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DEC 16 2019

Regional District of
East Kootenay

December 10, 2019

Rob Gay
Chair of the Regional District of East Kootenay
19 24th Avenue South
Cranbrook BC V1C 3H8

Dear Rob Gay:

I would like to thank you and Stan Doehle for such an informative meeting at this year's Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Convention in Vancouver. I am writing to follow up on our discussion regarding capital funding for Rural Fire Departments.

I am aware of the essential structural and wildfire response services that many rural fire departments provide. The Province recognizes and appreciates the challenges that small communities face in delivering critical fire services. We are taking a number of targeted actions to support BC fire departments and are open to suggestions for improvements.

As you are aware, on May 10, 2019, the Province provided \$5M to the UBCM Community Emergency Preparedness Fund to provide funding to volunteer and composite fire departments from across BC to facilitate the delivery of firefighter training and to purchase new or replacement equipment. The news release can be found at:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019PSSG0051-000922>

Emergency Management BC and the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) continue to work collaboratively with UBCM, the Local Government Management Association, the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS), and the Fire Chiefs' Association of BC (FCABC) on a variety of funding and training initiatives that can assist fire departments and local authorities that have fewer resources. BCWS currently provides subsidized structural protection training courses for local authority fire departments for an urban interface environment and is working with the OFC to develop a long-term plan for provision of this training.

FCABC, in partnership with the Canadian Red Cross (CRC), is currently helping to administer \$5M in grant funding, part of the \$100M provided by the Province to the CRC to support 2017 wildfire response, to assist local authority fire departments. This is currently being done in two phases. Phase one will be provided to fire departments in communities that were affected by the wildfires in 2017. In phase two, any remaining funds from this program will be made available to other departments across BC.

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His Worship Rob Gay
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On May 22, 2019, the Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; the Honourable Claire Trevena, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure; and the Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General wrote to the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and to the Honourable Ralph Goodale, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, requesting that local governments be permitted to use their Community Works Fund (Gas Tax) allocations to support local fire departments. Under the current Gas Tax Agreement, the 18 broad eligible investment categories do not currently permit local governments to make investments in their fire departments with this funding.

In addition, the letter requests that tri-partite funding programs, such as those under the national *Investing in Canada* Infrastructure Program streams, allow fire halls and related infrastructure (primarily vehicles) as eligible projects for consideration. At present, these programs do not permit fire department infrastructure as an eligible category for funding consideration. For your reference, I have included the related correspondence associated with this request.

While not specifically discussed at our meeting, and as you may be aware, a discussion paper was released on October 28, 2019, that outlines proposed legislative changes to the *Emergency Program Act*. The news release outlining the three-month consultation can be found at:
<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019EMBC0003-002046>

The discussion paper is available online at:
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/emergency-program-act-modernization>

Given you and your board's commitment, I encourage your participation and input to ensure this new legislation advances the Regional District's interest and experience in emergency management.

Please feel free to follow up with me or contact the Jay Brownlee, Acting Fire Commissioner, directly. Jay can be reached by email at Jay.Brownlee@gov.bc.ca or by phone at 250 952-4807.

I appreciate these important opportunities to exchange ideas and share information. Through a continued partnership, I am confident that we can work together to increase the safety and security of the Regional District of East Kootenay.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Rice
Parliamentary Secretary
for Emergency Preparedness

Enclosure

pc: The Honourable Mike Farnworth
Lori Halls
Madeline Maley
Jay Brownlee
Shawn Tomlin, CAO, Regional District of East Kootenay



May 22, 2019

The Honourable François-Philippe
Champagne
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
180 Kent Street, Suite 1000
Ottawa Ontario K1P 0B6
infc.minister-ministre.infc@canada.ca

The Honourable Ralph Goodale
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency
Preparedness
House of Commons
Ottawa Ontario K1A 0A6
Hon.ralph.goodale@canada.ca

Dear Ministers Champagne and Goodale:

We are writing to bring to your attention an issue that is a continuing source of concern with British Columbia local governments in making decisions to protect their communities. In our provincial ministerial roles, we have been asked by a number of communities to bring these issues to your attention and to give local governments more options to support fire departments, both volunteer and professional, in their communities. We support these concerns; the Province acknowledges we too have a role in supporting BC communities in this regard and also wish to seek the support from you as our federal counterparts.

As you are aware, the Community Works Fund under the renewed Gas Tax Agreement delivers to all local governments a direct annual allocation to support local priorities based on a per capita formula. Local governments are free to use their allocations for costs associated with 18 broad eligible investment categories. However, there continues to be concern that the Fund does not currently permit local governments from making investments to support fire departments.

Fire departments are a critically important public safety support for all communities, and perhaps even more-so for many small and predominantly rural communities. They not only provide structural fire support, but they also provide road rescue emergency response for motor vehicle accidents. In addition, many volunteer fire departments have been widely utilized on the frontlines of the wildfires that raged in our province in 2017 and 2018. The increased demand on the existing infrastructure (equipment and facilities) is simply not sustainable and may prove more costly to the residents of British Columbia in loss of structure as well as the threat to life safety.


In addition, the *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program* streams, while very beneficial for a number of other community related outcomes, such as the Rural and Northern Communities stream, unfortunately do not allow for fire halls and related infrastructure (primarily vehicles) as eligible projects for consideration. Communities feel strongly and have shared with us that the longstanding absence of support for local government fire responsibilities with tri-partite funding programs has led to a serious infrastructure deficit for emergency response capabilities in many BC communities.

The increased rate of wear and tear on both the rolling stock and support facilities due to the fire and flood response for the last two years has only intensified the issue. Hence, firetrucks and their associated pumps are reaching their service life faster than anticipated. Additional impacts from climate change including the potential for an increase in other natural disasters such as landslides and drought, places additional pressure on our first responders including local fire resources.


We believe that one of the three national program objectives under the Gas Tax Fund — strong cities and communities — would be better served with an opportunity for local governments to access funding for fire services in their jurisdictions. We are confident that our local governments have the best interests of their communities in mind and can make investment decisions that match local priorities. While BC made this request during discussions regarding the Gas Tax Program in 2018, we are asking that local governments be given the autonomy to invest in their fire departments with resources available to them under the Community Works Fund and to have the ability to apply to infrastructure programs for funding for resources for local fire services.

Therefore, we are requesting that the federal government partner with the provincial government to support local governments in this regard. We look forward to hearing from you.


Sincerely,



Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General



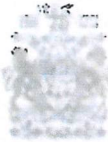
Claire Trevena
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure



Selina Robinson
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

cc. Mr. Arjun Singh
President
Union of BC Municipalities

Minister of Public Safety and
Emergency Preparedness



Ministre de la Sécurité publique
et de la Protection civile

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P8

JUL 12 2019

The Honourable Mike Farnworth, M.L.A.
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Room 128 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4

The Honourable Claire Trevena, M.L.A.
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure
Room 306 Parliamentary Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4

The Honourable Selina Robinson, M.L.A.
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Room 310 Parliamentary Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4

Dear Ministers:

Thank you for your correspondence of May 22, 2019, concerning your request for more funding options to support professional and volunteer fire departments within the province of British Columbia. I applaud the critical work that fire departments—both volunteer and professional—do every day, in every corner of Canada, to keep people safe.

The Government of Canada recognizes that disasters are increasing in frequency and magnitude due to factors such as climate change, critical infrastructure dependencies, and ecological changes. Recent extreme weather events in British Columbia and across the country remind us of how all of society comes together, including fire departments, to support response and recovery efforts whenever and wherever disaster strikes.

Canada

As you are aware, on January 25, 2019, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for Emergency Management formally approved and released the *Emergency Management Strategy for Canada: Toward a Resilient 2030* (the Strategy). The Strategy provides a roadmap to strengthen Canada's ability to better prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and natural disasters, including wildfires and floods. While Public Safety does not have programs that fund the operations of local fire departments directly, I look forward to continuing our work under the Strategy to advance emergency management capabilities in British Columbia and in Canada as a whole.

I note that you have also addressed your correspondence to my colleague, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, who is best positioned to respond to the issues you have raised regarding the eligibility criteria under the Gas Tax Fund and the *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Programs* streams.

Thank you for taking the time to bring this issue to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable Ralph Goodale, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities

Arjun Singh
President, Union of British Columbia Municipalities

Minister of Infrastructure
and Communities



Ministre de l'Infrastructure
et des Collectivités

Ottawa, Canada K1P 0B6

The Honourable Mike Farnworth, M.L.A.
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
The Honourable Clair Trevena, M.L.A.
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure
The Honourable Selina Robinson, M.L.A.
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Government of British Columbia
pssgwebfeedback@gov.bc.ca

JUL 04 2019

Dear Ministers:

Thank you for your letter of May 22, 2019, also addressed to the Honourable Ralph Goodale, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, regarding the eligibility of fire halls under the federal Gas Tax Fund. I also thank you for raising this issue during the meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for infrastructure on June 6, 2019.

I appreciate the significant impact that wildland fires have had on British Columbia and other jurisdictions throughout the country. Natural Resources Canada is actively working with provinces, territories and municipalities through the FireSmart program. In addition to this work, Infrastructure Canada is supporting projects that address wildland fire risk through the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund and the Integrated Bilateral Agreement for the *Investing in Canada* plan. Investments in fire breaks and monitoring systems, when coupled together, can go a long way to securing communities from the dangers of wildland fire.

The Gas Tax Fund is intended to provide local decision makers with the ability to fund projects that are priorities in their respective jurisdictions. With 18 different project categories of investment, the Gas Tax Fund offers a range of options for local governments. For example, upgrades to fire stations that offer energy savings can be funded through the Community Energy category. I completely agree with your statement that local governments have the best interests of their communities in mind and that their investment decisions reflect this.

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Canada

In Budget 2019, the Government of Canada has pledged \$2.2 billion in new funding for municipalities through the federal Gas Tax Fund. This funding will be in addition to the regular payments under the program and will be flowed to agreement signatories across the country. Funding under the Gas Tax Fund will be disbursed in accordance with respective agreements in place for each jurisdiction. This will mean an additional federal investment of over \$278 million in communities in British Columbia this year.

It is important for me to understand the needs of local and provincial governments. I welcome your input and will ensure that your suggestions are considered the next time we evaluate the program parameters of the Gas Tax Fund. As you know, the existing administrative agreements are in place until 2024, at which time we can consider your proposed changes.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities

c.c. The Honourable Ralph Goodale, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Arjun Singh
President, Union of British Columbia Municipalities