
Justice

Meeting with Minister Matt Wiebe

February 10, 2025



Association of
Manitoba Municipalities

Summary of Municipal Priorities

The AMM appreciates the opportunity to meet with Minister Matt Wiebe and representatives of Manitoba Justice. The AMM encourages the provincial government to consider municipal concerns as well as the effects of funding decisions on local communities throughout the budget process. This document outlines the AMM's position and recommendations on a number of important municipal issues relevant to Minister Wiebe's portfolio. The AMM looks forward to working with the Province to strengthen provincial-municipal growth and partnership opportunities.

1. Modernizing Police Funding and Governance

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Consult with the AMM and municipalities on the distribution of policing costs and grant funding to promote a more transparent, fair, and sustainable policing model; and*
- ✓ *Support municipalities by calling on the federal government to commit to meaningful consultation and cost containment principles for contract partners with RCMP services.*

2. Strengthening Public Safety and Bail Reform

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Address rising crime rates by strengthening support for law enforcement and enhance advocacy to reduce RCMP vacancies; and*
- ✓ *Advance the implementation of the Province's Public Safety Strategy in consultation with the AMM to ensure alignment with municipal priorities.*

3. By-Law Efficiency and Standardization

Recommendation:

- ✓ *Collaborate with the AMM and municipalities to streamline by-law enforcement and accelerate the development of an informational toolkit.*

4. Next Generation 911

Recommendation:

- ✓ *Ensure the transition to Next Generation 911 imposes no costs on municipalities and create a multi-stakeholder Working Group with the AMM to ensure a smooth transition.*

Modernizing Police Funding and Governance

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Consult with the AMM and municipalities on the distribution of policing costs and grant funding to promote a more transparent, fair, and sustainable policing model; and*
- ✓ *Support municipalities by calling on the federal government to commit to meaningful consultation and cost containment principles for contract partners with RCMP services.*

The AMM has long called on the Province to review the distribution of policing costs and grant funding in Manitoba as the current model is antiquated and unsustainable. Following the amalgamation of some “urban” and “rural” municipalities, significant financial and administrative strains have also emerged concerning policing services. It is imperative to review the current policing funding model to address inequities.

As policing costs continue to rise, municipalities face growing challenges, with reported costs nearly tripling for the same level of service while residents experience a decline in police visibility. While the commitment to a **2% annual escalator** for municipal law enforcement is a step forward, additional measures are needed. The AMM calls on the Province to expedite its policing funding review to provide greater predictability in local police resourcing. A fair, transparent funding model must reflect both municipal fiscal capacity and the Province’s role in supporting communities and addressing the root causes of crime.

Additionally, following two rounds of collective bargaining with the RCMP, contract costs for municipalities increased by an average of 40% from 2020 to 2023. The situation is particularly concerning as the third round of collective bargaining is set to begin soon. Adding to the financial strain, the phased roll-out of body-worn cameras began in 2024, starting with the City of Steinbach. This initiative represents yet another federal commitment negotiated without municipal input, leaving municipalities to bear the costs. Although the federal government initially committed **\$238.5 million** to support the roll-out, the vast majority of these funds have been reprofiled while the financial burden has shifted entirely to municipalities.

Given that policing costs are already unsustainable, municipalities cannot absorb federally mandated expenses without proper consultation and financial support. Some municipalities are also facing logistical challenges, as infrastructure upgrades will be required to manage the data storage needs of body-worn cameras. Thus, we urge the Province to support municipalities by calling on the federal government to commit to cost containment principles for RCMP contract partners to ensure a fair and sustainable approach to public safety.

Finally, municipal representation on police boards is critical. A 2023 Probe Research survey found that **90%** of respondents oppose granting the Province authority to replace municipal representatives. As part of *The Police Services Act* review, the mandatory police board requirement must be re-evaluated to preserve local decision-making and accountability.

Strengthening Public Safety and Bail Reform

Recommendations:

- ✓ ***Address rising crime rates by strengthening support for law enforcement and enhance advocacy to reduce RCMP vacancies; and***
- ✓ ***Advance the implementation of the Province's Public Safety Strategy in consultation with the AMM to ensure alignment with municipal priorities.***

Municipalities have been ringing the alarm on increasing crime rates in their communities since the Prairie provinces experience higher rates of rural crime compared to other areas of the country. Further, frontline officers are becoming less visible in communities due to increased administrative duties, court hearings for repeat offenders, and rising demands from issues like homelessness, addictions, and mental health, extending their responsibilities beyond traditional law enforcement.

This growing concern is compounded by frequent media reports highlighting the strain on police services due to high vacancy rates and staff burnout, with Manitoba having the second highest RCMP vacancy rate in Canada. The situation has reached a critical point, with the RCMP even requesting officers from other provinces to temporarily fill shortages in Manitoba. To address growing public safety concerns, it is critical to boost efforts and offer incentives to help fill vacancies more quickly, improving police visibility and response times in communities across the province.

The AMM welcomes the Public Safety Strategy, particularly its five-point plan to strengthen the provincial bail system and the \$2.9 million investment over two years to expand electronic monitoring in rural communities. Calls for bail reform continue to grow across the province as communities grapple with violent repeat offenders who wreak havoc, committing random and brazen attacks, only to be released back onto the streets within hours. This revolving door of offenders reoffending has contributed significantly to rising property crimes, petty theft, and violent offenses, often committed by the same individuals. More recently, the flaws in the catch-and-release system have resulted in devastating consequences, with innocent lives lost at the hands of individuals out on bail for previous offenses. We urge the Province to take immediate action to advance bail reform measures within provincial jurisdiction to prevent further tragedies.

Additionally, stronger enforcement tools are needed to enhance public safety across Manitoba, including the expanded authority of Community Safety Officers (CSOs). While not all municipalities have the resources to employ a CSO, those that have implemented the program have seen improvements in public safety. To ensure more communities can access this program, the Province must expand CSO training opportunities and provide financial assistance to help offset costs for municipalities that choose to participate. Furthermore, training must be offered closer to local communities to reduce expenses related to staff travel, lodging, and overall training costs. The AMM also urges the Department to review the CSO curriculum to ensure it aligns with municipal needs.

By-Law Efficiency and Standardization

Recommendation:

- ✓ ***Collaborate with the AMM and municipalities to streamline by-law enforcement and accelerate the development of an informational toolkit.***

The increasing costs of policing place a greater burden on municipalities, requiring enhanced by-law enforcement. While vital for maintaining public safety, by-law enforcement presents its own challenges, including unclear regulations, inconsistent training standards, and limitations in officer capacity. Additionally, municipalities face difficulties in collecting fines, with the maximum administrative penalty for by-law violations capped at \$1,000. When fines cannot be fully recovered, municipalities must shoulder the rising cost of enforcement, ultimately passing these expenses onto taxpayers.

In addition, municipalities typically consult legal counsel when developing by-laws, further contributing to overall costs. Expenses to prosecute by-law offences are also significant, often exceeding the allowable \$1,000 fine. To address this, municipalities would benefit from a standardized by-law resource, such as a resource library with vetted sample by-laws supported by a common fine structure, accessible to all. A standardized approach to by-laws could enhance enforceability and acceptance by the courts, as opposed to a fragmented system that may lack credibility. This standardized system would also reduce duplication, staff time, and financial costs for municipalities.

The AMM appreciates the establishment of a joint Working Group between the Department of Justice and Department of Municipal and Northern Relations, which is focused on improving by-law enforcement and developing a toolkit to enhance clarity. However, it is essential to continue advancing this work to drive greater efficiency.

Lastly, the AMM believes that Community Safety and Well-Being plans can significantly improve public safety and local enforcement. For municipalities that have received funding, these plans offer valuable opportunities to assess current practices, respond to incidents, and mitigate safety risks. They also allow municipalities to engage in long-term planning to address the root causes of crime in their communities. It is crucial that all Manitoba municipalities benefit from this initiative to strengthen community safety across the province with provincial funding support.

Next Generation 911

Recommendation:

- ✓ ***Ensure the transition to Next Generation 911 imposes no costs on municipalities by creating a Working Group with the AMM to ensure a smooth transition.***

The AMM acknowledges that the transition to Next Generation 911 is underway, with a planned go-live date of March 2025. However, despite our direct engagement with Bell MTS, we are concerned by the lack of progress on this critical initiative, particularly since we have raised these concerns as early as 2022. Municipalities continue to receive Next Generation 911 Authority Service Agreements and contracts with little clarity regarding their roles and impacts, yet they are pressured to sign or risk losing access to 911 services once the new system is implemented.

To support municipalities through this transition, the AMM has actively collaborated with Bell MTS to host a webinar, addressing key questions and raising awareness. However, significant uncertainties remain, preventing municipalities from signing contracts with confidence. Municipalities require clear assurances that the Province will not shift costs onto them and that GIS mapping and coordinates are properly integrated. Given that the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre (MTCC) hosts the most extensive mapping and road network data in Manitoba, we strongly urge the Province to share this information with Bell MTS. This will prevent unnecessary duplication, allowing Bell MTS to identify and address any outstanding GIS mapping requirements before municipalities are asked to sign service agreements.

Additionally, the AMM values its collaboration with the Department of Justice and appreciates ongoing efforts to develop an informational toolkit. To ensure municipalities fully understand their responsibilities and have the necessary resources ahead of the implementation deadline, we urge the Province to expedite this process in coordination with Bell MTS. While there is speculation that the CRTC may extend the looming deadline, no formal confirmation has been provided. It is therefore critical that municipalities receive timely and clear information to guarantee uninterrupted 911 services for all Manitobans, regardless of their location. Therefore, we recommend the establishment of a Working Group with relevant provincial departments, Bell MTS, and our organization to support a smooth transition.

Finally, while connectivity does not fall directly under the Justice portfolio, we must highlight the widespread coverage gaps affecting rural and remote regions across Manitoba. Poor connectivity undermines public safety, hampers economic development, and weakens our competitiveness. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensuring equitable access to emergency services.

Active AMM 2024 Resolutions

AMM Resolution #07-2024: Modernizing Beer Vendor Regulations

Sponsor(s)

Selkirk, City (Interlake)
Dauphin, City (Parkland)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to amend *The Liquor Licensing Regulation* to permit the operation of retail beer vendors in municipalities without the requirement to operate accommodations; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Province of Manitoba work with the AMM and the Manitoba Hotel Association to ensure that this change does not impact the economic viability of rural hotels.

AMM Resolution #20-2024: Bail Reform

Sponsor(s)

Roblin, Municipality (Parkland)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to implement stronger measures within the justice system that ensure offenders are held accountable for their actions; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM advocate for policies that prevent the early release of offenders, thereby ensuring that individuals who pose a threat to public safety are adequately rehabilitated and no longer pose a risk to the community; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM advocate for increased consequences to individuals who violate release conditions, thereby enhancing public safety and ensuring accountability within the justice system; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM requests the Province of Manitoba work with law enforcement agencies, judicial bodies, and community organizations to develop and support initiatives aimed at reducing crime and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the justice system in Manitoba.

AMM Resolution #21-2024: Rural Crime Watch

Sponsor(s)

Pipestone, RM (Western)
Two Borders, Municipality (Western)
Grassland, Municipality (Western)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba for ongoing revitalization of the Conservation Officer Service with direct operational linkages to the RCMP, continued night hunting prevention and overall rural crime prevention through the following measures:

- The maintenance of Fall and Winter night hunting enforcement including night helicopter surveillance, consistent enforcement bulletins that describe enforcement results as a deterrent, and use of all modern techniques, tools and regulations such that illegal night hunting activity is deterred long term.

- The follow-through of past and current budget commitments to grow the number of Officers in the field through the immediate approval to hire 25 new Conservation Officers, with a portion of the new officers located in the southwest region; and
- The immediate formalization of operational collaboration between the RCMP and COS leading to reduced response times in rural areas.

AMM Resolution #39-2024: By-Law Enforcement Fines

Sponsor(s)

Ste. Anne, RM (Eastern)
Whitemouth, RM (Eastern)
Reynolds, RM (Eastern)
Brokenhead, RM (Eastern)
Montcalm, RM (Eastern)
St. Clements, RM (Eastern)
Alexander, RM (Eastern)
East St. Paul, RM (Eastern)
Emerson-Franklin, Municipality (Eastern)
Stuartburn, RM (Eastern)
Springfield, RM (Eastern)
La Broquerie, RM (Eastern)
Lac du Bonnet, RM (Eastern)
Beausejour, Town (Eastern)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to review the *Municipal By-law Enforcement Regulation's* Section 2 as it pertains to the maximum imposable fine imposed under the authority of *The Municipal By-law Enforcement Act*.