



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

MAYOR'S AND COUNCILLORS' REPORT

From: Councillors Boardman, Brame, Cavens, Morrison

Council Meeting: July 7, 2025

Subject: Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Conference – May 29 to June 1, 2025

Councillors Boardman, Brame, Cavens, and Morrison had the opportunity to attend the 2025 Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Conference in Ottawa from May 29 to June 1. This annual gathering brought together over 2,500 municipal leaders, staff, and partners from across Canada to share ideas, deepen understanding of common challenges, and strengthen the leadership capacity of local governments.

Throughout the event, our delegation participated in plenaries, workshops, and informal discussions with fellow councillors and mayors, gaining insights into both national trends and practical tools that can inform our work in Esquimalt.

Shared National Challenges: Common Ground Across Communities

A recurring theme throughout the conference was just how much Canadian municipalities—large and small—have in common. In informal conversations with peers from across the country, it became clear that Esquimalt is not alone in grappling with key pressures:

- **Aging infrastructure and limited funding:** Many communities are struggling with infrastructure systems that are decades old. Rather than building for the future, we've been patching what we already have. Concerns were raised about proposed reductions to Development Cost Charges (DCCs) and how communities will be able to fund growth-related infrastructure.
- **Rising policing costs and public safety concerns:** Street crime and the growing costs of policing were widely shared concerns, with few easy answers but strong interest in coordinated responses.
- **The housing crisis:** Every region of the country, from major urban centres to small towns, is feeling the pressure of housing scarcity, affordability gaps, and the strain of homelessness.
- **Canada–U.S. trade tensions:** The opening plenary focused on the trade dispute with the U.S., with border mayors highlighting the interconnectedness of our economies and communities. Tourism, in particular, was emphasized as a vital sector that supports over 2 million jobs in Canada. Delegates were encouraged to deepen municipal relationships and build economic resilience through collaboration.

- **Federal-municipal cooperation:** Leaders from all major federal parties addressed delegates and presented their approaches to working with municipalities. The response from FCM officials was clear: local governments are often closest to the people and best positioned to deliver solutions—but they need better tools and more stable funding and support from the Federal and Provincial Governments to do so.

Tackling Misinformation and Communicating Effectively

Several workshops focused on how elected officials can better navigate today's complex media landscape, where misinformation and disinformation can erode public trust and stall important projects.

- **Misinformation** is incorrect information shared unintentionally.
- **Disinformation** is false information shared deliberately to mislead.

Both can fuel confusion and division—especially on issues like climate policy, infrastructure development, or zoning decisions.

While the situation and recommendations are evolving, panelists recommended a number of strategies:

- **Listening first:** Understand where people are coming from and what concerns underlie their beliefs.
- **Telling stories, not just sharing facts:** Personal stories connect more deeply and stick longer than numbers alone.
- **Being consistent and visible:** Repetition helps the message stick. Residents want to hear directly from their local leaders.
- **Using trusted voices:** Partnering with respected community members can help reinforce accurate information.
- **Planning ahead:** Having a clear communications plan in place—before controversy arises—helps with transparency and crisis response.
- **Correcting the record:** False information should be addressed promptly, whether in public meetings or online.

Municipal leaders were encouraged to embrace tools like short videos, newsletters, and town halls to keep residents informed and engaged.

Equity and Inclusion in Local Government

A couple of sessions focused on how municipalities can make better decisions and improve outcomes by applying an equity lens. This involves examining who is being left out of current systems and policies—and identifying ways to remove barriers to participation, services, and leadership.

- **An equity lens** means looking at policies and projects through the experiences of residents of different ages, income levels, ethnicities, gender identities, and abilities. It's not just about fairness—it's about designing better services that serve more people, more effectively.
- Tools provided by FCM include guiding questions such as:
 - What is the purpose of this project or decision?
 - Who could benefit, and who could be negatively impacted?

- What barriers exist, and how can they be addressed?
- How will we measure success?
- It's not enough to have people "in the room." True inclusion means ensuring a diversity of voices are heard, respected, and reflected in decision-making.

Another session highlighted the **Women in Local Leadership (WILL)** initiative, a global collaboration working to increase the number of women in elected and leadership roles. While challenges remain—including cultural expectations, family pressures, and systemic bias—tools like peer mentoring and policy reform are making a difference both in Canada and abroad.

A powerful takeaway: *when women aren't at the table, the services that matter to women are often overlooked.* Local councils have a responsibility to create space and opportunity for diverse leadership.

Innovation and Efficiency in Local Government

With limited budgets and rising expectations, municipalities are exploring ways to improve services and reduce administrative burdens without sacrificing quality.

One workshop—**"Results Over Red Tape"**—highlighted success stories from communities that are streamlining services, improving responsiveness, and embracing new technology.

Some of the ideas presented:

- **Chatbots and digital assistants:** These tools can handle common resident questions after hours, freeing up staff time and improving public service. For example, they can provide information on garbage pickup, permit requirements, or how to pay taxes.
- **Digital training for seniors:** Partnering with local libraries or community organizations to help older residents access online services is a simple, effective way to increase inclusion.

Esquimalt already is ahead of other municipalities in Canada, as some of the suggested approaches are already being used by staff, such as Asset Management Systems to prioritize repairs, and belonging to Group Purchasing groups to reduce costs of purchases such as our recently approved Garbage Trucks and Street Sweepers.

A shared message from these sessions: overcoming the mindset of *"we've always done it this way"* is key to unlocking innovation.

Meeting with MP Stephanie McLean

Following the conference, Councillors Cavens, Boardman, and Morrison met with our newly elected Member of Parliament, Stephanie McLean, at the House of Commons. The meeting was both a chance to offer congratulations and to establish a working relationship focused on Esquimalt's priorities.

Topics discussed included:

- Infrastructure funding programs and opportunities
- Traffic and congestion for commuters to and from CFB Esquimalt
- Senior services and aging-in-place initiatives

We extended an invitation for MP McLean to meet with Council regularly to ensure continued collaboration between the Township and the federal government on matters that affect our residents.

Final Reflections

The sessions, speakers, and conversations at FCM offered not only inspiration, but practical tools we can bring back to Esquimalt—tools for stronger communication, smarter investment, and more representative governance.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend on behalf of the community.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Cavens for Councillors Boardman, Brame and Morrison