



**RMA**  
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES  
of ALBERTA

February 2023

# SEEKING BALANCE

Voting Inequalities in  
Alberta's Growth  
Management Boards

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# Executive Summary

As Alberta grows, regional planning and collaboration are becoming increasingly important, particularly in municipalities surrounding Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta's two largest cities. In 2018, the Government of Alberta (GOA) created growth management boards (GMBs) in the Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan regions. Prior to 2018, some or all municipalities in both the Edmonton and Calgary region participated in regional planning bodies (known as the Calgary Regional Partnership and Capital Region Board in Calgary and Edmonton respectively), but the GOA's creation of twin regulations for the regions surrounding both cities created mandatory membership requirements, governance processes and responsibilities. GMBs are intended to support a regional approach to growth by bringing area municipalities together to address land use planning and service delivery challenges. The Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board includes 13 municipalities, and the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board includes eight municipalities. Members of each GMB are diverse in size, type, and local priorities related to growth and planning.

Within GMBs, any decision made by a vote must be approved by no fewer than two-thirds of the representatives from participating municipalities that collectively comprise at least two-thirds of the GMB's population. This voting structure gives Calgary and Edmonton veto powers over all decisions, as each have over two-thirds of the population among GMB members. This is especially problematic for rural GMB members, which share the same characteristics as rural communities elsewhere in Alberta: low population densities with a focus on industrial development in sectors such as oil and gas, agriculture, and renewable energy. In other words, although GMBs are intended to address regional challenges commonly linked to urban growth, a significant portion of GMB membership is rural. Unfortunately, the current voting structure does not reflect that significance due to its singular focus on population as the driving factor in determining decision-making power.

Regional bodies elsewhere in Canada utilize different voting structures that may be effective for GMBs. These include Ontario's upper-tier municipalities, in which voting strength is determined on a case-by-case basis and typically considers a combination of population and other factors, and British Columbia's regional districts, which utilize a combined weighted (by population) and non-weighted voting structure depending on the type of decision being made. While none of the models is perfect, both offer possible options to support a more equitable voting structure in Alberta.

Because local and regional decisions regarding land use, growth, and planning and development are driven by much more than population alone, it is concerning that determinators of voting strength in GMBs do not include other factors. Comparing GMB member municipalities based on their share of land managed and of capital assets that support local and regional service delivery would tell a more fulsome story of comparative voting influence within the region. Additionally, revising other aspects of GMB scope and decision-making processes would reduce the importance of the voting structure.

This report does not recommend a specific voting structure, as this should be developed collaboratively by GMB members and the Government of Alberta. However, a fair and effective voting mechanism should align with the following priorities:

- ♦ GMB member voting strength should be determined based on a combination of member population, area, and infrastructure responsibilities.
- ♦ No single GMB member should have the ability to individually pass or veto a motion.
- ♦ To maximize equity, the GMB voting structure should utilize a combination of weighted and unweighted voting, similar to the approach used in BC's regional districts.
- ♦ GMB appeals should be sent to an independent third party.
- ♦ The scope of decisions subject to member votes under the REF should be reduced.



# Introduction

As Alberta continues to grow, regional planning and collaboration are becoming increasingly important, particularly in municipalities surrounding Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta's two largest cities. As those large cities and surrounding urban and rural municipalities continue to grow, new challenges and opportunities arise related to land use planning, service provision, the balance of increasing development and preservation of agricultural lands, and others.

In an effort to address these regional challenges the Government of Alberta (GOA) created growth management boards (GMBs) in the [Edmonton](#) and [Calgary](#) metropolitan regions in 2018. The GOA established twin regulations to implement each growth management board, which included mandatory membership for smaller urban and rural municipalities surrounding the cities (and the cities themselves), as well as specific requirements for the planning and service delivery issues that the GMBs would address on a regional basis. The regulations also establish the governance and voting structures for GMBs.

Because GMB members are diverse in size, population, capacity, and priorities, developing an equitable governance approach has been a challenge, which in turn impacts the quality of decisions made and level of member support for nearly all issues addressed within GMBs. For rural GMB members, mandatory

involvement in regional planning has been problematic. Participation in GMBs requires significant staff and elected official time and capacity, which results in increased organizational costs. Were GMBs effective in meeting the needs of each municipality in the region, the commitment may be worthwhile. Unfortunately, due to an inequitable voting structure and inadequate appeal process, GMBs provide large cities with disproportionate control over regional decision-making, and place rural municipalities in a marginalized position even though they are responsible for the vast majority of the land and non-residential growth within the boundaries of each GMB.

This report examines the GMB voting structure in detail and considers its implications for municipal GMB members. It also highlights different voting structures used by similar regional entities elsewhere in Canada to demonstrate that other options exist. The report concludes by proposing alternative metrics to weigh votes among members within GMBs, as well as a series of priorities that should guide the development of an improved GMB voting structure that will be more equitable and encourage more effective regional planning outcomes.

If GMBs continue to exist, they require a new voting and governance structure that prioritizes equity for all members. This report will propose a path forward.





# Growth Management Boards – An Overview

In an effort to address challenges related to growth in and around [Edmonton](#) and [Calgary](#), in 2018, the Government of Alberta created growth management boards (GMBs) in the Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan regions. According to the Government of Alberta, the GMBs in the Edmonton and Calgary regions are intended to:

- ♦ Promote long-term sustainability.
- ♦ Ensure efficient land use, including environmentally responsible land use planning and growth management.
- ♦ Develop coordinating policies for regional infrastructure investment and service delivery.
- ♦ Promote economic well-being and competitiveness.
- ♦ Develop public engagement policies.
- ♦ Develop growth and servicing plans that guide planning and service delivery for the regions.

The existence of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB) and Calgary Metropolitan Region Board (CMRB) are established by twin regulations under the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) ([Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board Regulation](#) and [Calgary Metropolitan Region Board Regulation](#)). The regulations establish the GMBs' structures, mandates, and governance and voting processes. Although the focus of this document is on the voting structure used for the GMBs, it is worth briefly discussing the GMB mandates and responsibilities, as this contextualizes the importance of equitable voting.



## Creating Regional Plans and Approving Local Plans

One of the core purposes of each GMB is to develop and implement a growth plan. The specific objectives and content can be found in sections 8 and 9 of each regulation, but in general, their purpose is the plan for an integrated and strategic approach to long-term growth across the region. This planning includes considering where development should occur, how such development would align with existing infrastructure, where new infrastructure would be required, how services will be modified or expanded to accommodate such growth, and how growth can be supported in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. The plan objectives must be supported by specific data and information in areas such as:

- ◆ Population and employment projections
- ◆ Current and future land use
- ◆ Development of a wide variety of regional policies, including those related to:
  - ◇ Recreation
  - ◇ Utility and transit corridors
  - ◇ Environmentally sensitive areas
  - ◇ Coordination of infrastructure planning and development among the member municipalities
  - ◇ Conservation of agricultural lands

The second core purpose of the GMBs is to approve local statutory planning documents developed by member municipalities. Statutory plans are municipal land use planning documents that must be approved at the municipal level by bylaw, meaning that they must go through three readings at the council level and the public must have an opportunity to provide input. Each GMB is tasked with developing and implementing a “regional evaluation framework” (REF) which would be used by the GMB to approve or reject a statutory plan developed by a member. The REF should include the following:

- ◆ Criteria to be used to determine whether a statutory plan must be submitted for approval.
- ◆ Procedures for submitting statutory plans for approval.
- ◆ Criteria and objectives to be followed by the Board for the objective evaluation and approval of statutory plans in relation to growth plan and servicing plan.

Each GMB is also required to develop a servicing plan to identify the services required to support the growth plan, the optimization of service delivery and cost-sharing for services among members to maximize efficiency and cost savings, as well as others. The plan can include a variety of services, although the regulations state that the plan may include transportation and transit, water / wastewater / stormwater, solid waste, and emergency services.



*Division 4 of the MGA provides a list of statutory plans, with details of what each must address. Statutory plans include intermunicipal development plans, municipal development plans, area structure plans, and area redevelopment plans. Combined, statutory plans form the backbone of land use planning for municipalities.*



## Growth Management Boards – Who's In?

The membership of both GMBs is established in the relevant regulation. Basic information on members is as follows (based on [2021 data](#) available from the Government of Alberta).

### Calgary Metropolitan Region Board

| MUNICIPALITY                 | POPULATION       |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| City of Calgary              | 1,372,178        |
| City of Airdrie              | 77,027           |
| City of Chestermere          | 23,178           |
| Town of Cochrane             | 33,399           |
| Town of Okotoks              | 31,560           |
| Town of High River           | 14,230           |
| Foothills County             | 24,290           |
| Rocky View County            | 43,147           |
| <b>Total CMRB Population</b> | <b>1,619,009</b> |

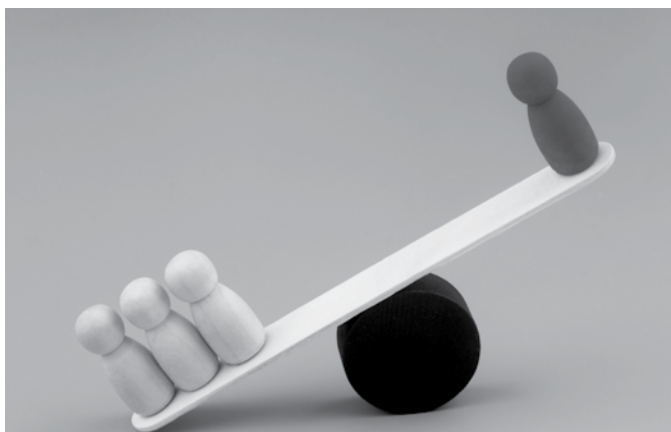
\* - Strathcona County population information sourced from <https://www.strathcona.ca/council-county/history-and-heritage/at-a-glance/population-through-the-years>.

### Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board

| MUNICIPALITY                 | POPULATION       |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| City of Edmonton             | 1,057,796        |
| City of Beaumont             | 21,180           |
| City of Leduc                | 34,560           |
| City of Fort Saskatchewan    | 27,658           |
| City of Spruce Grove         | 39,655           |
| City of St. Albert           | 69,789           |
| Town of Devon                | 6,632            |
| Town of Stony Plain          | 18,371           |
| Town of Morinville           | 10,442           |
| Strathcona County (urban)*   | 73,000           |
| Leduc County                 | 14,219           |
| Parkland County              | 34,182           |
| Strathcona County (rural)*   | 27,362           |
| Sturgeon County              | 20,902           |
| <b>Total EMRB Population</b> | <b>1,455,748</b> |



# Growth Management Board Voting Structure



*This voting structure essentially gives Calgary and Edmonton veto powers over all decisions, as each have over two-thirds of the population among GMB members.*

As membership in both GMBs is quite diverse in both the size and type of municipalities involved, it is not surprising that the GMB voting structure is quite complex and contentious. Section 5(2) of the twin regulations requires that any decision made by a vote must be approved by no fewer than two-thirds of the representatives from participating municipalities that collectively comprise at least two-thirds of the population in the GMB regions. This voting structure essentially gives Calgary and Edmonton veto powers over all decisions, as each have over two-thirds of the population among GMB members.

While this is challenging in the development of the region-wide growth and servicing plans, its implications are most serious in relation to the requirement that all individual member statutory plans must be approved by the broader GMB membership through the REF process, explained earlier in the document. As all statutory plans must be approved by GMB administration based on their alignment with the REF, and any such decisions may be appealed to the board by the sponsoring municipality or an individual board member, depending on the case. When this occurs, the voting process is then used to decide the outcome of the appeal. This internal appeal process, combined with the weighted



voting system, gives the largest cities in each GMB veto power over the major local planning decisions of all other GMB members.

The double two-thirds approach used by the GMB is certainly not the only option available — a later section of this report will examine voting structures used by other regional bodies in Canada. Additionally, the Capital Region Board, which pre-dated the EMRB, considered a range of options during their formation process in 2007, including the following, as summarized in *Working Together: Report of the Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan Project Team*:

- ♦ **Voting by population range** – Municipalities would be allocated a certain number of votes based on their population and a proposal would require the majority of votes.
- ♦ **Double majority based on incorporation type** – Municipalities would be categorized by type (cities, towns, counties, etc.). A proposal would have to be supported by two-thirds of member municipalities, as well as at least 50% of each municipal type.
- ♦ **Double majority with override** – Each municipality would have one vote but for a proposal to pass, it would require the support of at least 15 municipalities with 75% of the population. However,

regardless of population, any 21 municipalities could vote to pass a motion (note that this proposal was based on a larger number of overall member municipalities than the current EMRB).

- ♦ **Double majority with a super-majority** – Each municipality would have one vote. For a motion to pass, it must have the support of 17 municipalities with at least 75% of the population of the member municipalities.

The Capital Region Board was ultimately developed around the double majority with super majority structure, which was later modified and expanded to the EMRB and CMRB. Interestingly, the 2007 report acknowledges that the model will favour Edmonton due to its population majority but justifies this based on recognition that “Edmonton is the predominant player in the region when it comes to many services, especially social services, and deserves to have a substantial voice in the determination of what happens in the region” (page 65). The report acknowledges that even with its majority population, Edmonton will still need the support of multiple municipalities to move a motion forward but does not acknowledge Edmonton’s ability to veto proposals.

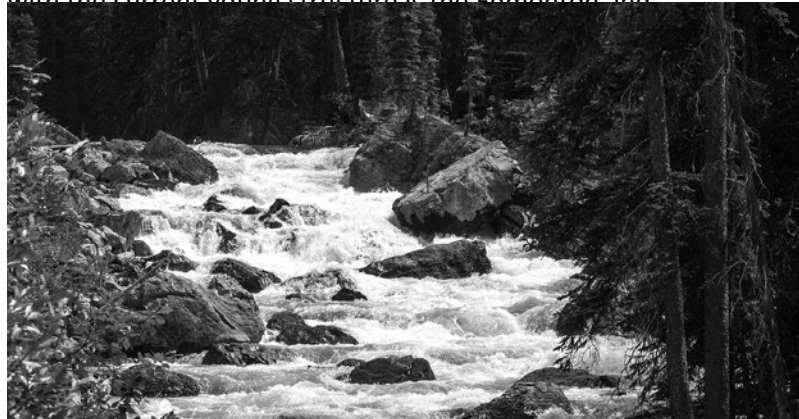
## Implications of Voting Structure – The Rural Municipal Perspective

While GMBs are in place in Alberta’s most high-growth areas, both include significant rural areas. While some rural sections within GMB boundaries have begun to support more urban or suburban-style commercial and residential development, the majority share the same characteristics as rural communities elsewhere in Alberta: low population densities with a focus on industrial development in sectors such as oil and gas, agriculture, and renewable energy. In other words, although GMBs are intended to address regional challenges commonly linked to urban growth, a significant portion of GMB membership is rural. Unfortunately, the current voting structure does not reflect that significance due to its singular focus on population as the driving factor in measuring growth within the region and in determining decision-making power.

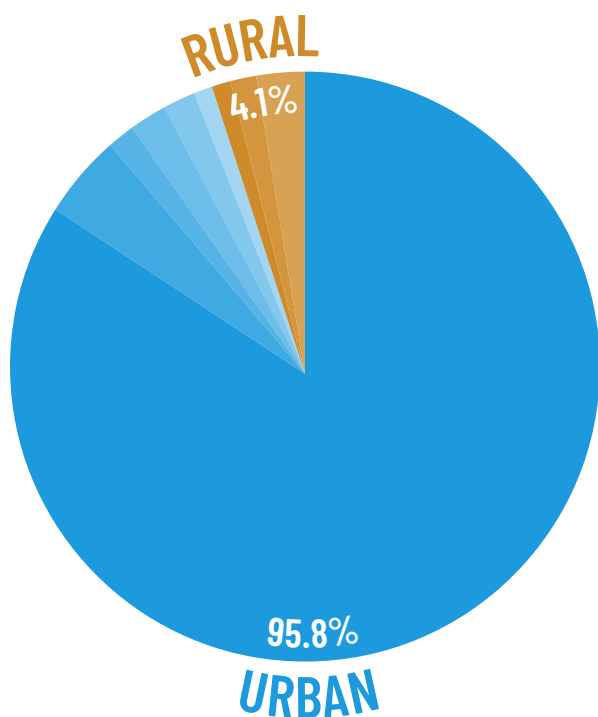
The defining characteristic of the GMB voting structure is its reliance on population and the significant control it affords Edmonton and Calgary to shape regional decision-making. The two-thirds voting requirement

allows Edmonton and Calgary to veto any decision, as their respective populations account for well over one-third of the population of the overall EMRB and CMRB membership. However, the current voting process does not allow Edmonton or Calgary to force approval on any issues, as their sole support vote would not meet the threshold for two-thirds of GMB members to support an item being voted on.

Although the most obvious and well-known issue with the current voting structure is the Edmonton and

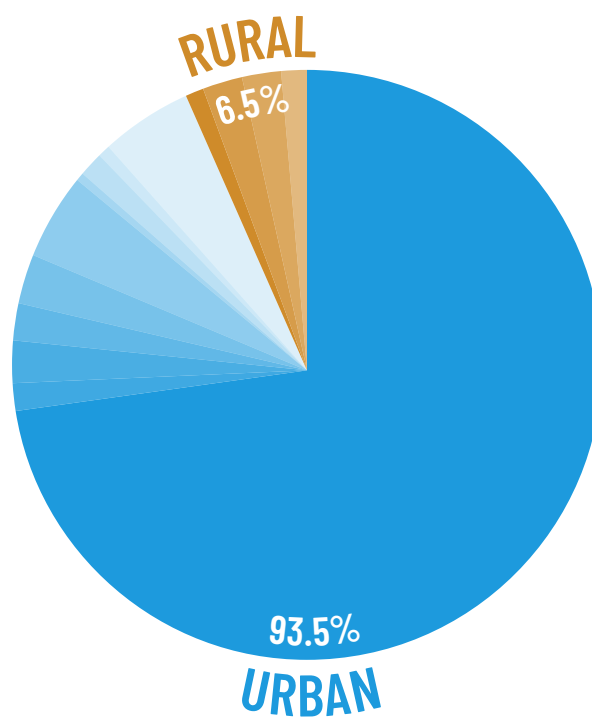


Percent of Total CMRB Population



| MUNICIPALITY                  | % OF TOTAL CMRB POP. |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| City of Calgary               | 84.8%                |
| City of Airdrie               | 4.8%                 |
| City of Chestermere           | 1.4%                 |
| Town of Cochrane              | 2.1%                 |
| Town of Okotoks               | 1.9%                 |
| Town of High River            | 0.9%                 |
| <b>Total Urban Population</b> | <b>95.8%</b>         |
| Foothills County              | 1.5%                 |
| Rocky View County             | 2.7%                 |
| <b>Total Rural Population</b> | <b>4.2%</b>          |

Percent of Total EMRB Population



| MUNICIPALITY                  | % OF TOTAL EMRB POP. |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| City of Edmonton              | 72.7%                |
| City of Beaumont              | 1.5%                 |
| City of Leduc                 | 2.4%                 |
| City of Fort Saskatchewan     | 1.9%                 |
| City of Spruce Grove          | 2.7%                 |
| City of St. Albert            | 4.8%                 |
| Town of Devon                 | 0.5%                 |
| Town of Stony Plain           | 1.3%                 |
| Town of Morinville            | 0.7%                 |
| Strathcona County (urban)     | 5.0%                 |
| <b>Total Urban Population</b> | <b>93.5%</b>         |
| Leduc County                  | 1.0%                 |
| Parkland County               | 2.3%                 |
| Strathcona County (rural)     | 1.9%                 |
| Sturgeon County               | 1.4%                 |
| <b>Total Rural Population</b> | <b>6.5%</b>          |

Based on population, urban municipalities make up the significant majority of GMBs. Rural municipalities are also outnumbered in terms of the actual number of rural municipalities in the GMBs. It is important to note that under the GMB voting structure, approval of any motion requires both two-thirds majority population, as well as two-thirds majority in terms of the number of members in the GMB. Unfortunately, rural municipalities are not able to vote as a bloc to oppose a vote, as they are not close to one-third of the GMB population, but are also less than one-third of GMB membership in both GMBs, even when including Strathcona County as rural, even though most of its population is urban.

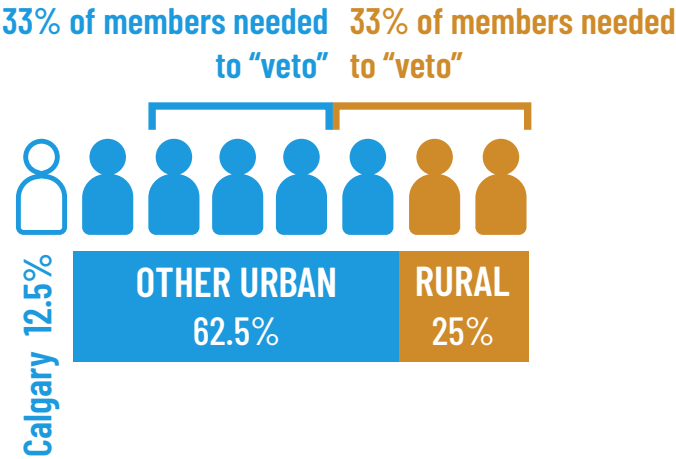
The table shows that, in addition to the individual veto power afforded to Edmonton and Calgary, smaller urban members in each GMB could potentially act as a voting bloc to collectively oppose rural land use planning and development decisions that may be in opposition to

their development interests. Due to falling just short of the one-third membership threshold required to veto a decision, rural members lack the same ability in both GMBs. In other words, any decision made in either GMB will be endorsed unless at least one urban member votes in opposition.

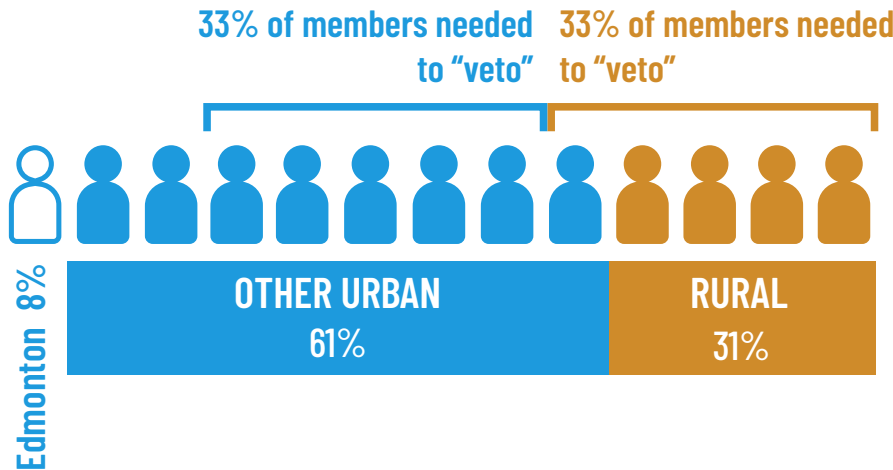
|  | CMRB  | EMRB |
|--|-------|------|
| Number of members                              | 8     | 13   |
| Urban members (excluding Edmonton and Calgary) | 5     | 8    |
| % of urban members*                            | 62.5% | 62%  |
| Rural members                                  | 2     | 4    |
| % of rural members*                            | 25%   | 31%  |

\*33% needed to collectively “veto” decisions)

### CMRB Members Needed to Collectively “Veto” Decisions



### EMRB Members Needed to Collectively “Veto” Decisions



# Other Regional Voting Structure Approaches

In Canada, the most well-known examples of regional municipal government structures are found in British Columbia and Ontario. Like GMBs, regional districts in BC and upper-tier municipalities in Ontario consist of several local municipalities with different populations. Although the mandates of Ontario's and BC's regional bodies differ from those of GMBs, it is still worthwhile to review voting processes used in these provinces to compare them to Alberta's GMB process.

## Ontario

In many parts of Ontario, both lower-tier and upper-tier municipalities exist. Lower-tier municipalities are small geographically and focus on local issues. Upper-tier municipalities consist of a group of lower-tier municipalities focused on regional issues. Ontario has 30 upper-tier municipalities. Voting processes for some upper-tier municipalities are not easily accessible, but several upper-tier municipalities do make their voting structure publicly available.

Unlike the GMB regulations in Alberta, Ontario's [Municipal Act](#) does not prescribe a specific voting requirement for upper tier municipalities. S. 218(3) of the act states that an upper tier municipality may change the number of votes allowed for any member, but all members must have at least one vote. The act does allow the minister to develop a regulation specifying voting requirements, of which four are currently in place. Aside from this, there does not appear to be specific requirements as to how voting is determined in upper-tier municipalities. However, the act does state that upper-tier municipalities are required to formally review (and possibly amend) their council composition every two years to ensure it aligns with changing demographics. Any changes to the council composition require a "triple-majority":

- ♦ Majority vote required at regional council,
- ♦ Majority vote required at each individual member (lower-tier) council, and
- ♦ The lower-tier councils that supported the change must, when combined, make up the majority of the electors in the upper-tier municipality.

With no specific voting or composition requirements known in Ontario, examining a few examples is the best way to consider how upper-tier voting and representation is determined.

### Peel Region

The [Region of Peel](#) consists of three municipalities located west of Toronto: the City of Brampton, the City of Mississauga, and the Town of Caledon. The population and regional representation of each is as follows:

| LOWER-TIER MUNICIPALITY | POPULATION (2016) | REGIONAL SEATS HISTORICALLY | REGIONAL SEATS AFTER OCTOBER 2022 |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mississauga             | 721,599           | 12                          | 12                                |
| Brampton                | 593,638           | 7                           | 9                                 |
| Caledon                 | 66,502            | 5                           | 3                                 |

In recent years, the City of Brampton has [undertaken a campaign](#) to increase its presence on the Region of Peel Council, arguing that it has only 29% of the regional council seats despite being home to 44% of the region's population. According to the City of Brampton's website, it has been advocating for increased representation in the region for 20 years, with progress being made recently.



In late 2020, the Region of Peel approved a bylaw amendment to increase Brampton's representation by two seats, and reduce Caledon's by two seats. This decision was opposed by Caledon, and some in the community have expressed concerns that the shift to greater urban representation within the region poses a long-term threat to farmland in Caledon.

Brampton's and Caledon's concerns with the Region of Peel's representation structure provides a look into the loose link that appears to exist in Ontario between population and lower-tier representation. Clearly, population is a driver of representation, but in the case of the Region of Peel, it was not a strong enough indicator for Brampton, and is much too strong for Caledon.

### *Durham Region*

A second example of an upper-tier municipality is [Durham Region](#). Located east of Toronto, Durham Region consists of eight lower-tier municipalities, all with different levels of representation:

| LOWER-TIER MUNICIPALITY | POPULATION (2016) | REGIONAL SEATS |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Oshawa                  | 159,458           | 6              |
| Whitby                  | 128,377           | 5              |
| Pickering               | 91,771            | 4              |
| Ajax                    | 119,677           | 4              |
| Clarington              | 92,013            | 3              |
| Uxbridge                | 20,623            | 2              |
| Scugog                  | 22,500            | 2              |
| Brock                   | 11,642            | 3              |

Clearly, population is a rough driver of voting in Durham Region, but not in a linear way, as Pickering has more seats than Clarington despite having a slightly smaller population, and Brock has more seats than Uxbridge and Scugog despite having the smallest population of any lower-tier member. Other factors may influence representation, but they are not publicly explained.

Overall, Ontario's upper-tier voting structure appears to be ad hoc in nature, roughly aligned with population, but not revised or updated in any consistent way. It is notable that changes to lower-tier membership and voting structures seem to be locally-driven, and at least in the case of Brampton, have resulted in frustration that some municipalities are under-represented.



## British Columbia

British Columbia uses regional districts throughout the province. Regional districts function similarly to upper-tier municipalities in Ontario in that they include a group of local municipalities and are responsible for services that are more regional in nature. BC has 27 regional districts, which include both municipalities and, in some cases, unincorporated areas and Treaty First Nations.

Regional districts have two types of voting for different issues:

- ♦ Weighted votes: board directors representing high-population areas have more votes than those board members representing low-population areas.
- ♦ Unweighted votes: each director on the board has one vote.

For the purposes of weighted voting, a “voting unit” is typically defined based on the population of the smallest member of the regional district. For example, if a regional district has a voting unit of 2,500 persons, each director of the regional district receives one vote for every 2,500 persons in their jurisdiction. In that regional district, a director whose jurisdiction has 12,500 persons would receive five votes in all weighted vote situations ( $12,500 \div 2,500 = 5$ ).

Unweighted voting (one vote per member) is generally used for matters relating to the establishment of services and on issues that impact all members of the regional district. Examples include:

- ♦ Establishing bylaws for services
- ♦ Regulatory bylaws
- ♦ Resolutions and bylaws on the conduct of the board’s business

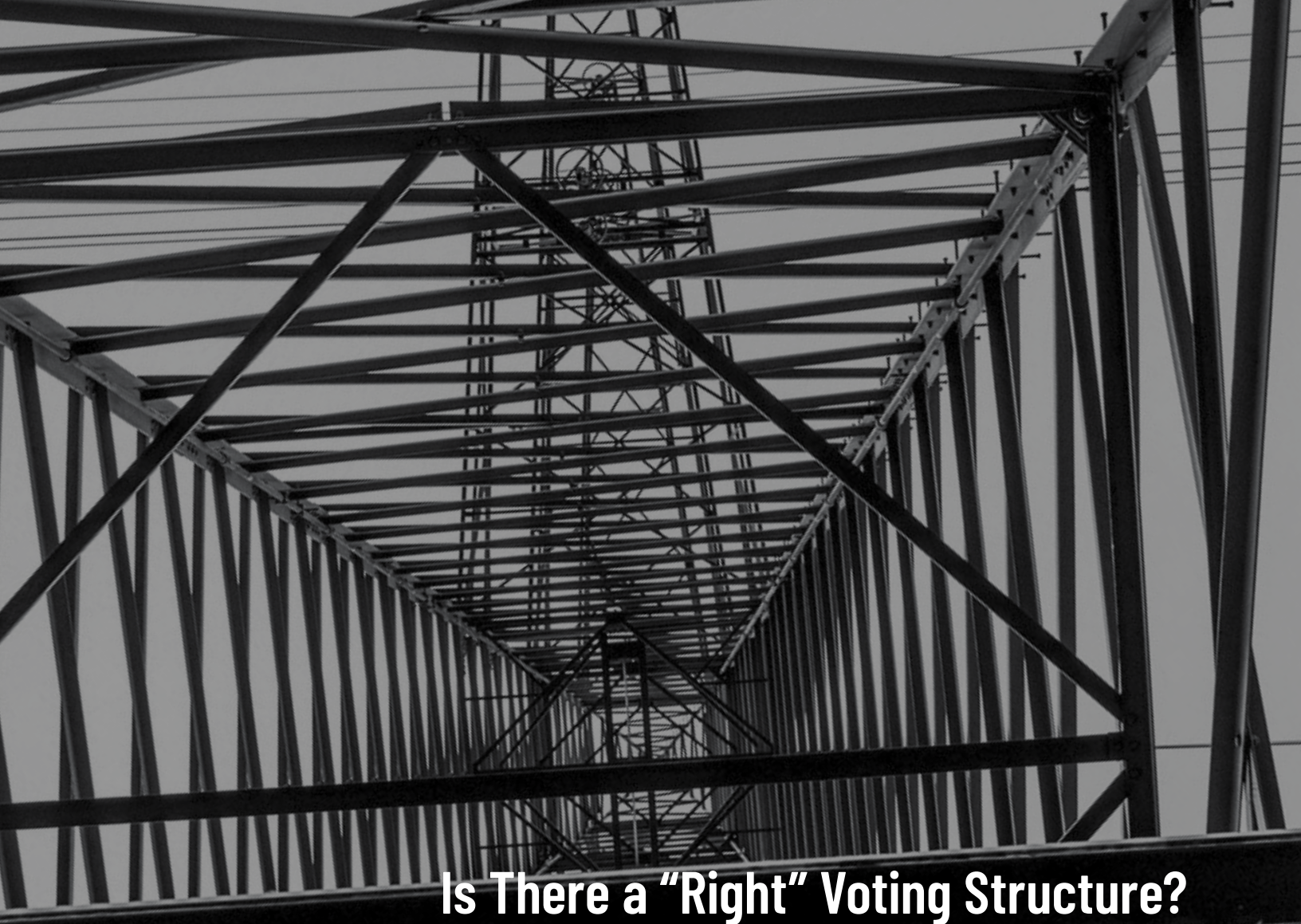
Weighted voting is typically used for financial decisions and decisions relating to the administration and operation of services. Examples include approving a financial plan, borrowing, contract approval, and specific service decisions. One notable exception to the weighted voting process is that decisions related to services may only be voted on by municipalities participating in the service.

Although there does not appear to be any direct BC comparison to the population dominance that Edmonton and Calgary have in EMRB and CMRB respectively, several regional districts in BC follow a somewhat similar pattern. For example, in the Fraser Valley Regional District, 47 of 68 voting units are held by the cities of Abbotsford and Chilliwack, while 12 districts, towns, and unincorporated areas share the remaining 21 voting units. Similarly, Prince George has 19 of 30 voting units in the Fraser-Fort George Regional District, while the remaining 10 participants share 11 voting units.

It is important to note that although BC’s regional voting structures are population driven, their use of unweighted votes and customized voting units somewhat offsets the voting inequities.







## Is There a “Right” Voting Structure?

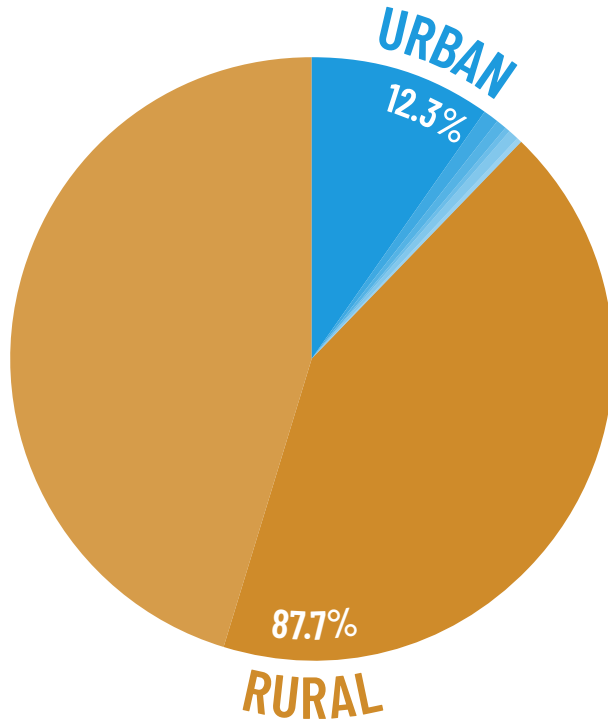
While the current GMB voting model differs from the models in place in Ontario and British Columbia, they have one important commonality: the use of population as the indirect yet primary indicator of voting strength. What this means is that in none of the three models does a municipality’s voting strength directly link to its share of population (e.g., the City of Calgary has 83.8% of the CMRB’s population but does not have 83.8% of the voting strength), but all three provide members with unequal voting strength that is linked to population to some extent. In Alberta, all GMB members have one vote, but by virtue of the two-thirds population requirement to pass a motion, Edmonton and Calgary carry a unique veto power (even if this power is not directly referenced in the regulation or elsewhere). Similarly, voting strength in Ontario and BC is linked to population in different ways, with no other known factors being considered.

Because local and regional decisions regarding land use, growth, and planning and development are driven by much more than population alone, it is concerning that determinators of voting strength in regional bodies across Canada do not include other factors. According to the [Government of Alberta](#), growth in the Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan regions increases the demand for services and infrastructure, while also putting pressure on built and natural environments. This suggests that the portion of infrastructure and land within the jurisdiction of each GMB member should be a consideration in their relative voting strength.

## Other Potential Measures of GMB Voting Strength

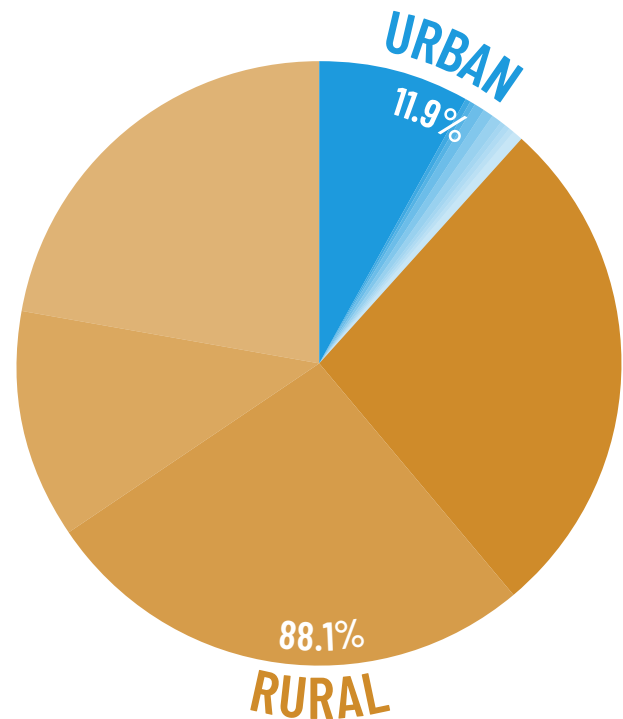
Although a range of indicators could be used to determine voting strength among the diverse municipalities comprising the EMRB and CMRB, population, land mass, and infrastructure responsibilities are all highly relevant in relation to decisions on regional growth, planning, and service delivery. While the breakdown of population has been covered earlier in the document, GMB member breakdowns of landmass and infrastructure responsibilities are as follows:

Percent of Total CMRB Land Mass



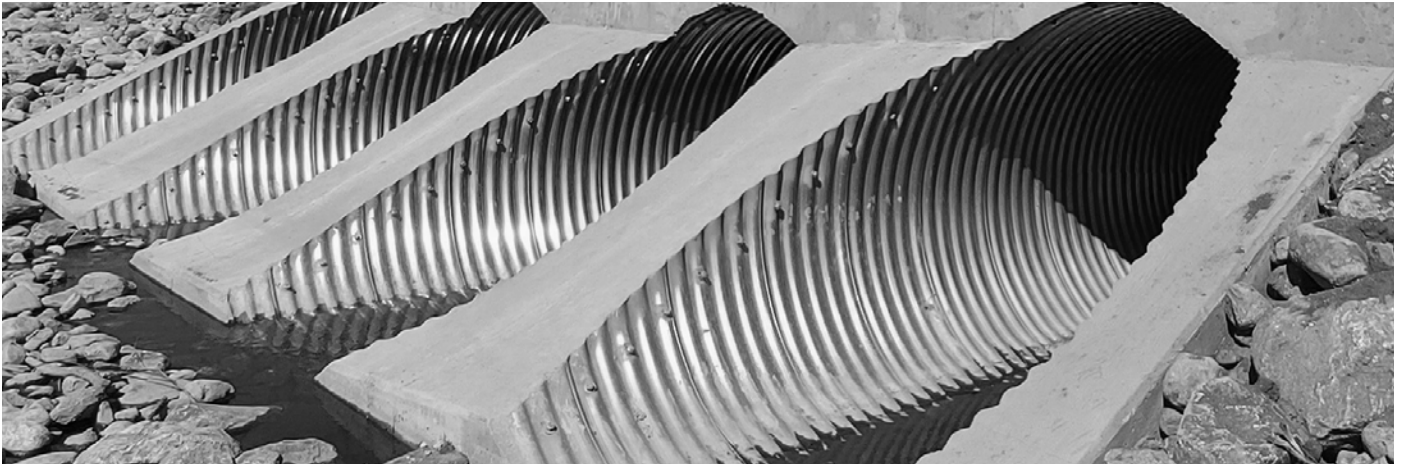
| MUNICIPALITY            | AREA (HECTARES) | % OF TOTAL CMRB AREA |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| City of Calgary         | 85,138          | 9.8%                 |
| City of Airdrie         | 8,598           | 1.0%                 |
| City of Chestermere     | 3,710           | 0.4%                 |
| Town of Cochrane        | 3,173           | 0.4%                 |
| Town of Okotoks         | 3,900           | 0.5%                 |
| Town of High River      | 2,302           | 0.3%                 |
| <b>Total Urban Area</b> | <b>106,821</b>  | <b>12.3%</b>         |
| Foothills County        | 367,026         | 42.4%                |
| Rocky View County       | 391,208         | 45.2%                |
| <b>Total Rural Area</b> | <b>758,234</b>  | <b>87.7%</b>         |
| <b>Total CMRB Area</b>  | <b>865,055</b>  | —                    |

Percent of Total EMRB Land Mass



| MUNICIPALITY              | AREA (HECTARES) | % OF TOTAL EMRB AREA |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| City of Edmonton          | 78,206          | 8.1%                 |
| City of Beaumont          | 2,426           | 0.3%                 |
| City of Leduc             | 4,303           | 0.4%                 |
| City of Fort Saskatchewan | 5,776           | 0.6%                 |
| City of Spruce Grove      | 3,674           | 0.4%                 |
| City of St. Albert        | 6,519           | 0.7%                 |
| Town of Devon             | 1,431           | 0.2%                 |
| Town of Stony Plain       | 3,686           | 0.4%                 |
| Town of Morinville        | 1,132           | 0.1%                 |
| Strathcona County (urban) | 7,098           | 0.7%                 |
| <b>Total Urban Area</b>   | <b>114,251</b>  | <b>11.9%</b>         |
| Leduc County              | 258,809         | 27.0%                |
| Parkland County           | 255,877         | 26.7%                |
| Strathcona County (rural) | 118,438         | 12.3%                |
| Sturgeon County           | 212,452         | 22.1%                |
| <b>Total Rural Area</b>   | <b>845,576</b>  | <b>88.1%</b>         |
| <b>Total EMRB Area</b>    | <b>959,827</b>  | —                    |



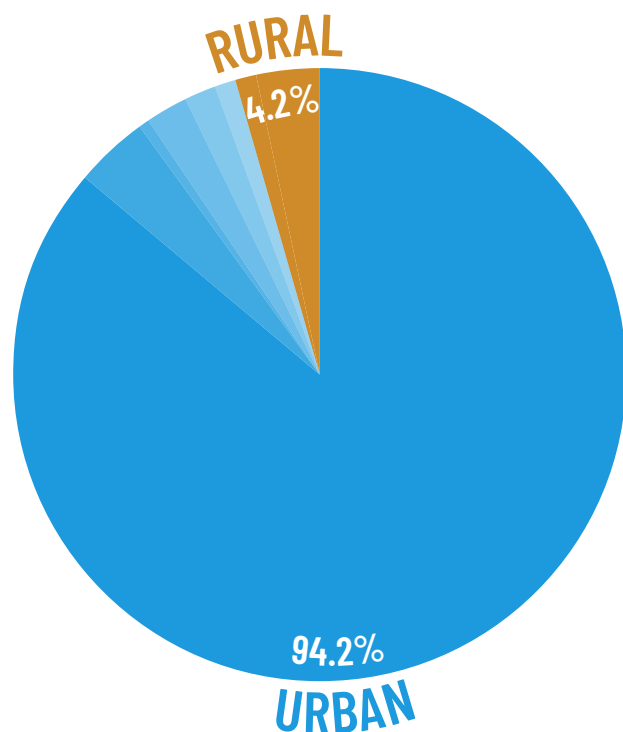


*"...Although such a model would still be more equitable than the current individual veto powers held by Edmonton and Calgary. Under this model, no individual municipality would have veto power."*

Clearly, linking voting strength to land mass would produce very different outcomes. For example, a model that required approval of two-thirds of members comprising two-thirds of the region's land mass would shift voting strength towards rural municipalities, although such a model would still be more equitable than the current individual veto powers held by Edmonton and Calgary. Under this model, no individual municipality would have veto power.

While considering land mass is straightforward, measuring relative infrastructure responsibilities is much more complex when considering its role in regional decision-making. The type of infrastructure, its role in regional service provision, and many other factors would influence how relevant a given asset is to regional discussions. If infrastructure responsibilities were incorporated into a formula to determine voting strength within a region, significant research and discussion would be required. However, for the purposes of this background, considering the relative value of each municipality's tangible capital assets (TCA) provides a general idea of how infrastructure is distributed across the GMBs. Although TCA tends to undervalue older infrastructure more common in rural municipalities (particularly roads), it is likely the best readily-available proxy for comparative infrastructure responsibilities. The data is based on the year end net book value of capital property for 2021.

## Tangible Capital Assets of CMRB

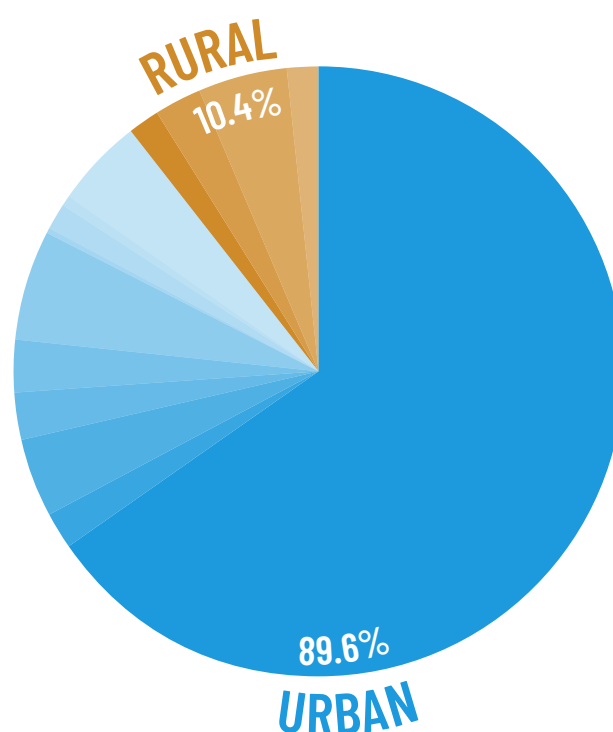


| MUNICIPALITY           | TANGIBLE CAPITAL ASSETS (MILLIONS OF \$) | % OF TOTAL CMRB TCA VALUE |
|------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| City of Calgary        | 19,282.6                                 | 86.3%                     |
| City of Airdrie        | 859.0                                    | 3.8%                      |
| City of Chestermere    | 109.5*                                   | 0.5%                      |
| Town of Cochrane       | 491.4                                    | 2.2%                      |
| Town of Okotoks        | 402.1                                    | 1.8%                      |
| Town of High River     | 262.1                                    | 1.2%                      |
| <b>Total Urban TCA</b> | <b>21,406.7</b>                          | <b>95.8%</b>              |
| Foothills County       | 236.4                                    | 1.1%                      |
| Rocky View County      | 692.6                                    | 3.1%                      |
| <b>Total Rural TCA</b> | <b>929.0</b>                             | <b>4.2%</b>               |
| <b>Total CMRB TCA</b>  | <b>22,335.7</b>                          | —                         |

\* - Chestermere's data is based on the 2020 fiscal year.

# - As provincial tangible capital asset reporting is not divided into rural and urban for specialized municipalities, the above data for Strathcona County is based on a 50/50 split, reflecting the fact that the majority of Strathcona County's population is urban, but the majority of its landmass is rural.

## Tangible Capital Assets of EMRB



| MUNICIPALITY               | TANGIBLE CAPITAL ASSETS (MILLIONS OF \$) | % OF TOTAL EMRB TCA VALUE |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| City of Edmonton           | 13,755.0                                 | 65.5%                     |
| City of Beaumont           | 394.8                                    | 1.9%                      |
| City of Leduc              | 905.8                                    | 4.3%                      |
| City of Fort Saskatchewan  | 514.5                                    | 2.5%                      |
| City of Spruce Grove       | 561.3                                    | 2.7%                      |
| City of St. Albert         | 1,198.8                                  | 5.7%                      |
| Town of Devon              | 100.8                                    | 0.5%                      |
| Town of Stony Plain        | 244.6                                    | 1.2%                      |
| Town of Morinville         | 145.8                                    | 0.7%                      |
| Strathcona County (urban)# | 989.2                                    | 4.7%                      |
| <b>Total Urban TCA</b>     | <b>18,810.60</b>                         | <b>89.6%</b>              |
| Leduc County               | 340.9                                    | 1.6%                      |
| Parkland County            | 543.3                                    | 2.6%                      |
| Strathcona County (rural)# | 989.2                                    | 4.7%                      |
| Sturgeon County            | 315.6                                    | 1.5%                      |
| <b>Total Rural TCA</b>     | <b>2189.0</b>                            | <b>10.4%</b>              |
| <b>Total EMRB TCA</b>      | <b>20,999.60</b>                         | —                         |



Infrastructure responsibilities follow a similar pattern to population, in which Edmonton and Calgary dominate, and among the remaining municipalities, the share is distributed fairly evenly among urban and rural municipalities.

In 2020, Parkland County presented a motion to the EMRB to revise the current two-thirds voting structure with a new approach that better balanced the various factors influencing service delivery within the region, and to provide a more balanced voice to participants by reducing the extremely strong link between population and voting strength.

Parkland County's proposal would add to the current requirement that two-thirds of the GMB members representing two-thirds of the population are required for a motion to pass with a third requirement: that municipalities comprising at least 15% of the region's

land mass also support the motion for it to pass. The "2/3-2/3-15%" triple majority structure would not remove Edmonton's veto power, but would allow the EMRB's rural municipalities to oppose motions as a bloc, something not currently possible as explained earlier in the briefing. With the EMRB's urban municipalities comprising less than 12% of the EMRB land mass, any decision would require support from at least one rural municipality to pass. Rural municipalities in the CMRB would have similar power under this model if applied there as well.

While Parkland County's motion was defeated, the proposal speaks to the frustration that rural GMB members face in participating in a mandatory regional level of government that does not allow them to adequately represent the needs of their residents, industries, and land base.





# Finding Balance: Building a Fair Voting Structure

Clearly, there is no perfect voting structure. By its very nature, a regional collection of local municipalities will include members of different sizes and types, and each member will likely have a different combination of factors and influences that guide local decision-making. While implanting each of those local influences into a single regional voting structure would likely result in an overly complex and impractical model, ignoring local priorities and forcing diverse municipalities into a decision-making structure that relies on only a single metric will inevitably lead to conflict and a sense among some members that their voices are not being heard.

A true “one vote for all” system with a simple majority is impractical given the differences among the municipalities in each GMB, although this could potentially be applied to some decisions, similar to the approach used in BC. It is also unlikely that a completely fair weighted voting structure can be developed given the subjectivity around the relative importance of population, land mass, infrastructure, and other factors in determining a municipality’s voting strength. However, the lack of a perfect solution does not mean that the current GMB voting structure cannot be improved upon.

While improvements can be made to the current GMB voting structure, because a fully equitable voting approach does not exist, it is also important to consider how the importance of the voting process itself can be reconsidered to better balance the voices of all municipalities within the GMB, even those that do not see themselves fairly represented through the voting process. This can include changes to other aspects of the GMB governance process related to voting, such as the appeals process and scope of control GMBs have over local land use planning decisions of member municipalities.

This report does not recommend a specific voting structure, as this should be developed collaboratively by GMB members and the Government of Alberta. However, a fair and effective voting mechanism should align with the following priorities:

- ♦ GMB member voting strength should be determined based on a combination of member population, area, and infrastructure responsibilities.
- ♦ No single GMB member should have the ability to individually pass or veto a motion.

- ♦ To maximize equity, the GMB voting structure should utilize a combination of weighted and unweighted voting, similar to the approach used in BC’s regional districts.
- ♦ GMB appeals should be sent to an independent third party.
- ♦ The scope of decisions subject to member votes under the REF should be reduced.

If GMBs continue to exist in Alberta, they must be re-evaluated to ensure their governance processes do not impact local land use planning and development decision-making of member municipalities. GMBs should help support regional collaboration in growth planning without preventing individual municipal councils from making decisions in the best interests of their residents and businesses. Unfortunately, the current voting structure does not properly balance regional and local decision-making, and unfairly allows certain members to have an unreasonable level of control over regional decision-making based on a single population-based metric, which does not reflect the relative importance or influence of various members.

While at this point, six RMA members belong to GMBs and are directly impacted by these governance inequities, it sets a concerning precedent related to the prioritization of regional over local decision-making, and of urban over rural growth and planning priorities.

