

POSITION STATEMENT

June 26, 2026

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. Recent provincial restrictions on local planning and development processes have been framed as red tape reduction for developers, especially in relation to residential development. Such changes risk increasing local land use conflicts, creating unexpected infrastructure strain, and interfering with long-term municipal plans for community growth. RMA will continue to advocate for planning and development to remain a local function that is based on local priorities, without unreasonable interference from industry interests or the Government of Alberta.

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

- ◆ Rural municipalities are responsible for planning and development decisions impacting most of the province's agricultural production, industrial activity, and environmentally sensitive areas. Alberta's nation-leading status and continued growth in such sectors indicates that rural municipalities have been effective in supporting industry growth and development locally and should continue to be empowered to do so.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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

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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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.
- ◆ Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association (ARMAA) and Local Government Administrators Association (LGAA): 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?

Local Planning and Development Processes

- ◆ Bill 28 introduces authority for the Government of Alberta to mandate automated “automatic yes” development permitting systems, reducing municipal discretion and limiting the ability to consider local context, cumulative impacts, or safety concerns. Any use of automated approvals must remain optional and respect municipal capacity and local decision-making.
- ◆ Bill 28 enables the Minister to establish standardized, province-wide “community design codes” that may override municipal plans and bylaws. Provincially imposed design standards risk misalignment with local servicing realities, development strategies, and local priorities.
- ◆ Bill 28 restricts the types of costs that can be funded through off-site levies, limiting municipal flexibility to design infrastructure that reflects local needs or long-term planning objectives.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta has signaled its intent to regulate the use of non-statutory planning studies, which municipalities rely on to assess safety, servicing, and compatibility. Limits on these studies could undermine responsible growth management and reduce municipalities’ ability to require information necessary for informed planning decisions.

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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.
- ◆ Bill 28 moves aggregate pit approvals into a provincially controlled process under MGA Section 619, reducing the role of municipalities in reviewing and influencing these developments. This shift raises concerns about how local conditions and community impacts will be considered when decisions are made at the provincial level.
- ◆ 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.

Regional Collaboration and Planning

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 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.

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