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Honourable John Horgan  
Premier  
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC V8W 9E1

Honourable Carole James  
Minister of Finance  
PO Box 1234 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC V1A 2BC

Dear Premier and Minister James:

During the month of July, I held 10 consultation sessions about COVID-19 and economic recovery with municipal mayors and regional district chairs or their representatives across the province. The sessions provided an opportunity for local governments to contribute directly to British Columbia's recovery conversation. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing invited representatives from 189 local governments including 21 regional districts and 14 resort communities to the conversations. The discussion and ideas that were generated helped inform this letter and I am pleased to share them with you.

Overwhelmingly, local government representatives were most concerned about connectivity, infrastructure, transit and food security. The ministry also heard that people want more than economic recovery, they want to make things better for everyone and COVID-19 provides the opportunity to do that as we restart the economy towards recovery.

The consultation sessions were guided by the principles, values and measures outlined in the government's discussion paper, Building B.C.'s Recovery, Together. They focused on the importance of getting people back to work quickly, the value of equity, leaving no one behind, restoring the Province of British Columbia's revenue base, supporting climate commitments, and having an immediate and demonstrable impact on economic recovery.

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Local governments put forward a variety of practical, innovative and valuable ideas in the consultation sessions. The following priority themes (common topics or subject areas for recovery investment) were identified:

- **Connectivity/Broadband**
- **Investment in Infrastructure**
- **Transit/Transportation**
- **Agriculture/Food Security**
- **Child Care**
- **Low Wage Workers/Employment**
- **Health Care, Mental Health and Social Services**
- **Tourism/Recreation**
- **Education/Training**
- **Clean Energy and Technology**
- **Affordable Housing**
- **Industry/Business Development**
- **Reconciliation**

These priority themes (described further in **Appendix 1**) cut across all local governments, independent of size and location. They also reflect a strong sense of “building back better” – an idea that has been widely expressed by many who say that with the hard economic impact of COVID-19 comes an opportunity to diversify, innovate, collaborate and partner to make things better for people and communities as we work towards economic recovery.

The priority themes and ideas expressed by local government leaders were primarily focused on what could be done to help various sectors in their communities rather than on the needs of the local governments themselves. At the same time, the importance of local governments having enough supports and capacity to restart operations was also noted.

A number of local governments have laid off workers, experienced real revenue losses (e.g. transit, user fees) and faced significant new costs (e.g. adapting local government facilities and services to a COVID-19 environment). Some local governments also noted the opportunity to rethink local government financing to ensure that their financial tools are sufficiently robust and sustainable to meet the increased and changing demands on local governments and their services.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the dedication, hard work and leadership local governments are providing to their communities, each with unique needs, during a challenging and ever-evolving time. As B.C. has moved into restart and now recovery planning, local governments have not only been working hard to get themselves back to full operation in a safe way, they have also been supporting the businesses, non-profits and other interests in their communities. This includes patio expansions for restaurants, shop local campaigns, virtual community events, business information tools, local economic recovery task forces and direct contributions in dedicated time and resources.

Most importantly, local governments have been doing this work in collaboration with other local governments across their regions, First Nation neighbours, all sectors in their communities and the Province. The commitment to come together in response to the unprecedented COVID-19 emergency persisted as we worked together to get restarted and now continues in rebuilding together as local governments work with the Province to plan for recovery.

I appreciate the time that everyone took out of their busy lives to participate in the consultation sessions and the recommendations they provided from their unique positions on the front lines of the pandemic.

It gives me great pleasure to provide this input from my calls with local government leaders to the economic recovery engagement process. I expect that some local governments will also be submitting ideas into that process directly. The Union of BC Municipalities has also prepared a letter for submission and I am very pleased to include it here.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Selina Robinson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Selina Robinson  
Minister

pc: Her Worship Mayor Maja Tait, President, Union of BC Municipalities  
Local Governments in British Columbia

## **Appendix 1 – Description of Priority Themes**

### **Connectivity/Broadband**

Digital connectivity is the number one opportunity that emerged in almost every engagement session, especially for rural and remote communities. To fully participate in the new economy, communities need digital access through broadband, cellular mobility, and capacity development to effectively use these technologies. Reliable and affordable high-speed internet is critical to removing barriers to growth and community well-being to enable working from home, remote schooling, moving traditional businesses to an online format and developing new types of businesses. Improving connectivity generates opportunities for everyone to learn new skills and access essential services and it will make it easier for communities to attract new residents and business investment that creates jobs for the long-term.

### **Investment in Infrastructure**

Local governments recognize that continued investment in critical infrastructure projects that facilitate the delivery of public services, such as drinking water, sewage collection and treatment, cultural and recreational facilities, parks and transportation are good investments for everyone and creates primary and secondary jobs in their communities. Investment in infrastructure addresses environmental, economic and social dimensions, and is seen as having general economic benefits for all industry sectors. Several communities have also noted that they have “shovel-ready” projects.

### **Transit/Transportation**

Effective transit and transportation networks are vital for economic recovery as they help bring people back to work and allow businesses to distribute their products and get the supplies they need. Local leaders identified a need for transit funding to make up for revenue losses and to enable the service frequency and safety that will get riders “back on board”. Other transportation infrastructure needs identified include expansion of highways, increased ferry services and investment in railway and municipal airports.

### **Agriculture/Food Security**

During the pandemic, it became even more apparent that food security is an essential need. The ability for small producers to increase their capacity and structural support is needed to ensure food is marketed, produced, processed, packaged, distributed and sold locally. Local leaders acknowledged that our reliance on foreign agricultural workers impacts food security and identified an opportunity to create a skilled domestic agricultural workforce in order to reduce reliance on workers from outside B.C.

### **Child Care**

The provision of childcare is essential for enabling workers to return to work and speed up economic recovery. Many communities identified a lack of adequate childcare in their communities. Local leaders recognize that investments in safe, reliable and affordable childcare is vital to economic recovery.

### **Low Wage Workers/Employment**

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on low wage workers especially in certain sectors (e.g. tourism, retail and food services, agriculture and non-profits), and particularly women and youth, highlights the need for support for these workers. Local leaders talked about supplementing wages as a way to stimulate recovery that would also make it easier to recruit for often hard-to-fill jobs. Some local governments noted that their communities would benefit if they could hire students and others for temporary positions in the short term, until the economy picked up.

### **Health Care, Mental Health and Social Services**

The pandemic and emergency measures have strongly impacted vulnerable populations. Isolation from services and support networks has had a profound impact on the homeless population, families living in poverty, and individuals struggling with pre-existing mental health and substance use issues. Local governments and non-profit organizations have been at the forefront of mitigating these impacts during the pandemic. Support from the Province and collaboration with local governments and non-profit organizations is essential in post-pandemic planning as this provides an opportunity to not just “pick up where we left off” but re-shape and strengthen B.C.’s health care, mental health and social services.

### **Tourism/Recreation**

Some local governments with great natural assets, noted the challenge of diversifying their tourism economies to be more resilient over the long term. Investments to support local governments in enhancing natural assets through the development of trails, parks and facilities such as campsites and washrooms will help create new jobs, especially for youth, expand tourism and improve outcomes for people and communities.

### **Education/Training**

A number of local governments identified the need for training programs to attract young people that can participate in the economy and some others noted that resource-based workers were also going through a separate economic downturn (i.e. mill closures) and that sector could also benefit from retraining and education programs.

### **Clean Energy and Technology**

Communities have asked for consistent investment to help them transition to a low carbon future and support green technology aligned with CleanBC goals. These investments will ensure that communities and local businesses are ready to seize economic opportunities coming from clean energy and technology and create more and higher-value jobs. Additionally, local governments noted that investments in climate change adaptation and mitigation activities and studies would have long-term benefits.

## **Affordable Housing**

There is still a shortage of affordable housing in the province. Investment in affordable housing will reduce chronic homelessness and support vulnerable populations by providing those most in need with a safe place to call home. Affordable and workforce housing will allow people to return to work quickly and give them the security they need to fully participate in the economy. Building affordable housing not only provides much needed housing but employs hundreds of skilled workers and can provide new workers with opportunities to learn new skills.

## **Industry/Business Development**

Innovation and investment in traditional resource industries such as forestry is a critical component of economic recovery as these industries support and create jobs in many of B.C.'s rural communities. Communities and businesses need support to capitalize on innovative and emerging opportunities. Local governments recognize the need to assist businesses in developing an online presence and the need to work in collaboration with their local business community on an ongoing basis to promote economic recovery.

## **Reconciliation**

The pandemic has highlighted the need to work together across communities and regions. Investing in ways to foster partnerships with Indigenous neighbours that not only support reconciliation but also builds community economic resilience is a real opportunity before us. There is strong willingness among local governments to work in collaboration with neighbouring Indigenous communities (as many have done in COVID-19 response); it was noted that some smaller and rural/remote local governments as well as First Nations lack resources and capacity for the level of engagement needed to achieve real economic progress.