

Rural Economic Development

Alberta's economy is largely based on an array of industries that primarily operate in rural areas, such as energy, forestry, and agriculture. In addition, small business, tourism, manufacturing, renewable energy, and value-added processing of natural resources and agriculture products have all gained importance in rural Alberta in recent years. To sustain this development, the Government of Alberta and rural municipalities can collaborate to promote rural communities as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

What is RMA's position on the importance of rural economic development?

- ♦ The natural resources and industrial development located in rural Alberta provide significant province-wide economic benefits. A strong rural economy not only benefits the province as a whole but ensures that rural residents can continue to enjoy a high quality of life and rural communities remain viable.
- ♦ Rural economic development is strongly linked to healthy rural communities. To attract innovative and long-term economic development, rural communities must have reliable infrastructure and community services such as roads, bridges, health care, education, and broadband, among others.
- ♦ The growth of value-added products across all industries in Alberta has been beneficial for economic diversification and rural economic development.

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

- ♦ Rural economic development helps to expand the municipal tax base so that rural residents can provide a wider range of services to their residents. These services enhance the overall quality of life in rural Alberta.
- ♦ Much of the industrial development that takes place in rural Alberta relies on the use of heavy equipment and frequent truck traffic, which strains and damages rural transportation infrastructure, resulting in significant costs for rural municipalities.
- ♦ Many of the industries that are prevalent in rural Alberta are unique in that they are seasonal in nature, have unpredictable work hours, and require flexibility in when work takes place. It is vital that any regulatory changes that may impact this flexibility be developed in consultation with employers and employees, as well as the municipalities that host such industries since regulatory changes could have unforeseen local economic impacts.

What collaborative relationships are essential to encouraging rural economic development?

- ◆ Intermunicipal Collaborative Frameworks (ICFs) may increase collaborative economic development strategies between neighbouring municipalities and Indigenous communities to attract development.
- ◆ Collaboration among the Government of Alberta and rural municipalities is essential to promoting the value of rural Alberta beyond Alberta's borders - both as a place to live and a place to invest.
- ◆ Regular communication and collaboration among rural municipalities, RMA, and industry associations will assist in developing a long-term relationship between industry and rural municipalities, in which needs, priorities, and concerns can be regularly shared.
- ◆ The work of regional economic development associations (REDAs) is vital to supporting the growth and sustainability of rural economies throughout Alberta.
- ◆ RMA recognizes the opportunities that exist for regional economic development between rural municipalities, urban municipalities and Indigenous communities. The RMA would be pleased to see the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI) continued funding to provide opportunities for rural municipalities and Indigenous communities to work together on regional economic development.

How does the work of RMA support rural economic development?

- ◆ Though advocacy efforts, RMA works to increase awareness of the economic potential of rural Alberta, as well as the local challenges that industrial development presents for rural municipalities.
- ◆ RMA regularly monitors proposed policy, regulatory, and legislative changes that may impact rural economic development, and provides the rural municipal perspective as to how such impacts could be mitigated. RMA is in a strong position to communicate information related to economic development to members.
- ◆ RMA provides its members with a variety of business services, which assist in lowering municipal costs. This allows for RMA members to dedicate more resources to attracting investment and residents.

What current rural economic development-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Tourism

- ♦ Rural municipalities contain some of Alberta’s most beautiful natural scenery, parks, and culture. A collaborative effort between RMA, the Government of Alberta, and Indigenous communities is needed to promote the natural beauty and activities that is present across rural Alberta.

Rural Broadband

- ♦ Being connected to the digital economy is vital to community development. Many rural communities are limited to unreliable, obsolete, or overly expensive internet access. This not only harms the ability of rural municipalities to attract economic development, but also contributes to rural depopulation and harms community development more broadly.

Renewable Energy

- ♦ Renewable energy generation is a growing presence in rural Alberta and has the potential to become a thriving industry. To minimize land-use conflicts and maximize the opportunities available for economic development, it is important that the Government of Alberta and the renewable energy industry work and collaborate with Alberta’s rural municipalities.
- ♦ Renewable energy projects need responsible end-of-life management regulations and plans to prevent such projects from turning into environmental liabilities on Alberta’s landscape.

Indigenous Relations and Economic Development

- ♦ Effective economic development requires strong relationships between municipalities and Indigenous communities. Every municipality and Indigenous community is unique and no one approach will fit all contexts. RMA believes that positive relations requires open and effective communication between municipalities, Indigenous communities, the provincial and federal governments.

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