



# Rural Still Matters!

## Moving Local Government Forward

### JOIN THE DISCUSSION

In 2008, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) hosted the Rural Matters! national symposium. The event brought delegates together from across the nation to discuss issues pertaining to rural Canada and set rural priorities. As a result, rural stakeholders were encouraged to advocate those priorities in their local context.

The AAMDC did and continues to do our part to forward the ideas and priorities outlined for moving local government forward in Alberta. There's been a lot of discussion about municipalities and how they interact with other levels of government. The time is right, with change on the provincial political horizon. It's encouraging that the dialogue is getting more attention, and it's an excellent opportunity to build on our long-time position—**Rural Still Matters!**

Municipalities are encouraged to support the AAMDC in building on these priorities by putting them in the Alberta context and informing decision-makers with the concepts embodied by the **Rural Still Matters!** initiative. It is a shared responsibility to move these messages forward and work for their successful outcome in the best interest of all Albertans.

- Local government is the government closest to the people. As such, we are best positioned to know what our citizens need and how to provide it.
- More than simply land, rural Alberta is a vital part of this province's economy, culture and future. Rural Albertans are as diverse and unique as their urban counterparts.
- Local governments in this province deal with myriad complex problems on a day-to-day basis. Municipalities are uniquely positioned to provide local services that reflect local need.
- Funding is a critical issue. All municipalities have very limited means to raise the necessary funds to meet the costs of adding or replacing needed infrastructure and funding service delivery.
- Municipalities are in the best position to determine where spending should be allocated based on their own long-term plans.
- Collecting a tax raises the bar on accountability for municipalities and makes accountability a primary consideration when expending these funds. Municipalities want to continue to be empowered to do that in a way to meet unique local needs, and improve transparency and accountability.
- Quality infrastructure is critical to supporting a healthy, vibrant province. For rural municipalities, the majority of municipal funding is spent on providing infrastructure such as roads, bridges and water not services. Rural infrastructure needs do not necessarily reflect population.
- Rural municipalities are expected to provide a comparable level of services as their urban counterparts but without the advantage of economies of scale. In addition, other non-population based variables such as environment or safety standards add to municipal expenses.
- Municipalities need and will continue to need long-term, sustainable funding options supported by other levels of government.
- The AAMDC believes it is imperative for the Alberta government to maintain its investment in municipal infrastructure spending. It is within the mandate and responsibility of other orders of government to address the fiscal imbalance.
  - With any funding scenario, it is important to recognize that this is to address an existing imbalance with current roles and responsibilities. Improvements in funding should not be accompanied by additional municipal responsibilities. Doing so would only increase the fiscal imbalance.
  - Consultation is essential. The impacts of any changes affecting municipalities will vary across municipalities, so the AAMDC believes more analysis and discussion is the way to proceed. We look forward to full engagement in discussions focused on the practical, working aspects of inter-governmental relationships.