



COVID-19

REGIONAL CONFERENCE CALL SUMMARY – ROUND SIX

MNL's held its 6th round of regional calls from July 8 – 10th. In total, 69 people joined the four calls. MNL CEO Craig Pollett chaired the calls, each of which began with a brief update to members. The update included the following information:

- Advocacy and lobbying work continues for emergency operational funding. At the time of meetings, MNL was copied on 25 letters to the Prime Minister advocating for emergency operational funding; attendees were reminded to complete and forward copies of this important campaign documentation as soon as possible. A student is being engaged so MNL follow-ups with communities regarding their COVID-period budget shortfalls also will commence soon.
 - The MNL Board of Directors met with John Abbott on July 2 and Andrew Furey on July 3 to discuss key topics and issues for the municipal sector. Questions to the candidates focused on municipal financial sustainability; regionalization; infrastructure funding, especially for drinking and wastewater; municipal-provincial relationships and a seat at the table and women in leadership. MNL is working with each of their campaigns to facilitate a July 23 webinar for members.
 - More progress is being made on the Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations (WSER) work. A Notice of Intent was published in the Canada Gazette Part I related to transitional authorizations on June 27. This is the first step to ensuring consultations for amendments can happen. A website is now open for the consultation process – and consultations are open until March 31, 2021. MNL is working with the provincial government and Environment and Climate Change Canada. An email will be sent out to everyone regarding next steps.
 - Significant questions have emerged from members regarding the opening of playgrounds and other facilities under Alert 2. President Sheila Fitzgerald spoke several times in the media on the importance of residents to be patient, and to remind everyone that municipalities are working hard. MNL sought additional clarification on what is possible if you cannot follow the guidelines exactly and have received additional information from the Department of Health and Community Services on this. A legal opinion and further information on what to do in cases when you cannot meet all aspects of the guidelines are now on the MNL website, including a [policy template for adaptation](#).
 - MNL sought a legal opinion on the charging of business tax. That legal opinion is available [here](#).
 - On June 30, MAE issued a special call for applications for communities who have long term boil water advisories. As per the circular, communities who are not addressing their BWAs will not be eligible for infrastructure funding under the upcoming open call. We have written the Minister asking for clarification on this information, and to express our concern at the tight timeline to apply for this funding, as well as the ability for communities to contribute their share of the funding. MNL is reaching out to municipalities targeted by this circular.
 - Meeting attendees were invited to identify any other emerging issues or ways MNL can help.
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ROUNDTABLE

Municipalities across the province shared updates and posed questions. Several themes emerged across all calls.

- Municipal operations and council meetings:** Municipalities continue to report that they are resuming aspects of in-person service delivery at town offices along with other previously suspended activities (e.g. fire department training, community clean-ups and bulk garbage pick-ups), albeit with safety precautions in place. While some council meetings are occurring with distancing measures in place, representatives note the importance of having meetings available virtually, as there continues to be a larger public interest and uptake when meetings are online. Related to this, several call participants noted that connectivity, particularly broadband access, is a barrier for some communities and that funding to support broadband was critical. Municipalities also lack the proper equipment to support videoconferencing. Several participants remarked that COVID-19 funding support should be available to cover technology and equipment costs associated with meeting virtually. Greater flexibility in the application of existing Gas Tax funding was also raised.
- Facility reopenings:** Many municipalities are reopening recreational facilities, including playgrounds, while others are waiting for further direction and policy information to support reopening. They note that summer student hires are supporting reopening through monitoring and sanitization work. Some call participants commented on the extra costs incurred to run facilities with no programs available to recoup those costs. Many municipalities report not being able to meet all aspects of outdoor/playground facility guidance. This is the case for both large and small ones. For those unable to meet all aspects of the guidelines, they report using signage to communicate risk; and they are communicating with the public. They indicate that they will also use the (St. John's) [facility signage](#) and MNL [policy templates](#), when available, as suggested by the legal opinion. Ventilation is a key aspect of provincial guidance for indoor facilities. Some municipalities are working on how their facilities can be open with proper ventilation in place. Reference was also made to the need to continue checking with sector insurance providers (e.g. Cal LeGrow) on policy-specific directives.
- Community organizations and activities:** At the time of the calls, municipalities reported that in-person church services had not resumed and that local organizations, for the most part, remained closed.
- Tourist mobility:** Municipalities report that there is some degree of tourism mobility into their communities and they are adjusting accordingly.
- Business reopening supports:** Some towns referred to local business engagements in aid of their reopening. Municipal assistance includes recovery-period coordination and information-sharing.
- Labrador-Quebec border mobility:** Several representatives on the Labrador northern regional call noted concern about the reopening of the border to the Quebec North Shore and the monitoring of mobility more generally across both Labrador-Quebec border crossings.
- Second wave concerns:** Municipal leaders are concerned about a potential second wave in the province. Preparation for and thinking about a second wave was noted on the Avalon regional call by several participants.