

COMMUNITY
STRONG

YOUR TOWN, YOUR SAY:
**Understanding How
Three Hills Runs**



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WELCOME

How to Use This Guide

Municipal elections can have the greatest impact on your daily life, which is why we believe they are among the most important elections to vote in.

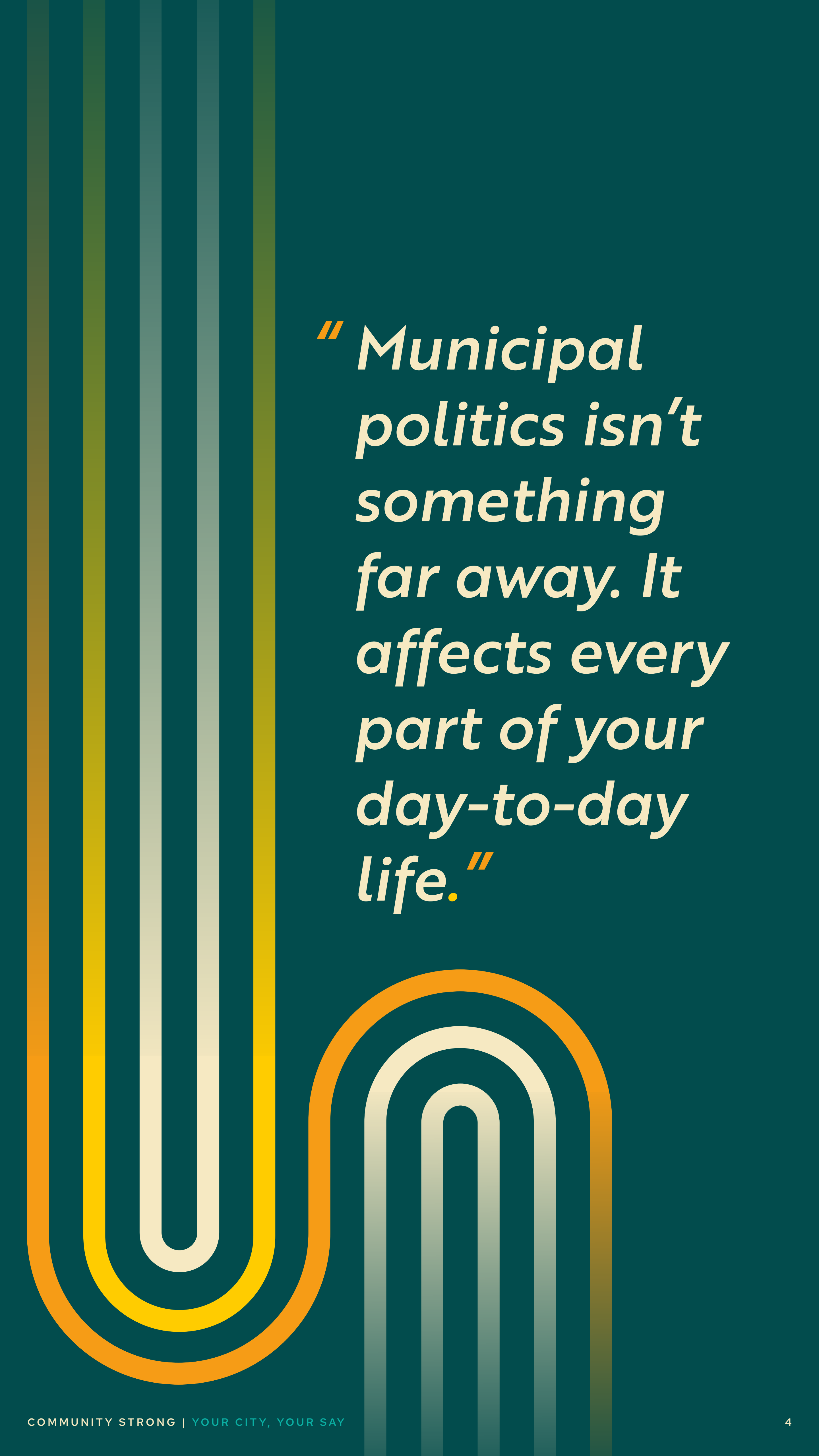
Why, you ask?

Your local town or city council makes decisions that affect everything from the water in your tap, to the potholes on your morning drive, to whether your street feels safe at night. From the time you get up in the morning to the time you get home from work or school, you've used municipal services.

But we know it can be confusing to understand which issues are part of municipal politics, and how it all affects you.

Community Strong's Your City, Your Say is here to make it clear and easy to understand. You'll meet Alex, a Central Albertan whose everyday story shows how city decisions affect us all. Along the way, you'll see quick lists, call-outs, and sidebars so you can jump to what matters most. And if you don't understand a word, we have a handy glossary of terms at the end of this guide to explain what it means.

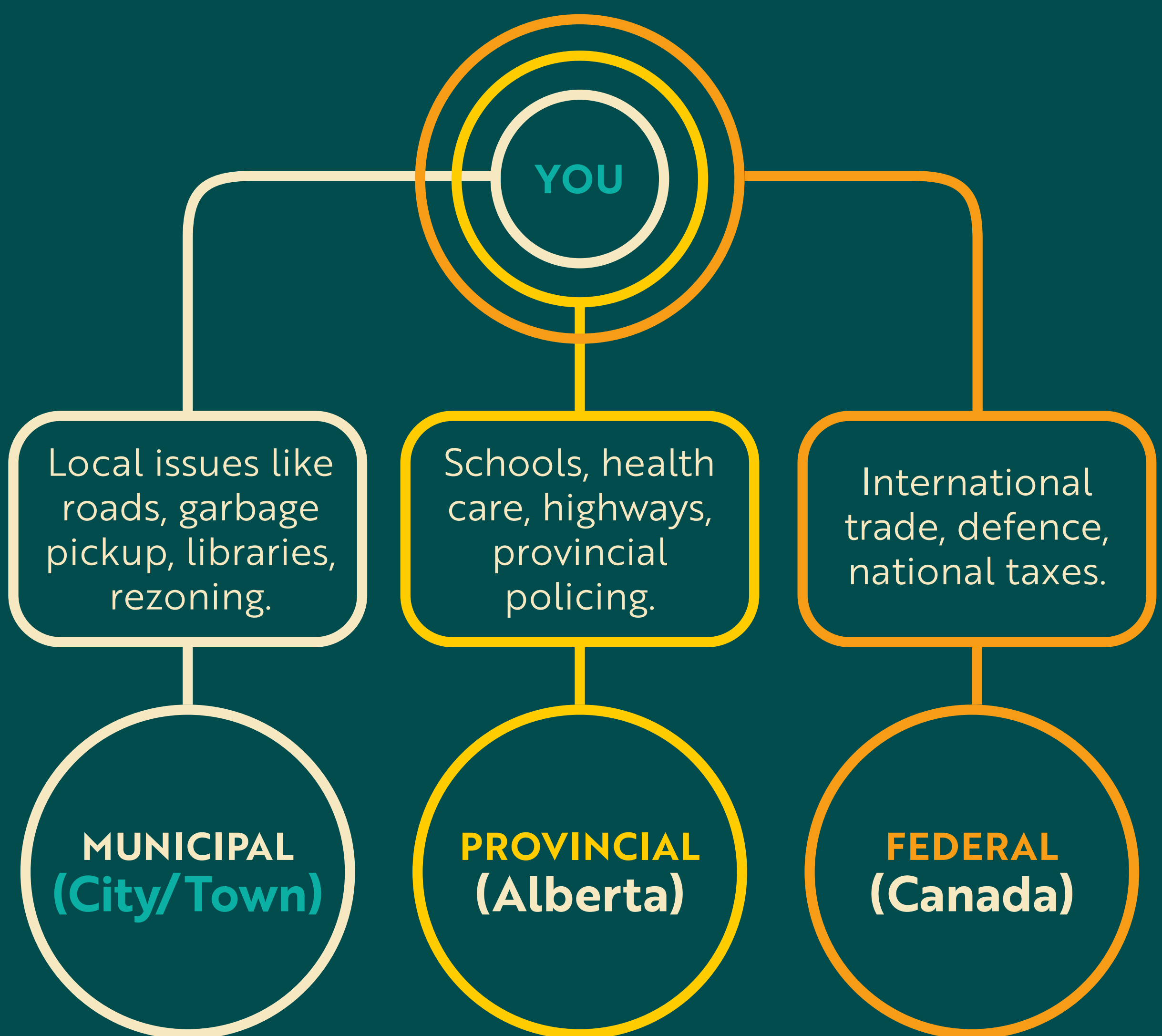
We hope this guide will help you feel a little more informed before the municipal election on October 20.

The background features several vertical stripes in shades of teal, green, and yellow. A large, stylized 'U' shape is formed by concentric lines in orange, yellow, and white, spanning the bottom half of the page.

“Municipal politics isn’t something far away. It affects every part of your day-to-day life.”

What Is “Municipal Politics”?

Think of government like three circles:



QUICK EXAMPLES:

Potholes on 32nd Street?
That's municipal.

Alberta school curriculum changes?
Provincial.

International trade deals?
Federal.

Meet Alex

Meet Alex, an average person who lives in Central Alberta.

As we move through this guide, watch for examples of how Alex is affected every day by municipal politics.



GETTING AROUND:

Roads, Potholes & Transit

**Heading to work in the morning,
Alex hits a pothole.**

Potholes in the road form because of Alberta's freeze-thaw cycles. Your town or city council is responsible for getting them fixed.



Municipal councillors can help get investment for new roads, or to make existing roads better, such as by widening a road that's often congested with too much traffic.

GETTING AROUND:

Roads, Potholes & Transit

Alex's car is broken down, and Alex needs to get across town for an appointment. But the bus schedule doesn't have a bus that will get there on time.

City and town councils are responsible for taking care of local roads and transportation. (Highways and secondary roads are the responsibility of the provincial government.)

Public transit is also a municipal responsibility. Residents often ask for better routes and transit that comes more often.



GETTING AROUND:

Roads, Potholes & Transit

QUICK LIST:

How You Can Help:

- Report potholes to your town or city online or by phone.
- Share your feedback on transit planning surveys.
- Ask council candidates about their plans to improve local transit.
- Ask council candidates how they plan to make local roads more drivable.
- Vote for councillors with the best road and transit plans.

HOME LIFE:

Affordable Housing, Rentals & Zoning

Alex takes an evening walk and notices a nice house for sale in the neighbourhood. But the listed price online is too high for Alex to afford.

Housing affordability remains a big concern across Central Alberta. Rents are also too high in many communities, and it can be hard to even find a place to rent.

You might think home prices are up to the Bank of Canada, which sets interest rates. But with their all-important zoning powers, municipalities are the real keepers of housing supply. They make the rules about what can be built, like more single-family houses or rental apartments, and where.



My rent is already so high I don't know how I'll save up for homes when they're so expensive,

HOME LIFE:

Affordable Housing, Rentals & Zoning

For instance, Red Deer was approved this year for about \$30 million in federal housing funding. But getting that money depends on whether Red Deer decides to Rezone to allow higher-density housing. Residents and businesses don't always agree that high-density housing should be allowed in more neighbourhoods.

By voting for councillors who agree with you on Rezoning, you can have a big impact on whether new housing types can be built, and where.



“Zoning decides what can be built where, from corner stores to apartment buildings.”

Budgets & Taxes

After buying a house, Alex gets the city's property tax notice in the mail and sees the assessment has gone up.

What are property taxes?

Every year, you pay taxes to your town, city or county based on the assessed value of your home or property. Property taxes are a main source of revenue for municipalities.



I wonder what I get in return for paying all this money?

Budgets & Taxes

Where Your Property Tax Goes:

- Fire & local RCMP.
- Parks & recreation.
- Snow clearing.
- Public pools, libraries & culture.
- Utilities.

If you think your property taxes are too high for the services you are getting in your town, here's what you can do:

- Give feedback on budget surveys.
- Attend budget meetings.
- Vote for councillors who will deliver value for your taxes.

Learn More:

For more information on property taxes in Alberta, you can read the provincial government's [Guide to Property Assessment and Taxation in Alberta](#)



“ When your council invests in the community, it’s an investment in making your neighbourhood a better place to live, both now and in the future.”



Budgets & Taxes

What is a municipal budget?

Alex heard on the news that the local council is cutting the budget for putting in new sidewalks in the neighbourhood this year. That means the sidewalks will stay cracked and broken for even longer.

The budget is a comprehensive financial plan for a town, city, or county. It outlines all expected income (revenues) and planned spending (expenditures) over one year.



Budgets & Taxes

There are two main types:

- **Operating Budget:** Covers ongoing costs for services like police, parks, and transit.
- **Capital Budget:** Plans for long-term investments in infrastructure, such as buildings, roads, and utilities.

Different people have different priorities. Your top budget priority in your hometown might be someone else's lowest priority. Councils have to make tough decisions about what to fund, and what to cut if there is a shortfall. And there is always pressure to keep taxes low.

Where to find your local budget

Your town, city or county will usually publish their budget documents in a special section on their official website. This is an important way to be transparent about where your taxes are being spent.

Three Hills budget

Utilities & Fees

Alex gets home after payday at work and decides to pay some bills.

Municipalities are responsible for providing certain **utilities** in Alberta.



Why is my water bill so high these days?

Utilities & Fees

Key Municipal Utilities:



Water and Wastewater

Towns and cities are generally responsible for making sure you have clean water delivered to your taps, and that your dirty water is drained and cleaned.



Waste Management

Municipalities also handle waste management services, making sure your garbage, green waste and recycling is picked up on schedule to keep your home and neighbourhood clean.



Utility Ownership

Some large municipalities in Alberta own and operate their own utility companies, providing services like electricity.

Utilities & Fees

Some municipalities own and operate public utility companies. Others may grant **franchises** to third-party companies to deliver services like gas and electricity. They then may charge the utility companies **franchise fees** to operate. The [Alberta Utilities Commission](#) (AUC) oversees these agreements and ensures utility services meet regulatory standards.

In Red Deer, the city [decided to partially privatize the public electric utility this year by creating a new municipally-controlled corporation.](#) Some residents wanted electricity to be fully privatized, while others want to restore full public ownership of power. This is a good example of how who you vote for now could change how much you pay for power and other public utilities later.

Parks & Recreation

Alex has lunch in the local park, and notices it's looking overgrown with weeds. There's trash on the ground, too.

Municipal councils are responsible for taking care of outdoor services. These can include:

- Emptying public garbage bins.
- Providing public restrooms.
- Cleaning up city parks.
- Maintaining spray and splash parks in the summer.
- Cutting grass and weeds.
- Planting flowers or installing hanging baskets.

For example, budget cuts in Red Deer reduced many of these outdoor services this summer.



Parks & Recreation

You can vote for councillors who make them a priority instead.

Report any problems you see to the Town of Three Hills Parks and Recreation agency at (403) 443-5822 or info@threehills.ca



Parks & Recreation

At the water cooler, Alex’s coworker complains she can’t find anything for her kids to do after school.

All they do is play video games and I want them to get some exercise, or maybe meet some new friends. But the closest recreation centre is too far away for it to make sense to go there.



Parks & Recreation

Your municipal council can support new recreation centres in your community in many different ways.

- 1.** Secure grant funding to launch projects and improvements.
- 2.** Leverage municipal funding to get more funds from other levels of government.
- 3.** Advocate for increased investment from groups and companies.
- 4.** Foster collaboration and partnerships across your community.
- 5.** Plan strategically to make more recreation a goal.
- 6.** Ask private donors to help launch new projects and improvements.
- 7.** Invest in local infrastructure so your community is future-proof.
- 8.** Develop joint-use agreements with sports organizations.
- 9.** Conduct needs assessments by asking residents.

FEELING SAFE & WELL:

Crime & Social Supports

Alex's local convenience store got broken into last night. It's the second time in a couple of months.

Your town or city council has a lot of power to prevent crime and make your community safer.



I'm not really feeling safe on this street anymore. Somebody needs to do something about all this crime.

FEELING SAFE & WELL:

Crime & Social Supports

Crime prevention:

- Crime can be the result of preventable contexts like addiction and poverty.
- Councils can decide to support programs that address those contexts, or cut support.
- Your council's decisions can also have a big impact on affordable housing.
- Shelter availability is also up to your council.

Youth programs:

- Cities and towns often fund youth outreach programs.

Safety & policing:

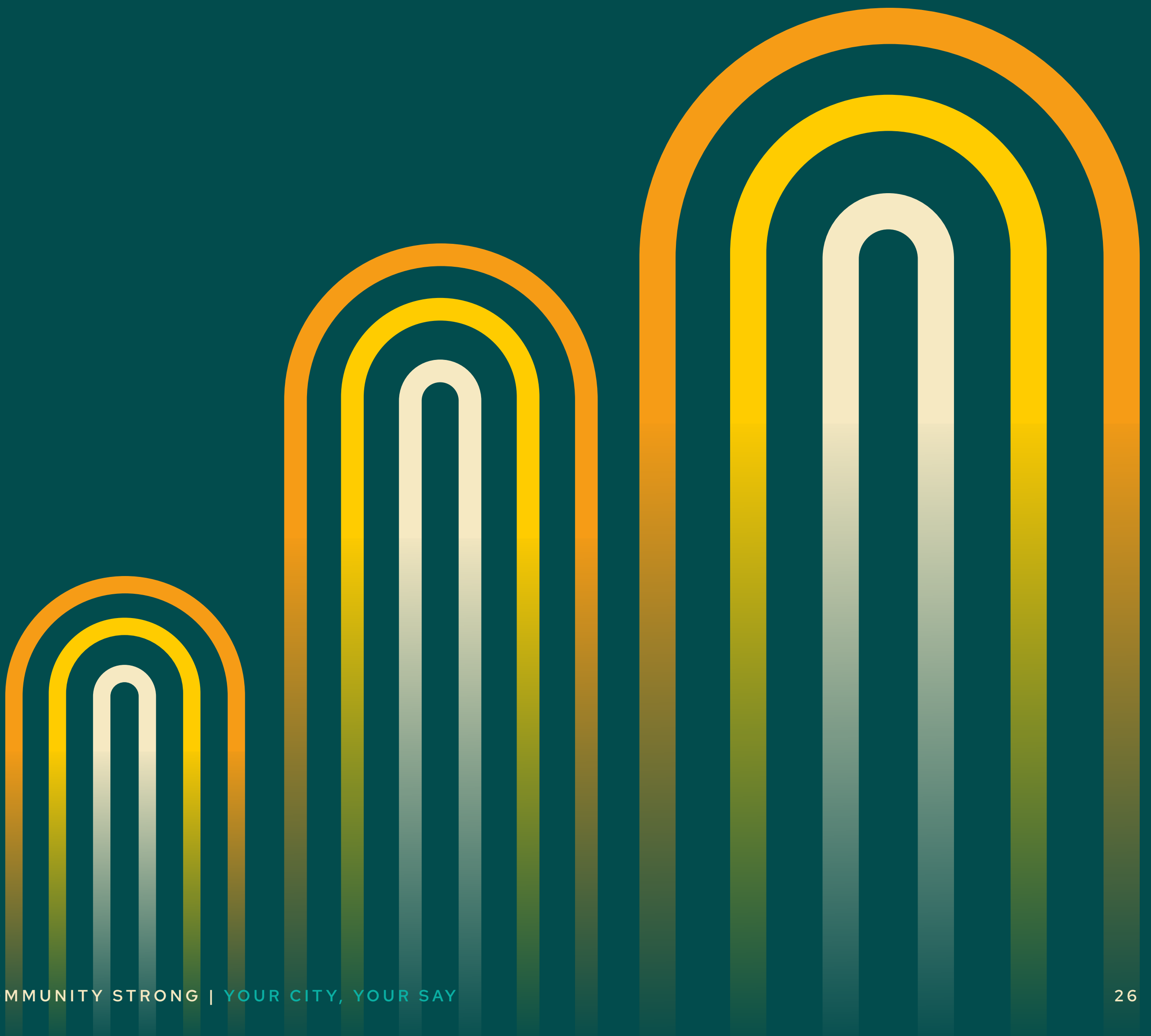
- Bylaw enforcement can stop everything from pets running loose on the streets to your neighbour's messy yard.
- Right now, municipalities contract with the RCMP for general policing services.

FEELING SAFE & WELL:

Crime & Social Supports

Quick Actions You Can Take:

- Attend public safety and police committee meetings.
- Volunteer with local outreach groups.
- Ask council candidates how they'll support harm reduction and prevention.
- Ask council candidates if they support municipal policing.



Downtown & Community Planning

Alex is out on a Saturday night and notices another downtown restaurant has closed.

Downtown Revitalization

A city's downtown is the heart of the community. Downtowns serve as central hubs for economic activity, driving job creation, generating tax revenue, and helping businesses thrive. Vibrant downtown cores contribute to a stronger community identity, boost local property values, and create a sense of place that benefits the entire region. They can attract tourism and new people to move to your community.

That used to be my favourite place to eat. Why can't businesses seem to make it here?

**PERMANENTLY
CLOSED**

Downtown & Community Planning

How can your council help downtown thrive?

- Supporting arts and culture, like funding community concerts and providing venues.
- Supporting local business organizations, like making sure customers can walk to shops.
- Approving funding for downtown revitalization projects to keep areas attractive.
- Facilitating community and business collaboration to focus on more development.

Sustainable Planning and Climate Change

Climate change is here, and planning for it is good fiscal policy.

Adding more transit options, creating green spaces and planting trees, planning for energy-efficient buildings, and planning for long-term sustainability are just a few of the ways your council can address climate change.

How Decisions Get Made

Your mayor and councillors are elected to govern your city or town. They make decisions at their regular and special council meetings, which you can attend in person or watch online.

Council's role: To make resolutions (decisions) and pass bylaws (laws) by voting on them.

Mayor's role: Chairs meetings, acts as a spokesperson for your town or city, and liaises with other governments, like those of other cities in Alberta or the provincial government.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)'s role: Hired and appointed by council. Provides information, presents options for decision-making, implements council policies and bylaws, and manages the municipal operations to ensure they align with council's strategic direction.

QUICK LIST:

Councillors' Duties

- Attend council meetings.
- Sit on committees.
- Listen to and represent residents.
- Vote on bylaws and budgets.
- Keep information confidential.
- Attend local events.

YOUR VOICE:

How You Can Influence Change

Alex wants to see if council is going to approve a rezoning change to build more apartments in the neighbourhood, and watches the livestreamed meeting on YouTube.

Ways you can make a difference before election day:

- Talk to your own councillors directly in person, by email or on the phone.
- Attend council meetings (in person or online).
- Report problems you see to the town or city.
- Share feedback on budget priorities.
- Submit at public hearings on zoning, parking, or parks.

Find the next council meeting in [Three Hills](#)

VOTING FOR YOUR NEXT COUNCILLORS:

The October Election

Election Day is Monday, October 20, 2025

What's Different This Year:

- No electronic vote tabulators. Ballots hand-counted.
- New voter registration list.
- Higher requirements for candidates.

Check here if you are registered to vote:

[Alberta Voter Registration](#)

If not, you will need to bring ID to register on election day.



VOTING FOR YOUR NEXT COUNCILLORS:

The October Election

Who's running?

Your town or city has a public list on their website of everyone who is running for Mayor and council. Here's where to find which candidates have been nominated: [Three Hills Candidates](#)

*“Democracy
only works if
we all take
part. Your vote
is your voice.”*



VOTING FOR YOUR NEXT COUNCILLORS:

The October Election

Choosing Who to Vote For

To decide who to vote for, get to know more about your local candidates.

Here's how:

- Visit your candidates' websites and social media accounts.
- Email or message candidates to ask questions.
- Attend candidate events.
- Attend **election forums** and ask questions.
- Talk to your candidates if they knock on your door while canvassing.
- See which candidates have **endorsements** from local community groups and organizations.

Election Issues

Your top election issues should be the things that matter most to you. Anything we've looked at in this guide can be an election issue.

Election Issues to Watch:

- Housing affordability & rezoning.
- Property taxes.
- Transit and roads.
- Downtown planning.
- Utility privatization.

VOTING FOR YOUR NEXT COUNCILLORS:

The October Election

Past Records

Another way to choose who to vote for is to check your councillor's past record. You can often look at past council meeting minutes to see how they voted, or look online for their name to see if they have gotten any praise—or gotten in any trouble!

Community Strong analyzed your council on key issues. By voting for councillors who are strong on these issues, you can change how well your council governs after this fall.

[Three Hills Town Council Report Card](#)

Resources & Where to Go for Help

Community Strong Alberta is here to help you make sense of the issues impacting your community.

Check out our website for more information:

<https://communitystrongalberta.ca/>

Town website: [Three Hills](#)

Community Associations

A community association is a volunteer-based, neighbourhood-focused organization that brings people together to improve their local area. They might manage community centers, organize events, keep spaces clean and safe, and address neighbourhood issues, ultimately building a stronger and more inclusive community.

Share This Guide

Help your friends and family get ready for the October vote.

Email or print this guide, and remind at least three people to check their voter registration.



Glossary of terms

Acclamation: A candidate is elected by acclamation when there are no opponents running against him or her in an election.

Bylaw: A local law passed by council.

Candidate: A person nominated to run for election for a position on council.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO): The main appointed official of a municipality who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the municipality. The CAO is hired by the municipal council to lead and manage the municipality's employees.

Constituents: The residents, property owners, and business owners in a municipality, generally considered to be those who are able to vote in an election.

Councillor: A councillor, alternatively councilman, councilwoman, councilperson, or council member, is an elected member of a town or city council. They vote on whether or not to pass bylaws.

County or Municipal District: a rural area that can include many different landscapes such as farmland, forested areas, mountains and parkland. Counties can include smaller communities such as hamlets or country residential subdivisions.

Glossary of terms

Endorsement: A political endorsement is a public declaration of one's personal or group's support of a candidate for elected office.

Election forum:

A candidate forum is a public event where candidates running for office are invited to express their positions on issues. Local residents can also ask the candidates questions.

Franchise Fee: A fee on utility bills that goes to the city. It gives a utility company the exclusive right to operate in the municipality and use its land, with the fee later passed on to customers as a rate rider.

High- density rezoning:

High-density rezoning is the legal process of changing a property's zoning designation to permit a greater number of housing units or more intensive land use in a given area.

Mayor: The head of a town or city government.

MGA (Municipal Government Act): The law that sets out how Alberta towns, cities and counties operate.

Motion: A motion is a formal proposal or request from a councillor for the council to consider and take action on a specific issue, such as adopting a policy or approving a project.

Glossary of terms

Property Tax: A tax you pay to the town or city based on the assessed value of your home or property. Property taxes are a primary source of revenue for municipalities. Property taxes are used to finance local programs and services.

Public Hearing: A public hearing is a formal meeting where municipal residents can provide input, express concerns, or voice support on specific proposed bylaws, land use plans, or other matters affecting the community. They are required before a council passes some types of bylaws.

Public works: Services and facilities such as roads and streets, sidewalks and lighting, storm water management, equipment management, engineering and public transit.

Rezoning: The legal process of changing a property's zoning designation, such as from residential to commercial.

Reeve: The head of a county and improvement district's government.

Resolution: A record of a municipal council's decision on an issue and the action it wishes to take relating to that issue. A resolution is not a bylaw.

Glossary of terms

Revenue: Money that comes into a municipality through various methods, such as taxes, levies, and sale of land.

User fees: Fees paid for using services, like recreation passes or development permit costs, to recover the cost of providing that item or service.

Utilities: Services such as water services, wastewater management, and solid waste management.

Ward: A specific area used to divide a municipality for elections, based on the number of people who live there. The council of a municipality may have one or more councillors for every ward.

Zoning: Regulation that divides a municipality into zones, establishing specific rules for what types of buildings, activities, and businesses can be located in each zone.

For a more comprehensive list of municipal government terms in Alberta, you can refer to the Alberta government's [Glossary of common words used in municipal government](#).



COMMUNITY STRONG