



RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta Federal Election Platform

August 2021



Rural Municipalities of Alberta – An Overview

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) represents Alberta’s 63 rural municipalities, five specialized municipalities, and the Special Areas Board. Together, our members represent 85% of Alberta’s land mass. In general, RMA members are characterized by very large land masses, small and dispersed populations, and high levels of economic activity in areas such as agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas. Villages, towns, and small cities are an important part of Alberta’s landscape, and rural municipalities often work closely with their urban neighbours to deliver service and pursue economic development opportunities. However, the focus of the RMA is supporting rural municipalities, and this document is intended to highlight rural issues for candidates running for federal office.

How to Use the Guide

The RMA has identified four key federal priority issues, including:

1. Rural Broadband
2. Disaster Mitigation and Recovery
3. Infrastructure
4. Drought Recovery

For each of the RMA’s priority issues, an overview of the issue is presented and a recommendation. These are intended to provide federal elected officials with information on challenges and opportunities facing rural municipalities.

1. Rural Broadband

Access to broadband internet service in rural Alberta is key for attracting investment, maintaining local businesses, and allowing all Albertans to participate in the digital economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought broadband connectivity issues to the forefront, with many rural Albertans struggling to work and learn from home due to lack of high-speed internet and infrastructure challenges. RMA's internet performance testing shows that less than ten percent of tests run in rural Alberta meet the Government of Canada's universal service standard of 50 megabits per second download and 10 megabits per second upload.

Rural areas are unlikely to be serviced by private internet providers without intervention, as there is not a business case to be made. As a result, action is required by the federal government to support rural broadband development through both policy changes and increased funding. Supporting these initiatives at a federal level will allow for rural Alberta to continue to be an economic engine while making room for future internet usage such as telehealth, connected agriculture, and working and learning from home.

RECOMMENDATION

The RMA is requesting that Budget 2021 funding for the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) is distributed to those in underserved areas currently experiencing the lowest internet speeds. The traditional methods used by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) tend to overrepresent the served areas of rural Alberta, however, rural municipalities have long understood that this does not reflect their reality.

2. Disaster Mitigation and Recovery

Climate change is being felt in communities across Canada and communities are becoming more vulnerable to a range of climate change impacts including rising temperatures and extreme weather-related events such as floods and wildfires. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, severe weather across Canada led to Canadians filing \$3.2 billion in insured damages, with three of the most expensive events taking place in Alberta: hail in Calgary, flooding in Fort McMurray, and storms in central and southern Alberta. When climate related disasters strike, local governments are the first to respond and their services and infrastructure are increasingly being affected by these events, with each region experiencing impacts differently. Climate adaptation and resiliency has become an important pillar in the Government of Canada's environmental plan and Budget 2021 provided \$1.4 billion over 12 years to Infrastructure Canada to top off the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to support projects such as wildfire mitigation activities. As the rollout of this funding begins, ensuring that funding distribution for municipal disaster mitigation investments is not based strictly on a per capita basis, but rather consider high risk areas as well as communities that may lack the capacity to effectively implement mitigation strategies.

RECOMMENDATION

The RMA is calling on every federal party to continue to empower local leaders with the right tools to adapt to climate change and protect families and business from new weather extremes. This means continuing to invest funding to work with rural municipalities to build a comprehensive understanding of the full range for risks from climate change, the impact to local services and infrastructure, and the tools and resources required to reduce those risks.

3. Infrastructure

Rural roads and bridges serve as important arteries to help Alberta's economy grow by connecting natural resources to national and international transportation corridors. This critical infrastructure provides the oil, gas, forestry, and agriculture industries with access to the natural resources that they depend on. Without these critical transportation links, Alberta's natural resources would be unable to reach key processing facilities and markets throughout Alberta, Canada, and beyond, and Alberta's disproportionate contribution to Canada's economic strength would be impacted. The economic value of rural municipal infrastructure can be measured by the fact that 41% of Alberta's public and private investment, and 26% of Alberta's GDP is in rural Alberta despite having only 18% of Alberta's population.

Rural municipalities manage approximately 75% of roads and 60% of bridges in Alberta. This makes transportation and infrastructure a significant priority and expense for rural municipalities. Proper investment in Alberta's rural municipal transportation benefits not only local communities, but also Alberta and Canada. Rural transportation systems are the first link for Alberta's resources in a global supply chain and it takes the collective efforts of all levels of government to work together to support a safe, reliable, and well-funded rural resource network.

Despite the outsized role that Alberta's rural municipal infrastructure plays in supporting Canada's economy, recent federal infrastructure programs treat rural infrastructure as an afterthought, with small portions of funding available for general rural support, with the majority being reserved for projects only feasible in large urban centres. To effectively recognize rural economic contributions and the importance of rural communities to Canada's present and future, the federal approach must shift to recognize rural infrastructure needs as unique. This approach would balance support for core rural infrastructure such as roads and bridges with recognition that rural communities are interested in pursuing innovative infrastructure approaches addressing climate change, connectivity, and other emerging challenges, but in a way that aligns with the capacity and geographic realities of rural areas, rather than existing programs that are often tailored to major projects in large cities.

RECOMMENDATION

RMA is calling on all federal parties to recognize and support the important role that rural infrastructure plays in supporting Canada's economy and community growth. Rather than federal infrastructure funding programs that treat rural infrastructure as an afterthought, the Government of Canada should design a Canada-wide rural infrastructure funding program that supports investment in core infrastructure such as roads and bridges while also allowing rural communities to invest in innovative capital projects that work in a rural setting.

4. Drought Recovery

Agriculture is a vital industry in Alberta, which includes a broad range in the types and size of farming operations; from small family operations to large-scale facilities. The agriculture industry can be significantly impacted by global market influences and unpredictable weather and climate fluctuations. Summer 2021 has been a challenge for farmers and agricultural production across the Prairies as severe drought conditions, sustained high temperatures, and wildfires continue to impact operations ranging from accessing feed for livestock, to crop producers being challenged in yields. To date, 31 rural municipalities across Alberta have declared agricultural disasters as the extreme weather has caused projected crop yields to drop by as much as 75 percent in some regions. Many livestock producers are concerned about the feed, pasture, and herd size which has resulted in cattle being sold early due to shortages of feed. In some regions of southern Alberta, the price of cattle has dropped by 20 to 25 percent less than in 2020 due in part to the shortage of feed.

The outcomes of this extreme weather will have lasting financial effects on farmers and ranchers. To support agricultural producers, the federal government announced the early designation of the Livestock Tax Deferral Provision which will allow beef producers who are forced to sell a significant amount of their breeding herd due to drought conditions to offset the resulting revenues with the costs to replace the herd. In addition, the federal government has committed \$100 million through the AgriRecovery disaster relief framework to help farmers affected by the drought.

RECOMMENDATION

The RMA is calling on the federal government to continue to provide drought recovery to affected farmers and agricultural producers. This includes providing immediate aid for affected producers and engaging with the agricultural industry to create tools and resources that will help lessen the impact of extreme weather events in the future.

RMA Structure and Contacts

The RMA's membership is divided into five districts. The members of each district elect a representative onto the RMA Board of Directors. A President and Vice-President are also elected by the RMA's entire membership. The Board of Directors holds a formal meeting each month to set the RMA's strategic direction.

The RMA Board of Directors regularly interacts with federal officials through formal meetings and informally as issues arise. Each Director is an expert on province-wide issues, as well as the key concerns within their district.

RMA Board of Directors

RMA President

Paul McLaughlin (Reeve, Ponoka County)

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RMA Vice-President

Kara Westerlund (Councillor, Brazeau County)

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Director: District 1, Foothills-Little Bow

Jason Schneider (Reeve, Vulcan County)

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District 1 RMA Members

Cardston County

Cypress County

Foothills County

County of Forty Mile

County of Lethbridge

County of Newell

MD of Pincher Creek

MD of Ranchland

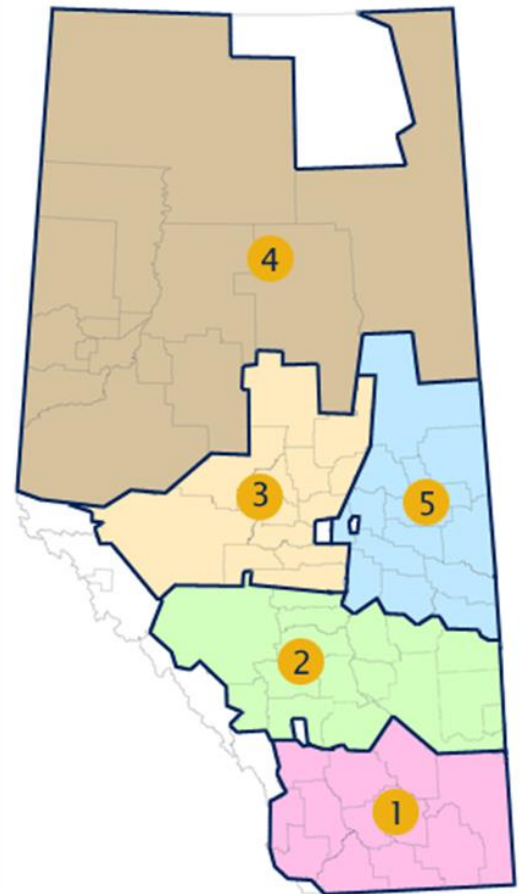
MD of Taber

Vulcan County

County of Warner

MD of Willow Creek

Municipality of Crowsnest Pass



Director: District 2, Central

Amber Link (Reeve, Wheatland County)

alink@rmalberta.com

District 2 RMA Members

<i>MD of Acadia</i>	<i>Ponoka County</i>
<i>MD of Bighorn</i>	<i>Red Deer County</i>
<i>Clearwater County</i>	<i>Rocky View County</i>
<i>Kneehill County</i>	<i>Special Areas Board</i>
<i>Lacombe County</i>	<i>Starland County</i>
<i>Mountain View County</i>	<i>County of Stettler</i>
<i>County of Paintearth</i>	<i>Wheatland County</i>

Director: District 3, Pembina

Kathy Rooyakkers (Councillor, County of Wetaskiwin)

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District 3 RMA Members

<i>Athabasca County</i>	<i>Parkland County</i>
<i>County of Barrhead</i>	<i>Sturgeon County</i>
<i>Brazeau County</i>	<i>Westlock County</i>
<i>Leduc County</i>	<i>County of Wetaskiwin</i>
<i>MD of Lesser Slave River</i>	<i>Woodlands County</i>
<i>Thorhild County</i>	<i>Yellowhead County</i>
<i>Lac Ste. Anne County</i>	

Director: District 4, Northern

Tom Burton (Councillor, MD of Greenview)

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District 4 Members

<i>Big Lakes County</i>	<i>County of Northern Lights</i>
<i>Birch Hills County</i>	<i>Northern Sunrise County</i>
<i>Clear Hills County</i>	<i>MD of Opportunity</i>
<i>MD of Fairview</i>	<i>MD of Peace</i>
<i>County of Grande Prairie</i>	<i>Saddle Hills County</i>
<i>MD of Greenview</i>	<i>MD of Smoky River</i>
<i>Mackenzie County</i>	<i>MD of Spirit River</i>

Director: District 5, Edmonton East

Soren Odegard (Councillor, County of Two Hills)

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District 5 RMA Members

Beaver County

Camrose County

MD of Bonnyville

Flagstaff County

Lac La Biche County

Lamont County

County of Minburn

Smoky Lake County

County of St. Paul

MD of Provost

Strathcona County

County of Two Hills

County of Vermillion River

MD of Wainwright

RM of Wood Buffalo