

Hon. Daniel Allain  
Minister  
Local Government and Local Governance Reform  
c/o Local Governance Reform Team  
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**Re: NB Local Governance Reform – Feedback on Green Paper**

Dear Minister Allain,

The Council for the Village of New Maryland would like to share the following comments as our official response to the ongoing dialogue resulting from the distribution of the Green Paper “Working Together for Vibrant and Sustainable Communities”.

We recognize the difficulties of creating solutions to such a challenging situation and commend you for engaging in the process to address the issues we face as a province regarding local governance. Members of our Council and senior staff have participated in various attempts over the past years to find viable solutions to reduce the inordinate number of local entities, provide local government representation to all New Brunswick residents, establish a fair tax system for service levels, and implement consistent land use planning.

The Green Paper focuses on four main components and we offer our input to each of those pillars, beginning with **Community Structures**. Although the Green Paper offers a number of potential options for restructuring the various entities currently in place, it is our position that the focus should be on the Local Service Districts (LSDs) and the communities that are not sustainable. The Finn Report identified criteria in this regard (minimum property assessment base of \$200 million and minimum population of 4000) which is a reasonable threshold as long as the community is sustainable. Basically, we feel the incorporated communities that are sustainable and able to offer the level of services required by their residents, such as New Maryland, should not be forced to make changes. The LSDs however, who are not paying fair taxes and have no elected representation, should be restructured. That restructuring could take the form of amalgamating LSDs into Rural Communities, or with LSDs joining nearby incorporated municipalities. In order for the latter option to be viable, there would need to be a clear understanding of the full cost of services to be provided to the impacted LSDs and municipality (i.e.: a fair process would need to be determined for funding the necessary improvements if the LSDs are to have the same infrastructure standards as the municipality).

The Municipal Reform engagement process has clearly identified the need for all residents in the province to have elected representation. The restructuring of the LSDs into entities with duly elected representation would help address this concern and provide a venue for residents to vote on important matters impacting their communities and allow them to determine the level of services wanted or needed, and for which they are willing to cover the full costs.

**Regional Collaboration** was identified as a key element for discussion and we strongly believe that New Maryland has been, and continues to be, a strong regional participant in many regards. We fully support the concept of the regionalization of services, however the fair distribution of costs is a critical factor that needs to be based on the actual costs **and benefits** for everyone involved. Municipalities cannot be forced to pay more for a regional service than it would cost to operate that same service on their own. It is necessary, albeit challenging, to find a way to have all users involved in the discussions and planning for regional projects and ensure that everyone is contributing their share of the associated costs. The larger municipalities in a region must also recognize that collaboration works both ways and simply stamping a project as “regional” on an infrastructure application in the expectation of getting regional support and funding is definitely **not** collaboration. The cost and benefits must be clearly identified and fair to all participants. If those issues can be addressed, regional services will become an effective and viable tool. New Maryland has illustrated the benefits of regional collaboration through our participation with neighboring communities in the Shared Recreation Service Agreement, provision of Fire Services, Mutual Aid Agreement, regional training for Emergency Response Services, funding contributions to Ignite Fredericton (formerly Enterprise Fredericton), the Feasibility Study and Design Phase of the proposed Regional Aquatic Facility, RSC 11, and other shared projects and programs.

**Land Use Planning** was also identified as a key component of Municipal Reform and we agree that provincial standards would be beneficial. It is necessary to address the challenges created by significant growth and sprawl just outside of municipal boundaries. New Maryland has been negatively impacted by the lack of Land Use Planning and Strategic Development Plans in the adjacent LSDs by way of increased traffic on New Maryland Highway, which is a significant concern. This, and other issues, are a direct result of unplanned growth happening in the LSDs and we believe that standard planning principles would help in this regard. However, those municipalities who currently have their own experienced and qualified staff who offer land use planning services should not be forced to buy those services elsewhere. The Village of New Maryland manages Land Use Planning with a focus on local conditions and sustainable, environmentally friendly planning methods. We have created, and implement, effective planning tools such as our Municipal Plan and Zoning By-laws, Storm Water Management Plan, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Water and Wastewater System Master Plans, Recreation and Trails & Bikeways Master Plans, etc. Municipalities who are able to offer land use planning within the principles of standards that are created for the entire province would not need any direction in this area. The provincial standards would need to be clearly articulated to all jurisdictions and may discourage the issue of urban sprawl, which will be further reduced by the creation of an equitable tax system.

The **Financial** component of Municipal Reform is challenging and all-encompassing, however our input is fairly straightforward – taxation should be based on paying for the services received. We believe this pillar needs an additional focus on education and awareness. Many residents throughout the province do not know the actual costs of the services they receive. In the LSDs in particular, with the tax rate subsidized by the provincial government,

there appears to be a lack of awareness of the costs associated with the services provided to the LSDs. An information and awareness campaign would help educate residents and support informed decision-making. There also appears to be a lack of awareness of the negative impact the current system has on neighboring municipalities. The results of the LSDs not paying for the full cost of the services they receive results in other municipalities, including New Maryland, subsidizing the LSDs. This is an unfair system that has been in place far too long.

Further to our comments regarding the information and awareness component, we strongly recommend a large-scale education and awareness campaign by the Minister and/or the Local Governance Reform Team on the shortcomings of the existing system so that all New Brunswick residents can appreciate and understand the need for municipal reform. The current process has highlighted the lack of understanding and knowledge of the intricacies of local governance, the cost of providing services, and who is subsidizing areas where taxation levels are neither sufficient nor sustainable. The engagement sessions simply asked for input on what is perceived as current issues with little to no educational support or communication to address misconceptions.

Our final recommendation is that the province initiate Municipal Reform in a phased approach. As you are aware, many reform initiatives have been started in the past, only to result in a report that sits on a shelf with no action taken. We firmly believe that if you approach this in phases and are able to clearly articulate the benefits of each phase before moving on, you will have significantly more success than your predecessors.

We also recognize that the submission of this letter has passed the initial deadline, however it was brought to our attention that additional recommendations may be considered. Our municipal Council felt that it was important to share our comments with you prior to making them public with the residents of New Maryland.

We thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Mayor Judy Wilson-Shee  
New Maryland Village Council