

Planning and Development

Municipalities play a large role in the planning for the responsible use of land, both within their boundaries and regionally. Planning and development involves the appropriate use and management of land resources, provision of services and infrastructure, orderly development of new growth, management of risks, and proper decision-making models for land-related issues.

What is RMA's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective in development and planning?

- With 86.5% of Alberta's land mass located within rural municipalities, the critical role that rural municipal governments play in both planning and development cannot be understated.
- Planning and development are core municipal functions. Each municipality has a fundamental interest in land-use planning within their own and neighbouring communities.
- Rural municipal perspectives on growth and planning are diverse. Depending on their location within Alberta, some rural municipalities may be dealing with the challenges of rapid growth, while others may be examining ways to stimulate new economic development in rural and remote areas.
- It is imperative that jurisdiction for local land-use planning remains with municipalities.
- Municipalities operate with significant autonomy as outlined and guaranteed in the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA); however, the Government of Alberta has recently assumed an increased role in planning and development, especially relating to high-growth areas, regionalization, and cumulative effects as identified in the Land-use Framework (LUF).
- Municipalities must be given appropriate tools and resources to enable the development of Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs), Municipal Development Plans (MDPs), and to comply with regional plans, and the cumulative effects approach.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to planning and development?

- The development of Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs) and Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDPs), both of which are now mandatory for municipal neighbours through the revised *Municipal Government Act* (MGA), results in increased costs for municipalities.

- Financial support should be made available to municipalities to enable the development of agreements with their neighbours. Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs) and Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDPs) will benefit all Alberta municipalities and RMA supports this endeavor.
- Based on individual circumstances, rural municipalities with a large number of municipal neighbours should be eligible for a deadline extension to complete Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs). This time is imperative to ensure ICFs are comprehensive and able to meet the needs of the communities involved.
- Rural municipalities periodically face annexation bids. Issuing a response to the bid is often very labour-intensive and costly. During the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) review, RMA recommended clear principles to be developed with respect to municipal authority and support during annexation procedures.
- Planning and development processes need to be adaptable and address changing priorities, shifts in available grants, and the potential for absorbing dissolving municipalities. The funding provided through the Alberta Community Partnership (ACP) supports the municipal viability process but additional supports are required to ensure municipalities inheriting dissolved municipalities are not inheriting unnecessary risk.
- To enable sound planning, promote sustainability and minimize liability, the province should provide municipalities on the receiving end of a dissolution with information regarding the state of infrastructure in municipalities that are at risk of dissolving, and access to proper funding to address the infrastructure costs inherited as a result of the dissolution process (e.g. aging water and wastewater infrastructure).
- RMA continues to support the viability review process, and participate in viability reviews, as a means to support the financial well-being of rural municipalities impacted by the viability challenges of their municipal neighbours.

What collaborative relationships are essential to rural municipalities in planning and development?

- Planning and development requires municipalities to have clear bylaws and statutory plans. To create those plans municipalities must engage with citizens and local business owners. Such regulations should be easily understandable to residents, developers, and industry.

- Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs) and Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDPs), both of which are mandatory for municipal neighbours through the revised *Municipal Government Act* (MGA), are effective tools to ensure that appropriate services and infrastructure are being funded regionally, while preserving local autonomy in reaching these decisions.
- As Alberta's large urban centers continue to grow, the RMA and impacted rural municipalities look forward to being involved in the development of specialized governance agreements (e.g. city charters). The impacts of decisions made for one municipality often spill beyond municipal boundaries with unforeseen impacts. Involving all impacted municipalities will create healthy and collaboratively-focused regions.
- The Government of Alberta requires municipal plans to conform to regional plans under the Land-use Framework (LUF). Therefore, it is vital that municipalities be actively involved in the development of regional plans, and that regional plans respect the local decisions reached in existing municipal and intermunicipal plans.

How does the work of RMA support the sustainability of municipal planning and development?

- RMA has produced a position paper outlining the detrimental effects of forced regionalization and highlighting the importance of municipal autonomy or voluntary collaboration in intermunicipal land-use planning.
- RMA participates in a number of initiatives related to planning and development including the overarching provincial Land-use Framework (LUF) and the associated regional plans. RMA's involvement in these forums will continue to be a setting for information to be gathered and provided to RMA members.

What current planning and development-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Intermunicipal Collaborative Frameworks and Intermunicipal Development Plans

- RMA is concerned about the restrictive timelines for municipalities to negotiate Intermunicipal Collaborative Frameworks (ICFs) and Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDPs). Completing these agreements within two years will require significant municipal staff capacity and resources, especially for those rural municipalities required to negotiate upwards of ten separate agreements, compared to urban municipalities who may only complete one.

- In some cases, Intermunicipal Collaborative Framework (ICF) negotiations will require municipalities to collaborate with one another, when they may have struggled to do so in the past. RMA believes that for ICFs to be effective, all involved municipalities must negotiate in good faith and respect varying levels of capacity and priorities that all partners may have.

Cost of Development

- The expanded use of offsite levies (i.e. development levies) through the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) should provide greater flexibility to municipalities and ensure that municipalities are able to cover the capital costs of new facilities in new development areas.

Planning with Indigenous Communities

- Effective planning within a region should take into consideration the priorities of both municipalities and Indigenous communities.
- To promote positive relationship building, it is necessary for municipalities to be exempt from paying a flat rate fee to consult with their Indigenous neighbours. RMA has advocated to the government on this proposal arguing that requiring a fee to engage with Indigenous communities will only result in animosity and resentment, which is exactly opposite of the intent to build healthy and sustained relationships needed.
- The success of relationship building between municipalities and Indigenous communities will be sustainable, in part, with consistent and dedicated resources (i.e. staff) from the provincial government to oversee consultation processes. Dedicated staff would ensure timely consultation processes, that are often halted due to long processing times.

Disaster Mitigation

- All land-use planning at the municipal level should consider possible environmental impacts, including the potential for flooding, wildfires, and drought.
- Unprecedented flooding has resulted in legislative changes for land-use planning in flood prone areas. Most municipalities recognize the importance of avoiding flood-prone areas, these formalized changes need to be monitored for impacts and unintended consequences. These legislative changes have yet to be implemented through the release of the *Floodway Development Regulation*.
- Municipal land-use bylaws must be amended to address legislative changes for planning in floodways. Flood mitigation efforts are timely and needed but must involve local governments, comprehensive consultation, and consider both environmental

impacts and agriculture considerations. Flood mitigation planning should also address drought mitigation planning.

- RMA encourages municipalities to work with government, residents, and landowners through programs such as FireSmart to plan and mitigate risks of wildfire.

Land-use Framework

- Regional plans under the Land-use Framework (LUF) have an impact on municipal planning and development plans, and therefore municipalities should be thoroughly consulted and engaged in the development of these plans.

Planning for Cannabis

- The legalization of cannabis will bring land use planning challenges to rural municipalities. Although they will be economic contributors, cannabis production facilities may have environmental, public safety, and infrastructure impacts for rural municipalities.
- The rural municipal perspective must be considered in the federal approval process for all cannabis production facilities.
- Rural municipalities should be empowered to determine where cannabis retail facilities are located within their boundaries. The RMA appreciates the Government of Alberta's flexibility in empowering municipalities to modify default provincial zoning requirements to meet local needs.

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