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## MEMO:

### OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO SUPPORT REFORMS TO THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ACT TO PROVIDE PERMANENT RESIDENTS OF CANADA VOTING RIGHTS IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

## ISSUE

Permanent Residents of Canada are currently excluded from voting in Municipal, Provincial and Federal elections. There is a growing movement at the municipal level of Nova Scotia, Ontario and New Brunswick requesting the respective provincial governments to reform the Municipal Elections Act, to provide permanent residents of Canada with the right to vote at the municipal level. However, no provincial government in Canada has made the necessary legislative changes to extend the right to vote in municipal elections to permanent residents. The Municipal Elections Act governs all municipal elections throughout the Province of New Brunswick, therefore broad-based political and community support is required in order to send a signal of wide acceptance for this legislative change.

## BACKGROUND

A permanent resident means a person who has acquired and not lost permanent resident status pursuant to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Permanent Residents have gone through a rigorous application process and met a residency requirement. They are citizens of other countries.

Permanent residents are issued legal documentation from the federal government such as a Permanent Resident card (PR card), Record of Landing, or a Confirmation of Permanent Residence (COPR) document to be used in circumstances which require proof of residence. Between 2010 – 2014, an average of 2232 new permanent residents arrived in New Brunswick each year. Between July 2015 and July 2016, a total of 4435 new permanent residents arrived in New Brunswick. These residents pay for community and public services equally, but cannot vote in municipal elections.

Individuals who are refugee claimants or in Canada temporarily, such as international students or foreign workers, are not considered permanent residents and would not be eligible electors should the legislation be changed to include permanent residents as voters in municipal elections.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Support for this legislative change has taken hold in several jurisdictions across Canada, however New Brunswick municipalities have shown the most support for this legislative change. On January 22nd, 2014, Saint John City Council sent a letter to the former Premier



encouraging the province to extend voting rights to permanent residents in municipal elections. In 2015, Dieppe, Edmundston, Moncton, and Fredericton all passed motions of support to allow permanent residents to vote at the municipal level. In addition, the Cities Association of New Brunswick passed a motion of support at its Annual General Meeting in May of 2015 and the Union of New Brunswick Municipalities passed a motion of support in October of 2015.

Other jurisdiction in Canada and abroad have also moved in this direction:

- Halifax Regional Council passed a motion on December 3rd, 2014.
- Toronto City Council passed a motion on June 11th, 2013.
- More than 40 countries (half of them in Europe) now extend the municipal vote to non-citizen immigrants.
- Consultations with ethno-cultural groups, multicultural associations and permanent residents in Nova Scotia confirmed that local voting rights for permanent residents would be considered a positive conduit to fully engage in their chosen community.

### **SUMMARY OF BENEFITS**

New Brunswick's future depends on the success of its cities. Increasingly, New Brunswick city residents are immigrants, and most immigrants are visible minorities. Issues that are important to recent immigrants and visible minorities may be overlooked because they can't participate in local election.

This change would:

- Signal belonging and participation for newcomers;
- Enhance accountability of municipal leaders because they would represent all the people they serve;
- Encourage the political participation of newcomers early in the settlement process;
- Put issues that are important to newcomers and visible minorities on the political agenda at the municipal level;
- Invigorate and enhance a notion of city citizenship; and
- May serve as a tool for attraction and enhance New Brunswick's immigrant retention efforts.

