

# Municipal Government Act Review

## What We Heard: A Summary of Consultation Input

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Public Open House  
Held in Edmonton on February 6, 2014

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Developed by KPMG for Alberta Municipal Affairs



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## Introduction

### Purpose

This document provides a summary of what was heard during a consultation session for the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) review. The summary below includes the comments and opinions of the participants of the Public Open House held in Edmonton.

These contributions have not been reviewed or edited for accuracy. Comments recorded here reflect the opinions of individuals offered in person and recorded by session facilitators; they do not necessarily represent the opinion of the Government of Alberta.

The input summarized below will be considered by Alberta Municipal Affairs as part of the review of the legislation. Municipal Affairs would like to thank the participants of this session, as well as all Albertans participating in the review of the MGA. Any inquiries related to this summary or to the consultation process should be directed by email to the MGA Review Team at [mga.review@gov.ab.ca](mailto:mga.review@gov.ab.ca).

### The Municipal Government Act Review

The MGA is designed to help build strong, prosperous and sustainable communities throughout Alberta. Alberta Municipal Affairs is reviewing and refreshing the MGA to address evolving circumstances and priorities in Alberta's many communities, and to ensure the MGA continues to meet its objective. A successful MGA review process will continue to position Alberta as the leading Canadian jurisdiction in terms of municipal legislation, having incorporated sound thinking, input and research into a clear Act that meets the needs of the Province and municipalities. In order to achieve this vision, an inclusive and comprehensive engagement process was developed to ensure stakeholders across the province have opportunities to provide input to the review.

As part of the MGA review, regional consultations were held in eleven locations around the province to give Albertans an opportunity to provide input face-to-face. In each location, different types of sessions were held, including Technical Sessions, a Business and Industry Session, a Municipal Administrators Session, an Elected Officials Session, and a Public Open House.

These engagements were conducted in February 2014 to April 2014 in 11 locations throughout the province. Each location was held over 3 days in the following locations:

- Brooks
- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Edson
- Fort McMurray
- Grande Prairie
- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat
- Peace River
- Red Deer
- Vermilion

Sessions were promoted via news releases, direct email invitations, social media, and by the Minister of Municipal Affairs at stakeholder conventions. Information on regional session locations, dates and registration were on the MGA Review website.

Input to the MGA Review has also been provided through other channels, including the MGA Review website ([mgareview.alberta.ca](http://mgareview.alberta.ca)), the MGA Review Consultation Workbook, and official submissions.

## Session Overview

<b>Session</b>	Public Open House
<b>Location</b>	Delta Edmonton South Hotel and Conference Centre, Edmonton
<b>Date</b>	February 6, 2014
<b>Number of Participants</b>	24

- This session was open to anyone who wished to attend. No registration was required.

## Regional Consultation Methodology

### *How the Open House was organized*

Participants were free to browse available materials or to engage in informal conversations with facilitators from Municipal Affairs, KPMG and ADR Education on any MGA relevant topic of interest to them. The Public Open House presented information on six topics that were thought to be of particular importance to the public:

- What rules can municipalities set?
- Why do municipalities change land use plans?
- What services do municipalities provide?
- How are municipalities funded?
- How do municipalities manage growth and development?
- How do we ensure accountability?

The information was presented on handouts and posters. The structure of the Open Houses allowed participants to provide feedback in the following ways:

- Comment cards were available for participants that invited them to note:
  - What is working well under the current MGA;
  - What is not working well under the current MGA;
  - What changes they would suggest; and
  - What the implications of desired changes would be.
- Where possible, facilitators from Municipal Affairs, KPMG and ADR Education took notes to record input provided by participants through informal conversations. Given the informal and unstructured format of these discussions, not all comments from participants may be captured.

### *Reporting*

The summary below documents the input received from participants during the Open House, as well as written feedback provided through comment sheets. This input has been organized according to relevant topics under the three themes for the MGA Review. Comments have not been screened for accuracy and do not reflect consensus of participants. As a result, comments and opinions listed may be contradictory. Comments that applied to issues outside of the scope of the review (e.g., suggested changes to other legislation) have been removed.

It is important to emphasize that this summary reflects the input heard from participants, and does not necessarily reflect the position of the Government of Alberta.

**How the Summary of Responses is Organized**

*Input from session participants is organized according to the three themes for the review:*

- *Governance and Administration*
- *Assessment and Taxation*
- *Planning and Development*

*Within these themes, comments are organized according to applicable topics. In some sessions, not all themes may have been discussed.*

## Summary of Input

### **Governance and Administration**

The following input was received and documented related to governance and administration.

### Municipal Accountability, Liability, and Risk Management

#### ***Compliance and accountability***

Comments from participants included that:

- Once elected, municipal councillors are not accountable to the public.
  - It is very difficult to get results or resolutions at the municipal level.

#### ***Provincial powers***

Comments from participants included that:

- The Province needs to have more power to hold municipalities accountable.
  - Ontario does this well through the Ontario Municipal Development Board.

### Municipal Services and Delivery

#### ***Service provisions***

Comments from participants included that:

- Municipalities are reluctant to accept new technology that could save them money. For example, snow removal and pothole repairs could be done much more effectively by utilizing new technologies, such as snow melting.

### Public Participation and Municipal Relations

#### ***Public participation***

Comments from participants included that:

- Long-term residents should have more compensation and input during expropriation (e.g., when houses are being removed to accommodate municipal infrastructure).

## **Assessment and Taxation**

The following input was received and documented related to assessment and taxation.

### Taxation and Municipal Finances

#### ***Taxation***

Comments from participants included that:

- Property taxes should be based on lot size.
- The MGA should only have one residential tax rate to ensure there are no negative impacts on social housing.

### Exemptions from Assessment and Taxation

#### ***Exemptions and other special tax treatment***

Comments from participants included that:

- Tax exemptions for social housing need to be clarified.
  - There should be an income test similar to the one used by Canada Revenue Agency to qualify for social housing exemptions.

### Market Value, Equalized and Supplementary Assessment

#### ***Market value assessment and administration***

Comments from participants included that:

- Currently, assessed values do not accurately reflect market value.
- It is difficult to value non-market housing using a market value approach.

### Public Participation and Assessment Appeals

#### ***Assessment complaints and appeals***

Comments from participants included that:

- Assessment appeals should continue to be handled on one level.
- The revised MGA should continue to require the production of written decisions.
- The complaint period currently allowed in the MGA should be shortened.
- There should be an alternate dispute resolution mechanism other than Assessment Review Boards.
- The assessment department should carry forward adjustments rather than making owners appeal multiple times.
- The Assessment Review Board should confirm assessments that are within the tolerances for mass appraisal.

## **Planning and Development**

The following input was received and documented related to planning and development.

### Fees and Levies

#### ***Fees and levies***

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA needs to clearly define levies and what they can be used to pay for.
  - There should be clear guidelines around the ability to appeal the amount, calculation or use of a levy.
  - The term “benefitting” needs further definition in the MGA.

### Regional Approaches

#### ***Managing growth and development***

Comments from participants included that:

- Municipalities should not be able to remove or destroy neighborhoods for bike trails.
- If a citizen’s land is affected by the municipality’s expansion there should be appropriate compensation from the municipality to the citizen.

### Land Management and Planning Tools

#### ***Statutory plans and land use bylaws***

Comments from participants included that:

- There needs to be greater transparency and more public engagement prior to rezoning and land development.
- Land use rezoning can decrease the value of land, which adversely affects citizens. For example, the development of a ravine causes erosion and vegetation to suffer, which drives the value of the land down.

### Land Dedication and Use of Reserves

#### ***Land dedication (reserves)***

Comments from participants included that:

- The definition of environmental reserve needs to be strengthened to ensure there is consistency across the province.
- Municipal reserves currently act as a “catch all.” They are being used to fund community halls and recreation centres.

- Municipalities should be able to set up non-market housing reserves to ensure there is an appropriate housing mix in every new neighbourhood.