

November 17, 2022

## New Ministerial Mandate Letters Released

*Many of the mandate letters include directions that will have major impacts on rural municipalities*

Over the past week, Premier Danielle Smith has released [mandate letters for all ministries](#). Mandate letters establish priority outcomes and initiatives for all ministries. The mandate letters were released on three separate occasions (November 9, 10, and 15). The first batch focused on affordability, the second on “standing up for Albertans”, and the third on “growing the Alberta Advantage.” The RMA has identified several priority issues and outcomes within various mandate letters that are particularly relevant to rural municipalities:

### Municipal Affairs

- ◆ Strengthen and maintain a relationship of mutual respect and cooperation with municipal leaders to serve Albertans more cooperatively.
- ◆ Continue to consult with stakeholders and improve the delivery of stable, predictable funding through the Local Government Fiscal Framework.
- ◆ Work with the Ministers of Education and Treasury Board and Finance to review the feasibility of changes to the Education Property Tax to assist municipalities with retaining more funding for local priorities.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Energy to consult with the energy industry, and with the Rural Municipalities Association on how to address the issues associated with the Linear Property Tax and unpaid municipal tax bills.
- ◆ Review the structure and effectiveness of the Calgary and Edmonton Metropolitan Region Boards to ensure they are effectively serving their residents.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, who is the lead, to work with municipalities to benchmark, measure and reduce the time it takes to approve permits in order to create a more attractive business investment environment.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, who is the lead and engage with large and mid-sized cities to ensure the province is paying its appropriate share to address issues of homelessness, and mental health and addiction services.

### Advanced Education

- ◆ Work with Alberta’s established medical schools (the University of Calgary’s Cumming School of Medicine and the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry) to examine ways to increase the number of physicians trained in Alberta, particularly in rural areas, by partnering with regional post secondary institutions (e.g., University of Lethbridge and Northwestern Polytechnic).

### Affordability and Utilities

- ◆ Address the cost of utility payments for Albertans by ensuring regulated rates for electricity and natural gas are formulated to best serve Albertans and review our electricity pricing system with the goal of reducing transmission and distribution costs.

## Agriculture and Irrigation

- ◆ As the lead, work with the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to develop and implement a Competitive Agri-Food Value-Added Processing and Manufacturing program that will make Alberta more competitive with competing jurisdictions.
- ◆ As the lead, work with the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas to expand and improve the irrigation network within Alberta to ensure Alberta is best served and maintains its standing as a global leader in food development and distribution.
- ◆ Continue to advocate on behalf of Alberta farmers and ranchers by identifying and pushing back on federal programs that hinder the advancement of production or improvement of yields to better supply Albertans and the world with food. Examples of these federal policies include, but are not limited to, fertilizer reductions, carbon taxes on fuel and natural gas for farms and equipment, Port of Vancouver access problems, and pest control regulations.

## Energy

- ◆ Work with industry to develop a pathway for the implementation of carbon technology to support their goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.
- ◆ Work with other provinces to further develop small modular reactor technology and pave the way for its usage and generation in oil sands operations.
- ◆ Develop a pilot program to effectively incentivize reclamation of inactive legacy oil and natural gas sites and enable future drilling.
- ◆ Work with Alberta Energy Regulator to improve and modernize processes around the new Liability Management Framework, project approvals and transfer of well sites in a timely fashion.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, who is the lead, to develop a plan to improve reclamation certificate issuance and bring reclamation requirements for renewable energy sources in line with the rest of the energy sector.

## Environment and Protected Areas

- ◆ Under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, continue establishing new land use plans and reviewing existing land use plans.
- ◆ Work to implement the Coal Policy Committee recommendations to continue the statutorily required review of existing land-use plans.
- ◆ Work with industry to improve criteria for assessing proper reclamation by exploring options with all relevant stakeholders and balancing the need for industry to reduce liabilities while ensuring that landowners, municipalities, and Indigenous peoples are satisfied with reclamation efforts and that surface lease payments are maintained, where applicable.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Energy to develop a plan to improve reclamation certificate issuance and bring reclamation requirements for renewable energy sources in line with the rest of the energy sector.
- ◆ Develop a government wide Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategy to demonstrate Alberta's world class ESG credentials in order to gain and maintain the confidence of investors and to ensure that jobs in Alberta are created and defended.

## Forestry, Parks, and Tourism

- ◆ Develop a clear and environmentally responsible policy framework for developing more campgrounds, recreation, and tourism opportunities on provincial lands.
- ◆ Shorten timelines for approval of permits and licences in all areas of the ministry.

## Health

- ◆ Take immediate tangible steps to have AHS improve EMS response times, decrease surgical backlogs, and cut emergency room wait times.
- ◆ Address health care staffing challenges, particularly in rural areas, through improving health workforce planning, evaluating retention policies, leveraging the scope of allied health professionals, streamlining immigration and certification processes, and further increasing the number of training seats for health care professionals in Alberta. This includes fully implementing the recently negotiated AMA agreement.
- ◆ Work with municipalities, doctors, and allied health providers to identify strategies to attract and retain health care workers to rural Alberta.
- ◆ Work with Parliamentary Secretary for EMS Reform RJ Sigurdson to address EMS challenges.
- ◆ Work with the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health Tany Yao to address rural health challenges such as access and health care professionals.

## Jobs, Economy, and Northern Development

- ◆ Focus on economic development and interconnectedness in Northern Alberta; and in particular, work with the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, who is the lead, to pursue the expansion of economic corridors from Fort McMurray to Grande Prairie and British Columbia, as well as interconnecting the major population and economic centres in the North.

## Justice

- ◆ As the lead, work with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to finalize a decision on establishing an Alberta Police Service.
- ◆ Continue to challenge the Federal Impact Assessment Act or Bill C-69, the “No more Pipelines” act by working with all other Canadian provinces and territories to defend the division of powers and provincial jurisdiction in the Supreme Court of Canada.
- ◆ Follow through on the recommendations outlined in the Final Report of the Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights by introducing legislation to abolish adverse possession, and further advance work to constitutionally entrench the protection of property rights.
- ◆ As the lead, work with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to address the need for funding increases to strengthen Alberta’s Justice system.
- ◆ Conduct a strategic review of provincial resourcing to the courts and advance recommendations to ensure that enough funding is in place to ensure that Albertans have a fair and accessible justice system, including without limitation, modernizing court services, and increasing the availability of remote hearings for lawyers and their clients.

## Public Safety and Emergency Services

- ◆ Make mental health and addictions recovery a central component to effective community policing and corrections. This will involve working across jurisdictional and ministerial boundaries as collaboration will be needed with other departments, municipalities, police services, and community-based organizations.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Justice, as the lead, and Municipal Affairs to launch an Alberta Police Service (APS).
- ◆ Support the alignment of the APS with mental health and addiction crisis response resources, including safe transportation of patients and access to health services, in cooperation with the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.
- ◆ Work with Indigenous, mid-sized, and rural communities to find solutions to address rising crime rates in these areas.
- ◆ As the lead, work with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to begin to establish a regional approach to policing in Alberta which includes work with municipalities and local law enforcement agencies to ensure a sharing of services, data and communications is in place to lead to improved outcomes for both released offenders and the public.
- ◆ Introduce emergency management measures that will ensure preparedness to address any natural disaster or required emergency response is available anywhere in the province.
- ◆ As the lead, work with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Forestry, Parks, and Tourism to develop a flood and fire mitigation strategy to proactively protect communities at risk of future natural disasters.

## Seniors, Community and Social Services

- ◆ Continue to implement Stronger Foundations: Alberta's 10-year strategy to address affordable housing across the province.
- ◆ Work with the Minister of Health, who is the lead, to develop a strategy to expand seniors lodges and seniors facilities to keep up with growth and increased demand.

## Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction

- ◆ Diagnose slow turnaround times in Land Titles. Bring forward both short-term and long-term solutions that will bring both efficiency and faster approvals that allow us to work through and eventually eliminate the backlog.
- ◆ Monitor and accelerate the implementation of Prompt Payment legislation to address the problems in the Alberta construction industry related to timeliness of payments from contractors to sub-contractors. Furthermore, develop an adjudication process to handle disputes and develop improvements for recourse in the event of a claim for non-payment.
- ◆ Refocus red tape reduction efforts to measure, benchmark and reduce wait times for permit approvals across all ministries. Report on the feasibility of adopting an “automatic yes” policy that would assume a permit is approved within a reasonable and specific amount of time after an application, unless the department in question delivers a written rationale on why it should be rejected.
- ◆ Work with the Parliamentary Secretary of Procurement, Dave Hanson, to continue to act on the MacKinnon Panel’s recommendation by forming a Procurement Council to provide a regular forum for conducting

ongoing dialogue among representatives from major procurement ministries and industry organizations whose members supply goods, consulting services and construction services.

- ◆ Support Municipal Affairs with the ongoing building codes review to ensure both safety and affordability concerns are appropriately addressed and ensure authority for building code changes remain provincial jurisdiction.

## Technology and Innovation

- ◆ Work on the ongoing implementation of the Alberta Broadband Strategy, to ensure that every Albertan has access to reliable, high-speed internet by 2026/2027.
- ◆ Explore options to address poor cell phone coverage on major highways across Alberta.

## Transportation and Economic Corridors

- ◆ Lead an initiative in consultation with Municipal Affairs, Indigenous Relations, Environment and Protected Areas, Agriculture and Irrigation, and Treasury Board and Finance to develop an integrated water program that facilitates water treatment and distribution for residential, industrial, and agricultural water usage across Alberta.
- ◆ Work with aviation industry partners to establish reliable, regularly scheduled service from Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat to Calgary and Edmonton so residents can more easily access travel to and from both major international airports.

The RMA looks forward to learning more about these priority outcomes and initiatives and in some cases collaborating with the Government of Alberta to move them forward.

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