



Municipalities Build Communities

The 72 municipalities in PEI only cover 30 percent of the province and one in three municipalities has an area of less than five square kilometres. The boundaries of many municipalities are based on school districts from the 1800s. These boundaries wouldn't work as school district boundaries today, and they don't work as municipal government boundaries. This outdated system has left local communities with limited capacity to address local challenges and pursue local opportunities.

We must appreciate and make the most of the many strengths of communities across Prince Edward Island. At the same time, we need to recognize and address weaknesses that make it difficult to tackle the challenges of today and the future. For example, the declining and ageing population in the eastern and western parts of our province is a concern, but most small communities lack the capacity to work on local solutions.

Municipalities build communities. From parks to sports programs to festivals, municipal services and amenities build a positive place where people of all ages want to live. I believe creating larger viable municipalities that reflect the community of interest will make existing communities stronger and more resilient. It will increase local capacity to address local needs and priorities, and enable locally elected councils to deliver services that matter to residents.

Today, only 10 percent of our Island is protected by municipal land use plans. Many small municipalities simply aren't large enough to provide land use planning. Residents living in those municipalities and in unincorporated areas have little say in developments proposed for their area. Municipal land use planning helps protect homeowners against incompatible development that could negatively impact the value of their home. It helps protect the land that many Islanders depend on, directly or indirectly, for their livelihood, and it helps preserve the character and lifestyle of communities that so many Islanders enjoy.

In other parts of Canada, unincorporated area tends to be vast uninhabited or sparsely populated areas where it would not be practical or feasible to establish a municipality. Few Canadians live in areas that are not within a local or regional municipality. As Land and Local Governance Commissioner Ralph Thompson pointed out in his report, our system in PEI is almost unique in Canada.

Viable municipalities are the foundation for strong local communities. Expanding boundaries will not fix all the challenges facing rural Prince Edward Island, but I'm convinced that it's an essential part of the solution.

Bruce MacDougall,
President
Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities