

Municipal Governance

Municipal governance is a cornerstone of local democracy in Alberta, facilitating effective service delivery, economic development, and taxpayer input in decision-making processes. These processes create resilient communities across the province. Maintaining local governance, which includes land use planning, budgeting, and decision-making, is paramount, ensuring that municipal elected officials have the ability to direct action that meets the distinct needs of each municipality. In rural Alberta, this is particularly vital, as governance within each RMA member municipality is attuned to the requirements of its residents and industrial ratepayers, reflecting rural Alberta's unique local challenges and opportunities.

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

- ◆ Rural municipalities are responsible for making decisions on local issues that directly impact the daily lives of residents and support industrial retention and growth. These include matters such as land use planning, development and maintenance of core infrastructure, waste management, and recreational facilities. Local councils ensure that decisions in these areas reflect the unique needs and priorities of each community within Alberta.
- ◆ Effective governance ensures that delivering essential services like infrastructure, transportation, waste management, and emergency response is done effectively, efficiently, and equitably for all residents and industrial taxpayers.
- ◆ Municipalities play a significant role in fostering economic growth and development within their communities. Municipal governance is essential for coordinating these efforts and ensuring that economic development initiatives align with the broader goals of the community.
- ◆ Municipal councillors are elected by residents based on local issues and priorities. Legislatively-required election and governance processes should be designed to balance consistent governance processes across the province with the importance of preserving local decision-making autonomy.

Rural Municipal Governance in Context

- ◆ 85% of Alberta's land base is governed by rural municipalities, including critical agricultural, forestry, mining, and energy-producing regions.
- ◆ Rural municipalities maintain billions in infrastructure assets, ensuring safe and reliable services for residents and industry.
- ◆ Municipal councils act as stewards of local democracy, balancing provincial legislation with community needs to deliver responsive governance.

POSITION STATEMENT

Why are governance-related issues relevant to rural municipalities?

- ◆ Rural municipalities require the ability to make decisions that reflect local priorities, ensuring governance remains rooted in community accountability rather than external pressures.
- ◆ Effective governance depends on strong leadership, collaboration, and adaptability, with long-term institutional capacity needed to meet evolving community needs.
- ◆ Clear processes and accountability mechanisms are vital to sustaining public trust in local government.
- ◆ Governance decisions must balance economic, social, and environmental priorities to create sustainable, resilient communities across rural Alberta.
- ◆ Alberta's municipalities have a long history of collaboration on delivering services across municipal boundaries. Strong governance and autonomy in both rural and urban municipalities is crucial to ensuring positive collaboration continues in the future.
- ◆ Limiting provincial over-reach is essential to protect municipal autonomy, ensuring that local governments can make decisions free from undue interference and remain accountable to the communities they serve.

Who does RMA partner with to advance the rural perspective on municipal governance?

- ◆ RMA members: RMA relies on the perspectives and feedback of members to understand how evolving opportunities, risks, and responsibilities impact municipal governance processes.
- ◆ Government of Alberta: RMA engages directly with provincial ministries to advocate for legislation, funding, and policies that reflect rural realities, and provides the rural municipal perspective on the importance of balancing consistency with local autonomy in relation to governance and decision-making processes.
- ◆ Local Government Administrators Association (LGAA) & Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association (ARMAA): RMA works with administrative associations to ensure governance reforms align with operational realities and administrative best practices.
- ◆ Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis): RMA collaborates on shared advocacy and education initiatives to strengthen municipal governance across Alberta.
- ◆ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM): RMA partners nationally to represent rural Alberta's interests in federal policy discussions and programs impacting municipal governance.

What are RMA's current priorities on municipal governance?

Municipal Government Act Changes

- ◆ Removal of mandated municipal codes of conduct has resulted in a significant accountability gap, reducing accountability and transparency. A new framework should be developed in consultation with municipalities that establishes a consistent baseline for councillor accountability, while remaining flexible enough to respect local autonomy and adapt to diverse municipal contexts.
- ◆ Standardized council meeting procedures risk limiting flexibility and responsiveness for rural contexts. Meeting procedure requirements must allow municipalities the flexibility to design processes that reflect local realities while still upholding transparency and fairness.

POSITION STATEMENT

- ◆ New Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) reporting requirements risk complicating and even blurring governance and administrative roles. Administrative accountability is crucial to effective governance, but reporting requirements must be developed with consideration of administrative/capacity impacts, risk of mis-use or weaponization, and maintaining the distinct responsibilities of council and administration.

Local Authorities Election Act Changes

- ◆ Expanded political party involvement in municipal elections risks intensifying partisanship and undermining the local, community-based nature of rural governance.
- ◆ New campaign finance provisions risk granting unfair financial advantages to party-affiliated candidates, including potential pooling of expense limits across candidates or municipalities. Campaign finance rules should be designed to create a level playing field, with clear limits that prevent disproportionate advantages for party-backed candidates.
- ◆ Introduction of elector assistance terminals improves accessibility but imposes new financial and administrative burdens on rural municipalities with limited resources. Provincial support and funding should accompany such measures to ensure successful implementation.
- ◆ Increased reporting and disclosure requirements strengthen transparency but may overwhelm small administrations without provincial support, training, and standardized tools. These requirements should be paired with accessible training and standardized reporting systems to help municipalities meet their legislative obligations.

Municipal Autonomy and Provincial Oversight

- ◆ Recent legislative changes have expanded provincial authority to intervene in municipal bylaws and governance processes.
- ◆ The Provincial Priorities Act, 2024 (Bill 18) further extends this oversight by requiring municipalities to obtain provincial approval before entering into funding agreements with the federal government. This added layer of control risks delaying projects and constraining local autonomy in pursuing partnerships that reflect community priorities.
- ◆ RMA supports a governance framework that ensures municipalities retain the ability to enact and enforce bylaws and agreements that reflect local needs without unnecessary provincial interference.

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