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Municipal Elections

Albertans go to the polls every four years to elect municipal and school board representatives.

Municipal elections are extremely important, as they provide Albertans a chance to give direction on local issues and engage with the level of government closest to the people. Ensuring municipal elections are fair, accessible, transparent and focused on local issues is crucial to supporting strong democracy.

What is RMA's position on the importance of municipal elections?

- ◆ As municipalities are the level of government closest to the people, municipal elections are extremely important to ensure that Albertans have a say in the direction of their local communities.
- ◆ Municipal elections are critical to supporting municipal accountability to residents. As local and municipal issues are often less publicized than provincial or federal issues, municipal election season represents the best opportunity to engage on local issues for many Albertans.
- ◆ For many Albertans interested in becoming involved in politics, municipal elections are often the most accessible entry point due to their local focus, limited partisanship, and relatively low-cost nomination and campaign requirements.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to municipal elections?

- ◆ The administration of municipal elections carries a cost for municipalities associated with administering the nomination process, hosting polling sites and recruiting and training election workers.
- ◆ Any administrative costs incurred by municipalities because of the addition of referendum questions, senate elections, or other provincially-focused issues on the municipal ballot should be reimbursed by the Government of Alberta.
- ◆ Fiscal transparency is crucial to fair and democratic municipal elections. Municipalities should be enabled to, by bylaw, require candidates to file pre-election campaign finance disclosures to maximize election transparency.

How does the work of the RMA support the effective delivery of municipal elections?

- ◆ The RMA's municipal election advocacy is based around four key principles that describe an effective municipal election process:
 - ◇ *Inclusive and accessible* – all those meeting eligibility requirements should have reasonable means to participate as candidates, as well as to vote in an election.
 - ◇ *Fair and equitable* – all candidates should have comparable opportunities to participate in an election, including through campaigning and participating in the nomination process.

- ◇ *Transparent and accountable* – all candidates should be required to disclose contributions received to ensure adherence to applicable campaign finance requirements.
- ◇ *Nonpartisan and municipally-focused* – the campaigning and election process should be designed in such a way as to ensure that candidates are focused on and accountable to the interests of their municipality as opposed to a political party or broader ideology.

What current municipal election-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Changes to the *Local Authorities Election Act*

- ◆ The Government of Alberta made significant changes to the *Local Authorities Election Act* in 2020 related to areas such as campaign financing, candidate financial disclosure requirements, third-party advertising, and other areas.
- ◆ Most of the changes that the Government of Alberta made to the *Local Authorities Election Act* in 2020 risk decreasing the local focus of municipal elections, reducing financial transparency, increasing partisanship, and allowing third-party advertisers more influence in municipal campaigns throughout the province.
- ◆ The RMA is concerned that the Government of Alberta's replacement of the previous campaign contribution limit of \$4,000 per person in total, province-wide, with a new limit of \$5,000 per person, per candidate, across Alberta will allow those with the financial means to provide significant financial support to candidates in municipalities across the province, regardless of their municipality of residence.
 - ◇ The RMA advocated for a campaign contribution process that only allowed Albertans to contribute to candidates within their municipality of residence as way to ensure municipal elections are focused on local issues.
- ◆ The RMA is concerned with the Government of Alberta's decision to narrow activities defined as third-party advertising by no longer considering advertising on an issue with which a council or candidate is associated as third-party advertising, and by removing requirements and regulation of third-party advertising outside of the municipal election period.
 - ◇ The RMA advocated for an expansion of the definition of third-party advertising to reflect the increased use of digital advertising, the implementation of expense and contribution limits on third-party advertisers, and increased third-party advertiser financial reporting requirements.

Introduction of referendums and senate elections into the municipal election process

- ◆ In recent years, the Government of Alberta has passed legislation (the Referendum Act and the Alberta Senate Election Act) that will increase the use of referendums to gather direction from Albertans on provincewide issues and allow Albertans to select provincial representatives to be recommended for senate seats.
- ◆ Under the recently passed legislation, the Government of Alberta inserted referendum questions and senate elections into the 2021 municipal election process.
- ◆ Administering referendums and senate elections in conjunction with municipal elections may obscure local issues, increase the administrative burden on municipalities, and insert partisanship into municipal elections.
- ◆ There is a risk that linking municipal elections to partisan referendum issues could increase the influence of provincial or federal political parties on local political races. This influence could have far-reaching impacts on municipal autonomy and may distort or overshadow issue-based local elections.



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