

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 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 eight 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 Mayors' 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 Session at 2011 AUMA Convention



Calgary TELUS Convention Centre September 28-30, 2011

For those of you who were unable to attend the 2011 Convention, a copy of the Small Communities Committee report is enclosed [here](#).

Highlights of 2011 activities included monitoring Municipal Sustainability Projects that are impacting Small Communities (for more information on municipal sustainability click [here](#); reviewing the Municipal Sustainability Strategy; providing feedback on the recommended changes to the Local Authorities Election Act ([see 2011 AUMA Convention Resolutions book](#)); providing feedback on various rural economic development initiatives such as the Business Vitality Initiative; and coordinating the Small Communities newsletter.

The Convention session showcased a panel discussion on the infrastructure deficit in small communities. [See the presentation from the Small Communities session here](#).

Some interesting points that the presenters made:

- Infrastructure in small communities is wearing out

- The percentage of all municipal drinking water lost to leaks has been determined to be up to 20%
- Municipalities are in a difficult financial situation and have limited capacity to address the failing infrastructure
- Municipalities could consider rate base utility charges to help deal with the issue
- Intermunicipal cooperation is also a way for municipalities to help address the infrastructure deficit

For more information, please contact [Zohreh Saher](#), Research Analyst at 780.989.7407.

AUMA's New Immigration Project: Helping Municipalities Attract, Retain and Integrate Newcomers

Statistics Canada projects that by 2031 almost half of the population over age 15 will be foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent. Although the majority of immigration is to large centers, smaller communities are also working hard to attract immigrant workers, changing demographics and posing challenges to populations that have often historically been fairly homogenous.

Municipalities are approaching work with newcomers from a variety of entry points. Some use their [Municipal Sustainability Plan](#) as a framework for strategies; others create one-off programs based on specific asks from newcomers and slowly build comprehensive implementation plans. Although the stages of newcomer settlement, adaptation and integration are multifaceted a number of communities across Alberta are exploring some promising practices. With limited resources, how can small communities cultivate genuinely welcoming communities that offer newcomers opportunities to

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the 2011 fall edition of the AUMA Small Communities Newsletter.

I am pleased once again to be the Chair of the Small Communities Committee for the upcoming year. I also welcome the new members who will be joining us this year as well as the ones who will be returning. I am looking forward to great dialogue, collaboration and the sharing of ideas as we focus on topics of interest to our communities with a population of 2500 or less.

Our session at the AUMA annual convention had great attendance and positive feedback. A summary is enclosed in this

newsletter. I encourage you to let us know what topics or issues you would like to see addressed in this next term. We will do our utmost to accommodate them.

For more information on the work of the committee or to pass along your ideas for the next newsletter, please contact [Zohreh Saher](#), Research Analyst, 780.989.7407.

Have a wonderful fall season!

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



Celebrating Smoky Lake's Economic Development as the Birthday Town of Alberta

In late 2010, Brian and Leesa Jones attended a tourism seminar hosted by Travel Alberta. They were looking for ways to boost business to their hotel/restaurant/lounge in Smoky Lake, the Smoky Lake Inn. One of the presenters mentioned a promotion that had been used by Disney World during a period of slowdown in the tourism industry.

"The speaker mentioned that Disney started giving free admission to people on their birthdays," said Brian Jones. "Everyone has a birthday, and nearly everyone brings someone with them to help them celebrate". An idea was born, for promotion of an 'experience' rather than just a special offer. On the drive back to Smoky Lake, Brian and Leesa talked the idea over.

Once back in town, they approached a few other merchants and attractions in the area. Quickly, they built a list of businesses that would give special offers for birthday celebrants, and the Birthday Town Alberta concept was created.

Initial partners in this concept included the Inn, the Old Fashioned Bread Bakery, Métis Crossing (zip line) and the Smoky Lake Town & Country Golf Course who all offered free gifts to birthday celebrants. This nucleus

launched the Birthday Town offer on April 30, 2011. Since then, many other merchants elected to join, bringing the total participation to more than 30 businesses in the area. Current offers are listed on the Birthday Town [website](#) under the headings of "Play", "Eat", "Stay" and "Shop". Birthday celebrants can register online or in person, with proof of date of birth, in order to claim their rewards.

To date, more than 800 people have registered their birthdays and over 300 have already visited the Town of Smoky Lake to celebrate their birthdays. Local businesses report that Birthday Town has been a bonus to many of the merchants taking part, with Métis Crossing reporting that each birthday ride on their Zip Line has had an average of four other guests along. Similar numbers are reported for the Golf Course. The Bakery has found that nearly every 'free birthday cake' offer has been associated with the purchase of a larger cake and often with repeat business from the celebrant or guests.

For several of these celebrations, Mayor Hank Holowaychuk has personally serenaded the birthday guest with a rendition of Happy Birthday. One notable celebration was that of AUMA Board Member and Beaumont Councillor Jacqueline Biollo

who came to Smoky Lake in July to celebrate her birthday and also to renew her wedding vows with her husband, Rick. The day included many fun events and celebrations with her family, as well as a chance meeting with MLA Alison Redford (now Premier) who was just finishing a campaign stop. You can read about Jacqueline's experience [here](#).

Through this, the Birthday Town Alberta brand has been growing. The municipality and the Chamber of Commerce have become members of this group, which has given it additional credibility in the business community. The term "Birthday Town Alberta" and the web site address have been trademarked and reserved to protect the brand,

and to make it possible to franchise the concept at some point down the road. One of the challenges facing Birthday Town now is building on their success with attractions in all seasons, instead of just spring through fall.

The Town of Smoky Lake will be celebrating its 50th anniversary of its town status in 2012, giving yet another focus for the Birthday Town celebrations. Organizers are contemplating a hot air balloon event and other features to help with the 'year of celebrations' planned for the town.

For more information, [click here](#). You can also contact Town of Smoky Lake Councillor, [Mark Watson](#) at 780.656.3674.



AUMA Board Member and Beaumont Councillor Jacqueline Biollo celebrating her birthday and renewing her wedding vows in Smoky Lake this summer.

Protect Your Community Against Bad Contractors: Using Criteria Other than Price in an RFP

Ensuring strong partnerships with vendors begins with the Request for Proposal (RFP). Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations staff indicate that there is a common misconception in the municipal sector that the successful bid always has to be the bid with the lowest price.

In reality, the RFP process allows the municipality to develop many types of criteria to base the successful bid on providing they are directly relevant to the procurement at hand. First and foremost, the RFP must be clear on what is to be purchased, the specifications for the goods or services, timeframes and any standards that must be met. Depending on the project, the criteria for determining the

successful vendor could include such things as:

- The vendor's ability to meet the specifications and/or standards of the project.
- Delivery or implementation timeframes.
- Service and warranty where applicable.
- The vendor's experience in other procurements of similar magnitude and scale.
- The capacity of the vendor to meet the requirements in terms of its financial and human resources.
- Any costs associated with transitioning from one vendor to another.
- Price.

Further, municipalities can put

a different weighting on each of these items. The key is to be open and transparent about what the criteria for evaluation are, how the criteria will be used to evaluate the bidders and how each of the criteria will be weighted. It is conceivable that price would not be weighted as high as experience, or technical solution, or some other criteria. In that case, the highest qualified vendor may not be the one with the lowest price. In essence, the successful bidder should be the one who best meets all of the criteria.

Simply stated: cost and value are not always synonymous. While cost and value can sometimes coexist, choosing a vendor based solely on price can have costly consequences for a municipality. Cost savings have a strong

likelihood of never being realized because of less experienced workers, deadline problems, subpar workmanship and higher employee turnover.

The Ministry of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations is working with the governments of Saskatchewan and British Columbia on developing a communication to guide municipalities in how to conduct their procurements in a trade compliant manner. AUMA will provide an update and link to that communication once it is available.

For more information, please contact [Zohreh Saher](#), Research Analyst at 780.989.7407.

A Debrief of ASVA's 53rd Annual Convention

Missed the recent ASVA Convention? Don't fear, we have a debrief for you!

The 53rd Annual Convention of the Association of Summer Villages of Alberta (ASVA) will go down in the books as a great success. Registrants from the 51 Alberta Summer Villages and three Counties participated in a variety of informative sessions, networked with their peers and were treated to the closing banquet with an energetic musical comedy act and silent auction.

Russ Farmer of Russ Farmer & Associates presented an informative session on Council and CAO relations, a topic of relevance to all municipalities, regardless of size. The importance of an effective Council/ CAO relationship was highlighted, as well as the fundamental differences between a board of management and a board of governance.

Alberta Municipal Affairs was represented by Izabella

Ruberry and Colin Doupe, who provided an informative overview of the MSI operating and capital grant programs, provided examples of eligible projects and described the application process.

Dr. Harold Wynne, CAO of the Village of Thorsby and Summer Villages of Sundance Beach and Silver Beach, reviewed the shared Community Peace Officer/ Bylaw Enforcement model utilized by all 10 Pigeon Lake Summer Villages. Funding formulas and other pertinent information was shared with convention attendees to assist with consideration of model implementation for other Summer Villages.

The Annual General Meeting was held on Friday evening; proposed revisions to the ASVA bylaws will be presented to members at the 2012 AGM.

Following President Peter Pellatt's opening remarks on Saturday morning, a stewardship tools session was conducted. Representatives

from the Alberta Stewardship Network, Green Acreages Guide, Alberta Environment's Central Alberta Recreational Lakes Project, Alberta Lake Management Society and Nature Alberta provided presentations on their respective organizations. The presenters then formed a panel and the convention attendees took advantage of the question and answer forum to obtain information on a number of issues regarding lake health and development.

Grandview Mayor Don Davidson reported on his initiative to obtain water chemistry and well location data for groundwater research purposes; this was supported by all those in attendance.

Jay White of Aquality updated the group on wastewater bylaws and issues as well as providing informative responses to a number of questions related to wastewater bylaw enforcement and authority.

The draft Ghost Lake

Sustainability Plan was presented by Bob Miller, which included a detailed account of the process in which the Summer Village Council engaged their residents in the formation of the plan. The community engagement process was highly successful and should be considered by other small communities.

A Council and Administration forum concluded the day's sessions, where people were free to ask questions and share knowledge on a variety of Summer Village matters.

Copies of all presentations to the ASVA Conference will be available on the [ASVA website](#) within the next week.

"The 2011 Convention was a great success" said ASVA President Peter Pellatt. "The ASVA Board and members wish to thank all sponsors, and hope to see everyone at the 54th annual convention scheduled for October 19 & 20, 2012 at the St. Albert Inn".

The Future Direction of Regional Economic Development Alliances—Where Now?

On February 4, 2011, as part of ongoing efforts to reduce government costs and ensure more effective use of resources in economic development, Finance and Enterprise Minister Lloyd Snelgrove announced that provincial grant funding for REDAs would be reduced by 25% (i.e., from a maximum of \$100,000 to a maximum of \$75,000). In addition, four provincial regional offices were closed and government staff in other regional offices was reduced meaning that they could no longer provide direct management or administrative support to REDAs. REDAs were also asked to vacate the spaces they had been using in provincial government buildings.

Some of our members have asked AUMA for information on the status of [Regional Economic Development Alliances](#) (REDAs), given these 2011 budget changes.

There are currently 12 REDAs throughout the province, consisting of 232 communities (148 towns and villages; 58 counties, municipal districts and special areas; 12 Aboriginal communities; and 14 cities), with 12 communities belonging to more than one REDA. The Government of Alberta also partners with other entities such as the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and communities in the capital region to support them in their economic development goals.

Why are REDA's important to small communities?

Currently REDAs throughout the province are working on a variety of key initiatives to advance regional economic development, encourage entrepreneurship and improve regional collaboration and cost effectiveness. Specific initiatives include:

- Regional Foreign Direct Investment Attraction and

Business Retention Strategies.

- Joint procurement and warehousing programs.
- Regional Business Licensing Programs.
- Productivity and Innovation initiatives.
- Diversification and value-adding initiatives.
- Development of web-portals for access to cultural service providers in the region.
- Establishment of industrial land inventories.

These types of initiatives are critical to the success of small communities and REDA's facilitate the ability to work cooperatively to improve local economies within small communities who otherwise may not have the capacity to undertake these initiatives individually.

How have REDAs been responding to the funding reduction announced in budget 2011?

Reaction from REDAs has been mixed as evidenced by the following comments:

"The move by the province to reduce the maximum funding for REDA's from \$100,000 (with a 3 to 1 sharing ratio) to \$75,000 (with a 1 to 1 ratio by 2012/13) was certainly a setback for Northeast Alberta Information Hub Ltd. (HUB) and REDA's in general, that put pressure on communities, particularly small communities, to find new ways to advance economic development within their region. However, while adequate funding for regional economic development is the best solution, there is some light at the end of the tunnel in that despite the province's cutbacks, communities in the HUB region are continuing to come together, are trying to advance partnerships with other entities in the region to address funding capacity

issues, and are still progressing on regional economic development matters".

Bob Bezpalko from Alberta HUB

"The SouthGrow Regional Initiative has certainly been impacted. Many member municipalities interpreted the changes as an attempt to download responsibility for regional co-operative economic development onto local governments without providing any opportunities for consultation. As a result, several large municipalities chose to no longer provide per capita funding to the regional economic development alliance, jeopardizing SouthGrow's ability to not only leverage available funding through Alberta Finance and Enterprise, but also to leverage funding available through other sources. SouthGrow's future sustainability is in question, not because member municipalities don't see the value of the REDA, but because municipal budgets are also under financial pressure. Regional co-operation is critically important and REDA's are a valued tool in promoting co-operation, especially urban/rural, with their value going well beyond the pure financial aspects. SouthGrow's initiatives in Productivity, Alternative Energy, Water for Economic Development and Ensuring Rural Sustainability align with the province's priorities and these types of initiatives that are critical to

the success of south central Alberta will not continue without proper provincial support. SouthGrow hopes that there is some mechanism by which the Province will revisit its funding commitment to REDAs and work with the REDAs on developing a collaborative solution".

Sandra Nelson, Chair - SouthGrow Regional Initiative

So What Now?

Most REDAs have hired new staff to take on the management and administrative functions previously provided by government staff and most have established new office space for their on-going functions. A \$50,000 one time grant was provided by the province to each REDA in 2011, to assist them in transitioning to the new model.

A number of REDAs have expressed concern about their ongoing viability, particularly as contributions from members may have to increase to compensate for the reductions in provincial funding. This has led to a greater need for REDAs to continually demonstrate their value to their members and a desire of REDA's and their members to work with the province on a solution that recognizes the value for the entire province of regional economic development.

For more information on REDAs, please contact [Jason Waywood](#), Director, Policy & Advocacy at 780.431.4531.



An Update on Local Matters

Local Matters is AUMA's current campaign towards a new relationship between Municipalities and the Government of Alberta. It recognizes that there is a better way for the province and municipalities to work together, to cooperate, and to ensure critical services and infrastructure commitments are properly planned, funded, delivered and maintained. The goals of Local Matters are to:

- Develop a relationship based on respect, trust and accountability...where communities are not subject to cost downloads like the controversial \$15 Motor Vehicle Search Fee, without any prior consultation or warning and do not have to go cap-in-hand to the Province to fund local projects.
- Ensure that municipalities have stable funding for core service obligations and that grants continue for specific purposes such as joint government initiatives and assistance to those municipalities with limited tax capacity.

The Local Matters campaign was recently profiled with provincial and municipal governments as it was the main theme for AUMA's 2011 Convention *The Future is Local*. Key Local Matters messages were conveyed through a number of events, including a speech from the President and during question and answer sessions with the various Ministers. As well, video clips were played of AUMA Board members speaking about the rationale for Local Matters and highlighting the key "asks" of the Government of Alberta. These videos are now part of the Local Matters toolkit. To see them, please click [here](#).

Local Matters will continue to be highlighted by AUMA over the coming months as we prepare for a Provincial

election. The focus will be on:

- Having the Province agree to come to the table in a partnership of equals to discuss Local Matters.
- Becoming recognized as an order of government and entrenching the appropriate changes into the MGA.
- Giving all the education property tax dollars to municipalities so that they have a stable source of revenue to provide core services.
- Recognition that grants will still be needed to:
- Provide a base for assisting municipalities with limited tax capacity and to ensure no community is hurt by the new system.
- Fund provincial programs delivered by municipalities.
- Fund joint programs.
- Fund regional joint projects and incentives such as economic stimulus.

AUMA recognizes that the current MSI funding for some municipalities is greater than their education property tax. That's why a key element of the Local Matters campaign is to ensure that no municipality has a negative financial impact as a result of a change in the funding arrangements. For example, there will likely need to be a provision to assist municipalities with limited tax capacity. AUMA would welcome the opportunity to discuss possible options with the Government of Alberta.

AUMA has developed the following additional materials in response to other key questions that may be posed about Local Matters:

- [Why MSI is not a viable](#)

[solution](#).

- [Why have a discussion on accountability](#)
- [Why municipalities can't just raise taxes](#)

For more information on Local Matters, please contact [Candice Bolton](#), Political Strategy Coordinator, at 780.989.7427.

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!](#)

AUMA's New Immigration Project: Helping Municipalities Attract, Retain and Integrate Newcomers

build a life for themselves and their families?

AUMA project to help small communities

AUMA's Welcoming and Inclusive Communities initiative has just launched a project to support Alberta municipalities in their work with immigrants and newcomers. The end result of the project will be the creation of a microsite of tools and resources designed to support the work of municipal officials and staff. The site will contain ideas, stories and practical tools for your municipality, as well as a set of videos profiling best practices from a range of communities around the province. In this article we profile some tools especially designed for small communities that will be available on the microsite.

Tools for Small Communities

Attracting and Retaining Immigrants: A Tool Box of Ideas for Smaller Centres

The Tool Box is a practical tool for smaller centres building strategies to address the issues surrounding the attraction and retention of immigrants. Topics covered include Canada's population picture, the importance of community consensus and how to build it, Canada's immigration laws, getting organized, important key factors like family ties, employment and housing, attracting people, and the many attributes of a welcoming community and how to develop them. The Tool Box contains many practical examples, check lists, and reference sources. Click [here](#) for this tool.

Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario

This toolkit offers strategies for rural communities to attract and retain newcomers from a community economic development perspective. Designed for economic development officers, municipal officers, community planners, community

developers and anyone involved in community economic development, the toolkit outlines how to get started, assess your community, take action and measure success. It also contains a tool to help organizations think about immigrant recruitment as part of their human resource strategy. Click [here](#) for this tool.

BCSAP Rural Services Networking Event: Final Report

Most often, the best way to find a municipal solution is to learn from other municipalities! This report summarizes discussions from the BC Settlement and Adaption Program (BCSAP) Rural Services Networking Event in May 2011. It's a great overview of some of the key challenges that small communities might face when trying to create strategies to integrate newcomers as well as some strategies used to overcome those challenges. The report addresses issues like social isolation, serving small populations with very diverse needs, and lack of cultural diversity among staff; and suggests strategies such as education, social media and organizational partnerships. Click [here](#) for this tool.

Multiculturalism in Communities: A Guide to Developing and Sustaining Dialogue

Community dialogues are an effective way to assess the needs of newcomers in your community and build relationships between municipal governments, newcomers and partner organizations. Developed by the Government of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, this guide is for leaders and organizations who wish to use dialogue to examine and strengthen the multicultural framework of their community. It offers tools and guidelines for convening communities of diverse interests - business, not-for-

profit, and civic sectors - and increasing knowledge capacity on multiculturalism, the elimination of racism and the support of welcoming and inclusive communities. Click [here](#) for this tool and watch the video on this Dialogue initiative [here](#).

An opportunity to learn more

AUMA is pleased to host Come Together Alberta: A Meeting of the Provincial Network of Welcoming and Inclusive Communities on December 1 & 2, 2011 in Edmonton, Alberta. Given that immigration is a particularly hot topic in Alberta right now, the meeting will focus on the attraction, retention and integration of newcomers in municipalities and communities. All municipalities are invited. Find out more [here](#).

The Immigration Project will also be offering eight capacity building workshops across the province tailored to the specific local realities of Alberta municipalities.

For more tools and municipal case studies, take a look at our preview microsite [here](#).

For more information on the project or to express interest in a workshop, contact [Marc Colbourne](#) at 780.989.7419.