



Key Messages on the MacKinnon Report

September 6, 2019



TM



TM

WE ARE
economies
OF SCALE

WE ARE THE
support
YOU NEED

WE ARE THE
experts
IN MUNICIPALITIES

WE ARE YOUR
advocate

Overall

- AUMA appreciates the intent of the [MacKinnon Panel on Alberta's Finances](#) to provide recommendations on how the Government of Alberta can improve its financing and smooth out “rollercoaster” spending patterns.
- We remain committed to working with the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) and the province to create a new fiscal framework for municipalities that supports the province’s financial goals while maintaining the critical infrastructure that supports Albertans’ quality of life.

Areas of Alignment

Capital Spending - Municipal Grants (pages 55-56)

We agree that capital spending on infrastructure contributes to both the quality of life and the productive capacity of Albertans.

- We concur that Alberta must continue to grow its economy to retain and attract young people. We also know that a modern economy and current local infrastructure are key to achieving this goal.

The [MacKinnon Report](#) largely reaffirms our positions on infrastructure funding.

- We continue to support the creation of a capital spending plan that will provide sustainable and predictable funding for municipalities.
- We encourage collaboration between the province & municipalities on a 20-year infrastructure investment plan.

We appreciate the support to make better use of the federal infrastructure funding through the Canadian Infrastructure Program (ICIP).

We agree that the allocation of municipal funding needs to be adjusted to:

- ensure funding is received according to each municipality’s needs; and
- address municipalities’ lack of capacity to increase mill rates.

Improvements to Capital Planning (page 80)

We agree that the capital process and system must consider future operating impacts as a mandatory requirement for approval. The selection criteria for projects should include considerations about

operating costs to ensure that a project balances a municipality's needs with revenue considerations (such as with water and wastewater projects).

Fixed Budget Dates (page 72)

We agree with the panel's recommendation to establish a fixed budget date (Recommendation 25). This would provide municipalities more predictability when determining their own budgets.

Nurse Practitioners (page 72)

In keeping with the spirit of our February 2019 decision to support a Primary Care Position Statement from the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta, as well as [previous resolutions from our members](#), we support the MacKinnon Panel's assertion that "many health care problems can be more appropriately treated at less cost by other health professionals, like Nurse Practitioners."

Our Questions

Capital Spending - Municipal Grants (pages 55-56)

We agree there is only one taxpayer, which gives us pause on the panel's conclusion that increasing the pressure on municipal property taxpayers is the answer to funding capital projects. It is the same taxpayer.

- Tax-shifting from the province to municipalities is only downloading the burden of revenue-raising and impedes intermunicipal collaboration that sees more effective and efficient infrastructure investment in regions.

The report states that capital grants to municipalities make up 25% of the provincial government's capital spending, and that the government can't maintain these levels. The report also suggests municipalities should contribute more to infrastructure projects. However, municipalities own and maintain 60% of Alberta's infrastructure, while they receive only 10% of every tax dollar.

- Provincial legislation limits municipalities' revenue generating options, resulting in reliance on property taxes. Urban municipalities do not have room to increase property taxes, especially considering that the provincial government takes roughly 30% of the property tax base for education from the same taxpayer the report references.

Municipal Accountability (page 56)

We question the report recommendation to establish more accountability mechanisms to monitor the delivery of municipal programs and services. Municipalities are already the most transparent level of government.

- Our budgets are debated in open council meetings.
- We provide detailed financial reporting to Municipal Affairs, and those results are accessible to the public.
- Municipalities are the only order of government that cannot run deficits.

The focus of municipal accountability should be to our local electorate, not additional reporting to the Government of Alberta, which would only serve to increase the government's footprint with another layer of red tape.

Municipal Grants – Financial Stewardship (page 55)

The \$440 per capita in municipal grants, as stated in the report, is very misleading, as it includes federal grant funds (such as the Gas Tax Fund) that flow through the provincial coffers before being reallocated to Alberta municipalities.

While we question the validity and context of much of the statistical revenue growth of the province and municipalities from 2008 to 2018, one factor is evident — municipalities are superior financial steward of taxpayer dollars when compared to the other two orders of government.

Municipalities are the most efficient stewards of financial resources. They are continually required to make tough economic decisions, since, unlike the other two orders of government, municipalities cannot run financial deficits.