

Op-Ed

Rethinking Municipal Governance for a Changing Alberta

Is municipal governance in crisis?

In a recent survey by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), 59 per cent of municipalities reported they believed municipal governance in Alberta needs to change in order to meet the challenges of the future.

That message echoes an underlying general and widespread uncertainty about the sustainability of municipalities in Alberta. Alberta Municipal Affairs Minister Ray Danyluk has stated that about 60 Albertan municipalities are struggling to exist.

AUMA President Lloyd Bertschi notes that Alberta's villages with small populations struggle to provide services because of their small tax base. Other municipalities are having difficulty finding skilled administrative staff.

The situation is complicated by the Province's lack of clarity when it comes to defining what a sustainable or viable municipality is, while at the same time claiming that municipal changes are needed.

[INSERT : You may wish to include some details about your own municipality's concerns over local governance here – e.g.

In XXXXX we are struggling with.... Our long term prospects are compromised by If we understood the ..etc.].

Municipal government in this province may very well be facing a crossroads and the AUMA is leading the search for a solution.

The Future of Local Governance (FOLG) initiative is AUMA's framework for a comprehensive review and discussion of how municipal governance is working in Alberta now, and where changes may be needed. A two-day think tank on the subject attracted nearly 300 municipal and provincial stakeholders this spring.

Research so far indicates it is unlikely that a "one-size fits all" model will be a solution. AUMA's is looking at restructuring approaches from other parts of the country and around the world to begin the dialogue between Albertans and their municipal leaders in creating possible new governance structures.

For example, AUMA considered the systems of local and regional government in British Columbia and Ontario and looked at how Denmark restructured using a minimum-population base for its municipalities.

AUMA's Future of Local Governance Task Force has already produced a Draft Policy Paper. This will be brought forward for discussion and approval as Policy at the Association's Annual Convention in November. The final Policy Paper will provide the Minister important background as we all consider what lies ahead for the municipalities of this province.

AUMA's Draft Policy Paper and related research is available for viewing on its website: www.auma.ca

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