

The information in this Guide is intended to assist candidates understand the role and responsibilities of an elected official as well as providing an overview of municipal government. Please note that certain sections of this Guide have been reproduced from the Government of Alberta's "[What Every Councillor Needs to Know – A Council Member's Handbook](#)".

Time Management

Elected officials experience significant demands on their time. There will be council, council committees, and various other meetings to attend. To participate effectively in all these meetings, elected officials should review meeting materials and become familiar with the issues that will be discussed. Conferences and workshops sponsored by your municipal association or educational institutions will help provide elected officials with the tools to be effective. Emails, calls from electors and community events are all important components of the job.

The City of Beaumont policy classifies the position of mayor as full-time, while the position of councillor is part-time. This means that the mayor can expect to dedicate approximately 40 hours per week on their duties, and councillors can expect to dedicate approximately 20 hours per week. However, there may be times that are busier than average, for example, additional council meetings are held as part of the annual budget process.

Elected officials typically spend time doing the following:

- Preparing for council or committee meetings (e.g., reading agenda packages and considering the various topics to be discussed);
- Attending council and committee meetings (this includes external committees to which Council appoints elected officials to serve as a representative of the City);
- Councillors serve as Deputy Mayor for a period of 9 months during the municipal term;
- Attending city and community events and building relationships with community members and other city stakeholders;
- Answering inquires from residents related to city matters;
- Attending information sessions or education sessions;
- Meeting with constituents or other stakeholders as required;
- Obtaining information on city matters through the appropriate channels (e.g., through the Chief Administrative Officer, Councillor Inquiries, etc.); and
- Attending strategic planning sessions, municipal conventions, or other special events.

Serving on Council means that you are in the public eye. Members of the public may not distinguish between your personal time and time spent on official duties. Consideration to your conduct is essential and familiarity with the requirements of the Council Code of Conduct Bylaw will help you navigate your role (see Council Code of Conduct section below for more detail).

Remuneration

Elected Official remuneration is set by Council [policy](#). The current annual salary for the position of Mayor is \$100,000; the annual salary for the position of Councillor is \$40,000, and the annual salary for the position of Deputy Mayor is \$43,000.

Elected officials are entitled to the following benefits:

- The Mayor may choose to participate in the City of Beaumont offered benefit program which includes but is not limited to Supplementary Health Care Plan, Dental Plan, Life Insurance and Accidental Death and Dismemberment. If choosing to participate, the Mayor must register within 60 days of being elected. Benefit premiums will be 100% paid by the municipality, excluding optional coverages under the plan.
- The Mayor may choose to participate in the Alberta Communities Pension Plan (ACPP) which is a registered Defined Contribution Pension Plan with a fixed rate and matching contributions between the Mayor and the municipality.
- Both the Mayor and the municipality will make a contribution in the amount of 8% of the Mayor's base annual salary to the Mayor's ACPP if the Mayor chooses to participate in the ACPP.
- If the Mayor chooses to participate in ACPP, the Mayor cannot withdraw from ACPP until the conclusion of their service as an elected official. If the Mayor chooses not to participate in ACPP, then the municipality will provide a contribution in the amount of 8% of the Mayor's base annual salary which the Mayor may use in support of retirement savings.
- The Deputy Mayor and Councillors may participate in the City of Beaumont offered benefit program, which includes but is not limited to Supplementary Health Care Plan, Dental Plan, Life Insurance and Accidental Death and Dismemberment. The Deputy Mayor or Councillor must register within 60 days of being elected and is responsible for 100% of the benefit premium costs.

Elected officials may access additional funding for necessary travel, conferences, training and development, and event registration.

Elected officials will receive a computer (including the necessary software) to be used during the municipal term and a \$100 per month internet and cell phone subsidy to offset costs related to conducting duties using personal cell phones and internet service.

Each Elected officials will receive a complimentary personal membership at the Beaumont Sport and Recreation Centre.

Municipal Government Act (MGA)

In 1967, the various pieces of municipal legislation were consolidated into the original Municipal Government Act (MGA). In 1994, a further consolidation and revision of municipal legislation took place. The 1994 revisions gave municipalities greater autonomy in local decision making and incorporated the provisions of the former Planning Act.

The current MGA is the primary statute governing the affairs of municipalities in Alberta. An online, searchable version of the MGA is available through the [Canadian Legal Information Institute \(CanLII\)](#).

Section 3 of the MGA states the purposes of a municipality are:

- to provide good government;
- to foster the well-being of the environment;
- to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality;
- to develop and maintain safe and viable communities; and
- to work collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities to plan, deliver and fund intermunicipal services.

A municipality is a corporation and has the powers of a natural person, except to the extent that those powers are limited by the MGA or any other enactment. The introduction of natural person powers provides council with a great deal of flexibility in terms of how the municipality is organized and administered, what services are provided, and how those services are delivered.

The power to pass bylaws is stated in general terms. This gives councils broad authority and respects their right to govern the municipality in the way that council considers appropriate within the jurisdiction provided under the MGA. However, bylaws authorized by the MGA or any other enactment are subordinate to federal and provincial legislation and regulations.

Council Roles and Responsibilities

Council is the governing body of the municipal corporation and the custodian of its legislative powers. Councillors exercise the powers of the municipality through decisions made at council meetings and they set the policies and direction that municipal administration puts into action.

The MGA provides that councils can only exercise the powers of the municipal corporation in the proper form, either by **bylaw** or by **resolution**. What this means is that no individual or group of councillors can make a decision or ask administration to take action. Direction or action can only be done through an appropriate bylaw or resolution passed at a public meeting of council.

Councillors must work with other council members to set the overall direction of the municipality through their role as policy-makers. The policies council sets are the guidelines for administration to follow as it manages the operations of the municipality. Much of a councillor's time will be spent considering new policies and programs and reviewing the current ones to make sure they are working as they should.

Councillor Responsibilities

Under section 153 of the MGA, all councillors have the following duties:

- to consider the welfare and interests of the municipality as a whole and to bring to council's attention anything that would promote the welfare or interests of the municipality;
- to promote an integrated and strategic approach to intermunicipal land use planning and service delivery with neighbouring municipalities;

- to participate generally in developing and evaluating the policies and programs of the municipality;
- to participate in council meetings and council committee meetings and meetings of other bodies to which they are appointed by the council;
- to obtain information about the operation or administration of the municipality from the chief administrative officer or a person designated by the chief administrative officer;
- to keep in confidence matters discussed in private at a council or council committee meeting until discussed at a meeting held in public;
- to adhere to the code of conduct established by the council by bylaw; and
- to perform any other duty or function imposed on councillors by this or any other enactment or by the council.

The Chief Elected Official (CEO) or Mayor

In Beaumont, the CEO is elected by a vote of a municipality's electors and is given the title "mayor." In addition to performing a councillor's duties, the Mayor presides when attending a council meeting; however, the Deputy Mayor presides when attending Committee of the Whole meetings. The Mayor is also the main spokesperson for the municipality, unless that duty is delegated to another councillor by Council.

The Deputy Mayor

The Deputy Mayor is responsible for performing the duties of the Mayor when the Mayor is absent. Beaumont City Council establishes a schedule that sees each Councillor assigned the role of Deputy Mayor for an 8-month period.

Committees, Boards, and other Agencies

Council may create "council committees" by bylaw and may delegate certain tasks to a committee. Typically, council committees provide advice to Council on topics that are relevant to Council's strategic plan. Information on the City's boards and committee can be found [here](#).

Council Code of Conduct

Council must establish a Code of Conduct by bylaw which applies to all members of Council. The Code of Conduct provides Councillors with a framework to guide ethical conduct in a way that upholds the integrity of the City and the high standards of professional conduct the public expects from elected officials. The bylaw addresses key topics such as using city resources, representing the views of council, communicating on behalf of council, gifts, respecting others, confidentiality, complaints, and more. You can view the Code of Conduct bylaw [here](#).

Councillor Liability

The question of liability may arise because of a councillor's actions. However, section 535 of the MGA was written to protect a councillor from personal liability while acting in good faith for the

municipality. This section of the MGA does not apply in circumstances of defamation and does not protect the municipal corporation from any such liability.

There are several provisions in the MGA that impose liability on a councillor: section 249 which deals with unauthorized expenditures and section 275 which deals with borrowings, loans, or guarantees that cause the municipality to exceed its debt limit are two such examples (more detail is provided in the Financial section below). While it is important to be aware of these liabilities, they should not be a concern if the municipality follows appropriate process.

Council Meetings and Procedures

Council adopts a regular meeting schedule at its Organizational Meeting each year, but additional council meetings (called Special Meetings) can be called as required in accordance with the rules set out in the MGA.

City of Beaumont typically has two regular Council meetings and one Committee of the Whole (COTW) meeting per month which all members of council usually attend. Council meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. and COTW meetings begin at 5:00 p.m. Meetings can vary in length but are usually between 2 and 3 hours. You can visit our meetings webpage [here](#).

All council and council committee meetings must be open to the public, except for agenda items that fall under one of the exemptions set out in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The provisions of the MGA regarding public presence at meetings are intended to promote public involvement and the accountability of the local government process.

As noted above, the timing of regular council meetings does not always align with urgent business that requires council attention. There will be times when a special council meeting is required. Section 194 of the MGA states that a special meeting may be called if the Mayor believes one is needed and must be called if a majority of councillors request one in writing.

Council and council committees can hold meetings by means of electronic or other communication facilities, (Section 199) rather than in person. Notice must be given to the public of such a meeting, including the way it will be conducted. The facilities must enable all the meeting's participants to watch or hear each other, and the public to watch or listen.

The rules for council meetings are established in the Meetings Procedures Bylaw. You can review the bylaw [here](#).

Voting

Elected officials are on council to make decisions. Under the MGA, elected officials are required to vote on all resolutions and bylaws unless they are required or permitted to abstain from voting under other legislated provisions. Council must ensure that each abstention and the reason for it are recorded in the minutes of the meeting. If there is a public hearing on a proposed bylaw or resolution, a councillor must abstain from voting on the bylaw or resolution if they were absent from all of a public hearing, and they may abstain if they were absent for a part of a public hearing. Section 172 of the MGA states that elected officials must also abstain from voting on matters in which they have a pecuniary (monetary) interest. Each councillor has one vote. A

resolution is passed by receiving the majority of votes from the councillors in attendance at the meeting. When there is a tie vote on a motion, the motion is defeated.

A quorum must be present at a council meeting for any resolution or bylaw to be valid. A quorum is a majority of councillors making up the municipal council. For example, if your council consists of seven councillors (including the Mayor); four councillors would constitute a quorum.

Pecuniary Interest

Membership on council is a position of public trust. The MGA describes pecuniary interest and sets out the procedure a councillor must follow if they have a pecuniary interest in a matter that comes up at a meeting in which they are participating as a member of council. Failure to follow these procedures can lead to disqualification. The Government of Alberta provides more detailed information on pecuniary interest for councillors [here](#).

Administration

A vital part of the smooth operation of municipal government is the interaction between council and administration. Understanding how administration works will help elected officials carry out their role as municipal councillors. Administration exists to take care of the everyday work of running a municipal government. This includes providing a variety of programs and services based on the priorities council has set for the municipality.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Every council must establish, by bylaw, a position of CAO. The CAO is the administrative head of the municipality and is directly responsible to council for the operational performance of the organization. The CAO is responsible to implement the decisions of council, implement the municipality's policies and programs, advise and inform council on the operation of the municipality, and perform any other duties assigned by council.

The CAO, together with the administrative team, will also provide advice, information, and recommendations to council on any matters that council is dealing with. Successful municipalities have found that clear lines of communication and accountability are essential for effective operation. This is generally achieved when the CAO is provided with the authority to take council direction (through resolutions and bylaws) and implement that direction through the administrative team. Although well intentioned, individual councillor's attempts to become involved by providing direction to the administrative team can blur this accountability.

A performance appraisal system for the CAO is a key building block for a lasting and positive relationship between council and the CAO. Even though the current relationship may be good, a formal appraisal process provides the opportunity to discuss opportunities for improvement. The MGA, therefore, requires that council provide the CAO with an annual written performance evaluation.

Financial Matters and Oversight

Almost everything the municipality is engaged in will have a cost associated with it. Council spends a lot of time assessing the financial implications of decisions.

See MGA s. 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, and 247 for information on operating and capital budgets.

The budget is the center of the municipal finance system. Service delivery and project development are always subject to several constraints, but financial constraints are generally the most limiting. As a result, the priorities of council will necessarily be reflected in the funding priorities established in the budget. Through the budget, council sets the municipality's priorities for the next year by allocating funding for each program, service, or project.

Careful and realistic budget planning and control can translate into better and more cost-effective services for the community. You can visit the City's [budget webpage](#) to learn more about the City's budget process and to review the last few approved budgets.

Like most municipalities, the City of Beaumont has a strategic plan that maps out longer term goals and identifies the municipality's priorities over several years. The strategic plan can provide year-to-year guidance and direction to the annual budget process and provides the longer-term context for annual goals. Learn more about the City of Beaumont's Strategic Plan [here](#).

The MGA requires that every municipality adopt an annual operating and a capital budget. Property and business tax bylaws cannot be passed until both budgets have been adopted. Municipalities are not allowed to budget for a deficit; however, sometimes unexpected circumstances may result in the municipality having a deficit at year end. If the deficit does not cause the municipality to have an overall accumulated deficit, net of the value of tangible capital assets, then the municipality remains on-side with legislative requirements and can budget to recover that deficit in future years as council sees fit.

The operating budget is a detailed estimate of how much the municipality needs to spend to meet its ongoing financial obligations and provide programs and services to the residents. The capital budget identifies the sources and uses of funding for fixed assets such as buildings, roads, vehicles, water and sewer facilities, and land.

Long Range Financial Plans

A long-range capital infrastructure plan, covering at least three to five years, is required to receive provincial infrastructure grant funding. The plan should set out what capital expenditures are needed and when, the future cost of maintaining the asset, when it has been built or purchased, and how the assets will be financed.

Additionally, municipalities are required to have, at minimum, a three-year financial plan and five-year capital plan. These plans allow council to see the long-term impact of decisions made today, ensuring council is considering the continued sustainability of the municipality when making financial decisions.

Procedure for Expenditure Authorization (MGA s. 248 and 249)

Each council must establish procedures to authorize and verify expenditures that are not included in a budget. If you, as a councillor, make an unauthorized expenditure, or vote to spend granted or borrowed funds for a purpose other than that for which they were granted or borrowed, you could be held personally liable under section 249 of the MGA for the amount of the expenditure, grant, or borrowing.

Borrowing (see MGA s. 249, 252, and 275)

The Minister of Municipal Affairs has, by regulation, established municipal debt and debt service limits. As long as a municipality is within the limits, no provincial approvals are required for borrowing, but the Minister's approval is required for any borrowing beyond the debt limits. If you vote for a borrowing that puts the municipality above the regulated debt or debt service limit, you could be held personally liable for the borrowing, unless the borrowing is approved by the Minister.

Auditor (see MGA s. 276, 277, 278, and 280; Alberta Regulation 313/2000)

Each council must appoint an auditor for the municipality and must submit audited financial statements and an audited financial information return to the Minister of Municipal Affairs by May 1 of each year. In addition, the financial statements or a summary of them must be made available to the public by May 1 of each year. The financial statements must disclose the municipality's debt limit.

Property Tax (MGA s. 242, 297, 318, 354, 355, 356, and 359.1)

Each year, municipal councils determine the amount of money they need to operate their municipality through the budget process. From this amount, council then subtracts known revenues (for example, licenses, grants, and permits). The remainder is the amount of money the municipality needs to raise through property taxes to provide services for the year. This revenue requirement is then used to calculate the tax rate. The tax rate is the percentage of assessed value at which each property is taxed in a municipality. The revenue requirement is divided by the assessment base (the total value of all assessed properties in the municipality).

The tax rate calculation is expressed in the following formula:

$$\text{Revenue requirement} / \text{Assessment base} = \text{Tax rate}$$

The tax rate is applied to each individual property assessment using the following formula:

$$\text{Property assessment} \times \text{Tax rate} = \text{Taxes payable}$$

Council is required to pass a property tax bylaw annually (MGA section 353). Council may set different municipal tax rates for each of the four assessment classes once each year; however, the difference between non-residential and residential tax rates can be no more than 5:1. Council may also set different tax rates for vacant and improved non-residential property and for different sub-classes of residential property.

If, after sending out the tax notices, the municipality discovers an error or omission in the tax rates, the bylaw can be amended to correct the error, new tax notices sent out and a copy of the new bylaw must be provided to the Minister within 30 days. In addition to municipal tax rates, municipalities must set tax rates to raise funds that are requisitioned for cost sharing programs such as the Alberta School Foundation Fund.

Education Tax and Equalized Assessment (MGA s. 318, 359.1 and 359.2; School Act: Part 6 Division 3, s. 174; Alberta Regulation 22/2004-Sec 10)

Property assessment is used as the basis on which to requisition property taxes from all or a number of municipalities for the financial support of several regional and provincial programs. Equalized assessment is a process that levels the playing field for municipalities so property tax requisitions and grants can be fairly allocated. Just as property owners pay taxes in proportion to the value of the property they own, municipalities are required to contribute to the provincial education and other requisitions based on the proportion of assessment within their jurisdictions. Equalized assessments are used to determine the specific contributions to be made by each municipality, and they are also used in formulas for provincial grants to municipalities.

Other Taxes and Revenues (MGA s. 7, 360, 371, 381, 382, 388, 393, and 399)

In addition to the property tax levy, a municipality may impose a business tax, a special tax, or a local improvement tax. As well, the MGA provides for taxes within a business improvement area and on well drilling equipment. Under section 360 of the MGA, franchise agreements may exist between a municipality and a utility service (power, gas, cable, telephone) that, among other things, provide for the payment of a franchise fee. The fee is usually a percentage of the distribution charges levied by the utility company, and is a rate set for rent of the municipal rights-of-way, the exclusive franchise rights granted within a municipality, and the property taxes that would otherwise be paid by the utility. There are other sources of revenue available, mainly user fees. Utility charges for water, sewer treatment, and garbage collection are common in Alberta municipalities. Council may want to develop a policy setting the rates based on the degree of cost recovery considered desirable (full cost recovery is normal for utilities). Fees can also be set for other services, such as recreational facilities, photocopying, or meeting room rentals.

Planning and Development

Council shapes the physical future of the community through its authority over land-use planning and development control. It is the responsibility of council to focus on the future of the

community as a whole while balancing the current rights, needs and concerns of property owners and residents. A number of tools are available to council for this purpose.

Municipal Development Plan (MGA s. 632, 636, 637 and 638)

Every council of a municipality must adopt a municipal development plan (MDP). The MDP provides a general framework for development within the municipality and is the official statement of the municipality's policies concerning the desired future pattern of development. The City of Beaumont's MDP can be viewed [here](#).

Land Use Bylaws (MGA s. 638.2, 640, 642, 685, and 686)

All municipalities must have a land use bylaw (LUB). This bylaw provides a specific means of implementing the policies that are expressed in a general way in the municipal development plan. For instance, if a council wishes to adopt a direct control district in the land use bylaw, council must also adopt a municipal development plan that establishes that direction. All statutory documents must be consistent with each other. The LUB provides for a system for issuing development permits and divides the municipality into land use districts or 'zones' prescribing permitted and discretionary uses for land, and development standards for each land use district.

Council must establish a development authority to administer the development approval process and make decisions. When an application conforms to the provisions of the LUB and is of a permitted use, a development permit must be issued. Where an application is for a discretionally use, it may be approved with or without conditions, or it may be refused. If an application is refused the applicant may appeal to the subdivision and development appeal board (SDAB) or in certain situations to the Land and Property Rights Tribunal of Alberta.

Additionally, people who believe they may be affected by the propose development may make submissions to the development authority and may also appeal the decision of the development authority. More information on the City of Beaumont's Land Use Bylaw can be accessed [here](#).

Conclusion

This Guide is a starting point to help you understand the role, expectations, and realities of serving on council. If you are elected to Council, the City's administration will be able to provide more orientation and training to help you succeed in your role. Administration can also provide you with a list of training opportunities offered by third parties. If you have immediate questions about the information in this guide, you may contact the Legal and Legislative Services department through the legislative@beaumont.ab.ca email address.