

N.L. plays hardball with small town over landfill dispute

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Minister of Municipal Affairs Dianne Whalen has sent King's Point council an ultimatum. (CBC)

The Liberal Opposition has accused the government of Newfoundland and Labrador of blackmailing a small town, after the province threatened to cut off capital works funding in a messy waste management dispute.

King's Point, a community of about 650 people, has been in a legal dispute with the province over waste regulations for several years, since municipalities across the province were ordered to cease using municipal dumps and begin trucking waste to regional landfills, in compliance with provincial waste management strategies.

The King's Point municipal council maintains it cannot afford to send waste to the regional landfill, and will continue to use its own dump. The matter is before the courts.

The dispute became ugly recently when the council received an ultimatum from Minister of Municipal Affairs Dianne Whalen — to participate in the province's waste management plan and use the regional landfill, or the town would not receive any provincial money for capital works.

That angered Mayor Perry Gillingham, as the municipal council has been lobbying for money for repaving Bayside Drive, which hasn't been paved since 1972, as well as for funds to improve municipal water works.

"What has the dump got to do with repaving Bayside Drive and improving our water supply? Nothing, as far as I'm concerned," Gillingham said. "It's not fair to the people of King's Point, unless all towns in Newfoundland got the same letter."

According to Whalen, other towns have gotten similar letters, urging compliance.

"We're not going to be issuing capital works to communities that are in defiance of provincial regulations," she said in a CBC News interview this week.

"I'm encouraging the town of King's Point, for the sake of the environment, and for future generations,

to do a transition to the regional site."

The three-sentence letter, received by the town March 5, says the Department of Municipal Affairs reviewed the town's funding request for the water system upgrade and paving and "is supportive of partnering" with the municipality.

The letter, signed by Whalen, goes on to state, "The final approval of these projects, however, is on hold until all issues relating to the Provincial Waste Management Strategy have been resolved."

"I would recommend that you and your council focus on resolving any outstanding issues related to waste management in order to expediate the final approval of your capital projects."

Opposition cries blackmail

Liberal municipal affairs critic Roland Butler told CBC News he was shocked Whalen gave such an ultimatum to the town while the dispute over the regional landfill was still before the courts.

"It's unfortunate that those people have this hanging over their heads," Butler said of the King's Point council. "There's an issue before the courts.... Here they are now, I believe, being blackmailed by another department in order to get them to proceed with what they thought they should be doing."

"I think on this issue here, and the way this issue has unfolded, I think yes, she has gone too far," he said.

Butler added that he appreciates Whalen is trying to protect the environment, but questions her methods.

"I think she's taking away the rights of the people who have a right to have a good road to drive over in their community, by withholding funding on that basis, because of another issue with another department."

Gillingham said he wants Whalen to rescind the letter. But the minister said that's not going to happen.

"I don't think there's any reason to apologize for wanting to protect our environment," Whalen told CBC News.