

## Municipal Governance

*Municipal governance stands as a cornerstone of local democracy in Alberta, facilitating effective service delivery, nurturing economic development, and actively involving residents in decision-making processes. These efforts collectively create resilient communities across the province. Maintaining local governance is paramount, ensuring that decisions are tailored to meet the distinct needs of each municipality. In rural Alberta, this approach is particularly vital, as governance within each RMA member municipality is attuned to the preferences and requirements of its residents, honouring the unique essence of rural life.*

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

- ◆ Municipalities are responsible for making decisions on local issues that directly impact residents' daily lives and create the conditions for which businesses operate under. These include matters such as land use planning, local infrastructure development, waste management, and recreational facilities. Local councils are able to ensure that these decisions reflect the unique needs and priorities of each community within Alberta.
- ◆ Effective governance ensures that delivering essential services like water/wastewater, infrastructure, transportation, and emergency response is done effectively, efficiently, and equitably for all residents.
- ◆ 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. Election and governance processes should be developed to minimize the insertion of issues outside the scope of municipalities into municipal governance processes.

### What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to municipal governance?

- ◆ Municipal finances play a central role in municipal governance, influencing decision-making processes, service delivery priorities, infrastructure investments, and long-term planning initiatives.
- ◆ Municipalities must effectively budget for the delivery of essential services and infrastructure development while ensuring fiscal sustainability. This involves generating revenue through property taxes, grants, and other sources to cover operational expenses and capital investments.
- ◆ Municipalities bear the costs of providing various services, including waste management, road maintenance, public transit, emergency services, and recreational facilities. Balancing service levels with available resources is crucial to meet community needs without overburdening taxpayers.
- ◆ Allowing significant funding related to candidates and third-party advertising in local elections risks introducing non-local issues into the campaigning and election process.

## How does the work of the RMA support the sustainability of municipal governance?

- ◆ RMA supports local governments through a variety of mechanisms – from workshops to reports, RMA aims to provide tools that empower local leaders.
- ◆ Councillor codes of conduct are crucial to strong municipal governance. To support councils in developing and reviewing their codes of conduct, RMA partnered with ABmunis to create *Councillor Codes of Conduct: A Guide for Municipalities*.
- ◆ RMA has taken the position that local governments are in the best position to make decisions for their communities and with rare exception this responsibility should be upheld by other levels of government.
- ◆ RMA collaborates with ABmunis to operate the Elected Officials Education Program (EOEP). The EOEP delivers training to municipal councillors on a range of topics intended to enhance municipal governance.

## What current governance-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

### Bill 20: Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

- ◆ Bill 20, introduced in the spring 2024 legislative session, makes numerous changes to the *Municipal Government Act* and the *Local Authorities Election Act*.
- ◆ In October 2024, the Government of Alberta released a new set of regulations relating to Bill 20, which establish rules for local political parties and set expense limits for local election campaigns across the province – the *Local Political Parties and Slates Regulation* and the *Expense Limits Regulation*.
- ◆ Local politics should stay local. The addition of political parties at a municipal level is not conducive to how municipalities are run. Legitimizing municipal political parties risks introducing provincewide issues into local elections.
- ◆ RMA is opposed to the introduction of local political parties. However, if political parties are introduced on a provincewide basis, candidates should not gain a financial advantage in the form of additional monetary resources or higher expenses or campaign contribution limits as a result of joining a party.
- ◆ Bill 20 also includes changes which allow Cabinet to force a vote of electors for the recall of a councillor or amend/repeal bylaws for nearly any reason.
- ◆ Municipalities require autonomy to make local decisions. The Government of Alberta should not have the ability to infringe on this autonomy, but rather partner with municipalities to make decisions.
- ◆ Any provincial powers to remove councillors or interfere in local decisions must only be available in exceptional circumstances, such as criminal activity or obvious contravention of provincial legislation.
- ◆ Municipal governments should not be weaponized against other levels of government. As service providers, local governments rely on funding and support from both the provincial and federal governments and require respectful and collaborative relationships with both.

### Councillor Codes of Conduct

- ◆ Codes of conducts can be helpful to councils, but must be used as a tool within a broader governance process, not as the governance process itself.
- ◆ The province should provide an independent integrity commissioner to investigate complaints and determine sanctions.

- ◆ Currently, codes of conduct are sometimes “weaponized” to address minor disagreements or grievances. Councillors should have a clear understanding the purpose of codes and the risks of over-relying on them.
- ◆ RMA has released a Councillor Codes of Conduct guide to help municipalities develop codes which reflect the practices of their council and lead to healthy and constructive resolutions processes.

**Jared Shaigec**

*Policy Advisor*

825.319.2312

[jared@RMAAlberta.com](mailto:jared@RMAAlberta.com)