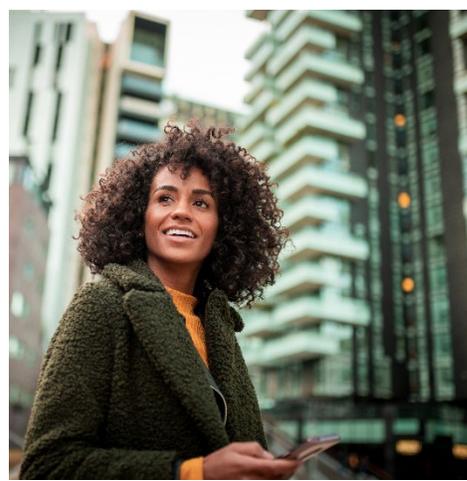


What We Heard: 2025 Municipal Election



 **Alberta
Municipalities**
Strength
In Members

February 2026

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Executive Summary

In the lead up to the 2025 municipal election, legislative changes presented significant challenges for municipalities across Alberta. Amendments contained in Bill 20: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*, Bill 50: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025*, and 54: *Election Statutes Amendment Act* amended critical legislative requirements for returning officers and candidates.

Municipal Affairs typically reviews the *Local Authorities Election Act* (LAEA) following each municipal election. Given this, following the 2025 municipal elections, ABmunis conducted an engagement to gather feedback from municipalities to help inform advocacy efforts during future reviews. Further, ABmunis will use this What We Heard Report to further engage members in identifying recommended solutions to identified issues in anticipation of a review of the act

Engagement was conducted via an online fillable form between November 7, 2025, and January 9, 2026. Participants were asked a series of questions around vote counting equipment, the permanent elector register, financial impact of amendments, complaints from voters, challenges that they experienced, what worked well and areas to consider for review.

ABmunis received 45 submissions, representing summer villages, villages, towns, cities, and specialized municipalities.

Respondents By Municipal Type



**Note: 6 Summer Village submissions represented 15 Summer Villages*

Generally, feedback highlighted the incredible effort required when planning and executing the 2025 municipal election. Significant strain was put onto municipal administrators across the province given amendments were presented within one year of the municipal elections. The prohibition of vote counting equipment, the introduction and implementation of the permanent electors register, and lack of clear training materials and guidance added further challenges to the election process. Given election planning typically begins 18-24 months in advance, with some municipalities beginning as soon as the previous election has concluded, amendments forced municipalities to review their processes and procedures and make substantial changes with limited time to implement. The lack of clear guidance made application difficult, resulting in confusion amongst all users of the legislation, including for electors. Rules on campaign finance and third-party advertising were also amended creating additional reporting requirements and causing confusion for both returning officers and political participants.

Those who provided feedback encouraged a review of the LAEA for consistency and clarity, a reconsideration of the prohibition on vote counting equipment, a review of the requirements of the permanent electors register, and a review of candidate campaign finance rules.

A detailed analysis of the results is enclosed.

VOTE COUNTING MACHINES & ELECTOR REGISTER

Impact on Prohibition of Vote Counting Machines

One of the most impactful changes of the amendments to the LAEA ahead of the 2025 election was the complete prohibition on vote counting equipment. Of the 45 submissions received, 22 respondents indicated that they had used vote counting equipment in previous elections. The removal of vote counting equipment created a cascading effect of other issues including for election worker recruitment, the voting process, the count, and unclear provincial resources.

A significant impact noted in the feedback was the strain on the workers hired to execute the election. Given the change to hand counting, more election workers were needed in many municipalities who had previously used tabulators. Recruitment proved to be a challenge given the unknown of the time that would be needed to count ballots. Worker fatigue was reported due to the long hours, resulting in an arduous process when counting and reconciling ballots.

The elimination of vote counting equipment and related provisions in the LAEA, changed the voting process resulting in multiple ballots being required along with separate ballot boxes for each race. This led to an overall increase in time to issue ballots, as well as required more ballot boxes at the voting stations. Amongst other challenges, the increase in ballot boxes meant more space was required in voting places and more boxes to store and count.

Respondents noted an overall increase in time to report results ranging from two additional hours to as much as several days. The range of responses align with the diversity of municipalities submitting responses. When completing the counts, municipalities noted confusion with legislative forms, as well as receiving emails from Municipal Affairs to report unofficial results, despite not being legislatively required to do so.

Given a significant number of municipalities use at-large systems, ballots that allowed for multiple candidates to be selected created additional challenges with little guidance or resources from Municipal Affairs on how municipalities should proceed.

Impact of Mandatory Permanent Elector Register

The introduction of a mandatory permanent elector register marked a significant process shift for most municipalities across Alberta. Although a similar provision existed in the legislation pre-2025, it was a voluntary process that municipalities could choose to implement based on individual municipal needs. The requirement of the permanent electors register was not extended to Summer Villages. However, this created different challenges given the legislative requirement to have a register if the Summer Village chose to offer special ballots.

To implement the permanent electors register, agreements must be entered into with Elections Alberta, which allows for information to be sent to municipalities for the purpose of creating the register. Following the election, any updates received from the municipalities during the election must be shared with Elections Alberta.

The most significant issue that was raised during the engagement related to the relationship between the permanent electors register, the completion of the Form 13: Elector Register, and identification requirements. Although it can be assumed that the intent of introducing the permanent electors register was to create efficiency and increase confidence in the voting process, the opposite occurred in most municipalities. Unclear instructions

related to Form 13: Elector Register added complexity to the process and further confusion for returning officers and electors.

Respondents noted that inconsistent information between Municipal Affairs and Elections Alberta created confusion, along with how the register applied to Summer Villages, and in instances of joint elections between municipalities and school boards. Respondents also reported outdated information on the register including deceased electors, electors who indicated they'd voted in every election with no change to any of their personal information including address, and electors not being on the register despite registering in advance. Instructions relating to when and how to update the register were also unclear, including a simple name or address change versus registering a new elector.

In addition, implementation and use of the register took considerable resources to develop and maintain, along with impractical requirements to make copies of the register at voting places, when it would be administratively impossible to have a copier or scanner at each voting place. Some municipalities reported using NCR forms for Form 13: Elector Register, which added to the increased cost of the election.

Given the administrative time to develop the register, upload, and prepare the register for use, electors needed to register no later than two months before election day. The implementation of the register required significant financial and human resources, with an overall lack of understanding by electors of what the register was.

Cost Implications of Legislative Changes

The 2025 elections had significant cost implications compared to the 2021 given the elimination of tabulators and the introduction of the permanent electors register. Largely dependent on municipal size, cost increases varied considerably with some respondents indicating as much as double compared to 2021.

Due to the elimination of tabulators, municipalities reported:

- Hiring additional election workers for the count.
- Increased supply costs given the increase in ballot types due to the removal of the consolidated ballot and the need for more ballot boxes.
- The need for larger counting centres as well as additional security costs.
- Additional communications to electors to be clear on expectations and clarify the process.

Due to the introduction of the mandatory permanent electors register, municipalities reported:

- Higher communications costs to encourage electors to register early and to provide information on process changes.
- Increased administrative and staff time to provide data to Elections Alberta both pre and post-election, as well as to receive and sort data from Elections Alberta prior to the municipal election.
- The need for additional staff at voting places to search for electors and issue ballots.
- The introduction of new software, licenses, and equipment to help to manage the register.
- Completing Privacy Impact Assessments and cyber security testing.

**WHAT WORKED WELL
AND WHAT DID
MUNICIPALITIES
HEAR?**

What Worked Well?

Through the engagement, respondents were asked to highlight what sections or provisions of the LAEA worked well and should be maintained. It is worth noting that some feedback highlighted that the LAEA affords municipalities the flexibility to adapt processes for their communities, which is particularly important for small municipalities. There were competing viewpoints on the value of the permanent electors register with some respondents indicating that the register worked well, so long as improvements are made to the instructions related to Form 13: Elector Register and identification requirements.

Respondents also highlighted that overall, the nomination process works well, including the longer nomination period, particularly for larger municipalities. The longer nomination period, coupled with expanding the ability to pay deposits through credit and debit cards, were helpful and eliminated barriers for those interested in running for municipal office.

Many respondents noted that the voting process related to establishing voting subdivisions, voting stations, requirements for compartments for voting, ballot boxes, sealing ballot boxes, printing of ballots, names on ballot, contents of ballot, form of ballot, instructions for voters, and voting hours all work well. Lastly, respondents noted the importance of maintaining vouching provisions given that it removes barriers to voting.

Respondents were appreciative of the removal of the limited criteria to request a special ballot, allowing for greater access. Some also indicated that if the prohibition of vote counting machines continues, separate ballots work well.

Overall, respondents noted that section 147 being Candidate Campaign Finance and Contribution Disclosure contributes to overall fairness and transparency by requiring candidates to disclose contributions, which strengthens and enhances accountability. Although candidates raised concerns, and respondents indicated that aspects of candidate campaign finance need to be reviewed and reconsidered, the basic principles of transparency and accountability were agreed to.

What did Electors Say?

ABmunis asked respondents to indicate if they received any feedback from electors and if so, what types of feedback they received during the election.

The most prevalent complaints were related to the voting process, including reports of long lines and the length of time it took to go through the voting process. Specifically, electors noted the redundancy of completing the Form 13 – Elector Register if they were already on the permanent electors register and unclear identification rules. Electors also raised questions related to how someone gets onto the register, why some people are not on the register despite registering early, how personal information contained on the register is used, and how individuals in the same household are not all included in the register.

Electors also shared specific concerns regarding identification that are not made clear within the LAEA, including the importance for identification to match information included in the permanent elector register, PO boxes being on identification but not listed on register, and no requirement to prove Canadian Citizenship.

Numerous complaints were received relating to the elimination of vote counting equipment, including the length of time it took to count ballots, the costs associated to complete the hand counting, and confusion regarding who made the changes to no longer use vote counting equipment. In addition, some electors noted the distrust of the election given the potential errors with hand counting and the time it took to release results.

Respondents also shared fewer common concerns including confusion regarding the institutional voting process, not being permitted to use drop boxes to collect special ballots given the ongoing Canada Post work disruption,

restrictions on the vouching process, no longer being permitted to object to a person voting, and lack of clarity around the role of scrutineers.

Many respondents also shared concerns from candidates including the reintroduction of the intent to run process, lack of clarity around requirements when a candidate withdraws their name from the register of candidates, campaign disclosure timing, requirements for bank accounts, use of municipal resources for the purposes of campaigning (previously addressed in codes of conduct), and an overall lack of enforcement and lack of clarity on who has the authority to investigate candidates or adjudicate disputes. Some respondents also noted issues with the rules relating to campaigning in multi-unit dwellings.

Summer Village Perspective

Summer Villages offer unique perspectives as they relate to the LAEA. Although the LAEA includes section 12 to offer specific provisions for the application of the legislation to summer villages, there continue to be challenges. The Association of Summer Villages of Alberta (ASVA) has compiled a submission to Municipal Affairs and shared with ABmunis as a part of our engagement. The ASVA submission is detailed to support the needs of summer villages. The items below represent a summary of the common issues that we heard from those summer villages who submitted feedback during ABmunis engagement but is not inclusive of all information shared by ASVA.

ASVA highlighted that a top concern relates to voting equity and allowing multiple voters per property. Current legislation allows an unlimited number of owners and spouses listed on a single certificate of title to vote. In practice, this can result in dozens of votes tied to a single property, creating disproportionate influence. This risk is unique to Summer Villages and undermines the principle that each property should have a fair and roughly equal voice.

Respondents also highlighted difficulty with the nomination process, specifically that the nomination period for summer villages is restricted to a single nomination day, whereas all other municipalities nomination period opens on January 1st in the year of the general election. This creates restrictions on access for those interested in seeking nomination in summer villages and creates a disparity amongst summer villages and other municipalities, which could lead to confusion for voters and potential candidates.

The requirements of the permanent electors register did not apply to summer villages. Summer villages shared that it was confirmed that Elections Alberta data is not suitable for summer villages given that voter eligibility is based on land title ownership rather than residency. In 2025, the difficulty in not having a permanent electors register meant that summer villages could not access special ballots, an offering that is useful for summer villages given the uniqueness of their voting population. In addition, respondents identified that voter eligibility for summer villages should be reviewed including requirements in section 12, and the relationship between section 47 (Eligibility to Vote) and 48 (Rules of Residence).

Respondents identified that identification requirements for summer villages are problematic given that requiring only one piece of identification does not work as it cannot be compared to any use of the permanent elector register. Requiring a second piece of identification is crucial for summer villages.

Additional feedback shared by ASVA included concerns around:

- examining nomination papers,
- candidate eligibility and a concentration of power given that multiple individuals may be associated with the same property,
- election administration capacity and staffing,
- returning officer discretion and election integrity,
- campaign finance, and
- forms and regulations.

**WHAT NEEDS TO BE
IMPROVED?**

What to Focus on for 2029

Overall, respondents called for a comprehensive review of the LAEA to remove ambiguity and align requirements (especially relating to the permanent electors register, identification, and campaign finance). Respondents also indicated that form templates available in editable formats would be helpful, and improvements on resources made available through Municipal Affairs.

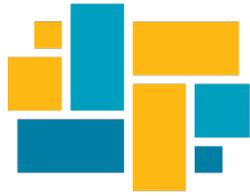
At a high level, suggestions for improvement focused on:

- nomination processes,
- reviewing the permanent elector register requirements, including clarifying the use and requirements of Form 13 – Elector Register, and identification requirements,
- reviewing and creating clarity related to voting processes including:
 - voting options,
 - scrutineer roles and responsibilities,
 - ballot marking instructions,
 - count centres,
 - ballot accounting,
 - packing election documents,
 - and timelines for official results and recounts,
- permitting vote counting machines,
- reviewing candidate campaign contribution and disclosure requirements,
- examining options related to the enforcement of the LAEA,
- updating government forms to create clarity and ease of use, and
- aligning municipal, school board, and provincial election processes, where possible.

Significant stress was placed on municipal administrators due to legislative amendments made within a year of the election. Many municipalities struggled to adapt their planning and processes to these late changes, resulting in confusion and increased workload.

Acknowledging that municipalities begin to plan and create processes for elections as soon as the previous election has concluded, future amendments must be coordinated with more than twelve months' notice to allow for adequate time to implement changes.

ABmunis will use this What We Heard Report to engage members in identifying recommended solutions to inform our input to Municipal Affairs in anticipation of a review of the act.



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