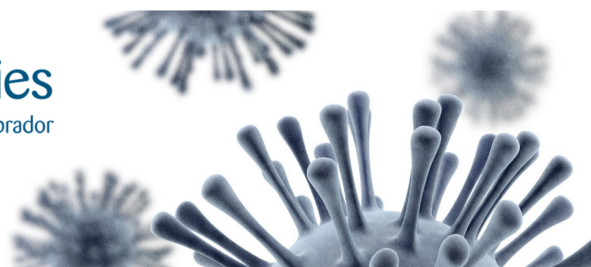




COVID-19



REGIONAL CONFERENCE CALL SUMMARY – ROUND FIVE

MNL's 5th round of regional calls took place June 15-17th. The five calls provided an opportunity for members to check in and share information. They also focused on municipal questions, concerns and experiences under Alert Level 3 guidance in the province. In total, 60 people joined the calls, representing municipalities from all regions in the province. MNL CEO Craig Pollett chaired the calls, each of which began with a brief update to members. The update included the following information:

- On May 29, MNL met with Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, her public health team and our colleagues from Municipal Affairs and Environment (MAE) to discuss the needs of municipalities in the province in terms of guidance, and the importance of putting forward a perspective focused on what you can do, versus what you cannot do.
- MNL municipal guidance and recommendations, focused on eight main areas, was released on June 5. MAE released a guidance document for municipalities the following week.
- MNL met with board members and staff of Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador on Friday, June 12 to discuss common issues in the municipal and tourism sector, including the need to support staycation promotion efforts.
- Municipal Awareness Day is set for June 24. MNL made information available on its website to support virtual celebrations.
- Clarity on emergency operational funding for municipalities is still needed. Announcements were made concerning the 2020-21 federal gas tax transfers on June 1st. This is not new money. The Prime Minister announced \$14 billion in provincial-territory funding to restart the economy on June 5. MNL still does not have clarity on what this means or how this money will be allocated. We are working on this and will be starting pointed advocacy this week. MNL will launch a letter writing campaign this week to advocate for the emergency operational funding required. Members are asked to write letters to the Prime Minister, to MPs and MHAs. Information will be on the MNL website and in emails.



ROUNDTABLE

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

- **Town offices:** At the time of the calls, some municipalities were in the process of bringing staff back to town offices and opening to the public. Some remained closed to the public and were operating by appointment only.
- **Council meetings:** In-person Council meetings have resumed in some instances. Numerous towns noted virtual meetings have been beneficial for reaching more people.
- **Municipal finances:** Some municipalities are reporting significant financial losses. Others remain stable at this point. Without federal operational financial aid, many members report that 2021 will be a difficult year and that tax increases are almost inevitable. Several continue to offer a tax deferment to residents and businesses. Questions remain regarding a municipality's right and responsibility to charge business tax. The legal opinion sought by MNL is that municipalities have the right to charge business tax whether or not the firm in question is generating revenue. Municipalities are concerned about local economies and the business sector in their communities. While some sectors like the fishery have started up, others such as marine ferry services, are experiencing losses and lay-offs. The tourism sector, and businesses reopening associated with it, was still a point for concern and uncertainty. Economic downturns in other provinces, and the lack of employment for those who normally work out-of-province, was also noted. Members noted a concern regarding what will happen when the CERB money ceases for individuals. Municipal tax assessments have also been processed. Several municipalities note that residential tax assessment values have decreased, which will have additional impacts on revenue next year.
- **Reopening under Alert Levels:** Municipalities report that the pace of moving from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3 without significant guidance ahead of time from the Province was challenging. Operating municipal recreational programs and facilities, including day camps, will be difficult for many communities because of a lack of human resources and space available to meet physical distancing requirements. Two urban region municipalities reported their day camps would only host 13-20% of regular registrant numbers. Some municipalities are working on innovative ways to offer programming and services.
- **Public expectations:** Numerous towns expressed concern about the degree to which the general public's expectations of resuming town services and activities are not in keeping with municipal capacity. Harmonized communications to the effect that towns may not be able to safely offer everything that is "allowed" under a given Alert Level are still required.
- **New liabilities:** Questions were raised respecting potential liabilities in connection with the resumption of recreational activities (e.g. soccer, other sports). Towns do not feel they have the expertise to rule on sport-specific safety practices. It was also reported that infectious disease coverage has been discontinued in the municipal fire department insurance policies provided by Trio.
- **Summer student employment:** Many municipalities noted that because of funding decreases in the Canada Summer Jobs Program, on which they depend to support summer student hiring, they do not have the means to offer some regular and much-needed summer activities (e.g. day camps, swimming pool and sports field operations). Many reported not receiving any summer student funding; several said they received fewer approved positions than they expected.
- **Reopening of provincial borders:** The reopening of the provincial border in Labrador was discussed on the Labrador regional call.

- **Provincial services and inspection activities:** Concerns were expressed about increased instances of construction activity not respecting the terms of approved building permits (e.g. oversized and improperly located structures). Stop work orders and building inspections were not being actioned by Service NL.
- **Bulk garbage:** Refuse build-up and illegal dumping issues continue to be reported.
- **Capital project processes:** Several members indicated issues with getting capital works projects moving as a result of delays/availability on the part of engineering consultants and construction contractors, and in relation to change order approvals.
- **Innovative celebrations and activities:** Municipalities plan to celebrate Municipal Awareness Day and Canada Day in innovative, virtual ways. Many are actively engaged with their residents to support safe community activities including virtual scavenger hunts, online festivals and drive in movies.