

Rethinking Municipal Governance for a Changing Alberta: Future of Local Governance Communications Package

Backgrounder

Beginnings:

In 2008, the AUMA Board of Directors set a goal to investigate the state of municipal government and/or the possibilities of integrating Government. But the issue is neither new, nor a purely municipal debate. In fact, governance has been discussed by provincial officials in Alberta over the past several years. Provincial officials talk about sustainability of municipalities, and they have stated publicly that there are too many municipalities in Alberta. However, they have been slow to release official criteria on how they define a sustainable municipality.

AUMA began the investigation into the future of local governance by asking if members believed municipal government in Alberta could stay the same.

The answer was a resounding “No.”

As a result of this and other feedback from the members in 2008, the **Future of Local Governance Initiative** was launched in 2009 with the following objectives:

- review the current state of local governance (legislative, program, policy, financial and restructuring), and current issues affecting local governance;
- develop clear options related to effective local governance, including an assessment of the effectiveness of the proposed options for change;
- consider the risks and benefits of proposed options for change and the incentives required to make changes; and
- review examples outside of Alberta where local governance has been restructured and why it worked or did not work.

That there has been no formal process or framework established by the Government of Alberta for assessing the sustainability of municipal governments means uncertainty for municipal elected officials, municipal administrators, and for community members concerned about the future of their communities.

The present **AUMA Draft Convention Policy Paper** attempts to fill that void by making recommendations to both AUMA and the Government of Alberta on how to assess municipal governance sustainability, and how to assist municipal governments that may wish to consider a change in their governance structure.

AUMA is proud to have developed this Draft Policy paper that has led to the broader discussion of the options for the future of local governance in Alberta.

AUMA Actions:

Following the 2008 Convention, the Board of Directors established a **Task Force on the Future of Local Governance** to assist AUMA in developing policy on the issue. The Task Force consists of administrators representing summer villages, villages, towns and cities who meet regularly to shepherd the research process and draft the Convention Policy Paper. AUMA's Standing Committee on Municipal Governance and the AUMA Board of Directors have also been heavily invested in this project and provide the final direction on the Initiative.

AUMA first reviewed municipal government restructuring in other jurisdictions and then commissioned an **online survey** on the topic. The findings were published in a Future of Local Governance Online Survey Report.

A **Discussion Paper** on the Future of Local Governance was developed and published as a tool for discussion at the **2009 AUMA President's Summit on Local Governance** held in Red Deer this spring. The Summit included workshops where participants considered and discussed potential municipal governance models.

The following points were emphasized by participants at the President's Summit:

- No one governance model that can be applied across Alberta. Each situation/area is unique. **The main goal is to move to a model of governance that will be sustainable.**
- Urban and rural municipal governments are equally affected by changes to local governance structure, and by discussions about changing or remaining the same.
- All types of municipal governments should work together on this initiative, including the two municipal associations in Alberta.
- A Toolkit for municipal governance sustainability is required (including performance measures).
- Progress in sustainability would improve if the Government of Alberta would supply the criteria it is using to define "sustainable" or "viable" municipal governments.

In June, a **Draft Convention Policy Paper** was released broadly for comment. The AUMA Board of Directors will approve a final Policy Paper for consideration at the AUMA Convention in November 2009.

What Lies Ahead:

The Future of Local Governance initiative is an ongoing effort. AUMA is both a voice and a service for its membership. To press forward and provide value on both counts, the final Policy Paper will propose recommendations to both the Association and to the Government of Alberta.