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

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Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

## **SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs

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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: Bobbi Russell

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Appearing:

### **Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs**

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

### **Also Present**

Hon. Lisa Dempster, MHA, Minister of Labrador Affairs  
Hon. Pam Parsons, MHA, Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality  
Jordan Brown, MHA  
Christine Baldwin, Government Members' Caucus  
Nathan Ryan, Official Opposition Caucus  
Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright -L'Anse au Clair, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West, substitutes for MHA James Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

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

**CHAIR (Pike):** Good morning, everyone.

Okay, we'll call the meeting to order. First of all, I'd like to thank you all for being here this morning. It's very important that we meet with the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs to go through the Estimates.

I'd like to announce the substitutions this morning. We have Minister Dempster for MHA Sherry Gambin-Walsh. We have Minister Pam Parsons for MHA Stoyles and we have MHA Jordan Brown for MHA Jim Dinn. We don't have any unaffiliated Members here today, so we don't need to ask for agreement on those in time allocations.

Would you guys like a break today?

**K. HOWELL:** See how long it goes.

**CHAIR:** See how long it goes, okay.

A reminder to witnesses and department officials, always identify yourselves when you're speaking, please, and wait for the tally light to come on. That's very important because we did have an issue in our last sitting that people weren't waiting and then Broadcast didn't know who was speaking.

You're reminded not to make any adjustment to your chair that you're sitting in. Unless you're sitting in mine, you can. I don't really mind. And water coolers are located in the corners here.

We are now going to ask Committee Members to introduce themselves and department officials.

So we'll start on this side.

**B. WARR:** Brian Warr, District of Baie Verte - Green Bay.

**S. REID:** Scott Reid, MHA, St. George's - Humber.

**C. BALDWIN:** Christine Baldwin, Government Members' Office.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Lisa Dempster, Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

**N. RYAN:** Nathan Ryan, Official Opposition Office.

**J. WALL:** Joedy Wall, MHA, Cape St. Francis.

**J. BROWN:** Jordan Brown, MHA, Labrador West.

**S. FLEMING:** Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Caucus Office.

**CHAIR:** Okay. On this side here ...

**J. HEARN:** Judith Hearn, Deputy Minister, Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Krista Lynn Howell, MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**B. STEELE:** Bonnie Steele, Departmental Controller.

**B. HANLON:** Bren Hanlon, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**R. SIMMS:** Randy Simms, EA to the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**J. HOWARD:** Jacquelyn Howard, Director of Communications, Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**CHAIR:** Okay, thank you.

Next we have the minutes of our last meeting that we held. I need a mover and a seconder.

Moved by MHA Wall.

Secunder?

Seconded by MHA Reid.

Call for a vote, please?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Contra-minded, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** Clerk.

**CLERK (Russell):** 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.04, Executive and Support Services, carry?

I'm going to ask now the minister for her opening remarks if she'd like some. Then we'll get into our questioning.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, everyone, for joining us this morning for another lovely adventure in our Estimates course. It's always important to get this stuff done. I know sometimes it's a bit thick, a bit heavy but it's important to make sure that we are stewards of the Crown and welcome the opportunity to chat about the things that are

happening in Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

We have a small but mighty team all across the province and certainly proud of the work that the department has done. As we work through, you'll see some of the things that we've been able to focus on and some of the progress that we've been able to make. So I welcome the opportunity to chat and here we go.

**CHAIR:** I'll call on the first questioner.

MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, Minister, I'll ask for a copy of your binder for today.

**K. HOWELL:** Absolutely.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

**K. HOWELL:** No problem.

**J. WALL:** Minister, just a couple of general questions before we get into the line items.

Could you please outline your department's approach to attrition, any positions removed last year and how many positions are expected to be removed this coming year?

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

So our attrition targets for the previous year had been met. We had five that either retired or cashed out pensions or whatnot. That happened over the course of the year and the same will be true for next year. It will just be natural, whoever falls into that queue. But at this time we are scrutinizing any and all requests that would come for staffing and when any requests come in, we definitely determine whether or not it's a position that we want to move forward with.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, could you please provide some information about the overall staffing complement of your department, how many people full-time, part-time or contractual?

**K. HOWELL:** Okay. I'm going to just turn it over to the folks here. Apparently they've got something to add about attrition.

**B. HANLON:** Just to clarify, our attrition targets had previously been met. We didn't have any attrition target as per attrition management last year but we did have five people who had left the department. Those positions will be met with an attrition lens but most likely will be filled. Just to clarify our actual attrition target, there was no attrition target for Municipal and Provincial Affairs last year. We had met it in previous years.

**J. WALL:** Would you care for me to repeat the question?

**K. HOWELL:** Sure. Go ahead.

**J. WALL:** With respect to your staffing complement in your department, how many are employed full-time, part-time, contractual or temporary?

**K. HOWELL:** We have a total departmental staff complement of 74 positions, 58 of those are permanent and 13 are temporary. We have three contractual positions.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, how many community relocation files are currently before your department at this time?

**K. HOWELL:** We just concluded one and we have one in the queue.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Could you please provide us an update on the NEAR Plan?

**K. HOWELL:** The NEAR Plan is up and running. It's still in progress. As you can imagine, there has been significant turnover since that plan was initiated, but in recent weeks, even, we've gone back to the current mayors that are in the positions and the councils and approached them to see what it is that they want and how they would like to pursue that matter. Stay tuned.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Minister, can you give us an update on the review of the Municipalities Act and the *Municipal Elections Act*?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, the Municipalities Act, I have not been shy in saying that I think that needs to be done. It is old and outdated and we need a piece of legislation that serves the municipalities as they are today. So I am aggressively pursuing getting that act to the House of Assembly as soon as possible.

**J. WALL:** Okay, and the *Municipal Elections Act*.

**K. HOWELL:** Will follow that.

**J. WALL:** Will follow that.

Minister, any update on the Greene report recommendations for your department. Has any analysis been completed?

**K. HOWELL:** In relation to what, specifically?

**J. WALL:** Just from the Greene report recommendations for your department, anything there that had to be analyzed out of the Greene report? Nothing?

**K. HOWELL:** Nothing specific. We take the considerations of the Greene report as whole and apply them to the department, but in terms of specifics, I don't think we have anything that was particularly outlined for us.

**J. WALL:** All right, I'll get into the line items, Minister.

1.1.01, under Salaries, last year there was \$208,500 budgeted but the revised estimate is \$222,000 for the Minister's Office. Can you explain why the overage occurred?

**K. HOWELL:** That was a higher salary budget due to the salary increases and salary steps for departmental secretary to the minister and the minister's executive assistant.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

1.2.01, Executive Support, under Salaries, \$616,700 budgeted, the revised estimate of \$571,900, how was the savings achieved? Was there a vacant position for a period of time or?

**K. HOWELL:** That's lower due to the delay in recruitment of a vacant position, that's our ADM secretary and media relations manager.

**J. WALL:** Two positions?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

1.2.02, Administrative Support, under Salaries, the salary vote here is only \$12,000. Seems less than a full-time position. Can you please explain what this particular lot of funding is for?

**K. HOWELL:** That's for summer students salaries.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Under Employee Benefits, the revised estimate for '22-'23 is \$30,500. It seems high considering the salary line item is less than \$6,000. Can you please explain that one?

**K. HOWELL:** That reflects a higher '22-'23 workers' compensation costs associated with the former departmental staff.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Under Purchased Services, last year services went over budget spending \$24,900. Could you please explain why?

**K. HOWELL:** That was an increase that reflected the departmental promotional costs at the Municipalities NL conference.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, under Revenue-Provincial, could you please outline where the provincial revenue comes from and only why \$500 of the anticipated \$5,000 was received?

**K. HOWELL:** The revenue is a repayment of petty cash float. The decrease reflects a lower departmental revenue from salary overpayments, prior year impress and other miscellaneous revenue.

**J. WALL:** Minister, 1.2.03, Strategic Financial Management, under Salaries, last year it was budgeted for \$824,400, the revised estimate was \$734,000; a savings of \$90,400. Can you please outline how this was achieved?

**K. HOWELL:** That decrease reflects a lower salary cost due to delays in recruitment of vacant positions and it was partially offset by a salary increase. So the 2 per cent increase and the recognition bonus.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

So the positions vacant were some of the ones that you mentioned earlier with respect to the breakdown of the staff in your department?

**K. HOWELL:** It was a restructuring to focus on our legislative work.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Minister, 1.2.04, under Policy and Strategic Planning, under Salaries, could you please provide some context to the Salaries line? I noted that there was \$359,300 budgeted; \$474,000 required for this year and the budget is now being set at \$440,100. Can you please give us some insight on that?

**K. HOWELL:** Sure.

It's higher due to a new senior legislative advisor and an ATIPP coordinator, plus the salary increases that are incurred. Then the salary budget is for the required positions of senior legislative advisor and ATIPP coordinator as well.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

One last one for this subheading, Minister, Grants and Subsidies, can you please outline where the \$10,200 is going?

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, that's for our provincial-territorial officials committee. That's a coordination of research related to local government and all the provinces contribute to that one.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you, Minister.

Nothing further, Mr. Chair, for this section.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA Brown.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of questions here. Is it possible to get the data behind the decision not to go ahead with regionalization? Can we get a copy of that?

**K. HOWELL:** It's actually online on our departmental web page.

**J. BROWN:** It is on the departmental web page. Thank you so much.

How many appeals are currently outstanding by the regional appeals board and has the Urban and Rural Planning Act helped streamline the process? Have you gotten the results that you were expecting?

**K. HOWELL:** Hang on now.

**J. HEARN:** (Inaudible.)

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, go ahead if you can find it quicker than me.

**J. HEARN:** Thank you for that question.

There are currently 39 appeals outstanding. We are anticipating that once we have the roster completed that we'll quickly be able to move through that backlog. So, yes, we're headed in the right direction and anticipating to have the roster up and running very shortly.

**J. BROWN:** Currently, inside the department, has there been any work done regarding unincorporated areas and their status within the province on delivery of service or anything like that?

**K. HOWELL:** We've worked with unincorporated areas, Local Service Districts, municipalities all across the province to figure out what it is that they're providing and how we can help them provide it better. I think that is part of the plan as we move forward with our community self-assessments, if there is a way that we can get in there. A lot of the times there is not even a way to communicate with this group of people.

When we get the community self-assessments done, then we'll be able to determine what it is that unincorporated areas are conducting.

**J. BROWN:** Perfect. Thank you so much.

Is there any work being conducted to provide municipalities with more transparent and available information on how

infrastructure funding works, as per the recommendation from MNL?

**K. HOWELL:** That's a question that I'd ask you to pose to the Minister of Transportation as well. We continue to work with them and have a really good working relationship with MNL and include them in on most of the discussions around all the things that affect municipalities across the province.

**J. BROWN:** So, yeah, even that has been completely pulled from this department and it's all fully over to them. Okay, thank you so much.

Are there currently any communities that have expressed interest in relocating since the most recent one? Is there any more that have come forward?

**K. HOWELL:** No.

**J. BROWN:** No.

Municipalities NL have been calling for improvements to civic addresses in rural areas for a few years now. Has any progress been made by the department to make sure that civic addresses are posted correctly?

**K. HOWELL:** That is again part of the plan of regionalization as we move forward with our shared services and collaboration approach; hoping that is something that communities will latch onto and make it a priority for them. We always encourage them to facilitate that as a community and as a group of community leaders because we all recognize the importance of it. Those are ongoing conversations with the Department of Justice on how we can do that better in our communities.

**J. BROWN:** Perfect. Thank you.

How many planners are there now in the department and how many are working on town plans for approval?

**K. HOWELL:** In the department of local governance and planning, we have nine permanent staff and four who are temporary. I think we have – I'll get Bren to speak to the allocations.

**B. HANLON:** So right now there are three planners and one planning manager. All the planners, of course, work on municipal plans; they work on different plans at different times so it is fair to say that there are three planners right now in the department working on municipal plans and plan amendments and whatnot.

**J. BROWN:** Oh, perfect. Thank you so much.

Other than the work that is done by Equal Voice and MNL, has there been any work under way for supporting gender-diverse people running for municipal government? But also any other plans to encourage people to run for municipal governments because we're seeing less and less people in these jobs? Is there any work being done by the department to encourage all groups of people to run for these kind of positions?

**K. HOWELL:** Always. It's certainly a piece that we want to escalate and draw awareness to. We contributed to the campaign for Equal Voice in the last year to ensure that diverse individuals and women had an opportunity to participate, working with the Make Your Mark campaign, who continue to do that type of advocacy and we'll continue to support those efforts.

**J. BROWN:** Okay. Perfect. That's my last question.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

**J. BROWN:** Thanks.

**CHAIR:** And no more questions on these subheads?



Clerk, can you recall the grouping, please.

**CLERK:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive, Executive and Support Services, 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.

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.3.02 inclusive, Municipal Support.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Start with the question.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, 2.1.01, Regional Support under Salaries, last year Salaries were over budget, \$914,800 was budgeted and just over a million dollars was spent. Can you please explain why?

**K. HOWELL:** That's an increase due to annual leave payout for a retired director plus salary increases.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

2.1.02, Municipal Finance, last year Salaries, again, was over budget, \$657,500 was budgeted; \$672,300 was spent. Could you please explain?

**K. HOWELL:** That's the same reason, the salary increases and the recognition bonus.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

2.2.01, Municipal Debt Servicing under Grants and Subsidies, last year \$22,000

was required. Could you please outline why more money was required than anticipated?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll let Bonnie speak to that one.

**B. STEELE:** That was due to an additional payment made for a prior year so we incurred a little bit of an extra cost.

**J. WALL:** Payment for a prior year?

**B. STEELE:** Yes, we didn't make a payment last year. We made it this year instead. So there would have been savings reported in the previous fiscal and now we're incurring the cost.

**J. WALL:** Thank you for the explanation.

2.2.02, Municipal Debt Servicing under Grants and Subsidies, last year it was estimated \$230,300 would be required but the revised estimate was \$461,600. Could you please explain why?

**B. STEELE:** That's the principal portion of the payment that we made. Again, last year there would have been savings reported and this year we made the payment this fiscal instead of last.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Under Grants and Subsidies, could you please explain why the budget has been decreased to \$10,000?

**K. HOWELL:** That's an annualized change in the principal component of the debt servicing. So these are old capital works project loans that the government had agreements with the towns to pay a portion of. So this practice is no longer being conducted as government now distributes these amounts through approved projects by our municipal infrastructure program.

**J. WALL:** Understood, thank you.

2.2.03, Municipal Operating Grants, we know the MOGs were increased by \$3 million, very pleased to see that, Minister, as I've said to you before and another \$3 million slated for the upcoming year. So will municipalities be allocated this funding under this current formula that was previously used or are you going to come up with a new one?

**K. HOWELL:** That's a conversation that we're having every day in our department. For this year, the allocations will be distributed under the current formula, but we recognize that there are challenges with that and moving forward into the next fiscal it will be something that we reconsider.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

2.2.04, Special Assistance, under Grants and Subsidies, the budget for Special Assistance Grants \$2 million; yet, last year, \$5.8 million was required. Can you explain why?

**K. HOWELL:** The increases this year are due to funding for Hurricane Fiona disaster relief for municipalities, as well as a one-time public transition operating grant to the City of St. John's. As well, there was a payment for the Little Bay Islands relocation.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Minister, can we obtain a list of which municipalities received grants and the amount for each?

**K. HOWELL:** Absolutely.

**J. WALL:** I'm looking forward to that. Thank you very much.

2.2.05, Community Enhancement, under Grants and Subsidies, last year there was \$610,000 unspent. Can you please explain?

**K. HOWELL:** These are projects that are based on estimated costs when they come

in. The variance in actual versus reported cost often leaves us with that difference and some projects do get cancelled.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

2.2.06, Provincial Gas Tax Revenue Sharing, under Grants and Subsidies, is there a list available of how much goes to each municipality?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, there is.

**J. WALL:** And you can provide that to us?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, we can.

**J. WALL:** Thank you very much.

Minister, 2.3.01, under Local Governance and Planning, under Salaries. Salaries went over budget, spending \$853,500. Can you please explain?

**K. HOWELL:** That increase reflects a higher salary cost due to staffing of required positions plus the salary steps and salary increases.

**J. WALL:** Normal progression.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Transportation and Communications, last year that went over budget, spending \$32,200. Can you please explain?

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, that was an increase because of higher board members and staff travel costs. Due to the increase in regional board appeal meetings, we put a push on to clear up some of the backlog.

**J. WALL:** Yeah, we discussed that.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, we did.

**J. WALL:** That needed to be done for sure.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, can you please explain what was purchased to total \$8,000?

**K. HOWELL:** That increase reflects required furnishings in an office chair and replacement laptops.

**J. WALL:** Under Grants and Subsidies, the budget here is \$88,500. Last year only \$44,600 was required. Can you please outline what these grants are in support of and why only about half the budget was required for last year?

**K. HOWELL:** So these are decreases that are reflecting lower grants required relating to the preparation of feasibility reports for regional co-operation initiatives.

**J. WALL:** Under Revenue - Provincial, last year \$29,500 was anticipated and \$12,500 was received. Why wasn't the full amount received and where does this particular source of revenue come from?

**K. HOWELL:** The decrease is a reflection of the lower cost recovery on fees and expenses related to the protected road zone amendments.

**J. WALL:** Protected road zone amendments?

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah.

**J. WALL:** So can you just elaborate on that, Minister, please?

**K. HOWELL:** Sure, I'll let Bren elaborate on that one.

**B. HANLON:** So people require amendments – say if they want to put a cabin in a protected road zone, they pay for the amendment to be done in order to facilitate that, so we get the revenue back as cost recovery. So the revenue line is made up of appeal board fees and those road zone amendment recoveries.

**J. WALL:** Thank you for the clarification. As soon as you said one particular word, I had it. Thank you.

Minister, all municipalities are required to undergo training for *Municipal Conduct Act*, something that we support. Are there any stats on how many have completed the five training modules?

**K. HOWELL:** There absolutely are. I don't have them with me right now, but there's been a significant uptake. We have – correct me if I'm wrong, Jacquelyn – but I think there's upwards of 1,000 to 1,800 participants who've taken in some capacity of the online and in-person trainings.

**J. WALL:** Okay. You can get that information?

**K. HOWELL:** Absolutely. If I had my House of Assembly notes, I'd have it.

**J. WALL:** Minister, what's the deadline for all this to be completed? Do you have a hard deadline for municipalities to have this done?

**K. HOWELL:** When the *Municipal Conduct Act* was discussed and put in place, we gave everybody six months to get their staff up-trained and so far so good. There are some communities that have requested a little longer and we've made allowances in some circumstances.

**J. WALL:** So you're working with those going forward?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you for that.

2.3.02, Canada Community-Building Fund, under Salaries, last year there was a savings of \$73,400. Can you please explain, Minister?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, that decrease reflects a lower salary cost due to a vacant manager

position. It was retirement and was partially offset by salary increases.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Under Professional Services, last year there was a savings in Professional Services; \$32,900 was budgeted and \$17,500 was spent. This year the budget is being increased to \$44,800. Can you please give us some context to how you came to those numbers?

**K. HOWELL:** The decrease reflects lower than anticipated expenditures related to the development of the municipal capital asset management framework. So that project is being led by TI and we continue to contribute to that.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Under Grants and Subsidies, Minister, last year there was \$111 million allocated for grants and I can only assume that this money is available under the Canada Community Building Fund for projects, but only \$26 million was spent. So could you please outline why more money wasn't given out?

**K. HOWELL:** This decrease reflects lower grant payments, carry over of funds into the fiscal, administrative costs, waste management costs, waste water and municipal allocations.

**J. WALL:** How much in total is allocated out of this program?

**B. HANLON:** Right now there's \$119 million left in the carry forward. All the municipalities have all their allocations and there's about \$45 million left in the waste management portion. So the municipalities come forward to us, and we sort of approve their projects. So it's all been allocated to municipalities but they need to come forward with the projects.

**J. WALL:** And do you have a list of the projects approved under this allotment of funding? And we can get that as well?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** MHA Brown.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you.

Have there been any discussions in expanding the municipal training for the financial assistance fund?

**B. HANLON:** The financial assistance fund is under our Special Assistance Fund right now. We haven't been turning anyone down. So if we saw this sort of demand then we could look at a reallocation, but right now we're sort of serving all the needs of the people that come forward within the required limits.

**J. BROWN:** All right perfect, thank you so much.

The training offered by the department, how long are the courses and is there any requirement for refreshers or if there isn't, would the department consider making refreshers mandatory?

**K. HOWELL:** The courses are offered to a council when they take office. By nature, when the council changes, then the training would change as well. You'd have to do it again as a new council.

**J. BROWN:** Okay.

**K. HOWELL:** No real requirement. We're not making that refresher mandatory. I'll let Bren speak to the length of the courses.

**B. HANLON:** The mandatory training that the department is putting off is about a day long. So we just had our last one on

Saturday. Over 200 people attended that, for instance. So we're getting a real good pick up, but it is approximately a full day for all the mandatory training but we're being really flexible with weekends, after hours and online and in-person training.

**J. BROWN:** All right, perfect. Thank you so much.

Now that the related program has been in place for a while and many municipality level officials have been through it, are there any areas of the *Municipal Conduct Act* that you might be looking at amending or improving going forward?

**K. HOWELL:** At this time, we haven't heard that.

**J. BROWN:** Municipalities NL have stated that municipalities have often lacked the human resources needs to meet their administrative, legislative and service requirements. Is there anything new in this budget to help with those kind of emerging burdens?

**K. HOWELL:** That's exactly the intention of the announcement that we made last week is that we recognize that there are a lot of gaps in communities capacity to do those types of things. So if communities can come together and find a way to do that, as a collaborative approach, then that's something that we'd be interested in funding.

**J. BROWN:** Perfect.

How many special inspections has the department conducted in the last year and does this number reflect an increase or decrease year over year?

**K. HOWELL:** Last year we conducted one special investigation and I think that's about on par with the previous years.

**J. BROWN:** So about roughly one or two a year kind of thing?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. BROWN:** Perfect.

Has the department been active in finding or training more technicians to manage the water safety in rural areas, particularly those with longstanding boil-order advisories?

**K. HOWELL:** We've certainly been working with the Department of Environment and Climate Change on that initiative. The funding for the regional water operators comes from our department, so we're very pleased to be supporting that and want to continue that work as they work on a regional approach for that type of planning.

**J. BROWN:** Okay.

Municipalities NL have called for more tools to provide municipal fiscal stability. Has the department looked into creating some opportunities for these kind of tools to be available to municipalities?

**K. HOWELL:** We're always looking for opportunities to work with municipalities and how we can strengthen the way that they deliver services, which is largely what we're hoping to accomplish with some of our collaborative service-sharing models as we move forward with that plan.

**J. BROWN:** Okay.

The increase to the municipal grants this year, which is good, but that figure sat at almost \$50 million in the '90s and early 2000s. So you set it at \$25 million. Is there any chance of going back to more of that – of more of a higher – like going back towards \$50 million for the Operating Grants?

**K. HOWELL:** I think that's a reflection of some of the larger municipalities coming off the Operating Grant formula and they moved into more of a multi-year Capital Works plan in lieu of that. As we continue to work with municipalities and identify the

things and the needs that they have, I'm always going to be able to champion that cause and, as I've said before, it's not a difficult case to make when you look at some communities. They know what to do with their cash and they're very good stewards of their money. It's always an open conversation.

**J. BROWN:** Perfect. Excellent.

How many applications for the Building Age-Friendly Communities Grant were received and out of the number how many received funding?

**K. HOWELL:** A lot. We had like four times greater subscription than we had originally planned for.

**J. BROWN:** Okay.

**K. HOWELL:** I can't tell you the exact number. We can provide a list of the approved projects. I think there were five that didn't get funding because they were outside of the scope of what this project actually was; they didn't qualify. But other than that, everybody who applied got funding.

**J. BROWN:** Excellent.

How much was awarded last year out of the Special Assistance program? What were their purposes?

**K. HOWELL:** I can't tell you specifically how much was – our budget was gone, so \$2 million, but the scopes of those projects were far-reaching. We did everything from replacing screens in water filters to assisting with the Fiona relied effort from that department.

**J. BROWN:** Okay. Perfect. Thank you so much.

**K. HOWELL:** We can provide a list of those projects.

**J. BROWN:** Excellent. Thank you, Minister.

Community Enhancement: Which communities availed of the funding in the past year? How many jobs were provided and which projects were completed as a result of this?

**K. HOWELL:** Okay, so we have 189 approved projects and that assisted 752 workers.

**J. BROWN:** Excellent. Thank you so much.

Out of the Canada Community-Building Fund, can we be provided a list of recipients of the money and the projects that were funded from this pot of money?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you so much.

Can you provide an update on the Municipal Capital Asset Management framework and what types of projects that covered? Will it be bid on by all municipalities?

**K. HOWELL:** So that's a project that's being lead by TI. We are just giving our voice of reason to that one. So the Minister of TI can answer to the progress on that one.

**J. BROWN:** Okay, I'll make sure he does tomorrow.

Thank you so much, Minister. That was the last of my questions.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

Back to MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I have a few more questions.

With respect to 2.3.02, under Revenue - Federal, could you please provide a copy of the federal-provincial agreement which covers this particular allotment of funding?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, we can.

**J. WALL:** And the report as well.

Thank you.

Just some questions that I jotted down, Minister, from questions being asked. Could you please provide the number of town plans that are on your desk or on a desk that are waiting approval from the province?

**K. HOWELL:** I think we can do that.

**J. WALL:** Can we get that as well?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Perfect, thank you.

With respect to regionalization and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, we've aware of your announcement, aware of how it's going forward, do you have any time frame with respect to working with MNL on how it's going to get moved to a shared-services agreement?

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah.

So we're looking very much at a step-wise approach here. I think the first step that we want to accomplish is these community self-assessments. We have to work closely with MNL on that one. I think they've already expressed an interest to be part of that process. As we look at the communities and identify the things that they're doing really well, then we can identify the service gaps. Then from there we can build on that to determine what each region would need in terms of support and then we can work on implementing those.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

How long are you going to be giving these for these community self-assessments? Is there any time frame on those?

**K. HOWELL:** We haven't put a time frame on that right now, but fully recognizing, as I've said before, when you ask somebody to assess themselves, nine times out of 10 they're going to tell you they're deadly. So we want to make sure that we have parameters in there that we can double-check, that they're measurable and realistic. Our department will work closely with all the communities to make sure those are done.

**J. WALL:** I'm glad to hear that because a lot of communities don't have the same supports as others –

**K. HOWELL:** Definitely.

**J. WALL:** – when you're looking internally. It's quite important to do so. So thank you for that.

Minister, will there be any further consultation in advance of the new Municipalities Act coming out; any other outreach you're going to go to municipalities with?

**K. HOWELL:** I need that to go yesterday. So that is locked and ready to go. It's just a heavy legislative agenda this session.

**J. WALL:** Okay, fair enough.

Minister, with respect to the regional appeals, you said there were 39 outstanding, from what I jotted down in my notes earlier. There are two questions from that. What is the average length of time to finalize an appeal once it comes to the board?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll let Bren speak to that.

**B. HANLON:** The backlog right now is in Eastern. So in Central, Western and Labrador, there is sort of a delay but normally it is just until the next meeting, like a month or two down the road, but in Eastern, unfortunately, there is a bit of a backlog. Right now, we can take up to a year to hear an appeal at Eastern. Of

course, if there is some emergent issue that comes in, we can deal with it sooner, but just because of the backlog, and that's sort of why we went with the new method, because we were hoping we'd be able to get through all of the backlog shortly.

**J. WALL:** The minister and I did discuss that exact reason, I was just wondering about the length of time, but I appreciate the answer.

Minister, the average cost per appeal, I know it all depends what is coming to the board in the appeal but do you happen to have an average cost on it?

**K. HOWELL:** Do we have an average cost?

**B. HANLON:** The board, the cost for a full day is around \$450 plus travel and depending on how long the appeal is. Normally an appeal can be heard in a day, so you're looking at the cost of the board and if there was travel required so it can be in that sort of range.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, I just have one final question with respect to the Fiona relief. Are there any outstanding payments from your department that has to be made or do you have a time frame on what is outstanding from your department with respect to Fiona?

**K. HOWELL:** Not particularly a time frame. We've worked with the communities to determine what it is that they needed done and to get their funding to them as quickly as possible. If, moving forward, there is something that comes up, then we'll certainly be able to look at it and address it.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Okay. If there are no more questions, Clerk, can you recall the section, please?

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.3.02 inclusive, Municipal Support.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.02 inclusive, Municipal Support, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.3.02 carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** 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?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Okay.

Thank you.

The next meeting will be May 3 at 5:30 to consider the Estimates of the Department of Education.

I'll ask the minister if she would like to make any final statements.



**K. HOWELL:** Just thank everybody for their time this morning and for the attention to the department. Again, I want to say thank you to the staff in the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs and all across the Island. They do an incredible job of supporting communities. There are a lot of day-to-day things that people don't often see, but they get down in the weeds and they're there to support communities and help them sort out what it is that's bothering them on the daily. So thank you very much to the staff.

Thank you to the dream team over here that keep things running smoothly and keep me from getting in trouble. Thank you to our colleagues across the way who always bring up important issues and continue to advocate for their communities and advance the work that municipalities, LSDs and unincorporated areas are able to do.

**CHAIR:** MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the answers to the questions, Minister, from your staff and a shout-out to your staff because I've said it over the years, you're only as good as those around you.

**K. HOWELL:** Absolutely.

**J. WALL:** So I appreciate the work that your staff does as well for the benefit of municipalities and I appreciate the time here this morning.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** MHA Brown.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the minister and her staff as well for coming out early this morning and doing Estimates. I know it's a bit of an early morning and a rocky start, but we got it done. I really appreciate all the work that

yourself, your staff and all the people in the department do.

Thank you so much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'll now ask for someone to move the motion to adjourn, please.

Minister Parsons.

The motion to adjourn is moved by Minister Parsons.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Motion carried.

Thank you.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.