



# CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS SPRING 2019



**RMA**  
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES  
of ALBERTA



## RMA TRADE SHOW

RMA's annual trade show featured business and organizations from around Alberta and beyond displaying the products and services available to support rural municipalities. The event is a great opportunity for municipal staff and councils to view new services, products and technologies, and learn how they can strengthen relationships with vendors to better provide municipal services. Overall, more than 150 exhibitors participated in the trade show.







## PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

The RMA Spring 2019 Convention kicked off with opening ceremonies and the semi-annual address from RMA President Al Kemmere, which touched on several issues important to rural municipalities. For the past several months, RMA, in collaboration with AUMA, has been negotiating with the Government of Alberta to determine a long-term municipal funding framework to replace the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) upon its conclusion following the 2021 – 22 budget year. Negotiations have been challenging, with RMA and AUMA emphasizing a need for equity between this agreement and the agreement already agreed to with Edmonton and Calgary through the city charter process. RMA hopes to resume discussions following the election.

As the movement of Alberta's energy resources to market continues to be a huge issue within the province and across Canada, RMA is working with sister municipal associations across Canada to develop strategies to support pipeline construction and change the Canada-wide conversation about the relationship between municipalities and energy development. This work is taking place through the newly formed Resource Communities of Canada (RCC), which will be undertaking a number of advocacy initiatives related to providing a unified municipal voice on energy development.

A related challenge to the lack of market access for oil and gas products is the growing amount of unpaid municipal property taxes on oil and gas infrastructure. RMA recently surveyed its members and learned that there is at least \$81.5 million in outstanding property taxes from the oil and gas industry owed to RMA members. RMA is supporting members currently struggling with this issue and considering legislative and regulatory approaches to strengthen the ability of municipalities to recover these taxes.

As municipalities continue to work with their neighbours to complete ICFs and IDPs, there is approximately one year remaining prior to the April 1, 2020 completion deadline. RMA's continued concern with the process is the administrative burden that rural municipalities face in being required to complete multiple agreements with all municipal neighbours. RMA encourages members to access the ICF Toolkit available online, as it is a great resource to support municipalities in working through the process.

President Kemmere also provided an update on RMA Business Services, which continues to offer members a wide range of services such as insurance, trade services, and bulk fuel purchasing. Not only does RMA Business Services support members through low prices and excellent customer service, but also funds RMA's advocacy efforts.

President Kemmere closed his address with a reminder about the importance of all members working with RMA to voice the rural municipal perspective during the upcoming provincial election. Although the RMA election strategy was explained in detail later in the convention program, President Kemmere shared a glimpse of RMA's work on highlighting rural Alberta is "Where it All Starts."



## ADDRESS FROM THE PROVINCE: HONOURABLE SHAYE ANDERSON

Shaye Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, provided delegates with an update of key issues impacting municipalities in the province. Minister Anderson focused on two key issues in his address. The first was an update on the province's efforts to develop and legislate a long-term municipal funding program to replace the Municipal Sustainability Initiative when it concludes in 2022. Minister Anderson spoke to the importance of providing municipalities with predictable funding, as well as the need to develop a model that is financially sustainable for municipalities and the province.

The second issue addressed by Minister Anderson was the importance of rural broadband access. He noted that access to high speed internet everywhere in Alberta is vital to keeping businesses in rural Alberta and providing access to the digital economy. To guide the goal of providing broadband service to all areas of the province, Minister Anderson spoke about creating a broadband policy.



# DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING LIABILITY: TODAY'S DECISIONS AFFECTING YOUR MUNICIPALITY'S FUTURE

RMA Legal Counsel Raman Khabra delivered an overview of important considerations that municipalities must make related to development planning and decision-making. The presentation touched on common mistakes made by councils when making planning decisions, and the potential liability consequences that could follow. Raman's presentation provided councillors with a helpful roadmap as to how to work through the development planning and decision-making process effectively and legally.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RYAN HRELJAC

Keynote speaker Ryan Hreljac provided an honest and thought-provoking overview of what motivated him to help deliver clean drinking water to children in developing countries across the world. What started in grade one, with Ryan being confused as to why children in some parts of the world could not access the clean water that seemed so plentiful in Canada, grew to the creation of the Ryan's Well Foundation, a new adopted brother, and a positive change in the lives of thousands across the world. Ryan's address showed that asking "why" can be the first step towards making a difference in the world.

## RMA CHARITABLE GAMING COMMITTEE

In 2017, RMA members passed a resolution directing RMA to form a member committee to research Alberta's charitable gaming system and recommend ways the system could be made more equitable for rural organizations. The committee completed their report and recommendations in December 2018 and reported on them to RMA members at the committee. The five principles and four recommendations map out a plan to advocate for a more equitable gaming model, and RMA encourages members to utilize the report if consultations on the gaming model occur later in 2019.

## RMA BUSINESS SERVICES APPROVED SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT: LANE QUINN BENEFIT CONSULTANTS

We are excited to be able to highlight one of our RMA Business Services approved suppliers as a new feature of our conventions. This convention, Lane Quinn Benefit Consultants spoke to the programs available to RMA members including group life insurance, dependent life insurance, short and long term disability, extended health care and dental, employee family assistance programs, healthcare spending accounts, and group retirement programs. The RMA benefits program has provided value to over 65 of our members and we welcome the opportunity to work with new members to provide cost effective benefit programs to meet budget and staff expectations.







## MINISTERIAL FORUM

RMA hosted three members of the Government of Alberta Cabinet (Minster Anderson, Minister Hoffman, and Minister Mason) on our convention stage. Provincial government involvement was limited due to the writ drop shortly before the forum began. The ministers addressed questions from RMA members on several topics, including:

- ♦ Unpaid municipal taxes from oil and gas companies
- ♦ Disaster relief funding for overland flooding
- ♦ Funding for rural hospitals
- ♦ Funding for HALO air ambulance
- ♦ Modernization of rural schools
- ♦ Sustainable funding for municipalities
- ♦ Access to recycling services
- ♦ The status of “Ropin’ the web”
- ♦ Formal commitment for a long-term care facility
- ♦ Specific highway concerns
- ♦ Conversion of high-quality agricultural land
- ♦ The cost of new school bus driver training
- ♦ Funding for libraries including accessing the SuperNet
- ♦ Including municipalities in discussions on creating provincial parks
- ♦ Re-introducing front licence plates as a tool to fight rural crime
- ♦ Concerns about long wait times for approvals from Alberta Environment and Parks
- ♦ Financial support for rural broadband
- ♦ Firetrucks being exempt from daily inspection requirements
- ♦ Status of municipally funded ambulance service pilot
- ♦ Concerns over increasing healthcare costs
- ♦ Transparent funding for recreation centres



## ALBERTA'S ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Pedro Antunes from the Conference Board of Canada was invited to speak to the convention on the topic of Alberta's economic outlook. Pedro spoke to a number of trends that are ongoing in the province, many of which are related to Alberta's oil and gas industry. The primary findings show that growth in terms of real GDP remains low compared to Alberta's historical averages; however, wages in Alberta remain the highest in the country. Real challenges remain going forward for Alberta related to investment in the oil and gas industry and the inability to move Alberta's natural resources to export markets.

## FUTURE OF ENERGY PANEL

Shannon Joseph from CAPP, Pedro Antunes from the Conference Board of Canada, and Gerald Gabinet from Strathcona County joined the RMA stage for a panel on energy. Alberta's energy industry has struggled from low oil prices, a high price differential, and a globally competitive investment climate. The inability to move Alberta's energy to tide water and export markets has only exacerbated many of these concerns; the need for export capacity remains the primary challenge facing the industry. Mr. Gabinet also spoke to the investment and best community practices from his municipality and how to work with industry to coordinate development with municipal infrastructure.



## FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES

Bill Karsten, First Vice President of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, brought greetings to delegates on behalf of the organization. Vice President Karsten emphasized the importance of the upcoming federal budget and the important role that FCM plays in advocating for Canadian municipalities at the federal level. In particular, he provided an overview of FCM's work on advocating for greater federal support of rural broadband and the need for a long-term federal funding strategic approach to connecting all Canadians, regardless of where in the country they live.

Vice President Karsten also discussed the importance of the upcoming federal election for municipalities across Canada and the need for FCM and provincial/territorial associations to develop a common advocacy voice when engaging with federal candidates.

## RHPAP'S RECIPE FOR RURAL SUCCESS: A MIX OF COLLABORATION, CAPACITY BUILDING AND PASSION

Bernard Anderson, Executive Director, and Rebekah Seidel, Director of Community Development and Engagement, of RhPAP presented on their work to recruit healthcare professionals to rural Alberta. The speakers discussed their Attraction and Retention Committee Toolkit, which is designed to help communities in their efforts to provide healthcare services in rural areas. They also addressed the three domains that are important to attracting and retaining healthcare professionals in rural areas: professional, family, and community, noting family support and lifestyle as important factors.









## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Six breakout sessions were held at the RMA Spring Convention. They included:

### **BUILDING HEALTHY RURAL COMMUNITIES: RECRUITING AND RETAINING HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

Bernard Anderson and Rebekah Seidel with RhPAP, Jared Friesen with the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta (NPAA), and Carolyn Sedlowsky with Thorhild County, each presented and participated in a panel discussion with questions coming from RMA members. RhPAP spoke about their skills weekends and workshops designed to expose healthcare students to rural healthcare. The NPAA spoke about nurse practitioner's scope of practice and their ability to practise without the supervision of a doctor. Thorhild County spoke about their experience with opening their own clinic after the local doctor stopped practising in town. The county shared their involvement with hiring a nurse practitioner and the positive feedback from residents.

### **FROM TRASH TO TREASURE: A RECYCLING UPDATE IN ALBERTA SPONSORED BY ALBERTA RECYCLING MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY**

Changes in the recycling industry have shifted and this has municipal implications as programs are forced to adapt. These challenges are largely related to the closure of the Chinese market for recycling material and the reality that alternative markets are not available to accept these materials. Christina Siedel and Lorenzo Donini from the Recycling Council of Alberta spoke to some potential solutions in the recycling industry as well as some future trends. Tammy Schwass from the Alberta Plastics Recycling Association spoke to the Agriculture Plastics Recycling Pilot Program which is supported by the RMA and has recently received a \$1 million grant. The pilot program is set to launch in summer and fall 2019. More information is available at [APRG.ca](https://www.aprg.ca)

## COLLABORATION AND TECHNOLOGY: TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN REDUCING CRIME

Crime continues to be a major issue for many of Alberta's rural municipalities. This workshop featured speakers from the County of Barrhead, the Town of Barrhead and the RCMP, who highlighted the Barrhead and Area Regional Crime Coalition Connect (BARCC Connect) tool. This is an innovative service they are providing to the region to improve communication between the RCMP, municipalities, and residents on local crime incidents, as well as other issues such as inclement weather, road construction, and upcoming community events. BARCC Connect provides real-time alerts to subscribed residents through text, email, or landline calls, and can be customized to allow residents to receive the types of information they prefer. BARCC Connect has already been instrumental in addressing rural crime and is improving communication between the participating municipalities and their residents.

## ALBERTA'S OMBUDSMAN: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OMBUDSMAN AND MUNICIPALITIES

Alberta's Ombudsman, Marianne Ryan, was joined by Lisa Rimstad and Chad Bouman from the Ombudsman's office. They spoke about the Ombudsman's role as an appointed legislative officer and a neutral third party. The Ombudsman's office is the final resort for dispute resolution; if there is another avenue of appeal, their office will refer a complainant there. Regarding municipalities, which came under the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman's office in April 2018, the majority of written complaints received by the Ombudsman have been resolved through an early resolution process, which takes significantly less time than a formal investigation. To date, there have been only eight formal investigations into municipalities by the Ombudsman's office.

## GOING WITH THE FLOW: WETLANDS AND WATER

Jocelyn Thrasher-Haug with Strathcona County, Shari Clare with Fierra Consulting, and Kristina Dembinski with the Land Stewardship Centre joined the RMA on a panel about Alberta's wetlands. Wetlands exist across Alberta's vast landscape and the Alberta Wetland Policy has posed numerous challenges for municipalities and landowners. The speakers spoke to some new tools and resources available to municipalities, as well as the experience of the County of Vermilion River as a wetland restoration agent. New changes are coming to the wetland process and it will be an ongoing effort to fulfill the intent of the province's policy and legislation.

## UNDERSTANDING UNPAID LINEAR PROPERTY TAXES

As Alberta's oil and gas industry continues to face challenges, many rural municipalities are facing one of their own: unpaid property taxes from bankrupt or struggling oil and gas companies. Shauna Finley, Partner with Reynolds Mirth Richards and Farmer, provided an overview of the current provincial and federal legislation related to the ability of municipalities to recover unpaid taxes on linear property, outlined current legal cases on this issue, and summarized potential next steps for municipalities to take to recover taxes they are owed.







## KEYNOTE SPEAKER: VIVIAN KRAUSE

Vivian Krause is an independent researcher who has dedicated significant time and resources into understanding how environmentally-focused organizations in Canada, particularly those focused on opposing the development of Alberta's oil sands and the construction of pipelines, are funded. Ms. Krause's address demonstrated the complex and international connections informing what often appear to be local protests and resistance, and raised questions about the ethics of international organizations having a role in opposing projects with local, regional, and national impacts.



## ALUS AND THE CASE FOR CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO WETLAND RESTORATION

Bryan Gilvesy, CEO of ALUS Canada, was joined on stage by Rod Shaigec, Mayor of Parkland County. Mr. Shaigec spoke about the alternative land use services (ALUS) program in Parkland County and the impact it has had so far, giving a local view on the program. Mr. Gilvesy spoke about ecosystem services: benefits that humans enjoy provided by the natural environment. Examples include wetlands slowing the flow of water and acting as a carbon sink. There are currently 11 counties in Alberta with an ALUS program.



## RESOLUTIONS

The business portion of the RMA convention includes the resolutions session, which allows members to vote on resolutions brought forward by member municipalities. Endorsed resolutions become the marching orders of the RMA for three years. Active and past resolutions can be found on the RMA resolutions database at [RMAAlberta.com](http://RMAAlberta.com).

The following resolutions were endorsed at the RMA Spring 2019 Convention.

- 1-19S      Municipal Support for the Energy Industry (*Strathcona County*)
- 2-19S      Access to Agriculture-Specific Mental Health Resources (*Lac Ste. Anne County*)
- 3-19S      Light Weight Concrete Bridge Girders (*County of Northern Lights*)
- 4-19S      Bighorn Country Proposal Consultation (*Brazeau County*)
- 5-19S      Amendments Required for Crown Land Recreation Disposition Applications and Renewals (*County of Grande Prairie*)
- 6-19S      Prevent Implementation of Seed Royalty on Producers for Farm Saved Seed (*County of Northern Lights*)
- 7-19S      Solar Power Reclamation (MD of Taber)
- 8-19S      Reinstatement of the Municipal Officer's Expense Allowance (*Clearwater County*)
- 9-19S      Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Funding (*Northern Sunrise County*)
- 10-19S     Strategic Direction for the RMA (*RMA Executive*)
- 11-19S     Update of the Provincial Code of Practice for Compost Facilities (*Wheatland County*)
- 12-19S     Making Children's Healthcare a Priority in Alberta (*MD of Opportunity*)



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