

SO YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT RUNNING FOR COUNCIL?

A practical guide to understanding
elected roles in local government.

Voices from Alberta Councils



I ran because I saw opportunities to build a better future for our community. My background in small business gave me useful skills, but what really mattered was simply caring about my town and wanting to be part of its growth. — Alberta councillor, small municipality

The most rewarding aspect of serving on council is seeing projects come to fruition that improve residents' quality of life. When you help solve a long-standing problem or bring a new amenity to your community, the sense of accomplishment is incredible. — Alberta councillor, rural municipality

What Municipal Councillors Do

Municipal councils are responsible for:

- Setting the direction and future vision for your community
- Establishing policies and bylaws to set the quality and level of local services
- Approving annual budgets and determining tax rates
- Making land use, zoning, and development decisions
- Providing oversight of the municipality through the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)
- Engaging with the community to understand their needs and concerns

Understanding Local Jurisdiction

One of the most important aspects of municipal governance is understanding what falls within local jurisdiction:

Within municipal authority:

- Local roads and transportation
- Water, wastewater, and waste management
- Parks, recreation, and community facilities
- Fire services, peace officers, and bylaw enforcement
- Land use planning and development permits
- Property taxation
- Local economic development

Outside municipal authority:

- Healthcare system and hospitals (Provincial)
- Education and school curriculums (Provincial)
- Highways (Provincial)
- Social services (Provincial/Federal, with municipal partnerships)
- Criminal code and justice system (Federal)
- Income tax and GST (Federal)

Working effectively within your jurisdiction means focusing on what you can control while advocating for your community's interests with other levels of government when needed.

Typical Monthly Duties

- 2-3 Council meetings per month
- Committee meetings (hours dependent on the community)
- Reading reports and preparing for meetings (6-10 hours per month)
- Public events and resident interactions
- Email and phone correspondence with constituents

The workload often increases during budget season and important public hearings.

Working With Administration

Council sets policies, and municipal administration implements them. Understanding this relationship is crucial:

- Council works as a collective body (individual councillors have no direct authority)
- The CAO is Council's only employee
- Staff report to the CAO, not to individual councillors
- Respecting administrative expertise improves governance outcomes

Practical Skills That Help

While there are no formal qualifications required to serve on municipal Council, the following skills will help you to be an effective councillor:

- Strong communication and listening abilities
- Ability to understand budgets and financial documents (training provided)
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Ability to work collaboratively with diverse perspectives
- Time management and organizational skills

Common Misconceptions vs. Reality

- ✗ Councillors run day-to-day operations
- ✓ Council provides direction; staff handles operations
- ✗ You need specific qualifications
- ✓ Your willingness to learn and a commitment to serve all members of your community matters most
- ✗ Being a councillor is a full-time job
- ✓ For most councillors outside of large cities, it's a part-time role you can balance with other commitments
- ✗ You'll make decisions alone
- ✓ Council decisions require a majority vote
- ✗ You should know everything going in
- ✓ You'll learn through orientation and experience

Challenges and Rewards

Challenges you might face:

- Balancing diverse community interests, dealing with public scrutiny
- Managing time between various commitments
- Learning municipal processes and legislation

Rewards you'll experience:

- Making real improvements in your community
- Building meaningful relationships
- Being part of critical decisions creating a legacy for future generations

Ready to Learn More?

Join our webinar series:

At [Events](#) | [Alberta Municipalities](#), [RMA's Webinar Calendar](#)

Additional resources:

- Explore online resources about the [Municipal Government Act](#)
- Visit [ABmunis](#) and [RMA's](#) [Running for Municipal Office](#) webpages

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