

Munis 101

Understanding Alberta's Municipal Governments



WE ARE
economies
OF SCALE

WE ARE THE
support
YOU NEED

WE ARE THE
experts
IN MUNICIPALITIES

WE ARE YOUR
advocate

What is municipal government?

Municipal governments are one of the three orders of government—along with provincial government and federal government—that work to serve the needs of citizens. Although each order has different roles and authorities, we all share a responsibility to serve the people of Alberta and to work together to ensure a sustainable future for our communities.

In Alberta, municipal governments are governed by the Municipal Government Act, which states that the purposes of municipalities are:

- to provide good government.
- to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality.
- to develop safe and viable communities.

These are responsibilities that the AUMA and its members take seriously.

Urban municipalities fall into five categories:

Cities have a population size of over 10,000 people. Those elected to the municipal council, are required to be residents of the wards they represent.

Towns have a population of at least 1,000 people and may exceed 10,000, unless city status is requested. The mayor and councillors are elected at large.

Villages may be formed upon request by 30% of electors in a community with a population of at least 300 people.

Summer Villages are the only municipality where a person can vote twice in municipal elections: once in the summer village and once in their permanent residence's municipality. Since 1995, summer villages can no longer be created in Alberta.

Specialized municipalities can be formed without resorting to special Acts of Legislature. Often, they allow urban and rural communities to coexist in a single municipal government.

What does municipal government look like?

Municipal governments consist of a council, made up of councillors that represent the electorate in the municipality, and a Chief Elected Official, known as the mayor. The councillor's job is to work with other council members to develop and create the policies that guide the overall direction of the municipality and how it is run.

Each councillor is elected to, and expected to, look after the municipality as a whole. The mayor and council are elected every four years. With a transparent and open local government, citizens have the right to attend council meetings and petition their council on issues of importance to them.

Along with the councillors and CEO, municipal governments must also create the position of a Chief Administrative Officer, who serves as the administrative head the municipality. This position focuses on the day-to-day administrative operations of the municipality and allows the councillors to focus on policymaking, and the strategic direction of the municipality.

Often, mayors and councillors become advocates for the community for services provided by other orders of government, examples of which include education and health services.



What do municipal governments do?

Municipal governments are intrinsically involved in the everyday lives of the people they serve. They guide and oversee the issues, programs and services that most directly impact the day-to-day lives of its citizens.

Alberta's Municipal Government Act has three main areas of focus:

- Planning and development
- Governance and administration
- Assessment and taxation.

Within each of those areas, there are myriad roles, responsibilities, services and programs that municipalities develop, administer and assess, including:

- Drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater
- Garbage collection and recycling
- Police and emergency services
- Land use planning and development
- Environmental impact and conservation
- Economic development
- Maintenance and upgrading of bridges, streets and potholes.
- Social housing
- Recreation and culture.

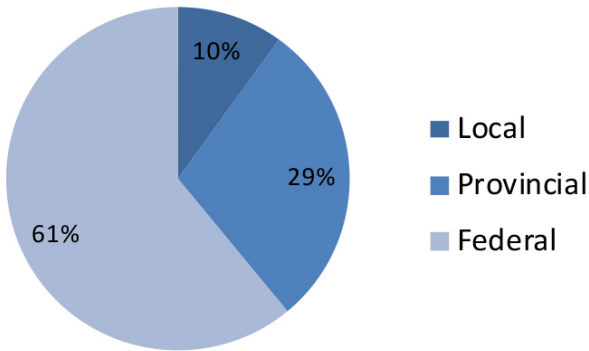
These are the programs, facilities and services that impact citizens in the here and now—the things that make communities safe, livable and sustainable. Municipalities work closely with their provincial and federal counterparts to create a quality of life that makes people want to invest in their communities and make that community their permanent home.



How are municipalities funded?

Municipal funding is complex and sometimes confusing. It includes a mix of tax revenue, fluctuating transfer payments and grants, and user charges and service fees.

Total tax collected by level of government



Municipalities are responsible for 57% of the public infrastructure. This is done with 10% of the total tax base, which municipalities collect as a portion of the property tax revenue their residents pay in total, as well as transfers and grants received from other orders of government.

These huge infrastructure obligations need long-term transfer commitments as property taxes cannot support current needs or future growth.

One of the issues municipalities have been exploring with both the provincial and federal orders of government is a way to create more predictable, sustainable funding. A more stable approach to funding will allow municipalities to plan for and implement services and infrastructure needs in their communities—both today and for the future.

The importance of municipal government

Municipal governments are mentioned in the constitution and are created by provincial legislation, which assigns them certain duties and responsibilities. This is done through the Municipal Government Act.

The province regulates some of the work done by municipalities in areas such as municipal finance and land-use planning, while initiatives relating to cultural diversity and recreation are locally driven. Many of the federal programs that impact municipalities are handled through federal-provincial agreements. The province is responsible for regulating environmental standards for such things as water.

As the closest level of government to our citizens, municipalities are essential to creating healthy, sustainable communities. Municipalities are the places where Albertans build their families, their careers and their homes. It's where people access the programs, facilities and services they need to live their lives and contribute to the economic prosperity of their municipality and this province and country. Municipalities champion the wellbeing of their citizens and create opportunities for residents to contribute to decisions about the local issues that matter to them.

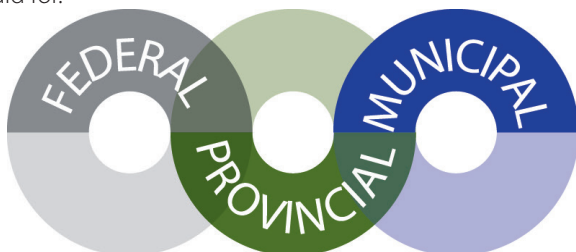


How municipalities work with the provincial government

The Alberta government recognizes the importance of giving municipalities the autonomy they need to make decisions that reflect local needs and priorities through the Municipal Government Act. Those priorities are reflected in the services provided by individual municipalities, which they fund using a mix of local revenues raised through property and business taxes, utility and service fees, as well as provincial or federal grants. The province and municipalities often partner in the delivery of shared jurisdiction services.

Alberta's Municipal Government Act spells out municipal duties and responsibilities, as well as requirements to ensure transparency and accountability. As part of this expectation, each municipality must submit an annual financial information return and an auditor's report by May 1 of each year. Alberta's municipalities also collaborate with their provincial counterparts through the AUMA and its working groups, meetings, events and other advocacy efforts. In addition, AUMA produces a variety of communications tools for provincial officials that focus on the issues impacting municipalities.

Through the Municipal Government Act, provincial and municipal governments work together to decide which government services are best delivered on a local basis, and how the services are paid for.



Who is AUMA?

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) represents urban municipalities including cities, towns, villages, summer villages and specialized municipalities. We work to engage our members and develop strategic partnerships between all orders of government to meet municipal needs. We also strive to be a resource for both our members and the provincial and federal orders of government.

The Alberta Municipal Services Corporation (AMSC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of AUMA, is a solutions-based company that works to deliver innovative products and services to municipalities, municipally related organizations and their employees.

Contact us

If you'd like to learn more about Alberta's municipalities, and the services and resources AUMA provides, please contact us.

AUMA/AMSC
Alberta Municipal Place
300 – 8616 51 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6E 6E6
780.433.4431 310.AUMA
main@auma.ca

