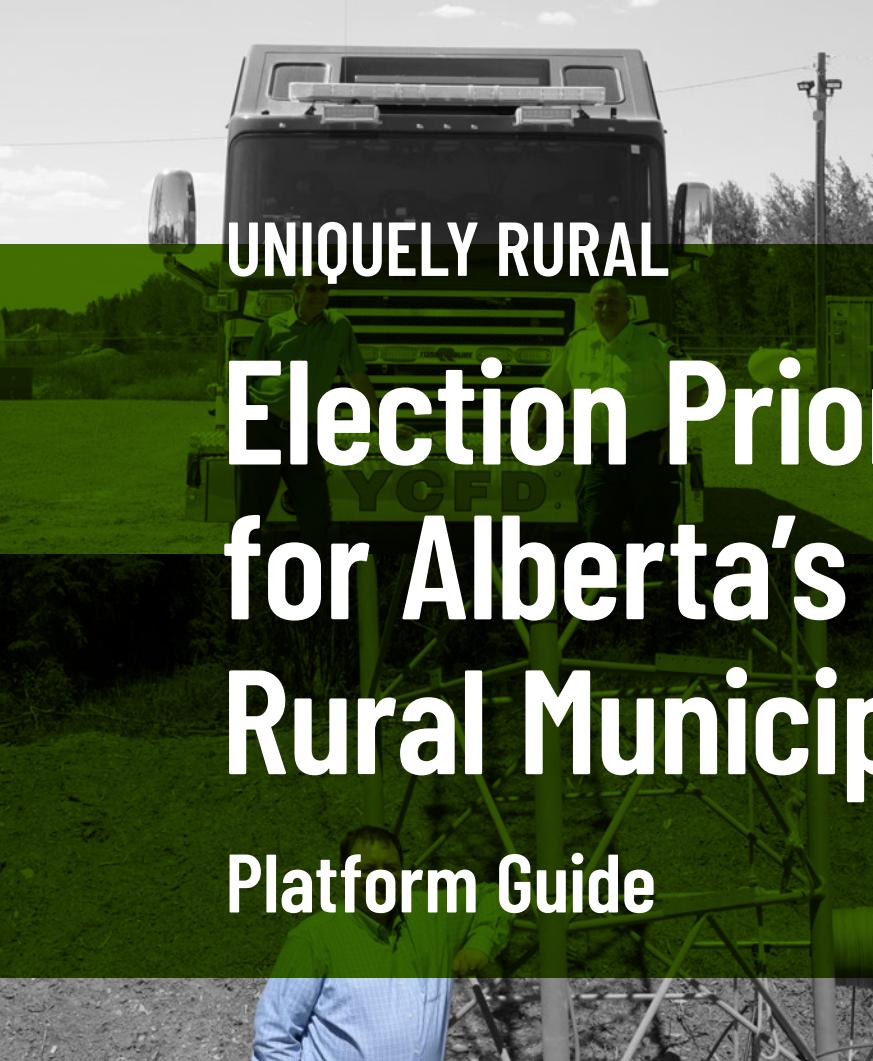




RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA



UNIQUELY RURAL

Election Priorities for Alberta's Rural Municipalities

Platform Guide



April 2023



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| RMA ELECTION PRIORITY AREAS | 4 |
| Priority Area 1: Adoption of a Rural Lens | 4 |
| Priority Area 2: Municipal Funding | 5 |
| Priority Area 3: Municipal Access to Property Tax Revenues | 7 |
| Priority Area 4: Municipal Autonomy | 8 |
| Priority Area 5: Rural Healthcare & Social Services | 10 |
| Priority Area 6: Rural Internet | 12 |
| ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS | 14 |



Introduction



Rural municipalities deliver a wide range of services and manage massive infrastructure networks. This means that municipalities are impacted by provincial policy, spending, and operational decisions across ministries. In fact, rural municipalities have so many election priorities in such a range of different policy areas that including them all within election advocacy is difficult, if not impossible.

This document is intended to supplement the RMA's election website and candidate guide by providing a quick list of key rural municipal goals within each of the RMA's six election priority areas:

1. Adoption of a rural lens
2. Municipal funding
3. Municipal access to property tax revenues
4. Municipal autonomy
5. Rural healthcare and social services
6. Rural internet

Much like a political party platform document, the key goals are specific policy issues falling within each of the RMA's election priority areas.

If you are a candidate reading this document, please follow up with the RMA or local rural municipal leaders within your riding to learn more about any of the specific list items below. This document is not intended to be exhaustive or provide details, but rather to encourage further discussions between candidates, the RMA, and rural municipalities. Please feel free to reach out to the RMA or rural municipalities to discuss any issues not included within this document.

RMA Election Priority Areas

Priority Area 1: Adoption of a Rural Lens

Overview and Importance

Provincial government legislation and policies impact stakeholders in different ways. For RMA members, policy changes designed to address issues in urban areas or other sectors can have unintended consequences. The RMA is requesting the next government to adopt a rural lens when designing and evaluating policies. A rural lens means considering that rural areas have dispersed populations, large land masses, and high levels of industrial activity. As a result, rural municipalities often have unique challenges in delivering services and building infrastructure, but also unique opportunities in hosting industries and developments that require land or resource access.

Key Goals

- ♦ Advocate to the Government of Canada for a definition of “rural” for federal funding programs that aligns with the characteristics of rural municipalities in Alberta.
- ♦ Develop a government-wide “rural lens” to be applied to all major policy changes and new legislation to ensure it does not have unintended impacts on rural Alberta.
- ♦ Eliminate reliance on per capita metrics to direct grant funding or evaluate municipal performance or attributes.
- ♦ Expand eligibility for existing provincial infrastructure grants to ensure they allow for projects in rural municipalities that support industrial development.
- ♦ Recognize rural roads and bridges as the first link in interprovincial or international economic corridors to move Alberta’s natural resources to market.
- ♦ Adopt a new electricity pricing model that reduces the extremely high transmission and distribution charges in many rural areas.
- ♦ Advocate for the establishment of a dedicated provincial funding model for critical infrastructure investments in rural Alberta that supports industrial economic development.
- ♦ Push for changes to current legislated debt limits to remove barriers for critical infrastructure investment in rural communities.

RMA Resolutions

- ♦ [Resolution 3-19F](#): Development of a Rural and Remote Lens for Government Services
- ♦ [Resolution 11-22F](#): Disparity in Electricity Distribution and Transmission Rates
- ♦ [Resolution 2-23S](#): Provincial Funding Stream for Non-Residential Infrastructure

Relevant Resources

- ♦ [Alberta’s Rural Municipalities: Unique Size, Unique Responsibilities](#)
- ♦ [Uniquely Rural: Community](#)



Priority Area 2: Municipal Funding

Overview and importance

Property tax revenue alone is not sufficient for municipalities to provide all the services delegated to them by the province. As a result, municipalities rely on grant funding to provide infrastructure and services like road maintenance, water and wastewater, recreation, and other infrastructure and services. The most significant provincial grant is the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI), which will be replaced by the Local Government Fiscal Framework (LGFF) in 2024. The LGFF funding pool for 2024 is 37% lower than the average annual allocation of MSI over the previous 10 years. This means that as Alberta's population and economy continue to grow, Alberta's municipalities are receiving less provincial support to deliver core infrastructure and services.

By providing services in a cost-effective manner, rural municipalities play a significant role in supporting economic development. Adequate provincial funding ensures the sustainability of municipalities, which allows them to provide certainty to the businesses that operate within their communities and attract new investment.

Key Goals

- ◆ Develop an LGFF funding model that meets the needs of small and rural municipalities to adequately build and maintain core infrastructure. This includes the following:
 - ◇ Provide initial LGFF funding in 2024 – 2025 of \$1.77 billion; this amount represents 2.75% of provincial expenditures, which aligns with the portion of provincial expenditures allotted to the original MSI program in 2010.
 - ◇ Allocate LGFF funding among municipalities using a formula that balances growth needs and viability challenges, as well as costs associated with building new infrastructure and maintaining existing infrastructure.
- ◆ Develop and implement an improved approach to providing financial and capacity support to municipalities required to receive a dissolved municipality.
- ◆ Work with the RMA and rural municipalities to quantify the current local road bridge infrastructure deficit and use this data to support future funding amounts for the Local Road Bridge Program component of the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP).
- ◆ Work with municipalities to quantify current capital and operational deficiencies at municipally managed airports and use this data to support future funding amounts for the Community Airport Program component of the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP).
- ◆ Consider new and innovative approaches to supporting municipalities in addressing bridge rehabilitation costs, including providing funding for blocks of bridges of a similar age, type, or condition in municipalities across the province.
- ◆ Ensure that provincial broadband funding is available to municipalities as direct project partners.
- ◆ Increase investment into core infrastructure, including but not limited to roads, bridges, and municipal airports.

RMA Resolutions

- ♦ [Resolution 1-23S](#): Enhanced Support for Receiving Municipalities in Dissolutions
- ♦ [Resolution 2-23S](#): Provincial Funding Stream for Non-Residential Infrastructure
- ♦ [Resolution 20-15F](#): Capital Funding for Community Airports

Relevant Resources

- ♦ [Municipal Finances Position Statement](#)





Priority Area 3: Municipal Access to Property Tax Revenues

Overview and Importance

Municipalities rely on property taxes to fund infrastructure, services, and municipal operations. Because rural municipalities have low populations and high levels of industrial activity, RMA members receive most of their property taxes from non-residential properties, and in particular oil and gas properties such as wells and pipelines. In recent years, the Government of Alberta has made several decisions that have weakened the ability of municipalities to collect property taxes on oil and gas properties.

Key Goals

- ◆ Reinstatement of the Well-Drilling Equipment Tax (WDET) and work with municipalities and industry to improve the WDET in the long-term to better balance the needs of industry and municipalities.
- ◆ Immediately end the property tax holiday on newly drilled wells as the economic conditions for the oil and gas industry have improved dramatically since the holiday was implemented in 2020.
- ◆ Reverse the process for centralizing industrial property assessment to return to municipalities the ability to assess such properties locally and ensure that the assessment process accurately captures the full value of the property.
- ◆ Continue to make progress on addressing unpaid property taxes by the oil and gas industry by further enhancing the Alberta Energy Regulator's scope to require companies to pay property taxes in order to operate in Alberta.
- ◆ Reverse cuts made to grants in place of taxes (GIPOT) for Government of Alberta-owned properties to ensure municipalities receive adequate revenues related to these properties to support the provision of municipal services.
- ◆ Ensure that the upcoming assessment model review for designated industrial properties focuses strictly on modernizing the data and methodology used to develop assessments and does not include changes to tax policy.

RMA Resolutions

- ◆ [Resolution 4-22F](#): Well Drilling Equipment Tax Regulation
- ◆ [Resolution ER1-22S](#): Alberta Energy Regulator Action to Require Oil and Gas Companies to Pay Municipal Property Taxes
- ◆ [Resolution 1-21S](#): Alberta Energy Regulator Directive 006 – Licensee Liability Rating (LLR) Program and Licence Transfer Process
- ◆ [Resolution 2-20F](#): Blue-Ribbon Panel to Review Unpaid Taxes Owed by Oil and Gas Companies

Relevant Resources

- ◆ [Assessment Model Review](#)
- ◆ [Unpaid Oil and Gas Tax Summary](#)



Priority Area 4: Municipal Autonomy

Overview and Importance

To meet the needs of residents and industry, municipalities must have adequate decision-making autonomy. Alberta's communities are diverse. Too much province-wide control over municipal decision-making and priority-setting can undermine the role of municipalities to support local needs and priorities.

In recent years, municipal autonomy has been eroded in several ways, including reductions in municipal funding, increased downloading, and limitations in municipal input into approvals for provincially-regulated developments such as renewable energy projects, wells and pipelines, and confined feeding operations.

It is the province's responsibility to equip municipalities with the tools to plan and make decisions locally and ensure that they have a mechanism to share the local perspective in all land use issues, even if the final decision is made by the province. Municipalities work in the public interest and are experts at balancing competing interests to make difficult decisions. Moving forward, it is crucial that the Government of Alberta recognize, respect, and design policy that supports this role.

Key Goals

- ◆ Local autonomy in land use planning
 - ◇ Amend the Alberta Utility Commission approval process to require renewable energy projects to align with existing municipal land use plans and bylaws.
 - ◇ Amend section 619 of the *Municipal Government Act* to no longer allow quasi-judicial regulatory agencies such as the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER), the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB), and others to overrule or disregard municipal land use planning documents when reviewing development applications.
 - ◇ Work with the RMA and rural municipalities to re-develop approval processes for provincially-regulated developments to ensure that rural municipalities can participate in a way that matches their land use planning and development bylaws.
 - ◇ Work with rural municipalities and agricultural stakeholders to develop a provincewide policy and strategy to balance development with the preservation of agricultural lands.
 - ◇ Require renewable energy project proponents to post a bond or similar security prior to approving a new renewable energy project. This will ensure funds are available for end-of-life reclamation of the project and land.
 - ◇ Expand the Wetland Replacement Program to support a broader range of eligible replacement or rehabilitation projects.

- ◇ Continue to prioritize the removal of red tape relating to provincial *Water Act* approval process to minimize wait times faced by municipalities.
- ◆ Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks
 - ◇ Amend the *Municipal Government Act* to define “service” and set a threshold for an “intermunicipal service” for the purpose of intermunicipal collaboration frameworks.
 - ◇ Require ICFs to also include discussions on shared decision-making for how and to what level intermunicipal services are delivered.
 - ◇ Improve the ICF arbitration process to reduce the risks of unpredictable or misinformed arbitrator decisions.
- ◆ Growth Management Boards
 - ◇ Amend the Growth Management Board (GMB) voting structure in the following ways:
 - Eliminate the ability of single municipalities to veto decisions.
 - Determine the voting strength of members based on a combination of population, area, and potentially other factors.
 - Utilize a combination of weighted and unweighted voting depending on the issues being voted on.
 - ◇ Narrow the scope of the GMB to be less impactful on the local land use planning decisions of members, especially if the inequitable voting structure remains in place.
 - ◇ Develop an independent, third-party appeal process in the GMB decisions.
 - ◇ Develop criteria linked to population, industrial investment, growth trends, etc. that a region must meet before a new GMB can be considered.

RMA Resolutions

- ◆ [Resolution ER1-19F](#): Dissolution of Mandatory Growth Management Boards
- ◆ [Resolution 6-22S](#): Responsiveness of Service Delivery by Quasi-independent Agencies in Alberta
- ◆ [Resolution 21-22F](#): Loss of Agricultural Land to Renewable Energy Projects
- ◆ [Resolution 7-22F](#): Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework Reform
- ◆ [Resolution 13-22F](#): Enhanced Wetland Replacement Program

Relevant Resources

- ◆ [Seeking Balance: Voting Inequalities in Alberta’s Growth Management Boards](#)



Priority Area 5: Rural Healthcare & Social Services

Overview and Importance

Rural healthcare and social services typically involve the provision of services in remote and isolated areas often requiring residents to travel for more specialized services. On the healthcare front, it is often characterized by limited access to services, limited availability of healthcare professionals, and limited funding for healthcare infrastructure. Similar challenges exist in the delivery of other provincially-funded social services in rural areas, as the service levels found in urban communities often far exceed those in rural areas due to the higher costs of service delivery. As a result, rural residents often face limited levels and types of health and social services.

The importance of access to healthcare and social services in rural Alberta cannot be overstated. These services have a direct and profound impact on the lives of rural Albertans. They are essential to promoting and maintaining the health and wellbeing of rural communities. The goals below include some of the specific issues that rural areas are facing and should be considered in all election platforms.

Key Goals

- ♦ Provide funding for rural areas to enhance supports for addictions, homelessness, and mental health at the same level as funding provided to urban centres in 2022.
- ♦ Maintain and enhance fixed wing air ambulance services through municipal airport funding and capacity support to ensure that safety standards are met, and rural areas can continue to access air ambulance services.
- ♦ Create rural specific seats in post-secondary healthcare programs and encourage the placement of young professionals in rural settings through grant and loan forgiveness programs.
- ♦ Develop a funding model which allows nurse practitioners to work independently to serve rural areas which may not have access to a doctor otherwise.
- ♦ Increase the funding allocated to Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) in Alberta so that rural residents can continue accessing the necessary services in their communities and municipalities are no longer required to subsidize FCSS delivery beyond their required contribution.
- ♦ Reverse the planned regionalization of the victim services governance model to ensure victim services can still be delivered at the local level.
- ♦ Reform the current charitable gaming model to eliminate the inequity in charitable gaming funding available to rural charitable organizations compared to those in large cities.

- ♦ Review current provincial support for housing management bodies to ensure rural seniors lodges have adequate capital funding to sustain supportive living services.
- ♦ Provide compensation to municipal fire services in situations when municipal first responders are required to respond to emergencies due to the delay or absence of provincial emergency responders.
- ♦ Collaborate with rural school boards and municipalities to develop and implement a rural school sustainability strategy.
- ♦ Develop a strategy to recruit and retain veterinarians in rural communities.
- ♦ Increase access to addiction and mental health treatment in rural areas.

RMA Resolutions

- ♦ [Resolution 2-22F](#): Laboratory and X-Ray Technologist Training for Rural Healthcare
- ♦ [Resolution 8-22F](#): Rural Mental Health Advocacy
- ♦ [Resolution 17-22F](#): Government Funding for Nurse Practitioners
- ♦ [Resolution 10-22F](#): Sustainability of Small Rural Schools
- ♦ [Resolution 6-23S](#): Rural Access to Supports for Addictions, Homelessness and Mental Health
- ♦ [Resolution 10-23S](#): Victim Services Delivery Model
- ♦ [Resolution 12-23S](#): Casino Opportunities for Charitable Organizations
- ♦ [Resolution 3-22S](#): Attraction and Retention of Veterinarians to Rural Veterinary Practice
- ♦ [Resolution 15-23S](#): Capital Funding Support for Housing Management Bodies

Other Resources

- ♦ [RMA Health Position Statement](#)
- ♦ [Rural Municipalities are Unique](#)
- ♦ [Uniquely Rural – Social Services](#)





Priority Area 6: Rural Internet

Overview and Importance

Rural areas often lack infrastructure and resources to support reliable internet connectivity. The lack of access makes it difficult for people in rural communities to utilize services like telehealth and education, and can lead to economic stagnation. Without access to highspeed internet, rural communities are also unable to take advantage of the many economic opportunities available online. This could lead to a widening of the digital divide and result in a further economic disadvantage for rural populations.

High quality internet access is a crucial component of economic success, as it allows people to connect with job opportunities, education resources, and other essential services, while providing a platform for businesses to reach a global customer base. By providing rural areas with essential highspeed internet infrastructure, businesses and residents can benefit from the same opportunities as their urban counterparts. Businesses can remain competitive and residents can access needed services.

The Government of Alberta has taken steps in recent years to help close the digital divide in rural Alberta. This includes the creation of the Alberta Broadband Strategy in 2022 and subsequent Alberta Broadband Fund in 2023. While this is a good start, the RMA's research shows that rural Albertans continue to struggle with extremely slow connection speeds and there is much more work ahead in transforming the province into a leader in rural connectivity.

Key Goals

- ◆ Address the need for better access to mobile wireless (cellular) services throughout rural Alberta.
- ◆ Strengthen the provincial broadband strategy by providing more details on the delivery of funding to rural areas.
- ◆ Collaborate with the RMA to advocate to the Government of Canada for a modernization of spectrum allocation, including a modernization of Canada's Spectrum Policy Framework and changes to existing spectrum deployment, and set aside policies.
- ◆ Develop a rural connectivity advisory board consisting of government and rural stakeholders to provide ongoing monitoring of progress made in enhancing rural connectivity.
- ◆ Reduce the costs of connecting to the Alberta SuperNet for rural Internet Service Providers.
- ◆ Incentivize partnerships between municipalities, province, and private industry for infrastructure development.
- ◆ Promote competition in the broadband industry for a more competitive business environment.

RMA Resolutions

- ♦ [Resolution 5-23S](#): Access to Mobile Wireless (Cellular) Services
- ♦ [Resolution 4-18F](#): Enabling High-Speed Internet Access for Rural Alberta

Relevant Resources

- ♦ [RMA Internet Speed Testing Summary Report](#)
- ♦ [Uniquely Rural: Broadband](#)



Additional Considerations

Overview and Importance

There are several goals which do not fall within the priority areas, but still have significant implications for municipalities. This is not an all-encompassing list of concerns for rural municipalities; however it does provide insight into the broad array of issues that rural municipalities face.

Key Goals

- ♦ Review the current bail system which allows for no-cash bail for repeat offenders and do a jurisdictional scan of other provinces which use alternative bail packages and bail ladder systems.
- ♦ Review the Disaster Recovery Program and ensure that municipalities receive their payment within a defined amount of time following an eligible disaster.
- ♦ Discontinue efforts to investigate the creation of the Alberta Provincial Police Service and instead prioritize improving rural policing service levels under the existing contract policing model.
- ♦ Develop and implement an agribusiness / agritourism strategy to support the diversification of the agricultural sector. Reduce red tape and regulatory burdens for agricultural operators interested in focusing on expanding their operations to focus on commercial or tourism-focused initiatives.
- ♦ Reinstate a vegetation management program for proper weed control along provincial highways.
- ♦ Revise the Historical Resources Impact Assessment process to mitigate municipal costs associated with undertaking historical resource impact assessments, as well as the costs to landowners and municipalities associated with the discovery of historical resources sterilizing land for development.

RMA Resolutions

- ♦ [Resolution 11-23S](#): Reforming the Bail System to Address Rural Crime
- ♦ [Resolution 4-22S](#): Continued Support for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Alberta
- ♦ [Resolution 6-21F](#): Historical Resources Impact Assessment
- ♦ [Resolution 2-21F](#): Disaster Recovery Program Cost Allocations
- ♦ [Resolution 13-20F](#): Provincial Government Disaster Recovery Program Payments
- ♦ [Resolution 8-23S](#): Provincial Review of Agribusiness and Agritourism
- ♦ [Resolution 3-21F](#): Vegetation Management on Alberta Provincial Highways

Relevant Resources

- ♦ [APPS Transition Study](#)
- ♦ [APPS-RMA Submission](#)
- ♦ [Transportation and Infrastructure Position Statement](#)