A Partnership for Strong Communities

Union of BC Municipalities

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Throughout B.C.'s history, the Province has relied on local governments to support the achievement of provincial goals. A key factor in the success of these efforts is a corresponding commitment by the Province to ensuring local governments have the resources and capacity required to successfully deliver on new responsibilities as they are introduced.

Communities are helping to address provincial service areas like housing affordability and homelessness while also modernizing emergency management systems and investing in climate resilience. They are accommodating growth, responding to public safety concerns, and replacing aging infrastructure. These responsibilities continue to expand while local revenues and authorities remain largely unchanged.

While local governments remain committed partners in advancing provincial and national priorities, the scale and complexity of these challenges are outpacing local capacity and the revenue tools available to meet them.

A renewed partnership with the Province is required to ensure communities have the tools, resources and authority necessary to continue delivering results for British Columbians.

The provincial government has an opportunity to strengthen its partnership with local governments and improve the delivery of provincial and shared priorities.

UBCM recommends four priorities to support resilient communities, sustainable growth and effective service delivery: (1) Renew the partnership with local governments; (2) Support safer communities through better care; (3) Enhance emergency management and community resilience; and (4) Invest in infrastructure and support local fiscal sustainability.

Priority 1: Renew the partnership with local governments

As the level of intergovernmental cooperation required to address today's challenges continues to increase, meaningful engagement between local governments and the Province has become more important than ever.

Local governments are recognized in provincial legislation as an order of government with unique responsibilities, authorities and jurisdiction. Consultation practices should reflect this relationship by recognizing local governments as an order of government as set out in the *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act.*

Local governments bring practical implementation experience, community knowledge and operational expertise that help improve public policy outcomes. When local governments are consulted early in policy development, legislation is stronger, implementation is more effective and public confidence is enhanced.

The opportunity

In recent years, many local governments have expressed concerns regarding consultation on major provincial initiatives. Legislation related to housing, major project approvals and heritage conservation has highlighted the need for more consistent and meaningful engagement practices.

Too often, local governments are consulted as stakeholders after key policy decisions have already been made, reducing consultation to a procedural exercise rather than a meaningful opportunity for collaboration. Local governments have emphasized the importance of engaging them as partners in shaping policy, recognizing their frontline role in delivering services and implementing provincial priorities.

The expanded use of non-disclosure agreements in consultation processes has further eroded transparency and weakened trust in provincial-local government engagement, limiting the ability of elected local officials to represent and inform their communities.

At a time when local governments are expected to deliver increasingly complex provincial priorities, meaningful engagement is critical to ensuring successful outcomes. Doing so will deliver better legislation, reduce the likelihood of unintended consequences and improve public trust in Provincial decisions.

UBCM recommendations

✓ Reinforce the principles of consultation, cooperation and mutual respect contained within the *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act*.

✓ Restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements in consultations with local governments to exceptional circumstances where confidentiality is demonstrably necessary.

✓ Establish a Premier-directed provincial-local government consultation framework to ensure ‘early and often’ engagement practices across government.

✓ Establish a transparency and engagement framework that provides local governments with timely information and meaningful opportunities to identify implementation impacts arising from Indigenous title, treaty implementation, land governance and reconciliation initiatives that may affect infrastructure, service delivery, taxation or community planning.

Priority 2: Support safer communities through better care

Communities across British Columbia continue to face growing challenges related to homelessness, untreated mental illness, addiction and public disorder. Residents expect safe public spaces, while vulnerable individuals deserve access to treatment, housing and appropriate supports. Local governments are looking for stronger provincial leadership, investment and service delivery to address the root causes affecting communities.

While housing, treatment, mental health and social services remain primarily provincial responsibilities, local governments increasingly bear the financial and operational impacts when these systems lack sufficient capacity. Local governments are responding through policing, fire services, bylaw enforcement, outreach, emergency response, shelter support, encampment management and community safety initiatives. In many cases, these efforts are funded through local property taxes, even though such services were never intended to be core local government responsibilities.

The opportunity

Local governments support the Province's efforts to strengthen public safety, mental health care, addictions treatment, and supportive housing. Addressing these issues will require sustained provincial investment and coordinated action across multiple service systems.

Better care systems will help create safer communities and ease the financial burden our members face as they manage street disorder. Local governments support a

balanced approach that combines public safety, treatment, recovery, supportive housing, and community-based services.

UBCM recommendations

✓ Expand access to treatment, recovery, mental health, and addictions services, including additional treatment beds, involuntary care, recovery spaces and complex care supports.

✓ Increase supportive and complex-care housing options to address homelessness, improve housing stability, and reduce pressures on local services and public spaces.

✓ Strengthen integrated service delivery by improving coordination among health, housing, mental health, addictions, policing and community service providers through community-based models that connect individuals to appropriate care and support.

✓ Provide sustainable provincial funding for community-based responses, including mental health, addictions, homelessness, community safety and programs such as HEART and HEARTH.

Priority 3: Enhance emergency management and community resilience

British Columbia communities are increasingly experiencing the impacts of extreme weather events. Floods, droughts and wildfires are affecting communities throughout the province and placing growing pressure on emergency management systems.

At the same time, modernization of provincial emergency management legislation has significantly expanded local government responsibilities. Communities are required to undertake more planning, more coordination and more risk-reduction activities than ever before.

Local governments support the need to modernize emergency management and recognize the importance of preparedness and resilience. However, these new responsibilities require sustainable resources and capacity support.

Communities are expected to:

- Complete comprehensive disaster risk assessments that include new requirements for First Nations consultation and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge.

- Develop enhanced emergency management plans.
- Implement disaster risk reduction activities.
- Invest in climate adaptation infrastructure.
- Increase emergency management staffing and capacity.

Many communities are also facing major costs associated with flood protection infrastructure, wildfire mitigation and long-term climate adaptation.

The opportunity

Investments in prevention and mitigation are among the most cost-effective approaches to emergency management. Communities that are better prepared are more resilient, recover faster and require fewer resources during disasters. Supporting local emergency management capacity protects residents, infrastructure, businesses and provincial investments.

UBCM recommendations

✓ Provide dedicated, ongoing funding and capacity-building supports tied directly to new *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* responsibilities including risk assessments.

✓ Invest in disaster mitigation, flood protection and climate adaptation infrastructure.

✓ Establish stable, long-term funding for FireSmart and other wildfire mitigation initiatives.

✓ Ensure local governments are actively involved in the design and redesign of emergency management and mitigation funding programs.

Priority 4: Invest in infrastructure and support local fiscal sustainability

Local infrastructure is the foundation on which British Columbia's economy and quality of life rests. Water systems, wastewater treatment facilities, roads, bridges, transit systems, parks and recreation facilities are essential to supporting housing growth, economic development and healthy communities.

Communities throughout British Columbia face mounting infrastructure pressures driven by population growth, climate change, regulatory requirements and aging assets. To accommodate provincially mandated housing targets and new density

requirements, local governments must invest in significant upgrades to water, sewer, transportation and utility infrastructure that were not designed to support today's growth expectations.

Local governments are committed to supporting the Province's housing goals, but increasing housing supply must be accompanied by investments in the infrastructure and provincial services needed to support complete, livable communities. As the Province advances its housing agenda, local governments require sufficient flexibility to direct growth to areas where infrastructure exists or is planned, helping ensure new housing can be delivered efficiently, sustainably and cost-effectively.

Despite these growing responsibilities, local governments remain heavily reliant on property taxation and development-related financing tools to support infrastructure investments. New federal proposals that would require reductions to Development Cost Charges (DCCs) and Amenity Cost Charges (ACCs) as a condition of accessing infrastructure funding threaten one of the most important tools available to finance growth-related infrastructure.

The opportunity

Investments in local infrastructure support housing growth, strengthen community resilience, improve productivity and stimulate economic activity during periods of economic uncertainty. Infrastructure investment remains one of the most effective tools available to support long-term economic growth.

Local governments and the private sector require certainty and stability regarding land ownership, taxation authority and servicing responsibilities to effectively plan for growth, finance infrastructure and deliver local services.

Changes to land governance arrangements or ownership structures can have significant implications for local government taxation, infrastructure planning, growth management and service delivery. Long-term infrastructure investments depend on stable and predictable governance frameworks that enable local governments to meet their responsibilities and support complete communities.

Maintaining certainty around property ownership and local government authorities helps ensure communities retain the ability to finance infrastructure, plan for growth and provide essential services to residents and businesses.

UBCM Recommendations

✓ Create a long-term and predictable provincial infrastructure funding stream that supports both growth-related infrastructure and the renewal of existing community assets.

✓ Protect Development Cost Charges, Amenity Cost Charges and other local development finance tools that enable growth-supporting infrastructure and protect taxpayers from paying for growth related infrastructure.

✓ Provide local governments with certainty regarding property taxation and service delivery authorities when considering changes to land governance, ownership structures or provincial land policy that may affect local government infrastructure planning, servicing obligations or fiscal capacity.

✓ Consult with local governments when reviewing Bill 44 and other housing legislation to strengthen local flexibility, align housing growth with infrastructure capacity, and support the delivery of complete communities.

Conclusion

British Columbia's local governments are the delivery partners that transform provincial priorities into local results. Whether addressing community safety, emergency preparedness or infrastructure renewal, success depends on strong collaboration between the Province and local governments.

A roadmap for achieving these shared objectives is through:

Meaningful Engagement → Working together as governing partners.

Sustainable Infrastructure → Investing in the foundations of growth.

Resilient Communities → Supporting emergency management and climate resilience.

Safer Communities → Providing the supports necessary to address complex social challenges.

UBCM looks forward to working with the Province to advance these priorities through renewed consultation, sustainable investment and a shared commitment to delivering results for British Columbians.

Appendix A – Evidence and Impact

Priority 2 - Support Safer Communities Through Better Care

Local governments across British Columbia are increasingly responding to the consequences of homelessness, untreated mental illness, addiction and public disorder through local budgets, services and emergency response systems. What were once primarily health and social service challenges have become significant fiscal and operational pressures for local governments.

In any given year, mental health and substance use challenges directly affect approximately one in five British Columbians. Local police and fire departments are increasingly being relied upon to provide frontline responses to crises involving homelessness, addiction and mental illness. While pre-hospital care is a provincial responsibility under the *Emergency Health Services Act*, local governments are increasingly bearing the costs of these responses through policing, fire services, bylaw enforcement and community safety programs.

First Responder and Emergency Response Pressures

- In 2023, RCMP officers responded to approximately **71,000 mental health occurrences** and conducted more than **73,000 wellness checks** across British Columbia. In that year, British Columbia accounted for almost half (49%) of all RCMP reported mental health occurrences.
- Following responses to approximately **700 overdoses** and a situation where more than **50 per cent of 8,000 annual calls** were medical emergencies, the City of New Westminster hired **11 additional firefighters** to meet increasing demand.
- The City of Port Alberni has experienced a **75 per cent increase in fire department call volume since 2019**, with most new calls related to medical first response. Local leaders have identified staff burnout and resource pressures as major concerns.
- In 2024, the City of Cranbrook Fire Department responded to nearly **2,500 incidents**, with approximately **75 per cent** involving emergency medical response activities. The community has explored both service limitations and staffing increases to address growing demand.
- The City of Nanaimo Fire Department saw overdose responses increase from approximately **507 incidents in 2021** to more than **1,500 responses** over a two-

year period, demonstrating the increasing use of municipal first responders to address health-care emergencies.

Homelessness and Housing Pressures

- Nearly **25,000 households** were on the BC Housing waitlist in Metro Vancouver in 2025, representing a **32 per cent increase** over the previous year and highlighting continued pressure on affordable housing, supportive housing and shelter systems across British Columbia.
- Local governments continue to make significant investments in affordable and supportive housing. Examples include:
- City of Coquitlam investing more than **$17 million** since 2017 to support 840 affordable housing units.
- Township of Langley waiving approximately **$3 million** in fees to create 98 rental homes.
- City of Chilliwack contributing approximately **$2.4 million** in land and fee waivers for a 66-unit project.
- Village of Lumby, with a population of roughly 2,000, contributing land, cash and tax exemptions to support 20 units of seniors housing.

Local Government Financial Impacts

- The City of Prince George reported approximately **$19 million** in local expenditures between 2020 and 2024 related to housing, social services, outreach, security, encampment management and community safety initiatives.
- Over a four-year period, the City of Kelowna spent approximately **$20 million** responding to homelessness-related challenges, including approximately **$10 million funded through local taxation**.
- Between 2021 and 2024, the City of Coquitlam incurred approximately **$1.55 million** in police and fire service costs associated with operations at the Red Fish Healing Centre for Mental Health and Addictions, highlighting how provincial health and housing initiatives can create significant municipal service pressures.
- The City of New Westminster spent approximately **$315,000** responding to **802 homelessness-related incidents** in 2024, including 517 emergency medical responses and 249 fire-related incidents.

Priority 3 – Enhance Emergency Management and Community Resilience

- Bringing disaster risk assessments up to Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA) standards is estimated to cost approximately $31 million province wide.
- Many local governments have hired additional staff to meet new EDMA obligations
    - The **Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS)** reports that new emergency management staffing costs nearly **$300,000 annually**.
    - The **Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD)** emergency management tax requisition more than **tripled** the year after EDMA was introduced and has continued to rise each year since.

Local governments are facing major climate adaptation and mitigation infrastructure costs:

- The **City of Delta** faces approximately **$1.9 billion** in dike upgrades.
- The **City of Dawson Creek** faces up to **$272 million** in costs to secure a new drinking water supply following drought-related impacts to its current source.
- The **City of Merritt's** flood mitigation plan is estimated at approximately **$165 million**, despite an annual municipal budget of only **$9 million**.

Fire Smart Community Funding and Supports has been one of the Province's most effective wildfire mitigation tools:

- The Province has invested more than **$175 million** in the program since 2018. The program supports wildfire mitigation efforts in more than **280 communities** and funds the majority of FireSmart coordinators across British Columbia.

Every $1 invested before a disaster saves between $7 and $13 in post-disaster response and recovery costs

Priority 4 - Invest in Infrastructure and Support Local Fiscal Sustainability

British Columbia's communities face substantial infrastructure pressures driven by growth, environmental compliance, climate adaptation and asset renewal.

Key examples include:

- Over **$24 billion** in core local government infrastructure must be replaced within the next ten years due to aging infrastructure. This excludes infrastructure required for growth and climate adaptation.

- An annual investment of **$5.3 billion in** local government infrastructure adaptation measures is now needed in Canada to combat extreme weather events.
- The **District of Tofino** required approximately **$78 million** for a mandated wastewater treatment upgrade despite a population of only 2,500 residents.
- The **City of Abbotsford's** still requires at least **$1.5 billion** to complete its long-term flood mitigation plan.
- Every $1 spent on local infrastructure generates $1.14 in gross domestic product (GDP), creating jobs and driving local business spin-offs.
- Local governments secured approximately **$1.2 billion** through Development Cost Charges and amenity contributions in 2024.
- Cutting these revenues in half would create an estimated **$600 million infrastructure funding gap**.
- Approximately **100 local governments** in British Columbia use Development Cost Charges to finance growth-related infrastructure.