

POSITION STATEMENT

June 26, 2026

Municipal Governance

Municipal governments are a cornerstone of local democracy in Alberta. Councils make decisions in the best interest of their local communities, which facilitate effective service delivery, economic development, and responsible land use planning. These processes create resilient communities across the province. Maintaining local autonomy 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.
- ◆ Recent provincial policy decisions to restrict municipal autonomy and centralize decision-making introduces significant risks to local representation, particularly in relation to planning and development.
- ◆ 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.

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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.
- ◆ Rural municipalities have a proven history of driving economic development. Ensuring they continue to have tools to steer development in the location and form that works locally is crucial to supporting Alberta's continued growth.
- ◆ Recent provincial policy and legislative changes have led to reduced local decision-making power and increased red tape for municipalities.
- ◆ 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

- ◆
- ◆ The repeal of mandated municipal codes of conduct has created a significant accountability gap. Bill 28 introduces an enabling framework for a new councillor accountability system, with a future regulation expected to be developed in the short-term. Any new regulation should be developed collaboratively with municipalities to ensure it strengthens councillor accountability while respecting local autonomy and accommodating diverse municipal contexts. Municipalities make development decisions based on local input and an understanding of local conditions. To

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do so, municipalities require information from project proponents that is frequently sourced from proponent provided studies. RMA supports the ability of municipalities to request studies from project proponents on issues that will impact their local decision-making.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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.

Municipal Autonomy and Provincial Oversight

- ◆ Recent legislative changes through Bills 19, 20, 50, and 28 have significantly expanded provincial authority to intervene in municipal bylaws, governance processes, and intergovernmental decision-making. These changes increase ministerial discretion, introduce new provincial approval requirements, and reduce the autonomy and decision-making authority traditionally afforded to municipalities. RMA supports a governance framework that preserves meaningful local decision-making and limits provincial intervention to occur only following fulsome and meaningful engagement.
- ◆ The *Provincial Priorities Act, 2024* (Bill 18) requires 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.
- ◆ Bill 28 significantly expands ministerial discretion in municipal viability reviews by making viability votes advisory rather than binding. Allowing the Minister to recommend dissolution or impose remedial measures regardless of the vote outcome reduces the certainty and influence of local elector input. Municipalities require clear guidance on how this discretion will be exercised to ensure transparency, predictability, and respect for local autonomy in viability processes.

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.



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