Northern Peninsula Regional Government Consultation
St. Anthony, (October 13th, 2011; 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.)

The meeting started with Robert Keenan, Community Cooperation Officer (CCO) with MNL, addressing the municipal officials. Mr. Keenan opened with a presentation on Regional Government and regionalization. In the first part of the presentation, he addressed the reasons MNL is examining regional government, and why now. It was pointed out that these consultations are a follow-up to the three regional government discussion papers released by MNL in 2010 -- *Continuities and Discontinuities*, *Searching for a Purpose*, and *The Umbrella of Protection*. The CCO officer advanced MNL's position that the current municipal structure needed to be reformed. The purpose of this much needed reform would be to increase the efficiency, feasibility, and sustainability of municipalities while protecting municipal autonomy. The CCO officer emphasized the need for reform at this time because municipalities need:
* to become more organized;
* to find ways to maintain and improve aging infrastructure;
* to address the demographic difficulties that exist for many small towns; and
* to account for the reduced financial and technical support available to municipalities from the Provincial Government

Mr. Keenan pointed out that neither the provincial nor federal government has a plan for local government in Newfoundland and Labrador. Such a plan, however, is warranted, and municipalities ought to take the lead in putting forward ideas and suggestions to make them (municipalities) better and more sustainable. Mr. Keenan noted that municipal leaders are local leaders dealing with local problems. Further, it is local leaders, not provincial government officials, who are better positioned to address the problems with the Province's local government system.

Finally, the CCO Program Officer explained the purpose of the consultations and the workbook. Participants were informed that workbooks had been sent to all municipalities in the Province -- they were encouraged to complete the workbooks as a council and as individual councils. After this brief presentation, the consultation moved to a question-and-answer session; a summary follows.

Question 1: What do you think is your region? Why do you think this is your region? And what do you estimate to be the population of your region?

This question generated a lot of feedback:
* Many respondents detailed the geographic situation of the Northern Peninsula: communities with small populations on a large stretch of land.
* One individual stated that their region ran from Woody Point to Trout River (pop. 1400-1500).
* Another defined the Straits as their region.
* One region spanned from Cook's Harbour down through the Straits; the other region ran north from Cook's Harbour to St. Anthony at the top of the Peninsula.
* One respondent noted the presence of Parks Canada, and associated Rocky Harbour, Cow Head, and Trout River as part of a region that comprised 11 municipalities.

There was a great deal of discussion concerning the lack of population on the Northern Peninsula -- municipal officials raised this lack of a population as a reason for identifying certain regions. Individuals also debated what constitutes a region, detailing that different regions exist in the Northern Peninsula addressing Economic and Zone Boards, School Boards, and the Rural Secretariat. Additionally, respondents singled out their geography as a potential obstacle to successful regionalization.

Question 2: How would you rate the level of cooperation that currently exists in your region?

The following is a sample of this discussion:
- Overall, many individuals rated cooperation as poor.
- A Joint Council was in place that was working very well.
- Tourism was rated as sufficient.
- Respondents felt that too few people were on too many boards.
- The RED Board worked well in certain areas.
- For some respondents, bigger regions were not working.

A discussion quickly ensued; respondents voiced many concerns about their lack of cooperation. Respondents discussed the need for larger and smaller towns to coexist and to stop blaming one another. Tourism was used as the example for unifying communities. L'Anse Aux Meadows was cited as a strong center for tourism, and individuals noted that instead of competing for tourism, communities should work together for the benefit of the region. Recreation was also raised as a possible area for future collaboration. The dynamic of the Northern Peninsula was described with small towns and a larger town, St. Anthony, having the majority of the services. One respondent described "dormitory towns" where individuals merely live while doing all other activities in neighbouring communities (work, shopping, hospitals etc.).

The respondents cited two problems for the lack of cooperation in the region: an aging population and a lack of public transport. Both these factors were related and generated a great deal of conversation about how public transport between communities would benefit all communities, particularly, access to the hospital.

Question 3: What services presently performed by municipalities should be conducted regionally, or should never be conducted regionally?

Some of the responses included:
- The vast majority of responses indicated that all services should be conducted regionally.
- Some municipal officials stated that this was a very difficult question, and that circumstances would dictate what could be applied regionally.
- In certain cases, respondents suggested that it would not make sense to perform services regionally, for example, By-Law enforcement.

- It was suggested that currently infrastructure, recreation, and other needs were not met; therefore, regional government would be an improvement.

Question 4: Are you aware of the regional council option set out in Part II of the *Municipalities Act?* If so, have you ever considered establishing a regional council in your area?

Points raised on this topic included:
- Some respondents admitted that they were familiar with the Act.
- One respondent explained that his Town was aware of this provision and had completed a feasibility study.
- Others were involved in preliminary discussions concerning amalgamation, but noted that nothing came to fruition.

At this point, a discussion on amalgamation ensued. The respondents of the Northern Peninsula raised the idea that they were pro amalgamation. One respondent used the example of Winnipeg to describe how successful amalgamations did not necessarily have to result in a loss of identity. Other individuals described how they held referenda on amalgamation, but were defeated. One respondent described how the young and old people of their community were split on amalgamation -- young members of the community wanted the amalgamation while the older members did not. Another respondent explained how amalgamation would benefit most of the communities; however, the respondent noted that there would be no current incentives for LSDs and unincorporated areas to join.

Question 5: Should regional government be municipally controlled or a partnership between municipalities and the provincial government and/or other regional bodies?

Points discussed included:
- One group of respondents felt that both options would be needed to enact success.
- Another group suggested that another option be added; however, they preferred for it to be municipally controlled.
- Another group proposed that it must be municipally controlled in order to avoid being controlled by the government; those who live within the region would be in control.

Question 6: Do you think that regional government should be optional or mandatory?

Unanimous agreement here:
- All groups of respondents agreed that it should be mandatory.
- Respondents noted that if anyone was left out, or if regional government was optional, too many loopholes would exist.

Question 7: How do you propose giving voice to the interests and concerns of LSDs and unincorporated areas within a regional government?

Suggestions generated included:
- Two groups of respondents elected for LSDs and unincorporated areas to be directly governed by the regional government on which they have representation.
- The other group of respondents believed that LSDs and unincorporated areas should elect community councils, which in turn, would have representation on the regional government.

Question 8: Should a regional government have: A. Specific legislatively prescribed responsibilities; or B. Only those responsibilities delegated to it by the municipalities and communities in the region?

Opinions included:
- One group supported a combination of both options in order to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and to be flexible.
- Another group of respondents strongly supported **A** -- towns would have a standard to follow and would be held accountable.
- The last group favoured **A,** but warned that some flexibility maybe be needed.

Question 9: Should a regional government be: A. Flexible: able to perform any municipal service that a municipality or group of municipalities wants the regional government to perform; or B. Inflexible: perform only those responsibilities granted to it upon its creation?

Points generated included:
- All groups agreed on **A**; it needed to be flexible.
- One respondent cautioned that although flexibility would be needed, in some instances, it would need to be inflexible – for instance, in assuring that tasks and duties were completed.

Question 10: How should the costs of regional services be set: A. All residents within a region pay the same fee; or B. Fees would vary depending on which services you receive from the region?

Unanimity on this point:
- All respondents selected option **B**.

Question 11: **How do you think a regional government should raise revenue: A. Invoice municipalities for the costs of regional services; B. Regional government should impose and collect its own tax; C. Regional government should work with municipalities to set appropriate tax rates to cover the cost of regional services; D. Each household pay a fee for service to the regional government for each service it receives from the regional government?**

Points included:

- Some respondents selected **B,** which would also allow for the inclusion of option **D.**
- One group opted for **C,** so that rates are not arbitrarily set.
- The other group selected option **B.**

Question 12: If a regional government were to use some form of taxation, what type should it use: A. Property tax: regional government rate added to the municipal rate; B. Income tax: a regional government would receive a portion of the income tax from the provincial government; C. Sales tax: a regional government would receive a portion of the sales tax from the provincial government; D. Fee for service; E. Combination of the above options?

Respondents noted:
- One group chose **D**; however, they explained that **E** might be the only option that works given the complexity of taxation. Communities with fixed income, for instance, seniors, would suffer from a fee for service. Additionally, issues concerning Capital Works funding would also have to be addressed. Perhaps, a combination of options would be needed.
- Another group chose option **E** as this would allow for a 90/10 share.
- The last group chose option **E,** combining options **B** and **D**.

Question 13: **If regional government results in the establishment of a two- tier system, how should regional councils be selected: A. Directly elected; B. Appointed by municipal and community councils; or C. Other?**

Unanimity on this question:
- All respondents agreed on option **A**-- the regional government should be directly elected.
- Several respondents introduced the concept of having a ward system with direct elections within the regional government.

Question 14: If regional government results in the establishment of a two- tier system, how do you think a regional government should make decisions: A. One vote per representative with majority rules; B. Weighted voting with majority rules - the number of votes a representative can cast is determined by the population of the representative's municipality; C. Double majority - support is needed by a majority of municipalities/communities representing a majority of the population in the region; D. Double majority based on incorporation - support is needed by a majority of municipalities and a majority of LSDs in a region?

Points included:
- The majority of respondents favoured **A**, seeing it as the most democratic option.
- One group could not reach a conclusive decision, stating that in certain cases, if the majority governs then the LSDs and unincorporated areas could decide the

fate of all municipalities, and would dominate all actions in the regional government.

The consultation ended with the CCO officer thanking all participants and urging them to complete the workbook.

General findings from this consultation include:
- The Northern Peninsula is the most supportive area for regional government in the Province.
- There was some disagreement on building an entirely new system or keeping aspects of the old, while making drastic changes
- The Northern Peninsula municipal officials would welcome change to the present system.