

Municipal Governance

During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Frequently Asked Questions – May 8, 2020

The state of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on municipalities continues to change on a daily basis. As we navigate these challenging times together, Municipal Affairs will continue to support municipalities and provide regular updates addressing frequently asked questions and providing information on new tools as they become available.

Municipal Affairs Updates

Previous COVID-19 updates are available at www.alberta.ca/municipal-government-resources.aspx

Economic Relaunch

The province has established a cross-ministry Pandemic Response Planning Team (PPRT) to lead efforts to coordinate and develop medium to long-term plans for responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes critical initiatives such as the province's Relaunch Strategy announced on April 30.

The province is aware of the fluidity of the COVID-19 pandemic and acknowledges there is still a lot of planning, communication, and action required to resolve the issues emerging as a result of the pandemic. The Pandemic Response Planning Team (PPRT) will continue to provide new information to all stakeholders as soon as it is available.

With Stage 1 of the Alberta relaunch starting as early as May 14, 2020, does this mean we must open our municipal facilities and bring staff back to work?

NO. Councils must remain vigilant and ensure safety is a main consideration. All social distancing and public health precautions remain in place and this will remain the case for some time yet. Stage 1 still recommends that working remotely be encouraged where at all possible. In addition, public attendance at businesses, facilities and events that have close physical contact will not be permitted, including arts and culture festivals as well as movie theatres. Pools, recreation centers, arenas, spas, gyms and nightclubs are also to remain closed.

Some of the services listed in Stage 1 of the relaunch strategy are located in municipal facilities (e.g., daycares, summer camps, restaurants, personal services). Does this mean we must open our municipal facilities and bring staff back to work too?

NO. At this time, municipalities are not required to open facilities, but may choose to if it is possible to follow and respect the guidelines outlined by the chief medical officer of health.

In conjunction with your business continuity plan, municipalities should have, or should be preparing, their own phased community relaunch strategy to be implemented when it is safe to do so.

Can municipalities choose to keep certain municipally-controlled properties closed even if they are allowed to be open under the provincial approach?

YES. The decision to open facilities remains a local council decision. Municipalities and the public must continue to put safety first while gradually reopening businesses, resuming activities and getting people back to work.

With the Alberta Relaunch Strategy now in effect resulting in the relaxation of restrictions on boat launches and campgrounds, and visits to cottage properties, will there be a coordination of relaunch provisions in provinces that share borders with Alberta?

YES. The province recognizes the strong relationships that exist with communities and regions between Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan. As a result, Premier Jason Kenney has already had discussions with the BC and SK Premiers. As much as is possible, the three provinces will coordinate their relaunch strategies to avoid any huge differences in neighbouring communities.

Is there a resource available for residents asking for more information about boat launches and parks?

YES. Alberta Parks has more information available at <https://albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/news-events/response-to-covid-19/boat-launches-open/> and is encouraging all Albertan's to visit their [Response to COVID-19](#) webpage before visiting Alberta Parks.



Are municipalities able to open municipal golf courses while keeping club houses and pro shops closed?



YES. Golf courses can open as of May 2 as long as prevention and control measures are still in place. Municipal courses should implement precautionary measures to ensure the health and safety of staff, members and guests, including ensuring staff and patrons are able to book tee times online or via phone and physical distancing is practiced upon arrival and during play. The province has developed a factsheet providing guidance for golf course operators to support this relaunch phase available at <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-fact-sheet-golf-course-operators.pdf>.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative

The Minister of Municipal Affairs announced some temporary changes to the 2020 Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) Program last week to support local governments in responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Will capital funding be available to municipalities when it is needed to advance projects that are ready to proceed?

YES. In light of the significant urgent spending pressures on the provincial government, spending must be as efficient as possible, while ensuring that capital funding is available as soon as it is needed to advance projects that are ready to proceed. The province has implemented a new step in the payment process for the MSI capital program.

Every month, Municipal Affairs will send an email to each municipality that qualifies for an MSI capital payment and did not receive an email in a previous month. To access their payment, each municipality must respond to the email indicating if they intend to spend the payment on a new or existing MSI capital project this year after spending any carry-forward amount from previous years. If a municipality does not intend to spend their payment this year or does not respond to the email, the payment will be

withheld until February 2021. If a municipality initially indicated they did not need the payment this year, and their project plans change so that a payment is required, they can email a grant advisor at ma.msicapitalgrants@gov.ab.ca and their payment will be processed in the next payment batch.

Are municipalities able to use MSI operating for any local government expenditure in the 2020 program year?

YES. The province has also expedited payment of 2020 MSI operating allocations to qualifying local governments. This will give municipalities flexibility to manage operating funding in a way that best addresses unique community needs. Additional information on the changes is available in the [2020 Addendum to the MSI Operating Program Guidelines](#).

Do these changes impact on the amount of funding local governments will receive?

NO. The changes announced are temporary measures to help communities and the province deal with the extremely difficult situation at hand. Additional information regarding any stimulus funding for shovel-ready projects will be made available as soon as possible.

Additional MSI Information

Connect with the [MSI program](#) at:

780-422-7125 or toll-free by first dialing 310-0000 or email

ma.msicapitalgrants@gov.ab.ca (MSI Capital Grants) or
ma.msioveringgrants@gov.ab.ca (MSI Operating Grants)

Are these program changes only in effect for the 2020 year?

YES. These changes are in place for the 2020 program year only and local governments will continue to be required to meet their annual SFE reporting obligations. These are outlined in the [2020 Addendum to the MSI Operating Program Guidelines](#).

General Questions

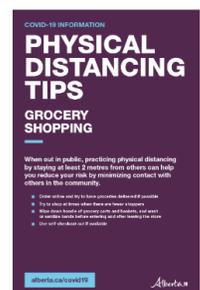
Does the province support the placement of blockades to stop casual travelers from coming off highways into various communities?

NO. While the province understands the desires for councils to act on behalf of residents, we encourage decisions made by leaders to balance fundamental rights and public safety. Blocking provincial highways is unlawful and a risk to public safety. Municipal Affairs suggests that municipalities remain consistent with provincial public health guidance to reduce public confusion and increase compliance. If you have questions about legal impacts, you should seek appropriate advice.

Are there resources available to ensure municipal messages are consistent with the provincial public health guidance?

YES. Posters and fact sheets are available for download at <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-information-posters.aspx>.

Municipalities are encouraged to post in public places and share with local businesses to help reduce public confusion and increase compliance.



Municipal Advisory Services

If you have further questions, please contact us at:

780-427-2225

or toll-free by first dialing 310-0000

or email ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca

Are there options for councillors who are struggling to remain on council during the current pandemic as they deal with personal matters or small business affairs?

YES. Section 174(2) of the *Municipal Government Act* permits a councillor to be absent from all regular meetings held during any period of eight consecutive weeks without disqualification if the absence is authorized by a resolution of council.

Are there other resources that can support councillors during the current pandemic?

YES. Municipal elected officials should be encouraged to reach out to their peers, connect with other peer mentors for advice and assistance through the [Peer Network](#), and the [Alberta Urban Municipalities Association](#) and [Rural Municipalities of Alberta](#) board members.

Councillors should also be encouraged to take advantage of existing Municipal Health & Safety Association mental health webinars available at <https://maintainingmentalfitness.com/>.

Many municipal elected officials are small business owners. Their businesses have been significantly impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Federal Government put in place the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) to ensure that small businesses have access to the capital they need to see them through the current challenges by providing interest-free loans to small businesses. This impacts many municipal councillors in Alberta, who may consider resigning in order to access capital for their business. Are entities owned by individuals holding political office now eligible to access the program?

YES. Based on advocacy by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) and with support of other municipal associations, the Government of Canada is currently updating agreements with banking institutions to clarify that members of parliament and senators are the only political office holders to be excluded from CEBA. As such, entities owned by provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous political office holders are now eligible for the program. For more program information visit <https://ceba-cuec.ca/>.

Further Updates

We will continue to examine ways to support municipalities in navigating through this situation, and will provide further updates as new tools become available.

If you have a specific question you would like answered in an upcoming update, please email your request to ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca.