

Government Response to the
Final Report of the Select Committee on
Local Governance and Regional Collaboration



***Local Governance and
Regional Collaboration
for New Brunswick***

INTRODUCTION

In December 2000, government launched an important and detailed process of consultation with New Brunswickers to determine needed and desired improvements to the province's local governance system.

The first part of this process was the establishment of the Round Table on Local Governance, which made 16 recommendations providing directions to improve the local governance system in New Brunswick.

As a result of the recommendations of the Round Table, a Select Committee on Local Governance and Regional Collaboration was established in December of 2001. This all-party legislative committee was given a mandate to conduct public consultation to explore acceptable and appropriate local governance models and regional service delivery structures for New Brunswick communities.

The Committee held 13 days of public hearings, and after listening to more than 225 presentations and receiving 140 written briefs, tabled its final report containing 9 recommendations in the Legislative Assembly on January 15, 2003.

The 13 members of the Select Committee are to be applauded for their hard work and dedication in receiving, analyzing and reporting the views of many New Brunswickers on models of local governance and regional service delivery structures.

Government also wishes to thank the many New Brunswickers who made their views known to the Select Committee. The contributions of those who made presentations and submitted briefs were crucial to this undertaking.

The input provided to the Select Committee was both insightful and beneficial. The Select Committee heard that citizens from many parts of unincorporated areas, where close to 270,000 or 40% of New Brunswickers reside, are interested in acquiring local representation through the municipal election process as well as the ability to make basic local decisions through the empowerment of local service districts. Citizens also expressed the desire to be in control of any change affecting them and be supported and assisted by the provincial government to facilitate the process of change.

The Select Committee also heard that communities could better plan their future and meet their local service needs if the geographic boundaries of local service districts and municipalities would better reflect present settlement, community relationships and citizens' relationship with the natural environment. In addition, the committee heard of ways to encourage and enable communities to share needed services, and of the need to have provincial planning goals for the sustainable development of urban and rural communities, as well as the local ability to achieve those goals.

Government's response to the final report, is consistent with the unanimous recommendations made by the Select Committee on Local Governance and Regional Collaboration. It outlines key improvements that will be pursued to give New Brunswickers the ability to make local decisions so they can plan the growth of their community and meet their local service needs.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE IN UNINCORPORATED AREAS

SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

1. *Encourage local service districts and municipalities to examine their geographic boundaries and reorganize them as necessary to reflect and serve the communities of today.*
2. *All local service districts should elect local representatives through the municipal election process.*
3. *Each local service district should have the local power for land use/community planning.*
4. *Provide the legislative framework for each local service district to choose to take on additional local powers, as it is ready.*

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The government agrees with these recommendations and will implement them in the following matter:

- Government will encourage local service districts and municipalities to examine and reorganize their boundaries as necessary to reflect and serve today's communities.
- Government will take steps to enable local service districts to acquire local representation through the municipal election process, obtain the power to adopt and enforce a land use plan and gain other local service powers when they are ready.
- Government will examine the possibility of providing interested municipalities with the opportunity of becoming a local service district empowered with local representation and some local decision making powers.
- Government will assist communities in studying the benefits and costs of reorganizing their boundaries, acquiring local representation and decision-making powers, and in measuring the level of local support for such decisions.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SHARED PROVISION OF SERVICES

SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

5. *Complete the establishment and restructuring of regionally-based District Planning Commissions to serve all local service districts and municipalities in all regions of the province.*

6 *Improve District Planning and Solid Waste Commissions.*

This includes:

- *Allowing local service districts to appoint their members*
- *Requiring each commission to adopt a multi-year service plan and an annual review of that plan, in consultation with participating municipalities and local service districts*
- *Requiring a double-majority support for the making of significant decisions*

7. *Develop the legislative framework to empower local service districts and municipalities to design and review arrangements for the shared provision of services and to resolve disputes.*

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The government agrees with these recommendations and will implement them in the following manner:

- Government will establish Regional Planning Commissions to serve all municipalities and local service districts in all regions of the province. While all communities will be required to participate in the regional planning process, some municipalities may choose to continue providing local land planning services on their own.
- Government will improve and strengthen the structure and decision-making process of Regional Planning and Solid Waste Commissions to ensure that community planning and solid waste management services are provided in an effective, efficient and equitable manner to all communities of New Brunswick.
 - Each local service district and municipality will be able to appoint no more than one member to Solid Waste and Regional Planning Commissions.
 - Each commission will also be required to adopt a multi-year service delivery plan and conduct annual reviews of that plan, in consultation with all participating communities.
 - Significant decisions made by Regional Planning and Solid Waste Commissions will also require the support of an appropriate weighted majority.
- Government will empower local service districts and municipalities with the tools necessary to voluntarily design and review formal arrangements for the provision of shared services and to resolve disputes. This framework will enable communities to clearly define and agree upon the service to be shared, how the costs of the service will be shared, and how they will share control over the shape and future direction of the service.

PLANNING TOOLS

SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

8 *Complete the development of a comprehensive and integrated Provincial Planning Policy.*

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The government agrees with these recommendations and will implement them in the following manner:

- Government will establish a comprehensive and integrated provincial planning policy and facilitate a regional planning process, in order to foster the sustainable development of urban and rural communities.
- The provincial planning policy will address issues related to the future growth of our urban and rural communities, such as water resources, agricultural land and infrastructure. It will serve to guide Provincial Government Departments, municipalities, local service districts and Regional Planning Commissions in making decisions regarding the future development of our communities.
- Regional planning will give municipalities and local service districts the ability to address common issues that would otherwise be impossible or more difficult to address on their own.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

9 *Local service districts, municipalities and regional commissions must be engaged in the process of change, with the technical and financial assistance of the provincial government.*

The provincial government should:

- *Seek and facilitate the involvement of all stakeholders*
- *Support the involvement of stakeholders with technical and financial assistance*
- *Provide sufficient time and adequate information for all stakeholders to fully assess and understand changes*
- *Establish local and regional committees to facilitate the sharing of information*

- *Require the support of citizens in each local service district and municipality*
- *Provide for an assessment of the costs and fiscal implications of changes*
- *Provide for the training of elected representatives*

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The government agrees with these recommendations and will implement them in the following manner:

Any changes to the local service districts, municipalities and regional planning and solid waste commissions will be based on the following approach as recommended by the Select Committee -

- Seek and facilitate involvement of all stakeholders
- Support the involvement of stakeholders with technical and financial assistance
- Provide sufficient time and adequate information for all stakeholders to fully assess and understand changes
- Establish local and regional committees to facilitate the sharing of information
- Require the support of citizens in each local service district and municipality
- Provide for an assessment of the costs and fiscal implications of changes
- Provide for the training of elected representatives

■ Government, through the Department of the Environment and Local Government will be developing, over the next several months, an implementation plan, with the involvement of various stakeholders, in order to achieve improvements to the local governance system. This will include, for example, a plan to work closely with communities, focusing on those that have already expressed a strong interest in examining their boundaries, acquiring local representation and obtaining some local decision making powers.

CONCLUSION

Empowering New Brunswickers with the ability to make local decisions, so they can plan the growth of their community and meet their local service needs is the overriding purpose of government's response to the final report of the Select Committee on Local Governance and Regional Collaboration.

Government will be working closely with communities in order to shape the local governance and regional collaboration they need and desire.