

Role of Municipal Government

In Alberta, municipal governments are governed by the Alberta *Municipal Government Act*, which states that the purposes of municipalities are:

- to provide good government
- to foster the well-being of the environment,
- to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality,
- to develop and maintain safe and viable communities, and
- to work collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities to plan, deliver and fund intermunicipal services¹.

The MGA has three main areas of focus:

- Planning and development,
- Governance and administration, and
- Assessment and taxation.²

The MGA assigns municipalities duties and responsibilities within each of these areas. Municipalities have many roles, responsibilities, services and programs that they must develop, administer and assess, including:

- Drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater,
- Garbage collection and recycling,
- Land use planning and development,
- Environmental impact and conservation,
- Economic development,
- Maintenance and upgrading of bridges, streets and potholes, and
- Recreation and culture.

Council's authority in these areas allows it to:

- Pass bylaws that may regulate or prohibit, deal with any development, provide for a system of licenses, establish and specify fees for livery, and provide for an appeal body.³
- Make new or revised policy, through its Standing Policy Committees, within committee mandates.⁴

¹ Province of Alberta, *Municipal Government Act*, (Alberta Queen's Printer, 2019), 39, <http://www.gp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/m26.pdf>.

² "Understanding Alberta's Municipal Governments," AUMA, accessed March 16, 2019, https://www.auma.ca/sites/default/files/About_AUMA/government_resources/munis_101_larger_format_2015.pdf.

³ Province of Alberta, *Municipal Government Act*, (Alberta Queen's Printer, 2019), 42, <http://www.gp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/m26.pdf>.

⁴ "Procedure Bylaw 35M2017," The City of Calgary, 33, accessed February 11, 2019, <https://mycity.calgary.ca/ourorg/mayorcouncil/councilresources.html>.

These impact communities directly and make them safe, livable and sustainable.⁵ Municipalities work closely with their provincial and federal counterparts to create a desirable quality of life.⁶

Provincial and federal powers, by contrast, are limited only by the constitution itself, and how powers are divided between provincial and federal governments. Section 92 of the constitution spells out the powers of the provinces and includes things like education, property and civil rights, health, local works and administration of justice. Although in 1867, these powers were considered relatively narrow compared to the federal powers contained in Section 91, today they have led to Canadian provinces enjoying much more autonomy than sub-state governments in other federations.

While, constitutionally-speaking, municipalities' policy-making capacity pales in comparison with that of Canada's federal and provincial governments, in practice, municipalities exercise a range of policy-making power, insofar as provincial legislation or political will permits. Those powers differ depending on the province, but historically the core functions that have been handed over to municipalities involve planning, regulating, protecting and providing infrastructure services for our built environment. This has changed over time, of course, and as issues and challenges have become increasingly complex, provinces have seen fit to pass on additional powers to municipalities. Nevertheless, while municipalities have considerable powers and responsibilities, the sphere in which municipalities have policy-making power is much more limited than either the provincial or the federal government.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.