

March 21, 2022

## T&T EDITORIAL REBUTTAL

So, let's not lose sight of the "big picture", the editorial urges.

Alma agrees. But first, and foremost, let's acknowledge that the subject at hand concerns local governance reform. And the emphasis must first be on the LOCAL, and then on the REFORM.

Contrary to what is stated in the editorial concerning representation – not everyone will be represented equally. Unlike with the Provincial elections, where a **LAW** (the NB Electoral Boundaries and Representation Act) prescribes that an equal (or nearly so) *voter to MLA representative ratio* exists for all ridings in the Province, within Entity 42 the *voter to Councillor ratio* is not at all equal throughout the entity. In fact, the different Wards within Entity 42 have such wildly different *voter to Councillor ratios*, that if this Ward structure was to be used for ridings in a provincial election, it would be deemed illegal under the **LAW**! But the editorial really missed the important point that concerns Alma the most.

In Alma's view, it is not just the representation of the residents that matters, but equally important is the representation of the COMMUNITY. A community should be represented by a governing council, that is comprised of members of the community, and that operates in a place physically close to itself. It is naïve to think of Entity 42 as a cohesive community. It is, in fact, a huge entity in terms of land area (almost 100 km from end to end) and is comprised of three, very different, founding communities, with many hamlets and rural areas in between, and a virtual suburb of the Town of Riverview in the north. Although everyone in the entity shares Albert County as a common bond, the glue that binds the entity together as a critical mass that can achieve great things, is simply not as present like the Provincial government officials might hope, or think.

Over time, Alma understands that the various parts of Entity 42 could grow together to become one. But setting up different tax rates and service standards within different areas of the entity is no way to achieve cohesion and harmony. Yet this is what the amalgamation project is pushing upon the entity.

Simply put, the founding community of Alma is losing its voice, commencing from day one. Other communities in the entity are experiencing something similar. This is no way to properly represent the unique aspects of the entity's population centres. After all, the entity's founding villages are really the "downtown areas" of the new entity.

Now, to the costs to govern. It is acknowledged that lumping everything together will provide Entity 42 with opportunities to become more efficient in the administration of local governance. But Entity 42 is catering to many more people than the previous municipal communities were responsible for. In fact, the combined LSD populations of Coverdale, Hillsborough, Hopewell and Harvey are more than twice the amount of the founding three municipalities. Who is saving the most here? Let's be clear - it is the Provincial government - not the new municipal government. Let's not be so simplistic as to portray Alma as an ignorant fool.

And oh yes, let's not forget about that "stroke of the pen". Yes, that was all it took for Alma's own local government (since 1966) to be vaporized. The new entity was not created as a result of meaningful open dialogue and debate at the local level, or in answer to the expressed wishes and dreams of our residents and taxpayers; but instead, as a stroke of a pen!

And while we are at it, we would have expected better of the editors in getting basic facts correct. Alma's permanent population may be small, but, in fact (check the census data), it is considerably more than the editorial states, and it swells tenfold once the better weather arrives – and this does not even account for the thousands of visitors that Alma supports as the gateway community to Fundy National Park. Even these numbers do not reflect the true extent of Alma's importance and contributions to the Provincial tourism and fishing economies.

That's the "real" big picture, folks.

Council of the Village of Alma