

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.

POSITION STATEMENT

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

- ◆ The RMA supports local governments through a variety of mechanisms – from workshops to reports, RMA aims to provide tools that empower local leaders.
- ◆ The 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 50: the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

- ◆ Bill 50: the *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025* was introduced to the Legislative Assembly on April 8, 2025. The Bill proposes a wide range of changes to the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA), the *Local Authorities Elections Act* (LAEA), the *New Home Buyer Protection Act* (NHBPAA), and the *Safety Codes Act* (SCA).
- ◆ Bill 50 significantly restructures the Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework (ICF) process by introducing a narrowed scope of mandatory services, enhancing requirements for input from contributing municipalities, introduces new planning and implementation provisions, and limits the scope of arbitration. Generally, RMA is supportive of the changes to the ICF process, which work to ensure a balance of provincewide consistency and local autonomy.
- ◆ RMA will continue to advocate for enhanced funding and capacity-building support from the Government of Alberta related to data-gathering and usage provisions which place higher expectations on municipalities as to how they develop ICFs; without proper support, many municipalities will be at high risk of being unable to develop and utilize quality data.
- ◆ The removal of the legislated requirement for municipalities to adopt Codes of Conduct for council members eliminates a key tool for ensuring accountability and transparency in local governance. Without a replacement framework, rural municipalities are left without clear guidance for addressing council member conduct.
- ◆ Mandatory standardization of municipal council meeting procedures through new provincial regulations may limit the ability of councils to govern in ways that reflect their unique local contexts. While consistency can benefit intermunicipal collaboration, rural municipalities may find one-size-fits-all procedures ill-suited to their governance needs.
- ◆ The new reporting requirements imposed on Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs), have introduced ambiguity that may lead to conflict or confusion between elected officials and municipal administrators. By blurring traditional boundaries and expectations, these changes risk straining relationships and undermining clarity in roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority.
- ◆ Amendments to the LAEA allow for greater involvement of political parties in municipal elections and introduce new campaign finance rules. These shifts may intensify partisanship at the local level and create additional barriers for non-partisan candidates in municipal elections.
- ◆ Despite the significant changes introduced through Bill 50, limited consultation with municipalities prior to its introduction has left many questions unanswered and potential risks unexplored. The absence of early and fulsome engagement has contributed to uncertainty around implementation, and municipalities continue to grapple with the practical implications of Bill 50's legislative amendments.

POSITION STATEMENT

Changes to Growth Management Board Membership

- ◆ Recent legislative changes have made participation in Growth Management Boards (GMBs) voluntary, providing municipalities with greater flexibility in deciding how to engage in regional planning and governance.
- ◆ Voluntary Growth Management Boards may reduce administrative and financial commitments associated with board participation, depending on local circumstances and priorities.
- ◆ The shift to voluntary Growth Management Boards may lead to varied approaches to regional planning, highlighting the importance of continued collaboration between municipalities where shared interests exist.

Recall of a Municipal Councillor

- ◆ The RMA supports a balanced, well-defined municipal recall process that upholds democratic principles while safeguarding against abuse. Any changes to the process must reflect the realities of Alberta's municipalities, reinforce transparency and fairness, and preserve the capacity and integrity of local governance.
- ◆ The RMA supports a recall process that is fair, equitable, and clearly defined in legislation and regulations, with specific objectives and criteria. In RMA's view, the threshold to recall a councillor should be reasonable and achievable, but not so low that it undermines the integrity of the democratic process. Recalling a duly elected official is a serious action that should only be considered under defined circumstances.
- ◆ While recall can have a role in holding municipal elected officials accountable to the electorate, it is a highly disruptive, politicized, and divisive process and should not be viewed as a substitute or replacement for mechanisms to support effective internal governance and accountability processes.
- ◆ Any amendments to municipal recall legislation should:
 - ◇ Ensure clarity and alignment with existing legislative mechanisms
 - ◇ Apply a rural lens to all regulatory reforms
 - ◇ Prevent weaponization and abuse
 - ◇ Support municipal capacity and administrative feasibility
 - ◇ Ensure fair, transparent, and scalable processes
 - ◇ Clarify and assess fundraising and advertising rules
 - ◇ Support public education and misinformation mitigation

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