

POSITION STATEMENT

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Municipal Planning and Development

Rural municipalities play a central role in planning for the responsible use of land, both within their boundaries and regionally. Planning and development involves the appropriate use and management of land resources, provision of services and infrastructure, responsible growth, risk management, and sound decision-making models for land-related issues.

What is RMA's position on the importance of municipal planning and development?

- ◆ Rural municipalities oversee the vast majority of Alberta's land base, making them responsible for managing most of the province's agricultural production, industrial activity, and environmentally sensitive areas. This makes their role in planning and development not only critical for local communities but also essential to the overall sustainability and prosperity of Alberta.
- ◆ Planning and development are core municipal functions mandated by the *Municipal Government Act*, giving municipalities primary authority over land-use planning. This responsibility requires municipalities to balance growth with infrastructure capacity, environmental stewardship, and community safety, while tailoring decisions to reflect the unique priorities of their communities.
- ◆ Rural municipalities face diverse planning realities depending on their location and circumstances. Some are experiencing rapid population growth and must manage pressures on housing, transportation, and services, while others are focused on stimulating new economic opportunities in remote or sparsely populated areas. This diversity highlights the need for flexible planning frameworks that respect local autonomy and allow municipalities to respond to their unique needs.

Planning & Development in Context

- ◆ 86.5% of Alberta's land base is governed by rural municipalities, making them central to growth, sustainability, and development decisions.
- ◆ Growth pressures continue to drive agricultural land fragmentation and conversion, requiring careful municipal planning responses.
- ◆ Rural municipalities approve thousands of development permits each year, shaping residential, commercial, and industrial growth while balancing infrastructure and environmental impacts.

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- ◆ Jurisdiction for local land-use planning must remain firmly with municipalities, as they are best positioned to understand community needs and make decisions that balance development with long-term sustainability. Shifting authority away from municipalities risks undermining local accountability and could create unintended consequences for communities, regions, and the province.
- ◆ Municipalities are responsible for all aspects of planning and development. While provincial decisions to reduce or restrict local autonomy may streamline development, they have the potential to result in governance and service delivery challenges, added costs, and safety concerns if not developed in close consultation with municipalities.

Why is municipal planning and development relevant to rural municipalities?

- ◆ Rural municipalities manage vast land bases, balancing agricultural, industrial, residential, and environmental priorities. Rural planning decisions have local, regional and provincewide impacts due to the portion of industrial development hosted in rural areas.
- ◆ Effective planning processes and local autonomy ensures infrastructure capacity, service delivery, and community safety keep pace with development.
- ◆ Local autonomy allows councils to tailor decisions to the unique needs of each community.
- ◆ Planning supports economic diversification, helping rural areas attract investment and sustain long-term growth.
- ◆ Strong planning frameworks reduce risks of fiscal pressures, environmental impacts, and infrastructure strain.

Who does RMA partner with to advance the rural perspective on municipal planning and development?

- ◆ Government of Alberta: RMA engages directly with provincial ministries to advocate for legislation, funding, and policies that respect rural planning and development realities.
- ◆ Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis): RMA collaborates on shared advocacy and education initiatives to strengthen municipal planning and development capacity across Alberta.
- ◆ Local Government Administrators Association (LGAA) & Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association (ARMAA): RMA works with administrative associations to strengthen municipal administration and support effective planning across Alberta.

What are RMA's current priorities on municipal planning and development?

Regional Collaboration and Planning

- ◆ Recent legislative changes have made Growth Management Board participation voluntary, reducing mandatory collaboration while potentially limiting consistency in regional planning approaches. Municipalities must be supported by the Government of Alberta to reinforce their planning capacity and sustain effective regional cooperation, while ensuring that local autonomy is respected in all regional planning processes.
- ◆ Recent legislative changes have narrowed the scope and introduced greater certainty into Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs), allowing municipalities to focus on collaboration in core service delivery areas. RMA is optimistic that the changes will preserve

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local autonomy and ensure collaboration remains practical, service-focused, and mutually-beneficial.

- ◇ RMA supports collaboration models that respect local autonomy and ensure rural municipalities remain full and equal partners in regional decision-making.

Quasi-Judicial Agencies and Local Land-Use Authority

- ◆ Industrial developments have significant impacts on local land-use, and any projects proposed on municipal land must adhere to municipal land-use bylaws.
- ◆ Municipalities dedicate substantial resources to developing land-use plans and bylaws that reflect long-term community needs and growth priorities, and new projects must align with these frameworks.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta and quasi-judicial agencies must ensure land-use decisions are made in a timely, consistent, and coordinated manner across government and regulatory bodies, and in such a way that provincial decisions align with municipal land use plans and consider local risks and benefits.

Local Planning and Development Processes

- ◆ The shift towards an “automatic yes” approach for municipal development approvals risks limiting local input and municipal autonomy without evidence that municipalities are a barrier to development.
 - ◇ Municipalities are charged with planning and permitting roles in part to ensure safety for residents and businesses. Attempts to increase the speed and reduce oversight of development permits and other approvals risk creating an unsafe system.
- ◆ Offsite levies are a powerful tool for municipalities seeking to offset the cost of development from the developer. RMA supports enabling legislation that provides this opportunity.

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