

March 2021 Report to council

Virtual meeting of FCM's Board of Directors

March 9-12, 2021

This document summarizes key updates from the most recent meeting of the Board of Directors and Standing Committees of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). It is designed to support board and committee members in reporting back to their local and regional councils on their progress with FCM.

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Table of contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| ► Message from FCM's president | 3 |
| ► Shaping Federal Budget 2021 | 4 |
| ► Committees & forums..... | 5 |
| ► Resolutions..... | 6 |
| ► Key points to share | 7 |



Governance in the COVID era: FCM's Board of Directors meets safely online.

Message from FCM's president

Dear board and committee members,

Remember this week. Even though we didn't get the opportunity to gather in person, our March board meeting showcased yet again the important work FCM's board and committee members do every day. You delivered results. We all delivered results together.

Our meeting coincided with the one-year anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic. So we took some time to look back on just some of the critical federal investments that FCM has secured for our members through the pandemic. From up to \$8.6 billion in emergency funding with the Safe Restart Agreement to the \$1 billion Rapid Housing Initiative. From the \$1.75 billion Universal Broadband Fund to landmark investments in public transit and rural transportation. I'm so proud of what we've accomplished together under incredibly difficult circumstances.

Of course, we didn't just spend the week looking back. In our committees and forums, as well as committee-of-the-whole, we looked ahead to how FCM can continue supporting municipalities of all sizes through the pandemic, and into Canada's recovery. We reviewed FCM's recommendations for empowering local governments in Budget 2021, as well as our spring advocacy strategy ahead of a possible federal election. We also announced that Halifax Councillor Lindell Smith will serve as Chair of FCM's new Standing Committee on Anti-Racism and Equity. Councillor Smith is a visionary leader who will play a central role in advancing FCM's commitment to equity and anti-racism. And at our board meeting on Friday, we approved FCM's 2021-2022 Corporate Plan—setting a strong foundation for the work ahead.

In this report, you'll find key highlights of the progress we made together during the week. Please share our work with your council. Your dedication to FCM—to our members and Canadians—is appreciated. I hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,



Garth Frizzell
FCM President
Councillor, City of Prince George



Shaping Federal Budget 2021

All week, board and committee members discussed FCM's recommendations and engagement strategy for the upcoming federal budget. Budget 2021 will come as municipalities continue working through pandemic challenges *and* ready themselves for a future recovery.

Our cities and communities are where Canadians are living out the realities of COVID-19. These are also the places where a strong national recovery will need to take root. And our message is that Budget 2021 should build on *proven tools*—to reliably drive progress in *communities of all sizes* across the country.

That's why a key FCM recommendation is to **double the Gas Tax Fund transfer to municipalities**—and on March 25 the federal government announced that it will do that, for one year. This will directly empower local leaders, rural and urban, to kickstart more job-creating infrastructure projects. Because *you* know what's needed most locally right now—whether it's fixing a bridge, upgrading a recreation facility or expanding a community centre.

We're also urging a rapid **scale-up of the Rapid Housing Initiative**. The RHI has been a real COVID success story. By making good use of distressed buildings, available land, and modular housing, community housing providers are on track to deliver *permanent* safe and affordable homes to 4,700 Canadians facing homelessness. And by building on this success, we can deliver housing to at least 24,000 more people while creating good jobs.

We are calling on our federal partners to **apply a rural lens to national recovery**. That means prioritizing tools, like the GTF, that directly empower rural leaders who best understand local needs. It also means optimizing other tools for rural realities—for instance, by removing the project-size threshold for disaster mitigation funding, and by specifically growing the rural and remote stream of the Reaching Home homelessness strategy.

This budget is also a key moment to **address economic anxiety in western communities**. FCM's Western Economic Solutions Task Force (WEST) has advanced a suite of concrete recommendations. Together, they are designed to promote regional economic development, strengthen trade and transportation infrastructure, and support western economic diversification on the road to the federal net-zero emissions target.

As the pandemic continues, we also need to tackle remaining **municipal operating budget shortfalls**. That means working on a durable follow-up to the Safe Restart Agreement, and any solution will once again need to bring provinces and territories to the table as well.

ACTION ITEM: We've detailed FCM's recommendations in a **formal submission to the Finance Minister**, and we'll keep pressing our message through strategic touchpoints with all federal parties. We're urging board members to take the message directly to local MPs and other stakeholders—and FCM staff will be in touch with tools to help.

Committees & forums

FCM's Board of Directors oversees various committees and forums that provide direction and insight on a wide range of issues and priorities. Highlights from the March 2021 virtual meeting include:

Community Safety and Crime Prevention: Continued discussions on policy options to address intersecting issues of police reform, anti-racism, mental health and drug policy. Received a presentation on the decriminalization of simple possession of illicit drugs as an approach to addressing the opioid crisis and substance use disorders in communities. Shared perspectives on the federal government's proposed legislation that would allow municipalities to ban handguns.

Conference Planning: Received an update from staff on planning for FCM's first-ever virtual Annual Conference, set for June 2021. Committee members emphasized the need for a diverse and engaging program that reflects the issues facing municipalities in the post-COVID landscape. They also received reports on the success of 2020's successful Sustainable Communities Conference, and on the selection process for locations of future FCM Board Meetings.

Environmental Issues and Sustainable Development: Discussed FCM's advocacy on the federal plan to plant two billion trees, and on reducing plastic waste. Approved additions to FCM climate policy, supporting the goal of achieving net-zero GHG emissions by 2050 and calling for an equity-centre and place-based federal approach to climate policy. Received an update on FCM's Green Municipal Fund, including the new Community Building Retrofit program supporting energy retrofits for municipal buildings like arenas, pools or libraries.

Equity and Anti-racism: Halifax Councillor Lindell Smith was named chair of this new committee struck in November. It will deliver an equity vision and action plan, including recommendations on a training and capacity-building program. It will provide the Board with an equity lens on new policies and activities—internally and across municipalities—and with systems to evaluate FCM's anti-racism and equity work. Fundamentally, it will support this Board in becoming a Canadian leader in anti-racism at the municipal level.

International Relations: Received guests from international organizations who shared insights on global trends and impacts on municipal international cooperation. Discussed the vision and opportunities for international program development and growth. Governance representatives presented updates on program activities, with particular attention to the Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance (PLEDDG) in Ukraine that comes to a close in April 2021.

Municipal Finance and Intergovernmental Arrangements: Discussed the impact of the Safe Restart Agreement and how its funding helped communities keep vital services running despite financial impacts of COVID-19. Received an update on the Legal Defense Fund and upcoming intervention at the Supreme Court of Canada in Toronto's appeal of *Bill 5*. Also received an update on the municipal data partnership between FCM and Statistics Canada.

Municipal Infrastructure and Transportation Policy: Discussed FCM's pre-budget advocacy and updates on rail safety, active transportation, infrastructure funding, and rights-of-Way. Received an update on the announcement of a Permanent Transit Fund and updated FCM policy on NAV CANADA and passenger rail. Received an update on FCM's Municipal Asset Management Program (MAMP).

Northern and Remote Forum: Discussed Northern and remote considerations for policy and advocacy on broadband, housing and the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. Also discussed how strategies to ensure that FCM's federal-election advocacy efforts reflect priorities for Northern and remote communities.

Rural Forum: Received an update from FCM CEO Carole Saab on rural-focused strategies. Discussed key priorities for economic recovery, including broadband, infrastructure, and rural and regional bus service. Discussed feedback that should be provided to the federal government on the creation of the new Rural and Regional Transportation Fund. Also received a presentation on FCM's continuing rural-broadband advocacy.

Social-Economic Development: Discussed FCM's federal advocacy on housing affordability and homelessness—focusing on the Rapid Housing Initiative, market rental housing and rural housing. Received an external presentation on housing in non-metropolitan Canada and an update on the First Nations—Community Economic Development Initiative.

Women's Participation in Municipal Government: Heard from beneficiaries of Toward Parity in Municipal Politics demonstration projects, including Nanaimo (BC), Region of Muskoka (ON), and Yellowhead County (AB). Discussed the vision for FCM's newest program that will aim to increase political empowerment of women in municipal leadership. Highlighted results of the FCM's Women in Local Government Scholarships and Awards and municipal contributions to the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings in March.

Resolutions

FCM members submit resolutions for the Board's consideration on subjects of national municipal interest. Our process recognizes diverse voices while providing a focus for building a united municipal voice to drive concrete action. Resolutions considered at our March 2021 meeting include:

Preventing Accidental 9-1-1 Calls on Personal Devices:

This resolution calls on FCM to urge the federal government to reduce the impact that pocket-dialed and dropped 9-1-1 calls are having on municipal resources—by requiring carriers to educate consumers on preventing accidental calls, and by working with the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association to develop a strategy to mitigate municipal impacts. The Board approved this resolution for consideration at FCM's 2021 Annual Conference.

Strengthening Canada's Hate Speech Laws: This resolution calls on FCM to advocate for the federal government to address hate speech in two major ways: through legislation that clarifies and strengthens the definition of hate speech, and through engagement with all orders of government to address the root causes of hate speech. The Board approved this resolution for consideration at FCM's 2021 Annual Conference.

Expanding the Rural and Remote Stream of the

Reaching Home Program: This resolution calls for an increased federal commitment to alleviate rural homelessness by strengthening data gathering and funding specific to rural and remote areas. It also argues that resources required to adequately respond to current levels of homelessness in rural and remote communities are considered insufficient relative to overall need. The Board approved this resolution for consideration at FCM's 2021 Annual Conference.

FCM resolutions database:
fcm.ca/fcm-resolutions

Key points to share

- **FCM's member-elected Board of Directors met this March 9-12.** The meeting was originally set for Prince George, BC, but we continue to meet safely online amid the COVID-19 pandemic. FCM unites 2,000 municipalities of all sizes at the national level, representing more than 90 percent of all Canadians.
- **We assessed progress that FCM has secured for members amid COVID.** That includes \$8.6B in emergency operating funding and the \$1B Rapid Housing Initiative for vulnerable residents. Looking to recovery, we've secured a \$1.75B Universal Broadband Fund, plus major public transit funding for municipalities of all sizes.
- **The upcoming federal budget was a major theme all week.** FCM has put forward recommendations to empower municipalities of all sizes to continue protecting Canadians through the pandemic—while gearing up to drive a strong post-COVID recovery.
- **FCM's budget recommendations build on proven municipal funding tools.** Those include doubling the Gas Tax Fund transfer for three years as a Municipal Economic Recovery Fund; and scaling up the federal-community Rapid Housing Initiative to deliver permanent housing to more Canadians who are experiencing chronic homelessness.
- **FCM's Rural Forum discussed recovery priorities—in Budget 2021 and beyond.** Those include a scaled-up Gas Tax Fund allocation for local infrastructure—as well as decisive federal follow-through on commitments to rural broadband infrastructure and rural/regional bus services (through national transit investments).
- **FCM's committees and forums studies and recommended action on a wide range of priorities—from rural & northern issues through community safety, environmental issues, women's participation, international relations, infrastructure, municipal finance and social-economic development.** Halifax Councillor Lindell Smith was named chair of the new Standing Committee on Anti-Racism and Equity.
- **Board members considered resolutions calling for federal action on key priorities.** Those include mitigating municipal impacts of accidental 9-1-1 calls; strengthening Canada's hate speech laws; and expanding the rural and remote stream of the Reaching Home homelessness strategy. The Board approved these resolutions for consideration at FCM's 2021 Annual Conference.
- **Board members approved FCM's 2021-22 Corporate Plan** (presented by CEO Carole Saab)—laying a foundation for the vital year ahead. They also received substantial updates on the FCM's financial strength, and on organizational initiatives, including FCM's commitment to anti-racism and equity.