

Pre-Budget Consultations
RiverWood Inn
Springdale, NL
March 12, 2015

Town of Baie Verte

I would like to thank the Minister for the opportunity to present.

Capital Works Projects:

The priority for capital works projects for the Town of Baie Verte has been the same for the last four years- Fire Hall-Community Complex. To date Phase 1 (Fire Hall), is almost complete and our priority request this year is for Phase II- the Community Complex. When completed this complex will be the only facility of its type on the peninsula. It will replace aging infrastructure originally built by the mining company in the early 1960s. The Town is fortunate that Rambler Mines has contributed \$250,000 towards the Town's share of the 10% cost.

Additional priority for capital works is related to Sewage treatment and municipal road upgrades. We are not unlike all other small communities in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Council understands that a period of fiscal restraint is imminent and this spring's budget is not being anticipated with a lot of optimism.

Some suggestions to help rural municipalities:

- **Engineering costs re capital works projects** - Current costs associated with any project run from 18 -20 %, for example, if and when our complex is completed engineering costs will approximate \$750,000. We would recommend utilizing on a much larger scale engineers associated with the Department of Transportation and Works for projects involving municipal roads and water and sewer, or hiring additional engineers for Municipal Affairs. Cost to both government and municipalities would decrease and projects could be completed earlier.
- **Project Management:** - Some towns are quite capable of hiring their own contractors to do particular aspects of smaller projects, for example re-paving of streets without complicated water and sewer changes or additions. However the current regulations for project management are very restrictive and designed to discourage small towns from proceeding on their own. There are regional contractors, in particular paving and construction companies that are familiar with government guidelines and have the expertise to complete many projects in small

towns. Utilizing local and regional expertise could certainly save municipalities both time and monies.

- **Regulations in General** – Often changes or modifications to the Municipalities Act impact smaller communities more significantly than larger communities. The larger community has the staff and the facility to absorb additional costs. Any changes to regulations should be looked at through a “real rural lens”. Costs though seemingly small are not insignificant for a Town the size of Baie Verte. One example from the amendment to the Municipalities act, 1999- Authority to sell, Lease or Dispose of Municipal Property :

- (1) *Real or personal property with an estimated fair market value of less than \$500 may be sold by private sale with a resolution of council.*
- (2) *The following requirements apply to real or personal property with an estimated fair market value of \$500 or more:*

(b) A council must advertise council’s intention to sell or lease real or personal property through a public notice placed in no fewer than 2 conspicuous places in the municipality and a local newspaper, ...

...requiring the prior approval of the Minister.

There has to be more autonomy given to smaller communities especially where fiscal responsibilities are in order. (The community meets deadlines and submits balanced budgets) The \$500 determinant for selling real and personal property has to be broadened and realistic.

Educational Property – Currently in Baie Verte there are 4 abandoned schools- one former Catholic High School has been sold twice to date. Three large facilities remain that housed at one prosperous time close to 800 students. Today we are blessed with a new modern facility that houses all students from 8 communities. One of the schools has been vacated since 2007 and the other two since 2010. The Town explored on a number of occasions the utilization of one of the schools in a shared lease arrangement. With the many changes in the school boards it has been increasingly difficult to find common ground for any kind of sharing. The costs associated with complete takeover are beyond the scope of the Town of Baie Verte. Insurance and heating costs of \$60,000 per year are not initially sustainable, but with a cost sharing arrangement and increased utilization the building could serve a very useful facility for the Town. But there was very little cooperation with the school boards and now residents face 3 additional eyesores.

The Department of Education should work with communities on alternate use or disposal of vacated schools as new schools are planned.

Materials within the schools not being used by the school board should be auctioned off or given away. Today these schools are becoming storage facilities for student desks,

tables and chairs not required in today's reduced student population. Communities should have access.

The new school in Baie Verte is a fine facility. It's a great school but it is not a community school. During school hours it's accessible, but for most of the year it's Fort Knox. Any community group has difficulty accessing the building outside school hours and when they do they are charged \$30 -\$40 per hour. Our local "Young at Heart Seniors" group pays \$30 per hour. If they used the basketballs it would be \$40 per hour. If recreation is a key to preventive health, then this facility is not being utilized as it should be.

I ask the Minister to review the policy with the English School Board on use of facilities within the community on a year round basis. Many small communities have only a school as its recreation centre.

I thank you for your time...there are many more issues I am sure. Baie Verte looks forward to this year's budget with guarded optimism.

*Oliver Brown
mayor
Baie Verte, NL*