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

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Municipal and Community Affairs

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Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Municipal and Community Affairs

Chair: Joseph Power, MHA

Members: Paul Pike, MHA
Jim McKenna, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Hal Cormier, MHA
James Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Emily Gushue (A)

Appearing:

Department of Municipal and Community Affairs

Hon. Chris Tibbs, Minister

Candice Ennis-Williams, Deputy Minister

Gerry Osmond, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal and Community Support Branch

Mark Healy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Engagement Branch

Michelle Hunt-Grouchy, Director of Communications

Christopher Stamp, Director of Municipal Support Division

Lori Evoy, Director of Local Governance and Land Use Planning Division

Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller

Paul Forristall, Manager of Finance, Budget and General Operations

David Thomlyn, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Jim Parsons, MHA

Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA

Margot Pitcher, Official Opposition Caucus

David Hamlyn, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Evan Beazley, Committee Analyst

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Parsons, MHA for Corner Brook, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, substitutes for Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

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

CHAIR (Power): Good morning, I call the meeting to order.

I'll announce the substitutions first. MHA Parsons is substituting for MHA Pike. MHA Stoyles is substituting for MHA Gambin-Walsh.

Just a reminder for Members and department officials, each time you're asked to speak, just put your hand up, identify yourself, wait for your tally light to come on; say your name and position when you speak. We'll take a break probably an hour and a half through, halfway through, for 10 minutes. Anybody who wants any water or anything, they're in both corners here.

I now ask the Committee Members, substitutions and caucus employees to introduce themselves starting in the front row.

L. STOYLES: Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

J. PARSONS: Jim Parsons, MHA for Corner Brook.

M. PITCHER: Margo Pitcher, Opposition Researcher.

S. O'LEARY: Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Researcher for the Third Party.

H. CORMIER: MHA Hal Cormier from the scenic District of St. George's - Humber.

J. MCKENNA: Jim McKenna, MHA Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

J. DWYER: Jeff Dwyer, MHA for the industrial District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

CHAIR: I now ask the department officials to introduce themselves, starting with the minister.

C. TIBBS: Chris Tibbs, MHA Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

J. TORRAVILLE: Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller.

M. HEALY: Mark Healy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Engagement.

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

G. OSMOND: Gerry Osmond, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal and Community Support.

L. EVOY: Lori Evoy, Director of Local Governance and Land Use Planning.

C. STAMP: Chris Stamp, Director of Municipal Support.

D. THOMLYN: David Thomlyn, Executive Assistant for Minister Chris Tibbs.

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

P. FORRISTALL: Paul Forristall, Manager of Finance, Budget and General Operations.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Before we start with this review process, the Committee will now consider the minutes of the previous meeting for May 4, 2026. If there are no errors or omissions, I ask for a mover for those minutes.

Moved by MHA Stoyles.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted.

CHAIR: We will now proceed with the Estimates review process.

Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping for this head of expenditure, I will proceed to recognize the minister who will get 15 minutes for opening remarks. Then I will proceed to introduce the first responder questioner from the Committee who will get 15 minutes. After the first round of questions, we'll proceed in rounds of 10 minutes each, alternating between Members of the Committee.

I now ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK (Gushue): 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?

I now recognize the minister for opening remarks.

C. TIBBS: Good morning, everyone, and thank you so much Chair and Table Officers for being here this morning to participate in the Estimates Committee meeting for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

I will keep my remarks focused and concise, and I am ready for your questions. This meeting is an important part of the democratic process. As I've sat on that side many times for the past seven years, I'm very excited to sit on this side and I'm even more excited for those folk. This is their first time as well. It is also a creative test of one's ability to think while being stared at. We'll see how it goes.

Our mandate is simple but important: We're here to help communities succeed. We support strong sustainable municipalities, communities and regions throughout the programs, services and practical supports for local governments and the residents which they serve.

We do this by working side by side with local councils and committees through funding, training, modern legislation, financial supports and Land Use Planning services so our cities, towns and Local Service Districts have what they need to move forward and plan with confidence.

For 2026-27, the department's gross expenditure budget is \$191.1 million, with approximately \$33.5 million in revenue, for a net investment of \$157.6 million in communities across this beautiful province. Almost 97 per cent of the department's budget consists of grants and subsidies.

We have a dedicated team of 89 positions, with 71 currently filled and nine vacancies, working out of seven offices located around the province. In fact, only 0.3 per cent of our budget goes to operating; 3.2 per cent to staffing. While most staff are based in St. John's, we also have 14 people on the ground in Placentia, Gander, New-Wes-Valley, Burin, Corner Brook and Roddickton.

While the Community Engagement Branch was introduced prior to 2025, our government has strengthened its role and direction, ensuring it delivers real engagement and meaningful results from

municipalities, communities and stakeholders.

A recent example of the leadership, planning and delivery of the mandatory municipal orientation training is from December 2025 to April 2026, a total of 91 training sessions has been scheduled for municipalities across the province, which is a lot of calendars working very hard. Participation to date has been strong, as the department continues to deliver mandatory orientation training to approximately 1,700 councillors and municipal staff. This level of engagement reflects the shared commitment to strong local leadership and well-governed communities.

This branch also supports inclusive engagement and consultation across government, helping ensure that policies and programs are shaped by real experiences and voices of people in communities throughout the province. Whether in person, online or through engageNL, this work builds trust, strengthens relationships and helps our department move forward together with communities, not ahead of them.

I want to sincerely thank our department staff. Every day, and often in the evenings and on weekends, they work closely with cities, towns, Local Service Districts and Inuit community governments, answering questions, offering guidance and supporting solutions that help local governments thrive. For example, in 2025-26, our Municipal Support Division formally supported more than 120 councils and committees through both in-person and virtual engagements and 82 inspections were completed, up from 60 in '24-'25.

Our incredible director of Municipal Support, Chris Stamp, which I am very pleased to have with me today, together with his team, plays an essential role in providing daily guidance and operational support to thousands of municipal leadership and staff around our province.

Our staff work with councils and Local Service District committees daily to answer questions, provide guidance and training proactively addressing issues before they escalate and help identify practical solutions. Sometimes our most important role is simply to listen so communities feel heard, respected and supported.

That support matters, even more in challenging moments, whether it's part of a province-wide response to a wildfire or flood or a local incident like a dump fire or a major water break, our staff work alongside local leaders to help coordinate, problem solve and connect communities with the right supports that are needed. When a community faces a special election or an unexpected vacancy, we step up to provide practical guidance so local processes can keep moving and essential services can continue. In short, when communities need extra support, an extra hand or an extra voice, our department is there.

Our team regularly participates in public meetings on complex taxation matters and other polarizing issues, many of which take place during evening and weekends. This level of commitment reflects the government's strong dedication to supporting local governments when, where and how assistance is needed most. Many people in my department don't know what a 40-hour work week looks like. They go well above and beyond.

Local governments are on the front lines of building the future of our province. Our government is committed to working with them, listening, collaborating and keeping community needs at the centre of the work.

Through *Budget 2026*, we are investing more than \$183 million in key funding initiatives to empower communities and help them grow stronger, more resilient and more sustainable. These investments include: \$28 million in Municipal Operating Grants, \$2.4 million in Special Assistance Grants, \$4.9 million for the Community

Enhancement Employment Program, \$7.1 million for provincial gas tax and \$142 million in federal funding for the Canada Community-Building Fund.

I want to take a moment to highlight our Community Enhancement Employment Program, familiarly known as CEEP. This is an important program that helps municipalities provide short-term work for residents who need EI-eligible hours. Each year, this program helps more than 600 people qualify for EI while also supporting community projects related to tourism, economic development, infrastructure improvements and local services. Funding is approved on a project-by-project basis with municipalities, community groups and other eligible organizations being able to apply if their project meets program goals.

The total CEEP budget is \$4.9 million. For the 2025-26 fiscal year, there were 142 projects approved totalling \$4.2 million in funding. Approximately 700 people were approved for work on CEEP projects. Of that, 5 per cent worked in the fishing industry and the remainder were in labour positions such as carpenters, truck drivers, brick layers and scaffolders. If a community cannot use all of its hours, those hours can be reassigned to another district and sponsor, so they can still be used for eligible workers.

CEEP projects usually run from September to February; however, I understand this past year our municipal finance team worked hard to launch the program in May, which is the earliest yet to take advantage of better seasonal conditions. This led to more applications and more projects being funded and we worked hard through the fall and winter to support successful implementation of these projects.

To support our cities and towns and Local Service Districts, this program is taking a region-by-region approach, recognizing that solutions work best when they fit local realities. We are working closely with

Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, Professional Municipal Administrators of Newfoundland and Labrador, our local leaders, businesses and community organizations to help every region of the province grow sustainably and access the services people rely on.

Regional collaboration and shared services are a key part of this work. When governments work together, they build capacity, reduce costs and strengthen services. Sharing services with fire protection infrastructure, maintenance waste management, financial administration and land-use planning can make a real and long-lasting difference.

What feels impossible for one community can often become achievable when neighbors work together. A couple of examples include, infrastructure maintenance Exploits Regional Water Treatment facility, which services five communities, received funding from the Canada-Community Building Fund and the provincial targeted infrastructure fund for major upgrades to the facility. Being a regional facility, opened up other funding options for these upgrades instead of each community having to try to come up with their own share.

Waste management: regional service boards serve areas in Eastern, Central and Western and provide waste collection with the assistance of funding from the Canada Community-Building Fund and the provincial targeted infrastructure fund. We will continue to look for new ways to support regional collaboration and shared services approaches because strong community partnerships lead to safer economically stronger and more resilient municipalities.

Modern legislation is essential for modern communities. That's why our department is actively working to modernize municipal legislation including, developing a new cities act to replace the *City of Mount Pearl Act* and the *City of Corner Brook Act*,

undertaking an extensive review of the *City of St. John's Act*, actively exploring ways to support municipalities dealing with code of conduct and harassment concerns under the *Municipal Conduct Act* by broadening criteria and expanding access to mental health training through the department's Municipal Training Fund and partnering with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the Professional Municipal Administrators to form a municipal harassment work group to develop real, practical solutions to help our mayors, councils and Local Service District committee members.

In addition, we have begun an initial review of the *Municipal Elections Act*, with the legislation now more than 20 years old and following 2025 municipal general election in October, we know the time is right to modernize this act to better support municipalities around this beautiful province.

The 2025 municipal general election was delivered successfully, supported by extensive training and hands-on assistance for local governments. Our department had a full-time coordinator to assist with election development and delivery, as well as a dedicated staff person focused on Local Service District elections. Our team was available throughout the election process to answer questions and provide support. We received lots of phone calls and lots of emails from municipalities looking for clarity, reassurance and timely answers and our staff handled them all with patience and professionalism.

That level of engagement showed how seriously our communities and residents take local democracy and our staff was there for them every step of the way. I want to particularly recognize the professionalism and expertise shown by our director of Local Governance, Lori Evoy, who I am so pleased is here today as well. During that busy period, in the midst of the constant questions and tight timeliness, her and her team's calm leadership and deep

knowledge of the municipal election process helped guide municipalities with confidence and earned their trust.

We have a couple of firsts in the elections including cities, towns and Local Service Districts voting on the same date and the department supplying election kits, ballot boxes and voting screens to support fair and accessible elections. We also partnered with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and Equal Voice Newfoundland and Labrador to deliver the Make Your Mark public awareness campaign.

We heard great stories of people being inspired through that campaign to step up and try their hand at running in an election, a reminder that a little encouragement can go a long way.

In total, 53.5 per cent of municipalities held elections on October 2, 2025, with many councils acclaimed, 42.4 per cent; 16.4 per cent required by-elections to fill outstanding vacancies and another 4.1 per cent required special or deferred elections. We will continue exploring ways to strengthen participation in local government and encourage more people to step forward as leaders in their community.

When it comes to land use planning, through our Land Use Planning and local governance work, the department supports municipal restructuring that helps communities plan for growth, strengthen services and make sure local decision-making reflects today's realities, including boundary alterations. In 2025-26, we received two new requests for boundary alterations, in addition to five requests already under way.

We are also working with Three Rock Cove and Mainland Local Service Districts toward a new incorporation date to become a town. We're so proud of that. We have one request for an amalgamation, and we continue to see interest from a number of

unincorporated areas that are exploring to become Local Service Districts.

Recruiting planners remains a challenge; however, I am pleased to report we currently have only one vacancy, thanks to creative efforts of our staff. In '25-'26, we heard 15 appeals, with 25 still outstanding. We registered and published four municipal plans, and development regulations are in various stages of progress.

On 46 municipal plans, we have completed 67 amendments, have another 36 in progress and made approximately 1,500 applications and referrals related to Crown lands, protected roads, environmental assessments and quarry expirations, mineral lands and aquaculture leases.

The volume is significant and it speaks to a team that shows up every day to help communities move from ideas to plans to actions.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to take a moment to recognize the kind of leadership that quietly holds communities together, the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award. Chair, if I can have an extra moment, with leave, it's just talking about Derrick Bragg, please. I'd appreciate it.

Created in partnership with the Professional Municipal Administrators of Newfoundland and Labrador, this award honours the life and legacy of the late Derrick Bragg and celebrates outstanding leadership in municipal administration, leadership that shows up day after day for residents.

Last November, I had the honour of announcing the first recipient of the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award, Ms. Lizeta Gould, who has served the Town of Port au Choix for more than 15 years with a steady commitment to her community. Ms. Gould's leadership is rooted in fairness, inclusion and community pride. She is not only a skilled administrator, but also a mentor, a visionary and a community builder;

someone people can count on when the work is complex and the stakes are real. She truly exemplifies the very values the Leadership Award is meant to recognize.

Just last month, on April 16, I announced that nominations are now open for the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award until May 20, 2026. I encourage my hon. colleagues and municipal leaders to nominate a municipal administrator who goes above and beyond in service to their community and residents, because taking the time to recognize excellence helps strengthen it across our province.

In conclusion, our department has made meaningful progress over the past year, and I am proud of the team and the dedication they bring to supporting local governments and residents across this beautiful province. I look forward to continuing our strong partnerships with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, Professional Municipal Administrators of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Municipal Assessment Agency and local governments. Together, we are building resilient, healthy and vibrant communities through Newfoundland and Labrador for everyone who calls this province home.

Thank you and we look forward to your questions. I'll do my best to keep the answers clear, even when the questions are delightfully specific. Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, and thank you to your staff and the table staff for today and all the work that the staff have done over the past number of years, and especially last year in the midst of an election and everything, keeping the department together and working closely with all the municipalities.

I also want to say thank you for continuing with the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award. Derrick certainly was a true leader in our province. I served on the board with him at MNL for a number of years as he represented the workers in the province and it was certainly a pleasure to work with him and the board at MNL for a number of years.

Starting with the questions now, Minister, this is 1.1.01, Minister's Office. So how many staff are actually working?

C. TIBBS: Three.

L. STOYLES: (Inaudible.)

C. TIBBS: Sorry, I –

OFFICIAL: Hard to hear her.

C. TIBBS: Yeah, until you get recognized, I can't hear.

CHAIR: The light is not on.

C. TIBBS: Yeah, I think we've just got to go back and forth. Do you have to recognize, Chair?

CHAIR: Yeah, I did.

L. STOYLES: Yes, sorry about that.

C. TIBBS: No, that's okay. I'm just getting old and hard of hearing.

L. STOYLES: Your answer was three. I'm referring to the whole department. I believe there was 56 staff last year?

C. TIBBS: Oh, sorry.

L. STOYLES: I'm just wondering.

C. TIBBS: 80 for the full department.

L. STOYLES: 80?

C. TIBBS: Yeah.

L. STOYLES: So is that an increase from last year? Because from what I gathered, there was 56 there last year.

C. TIBBS: No, there are 80 this year and there was 80 last year.

L. STOYLES: 80 last year?

C. TIBBS: Yeah.

L. STOYLES: What about vacancies?

C. TIBBS: Nine vacancies.

L. STOYLES: Nine vacancies.

So regarding the executive assistant and the special assistant staff, are they still in the same role and under the same pay scale or has there been any budget changes over the past year?

C. TIBBS: No, same pay scale.

L. STOYLES: Same pay staff and everything? So you mentioned you have nine vacancies. What about new hires?

C. TIBBS: Six new hires, new to government.

L. STOYLES: And layoffs, what about layoffs?

C. TIBBS: No layoffs.

L. STOYLES: No layoffs.

The liaison person between the staff is the same that was in place a year ago, right? You do have a liaison person working – you have an EA, so there is a liaison person working with your department?

C. TIBBS: Just the one executive assistant.

L. STOYLES: Just one executive assistant? So you don't have an extra liaison person in your department?

C. TIBBS: No liaison in the department.

L. STOYLES: No liaison person.

C. TIBBS: When I've got an EA that good, I don't need any liaison person.

L. STOYLES: And there hasn't been any budget changes in that administration support or anything like that in your department?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: The only change in the administrative assistant for the executive for the minister's office was just we had two retirements and we have replaced both positions.

L. STOYLES: So there have been some retirements in your department?

C. TIBBS: Five retirements and we wish them well.

L. STOYLES: Five retirements – so they've all been replaced by new staff?

C. TIBBS: They have been replaced, yes.

L. STOYLES: Okay.

I think that's all I have for this section.

C. TIBBS: I thank the Member. My Grandmother Tibbs lived in the Member's district for a long time, She supported you forever, and she still does.

Thank you.

L. STOYLES: Thank you.

I pass it on there.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister and certainly to the very supportive staff and team that I know are doing incredible work behind the scenes. I

am no stranger to municipal politics and municipal affairs, so it's my pleasure to be here as the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi to ask some questions and get a little bit more intel.

I was very, very pleased to hear you, Minister, speaking about the voices of real experience. As a long-time advocate in the municipal sector, I've heard not only from the City of St. John's vantage point, but as a former board member of MNL and the various committees that support women and gender-diverse actions and support and Make Your Mark and Equal Voice NL and all of it, so this is a really wonderful area.

I certainly commend everybody, all the work that you do to try to support municipalities. I just wanted to start with that.

Thank you so much.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

S. O'LEARY: It's a great area, wonderful portfolio.

My colleague here started with some of the general questions that have asked some of these questions about who's employed in the department. I'm just going to go into a few general questions first.

Again, are you still using zero-based budgeting?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, wonderful.

How many appeals are currently outstanding by the regional appeal board and what would be the average wait time for an appeal to be ruled out?

C. TIBBS: Twenty-five appeals outstanding right now, that's as of March 31.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

There was a second, it's just basically the average wait time for people.

C. TIBBS: I can avert to Lori for that.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

L. EVOY: We don't have necessarily an average wait time but I can say there is one appeal over a year of the 25.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you, that's great.

Again, these are more general questions. I'm just going to continue on that route.

When can we expect to see amendments to any of the city-specific legislation? I know that, Minister, you referenced some of the city acts and things that are being worked on. I guess, just to follow up on that, I've been in the know about the ongoing process of trying to rehabilitate our city acts, certainly with Corner Brook and Mount Pearl. My understanding, of course, as you've noted, is that they are coming first. Having experienced the ongoing process with the City of St. John's and the adage that we're still working with horse and buggy language in our legislation, or formerly in my capacity as deputy mayor, there is a real importance to the timeliness of this.

So my second question to the legislative question would be the timeline for the City of St. John's, which obviously impacts my district as well. These are things that obviously have been questioned repeatedly and are very important to new legislation coming forward and the modernization of that act for the capital city of the province. Anyway, that's my question.

C. TIBBS: I thank the Member for her question. I just want to take a moment and thank the Member for her service to the City of St. John's. I've watched you over the years and you've done a splendid job. For anybody to put their name on the ballot and put themselves out there, especially on that local level, it takes a lot. It's a thankless job,

so I thank you very much for your service, first of all.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

C. TIBBS: The City of St. John's, I've met with several times, with Mayor Breen and some of the councillors down there, that is what we are working on. Like you say, it's a very outdated act. It definitely needs to be done. We have some great people in the department working on that act to formulate it, come up with something that's going to work better for the City of St. John's and the province, as a whole, as it being our capital city.

So that is something, again, that we're working very diligently on. We want to make sure that we get it right. Like you say, the last act has been there for over 100 years, so we want to make sure that this act is stable enough to stand on its own feet and it works for the city in these changing times. So I can't give a clear date or time, but, again, it's something that we are working on. I'm hoping to see it within our mandate.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair.

So just to follow up on that, there is a real sense of urgency around this. Certainly, in my former role, I've been a long-time advocate to try to get it moving and to try to see if we can put a pin in a deadline.

While that's happening, of course, we're seeing a myriad of issues happen in the City of St. John's in terms of heritage structures and development issues throughout the city. These are things that are on the plate right now and we have been waiting, or the people in the municipality, have been waiting for quite some time.

These are things with very real impacts, as we continue to move forward, progressively. So I would certainly hope that we can actually see if we can put a timeline on that. With full respect to my colleagues here who

obviously are in the queue, first and foremost, with Corner Brook and Mount Pearl, we all know we all need it. But with the historic significance of St. John's, and certainly in my particular District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, there are very real impacts that are happening right as we speak.

It would be my hope – and I'll just put it on the record – during your mandate, fabulous. That would be wonderful because this will truly change how governance works at the municipal sector, so that would be greatly appreciated.

C. TIBBS: Yes, absolutely, and you represent one of the more historical parts of this province. It's an absolutely beautiful recognition, your way, historically and aesthetically. It's what Newfoundland and Labrador is all about, at the end of the day, our culture and heritage. We want to come up with some legislation that's going to protect that but also move forward with a modernized act.

To put a date on it, again, MHA, I wouldn't put a date on it because I want to do due diligence there, but we do appreciate the urgency of it, and make no mistake, the people in the department are working extremely hard every single day, as you know they are, to get these acts in place.

We want to make sure, once again, that we take the time to get it right because, again, who knows how long this act is going to be around for. It took us over 100 years to open it up and get a new one in place, which is what we are going to do. We want to make sure that it works for the City of St. John's and gives the city the autonomy that it needs, as well as the support it needs.

We'll continue to do that. Once we get closer and closer and closer, I'll keep you abreast of it and where we're going with it because I know how important it is to you. We'll keep engaging with our stakeholders to get this act right. We'll keep you updated.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

I appreciate that and, yes, I've been a long-time vocal advocate of that.

I do want to, actually, make note of the fact that municipal leaders in this province are the cream of the crop. These are the people who are the boots on the ground and my experience, as a Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador board member and an FCM board member, really drove home the importance of the support for municipal leaders.

The City of St. John's, of course, has lots of privileges that many of these small towns and communities that we support across the province do not have. I recognize that. Of course, it was a fantastic learning curve to be so involved in Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador as they continue to broker and they advocate on behalf of those towns and communities.

It really has been a privilege to see so many people with so many barriers and so many potential conflicts of interest within their communities still continue to step up and be leaders in the communities. I have to just give a shout-out to the municipal leaders right across the province because they're working with, sometimes, a dull tool in order to be leaders in their community and to make sure that the communities survive and thrive.

I just needed to put that out there, because you know it as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and, certainly, we know it as former municipal leaders as well here, as Members in the House now. That's great experience to bring forward. I think it will actually create a great conversation and potential collaboration for how we can serve everybody and not just one community or another.

Anyway, just wanted to mention that. I will move on to my questions here now, so thank you. The next question I have is, is

work being conducted to provide municipalities with more transparent and – I’m almost out of time – available information on how and where infrastructure is funded as per calls by MNL?

We can leave that to the next one if it’s too long an answer or –

CHAIR: No, you can go ahead and answer.

C. TIBBS: The department engages with municipalities all the time. Make no mistake, yes, things change and move around whatnot, but the support that they give municipalities, it’s unparalleled. Like I say in my opening remarks, we talked about we don’t know what a 40-hour work week – a lot of these people over here, these great people, they work evenings, weekends; but yes, they ensure that the municipalities and the Local Service Districts across the province have the information they need.

We work very closely with MNL. We respect MNL and we consider them a full-fledge partner with this department – Rob Nolan and Amy Coady – to ensure municipalities have the support that they need, and we’ll continue to do so.

When MNL speaks, we listen and we want to make sure we keep up that commitment and that partnership.

S. O’LEARY: Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

I missed my opportunity for a preamble. We sort of got a little mixed up there, who speaks, but I’ll take a couple of minutes to say how much I appreciate the work the department does. As a mayor for eight years, I know why there are a lot of complex issues. I like to think that, being from Corner

Brook, we caused you few problems, but maybe that’s not the case.

I do understand the long tale of these small communities that dot a very broad geographic area in Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is your support that really makes it possible for us to do the work, the day to day – I always tell everyone, municipalities, and I tell kids this when I’m giving tours and talking about our services, when you get up in the morning, it’s your municipality that you face. When you flush the toilet, that’s your municipality. When you brush your teeth, the road you go down to get – the snow plow is usually a municipal snow plow. It is the sport field that you recreate on, your ice rink, all those things. So it is the first line of government that most people deal with on a regular basis.

Again, I just want to say how much I appreciate the work that our municipalities do and the work you do to support them. So thank you very much for that.

Again, Minister, I appreciate your comments around Derrick Bragg. Derrick was a friend of mine as well. Of course, with his municipal experience, I remember him telling a story about coming to the door with a key and a receipt book – a water key and a receipt book. So you had a choice, you had to pay your water bill or it was going off. That’s the real down in the mud kind of work that our municipalities do, of course.

I have a few questions; I’ll start off with more general around just general policy of the department. Wondering what the current thought and philosophy is around regionalization? It’s been a topic that’s been talked about for many years, so maybe you could tell us what the department’s current philosophy is on and what the approach will be to regionalization.

C. TIBBS: Sure.

MHA Parsons, again, I thank you for your service as well to municipal politics. It’s not

an easy job. Like I said to Ms. O'Leary, it's a thankless job and everybody that steps up, God love you all, it means a lot to the province, so thank you very much for that.

When it comes to regionalization, that's a word that's been thrown around quite a bit over the past couple of years. It's no mistake that it's something that we work towards every single day. The philosophy, in a nutshell, is this, if we can find more efficient ways for communities to work together throughout this province, as geography is not our friend in this province sometimes, we will avail of that. We will work with communities. We will work with stakeholders to ensure that each community, each municipality, each LSD gets the benefit of working together as efficiently as they possibly can when it comes to services, when it comes to capacity.

There is a better way of doing this. There truly is. It definitely takes some time, but it needs to be led by the communities themselves, there's no doubt about it. We're not here to tell communities how to regionalize and how to better make themselves more efficient. We're here to work with them because each community is distinct, each community is different and we want to make sure that it's something that works for all communities. The same approach on the Northern Peninsula may not work down the Burin Peninsula.

So we need to make sure that we don't come at it with a blanket approach as well. We are here to listen to communities. We are here to work with communities. Over my four-year mandate and the wonderful department I have here with me, we are hoping to advance these communities to a place where they can work together and avail of every piece of funding, every initiative that is out there and we know that we can get there and we can make this place more efficient with the municipalities and LSDs we have.

J. PARSONS: Thank you for that.

I'm really glad to hear community-led regionalization. I think what I'm not hearing is other levels of government or things like that to do regionalization.

I guess the concern is that – and again, those arrangements have been possible over the years and have been done, where there's co-operation between communities for things like municipal enforcement or planning staff or fire services, water treatment staff, things like that; but obviously there is a greater need and there is a greater need, a financial incentive I guess, to get communities over the hump.

So has there been any consideration to incentivize communities to look for those opportunities more actively, rather than just treading water as we are doing from day to day?

C. TIBBS: Yes, absolutely and it's a great question. I love where your head is at, and ours is sort of in the same place. I've spoken to many municipalities and local governance over the past six months about where this is going. Again, we have some great department staff who have been here for quite some time who have seen this evolve over the years of some good things happening.

I know we can go further and I know we can do things better, but again, it doesn't happen without the community say. Whether you're a community of 15 people, 15,000 or 150,000, those communities need to be involved, they need to be at the head of this and they need to work with us to let us know what works for them.

With the support and guidance and leadership of the department, with that partnership I know that we can get there. Yes, the incentivization, if anything else, is to make your tax dollar within your community go a little bit further, to ensure that whatever programs and funding is

available out there can be extracted and used in the best, most efficient way possible for these communities.

With all these smaller communities, it's an approach that we're going to take over the next four years and I'm very hopeful to see the progress that we're going to make.

J. PARSONS: Okay.

What is the role of the Regional Service Boards in this? I know we talked about waste management, but I know there are other opportunities for them to be involved in this. What is the department's philosophy and approach going to be for our Regional Service Boards coming up?

C. TIBBS: Thank you for the question and it is; it's extremely important.

Our Regional Service Boards, they play a big role within the province. I'll talk about, for instance, Wabana out in Bell Island. Our Regional Service Board played an intricate part into their waste management with the changes that they've just gone through. It's something that they've been asking for a very long time now. We seen a path forward. We seen how it can work, along with the Regional Service Board.

When I sat down with the mayor of Wabana and our Regional Service Board director, amongst the staff here, we came up with a solution that works for them and it is working for them. It's a community now that is extremely happy with the changes that are made. We're going to continue with those changes as they work for different communities across the province.

J. PARSONS: Okay. Thank you for that.

I think the Regional Service Boards will need some clarity. Of course, they largely function for waste management, at this point. There are a number of issues, I guess, regionally, that we're still dealing with. I know, out west, we're paying a lot for

garbage. The relationship between the boards is something that has to be looked at and I would suggest something very closely and very quickly that we need to figure out. I think there's great potential there. I know that our local Regional Service Board out West is doing some work toward looking at fire protection services and other services. Again, that might be an approach to spur some of this co-operation between communities.

C. TIBBS: If I can, just for one second, I won't run you out of time.

When I came to the department, we met with the Regional Service Boards and I wanted a review of what the Regional Service Boards are doing and if we can expand their scope of practice and to how we can better utilize our Regional Service Boards across the province. I believe there is a role for them to play, a very important role, but we're going to make sure that they are utilized in the best way possible.

J. PARSONS: Okay. Thank you for that.

So back to my colleague mentioning the cities act and the *City of St. John's Act*. I'm just curious, as I wasn't sure if I misheard, but has there been any recent progress on the cities act? When was the last time the department engaged Mount Pearl and Corner Brook on this? I do understand there has been some progress on the *City of St. John's Act* but I'm not too sure what the progress has been on the cities act itself.

C. TIBBS: Sure, that's a great question and I'll defer to my deputy minister for some comments.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: There has been significant progress on much of our legislation related to the cities. As many of you would be aware, we brought into force the *Towns and Local Service Districts Act*, effective January 1, 2025. That set the groundwork for the discussions we've had, similarly, with the City of Mount Pearl and

the City of Corner Brook because what we're pushing is legislation that is enabling versus prescriptive.

So we started with the TLSDA. We've done significant work with both cities of Mount Pearl and Corner Brook back and forth, but, concurrently, we've also done significant work with the lawyers in the City of St. John's because, ultimately, as you open up each section of the cities act, it brings forward a question about what is the principle behind that particular section and how do we modernize it so that it works effectively for the cities themselves?

So I don't want to give an impression that it's one and done and then we move on. Everything is moving concurrently. So we have significant progress made, fundamentally, on the cities act. In turn, we've also progressed the *City of St. John's Act*. But as you've already spoken to, that act is quite complex so we can't treat it the same. So there's been a lot of back and forth and that continues daily.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: I don't have any questions for this section.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just going to continue with some general questions. I'll have a couple of specific ones in other areas. Sorry, I'll just start in with this one. I've got so many notes here, so my apologies.

C. TIBBS: Take your time.

S. O'LEARY: Last year, we saw the postal strike created a number of problems for municipal elections. What lessons has the

department learned in general from the election cycle last year? Are you working on any reforms or modifications to the system to improve resilience and adaptability?

C. TIBBS: Thank you for the question. I'll refer to Mr. Christopher Stamp, who is taking the day off from Victoria today.

C. STAMP: I think one thing about the *Towns and Local Service District Act* that's important to mention is the publication requirements. So in the previous legislation, publications were required by newspaper and, in some cases, mail. The act now allows for more ways to communicate with the public, whether it be social media, website, leaflets, common places and any other means that's necessary by a town. That helps get the information out to residents and communicate the messages that may need to be discussed.

I hope that answers your question.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

I was going to wait until after the break, but I'll speak on this one right now. Of course, we've already had our Estimates in Transportation and Infrastructure, but there's no way we can talk about municipalities without talking about Transportation and Infrastructure. So I hope that's fine that I actually bring this forward here now. If it needs to go to another level of discussion, then we'll figure that out.

The Multi-Year Capital Works funding cut has been something that has been expressed as a concern, both in my discussions with advocates within the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador sector, as well as with the City of St. John's. Understanding that there are a number of issues built into this and some changes that have happened; however, I understand that there was very little, if no, consultations around that decision-making process.

I'm just wondering about, number one – I can go into the details of that a little bit further– how that decision was basically made to change the Multi-Year Capital Works funding and the cuts that certainly have transpired? I'll speak to it a little bit further, but if you can start with that.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

It's an important question, and though I can't speak directly for TI, of course, I can speak directly for this department.

We work closely with all departments to ensure that we get good results in government for the people who are affected each day and the Multi-Year Capital Works is no different. Again, I can't speak to TI's decision, but we work closely with TI to ensure that all the funding models can get out through the door and municipalities can use them to their greatest capacity possible.

There is a vision moving forward to leave less money on the table, to get more money out the door and to, I guess, organically have different projects working to ensure that we get the maximum benefit from it, to bring it back to the seven communities that it was originally, I guess, meant to be for.

TI and the minister in TI have often talked about rightsizing different projects or different funding models. I think that this is a vision moving forward to help the seven of the greater municipalities throughout the province and getting some of that money out the door.

It's something that we're going to have to look at moving forward and see where it goes. I believe that it is going to rightsize the municipalities that are affected; I believe that it's going to put them back where they need to be. We'll continue to work with TI to get this done and make sure that all municipalities can get what they need out of these programs.

A little bit of an in-depth more discussion, of course, you already had it with TI, but we'll continue to work with Transportation and Infrastructure to ensure that municipalities have exactly what they need.

My apologies, we do have a meeting as well, this Friday, with MNL. Department staff and I believe somebody from TI will be there as well. We're going to meet with MNL this coming Friday at the Symposium in Gander to talk and have a more robust discussion about where these funding models are going.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

I understand that there's some shifting going on and rightsizing, as you've indicated; however, because it's moving to four years instead of the previous three years, this means that the per year allotment is decreasing for all municipalities. So that's a concern.

A situation where there's no new money for 2026 so municipalities can continue with their ongoing projects but have no new Multi-Year Capital Works allotment for new projects, it creates a little bit of gap there for municipalities, which obviously is a concern, as you know, because they have to work within a balanced budget and all the rest, the barriers that municipalities have.

So those are some of the concerns that are happening there. I'm very pleased to hear that you're going to have a meeting, and I would strongly advise that you definitely have Transportation and Infrastructure at the table when you are having those discussions. Because, as I prefaced, there's really no way that you can have a conversation with municipalities without having that discussion as well. That is like the lifeline for so many communities.

Again, consultation, consultation.

C. TIBBS: Of course.

S. O'LEARY: Anyway, thank you for that. I know that that's something that certainly my colleagues at both Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador have concerns about and City of St. John's as well.

C. TIBBS: We realize the financial pressures that are on municipalities across the province, but again, we're here to work with the municipalities. We're here to work with TI and these stakeholders – we need to all be engaged. Like you just said, we need to make sure that we are consistently being engaged with MNL, with TI because, at the end of the day, we all want success for these municipalities and these cities and towns that we represent.

S. O'LEARY: Absolutely. Appreciate that very much.

I think for that particular section is the end of my comments there. I just will end on the fact that again, Derrick Bragg, so pleased to hear you speak about that acknowledgement. I'm a big fan of acknowledging good work in communities, just as MNL has gone out and done the Inspiration Award with the former mayor of the City of St. John's, Shanney Duff. We need to recognize these municipal leaders. It's really important that we do so.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely.

Derrick was a friend to us all. Like I say, he's very missed and I couldn't think of a better way to honour him but every year recognize somebody that has given their all to their community, and nobody has done it like Derrick. So God bless him.

S. O'LEARY: The only other thing that I would mention is that, in reference to my previous comments about that gap, maybe that could be a consideration for your discussions and your consultation is about that little bit of, you know, it's a ditch right now for municipalities to not have that funding for this particular year. So I understand that things have to shift, but I

certainly hope that you have those in mind in your consultations.

C. TIBBS: I guarantee it.

S. O'LEARY: Yeah, thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Yeah, I'll continue along that vein. I was going to save some of the funding things for later on, the subheads around the grants and things like that. I know Multi-Year Capital Works is under Municipal Infrastructure over at TI. But I hope that this department is setting policy here and not deciding, I guess, how municipalities and what they need from an infrastructure point of view.

It makes sense to me that TI would administer the fund because they're used to dealing with engineering, tenders, procurement, that kind of thing. But I would hope that this department is the one informing about Municipal Capital Works and Multi-Year Capital Works.

So I guess there are a couple things I wanted to confirm about that because I am hearing outcry the last few days about the changes to that program. I wanted to confirm, I guess, first of all, that the program is being reduced. Instead of the 22 municipalities, we're going down to the seven – 7-11 we often call them in municipal parliaments. That these 15 municipalities that are now switching over to Municipal Capital Works.

I know the deadline for completing work under Multi-Year Capital Works is shifted to 2031, but the program itself is, in fact, going to be a four-year instead of a three-year. Is that correct?

C. TIBBS: Again, policy from this department, we will always work with TI to

inform them. Again, it's a partnership because, on this side, we want to make sure that municipalities get the best work that they can and get the most efficient out of any of these programs, and TI wants the same thing, of course. We're there policy-wise. We can help TI.

It doesn't work without the communities, of course, because municipalities know more than anybody what they need. We're here to help them with whatever we can. We're going to continue to work with TI through this project, through Multi-Year Capital Works and Municipal Capital Works. We will always be hand in hand to get the greatest outcomes we can for municipalities.

J. PARSONS: Can you confirm that it is, in fact, switching from a three-year to a four-year funding allotment? So the funding won't be available again until 2031?

C. TIBBS: I cannot, but I can get back to you. How's that? I'll have that answer before the day is out.

J. PARSONS: Perfect, thank you very much.

If there's been a problem getting money out, has the department considered providing additional supports? I've heard this concern from Municipal Infrastructure in both in the department and in TI when it's been shifted around. I'm sure that's a concern, but has there been any additional support or training to fix that problem rather than just remove the program from the 15 municipalities?

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much for the question.

I'll defer to my deputy minister.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Such a reasonable question.

I think what we tried to do, as a department, is work with each municipality to see where, in fact, their best approach forward is from

an infrastructure-consideration perspective because there are multiple pots. So we have Municipal Capital Works through TI, we have the Multi-Year Capital Works through TI but we also have the Canada Community Building Fund which is now called Build Communities Strong Fund, and there's a provincial targeted initiative fund under that.

Federally, they allocate so much money per municipality for the use of infrastructure issues. Those categories are fairly broad, so municipalities can use it for everything from brownfield redevelopment, local roads, bridges, drinking water, community energy needs, systems, solid waste, et cetera.

There are lots of opportunities for infrastructure spending depending on the capacity of the municipality, and that's TI and MCA's responsibility is to work with the municipalities and figure out what is the best approach to their infrastructure needs and planning.

The other thing I want to highlight is that under the minister's direction, we did send out a letter to all municipalities by the end of March in which we actually spoke to or ensured that every mayor and council member understood what was available to them in terms of grant programs and that included everything from MOG to the Provincial Shared Gas Tax. We told them what their allocations were under the Canada Community-Building Fund. We wanted to ensure that we weren't making any assumptions on behalf of the municipalities, that the mayors and the councils knew what allocation amounts they had available to them.

So the letter that went out in March. We have received extremely good feedback from mayors and councils who have said this is fantastic because they now know what amounts of funding they have available to them immediately to start working through whatever planning it is they intend to focus on for the coming year.

J. PARSONS: Yeah, thank you for that.

Getting that information out with the turnover in councils, the acclamations, all the things you mentioned, we'll talk a little more about that when we get to the other funding programs.

I'll just take this opportunity to continue to talk about the Multi-Year Capital because it's not part of the typical grants that are covered in these subheads later on. Can you confirm the budget? I heard announced in the budget of \$20 million for Municipal Capital Works, as opposed to \$10 million last year. Then, as well, I'm getting information that the Multi-Year Capital Works for this coming funding period is reduced from the normal \$70 million down to \$53 million. Can you confirm those amounts for me?

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much for the question. I know how important this question is to a lot of people.

Again, I think that this would be more of a TI question. This is what they would have in their department. This is not something that this department would oversee right now. So, again, we work very well with TI when it comes up with policy and trying to get this funding out the door but, at the end of the day, this would be for TI.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you for that.

Again, I would stress that this direction needs to come from your department and not from TI. How TI manages the money is really – that's not their problem, I would suggest. This is about municipal needs, so just like MOGs, just like Special Assistance Grants and the gas tax, how that's administered. Again, I appreciate the idea that TI has expertise around how to get out infrastructure, water and sewer, roadwork all those things, they have that expertise and you can utilize the expertise but I think the policy direction for this should really come from this department.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely, I agree with you to a certain point as well because we're going to continue to listen to municipalities. We're going to listen to communities across the province. They're going to tell us what their needs are and we're going to help them get to where they need to be. We'll continue to work with TI in partnership to ensure that these towns and Local Service Districts and cities are taken care of the best way we possibly can.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

To go back to policy and regionalization and that kind of thing, I have heard from an LSD recently, they're having some issues around getting quorum for special meetings and elections and things like that. I'm wondering if the department is hearing the similar problem from other LSDs?

C. TIBBS: Yes, we have been. I'm going to defer this to Chris Stamp. Like I say, we know the pressures that are on LSDs to get quorum and stuff. I'll let Chris talk about this a little bit.

C. STAMP: One of the things about the election in 2025 for LSDs, bringing them all together at one time, was that it allowed us to have a greater focus and see the change in point of time when things happen, when community members leave, why they leave. It allows us to step in and provide an appropriate response.

We are working directly with those communities, probably the ones that you were referring to, to support the next election. We're offering on support on the ground, our team to be present during the election to provide legislative advice and ensure that they're not alone. In some cases, this is new for them and we're here to support in every possible way.

It's an active thing for us, it's a responsible thing for us and we'll do our best to support in each possible way.

Thank you.

J. PARSONS: Thank you for that.

Yes, I think, that's going to be a common theme for a lot – we've talked about the number of acclamations and by-elections. I know at MNL, I've been present for many years, we're all getting a little bit older every year as a province and as a group of municipal leaders. Recruitment and retention is very important and LSDs are again a form of regionalism. This is the regionalization that needs to happen in order for these communities to survive and provide the set of services required.

In that regard, in a similar vein, volunteer fire departments, I know that there were some measures put in, some tax credits and things like that, which is appreciated, absolutely, but what is the department's plan to help municipalities recruit new volunteers, as our volunteer fire departments get older and have to face recruitment challenges?

C. TIBBS: Well, thank you for your question.

Like you said, in our budget there are some measures there to help with some recruitment and some retention. I was a volunteer firefighter most of my life and we need to make sure that the structures and supports are there to support our firefighters moving forward and that comes from, of course, FAL. It comes from support from this department.

The volunteer firefighters in every community are not just firefighters. They're a huge part of the community, whether it comes to fundraising, whether it comes to anything inside the community, they're a huge part of it. We want to make sure that our firefighters across the province are protected and given the incentives that they need to take to get there.

When you become a volunteer firefighter and you become within that group of men and women who put it all on the line every single day without a paycheque, it takes a lot.

So to incentivize a volunteer firefighter you need to make sure, first of all, that they are protected and have the gear to do the job and that camaraderie is there. It has to be enjoyable for them for a volunteer firefighter to do what they need to do. We've seen some issues across the province.

Make no mistake, this department, along with FAL, along with this government, are there to support volunteer firefighters. We've never needed them so dearly and held them so dearly to our hearts as we have this past summer. We've seen what they went through. They're a different level all their own.

I just want to take the time to thank all volunteer firefighters across the province right now. We will remain engaged with the volunteer firefighters across the province. We will listen to them and what they need. Through our grants and programs throughout government, we're going to make sure that the supports are there.

CHAIR: Any more questions regarding this subhead?

S. O'LEARY: 1.2.04?

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

So I'll just move into Policy and Strategic Planning questions. I'll try to speed these ones up here now and try to be a bit more succinct.

Are there currently any communities that have expressed interest in relocating under the Community Relocation Policy?

C. TIBBS: None right now, no.

S. O'LEARY: None. Okay. Thank you.

Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador has been calling for improvements to civic addressing in rural areas now for many years. Has there been any progress made on that?

C. TIBBS: Great question. I know that many people have been looking at it for quite some time now. I'll refer to Mr. Gerry Osmond.

G. OSMOND: It's a topic, obviously, that's top of mind for us. Certainly, in relation to last summer and the wildfires, I know that was an issue that came up.

Civic addressing is part of our legislation. It's a may, not a shall, just to keep that in mind. Municipalities and Local Service Districts are not required to have civic addressing. They have the ability to do so, not required to do so.

That being said, obviously, we would like to see a system in place that allows for that and encourages that. That is more the bailiwick of FAL, but we are working directly with them and talking to them on a regular basis. I know they are also thinking of this, and it's top of mind for them as well. Hopefully we get to a place where we can ensure that every community has civic addressing.

It's a bit more challenging for unincorporated areas. That's something that's still top of mind for all of us to get through. There's an ability for unincorporated areas, in particular, to put in place their own civic addressing, if they so wish, and then they can work with 911 and FAL to deliver that service as required.

But yes, it's something that we are working with FAL on a regular basis to try to address. Circumstances over the past year in terms of emergencies, I think, have

brought this to the forefront and I think we'll obviously advance these conversations about ensuring that all municipalities and all communities have proper civic addressing.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful, thank you.

Just to follow up on that, we know that safety issues, especially with climate change, fires, the different things that are happening in our communities and that we need to have a heightened thing, this is becoming more important that we have these proper civic addresses. I would certainly like to put forward that the government actually find an opportunity for education and incentivizing.

Education is one thing – and I was speaking with the minister yesterday about this. I love education. Education is the basis of everything, but it's not until we get a little dangle of an incentive that really do we oftentimes see action or people taking up.

This impacts not only public safety, but it also impacts our colleagues out in communities doing assessments. It's really tough work for people to be kind of throwing darts into the unknown. If there's an opportunity for government, I would certainly put forward that some sort of incentivizing, I think you can be creative about how we try to encourage people to do that, without coming down with a heavy hammer, but I think it's becoming more and more important all the time.

That's just a comment that I would put forward. I will move on to my next question, which is, how many planners are there now in the department to sign off on town plans that come in for approval? Do you think that the number is sufficient right now for the workload?

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much.

I'll divert to Lori Evoy.

L. EVOY: We currently have three planner III's, one manager of Land Use Planning and, just recently, a co-op student as well joined the team. We are continuing recruitment for planners as well.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

Do you know how many more positions that you're recruiting for?

L. EVOY: We currently have a vacant position for a planner III and a planner II.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

My final question in this particular section is, has your department been in discussions with SSWB or Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, as well as municipalities and MNL, on how to improve the approvals process for building affordable housing?

So it that's collaboration and conversation.

C. TIBBS: The short answer is yes, I've been involved with Minister Wall now, along with Minister Goosney, to ensure that that capacity is there. We all know in Newfoundland and Labrador we need more housing. Minister Wall has said many times that housing is a right that everybody should have.

So this department is going to partner with SSWB to ensure that we have a plan moving forward for housing. I know that we all want to see more housing across the province, and that's one of our main goals that we're fighting towards and we're going to continue to do so.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

C. TIBBS: But those discussions are constantly ongoing, yes.

S. O'LEARY: Yes, as they should be. Absolutely, thank you.

Okay, that's it for me in that section.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Any further questions? You good?

Seeing no further questions, I'll now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

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.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.04 carried.

CHAIR: We're going to take a 10-minute break then before we start the next subhead.

Recess

CHAIR: I call the meeting to order.

Before we move on, I've just got a substitution that we didn't get on the first of it. The MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi is substituting for St. John's Centre.

I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Municipal and Community Support.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Municipal and Community Support, carry?

I call on the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Chair.

We're into the Regional Support and Municipal Finance and we talked a little bit about the program in TI, the Municipal Capital Works and Multi-Year Capital Works. I know we'll probably be seeking more information about the details of that allotment, but, first, I want to ask about Municipal Operating Grants.

Can the department explain how the amounts are determined for the Municipal Operating Grants?

C. TIBBS: Yes, of course. Municipal Operating Grants are very important to all municipalities across the province.

I'll defer to my good friend Gerry Osmond for this.

G. OSMOND: It's a good question. The answer is two-fold. One is population, which is a criteria that we use. Also, we have a remoteness index for communities that are geographically more remote. So these two things combined result in the actual amount for each municipality.

J. PARSONS: Okay.

Now I notice that the amount has not changed this year, but it was changed from 2024 to 2025. I think it was increased by about \$3 million to \$28 million. We've talked about the rising costs that we're all facing, and I know Municipal Operating Grants are the only component that these municipalities that receive them rely on, of course, but is there a plan on how they should be indexed or increased to facilitate the provision of municipal services?

C. TIBBS: Like you say, it's extremely important to municipalities. No, there was no raise in MOGs this year. That's not to say in coming years there could possibly be a raise. But we understand the financial pressures that are on municipalities, especially administrative-wise, and how important MOGs are.

I'll bring it back to Gerry if he wants to have a couple of more words about MOGs and their capacity.

G. OSMOND: Yeah, I would say it's a complex situation when you're tying amounts to populations and populations are shifting. So we need to be cognizant of that shift and understand that, to the minister's earlier point, what might work in St. Anthony might not work in Marystown, might not work in Fogo.

So we're always cognizant of that element of it. Obviously, the \$28 million is critical for municipalities. We certainly know that. We try to work with all of them to ensure that they use that money as effectively as possible and it taps into opportunities that they have. But it's not a simple conversation because, as you know, each municipality is very different so there are a lot of complexities that go into that.

J. PARSONS: Thank you.

The Special Assistance Grants, I think I know the answer to this, but I'll ask for the department to confirm. There is a significant change in budget there, can you explain, I guess, why it's almost a \$4-million change in the grant amount for Special Assistance Grants? Of course, these are very small grants, very important to communities, just to make sure we know how this will affect them.

C. TIBBS: I think the big change that you may be referring to is the lower budget will reflect a forecast in reduction due to the completion of Hurricane Fiona expenditure. That was in there and it ran out. The municipality, of course, they're informed about it, they know about it. But that would be the huge distinction over the past year or past couple of years. We didn't carry that forward with us this year because there's no need because that funding ran out for Hurricane Fiona and we're back to our \$2.4 million now.

J. PARSONS: Okay, perfect.

I'm curious again, with the Special Assistance Grants, it seems that they were underspent by about \$600,000. I wonder what happened there or why it would be less than anticipated?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: So SAG grants are actually community driven. It's demand application, so that would explain – applications come in as emergency issues come up, whether it's related to health and life safety or a community is having some unexpected expense. There are actually a couple of committees within the department, one of which consists of more than just our department, and then it comes before the minister for final consideration.

Given it is demand driven, it is expected that from time to time we will not spend all of it and we'll push out as much as we possibly can to assist communities.

J. PARSONS: Do we know from a year-to-year application for these grants, has that changed or what is the trending there from the last number of years? Is it going down?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: It's a great question. Again, where it is demand driven, we know consistently we should always have \$2 million put away for SAG; we have then \$400,000 for the Municipal Training Fund. Again, it is an emergency response program so we saw applications this past year related to the wildfires. We saw it related to floods. Again, in a running year, it's hard for us to predict consistently what types of applications we may receive but we know consistently we will receive applications.

The \$2 million right now seems to be the number that allows us to address things quickly and appropriately.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

The Community Enhancement Employment Program, that as well was a little under

budget. Could the department explain what the rationale there is? Is that again a demand issue?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: This year we receive 177 applications. There were 135 of them approved from 89 communities. First things first, we have a responsibility to ensure that the projects that are being brought in are eligible and then, based on that, it is really up to the municipalities to implement and to find eligible workers.

That does become a challenge sometimes. We've had projects that have been approved and not moved because the community has just struggled to have the capacity to get that project moved in the timeline that's needed or, in some instances, they have not been able to find the sufficient number of eligible workers to complete the work that they were hoping to get done.

J. PARSONS: I'm jumping around here a bit, but I'll stick with the grants and funding. This is, again, one that would be covered, I think, through Municipal Infrastructure and, as you would know, CHIF was a recent federal-provincial program. Unfortunately, it was tied to housing, so it had some limited applications for how it could be used in municipalities.

I'm just wondering if the department is aware of, and what the current status of the next federal-provincial program for infrastructure is? I don't think there is a bilateral agreement signed yet, but what is the progress of that? I know it's something that's more TI's focus, but I would assume that this term would know a little about that.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: So you're correct, CHIF questions should be directed specifically to TI. I'd be hesitant for any of us to speak to it in case we incorrectly speak to that particular program.

What MCA is responsible for is for the Canada Community Building Fund now

called Building Communities Strong. I can tell you that we have signed a 10-year agreement. We are in year three of the first five years of that funding. Then it is anticipated that the federal government will do an evaluation and then allocate the final five years for that program.

J. PARSONS: Okay.

I have a number of questions related to Local Governance and Planning, 2.3.01, but maybe I'll move on now and let my colleague continue, if that's all right?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

I'll hop in where my colleague left off on Municipal Operating Grants and kind of backtrack. Given inflationary pressures and the limited means that municipalities have in raising funds, why did the government opt not to increase the amount for grants this year?

C. TIBBS: When we do up a budget, of course, it's designed to help as many people across the province, as many sectors as we possibly can. Just because it didn't have an increase this year – I mean, everything needs to be increased at some point, that doesn't mean that we're not going to have an increase in years to come.

Again, we understand the financial pressures that are on municipalities. We're here to work with municipalities to extract the most of whatever we can out of all these funding projects, including MOGs. We're there to support municipalities.

Again, at the end of the day, there is never enough. There is never enough for any program across this province. We realize how people are hurting, they need more and it's not lost on this government and it's not lost on this department.

So make no mistake, we're going to continue to work with stakeholders and municipalities across the province to ensure that they're supportive with what we have now. What I'll say is this, I'll continue, as minister of this department, to take a look at the numbers and what municipalities need across the province and we will look forward to the rest of the mandate to see if there are any increases. Make no mistake, we will continue to work with them to see what they need.

S. O'LEARY: Perfect and, certainly, Minister, as you're going to be meeting with them on Friday, that this is a great opportunity to keep that on your agenda as well.

C. TIBBS: It is.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador has called for more tools to provide municipal fiscal stability. The mayor of St. John's also floated the idea of sharing in sales tax income to help reduce dependence upon property taxes, which we all know are completely regressive. Is this government looking into new options?

C. TIBBS: I'll divert to Candice.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Certainly, we're aware of ideas and suggestions that various municipalities are bringing up as to how they would like to see municipal finance issues addressed moving forward. Part of what we're trying to do, as a department, is to ensure that the programs that we currently have in place are appropriately and adequately utilized.

What we've been doing is we've been actually looking at the parameters around our programs. Just to the question that was asked by your colleague earlier, we've been noting where there have been trends of money not being spent in total. We've been looking at where some programs maybe

we're starting to see a different type of application come in.

There's a lot of work going on within the department to have a better understanding of what program use looks like in 2026 versus maybe when a program was started years ago. That allows us to understand what the current gaps are and, more importantly, where we might be able to bring recommendations to the minister for his consideration in terms of redesign or evaluation.

We work very closely with the Municipal Assessment Agency and certainly, as many of you would know, we've moved from a poll tax to a property tax. We were the last province in Canada to have that initiative move ahead.

I think, as the deputy, I feel very confident that we are having the right types of conversations with municipalities. We're engaged with MNL and PMA. I think Rob and I are talking, if not every day, almost every day, especially as of late.

So certainly, we are open and the minister has really stressed for us that we continue to listen and heed what's being said, because certainly the pressures that a lot of our municipalities are facing right now are incredibly different than what they were even five years ago. It's a lot of learning for us, and we're excited about what the opportunities are moving ahead.

Also, I'd be remiss to not also mention that we're part of national discussions. We are hearing that some things that we think are unique here are not unique, and we don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are opportunities to learn and to see where we might be able to find new solutions moving ahead from other provinces and territories.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Just to follow up on that, the last question about the national partnerships as well. So

do you have ongoing dialogue with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities on an ongoing basis or is that an avenue that you explore in any capacity? I'm just curious as to who you collaborate with there.

Thank you.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: The minister is part of a national pan-Canadian. The minister is responsible for local governance, so they meet twice a year. Gerry Osmond actually chairs the ADM-level group. So we are very actively engaged at the national level.

I should also say that while it is PT focused, the minister will have opportunity to have regular discussions with the federal minister at those meetings.

In terms of your question around the Federation of Municipalities, we don't engage with them directly. We engage with our version here, MNL. But I will say that meetings that we've attended, even in the last year, the national federation has been present and the minister has participated, even as recent as the urban municipalities, he was a guest speaker.

So any opportunity we can to get more than just a provincial view, we welcome that because, again, there are lots of opportunities to learn from those experiences.

S. O'LEARY: Absolutely, and I certainly know from experience that MNL and FCM are connected at the hip. There really are such incredible insights that are offered through seeing the national lens as well, just as we do here with MNL. So thank you for that answer.

My next question would be the City of St. John's has asked for a grant in lieu of taxes for provincial-government properties. Is this something the department is considering?

I'll just mention that I know that this has been a contentious issue with the City of St.

John's for a long time about the inability to draw revenue taxation on provincial buildings, so this question offers an opportunity for an alternative solution in that regard.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, it is a good question.

We're very well aware of it as we work with these municipalities and with Mayor Breen. We have a great relationship, but, no, it's not something that we are considering right now, but, of course, we are open to discussions with all communities and stakeholders to see if we can do different ways. No, it's not something that we are considering right now would be the short answer.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, all right.

Of course, there are provincial buildings throughout our province, not just the City of St. John's, but obviously that's the lens that I'm coming through.

Is the province willing to share some its HST revenue with municipalities that do not receive Municipal Operating Grants?

C. TIBBS: Again, that's not something that we are considering right now or not something that we've committed to, but ongoing discussions can happen or are continuously happening around different ways of doing things.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

I'll move on to Regional Support, I'm going to just ask how much of the Municipal Training Financial fund was used last year and are you looking at ways of encouraging more people to take part?

C. TIBBS: The Municipal Training Fund, \$188,662,000 – sorry \$188,662.76 – that would have been quite the expenditure, wouldn't it?

S. O'LEARY: You got a lot of people excited.

C. TIBBS: Yeah.

The clean water workshop in 2024 would have been \$21,368 and the fire school for LSDs, of course, which was a success, was \$2,566 for a total of \$212,617.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

Of course, the last part of that question was about encouraging people to take part. So, again, we're just going back into education, incentivizing how we can get people to draw into these potential opportunities, because we want to support people supporting themselves.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely, and it's extremely important, the education aspect of it. It would be 412 attendees overall, which we want to make sure that, again, the people who are focused on these are supported in any way we can. We know how important it is, especially the education piece. Myself, as minister, throughout the department, that's something that we're extremely focused on, thus the letter, for instance, that went out to all municipalities about their funding options and what they have available. It was certainly an eyeopener to a lot of municipalities and we're glad that it was well received and we're going to continue on that trend.

S. O'LEARY: Perfect, thank you.

C. TIBBS: Chair, could I request a four-minute recess?

CHAIR: Yes, Sir.

C. TIBBS: I quickly have to use the washroom. My apologies to everybody. I'll be very, very quick.

Recess

CHAIR: I'll call the meeting to order again.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

A few questions now around the planning and training. We had one amalgamation request, I understand, this year. Can I get a sense of what the government's policy and approach is to the feasibility of amalgamations?

C. TIBBS: I think that also goes in line with what we talked about earlier, when it comes to the regionalization of different places throughout the province. Again, it's always led by community, like we talked about a little bit earlier. We want to make sure that they do take the lead on this and they let us know what the groundwork would be to make them successful.

So, again, if it works for them and if it works within the department, it's something that we encourage. There are so many advantages to it that there could be taken up from. So, again, the philosophy behind that is if it works for the communities, it works for us, and we want to see these communities become as successful as they possibly can.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

I have a few questions around planning. I heard earlier we had a couple of vacancies of planners right now. Do we have an idea of, I guess, the turnaround time for section 15 reviews under URPA.

C. TIBBS: Great question. I'll defer to Lori Evoy once again, please.

L. EVOY: So in terms of municipal plan amendments or municipal plan reviews for a complete municipal plan and development regulations, it goes through the process under the Urban and Rural Planning Act. There are a number of steps to the process, which includes public consultation at the beginning, it comes into the department for

review and then there's a public hearing, another opportunity for consultation. It's a process back and forth with the municipalities as we work with them, with their town plans and development regulations.

There are no defined timelines. We do have a table of a schedule estimate that we can share with you after, if you'd like.

J. PARSONS: Yes, that would be great. Thank you for that.

In terms of the overall number of municipal plan amendments or reg amendments that are done, do you have a number, I guess, of year over year what's completed – goes through the department?

L. EVOY: Currently, there are a number of different plans under review for both amendments, I'll get you the number. Just one minute.

There are currently with us for amendments – 67 was completed last year and we currently have 36, for municipal plan and development regulations. In terms of new municipal plans for review, there are currently 46.

J. PARSONS: Forty-six.

Of course, I understand the complexity of these are a lot. I do know that it has been rumoured for quite a while that there is some lack of manpower or person power at the department when it comes to the ability to review this and the timelines have been difficult sometimes. In addition to that, I'm hearing from municipalities that they're having trouble getting planning services and recruiting planners.

I wonder if the department has any idea on how to tackle that issue? Obviously, with two vacancies in the department, right now, I guess recruiting planners is a problem. It's not just a municipality problem, it's a government problem, but has there been

any ideas floated on an approach to solve this problem?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: So, certainly, I've been in this role with this department for a year. Lori is working through a lot of continuous challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of planners. With that said, she and her team, under the leadership of Gerry, as the ADM, have been really exploring creative and new ways to deal with the challenges of planners because, you're absolutely right, it is not just a provincial issue, it's a national issue.

Just as a couple of solutions, we have tapped very successfully into co-op programs through Waterloo and Dalhousie. Gerry and Lori have actually met with those universities. We actually were successful and have consistently had co-op students on staff for at least a year now. In some cases, Lori will happily tell you that we've been able to retain them because we've impressed them in terms of, not just the quality of the workplace, but the beauty of this province. So we brought some come from aways who have decided to stay on staff with us, so we're excited about that.

The other piece that we've done is we have a staff who we've supported in getting certified as a planner, so we actually now have in-house ability. We have, I believe, at least two other staff, if not three, who are working through those processes as well. So that certainly will help expedite these types of challenges.

But at the end of the day, we get the work done. It might mean overtime, it might mean extra and additional work, but we are working very successfully through the plans and the amendments that are required of us and working very diligently to ensure municipal needs are met.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you for that. That's great to hear that there's progress being made on that file. That's great.

Of course, this is the proverbial red tape that we always hear developers complaining about when it comes to municipal plan amendments or development reg changes in our municipalities. Of course, we're partners in that with the province and municipalities. We both share, I guess, part of that responsibility, part of that blame for getting those things done in a timely manner.

Now I would suggest that we look into URPA further to see if, as we've discussed here, there's a big disparity in abilities amongst municipalities to engage planners, planning consultants and things like that to get planning work done. Should we look at URPA, find ways to make shortcuts where we do have certified planners involved, because not all planning amendments are the same. That's the truth of the manner. Sometimes there are comprehensive, brand new municipal plans; sometimes it's moving a zoning boundary. It's really diverse and could be handled, I think, more efficiently if we look for those changes.

The other thing is when it comes to housing, and I think my colleague mentioned that earlier, there is a push, of course, for municipalities to find solutions for housing, and planning is a big part of that. Governments, for a long time, have routinely blamed municipalities for not having the proper zoning and development regs to accommodate funding.

Is the department aware of any such problems like that? In my experience, the municipalities are more than eager to address the problems.

C. TIBBS: Sorry, housing you said?

J. PARSONS: Yes.

C. TIBBS: You mean barriers for municipalities?

J. PARSONS: Barriers for developing more housing, especially affordable housing.

C. TIBBS: Yes, of course. Again, we're working with municipalities. We are also working with Forestry, Agriculture and Lands for different Crown lands. I know in Grand Falls-Windsor, for instance, we have some Crown land there that we're going to be untying so developers can come in and create some housing, as well as low-income housing.

It is a big push now. We feel as though it has been, not ignored, but it's definitely not given the attention for quite some time. In order for this to work within municipalities, many fields across government need to come together to ensure that this works as a plan for each municipality. Again, they're all different.

At the end of the day, I think we all have the same goal in mind, which is to create more housing here in Newfoundland and Labrador, not just to house the people that are underhoused or unhoused, but to attract more people to Newfoundland and Labrador. That's something that this government will be focusing on over the next four years. We've been focusing on it over the past six months since we've been here and we'll continue to do so.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

A very specific question in the Local Governance and Planning subhead there. There's about a decrease of \$51,000 around Professional Services. I'm just wondering if you can tell me what that was related to, specifically?

C. TIBBS: That is the one-time funding for the municipal general election last year.

J. PARSONS: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

When it comes to training, can the department tell us the range of training and who is delivering that training to municipalities?

C. TIBBS: We do training across the province, of course, and many municipalities and people within our towns and Local Service Districts take advantage of that training. We want more to take advantage of the training; we believe more should take advantage of the training.

I'll defer it to Candice. She has a couple of numbers there.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Just to clarify, are you asking about the Municipal Training Fund or municipal training in general?

J. PARSONS: Municipal training in general.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: In general, okay.

Certainly, there is mandatory training that we offer and, given we had a general election in October, to date, we have over 1,700 municipal leaders that have participated in municipal training. I think it's close to 91 sessions we've had, and they are continuing right up until May.

It's been an incredible year in that we've had the opportunity to bring our Community Engagement Branch into the design and delivery of that training. We've been able to offer not just in-person but also online delivery. We've broken it up because there are six training modules?

C. TIBBS: Five.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Five, sorry. Thank you.

There are five training sessions that are mandatory under the legislation for mayors and councillors to participate in.

With that said, we also have voluntary training and, right now, I know that the team is looking at what additional types of training we can provide over the coming year that might deal with some of the broader systemic issues, like harassment, code of conduct, that sort of stuff. We're hearing

new topics and, with that, we're working internally to look at how we might be able to offer additional training to help support our councils around the province, and our LSDs of course as well.

J. PARSONS: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you.

I'll continue with my colleague. You know, we're in tandem here; we've got the same kind of mindset, I believe. Anyway, it's wonderful.

Continuing on with the training aspect here, has the department been active in trying to find or train more technicians to manage the safety and quality of water supplies in rural areas, particularly those with long-standing boil water advisories?

C. TIBBS: I would have to contact the ECC Minister for that. That would fall underneath the ECC training, which I think is Thursday night. I'm sure that I will have the pleasure of having your company then as well.

OFFICIAL: He's much more handsome, I think.

S. O'LEARY: Yes.

C. TIBBS: I'll talk to him.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful. Thank you. I look forward to that update.

Just a few more on my end here. MNL has stated that municipalities often lack the human resources needed to meet their administrative, legislative and service requirements. Specifically what work is being done by the department to support municipalities with these types of obligations?

C. TIBBS: Again, within the department, there are many opportunities to be taken advantage of. Our goal at the end of the day is to support municipalities and what they need, and that landscape can be ever changing. With our meetings through MNL, through PMA and through municipalities in general, we will gauge a sense of their needs.

You're right, there is a need for more human resources, and surely Candice Ennis-Williams can elaborate on that.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: So just to build on what the minister has said, we've offered nine sessions already this year in terms of budget training to help support new CAOs or municipal clerks, town clerks, town managers.

Where needed, we'll step in to provide an administrator or, in some instances, not an administrator but a comptroller. We're happy to report that Sunnyside had a comptroller and that is now finishing as of May 5, because the council itself is in fantastic shape and able to now move without that additional help from our department. We've provided a comptroller to Small Point-Adam's Cove, specifically to the wildfire. Knowing that they had a tremendous amount of financial investment, we wanted to ensure that the council felt supported and had the financial expertise available to them to support them as they move forward making decisions related to wildfire recovery.

Chris's shop also attends. We've had close to, I think, 120 council meetings. We'll show up. We've had instances over the last year where a town or an LSD will reach out and we'll actually send a staff to spend a couple of days with that, go to the town and stay with them in the office and help them work through a process or understand what type of bylaw they might need to develop to address an issue.

We are very much hands on when it comes to providing the technical expertise. If we don't have the expertise, we reach out to other departments to provide additional support, for example ATIPP. If it comes to financial matters, we'll reach out to our own departmental comptroller or OCG. We are not averse to getting the expertise wherever we can. Sometimes it's a learning experience for us because it's an issue we've never dealt with before.

S. O'LEARY: Right.

I truly appreciate that because there are so many different issues, obviously, that people walk into unknown. There's a huge learning curve, and I'll speak on that myself, and ongoing. So thank you. I appreciate that.

Moving along, I love the conversation about Crown land free up for housing. I'm just wondering if the minister could enlarge a little on that because I know that Crown lands have been something that have been advocated for at the municipal level, for municipalities to avail of the Crown lands within their own jurisdictions, for a long time. This has been an ongoing conversation.

Now, of course, with the housing crisis, this is not only a wonderful ask, but also it's now imperative. Minister, you had mentioned about also attracting people to communities that we know are losing their population. I'm just wondering if you can speak a little bit more to that.

C. TIBBS: Sure.

The Crown land referrals – we have 1,221 of them. Again, we all know that Crown lands have been an issue within the province for quite some time, but it is this administration's goal to clear-cut through that.

I know that the Premier has been talking about red tape reduction for quite some time now. If there's something we have in

Newfoundland and Labrador it's a lot of land and we need to start utilizing it to what specifically we need, which is housing. That's one of the specific needs we have.

I've talked about Grand Falls-Windsor and so many other municipalities across the province. They do have Crown land, which we're looking to free up and get some housing built. But make no mistake, it's a top priority for this department and this government, again, not to just house the unhoused or underhoused because many people that are homeless, it's not just on the street, but living with friends, depending on family. Everybody deserves a home to come home to every single day.

So we're going to continue to work with multiple departments, especially FAL, to see what we can do with Crown lands, especially closer to municipalities to expand municipalities, to get a better sense of how many people are in these municipalities and their needs.

It's so diverse, just across Newfoundland and Labrador, as a small province, the needs of people when it comes to homes and when it comes to housing. It's something that we're continuing to work on. We will continue to work with a multitude of departments to get there to where we need to be. I would love to get to the point some day where there is no homelessness, but make no mistake, we're going to ensure that we cut that as far as we possibly can.

S. O'LEARY: I would like to emphasize to the minister that, as the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, we do see a lot of people coming from rural communities for the supports that obviously fall under the Housing portfolio to seek supports for health, mental health and addictions supports, the wraparound services that are required, the shelters that aren't existing in a lot of the small communities.

We see it loud and clear and having those kinds of things instated would be very good

for everybody because people want to stay in their communities. Right?

C. TIBBS: They do and the supports – we need them now more than ever.

Another initiative we're looking at, as a government, is how to get these supports in the smaller communities, like you said, so they can remain in their communities. We want to grow these smaller communities. We're very proud of rural Newfoundland and Labrador and we want to ensure that the supports are there so they can stay at home.

S. O'LEARY: Absolutely. Thank you.

Okay, so the next one for me is Community Enhancement. Which communities availed of this funding in the past year and how many jobs were provided?

C. TIBBS: There were 700 jobs, I believe, from my opening remarks. Yes, close to 700 workers were approved for this program and 135 approved applications out of the 177 that were accepted.

I know changing the program from the fall to the spring was an initiative that has been successful. It is much easier to work in the summer than trying to take on a project going into the fall and into the winter.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Thank you.

Under 2.3.02, Canada Community-Building Fund, could we have a list of recipients and projects that were funded?

C. TIBBS: Yes, we can get that.

S. O'LEARY: We can. Okay, that's great.

I'm actually on to my very last comment or question. This is more of a request for elaborating. I know you referenced the boundary shift request earlier on, about some communities that are starting to shift. I guess my question would be, we're also in a

shift in terms of our electoral districts, I'm just wondering if you could elaborate a little bit on how those two intersect in the process, if there's ongoing dialogue in those realms and how that unfolds.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Yes, so we are currently reviewing the *Municipal Elections Act*. I'm sure that's going to be something that's going to be discussed there. Again, this is community-driven. We want to make sure that the communities are taken care of, but we will address that in the *Municipal Elections Act* as we move further.

We just had an election, of course, in October and we want to thank everybody who stepped up and gave it their all. Again, over the next four years, it's going to give us an opportunity to open up that act, take a look at it, review it and see what needs to be done. I'm sure that your question, your concern would fall underneath that act when we do open it again.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. All right. That's it for me.

Thank you very much for your time.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you. Just a couple of questions.

Back to training again, it's good to hear that there is some openness to doing new types of training, I know there are a number of issues that pop up. I know there was an issue in Salmon Cove earlier this year, expressed frustration around not having the expertise or the training to be able to deal with union negotiations, for example. We have a very diverse set of problems and issues that we have to deal with as

municipalities, so this training is very important.

A couple of other areas where I've personally seen problems is around ATIPP, as well, coping with ATIPP requests is something that is very onerous, it takes a lot of staff time. I would encourage the department to add its voice to helping maybe reform ATIPP in some way, that we could reduce any vexatious requests or expand the definition of vexatious requests. We obviously want to be transparent and provide information to people, but it is a tool that's being misused quite a bit and is a burden on our towns and cities.

Likewise, code of conduct, I know that it's been a big issue since the code of conduct and conflict of interest legislation was brought in. It still hasn't resolved everything. I think that's actually a source of much confusion. So I think there is some work that needs to be done there.

I'm going to change gears to the Canada Community-Building Fund that is the last subhead in this section.

Can the minister or staff just give us a really brief: How is that fund derived and what is it used for?

C. TIBBS: So we're very proud of the Canada Community-Building Fund. It's federal funding and we want to make sure that we get as much of that money out through the door so municipalities can use this as they see fit, as they need to.

Our job is to support those municipalities in seeing where the greatest need would be for that funding, get it out the door and to work with them on projects. It could also come back to what we talked about earlier, which is the regionalization piece and how communities can take advantage of this and work together.

I don't know if Candice has any more comments about it.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: The CCBF certainly is a significant fund, and as I've mentioned previously, it's now called the Build Communities Strong Fund. In fact, two of our lead staff are actually at a conference, as we speak, at a session, which is hosted by the federal government today and tomorrow to meet with colleagues and with the federal government to get any new updates on the CCBF, so we are very current in terms of ensuring that we have all the information we need.

As you're aware, the CCBF doesn't directly fund housing construction, residential renovations or housing programs. It funds core municipal infrastructure that supports housing development and includes water and wastewater systems, stormwater and drainage infrastructure, local roads, bridges, transit infrastructure that could improve access to residential areas, as well as it deals with climate resilience and disaster mitigation infrastructure in residential communities.

As I said before, it is a 10-year agreement. We are actively engaged with all of our municipalities. The letter that the minister sent out in March was to ensure that every municipality understood what their allocation was and to ensure that, more importantly, they had the contacts in our department to be able to reach out, should they need any further information, because we have a unit directly committed to facilitating that funding pot.

J. PARSONS: Yes, that is a very useful fund. What's so nice about it is that you have a predictable amount of money that you can access.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

J. PARSONS: It has had a very broad –

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: It still does.

J. PARSONS: Does it?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: The eligibility categories are fairly broad.

J. PARSONS: Okay, good. That's very important.

I know that FCM has lobbied – successfully – to double that fund a few times, which is great. Again, we always liked it as a municipality because we knew what we had and could utilize it.

I know it's, politically, probably not as popular amongst the federal government because it goes into a general pot of funding. It's hard to put your sign on a bridge with this kind of funding, but it's very important for municipalities. So, again, I would hope that the department would continue to advocate on our behalf in that regard.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: If I might, the minister drives home every day the need for us to push municipalities to spend their allocations –

J. PARSONS: Yes, good.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: – because we are in the first five years of a 10-year agreement and, pending an evaluation by the federal government, we want to ensure that, in the next five years of the 10-year contract, we get what we have at a minimum, if not more.

J. PARSONS: Okay, good. Good.

In just an accounting question I guess – I'm assuming it's some kind of timing issue – why is there so much variance in the actuals versus the budget amounts? Also, there is, I think, \$33 million that looks like it comes from the feds directly in this subhead, but isn't all of it coming from the feds besides the administration costs?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Yes, it is all from the feds. There's the actual CCBF and then we have what's called the Provincial Targeted Infrastructure Fund, which is a stream within

that. That's a fund which allows for a regional type of initiatives to be pursued by municipalities as well.

J. PARSONS: I'm looking at item 10 there, Grants and Subsidies, what accounts for the significant difference between the actuals, about a – what are we missing – \$107 million variance from the budgeted amount to the actuals.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: You're just speaking about the carry-over, the \$107 million?

J. PARSONS: 2.3.02.

C. TIBBS: The \$107 million?

J. PARSONS: Yes, item 10 there.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Yes, the \$107 million.

What it is, is that the CCBF – if I understand your question correctly – allocates amounts to each and every municipality; it is their prerogative to spend that money. So the carry-over is that some municipalities, to date, have not availed of that money, but they have within five years the opportunity to spend their allocation.

J. PARSONS: Okay, so that \$107 million is carried over –

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: That's carried forward.

J. PARSONS: – is still not accounted for back to the province?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Right. We have the opportunity to carry forward the money on behalf of the municipalities. The timing of when they wish to spend it is their prerogative, depending on the nature of the project and the timing of it.

J. PARSONS: Okay. Perfect.

C. TIBBS: We're hoping to get the carry-overs down to zero here eventually. We want this money out the door; we know how important it is. Any money coming from the feds, like I say, it's important to municipalities.

J. PARSONS: With regard to that, what does the department see as the barrier? Why are municipalities having trouble getting that money spent?

C. TIBBS: Some of it is capacity, of course. They do need the supports and they don't have it, but, again, at the start of our four-year mandate here we're looking at an approach that would help municipalities work together where they could possibly share capacities and get this money out the door.

J. PARSONS: Okay.

I don't think I have anything else for this set of subheads.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions for this subhead, I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.02 inclusive, Municipal and Community Support.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.3.02 carried.

CHAIR: I'll now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01, Community Engagement.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01, Community Engagement, carry?

I now call on the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you. We're almost there.

Community Engagement – I know this is a new addition to the department, but I can see a lot of useful overlap here for sure. We talked earlier about the need for a reform of the *Municipal Elections Act* and hearing some concern from municipalities, and from MNL as well, about modernizing that act.

Particularly, there has been some questions about mail-in voting, whether or not we'll look at or pursue other types of online voting or other ways to make the voting process more accessible for municipalities. Has the department engaged or come up with any preliminary study or wish list for the new legislation around the *Municipal Elections Act*?

C. TIBBS: Yes. We are actually launching the first engagement with MNL this coming week, which will see that as well. It's constantly evolving, especially when we open up the *Towns and Local Service Districts Act*.

The Community Engagement team, they are absolutely fantastic. I'll just point back towards the budget that we just had, more people were engaged this time than the previous three years. Community Engagement is a strong team across the province. I'm very proud to have them in my department. They do a lot of great work. They bring back a lot of data for what we need to do our jobs here.

J. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

Related to that is the issue of municipal recruitment, and I'm sure you're hearing a lot about these problems with encouraging people to step up and take on a leadership role. I would say it's wrong to say it's

thankless; there is a lot of personal satisfaction that people gain from public service – we all do that – but there is also a lot of harassment and a lot of abuse sometimes, a lot of lack of privacy. You don't get to go to the grocery store in peace usually.

I think the education outreach that has to be done here – and this division could really help with that – is there a plan to increase recruitment for municipal officials?

C. TIBBS: Absolutely. We need to make sure that it's enticing for people to step up, young and old.

On the local governance leadership, when it comes to our municipalities, we know how important it is to fill these roles. It's extremely important and it seems to be getting very difficult. We need to listen to communities; we need to listen to municipal leaders, what barriers they may have had to make them not run or hesitate to run. Then we need to come back to our community engagement, come back with our findings, so we can reach out to municipalities.

When it comes to the next election, we want to make sure that the environment is in place to make people feel, not just comfortable to run, but have that desire to run as well for local governance. Again, we know how important it is. We know how difficult it can be when it comes to the bullying and harassment and the ATIPP piece that we talked about a little bit earlier. It's not an easy job. On many levels, the people in local governance, those leaders, those are the heroes of our communities and our province. There's no doubt about it.

I'm very fortunate and I'm very proud to be head of this department and work with the great people that I have, but, make no mistake, there are barriers to running in municipal elections. We want to identify those barriers and we want to help mitigate those barriers as best as we possibly can to, once again, create an environment that's

comfortable and enticing for people to step up and run for an election.

I know we have a special election coming up in Victoria. I believe we had 14 people on the ballot?

OFFICIAL: Fifteen.

C. TIBBS: Fifteen people on the ballot for that one; that's extremely exciting news for us.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Chris Stamp, who many nights I've called at 9:30 or 10, when he's on his way home from Victoria, to see his own family, but, make no mistake, people in this department, that's a mandate of ours, to ensure that we set up a safe environment for people to run in the next election throughout the province.

J. PARSONS: Okay. Thank you.

One last thing around community engagement and the ability to get information out to the public. We are all experiencing, what I call, a low information environment right now. Our media is being pushed, the local level especially and very limited options. It is difficult for government to get out public information in an effective manner. Social media is unreliable to say the least.

Is there any plan to or ability for government to cut through this? Are there any innovative, new approaches the government is exploring to get information out to our residents?

C. TIBBS: That's a great question. It's ever evolving and I'm very proud of my Community Engagement team. I'm extremely proud of my Community Engagement leader, Mark Healy. I'd like to pass over to Mark to give us a little bit more information on his Community Engagement team.

M. HEALY: Thank you, Minister, for the opportunity to speak.

Great question, MHA Parsons. In today's world, getting information out is a struggle. Facebook and social media, in general, can be unreliable as you mentioned. We take the approach to try to be as inclusive as possible. We offer in-person sessions. From the department's perspective, we use email circulars to try to get information out.

Myself and ADM Osmond were talking yesterday about other unique ways to figure out how to move forward on this. Maybe we could offer a monthly virtual session for people to attend in various different ways. We're trying to be creative and make sure that we find new and unique ways to get the information out to our citizens of the province.

J. PARSONS: Thank you. Yes.

It has been, I know, at all levels of government, difficult these days so it's good to hear. I'm glad. I'm looking forward to seeing what you come up with for sure.

That's all I have for this subhead.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: You have to learn to trust me when I say that I have no more questions, that there might be one more.

The discussion here is fantastic and I really appreciate everybody's effort to make sure that we have all the tools that we need to improve the lives of municipal leaders and, certainly, communities.

One of the big things that I've been extremely passionate about is mentorship. I was a former co-chair of Equal Voice NL and, honestly, in all of my life as a political leader, I feel it's not only my responsibility but it's my passion to actually pass the baton. All of us are going to be here for a

moment in time and what we need to grow is new leaders in our community to step up, so young or old engagement is crucial.

I guess my question would be, MNL does a fantastic job and Municipal Affairs with the Make Your Mark program; however, it kind of comes out in one kind of spout at one point in time. Groups like Equal Voice NL are very grassroots organizations that obviously supports women and gender-diverse individuals getting involved. We know that we need to continue to push, as we can see our numbers in our House of Assembly in terms of proper representation of the people throughout our province.

I guess my question or my comment would be how the government can continue to support organizations, like Equal Voice NL, in their capacity to continue to engage people. They're the ones out doing workshops. They're the ones who are telling people who are community leaders: You would be great, step up.

I will even just say, in terms of a historical, I actually did an EVNL training session with my colleague here across the way in Corner Brook. I went to do a training session and, of course, there he was. It was wonderful to engage people and look, you can see how everybody moves and flows through the political process. So EVNL, because it's grassroots and it's non-profit, it is also always driven by people who have political interests and sometimes end up in political roles. Our last EVNL leader was the youngest candidate for the City of St. John's, Kate Cadigan.

Again that's constantly turning over, so keeping that group healthy and supporting them, I think, is crucial. I do feel that government has a role in doing that. I don't know if you have any comments or suggestions around that.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much. It's an extremely important question. It's an honour to come from yourself. I know the things that you've done.

I've always prided myself as an MHA and as a minister on accessibility. Wherever we can find information that helps this department help municipalities, we are there. We are fully engaged. We don't know everything, of course we don't, but we need these groups to help us open up our minds a little bit, maybe see it from a different angle and maybe come up with some great ideas that we may not have thought about yet. I mean, it takes a full community to try to make a successful department make successful communities.

I'll hand it over to Candice Ennis-Williams here for a couple of comments on that as well.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: First things first, absolutely, I think our minister has already shown leadership in terms of mentorship, even for this morning.

You can see we have a large contingent, and the reason is, we recognize as a department we have individuals who have never come to Estimates. We, ourselves, are trying to demystify some of the processes, even in our own governance system, so that people can get the experience and understand that it's a good process.

I think that's part of the discussions he's encouraging us to have with local governments around the province is how can you make yourselves more available and less mystical to the general population and to your residents so that people can and want to participate. Part of that is through our legislation, in terms of transparency, ensuring that meetings are open, making sure that the minutes are posted so that people can understand the

types and latitude of decisions that are being made on their behalf in their communities.

Part of it is our involvement with MNL and PMA, and having, for example, Gerry and Mark being part of a working group where we're looking at how can we better create a more conducive, safe environment for people to want to participate in local politics. Part of it, as the former deputy of Women and Gender Equality, is providing opportunities and bridges for groups, as you've mentioned, like Equal Voice to participate. We were very proud to partner with Equal Voice and MNL around our Make Your Mark campaign for October, but we see that as just a beginning of things.

The other piece is about marginalized as well. We have a lot of newcomers. A lot of our planners are from other countries. We, as a department, are trying to lead by example in terms of the types of exposures that we give our staff, and encourage the same across municipal government and part of that is through our participation in, this week, MNL's symposium and our participation in PMA in Gander a couple of weeks ago.

We're trying to be present and, really, as the minister says, listen and hear what some of the challenges are and how we can collaboratively come up with solutions to support our local municipal governments.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful.

My final comment there on that would be it's a task in itself to attract but it's the retention. That's where the supports, in my experience, really lie, and making sure that we keep those people, those newcomers, those women and gender-diverse people, young and aged, in those roles, and that we don't drive them out because they're not well supported.

I want to say thank you; that's all my questions for today. A really great discussion.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of comments. I'm really happy with the discussion here this morning. Being the MHA of a very large district, actually, Chris Stamp has helped me with a few communities along the way. I want to commend him on his professionalism and for knowing what direction to take. It's always a little scary when you got to call Chris Stamp to come in, because you know that town is in a little bit of trouble.

In the meantime, your professionalism, Sir, is second to none. I appreciate it.

I just wanted to comment and say that the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award is certainly amazing. I'm glad that's carrying on. He was probably one the nicest guys I've met since I came here. Great guy and we all miss him.

When it comes to our towns, I don't think it falls short on the department that these are volunteers. I really appreciate the fact that you are carrying on in that light to know that these are very important people. As MHAs, we can't do it ourselves. I oversee, including LSDs and everything, 54 communities. You just couldn't do it without them. I start every meeting by thanking them for their service. Also, I have 16 fire departments. It's always good to make sure that they're well equipped and ready to go. I feel that's my responsibility as well.

I'm encouraged by the rightsizing of some of the programs in your department. For too long, I think that certain communities were in the wrong category. Now that we're rightsizing, I think that's very important, especially, about getting that money out the

door because if we're borrowing money to have a budget and we're not spending that money and we have to keep it on the books, then we're really paying interest on something we didn't need to borrow until it was needed to be used. So I really like that. I think that's going to be great for our municipalities. Working with MNL, I think, is very important for the department because you're listening to the boots on the ground. They are a good organization as well.

So, again, I appreciate you being here today. The only one thing that I would ask is that we work a little bit closer with Crown Lands in this department. When there's a town that wants to extend their boundaries, it seems to be a very delayed process, and I think that comes down to communication. I'm sure the minister is well aware, as you've been around for seven years.

To go from Opposition to government is eye-opening, I'm sure. You're doing a good job as a minister and you have a good team around you. Like I said, keep up the good work. The only thing I ask is about the boundary extensions because I ran into it a few times where it seemed to get caught up in the bureaucracy of it, when, really, it's a natural thing to do for a lot of towns.

I thank you all for being here and proud to be part of this Committee.

C. TIBBS: Chair, do we have closing remarks now or will we be afforded at the end of the subheading?

CHAIR: Just in a few minutes.

Seeing no further questions for this subhead, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01, Community Engagement.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01, Community Engagement, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subhead 3.1.01 carried.

CLERK: The total, Municipal and Community Affairs.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried,

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

CHAIR: Go ahead, Minister.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much Chair, Table Officers and Karsen.

It's been a pleasure here today. This is my first Estimates as government. I've always enjoyed this process because it's not adversarial. It's a place where we can come together with different ideas, some really, really great questions which can help my

department move forward and focus on what's important to this department which is the municipalities across this province and their needs.

I want to thank everybody on the other side there. MHA Stoyles, thank you so much for your questions; MHA Parsons, thank you so much for your questions. Thank you so much for your eight years of duty as mayor to the City of Corner Brook. Again, it's not an easy job but I commend you on everything that you've done. Ms. O'Leary, I commend you as well for stepping up for so many years with the City of St. John's.

I just said to my deputy minister, it was only a couple of days ago – and I hope this comes across the right way – there's nothing for this minister more inspiring than a strong female leader in a position because it gives so many other people out there a voice because the barriers were real for so many years and they're still real. We want to make sure that we remove those barriers and let young women across this province know it's okay to step up and we are there to support you. We need to see more of it across this province. So thank you for blazing that trail and I know that you've done some amazing work.

I just want to say that I've learned a lot as I go through this department. I'm learning every single day. It's not just going to come from this department, though, it's going to come from people like yourself who have served in municipal politics. I just want you to know that this doesn't end today. If anybody from your caucus or yourselves would like to sit down with me at any time and discuss some ideas or initiatives moving forward, I'm all ears, guys.

At the end of the day, we're all here for the same reason, that's the people of this beautiful province of ours and to make this province as successful as we possibly can. On a municipal level, that's exactly what I want to do.

Finally, I want to thank the department behind me. It's extremely humbling, when in government, to be thrown into a department where you have so many amazing, great people around you. This isn't a job for these people; this is a life. I watch them day in and day out give everything they can when it comes to municipalities and they take it on the chin as well as the people out in the municipalities.

For my deputy minister and my ADMs, everybody around me, I just want to say – and I hope more people from the department are listening – thank you so very much for working with me, for teaching me as we move forward. I look forward to four amazing years with this department and these amazing group of people around me. It's certainly delightful.

I want to thank you fellows from across the way for making this day extremely – it was very enjoyable for me. I've got to say, it was really, really enjoyable for me. I enjoyed the questions and I look forward to, over the next year, making this department stronger, which will in fact make municipalities stronger. If there are any ideas or any conversation you want to have, I'm always there.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I want to thank the minister, his department officials and all the Members of the Committee for their attendance here today.

The next meeting is May 19 at 9 a.m.

I now ask for a mover to adjourn.

Moved by the Member for St. George's - Humber.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Thank you.

On motion, Committee adjourned.