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Municipalities Build Communities

The Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities recently met with each of the four provincial party leaders and was pleased to hear that each of them recognizes the important link between strong municipal governments and the strength of the Island as a whole.

In fact, many of the issues Islanders are concerned about during this election could be addressed and supported through strong municipal governments – land planning, environmental sustainability, rural development, outmigration and economic development to name a few.

Yet our current system does not support this. There are 73 municipalities across the Island yet they only cover 30% of our province. One in every three municipalities is smaller than five square kilometers, including seven of the ten towns. Many of these municipalities were formed using school district boundaries dating back to the 1800s. These districts were small because students needed to walk to school. These boundaries wouldn't work as school districts today, and they certainly don't work as municipal boundaries.

It isn't surprising that we're hearing more discussion about regional municipalities to serve larger rural areas, as an outdated municipal structure is creating challenges and people are looking for solutions.

We need strong municipalities covering the entire Island so councils can provide the services to give us a better quality of life and create conditions for economic growth. Unfortunately, municipalities large and small are struggling.

The Island needs vibrant communities and neighbourhoods supported by sustainable municipalities to build a stronger future for Prince Edward Island. To do this our next provincial government must work in collaboration with municipal leaders and Islanders to create an Island-wide solution with two key pillars:

- A fair and predictable revenue sharing framework for municipalities, and
- Island-wide incorporation with municipalities of a sufficient size to be viable and to have the capacity to serve their residents.

For communities across the Island to grow and prosper we need all areas benefiting from the local services, strategic planning and sense of community that comes from being a vibrant municipality.

In the years ahead, issues such as an ageing population, rural depopulation, economic challenges and climate change will make it even more important to have strong municipal governments.

Municipal leaders recognize that we have a broken and unsustainable system and we need change. A patchwork of partial changes is not the answer. The provincial and municipal governments must work together, as partners, to develop and implement a comprehensive long-term solution that will take Prince Edward Island toward a prosperous future for all communities.

As the late Ralph Thompson said in his report on land and local governance, "*we cannot afford to maintain the status quo in a world that is changing all around us.*"

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