



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

Second Session  
Fiftieth General Assembly

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

April 16, 2025 - Issue 25

Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs

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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

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Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Chris Tibbs, MHA

Members: Perry Trimper, MHA  
Lucy Stoyles, MHA  
Jamie Korab, MHA  
James Dinn, MHA  
Paul Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Evan Beazley (A)

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Appearing:

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

Hon. John Haggie, Minister  
Candice Ennis-Williams, Deputy Minister  
Gerry Osmond, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs  
Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller  
Michelle Hunt-Grouchy, Director of Communications  
Alicia Chenard, Executive Assistant

### **Also Present**

Hon. Gerry Byrne, MHA, Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture  
Hon. Scott Reid, MHA, Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation  
John Abbott, MHA  
Jordan Brown, MHA  
Jack Norman, Government Members' Caucus  
Colby Greeley, Official Opposition Caucus  
Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus  
Gerrie Smith, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Gerry Byrne, MHA for Corner Brook, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber, substitutes for Jamie Korab, MHA for Waterford Valley.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Abbott, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

The Committee met at 5:00 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

**CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh):** We're going to call the meeting to order.

I'm just going to announce the substitutes first: Substituting for MHA Trimper, Lake Melville, we have St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, MHA Abbott; substituting for Mount Pearl North, Lucy Stoyles, we have Minister Gerry Byrne, MHA for Corner Brook; substituting for St. John's Centre, Jim Dinn, we have Labrador West, Jordan Brown; and substituting for Waterford Valley, Jamie Korab, we have St. George's - Humber, Scott Reid.

Typically, we will take a break an hour and a half in, so 7:00, for about 10 minutes. I remind you to just wave so that Broadcast can see you. The water coolers are on the end of the room here. Please, don't adjust the seats.

We are going to start off with the Committee Members and any of the staff introducing themselves, and we'll move over to the departmental staff. Then I'll call for the minutes to be approved from the last meeting and we'll start with the minister.

Okay, we'll start on this side.

**C. TIBBS:** Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. GREELEY:** Colby Greeley, Office of the Official Opposition, Researcher.

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

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

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

**J. ABBOTT:** John Abbott, MHA, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**G. BYRNE:** Gerry Byrne, MHA, Corner Brook.

**J. NORMAN:** Jack Norman, Government Member's Office.

**J. HAGGIE:** John Haggie, Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS:** Candice Ennis-Williams, Deputy Minister.

**G. OSMOND:** Gerry Osmond, ADM.

**M. HUNT-GROUCHY:** Michelle Hunt-Grouchy, Director of Communications for MPA.

**A. CHENARD:** Alicia Chenard, Executive Assistant to Minister Haggie.

**J. TORRAVILLE:** Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

The Committee has a copy of the minutes. I ask, if there are no errors or omissions, for someone to approve the minutes.

**J. BROWN:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** The MHA for Labrador West, so approved.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** We'll proceed with the Estimates; I'll ask the Clerk to call the first subheads.

**CLERK (Beazley):** For the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

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

The Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

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

Just a couple of opening remarks. The mandate of the department is to support the economic and social sustainability of municipalities and communities throughout the province with the delivery of programs, services and supports.

So we have several tools at our disposal. We have legislative, financial, land use planning. We are heavily engaged in training, and we're also a funding source and conduit for various programs. You'll see the budget for 2025-26 is \$193,254,300, with related revenue of \$33,518,200 for a net of \$159,736,100. The department achieves this.

We have 75 positions; 53 are permanent, 16 are temporary, six contractual and we have 15 vacancies. We have three offices throughout the province, mostly in St. John's, but with four staff in Corner Brook and four in Gander. I just would be remiss if I didn't use this opportunity to thank each of them, who I've met over my time in the department, for the hard work and the ability that they have to meet the communities where they live, literally sometimes.

*Budget 2025* is further investment in the municipalities. There's \$187.5 million for programs and grants and that's broken out by municipal operating grants which are \$28 million. Those were increased incrementally over the last two years. There are special assistance grants of \$6.9 million; Community Enhancement Employment Program, or CEEP, which is \$4.9 million; we have a provincial gas tax of \$7.1 million; and Canada Community-Building Fund of \$140.5 million, which is federal in origin. It used to be referred to as the federal gas tax.

We also have this year, \$350,000 special allocation for the general municipal election in 2025. That's not an every-year occurrence but, in addition to cities and towns, it will also involve Local Service Districts. We've synchronized them all. It will occur scheduled the 2nd of October 2025. That funding will provide an election toolkit for interested communities and create a public awareness campaign called Make Your Mark in collaboration with MNL. We are really keen to encourage local candidates for local government.

From legislation, the past winter sitting we amended the Urban and Rural Planning Act and the *City of St. John's Municipal Taxation Act* and, for those of you who were there, these were to strengthen municipalities' legislative authority. It was aimed at encouraging more housing developments and access to affordable homes. They also modernized some of the pieces of legislation with respect to planning tools and in the case of URPA, the Urban and Rural Planning Act, the amendments were around facilitating inclusionary zoning, incentive and bonus zoning, virtual public meetings in the light of the changes in technology – since the original legislation was 20-odd years ago – and the modernization of public notification methods. That's been a theme for a lot of legislation in the House, here, particularly with relation to notices from colleges and these kind of things.

The city's Municipal Taxation Act, there was gender-neutral language and real property tax exemptions for affordable housing and development, which didn't exist before. Each of these fits in with the five-point housing plan that was announced through the then Department of Housing, which I think was housed in CSSD at the time; it's now moved.

The big piece for us, we proclaimed the new *Towns and Local Service Districts Act*, of which there was a lot of discussion and commentary of a useful and helpful kind from the Opposition, which replaced the *Municipalities Act, 1999*. That came into force on the first of January. It acknowledges, also, the role of Local Service Districts and strengthens their accountability, in addition to rewriting what is effectively a constitution between the provincial level of government and the municipal.

We had in-person training starting in October of last year and virtual training sessions that have been very well attended. We work with PMA, Professional Municipal Administrators, and MNL to help design, develop and modify those in the light of feedback. They have been well received.

We also hold mandatory and voluntary training information sessions every spring and fall. There is a mandatory component to the *Municipal Conduct Act*, which predated my time, that Minister Howell brought in. We try and work on a toolkit for councillors, and we're certainly keen to have that enhanced and ready for the results of the fall election so that those new councillors will be onboarded as rapidly as possible. We're kind of gearing up for that in the background as the next phase after the election.

The code of conduct has been in place now for just over a year. It was a crucial piece of legislation. It was originally intended to be part of TLSD, but the minister of the day felt it needed to go in earlier. It's been an important process. Ideally, we shouldn't

need it, but we do because we deal with individuals in an imperfect world. What it does is it strengthens municipal governments' governance and it helps build confidence of the community in their local elected.

We've had an emphasis on community collaboration and shared services. I've said, and continue to say, that for smaller communities there are services they cannot deliver by themselves, and collaboratively and in a group, this then becomes possible. We're encouraging that and we'll continue to work on that over the course of the coming year.

It provides benefits in terms of regional economic development and, indeed, we've used the grants that we had at the time to fund regional economic development offices for areas, and there are several across the province who adopted that approach. It also makes available better service delivery for things like land-use planning, financial administration, engineering and water and road maintenance. We have seen positive impacts there. I'll try and recall some stories if anyone is interested as the evening goes on, because I know we usually stray a little bit from the numbers and heads of expenditure.

Before we finish, there's just one thing close to my heart which is the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award. We announced that and announced the nominations opening, I think it was yesterday. Since last year, we've worked with PMA to finalize the criteria for this award. The department has invested time, effort and money in what I think is a superb little pin and some artwork. The award will be granted by PMA to one recipient. That could be a town clerk, a manager, a clerk manager or a CAO that demonstrates dedication to the municipality, the municipal sector and the public service – things that Derrick did for a long time. I think it's important to keep his memory alive. Those of us who knew him, I think, will

appreciate the award when it comes to fruition. I've be proud to be involved in it.

We've done a lot. We've got a lot to do. I don't really want to take up a lot of time talking when there are numbers to be discussed. I'll conclude there and hand it back to you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Minister.

I'll reinforce your sentiment there about Derrick Bragg, just a true gentleman and he's very missed. He was a friend to all of us. That's a great idea and I totally support that. I look forward to years of people winning that award in memory of his name.

Thank you very much for setting that up. It's fantastic.

I have a list of general questions, Minister, with regard to the vacancies. How many vacancies have you had for six months or more?

**J. HAGGIE:** One.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

How many individuals both resigned or retired last year?

**J. HAGGIE:** We have had two retirements and seven end of employment or resignations.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Are there any new hires this year?

**J. HAGGIE:** Six.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

How much was spent of the committed \$400,000 allocated for municipal training last year?

**J. HAGGIE:** I'll have to find that. It's buried away in there somewhere.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you.

Once we get to it, you can worry about it as well.

**J. HAGGIE:** Okay.

**C. TIBBS:** How many communities are currently under a boil-water advisory, Minister?

**J. HAGGIE:** I would have to direct you to ECC for that one, I don't have that hand to hand.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Has there been any progress in the civic addressing policy and is there any data available for its year-over-year progress? I know it's important to a lot of –

**J. HAGGIE:** The issue of civic addresses is a challenge. Communities have tried to do that; I'm aware of at least one community where there are two sets of numbers from two attempts to do it.

We have been speaking to Fire and Emergency Services where this is a particular hot topic, if you'll pardon the expression, and between them and the municipalities, they're working on a template to deal with those communities that don't have civic addressing. I think the challenge is that a lot of communities regard this as something to do with mail delivery and bills and this kind of thing, and I think there's an education piece there.

In many respects, not having a regional structure, we have become simply a communications conduit for those departments that have a particular interest

in civic addressing. I think one of the things we are working on is the role of regional service boards in how that approach for civic addressing, for example, could be advanced. It's one of many possible threads that would be allowed under the legislation but has never been enacted or regulations written about it.

**C. TIBBS:** Yeah. Thank you, Minister.

I can imagine it's the challenge in Newfoundland and Labrador. It has to be a huge challenge when it comes to civic addresses.

Minister, I'm going to move on to 1.2.04, Policy and Strategic Planning. What is the current backlog of town plans which are awaiting approval?

**J. HAGGIE:** I have that one on another piece of paper. We have currently 36 municipal plans in development and 26 are six months or older. Those, by and large, are an iterative process where it comes into the department – there are questions or issues with maps or something – it goes back and then the community takes its time and then sends it back. That's not an excuse; it's an explanation of why these processes sometimes take so long.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

What is the current staffing compliment of this division?

**J. HAGGIE:** You've got me bouncing around here today. I will get there in a second.

Seven positions and five filled.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

How long have the vacancies been active?

**J. HAGGIE:** My understanding is that they are rotating. We fill them and there is a turnover.

We're working on trying to stabilize that, in actual fact. We have an arrangement now for a co-op student and we're working on a program whereby we will have a sponsored student in Planning in each of the two years.

We've had interest from Dalhousie and we've had interest from University of Alberta. Our focus would be on having Newfoundlanders and Labradorians go there, get their planning certification and come back for return in service. It's an idea I stole from Health.

**C. TIBBS:** Fantastic. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, what is the timeline from submission for a town plan for an amendment to clear the department – average?

**J. HAGGIE:** I have a nice graphic somewhere of that. The steps to registration, here, is an iterative process. I can actually give you that rather than read it out, which might be easier.

**C. TIBBS:** Perfect.

**J. HAGGIE:** We have a nice little table there for you rather than read it into the record. If you guys would be happy with that, we'll duplicate it and make sure the Third Party have it too.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Has the minister received correspondence regarding issues with the approval backlog from concerned municipalities?

**J. HAGGIE:** What, by and large, tends to happen is that there is a regular dialogue with the municipality concerned. Occasionally, an interested party will email the department to ask the status of an application and we do our best to connect the individual with the process. We'll provide a contact in the department and then that contact in the department will sort of liaise with the municipality.

**C. TIBBS:** What are the position titles, Minister?

**J. HAGGIE:** It depends on the application, quite frankly.

The common thread is they go through, usually, the director of municipal support. They can approach that individual via the regional office or directly with the office in town, and that director will then connect the person concerned with the appropriate individual in planning.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

I have to wait until subheading 2, don't I, if I'm finished with one? Can I move on to 2.1?

**CHAIR:** 2.1? No, not yet.

**C. TIBBS:** Okay.

Well that's all I have for this first subheading.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Labrador West.

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

Like my colleague, I guess, most of it is covered there, but how many appeals are currently outstanding with the Regional Appeal Board and what's the average right now for that?

**J. HAGGIE:** We restructured the appeals and we have commissioners now. That was fairly new.

There were 52 appeals heard in 2024, and there are 17 on the docket. One is very old, none are from '23 to '24 and the 15 are from the April '24 to March '25 period.

The answer in terms of numbers, there are 17 still waiting to be heard as of April 9.

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

Right now, under the city-specific legislation that was being redone, like the Towns Act, when will we expect to see the new cities acts?

**J. HAGGIE:** Good question. They are on the top of the work plan currently. There had been some discussion about the sequencing. Originally, there had been a thought that the cities act would precede the *Towns and Local Service Districts Act*. My predecessor kind of dealt with that one and moved it back.

There was a debate again, around the sequencing of the others, but the next one will be the *City of St. Johns Act*. That, I would anticipate from our work plan which I have here – I don't want to commit my deputy to something that will give her a seizure – we're looking I think at March of 2026 as the latest. That would be having it into the House.

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

I know that MNL have called for more transparent and available information on when infrastructure is funded, is any work being done around their recommendation?

**J. HAGGIE:** The infrastructure piece is now moved to TI. We will facilitate where we can, but that process lies with Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

Are there any current communities that have expressed interest in relocation under the Community Relocation Policy in this past year?

**J. HAGGIE:** There is one which the relocation has been agreed and monies have started to flow, but the power and services have not yet been cut off because of some administrative issues with Newfoundland Power that we hope will be clued up over the summer.

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

Has your department been in discussions NLHC, as well as any other municipalities or MNL, on how to improve zoning practices for expediting construction?

Yeah, NL Housing Corporation, an expectation on affordable housing? Sorry, I had the acronym wrote down wrong.

**J. HAGGIE:** I got the question. Thank you very much.

The amendments I alluded to for URPA and the *City of St. John's Municipal Taxation Act* were around that. If you recall, we brought them in the House. We talked about inclusion rezoning, density bonusing and this kind of thing. The *Towns and Local Service Districts Act* gives municipalities a lot more flexibility, and it was only really those two pieces of legislation that needed amending.

A lot of that resides with the towns. I am happy to engage with MNL or, indeed, anybody who thinks that we can improve the zoning practices. I do know that there is material in other jurisdictions – BC I'm thinking of at the moment – who've adopted a slightly more militant approach to zoning changes. We, in actual fact, have a meeting with the NL Construction Association in May to discuss that.

**J. BROWN:** Oh, excellent. Thank you so much, Minister.

I know when we were debating the *Towns and Local Service Districts Act*, we talked about the taxes for accommodation tax. I know that we've discussed that was for hotels and stuff for tourist accommodations, but has there been any chance to change, I guess, the thought on using it to tax work camps and construction camps that are set up for projects and stuff like that, like we have in Labrador West where we have bunkhouses set up for the mining industry?

Is there any change in policy or thinking about allowing them to be taxed under the accommodation tax, as well?

**J. HAGGIE:** The discussions around tax have actually, really, now just shifted to an implementation phase for the tourist accommodation tax. We haven't had any particular discussions around the kind of tax you're referring to specifically for accommodations.

I mean, if you have something that you would like us to consider, send it in. I'm always interested.

**J. BROWN:** I absolutely will. Thank you.

That would be my final question under this subhead.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

Seeing no further questions, I ask the Clerk to recall the subheads.

**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.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next subheads.

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

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

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, my apologies, I forgot to ask – could I get a copy of your binder as well?

**J. HAGGIE:** Of course you can.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Sir.

**J. HAGGIE:** We'll give it to you in an electronic format if that's all right. Don't want to kill trees.

**C. TIBBS:** Absolutely.

Minister, Regional Support, there's a major challenge for municipalities in acquiring audited financial statements in a timely and cost-effective manner. Has the department seen a decline this year in the total audited financial statements received by the prescribed timeline?

**J. HAGGIE:** We have been doing a piece of work on that, and I'm trying to find the piece of paper because you'll be very impressed with us when you see it.

I've got it. We both found it at the same time. Thank you very much.

There are communities that struggle with that. What we did between ourselves and MNL was we picked, I think, the most needy eight or so. Between us funding and MNL's outreach, we have worked with them to try and remedy those financial statements so that the MOGs don't lapse. They have that three-year window.

It is a source of active discussion in our department. We're looking at possibilities about routes to access this, either through the regional service board or, alternatively, in partnership with MNL with kind of like an

approved vendor approach. The issue about the audited statements, usually, is auditors reluctant to do it because of recordkeeping.

So if you go back to the recordkeeping phase and fix that – and we have discussions in the pipeline with providers of accounting and recordkeeping software, and are prepared to offer that and training in conjunction with MNL. It is an issue that we are aware of, and we've worked hard with the communities to get that down and, in actual fact, I think we have had some success. It would be hard for me to put a number on it. It does seem to me, though, that we have more defaulters from before who have now got their MOGs.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister, last year, the minister discussed the potential of developing a human resources tool for municipalities to avail of specialized assistance similar to locum physicians. Has this concept been considered further?

**J. HAGGIE:** Yes, it has. It's on the list of things to do under collaborative services. We have been in discussions with PMA, and I don't know that anything more concrete has come out of those yet, but we're continuing to do that.

This was an issue that was brought up at PTOC, which is the provincial ministers as well. It's not unique to this province and no one has found the magic bullet yet.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I'll move on to Municipal Operating Grants, 2.2.01. It is known that Municipal Operating Grants are allocated based upon data collected from the 2011 census. In past hearings we've been told that discussions were being had on whether this will still be appropriate. Could the minister outline whether these discussions did take place and what would the result be at this time?

**J. HAGGIE:** I think it's safe to say that those are on the work plan and are discussions that really need to be rebooted. We have worked with the stats agency to gain information about population. It's not difficult to get updated census data. I think the issue there with MOGs is what is it communities need.

Because a small community will need a level of skills and access to services. You mentioned financial accounting. It's simply a matter of degree. You need someone to do it, whether it's Carmanville, Gander or St. John's, it's a question of scale. So what's the floor that you need to make sure everyone has got a safety net, and then do you actually use pure population as a way of giving an MOG or do you weight it somehow?

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister, what led to the under use of Grants and Subsidies allocated last budget of \$4.5 million?

**J. HAGGIE:** Which head specifically and I can give you a variance?

**C. TIBBS:** 2.2.02, Special Assistance, my apologies.

**J. HAGGIE:** There were some changes in there. There's Hurricane Fiona money in there and some of that has not flowed yet. So that's where, under 2.2.02, the \$4.5 million comes from.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I'll move on to 2.2.03, Community Enhancement. It's just a line-item question, Minister. What led to the \$600,000 in under use of the allocation of Grants and Subsidies underneath this heading?

**J. HAGGIE:** It's an application-driven process. We had fewer applications, fewer projects and fewer workers.

**C. TIBBS:** That makes sense.

Thank you, Minister.

I'll move along to 2.3.01 Local Governance and Planning. Just a couple of general questions under here. Minister, are there any communities officially proposing a resettlement referendum at this time?

**J. HAGGIE:** None that I'm aware of.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Are there any amalgamation requests in progress at this time?

**J. HAGGIE:** There is one that I'm aware of.

**C. TIBBS:** Which one would that be?

**J. HAGGIE:** Mainland-Three Rock Cove.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Just some line questions, Minister. What led to the \$42,000 over expenditure in Professional Services?

**J. HAGGIE:** The 52 hearings, we don't usually get to that number, and now we've got appeals adjudicators. We did more; we pay more.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

Despite being significantly underutilized this past year, why is Purchased Services increasing by \$51,000?

**J. HAGGIE:** We are looking at advertising, and I think some of that will tie up around municipal elections from our perspective. We have also used more advertising and promotional material.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

I'll move on to 2.3.02, Canada Community-Building Fund.

Minister, what are the driving factors behind the department's lacklustre use of the massive pool of infrastructure funds it has in reserve with so many needs around the province at the current time?

**J. HAGGIE:** It is a source of intense frustration that these are application-driven. I would love to get this money out the door. We have tried really hard with MNL and PMA to make sure they are aware of this money. Up until very recently, these were very much ring-fenced and they were allocated on the basis of the previous CCBF agreement. So they had to be used for solid waste disposal. They had to be used for these kinds of things.

Now, because of the renegotiation we did, that pot is much more generic and we've tried again to go back out to MNL to say look, this money's here and these are the new criteria. We've made the people aware as best we can, and we'll continue to do that.

I don't know whether some of the lack of response is simply just a timing thing, or maybe some of the councils are waiting for the results of the election and kind of new blood and start off again. That's speculation on my part, but I'd love to get that money out the door. I really would.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Minister.

You said that – actually, I'll just stick with a couple more questions here and then I'll ask a couple of my own – last year saw the lowest flow-through of these funds in the programs history; nearly 50 per cent less was provided this year, in contrast to 2023-24. Why?

**J. HAGGIE:** It's application-driven. I'm at just as much of a loss as you. I think maybe we haven't done as good a marketing thing, but the criteria changed. We're now in a different situation. We've got a different widget to sell.

**C. TIBBS:** Could you elaborate a bit more about the criteria itself? You talked about solid waste. What would the criteria encompass now?

**J. HAGGIE:** Anything with a green focus is likely to be eligible. Again, it is around water, waste water and waste management, but there's much more flexibility in terms of now you can use it for feasibility studies where you couldn't before.

So as a municipality, if you wanted to do something, you actually had to pay to find out if your idea was feasible and what it looked like. Now you could actually come to that fund and say I want some money for a feasibility study and it's one step further back, but it eases the financial burden to actually see if you can use the bigger pot.

**C. TIBBS:** And just finally, Minister, are there any vacancies in this program?

**J. HAGGIE:** I would have to check.

**C. TIBBS:** Okay.

**J. HAGGIE:** Hang on, Jennifer might be able to answer that.

**J. TORRAVILLE:** There are four positions and they're all filled, currently.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

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

Has there been any discussion about expanding the Municipal Training Financial Assistance Fund?

**J. HAGGIE:** Is that the \$200,000 you were referring to or –?

**J. BROWN:** Yes.

**J. HAGGIE:** I think we probably half spent it. Again, we have worked with MNL to find out what it is that they want and we're really the funder, so it is more application-driven. The training that we provide is based around the legislation, it's based around the code of conduct and its general advice around what the policies state.

If it's a specific topic, we have worked with MNL who want to provide training in a specific area and we've let them go out to the market and we've funded it through that fund.

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

MNL stated that they often lack human resources needed to meet their administrative, legislative and service requirements. Is there any new help in this budget to help with some of this burden with the administration, like municipalities lack of ability for human resources and administrative and legislative requirements, to help them expand on that?

**J. HAGGIE:** Again, this is an ongoing piece of work through MNL to try and help MNL help their members. I think one of the things that may be helpful – and we've talked to MNL about it – is whether or not we could give them some seed money to put an individual in place to help with that. We've done that in other areas, and this may work, but again, it's a source of discussion. I mean, we're prepared within our budget to fund whatever MNL would like as an agent for the municipalities in general.

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

You know, a lot of municipalities have issues with getting more trained technicians to manage water and water supply safety. Is the department working with the municipalities to help them either train or get trained people to manage water supplies and help them with that cost?

**J. HAGGIE:** The water management course is funded through ECC and our department, and I go to it every year because it's held in Gander and the certificates are awarded there. It is a popular course. We have looked to aid some of the larger communities in having an extra certificated water operator as a resource for the smaller communities, and we're trying to build a network for, say, the smaller communities around the Gander loop whereby if they had an issue, there would be sufficient resources and personnel in Gander that they could ring up.

One of the advantages of that convention in Gander is that it allows that networking to start, and it's something I personally have emphasized every time I've spoken at that. So we're trying to do it informally, and if there was ever a formal request, we'd certainly see what we could do to help.

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

MNL has called for more tools to be provided to municipalities for fiscal stability. Has the department looked at creating more of these abilities to help municipalities be fiscally responsible?

**J. HAGGIE:** One of the things that we're very keen on is accountability in terms of recordkeeping and in terms of modern techniques rather than, you know, sort of having the shoebox of receipts at the end of the year and handing it to some poor, unsuspecting auditor to unravel. I referenced earlier on about how we've been in discussions and are continuing to have discussions both with MNL and with vendors whereby reasonable priced software and some training and this kind of thing could be done.

We've worked with, I think the number is eight communities in this little tranche of communities where they hadn't had audited financial statements for a while and their MOGs were going to lapse, and we've got them into a stage where we can help.

Interestingly enough, one community declined assistance.

**J. BROWN:** Okay. Wow, I'm a bit taken aback there, but unfortunately for that community –

**J. HAGGIE:** I was surprised,

**J. BROWN:** Yeah, that's a surprising statement from a community that's for sure but thank you for the answer, Minister.

Are there any plans to continue the increases to the operating grants in the coming years? Things are changing; cost of doing business is increasing. Is there anything to help keep lifting up that grant to help municipalities along?

**J. HAGGIE:** Well, they had, I think, what amounted to a 27 per cent increase over the previous two years. I think if you wanted to change that line item, subsequent for budget '26, I or whoever is in this chair at that time would have to make the case to the minister of Finance of the day. I think if it was clear what was being bought then yes, and that really goes back to this, what do we do with MOGs? What is their purpose? How much is a floor and is pure population appropriate? Should it be a weighted population and if so, what do you weigh? Do you weight for age or how do you determine that weighting?

Those are discussions that we will be having over the coming period with MNL, with PMA and with any other stakeholder we can think of.

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

How much was awarded last year out of the Special Assistance Program and what was the purposes for those awarding?

**J. HAGGIE:** Okay, right. Now then, I will have to find those Special Assistance Grants. You don't happen to have a head there do you, by any chance?

**J. BROWN:** 2.2.02.

**J. HAGGIE:** 2.2.02.

Special Assistance Grants, we had disbursed 152 applications were submitted. We approved \$3,472,411 through SAG and the municipal training funds spent \$174,146. These are all sorts of things. We have paid for emergency generators for warming centres. We have paid for heat pumps for warming centres. We have paid for emergency repairs to roofs. We've paid for emergency repairs to culverts.

The criteria really are something that you can't budget for, something that challenges the municipality financially and something for which there is no other source of money. Those are the general criteria. Around that, you can actually have a considerable amount of flexibility.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Minister, for that.

For the Community Enhancement, which communities availed of this funding in the past year and how many jobs did that provide for the communities?

**J. HAGGIE:** I can give you the number of projects when my deputy minister finds it for me. I've got it.

Saved by Mr. Osmond. Thank you very much.

CEEP allocated \$4.8 million, approved \$4,390,100; 177 applicants, 132 approved, 693 workers.

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

My final question, can we please have a list of the recipients for the Canada Community-Building Fund projects that were funded in the last year?

**J. HAGGIE:** A list of the projects?

**J. BROWN:** Yes.

**J. HAGGIE:** I don't have one with me.

Carried.

**J. BROWN:** If your department could provide it.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.3.02 carried.

**J. HAGGIE:** I don't think there's any reason why we couldn't, offhand.

**CLERK:** The total.

**J. BROWN:** Yeah, that's it.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All right, perfect.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

**C. TIBBS:** Minister, I think you may have alluded to it a moment ago, and I'm not sure if I caught it, but you were going to come back to it. How much of the \$400,000 for training in last year was used?

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

**J. HAGGIE:** I just read out that.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs carried?

**C. TIBBS:** Was it \$174,000?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**J. HAGGIE:** \$174,000 yes.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**C. TIBBS:** Yeah, that's what I thought.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

**J. HAGGIE:** And change.

Carried.

**C. TIBBS:** That's all the questions I have.

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

**CHAIR:** That's all the questions?

Okay, I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

**CHAIR:** I just want to announce the date of the next meeting. It's Monday, May 5, 2025, at 1 p.m. to consider the Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, and Housing.

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

Can I ask for a mover for adjournment?

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

**J. BROWN:** So moved.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**CHAIR:** The Member for Labrador West.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The meeting is now adjourned.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.