RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES of ALBERTA

ENDORSED RESOLUTIONS

Fall 2026

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Resolution 1-26F

Preserving Municipal Authority in Aggregate Pit Approvals

County of Stettler and Smoky Lake County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Protected Areas

WHEREAS municipalities are responsible for land-use planning, public engagement, local road and bridge networks, emergency access, drainage, and the long-term compatibility of industrial development with neighbouring properties and planned community growth; and

WHEREAS the *Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act* (Bill 28), through section 619.1 of the *Municipal Government Act,* gives paramountcy of a provincial registration of a sand and gravel pit over any municipal planning decision and approval, including municipal statutory plans, land use bylaws, subdivision decisions and development decisions; and

WHEREAS implementation of Section 619.1 is to be more fully defined through an update of the Code of Practice for Pits under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*; and

WHEREAS the provincial registration process for pits was primarily designed to address environmental requirements and does not include a municipal planning review, mandatory public hearing, transparent public decision record, or assurance that local infrastructure impacts will be addressed before approval; and

WHEREAS in summer 2026, Alberta Environment and Protected Areas have undertaken consultation with municipalities regarding the implementation of Bill 28 and updates to the Code of Practice; and

WHEREAS these consultations and unclear policy intent generated significant questions and concerns regarding the effectiveness of using the Code of Practice and its parent legislation to create a system that adequately addresses the complexities involved in changing land use to allow for sand and gravel pits; and

WHEREAS the limited time for the consultations and implementation details may not produce the best results for Albertans; and

WHEREAS municipalities and local taxpayers may bear road, bridge, drainage, enforcement and land-use costs arising from provincially approved aggregate developments while municipal authority to prevent, condition or recover those costs is restricted;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to suspend proclamation of the sections of Bill 28 related to sand and gravel pit approvals to allow for required legislative, regulatory and policy changes to ensure that aggregate pit registration decisions are informed by local considerations;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Government of Alberta establish mandatory public notice and input, publish reasons for registration decisions, provide municipalities with application-tracking access, and ensure adequate provincial inspection, complaint response, enforcement, reclamation security and operator accountability before further expanding provincial paramountcy or streamlining pit approvals;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the provincial framework preserve clear and enforceable municipal authority over local land-use compatibility and off-site impacts, including setbacks, hours of operation, noise, dust as a nuisance, traffic, haul routes, road-use agreements, drainage, emergency access, municipal infrastructure protection and recovery of costs attributable to pit operations;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA urge the GOA to explore whether further legislative changes are needed to establish a system that best balances the provincial and local planning interests with respect to sand and gravel pits.

Member Background

Historically, aggregate pits on private land were considered through two complementary processes. Alberta Environment and Protected Areas reviewed environmental matters under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the Water Act, the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation and the Code of Practice for Pits. Municipalities considered local land use, development compatibility, public input, traffic, roads, setbacks, operating conditions and other community impacts through statutory plans, land use bylaws and development permits.

The Code of Practice for Pits applies to Class I pits on private land with a disturbance area of five hectares, approximately 12.5 acres, or more. Alberta's public information reports approximately 900 Class I pits and more than 1,500 Class II pits, based on estimates published in 2018. Class II pits are smaller than five hectares and do not require registration under the Code, although conservation, reclamation and Water Act requirements may still apply.

Bill 28 received Royal Assent on May 14, 2026 and introduced section 619.1 of the Municipal Government Act. One of the many topics addressed in Bill 28 is the approval framework for sand and gravel pits. The primary change is the elimination of the system of dual compliance between an Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (AEPA) approval, a pit registration, and a municipal land use bylaw and/or development permit approval. As such, a provincial registration for a pit prevails over a municipal statutory plan or related municipal authorization. Furthermore, certain statutory-plan or land-use-bylaw amendments must be approved within 90 days to ensure compliance with the provincial registration unless the applicant agrees to a longer period.

Municipalities may attach conditions that do not conflict with the registration, but the boundary between provincial and municipal authority is not sufficiently clear. Issues such as dust, drainage, setbacks and operational impacts can have both environmental and local nuisance dimensions. If the provincial registration addresses an issue broadly, a municipality may be prevented from applying a

locally appropriate condition even when the local impact, road standard, settlement pattern or neighbouring land use is different.

The RMA's July 2026 member resource identifies several gaps in relying on the provincial process as the primary approval mechanism. Provincial notification is governed by section 72 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, but there is no requirement for the Director or Alberta Environment and Protected Areas to hold a public hearing for a new pit registration or an amendment. The Director's decision memo and record are not released publicly, and registrations under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act cannot be appealed to the Environmental Appeals Board. The provincial service target for an initial Code of Practice registration is 120 days.

The combination of provincial paramountcy, a 90-day municipal amendment timeline and a 120-day provincial service target creates pressure for speed without ensuring that local infrastructure capacity, cumulative land-use effects and community concerns have been resolved. Streamlining can improve predictability, but it should not remove the information and safeguards needed to make a sound public-interest decision.

Additionally, the sections of Bill 28 to implement the proposed changes have not yet been proclaimed in force and are expected to come into force when amendments to the Province's Code of Practice for Pits are approved. The amendments to the Code of Practice are scheduled for approval by November 2026.

As part of the process to update the Code of Practice and implement the intent of Bill 28, AEPA held three virtual sessions to seek input from municipalities. The sessions revealed the following:

- There may be limited opportunities to incorporate adjacent landowner or local participation in the approval process used by AEPA when issuing registrations compared to the degree of input allowed under the dual compliance approach (i.e. no hearing prior to a decision and no right of appeal of a decision).
- The *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*'s and its mandated focus on "environmental considerations" may limit AEPA's ability to expand the range of topics covered by their pit approval; for example, offsite noise impacts on human or wildlife populations is not considered an "environmental consideration."
- While AEPA is willing to leave some topics, such as hours of operation, to be regulated by municipalities, the municipality's ability to enforce compliance on any issues that may have been left to be addressed through the municipal development permit process, specifically the ability to issue a stop order to cease or suspend an activity that has a provincial approval that is meant to have paramountcy over any local planning decision, may be limited.
- There may be limited flexibility available under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* compared to other legislation such as the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* to establish a system which balances provincial and local land use considerations.

With the changes introduced by Bill 28, AEPA staff will now be the decision maker on the question of any change in land use to allow a pit. What may be lost in the process may be any consideration of compatibility with adjacent land uses, sometimes referred to as “good neighbour expectations”, and consideration of offsite infrastructure impacts.

Given the number and significance of the unresolved issues, it does not seem prudent or wise to rush ahead with implementation of a system that has a high potential to produce unforeseen or unintended consequences due to potential legislative limitations and limited time to evaluate options.

The proposed changes pose significant impacts to rural municipalities, who manage approximately 130,000 kilometres of roads across the province. A pit may generate repeated heavy-truck movements over roads and bridges that were not designed or funded for that traffic. Without municipal involvement before registration, an approval may proceed before haul routes, seasonal restrictions, intersection improvements, dust-control responsibilities, road-use agreements, emergency access or cost-recovery arrangements are settled. The resulting maintenance and rehabilitation costs can be shifted to the municipal tax base.

Local impacts are not limited to roads. Aggregate development may affect drainage patterns, groundwater concerns, agricultural access, nearby homes and businesses, future residential or industrial growth, emergency response routes and the value or future use of surrounding land. Residents will continue to bring complaints and infrastructure concerns to their municipal council even when the municipality lacks authority to change the provincial registration or enforce provincial requirements.

Required Safeguards

- Early municipal notice would require notification to the municipality before the application is accepted as complete to provide access to the full application, technical reports and proposed activities plan.
- Planning alignment would require the applicant and the Director to identify conflicts with municipal statutory plans, land use bylaws, growth plans and planned infrastructure, and document how conflicts should be addressed.
- Public participation would require meaningful public notice and input before registration, with additional engagement for amendments that could increase disturbance, traffic or off-site impacts.
- Infrastructure protection would require the preservation of municipal authority to require haul-route approval, road-use agreements, traffic controls, drainage protection, security and recovery of attributable municipal costs.
- Infrastructure protection would require the preservation of municipal authority to require haul-route approval, road-use agreements, traffic controls, drainage protection, security and recovery of attributable municipal costs.
- Local operating conditions would require municipal authority over setbacks, hours, noise, nuisance dust, access, traffic, emergency response and other local matters where conditions do not undermine a provincial environmental requirement.

- Transparency and enforcement would require the publishing of decision reasons, give municipalities application-tracking access, maintain adequate inspections and complaint response, and provide clear escalation tools for non-compliance.

A durable aggregate approval system requires both provincial environmental oversight and municipal knowledge of local roads, land use, drainage, emergency access and community development. Provincial registration should not force a municipality to approve an incompatible development or leave local taxpayers responsible for impacts that could have been addressed through early consultation and enforceable conditions. The requested amendments would support timely aggregate development while restoring the checks, transparency, and accountability needed to protect the public interest.

RMA Background

2-23F: Amendments to the Municipal Government Act – Section 619

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to amend Section 619 of the Municipal Government Act to state that decisions made by provincial regulators in granting licenses, permits, approvals and other authorizations under their jurisdiction must be consistent with municipal statutory land use planning related to the protection of productive agricultural lands, impacts on municipal infrastructure, existing land uses, and other possible local project impacts.
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> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 2-26F

Review and Improve the Dissolution Process to Enhance Support for Absorbing Municipalities

Mountain View County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs

WHEREAS the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) defines the process for dissolution, which focuses solely on the municipality that may dissolve and not the absorbing municipality; and

WHEREAS the *Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act* (Bill 28) amends the MGA to allow the Minister to override a public vote on dissolution following a viability review by recommending to Cabinet that a municipality dissolve, or that it remain a municipality while meeting viability directives, regardless of the public vote results; and

WHEREAS currently, financial support for absorbing municipalities is limited to capped funding available through the Alberta Community Partnership (ACP) grant funding streams, as well as some limited taxation tools and grandfathering of grant allocations; and

WHEREAS small villages undergoing viability reviews are typically set very high mill rates; and

WHEREAS significant issues with the quality and comprehensiveness of infrastructure audits conducted during the viability review process have been raised; and

WHEREAS RMA issued a post-dissolution impacts study, including four case studies.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate that the Government of Alberta (GOA) enhance Alberta Community Partnership (ACP) funding for municipalities absorbing dissolved municipalities to reflect audited infrastructure needs, costs of replacing or repairing inherited assets that are beyond their useful life, and for other emergent post-dissolution costs;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA review and amend the municipal viability review and dissolution process to ensure the financial, operational, and governance impacts on absorbing municipalities are fully considered through improved due diligence, standardized infrastructure assessments, enhanced access to information, and adequate provincial support;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that, for the duration of any municipal viability review, the GOA appoint an Official Administrator, in consultation with the potential absorbing municipality, to ensure governance stability, administrative oversight, and continuity;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA implement and adequately fund standardized infrastructure audit requirements that comprehensively assess infrastructure against the standards of the absorbing municipality prior to dissolution.

Member Background

Alberta's current municipal viability review and dissolution process places significant emphasis on the municipality under review, with limited consideration given to the financial, operational, and

governance impacts on the municipality that would ultimately absorb the dissolved community. Publicly available guidance and the viability review workbook focus primarily on outcomes for the dissolving municipality, while providing little information or support to help absorbing municipalities assess the full implications of dissolution. Many workbook questions require information that is not available to absorbing municipalities or ask them to make assumptions and commitments before sufficient due diligence of the viability review and dissolution process has been completed. Additionally, the lack of data shared by the municipality under review does not allow the potential absorbing municipality to fully understand risks and opportunities when answering the workbook questions.

While the ACP program provides some financial assistance to absorbing municipalities, current funding and processes do not adequately reflect the full costs and risks associated with municipal dissolution. Infrastructure deficiencies, administrative transition requirements, and unforeseen post-dissolution issues can create significant financial pressures for absorbing municipalities. Strengthening provincial funding, improving infrastructure audit standards, and revising the viability review process to better support informed decision-making would help ensure municipal dissolutions are fair, transparent, and sustainable for all affected municipalities.

Municipalities that have gone through dissolutions have identified significant concerns with the quality, scope, and reliability of infrastructure audits conducted during municipal viability reviews. Limited funding, inconsistent procurement practices, and reliance on incomplete municipal information have resulted in audits that fail to identify critical infrastructure deficiencies and liabilities before dissolution. While Municipal Affairs provides minimum audit requirements, there are insufficient standards for audit rigor and long-term assessment, leaving absorbing municipalities vulnerable to unexpected costs and commitments. Strengthening infrastructure audit requirements would improve due diligence and ensure municipalities have accurate information to make informed decisions during the dissolution process.

RMA Background

1-23S: Enhanced Support for Receiving Municipalities in Dissolutions

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta review the total financial compensation, timelines, process, and other support provided to receiving municipalities to better mitigate and manage the immediate and ongoing impacts resulting from the dissolution or amalgamation process.
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> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 4-26F

Dedicated Rural Economic Corridor Infrastructure Funding Stream

Westlock County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors

WHEREAS rural municipalities own and maintain most of Alberta's local road, bridge and culvert network; and

WHEREAS rural transportation networks connect farms, forests, energy developments, gravel and silica operations and other resource industries to provincial highways, railways, processing facilities and export markets; and

WHEREAS heavy industrial and resource-haul traffic accelerates the deterioration of rural municipal roads, bridges and culverts; and

WHEREAS the employment, royalties, taxes, exports and broader economic activity enabled by that infrastructure benefit the entire province; and

WHEREAS the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP) is competitive, oversubscribed and project-based; and

WHEREAS broader municipal funding approaches that emphasize population do not adequately measure the industrial traffic, provincial revenue generation or economic output supported by rural municipal infrastructure; and

WHEREAS population-based measures inherently direct a greater share of infrastructure funding toward urban centres even though rural roads, bridges and culverts provide the essential first-mile connections that enable Alberta's forestry, oil and gas, gravel and silica, agriculture, mining, processing and other resource industries; and

WHEREAS rural residents, farms, businesses, emergency services and school transportation rely on the same rural roads, bridges and culverts for daily and essential travel; and

WHEREAS unlike residents of major urban centres, they cannot resort to a public transit system or other forms of transport when local infrastructure becomes unsafe, restricted or closed; and

WHEREAS years of chronic oversubscription of funding programs have created a compounding backlog and an increasingly serious public safety concern across rural Alberta, as municipalities may identify 20 or more necessary projects but receive funding for only one or fewer, leaving no practical way to catch up on infrastructure deficits before additional roads, bridges and culverts deteriorate into urgent failures; and

WHEREAS project-by-project provincial approvals do not necessarily align with locally established infrastructure priorities, limiting municipalities' ability to sequence projects, bundle work, plan capital investment and responsibly debt-finance urgent upgrades; and

WHEREAS a predictable provincial funding commitment would allow rural municipalities to debenture and complete multiple priority projects over several years; and

WHEREAS RMA's rural infrastructure analysis identified a $17.25 billion deficit in rural municipal roads, bridges and culverts as of 2023, projected to exceed $40 billion by 2028 without urgent and sustained investment; and

WHEREAS deferring rehabilitation and replacement increases long-term costs, creates safety and reliability risks, restricts heavy-haul routes and undermines Alberta's ability to attract and retain resource-sector and value-added investment;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to immediately establish a dedicated, predictable and long-term funding stream, available exclusively to rural municipalities as an enhancement to the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP), for the lifecycle maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement of rural municipal roads, bridges and culverts that support provincially significant economic activity and heavy-truck traffic, with municipal allocations confirmed sufficiently in advance to support local capital planning and multi-year debt financing;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the funding stream be allocated through a transparent, needs-based formula that is not population-based and instead:

- **Considers asset condition, road kilometres, bridge and culvert inventory, heavy-truck volumes, industrial activity, provincial revenues, economic output, emergency access, school transportation and the absence of practical alternative transportation routes or transit systems;**
- **Provides municipalities with authority to direct their allocation to locally established priorities;**
- **Permits municipalities to bundle and debenture multiple projects over several years against confirmed future provincial allocations;**
- **Provides through legislation or regulation that debt supported and repaid by those confirmed allocations is excluded from the municipality's ordinary debt-limit calculation; and**
- **Is additional to, rather than a replacement for, existing STIP and Local Government Fiscal Framework funding.**

Member Background

Rural municipal transportation infrastructure is not merely local infrastructure. It is the first and last link in Alberta's economic corridors. Before timber, energy products, gravel and silica, agricultural

commodities and other resources reach a provincial highway, rail terminal, processing plant or export market, they often travel over a rural municipal road and cross a municipally managed bridge or culvert.

The economic value created by these industries extends across Alberta through jobs, royalties, corporate activity, processing, exports and government revenue. The infrastructure burden, however, is concentrated on rural municipal ratepayers. Heavy trucks impose wear far beyond ordinary local traffic, and a single failed bridge, culvert or road segment can force long detours, reduce allowable weights, interrupt supply chains or prevent new investment from proceeding.

STIP is valuable but does not provide the scale, certainty or planning horizon needed to address the rural infrastructure deficit. Its Resource Road Program is competitively scored, limits a municipality to one approved project every two years, and provides a 50% provincial contribution up to $3 million. Its Local Road Bridge Program is also project-based. These structures can help individual projects but cannot sustain an entire rural network or support systematic lifecycle maintenance before an asset deteriorates into a major replacement.

The underlying funding imbalance is made worse when municipal infrastructure need is measured mainly through population. Population is a reasonable consideration for services used directly by residents, but it is an incomplete and inequitable measure for transportation infrastructure carrying industrial loads. A rural road may serve relatively few residents while carrying thousands of heavy-truck movements connected to forestry, energy, gravel and silica, agriculture or processing. That road can be economically significant to the entire province even though the local population is small.

Population-weighted approaches naturally direct more dollars toward urban municipalities. At the same time, much of the industrial development that generates Alberta's royalties, taxes, exports and employment is located in rural Alberta and depends on municipally owned rural roads, bridges and culverts. Rural municipalities are therefore expected to maintain infrastructure serving provincial economic activity using a funding system that does not adequately count the activity, loads or revenue the infrastructure supports.

The population comparison also overlooks how completely rural Albertans depend on this network. Rural residents and businesses must use local roads and bridges to reach work, healthcare, schools, farms, customers and essential services. Ambulances, fire apparatus, police, school buses, agricultural equipment and commercial vehicles use the same infrastructure. When a rural bridge is restricted or closed, these users may face lengthy detours, delayed emergency response and increased transportation risk. Rural residents cannot be redirected to an LRT or another urban transit alternative; the road and bridge network is their essential transportation system.

The cumulative effect is now an urgent rural safety concern. Municipalities can submit documented lists containing 20 or more necessary bridge, culvert and road projects, yet receive approval for only one project or no funding in a given year. While one structure is addressed, the remaining assets continue to age, deteriorate and become more expensive to repair. New deficiencies are added faster than existing

ones can be removed from the list. Under the current competitive model, there is no realistic path for rural municipalities to eliminate the backlog or get ahead of emerging safety risks.

This resolution is intentionally different from RMA Resolution 1-23F, which requested a substantial increase to the Local Road Bridge Program stream of STIP and remains classified by RMA as Intent Not Met. The present resolution calls for a new rural-only enhancement that addresses roads, bridges and culverts together and recognizes the exceptional cost pressures created by provincially beneficial industrial traffic.

RMA reported a $17.25 billion deficit in Alberta's rural municipal roads, bridges and culverts as of 2023 and projects that the deficit will exceed $40 billion by 2028 without urgent investment. RMA's bridge analysis found that the rural municipal bridge and culvert portfolio was at approximately 49% condition in 2023 and that an estimated $2.29 billion investment was required to return the portfolio to a 94% target condition. The same analysis concluded that current investment was less than 10% of the annual amount required merely to hold the portfolio at its existing condition.

Westlock County's experience illustrates the structural problem. Its 2025–2029 assessment identified nine priority bridge projects valued at approximately $5.5 million, while unfunded carry-over projects brought the overall list to 32 priority projects valued at roughly $11.9 million. From 2020–2024, the County received approximately $1.7 million in STIP funding despite a much larger documented need, including one year in which it received no STIP funding.

Funding one priority project in a year—or none—does not prevent the remainder of the network from continuing to deteriorate and does not provide a credible path to address accumulated safety risks.

Westlock County's recently approved culvert replacement further demonstrates the issue. The County appreciates the provincial contribution; however, the approved structure was not ranked among the County's five highest infrastructure priorities. Under the current project-by-project model, provincial approval decisions can be tailored to the province's annual program budget without necessarily enabling the municipality to address its most urgent local priorities first.

Westlock County has also invested more than $17 million of municipal capital funding in its gravel program since 2015. Because recurring gravel placement and similar maintenance are generally treated as operating expenditures rather than capital additions, this necessary investment does not improve the Tangible Capital Asset measure used in the Municipal Affairs infrastructure-age indicator. The result can understate the effort rural municipalities make to preserve gravel road networks while still demonstrating the underlying need for sustained renewal funding.

A dedicated rural stream would allow municipalities to move from reactive repairs to planned lifecycle management. Predictable multi-year allocations would support engineered priority plans, project bundling, earlier tendering and economies of scale. When future provincial allocations are confirmed, municipalities could debenture and complete multiple locally ranked projects over several years, then repay that borrowing from the guaranteed funding stream. To preserve capacity for other essential municipal obligations, debt secured and repaid by the confirmed provincial allocations should not be

counted against the municipality's ordinary debt limit. This approach would accelerate urgent upgrades while maintaining local accountability for project selection, capital planning and borrowing decisions.

Why Provincial Action Is Required

The existing municipal tax base cannot reasonably absorb infrastructure costs driven by province-wide industrial and trade activity. Rural municipalities already devote a disproportionate share of their expenditures to transportation infrastructure, while linear assessment volatility, unpaid oil and gas taxes, inflation and a limited population base restrict their ability to finance large replacements. Using that small population base to determine funding compounds the inequity because it ignores the much larger industrial and economic load carried by the infrastructure.

Timely provincial investment protects public safety, reduces the cost of deferred rehabilitation, supports industry reliability and strengthens Alberta's competitiveness. It is also fiscally responsible: RMA's analysis found that restoring infrastructure to good condition would lower annual holding and maintenance costs and produce a positive return over time.

The Government of Alberta should therefore treat the local rural links used by resource and heavy-truck traffic as part of Alberta's economic corridor system and share responsibility for maintaining them through a dedicated, durable funding partnership.

Previous Advocacy and Current Gap

RMA Resolution 1-23F requested substantially increased funding for STIP's Local Road Bridge Program. RMA reports that the resolution remains Intent Not Met and that STIP continues to be heavily oversubscribed. Budget 2026 allocated $29.3 million to STIP for 2026–2027, which RMA describes as insufficient to slow deterioration or reduce the rural infrastructure deficit. This proposed resolution advances the advocacy by requesting a complementary rural-only stream with predictable, multi-year, needs-based allocations and broader eligibility for roads, bridges and culverts that support Alberta's economy.

References

- Rural Municipalities of Alberta. Resolution 1-23F: Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program Funding (current development and Intent Not Met status).
- Rural Municipalities of Alberta. Transportation and Municipal Infrastructure Position Statement (2026).
- Rural Municipalities of Alberta. Asset Deficit Summary Report – Bridges (2024).
- Government of Alberta. Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program – Resource Road Program (current program criteria).
- Westlock County. Briefing Note: New Funding Model – Bridge Program for Rural Municipalities (November 5, 2024).
- Westlock County. Briefing Note: Annual Report Card – Infrastructure Age (November 5,2024).

RMA Background

1-23F: Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program Funding

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to substantially increase the funding available for the Local Road Bridge Program stream in the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

14-23F: Provincial High-Load Corridor Protection

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to collaborate with municipalities to protect and coordinate the provincial high-load corridor network.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 5-26F

Streamlined Infrastructure Approval Processes to Promote Local Economic Development

MD of Lesser Slave River

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Transportation and Economic Corridors

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta, through the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas, is responsible for issuing permits under the *Water Act* and *the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta has committed to reducing red tape and streamlining environmental approval processes; and

WHEREAS the cost and time required of municipalities to obtain provincial approvals can delay timely infrastructure repairs;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta (GOA) identify efficiencies within, and streamline, its internal permitting systems, regulations, and approval processes under the *Water Act* and *the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA request that the GOA exempt the replacement of culverts and comparable minor drainage infrastructure from *Water Act* Code of Practice Notification requirements in cases where the design specifications are less than those of a bridge culvert, the replacement does not alter the original structure, and the existing footprint, function, capacity, and environmental impact are maintained.

Member Background

The Municipal District of Lesser Slave River, located in north-central Alberta, serves a population of approximately 2,800 residents. The municipality is responsible for an extensive transportation network that includes 50 bridge files and more than 2,500 culverts, representing a significant infrastructure inventory relative to its population. In 2026, high spring runoff combined with significant precipitation contributed to numerous culvert failures, road washouts, and road closures throughout the municipality.

Navigating the numerous regulatory approvals, permits, and notifications required to replace underground infrastructure at the end of its service life is considerably challenging on administrative and technical resources in rural municipalities.

The current provincial and federal regulatory framework can significantly delay the replacement of damaged infrastructure and the reopening of roads. In addition, climate change, beaver activity, and other environmental factors are contributing to increasingly variable water levels and flow conditions, both seasonally and from year to year. As a result, an increasing number of previously standard culvert installations now require bridge culvert structures which, under provincial requirements, must be designed by qualified engineering professionals. This increases both project costs and replacement timelines.

Regardless of project size, municipalities are often required to obtain multiple permits, approvals, and authorizations before proceeding with infrastructure replacement. These requirements may include Water Act Code of Practice Notifications, Public Lands Act Notifications, Qualified Aquatic Environment Specialist (QAES) assessments, utility agreements, Alberta One Call notifications, migratory bird surveys, wildlife assessments, damage control licenses, Temporary Field Authorizations (TFAs), and historical resources clearances. The cumulative cost, time, and administrative burden associated with these requirements place significant pressure on rural municipalities already facing substantial infrastructure replacement demands.

Streamlining the environmental permitting and approval process would provide substantial benefits to municipalities throughout Alberta. Approaches may include the establishment of a single-window approval system or exemptions for "like-for-like" infrastructure replacements where the footprint, function, and environmental impact of the existing infrastructure remain unchanged.

Without regulatory improvements, municipalities may be forced to consider permanently closing roads rather than replacing damaged infrastructure. Such decisions can reduce emergency access and egress options for communities already facing elevated risks from wildfires, extreme weather events, and overland flooding. When critical transportation routes remain closed due to delays associated with replacing a relatively small culvert, the broader public safety implications must be considered alongside environmental objectives.

While environmental stewardship remains an important priority, there is an opportunity to achieve both environmental protection and infrastructure resilience through a more efficient, coordinated, and streamlined approval process that provides municipalities with a single point of regulatory coordination rather than multiple independent approvals.

RMA Background

4-25S: Re-evaluation of Wetlands Policy to Streamline Road Construction and Improvements in Rural Alberta

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to amend the Wetland Policy to streamline regulatory processes for rural municipalities in relation to road construction and improvements;
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> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the amendments to the Wetland Policy address the unique challenges faced by rural communities when determining wetland mitigation measures and introduce alternative approaches to minimizing costs by ensuring that road construction and maintenance projects are not unduly delayed or hindered by overly restrictive policies.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 8-26F

Non-Payment of Municipal Fire Suppression and Emergency Response Costs by Utility Companies

MD of Smoky River

Carried

Advocacy Target:, Alberta Affordability and Utilities, Alberta Forestry and Parks

WHEREAS rural municipalities across Alberta are responsible for providing fire suppression and emergency response services within their boundaries to protect public safety, infrastructure, highways, and surrounding lands; and

WHEREAS municipal fire departments routinely respond to fires and emergency incidents involving electrical utility infrastructure, including downed power lines, failed poles, equipment malfunctions, and utility-related ignition sources; and

WHEREAS in many cases, utility providers directly request municipal fire department assistance to suppress fires, secure sites, manage traffic, or protect utility assets while repairs are completed; and

WHEREAS municipalities across Alberta have reported increasing difficulty recovering fire suppression and emergency response costs from electrical companies for incidents associated with utility infrastructure; and

WHEREAS utility companies have declined to pay these municipal invoices, asserting that under the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*, responsibility for fire suppression costs rests with landowners or those who directly caused the fire, and that easements or rights-of-way do not constitute land ownership or control; and

WHEREAS utility companies have further relied on provisions of the *Electrical Utilities Act*, to state that their liability is limited to situations involving proven negligence, willful misconduct, or breach of contract, and that, in the absence of demonstrated fault, they are not responsible for municipal fire suppression or emergency response costs; and

WHEREAS as a result, rural municipalities and their taxpayers are absorbing significant unfunded emergency response costs related to privately owned and operated utility infrastructure over which municipalities have no operational control;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to:

1. **Clarify and, where necessary, amend provincial legislation, including, but not limited to, the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act* and the *Electrical Utilities Act*, to ensure municipalities are not left financially responsible for fire suppression and emergency response costs arising from incidents involving utility infrastructure;**
2. **Establish a clear, consistent provincial cost recovery framework requiring utility companies to compensate municipalities for emergency services provided in response to utility related fires or incidents, including those initiated at the utility's request;**

3. **Engage with utility providers and the Alberta Utilities Commission to develop standardized, province wide expectations regarding responsibility for emergency response costs associated with utility operations; and**
4. **Protect rural taxpayers by preventing the ongoing transfer of private utility operational risk and emergency response costs onto municipalities.**

Member Background

Municipal fire departments serve as the primary emergency responders in rural Alberta, particularly in remote areas where alternative resources are limited. When incidents involving utility infrastructure occur, municipalities respond to protect public safety, highways, adjacent lands, and critical infrastructure—often to prevent escalation or further damage.

Current provincial legislation does not clearly assign responsibility for municipal cost recovery in these situations, allowing utility companies to rely on narrow interpretations of liability provisions to deny payment. As fire risk continues to rise due to aging infrastructure, environmental conditions, and increased service demands, the frequency and cost of these emergency responses are expected to grow.

Rural municipalities across Alberta are increasingly experiencing situations where municipal fire departments are required to respond to fires and emergency incidents associated with electrical utility infrastructure. These responses include fire suppression, site security, traffic control, and public safety protection, often undertaken at the request of the utility provider.

Despite the direct connection between utility infrastructure and the emergency response required, municipalities report that recovery of these costs is frequently denied. Utility companies have cited existing provincial legislation to assert that responsibility for fire suppression costs rests with landowners unless negligence can be proven, and that utility easements or rights-of-way do not constitute land ownership or control.

As a result, municipalities are funding emergency responses for incidents related to infrastructure they do not own, operate, or control. Without legislative clarification or a consistent provincial cost recovery framework, these unfunded obligations place increasing financial pressure on rural municipalities and create inequitable outcomes for local taxpayers.

Rural municipalities will continue to subsidize private utility operations through uncompensated emergency services, undermining municipal financial sustainability and shifting private operational risk onto rural taxpayers unless provincial action is taken.

RMA Background

11-24F: Enhanced Brushing Along Powerlines to Mitigate Wildfires

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge relevant provincial authorities to prioritize and expand brushing initiatives along powerlines on all lands within forested areas to reduce the risk of wildfires;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to relevant provincial authorities for a comprehensive review of powerline right-of-way widths across the province, considering local conditions, tree length, surrounding vegetation, and fire risk to ensure adequate right-of-way widths are in place for purposes of wildfire mitigation through vegetation management.

Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 9-26F

Dedicated Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program Funding Stream for Rural Municipal Bridges

Smoky Lake County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors

WHEREAS rural municipalities own and manage extensive inventories of bridges and bridge-sized culverts that are essential to agriculture, industry, emergency response, school transportation, resident access, and the movement of goods across Alberta; and

WHEREAS many rural bridge structures are aging, weight-restricted, deteriorating, or approaching the end of their service lives, while rehabilitation and replacement costs continue to increase; and

WHEREAS the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP) Local Road Bridge Program provides important provincial assistance, but existing annual funding levels and per-project limits do not adequately address the scale, urgency, and cost of rural municipal bridge needs; and

WHEREAS delayed bridge rehabilitation or replacement may result in load restrictions, extended detours, road closures, reduced emergency access, higher transportation costs, and increased risks to public safety and the provincial economy;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to establish a protected, predictable, and multi-year funding stream within the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program that is reserved specifically for bridges and bridge-sized culverts owned by rural municipalities;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the dedicated rural bridge funding stream include an expanded annual funding envelope, funding limits and cost-sharing provisions that reflect current project costs, and transparent prioritization criteria based on structural condition, public safety, network importance, detour impacts, economic significance, emergency access, and municipal financial capacity.

Member Background

Rural municipalities are responsible for extensive local road networks containing bridges and bridge-sized culverts constructed over many decades. These structures provide essential connections for agricultural producers, energy and forestry operations, school transportation, emergency responders, businesses and rural residents. They also support provincial supply chains and the movement of goods throughout Alberta.

As these structures age, rural municipalities must pay for inspections, engineering, maintenance, environmental approvals, rehabilitation, replacement, traffic accommodation and temporary detours. These costs are increasingly difficult to fund through property taxation, particularly for municipalities

that maintain large, geographically dispersed bridge inventories supported by comparatively small populations and assessment bases.

Current Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP) Framework

Alberta's STIP provides funding through four components:

- Local Road Bridge Program;
- Local Municipal Initiatives;
- Resource Road Program; and
- Community Airport Program.

The Local Road Bridge Program provides a provincial contribution of up to 75% of eligible project costs, leaving the municipality responsible for the remaining 25% and any ineligible or unanticipated costs.

The Government of Alberta's 2026 approved-project list identifies $22,921,927.98 in provincial STIP funding for 34 projects. Urban municipalities received the following funding:

Urban municipality	STIP component	Approved project	Provincial grant
Town of Crossfield	Local Road Bridge	BF 75095 culvert replacement	$328,725.00
Town of Innisfail	Local Municipal Initiatives	Highway 54 pedestrian trail connection	$126,375.00
Town of Penhold	Local Municipal Initiatives	Highway 2A drainage at Minto Street	$88,987.50
Town of Sylvan Lake	Local Municipal Initiatives	West Memorial Trail modernization	$250,000.00
Town of Edson	Resource Road	Township Road 532 access project	$1,938,370.88
City of Lacombe	Community Airport	PAPI and windsocks	$120,000.00
Total urban funding		Six projects	$2,852,458.38

Urban municipalities therefore received $2,852,458.38, representing approximately 12.4% of all provincial STIP funding approved in 2026. The Town of Edson's Resource Road grant accounted for $1,938,370.88, or approximately 68% of the total urban allocation.

Rural Bridge Funding in 2026

The Local Road Bridge Program approved 28 projects, consisting of 27 rural projects and one urban project.

The 27 rural bridge and bridge-sized culvert projects received $18,656,969.60 in provincial funding. By comparison, the only urban Local Road Bridge project, the Town of Crossfield culvert replacement, received $328,725.

Rural municipalities therefore received:

- 98.3% of all 2026 Local Road Bridge funding;
- 81.4% of all provincial STIP funding approved in 2026; and
- An average provincial grant of approximately $690,999 per rural bridge project.

The 27 approved rural projects were distributed among only 21 rural municipalities and Métis settlements. This demonstrates that even with approximately $18.66 million in provincial bridge funding, the annual program supported a limited number of projects across Alberta's extensive rural transportation network.

The funding results also confirm that rural bridges are not a minor or incidental part of STIP. More than four out of every five provincial STIP dollars approved in 2026 were required for rural bridges and bridge-sized culverts. Despite this demonstrated rural responsibility, the funding remains part of a broader annual program rather than a protected, predictable rural infrastructure stream.

Example of Smoky Lake County

Smoky Lake County received approval for two Local Road Bridge projects in 2026:

Project	Total project cost	Provincial grant	County contribution
BF 76438 culvert replacement	$532,000	$399,000	$133,000
BF 06872 bridge replacement	$1,012,000	$759,000	$253,000
Total	$1,544,000	$1,158,000	$386,000

Without adequate and dedicated funding, infrastructure rehabilitation can be deferred, which can also increase the eventual cost to taxpayers. A bridge that could have been repaired may deteriorate until full replacement is required. Emergency repairs and unplanned closures are generally more expensive and disruptive than scheduled capital work.

The provincial evaluation process considers factors such as total traffic and truck traffic volumes. Although these are relevant considerations, traffic counts alone may undervalue a low-volume rural

bridge that provides the only practical crossing for emergency responders, school buses, residents, agricultural equipment or resource-sector traffic.

Need for a Dedicated Rural Funding Stream

The 2026 funding figures establish that the Local Road Bridge Program already functions overwhelmingly as a rural infrastructure program. Rural projects received 98.3% of its provincial funding, while rural bridge grants accounted for 81.4% of the entire STIP allocation.

Because rural bridges represent STIP's largest funding responsibility, they should not depend on an annual discretionary allocation within a broader program that also funds airports, trails, drainage improvements and resource roads. A dedicated stream would formally recognize the rural nature of the bridge program and protect rural bridge funding from being reduced or redirected to unrelated priorities.

A protected rural funding stream would also allow bridge projects to be assessed against other rural bridge projects using criteria suited to rural conditions, including:

- Structural condition and remaining service life;
- Public-safety risk;
- Emergency and school-bus access;
- Availability and length of alternate routes;
- Agricultural, industrial and economic importance;
- Load restrictions and truck-traffic requirements;
- Municipal bridge inventory;
- Project readiness; and
- Municipal financial capacity.

Strategic Planning Capital Planning and Asset Management

Bridge funding uncertainty directly affects municipal strategic planning, capital planning and asset management. Municipalities use inspection results, condition ratings, traffic patterns, detour impacts, safety risks and remaining service life to prioritize structures within long-term capital and asset-management plans. When funding is unpredictable, municipalities may spend money on engineering for projects that cannot proceed, defer planned rehabilitation, redirect reserves from other infrastructure or respond only after a structure requires a weight restriction or closure.

A protected, indexed and multi-year rural bridge funding stream would allow municipalities to align bridge work with strategic priorities, approved capital plans, reserve contributions and asset-management data. Greater funding certainty would support earlier intervention, coordinated procurement and regional scheduling, improve the accuracy of long-term financial forecasts, and reduce the risk that deferred maintenance turns a manageable rehabilitation into a substantially more expensive replacement or emergency project.

The annual minimum should:

- Be reserved exclusively for rural municipal bridges and bridge-sized culverts;
- Be indexed to changes in construction and engineering costs;
- Be protected from transfer to other STIP components;
- Include multi-year funding commitments;
- Maintain meaningful provincial cost-sharing; and
- Be reviewed regularly against the condition and replacement value of Alberta's rural bridge inventory.

Requested Outcome

The requested outcome is a protected and predictable rural bridge funding stream indexed to construction costs and supported by multi-year commitments.

This would protect the province's current level of rural bridge investment, give municipalities greater certainty when planning engineering and construction work, and help complete rehabilitation and replacement projects before structures require emergency restrictions or closure.

RMA Background

1-23F: Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program Funding

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to substantially increase the funding available for the Local Road Bridge Program stream in the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

2-26S: Changes to Provincial Bridge and Culvert Classification

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta review and change its definition of a bridge to match the national practice of a culvert spanning 3000mm as a bridge structure.
>
> FURTHER, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) investigate cost effective bridge replacement and maintenance options for Municipalities.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 10-26F

Modernization of Municipal Investment Authority Under the Municipal Investment Regulation

MD of Peace

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs

WHEREAS Section 250 of the *Municipal Government Act* authorizes municipalities to invest surplus funds only in investments permitted by provincial regulation; and

WHEREAS the Municipal Investment Regulation (AR 149/2022) restricts municipal investment opportunities primarily to low-risk, low-yield investments that often fail to preserve the long-term purchasing power of municipal reserves; and

WHEREAS many Alberta municipalities maintain significant long-term reserves for infrastructure replacement, capital planning, and financial sustainability that are well suited to diversified investment strategies; and

WHEREAS other Canadian jurisdictions have modernized municipal investment frameworks using prudent investor principles while maintaining rigorous governance, transparency, and accountability; and

WHEREAS Alberta municipalities have the governance structures, fiduciary responsibilities, financial oversight, and access to professional investment expertise necessary to prudently manage diversified investment portfolios.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to amend the Investment Regulation (AR 149/2022) under the *Municipal Government Act* to permit municipalities to pursue balanced and diversified investment portfolios, including equities and professionally managed pooled investment funds, consistent with prudent investor principles and appropriate governance, transparency, reporting, and oversight requirements.

Member Background:

Alberta's current investment framework prioritizes capital preservation but significantly limits long-term investment performance, even for reserve funds that may not be required for decades.

When inflation exceeds the returns available through permitted investments, municipal reserves lose purchasing power, reducing municipalities' ability to fund future infrastructure and essential services.

Modern public-sector investment practices emphasize a prudent investor approach rather than a prescriptive list of allowable investments. Diversification, professional management, and robust governance have consistently demonstrated stronger long-term, risk-adjusted outcomes.

Saskatchewan's SUMAInvest model and similar approaches across Canada demonstrate that municipalities can responsibly achieve improved long-term returns while maintaining public accountability.

Rationale for changes to existing public sector investment practices:

1. Erosion of Real Value: Current investment returns frequently fail to keep pace with inflation.
2. Investment Horizon Mismatch: Long-term reserve funds should be permitted to follow long-term investment strategies.
3. Alignment with Canadian Best Practices: Other provinces successfully apply prudent investor models.
4. Intergenerational Fairness: Protecting reserve values reduces the burden on future taxpayers.
5. Economic Development: Greater flexibility could support Alberta-based investment opportunities where appropriate.
6. Improved Risk Management: Diversification reduces concentration risk while improving long-term resilience.
7. Enhanced Fiscal Sustainability: Higher sustainable returns strengthen municipal finances and reduce pressure on taxation.
8. Transparency and Accountability: Council-approved investment policies, annual reporting, and professional oversight remain essential safeguards.

Modernizing Alberta's Municipal Investment Regulation will align municipal investment authority with contemporary public-sector standards while maintaining prudent governance and accountability. This measured approach will better protect the long-term value of municipal reserves, strengthen financial sustainability, reduce pressure on future property taxation, and enhance municipalities' ability to responsibly plan for future infrastructure and service needs.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 11-26F

Environment and Protected Area Temporary Diversion Licence Audit

Mountain View County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Energy Regulator

WHEREAS the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) have dual authority to regulate freshwater use and approval of Oil and Gas Diversion licenses; and

WHEREAS The *Responsible Energy Development Act* authorizes the AER to regulate non-saline (i.e., fresh) water use for the oil and gas sector; and

WHEREAS the use of non-saline water must be licenced under the *Water Act*; and

WHEREAS EPA's primary responsibility is to protect and enhance Alberta's environment and ecosystems to ensure a sustainable future, making life better for Albertans; and

WHEREAS Temporary Diversion Licences (TDLs) are not appealable and neither the AER or EPA will accept statements of concern from the public prior to approving industry use of TDLs; and

WHEREAS municipalities have continually raised concerns over the use of fresh water in the hydraulic fracturing process.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Government of Alberta (GOA) conduct an audit on the Alberta Energy Regulator's (AER's) historic issuance of Temporary Diversion Licences (TDL) to determine if the AER is adhering to required legislation, policies, regulations and directives related to TDL allocation decision-making processes and criteria;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the audit include evaluation of AER's compliance with all findings in the Surface Water Management Report of the Auditor General (July 2024);

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta collaborates with RMA and rural municipalities to ensure that the scope of the audit is adequately representative; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the results of the audit are made public.

Member Background

The issues presented in this resolution have been raised in the past with significant member support (Resolution 7-24F). Despite this previous resolution, the Government of Alberta (GOA) has not taken any measurable action to address the issues raised. The current stance of the government appears to be that the AER is adhering to relevant legislative requirements in the issuance of TDLs. However those municipalities that are seeing increased activities in hydraulic fracking do not agree this is the case. To satisfy the public, it is imperative that the GOA undertake a transparent audit of the AER's TDL approval and issuance process to confirm their current position.

For the audit to hold merit, it is also important that RMA and rural municipalities be consulted to determine which historical TDLs should form the input to the audit so that a representative sample be reviewed from across the province.

On July 10, 2024, the office of the Alberta Auditor General shared the findings of their inquiry into the management practices of surface water in Alberta. The Surface Water Management Report of the Auditor General (July 2024) identifies four key findings that further support the resolution:

- Licence applications approved without support for key decisions.
- Licensing guidelines unclear on use of discretion.
- Insufficient monitoring of licensee compliance with requirements such as allocation and withdrawal limits.
- No assurance licensee-submitted water usage is accurate and complete.

The audit of TDL issuance and approval processes should address all findings in the Surface Water Management Report of the Auditor General which includes, but is not limited to, insufficient monitoring of licensee compliance with requirements such as allocation and withdrawal limits, assessment of risks, and decisions when water conservation objectives are needed. The results of the audit should be made public.

In discussion with the Alberta drought response team the guidelines that should be followed as part of the TDL issuance and approval process include:

- An application for a *Water Act* Licence is guided by the Water Conservation Policy for Upstream Oil and Gas Operations, and must identify the proposed location of water diversion, along with the maximum volume, rate and purpose, among other things.
- To discourage the use of fresh water, this policy requires applicants to demonstrate that they have considered and documented alternatives to fresh water as part of the application process.
- Another important aspect of the application process is to determine the risk level of water extraction from each water source.

However, in practice we observe the AER does not require demonstration of consideration of non-saline water supplies, such as wastewater effluent or produced water, and that licences are issued based on what the applicant asks for in terms of volume and rate. In cases where there is access to aquifer sources (through gravel extraction operations), the AER considers these volumes low risk and does not require policy to be followed.

According to the Surface Water Allocation Directives, there are clear guidelines for determining if licence applications may be considered low risk. If the screening criteria are met, the Director may issue a licence with standard protective clauses and conditions after having considered any matters of cumulative allocation and other timing or species-based criteria or limits as required by this directive. This directive may not be currently followed, and screening criteria may not be required when the AER deems the water body a low risk (examples are, but not limited to, alluvial aquifers). The directives do not state anywhere that the AER has their own discretion regarding low-risk water bodies, and only that the screening criteria must be met.

Further examples of concern are TDL's being issued for spring fed water bodies/ponds/dugouts that have been created where none existed before, without the appropriate EPA approvals.

Relevant legislation, policy and other documents considered:

- Water Act
- Responsible Development Energy Act
- Guide to Groundwater Authorization
- Surface Water Allocation Directives
- Water Conservation Policy for Upstream Oil and Gas
- Surface Water Management Report of the Auditor General July 2024

RMA Background

7-24F: Improved Water License Approval and Compliance Processes

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to develop alternatives to the use of fresh water for hydraulic fracking;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA require the oil and gas industry to reduce water use proportional to all other users if drought restrictions are implemented;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that that the GOA amend the Responsible Energy Development Act to remove from the mandate of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) "to consider and decide applications and other matters under the Water Act in respect of energy resource activities" to ensure that all authority for granting water licenses falls to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas and that the AER continue to be responsible for industry compliance;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that that the GOA, without exception, require all Temporary Diversion License (TDL) applications, including those diversions from alluvial aquifers, follow the process outlined in legislation, policy and directives and that the information on which the approving authority has used to issue the TDL be made available to the public.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 12-26F

Review of Provincial Regulatory and Engagement Framework for Large Scale Data Centre Development

Sturgeon County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Affordability and Utilities, Alberta Technology and Innovation

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta (GOA) has identified artificial intelligence (AI) and data centre investment as a strategic economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS the GOA has recently released *Alberta's AI Data Centre Strategy: Powering the Future of Artificial Intelligence*, which is intended to position Alberta as a leading jurisdiction for data centre development; and

WHEREAS large-scale data centre developments require a responsible approach to ensure the public's economic and environmental interests are reflected; and

WHEREAS modern data centre projects frequently involve approvals and oversight from multiple levels of government; and

WHEREAS proactive communication with municipalities, Indigenous communities, landowners, and the public is essential to maintaining confidence in project review and approval processes;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta, in consultation with municipalities and stakeholder groups, review the provincial regulatory and engagement framework for data centre development to clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of municipal, provincial, and federal governments with respect to industrial siting criteria, setbacks to residential communities, environmental approvals, cumulative effects, digital privacy, responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, water and infrastructure servicing, electricity generation and transmission, noise and light pollution, digital sovereignty, public engagement, and community benefit allocation.

Member Background

Data centres are critical infrastructure for Canada. Data centres are part of daily life for all Albertans, supporting activities such as online banking and government services, as well as fields such as health care, finance, scientific research, cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

As noted by the Government of Canada, "they support the health care system, financial services, scientific research and secure government systems that Canadians rely on, and they power the digital economy and artificial intelligence (AI). Canada currently relies significantly on infrastructure and services based outside the country for the compute, cloud and data storage that power AI. Building more capacity here at home will give Canada greater resilience and choice, while helping Canadian researchers, innovators and businesses build, deploy and scale."

In December 2024, the Government of Alberta released *Alberta's AI Data Centre Strategy: Powering the Future of Artificial Intelligence*, establishing a vision to attract significant private-sector investment and position Alberta as a preferred North American destination for AI and data centre infrastructure. The

strategy identifies Alberta's competitive advantages, including power availability, climate conditions that support cooling requirements, and streamlined regulatory processes.

Since the release of the strategy, Alberta has experienced growing interest from major technology and infrastructure investors seeking to develop large-scale data centres throughout the province. These projects represent significant economic opportunities, including construction activity, construction and ongoing employment, local and spin-off economic activity, government taxation revenue, new infrastructure, and new technological innovation. At the same time, they require considerations regarding land use planning, infrastructure capacity, electrical generation and transmission requirements, water use, environmental management, and potential community impacts.

Municipalities are increasingly being asked to evaluate development proposals that involve multiple regulatory bodies. In some cases, uncertainty can arise regarding which level of government is responsible for specific approvals, how decisions are coordinated, and how local inputs will be incorporated into project planning and review. More clarity within a provincial framework would improve transparency, consistency, and predictability for municipalities, developers, and all Albertans.

Recent experience in Alberta demonstrates the need for greater regulatory clarity and more coordinated planning for data centre development. For example, in 2025, Rocky View County Council rejected a proposed large-scale data centre campus near Balzac following significant public concern related to agricultural land conversion, water use, infrastructure impacts, and compatibility with surrounding land uses. More recently, proposals associated with a major data centre development in Olds faced opposition from residents and regulatory scrutiny, with the Alberta Utilities Commission ultimately determining that the proposed site was not suitable for the associated power generation infrastructure. In Sturgeon County itself, a Canadian first data centre was announced for location within Alberta’s Industrial Heartland, an area pre-zoned for major industrial uses for decades and positioned as Alberta’s first designated industrial zone. Although the appropriateness of the area, high development standards, and multiple layers of environmental stewardship were recognized, the announcement generated significant attention and concern around lack of awareness as well.

Recent public discussions surrounding proposed data centre projects have also highlighted concerns regarding the timing and effectiveness of public engagement and education. Supporting Albertans with maximum clarity on all project elements and community benefits is important to advance additional large-scale projects.

On a national scale, the Government of Canada is also active on this file. It recently launched “Canada’s Responsible Data Centre Development Principles”, which require provincial consideration. The principles establish a common national framework for how Canada builds the data centre capacity it needs. The framework sets five clear expectations for data centre projects:

1. Data centres must create lasting local benefits.
2. Data centres must not shift electricity costs to Canadians.
3. Data centres must minimize water use and environmental impacts.
4. Data centres must be transparent about local impacts.
5. Data centres must bring strategic value to Canada.

The principles are supported by a broad cross-section of Canada’s data centre, cloud, AI and technology sectors. Signatories’ commitments will help grow Canada’s digital infrastructure responsibly and promote a consistent, community-centered approach to data centre development across Canada.

Other provincial governments are also engaged in data centre policy and investment, such as the Government of Ontario which released its draft Data Centre Playbook, establishing a provincial framework that treats data centres as strategic infrastructure while making access to electricity conditional on benefits to Ontario. The Ontario Data Centre Playbook is built around three principles:

1. Data centres must make substantial investments in Ontario and host communities
2. Proponents must pay the full costs associated with their electricity consumption and any required grid upgrades, and
3. Ontario will compete using non-financial supports such as expedited permitting and government facilitation rather than direct financial incentives. The framework also evaluates projects against broader objectives including economic development, digital sovereignty, cybersecurity, workforce development, community benefits, and environmental performance.

Alberta's strategy is primarily focused on attracting investment through streamlined approvals and private sector responsibility for new generation. Grid connections are determined by the Alberta Electrical Systems Operator (AESO), whereas the Ontario government proposes a government-led prioritization process that can determine which large-load projects receive grid access based on economic, community, and sovereignty considerations. The Ontario government also places a strong emphasis on requiring tangible community benefits and advancing Canadian ownership and digital sovereignty objectives. Some of the criteria the Government of Ontario is proposing to use in evaluating grid connections is subjective in nature - likely leading to increased political involvement in decision-making processes. Alberta's approach is generally centered on reliability, investment attraction, and ensuring that proponents fund the infrastructure required to support their operations, with grid-connections being evaluated objectively through AESO based on technical requirements and system capacity.

While Alberta's AI Data Centre Strategy provides a valuable foundation for pursuing economic development opportunities, it would benefit from more clarity on industrial siting criteria, setbacks to residential communities, environmental approvals, cumulative effects, digital privacy, responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, water and infrastructure servicing, electricity generation and transmission, public engagement, and community benefit allocation.

No two data centre projects are alike, nor will they have the same impact. Having maximum clarity in regulatory frameworks will strengthen public confidence, support responsible investment, and ensure Alberta remains competitive in this critical sector.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 13-26F

Changes to Charitable Gaming Model to Promote Equity for Charitable Organizations

Northern Sunrise County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission

WHEREAS there is a great need for charitable organizations in Alberta to raise funds to maintain and expand their operations for the good of all Albertans; and

WHEREAS the current provincial charitable gaming model creates a significant disparity in the frequency and quality of funding opportunities available to rural charitable organizations compared with charitable organizations in major urban communities; and

WHEREAS the challenges of rural charitable organizations regarding access to casinos and the distribution of proceeds from casinos have been under multiple reviews since at least 2009 with limited progress; and

WHEREAS in 2017, the membership of Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) approved a resolution directing RMA to establish an advisory committee to provide recommendations for reforming Alberta's charitable gaming model to more equitably distribute funding among rural and urban charitable organizations; and

WHEREAS in 2019, the RMA advisory committee submitted their report and recommendations, which were endorsed by the RMA Board of Directors, to the Government of Alberta (GOA); and

WHEREAS in 2019, the GOA undertook a new round of engagement on the charitable gaming model; and

WHEREAS in 2023, the membership of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) endorsed a resolution directing RMA to advocate to the GOA and Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis to reform Alberta's charitable gaming model to provide equity to all charitable organizations in Alberta, by addressing the disparity between the funding provided and the frequency of casino opportunities available to charitable organizations in major urban centres compared with those in rural communities, and

WHEREAS the GOA has still not released any recommendations for changes to the model based on the engagement process or on the input provided by the RMA; despite the engagement having been concluded in 2021;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocates to the Government of Alberta (GOA) and the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC) to reform Alberta's charitable gaming model to provide equity to all charitable organizations in Alberta, by addressing the disparity between the funding provided and the frequency of casino opportunities available to charitable organizations in major urban centers compared with those in rural communities;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocates to the GOA and the AGLC to release the final report from the 2021 engagement.

Member Background

Alberta's 19 casinos are divided into ten regions for the purposes of charitable gaming. Organizations across the province are assigned to a casino in the closest proximity to their location. Because charitable organizations are not distributed equally across the province, some regions host many more charitable organizations than others. For charitable organizations, this results in unequal wait times between casino events across different regions. As charitable organizations receive revenue only when they "work" a casino, an inequity exists in how often they have this revenue-generating opportunity across the province.

Furthermore, Alberta's gaming landscape has evolved significantly since the charitable gaming review was conducted. In 2020, AGLC launched Play Alberta, the province's regulated online gaming platform. Play Alberta generated approximately $37 million in revenue during its first year of operations and has since grown substantially. While gaming revenues and opportunities have expanded through new platforms, the charitable gaming model and the inequities experienced by charitable organizations across casino regions have remained largely unchanged. This demonstrates the need for a modernized charitable gaming framework that reflects the current gaming environment and ensures equitable opportunities for charitable organizations throughout Alberta.

In 2019, AGLC initiated a comprehensive review of Alberta's charitable gaming model, followed by stakeholder engagement in 2021, involving charitable organizations, casino operators, and sector representatives. Following the engagement, AGLC released a "What We Heard" report summarizing the feedback received and indicating that recommendations would be developed and released in the next phase of the review. While the "What We Heard" report identified concerns regarding casino wait times, regional funding disparities, and opportunities to modernize the charitable gaming model, final recommendations have not been publicly released. As a result, charitable organizations and municipal stakeholders remain without clarity on how the GOA and AGLC intend to address the inequities identified through the review process.

According to the AGLC website, the following table outlines the wait times and revenues for each casino region in 2024:

Casino Region	2024 Wait Time for Key Events (Months)	2024 Annualized Return (product of wait times and proceeds)
Calgary	20	$49,281
Calgary (Rural)	36	$21,494
Camrose	40	$5,760

Edmonton	22	$42,730
Fort McMurray	17	$20,852
Grande Prairie	28	$16,459
Lethbridge	33	$12,898
Medicine Hat	17	$12,967
Red Deer	34	$10,484
St. Albert	31	$7,379

While the waiting period is a critical aspect of equity in the casino gaming system, it tells only part of the story. The per-event revenue generated varies widely among regions as well. Some casinos are more popular than others, and this is reflected in the amount of money raised at casino events across regions. Casinos in Edmonton and Calgary generate significantly more revenue per event than those elsewhere in the province.

Both the waiting period and the per-event proceeds indicate how casino proceeds vary by region. However, to understand the full scope of how regions compare to one another, these measures must be combined. To do this, the AGLC uses "annualized proceeds," which are a calculation of the estimated proceeds per year that an organization in a region would receive. This measure is effective as it combines the waiting period and the per-event proceeds into a single factor. It is important to note that annualized proceeds are a hypothetical measure. It looks at how much money a charity would receive in a single year within its region if proceeds were distributed in this manner. It is also important to note that proceeds are not actually distributed in this way. In reality, organizations receive the average per-event proceeds from the quarter in which they volunteered at a casino event. Using annualized proceeds, there is a significant gap between the high-revenue Edmonton and Calgary regions and the other regions in the province.

RMA and other stakeholders have previously proposed changes to the charitable gaming model to reduce the impact of these regional differences and support charitable organizations across the province receiving a more similar level of financial benefit for the same amount of volunteer work. To this point, the GOA has not considered changes to the current boundaries and revenue distribution across the province.

Charitable organizations within Northern Sunrise County and surrounding rural communities experience significantly longer wait times and lower annualized returns than organizations located in Alberta's major urban centres. These inequities reduce the ability of local organizations to consistently fund community initiatives that benefit rural residents. The current charitable gaming model places rural organizations at a disadvantage, despite their providing the same level of volunteer commitment required to participate in casino events.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 14-26F

Enhancements to the Fire Service Training Program Grant

MD of Taber

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs

WHEREAS fire services in rural municipalities across Alberta are experiencing increasing demands related to fire suppression, rescue, medical response, and emergency management; and

WHEREAS many rural fire departments depend on paid on-call (POC) firefighters, whose recruitment, retention, and competency rely on accessible and consistent training opportunities; and

WHEREAS the Fire Service Training Program grant provides essential funding for training but is limited in both overall funding levels and eligible expenditures; and

WHEREAS current grant guidelines do not permit funding for POC firefighter wages during training or for full-time instructor wages, despite these being critical components of effective training delivery; and

WHEREAS compensating firefighters and instructors for training time is essential to maintaining operational readiness, safety, and compliance with provincial standards;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to increase funding for the Fire Service Training Program grant to better reflect the growing scope, frequency, and cost of fire service training;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to the GOA to amend the grant eligibility guidelines to include wages for paid on-call firefighters attending approved training, and wages for full-time fire service instructors delivering approved training.

Member Background

Rural fire departments face unique challenges in maintaining training standards due to geographic distance, limited staffing, and increasing service demands. Many fire departments rely heavily on Paid On-Call personnel who must often forego other employment income to attend training. Without compensation, participation in training can be a barrier to recruitment and retention.

In addition, high-quality training requires qualified instructors, whose time and expertise represent a significant cost. Full-time instructor wages are currently not supported under existing Fire Service Training Program (FSTP) grant guidelines. This limits departments' ability to fund consistent and standardized training aligned with provincial expectations.

Enhancing both the funding levels and eligible expenditures under the FSTP would directly improve training accessibility, firefighter competency, and overall emergency response capability in rural Alberta.

Alberta's municipalities rely on local fire services to deliver critical emergency response. Ensuring that fire departments are properly trained is essential to public safety, responder safety, and effective incident management.

Previous advocacy efforts have highlighted funding gaps in fire services, particularly in rural and volunteer/paid on-call based departments. Expanding the FSTP would align provincial support with the operational realities of modern fire service delivery and support sustainable emergency services across Alberta.

References

Government of Alberta Website – Emergency preparedness, disaster response and public safety - Emergency Responders

https://www.alberta.ca/fire-services-training-grant

RMA Background

1-24S: Declining Fire Department Services Across Rural Alberta

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to collaborate with the Government of Canada and Fire Underwriters Survey to assist municipalities to retain fire services by recruiting firefighters and addressing the declining fire department services across rural Alberta.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 15-26F

Protecting Municipal Authority over Municipally Owned Utilities

County of Vermilion River

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs

WHEREAS municipalities have historically been granted authority under the *Municipal Government Act* to establish, operate, and govern municipal public utilities in a manner that reflects local needs and priorities; and

WHEREAS municipally owned utilities provide essential services to residents and businesses while ensuring local accountability, community-based decision making, and reinvestment of revenues into local infrastructure, services and communities; and

WHEREAS Bill 28, the *Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act*, 2026, introduces Section 44.1 to the *Municipal Government Act*, granting the Lieutenant Governor in Council authority to require a municipality to transfer ownership or control of a municipal public utility to a designated public utility entity; and

WHEREAS the proposed legislation further allows regulations to govern the transfer of assets, employees, operations, governance structures, and may override provisions of the *Municipal Government Act*; and

WHEREAS the intent, criteria, and circumstances under which the Government of Alberta may compel such transfers have not been clearly defined, creating uncertainty for municipalities that have invested significant resources into developing and maintaining utility infrastructure; and

WHEREAS municipal utility assets have been funded through local ratepayers and customers and should remain subject to local governance and accountability unless a municipality voluntarily elects to pursue an alternative governance model; and

WHEREAS the potential transfer of municipal utility ownership or control may negatively impact municipal autonomy, local service delivery, long-term infrastructure planning, and the financial sustainability of municipally owned utilities; and

WHEREAS both the Rural Municipalities of Alberta and Alberta Municipalities have identified concerns regarding the implications of Bill 28 on municipal autonomy and local decision-making;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to repeal or substantially amend Section 44.1 of the *Municipal Government Act* to ensure that ownership and control of municipally owned public utilities cannot be transferred without the consent of the affected municipality; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA engages municipalities, the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, Alberta Municipalities, and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta in meaningful consultation prior to implementing any regulations related to municipal utility governance, ownership, or control; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that any future legislative or regulatory changes affecting municipal public utilities preserve municipal autonomy, local accountability, and the ability of municipalities to determine the most effective utility governance model for their communities.

Member Background

The County of Vermilion River owns and operates a municipally controlled Natural Gas Utility that has been providing reliable and affordable service to residents, industry and customers throughout multiple municipalities since 1979.

The system has been developed and maintained through local investment and planning, demonstrating responsible stewardship of municipal assets and ensuring that decisions regarding service levels, infrastructure replacement, rates, and long-term planning utilities remain accountable to local residents and industry standards.

Bill 28 introduces a new section to the *Municipal Government Act* that allows the transfer of ownership or control of a municipal public utility to a designated public utility entity. The legislation does not clearly identify the circumstances under which these powers may be exercised and functions as a blanket clause for all utilities, whether they are functioning and operating successfully or not.

Municipalities have made substantial investments in utility infrastructure and have a responsibility to ensure these systems remain sustainable, responsive to local needs and adhere to industry standards. Any authority that enables the involuntary transfer of municipal utility ownership or governance to the province or a designated public utility entity creates uncertainty regarding local operations, financial planning, and accountability to utility customers, and poses risks to municipalities regarding staffing, compensation for resources invested in the utility, and transitions if a takeover is mandated.

Municipal utility services are best governed by the communities they serve. Any changes to utility governance structures should occur through voluntary collaboration and consultation rather than through provincial authority to compel ownership or operational transfers. There should also be clear guidelines and requirements for when a utility is at risk of being taken over by a provincial authority or a designated public utility entity.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 16-26F

Electricity Infrastructure Planning for Municipal Growth Readiness

Rocky View County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Affordability and Utilities

WHEREAS municipalities in high-growth areas of Alberta are experiencing delays to industrial, commercial, and employment-generating development because electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure is not being planned and constructed early enough to align with approved municipal growth plans; and

WHEREAS current provincial electricity planning and regulatory processes do not sufficiently require alignment between municipal land-use approvals, growth projections, and long-term electricity infrastructure planning; and

WHEREAS this lack of alignment contributes to circumstances in which utilities may defer infrastructure investment until after development is already in place; and

WHEREAS recent changes to Ontario's planning framework offers a practical example of better integration, including a regional planning process involving the system operator, transmitters, municipalities, and local distributors; and

WHEREAS Ontario's recent changes include provisions allowing distributors to use municipal statutory planning documents to forecast significant load growth and plan capacity in advance within qualifying development areas;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to review the *Electric Utilities Act* and related provincial mandates, regulations, and regulatory directions with the goal of ensuring that the Alberta Electric System Operator and relevant regulated utilities incorporate approved municipal statutory plans, including Area Structure Plans and other recognized growth forecasts, into electricity transmission and distribution planning;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA require proactive infrastructure planning for designated high-growth areas so that necessary electricity infrastructure can be approved and constructed in advance of or concurrent with development readiness, rather than only after customer demand is already committed;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA direct AESO, transmission facility owners, and distribution utilities to establish a formal growth-readiness planning process with municipalities for major employment and industrial corridors, including regular information-sharing on load forecasts, constrained areas, planned upgrades, and infrastructure timing.

Member Background

Rocky View County has identified electricity servicing constraints in the broader eastern growth corridor, including a mismatch between forecast demand and currently available capacity, resulting in delays for

developments requiring more significant power connections and creating risks to investment certainty, assessment growth, and regional economic development.

Alberta municipalities require a more proactive provincial electricity planning framework that aligns transmission and distribution infrastructure decisions with approved municipal growth plans. Without this alignment, municipalities risk continued delays to investment-ready development, reduced certainty for industry, and lost economic opportunity.

Recent Ontario Energy Board code provisions allow distributors to use municipal statutory planning documents to forecast significant load growth and plan capacity in advance within qualifying development areas. This represents a practical example of better integration of municipal growth plans and electricity infrastructure, including a regional planning process involving the system operator, transmitters, and local distributors.

Requiring earlier coordination among municipalities, AESO, and regulated utilities – and enabling infrastructure to be planned and built ahead of demonstrated customer connection requests in high-growth areas – would better support orderly growth and provincial economic development.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 19-26F

Improvements to Weather Station Network and Weather Monitoring in Rural Alberta

County of Grande Prairie

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation

WHEREAS accurate, localized weather and soil moisture data are critical for agricultural production, pest and disease monitoring, vegetation management, drought assessment, agricultural disaster evaluation, wildfire modelling, and other weather-dependent activities; and

WHEREAS some areas in the province have fewer agricultural weather stations and less dense monitoring coverage than other areas, resulting in weather and soil moisture data that may not adequately reflect local conditions experienced by producers; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities, agricultural producers, and provincial agencies rely on weather station data to support operational decision-making, crop reporting, moisture assessments, and agricultural risk management; and

WHEREAS existing weather station coverage may not sufficiently capture localized environmental variability across municipalities and agricultural regions;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to collaborate with municipalities, agricultural organizations, post-secondary institutions, and federal partners to assess gaps in weather monitoring stations across the province.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the GOA expand and modernize the provincial agricultural weather station network in Alberta through the installation of additional weather stations and soil moisture monitoring sites in underserved regions.

Member Background

Agricultural producers and municipalities rely on weather and environmental data to support agricultural programming, crop and soil assessments, pest and disease monitoring, vegetation management operations, and evaluations related to agricultural disaster conditions. Current data sources do not always reflect localized conditions experienced across large agricultural regions. It is often the case that field observations differ significantly from reported weather and soil moisture conditions. This can affect the accuracy of operational planning and provincial agricultural reporting.

Accurate weather and soil moisture information supports agricultural producers in making informed decisions regarding seeding, spraying, crop management, pest and disease prevention, irrigation management, and harvest planning. Improved data quality also assists governments in assessing drought conditions, agricultural disasters, and environmental risks.

The Alberta Climate Information Service (ACIS) provides weather information for Alberta's agricultural sector through a network of meteorological stations. However, concerns regarding lower station density in parts of the province continue to be raised by municipal and agricultural stakeholders. Data gaps

remain particularly significant in large northern municipalities where local weather conditions can vary considerably over relatively short distances.

In discussions reported through municipal agricultural forums, provincial officials have acknowledged the need for additional weather stations across the province. While proposals to add stations are encouraging , municipal representatives have indicated that further investment is needed to achieve more equitable coverage levels.

Improving Alberta's agricultural weather-station network would benefit producers, municipalities, provincial departments, emergency management agencies, and other stakeholders by providing more reliable and localized information for agricultural and environmental decision-making.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 20-26F

Enhanced Authority for Landowners to Protect Property, Livestock and Domestic Animals from Grizzly Bear Threats

Yellowhead County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Forestry and Parks

WHEREAS grizzly bears are designated as a threatened species in Alberta under the Wildlife Act, limiting the circumstances under which they may be legally killed; and

WHEREAS Section 53.1 of the Wildlife Regulation permits the hunting of grizzly bears through a ministerial authorization, despite their threatened status, on a case-by-case basis; and

WHEREAS Alberta has experienced an increase in human-grizzly bear interactions in recent years, particularly in rural and agricultural areas, which represents significant risks to public safety and well-being; and

WHEREAS rural landowners face growing risks to livestock, domestic animals, and property as a result of these interactions posing considerable risk to local economic development; and

WHEREAS current provincial legislation and regulatory processes do not provide landowners with clear, timely, or practical authority to respond to immediate threats posed by grizzly bears; and

WHEREAS delays in obtaining authorization to destroy a problem grizzly bear may result in preventable loss of livestock, pets, and property, as well as increased safety risks to rural residents;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to amend the *Wildlife Act* and associated regulations to provide landowners with clearly defined authority to lethally remove grizzly bears that pose an immediate threat to livestock, domestic animals, or property.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT the GOA establish a streamlined, responsive authorization process or standing provision that enables rural landowners to take timely action in situations involving dangerous human-grizzly bear conflicts, while maintaining appropriate conservation safeguards.

Member Background

Grizzly bears (Ursus arctos) were designated as a threatened species in Alberta in 2010 under the *Wildlife Act*. In response to declining populations, the Government of Alberta implemented a moratorium on licensed grizzly bear hunting in 2006, effectively prohibiting general harvest of the species.

While these measures have contributed to population recovery, they have also coincided with an increase in human–bear interactions, particularly in agricultural and rural interface areas where bear habitat overlaps with private land. These interactions often involve livestock predation, property damage, and risks to human safety.

Current legislation allows for limited lethal control of grizzly bears through a ministerial authorization process, typically administered when a bear is deemed a "problem animal." However, this process can be time-sensitive, reactive, and administratively burdensome, leaving landowners with few immediate options to protect their livelihoods.

Rural municipalities report that landowners are increasingly concerned about their inability to respond quickly to active threats, particularly in remote areas where wildlife response resources may be delayed. This creates financial strain, emotional distress, and potential safety risks.

A legislative amendment or regulatory mechanism that provides clear, conditional authority for landowners to act in defense of property when a grizzly bear poses an immediate threat would help balance species conservation with rural safety and economic sustainability.

This resolution seeks to ensure that Alberta's wildlife management framework reflects the realities faced by rural residents, while continuing to support responsible stewardship and long-term grizzly bear recovery.

RMA Background

13-26S: Controlling Grizzly Bears to Ensure Community Safety

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to end the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and implement a Grizzly Bear Management Plan;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA establish a dedicated funding program to support grizzly bear research, conflict-mitigation efforts, and community safety initiatives;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that this dedicated funding program include stable contributions to organizations focused on grizzly bear-related research and management (such as the Waterton Biosphere Reserve) and provide direct or indirect financial assistance to landowners for bear-proofing measures, such as secure grain and feed storage, electric fencing, carcass management, and other proven deterrents;
>
> FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to the GOA to implement a regulated grizzly bear hunt administered through a draw system, with the number of available tags determined annually based on population data, conflict trends, and the outcomes of previous seasons, to help maintain an appropriate and sustainable bear population.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

17-24F: Improved Grizzly Bear Management to Ensure Human, Livestock and Wildlife Safety

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to increase funding for Conservation Officers and problem wildlife specialists to ensure that an updated and properly funded grizzly bear management plan is in place to protect both the public and bears.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 22-26F

Returning Officer Powers to Enforce Eligibility of Municipal Candidates

Leduc County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs

WHEREAS under the *Local Authorities Election Act* (LAEA), the returning officer has limited grounds to deny a candidate from filing their nomination papers; and

WHEREAS returning officers have no authority to take action or enforce eligibility of a candidate; and

WHEREAS the LAEA places the responsibility on candidates to know and follow the rules; and

WHEREAS if the legislation is contravened, it is up to the candidates, electors or scrutineers to make any objection, complaint or to contest the election; and

WHEREAS if an elector, candidate or Council files a disqualification application pursuant to the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) or files a complaint to Elections Alberta for breach of the LAEA at the time of the election, it is unlikely to be heard by Elections Alberta or the courts until after the election; and

WHEREAS this has resulted in ineligible candidates being elected to municipal councils; and

WHEREAS an elected councillor is required to remain eligible therefore requiring an elector, candidate or Council to file a disqualification application to disqualify the councillor, if the application was not already filed when they were a candidate; and

WHEREAS if an ineligible councillor does not voluntarily resign, removing them from Council requires a lengthy and costly court proceeding; and

WHEREAS during these proceedings the alleged ineligible councillor would still be able to sit on Council; and

WHEREAS if the candidate voluntarily resigned or was disqualified, a by-election would be held, creating more cost to the municipality;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to amend the *Local Authorities Election Act* and other relevant legislation to require municipal candidates to demonstrate their eligibility to the returning officer when filing their nomination, and to empower the returning officer to inform candidates about the eligibility requirements, verify the eligibility of all candidates, inform candidates when they are ineligible and disallow ineligible candidates from being nominated.

Member background

The *Local Authorities Election Act* (LAEA) requires that candidates must meet the following requirements to be eligible to run as a candidate: *LAEA* s.21(1):

- A Canadian citizen

- 18 years of age or older on Election Day, and
- Must be a resident of the ward or the electoral division in which you intend to run for the six consecutive months immediately preceding nomination day.

Ineligibility for Nomination

No one is eligible to become a candidate under any of the following circumstances:

- if you are the auditor of the local jurisdiction; LAEA s.22(1)
- if your property taxes are more than $50 in arrears (excluding indebtedness on current taxes, and indebtedness for arrears of taxes for which the person has entered into a consolidation agreement with the municipality); LAEA s.22(1)
- if you are in default for any other debt to the local jurisdiction equal to or exceeding $500 for more than 90 days; LAEA s.22(1)
- if within the previous 10 years, you have been convicted of an offense under the Local Authorities Election Act, the Election Act, Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, or the Canada Elections Act; LAEA s.22(1)
- if on nomination day you are employed by the Office of the Ombudsman (unless you take a leave of absence); LAEA s.22(1)
- if you are a judge, Member of the Senate or House of Commons of Canada, or Member of the Legislative Assembly; MGA s.174(1)(c) or
- if you have been convicted of an offence punishable by imprisonment for 5 or more years, or of an offence under Section 123, 124 or 125 of the Criminal Code of Canada (an offense related to municipal corruption, influencing a municipal official, or financial abuse of an elected office) MGA s.174(1)(e).

A person will be ineligible for nomination if they have failed to comply with the campaign finance and disclosure requirements of the LAEA s.22(1.2) and:

- the secretary or CAO transmitted or presented a report in respect to that person, and
- the court did not dispense with or extend the time for compliance.

A person is deemed to be ineligible under these circumstances for either an eight-year period following the day that a report was transmitted by the secretary, or a three-year period following the day the disclosure statement was filed with the municipality (whichever period expires first).

If you are a municipal employee and you wish to run for local office you must take a leave of absence without pay as outlined in the LAEA. This point does not apply if you perform duties for a jurisdiction in a volunteer capacity. You may notify your employer on or after January 1 in the election year (on or after the day council passes a resolution setting election day) but before the last working day prior to nomination day. Any employee who requests a leave of absence without pay in accordance with those conditions must be granted that leave. LAEA s.22(5) s.22(5.1)

*Source A Candidate's Guide: Running for Elected Office | Municipal Affairs, ©2025 Government of Alberta | March 2025

Under the current legislation and nomination process, the candidate signs a declaration that they meet all the above criteria. The CAO or returning officer have limited grounds to deny a candidate from filing

their nomination papers, all of which are administrative in nature (such as incomplete forms). Currently, the CAO or returning officer has no authority to verify the eligibility of a candidate. In addition, the CAO or returning officer is not authorized to collect information such as indebtedness to the municipality as this would be a breach of privacy because the information is not being used for the purpose it was originally collected for. The returning officer may raise awareness of the ineligibility of the candidate, if suspected, however they have no power to reject the nomination.

Benefits and drawbacks of giving the returning officer the ability to address candidate eligibility

Benefits

- Verifying eligibility requirements would be straightforward and objective.
- Ineligible candidates would not be allowed to be nominated and run for office.
- Changes would avoid undue campaign costs for the potential candidate.
- Changes would allow a potential candidate to address any issues of ineligibility such as indebtedness.
- Changes would remove the possibility of an ineligible candidate being elected and council or an elector forced to submit an application of disqualification to the courts or complaint to Elections Alberta to remove the candidate from council.
- Changes would also remove the associated costs of potential court proceedings for disqualification and a potential by-election if they were disqualified.
- Greater accountability to the electorate regarding the eligibility of candidates.

Drawbacks

- Returning officers would need to have the ability to check all the various aspects of eligibility.
- It would take slightly more time and resources to process candidate nominations.
- There would be more risk and liability for returning officers and the municipality in checking eligibility.
- Some smaller municipalities may not be able to hire a returning officer that would have the competency to check the eligibility of candidates.

Legislation could be amended to allow municipalities with limited resources the ability to opt out of the requirement to check eligibility and revert to requiring the candidates swearing that they are eligible.

There are far more benefits than drawbacks to changing this legislation and overall would result in a more accountable, fair and transparent system that functions for all municipalities in Alberta.

RMA Background

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Resolution 24-26F

Sustainable Provincial Funding for Community-Owned, Team-Based Rural Primary Care

Lacombe County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Primary and Preventative Health Services

WHEREAS stable access to local healthcare services is essential to long-term viability, economic sustainability, and ability of residents to live and age in place within rural communities; and

WHEREAS longitudinal primary care in rural Alberta remains uneven due to ongoing healthcare workforce shortages, including challenges in recruiting and retaining family physicians; and

WHEREAS team-based interdisciplinary primary care teams, including nursing professionals and pharmacists, can provide consistent, high-quality care even with limited on-site physician availability, thereby reducing pressure on emergency departments and neighbouring healthcare facilities; and

WHEREAS the Bashaw Medical Clinic represents an innovative, community-owned and operated Patient Medical Home model that delivers primary care through an interdisciplinary team, reducing reliance on physicians as sole providers and improving access to care; and

WHEREAS this team-based approach has significantly increased patient attachment, expanded access to care, and improved continuity of care for over 1,500 rural residents, with continued growth expected; and

WHEREAS current funding for team-based primary care models rely on limited grants that are not sufficient to ensure long-term stability;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to establish long-term, sustainable provincial funding and support for community-owned, interdisciplinary, team-based primary care models in rural and remote communities;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the GOA work collaboratively with rural municipalities and community partners to ensure equitable access to team-based primary care across rural Alberta.

Member Background

Rural Alberta continues to face persistent gaps in access to primary healthcare, largely driven by ongoing shortages in family physicians and challenges related to recruitment and retention in smaller communities. As a result, many rural residents experience limited or inconsistent access to longitudinal care, increasing reliance on emergency departments and placing additional strain on the broader healthcare system.

In response to these challenges, the Bashaw & District Regional Health and Wellness Foundation, in partnership with local stakeholders, developed the Bashaw Medical Clinic; Alberta's only community-owned and operated Patient Medical Home embedded within an Integrated Health Neighbourhood. This model leverages an interdisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, including nurses, an advanced practice pharmacist, and administrative support staff, to deliver comprehensive, team-based care.

Despite limited on-site physician availability, the clinic provides full-time primary care services and has more than doubled its patient panel to over 1,500 residents, with continued growth anticipated. This approach has improved patient attachment, enhanced continuity of care, and reduced pressure on emergency departments and neighbouring healthcare facilities.

The Bashaw model demonstrates that community-driven, team-based care can provide a sustainable and effective solution to rural healthcare access challenges. It also supports broader community outcomes, including enabling residents to remain in their homes, strengthening workforce retention, and contributing to the long-term sustainability of rural municipalities.

However, the long-term success of this model is currently at risk due to reliance on short-term grant funding, which is insufficient to maintain stable operations and support continued growth. Sustainable provincial investment is required to ensure continuity of care and to expand similar models across rural Alberta.

Lacombe County, alongside regional partners, supports increased provincial commitment towards interdisciplinary, team-based primary care and encourages the Government of Alberta to recognize and fund these innovative models as a core component of the provincial healthcare system.

RMA Background

1-24F: Attraction and Retention Strategy for Rural Health Care Professionals

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate for the Government of Alberta to urgently prioritize a commitment to long-term sustainable funding to accelerate implementation of the Rural Health Action Plan 2024-2027 and the work of the Rural Health Professions Action Plan that focuses on increasing the total number of health care professionals in rural and remote Alberta.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

Resolution 25-26F

Reinstating Legislative Continuing Care Standards in Alberta

Vulcan County

Carried

Advocacy Target: Alberta Assisted Living and Social Services

WHEREAS the *Continuing Care Act* regulates the full spectrum of continuing care services in Alberta; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta has set standards for quality in continuing care, including the Continuing Care Health Services Standard, which establishes minimum standards for the provision of high quality, individualized health care, based on the assessed needs of each client and resident; and

WHEREAS Alberta does not currently have a legislated minimum of direct care hours per resident per day; and

WHEREAS a legislated minimum of four hours of direct care per resident per day would create a consistent, enforceable baseline while allowing additional staffing based on resident needs; and

WHEREAS Alberta does not currently require minimum staff-to-resident ratios for registered nurses or health care aides, and staffing may therefore vary significantly between facilities regardless of resident complexity; and

WHEREAS legislated minimum ratios would support timely care, resident safety, and more consistent staffing across the province; and

WHEREAS complaints involving abuse, neglect, and non-compliance may involve both the Continuing Care Licensing Office and Protection for Persons in Care; and

WHEREAS these separate processes can result in confusion, delays, and gaps in communication or follow-up; and

WHEREAS stronger coordination, information sharing, and enforcement would improve accountability and ensure concerns are addressed consistently; and

WHEREAS repeated non-compliance may continue when corrective actions do not lead to meaningful consequences, and enforcement should become stronger when violations are serious, recurring, or remain unresolved; and

WHEREAS escalating penalties could include fines, increased monitoring, and potential license restrictions or suspension;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta (GOA) to strengthen continuing care standards in the *Continuing Care Act* by legislating a minimum of four hours of direct care per resident per day in continuing care homes;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to the GOA to establish minimum staff-to-resident ratios for registered nurses and health care aides; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to the GOA to improve collaboration, investigation, and enforcement processes between the Continuing Care Licensing Office and Protection for Persons in Care; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to the GOA to establish escalating penalties for serious or repeated non-compliance with continuing care standards.

Member Background

Community organizations, service providers, and other agencies across rural southern Alberta have reported an increasing number of concerns related to neglect, abuse, and unmet care needs in continuing care homes.

As these agencies shared emerging trends with the Southern Alberta Senior Protect Society, it became increasingly apparent that the concerns were not isolated to individual facilities or communities but reflected broader systemic challenges within continuing care.

Senior Protect brought together agencies and community partners to examine these concerns further and has since worked with residents, families, staff, and service providers to document issues, support navigation of complaint and reporting processes, and identify gaps in the current system.

This work has highlighted recurring concerns related to staffing capacity, insufficient direct-care time, fragmented investigation and oversight processes, and limited consequences for repeated non-compliance.

Legislated Minimum Care Hours

Alberta previously required 1.9 hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day. The Continuing Care Act introduced in April 2024 removed mandated minimum care hours, leaving staffing levels to operator-specific plans. Continuing care homes no longer have a legal requirement to deliver a set amount of care per resident. The new funding model for Type A continuing care homes is intended to support flexible, person-centered care. A legislated minimum of four hours of direct care per resident per day would create a consistent, enforceable baseline while allowing additional staffing based on resident needs.

Minimum Staff-to-Resident Ratios

Alberta does not currently require minimum staff-to-resident ratios for registered nurses or health care aides. Staffing may therefore vary significantly between facilities, regardless of resident complexity. Legislated minimum ratios would support timely care, resident safety, and more consistent staffing across the province.

Strengthened Investigations and Oversight

Complaints involving abuse, neglect, and non-compliance may involve both the Continuing Care Licensing Office and Protection for Persons in Care. Separate processes can create confusion, delays, and gaps in communication or follow-up. Stronger coordination, information sharing, and enforcement would improve accountability and help ensure concerns are addressed consistently.

Escalating Penalties for Repeated Non-Compliance

Repeated non-compliance may continue when corrective actions do not lead to meaningful consequences. Enforcement should become stronger when violations are serious, recurring, or remain unresolved. Escalating penalties could include fines, increased monitoring, and potential license restrictions or suspension.

In conclusion, implementing these changes would require additional investment in Alberta's continuing care system. However, the social and health-system return on that investment has the potential to be substantial.

Adequately staffed continuing care homes can better meet residents' daily needs, identify health concerns earlier and prevent avoidable deterioration. When care needs are not met, the consequences can extend beyond the continuing care system, including emergency department visits, hospital admissions and longer hospital stays related to issues such as falls, dehydration, malnutrition, medication concerns, wounds and other potentially preventable complications.

Investing in continuing care should therefore be viewed not only as a cost, but as an opportunity to protect vulnerable Albertans while reducing avoidable pressures elsewhere in the health system. A stronger continuing care system ultimately supports residents, families, staff and the sustainability of Alberta's broader health care system.

Resources

Continuing Care Legislation and Standards in Alberta

https://www.alberta.ca/continuing-care-legislation-and-standards

4.1 Hours of Care Per Patient Per Day Benchmark

- Health Standards Organization (page 38) https://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/ENG_2023HSO_LTC_Standards.pdf?utm
- "The average required hours of direct care per resident day will vary depending on the LTC home’s resident population, the complexity of their needs, and workforce composition. Evidence indicates that LTC home residents require a minimum of 4.1 hours of direct care per day. Higher staffing levels improve quality of care, especially as residents’ care needs become more complex.

Organizations That Have Supported The 4-Hour Benchmark

- Health Standards Organization (HSO)

- The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU)
- United Nurses of Alberta (UNA)
- Nova Scotia Nurses' Union
- Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
- Canadian Health Coalition

Supporting Peer Reviewed Evidence

- Boscart, V. M., Sidani, S., Poss, J., Davey, M., d'Avernas, J., Brown, P., Heckman, G., Ploeg, J., & Costa, A. P. (2018). The associations between staffing hours and quality of care indicators in long-term care. BMC Health Services Research, 18, 750.

Public Compliance Reports

https://standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca/

RMA Background

10-24F: Full-Time (24/7) Home Care Support in Lodges/Supportive Living Accommodations

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to incentivize transportation and health care services to enable the provision of unscheduled home care for rural seniors, including those in supportive living accommodations.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.

10-23F: Enhancing Home Care Services for Rural Residents in Alberta

> THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to enhance home care services for rural residents by increasing funding, improving accessibility, implementing innovative care models such as community-based care tailored for rural settings, and other means.
>
> Click here to view the full resolution.