Fire trucks

Vince MacKenzie, representing the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services, wants government to look at a regional concept in providing fire services, while increasing the cost-share program for the replacement of fire trucks.

“In the fiscal year 2011-'12, government provided a much needed and significant boost in funding to assist communities to purchase new fire trucks. This was the first time in over a decade, and as a result 22 fire apparatus (trucks) have been replaced,” he told Minister King, who was joined in the session by Gander MHA and Minister of Municipal Affairs Kevin O'Brien.

“Unfortunately, to the disappointment of the province’s firefighters, that 2011-'12 extra funding was essentially erased in last year’s budget allocation… we ask that the cost-shared program for fire trucks be increased to provide for the replacement of 20 fire trucks per year for three years.”

Mr. MacKenzie added government should also look at placing fire equipment (within the province) to better enhance regionalization and provide for better incentives for the promotion of regionalization, as well as commission a comprehensive study on regional fire provision.

“Significant savings can be found in both infrastructure and operating expenses by governments on all levels if this concept is embraced in a meaningful manner,” he said.

Minister O'Brien, who is also the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services, told Mr. MacKenzie, the provincial government doesn’t have any legislative authority to regionalize fire services at a municipal level, but was open to suggestions from the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services on how to accomplish such a move.

Housing matters

Carol Sturge, who spoke on behalf of the Gander and Area Community Advisory Board for Housing and Homelessness, said more collaboration is needed to meet the growing housing needs in our province, especially considering the current record low vacancy rates, the ever increasing cost of living and the growing number of individuals with complex needs.

“Housing that is available and affordable across every income level creates a stronger, healthier and more vibrant province,” said Ms. Sturge. “Affordable housing is truly the cornerstone in reducing poverty in Newfoundland and
She suggested government make affordable housing a priority in its upcoming budget by making provincially-owned land and buildings available for housing initiatives, as well as investing in supportive housing that provides cost savings.

She also said government needs to create real pathways out of poverty with an affordable home ownership program, and by shifting resources from the Energy Rebate Program towards an expanded low-income home energy retrofit program.

“One of the most cost effective methods towards housing stability is the creation of a collaborative approach between government ministries to help solve the problems that pose barriers to ending homelessness,” she said. “Government-funded facilities such as corrections, health, mental health, etc., should not be discharging people into homelessness. We need to take a collaborative approach in working with in-patient mental health clients, correctional services, etc., in creating a system that ensures housing stability for all.

“Sometimes solutions are not about spending additional money but rather reinvesting in improving programs and services that offer cost savings.”

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