

Winter 2011 [issue 40]

# ruralroutes

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties



Partners in Advocacy & Business

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# ruralroutes

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties

## Message from the Editor

*Kim Heyman, Director of Advocacy and Communications, AAMDC*

The AAMDC, its fellow provincial municipal association—the AUMA—and Alberta Municipal Affairs support municipalities in a variety of ways. Among these supports are resources—such as toolkits—that help guide municipalities in planning, maintaining and sustaining successful communities.

Our Winter 2011 edition of *Rural Routes* talks about some of these resources and toolkits. We hope to raise awareness about and increase the use of these significant municipal supports.

Municipal sustainability and viability are two important topics of discussion for all Alberta municipalities, rural and urban, large and small. Our first article delves into the Municipal Sustainability Strategy Working Group and its work in creating a strategy for the Government of Alberta to assess and support municipal viability.

We also offer information about several AAMDC toolkits on topics including Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP), Municipal Careers Awareness and Citizen Engagement. These toolkits, and others, are all readily available on the AAMDC's website, [www.aamdc.com](http://www.aamdc.com) to assist you in a variety of issues.

We look at the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association's Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy, which takes an in-depth look at innovative ways to deal with ongoing labour recruitment and retention issues; and the vital role that all types of fire departments play in municipal sustainability.

Alberta Municipal Affairs shares information on its new Municipal Excellence Network (MENet) resource library, which compiles best practices and other relevant tools for municipalities. The ministry also discusses its Municipal Excellence Award, awarded every fall to municipalities that exemplify partnership, innovation and best practices.

2010 Municipal Excellence Award recipients for Partnership, Rocky View County and the Town of Cochrane, are the subjects of this issue's municipal feature. Learn more about their groundbreaking RancheHouse Accord, which has set a precedent for inter-municipal communication and cooperation.

Lastly, the AAMDC's Aggregated Business Services division offers information on tire price increases related to a shortage of natural rubber. Learn how this price increase may affect your municipality. And of course, as always, view our list of approved trade suppliers on the back cover.

Enjoy this latest issue of *Rural Routes*.

Kim Heyman,  
Director of Advocacy and Communications, AAMDC

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## A Proposed Municipal Sustainability Strategy

IN 2009, after member consultation, the AAMDC published the position paper *Ensuring Alberta's Future: a Framework for Municipal Viability through Community Sustainability*. This paper gave a high-level look at how municipalities could identify and deal with the challenges of long-term sustainability. Challenges such as loss of community identity were discussed, as well as the possibility of restructuring solutions other than municipal dissolution. This paper became the catalyst to the AAMDC's position paper *Cost Sharing Works*, released in late 2010.

Since the position paper was published, several municipalities identified as struggling to survive had applied to the Government of Alberta for dissolution studies. It also came to light that the whole process of dissolution was not always the best solution, although it was often the most-sought solution.

The need for a more in-depth look at the issue of long-term municipal sustainability was identified by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In January 2010, AAMDC staff began their involvement with Municipal Affairs, the AUMA and other municipal organizations in the Municipal Sustainability Strategy (MSS) Working Group. In November 2010, Municipal Affairs distributed a newly drafted Municipal Sustainability Strategy. It also released the *Municipal Sustainability Capacity Building Toolkit or Self Assessment Toolkit (SAT)* with a request for feedback by late February 2011.

### WHY THE NEED FOR A MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY?

In 2009, the Premier's mandate letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs included a directive to develop a municipal strategy for improving long-term viability for municipalities.

The government identified that the current economic climate, as well as changing resident expectations, necessitated a long-term framework to ensure municipalities could continue delivering well-managed, accountable local government. With this in mind, the Municipal Sustainability Strategy Working Group (MSSWG) agreed on the following four questions to guide their discussions:

- What constitutes a viable and sustainable municipality?
- What basic services should a municipality provide?
- What capacity-building tools are required?
- What restructuring process should be used?

### INDICATORS AND KEY MEASURES

The discussion around what constitutes a viable and sustainable municipality resulted in the key measures that would indicate when a municipality's viability was at risk. The proposed MSS identifies the indicators and key measures of viability that will assist municipalities in clarifying challenges before they become insurmountable. The self assessment toolkit (SAT), along with a number of key measures, are designed to identify possible areas of weakness and options for capacity building.

The proposed strategy's key measures form part of the SAT, but are of paramount importance in monitoring municipal viability. These key measures are data already collected by Municipal Affairs. The key measures serve as a screening tool to identify municipalities that may benefit from additional ministry support. They are:

1. The municipality has reached 80 per cent or more of its debt and debt service limit.
2. Provincial and federal grants account for 50 per cent or more of total municipal revenue.
3. The municipality's unpaid property taxes for the current year are greater than 10 per cent.
4. The municipality's ratio of current assets to current liabilities is less than 1:1.
5. The municipality has run a deficit budget for the previous two consecutive years, or five out of the previous 10 years.
6. The municipality has experienced a decline in population over the previous 20 years.
7. The municipality has experienced a decline in non-residential assessment as a percentage of total municipal assessment over the previous 10 years (i.e., the non-residential proportion has declined to less than half its previous proportion, where the initial proportion was at least 10 per cent of total assessment).
8. The municipality has a qualified audit report or has an "absence of opinion."
9. Capital investment as a percentage of total capital assets.\* (\*Note: This ninth measure will be added for future use when meaningful data is flowing from the implementation of tangible capital assets. This is not currently available.)

Municipal Affairs proposes to initiate contact with any municipality that triggers three or more of the first seven measures. However, if measure No. 8 (qualified audit report) alone is triggered, it would initiate Municipal Affairs contact.

## BASIC SERVICES

The basic services discussion resulted in the recognition of municipal diversification: that mandating which services should be provided would remove a municipality's or council's ability to make those decisions. Instead, it was decided to create a list of services most commonly provided by municipalities for reference purposes only. This agreed upon list included:

- A municipal council
- Disaster and emergency measures
- Fire protection
- General admission
- Land-use planning and development
- Policing and by-law enforcement
- Recreation
- Roads /and or streets
- Transportation
- Waste management
- Utilities

The discussion revolving around capacity building tools resulted in the Self Assessment Toolkit with the toolkit resources listed.

## SELF ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

The toolkit is intended to provide local municipal councils and administration with various tools to evaluate and understand their current situation. It also allows municipalities to identify and build upon areas of strength, and to identify areas where improvement may be desirable or even necessary. It is designed primarily for voluntary use at the discretion of each individual municipality. However, Municipal Affairs intends to incorporate the toolkit, or at least elements of it, into some of its practices and programs.

The toolkit includes a self-assessment questionnaire covering eight broad areas. It will become evident that they are not mutually exclusive and must be looked at as a whole when addressing municipal viability and sustainability. In addition, the toolkit provides linkages to capacity-building tools relevant to each respective topic area. This offers easy access to meaningful opportunities to strengthen municipal performance where desired or necessary.

While it is hoped that the SAT will help some municipalities avoid dissolution altogether, in some cases municipal viability may simply be too overwhelming. As such, a substantially revised restructuring process is being proposed that assists communities in a more positive and proactive fashion, called the Municipal Viability Process.

The Municipal Viability Process can be triggered by three mechanisms:

1. Key Measures: If a municipality is flagged by Municipal Affairs through key measures, it may be required to work through the SAT. The municipality would be contacted to discuss the reasons for the flags. Where extenuating circumstances explain the key measure flags, the municipality would not be required to proceed towards the Municipal Viability Process.

2. Citizen Petition: Any petition would be screened to determine if it relates to a viability issue. If not, the petitioners would be advised of other avenues available to address concerns. If it does address viability, the municipality would work through the SAT and report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.
3. Voluntary Decision by Municipality: Any municipality can decide to work through the toolkit. If a municipal council has concerns about viability, it can pass a motion to request a viability review from Municipal Affairs.

Once the viability process is triggered, a Viability Review Team is created. This team is chaired by Municipal Affairs and includes representatives from all affected municipalities (including neighbours), municipal associations and — potentially — respected municipal leaders selected by the minister.

The review team will first evaluate the completed SAT. It will then focus on potential financial, administrative and service impacts on all affected municipalities. The review team's second task will be to determine the viability of the municipality. If the municipality is viable, the team will recommend the process terminate. If the municipality trends towards non-viability, the team will recommend the third step.

## RESTRUCTURING OPTIONS

The third task will be to develop a viability plan. The plan will be developed through inter- and intra-municipal discussions, and engagement with citizens and community groups. Implementation and transition plans will be developed, and two paths presented. First, the municipal council may choose to remain in its current structure, likely with the requirement to address viability issues. Many of the toolkits listed in the SAT may be options to deal with the viability issues. These required actions, when agreed upon, may be laid out in a ministerial directive.

Alternatively, the council may ask the public to vote on restructure. If the public votes not to restructure, the municipality will face the same required actions as in the first path. If viability issues have been identified, it will no longer be an option to retain the status quo. After the implementation timeframe has passed for the required actions, the viability review team will evaluate the activities' success in resolving viability concerns.

The AAMDC believes that if its proposed changes are implemented, the result will be an immensely improved process that is solution- based, consultative, non-divisive and action-oriented.

Visit [www.aamdc.com](http://www.aamdc.com) to read the AAMDC's *Ensuring Alberta's Future: a Framework for Municipal Viability through Community Sustainability and Cost Sharing Works: An Examination of Co-operative Intermunicipal Financing*.

To learn more about the MSS, visit Alberta Municipal Affairs at [www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca).

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# Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) Toolkit

**WHAT** does sustainability mean for a municipality? To be sustainable, municipalities need to offer multiple positive qualities to attract and retain residents. They must decide how to invest in their communities to enhance appeal, stimulate economic development, create jobs and address environmental concerns.

The federal government introduced the ICSP as a part of its funding arrangement with provinces under the Gas Tax Agreement, formerly called the New Deal for Cities and Communities (NDCC). This long-range plan had four dimensions—environmental, cultural, social and economic—to be developed through public consultation.

The main goal of an ICSP was to develop a plan for allocating municipal resources to obtain the greatest benefit over the long term. This proactive approach would ensure that new infrastructure and programming meet a community's needs, both today and in the long-term.

The AAMDC consulted with stakeholders to draw on their technical expertise and advice as the Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSP) initiative moved forward. Its objectives were to:

- Build community capacity by providing municipal governments with tools that would facilitate long-term, sustainable planning addressing the four dimensions (environment, economic, social and cultural).
- Give municipal governments the tools required to access funds under the New Deal for Cities and Communities.

In March 2007, the AAMDC announced the release of its *Integrated Community Sustainability Plan* toolkit. The toolkit was endorsed by Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation and the federal minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. The computer-based tool serves as a single source for data entry and consolidates reporting.

The toolkit was designed so that a municipality could spend anywhere from eight to 80 hours completing its plan. The municipality's current situation could be inputted, and then goals set with a plan on how to achieve them. The toolkit would generate a report for council and the community to adopt. The ICSP toolkit is also capable of incorporating other future planning documents into the report as appendices.

In the fall of 2008, Alberta Transportation informed all municipalities that their ICSP would be necessary to continue receive Gas Tax funding. Municipalities without an identifiable ICSP were informed that they would not receive any further program grants until a plan was completed.

Though the deadline for having a sustainability plan in place in order to receive Federal Gas Tax Funding has passed, the opportunities that come with having a sustainability plan remain. The ability to plan responsibly and utilize your municipality's resources in the most effective manner while taking into consideration long-term commitments is what sustainability planning brings.

The ICSP toolkit has fields to track progress as a municipality moves through the plan. This can be used to increase accountability and transparency as you begin to fulfill objectives within your sustainability plan. The toolkit was not only designed to create a plan and meet the obligations of the Federal Gas Tax program, but to also increase the ease of goal tracking and reporting back to residents.

While the development of an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan may have been labour intensive, the long-term benefits of the plan with the increased functionality brought through the use of the ICSP Toolkit will hopefully ensure that your municipality is prepared for the future.

The toolkit is available on the AAMDC website under **Advocacy > Toolkits > ICSP Toolkit**. A key code is required to use the program, and is available by contacting the AAMDC.



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# Rocky View, Cochrane and the RancheHouse Accord



**AT** both the AAMDC and AUMA's 2010 fall conventions, members applauded Rocky View County and the Town of Cochrane as they received the Municipal Affairs Minister's Award of Excellence. Minister Hector Goudreau presented the two municipalities with the annual award in the Partnership category for their groundbreaking RancheHouse Accord.

Addressing issues from a regional point-of-view, the RancheHouse Accord has formalized the municipalities' commitment to cooperation with a framework of openness, cooperation and communication.

Feature Article

## THE ACCORD

The RancheHouse Accord came together in 2010 as a strategy for Rocky View County and the Town of Cochrane to sustainably plan their futures. The Accord is based on three fundamental principles—commitment, respect and trust—whose success relies upon a high level of communication.

The Accord sets out four protocols that dictate how the two municipalities work together on their relationship and issues as they arise. The Relationship Protocol states that regular communications are to be established between Rocky View County and the Town of Cochrane. These include in-person meetings, quarterly reports, inter-municipal committee meetings and brainstorming sessions, among others.

Should an issue arise, the Opportunity/Issue Protocol comes into play. This process starts with the acknowledgement of an urgent matter, with plans in place on how to proceed with bringing the matter to the attention of one, or both, municipalities. The municipalities should determine if and how the situation impacts its neighbour, such as land use issues, political implications, cost sharing, service delivery, etc. There are three council forums set up to deal with emergent issues: an inter-municipal committee (IMC), each municipality's respective council, and a joint council.

As the RancheHouse Accord is a living document, there is a protocol in place for amendments as gaps, new ideas and new approaches are identified.

Cochrane's mayor and Rocky View's reeve are responsible for upholding, promoting and acting in accordance with the Accord. They are to ensure that its spirit and intent are incorporated into discussions both between the two municipalities and within their respective municipality.

As administrative leaders, the municipalities' CAOs are responsible for upholding the Accord within their respective administrations and in all inter-municipal interactions. This includes ensuring the ongoing promotion of and education about the spirit, intent and specifics of the Accord to employees and contractors in their municipality. The AAMDC spoke with CAOs Rob Coon of Rocky View County, and Julian deCocq of the Town of Cochrane, on the RancheHouse Accord's impact.

## THE RANCHEHOUSE ACCORD: A MUNICIPAL PERSPECTIVE

### *How does having a framework in place aid in strategy?*

**RC:** We've had municipal agreements for this, that and the other: emergency and fire services, waste management and recreation. But [these agreements] haven't really gone beyond the point of a one-off discussion.

When we started talking [about an accord]—with assistance and funding from Municipal Affairs—we talked about what does and doesn't work. We concluded that some formal agreement that has the standard boilerplate wasn't going to cut it for us. We needed something that gave the people within the organization an opportunity to use their own initiative to reach out to [the other municipality]. The Accord is intended to create a less structured environment that's a lot more open and flexible as dynamics change over time.

We didn't have any issues confronting us; we thought it was a great opportunity to sit down and talk about cooperating in a different format. This made it somewhat unique; we had no issues that were burning between us. We'd just finished an annexation and had within the annexation agreement some things that allowed us to work together, so this was completely proactive. We thought "now's an opportunity to strike out and see what we can come up with in terms of a much more truly intended process for cooperation."

**JD:** I think it boils down to willingness to communicate frequently and openly and honestly. Culturally, we have to drive it for the organization to build on what [we're] doing: opportunities to share and ideas worth pursuing. [The Accord] formalizes some of the protocols we've agreed to follow. Dealing with two autonomous municipalities, with urban/rural interests, if you're able to talk about those hurdles openly, you [are better able to] move on. We're always trying to find ways to achieve some common ground.

### *What about the Minister's Award of Excellence?*

**RC:** Accolades are always nice, but you don't embark on these processes for the awards, you really try to do it from a really practical perspective. We didn't sugarcoat this process at all. We had some very blunt conversations between the two communities, so we always knew that we were going to be successful. Having said that, we all acknowledged that it was something different—we weren't going to try to cookie-cut some agreement from somewhere else. We wanted to build it from the ground up. It's always nice to be acknowledged, particularly for the political members who take time out of their personal lives to invest in this. It's a sort of validation of that process, and it's nice for [our councils] to be acknowledged in front of their peers.

**JD:** Of course it's an opportunity to celebrate the success of our project. We made an application for the award on the basis that it would be seen as a win-win for both of our municipalities.

***How were Rocky View and Cochrane able to successfully create the Accord?***

**RC:** I think it works because the Accord is strictly between our two municipalities. I understand that Municipal Affairs is looking at taking this model and trying it out elsewhere. We're also conversing with some of our neighbouring municipalities to create other accords. We've kind of stepped up our game, even creating a manager position so that we have staff able to handle intergovernmental affairs.

**JD:** Our proximity helps make it work. We share common boundaries, and there are no other immediate urban centres. The Accord was seen as an opportunity to benefit an urban centre out in the middle of a county. It built on earlier discussions and focused on what it would take to have open communication.

***As councils change, how do you ensure that the Accord is adhered to and strengthened?***

**RC:** In anticipation of a change in council [with the 2010 election], we structured within the Accord a requirement that each new council sign the document. Councils must acknowledge that they're willing to adhere to it. As the new council came in, as part of the orientation package, we walked through the Accord, the principles and intent of the document. A formal resolution in council authorized that each member of council sign the commitment document to the ongoing spirit of the Accord.

**JD:** The Town of Cochrane was fortunate not to see a large turnover in council. We fortunately identified as one of our protocols that new councils be asked to endorse the Accord early on. Sort of like renewing our vows.

***Has there been an emergent matter or crisis situation in which the protocols have been used?***

**JD:** Not yet. Everything's going well because we have no burning issues. Practically speaking, if we had burning issues at the time, there may have been some reluctance to work together. We've got several issues burning between us, but they're being handled in a very open way so that they don't become political fodder. [Mr. deCocq and I] have a standing agreement to have a breakfast meeting at a moment's notice to discuss an issue, put forward solutions and move forward.

**JD:** I think everyone's aware of larger issues impacting our region. I don't think that the Accord is going to be the solution to all relationship issues. However, the protocol does have reminders on how to communicate in both communities' best interests. If something isn't working, we know how we want to communicate it, rather than making it political out of the gate.

***How does the protocol work in the daily life of your municipality?***

**RC:** The document essentially makes the mayor and reeve accountable on the political side and the two CAOs accountable on the administrative side. As such, we are responsible for adhering to the spirit and intent of the document. For example, [Mr. deCocq] and I have hosted our managers from across both organizations in sessions to talk about opportunities to work together. Our understanding is that now our people are phoning each other and looking for efficiencies, sharing information and so forth. On the political front, it's more of a dialogue, keeping regular updates back and forth.

**JD:** I think that it just becomes part of your municipality's culture.

***What advice would you offer other municipalities who want to enter into partnerships?***

**RC:** Part of what allowed for our success, notwithstanding the people who were in the room, was the fact that we didn't have any burning issues. We were able to talk about some of our past issues and laugh about them, because they weren't staring us in the face. We knew there were going to be opportunities for things to go off the rails if we didn't have some sort of understanding or agreement. It's a proactive piece that's most important. We didn't sugar-coat it; we had very blunt conversations about the need to be prepared for future challenges and issues.

**JD:** If you're thinking about establishing some protocols or good relations, do it in the midst of good relations. Don't try to build an accord for how to communicate if you've got something that's gone off the rails. All too often, that leads to a different type of outcome. Both [Mr. Coon and I] feel that building on a positive relationship is easier than on a house of cards that's fallen down.

To learn more about the RancheHouse Accord, visit either the Town of Cochrane at [www.cochrane.ca](http://www.cochrane.ca) or Rocky View County at [www.rockyview.ca](http://www.rockyview.ca).

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# Sharing New Ideas: The Municipal Excellence Network (MENet)

*by Catherine Dunn, Advisor, Municipal Excellence Capacity Building*

**THE** idea of a Municipal Excellence Network (MENet) began in the late 1990s as a place where councillors and administrators could share information and ideas. The Government of Alberta felt that this resource would provide learning opportunities and develop practices to help increase municipal sustainability. Thanks to the support and contributions of municipalities over the years, the program has grown and increased available practice information along the way. In 2010, MENet took an exciting step forward with the addition of bylaws and policies to its online resource.

## **THE MENet LIBRARY**

The MENet Library ([www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/mc\\_municipal\\_excellence.cfm](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/mc_municipal_excellence.cfm)) is available for anyone to access and view. Municipal Affairs continues to add more resources as they arrive, and is always happy to get updates and new information to facilitate the knowledge transfer.

Completely searchable, the MENet library holds resources on the majority of municipal operations. Municipalities of all sizes and types may find information in the library that could provide that new spark of an idea. MENet may help municipalities discover a basis for an improvement that could help make municipal operations more effective or efficient. The capacity building resources on MENet are available to assist all municipalities. Administration, council, public works, finance, strategic planning, economic development and community development are just a few of the topics included in the MENet library.

Bylaws and Policies sections were added to the MENet in 2010. In order to populate the resource and give it greater depth, Municipal Affairs requests municipalities' support in adding their own bylaws and policies. When municipalities develop new policies or pass new bylaws that are well researched, they are encouraged to submit a copy to [menet@gov.ab.ca](mailto:menet@gov.ab.ca). Remember: when we share knowledge, we all grow.

## **MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR MUNICIPAL EXCELLENCE**

It is important to recognize all the excellence that is at work in municipalities. The Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence, presented annually, acknowledge this excellence in action. The current awards categories include: partnership, innovation, smaller municipalities and safe municipalities. An Outstanding Achievement Award is also presented to the municipality that submits the "best of the best" practice, as determined by the awards review committee. Award winners, as well as honourable mentions, are identified on the MENet website.



MENet

Municipal Affairs encourages cooperation between municipalities and their regional partners. 2010 saw a number of separate practices submitted for the Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence that exemplified municipalities sharing services and resources in win-win relationships. The Town of Cochrane and Rocky View County were chosen as the Partnership winners for their RancheHouse Accord, an inter-municipal cooperative agreement. Also in 2010, Lac Ste. Anne County submitted the Municipal Services Package it developed for sharing services with the many summer villages within its boundaries. Strathcona County contracted CAO services to smaller municipalities; this is yet another great example of resource sharing.

Innovation, cooperation and environmental focuses were also exemplified in the 2010 awards. The Emergency Services Automatic Vehicle Locating System implemented by the town and the MD of Taber was a recipient. Other recipients, for their Tax Revenue Sharing Agreement, included Woodlands County and the Town of Whitecourt. The Peace Region's Eco-Centre was always awarded an Innovation award. These are just some of the many gems to be mined on MENet of partnerships and innovative practices both within and between municipalities.

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# Municipal Careers Awareness Toolkit: a Simple Approach

by R. A. (Bob) Miles, Chief Administrative Officer, Northern Sunrise County

**IN** 2008, a *Municipal Careers Marketing Strategy* was developed under the direction of a partnership between Alberta Municipal Affairs, the AAMDC and a number of other municipal associations. These included the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association (ARMAA), Local Government Administration Association (LGAA) and Society of Local Government Managers (SLGM).

The Municipal Careers Awareness Toolkit will help municipalities produce a simple campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of employment with their municipality. It provides several different tactics that will bring positive attention to municipal employees, and raise the public's interest in municipal career opportunities.

The strategy research revealed four key findings regarding the public's perception of municipal careers. These were:

1. Municipal careers are poorly understood;
2. Municipal employees are motivated by factors that are not entirely financial;
3. Lifestyle and quality of life are important influencers for today's municipal workers, and;
4. Word-of-mouth advertising and social media networking are extremely powerful influences over an individual's career choice.

The Municipal Careers Marketing Strategy proposed a range of tactics. These included a number of internal communication initiatives meant to be executed in tandem with broad-based marketing and public relations activities. Of particular interest was the strategy's proposed media awareness-building tactics. These tactics form the basis of the Municipal Careers Toolkit.

Alberta's municipalities will almost certainly continue to face challenges in attracting and retaining top-tier talent. The toolkit is intended to help municipalities undertake recruitment in a flexible, cost-effective way. The Municipal Careers Awareness Toolkit provides the how-to for implementing tactics aimed at building awareness of the positive qualities inherent to municipal careers. It is limited to activities that are realistic, considering the pressure of municipalities' day-to-day priorities. The tools were designed to be flexible and customizable based on a community's goals and desired outcomes.

A municipal awareness campaign can yield valuable benefits, including higher rates of employee retention and a stronger municipal brand as an employer of choice.

The Municipal Careers Awareness Toolkit is available on the AAMDC and ARMAA websites.

Each of the Municipal Careers Awareness Toolkit's sections provides the basic chronological map and "how-to" guide for developing and executing a customized awareness campaign specific to your community. This includes three proven awareness-building tactics: media relations, advertising and the utilization of social networking sites.

This toolkit is broken down into five main sections:

**1. Preparation:** The preparation that should ideally be undertaken beforehand.

Activities include conducting preliminary employee research, determining campaign objectives and target audiences, establishing the campaign timeline and setting the budget.

**2. Awareness Building Tools:** The tools you will need to create and make use (samples and templates).

Tools include media relations, advertising and social media networking. Op-eds to newspapers, press releases, print advertisements, sponsorships, Twitter and Facebook pages, etc.

**3. Suggested Themes and Strategies:** Concepts and narrative that will anchor your awareness building efforts.

Tools include hosting a municipal careers week that recognizes the importance of municipal workers in citizens' daily lives. Municipalities could also establish a Municipal Employee of the Year Award to acknowledge outstanding achievement and draw media attention. Lastly, there could be a drive for students, campaigning at career fairs in post-secondary institutions.

**4. Campaign Evaluation:** measuring the outcomes.

Tools include a template media tracking chart and final report on all municipal careers awareness activities.

**5. Appendices:** including customizable samples and templates.

Templates for op-eds, press releases, Twitter pages, best practices guides, etc.



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- The first natural gas well was drilled in 1883 in a field near Medicine Hat, Alberta
- The average Albertan household uses 120 GJ of natural gas each year. A gigajoule (GJ) is a unit for measuring natural gas and is the energy equivalent of about 30 litres of gasoline
- Over 75 per cent of Canada's natural gas production is from Alberta
- Alberta's total marketable natural gas production, including coalbed methane, was 4.4 trillion cubic feet in 2009. 28 per cent of the gas produced in Alberta was used locally, with the remainder being shipped to other Canadian provinces and the United States
- Visit the new [www.csug.ca](http://www.csug.ca) for more information on natural gas and other unconventional resources



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# Fire Services

## The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association - Supporting Local Fire Services

**IN** spring 2010, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA) released a report on the recruitment and retention of paid, on-call (aka: volunteer) firefighters. The comprehensive *Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy* was informed by ideas and perspectives gathered through an environmental scan of the best practices used by local fire departments; research and review of literature regarding recruitment and retention practices, and; knowledge and expertise regarding best practices.

### WHAT THEY FOUND

The research found a number of issues and barriers impacting recruitment and retention, including:

1. **Employer-related:** A lack of support of volunteer firefighters, especially of the on-the-job time volunteer firefighting requires.
2. **Family-related:** The time commitment required separates volunteer firefighters from their loved ones at unpredictable times. As well, being called away from work impacts family income.
3. **Availability of people:** Many people work outside the community during the day; Alberta's transient population makes retention difficult.
4. **Time commitment:** There are increased demands on volunteers' time, and many different ways to spend free time. Codes of practice and disciplinary action for missing training are necessary, but discouraging for volunteers.
5. **Perceptions and public image:** People may begin volunteer firefighting without properly understanding the role, or the overall experience; volunteer firefighters may quit after traumatic experiences. The local reputation of the fire department also may not encourage volunteerism.
6. **Structural challenges:** Unrealistic demands from municipalities; low funding; time taken up by administrative tasks; high turnover.
7. **Cross-generational recruitment** was also an issue.

### OBJECTIVES

The recommended tactics in the strategy are designed to:

- Increase volunteer firefighter recruitment, including non-traditional demographics such as women, immigrants, and First Nations;
- Increase retention, including that of firefighters who move between communities;
- Increase overall awareness of volunteer firefighting in Alberta, especially by political stakeholders;
- Provide all Albertan fire departments with a volunteer screening framework that can be adapted to meet the specific needs of a given community or fire department.

### INITIATIVES

The strategy outlines both local and centralized initiatives. Local initiatives are adaptable to allow each fire department to tailor its approach to local conditions and priorities. Centralized initiatives reinforce and support fire departments in their

local activities, and require resources or management that go beyond any single fire department. Examples of centralized initiatives aimed at the provincial government include:

- A province-wide awareness and recruitment campaign;
- Coordinating public relations, and;
- Leveraging the National Fire Prevention Week, as well as the National Firefighter Health Week.

The toolkit provides instructional guides, templates and samples to help local fire departments in carrying out initiatives they deem appropriate for their community.

In follow up to this initiative, the AFCA has established four subcommittees to support the strategy. The subcommittees are researching, collecting and will ultimately distribute best practices in the following areas:

- recognition (both of an individual person and the regular employers of paid-on-call firefighters)
- cadet programs
- protection of investments
- branding of the fire service

The AAMDC looks forward to the results from these working groups and will examine the best way to inform and support our members as they continue to deliver top-quality fire service.

The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA) has a long history of supporting municipal fire services through awareness, education, training, technology and products. Municipalities are encouraged to promote the report to their local fire departments and provide assistance where practical.

For more information, or to view the report in its entirety, visit AFCA at [www.afca.ab.ca](http://www.afca.ab.ca).

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# Toolkit

# Citizen Engagement Toolkit

**OVER** the last several decades there has been a gradual decline in citizen engagement, as evidenced through reduced voter turnout, volunteerism levels and committee memberships. In response to this, the AAMDC and Alberta Urban Municipalities' Association (AUMA) jointly released a *Citizen Engagement Toolkit* (CET) in 2007. This software-based toolkit was created to assist municipalities in developing strategies and practices to better engage citizens and ratepayers. The toolkit remains relevant today as a means to guide discourse and encourage participation in civic activities.

CET's goals included increasing citizen awareness and understanding of municipal government and services provided, as well as increasing buy-in from citizens regarding municipal decisions.

The toolkit guides users through a process to consider its target participants, budget and timeframe for engagement. Based on this information, a prioritized list of tools is generated and summarized into a citizen engagement plan. The plans developed through the *Citizen Engagement Toolkit* are intended to support the work of council as it sets direction for the municipality.

### ***Why was a Citizen Engagement Toolkit developed?***

An environmental scan to determine current engagement levels in Alberta was conducted. The scan showed that municipalities were not taking full advantage of citizen engagement and a new approach was needed.

A telephone survey of 800 Albertans found that nearly 50 per cent of respondents felt something prevented them from being more involved in municipal government. In addition, interviews with 21 Alberta municipal administrators and elected officials were conducted. These interviews found that:

- municipalities see a need to engage citizens
- citizen involvement is often reactive rather than proactive
- smaller communities have higher citizen participation
- the same citizens are continually involved
- the desire of a citizen to participate is based on the time commitment, the issue at hand and the potential influence they will have

### ***How is citizen engagement defined?***

The CET uses a decision-based engagement model. This recognizes that different types of municipal decisions require different levels of citizen engagement. The different levels of citizen engagement are:

- Receive information
- Vote
- Provide input
- Engage in two-way dialogue
- Participate in decision making
- Be involved in local government

The different types of municipal decision making are:

- Strategic
- Program development
- Program delivery
- Issues and initiatives

Following the toolkit's launch, the AAMDC and AUMA conducted training sessions for municipalities across Alberta. These included one-on-one coaching to complete an engagement plan for current and future municipal initiatives.

The toolkit is available for download on the AAMDC website, and features a tutorial video.

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### *Aggregated Business Services Article*

# Damage to Natural Rubber Supply Leads to Increase in Tire Prices

**IN** 2010, rubber plantations in Southeast Asia experienced flooding that has affected the world tire supply. The result for tire companies has been an increase in the cost of natural rubber, creating higher costs passed on to consumers. According to *Business Week*, "global production will lag behind soaring demand for at least another two years."<sup>1</sup>

This shortage may continue further in the long term, due to the large international demand for rubber outpacing the product supply.

What this means for consumers is a four to six per cent price increase on all tire purchases to make up for raw materials costs.

Recently, AAMDC Trade suppliers such as Goodyear have announced percentage increases to their product lines. However, purchasing through the AAMDC's National Tire Account Program may help mitigate these price increases. The program's great discount structure is available through our various tire suppliers that carry Goodyear or Michelin brand tires. The National Tire Account Program does not compete with local businesses, as the authorized dealers still receive reimbursement for the purchased products and provide the install and service. For information on the National Tire Account Program, contact the AAMDC at 780.955.3639 or email [trade@aamdc.com](mailto:trade@aamdc.com).

<sup>1</sup>[www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10\\_40/b4197024486256.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_40/b4197024486256.htm)

# AAMDC Trade Division Approved Suppliers

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