



Municipal Restructuring is an opportunity

By Bruce MacDougall, President, Federation of PEI Municipalities

With 73 municipalities in PEI that only cover 30 percent of our Island, how can we expect rural PEI to be strong? We can't. Many municipalities lack the capacity for local planning and strategic decision-making. These are essential for shaping a better future.

If fixing municipal boundaries was easy it would have been done decades ago. If it had been done then, our rural service centres would be larger and better positioned to provide services and amenities that help attract new businesses and jobs. More of our countryside would be just that – countryside. Instead we have ribbon development along rural roads. This has negatively impacted our Island in many ways, including driving up the cost of public services.

A couple of years ago, I had a serious health scare. It could have been avoided if I had made some simple lifestyle changes. But as we all know, sometimes even simple changes seem hard. It was only when I reached a crisis point that I started walking regularly and made some changes to my diet. I had reached a point where I no longer had a choice.

We're doing the same thing with municipalities. The decline is gradual, so we don't notice it happening. Let's not wait for communities to reach a crisis point before we address outdated municipal boundaries. Instead, I encourage Islanders, municipal leaders, and all provincial political parties, to embrace this opportunity to make our municipalities viable, and our Island stronger. It won't be easy, but that's usually the case with major change.

Those already working in communities across the province to create larger municipalities are demonstrating leadership, vision and courage. They recognize that municipal restructuring will build better, stronger, more resilient communities. If they succeed, citizens and the Island as a whole will be better off in the long run.

Municipal restructuring is about communities coming together so they can deliver the services that matter to citizens. It's about building the capacity to tackle local challenges and seize local opportunities. It's about having a stronger voice than ever before. And, it's about empowering communities with common interests to work together on a shared long-term vision. It isn't a solution to all of the challenges facing rural Prince Edward Island, but it is an important step in the right direction.