

Building strong Island communities

The Guardian (Charlottetown) · 27 Nov 2015 · BY BRUCE MACDOUGALL Bruce MacDougall is president, Federation of P.E.I. Municipalities

At our recent semi-annual meeting of the Federation of P.E.I. Municipalities, leaders from across the province and all levels of government came together to discuss common challenges and consider how we can move forward together to create change.

As municipal leaders we know the status quo is not viable. Our financial framework is broken. Our current municipal acts are based on a model that was introduced in 1849. It was groundbreaking legislation at the time — but it certainly isn't today.

Many of our current municipal boundaries are based on old school districts created in the 1800s. They were small because children had to walk to school at that time. Today, one in three municipalities are smaller than three-square kilometres. It's time to put the 1800s in the history books and put solutions in place for the 21st century.

The provincial government has taken some important initial steps to move toward a vision of the Island that includes strong cities, towns and communities from tip to tip. They have reinitiated dialogue on the municipal financial framework. They are working toward the adoption of a modern Municipal Government Act in 2016. They have agreed to provide funding for municipal growth studies as well as transition costs for municipalities that undergo significant boundary change.

I'm more optimistic than I've been for a long time that big changes are on the horizon — changes that many of us have been waiting to see for a long time — changes that will not only benefit municipalities, but P.E.I. as a whole, because our cities, towns and communities are the foundation for a strong province.

To achieve this change we need leadership from the province, municipalities and citizens. The solutions that will result in strong and effective municipalities Island-wide will require us to have open dialogue and consider our communities in different ways. Opportunities for transformational change don't come often. We must take advantage of it and we must get it right.

Communities are not just where we live, they represent our homes, our families, our history and our future. Our goal is to see all communities on the Island be vibrant places to live, work and play. Together we can achieve this.