

Planning and Development

Municipalities play a large role in 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 planning and development?

- 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 must be provided the time, tools and support to meet increased local and regional planning requirements introduced through changes to the *Municipal Government Act*, such as mandatory municipal development plans for all municipalities and mandatory intermunicipal development plans for all municipalities sharing a common border.

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 and financial support should be made available to municipalities to enable the development of agreements with their neighbours.
- 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.

- As regional planning collaboration increases through the development of Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks, some municipalities are investigating regional approaches through voluntary amalgamation or dissolutions. Local autonomy should be supported in cases where all municipalities are willing participants, but such processes should not proceed without research and understanding of the governance, financial and service delivery implications.
- 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 bylaws and plans 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.
- Given the high level of interconnectedness between the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and the rural municipalities with which they border, RMA is disappointed to not have been involved in the development of City Charters between the

Government of Alberta and Edmonton and Calgary. Specialized powers for those municipalities have the potential to have spill-over impacts on bordering municipalities.

- The Government of Alberta requires municipal plans to conform to regional plans under the Land-use Framework (LUF). However, LUF regional plans are finalized in only two of seven regions, and are not yet started in four of seven regions despite an initial goal of completing all seven regional plans by 2012. At this point, the finalization of regional plans must be prioritized, or the overall LUF approach must be reconsidered as the inconstant application of regional plans creates uncertainty and inconsistency for municipalities throughout Alberta.

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 has produced several resources and training options to support municipal planning and development efforts, particularly in relation to changes to the *Municipal Government Act*. These include An Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework toolkit (which includes guidance on Intermunicipal Development Plans), a Public Participation Policy and Public Notification Guide, Subdivision and Development Appeal Board Training, and an Elected Officials Education Program course focused on land use and development approvals.

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

Intermunicipal Collaboration 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

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- 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.
- Prior to creating or expanding an offsite levy regime, it is critical that municipalities understand where planned growth will occur, and the services required to support it. Offsite levies must be collected for a clearly-defined purpose within a clearly-defined benefitting area.

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 opposite of the intent to build strong relationships.
- Rural municipalities need clear and consistent direction and leadership from the Government of Alberta and the Aboriginal Consultation Office in the consultation processes to ensure timely and appropriate consultations are completed in connection with municipal development, and without the expectation that municipalities incur punitive financial costs to enter into consultations with neighbouring Indigenous communities.

Disaster Mitigation

- 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. 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 for and mitigate risks of wildfire.
- Municipalities must address the increased likelihood of disasters and build resiliency into asset management planning and infrastructure investment decisions.
- Federal and provincial climate change-related funding should support municipalities to plan and upgrade infrastructure for climate resiliency.
- RMA looks forward to learning more about how the Government of Canada's \$151 million investment in natural disaster preparation and response will be used to support municipal planning and resiliency efforts, particularly in Alberta.

Planning for Cannabis

- Cannabis legalization has brought land use planning challenges to rural municipalities. Although cannabis production facilities are economic contributors, they 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.
- The Government of Alberta's Municipal Cannabis Transition Program (MCTP) funding is not available to rural municipalities. As municipalities of all types face administrative costs related to land use planning, the MCTP should be expanded.

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