



Small price to pay to strengthen rural PEI

Municipalities only make up 30 percent of the area of Prince Edward Island. In other provinces, unincorporated areas tend to be vast sparsely inhabited or uninhabited areas. There aren't any areas in PEI that fit that description, but resistance to change has left us with a system that was outdated decades ago.

Rural areas across the province are faced with a declining and aging population. We can ignore those realities, or we can face them and plan for a better future. I don't believe in change for the sake of change, but when the status quo isn't working it's time to consider other options.

The new Municipal Government Act allows municipalities to set different tax rates for different areas within the municipality. This was done to allow municipalities to set a lower rate for areas with fewer services. For example, the Three Rivers Steering Committee has proposed a five-cent tax rate for the areas that are presently unincorporated. That would amount to \$75 per year for a home assessed at \$150,000. It's a small price to pay to strengthen rural communities, while bringing tax fairness.

Municipal services often benefit areas outside the municipality. For example, the Montague Public Library has more than twice as many members as the Town has residents. Residents of municipalities are paying for these services through municipal property taxes.

Under the Municipal Government Act, all municipalities will be required to have land use and emergency preparedness plans. Through restructuring, these municipal services will be provided to areas that are now unincorporated. Public safety during an emergency and protecting land on our small island are too important to ignore.

Creating sustainable rural municipalities that reflect the community of interest would bring local democracy to unincorporated areas, help preserve the rural way of life and strengthen local communities. Municipal restructuring will build better, stronger, more resilient communities and citizens and the Island as a whole will be better off in the long run.

Bruce MacDougall,
President
Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities