



**Municipal Affairs and Housing
Office of the Minister**

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May 13, 2020

Mayor Pam Mood
President, Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities
VIA EMAIL: info@nsfm.ca

Dear Mayor Mood:

Thank you for the letter dated April 7th, 2020, on behalf of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) Board, regarding your concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on municipal and CSAP elections in October.

I understand the financial and operational pressures that municipalities are facing in Nova Scotia, and across Canada, as a result of the pandemic. I appreciate the work that all municipalities are doing to protect the health and safety of Nova Scotians, and to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

As you are aware, the Province of Nova Scotia is under a State of Emergency and there are a number of public health orders in effect in an effort to minimize the impact of the pandemic. We are making progress in our goal to “flatten the curve”, however, we will continue to monitor the situation to determine how long we will need to remain in the State of Emergency.

I want to assure you that we examined your request to postpone the October 2020 election carefully. As Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I can confirm for you we will be holding the municipal elections in October of 2020.

Because the situation continues to be unpredictable, I encourage municipalities to continue their preparations for an October election with the current public health protocols in mind; specifically, the requirements around social distancing. With the tools and flexibility provided in the *Municipal Elections Act*, I am confident municipalities can hold safe and democratic elections that conform with public health directives, if necessary.

As you know, there are several options for municipalities in terms of how they conduct elections, how electors can vote, and how candidates campaign, such that an election can be held safely. We would highly recommend that municipalities explore the various options afforded by the Act to ensure a safe election. For example:

- Use the provincial and federal voting lists available through Elections Nova Scotia rather than conducting door-to-door enumeration.

- Through by-law, use alternative voting methods for voting other than, or in addition to, paper ballots to give electors options for advance polls and ordinary polling day. These methods could include voting by mail, telephone, or through a personal computing device.
- Consider options for physical polling stations such as increasing the number of polling stations, limiting the number of electors in a polling station at one time, and providing markers on the floors in polling stations to indicate voters to stay 2 metres (6 feet) apart for those in line to vote, etc.
- As ordinary polling day draws near, encourage electors to vote by any alternative methods available, and use advance polls to reduce in-person contact on election day.
- Encourage candidates and their teams to use signs, printed materials, telephone, social media, or virtual options to engage with constituents rather than canvassing door-to-door.

This is an unprecedented time, and now more than ever, it is critical that the democratic rights of citizens are preserved and respected. We are aware of a number of municipalities with vacancies on council who are holding off on filling those vacancies pending the October election. If we delay elections beyond October, there will be thousands of Nova Scotians who will not have a representative at the table when those councils make important decisions about the future of their communities

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing is here to assist municipalities to plan and administer a safe and democratic election. If any municipal units require assistance in their election planning, please advise them to contact our Municipal Elections Officer, Sandy Hudson at 902-294-0610, or via e-mail at: sandy.hudson@novascotia.ca. Sandy is experienced in planning for and administering municipal elections, and in running for municipal office.

In early June, we will be providing virtual online training to Returning Officers and we will be again launching the *Local DecisioNS program* by Springtide Collective to help candidates and their teams with online resources relevant to running a campaign. We are working with them to tailor some materials to planning and campaigning in an environment of social distancing.

Thank you for raising your concerns to me. I hope that you, your family and friends, are healthy and safe.

Sincerely,



Chuck Porter
Minister