

Communities talking to communities

The Guardian (Charlottetown) · 17 Sep 2015 · BY COLIN MACLEAN

The unincorporated communities of Prince Edward Island do not have to fear being forcibly merged into larger municipalities – for now.

Robert Mitchell, minister of the new Department of Communities, Land and Environment, said Tuesday that, for the moment, the provincial government is content to let the more than 70 municipalities on P.E.I. work amongst themselves to sort out any annexation or amalgamation plans they might have.

“We’re letting the process unfold the way it should, with communities talking to communities,” said Mitchell.

“The bottom up, the local approach, that’s where you’re going to have the most successes and we certainly encourage those to take place across P.E.I.,” he added.

However, when asked if the province would consider stepping in at some point and implementing the 2010 Thompson Report on Land Use and Local Governance, Mitchell didn’t rule out the option and reiterated the government’s support for the goals outlined in that document.

“All of us in government have endorsed the Thompson report. We understand, as judge Thompson stated in that report, that 74 municipalities on Prince Edward Island is just not sustainable and we need bigger, more sustainable communities with stronger voices,” said Mitchell.

The Thompson report, compiled by the late judge Ralph Thompson, called for larger municipalities on P.E.I. with populations of several thousand and a \$200 million tax assessment base. Only then could they be financially viable into the future, it stated. That criteria is what the municipality of Bedeque and Area is using in its bid to annex several of its surrounding unincorporated communities. Its council passed a motion Monday night to submit that request to Mitchell’s office.

Bedeque and Area’s move seems to have sparked a renewed interest in the Thompson report by Island communities. Mitchell said there are “several” municipalities on the Island who have been in touch with his office, requesting information about annexation and amalgamation.