

## Policing and Rural Crime

*Regardless of where in the province they live, all Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities. Like many services, policing in rural areas is accompanied by challenges related to large geographic areas and low population densities. Rural municipalities have a history of working effectively with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to support community safety, but challenges related to response time, police funding, and collaboration between police and municipal leaders is ongoing. As with any service, if municipalities are required to financially contribute to policing, this should result in improved service levels and greater local input.*

### **What is RMA's position on the importance of policing and rural crime in rural municipalities?**

- Safe communities are critical to attracting and retaining residents and businesses. In rural areas this is especially critical as many properties are located in isolated areas far from neighbours or services, leaving them especially vulnerable to property crimes.
- In recent years, crime rates in rural Alberta have increased significantly. For example, in 2017, rural crime rates in rural Alberta were 38% higher than in urban Alberta. In many rural areas, residents and businesses perceive crime as a crisis that significantly impacts their quality of life.
- Due to the unique challenges of policing rural Alberta, supporting safe rural communities requires collaboration among many groups, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Justice, municipalities, and local non-profit organizations.

### **What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to policing and rural crime?**

- As is the case with most services, providing a comparable level of policing service in rural areas to that in urban areas would cost significantly more and is likely impractical due to rural Alberta's large geographic areas and dispersed population.
- The Government of Alberta's municipal police costing formula, which requires all rural municipalities and all urban municipalities with a population below 5000 to contribute a portion of frontline policing costs, requires rural municipalities to cover over 80% of the total costs that will be incurred by municipalities impacted by the model.
- Alberta's police costing formula will require rural municipalities to contribute a significant portion to policing costs with no

indication as to whether local services will improve, and no commitment to increased local input into policing.

- While policing is critical to addressing rural crime, adequate investments in Crown prosecutors, as well as Family and Community Support Services and victims services is important to supporting safe rural communities.

## What collaborative relationships are essential to developing safe rural communities?

- Effective outreach and engagement with the community is a critical aspect of effective, modern policing. Due to limited police capacity and fewer formal community organizations in comparison to urban communities, prioritizing outreach and engagement can be a challenge for rural police services.
- Rural municipalities currently have the option of forming police committees to collaborate with the local RCMP detachment on policing priorities and strategies. However, police committees are voluntary, and are used inconsistently across the province. It is critical that the Government of Alberta develop an enhanced mechanism for local input into policing based on new municipal cost contribution requirements.

## How does the work of RMA support safe rural communities?

- RMA champions the rural municipal perspective on policing and crime through regular communication with a variety of crime-related organizations (e.g. Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Association of Community Peace Officers).
- RMA looks forward to participating on the Alberta Police Advisory Board along with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Police Governance, and the Government of Alberta. RMA is hopeful that participation on the Board will provide an opportunity for meaningful input into rural policing.

## What current policing and rural crime-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

### *Police Costing Model*

- RMA is concerned with the Government of Alberta's decision to require rural municipalities to contribute to frontline policing costs in 2020. The costing model includes no indication that local service levels will be enhanced or that local input into policing will increase.

- Requiring rural municipalities to contribute to frontline policing costs may have unintended consequences, including a reduction in other community safety initiatives such as community peace officers and other services.
- Requiring municipalities to contribute to frontline policing with no consultation as to how the revenue collected will be used or how additional officers will be distributed across the province reflects a downloading of costs without increased municipal input. Municipalities should not be required to contribute to costs at a level that does not align with service level increases.
- Equalized assessment is a poor measure for use in Alberta's police costing model. Equalized assessment does not reflect a municipality's need for police services, and is a volatile measure that will lead to inconsistent municipal costs each year.

## *Community Peace Officers*

- Community peace officers play an important role in many rural municipalities by enforcing municipal bylaws and some provincial laws.
- As community peace officers may encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations, it is critical that they have adequate training and resources to support a safe work environment.
- Community peace officers likely to encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations require direct and timely access to the Canadian Police Information Centre in order to gather basic information before approaching an unknown person or vehicle.

## *Rural Crime Strategy*

- The Government of Alberta's Rural Crime Strategy is an important step toward developing a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional approach to reducing rural crime.
- RMA is pleased with the Government of Alberta's 2019 budget commitment to hire an additional 50 Crown prosecutors, although it is crucial that these hires lead to an increase of prosecutors in rural areas.

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