

March 27, 20120

COR/2020/00705-1

Ms. Sheila Fitzgerald
President
Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador
79 Mews Place
St. John's, NL A1B 4N2

Dear Ms. Fitzgerald,

Thank you for your letter of March 26 outlining concerns from your members that have come about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I can assure you my staff will do everything they can to address these concerns and work with your members to assist in these difficult and trying times. I offer the following responses to the specific concerns outlined in your letter.

1. Municipal operating grants and provincial gas tax funding will be released to your members by early to mid-April. We have staff set up to work on these payments and will process them as a high priority to allow your members have this funding to work with as soon as possible.
2. The department is keenly aware of the impact municipal capital works has on the economic well-being of our communities and companies. We are working with towns, consultants and contractors to ensure projects progress as they normally would. Our staff are all fully functional working from home and there should be no major delays in the issuing of Request for Proposals for consulting work, nor major delays in issuing tenders for construction. Part of the process requires timely responses on the part of Municipalities as well, we hope your members are in a situation to provide their approvals and responses without major delay.
3. Considering the circumstances we can extend the deadline for audits to be completed by up to three months to September 30, 2020. If, as the situation progresses, it appears more time is required we can work with you and your members to determine a more appropriate deadline.
4. Our Department is drafting an Essential Services checklist for municipalities that we will share once it is finalized. We are also working on a NL Pandemic Guide Document for Municipalities and the essential services checklist would be part of this. If a particular municipality has a specific issue I would refer them to the nearest Municipal Support office in their region.

I would also like to reiterate the importance of self-isolation for any staff member that becomes ill. However, we recognize that small communities have very limited numbers of staff and if they become ill operations would not be able to continue. As a suggestion, we could encourage communities to work with each other and, in the event of illness, they could help

each other by sharing resources. For example, if the maintenance person in one community has to self-isolate, the maintenance person in a neighbouring community could assist with essential services. We encourage communities to develop mutual aid agreements with each other. Where possible, we also encourage larger towns, with more resources, to assist small towns in the event of staffing shortages due to COVID-19.

5. Security of supply chains is a high priority for us as well. Discussions are occurring within our government and with our counterparts on the national scene to identify and secure supply chains for essential goods. I also note that the Department of Health and Community Services has a working group specifically tasked with developing and implementing plans to mitigate risks resulting from COVID-19 in rural and remote communities. This department will be working closely with the working group to bring issues to the forefront. As you can appreciate, the supply chain is a multi-faceted, complicated issue. If you hear about any specific supply chain issues, we would be interested in receiving information about them.

6. In these communities portable water dispensing units (PWDU) are the only source of clean and safe water and therefore should be maintained and operated. Currently, there is no evidence of the survival of the COVID-19 virus in drinking-water or sewage (World Health Organization, March 3, 2020 Technical Brief). PWDU's should be treated and maintained as communities are currently recommended to do so. Users have always been asked to disinfect containers before using a PWDU, this should be continued and encouraged. Communities can post signage requiring this, which the department can supply. Users should wash their hands after using the PWDU, as they are recommended to do so after leaving any public place.

7. Our staff have been in communication with the banks to assure them that if deferred payments go beyond the repayment deadlines we will provide the flexibility required to municipalities. Considering these exceptional circumstances we will do what we can to provide flexibility from a financial perspective within the limits of our authority.

We look forward to continuing to work with you your member organizations as we progress through these difficult times. If you have any other questions or concerns please contact my officials who will work with you.

Sincerely,



DERRICK BRAGG, MHA

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment
District of Fogo Island-Cape Freels

Cc. Mr. Dan Michielsen, Deputy Minister
Mr. Bren Hanlon, Assistant Deputy Minister
All Municipalities