

Small Communities Newsletter

Contact

Please feel free to contact us with questions or comments about the newsletter or the Small Communities Committee.

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Small Communities Standing Committee

The Small Communities Committee is a unified voice, advocate and resource, focusing on urban municipal governments with populations of 2,500 or less. The Committee is comprised of seven members from communities of 2500 or less, including two AUMA Board members.

The Committee is accountable to the Board for: sharing services - regional and AMSC aggregated; reviewing and recommending suggestions for under 2500 Mayor's Caucuses; reviewing the status of MSP (Municipal Sustainability Project) that is impacting Small Communities; and defining the process, developing a Work Plan and updating the Terms of Reference for the Committee.

Small Communities Take Action at the Rural Communities First Responders Conference

Small, rural, and remote communities gathered on August 26 and 27 in Stettler to discuss the impact of the provincial transition of ambulance dispatch on their local communities, fire departments, and first responders.

The well attended event included representation from AUMA, AAMDC, Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and numerous municipalities across Alberta.

Keynote speaker Dr. Rich Gasaway spoke about the importance of having a well integrated emergency response system. Dr. Gasaway raised the need for well trained and coordinated pre-hospital care as one of the key components to a system that places the patients' well being first. Communication, leadership and team work are the hallmarks of the best emergency response systems, according to Dr. Gasaway.

Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness talked about the provincial 5 year plan for Alberta's emergency medical system. Participants took this opportunity

Small Communities AUMA Convention Session



Calgary TELUS Convention Centre September 28-30, 2011

The infrastructure deficit in small communities is a provincial wide problem

In Case You Missed it: Changes to Weed Control Act

The world of weeds changed last summer. Effective June 16, 2010, old legislation was replaced by a new Weed Control Act and regulation. Regulations have been joined together to stimulate increasingly efficient protection of our land from invasive plants and to guard the production and quality of that land. The Weed Control Act has also expanded the list of invasive plants, which increases our ability to ensure that unwanted plants do not enter Alberta. Other changes include developments to enforcement and appeal processes, improvements in the seed-cleaning sector and other industry advances.

The Weed Control Act and Regulation is available here: [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/acts6156](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/acts6156). If you have questions or comments about the changes to the Act, please contact Zohreh Saher, Research Analyst, 780.989.7407 or by [e-mail](mailto:zsaher@auma.ca).

requiring action. The Small Communities Committee session will take a close look at how this issue can be addressed. Panelists at the session will talk about how municipalities across the province are tackling this issue head on.

The panelists are: **Mayor Jenelle Saskiw**, Village of Marwayne, **James Marr**, Engineer with Banner Environmental Engineering Consultants, and **Andy Pfeifer**, Public Works Manager, Town of Black Diamond.

The session is Wednesday, September 28 10:00-11:30 am at the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre.

Are Canada's Rural Areas Being Ruined or Renewed by Urbanites?

No one likes urban sprawl. But the reality is more Canadians are living in suburbs and small towns than ever before. What is this doing to Canada's countryside? Are rural areas being ruined or revitalized? Find out more by listening to this recent segment on [CBC's Cross Country Checkup](http://www.cbc.ca/crosscountry).

Message from the Chair

It has been a great pleasure to Chair the Small Communities Committee this past year. What a great group we had that made my first experience in being the Chair a very rewarding one.

I believe this Committee is important. We all know that smaller communities face different challenges. Being able to tackle these with a common perspective is vital. In addition to the Work Plan and Mandates that we worked on, we also shared roundtable discussions at the end of our meeting so that we could further discover the issues that are most prevalent to us at a local level and perhaps even discover a solution or an idea to try! This practice also aids us in discovering new mandates for

our action plan, as well as topics for the Mayors' Caucuses.

We had a busy year—tackling subjects such as the MSP project, the Municipal Sustainability Strategy, Emergency Services and Infrastructure Deficit. I would like to thank the Committee and staff for their hard work and dedication.

In our Small Communities session at the AUMA convention, we will be exploring solutions to the infrastructure deficit. I look forward to seeing you there!

Kindest Regards,
Anita Gillard
Committee Chair
Mayor, Village of Clive



Pigeon Lake Summer Villages Celebrate Collaborative Success

Staff and council of all ten Pigeon Lake Summer are celebrating provincial support for advancing new cooperative initiatives within the region. Support will come in the form of \$175,000 in Regional Collaboration Project grants. This grant program supports strategic activities that improve the viability and long-term sustainability of municipalities through regional collaboration and capacity building. Eligible projects include the development of intermunicipal partnerships through shared administration and integrated growth management plans, transitional costs associated with the shared delivery of municipal services, and internship program costs. The Government of Alberta expects to award nearly \$9 million in 2011-12 grants.

"We're thrilled that Minister Goudreau and the Municipal

Affairs department recognize the value of our regionally-focused initiatives and have provided us with these grants" said Sylvia Roy, Chief Administrative Officer of seven of the ten Summer Villages. "It validates our efforts in promoting cooperation among our collective municipalities and promoting Summer Villages as viable, sustainable communities". The funding will be used to develop a regional emergency plan (\$100,000) and to study a regional model for policing that would encompass the duties of RCMP, community peace officers and bylaw enforcement (\$75,000). These initiatives will advance an already strong regional partnership that includes sharing a number of services including community peace officers and solid waste collection, and striving to have common documents such as quality management plans

through the Alberta Safety Codes Council, bylaws, policies and weed inspection.

"We're anxious to get started on these critical regional initiatives" says Roy. "I'm pleased to work beyond my shared

administrative office for seven summer villages and work with the CAOs and councils of the other three communities. I believe that any of these services and practices could be implemented by other small municipalities, Summer Villages in particular, due to

their short distance from each other around Alberta lakes".

For more information, please contact Sylvia Roy, CAO, Summer Villages Office at 780.586. 2494 or by [e-mail](#).

First Responders, continued

Rural Community First Responders

to express concerns about the impact that the transition of ambulance dispatch has had on a number of communities. Participants raised concerns around dysfunctional communications between local first responders and ambulance services, the increased demands being placed on voluntary firefighters who serve as first responders, the lack of coordination between various emergency responders, and issues around the proper use and availability of the needed technological resources to ensure an effective and coordinated emergency medical system.

Conference organizers held conversation cafes as a way of promoting dialogue between stakeholders. The Conference

organizers will now move forward on developing a working group to continue to examine these issues and implement follow up actions.

To find out more, please contact Barb Sjoquist, Mayor, Village of Edgerton at 780.842.0615 or by [e-mail](#).

On a final note, Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services will have a trade show booth at AUMA's Annual Convention. They are open to meeting with communities that have concerns on ambulance, dispatch, etc. You could also arrange a meeting at the AUMA Convention with Alberta Health and Wellness/AHS by calling toll-free 310-0000 or 780-422-9654, or by [email](#).



Welcoming and Inclusive Communities – Findings from the Survey of Small Communities

What is the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities project?

The primary objective of the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) project is to build the capacity of municipalities to become more welcoming and inclusive and to combat racism and discrimination in their communities. The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities project is a partnership between AUMA, Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and the Government of Alberta. Please visit: <http://wic.auma.ca/> to find out more.

What was the purpose of the survey?

As existing research on diversity and inclusion in Alberta is likely focused towards large urban centres, the WIC project recently conducted a survey of small communities to gain an understanding of their perspectives. The survey findings outlined in the final report will be used to develop an engagement strategy to

encourage small communities to participate in the WIC initiative and to examine if and how the WIC project and resources could be utilized in these municipalities.

What is the current reality in Alberta?

Demographic trends suggest that the province will be increasingly diverse due to our heavy reliance on immigration to meet our current and future workforce requirements. Service needs in municipalities across the province are expected to become more diverse over time as many citizens will come from a wide range of countries, cultures and backgrounds. Despite public perception that discrimination is not a problem in Alberta, there is evidence that it continues to exist and negatively affect particular groups of people around the province.

What did small communities have to say?

Survey findings indicate that small municipalities in Alberta identify themselves as welcoming and inclusive

communities with varying levels of diversity. Work currently being done to promote welcoming and inclusive environments includes initiatives led by libraries, FCSS, and other community agencies.

Participants identified four main barriers to participation in the WIC initiative: resource and capacity strain, declining community participation, differences in priorities and attitudes, and limited opportunities for further learning. In addition to these barriers, participants suggested numerous opportunities for AUMA to continue to support their work, including: facilitating WIC projects at the regional level (rather than with individual towns and villages) in order to encourage effective sharing of resources and time, and having workshops/conferences in varying municipalities around the province on topics such as cultural diversity, accommodation, and strategies for attracting entrepreneurs.

What do these findings mean for the WIC project?

Recommendations AUMA to engage and support small municipalities in the WIC project include: utilizing an asset-building approach, investigating the possibility of collaboration on WIC projects at the regional level, establishing Community Advisory Committees of local residents to work on WIC activities, continuing the development of resources on the WIC website, and investigating opportunities for web conferencing and online learning. The findings of this survey and recommendations were recently presented to AUMA Small Communities Committee. WIC will continue to follow-up on these recommendations in future work with small communities.

How can you find out more?

For more information about the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities project and how your community can become involved, please contact Marc Colbourne, Senior Project Coordinator by [e-mail](mailto:) or 780.989.7419.

Online Initiative Enhances Rural Alberta Physician Recruitment Efforts

The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan (RPAP) has launched a new online resource to help rural Alberta communities enhance their efforts to attract and retain rural physicians.

The new [Community Physician Attraction and Retention website](#) offers rural communities a unique platform to access RPAP attraction and retention resources, and to network and share best practices amongst communities.

Unique features include:

- Individual community homepages allowing each community to highlight and promote the work they are doing to other communities in Alberta.

- Updates on resources and supports offered to communities from RPAP free of charge, such as the Cultural Integration Workshop and information sessions.
- A password-protected online repository for committee minutes, agenda's and working papers accessible only to committee members.
- Importantly, committees are able to distribute meeting notes, minutes, agendas and meeting updates to members via email.

The new Community Physician Attraction and Retention website is only the latest in a number of initiatives currently offered by RPAP to assist rural Alberta communities in the

attraction and retention of physicians:

- Community Physician Attraction & Retention Grants are available to communities to assist in the operations of community recruitment and retention committee, or the development of materials or other resources that are determined to be required to support recruitment and retention.
- Registration for the 4rd Annual Rural Alberta Community Physician Attraction and Retention Conference, 26-28 October 2011 in Edmonton, is now underway. This year's theme is "Engage the Community. Retain the Physician." Deadline for registration is

October 14 2011.

- Give your community a healthy dose of recognition! The Alberta Rural Community Attraction and Retention Award, co-sponsored by RPAP and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, recognize excellence in physician attraction and retention by a rural Alberta community. Submit your nominations to RPAP by 5 p.m. on September 30, 2011. [Check out their home page](#), for more details.

For more information on RPAP initiatives, please visit [Alberta Health Services](#), the [RPAP main website](#), or call toll-free 1-866-423-9911.

Working with Volunteers: Tips for Success

Volunteers are the backbone of many organizations. They can do everything from stuffing envelopes to serving on boards of directors. They raise funds for charity, coach sports teams, run youth and children's programs, deliver meals, shop for the elderly, help recent immigrants settle in, work to protect the environment, help feed hungry people, guide museum and art gallery visitors, and build homes for homeless people.

Volunteers make a vital contribution to all aspects of community life.

At the heart of volunteering is the willingness and ability to give freely of time out of a sense of solidarity and responsibility without financial gain. Even though volunteers provide their services for free, they require just as careful recruitment, training, management and supervision as do paid staff.

In order to recruit volunteers, it is important to give some thought to why people would want to work for your organization. Typically, there are three main reasons that people choose to volunteer: they want to contribute to a good cause, they hope to develop new skills, or they want to meet people and make new friends. Knowing why particular individuals may want to work for you will help you in recruiting the right people for your organization. Look to schools, corporate volunteer programs, community centres, the local media, religious centres, volunteer recruitment fairs, and civic clubs as places to recruit.

In order for volunteers to do the best job possible for your organization, they must know exactly what's required of them, so training is critical. All new volunteers will require not only basic training in how to meet their responsibilities, but also an overview of your organization's mission, values and daily work routine. In order for volunteers to remain interested in their work, it is also important to provide them with ongoing opportunities to

learn.

Overseeing your organization's volunteers does not end with recruitment and training. Managing your volunteers is an ongoing task that involves constantly clarifying volunteers' roles and responsibilities, providing feedback to your volunteers on their work, keeping records of their performance, and keeping your volunteers inspired.

Just as you would with a paid staff, matching the right person with the right job is critical for volunteers to be successful. For volunteers to feel appreciated and contribute in a meaningful way, you should ask them to work on projects reflecting their strengths.

As is the case with paid employees, some volunteers may feel overburdened with work and have the potential to burn-out. Making sure your volunteers are not shouldering more than their share and that they are comfortable letting you know if they are working too hard will help prevent volunteer burn-out.

One of the greatest challenges a nonprofit organization can face is preventing friction between paid and volunteer staff. To help avoid problems arising from unclear or overlapping responsibilities, clear job descriptions should be written out for every position on your volunteer staff.

Volunteer recognition plays a crucial role in working with volunteers. Even though no one who volunteers does so for recognition or praise, it is important that their contribution not be taken for granted. Special volunteer luncheons, volunteer of the month awards and volunteer social events all go a long way in showing your gratitude and appreciation. If you want to nominate a volunteer star in your community, [click here](#).

More volunteer related resources could be found at



the [Alberta Culture and Community Spirit website](#), at the [Volunteer Alberta website](#) as well as at [Volunteer Canada website](#).

Working with Volunteers: Success Stories from Small Communities

In this edition of the newsletter, you'll have read about some tips about volunteer retention. Take a few moments to read some volunteer success stories from small communities.

Village of Edgerton

The Fire N Wheels group (a group of volunteers) works with local Fire Departments (also volunteers) to raise funds for the departments. The first event was in Wainwright, the second in Irma and the third in Edgerton where just over \$80,000 was raised to go towards a new fire hall. Over the last three years over \$200,000 has been raised. Mayor Barb Sjoquist says, "This one is really unique to me because the Wheels guys have absolutely nothing to gain from all the work they do on behalf of the departments and the communities they represent. They are a group of men and women, most of whom ride motorbikes, and they have found a way to support a very worthwhile cause in communities they may not even live in".

Summer Village of Grandview

Don Davidson is the Mayor of the Summer Village of Grandview. When recent amendments to Alberta's Weed Control Act identified Himalayan Balsam as one of 46 prohibited noxious weeds, Davidson was quick to rise to the challenge to eradicate this weed from the Pigeon Lake area. Davidson has volunteered to assume responsibility for a 5 year eradication process to eliminate this prohibited

noxious weed from the lake. Last year, he organized volunteers in every Summer Village to patrol the lakeshore and pick weeds. By the end of the year, it became obvious that more effort was required. Davidson was successful in obtaining \$2,200 from the Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN) for the "Love the Lake" program that Davidson established, and worked with Leduc County's weed inspectors to learn more about prohibited noxious weeds. Davidson used the ASN grant funding to pay summer students to pull the weeds.

Town of Smoky Lake

Starting in 2000, Radway & District Friends of STARS has run annual fundraisers throughout the area to raise money for the STARS program. The STARS program is dedicated to providing a safe, rapid, highly specialized emergency medical transport system for the critically ill and injured. Town Councillor Mark Watson says, "This year's fundraiser put the total amount raised in the past 11 years well over \$500,000 and helps to allow STARS to operate their fleet across the province—benefiting all small communities throughout Alberta. The fundraisers have been a tremendous success in terms of bringing the community together. Without the STARS air ambulance service, most small communities would be hard-pressed to serve their residents and visitors who experience a critical injury or medical emergency".

Village of Alliance

The weight of the snow on the roof of the Alliance arena caused the structure to collapse this past January. Luckily no one was injured when the roof came down. The arena was built in 1948 and was a landmark for many in the town. The arena building committee (all volunteers) has raised a large amount of funds since the collapse and the arena is well on its way to being rebuilt.

Overview of AMSC Services Available to Small Communities

AUMA has been providing aggregated services to its members for over forty years, since as early as 1968. It's wholly owned subsidiary, the Alberta Municipal Services Corporation (AMSC), provides for the development of educational tools plus the development, coordination and delivery of aggregated services to the member municipalities, their employees, and their associates. Here is a quick overview of just **some** of the services AMSC provides.

Employee Benefit Services

The AMSC Employee Benefits Program has been specifically designed for municipalities and other non-profit organizations and has been in place for over 40 years.

Through its inception, the program has been enhanced to provide cost savings and flexibility. With over 13,000 lives insured, it is one of the largest municipal employee benefits programs in Alberta. Services include: Life Insurance, AD&D, Extended Health Care, Dental, Disability, Critical Illness, Best Doctors, Employee Assistance Program, Volunteer Fire, Health Spending Accounts and much more!

General Insurance Services

An insurance program with over \$8 Billion in insured buildings, the AMSC Insurance & Risk Management Program has been designed in response to the requests and desires of the membership and we are delighted to present our enhanced suite of products and services. Committed to customer choice principles, AMSC believes that the Commercial Insurance Program is a superior insurance program that serves the unique needs of municipalities and other non-profit organizations with specialized services, flexible products and numerous benefits. The program is holistic which incorporates an insurance reciprocal, risk management, claims and actuarial services. AMSC has

made a commitment to its members to provide a suite of risk management education tools, which will allow each member to develop in-house risk management awareness and to develop the necessary skill-set to manage municipal risk. AMSC has also substantially invested in developing user-friendly risk management training modules so that everyone from the risk manager to the frontline public works staff are aware of municipal risk and work together to mitigate such risks. AMSC has developed a comprehensive Municipal Risk Management Manual, which is available online for members use on our website.

Energy Aggregation Program

One of the largest municipal energy programs in North America, the AMSC energy aggregation program can provide fixed and variable rate natural gas and electricity, including green power, to participating municipalities for a variety of terms ranging from one to five years. The AMSC procures energy at wholesale prices and the restructured administrative fees recognize economies of scale and volume. The procurement structure allows the AMSC to coordinate purchases of energy directly with the producers. This eliminates the variability of retail commodity margins and typically results in cost savings if the municipality decides to add additional sites or volumes during the contract period.

Retirement Services



APEX is offered on a voluntary basis to employees who are exempt from collective bargaining, are in a class designated by their participating employer for inclusion to APEX and are concurrently members in the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP). APEX is a defined benefit plan that supplements

the LAPP benefit formula to a full 2.0% on earnings up to the maximum allowable benefit by the Canada Revenue Agency. The current employee contribution rate is 2.5% and the employer contribution rate is 3.0%.



Alberta
Communities Pension Plan
(ACPP)

The ACPP is a voluntary defined contribution pension plan in which both employer and employees make pre-defined contributions that are based on a percentage of salary. This program is available to employers or employees who do not actively participate in the LAPP. Elected officials are also eligible, making this an attractive option when reviewing their compensation.

MuniSERP (Supplemental Employee Retirement Plan)

MuniSERP offers supplemental employee retirement plan benefits to specified employees of the participating employer. These benefits are entirely paid for by the employer. MuniSERP is an unregistered retirement plan that provides for retirement benefits in excess of those permitted by the Canada Revenue Agency under registered pension plans. MuniSERP ensures a full 2.0% benefit is payable on all of an employee's highest average earnings.

Group RRSP (Registered Retirement Savings Plan)

A Group RRSP enables employees of a company to save for retirement by contributing to an RRSP through payroll deductions and receiving a tax break at every pay period. Because employees are participating as part of a larger group, they can often receive added benefits that most individual RRSP plan holders do not. Employers can choose their contribution rate and number of investment funds offered among many

Are You Tuned In?

Events Calendar

The AUMA and other organizations host a number of conferences and events throughout the year that are of interest to small communities. To find out about events that are key to your community, [click here to visit the AUMA web site calendar.](#)

Weekly Digest

Each week the AUMA and AMSC release a Digest that covers information on advocacy efforts, AMSC services and other topics of interest to municipal politicians and administrators. Make sure that you are in the know by subscribing via the AUMA web site. [Click here to subscribe.](#)



Does your municipality have a water efficient bylaw or a rebate program?

Do you need more support to implement AUMA's Water Conservation, Efficiency and Productivity (Water) Plan? Let us know. [Click here to take the Water CEP Targets Survey today!](#)

AMSC Services, continued

other flexible options.

Group TFSA (Tax-Free Savings Account)

A Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) is a flexible investment account that can help employees meet both short- and long-term goals. Investment income in a TFSA—whether it is earning interest, dividends or capital gains—is

not taxed, even when withdrawn. This tax-free compound growth means that employees' money grows more quickly inside a TFSA than in a taxable account. The 2009 contribution limit is \$5,000. This annual limit will rise along with inflation in future years, in \$500 increments. Additionally, unused contribution room can be carried forward indefinitely.

The federal government will report employees' TFSA contribution room to them annually.

To find out about any of these services, please contact: David Johnson, Director, Client Development, AMSC, 780.409.8330 or by [e-mail](#).