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Policing and Rural Crime

Regardless of where in the province they live, all Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities. Like many services, policing in rural areas is accompanied by challenges related to large geographic areas and low population densities. Rural municipalities have a history of working effectively with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to support community safety, but challenges related to response time, police funding, and collaboration between police and municipal leaders is ongoing. As with any service, if municipalities are required to financially contribute to policing, this should result in improved service levels and greater local input.

What is the RMA's position on the importance of policing and rural crime in rural municipalities?

- ◆ Safe communities are critical to attracting and retaining residents and businesses. In rural areas this is exacerbated as many properties are located in isolated areas far from neighbours or services, leaving them especially vulnerable to property crimes.
- ◆ In recent years, crime rates in rural Alberta have increased significantly. For example, according to Statistics Canada, in 2017, rural crime rates in rural Alberta were 38% higher than in urban Alberta. In many rural areas, residents and businesses perceive crime as a crisis that significantly impacts their quality of life.
- ◆ Due to the unique challenges of policing rural Alberta, supporting safe rural communities requires collaboration among many groups, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Justice, municipalities, and local non-profit organizations.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to policing and rural crime?

- ◆ As is the case with most services, providing a comparable level of policing service in rural areas to that in urban areas would cost significantly more and is likely impractical due to rural Alberta's large geographic areas and dispersed population.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta's municipal police costing formula, which requires all rural municipalities and all urban municipalities with a population below 5000 to contribute a portion of frontline policing costs, requires rural municipalities to cover over 80% of the total costs that will be incurred by municipalities impacted by the model.
- ◆ Alberta's police costing formula requires rural municipalities to contribute a significant portion to policing costs with no indication as to whether local services will improve, and no commitment to increased local input into policing.
- ◆ While policing is critical to addressing rural crime, adequate investments in Crown prosecutors, as well as Family and Community Support Services and victims services is important to supporting safe rural communities.

What collaborative relationships are essential to developing safe rural communities?

- ◆ Effective outreach and engagement with the community is a critical aspect of effective, modern policing. Due to limited police capacity and fewer formal community organizations in comparison to urban communities, prioritizing outreach and engagement can be a challenge for rural police services.
- ◆ Rural municipalities currently have the option of forming police committees to collaborate with the local RCMP detachment on policing priorities and strategies. However, police committees are voluntary, and are used inconsistently across the province. It is critical that the Government of Alberta develop an enhanced mechanism for local input into policing based on new municipal cost contribution requirements.
- ◆ Based on a 2020 survey that the Alberta Police Interim Advisory Board (APIAB) distributed to all municipalities receiving RCMP policing services, collaboration between detachments and municipalities varies widely in both scope and frequency. For example, although over 80% of survey respondents indicated that their municipality received some form of regular reporting from their detachment, only 27% had a police oversight body such as a police committee dedicated to issues of policing and community safety.

How does the work of the RMA support safe rural communities?

- ◆ The RMA champions the rural municipal perspective on policing and crime through regular communication with a variety of crime-related organizations (e.g. Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Association of Community Peace Officers).
- ◆ The RMA participates on the Alberta Police Interim Advisory Board (APIAB) along with the ABMunis, the Alberta Association of Police Governance, and the Government of Alberta. The purpose of the APIAB is to develop the governance structure for a permanent Alberta Police Advisory Board consisting of municipal and community representatives from across Alberta, which will provide the government of Alberta and Royal Canadian Mounted Police with input into local priorities, concerns and ideas related to policing.

What current policing and rural crime-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Police Costing Model

- ◆ The RMA is concerned with the Government of Alberta's decision to require rural municipalities to contribute to frontline policing costs in 2020. The costing model includes no requirement that local service levels will be enhanced or that local input into policing will increase.
- ◆ Requiring rural municipalities to contribute to frontline policing costs may have unintended consequences, including a reduction in other community safety initiatives such as community peace officers and other services.
- ◆ Requiring municipalities to contribute to frontline policing with no consultation as to how the revenue collected will be used or how additional officers will be distributed across the province reflects a downloading of costs without increased municipal input. Municipalities should not be required to contribute to costs at a level that does not align with service level increases.

- ◆ Equalized assessment is a poor measure for use in Alberta’s police costing model. Equalized assessment does not reflect a municipality’s need for police services, and is a volatile measure that will lead to inconsistent municipal costs each year.
- ◆ Any funds collected from municipalities under the police costing model should be reinvested within the region from which they were collected.
- ◆ The *Municipal Government Act* should be amended to allow municipalities to designate the provincial policing levy as a requisition displayed separately on municipal property tax notices. This would support municipal transparency in demonstrating the portion of property taxes used to support provincial police services.
- ◆ The portion of provincial policing costs contributed by municipalities should be frozen at 2020 levels until the Government of Alberta undertakes a full review of the Provincial Police Services Agreement and Royal Canadian Mounted Police services in Alberta to ensure that the current policing model is equitable and cost-effective and provides adequate service to rural communities.

Community Peace Officers

- ◆ Community peace officers play an important role in many rural municipalities by enforcing municipal bylaws and some provincial laws.
- ◆ As community peace officers may encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations, it is critical that they have adequate training and resources to support a safe work environment.
- ◆ Community peace officers likely to encounter dangerous or unpredictable situations require direct and timely access to the Canadian Police Information Centre in order to gather basic information before approaching an unknown person or vehicle.

Provincial Police Force

- ◆ When participating in engagements regarding the potential transition to a provincial police service rural municipalities will continue to prioritize service levels and adequate local input into policing.
- ◆ The creation of a provincial police force should not take place unless a detailed feasibility study proves that such an approach will reduce provincial and municipal policing costs and enhance service levels across the province.
- ◆ Municipalities should not be required to incur additional costs to support the creation and operation of a provincial police force.
- ◆ In late 2021 the Government of Alberta released three reports outlining a potential transition to a provincial police service. The RMA is supporting members by creating reports and educational opportunities to help members understand the potential impacts.

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