

COR/2020/01205

CIRCULAR TO MUNICIPALITIES

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment is continuing to work with cities, towns and Local Service Districts as they address concerns around COVID-19. We continue to follow the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer and the Department of Health and Community Services and are encouraging local governments to follow their lead.

The Provincial Government provides regular updates on [COVID-19 information](#). For general inquiries related to government services, please call [1-833-771-0696](tel:1-833-771-0696) from Monday to Friday or email covid19info@gov.nl.ca any time.

We would like to take this opportunity to provide some clarity on the current situation, specifically as it relates to local government operations. Local governments operate under specific legislation, including the *Municipalities Act*, various *Cities' Acts* and the *Municipal Elections Act*. These statutes contain specific requirements, and in some cases specific timeframes.

Municipal legislation requires that local governments hold a minimum number of meetings and also requires that the public be able to attend these meetings. While there are no legislative provisions that would permit the cancellation of such meetings, we recommend that public council meetings be temporarily postponed. Government is working on a solution to adjust legislative timelines and intends to address this in the very near future.

While local governments at this point are expected to continue with critical operations, we recognize the importance of minimizing social contact and avoiding larger gatherings of people. In the interest of public health:

- Follow the directions of the Chief Medical Officer; wash your hands frequently and practice social distancing;
- We encourage towns to only meet if necessary and to support social distancing measures;

- If meetings cannot be postponed for critical operating decisions, local governments are encouraged to live stream municipal meetings as an alternative to physical attendance by the public. Local governments may also consider using a teleconferencing service to allow residents to call in and to listen to the proceedings.
- Local governments are encouraged to use electronic billing and other online services to conduct business during this time.

Several local governments are either planning for or are in the process of conducting a by-election. Due to the quickly changing nature of the emergency response to the pandemic, all by-elections will be deferred until further notice.

We appreciate the understanding and cooperation of local governments during this difficult period. Staff are working diligently to address municipal concerns and will continue to work with all stakeholders. Please contact the regional manager as listed below if you have any further questions:

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