



RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

2021 FALL CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS



RMA TRADESHOW

The RMA tradeshow is an opportunity for members to learn about great products and services available to municipalities. It is also a great way to build relationships with vendors from across Alberta and Canada (not to mention get some great free swag!). This year's event featured 120 vendors offering everything from tires for municipal vehicles to environmental management services and everything in between!

A highlight of the tradeshow was the awesome door prizes offered by many vendors, including a trip to Jasper and canoe adventure offered by the Canoe Procurement Group of Canada.





OPENING CEREMONIES

The 2021 RMA Convention kicked off with an exciting introduction of the association's Board of Directors, complete with a smoke machine and awesome nicknames!

The opening ceremonies were also an opportunity for the RMA to honour fraternal delegates and dignitaries for their contributions to rural Alberta, as well as to remember former RMA members who have passed away since the previous convention.

The opening ceremonies were a great way to get delegates into the spirit of the RMA's first in-person convention in nearly two years, and set the stage for a week of great programming!

R.W. HAY AWARD

The R.W. Hay Award is supported jointly by the RMA and the Society of Local Government Managers (SLGM). The award demonstrates appreciation for the chief administrative officers who play such a critical role in implementing council visions in rural municipalities across Alberta. This year's recipient was Shawn Hathaway, CAO of the County of Warner. Mr. Hathaway leads by example, trusting his staff to do their jobs effectively and creating a positive environment by supporting staff through open communication and recognition for their efforts. As a municipal administrator, Mr. Hathaway has supported collaboration between municipalities and spearheaded the regionalization of emergency management in the County of Warner. In addition, Mr. Hathaway was involved in an award-winning water quality stewardship initiative. Congratulations to Shawn Hathaway for being the 2021 R.W. Hay Award winner!



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: JORDIN TOOTOO

Opening keynote speaker Jordin Tootoo was the first Inuk hockey player to make it to the NHL. Jordin's keynote address emphasized the importance of mental health and his personal journey in combating addiction. He highlighted these issues by sharing a compelling personal story about his struggle with alcohol addiction, and the tragic suicide of his brother, Terence. Jordin described his battle with alcohol addiction as one that intensified after the passing of his brother, and almost cost him his hockey career. Jordin noted that he was able to overcome these struggles by looking within himself, reconnecting with the land, and then expressing himself in a manner that he felt comfortable in his own skin. He ended his keynote speech by emphasizing the importance of inclusion and the important link between community and individual growth. In other words, a healthy and inclusive community gives life and meaning to every member within that community.

ADDRESS FROM THE PROVINCE: HONOURABLE RIC MCIVER, MINISTER OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Ric McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs, provided an update on several ministry initiatives. Firstly, Minister McIver spoke to the recent introduction of Bill 77: *Municipal Government (Restoring Tax Accountability) Amendment Act, 2021*. Bill 77 returns special lien powers to municipalities as a tool to address the non-payment of property taxes by the oil and gas industry. Minister McIver emphasized the importance of property taxes in ensuring industry receives the services and infrastructure they require and expressed optimism that Bill 77 will help to address this issue.

Additionally, Minister McIver touched on the extension of the Provincial Education Requisition Credit until 2023 – 2024 as another tool to support municipalities in relation to non-payment of taxes, as well as plans to re-start the assessment model review process in the coming year.

Finally, Minister McIver discussed the importance of sustainable and predictable municipal funding. He spoke of the ministry's plans to consult with the RMA and other stakeholders on the Local Government Fiscal Framework, which will replace the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) soon.



RMA ORIENTATION

The RMA is proud to be your municipal association. Executive Director Gerald Rhodes provided an overview of the RMA, its history, and its operations. Tasha Blumenthal, Director of External Relations and Advocacy, spoke about the work the RMA does advocating for member interests. Duane Gladden, Director of Business Services, gave an overview of the services available to members including group procurement and insurance programs designed to save costs for municipalities.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PANEL

Truth and Reconciliation is an emerging municipal issue, with many RMA members prioritizing the development of relationships with neighbouring Indigenous communities. A three-person panel that included the Honourable Rick Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations, County of Lac La Biche Chief Administrative Officer Ken Van Buul, and Roy Pogorzelski shared their expertise on reconciliation, the role that municipalities can play in the process, and reconciliation resources or programs available to municipalities.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: LAUREN SERGY

Public speaking specialist Lauren Sergy delivered an engaging and interesting session on the important role that leadership presence plays in supporting effective communication. For elected officials required to discuss important and contentious issues, a strong leadership presence is crucial to ensuring your voice is heard. Ms. Sergy's address walked delegates through the key markers of an effective leadership presence and how to develop one that works with your natural communication style.



RMA INTERNET SPEED TESTING PROJECT

Vulcan County Reeve and RMA District 1 Director Jason Schneider explained the RMA's internet speed testing project. This presentation highlighted the low internet speeds observed in rural Alberta and walked members through how to run a test. The data collected through this project helps the RMA tell the story of internet in rural Alberta to federal decision makers.

To complete the test, visit:

RMAAlberta.com/speed-test

RMA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The RMA Annual General Meeting focused not only on the routine approval of the association's annual financial statements, but also included an organizational update from President McLauchlin outlining the RMA's advocacy and business services initiatives, including priorities for the coming years. President McLauchlin provided an update on advocacy issues related to unpaid oil and gas taxes, policing, broadband, federal advocacy efforts, and the RMA's work in preparing member municipalities for the municipal elections. He also touched on the huge efforts undertaken by RMA Business Services to expand across Canada and its importance in providing financial stability for the organization. Finally, President McLauchlin touched on the importance of member engagement to him, the RMA Board of Directors, and the association as a whole. The AGM also included a series of votes on RMA bylaw amendments intended to streamline and modernize the association's governance processes.

PRAIRIESCAN

Assistant Deputy Minister of Western Economic Development Justin Reimer spoke about the newly created federal government agency, Prairies Economic Development or PrairiesCan, that formed in place of the previous Western Economic Diversification Canada. PrairiesCan has a mandate to facilitate economic diversification in the prairie provinces, and this presentation highlighted how municipalities can work with PrairiesCan to achieve shared goals.



ADDRESS FROM THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION: MLA RACHEL NOTLEY

MLA Notley shared information on the NDP's position on topics of interest for RMA members. This included perspectives on EMS service delays, addressing concerns with policing, and tying municipal funding to provincial revenues. MLA Notley also used this time to launch the NDP's Bridging the Digital Divide report, which outlines their plan to expand broadband in rural Alberta.

HONOURABLE JASON KENNEY, PREMIER OF ALBERTA

Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta, provided an address that covered a wide range of issues. The address opened with an acknowledgment that the past few years have been tough for Alberta due to economic challenges and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Premier Kenney emphasized that while times have been tough, Alberta is back! We still have challenges, but we are headed in the right direction.

Premier Kenney discussed issues associated with rural healthcare and the work that he and his government are undertaking on the file. He acknowledged that while physician recruitment and retention is an ongoing challenge, the province has invested \$80 million in this area recently, and Alberta actually has more doctors working across the province today than at any point in its history. He also spoke to the ongoing issues with EMS service levels, especially in rural Alberta. While part of the reason for the system strain is due to a recent 30% increase in calls linked to COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic, overall service levels are not adequate to meet demand moving forward, and the province is working on solutions to that issue.

From there, Premier Kenney touched on the Alberta Provincial Police Service transition study. He focused on the importance of community policing in building safe and livable communities and indicated that community relationships would be at the core of a provincial police service. He also commented that although the RCMP have provided quality service in Alberta for many decades, they simply lack the mandate to form a long-term community presence that could be achieved by a provincial police service. Premier Kenney acknowledged that the transition is a contentious topic but requested delegates to read the reports and consider the possible governance and service delivery benefits of the proposed approach.

Premier Kenney then shifted his focus to various initiatives undertaken by his government to support rural communities and rural economic development. He provided examples including a recent \$1 billion investment in agri-tech and agri-food, recent investments into irrigation infrastructure, a focus on attracting technology industry investment in the province, a continued government focus on rural high-speed internet, including a \$150 million commitment, plans to reform the current immigration nomination program to encourage more immigrants to settle in rural communities, and others.

Premier Kenney concluded his address by emphasizing the upward trajectory of Alberta, and the important role that rural municipalities will play in the province's recovery and continued growth in the future.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: MANJIT MINHAS

Manjit Minhas is the founder of the 10th largest brewery in the world and co-star of CBC's *Dragon's Den*. Ms. Minhas participated in a fireside chat with RMA District 2 Director Amber Link in which she shared her memorable experiences as an entrepreneur and leader, showing what it means to have vision, perseverance, teamwork, and what it takes to lead a team. Ms. Minhas shared some tips to elected officials on how to deal with the pressures of being in the spotlight and the importance of pushing yourself out of your comfort zone to learn new things.



MINISTERIAL FORUM

The RMA hosted several members of the Government of Alberta Cabinet during two ministerial forums. The ministers addressed questions from RMA members on several topics, including:

- ♦ The provincial justice system
- ♦ Funding for FCSS
- ♦ In-person victim's services supports
- ♦ Municipal censuses
- ♦ The municipal role in historical and cultural resource management
- ♦ The municipal role in Indigenous reconciliation
- ♦ The state of EMS service levels and staffing
- ♦ Funding for HALO
- ♦ Accessing charitable gaming funding
- ♦ Funding for RhPAP
- ♦ Access to labour and workers in rural areas
- ♦ Rural broadband funding and strategy
- ♦ Provincial downloading onto municipalities





BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Six breakout sessions were held at the RMA Fall Convention. They included:

Floating to the Future: Hydrogen in Alberta

Hydrogen is an emerging alternative energy in Alberta, across Canada, and worldwide. This workshop featured three speakers: Assistant Deputy Minister of Alberta Energy's Strategy and Market Access Division Erin Gregg, Sturgeon County Mayor Alanna Hnatiw, and ATCO Director of Utility Hydrogen Strategy Greg Caldwell. The workshop provided participants with information on the Government of Alberta's Hydrogen Roadmap, the importance of collaboration on each level of government to advance hydrogen in Alberta, an update on the Industrial Hydrogen Taskforce Initiatives, and the benefits hydrogen can bring to municipalities.

Preparing for the Worst: Municipal Disaster Mitigation in Alberta

As natural disasters seem to increase in frequency and severity each year, it is more important than ever for municipalities to integrate disaster mitigation into their planning processes to reduce the likelihood of a disaster having major impacts when it does occur. This workshop featured presentations from Mackenzie County Director of Finance Jennifer Batt, Red Deer County Director of Community & Protective Services and Director of Emergency Management Dave Brand, and MNP Senior Consultant Micki Baydack. The three panelists spoke on the roles and actions of municipal, regional, and non-profit organizations in adequately preparing for and mitigating disasters.

Developing and Leveraging Leadership Presence

Lauren Sergy spoke about the importance being an authentic leader and communicator. This includes being consistent and creating a personal brand that people identify with. Ms. Sergy shared strategies for communicating in a confident, calm, and controlled manner.

Municipalities and Rural Healthcare

Attracting healthcare professionals to rural areas is a challenge that can be addressed from multiple perspectives. Reeve Kevin Smook and Cyndy Heslin shared their experience working with RhPAP to attract healthcare professionals. Reeve Jerry Wittstock shared how Kneehill County bought a clinic and leases it to physicians to reduce barriers to practising medicine in their community.

On the Rocks: The Municipal Approval Process for Aggregate Projects

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) continues to modernize its regulatory system to reduce red tape, create efficiencies, and enhance transparency while still maintaining high environmental standards. One initiative AEP has undertaken is collaborating with the Alberta Sand and Gravel Association (ASGA) and the RMA to develop a resource clarifying the municipal and provincial process for reviewing and

approving aggregate pits. The workshop included three panelists who were instrumental in the development of the new provincial and municipal process: AEP Executive Director Scott Milligan, ASGA Joe Hustler, and RMA President Paul McLaughlin. This workshop provided an overview of the new process, the importance of collaboration between the provincial government, municipal governments, and industry. The session also covered roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of both AEP and municipalities under the new regulatory process.

The Fundamentals of Conflict Management for Elected Officials

The Capacity Services team from Alberta Municipal Affairs led participants through an interactive and engaging workshop on conflict resolution strategies. With the recent municipal elections, conflict among new and returning councillors is often high, and can risk derailing a positive working relationship for an entire council term. Participants learned about common signs of conflict, how quickly conflict can escalate, and de-escalation strategies through individual and small group exercises.

RESOLUTIONS

The business portion of the RMA 2021 Fall Convention includes the resolutions session, which allows members to vote on resolutions brought forward by member municipalities. Each endorsed resolution becomes the marching orders of the RMA for three years. Active and past resolutions can be found on the RMA resolutions database at:

RMAAlberta.com/advocacy/resolutions/resolutions-database/

The following resolutions were endorsed at the RMA 2021 Fall Convention.

- 1-21F *Emergency Medical Services Capacity and Service Delivery in Rural Alberta*
Wheatland County
- 2-21F *Disaster Recovery Program Cost Allocations*
Brazeau County
- 3-21F *Vegetation Management on Alberta Provincial Highways*
County of Two Hills
- 5-21F *Seniors' Foundation Requisitions*
Wheatland County
- 6-21F *Historical Resources Impact Assessments*
MD of Willow Creek
- 7-21F *Awareness Campaign for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)*
Starland County
- 9-21F *Increasing Knowledge- Sharing Among Regulators of Cannabis Production Facilities*
Kneehill County and Wheatland County
- 10-21F *Site C Dam – BC Hydro*
County of Northern Lights
- ER1-21F *RMA Refusal to Engage in Merger Discussion with Alberta Municipalities (formerly AUMA)*
Northern Sunrise County

