

OPINION

Leaders know municipalities move Canada forward

Election pledges: Campaign saw parties promise cities more investment and more co-operation

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN



We all have a deep connection to our hometown, to the neighbourhood streets where we grew up, or the community rink where we taught our kids to skate.

For me, that connection is strongest in East Vancouver, where my parents ran a bakery on Commercial Drive in Little Italy for 25 years. I can still remember getting to know local families — the regulars — as they stopped by for bread and pastries.

But the truth is, our communities are so much more than a collection of memories and experiences. They're hubs of economic activity. They're centres of innovation and creativity. They're where we connect with each other, and with the world.

In other words, it's our municipalities that move Canada forward.

Consider this for a moment: Just 33 municipalities in Canada produce more than 70 per cent of the country's GDP. Municipalities own 60 per cent of public infrastructure, including

roads, bridges and water systems. According to the Canadian Urban Transit Association, for every dollar invested in transit, three more are generated in economic growth.

It's simply not possible to talk about Canada's economy without talking about where you live, where you work, where you shop, where you invest in a home, and where you raise your kids.

Of course, Canadians don't need policy papers to tell them the central role our cities play — they feel it every day. They feel it in the day-to-day moments that allow all of us to dream of something better for ourselves, and our children.

Despite Canada's massive size, our local communities have more in common than we realize. Sometimes those common experiences come in the form of challenges — gridlock, the high cost of housing, outdated roads and bridges, just to name a few.

As president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the national voice for Canada's local governments, I can tell you that realities like these play out in urban, rural, northern and remote communities right across the country.

That is why it was so important to see the federal parties make real commitments to local issues during the federal election.



WAYNE LEIDENFROST/PNG FILES

A large part of Raymond Louie's connection to Vancouver is rooted in Commercial Drive where his parents ran a bakery for 25 years.

Municipal leaders in this country have never been more united, more active and more engaged. Ten months ago, the mayors of Canada's biggest cities, including Vancouver, came together to challenge federal party leaders vying to be prime minister.

Their call was simple, yet powerful: If you are serious about growing Canada's economy, if you are serious about improving the quality of life for millions of Canadians, partner with our cities.

And it worked. Throughout the campaign, we witnessed historic progress on the issues put forward by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and its nearly 2,000 members, including big city mayors and municipal leaders from across the country.

All four major federal parties

responded to our call — fully or in part — with promised investments in transit, infrastructure and housing.

These are smart investments in our hometowns, and in a stronger economy.

What's more, we saw a real commitment to a new era of co-operation between all orders of government to address the issues that impact Canadians in their daily lives, right where they live.

So the Federation of Canadian Municipalities will continue to be front-and-centre, working with the new government to turn those campaign commitments into meaningful action that works for municipalities — and for Canadians.

There simply isn't a moment to waste. Metro Vancouver alone is expected to grow by a

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million people over the next 25 years. That is 40,000 more people every single year who will be relying on the region's basic services, like transit and water systems.

Municipal leaders understand that strong cities are the foundation for a strong national economy. Livable cities are key for the future of our country, and for our children. Local governments are ready to work with the new government to address the priorities that Canadians voted for last week.

It just makes sense for all orders of government to work together. The fact is, some of Canada's biggest challenges — from job creation to climate change — play out in our local communities. The solutions to those challenges can be found locally, too.

Whether it's Vancouver's Greenest City Action Plan, Medicine Hat's bold initiative to end homelessness, or Halifax's Solar City, our hometowns are already taking action and showing leadership on the challenges we all face as Canadians.

Canada's municipalities have the experience and the know-how to get the job done. That's good news for our cities. And it's good news for Canada.

Raymond Louie is president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Acting Mayor for the City of Vancouver.