



STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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[The committee met at 15:42.]

Chair B. McLeod: — Welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. And thank you everyone for your being here as quickly as you could. We will get started right away.

I'm going to introduce myself: Blaine McLeod as Chair of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. To my right, I have MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Megan Patterson, MLA Jamie Martens, and MLA Brad Crassweller. And today also, on my left, we have MLA Erika Ritchie, MLA Matt Love, and MLA Noor Burki.

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for your presence here tonight, or this afternoon I guess, and it will turn into tonight. Last time I was in this Chair, I signed my name and initials 800 times. I'm not planning on doing that tonight. There's only this much, so we're in good shape that way. But today we will be considering three bills.

Bill No. 38 — *The Building Schools Faster Act*

Clause 1

Chair B. McLeod: — And we're first going to consider Bill No. 38, *The Building Schools Faster Act* beginning with the consideration of clause 1, short title.

Now Minister Hindley is here with his officials. And again I ask that officials introduce themselves the first time they speak. And don't touch the microphones, and the *Hansard* operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

Minister Hindley, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments, please.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be here today to talk about *The Building Schools Faster Act*, 2025, which is Bill No. 38. I'm joined today by Chief Of Staff Caelan McIntyre; Ministry of Education Deputy Minister Clint Repski; Assistant Deputy Minister Charlotte Morrisette; Ministry of Government Relations Assistant Deputy Minister Bonnie Chambers; and as well, several officials from the ministries of Education, Government Relations, and SaskBuilds and Procurement.

The Building Schools Faster Act will define the requirements to acquire and service land for new schools throughout the province. Purchasing additional land is often necessary, as we are building larger schools requiring more land than what is often available through municipal reserve under *The Planning and Development Act, 2007*.

The new Act will establish municipal responsibility to acquire sufficient serviced land for the purpose of constructing new schools in development areas. The cost contribution formula will be defined in regulations, allowing the Government of Saskatchewan and municipalities to share the cost of land in a predictable and consistent manner. The new Act also establishes the authority to set land acquisition time frames and enforcement mechanisms for municipalities.

[15:45]

Now in conjunction with the new Act, amendments to *The Planning and Development Act, 2007* have also been introduced to provide municipalities the tools to fund and acquire school sites. Providing mechanisms for municipalities to fund the purchase of land through levies or municipal reserve, for example, are necessary as this new Act requires municipalities to pay for a portion of the land.

A consequential amendments to *The Education Act, 1995* will also be required in conjunction with the new Act and regulations which are currently under development and will be brought forward after Royal Assent. A defined-cost contribution from the province will be developed in the regulations.

A defined-cost contribution allows the ministries of Education and SaskBuilds and Procurement to advance projects consistently and more effectively. This will reduce lengthy negotiations and allow parties to plan and budget for education infrastructure.

Thank you for the opportunity to outline the key elements of *The Building Schools Faster Act* and amendments to *The Planning and Development Act*. My thanks to the ministries of Education, Government Relations, and SaskBuilds and Procurement for the dedicated teams that have worked together to develop this important Act and related amendments. I look forward to continuing our shared work to deliver on our school infrastructure commitments in our province.

And our team would welcome your questions today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, Minister. I will now open up the floor to questions, and I recognize MLA Love, please.

Matt Love: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Minister, and for your officials from Education and Government Relations who are here today. We'll have a number of questions. We've got lots of time, starting in the afternoon, moving into the evening. Mr. Chair. Hopefully we'll keep those signatures under your 800 quota for today.

Minister, my first question for you is what is the position of your government on municipal governments paying for education-related costs in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. So as part of the planning around this particular Act, and this helps to address some of the issues and concerns that we've seen in municipalities across the province but predominately specifically in our cities where, you know, as I mentioned in my opening comments that we're building schools that are larger than we ever have before, larger than perhaps would have been contemplated previously with respect to the land that was available for schools of this size.

As part of the consultation, government is coming to the table with a contribution agreement as per the consultation and the consultation we had with a wide variety that are impacted by this legislation. Municipalities have paid before. So this concept isn't

necessarily new, but what we're trying to bring to the table is some consistency and predictability with respect to what that is going to look like. So that's just, at a high level, the reasoning for it, but I'll just maybe turn it to one of the officials here to explain it in a bit more detail.

Bonnie Chambers: — Hi, my name is Bonnie Chambers. I am the assistant deputy minister of the municipal relations division with the Ministry of Government Relations. Happy to be here and happy to answer the question.

Minister Hindley is correct. Over the years, municipalities have provided land for schools. But now we're seeing that in the larger cities where the growth is happening, the cost of this land is higher and the schools that are being built are for the neighbourhood that surrounds them too, the concept plan.

So with this Act not only will the province provide funding for it too, the municipalities will provide it, but it will also be a collaboration about where these schools are and the neighbourhoods that they service as well.

Matt Love: — Great. So just coming back to the minister's comments here. Minister, you indicated and your officials that municipalities have paid before. Costs are going up as the size of school projects escalate. You know, we have a project committed to in Saskatoon that will serve 3,600 students. As of today, I believe that that's the plan.

So you mentioned some historical precedent, but my question is, today, as the Minister of Education, is it your position that municipalities should be paying for education in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. And to the member's question just, you know, as I said earlier around the land component, it's been viewed as a shared responsibility between the province and municipalities.

Again, this is about trying to replace some of the case-by-case negotiations that have happened up until this point with respect to planning for new school developments which are . . . They're a good thing that they're happening, but we just need to be able to update what we're doing, the tools that we have to be able to address some of the realities of today with respect to how municipalities and the government plans for this. The Ministry of Education, we're looking at building new schools in communities. But maybe I'll just ask Ian to speak a bit about the tools and why we have those in place.

Ian Goeres: — Great. Thank you, Minister. Ian Goeres, executive director, community planning branch, Ministry of Government Relations. So through the Act and the related amendments to *The Planning and Development Act* we are providing municipalities with some tools to be able to pay for these costs of a school site.

So that includes an increase in the municipal reserve dedication amount by 2 per cent or up to 2 per cent if authorized in the municipality's official community plan and/or they can also implement a development charge. So off-site levy, development charge, service agreement fee — they're all one and the same. Essentially what it does is allows the municipality to share those costs with that growth area with the neighbourhood that school

would be servicing.

So what we heard from stakeholders is if this is going to be something that is required, then the municipalities need some tools. So we clarified through *The Building Schools Faster Act* that municipal responsibility and then ensured that the municipalities have those tools.

[16:00]

Matt Love: — Okay. Thanks to your official for that response, Minister. And we'll be coming back to discuss some of these tools later in our time today. We've got plenty of questions from stakeholders on these issues.

Minister, to you, you know, I hear you say that municipalities are expected to fund education through school land acquisition. So my question to you is, where should municipalities . . . From what revenue source should municipalities fund the cost of purchasing school land? Should that come from property taxes from ratepayers or should that come from municipal revenue sharing? Or, Minister, do you have another source of revenue from which municipalities should pay for these education-related costs that I haven't mentioned yet?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. With respect to the question around the avenues or the options that municipalities have for this, what we've done is we've provided . . . And there are several levers, several avenues here for municipalities to pay for a number of things in this regard, whether it's levies, whether it's municipal revenue sharing — which, as members of the committee know, that is no-strings-attached funding provided by the provincial government to municipalities, and they have the ability and the decision-making powers to spend that money as they see fit — whether it's on, you know, sidewalks and sewers and local infrastructure projects, whether that's recreation or perhaps, in cases like this, they do have the ability or the option to use it for these sorts of initiatives as well.

And I think, you know, what's important is that this is essentially growth paying for growth in areas of the province where we have some of these challenges. And we do provide, again . . . The reason we have the tools that are there, are to provide municipalities with some options that they can decide at the local level. The local city council or town council, you know, they can decide what they use, what works best for their community in terms of being able to address some of these initiatives and pressures, but you know . . . these investments, I should say, with respect to new schools.

And so we do provide that flexibility for municipalities, the ability to use a number of sources of funding to pay for growth.

Matt Love: — Minister, my next question is specifically prior to the drafting of this legislation — prior to, you know, first reading. Who was consulted and when did these meetings take place? If you can provide the committee with a list of, again, which organizations were consulted and the dates that those meetings occurred.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Stakeholders engaged with: city of Saskatoon; city of Regina; the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, SUMA; Saskatchewan Association

of Rural Municipalities, SARM; Regina & Region Home Builders' Association, and the Saskatoon & Region Home Builders' Association. Consultations occurred spring of 2025.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. We'll return to that list here shortly. My next question is, since the bill was released publicly, what feedback have you received since first reading of this bill from those stakeholders listed or others? And have you received any feedback raising concerns about this legislation?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — In terms of feedback — and I went through the list of the stakeholders who were engaged — the responses were varied from the groups that we heard feedback from, that we consulted.

There was general support for expanded municipal tools and early identification of school sites and concept planning. High school sites in particular raised some unique size and funding and regional challenges requiring some additional work. That was some of the feedback that we heard back from as part of the consultation. There was some questions raised around cost-sharing clarity, with some questions around what that would look like, you know, and if there was an opportunity for further discussions with our officials.

We did hear that local flexibility was preferred with respect to servicing standards, with consistency being sought under subdivision regulations. There was conversation, I think, and feedback around some of the timelines with respect to if, you know . . . for example in a case where a school might not be built.

[16:15]

Strong interest in consultation and transparency though, particularly in the regulations, the funding formulas, and enforcement tools. And there were a number of areas of support for the legislation. Of course there were some questions and concerns — I think the home builders had raised some concerns publicly — but we've committed to continue working with them through the development of the regulations and the work that's happening going forward. But, Ian, I think there's probably some other aspects to this you can touch on as well.

Ian Goeres: — Great, thank you. Yes, the home builders' associations raised concerns about the cost of affordability of new homes if these costs would be transferred directly to a new homebuyer. Now what we've done is provide municipalities with those tools that we mentioned, whether it's the increase in municipal reserve or the ability to charge a fee or, as the minister mentioned, MRS [municipal revenue sharing], property taxes, etc.

What we've done through this and the related amendments to *The Planning and Development Act* is to allow the municipal council to make that decision, to work with their development industry to see what works best for their situation. So Regina may have a different process than Saskatoon, and we want to ensure that they had that flexibility.

Matt Love: — Okay, thanks, Minister. We'll come back to that topic. I think it raises a lot of questions that we'll get to today. I'd like to, Minister, if I can, I have a letter from the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association that I'd like to

quote from extensively. So I brought a copy for you to follow along. I'm happy to table that for the committee, Mr. Chair, if you'd prefer to do it that way. And I even have an extra copy if the minister would like to take this one. I'll just wait a moment until it's in your hands.

So Minister, my next number of questions are going to be related to the concerns raised in this letter, and I'll go through chronologically so you don't need to read it all now. We'll go through kind of chunk by chunk. You know, SUMA raises a lot of concerns in this letter that they have shared with us and requested us to share with you. My first question. I'd like to read a quote from the first body paragraph and then ask for your response.

So to quote from the letter from SUMA president Randy Goulden:

The most concerning aspect of this entire process has been the lack of engagement, communication, and transparency. Although a working group was established, meetings have been minimal, sporadic, and insufficient to gather meaningful input from affected stakeholders.

So Minister, can you respond to this concern from the Saskatchewan municipalities, who will most certainly be impacted by this bill?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for providing the letter. First time I've seen the letter, so just having an opportunity to review it and the concerns raised by SUMA.

I guess I would just say again, having just seen the letter now, you know, we've been having consultation and meetings with the two largest impacted municipalities — with the cities of Regina and Saskatoon — and I think it's been appreciated by this province's two largest cities that we are having this feedback or this consultation, that the feedback is being taken seriously, that we are engaged with them.

You know, I can quote from letters where the city of Saskatoon says:

We'd like to thank you and your team for engaging with the city and for the continued opportunity to provide feedback on the development and implementation of the regulations for *The Building Schools Faster Act*.

They appreciate the province's support in providing tools for it. They do comment that:

We see benefits in further discussion. Looking forward to future discussions on the forthcoming regulations. Thank you for your continued conversations and your commitment to partner in the development of schools and support of neighbourhood planning.

Again so some issues that have been identified, but very grateful comments from the city of Saskatoon for the engagement of our government and of various officials from all the ministries that are involved.

Similar comments from the city of Regina along the way in

working with our officials. They appreciate the ability to collect development charges and levies. They want to continue the conversation with the working group.

Again some challenges identified both with respect to our two largest cities. Both appreciative of the work that's been done thus far by the ministries and their teams.

Again having seen the letter from the president of SUMA for the first time and having to look at the concerns from the president, I'll take note of those comments that she has made and raised in her letter. But again, would point to what we feel at government has been consultation and engagement with municipalities, particularly our two biggest cities where this presents, you know, the largest challenge with respect to planning and development of new schools in growing neighbourhoods.

Matt Love: — Returning to the letter, Minister, following the quote that I just read, another quote:

The absence of follow-up clarity on next steps and ongoing communication has been particularly disappointing given the time and effort invested, reinforcing concerns about poor and at times dismissive consultation.

So my question is, can you share with the committee why a major stakeholder like SUMA would describe your engagement as “dismissive consultation”? And could you share with us what concerns they raised that you dismissed?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — To the member, I would just simply say that, you know, I've given some examples where both the cities of Saskatoon and Regina have appreciated the involvement of our officials and the consultation and the communication that's happening back and forth between officials within the various ministries of government. Again thanking the government for engaging with the cities, thanking the government for the continued opportunity to provide feedback and further discussion. And these are recent comments at the officials level, I think, which reflects, you know, the work that has been done.

I can't speak to why the president of SUMA would make those comments. You know, I would hope that in writing a letter that SUMA and the organization, that the leadership would have engaged with officials at some of these municipalities to gather their feedback.

Again understanding that there are some concerns that have been raised, but also a number of areas of support for the steps that are being taken, the reasons behind why this legislation and this Act and the regulations are being introduced: to provide clarity and consistency with respect to building more schools in the province and being able to make that process quicker and more efficient with respect to the expectations for land and the acquiring and the development of land for school projects.

So again, having seen the letter for the first time, I don't know, you know, what would have gone into that. But what I've heard from officials at the cities of Saskatoon and Regina or what I'm seeing from those two cities is that they are identifying some challenges. That's the nature of these sorts of discussions and consultation and communication. But again, it's my view that

they do not feel that they haven't been engaged and that they have not had an opportunity to be engaged with our officials as we work through this.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. Returning to the letter: “Early in the process, materials were not made available to working group members despite repeated requests.” So, Minister, who was included in the working group for this bill? And why were materials not made available to them?

[16:30]

Ian Goeres: — Great, thank you. So we had the two meetings — one in April, one in May — to kick this off. So for the first meeting, it was really an introductory to have everybody meet each other, provide a broad overview of school acquisition in the province, and hear some initial thoughts.

The second meeting in May, we discussed what we had heard from the first meeting, and it was really a general discussion item. So materials were the agenda that would have been sent out in advance. There was a PowerPoint that was on the screen to keep the conversation moving. That would be it. That's how we were gathering the feedback from those stakeholders, including SARM, SUMA, the home builder associations, and the two big cities.

Matt Love: — Were school boards included in that working group?

Charlotte Morrissette: — Hi. Charlotte Morrissette, assistant deputy minister at the Ministry of Education. So the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, we met with them, with the president, with Government Relations to have a discussion about the Act as it was in development, so to hear their concerns and to meet with them.

Matt Love: — So, Minister, I'd like to hear from you. Were Saskatchewan School Boards included in the working group that led to the development of this legislation?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I talked to the president of the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association]. We'd had conversations, as we do, on a number of topics when we meet with the SSBA. And this would have been a topic of conversation as part of one of those regular meetings that we have with the leadership at Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

Matt Love: — So your officials have listed members of a working group, some who have raised concern that consultation was dismissive and materials were not provided. That working group included SUMA, SARM, Saskatoon, Regina, and home builders from each city. But I did not hear Saskatchewan School Boards included in that list.

So just for clarity's sake, I think a yes or no would work here. Were Saskatchewan School Boards included in the working group for this legislation?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, they weren't a part of the official working group, but we did engage with them through other forms of consultation.

Matt Love: — So I'm just going to pause my prepared questions here, Minister. Do you think it's wise as the Minister of Education to bring forward a piece of legislation for which major stakeholders are raising very reasonable concerns? And for you, as Minister of Education, school boards were not included in the working group to draft this legislation. Just to pause right here. Do you think it's wise to proceed at this point?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Don't appreciate the context of your question, Member.

Matt Love: — I think it's a reasonable question considering the concerns and now learning in this committee that school boards were not at the table. And you're the Minister of Education, so I think it's a fair question . . .

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I've said that, you know, we've engaged with a number of organizations — with municipalities, the cities of Saskatoon and Regina, home builders' associations — and the consultation has taken different forms as well. And you know, as we develop this legislation . . . And with respect to the regulations, we've said it in some of the feedback that we've had and the responses that we've had to various stakeholders. And we're going to continue to consult and have these consultations as we develop the regulations, working our way through the legislation.

Matt Love: — Okay, I'll accept that answer, Mr. Chair. And you mentioned you're going to continue to consult.

So let's return to the letter that we're working through here. I'm going to read another quote following the previous one:

Engagement has not improved since the legislation was announced. And five months after the Throne Speech, there is still limited information on the regulations and cost-sharing formula for how these costs will be split between municipalities and the province.

So again we have a major stakeholder who's upset about the process and the transparency, and they indicate that there's been no improvement since this bill was announced in the Speech from the Throne.

So my question to you, Minister, is, when will regulations be made available? And will there be a working group to ensure that important feedback is included this time in the drafting of the regulations?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I'll reach out to the president of SUMA, again having seen the letter that yourself and one of your colleagues had solicited as per trying to receive some feedback from them. So I'll reach out to the president of SUMA.

We haven't had any letters from SUMA, is my understanding. At least I haven't. I stand to be corrected, but it's my understanding I haven't had any letters from the president of SUMA asking for a meeting specifically on this or to raise concerns. We haven't had any letters since last fall.

But I'll reach out to the president of SUMA and engage with her and ask for further clarification as to, you know, the nature of her concerns — where they come from, who they represent — and

endeavour to address those concerns as part of the work that's going forward.

Matt Love: — So just to repeat the question: will there be a working group to ensure that important feedback is considered in the regulations? And, Minister, this time will school boards be at the table when those regulations are drafted?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We'll continue to involve the various groups that are impacted by this, you know, as part of the consultation going forward. And that will include the SSBA.

Matt Love: — And when can stakeholders expect to see regulations released following . . . Assuming that you choose to proceed with this bill, when can they expect to see regulations? And what will be the cost-sharing component of that when it . . . Have you determined that yet?

[16:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We're targeting introduction for the regulations in the fall. And then with respect to the cost-sharing agreement, that is, you know, that is precisely one of the items that's being discussed right now as part of the consultations. So that work is happening as we speak.

Matt Love: — Okay. Returning to the letter, I'd just like to read another quote here and hear your response to these concerns, Minister:

We do not feel SUMA has had a fair opportunity to provide our concerns to this legislation. Our primary concern relates to the requirement for municipalities to procure and service additional lands for schools where municipal reserves are insufficient, with limited financial tools to do so.

Ultimately these costs will be passed down to home builders and eventually to homebuyers, resulting in further increasing housing prices in a time when all levels of government are working to address housing affordability. This is deeply concerning as it further burdens municipalities with costs for providing a provincial service in education.

If you could just take a moment to respond to that concern, Minister.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Again having just seen the letter for the first time here this afternoon, as I said previously, I'll reach out to the president of SUMA to have the conversation around the concerns that are raised in the letter with respect to, you know, having an opportunity to offer their feedback and input as an organization. So I will have that conversation. I'll have that conversation with SUMA and discuss it further in order to try to address the concerns that they are bringing forward.

Matt Love: — Well, Minister, I'd like to ask a few questions about this concern that they've brought. And I'll say, you know, as shadow minister for Education and you as minister, we usually have conversations about things like class size and complexity, you know, collective bargaining, education workers, those types of things.

I am now, as shadow minister for Education, going to ask you about housing affordability, which is not something I had on my bingo card when this session started, but here we are.

One of the concerns that SUMA has raised in this letter is about house prices at a time when all levels of government are working to address housing affordability. And so my question to you is on that topic. Just one moment here. I'm going to pull it up. So given these concerns . . . And one of your officials pointed to the tools that this legislation provides municipalities to rely on. One of those tools would be a levy for new homes.

We've heard concerns that the end payer for this legislation will be a homebuyer. And let's just consider for a moment a first-time homebuyer for a new build in a developing community — Saskatoon or Regina or another, you know, municipality — in the province. And one of the concerns that we've heard is that this legislation and the cost sharing could result in increasing costs that will be worked into the cost per square foot of a new home build that would result . . . I've seen a figure of somewhere between additional costs of 7 to \$10,000 for a new house.

So as Minister of Education, you've brought forward this bill that stakeholders have indicated may result in increasing housing costs 7 to \$10,000 for a first-time homebuyer. So what is your response to that concern? And what would you say to that first-time homebuyer who's looking at additional costs of 7 to \$10,000 that could potentially result from this legislation?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Just in response to the question, again municipalities asked for flexibility and some tools with respect to, you know, what options they would have here. And that's what we've attempted to provide through the Act and what we'll determine through the regulations. So that's how we're going to and have been approaching this.

Matt Love: — So again, any response to that first-time homebuyer that will see their costs go up?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — You know, I would just say that, you know, that as a government we are concerned about affordability on a number of fronts. And I think we've had this debate in the House and elsewhere publicly around affordability measures that the government has taken in a number of areas and the steps that we have taken for long-term affordability measures.

And that impacts people in different ways, whether we're talking homebuyers, whether they're first-time homebuyers or not. You know, not necessarily every homebuyer that's a first-time homebuyer might be building a new home. But I do, you know, recognize that there are a number that, in new areas and new developments, that this would be something that they would be looking at.

Again the government takes a number of measures and steps to make sure that we are making affordability, you know, a top priority for this government. And we're, you know, we're proud of the steps we've taken over the years to be able to do that, but recognizing that these are challenges that face jurisdictions across the country. And so we're mindful of that when we make these sorts of decisions.

And again want to make sure that we continue to engage in this

particular case with our municipal partners and others to identify these challenges and try to address them as best we can.

Matt Love: — So thanks for bringing up the topic of affordability, Minister. Thinking of affordability, would you say that this is a step in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Well the critic's now bridging into . . . from his housing critic portfolio duties to now the critic of Finance. So I guess I'm happy to have the conversation.

But I would just say again that we're here to talk today about *The Building Schools Faster Act* and addressing some of the issues and concerns that we've seen with respect to making sure that we have the appropriate amount of land available for new school builds, and some of the challenges we've come across the way over the past number of years, and the 109 new schools that we've either built or are in the process of building right now. And a number in our two largest centres in Regina and Saskatoon, but also across the province.

So with that comes, you know, questions and pressures and challenges and opportunities as well as to how we continue to grow the province, to address enrolment pressures when it comes to our K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12], pre-K to 12 school system. And also with respect to replacing and renovating and consolidating schools in other parts of the province as well.

[17:00]

So you know, we take that challenge, we don't take it lightly. And recognize that we're working very hard with our partners at all levels to make sure that we address those challenges.

Matt Love: — Okay. Returning to the letter, Minister:

Additionally if municipalities are given limited choice but to charge development fees for the acquisition of land for new schools, this puts them in direct contradiction of a large push from the federal government to lower development costs.

Access to current and existing federal funding comes with an expectation that federal grant monies will be used to offset/lower development charges, further leaving municipalities handcuffed on how to find additional resources to pay for these downloaded charges.

Minister, can you comment on these concerns that increasing development charges may jeopardize federal housing programs and our participation in them.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah. Not going to comment. I'm not the Minister for Government Relations. So I'm not going to comment on, you know, federal government policy or potential policy that might be in conversations that they might be having with municipalities with respect to development cost. You know, I don't think that would be appropriate for me to intervene from that perspective.

But again, I just say with respect to this particular bill that we're here to answer questions about today, and as I've said before, we're committed to engaging and continue to engage with the

various stakeholders. And in the case of the letter, we'll reach out to the president of SUMA to further that conversation with that organization.

Matt Love: — So, Minister, I think that points to some of the questions that a lot of folks have on this bill in terms of how it was brought forward. You know, we're not in the Human Services Committee. This is a bill that largely impacts municipal stakeholders. I know you're not the Minister of Government Relations. But yet as Minister of Education you brought this bill forward. And one of the things that stakeholders are saying is that it may jeopardize Saskatchewan's participation in federal housing programs.

So my next question is about that. And it's very, very much related to this bill, and since you're the minister that brought it forward, you're the minister here to answer these questions. I can't bring in another minister at this time. So you're the minister here. And I'm going to ask questions about federal housing programs.

So my question is, there is a potential conflict with the Housing Accelerator Fund agreements. And the HAF requires municipalities to reduce barriers and cost to spur supply. Adding new mandatory servicing costs for schools could be viewed as an impediment to these federal commitments.

So my question to you is: if this legislation makes it more difficult for municipalities to access federal housing accelerator grants, will your government repeal or amend this legislation in the future?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Sorry, where's the member getting this information from? This isn't in your letter that you're reading out for the committee here word by word? Like where is this?

Matt Love: — No, it's my own question based on the concerns brought forward in the SUMA letter. So I'm not quoting from the letter. I'm simply asking if, you know . . . One of the requirements that I understand is required to access the federal housing accelerator grants is that all parties are working to lower development costs, and if this legislation increases development costs, it could impede municipalities' ability to receive these grants from the federal government.

So my question to you is, if that is the case — and I'm not certain it is, Minister; I'm saying if it is — will you repeal or amend this legislation so that Saskatchewan communities can take part in those federal Housing Accelerator Fund grants?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We'll bring it up as part of our consultations. My understanding is that the accelerator fund, that that's a conversation directly between the federal government and municipalities. I don't think the province is — what I'm told — at the table.

Again if that's something that we hear as part of our conversations we have, then you know, we can certainly take a look at those concerns and what steps might be possible to address it. But again that's not something that I've come prepared to answer today. But certainly if it's raised in the conversation with SUMA or others as part of the ongoing conversations, we can certainly have that discussion with them and look into it

further.

Matt Love: — Yeah, I think that's correct, Minister, that these are agreements directly between municipalities and the federal government. And my question is, if this provincial legislation impedes the ability for the municipalities to receive those grants to make housing more affordable and more accessible, would your government consider in the future repealing or amending this legislation so that those housing grants can be delivered to folks who are trying to access housing? And municipalities are trying to lead the way in providing the needed housing for a growing province.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah. As I said, we'll . . .

Chair B. McLeod: — Just a second. The minister's been asked that question now several times, and his response has reflected the available information that he has. That's more a question for Government Relations. So I want you to move to a different line of questioning, please.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. And I want to explain that I think that a number of my questions are about housing and are about affordability. Despite the fact that this is the Minister of Education bringing this bill forward, it has far-reaching impact that I do think he should be prepared to answer today.

I respect your judgment, and I'll move on to my next question. But certainly, I think these are important questions that folks deserve answers to.

Chair B. McLeod: — And I will just respond by saying that the minister has indicated and will be having conversations with the affected parties in regards to this, and ongoing consultation will happen. So I think that has satisfactorily answered the question in my opinion. Thank you.

Matt Love: — Yeah, I'll just take just a moment to move on to my next question then.

Okay, returning to the letter here, Minister:

SUMA recognizes that municipalities can use tax tools including development charges and levies to support school site planning. However we remain concerned that the proposed changes do not adequately address the unique site requirements of high schools which serve broader regional populations.

So the way that I interpret this concern is, you know, that high schools draw in students often from surrounding areas. They serve a region in a way that's, I think, often different than elementary schools.

So how would you respond to that concern, the offloading of these costs and the planning to municipalities for a service that serves the entire region? How would you respond to those concerns, Minister?

[17:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — With respect to that particular paragraph in the letter, I think that actually, you know, it does

reflect the reasoning behind the legislation. And you know, I would say that this is one of the main reasons why we're pursuing this. And again I'm recognizing the president feels that the proposed changes . . . she has some concerns with that, I suppose.

But that again, to the broader context of the paragraph, high schools do have unique site requirements. As I said in my opening remarks and earlier in committee, high schools are large — larger than the high schools that we've ever built before. They do serve a broader and a larger area. And we're seeing that as municipalities grow, as neighbourhoods grow and new neighbourhoods are established.

And part of the challenge that we've come across is that growth has been happening so quickly in some areas of Saskatchewan as a result of continued population increase and immigration and newcomers that come to our province. And just for a whole host of reasons that, you know, we're finding ourselves in situations where what may have worked previously in terms of the amount of land that was set aside or contemplated either for residential developments or potentially in this case — in the topic that we're talking about here today — for schools might not necessarily be enough given the student population that we're trying to serve.

So that is why we are doing this and it is why we're engaging with Government Relations, you know, with SaskBuilds and Procurement. And you know, I think the member had some comments earlier about other ministries that may be impacted here as well. Again that's why we remain committed to continuing to have this consultation, to have this feedback with stakeholders and others that offer, you know, their input on this.

Again though, you know, this is something that I think we feel is needed in order to be able to provide some clarity, some consistency to help plan for, to prepare for these sorts of situations to get ahead of them sooner with respect to making sure that we are thinking about this in as far advance as we can and having clear communication between us as the government through our various ministries, through municipalities. As well, as new neighbourhoods are being contemplated and then what services might be required there that are either (a) offered by the municipality; or (b) in the case of schools and education, through the province.

So I would just again say that with respect to the question around high schools, that is something that we recognize is a challenge. And that's why we're committed to having these conversations and looking at approaches that we can use to collaborate to come up with the best plan to move forward.

Matt Love: — Okay, Minister, my next question is about the short title of this bill. The short title, *The Building Schools Faster Act*, certainly infers that school builds have been happening slowly and that this bill intends to speed up the pace at which schools are built. So in your opinion, why have school capital projects been moving slowly in this province? And what problems are you looking to solve with this bill?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — The reasoning behind *The Building Schools Faster Act* is — as we've talked about today and previously — it's around the acquisition of the land.

And that's something that, you know, we've felt and have

identified, and it's been recognized that there have been some challenges, particularly in our two largest centres, I guess predominantly with Regina and Saskatoon — not saying that this can't be an issue in other parts of the province as well — but just the increased complexity of identifying land, the acquisition, the site infrastructure challenges that affect project timelines. The negotiation that's involved is part of this as well. The cost to acquire land, install infrastructure for schools, that places significant demands on budgets for everyone.

And so it has been happening very much so on an ad hoc basis. And you know, the whole purpose of the land is to be able to provide a consistent approach to school land acquisition and development and a defined funding formula for both parties in order to have that predictability there.

And so we have seen instances where in the past where there have been some challenges with respect to how do we, you know, work collaboratively with our partners in the municipal sector? And we've committed to improving and working on that collaboration and making sure that we are having these conversations well in advance so that we have the municipalities and the government on the same page with respect to, if there's going to be a new development in a new neighbourhood, what does that look like for the province?

Where do we, you know, have to be thinking ahead? Is that going to mean . . . Is there capacity in nearby and existing schools in that particular school division in that area and in that neighbourhood? Or do we need to start thinking about, you know, how we're going to serve that? What is the condition of schools in that particular neighbourhood? Are they reaching end of life? Should we be having discussions about replacement of that particular school?

And if we're having those sorts of conversations, should we then also be looking at, you know, potential growth in that area with respect to the K to 12 population and demographics for that area?

So again, the purpose of the legislation is to address some of those issues and challenges that have come up along the way, where perhaps hindsight is 20/20. And I think all parties would agree that, you know, there perhaps could have been a different approach with respect to preparing for schools and new schools, and making sure we address that.

I've said multiple times, you know, we've made significant investments into infrastructure in this province: minor capital, major capital projects, brand new schools, major renovations across Saskatchewan, and 109 new schools that are either have been built or are in the process of being built. They're at various stages of planning, design, and development right now across Saskatchewan, and working closely with our partners on that.

We know that Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions provide a capital list to the government, to the Ministry of Education, of their priorities. And we work closely with those divisions on working to advance projects. And again they're all excellent projects, but they're difficult decisions to make. And so it's part of this and the discussion and debate that we're having today, and the work around the Act is to address specifically some of the challenges around the land and making sure that we have the land in place for schools and making sure that we do everything we

can to make that part of the process as efficient as possible.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. In that response you indicated that the slow pace of building schools has primarily impacted Saskatoon and Regina. We have a letter from both board Chairs of Regina Public and Catholic that we've previously released following question period a number of weeks ago. I'd like to quote from that letter:

While this may support earlier access to school sites, land readiness represents only one component of the overall school construction process. Other key factors — including funding approvals, design processes, and construction coordination — remain critical hurdles.

As a result, their proposed changes may address one barrier but are unlikely on their own to substantially accelerate the delivery of new schools.

So can you respond to this? These are the two largest school divisions — here in Regina, one of the two municipalities that you said will be impacted — and they indicate that they don't expect *The Building Schools Faster Act* to build any schools faster.

So could you respond to that quote and also share with the committee what you're going to do to address all of those other factors indicated by Regina Public and Catholic that are also important if we want to deliver schools faster?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, I don't have the letter in front of me. But I've seen it, you know, earlier this spring and had a good co-operation and collaboration with both board Chairs of Regina Catholic and Regina Public. I understand, you know, talking to both of them and both of those divisions and their administration through our officials, the concerns that they've raised.

I would say that, and just reiterate that, land acquisition and site servicing is often an early and lengthy source of delay. So ensuring that we have serviced land secured early allows for approved school projects to proceed to design. So this is one of the issues, and I think that's what the Act addresses. And that's the intention of the Act, is to address those sorts of concerns.

And again we have had instances in the past where that has been the case, where we've identified this being a challenge in cities where there have been some issues with respect to acquiring the land, having it serviced, and preparing for this sort of growth. So that's what I would say on that.

I take issue with the member's earlier comments, and he put words in my mouth because I did not say anything about the government building schools slower. As I said, the government is proud of the record we have of investing in new schools across Saskatchewan — 109 major capital projects, brand new schools right across this province. I think, 26 in each of Saskatoon and Regina. Projects right across this province in rural communities, in northern Saskatchewan, in the communities that members on both sides of the House represent as MLAs.

And the member may choose to disagree with that. We know there are certain schools he does not want to see built and go

ahead, namely the Shellbrook school and perhaps others. But this government is proud of the work that we're doing where we continue to build schools across this province.

Matt Love: — Minister, my comments were about indicating that building schools faster, I asked you what problem you were trying to solve. And I was responding to that.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I was pretty clear, as I have said multiple times — and I don't know why the member doesn't understand, but I'll say it again for the committee — on the challenges that we've identified around land acquisition and site servicing. So I hope the member has written it down.

Chair B. McLeod: — I'll just comment here that we are approaching two hours, which was requested for both of these bills. 5:43 will be the stop time. And so if there are any questions that you want on the consequential amendment Act as well, you've got 10 minutes roughly.

[17:30]

Matt Love: — Yeah, I'm going to focus mostly on Bill 38. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Minister, section 9 of the bill, return of cost contribution grant. One of the concerns that I have is the potential for a municipality and potentially a school division, based on cost sharing, to incur fees for acquiring and servicing land, and then that the minister could essentially withdraw or pause the plan to build the school on that site. Can you help the committee to understand the intention of this section in the bill?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So section 9, just for reference for the rest of the committee if they don't have the bill in front of them, reads:

Return of cost contribution grant

9 If land has been acquired for a school site in accordance with this Act and the minister determines that the land is no longer required as a school site, the cost contribution grant made by the minister to the municipality or to a board of education or the conseil scolaire pursuant to the contribution agreement must be repaid by the municipality or the board of education or conseil scolaire to the minister within the time set by the minister.

It's highly unlikely that that would ever be the case. The provision is in there just for the very rare instance where the land that is acquired for the purpose of building a new school, for whatever reason, isn't required anymore.

And again I can't see necessarily where that might be the case. But if for some reason something changes in that neighbourhood or in that municipality or for that school division and it's determined or deemed that the land is no longer going to be used for a school, it just provides that opportunity to have this assurance in there for municipalities. But again, highly a rare and unlikely event that that might happen. But it's a provision in there that provides that assurance.

Matt Love: — So would those funds need to be repaid even if

the municipality or the school division already incurred large costs to service the land or other costs related? Would that be deducted from the amount that they have to return, or would they return the entirety of the funds?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. You know, pretty specific instance, but a fair one nonetheless, provided by the member. That would be something, just in consultation with my officials, I understand will be determined as part of the regulations, that sort of a calculation. Further to that . . . And again, this is, you know, a fairly unlikely circumstance or event. But in the event that we are faced with that sort of a situation, the regulations would address that.

The regulations will also establish dispute resolution processes as well so that fairness can be applied to, you know, the particular circumstances and why that would have occurred. Again, I can't necessarily foresee, you know, an instance where that might happen. But again, this will allow for those rare instances where this might present a challenge.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. Can you share for the committee which previously announced, or you know, projects that the Government of Saskatchewan has committed to, will be impacted by Bill 38 and 39?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah. And again, maybe just some clarity around, not 100 per cent wouldn't say "would be" but "could be" impacted, could benefit from the Act.

The anticipation is that the Act will come into force this fall. So there are several school projects that have been announced and are anticipated that they could — again, using the word "could" — be benefiting from changes as a result of the Act. That would be the Regina East joint-use high school in the Towns, dependent on the timing of requiring the land in that particular case; Saskatchewan West public elementary school, so that's one of the Kensington schools; and the Saskatoon West Catholic elementary school, so the other Kensington school; and then as well the Martensville-Warman joint-use middle-high school.

Matt Love: — So just from my understanding, Minister, the east side Saskatoon projects in Holmwood and Brighton, those wouldn't be included because the land has already been acquired. Is that correct?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, that's correct.

Matt Love: — Okay. And one of those projects I just mentioned, we've discussed here this afternoon, the Holmwood school which will be, you know, purpose built for 1,800 students on each side — 3,600 students. And I understand some of the reasoning you've provided for the committee tonight is, about the increasing size of schools and the scale of projects, you know, that have increased since these projects were first announced, is one of the reasons that this bill is needed.

Would you consider as ministers, is it best practice to build schools of that size? Is this your intention with this bill to continue to announce schools of this size into the future?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Just with respect to the size of the schools, you know, and these are very large schools. I would say

that there are, you know, some existing schools currently operating in the province, not necessarily joint-use schools that we're talking about, but that have, you know, fairly large populations, I think 1,500, 1,800 kids in some existing schools that we have in Saskatchewan in, you know, a couple of our cities.

But the numbers that we're talking about, that's, you know, us being responsive to what school divisions are coming to us with. So the sizes that we're contemplating and that we're looking at for these new builds aren't something being necessarily directed by the government. It's the school divisions coming to us saying, here's what we think we need based on our enrolment projections and other factors. So that's, you know, that's where we're responding to, to the asks from school divisions. So that's where the numbers are coming from.

And we of course would ask questions as government about the numbers when they're submitting capital projects and new requests and when we're talking about numbers of this particular size when it comes to new schools. So that's where the response comes in. You know, in some cases we've seen in the past where we do have schools that perhaps could have used more space, because we're adding on relocatables sooner than perhaps anticipated.

So again, I don't think we, you know, we don't want to be in a position of overbuilding of course, but you want to be mindful of what school divisions are telling us with respect to how many students they think will be coming through their doors and how many will be registering and taking classes in those schools in the years to come.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, then. We've come to the time allotted for this bill, and I see that there will be no more questions as a result of that. So we're going to proceed to vote on the clauses. And I will just make reference to the fact that we will wait for closing comments by the minister and by the members until we go through both Bill — make sure I have the numbers — 38 and Bill No. 39. So we'll move through that as quickly as we can.

So clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 14 inclusive agreed to.]

[17:45]

Chair B. McLeod: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Building Schools Faster Act*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 38, *The Building Schools Faster Act* without amendment. MLA Martens moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

Bill No. 39 — *The Building Schools Faster Consequential Amendment Act, 2025/Loi de 2025 corrélative de la loi intitulée The Building Schools Faster Act*

Chair B. McLeod: — Consideration of Bill No. 39. Moving directly to clause 1, short title, without questions due to the agreement in terms of time spent on its entirety on Bill No. 38. Yeah, thank you. So clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.]

Chair B. McLeod: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Building Schools Faster Consequential Amendment Act, 2025*, a bilingual bill.

I'd ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 39, *The Building Schools Faster Consequential Amendment Act, 2025*, a bilingual bill, without amendment. MLA Martens moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. So thank you for everyone being here tonight. Minister and your officials, good discussion. And thank you for the participation from everybody involved here. So any closing comments, Minister Hindley?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yes, just a thanks, Mr. Chair, to the committee members who are present here today for their questions around this bill, and thanks to the officials who were here answering some of the more detailed aspects of it, providing information to me. So thanks to the team not just at the Ministry of Education but also the folks here from Government Relations, and of course SaskBuilds and Procurement is part of this as well. And so thanks to them, and thanks to all the committee members for supporting the bill, voting in favour of it.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you very much. MLA Love, any concluding comments, please.

Matt Love: — Yeah. I'll thank the minister and the officials from Education and Government Relations who were here this afternoon, and I don't know if this counts as evening yet, but we've got a little ways to go. Thanks for your time and service for our province. Thanks to the committee members for hearing my questions for the last couple hours as we engaged in this important discussion. Thanks for your time, and again to all these officials here today, thanks for your work for the province of Saskatchewan.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you so much. So we're going to take a short recess. I would suggest let's take 20 minutes and be back here at 6:10, and we'll see if we can get the evening through. Thank you so much.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 43 — *The Municipalities Modernization and Red Tape Reduction Act*

Clause 1-1

Chair B. McLeod: — And thank you very much, everyone, for returning from recess, and we'll move back into the meeting again. So we're going to move on to consideration of Bill No. 43, *The Municipalities Modernization and Red Tape Reduction Act*, beginning with consider of clause 1, short title.

Now Minister Schmalz is here with his officials. And I'm just going to ask again that officials please introduce themselves the first time they speak, and no touching of the microphones. The *Hansard* operator's going to have it turned on for you when you speak. So Minister Schmalz, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments, please.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening, everyone. I am pleased to speak about Bill No. 43, which will amend *The Cities Act*, *The Municipalities Act*, and *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010*.

I am joined by several ministry officials who will introduce themselves as they speak. Together these three municipalities Acts establish the legal framework for how municipalities exist and function. The Ministry of Government Relations' consultation process spanned nearly a year and a half and included issue papers, public surveys, research, analysis, and many meetings which informed the following amendments in three key areas.

The first focus on transparency and public access to information. Changes in this bill will require municipalities to post key municipal documents like meeting minutes, financial statements, and bylaws online. While many municipalities already do this, citizens expect this standard of all governments in this information age. For municipalities who do not have websites, they have until September of 2027 to make arrangements to post information on a publicly accessible website.

The second set of changes enhance local governance and accountability of council to the people who elect them. This bill will require municipalities to offer orientation training after each general election. All elected officials will have access to training on roles and responsibilities and other important aspects of the job they were elected to do. This bill also states that council members must follow the principles of procedural fairness. This reminds them of their responsibilities as elected officials and when dealing with challenging situations of council, conduct, or conflicts of interest.

[18:15]

Finally there are several amendments aimed specifically to improve municipal process and reduce red tape. The bill will make it easier for municipalities to deal with taxation and bylaw enforcement issues related to illegal dumping, dangerous animals, and tax arrears. This bill also continues work to improve property assessment appeals, allowing parties an opportunity to enter into an agreement to adjust the assessment without the

expense and time of holding a hearing.

Additionally there are some House amendments included. Bill No. 43 includes provisions that gives council direct authority to give orders concerning dangerous animals instead of going to a judge. After the bill was introduced, cities asked to remove those changes to *The Cities Act* since they do not face the same challenges of court access as other municipalities.

House amendments will also correct some record-keeping responsibilities of the Clerk that were incorrectly assigned to the city manager. After this bill receives third reading and Royal Assent, the ministry will re-engage stakeholders to develop regulation changes to support this bill.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, Minister. I will now open the floor to questions. I recognize MLA Erika Ritchie.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you and welcome to the minister and his officials for being here today to answer our questions about Bill No. 43. I'll maybe start with some higher level kinds of questions before sort of digging down deeper into some of the more specific questions that I have here today.

Minister, in your introduction of the bill to the legislature, you know, you talked about red tape reduction. And I'm wondering if you could define the threshold at which red tape reduction begins to undermine public accountability, and where in Bill 43 that line has been expressly protected?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, I'll start and maybe hand it off to officials in a moment. I just would point to primarily the removal of duplication or redundancy in some of the Acts. We want to make sure that we're streamlining. If there's one Act that provides direction for those activities to occur, that they are indeed not being duplicated in another Act.

With respect to . . . I guess we could use the example of the dangerous animals in a community where there's an opportunity for a municipality to act more swiftly in dealing with dangerous animals while still providing due process to the owners. I think that that is a significant reduction for those communities, as they are serious issues for some municipalities. I'll maybe hand it over to Andrea Ulrich.

Andrea Ulrich: — Thank you. Andrea Ulrich, executive director of policy and program services with the Ministry of Government Relations.

Specifically regarding the duplication, there was one instance where when a person is nominated for office, they submit their nomination papers to run for office. Then they also do a public disclosure form of any conflicts of interest. When they're elected, *The Municipalities Act* then requires them to submit those same papers. Just removing that second submission, all they have to do now is declare that nothing has changed and then the same papers can be used again. It's just one process where we're cutting out a duplication.

And with the dangerous animals orders that the minister referenced, the municipality still has to have a bylaw and have all the due process and make sure they're following the right steps. So they have to have a bylaw that supports that process in order to be able to make those orders. We're protecting the process but also letting them be much more efficient, as the minister mentioned, in being able to deal with those dangerous animals.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you for that response. On the topic of dangerous animals, in some of my consultations the issue of bylaw enforcement has come up and sort of limited resources for municipalities. Many, as you know, do not have enforcement officers or they share them or they contract them. And that with limited funds and limited access to have bylaw enforcement, they identified that as problematic in terms of enacting the changes on that piece of the bill.

So I'm wondering if you can share, you know, how you intend to support municipalities in implementing that portion of the Act.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So specifically to the supports that we're providing through Government Relations to municipalities and their efforts to provide bylaw enforcement or any kind of services to their residents or RM [rural municipality] I guess or urban municipality, what we do typically is we provide support funding through targeted sector support where municipalities can join, as you mentioned in your question regarding were there collaborations made between municipalities to, you know, share the cost burden with bylaw enforcement or setting up a bylaw enforcement program in their municipalities.

We provide some of the funding in order to enter into those agreements or build those agreements. We also of course provide municipal revenue sharing, which is something that can be used to support the efforts of bylaw enforcement.

Specifically to this bill, what we're doing here is removing another barrier from these municipalities. You mentioned the bylaw may be an impediment for some municipalities. In addition to that bylaw enforcement piece, they then would have to go and find a judge or seek a court order to deal with these animals. What we're doing is removing one of those barriers and providing supports when and where we can for bylaw enforcement to occur.

So this is again another measure for municipalities to deal with, like I said, the dangerous animals, illegal dumping, tax enforcement, all of those things — removing the impediments around those and making it a simpler, more straightforward process.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you, Minister. I also had the opportunity to discuss these proposed amendments with New North at one of their recent meetings up in Prince Albert. And you know, for them they deal with a lot of stray animals in their communities. It's a major issue, as I'm sure you're well aware. They talked about the need for funding for a veterinarian to be able to address some of those concerns that could turn into I guess dangerous animal situations.

I wonder maybe if you could elaborate or offer any feedback in terms of how communities, especially in the North who are

experiencing some of these changes, how this bill is going to facilitate or address that concern.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah. So in our consultations with respect to judge availability or court availability in the North, having lived in the North myself for a significant portion of my previous career, there's very sparsely timed availability for court and judges in the North. Through our consultations we heard that that was a problem or an impediment for them to deal with, specifically the owners of dangerous animals and the ability to deal with those.

With respect to the actual stray animals and the animals themselves, that falls under the Ministry of Agriculture under that . . . I believe it's *The Stray Animals Act* . . . animal protection Act, I apologize. So we're again trying to remove impediments for municipalities, whether they be in the North or not, to be able to deal with animals, particularly as it seems — and I recall these many times having lived there — the issue with stray animals in the North.

So yes, this is again another measure by which we are providing that ability for communities to deal with these issues in their own way. And maybe I'll get Andrea, if you would please, just cover off some of the . . .

Andrea Ulrich: — Sure, thank you. So yeah, specifically when we were talking to the council of Creighton, they raised this, that they have the bylaws in place. They want to be able to deal with dangerous animals under that bylaw, but they simply weren't able to get the court orders that were required by the judge. So they expressly asked for municipal authority to deal with this.

Under *The Municipalities Act* it is about animals that are owned where the owner is known. Their bylaw can also deal with . . . You know, in a situation of, like, an emergency situation where an animal's attacking, then they can deal with that of course without going through any red tape or anything like that.

[18:30]

But that does fall under the Ministry of Agriculture. So we also had discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture to make sure that we were dealing with animals effectively from both sides and that we . . . yeah, just also efforts to help municipalities understand when something came under *The Municipalities Act* or when it came under *The Animal Production Act*.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you for that. Now you mentioned transparency being a major theme of this Act, and I guess I have one question there in terms of the deadline that you mentioned of September 2027. To your knowledge, or based on the consultation that you've undertaken, will these enhancements for public reporting, development of a website, create a challenge for some smaller municipalities? And if so, what recourse will they have?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, thanks for the question. With respect to the websites and website development for small municipalities, I mean, we're currently in an age where a lot of these are very simplistic tasks to be able to set up a web page, reserve a domain name, and move to have web-hosted documents available to the public. Any number of sites are available for that.

Within the ministry we are providing support to municipalities through advisory services for them to be able to reach out and have conversations with our officials and provide some direction on how they may achieve this in an effective way.

Again, posting of financials and public record on a website is something that we feel — again, through some of my experience even from the municipal sector as an elected official municipally — that there is an opportunity there to cut down on unnecessary inquiries when those documents are publicly available, and it's not tying up administrative time for those individuals having to repeatedly show, fax, or send emails of those documents when they're publicly available on a website that's fairly easy and cheaply obtained. I'll let Andrea speak on that a little further at this point.

Andrea Ulrich: — Thank you. We've had calls for municipal information on websites from Canadian Taxpayers Federation for several years, from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, from Ombudsman Saskatchewan. And our public survey also found there was strong public support. Of course people just expect to be able to find information on websites these days fairly easily, especially of governments, so there was a lot of support.

Of course when we did our consultation, we did hear from SUMA particularly that some smaller villages had concerns about the resources needed to comply with that. That's why we're giving them, you know, quite a bit of time — since it was announced in fall when this was introduced, almost two years — to come up with a solution.

They don't have to have a municipal website. It can be a regional website. It can be one of the associations. It could be on King's Printer. As long as it's a publicly accessible website, then that meets the requirements, so they have a number of different options that way. And SARM has also done quite a bit of work setting up a hub for rural websites, for rural municipality websites, so I expect we'll see an uptake of those sites as well.

We have also heard personally from some administrators who are, you know, very supportive. Since they started having a website, they have far less requests for information, and it in fact is a time saver at the end of the day. It's not very difficult, of course, to set up a website these days.

Last we heard — 2024 is when we did some information collection on this — the largest number of municipalities that didn't have working websites were villages, which is what you expect to see. Almost all towns had them and almost all resort villages. And about a third of the RMs did not, and then some of the northern municipalities.

That was two years ago. I expect even now we'd see some of those numbers change. But you know, we're certainly aware of those limitations, and we think this is going to be a big step forward in terms of transparency and just accessibility.

Erika Ritchie: — Yeah, and I guess I should also clarify that, you know, certainly I would concur with those stakeholders that you've been engaging with around that being an expected — not just best, but expected — practice of public organizations to have that kind of information available. Certainly in the casework that

I see coming across my desk, it oftentimes has to do with a lack of access to, you know, public documentation on files. And so certainly support the measure, but still had the question for those smaller municipalities who may find it challenging to implement.

So maybe moving on, another thing you mentioned in your opening remarks had to do with procedural fairness. And I'm wondering if you could elaborate on what is meant by procedural fairness and, in particular for Saskatchewan municipalities, you know, how that's defined for them and how they can ensure that they're adhering to it.

Andrea Ulrich: — Thank you for the question. You know, the reason this came about is some conversations we heard from some councils who struggle with some of the investigations that they do into council conduct or things like that — well how do we do this and that? And really, we don't want to intercede and say, this is exactly how you should carry out an investigation, right. We've outlined some principles that they have to follow, but really they are enforcing their own code of ethics and code of conduct.

So in discussion with the Ombudsman, you know, the Ombudsman hears about these issues all the time, has been doing an incredible amount of outreach this year with municipalities and to talking about the difficulties they face with carrying out investigations and just doing due process. So the solution that we came up with was to put this in the Act for something that they can point to. The Ombudsman can point to it and say, this is a duty of elected council members to follow the procedural fairness.

It's well established in case law. So it's a concept that is kind of, you know, even above provincial law. And they can point to it and say, as long as you were doing the duty of procedural fairness when you're doing your investigation, then you're doing your duty.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you for that answer. How will municipal councillors understand what that obligation looks like to achieve procedural fairness? What in this Act will facilitate that, or beyond the Act, I suppose?

Andrea Ulrich: — There's a lot of education available because, like I say, it's a concept established in case law. This is not unique to a municipal government. And the Ombudsman is expanding resources and training significantly right now in this space. We also have advisory services with the ministry, so at any time councils and administrators can call and ask for advice in terms of how they're doing those investigations and be advised. So there's a lot of resources available.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay. I guess related to this is the amendments that address training for councillors and the requirement for it to be provided. However there isn't a similar requirement that it actually be undertaken by councillors. So I'm just wondering if you could explain that decision process or why you landed where you did in terms of provisioning but not requiring that councillors receive training.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks. Thanks for the question. Through a process of consultation, obviously we've had discussions with representative organizations that are SARM and

SUMA, ensuring that they were providing feedback on any proposed amendments in this area. We wanted to make sure that they were heard as well as our constituent members were heard on it.

What we wanted to do was to approach this in a . . . we'll call it a softer way, ensuring that there's educational opportunities available for new council members to be better equipped to conduct and do their jobs as members of council. We didn't want to be overly prescriptive in mandatory training at this point.

We wanted to take the opportunity to do this on a phased approach. We want to have a look at what the uptake will be over the course of the next four years in our jurisdictional scans. Across the nation there are jurisdictions that have started in this way. They began with the option of mandatory offering of the training to newly elected or currently elected council members, and then eventually moved to the mandatory.

We wanted to make sure that if there was an opportunity, if we were seeing good uptake, that it wasn't necessitated that it become mandatory right out of the gate. We wanted to make sure that there was still the ability of people to choose whether or not they take that training and thereby not discouraging people or intimidating people from running for council thinking that they would have to take some type of significant training program, training regimen in order to do their jobs.

[18:45]

Erika Ritchie: — I think that, you know, one of the things I hear from stakeholders is that . . . I recognize, you know, you explained a bit of a phased approach. But certainly it does mean that that lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of councillors in general will mean that certain issues may continue to persist without adequate competencies in place.

And so as you go through that process of phasing in and testing and seeing kind of what is and what isn't working, are you providing any kind of mitigation or contingency to address persistent issues that may continue to present themselves to municipalities?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So currently what we have in the province is a municipal leadership development program, which was being offered through both SUMA and SARM. The curriculum on those programs for those two organizations is being wound down. They're not going to be offering it anymore.

What we're trying to do in conjunction with SARM and SUMA is to try to develop or help them or lean to a more regimented education program or educational tools to be able to put in place to offer to newly elected members of council to ensure that that's available to them.

Right now what we're relying on specifically is that there are obviously several organizations and post-secondary institutions in the province who offer this type of training. We're again looking to — as this grows and interest grows in the educational components of municipal councillors — to have that available to them through a more . . . I guess we'll call it regimented channel through both those representative organizations. We're moving that way to ensure that we as well, again, don't intimidate anyone

from running for council and ensure that there's still that openness to have them attend and learn on the job.

Andrea Ulrich: — So one of the things we'll be following up with in regulations though is the required topics for this training to ensure that the most important things are covered. So we'll be consulting on this further, but potential topics would be administrative rules and processes, roles and responsibilities of council members and administrators, conflict of interest and code of ethics, budgeting and financial administration, and the structure of the municipal system, and a harassment-free workplace.

These are things that we already know there's a lot of content out there. But just in terms of making sure that what is offered by each municipality hits the important topics . . . So we will be starting with that amount of structure just to make sure that those key topics are covered.

But as the minister said, we also need to know that the education, you know, kind of system is built up over time. That doesn't happen overnight. And if you've got 775 municipalities with councils needing to take training, that's significant. So this is certainly something we've been looking at for a while, and we're excited where this can go. But it's not something that you can just snap your fingers and implement overnight. The implementation side and the back end, there's significant challenges.

Erika Ritchie: — Yeah. And I did want to ask more about that, because certainly I think on the implementation side, whether it's mandatory or voluntary, I can only imagine that building awareness, setting expectations, ensuring people understand why it's important that they take this training, that that's being clearly communicated by the ministry.

So can you tell me a little bit about how that implementation and awareness building will occur?

Andrea Ulrich: — Certainly. We've been working with the municipal associations — SARM, SUMA, the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association, and the Urban Municipal Administrators' Association as well — and cities. And so this is only the kind of thing that will succeed if all of these associations and the ministry are working together. So plan to have more discussions on that with them; also with, you know, some of the post-secondary institutions who are also in this space of training, and just try to coordinate efforts.

And we're pretty early on in those discussions. But we know that the associations are very supportive of better council training resources and that we all have the same goal at the end of the day.

Erika Ritchie: — I don't think . . . Oh, with all due respect, you know, I heard something a little bit different when I was speaking with stakeholders. On the one hand, I heard administrators speak very strongly in favour of requisite training being compulsory, you know, because I think for them, a lot of this, when there is a lack of competency, it sort of lands in their lap to sort of clean up the mess, as I'm sure the minister can be quite well aware of.

And then also, you know, hearing comments that some people like to sort of learn by doing as opposed to sort of being more

proactive, I guess. And to me it seems like it's also a bit of a cultural shift. And I don't know if there's a question there actually, more of a statement. I apologize to the Chair for that.

But just, yeah, I'll be watching with great interest to see kind of how that proceeds, unless you had something you wanted to offer, Minister.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, to your point, absolutely I think there's opportunities there, specifically with . . . we'll call it on-the-job training with members of council coming to the table with skills already in hand, finding specifically around say, large urban centres . . . or not necessarily even that, but just usually that's where individuals with significant acumen or a pre-existing skill set come on to council to provide that leadership and that voice for their community. They bring skills to the table that wouldn't require them to necessarily take all the training.

But again we want to be able to, in those areas where individuals feel they need help or they need to be able to deal with an issue where there was a shortfall, or they feel they don't have the knowledge or intrinsic knowledge to be able to deal with things like . . . I've worked with council members who have openly admitted they don't know how to read a balance sheet and they need the help learning how to do that. So those type of things. We want to be there to support them, to ensure that they're able to actively participate in the processes of their council. So that's again some of the things that we feel we can fill that stopgap.

Erika Ritchie: — You know, I guess sort of one case that comes to mind readily for me is the RM of Lac Pelletier where, you know, there has been some decisions that have been rescinded and then reinstated. A lot of confusion clearly I think on the part of council in terms of what their obligations and duties are as a council. And I don't know even just kind of where that responsibility lies on the part of the administrator versus a reeve versus the councillors. I mean, you know, they all kind of play a role in that.

So I wonder maybe if you could highlight for me how the amendments in this bill would address a case like that.

Megan Istace: — I'm Megan Istace. I'm the director of municipal engagement. To answer your question, advisory services provides advice when it's sought by municipalities. We can't comment specifically on municipalities' inquiries to us at committee, but if they're having difficulties with procedures, meeting procedures, we will be more than happy to help them with those questions, walk them through their obligations under the legislation and procedures.

Sorry, this is the first time I've spoken at a committee, so I'm a little nervous. I will leave it at that if there's anything else to be added.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, over to me. Thank you. Well thank you for that response. Perhaps I'll move on. One of the things that's been added to the bill is an Indigenous advisor. So the bill permits councils to appoint Indigenous advisors. I wonder why the government chose a permissive rather than a mandatory approach if reconciliation is a stated priority.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks for the question. I guess I would

want to point out that municipalities are in fact an independent level of government and they have the ability to make those decisions on their own. What we've simply done is to provide the space for them under which, in the Act, under which they are provided the legislative framework to conduct business, that they have the opportunity to be able to provide that to their council and to their ratepayers. I'll turn it over to Andrea to speak a little bit more and expound on that.

Andrea Ulrich: — Sure. Yeah, thank you for this question. This was one of the interesting requests that came in during consultation from a northern village. And it follows what we already have in place for the ability to have non-voting youth members, to have them be able to sit with council and participate in deliberations, however not be a council member and not be a voting member and have any kind of conditions around that that council may decide. And so they asked for something similar for an Indigenous advisor.

We did also hear specifically from the larger cities that already have advisory committees where they're getting those Indigenous perspectives and participation. So we recognize that there's a number of different ways to do this. However, with the request, you know, it seemed like a really good idea, but they're an autonomous level of government. Of course it's their option to do that. This just provides that framework for them and has a kind of built-in option for them to use.

[19:00]

Erika Ritchie: — Will there be provisions for the province to support municipalities in identifying, compensating, or appropriately integrating Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers into their governance processes?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — I would suggest that this probably would be the area that we just described as far as the non-elected advisor to a council. This would allow them the opportunity, however they choose, to provide remuneration to the individuals that would be part of that council. Those would be obviously up to the municipality.

What we don't want to be is we want to . . . Any time that we move into the municipal space, we want to do so in a very measured way to ensure that that level of autonomy is still maintained while providing surety to the citizens of Saskatchewan that they are being represented in the appropriate way. If there is a, you know, a council that chooses to bring on an advisor and compensate them for that work, I would suggest that that's up to that council. But as far as mandating specific remuneration or requirements for an individual such as Elders to be brought in, I think that would be up to the municipality.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you for that answer. At the SUMA convention recently, there was a presentation by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. Certainly there does seem to be efforts under way, by SUMA at least, to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. And so I think that's really good work.

I'm just wondering sort of what role you see as the ministry in sort of furthering relationships between municipalities and neighbouring First Nations and in . . . You know, there seems to

be a lot of opportunity for collaboration and how the amendments in this bill would be supporting that.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks for the question. I would put it to the committee that it is happening now organically. I've had many interactions with many rural and urban municipalities who are in fact engaged with their neighbouring Indigenous communities and First Nations. In *The Municipalities Act* we are providing the space for those activities to occur through some of these initiatives that have been put forward in these amendments.

What we want to do is make sure that we're not impeding those in any way. We've got these, you know, wonderful collaborations happening in large urbans as well. We've seen it through our urgent care centre partnerships. We've seen it through, you know, urban reserve lands being outlined. And those are processes that are being undertaken by both the Indigenous representation as well as the municipal representation in those communities.

This is something that our province is doing quite well on its own. And we're providing, as a government, that space for those activities to occur. And we're seeing real results that are benefiting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this province.

Erika Ritchie: — Related to that, in *The Northern Municipalities Act* there are provisions for economic partnerships to occur, but we don't see that in the other two municipal Acts. I'm wondering if you could speak to why we see it there in *The Northern Municipalities Act* but not in the other two Acts, that opportunity.

Andrea Ulrich: — Yeah, thank you for that question. I could probably speak for an hour on this, but I won't. I guess we have some time. The legislation for northern municipalities has been through a number of different iterations and reflects a lot of the unique history of how the north part of the province was administrated and still is administrated differently than the southern part of the province.

So the differences you see there do come out of unique circumstances, consultations that happened in 2010 when that Act was rewritten. And you know, there's still just a lot of room for improvement. But what we know is that a lot of these partnerships, economic partnerships, are happening not even using the provisions of the Act. As the minister mentioned, these partnerships are already happening in many places, especially in the North.

Those communities are working very, very closely. They're side by side. They're essentially the same street, right. The provisions of *The Northern Municipalities Act* are almost more artifacts than anything. And it's certainly something that we've looked at at the ministry and we could improve perhaps. But what's happening in the real world right now is often not kind of directly under those provisions. It's more because municipalities have natural person powers. They can enter agreements; they can become part of corporations. You know, they already have all the powers to have those partnerships and do that collaboration without us expressly permitting it or setting up the structure and legislation.

Erika Ritchie: — That's fascinating. I guess I really want to just sort of ensure that I understand full scope of what you're saying.

So for example, say a city and a rural municipality and nearby First Nation want to partner on either a municipal undertaking or an economic project, are you indicating that the way that these amendments will work — in addition to the Acts themselves — that there would be no impediments to them acting in partnership to undertake an initiative or an undertaking of that sort?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, thanks for the question. And I mean what I can point to right away is currently there are some of these conversations occurring right now in the province and those are around recreational facilities, cultural facilities. These are real initiatives that are being, again, organically brought forward by the communities that are going to be benefiting from them the most. And that's the regional aspect.

It's something I've taken great pride in in this role as long as I've had the honour to serve here in that I've been a very big proponent of collaboration. Regardless of which communities they are — rural, urban, or Indigenous — I want to make sure that if we can do something together for the benefit of all, that we provide the framework or the ability for those individuals or entities to be able to come together and build what they need with respect to those types of good works. Our municipalities Act does provide space for that to happen. The amendments, again, create even more ability for that to go forward.

So I'll let Andrea talk to that a little bit more.

Andrea Ulrich: — Yeah, I wouldn't say that we looked at amendments too much on this space in this go-round, but certainly we have before. Just making sure there's transparency for what we call controlled corporations. So that's the kind of corporation I was speaking of; that's a model that can be used. So municipalities would have 50 per cent or more ownership, then it's considered a controlled corporation and they have obligations to do their audited financial statements and have auditor's reports and such for controlled corporations.

In the North we're seeing this model used for regional landfills. So that's been a really big undertaking. And then you have the municipalities sitting on those boards as well as First Nations, of course. And they're all engaged together, running these regional landfills. And yeah, like I said, that's been a really big hurdle to get over, and it's really only one that they've been able to make any progress on by working together as a corporation.

Erika Ritchie: — And so when you say “controlled corporations,” I don't think I'm familiar with that concept. You mentioned municipalities sort of having, I guess, more of a controlling interest through 50 per cent . . .

Andrea Ulrich: — Exactly. 50 per cent or more.

Erika Ritchie: — And is that basically the requirement? So then if a municipality is entering into some kind of a collaboration, is it necessary that they have at least 50 per cent ownership? Or can it be less?

Andrea Ulrich: — They don't have to have a controlling interest. That's just when it becomes a controlled corporation, and that's when it becomes, under the Act, in terms of transparency and having financial statements for it.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, I see.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — I'll maybe expand on that a little bit. I think a lot of that has to come in to play when you're dealing with the administrative burden of operating these facilities. You want to make sure that there's the ability for those audited financials to be put in place and have some of that infrastructure for these corporations to succeed.

Erika Ritchie: — Earlier on, Minister, you mentioned that a lot of this collaboration you think is happening organically. I just wondered though, you know, if there isn't opportunity for the ministry to demonstrate leadership as well. Or if you are, how that is being undertaken.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, thanks for the question. Some of the initiatives that we've undertaken over the last 12 months, particularly in the municipal space trying to ensure that we are approaching any potential opportunities as a province, that we're doing so hand in hand with our municipal partners, our Indigenous partners.

We want to make sure that, you know, if we're entering into another integrated bilateral agreement we have all parties at the table to ensure that they are being heard and their requests and requirements of their individual communities are being recognized when we're at the bargaining table to come forward with a new set of funding agreements with our federal partners.

We did that last year. I mean that was highlighted quite effectively by what we call the Team Saskatchewan approach when we went to Ottawa with our municipal and urban and rural partners in a joint way to ensure that the federal government heard from the municipalities, not just the provincial government, but the municipalities that would be the end user and beneficiary of any integrated bilateral agreements.

That's something we want to continue. We want to ensure that we are taking that leadership role. We did that at the behest of myself and cabinet in that we were wanting to again bring a united voice. And it was impactful. It was quite impactful as stated by the individuals that we met with.

They hadn't seen in their experience as federal politicians that there was a province come to the table with their municipalities at the same time to all state the same end goal, to provide opportunities for municipalities to benefit from integrated bilateral agreements, whether they be in the areas of infrastructure or in the areas of recreation, recreational infrastructure as well.

So we want to make sure that again we are supporting our municipalities in this province. And we look forward to continuing in those leadership roles with that.

Erika Ritchie: — And I'm sorry . . . Thank you for that answer. I should have been more specific when I mentioned leadership. What I'm specifically asking in regards to is around reconciliation and partnership with Indigenous communities.

[19:15]

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — I'll just say that, with respect, this is

probably a little bit . . . This is kind of going off the subject of the bill here. But I will state just publicly that we've . . . Of the 94 recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 34 of those were pointed at the provinces. Right now we are meeting 30 of them. In addition to those 30 we are also taking on, of our own volition, 17 additional recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

So we, as far as a leadership role, I think we are exhibiting that leadership through our willingness and our earnest wish to, you know, engage in that process and ensure that we are being active participants and true partners for Indigenous people in this province. But like I said, with respect to the bill, I think we're probably moving off the bill a little bit with respect to this. So I just wanted to state that for the record.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, thank you very much. You know, again sort of in line with more sort of high-level questions, you know, this opportunity to put forward amendments also sort of raises or begs the question around why it is that we have three separate municipal Acts as opposed to one Act that sort of governs all municipalities.

Did you consider that as part of your review, and if so, what the outcome of that was or if you had feedback. Certainly I had some questions come to me in my consultations, you know, that there are some upsides to sort of one large municipal bill as opposed to three separate ones. Would you care to address that question?

Andrea Ulrich: — And thank you for the question. Again we could delve into the history of how these came to be, having the three Acts, but there's certainly been more differences in the past between what used to be the urban municipalities Act and what was then the rural municipalities Act.

So there has been some consolidations over the years, but we did not get any requests during consultation to consider merging all three into one. In fact we have heard specifically from cities that they want to continue having a cities Act that is just for cities. And there are provisions in *The Municipalities Act* that are just for rural municipalities, and there are provisions in *The Northern Municipalities Act* that are just for northern municipalities.

So we have not heard any requests to merge them, and certainly some of those differences are important in terms of the different structures of how a rural municipality is specifically compared to a city. And it would also be an immense amount of work. So if we heard those requests, it's something we'd consider if there was an impetus for it, but we have not received any.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, thank you very much. Some of the casework that again I see in my office has to do with situations where there is allegations of council members who are acting in a conflict of interest.

We see that in some cases where, you know, there are unauthorized drainage works and environmental damage, and oftentimes members of the public can feel quite powerless in terms of seeking recourse in these kinds of situations where they may be, you know, the recipients of some of these decisions by their council.

I wonder if you could speak to the amendments in the Act and how they will strengthen accountability and discourage conflicts of interest from occurring going forward, and when they do happen, what enhanced measures these amendments will offer to ensure accountability going forward.

Andrea Ulrich: — Thank you for that question. Conflict of interest is something that was significantly amended in 2016, and so these rules have been in place for some time. Saskatchewan was a leader in Canada in terms of putting in the definition of conflict of interest that aligned with case law.

And it's certainly, you know, been a shift for people to think of conflicts not just pecuniary interests but any conflict that they might have as council members and then also as citizens. So there are some tools, you know, that are addressed in these amendments; however the core of those rules have been in place for some time.

One thing that we heard of is council members actually refusing to sign an oath of office which specifically refers to . . . It reinforces their agreement to follow these rules. And so one change that we made in this bill is that if they don't sign the oath of office they can't actually function as council members and take part in council activities, which would mean they could not attend meetings in an official capacity, which could lead to disqualification.

If they have a conflict and they do not deal with it appropriately according to the rules, that can also be taken to a judge for judicial review, again, for disqualification. Councils also have the ability to declare a member's seat vacant if they haven't followed the rules for conflicts of interest. And that can be appealed to a judge. So there's a number of those tools already in place. Any member of the public could take that to a judge as well.

Public disclosure statements, I already mentioned, are a tool of public accountability so that people can see what those interests are. I should mention though that conflicts of interest in themselves happen, right. We don't want to prevent them. They happen, especially in smaller municipalities. It's inevitable. So it's more about that awareness of how to deal with it appropriately and follow the rules.

I mentioned the Ombudsman already and the educational resources and the engagement that they've been doing with municipalities. They saw quite a few more interactions with municipalities this year, and we know that a lot of those are around how to appropriately deal with conflicts of interest. So we definitely see, you know, that kind of shift in paying more attention to these things and trying to do it properly and more engagement from councils on doing that, and certainly support the Ombudsman's efforts in that regard. And again our advisory services can always advise if they're not quite sure how to navigate those roles.

Erika Ritchie: — I guess I have sort of two follow-up questions to that response. I hope the minister can respond to just in terms of, you know, where you see that bar in terms of where you as the minister may step in and intervene when there has been a miscarriage, you know, lack of procedural fairness, a conflict of interest — all these cases.

Certainly it would appear and it's been my observation that there have been some missed opportunities for the minister to step in and request or demand a course of action in some of these more egregious cases. Where do you or how do you see your role in intervening where cases have kind of reached sort of a tipping point or a bar where, you know, an immediate response and action is required?

Chair B. McLeod: — I'm just going to say, I'd like to tie it back to the Act as such and the modernization of it. I feel like we're . . . It's tenuous at best. I will allow the opportunity to respond to it, but we're not going to go down this track very far.

[19:30]

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So just quickly on this. The municipalities again are an autonomous level of government. As the provincial government we provide the legislative framework under which they operate.

So when we are wanting to effect some level of change in the way municipalities operate, we do that through legislative procedures, like we're doing now when it comes to the review of *The Municipalities Act* and helping doing that through consultation with the individual municipalities themselves to ensure that there are measures in place to prevent or to help mitigate those instances from occurring.

Again these are independent levels of government. Members of the public who are having concerns and feel that there needs to be some type of recourse are able to do so through the judicial branch of government and seek advice and action through the court system to ensure that their own measures are being followed.

We are implementing the transparency measures in these amendments. Again that's another way of providing that openness so that the public has a full view on what is going on to prevent or highlight any potential conflicts that are going on. And they can seek action through, again, through the judicial process.

Erika Ritchie: — So, Minister, you started out your response indicating that municipalities are autonomous levels of government, but you know, it's also true that they are a feature of the province. I mean they exist because of *The Municipalities Act*. And so, you know, the Act and these amendments provide the framework and provide the rules within which they conduct themselves. And so I would take issue with your characterization there.

I mean certainly you don't want to be prescriptive and give them as much autonomy, but at the end of the day when there's issues, there is a role there for the province and the ministry to ensure that that fairness, transparency — all those things are being upheld. And I understand that the measures within these amendments are, you know, very clearly directed at that.

So related to that, I sort of have a subset of cases that I deal with where hamlets feel like they're sort of being unfairly treated within, you know, a rural municipal context. And so I'm wondering if you can tell me, with these amendments, what steps have been taken to ensure that the rights of residents within a hamlet are protected when they're dealing with their rural

municipality? And what amendments in this bill assist them in that?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Again respectfully, there's no reference to that in this bill particularly. That's just not part of what these amendments are meant to address. There are provisions in the broader Act that provide, you know, some framework for hamlets to exist and how they may be set up or stood up. However, with respect to this bill, it doesn't have anything to do with this bill specifically.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, that's fine. I did need to ask that question. There's a follow-up question. I wonder if you could clarify for me whether Bill 43 removes the Ombudsman investigative role in reprisal matters?

Andrea Ulrich: — So yes, thanks. That's a fairly technical amendment actually that stems from an earlier amendment that happened in 2020 that the Ombudsman's office felt that the previous wording assigned investigative responsibilities to the Ombudsman that did not exist, just the way it was worded.

So this amendment was to clarify that if a municipal employee makes contact with the Ombudsman, whether or not it's within the Ombudsman's power to investigate, they cannot be reprisal against. So it's just clarifying the role of the Ombudsman's office; nothing to do with, sort of, the actual protection from reprisal.

Erika Ritchie: — Great. Okay, thank you very much for that. Minister, does your ministry intend to undertake any measures that will measure whether Bill 43 is improving public trust in municipal governments versus, I mean, merely streamlining administration?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, thanks for the question. We've got obviously a process in place every four years to review through public consultation — which was undertaken in this instance, as has been in the past — public consultation on where and how the Acts, the three municipalities Acts can be improved. We take those under consideration as government to ensure that, we'll say, the requested amendments are merit-based and able to be implemented without impacting or providing impacts downstream in a negative way.

We ensure that through a broad, and again a very robust, consultation process undertaken by the Ministry of Government Relations, leading up to the introduction of the amendments as you see them here today.

We want to make sure that we're continuing that engagement with municipalities across this province to ensure that the Acts under which they operate are working for them. And that's something we take great pride in, ensuring that we have that open dialogue with our municipalities across this province to ensure that again their voice is being heard when it comes time to have these consultations.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, thank you very much. I'm just scanning a few items here. I did want to touch on just one other piece of case, some questions that sort of arose from some casework. Sort of in a related vein in terms of, you know, that capacity within rural municipalities and their relationship with hamlets. I wonder

if you could tell me, in terms of financial agreements between hamlets and RMs, what is in the existing Act and is there anything in the amendments that addresses, you know, rules around how taxation is applied to hamlets, and if that's changing at all?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Bit of a long consultation for a very short answer. There's nothing in these amendments, in this current bill, that would relate to RMs or hamlets.

Erika Ritchie: — And did the minister receive any feedback on the bill in relation to the financial powers that RMs, you know, have versus their hamlets? You know, certainly I understand that there have been some situations that have gone to advisory services where, you know, hamlets are feeling, are experiencing rather, additional tax pressure limiting their ability to meet their basic community needs and also limit their ability to undertake any sort of legal recourse in a situation where they're in that conflict with the governing RM.

And so, would you consider amendments to sort of address this situation? Or what, you know, what recourse would a hamlet have in such a situation?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Again nothing in this bill specifically, but there is, has been amendments made in the past to help deal with that when it specifically, you know . . . Pertaining to the current amendments before the committee, there's nothing in that right now.

Erika Ritchie: — I committed to asking the question, and I guess you've given me what I need. And I'll do some further follow-up action on that. So thank you so much.

Okay, maybe we'll switch gears now. So, Mr. Chair, there was a letter that was provided to yourself and the committee from Lee Fuller, and I just want to verify that that has been shared with the committee and the minister.

Chair B. McLeod: — It was certainly available to the committee — but not provided — actually just two days ago or three days ago, whenever it was. It was some recommendations in regard to assessment and I'm not sure that that really fits at all with what we're talking about here in terms . . . Unless you can provide me with a connection, I'm . . .

Erika Ritchie: — Oh, it very much does.

Chair B. McLeod: — I'll have to . . . You're going to have to convince me on that one.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, well there are a number of amendments in the bill that deal directly with property tax assessment, yeah.

Chair B. McLeod: — Yeah, and it really was unsolicited letter that came. The minister's not seen it. And so it did go to the IAJ [Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice] committee, but I did not pass it on as of yet.

[19:45]

Erika Ritchie: — So yeah, I . . . We did make some inquiries and it was my understanding that yes, if we shared it with you it

would be shared with the committee. And certainly we did also have a letter in the last bill that we reviewed that also had a letter that was shared. And so I offer that for the minister. If you want to make copies that's fine too.

But I guess part of the reason for this letter coming forward is that we don't allow for expert witnesses at our committees. And alternatively it was suggested that the letter come forth with very specific recommendations that I'd like to address with my next series of questions.

And this is coming from an individual by the name of Lee Fuller. He is a former tax assessor, retired; also served on the SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency] board, so is very knowledgeable on property tax assessment. And he had a number of suggestions and questions that he wanted to bring before the committee for their consideration.

So with that, I'll try to get myself organized here.

Chair B. McLeod: — Before we go any further with this, it would be very fair for the minister to have the opportunity to have a moment to discuss this with his staff. I'm reticent to allow this to go forward. There are some suggestions in here which . . . Yeah, let's get a copy and let's take a short recess, 10 minutes.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Chair B. McLeod: — Okay, we'll come back here. And I'll just say that we're going to have to make sure that any questions in regards to this letter that's been presented is tied very tightly to the amendments that are in the bill that's in front of us. And so I'll ask for that to happen please.

Erika Ritchie: — Well okay, we'll do that. It's my understanding and view though, however, that the contents of this submission are entirely within the subject of the meeting here today, looking at amendments and addressing assessment provisions that are included in this bill. But let's see where we get to. Okay, all right.

So maybe the first matter to bring up is in relation to the amendments to section 214 of *The Cities Act*. And maybe I'll just start by asking, what . . . well hang on a second here. So this is a proposed amendment that would allow direct appeals to Saskatchewan Municipal Board, bypassing boards of revision. I'm wondering if you can tell me what specific problem this clause is intended to solve that cannot be addressed within the existing board of revision framework?

Yomi Akintola: — Yeah, good evening. My name is Abayomi Akintola, director of policy and program services with Government Relations. Thank you for your question.

When it comes to the assessment appeal system in the province we have three levels. We have three tiers. The first level would be the local board of revision, which would be at the appeals first. And if, let's say, they make a decision and the ratepayer does not agree with the decision or the assessor does not agree with the decision — so basically anyone with an interest in the property that does not agree with the decision given by the local board of revision — could go to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, the SMB, give an assessment up to this committee.

They would hear the appeal and they would review the new . . . If their evidence or if they think the first level did not do a proper job or maybe there's some omission or errors in the application of the legislation, so that goes to the SMB. And if any party in the property or in the appeal, if they're unsatisfied with the decision of the SMB, then they can go to the Court of King's Bench, the appeal court, to kind of look at if there's administrative error in application of the law.

[20:00]

So what we're looking at in the amendment to 214 is to work on simplifying the process and ensuring that appeals, that direct appeals that go to SMB, they have proper grounds.

And during the consultation process for these amendments we consulted with multiple stakeholders, our tax agents who are involved, the municipal sector, administrators, and some industry players too to listen to their concerns. And there were no consensus with respect to what it means for appeals to go to the second level. That is why we are looking to do more prescription in the regulations. And when we get to the regulatory amendment stage we will do for that consultation as well.

So in answer to your question is to look for opportunities to streamline the process, court redundancy, and ensure that the appeals that go the second level will have merit and it's not going to lead to wastage with respect to the system itself.

Erika Ritchie: — I guess I'm failing to understand why it would be necessary to override a local appeal process and go straight to the SMB. Does that not contradict procedural fairness provisions?

Yomi Akintola: — Yeah, thanks for the question. The type of appeal that would go directly to the second level, these are appeals that are complex and in some cases the local board of revision themselves, they might not have the capacity to hear those appeals. And also in some cases too we have situations where corporations are property owners, that they own properties across many municipalities, so it is cost savings for the system itself if they can bundle the property appeals together and have one single appeal that goes directly to the SMB.

So the idea is not to take out the first level. The idea is to even make it a better system in ensuring that ratepayers have access to administrative justice and opportunities to argue their point if they don't agree to the assessment. So in essence to that, only appeals . . . There's some criteria with respect to appeals that would go to second level. We will work on the regulations to have more definition, but as it stands right now, complex appeals can go directly to the second level.

And we also see situations where the first level, they might look at the appeal and say, well we are unable to make a decision on this appeal. Then maybe this appeal should go to SMB. So in some cases too, the first level, they would advise the appellant to go to the second level.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, well I think that partially answers my next question. So who will determine in practice whether an appeal qualifies for a direct referral to the SMB? Will it be the assessor, the board secretary, or another authority?

Yomi Akintola: — Thank you for that question. In most cases it is the secretary. The secretary might be able to look at the grounds of appeal. And in some cases too, the secretary of the board, they have discussions with their board members, with the local board to kind of have maybe a preliminary review of the appeal, and they can make that decision to say this appeal should go directly to the second level.

Also the legislation allows the appellant to make that decision on their own in some cases. For example, in the case where I said how if you own multiple properties across the province, you can now go with what we call a consolidated appeal that will go to SMB, instead of going to one local board of revision.

Erika Ritchie: — Just to clarify what you just mentioned, are you saying that the appellant could choose themselves without the secretary concurring or consenting to that process? Like I'm just looking for those checks and balances in terms of, you know, like who's controlling the process and the decision making.

Yomi Akintola: — Right, so the appellant must also be in that discussion with the secretary to make that decision. So it is not just one individual that will make that decision. I'm just talking about, I'm making references to the provisions in the current legislation.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, so it's not unilateral by an appellant. Okay. All right, I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more. You know, it says that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations respecting appeals made directly to the appeal board. So what criteria will be prescribed in regulation to guide that determination, and why aren't those criteria set out in the statute?

Yomi Akintola: — Yeah, thank you for that question. Right now we are gathering more information. And as I mentioned earlier, in our consultation phase there are many ideas, but there was no really consensus on how to resolve some of these situations. So we know that we can make more prescription in the regulations.

So there's some criteria that have been ideas that have been floated around. One of them would be the definition of what a "complex appeal" means. Maybe setting criteria with respect to the amount of the assessment value of a property to say, if the property was this X amount of dollars and if the assessment model is let's say for instance, income approach versus cost approach, maybe this could go to the SMB.

As it stands right now the criteria is still in development. And the criteria will be developed in consultation with Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency, with Saskatchewan Municipal Board, with the municipal sector and all the stakeholders, including the industry and property owners.

Erika Ritchie: — Are you able to give us any sense or flavour of the kinds of things that would be included in those criteria?

Yomi Akintola: — During the consultation stage some of the ideas that were floated around include the type of the property. So if it's, you know, high-value commercial property. Also if it's like maybe millions of dollars' worth of property. And also the assessment methodology. And that is just some of the ideas that were floated around.

Erika Ritchie: — So how will the ministry prevent inconsistent application of this clause across municipalities?

Yomi Akintola: — One thing that we are taking our time to develop is that prescription that I mentioned in the regulations. And that is why we want to make sure that we have parameters that would ensure that an appeal meets the criteria to go to the second level. So it is not going to be a general term. It is going to be prescriptive, and it is going to be specific criteria that an easy checkbox could fulfill.

Erika Ritchie: — And will there be any form of recourse if an appellant or a municipality disagree with the decision to refer or not refer an appeal directly to the SMB?

Yomi Akintola: — Okay. Yeah, thank you for the question again. So the current system allows for recourse. So in the current system that we have, if the appellants or maybe the assessor, if they do not have an agreement as to whether the appeal should go to the second level, then that's a part of the decision that they have to make, especially the secretary. And it doesn't mean they have to be this; it has to go to second level. It could go to the first level first then, before it goes to the second level or it goes to the third level.

And in 2023 the ministry also established a local board of revision training through the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. It's . . . [inaudible] . . . training to ensure that board of revision members and secretaries, they have the knowledge and they develop the competences that would enable them to do their job. And the training has been successful, and it is also part of the criteria for a local board of revision to be certified. So in answer to your question, the current system allows for recourse and it allows for those types of situations.

Erika Ritchie: — All right, thank you very much. I'll move on to the next item, which has to do with section 197(6)(d) of *The Cities Act*, where Mr. Fuller identifies the importance of meaningful dialogue between prospective appellants and assessors. And I think his concern mainly centres around how that provision isn't regularly taken up.

And so given the evidence that, according to Mr. Fuller, the existing provision has been largely ignored, how does the minister expect this clause as drafted to change actual behaviour?

[20:15]

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So the revision here is to clarify and encourage individuals to have that conversation. We've also expanded the period in which that conversation can occur, the dialogue between the appellant and the assessor, to have that dialogue any time up to the hearing so that there's an opportunity for them to engage and attempt to, if at any point, jump off of the appeals process and move in a way that would be more amenable to both parties. So I'll let Yomi expound on that a little bit more.

Yomi Akintola: — Yeah, thank you for the question. Again so one of the amendments allows those type of conversations and discussions to happen, as the minister said, right from when the appeal is filed until the year-end, before the year-end, before . . . There is a limit to when they have to have that discussion. So what we've done is to extend that time, the window of discussion,

to allow that mutual, you know, a resolution to occur.

And another requirement would be that in the notice of appeals filed, there has to be documentation that speaks to those discussions happening to say, we've had a discussion; we just don't agree and we would like to go to hearings.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, well that kind of answers my next question. So there is that provision for documentation showing evidence of those conversations occurring. Because I think the things that are being suggested here are intended to ensure that, you know, issues are getting resolved substantially before they reach the board of the SMB, and address some of the backlog and sort of get some timely resolution, and also ensure some accountability as well of the appellants.

So who determines whether dialogue was meaningful? And how is that judgment documented or reviewed?

Yomi Akintola: — Okay, so thanks for the question. When the conversations happen like that with respect to the appeal, the secretary of the board will review that documentation to make sure that the discussion happened. However when it comes to whether the discussion is meaningful, the meaningfulness definition is not in the legislation.

But in the internal document, the policy for board of revisions, they have to determine and check whether this conversation has happened and who and when those conversations happened with. So to make sure that the appellant would have conversations with the assessor, or if they used SAMA, they had a conversation with SAMA. If it's the city of Regina, they would talk to the city assessors.

So it's, those are like internal policy document that ensures those conversations happened. And in cases where the documentation is not provided, then the appeal could be rejected.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay. And so then just a really basic question. So that's the role of the secretary, to ensure the robustness and that the process is followed. And where does that person . . . like within what organization do they reside and who are they accountable to?

Yomi Akintola: — It depends, and I'm going to just give you some, maybe two scenarios of that situation. So typically the secretary is accountable to the board of revision. And in some cases too, like maybe in large municipalities, the secretary might be an administrator. But we rarely find that happening.

So in most cases, the secretary is accountable to the board of revision. The board of revision is arm's length from the council. It's an independent quasi-judicial, you know, entity. Their main focus, is to, you know, uphold the justice and the assessment appeals regulations and legislation. So yeah, thanks.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, thank you for that explanation. The next item has to do with frequency of appeals within an assessment cycle. And so this is something that is not within the amendments. It was part of the consultation.

It's my understanding that 84 per cent of respondents to a SUMA survey were in support of that recommendation for one appeal

per cycle. It's also my understanding that it would also follow along with customary law and jurisprudence, as Mr. Fuller has outlined in his documentation. And so I mean it would also go a long ways obviously towards reducing the administrative burden that boards are seeing.

And so could you please tell me what policy rationale supports allowing multiple appeals of the same assessed value within a single assessment cycle?

Yomi Akintola: — All right, thank you for that question. So during the consultation, we consulted not only with the municipal sector; we also consulted with a wide variety of property owners. And one of the concerns that we're not comfortable with is limiting access to justice. So if there's any limit on the number of appeals for the ratepayers, it's just unfair to them. And just for instance, if there's a new error in the assessment values, they would be unable to appeal. So we didn't feel comfortable proceeding with that provision.

And another thing too is the results, even though the survey had full support for it, but the question has to do with the respondents of the survey. So like it's not really clear whether the property owners, based on what we had during the consultation from property owners, from tax agents who have interest in their properties, it does not align with that survey.

Erika Ritchie: — Well let's dive into that a little bit more. We currently have a four-year assessment cycle in Saskatchewan. That was something also that was up for debate, but we'll leave that aside for now.

And so given that it's one assessment within a four-year period, what materially would be changing within that four-year period to necessitate a subsequent appeal?

Yomi Akintola: — Okay. Yeah, thank you for the question. There are a couple of things that might change during a non-evaluation year. So for instance, there could be improvements to a property or there could be changes, other structural changes. So meaningful changes to the property. A garage or a storage that used to be in a premise that is gone.

And there could also be situations where an error is discovered, right? How the assessment was done previously. And then maybe if there is limitation to that, they will not be able to appeal. There could be also opportunities for administrative errors in the appeal process that were just recently discovered, and that could change the grounds of appeal.

And one thing that we also want to mention is that this is an amendment that led to, I would say, a lot of debates amongst our stakeholders, especially the property owners as I have mentioned. We understand the importance to the municipal sector. We understand it's going to reduce cost. It's going to streamline the process for them as they think because it's going to weed out more repetitive appeals.

[20:30]

At the same time too, there were a lot of strong opinions from property owners with respect to, what if we discover an error, then we don't have the opportunity to appeal? And we would

continue to consult on this item specifically. That's one of the goals: to continue to discuss, talk to our stakeholders, ratepayers, and the municipal sector. This is not just off the shelf yet; it's a work in progress. And it requires extensive consultation and analysis to really make sure that the property appeal system is fair and it supports everyone that is part of the process.

Erika Ritchie: — So are you suggesting that there will be time to introduce further amendments or make revisions to the current bill to make a change to the appeal process time frame? I do have some other questions, but just going off that last point you made, I'm not quite sure what timeline you're referring to, you know, things being improved upon.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — What Mr. Abayomi is referring to is the review of the Act over the four years, continuing those consultations into the future. It's always a work in progress, always moving into that space in advance of any amendments that are going to be made through legislative changes. So we're talking about the four-year cycle under which we are currently operating with respect to the amendments to *The Municipalities Act*.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, thank you for that. I just wanted to get some clarification. I wasn't really quite sure how to sort of take that response.

You mentioned first of all though that, you know, there may be improvements that happen within that four-year cycle that may require some appeal. But I mean, this seems a little bit backwards to me in terms of, I mean, all properties are subject to that same situation. And it's why there's been, you know, advocacy around shortening the assessment cycle to say two years. Of course that also has pros and cons.

And so to me that argument doesn't really hold water because, if that was truly the case, then you would shorten the assessment cycle, would you not?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So I would point out, for just in point, that this is again outside the scope of the current amendments before the committee. And this would be entirely, I guess, related to the overall Act. However with respect to these specific amendments before the committee, that would be outside of that realm.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, well I would just beseech the minister and his officials to have a close read of Mr. Fuller's expert advice and recommendation as it pertains to the one appeal per assessment cycle.

I think he makes a number of really good points that are equally important and valid in terms of, you know, trying to strike that balance between the interests of the property owners and the interests of the municipalities, who are under significant pressures right now, I would say, in terms of ensuring that, you know, they have those revenues coming in and not always be in a, you know, constant cycle of appeal.

It does create a lot of burden, and if we have an Act that's all about, you know, red tape reduction and finding efficiencies, I think that this is an area where there is some really good advice and opportunity here to strengthen the legislation and ensure that

it's meeting the needs of Saskatchewan people overall.

It's something I hear a lot about from municipal leaders in terms of, you know, this appeal process that it is used in ways that are . . . I can't think of the right word I want to use right now, but you know . . . It's not vexatious, but it is causing, you know, undue administrative burden.

And I would also take exception to the justice argument that you made. I think Mr. Fuller also talked about, you know, one appeal per assessment, you know, following in line with customary law and jurisprudence. And so I hope you'll take a look at that as well, Minister, and maybe come to see the merits of the argument. But with that, I'll move on.

The next one has to do with disclosure of assessment information. Here we have some concerns I think around, you know, the requests for information that come from appellants and how that can also get in the way of privacy considerations and not even be necessarily useful. It's like they're mining for data to then go back and do another appeal.

And so some of the questions I wanted to ask around that is if you could tell me what you understand to be included in information that forms the basis of an assessment.

Yomi Akintola: — Okay thanks for the question. So the information that has been provided during the assessment appeals isn't changing in these amendments. These amendments would only seek to clarify confidentiality and then with respect to just clarifying to all parties involved.

And another thing changing in these amendments would be when information has been provided to the assessor, the deadlines, we are moving those dates. We are moving them to the regulations. So the information being provided stays the same. It is not impacted.

Erika Ritchie: — One of the things that I've heard from stakeholders is a concern related to the information disclosure and the multiple appeals per cycle is that . . . You know, there's a whole industry that has been created that deals strictly or exclusively in appeals. And now they're using artificial intelligence to sort of aid them in sort of mining the data and, you know, putting together applications to appeal processes.

And so you know, I was at the SAMA annual meeting last week and heard from their strategic director around some of the things they're doing that will also benefit from AI [artificial intelligence] in terms of how they improve their processes.

But it's kind of a double-edged sword there, you know, because both sides are using it. And you kind of have to keep up — one step ahead I would say — to ensure that, you know, that fairness and justice are maintained in the assessment and appeal process.

And so can you tell me, within these amendments and the consultation process that you entered into in bringing these amendments forward, how did you consider the impact and the effects of AI on the assessment process?

Yomi Akintola: — Okay, yeah. Thanks. Yeah, thanks for the question. So this amendment that we're working on, the

assessment appeals, one of our focus has to do with the effectiveness of the system itself. And that it is why we focus more on the timelines. We wanted to make sure that all parties in the appeal, they have enough time, especially through the agreement, to adjust and then the provision of information and this discussion. And so at the end we would be able to reduce redundancies and then make the system more effective.

You know, on the topic of the AI usage, it's a tool that is available for anyone to use. And you also have to admit the fact that it could be a double-edged sword, right, that would work in both ways. But we are not really looking at legislating the use of AI with respect to assessment appeals.

However all parties in the appeal, they have to still follow the legislation and the regulation. And with respect to confidentiality, which has to do with data being provided to them, that they could use it but it has to still . . . We want to make sure that the confidentiality aspect is clear to all parties. So thanks.

Erika Ritchie: — Yeah, I think that's a really good point you raise around the confidentiality. And so I'm just wanting to know, how is that enforced and ensured going forward as part of whether it's the Act or these amendments? Because it does seem to be an increasing risk with AI.

[20:45]

Yomi Akintola: — Okay, yeah thanks for the question. In answering your question I would like to just refer to *The Municipalities Act* in section 231 that speaks to declaration of confidentiality. It says that:

Before providing information to the assessor or any other party to an appeal, the party that is to provide the information may:

declare the information confidential; and

[could also] seek an undertaking of the other party that:

all or some of the information so provided is provided solely for the purpose of preparing an assessment or for an appeal hearing; and

no other use may be made of the information.

And subsection (2) states that the:

Failure to provide an undertaking pursuant to subsection (1) forfeits the right of a party to obtain the information being sought by any other process.

And subsection (3):

No person who is required to comply with an undertaking given pursuant to this section shall fail to do so.

So in summary of that, if anyone requires a request for information and they are also party to the appeal, they have to sign an undertaking declaring that the information is confidential and they will abide by the confidentiality requirements that's required of them.

And if there's any breach, the provider of the information could bring this forward to the board of revision, and then also it's a general offence. Breach of confidentiality is a general offence.

Erika Ritchie: — So general offence subject to penalties as described in the Act. Is that right?

Yomi Akintola: — Yes. The answer to your question is yes. It's a general offence under *The Municipalities Act*.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, great. Thank you. I just have one last set of questions here with respect to the letter submitted by Mr. Fuller in regards to boards of revision — their training, guidance, and quality control. And I wonder if you could tell me how the minister assesses whether standardized training is sufficient for boards hearing complex, high-value commercial appeals.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Again, respectfully, this is not part of the bill before the committee. But I will say broadly that there are over 300 individuals, closer to 400 individuals who have been trained and certified by a third party in these complex and very, some would consider, tedious applications and appeals to ensure that there is a fair and equitable process put in place. So aside from that, that's I guess as far as we want to go here I think.

Erika Ritchie: — And so the amendments that are before us here today, how would you say that they're addressing the needs of local municipal boards in addressing these complex cases?

[21:00]

Yomi Akintola: — Thanks again for the question. So the couple of ways where these amendments would help the local Board of Revisions, especially with complex appeals, as we've discussed earlier, we are working on the criteria that would allow complex appeals to go to the SMB. And that would ensure that the local Board of Revisions, they focus more on appeals that they could handle with their expertise and their competencies. That's one thing.

The other thing which we believe is going to help the local board of appeals has to do with the agreement-to-adjust process, that we've extended the time. And in that situation it would make sure that only appeals that are supposed to go for a hearing will go for hearings. And most appeals, we would expect most appeals to be resolved through their agreement-to-adjust stage.

And another thing, another aspect of the amendments too that would help the local board of appeals, the local boards with complex appeals, it's about changes to the grants. So part of these amendments would not allow appellant to change the grants of appeal during the hearing. It has to be in advance of the hearing to ensure that both parties have an opportunity to review what the new grants are, and then they would have, you know, they have adequate time to do that. Also the time that we also are putting into the regulations would also help with that regard.

Erika Ritchie: — Okay, thank you very much. I appreciate those answers. I guess overall I just have sort of one final question for the minister. You know, for the amendments that we see here before us, what sort of measurements or indicators of success will you be using to assess whether fairness and efficiency has been improved overall with these amendments?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks for the question. We have in place an assessment appeal advisory committee that does exactly that. It advises the ministry and the minister on the success of, or issues or challenges that are being faced by, the process. In addition to that, obviously we do have a robust review of the Acts. Every four years ostensibly is when those occur, like we're doing now. That's when those changes are made and those inputs are weighed and assessed on their merit to be implemented.

Erika Ritchie: — Thank you, Minister. Mr. Chair, I have no further questions. Thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you then. So seeing no more questions, we are going to proceed to vote on the clauses. But before we do, I want to thank the minister and all the officials for your involvement tonight. And I'm going to make the executive decision that I will allow the minister to conclude with some remarks.

And the tedious process of us going through the signing and voting on this, we won't make you endure that process as we did in our last meeting as IAJ committee, which took an hour and 10 minutes. It's not going to take that long tonight. But we've got a fair number of people here that I think have families and involvement at home and we will allow them to depart. So, Minister, any concluding comments?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, absolutely. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the board, both the government and opposition members here tonight, as well as you, Mr. Chair. Appreciate the respectful and cordial tone struck by the committee and again express my appreciation for the work done by this committee.

I also want to thank the members of *Hansard* and the support staff here this evening. I know these are often long evenings for everyone, and I want to sincerely express my appreciation to all of you for that work as well.

With respect to my ministry team here tonight, we've had some long evenings in these rooms, and I really, really want to express my sincere appreciation for everything that they do on behalf of the people of this province every day in their role as ministry officials.

I want to thank Yomi particularly, because his technical expertise never ceases to amaze me at what some of us might refer to as a very numbing subject matter at times. So I want to express thanks to everyone here with me tonight as well. So thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — Excellent. And I would also allow the opportunity for concluding remarks by the members. Yeah.

Erika Ritchie: — Well yes, I want to join with the minister in saying thank you to his officials, the minister himself for the answers to the many questions. We maybe went down a few rabbit holes and learned more than we ever thought we would learn about such an engaging topic as property tax assessment and value assessment. So I hope everyone enjoyed that, and I know I certainly did. And I've been on a pretty steep leaning curve as it relates to that, but I did really very much appreciate the responses and the answers to my questions.

I want to also give thanks to members of legislative services, *Hansard*, and the Clerks-at-the-Table here for assisting us, and the rest of the committee for bearing with us through all of these questions. And yeah, just say thanks again.

Chair B. McLeod: — I will also add my thanks to everyone being here tonight. And we wish you well, and we'll see you next time as well. And the Oilers are up 3-0 at the end of the first, just so you know that. That's all good. So thank you for being here. And we'll dismiss officials and we'll get to the voting.

So right off the top I'm going to inform committee members I will exercise my right to deliver a vote this evening, if that is registered at this point in time. And we'll go through things right from the start and make it happen.

So clause 1-1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 1-1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2-1 to 2-8 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 2-9

Chair B. McLeod: — 2-9. I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an amendment, please.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an . . . Oh, you've got to read it. Sorry. Please go ahead.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — All right. I'd like to move the following amendment, that:

Clause 2-9 of the printed Bill

Amend subsection 68(2.1) of *The Cities Act*, as being enacted by subsection (2) of Clause 2-9 of the printed Bill, by striking out "commissioner or manager" and substituting "clerk".

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 2-9. Would any members like to speak to the amendment? The committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 2-9 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 2-9 as amended agreed to.]

Clause 2-10

Chair B. McLeod: — Where are we at? Clause 2-10. I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move the following amendment for:

Clause 2-10 of the printed Bill

Amend subsection 68.1(3) of *The Cities Act*, as being enacted by Clause 2-10 of the printed Bill, by striking out "commissioner or manager" and substituting [with] "clerk".

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 2-10. Would any members like to speak to the amendment? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 2-10 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Agreed. Carried, yeah.

[Clause 2-10 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 2-11 to 2-12 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 2-13

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 2-13. MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move the following amendment to:

Clause 2-13 of the printed Bill

Amend section 91 of *The Cities Act*, as being enacted by Clause 2-13 of the printed Bill:

(a) in clause (1)(e) by striking out "commissioner or manager" and substituting "clerk"; and

(b) in subsection (7) by striking out "commissioner or manager" and substituting "clerk."

[21:15]

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 2-13. Would any members like to speak to the amendment? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 2-13 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — It's carried.

[Clause 2-13 as amended agreed to.]

[Clause 2-14 agreed to.]

Clause 2-15

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 2-15. I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Yes, Chair. I'd like to move the following amendment to:

Clause 2-15 of the printed Bill

Amend subsection 116(1) of *The Cities Act*, as being enacted by Clause 2-15 of the printed Bill:

(a) in clause (a) by striking out “commissioner or manager” wherever it appears and in each case substituting “clerk”; and

(b) in clause (b) by striking out “commissioner or manager” and substituting “clerk”.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 2-15. Would any members like to speak to the amendment? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 2-15 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 2-15 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 2-16 to 2-34 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 2-35

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 2-35, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — No.

Chair B. McLeod: — I hear a no, so I will be calling for a voice vote. And I'll exercise my right to a deliberative vote. All those in favour of clause 2-35 as written, say aye.

All those opposed to clause 2-35 as written, say no.

Some Hon. Members: — No.

Chair B. McLeod: — No. And the nos have it. Clause 2-35 is not agreed. This clause is defeated.

[Clause 2-35 not agreed to.]

[Clauses 2-36 to 2-40 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 2-41

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 2-41, is that agreed? I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move the following amendment to:

Clause 2-41 of the printed Bill

Amend subsection 356(1.3) of *The Cities Act*, as being enacted by subsection (3) of clause 2-41 of the printed Bill, by striking out “commissioner or manager” and substituting “clerk.”

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 2-41. Would any members like to speak to the amendment? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 2-41 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 2-41 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 3-1 to 3-52 inclusive agreed to.]

[21:30]

Clause 3-53

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 3-53? I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move the following amendment:

Amend Clause 3-53 of the printed Bill:

(a) by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

“(2) Subsection 375(4) is amended by striking out ‘The owner’ and substituting ‘Before a judge . . . [appears] a complaint pursuant to subsection (1), the owner’”;

(b) By striking out clause (6)(c) and substituting the following:

“(c) by adding the following clause after clause (b):

‘(c) in the prescribed manner, if the order was made by council’; and

(c) by adding the following subsection after subsection (7):

“(8) The following subsection is added after subsection 375(10):

“(11) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations prescribing the manner in which an appeal may be made pursuant to clause (8)(c)”.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 3 . . . Oh, did we miss something?

Hon. Jamie Martens: — And sorry, Mr. Chair, there was just one word on my part that I had actually had misread, and that was during:

“(2) Subsection 375(4) is amended by striking out ‘The owner’ and substituting ‘Before a judge hears a complaint pursuant to subsection (1), the owner’”;

Chair B. McLeod: — Good catch. All right. So MLA Martens has moved an amendment to Clause 3-53. Would any members like to speak to the amendment? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 3-53 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 3-53 as amended agreed to.]

[Clause 3-54 to 4-40 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 4-41

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 4-41. MLA Martens, I recognize.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to move the following amendment:

Amend Clause 4-41 of the printed Bill:

(a) by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

“(2) Subsection 396(4) is amended by striking out ‘The owner’ and substituting ‘Before a judge hears a complaint pursuant to subsection (1), the owner’”;

(b) by striking out clause (6)(c) and substituting the following:

“(c) by adding the following clause after clause (b):

“(c) in the prescribed manner, if the order was made by the council”;

(c) by adding the following subsection after subsection (7):

“(8) The following subsection is added after subsection 396(10):

“(11) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations prescribing the manner in which an appeal may be made pursuant to clause (8)(c)”.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved an amendment to clause 4-41. Would any members like to speak to this amendment? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 4-41 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 4-41 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 4-42 to 6-1 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 2-35

Chair B. McLeod: — I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move the following new clause:

New Clause 2-35 of the printed Bill

Add the following Clause before Clause 2-36 of the printed Bill:

**“Section 327 amended
2-35 Subsection 327(9) is repealed and the following substituted:**

“(9) If a city has passed a bylaw respecting dangerous animals and, in accordance with that bylaw an order has been made declaring an animal to be dangerous, that order continues to apply if the animal is sold, given to a new owner, moved to a different location within the city or moved to any other municipality governed by this Act, *The Municipalities Act* or *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010* ”.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Martens has moved new clause 2-35. Would any members like to speak to the new clause? Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Is new clause 2-35 agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, I didn't. Let's do this again. Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is new clause 2-35 agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 2-35 agreed to.]

[21:45]

Chair B. McLeod: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Municipalities Modernization and Red Tape Reduction Act*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 43, *The Municipalities Modernization and Red Tape Reduction Act* with amendment. MLA Brad Crassweller moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Excellent. No concluding comments; we already did that. And adjournment. That concludes our business for today. I'd ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. MLA Crassweller has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair. And thank you everyone for your patience and indulgence today.

[The committee adjourned at 21:46.]