

# Municipal Government Act Review

## What We Heard: A Summary of Consultation Input

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Public Open House  
Held in Peace River on April 24, 2014

Released on June 24, 2014

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 Peace River.

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>	Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre, Peace River
<b>Date</b>	April 24, 2014
<b>Number of Participants</b>	6

- 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 the applicable topics for discussion, using the list provided to participants in advance. In some sessions, not all themes may have been discussed.*

## Summary of Input

### **General Comments about the MGA**

The following input was received and documented related to the MGA in general.

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA needs to be made more user-friendly. The MGA should be written in plain language for the average ratepayer to understand.
- When an issue is covered by two different acts or provincial government ministries, there needs to be clear communication to resolve the overlap.

## **Governance and Administration**

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

### **Municipal Powers, Structures, Annexations and Other Changes**

#### ***Municipal powers***

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA needs to provide a better way to account for “shadow populations” of temporary workers. Census processes are not helping because they are performed in the spring, when oil and gas companies and their staff are not in town.

#### ***Municipal structures***

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA should have clearer guidelines and definitions on municipal structures.

#### ***Fundamental changes and municipal restructuring***

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA needs to require an annexing municipality to provide notice to utility providers before annexation is finalized. This will ensure the proper fees are collected and passed along to the annexing municipality.

### **Municipal Governance and Administration**

#### ***Municipal governance***

Comments from participants included that:

- The reeve position should be put on the election ballot and should not be appointed by council.
- The MGA should require regular reviews of ward boundaries to ensure they are appropriate and representative of the population.
- The MGA should establish a more equitable representation system for specialized municipalities that include urban and rural populations.
  - At present, five small municipal councillors can potentially add up to one large municipal councillor in terms of representation, which skews decision-making.
  - A consistent ratio of population to councillors should be established.

#### ***Municipal administration***

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA should give administrators more power to stand up to council.

## Municipal Finances

### ***Municipal revenue sources***

Comments from participants included that:

- The amount of provincial funding that is allocated should directly relate to the municipal structure type.
  - Funding allocations for municipalities should be based on the assessment value in that municipality.
  - Different sized municipalities have different standards of servicing. This should be reflected in the funding allocated to them.

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

Comments from participants included that:

- Community revitalization levies needs to be considered as a cost recovery model, especially in downtown areas.

## Municipal Accountability, Liability, and Risk Management

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

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA should provide the public with more tools to hold council accountable.
  - There should be an ombudsman that the public can access to hold council accountable.
  - Present mechanisms are insufficient. Petitions are time consuming and legal action is too expensive.
- The public feels powerless to deal with rogue councillors.
  - There should be a phone line for the public to call Municipal Affairs when a council is out of line and is not responding to petitions.
- Currently, council can outmaneuver the public even if an initiative is not supported by the public and has been defeated by plebiscite.
- The MGA should outline what is to be done regarding councillor conflict of interest.

## Municipal Services and Delivery

### ***Service provisions***

Comments from participants included that:

- Seniors housing should not be the responsibility of a municipality. Tax funds are already allocated to the provincial program to handle these services.

## Public Participation and Municipal Relations

### ***Public participation***

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA should provide the public with more resources to participate.
- The MGA should require councils to share meeting minutes with the public within a timely manner and in an online format.

## **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:

- The MGA should address vacant properties and sites by raising the property tax rate on these properties. This would help to penalize property owners who refuse to clean up their brownfield sites.
  - The MGA should include incremental property tax funding as an option for cost recovery.

## **Planning and Development**

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

### Land Management and Planning Tools

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

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA should require all municipalities (except summer villages) to create municipal development plans.

### Regional Approaches

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

Comments from participants included that:

- The MGA should outline clear timelines for developers to clean up their brownfield sites.
  - If owners of a brownfield site are unable to pay for clean-up, the Province should be part of a cost sharing agreement to help clean up the site.
- The MGA should not allow publicly funded infrastructure to be turned over to private ownership. For example, publicly funded housing should be maintained as public assets.