders? Because it was significant funds, as you can appreciate, that have been spent to date on this. I have had people reach out to me. I sat on that for about four years – Randy, was that correct? About that time. I'd look forward to an update on that as well, Minister. If I can be of any assistance going forward, I offer that as well.

K. HOWELL: Absolutely, thank you.

J. WALL: One last question before my time is up. This was brought up last week in the House with respect to your notice on the provincial Coat of Arms. What consultations have your department began with respect to the proposed changes to the provincial Coat of Arms?

K. HOWELL: Right now, we've done a lot of work interdepartmentally. We're collaborating with the department of Indigenous Affairs to work on that. We still have a ways to go. We want to make sure that the process is there for people to contribute.

J. WALL: Yes, the process is going to be key going forward. I look forward to that.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for now. Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Looking at salaries from 2020 for municipalities, the total figure has gone up by over \$400,000. This is referring to Appendix II. What new hires occurred as a result of splitting the Municipal Affairs off into its own department, if any?

K. HOWELL: As you mentioned, we did split the department. A lot of this is just an issue of restatement of how they're working out, but for new hires ...

B. STEELE: The department was split and Environment and Climate Change was carved off, but for the municipalities, and Municipal and Provincial Affairs, there were no new hires due to this restructuring. Not within Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. DINN: Okay.

Then the \$400,000 – you mentioned earlier – is that a removal of the 2 per cent negotiated salary increase then?

B. STEELE: The total change in the salary plan was due to the removal of the 27th pay period.

Then we had to include the negotiated, approved wage increases, any step increases that we due to staff as a result of their regular hiring and their step movement along the salary plan.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Were there any other expenses incurred by splitting Municipal Affairs off into its own department? I'm assuming changing the letterhead and everything else, offices and whatnot. Would there be other expenses incurred?

K. HOWELL: Well, I think that we're still in the process of doing some of that. I don't know if we have those numbers right now.

Bonnie?

B. STEELE: Not at this time. There was very little change. Anything that was done for a letterhead and that was done internally, electronically, so there was not any printing or anything incurred to date.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

I think my colleague from the Official Opposition referenced the legislation. I'm just wondering: Can you update us on any work that has been done so far towards modernizing the Municipalities Act, the *City of St. John's Act*, the *City of Mount Pearl Act* and the *City of Corner Brook Act*? Specifically, which parts of the act would be the highest priority for reform?

K. HOWELL: Well, we're working through all of those, as you mentioned. The Municipalities Act, as a whole, was the first project and then the city acts, as we move throughout the fall, we'll approach that.

As I mentioned before, there were a couple of topics that came out in consultations with the public and with municipalities that were kind of big-picture issues or big issues for them and, primarily, code of conduct was one of the ones that came up there. So that was something that we did spend significant time on.

J. DINN: By code of conduct, you mean what, for councillors or for ...?

K. HOWELL: For councillors and staff. It's just an outline of responsibilities and roles, as well as expectations and giving some oversight as to how they are to conduct business. It's more of a way to enable municipalities to conduct themselves in a fashion that – it speaks to a teamwork approach in their own house, with the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs serving as oversight but allowing them to have autonomy in their own community.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Is it possible to have an update on the Safe Restart funds for municipalities? How much uptake has there been for this program, and any indication on how much it has helped in covering municipal deficits?

K. HOWELL: The federal Safe Restart Agreement was \$27.4 million allocated to support municipalities and they were provided on a per capita basis, in addition to the operating grants. It was cost shared equally between the federal and provincial governments and the province's share was provided by normal municipal operations, paid since April 1.

J. DINN: I'm assuming there's been a significant uptake on this.

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Has it helped in covering municipal deficits, or does more need to be done?

K. HOWELL: I'd say it's always safe to say there's room for improvement, but I can't answer that one.

Bren, do you have an answer for that one?

B. HANLON: The full \$27.4 million was disbursed in the last fiscal year. There was no holdback on that money. All municipalities would have received their Safe Restart funding by now. We did receive information from a lot of municipalities saying that it really assisted with their COVID needs last year, so it seems to have been a very successful program.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

B. HANLON: You're welcome.

J. DINN: Could we also have an update on the \$34 million that was announced for municipalities back in late November of 2020?

B. STEELE: Was that \$24 million?

J. DINN: \$34 million that was announced back in late November 2020.

B. STEELE: I have a number here for the stimulus COVID for the small-scale community projects for \$24 million.

J. DINN: Okay, I'll take that one for now.

B. STEELE: Okay.

J. DINN: It has the same last digit in it. That's good.

B. STEELE: That's okay.

That's a two-year program. In fiscal '20-'21 we disbursed \$10.7 million out to the difference municipalities that applied for projects for infrastructure and improvements within their communities. For this fiscal, the remaining of the funding will be disbursed this year based on completion of the projects.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Do we know how many people or how many primary residences there currently are in unincorporated areas and the number of secondary residences such as cabins, et cetera, in unincorporated areas as well?

K. HOWELL: Well, right now the numbers that we're looking at indicate that there's about 9 per cent of the population living in a local service district or unincorporated area. That captures about 46,000 people in our province.

J. DINN: That's 46,000 people as a primary residence?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

Under section 1.2.01, Executive Support, Salaries for this year increased by over \$160,000. I'm assuming that's to do with, again,

the removal of the 27th pay period and the 2 per cent increase?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Budgets for Supplies and Purchased Services, however, were significantly underspent. Why is that?

K. HOWELL: The decrease in that budget reflects lower than anticipated travel costs, alternative methods to be implemented to reduce future travel.

J. DINN: That is going forward? They are looking at reducing that?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: What is the source of provincial revenue here?

K. HOWELL: Sorry?

J. DINN: In the 1.2.01, the total amount under line 02, Revenue - Provincial, \$169,000 and then it was up to \$202,800 and back down. What would be the source of that revenue there?

T. LOMOND: That is funds recovered from the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board. The CEO for the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board is reflected in this estimate activity. When that is restated again next year, that will be moved to ECC, but right now it is in our budget.

J. DINN: Why did it go up significantly in actuals last year?

T. LOMOND: That is a case where there were actually five payouts in that year. We actually received the payment for the end of the year preceding at the beginning of that year. We actually had five payments from the MMSB that year.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I have about a minute and a bit left. I do want to take a moment though, before I finish up that 1.2.01, just to offer my condolences to your caucus on the passing of George Murphy. Of

course, before he was member of your caucus he was a Member of the Third Party. Certainly, he is the main person who brings us the Ministerial Statements in the day, he will be missed. I think a lot of people are going to miss his weekly updates on gas prices. More importantly our condolences to you, all of his friends in the House of Assembly and the Confederation Building and, most importantly, to his family as well. I'll leave it at that for this point.

CHAIR: Thank you, MHA Dinn. Your time has expired.

MHA Wall.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

1.1.01, Transportation and Communications, from \$20,800 to \$46,600 then going to \$45,800.

Minister, do you envision a return to normal operations hopefully soon?

K. HOWELL: I hope so. Again, this is a reflection of some of the changes in transportation allocations during COVID. As we move forward to the fall and our vaccine rates are on par, in the event that these things return, we want to be prepared for that.

J. WALL: Be prepared, okay.

The opportunity for savings given the lessons learned over the last 15 months, what is your department looking at with respect to going forward when we do return to normal, but have the opportunity to look at the opportunity for savings.

K. HOWELL: I think you hit the nail on the head. There is certainly an opportunity there where we can do things differently. We've learned over the past 15 months that these resources are available to us. It's certainly part of our plan. A lot of our meetings with a lot of the service boards and whatnot are conducted virtually.

B. HANLON: Yes, we've developed some online training as well for municipalities. Last year when we were doing our in-person training, we were conducting online training as well. We kind of put the two together. Some prefer online;

some prefer in person. As we move forward, we're going to continue with our online training because it was quite successful last year.

J. WALL: Again, it will cut down on the cost then for the municipalities –

B. HANLON: Yes.

J. WALL: – if you have to be there. We've all been there. To go to your training, hotels, travel, meals and what have you, all that would definitely be a cost savings to each municipality. I'd encourage that for sure going forward.

B. HANLON: Yes.

J. WALL: 1.2.01, General Administration, Executive Support, you touched on it earlier about the additional \$135,900 under Salaries. I appreciate that explanation.

Getting back to 02, Revenue - Provincial, with respect to MMSB: Deputy Minister, could you expand on that a bit more, please, if you would?

T. LOMOND: The CEO of the MMSB is paid through the MMSB. That's a full cost recovery. Going forward that money will be stated in Environment and Climate Change. It's currently in our department. That's why you're seeing the MMSB CEO salary reflected there even though the CEO doesn't report to our minister.

J. WALL: Okay.

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Sorry, I can't hear you.

K. HOWELL: In the upcoming year, it will be moved out of our department. I think it was just an issue of timing right now that we didn't –

J. WALL: Okay. This won't be the case next year?

K. HOWELL: No.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

We can go into 1.2.02, Madam Chair?

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any additional questions?

J. DINN: Sorry?

CHAIR: Do you have any additional questions?

J. DINN: For this section?

CHAIR: Yes.

J. DINN: Yes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Under 1.1.01 or 1.2.01?

CHAIR: 1.1.01.

J. DINN: No.

CHAIR: Finished, thank you.

I ask the Clerk to recall the subheading.

J. DINN: Sorry, are we talking about 1.2.01 or 1.2.0 –

CHAIR: The whole group.

J. DINN: Oh, I still have a few more.

CHAIR: Okay.

J. DINN: Sorry about that. I thought you were just looking at ...

1.2.02, \$175,000 was budgeted for Salaries last year. Furthermore, the budget this year is only \$13,800. Last year, no salary was paid out. Any reason for that? Are there any vacant positions in that section, in 1.2.02?

I may not have asked my question too clearly. While \$175,000 was budgeted for Salaries last year, none was paid out. Furthermore, the budget this year is only for \$13,800. Are there vacant positions here?

K. HOWELL: The decrease in the budget from 2020 to 2021 is the removal of the one-time 27th pay period. That was \$114,000 from Municipal Infrastructure and salary plan adjustments. The

division no longer has that staff after the reorganization.

J. DINN: That is the result of the reorganization of the –?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay.

Property, Furnishings and Equipment was way over budget, coming in at \$86,500. Why is this?

K. HOWELL: This reflects a higher budget for departmental cellphone replacements. Specifically, iPhones were no longer supported and they had to be replaced as they aged.

J. DINN: I’m sorry, that last part again?

K. HOWELL: The iPhones were no longer supported. They had to be replaced as they aged. I’ll defer to Bren for that as well.

B. HANLON: We purchased 68 laptops as primary computer devices for staff so that they could work home effectively. A lot of our staff had older desktop devices, so we invested in some laptops so everyone could work at home effectively and efficiently.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

The source of provincial revenue here, why is it so high in 2020-21? Is that funding for the iPads, laptops or is this just something else?

K. HOWELL: No, that one is a higher miscellaneous revenue from repayment of prior year’s community enhancement program grant. At the time, the project did not use all of its advanced funding and it was repaid to the department.

J. DINN: Is it safe to say that 1.2.03, again, the spending on Salaries was due to the removal of the 27th pay period and that the overall salaries budgeted for this year has been reduced by over \$100,000?

K. HOWELL: Yes, correct.

J. DINN: Is that because of the transfer or the loss of the 27th pay period?

K. HOWELL: The funding for the 27th pay period.

J. DINN: Okay.

Just a general question. In general, how are the costs calculated and then split between departments? How many employees are there in total under the Strategic Financial Management?

K. HOWELL: I’m going to have to defer that one to Bonnie.

B. STEELE: There are 13 funded positions in this division. The cost is not split between the departments that they do the work for. Everything is funded through Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

1.2.04, Grants and Subsidies: What do the Grants and Subsidies fund?

B. STEELE: There is \$9,900 for a Provincial Territorial Officials Committee and this has to do with the coordination and research of local grants related to the local governments.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Finally, are there –

CHAIR: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: My apologies.

T. LOMOND: I was just going to point out there that we pay our share on a per capita basis. This is actually a very good value for us.

J. DINN: Excellent, thank you.

Are there any alternative models for municipal revenue generation being considered at this time? For example, allowing municipalities to charge a sales tax.

K. HOWELL: That’s not a conversation that we’ve had at this point.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm done with that section.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Trimper.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much.

I'm just going to take a couple of minutes. I have two questions on this section. I see my colleague for Mount Pearl – Southlands is here, so we'll be watching.

I am going to start with, just as everyone else has, expressing my condolences to the family of George. My last two years I've worked so closely with this gentleman. On five of the private Member's resolutions we introduced in the House, I worked closely with him and Jeremy Reynolds. We would go out and have lunch afterwards, always testing George's palate and knowledge of this city. It's been a fascinating last few years. I'm still in shock and I know the whole province is. Hopefully, we can all find a way to carry on and honour his memory.

Minister, I have two questions – and welcome to government. One is I wanted to follow up on the exploration of models for – as you're looking at unincorporated areas and LSDs and so on. Could you be able to provide how many locations or how many residents may be tied up? I think I heard a number earlier, but I wasn't sure. Was it 46,000?

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

P. TRIMPER: Yes. Do you have list of locations as well?

K. HOWELL: We would, but as I mentioned before, we're making sure that it fits for the different areas in Newfoundland. To say that one area in particular will have a regional government, we haven't drawn those lines yet. Certainly looking at the models that are representative across the country and seeing what works in different jurisdictions similar to ours. With regard to saying who and where, right now it's undecided.

P. TRIMPER: Yes, it's going to be an interesting challenge for your department. I just think of the great expanses of land, for example, in Labrador or rural parts of the Island, and do you do it equitably or so many kilometres per isolated home on that huge stretch. Yes, it will be interesting.

My other exploration question here for this section – and I see the Minister of Environment and Climate Change is right behind me. A lot of questions for communities I'm dealing with, and I know other communities in the province are dealing with the effects of climate change and adaptation and mitigation measures. Are you able to separate the responsibility of this department now from the minister's behind me? Do you know roughly where your, sort of, lines are? For example, in the application of federal funding that might be there, would the lead come from your department or through the provincial ECC as it relates to a municipality?

K. HOWELL: I would think that as it relates to municipalities we're outlined on the funds that we are responsible for in our department and we have our mandate for those funds, and I'm sure that the Department of Environment and Climate Change has theirs as well. As each is allocated, and depending on what pot we're dipping into, whoever is responsible for it will be distributing it.

T. LOMOND: As well, Municipal Infrastructure is in Transportation and Infrastructure, so if you're looking at municipalities grappling with larger culverts or in terms of rainfall events, that sort of thing, that would be in TI.

P. TRIMPER: It might be safe just to have all three join in, yes.

Okay, thank you.

That's it for now for me.

CHAIR: All right.

MHA Wall, do you have any more questions for section one.

J. WALL: I have one quick question, Madam Chair, thank you.

I know my colleague from St. John's Centre has asked several of mine, but I have one left.

I want to go back to 1.2.02, Revenue - Provincial, and the deputy minister did allude to the repayment of a grant, or repayment of grant money, from \$5,000 for income to \$71,800. Did I understand that correctly?

K. HOWELL: Sorry, can you say what number you're speaking of again?

J. WALL: The repayment of a grant was the –

K. HOWELL: In what section?

J. WALL: 1.2.02.

Did I hear that correctly? You went from \$5,000 budgeted to \$71,800? Or did I –

K. HOWELL: That was the Community Enhancement Employment Program grant. The sponsor of the project did not use all the advance funding and repaid it to the department.

J. WALL: Okay, I understand now. I didn't get it first.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, a seat went out and they didn't use it so it came back.

J. WALL: Yes, got you now. Thank you very much.

That's it, Madam Chair, thank you.

CHAIR: All right.

MHA Dinn, confirm that you are finished with this section?

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Okay, I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.04 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next subheads, please.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 carry?

MHA Wall.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

2.1.01, Regional Support, under Operating Accounts. Professional Services, an unbudgeted expenditure of \$37,000, what would that entail, Minister?

K. HOWELL: This reflects a higher number due to legal expenses in relation to opinions on municipal governance items.

J. WALL: Legal expenses on the department's opinions on ...?

K. HOWELL: It was a special inspection.

J. WALL: Okay. On your department?

K. HOWELL: That our department was part of.

J. WALL: Was part of?

K. HOWELL: We conducted, yes.

J. WALL: Okay. And there's nothing budgeted going forward.

K. HOWELL: No, we incurred a cost there that we don't expect being recurring.

B. HANLON: These are special inspections, and we're employing more of our own staff now to conduct these special inspections because we're trying to avoid outside legal costs for doing this type of work, as we do inspections on municipalities if there are complaints, for instance.

J. WALL: Okay. And this is something that you're going to look at to continue going forward?

K. HOWELL: That's something that our department is offering now when we go out to do a special inspection. This one just seemed to be a bit of a different situation. Moving forward there, as Bren mention, the intention is to let our department handle these things so that we don't have to incur these outside fees.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Under Transportation and Communications, same section, the increase back to \$42,200. Again, you're expecting we're going to get back to normal travel and what have you, the same as the previous section?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: Okay.

Nothing else for 2.1.01, and 2.1.02, nothing to note on that one.

I'll go to 2.2.01, if I could.

2.2.01, Municipal Debt Servicing, under Grants and Subsidies: Why the cut from \$156,000 down to \$49,200?

K. HOWELL: This decrease reflects a lower forecasted budget due to the lower debt-servicing expenses. The interest is declining as the debt is paid off. We have 10 loans that are outstanding, and as we pay down on those, the number gets lower; the interest declines.

Did you want to speak to that, Bren, as well?

T. LOMOND: I was just going to point out that program ended in 2006. As the balance of the loans is paid out – and you'll see it reflected in the next activity as well – the amounts will decrease.

J. WALL: Okay.

Thank you for that explanation.

K. HOWELL: Bren.

B. HANLON: Yes, these are old capital works loans. The way it used to work is that we used to pay municipalities' debt for our share of projects. Of course, now government funds the municipalities directly for infrastructure projects through Transportation and Infrastructure. It's just a change in the way the provincial portion of capital infrastructure projects was funded. In 2006, it changed.

J. WALL: Just cleaning up going forward, I guess.

B. HANLON: Yes.

K. HOWELL: Going forward it should be clearing itself up.

J. WALL: We should expect to see a lesser number this time next year.

K. HOWELL: We would hope.

J. WALL: Fingers crossed.

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: Okay.

2.2.02, Municipal Debt Servicing - Principal, under Grants and Subsidies: Minister, why the cut from \$2.9 million to \$1.285 million?

K. HOWELL: Sorry, can you say your section again? I'm tangled up here.

J. WALL: Certainly. 2.2.02, Municipal Debt Servicing - Principal, under Grants and Subsidies, you went from \$2.9 million down to \$1.285 million. Is there a reason for that?

K. HOWELL: That's the same answer: The decrease is reflective of lower debt-servicing expenses.

J. WALL: Same thing the deputy minister mentioned, okay, same answer. Thank you.

2.2.03, Municipal Operating Grants: Why did this amount drop by \$668,900, from \$22 million down to \$21,331,100?

K. HOWELL: This reflects grants that were not paid out to communities, pending submission of required documentation as per agreements.

J. WALL: So municipalities basically missed the boat if they didn't have –

K. HOWELL: If they had missed their deadline. We did make allowances given the situation for COVID.

J. WALL: That was my next question.

K. HOWELL: Yes. A lot of the audits or the financials were delayed. We did give a grace period and gave extensions. For those that didn't meet them, this is the result.

J. WALL: That \$668,900, how many municipalities would that have affected?

K. HOWELL: Bren, did you want to?

B. HANLON: It is kind of a combination because the way this works, if a municipality doesn't submit all their documentation and they submit it next year, they can still get their Municipal Operating Grant. There is actually a one-year carry-forward. There are approximately 50 municipalities that didn't submit all the required documentation by the deadline.

J. WALL: Five-zero, 50?

B. HANLON: Five-zero. But then, of course, there would have been some from the previous year that did not submit, so the difference is kind of what reflects in the \$600-something thousand. There are actually some after coming in since. If they do come in since, we will pay out the Municipal Operating Grant because, again, they get a one-year grace period to submit all their information. A lot of the audits and whatnot were late due to COVID. Even though we did provide a six-month grace period, there were still approximately 50 that didn't get all their information in on time.

J. WALL: So that is 50 municipalities through not your fault. That is not where I am going with this. Would it be a lack of training on the municipalities' parts that they would require more training or is it working with their particular auditors? I just know that is a fair

chunk of change for municipalities to miss out on.

K. HOWELL: Yes. I think it is fair to assume that COVID had a significant impact there.

J. WALL: No doubt.

K. HOWELL: A lot of the auditing and financials were delayed. It is certainly something that we can work on going forward – working with communities to make sure that they understand their responsibilities and requirements.

J. WALL: I appreciate the grace period being given. Some of the smaller municipalities throughout our province that I have had the fortune of meeting and speaking with are not always – and I have to say this very respectfully – fully capable at an office level –

K. HOWELL: That's right.

J. WALL: – if you understand what I am saying. That is why if there could be some – not more leniency, but probably some more guidance from the department there, it would be – yes.

B. HANLON: Just to follow up, even though there were 50 that were late, traditionally we only see two or three that may not get their Municipal Operating Grant in the run of a year. Undoubtedly, this 50 number is much lower now and as we work with them and help them out and whatnot – again, normally there are only two or three that don't come across at all out of 270.

J. WALL: COVID has certainly affected everything in life going forward.

B. HANLON: It did, yes.

J. WALL: Would you know what parts of the province these would be from? Would that be something that you would know?

K. HOWELL: I don't have that information right now.

B. HANLON: Yes, we don't have it on hand. I mean, undoubtedly it's all across the province.

J. WALL: No doubt, yes.

B. HANLON: I could certainly provide a list of who may have been late submitting –

J. WALL: But it's not an urban-rural divide-type thing. This is just –

B. HANLON: Not necessarily, not necessarily, yes.

J. WALL: Okay.

B. HANLON: Again, we can provide a list, but it's kind of all across the province-ish.

J. WALL: Yes, understood. Okay.

2.2.04, Special Assistance, under Grants and Subsidies: Minister, can we get a list of the disbursements for this past year for Grant and Subsidies of just over \$2 million?

K. HOWELL: Yes, we sure can provide that.

J. WALL: You can provide that. Okay, that will be great, thank you.

2.2.05, Community Enhancement, again, Grants and Subsidies, the drop of \$624,400 over the last year. Can you explain the drop? Also, another list of disbursements, if you could.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, we certainly can provide that information.

J. WALL: The drop of \$624,400?

K. HOWELL: The decrease reflects lower grant expenditures due to anticipated savings and delays in processing final reports from COVID-19.

J. WALL: So it's related back to the previous one?

K. HOWELL: Yes. All the money was a hundred per cent committed based on the quotes, so sometimes savings occurred or projects came in under. A lot of them were really short projects and sometimes we moved deadlines in giving the money out, so there was a lot of leniency in this one as well.

J. WALL: Okay, all right.

T. LOMOND: I didn't know if we wanted to mention, as well, that because of the change last year the qualifying time for unemployment insurance had shortened, so projects tended to be a bit smaller as well. In terms of that slippage piece, you wouldn't be alert to your slippage until a bit later.

J. WALL: Okay, good point. All right.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Just so I don't have to repeat questions, is it possible for us to have the same information that has been requested and vice versa?

K. HOWELL: Yes, absolutely.

J. DINN: So I don't have to ask the same question and ask for the same list.

Thank you.

Just under 2.1.02, Municipal Finance, I'm just trying to remember now. I think it's the road tax. Am I correct in that? The road tax, is that for maintaining infrastructure, roads and bridges provincially? It's one that I know the city was looking for – I don't know if it's a portion on gasoline – sorry, I don't have my notes in front of me at this point in time. I think it was a significant chunk of change that is collected on municipal transportation, but the province doesn't maintain any of the infrastructure within the city. But it's also money that could be used – looking at rebated back to the city since it takes care of all of its infrastructure and that.

I'll have to have a further conversation with you, Minister. I did bring it up in the House at one point. The term of the tax escapes me at this point in time, but it's one that the city could use in maintaining its own public transit system. It's charged in all their municipal vehicles. It's a significant cost that could be better reinvested

here within the city itself, especially since the city is responsible for maintaining the infrastructure within their city limits.

I'm just wondering: Does the province pay the City of St. John's property taxes or anything like that on any provincially owned buildings that are within the city limits?

T. LOMOND: I might have to defer to my team here on this one, but not to my knowledge, no, we don't pay tax. We might pay something in lieu of.

J. DINN: No, and I ask that because I understand there's nothing to be paid in lieu of. You're paying a water tax, as I understand it, but I would just like that confirmed.

Secondly, if that's the case I would like it confirmed, too, if indeed property taxes or taxes being paid to the City of Corner Brook – something opposite. In other words, if they were paying taxes on municipal buildings, I would like that confirmed. I would assume that one size should fit all here, especially if it's a large urban city; the services still have to be maintained.

I would like to know, I guess, with regard to the policy if, indeed, property taxes are paid to the city, if it's a different treatment for the City of Corner Brook versus the City of St. John's. I would like to see any municipality where there is a provincial building that their taxes are paid or some sort of grant in lieu of maintained. That would be one way certainly to maintain when you look at Municipal Finance.

K. HOWELL: That's a conversation that we can certainly have. It is going to require a little bit of information finding on our part. We can definitely continue this.

J. DINN: I appreciate that and I appreciate the fact that you'll look for it there. Thank you.

Under 2.1.02, are there any plans to extend the COVID-19 Stimulus Program for municipalities or to provide some alternate program to help them transition to the new normal, whatever that's going to be?

K. HOWELL: Well, the stimulus program is continuing for this year. We're still working

with municipalities on getting that money to them as quickly as we can. As we move forward and things are improving, we will have to re-evaluate our current situation.

J. DINN: By this year, you mean the fiscal year or the calendar year?

K. HOWELL: Yes, the fiscal year.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'm going to move on to 2.2.06, Provincial Gas Tax Revenue Sharing. Has there been any consideration lately of increasing the portion of revenue from the provincial gas tax that the municipalities receive?

K. HOWELL: Sorry, MHA, I'm still finding my paper here. Can you say your section again?

J. DINN: Sure, 2.2.06. Has there been any consideration lately of increasing the portion of revenue from the provincial gas tax that the municipalities receive?

K. HOWELL: At present, we haven't had that discussion. We're just glad that the communities are receiving the doubled federal fund, and as we look at our financial situation then we will assess going forward.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Chair, is it all right to move on to 2.3.01? It's all under that –

CHAIR: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Under 2.3.01, Local Governance and Planning, are there currently any communities that have expressed an interest in the Community Relocation funding?

K. HOWELL: The Community Relocation funding is a topic where communities have to come to us. As of now, we have one community that we're talking with and it's certainly a priority if that's the community's interest and if that's what in their best interest. Our department is willing to have those conversations.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Civic addressing has been a problem in rural communities for a while. It's necessary for the proper functioning of a number of agencies, especially Fire and Emergency Services. Municipalities NL has been pushing for this for years. Is it possible to have an update on efforts to complete civic addressing?

K. HOWELL: I don't have that information right now, but we can certainly go and look for that.

J. DINN: Thank you.

But it is being worked on I take it. Correct?

K. HOWELL: It is certainly a part of providing services to communities, yeah.

J. DINN: Okay.

This is a bit of a back to regionalization; we talked a little bit about that. Would the minister provide an update on plans to advance regionalization? Realizing, of course, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work and depending on how it is done, it could result in push back from municipalities. I am just looking here, we talked a little bit about it – what are some of the alternative models that are being considered and how far towards maybe running a pilot project are we?

K. HOWELL: I do appreciate that there are going to be communities that may take some issue with this, but the broader picture here that we are presenting is availability and access of services. A lot of our communities are struggling and it is our intent that we can provide support to these areas.

The regional models that we're looking at – we're not reinventing the wheel, as much as I'd like to take credit for it all, we're looking at models that are currently existing; shared services models, county models and different things like that which exist right throughout the country. Given our jurisdiction, we will see, as you mentioned, which is the right fit for our province because we can't use a one-size-fits-all.

J. DINN: I just say this, when I taught on the Southern Shore, every community had a school and if you want to see – the minute you close a school, a lot of people would look at that as the death of a community. People resisted and all you need to look at now is a lot of denominations are looking at closing churches and there you can sort of see how the people – people never get so attached to something as when they are going to lose it. It will be interesting, even if it is a pilot project that we can try out and see how this works.

How many municipalities have come to the department to ask for help in amalgamation or in setting up some sort of a regional framework? Have any communities approached the department?

K. HOWELL: Not specifically yet. We have several examples of communities that are already doing such things in the province. We don't necessarily call it regionalization but there are definitely examples that exist of communities that are sharing services or doing economic development together and we have highlighted those. Certainly, our work with PMA and MNL has been influential there in figuring out what is working in certain areas. In moving forward, those are examples that we would like to build upon.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What accounts for the slight variations in Salaries between budget 2020 and the actuals and between the actuals and this year's budget? Is that to do with the 27th pay period?

K. HOWELL: Sorry, what section are you referencing?

J. DINN: Same section, 2.3.01, there is a variation in Salaries, is that related to the 27th pay period?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay.

I'll leave it at that, Chair, until the next time.

CHAIR: Your time has expired.

MHA Wall.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Myself and my colleague from St. John's Centre are on the same page on a lot of questions.

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Do you know what? It is, I have to say. It's all good.

Minister, 2.2.06, Provincial Gas Tax Revenue Sharing, again, like the other questions I have ahead of me, can we get a full list of disbursements of those as well for myself and my hon. colleague?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: Thank you.

Can we get an update on the number of appeals before the Eastern board, for example? Would that list be available as well?

B. HANLON: I can provide you with the number of outstanding appeals now if you like or we can get you a list.

In Eastern, there are 26 outstanding and hearings are scheduled every month now through December to look after that backlog. In Central, there is one outstanding appeal. In Western, there are two and in Labrador, there are two.

J. WALL: So 31 total.

You're scheduled every month now until December? So you meet –

B. HANLON: (Inaudible) scheduled every month through December and there are hearings in Central and Western scheduled for October and Labrador, I think they may have to still schedule, I'm not sure. There are two outstanding.

J. WALL: Meeting once a month, is that correct?

B. HANLON: Depending on demand. In Eastern, there's a higher demand so monthly meetings and in other areas depending on

demand for appeals. If there are no appeals waiting for us, they're not going to meet. If there are one or two, they'll schedule a meeting.

J. WALL: From experience, I know that they can be tangly, if I can use that word in the House. It does get overwhelming for municipalities from time to time. I'm glad to see, Minister, that your department is looking to take care of that backlog especially for Eastern. The other numbers are fairly normal, we'll say, but having 26 outstanding, it would be great having that clued up.

B. HANLON: I'll just kind of add in COVID did put a little wrinkle into Eastern plans to have meetings. Of course, we couldn't get anyone together in a room. We are using teleconference meetings now so the board will get together and everyone else will be virtual or on teleconference. We have adapted by using the teleconference method to try to get this sped along.

J. WALL: Okay.

This just came to me now. With respect to the Appeal Boards members, do they do any site visits to particular sites that are being appealed? Do they do actual site visits, or is it all just what information has been given? That just came off the top of the head, sorry.

K. HOWELL: I'm not aware.

J. WALL: No.

K. HOWELL: I don't know. I can't speak to that. We can check.

J. WALL: Okay, all right, thank you. No problem on that one.

Minister, can you provide us an update the Provincial Solid Waste Management Strategy that was released by government last January 2020?

T. LOMOND: I think that question would be better referred to the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

J. WALL: Okay, so I'll speak with the hon. minister on Wednesday.

B. DAVIS: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Sounds good, thank you.

With respect to civic addressing, my colleague touched on that one. That's something that as a municipality we all struggle with and we all know the importance. Does that come under your department? Would it be under Justice and Public Safety? Is there something that your department can do through the Municipalities Act with respect to the mandatory civic addressing?

I do know that, again, being a former mayor of the Town of Pouch Cove, we had our staff look into this. We actually went to every physical address in the town, provided them with their civic address because we do Code 4 medical calls on top of all fire and emergency service calls. But is there something that your department can do with respect to making it mandatory, having your civic address? Again, that's to follow off my colleague's comment.

K. HOWELL: Again, in my experience, the same. We went to everybody and showed them what their actual address was, but there were a lot of places that required more work in some of these local service districts than smaller unincorporated.

J. WALL: Understood.

K. HOWELL: There might not even be a name on the road. So that's a collaborative effort that's going to have to come forward, I think, on behalf of our department, as well as the municipalities, local service districts and the unincorporated to determine how we best address that.

Again, certainly value the importance of having everybody's civic address and it is highly reflective in the Department of Justice as well, especially referencing emergency services. It is a conversation that needs to be had and it's important that we get it there, get that message out to those smaller communities who may not even have a road name.

J. WALL: Yes.

K. HOWELL: When you're giving a description of where you live: It's the third house on the left past the garbage can with the blue fence. So we do have to figure out how to do things better for our communities.

J. WALL: I understand. I did sit on the Estimates for Justice and Public Safety with the hon. minister and I neglected to ask the question. I'll be asking him the next time I see him, no doubt, but it's probably something that we should keep in mind going forward for everyone's safety.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

J. WALL: Yeah.

Minister, this is a question I know many municipalities struggle with: How many municipalities are currently under a boil order that your department is aware of?

K. HOWELL: I don't have that answer.

J. WALL: No.

K. HOWELL: Again, I think that would be reflective in the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

J. WALL: Again?

K. HOWELL: We do work closely with those communities when it comes to our department to see how we can move forward on that.

J. WALL: Okay. Because I do know your staff does the testing of the water from different municipalities –

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: – and what have you, so I thought it would be under your department.

B. HANLON: Just to clarify, the Water Resources Management Division is under Environment and Climate Change when we did the reorganization. As of very recently we were doing it, but as of the last reorganization it is with Environment and Climate Change's Water Resources Management Division.

J. WALL: Okay. I hope the hon. minister at the end of the hall is making notes.

B. HANLON: I hope he is, too.

J. WALL: Okay. Thank you for that.

2.3.01, Local Governance and Planning, under Grants and Subsidies, I think my colleague asked the question, but I was –

J. DINN: No, I didn't.

J. WALL: You didn't? Thank you.

Grants and Subsidies, only \$2,000 was spent last year. Minister, can you please tell us why that was the case?

K. HOWELL: That line item reflects grants provided for Long Service Awards for municipalities. Other than that, we have received no applications for feasibility studies or co-operative initiatives in that department.

J. WALL: Long Service Awards for municipalities, could you just expand on that one, please?

K. HOWELL: Those are individuals who contribute to their communities for different periods of time, and after a certain level, then they are recognized for their contribution.

J. WALL: Elected officials? On council?

K. HOWELL: Yes, and staff as well.

J. WALL: Staff as well. Basically, we just had a year where we didn't have many people apply?

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Okay.

Going back to my municipal background, I do know the importance of the mandate of a town plan. I do know that having a town plan approved is quite a lengthy process. We just went through that in my town.

Two questions: How many town plan reviews do you have on your desk currently from across the

province? And how many planners are in your department to review those town plans?

K. HOWELL: With regard to town plan reviews that are currently under way, I don't have an answer for that.

B. HANLON: I can give a ballpark. Right now, there are over a hundred plan reviews, amendment reviews, protected road zone and SJURRP Amendments in our department. We have four professional planners in our department currently working on these amendments and plans.

J. WALL: Four planners dedicated to those 100 plans.

B. HANLON: Four planners dedicated to municipal planning.

J. WALL: Okay.

I do know it is important. Again, I can speak from my own background. We had development that was hinging on a signed-off town plan, an approved town plan. I understand that the municipalities struggle waiting for this. I understand, again, as I spoke to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, the parameters that we're under. I do.

I was told that there were two. I'm glad that there are four. I'd like to see eight. I'm glad to see that there are four there to get those plans moving forward.

Do you have an estimated time, Minister, on getting those plans moved out, those hundred that are on your desk? What's your timeline for that? A difficult question, I know.

K. HOWELL: It's hard to say because each of them has its own merits and own questions and stuff, but as we move forward, we want to do things as efficiently and effectively as we can. Hopefully, we'll see action on these soon. Nobody is dragging their feet.

J. WALL: Not intended that way either, none at all. I'm glad to see that there are four there doing those hundred plans.

B. HANLON: I'll just add in some of the amendments are small; some are big.

J. WALL: Understood.

B. HANLON: All the work takes all different amounts of time, just to be clear.

J. WALL: Totally understand, yes. Been on the other side of the desk, totally understand. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to pick up on the civic address. Would it be fair, once – and my colleague who has had experience in this area – a civic address is assigned, is that then passed on to Emergency Services or is there a GPS coordinate, whatever you want? To your point, the third house past the garbage bin, whatever else, is not the most efficient way, but whether the person has the number up on the house or not, is that recorded somewhere so that Emergency Services know? Would there be a GPS? I can punch in someone's address, but in an emergency situation minutes count.

K. HOWELL: Absolutely.

J. DINN: Whether it's a fire, a heart attack or anything at all like that.

K. HOWELL: I don't know the answer to that.

T. LOMOND: I'm unaware. I'd have to speak to Emergency Services to find out what the process is, but we can certainly get it.

J. DINN: I ask this in terms of my colleague who said they went door-to-door and assigned each person a civic address. Whether that person puts it up – and I'm assuming that is another matter – I'm assuming the roads are marked. Having said that, I would assume, then, the fire department, if they're going looking for an actual physical number, that's one thing, or if they're able to call up a GPS. Because every

time, if you look at any GPS system, you can see that the roads have been added. Obviously, somewhere along the line this is updated digitally or otherwise. That's what I'm thinking about.

K. HOWELL: That's a good point. To that, we will have further conversations with that. I don't know if it's uploaded, but it's a good idea.

J. DINN: I think the only other question I have in 2.3.01 at this point in time is why did we receive so little provincial revenue under this section last year? It was \$29,500. It's down to under half – \$12,800 – and it's back up to \$29,500.

K. HOWELL: That's a reflection of lower revenues from cost recovery on Land Use Planning amendments that are expensed through the Professional Services.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 2.3.02, why was there such a large increase to Grants and Subsidies after so much money was left on the table last year? And is this because this is a multi-year program and what doesn't get spent in one year gets rolled into the next?

K. HOWELL: This line item is a reflection of additional program funding in a one-time federal funding for the fiscal '21-'22 year.

J. DINN: And what would that funding have been used for, then?

T. LOMOND: We see a lot of drinking water projects here. It could be used for sports infrastructure; it could be used for some roadwork, waste water. There are a number of things in there that are eligible. I think the numbers move because some communities will sort of bank their gas tax waiting as part of their plan until they get enough money to do something that they're planning to do, something significant.

Sometimes you'll see that while the funds are available, the community itself won't draw down the fund. Even though it has them, it'll wait until maybe next year until it gets enough money to do whatever it is it wants to do.

Because they're doing their infrastructure planning over multiple years.

J. DINN: So a question – and this again goes back to a question my colleague asked. It has to do with the number of boil orders that are out there. I think it's better to refer that to Environment and Climate Change.

I'm asking this: Would there be a record here, then, of could this money be used to upgrade or install water treatment to make sure that people have clean facilities? Would that be recorded here in this section?

T. LOMOND: Yes, that would be an eligible activity under this funding.

J. DINN: Is it possible, then, to have under that funding the number of applications, maybe from municipalities, to upgrade or to install water treatment facilities to provide clean drinking water? I would assume, then, a lot of that might come from communities that are currently under a boil order.

T. LOMOND: Right, we can certainly provide that list.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In that section, why do you expect that the amount of federal revenue to be more than double in this coming year? Again, is that to do with the projects that you expect, the uptake? I know it's gone from \$31 million to \$64 million; it's over double.

K. HOWELL: That's the additional federal program funding approved for the '21-'22 year.

J. DINN: Again, it could be used for drinking water. Because in this day and age, really, especially if we're looking at attracting tourists to a community, you shouldn't have to worry about whether the water is safe to drink or not. Is there – I lost my train of thought then. I have a few seconds to think of it. Is there, I guess, an emphasis here on making sure that people do upgrade their drinking water? I mean, to me that would make a – I guess that's what it's for. Is there any indication here that you're planning to make sure that the drinking water is up to standards?

K. HOWELL: Well, just in conversation, we'd like to think that would be a priority for communities.

J. DINN: Yeah, okay.

K. HOWELL: So we certainly do encourage communities to look at that and to consider investing their money in water.

J. DINN: I've seen some remarkable, I thought, innovative waste water treatment. I'm thinking of the one out by the Gander River there that's using a natural filtration. I can tell you that the effect it had on the Gander River is remarkable in terms of, before that was up and running, you could see the scuzz, the film there and the rot, but since it has been in place it's a model and sort of like a passive form of treatment and probably one that's easier to maintain for small municipalities.

Here in St. John's I don't know if you need the same kind of system in smaller communities, but there are one, two or three drinking reservoirs and treatment facilities. I'm just looking at finding ways of making sure waste water is treated and that's affordable and efficient, but anyway.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm done all questions. You never know, my colleague here might prompt me with a few more yet.

Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Lane.

P. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I apologize; I was a little late getting here. I had some things to do in my district. So I apologize if these questions have been asked.

Municipalities Act and the city's act – obviously, for me, the city's act would be the primary one but I understand you were looking at the Municipalities Act as well. When can we expect to see that brought before the House of Assembly? Will it be this coming fall perhaps?

K. HOWELL: That's our intention. We're working with that impression that we'll have things ready to move in the fall.

P. LANE: That would be both the city's act and the Municipalities Act?

K. HOWELL: No, that is the Municipalities Act but, as we move deeper into the fall, considering what time frames we have to work with, the Municipalities Act will be addressed first and from there we'll move on to the city's act.

P. LANE: Okay.

In terms of the city's act, in some conversation I've had within the department over the last few months inquiring about this, I know there was a request that had gone in through the City of St. John's but, obviously, it could apply to Mount Pearl and Corner Brook as well: a code of conduct, if you will, for city councillors. Are we going to have to wait for the city's act to see that or is it the intent to bring in – because I was told it was possible, you could see the code of conduct, maybe even this sitting, brought forward as opposed to waiting for the city's act.

K. HOWELL: Again, that's still a work in progress. We have created a stand-alone code of conduct. Again, it's just an issue of timing and where we can go with it in the time frame that we have. That was an issue that came up across all of the communities that we had consultations with, not just the cities. These issues are widespread and, through our consultations, it was often a deterring factor for people who wanted to have a role or wanted to have something to say. Again, considered a top priority for our department as we move forward.

P. LANE: Can you at least tell me is it possible it would be brought forward this sitting of the House – is that a possibility, or is it the fall or later?

K. HOWELL: I don't think I can say right now. I don't know. How late do you want to stay?

P. LANE: Oh, I don't care. I'll stay here for the summer; it doesn't bother me.

T. LOMOND: I think the minister said the legislation can proceed independently. We would not have to wait for changes to the *City of St. John's Act* to bring in the code of conduct legislation. Discussion maybe with the

Government House Leader in terms of timing of when various bill come to the House, but certainly those two things, one is not dependent on the other.

P. LANE: Okay.

I understand that. I appreciate the answer. I guess all I'm trying to get an understanding of – because I have a couple of people; one person in particular who is constantly asking me about this. I just want to be able to say to this individual, it is coming forward this spring – it will be coming forward in the next two weeks or three weeks, or it will be coming forward in the fall, one or the other. All I'd like to know is that it is not happening now, wait until the fall so I can tell him.

That's the sense I'm getting without you specifically saying that. Is that ...?

K. HOWELL: Again, this is a conversation to have with the Government House Leader but if we don't get a chance to get it through this time, it will be in the fall.

P. LANE: Okay.

Northeast Avalon Regional Plan: That has been on the table, off the table – I think we were talking about that when I was on city council, so that is almost 11 years ago now. Is that back on the table, or is it sort of dormant?

K. HOWELL: Actually, this past week, I had a request for a meeting with that group. It is active and we are moving forward with it. I hope to gain a lot of information there that we can apply to regional government as we move forward.

P. LANE: Okay.

In terms of the regional government piece, once you decide – and this question may be premature, but I am going to ask anyway because I have had some people ask me this one as well. At some point in time when you move forward with regional government, whenever that would be and whatever it would look like, would it be the intent – for an example, if we had a county system, for argument's sake, would it be the intent to include cabins in that?

I know cabins were thrown into the waste management and all hands went off their head and they were taken out. Is it the intent, if you were to create a county system to include cabins under that county and we're going to be back at that same situation again, or will cabin country simply be left out of the equation?

K. HOWELL: Right now, we are still looking at the models that are appropriate for the areas that we're talking about for our province. It would probably be premature for me to say that at this point because we have to figure out what way best services the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and how we can get effective and efficient service delivery for these areas. We are still looking at our options.

P. LANE: Okay, so undecided at this point.

In terms of the relocation of communities, people wanting to shut down their communities, basically, and relocate, are there any thoughts on changing the threshold? Because right now I think you need like 90 per cent, and depending on the size of the small community – and I believe my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands may have sort of referenced this in the House last week or the week before – someone said it. But basically, as he said, one family, in essence, can – you could have the majority of people wanting to move and one family, for whatever reason, can hold up the whole process and hold the whole process at hostage.

So is there any move to change that 90 per cent threshold perhaps down to – I don't know what the number would be, 80, 70, 51, whatever? But are you looking at changing that 90 per cent threshold?

K. HOWELL: Well, it's certainly not our intention to drive everybody out of the rural communities and bring them all in. That's not the –

P. LANE: No, I understand that.

K. HOWELL: – sweeping generalization. But any communities that are interested in that we would have conversations with them. As it stands now, there is the 90 per cent. Once we move forward and as we determine how to do things, those are conversations that we can have.

P. LANE: So currently there's no – so what I'm hearing is that currently we're at 90 per cent and as it stands there's no conversation about changing that at this point in time, at least. Would that be correct?

K. HOWELL: We haven't moved to that piece of the puzzle yet. We're more focusing on how we can service the communities that we do have in these areas and making sure that we have effective service delivery in our rural communities. But again when the big picture things, it's not a non-factor, do you know what I mean? It's not a conversation that I'm opposed to having when the time is right.

P. LANE: Okay, so no movement there.

Either through the city's act and the municipalities act or stand alone, in either case, is there an intent to put some kind of a process in place to deal with conflicts of interest when councils reach those impasses? In other words, an arbitrator of some sort – at some point in time, a council can't deal with an issue on conflict of interest, what we've seen is you see some mediation and I gets thrown back and things don't get resolved.

I know a former colleague and mayor who I know quite well, at one point in time, I can remember us having the conversation about there should be an independent process with some sort of an arbitrator or tribunal or whatever to sort of deal with it and make the decision. Are there any plans to initiate such a thing, either stand alone or as part of the municipalities or city's act?

K. HOWELL: Our code of conduct legislation, as we mentioned, is a work in progress and that is something that we feel is very important and by nature we want to make it enabling, so we want to give municipalities and communities as much information as possible to determine conflict of interest. Right now, a lot of the times people will say that I am afraid that I might be in conflict so I will just step back, I won't even have a vote and then often you are left without quorum to make a decision or things like that.

The intent is that we can provide as much direction as possible upfront so that we avoid this type of situation in the first place. I know

that our department has done some work on that and will continue to work on that if communities want to come and ask questions for clarification purposes then we do have that capacity.

For now, our focus is trying to make the code of conduct such that these things become clearer and that we have different way to evaluate that. Right now, if you are caught in a conflict of interest, your seat is vacated, you have to go home; it is all shut down. There are different approaches to looking at conflict of interest, sometimes it is from monetary gain, other times it is just buddy-buddy gain because you had a conversation with the mayor. We want to consider whether or not public trust is compromised in a lot of these things and that will hopefully come forward in the code of conduct.

P. LANE: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Thank you.

We are almost through to the end. Does the Committee want to continue on, rather than take a break?

Are we good? Okay.

MHA Wall.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to go back as a quick follow-up and it's more of a comment with respect to the civic addressing, Minister. As I said, in my former role, my staff would visit every house. We even offered to provide the numbers but, of course, we could not physically place the numbers on the property.

K. HOWELL: That's right.

J. WALL: Why someone wouldn't want them, I have no idea. However, that is an obstacle as well. If there is anything that can be done with respect to that, I know all municipalities would certainly benefit from it.

Minister, again, going back with respect to municipal plans and you have four planners looking at the 100 that are outstanding. The City of St. John's, is that plan included in that pile or

a stack of 100? Because I know they've been waiting for quite some time. That hasn't been approved yet, has it? Are you aware?

K. HOWELL: Do you want to take that?

B. HANLON: The Envision plan, my understanding is that has been approved. I know there was an update on it recently.

J. WALL: Okay.

B. HANLON: I'd say about two months ago. I thought that was the final step in the process, but I can double-check. I know there has been progress made on the Envision plan.

J. WALL: Okay. Of course, these are coming through conversation, but I'd appreciate that update, if you could.

I wanted to just touch on, very briefly, another municipal issue with respect to Ragged Beach, up the Southern Shore. Has that been resolved with respect to – of course, you're bringing Crown Lands into it; I know that's not your department. That's in Minister Bragg's.

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. WALL: Correct, yes. So I know that's his department.

Any update on that, Minister, with respect from your department, or is it just all Minister Bragg's?

K. HOWELL: I think our department was responsible for the planning, land planning and land use and that is really where it started and ended with us.

J. WALL: And ended.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

J. WALL: Yeah, okay. No, listen, I understand it's a touchy situation and different municipalities have different areas that are, you know, with respect to the coastline, sensitive areas and conservation areas.

That goes back to municipalities signing stewardship agreements as well. What level of

involvement does your department have with the Stewardship Association of Municipalities? The SAM agreements, for a lack of a better term. Is there any involvement from your department, or is that again –?

K. HOWELL: I think that's the municipalities. Our department has (inaudible) –

J. WALL: Nothing from your department?

K. HOWELL: No.

J. WALL: Okay, all right.

Having gone through almost a five-year process for clean drinking water in the Town of Pouch Cove, it's quite arduous let me tell you. I spoke about it in the House; it was under two governments that we got this approved and almost five years. I do know the importance of clean drinking water to every municipality. I know we touched on boil orders earlier. Can you provide a list of municipalities that have applications in for water upgrades or clean drinking water? Do you have that?

K. HOWELL: I think we just had to mention that to MHA Dinn.

J. WALL: It was mentioned, yeah, but that was a part of the question with respect to the list of municipalities across the province.

K. HOWELL: The number of applications of communities working towards water treatment projects.

J. WALL: Right.

K. HOWELL: That's what I have, yeah.

J. WALL: Thank you very much.

Of course, the priority is on clean drinking water, but we all know what's going to come down the pipe, for a lack of a better term, on waste water and those regulations that are going to come into effect. I do know from experience, you know, almost \$5 million for clean drinking water and almost \$40 million for waste water for a community of 2,100 people. Every municipality across the province is facing this. What's your department's level of engagement

with respect to the federal regulations on waste water?

I know that for Pouch Cove we have one outfall. The Town of Clarendville has 13 outfalls. That type of situation – they all have to be treated, monitored, what have you.

What's your level of engagement from your department, Minister, with respect to waste water applications?

K. HOWELL: Like you said, every community has a different requirement or a different number of outfalls and things that they're dealing with. We work closely with those communities in whatever capacity we can be of assistance by talking to our federal counterparts. I think that's going to be very important as we move forward on this.

This is an issue that's facing, as you said, these astronomical costs for small numbers of people, so it's something that we have to work together on and conversations have to be had with our federal counterparts on this.

J. WALL: I agree. When they say there are fines, jail time or what have you, these are serious consequences.

K. HOWELL: Well, most of Newfoundland would be in jail.

J. WALL: Yes. Well, that comes back to Justice and Public Safety, then, for building a bigger prison. Anyway, we'll handle that one.

Two more quick things, Minister, and I want to go back to the public tender act again just to touch on. I understand municipalities have difficulties out there with following the public tender act. If a municipality, for example, does not follow the public tender act – outright doesn't follow it – what is your goal from your department in handling that? How would you handle that?

K. HOWELL: I think the ultimate goal is to make sure that the information from our department is available to them. We do want to engage in any educational opportunities to provide that information and that support to communities. If there were some way that we

can direct them, then by all means we would do that.

With regard to what action we take, I think once the information is available to us, we reach out to the community.

J. WALL: Is there any obligation then on your department? That's what I'm trying to get at.

B. HANLON: Yes, as the minister said, we provide training, guidance and some support, but the Public Procurement Agency owns the public tender act. Some of that rests with those guys as well, so it's kind of a joint effort. We provide as much information and guidance as possible to assist communities in following the public tender act.

J. WALL: Good to know, thank you.

One last question, Minister, and that's with respect to the municipal elections coming up this fall. What level of engaged is your department going to be going forward with respect to the elections coming out? To what degree?

K. HOWELL: Our department has made a significant contribution to the Make Your Mark campaign. I'm looking to do as much promotion as I can possibly do myself, because it is, as you said, an area that we're both familiar with.

The value of municipalities and these communities is sometimes not blown up to the level that it should be. Because this is where the work happens. I've said this in several of the communities that I've had the chance to visit, that these are the boots on the ground to all of these papers, everything that we're making happen here today. It requires the boots on the ground and that level of commitment from local government. They are local governments. They govern; they do important work.

It's certainly our intention to promote that and to work with all communities and as many people as possible to get these candidates moving forward so that we have sustainable governments who have the opportunity to do great work at the local level.

J. WALL: And it comes back to the point I made in the House with respect to the updated

act – which you are working on – and having mandatory training, code of conduct. All this is important when you're looking at – the first line of defence for any resident, any municipality, is your local government. Boots on the ground is the one that I use quite often, because if it's a provincial or a federal issue, you go to the mayor or you go to the council first, because they don't know where to go or how to get there most times.

It's proven well for us here in this House, that level of engagement on a municipal level, so whatever your department can do going forward.

There are municipalities out there with budgets of \$200,000 and they're out there for \$250 million, but they all have the same degree of responsibility. That's why going forward it needs to be done right, done proper and have the level of engagement from your department, which I'm looking forward to.

I thank you, Minister, and thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Dinn, can I confirm you're finished?

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: MHA Trimper, there are seven minutes left. Are you finished?

P. TRIMPER: I have one little question I'd like to follow up on – my colleague, the MHA for Mount Pearl – Southlands – on the threshold decision-making level for whether or not a community relocates. I think I just want to emphasize the importance of taking a good luck at that. I'm familiar now with about a handful of communities, some in my own district, that are very much struggling with this. I think about issues around mental health, declining services, entities like Bell Aliant and whether they invest. It is very much, I think, a centrepiece of the future and fate of some of these communities and their residents that are there.

I just wanted to emphasize that to you and hope that, in terms of looking for models and formulas, perhaps there's another strategy there. As, again, my colleague said, it can be as much

as one family holding up the future and fates of the rest of the community. It's quite something to deal with as an MHA.

K. HOWELL: Yes, I certainly appreciate that.

Again, I don't want to sound like I'm badgering it, but we're kind of tied up with a few of the other issues with regionalization right now. That is a major factor in the big regionalization puzzle. It's not that we're ignoring it and it's certainly not that it's not on our radar. It's just that I don't have anything to offer you at this time. It is a consideration that is being looked at as part of how we provide services to rural Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

It's not necessarily a no go that we won't address it, but we haven't had that opportunity at this point.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Lane, do you have any further questions? No?

P. LANE: No.

CHAIR: Okay, I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

Did you say 2.3.01 or 2.3.02? I heard (inaudible).

CHAIR: Okay, thank you for that. There actually is a typo here.

I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.3.02 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to recall the total.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 8, at 6 p.m., considering the Estimates of the Department of Health and Community Services.

Can I ask for a mover to adjourn the meeting?

MHA Wall.

Motion to adjourn is moved by the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

Thank you.

Meeting adjourned.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.