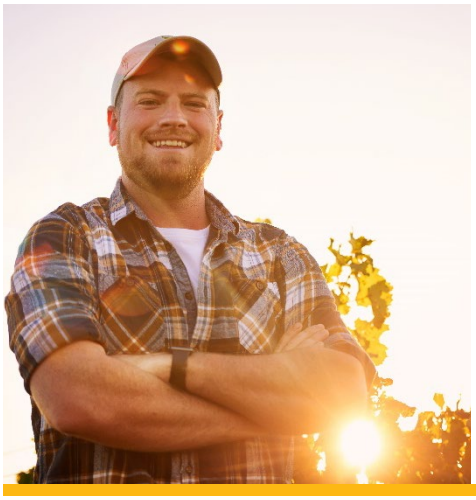
What We Heard: Virtual Special Municipal Leaders Caucus Fall 2026





Alberta Municipalities
Strength In Members

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Local Decisions. Local Voices

Alberta Municipalities convened a special virtual Municipal Leaders Caucus in response to concerns about the cumulative effects of provincial legislative changes and intervention in areas of municipal legislative authority. These concerns extend beyond individual decisions to their implications for local decision-making, municipal operations and services, and residents' confidence in local government.

The caucus provided an opportunity for members to consider these changes together, share examples of their local impacts and help shape Alberta Municipalities' response. Discussions centred on six proposed principles intended to guide advocacy on municipal autonomy—the ability of municipalities to make decisions within their responsibilities that reflect local needs—and a coordinated path forward.

Participants voted on each proposed principle and were invited to provide written feedback. Additional polling sought input on the proposed advocacy direction, and the support members need to share the principles and key messages.

This What We Heard report brings together polling results and written feedback from both days of the caucus. It summarizes levels of support, key themes and suggested refinements to inform the development of the principles and Alberta Municipalities' advocacy plan. Response totals varied by question and by day; the findings reflect the input received from caucus participants.

VOTING RESULTS & WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Results at a Glance

Proposed Principle	Yes	No	Support
Respect Local Democracy	107	1	99.1%
Consult Before Intervening	103	4	96.3%
Recognize Local Differences	100	4	96.2%
Ensure Transparency & Fairness	96	2	98.0%
Consider Municipal Impacts	96	5	95.0%
Work Together for Better Outcomes	96	3	97.0%

Overall, there was strong endorsement for all six principles, with all results showing at least 95% support. The following general feedback was received:

- Participants wanted municipalities engaged before decisions, with clear definitions, adequate time and a genuine opportunity to influence outcomes.
- Participants cautioned that consultation and collaboration language should not normalize provincial intervention in local matters.
- Participants emphasized differences in geography, population, municipal type, demographics, capacity, resources and community priorities when speaking about local differences.
- Participants asked that the province provide written reasons, clear evidence, representative consultation, draft rules where possible, while ensuring reasonable response periods and accountability for following the process.
- Participants also voiced it being critical for the cumulative impacts related to financial, operational, service, staffing, timing to be understood and addressed before implementation of any provincial decision or directives.

What we Heard About Each Principle

The following represents a summary of written feedback on each principle. Individual responses have not been included to ensure anonymity, but rather key themes and feedback summarized.

Respect Local Democracy

Locally elected councils should have the authority to make lawful decisions within their responsibilities. When councils follow provincial rules and established processes, their decisions should be respected. Councils are accountable to residents through local elections.

107 of 108 respondents supported the principle (99.1%).

- Councils are elected by and are accountable to residents, and decisions made through legitimate municipal processes should be respected.
- Local officials were described as closest to residents and best positioned to understand local needs. Participants linked interference with reduced accountability and public confidence.
- Participants asked for language that is specific and clear about what respecting local democracy requires.
- Some also emphasized amplifying common ground across orders of government rather than expecting complete alignment.

Consult Before Intervening

The province should engage municipalities in meaningful consultation before intervening in local decisions, providing opportunities to understand concerns and explore alternatives.

103 of 107 respondents supported the principle (96.3%).

- Participants strongly supported meaningful consultation before provincial action and repeatedly asked for a clear definition of "consultation" or "meaningful engagement."
- A recurring concern was that the phrase may legitimize intervention. Participants suggested intervention should be rare, clearly justified and preceded by engagement with the affected municipality.
- Suggestions included a formal consultation protocol, direct engagement with councils, early sharing of the problem being addressed and sufficient time to identify local consequences.

Recognize Local Differences

Provincial policies should respect the diverse needs, circumstances and priorities of Alberta's communities. Local flexibility is essential to effective governance.

100 of 104 respondents supported the principle (96.2%).

- Participants rejected blanket approaches and emphasized differences in municipal type, geography, population, demographics, resources, capacity, culture and priorities.
- Feedback supported principles rather than prescriptions and flexibility to apply local context case by case.
- Some participants cautioned that complete flexibility does not automatically produce effective governance and that common standards and consistent advocacy messages may still be needed.

Ensure Transparency & Fairness

Provincial intervention should be supported by clear reasons, transparent processes and fair opportunities for municipalities to respond.

96 of 98 respondents supported the principle (98.0%).

- Participants wanted clear reasons, evidence, draft rules or regulations where possible, and formal written explanations of decisions and consequences.
- Consultation should be transparent and representative, provide reasonable time for feedback, and give affected municipalities a fair opportunity to respond.
- Participants asked that “transparency” and “fairness” be defined in practical terms and suggested stronger wording such as “must” rather than “should,” with accountability when agreed processes are not followed.

Consider Municipal Impacts

Provincial decisions should account for financial, operational and community impacts, including the costs of implementing changes to established municipal plans and services.

96 of 101 respondents supported the principle (95.0%).

- Financial impacts remained central, including unexpected costs, downloading, tax pressures, budget disruption and disproportionate effects on municipalities with limited revenue and capacity.
- Participants also pointed to operational, staffing, service, planning, community and cumulative impacts. Early engagement was seen as essential because provincial decision-makers may not know the full local consequences.
- Several comments supported assessing and mitigating impacts before legislation or implementation. One participant suggested the principle may overlap with the other principles and could be made more direct.

Work Together for Better Outcomes

Provincial and municipal governments share responsibility for serving Albertans. Respectful collaboration, clear roles and constructive dialogue lead to better decisions and stronger communities.

96 of 99 respondents supported the principle (97.0%).

- Participants supported constructive relationships, ongoing communication, shared accountability and using local knowledge to improve outcomes.
- Collaboration should not blur jurisdictional boundaries or assume that provincial intervention is acceptable. Participants asked for clearer roles and a shared understanding of what “better outcomes” means.
- Some viewed working together as an action or expected practice rather than a standalone principle, suggesting the next draft should clarify what collaboration looks like in practice.

Feedback After the Virtual Meeting

ABmunis received several written submissions from members who attended the webinar and wanted to share additional thoughts outside the online format.

Provincial Intervention Must Be Challenged

The feedback focused primarily on the fourth principle, *Ensure Transparency & Fairness*. Some members were concerned that its wording could be interpreted as accepting provincial intervention in municipal administration and operations, provided the province gave reasons and a fair opportunity for the municipality to respond.

Alternative Viewpoints

ABmunis did seek feedback from those who have different viewpoints on provincial intervention. Among those who voted against the principles and indicated that they viewed provincial intervention as justified, the dominant argument was not that municipalities should lose autonomy generally, but rather that intervention may be warranted when local councils are perceived to have ignored residents, when broader public interests are affected, or when the province is exercising a legitimate oversight role under provincial legislation.

Notably, even some respondents who supported a provincial role emphasized that intervention should be transparent, fair, and collaborative rather than unilateral.

Suggestions for Improvement

Members suggested clarifying that provincial intervention should address municipal decisions that do not comply with the *Municipal Government Act* or other applicable municipal legislation—not decisions that simply attract disagreement from the province or the public.

Under this approach, intervention would remain the exception, not the norm. Any intervention would be grounded in applicable legislation and accompanied by:

- Clear reasons.
- Transparent processes.
- Fair opportunities for municipalities to respond.

THE WAY FORWARD, TOGETHER

Advocacy Direction: Are We Hitting the Mark?

Proposed advocacy steps

After reviewing the cumulative legislative changes, sharing examples of their effects on municipalities and residents, and gathering feedback on the draft principles, ABmunis outlined the following next steps on municipal autonomy:

- Refine the principles based on member feedback.
- Engage with the Government of Alberta.
- Explore public opinion research and a stronger media presence.
- Draft proposed solutions that reflect the principles.
- Re-engage members through future webinars and events, including the Spring Municipal Leaders Caucus in April 2027.
- Ensure municipal impacts are considered in future Government of Alberta policy and legislative announcements.

Polling results

Across both days, participants were asked whether ABmunis' proposed advocacy approach was hitting the mark. Responses were:

- Yes: 76 submissions.
- No: 6 submissions.
- I need more information: 10 submissions.

Priorities raised in feedback

Follow-up comments reflected both support and urgency. Participants asked ABmunis to:

- Sharpen and broaden its message and communicate more directly with the public.
- Give greater attention to municipal authority and fiscal capacity.
- Report more frequently on interactions with the Government of Alberta.
- Strengthen advocacy on downloading and the cumulative effects of provincial decisions.

Other comments highlighted the volume of existing resolutions and the need to maintain a focused advocacy agenda.

How Members Want Support

Across both days, members suggested practical ways ABmunis could help them share the principles and key messages on municipal autonomy:

Communication tools and public visibility

- Provide ready-to-use messaging toolkits and media templates for council columns, municipal social media and constituent communications.
- Coordinate media and social media communications to raise public awareness of municipal concerns.
- Emphasize the cumulative impacts of provincial decisions on local authority, budgets and service delivery.

Regional and council engagement

- Offer smaller regional or representative engagement sessions alongside major annual events.
- Engage directly with councils where this would support municipalities.

Joint advocacy and alignment

- Explore a joint declaration on municipal autonomy.
- Coordinate with municipal associations in other provinces and explore broader alignment while maintaining Alberta-specific priorities.

What Comes Next

ABmunis will use the feedback to refine the six proposed principles and develop a concise advocacy plan connecting local democracy with voices across Alberta's municipalities. The plan will recognize that residents entrust their elected leaders to make decisions that reflect their communities' unique needs. Updates will be shared as they become available.

Alberta Municipalities

Strength In Members

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