

# Municipal issues dominate question period

## Liberal survey shows trash and infrastructure money concerns

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The provincial Liberals say the government has to do a better job at getting infrastructure funding to municipalities. The opposition also says towns need financial help to comply with the provincial waste management strategy.

A survey of 53 municipal leaders conducted by the party in March shows those two issues are front and centre for many towns in the province.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones used the survey results to quiz Municipal Affairs Minister Dianne Whalen and acting Environment Minister Clyde Jackman on the issues in the House of Assembly Thursday.

Outside of the House, Jones said the Opposition did the survey because of the number of calls it was getting on the two issues.

"In the last two years, there's \$55 million in infrastructure projects for municipalities that were announced and committed to in budgets that never ever got spent," she said.

Jones said some projects were cancelled because tenders came in too high or were delayed because engineering work wasn't done on time for projects to start.

Jones said other municipalities are still waiting to find out if they'll get money they've applied for or not.

She also said some communities aren't getting money under programs like the federal gas-tax rebate because they've been they don't meet the criteria.

The gas money has to be used for environmental projects, but Jones said towns have been turned down for trying to fund things like trucking garbage to regional landfills.

Jones also said the province has made very little progress on waste management issues.

A deadline to shut down the provinces 25 teepee incinerators, which was extended to June 30, still won't be met.

"Many of those municipalities that are expected to close (the incinerators) do not have a land fill area to bring their garbage," she said.

Jones said it's unreasonable for towns to shut down their only means of disposing of trash without an alternative.

That's why at least four communities have asked the province for extensions.



*Dianne Whalen*



*Yvonne Jones*

" We're not saying that this isn't the right way to move because we honestly believe it is," said Jones of the incinerator closures. " The issue that we have is (government) isn't moving fast enough, (and is) making demands on municipalities before the infrastructure is ready."

She also said the province's waste management strategy is costing municipalities more than they can afford.

Garbage collection has gone up between 150 and 500 per cent over the last three years according to Jones.

She said rural communities are struggling to pay to truck garbage long distances, while their tax bases are shrinking due to out-migration.

And she said many residents left in small communities are on fixed incomes and can't afford a tax hike.

She's asking government to look at a regulated waste management disposal rate so all people in the province are paying the same for garbage collection.

Whalen told reporters regional waste management boards have representatives on them from towns and her department is working with all communities on these issues.

"We're always working with municipalities. They always have issues that they're contacting the department (on) from time to time," she said.

Whalen also said the government is committed to its waste management strategy and so are the towns in the province.

She says by 2020, 50 per cent of waste will be diverted from landfills through projects like recycling and composting.

And she says the cost to communities and their residents are modest.

"In some cases it works out to be \$150 a year per household," she said. " That's a small amount of money to pay to get your waste taken away in my opinion."

Whalen said when the strategy is up and running it will be affordable to everyone in the province.

When it comes to helping towns to access the federal gas tax, Whalen said Municipal Affairs hired a new official about a month ago to help towns with the paperwork to get that money.