

Resources for Learning about Municipal Government

Glossary



Common words used in municipal government

Acclamation: A candidate is elected by acclamation when there are no opponents running against him or her in an election.

Accountability: People are expected to be responsible for their actions and may be required to explain them to others. Representatives are accountable to the residents of the municipality in which they are elected.

Administration: The people in the municipal organization who are responsible for making sure policies and decisions of council are carried out for the day-to-day operations. The head of administration is the Chief Administrative Officer.

Advisory council: a group of people who are appointed to help with the implementation of the policies and decisions of an area. For example, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is responsible for improvement districts (ID), and an elected advisory council guides the activities of the ID.

Appointed: being hired into, designated, or chosen for a role. In some municipalities, the mayor or reeve is chosen by and from the group of councillors who have been elected by the citizens. The Chief Administrative Officer is hired by council and appointed to the position.

Authority: The power and permission to speak, make decisions, give orders, and enforce rules.

Boundary: An imaginary line or border that indicates the limits or extent of an area.

Budget: An estimate of income (also called revenue or money coming in) and expenditures (money that is spent) for a set period of time.

Built environment: the buildings and spaces in a municipality, such as homes, schools, parks, commercial, and industrial areas, as well as the infrastructure that supports and connects them, such as roads and sidewalks.

By-election: an election held to fill a vacant position at a date other than the general election date if an elected municipal official must step down or resign part way through his/her four-year term of office.

Bylaw: a law passed and enforced by a local authority in accordance with the powers given to that authority. In Alberta, the authority to make bylaws is given to municipal governments through the Municipal Government Act.

Bylaw enforcement officers: municipal employees who enforce the bylaws of the municipality.

Candidate: a person nominated to run for election for a position on council.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO): The main appointed official of a municipality who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the municipality. The CAO hired is hired by the municipal council to lead and manage the municipality's employees.

Chief Elected Official: the person who leads and is the public spokesperson for the council and the municipality. The title of the Chief Elected Official in a municipality is generally Mayor or Reeve.

Citizen: a person who lives in a municipality.

City: a large urban municipality with a population of at least 10 000 people.

Community: a group of people who have something in common, such as a geographic location, a common identity, or shared goals.

Community Scan: a description of ways of life, questions, decisions, interests and issues that influence and affect the community. A community scan collects information and examples about the community, and identifies issues and challenges that municipal governments can deal with.

Consensus: a general agreement between individuals or groups of people.

Constituents: The residents, property owners, and business owners in a municipality, generally considered to be those who are able to vote in an election.

Council: refers to people who are elected officials responsible for representing the interests of their residents.

Councillor / Elected Official / Council Member: Councillors are elected representatives of the municipality.

Council meeting: meetings of the elected members of council, where community concerns, issues, policies, projects, and actions are debated, discussed and vote upon.

County / Municipal District: a rural area that can include many different landscapes such as farmland, forested areas, mountains and parkland. Counties can include smaller communities such as hamlets or country residential subdivisions.

Country residential subdivisions: areas that are usually in a municipal district or county, but near an urban community, on which housing is built.

Democracy: a system of government in which people choose their rulers by voting for them in elections.

Development: can refer to an area of houses or buildings which have been built by property developers, or changes in a municipality, such as new projects, neighbourhoods, buildings, facilities and services.

Electors / Electorate: those people who can elect, or vote for, representatives who are responsible for making decisions and representing the people who live and work in a particular area. In Alberta, a person can vote in

municipal elections if the person is at least 18 years old, is a Canadian citizen, has lived in Alberta for six months before the election day and resides in the municipality on election day.

Elected at-large: Councillors are elected by all eligible voters in the municipality.

Election: An election is a process in which people vote to choose a person or group of people to hold an official position, such as residents voting for municipal councillors.

Electoral Division/District/Ward: a geographic area that a municipality can use to divide areas for election purposes, based on the number of people who live there. A municipality may have one or more councillors for every electoral division.

Electoral process: the manner in which voters elect representatives from those nominated as candidates in an election.

Expenses / Expenditures: money that used to purchase goods and services.

Family and community support services

(FCSS): a service area in a municipality that provides programs such as Meals-on-Wheels, seniors transportation, youth recreation programs, and mental health supports.

First Nations reserve: a legal entity that is not part of any municipality. The federal government is responsible for First Nations reserves.

Govern: to make decisions for or have control over a specific geographic area (e.g. a

municipality) or organization (e.g. non-profit society).

Governance: the rules and processes that guide the way decisions are made in and between formal institutions, such as governments, schools, or businesses.

Hamlet: a community of five or more dwellings, boundaries that help identify the community, a name, and contains land that is used for non-residential purposes.

Improvement District (ID): The provincial government is responsible for all of the functions of municipal government in improvement districts, including the levy and collection of taxes. The residents of an improvement district may elect representatives, who are subsequently appointed by the Minister, to an advisory council that assists in its administration and governance. Five of the eight IDs in Alberta are located in national parks.

Legislation: laws that are put into place and enforced by a government.

Levy: an amount of money charged and collected.

Lobby: to try to influence and put pressure on representatives from different levels of government to make their opinions known through strategies such as media campaigns and petitions.

Lobby group is a group that tries to change or influence policy or legislation towards its interests.

Local authorities: are areas in Alberta that provide governance to a geographic area. Examples of local authorities are municipalities, improvement districts, regional health authorities, and school districts.

Local / General Elections: residents of the community vote for individuals who will represent their interests on the municipality's council. Local elections are held every four years in Alberta.

Local / Municipal Government: the level of government given the power to make decisions that relate to local issues and services. Local governments work within communities to represent the interests and goals of community members, and make decisions on what services will be provided in the community.

Mandatory: something that is required.

Mayor / Reeve: the title of a Chief Elected Official. The Chief Elected Official is the person who chairs council meetings and is the public spokesperson for the council and municipality.

Métis settlements: There are eight in Alberta that were established by the Métis Settlements Act of Alberta. Métis settlements are not considered to be municipalities, but are treated like a form of local government.

Municipal Council: the group of people who are elected to make decisions on behalf of people who live in the municipality.

Municipal District / County: a rural areas that can include many different landscapes such as farmland, forested areas, mountains and

parkland. Municipal districts can include smaller communities such as hamlets or country residential subdivisions.

Municipal Employees: people who are hired to work for the municipality and are responsible for following its policies as well as providing services to the community.

Municipal Government Act (MGA): The Municipal Government Act is the legislative framework in which all municipalities and municipal entities across the Province of Alberta operate. Under the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*, municipalities are responsible for providing good government; services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality; and to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

Municipality: Municipalities have clearly defined boundaries and are formed to provide government to the population within those boundaries.

Neighbourhood: an area within a community. Neighbourhoods usually have boundaries that define their area and a population.

Nominated: when a person has been chosen or is supported to run for an elected position.

Non-profit organizations: groups or organizations that are usually formed to support public or private interests without expecting to make a profit by doing so. Non-profit organizations can support activities related to protecting the environment, protecting animal interests, providing support programs for seniors and children or providing recreation or sports to a community.

Non-residential land: land without residents or dwellings in which people live. Examples include land where stores, office buildings or car lots are located.

Peace Officers: trained professionals who are appointed by the provincial government and hired by municipalities. They have very specific and limited law enforcement authority in such areas as liquor, traffic and noxious weeds.

Penalty: a punishment that is applied if rules are not followed.

Petition: a document that presents a point of view on an issue and is signed by people who support that view. Petitions are sometimes used as a tool to communicate a point of view to government.

Police service: In Alberta, most municipalities receive their police service from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). A number of municipalities provide police service using their own municipal police forces. In addition, there are First Nation police departments such as the Blood Tribe Police and the Tsuu T'ina Nation Police that provide policing services to their individual communities on reserves.

Policies: guidelines that determine how services and programs will be provided by a municipality.

Population: the people who inhabit, or live in, an area. Also the number of people in a group.

Population density: a measurement of population in an area which is calculated by

dividing the number of people living in an area by the square kilometres of land in that area.

Press Release: informs the local media about an event, a report or an issue. A press release gives reporters information they need to write a news story.

Priorities: choices that are considered to be the most important.

Private spaces: areas that are used by an individual, such as a locker or desk. In a municipality, private spaces may include privately-owned businesses that set hours when people can come in, private homes, or land.

Property: land, buildings and businesses in a municipality.

Property assessment: the process of placing a dollar value on land and property developments. This value is used when calculating the amount of property taxes that will be charged to the owner of this land or property.

Property Taxes: an amount of money charged to property owners in the municipality based on the value of the land and any developments (e.g. buildings on the land).

Provincial government is the level of government that is responsible for looking after the needs and interests of the province as a whole.

Public lands: Lands owned by the provincial government, which are generally used for grazing, cultivation or irrigation.

Public spaces: shared spaces in a municipality, such as roads, streets and sidewalks, parks, recreational facilities, and libraries.

Public works: services and facilities such as roads and streets, sidewalks and lighting, storm water management, equipment management, engineering and public transit.

Regional health authorities: local authorities that have representatives appointed to provide public services for health care.

Regional school divisions: local authorities that elect representatives to provide public services for education.

Representative democracy: provides residents with the ability to elect a representative to govern and make decisions on their behalf.

Representatives: people who are elected or appointed to represent the residents of a municipality or local authority, discuss issues and ideas in council meetings or board meetings and let people know about their decisions.

Resident: people who live, or reside, within a municipality.

Resolution: A record of a municipal council's decision on an issue and the action it wishes to take relating to that issue.

Resources: the useful or valuable possessions or qualities of a country, organization or person. Resources can come from the environment as well as from the products and services that people in a municipality or community make and provide.

Revenue: money that comes into a municipality through various methods, such as taxes, levies, and sale of land.

Rural: areas with farming and agricultural activities, generally with a relatively low population density.

Solid waste management: methods of dealing with household, commercial, industrial, and agricultural waste.

Special Areas: an area of local authority in east-central Alberta. The purpose of a special area is to provide administration of Crown land and came about when the province took ownership of large areas of land resulting from unpaid taxes during the Depression.

Special interest group: a group with an interest in a specific area that works to promote its beliefs, values and views.

Specialized municipality: a type of municipality that is formed when other types do not suitably meet the needs of its residents. Specialized municipalities may include both urban and rural characteristics in one municipality. Alberta examples include Strathcona County and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Strategic plan: used to set the direction for the future of the municipality. It is a statement of beliefs, principles or guidelines that guide the work of an organization, and considers the roles and responsibilities of the people involved.

Summer village: are a form of government that was designed to meet the needs of part-time

residents in specific areas, often next to lakes. Summer villages required at least 60 per cent of the land to have buildings used as dwellings. A summer village may no longer be created.

Sustainable: maintaining at a certain level. At the municipal level, this can involve ensuring there are enough resources for the future of the community when making decisions for the present.

Taxes: an amount of money that is charged and collected on such things as property, income and business profits, or added to the cost of some goods, services, and transactions.

Term of office: the length of time that a representative holds an elected position. In Alberta, the term of office for a municipal councillor is four years.

Town: an urban municipality that can be formed when an area has at least 1 000 people.

Urban: areas in which there are cities, towns and villages. Urban areas often have a higher population density than rural areas.

User fees: fees for using services and are commonly used to pay for utilities such as water services, sewer and garbage pick-up.

Utilities: services such as water services, wastewater management, and solid waste management.

Viable: Something that has the ability to work successfully, to grow, and develop.

Village: an urban municipality that can be formed if there is a population of at least 300 people.

Volunteer: a person who provides time and services to support activities and people, without expecting any financial fee or reward.

Voter: a person who has the legal right to vote in an election.

Ward / Electoral Division: a specific area used to divide a municipality for the purposes of elections, based on the number of people who live there. The council of a municipality may have one or more councillors for every ward.

Wastewater management: providing a system to dispose of water that has been used by residents of a municipality.

Water services: involve using a water resource and, in some municipalities, the storage of treated and untreated water. Water service also includes the movement of untreated water to a treatment facility, the storage of treated water in a reservoir, and a pipe or distribution system to homes, businesses and industry.