

# Municipal Governance

## During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Frequently Asked Questions – June 12, 2020

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As we continue down the road to recovery, Alberta Municipal Affairs will continue to provide biweekly updates addressing frequently asked questions and providing information on new tools and resources for as long as required.

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

### Municipal Affairs Updates

Previous COVID-19 updates are available at [www.alberta.ca/municipal-government-resources.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/municipal-government-resources.aspx)

## Alberta's Relaunch Strategy

The province has entered into Stage 2 of the Alberta Relaunch Strategy. Stage 2 allows additional businesses and services to reopen and resume operations with two-metre physical distancing requirements and other public health guidelines in place. Municipalities, business operators, sports, and recreation service providers can determine if they are ready to open and are able to ensure that all [guidance for workplaces are met](#).

As the fluid nature of the relaunch timing and detail makes it challenging to stay current, municipalities are encouraged to continue to visit [Alberta's Relaunch Strategy](#) webpage to stay up-to-date.

## Municipal Pandemic Planning

**Previous updates mentioned that the ministry was working on a guide to supplement municipal emergency and business continuity plans. Is this resource available?**

**YES.** The *Pandemic Response Planning - A Guide for Alberta Municipalities* has been developed to supplement your municipal emergency and business continuity plans. The guide provides municipalities with ideas and considerations for developing community-specific plans for your pandemic-specific response and, most important for now, planning your community recovery. It will be available on the ministry website.

## Public Health Emergency

**When the province made the Public Health Emergency declaration under the *Public Health Act*, there were other non-Health Ministerial Orders issued in relation to COVID-19. Are there implications with those Ministerial Orders if the provincial declaration is not extended?**

**YES.** Ministerial Orders (MOs) made by ministries under Section 52.1(2) of the *Public Health Act (PHA)* will lapse 60 days after the state of public health emergency is lifted unless extended or terminated sooner. Once these MOs lapse, amendments will require consideration under the regular legislative process and the individual ministries will be developing communications strategies for decisions about their respective orders.

## Electronic Meetings

**As a means of mitigating the spread of COVID-19 some council meetings are occurring with council and the CAO in attendance, but public participation is restricted to electronic means only. Is this practice considered an electronic meeting under the Meetings Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation?**

**NO.** The intent of the Meetings Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation is to provide flexibility for meetings to continue in a manner that mitigates spread of COVID-19. It is important to remember the intent of the regulation is not to allow councils to meet in-person, while barring the public from attendance and instead just enabling the public to “listen in” to the meeting procedures by live-streaming or teleconference (and make email submissions during the meeting as required under the regulation).

The regulation requires the CAO or a designated officer attend a meeting by electronic means. It is the position of Municipal Affairs that if the CAO and the Mayor, and possibly a small minority of council, attend the meeting in council chambers because that is where the equipment to enable electronic broadcast to the public is located, that would be consistent with the intent of the regulation, which enables councils to continue meeting electronically with no members of the public attending in-person during the public health emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

If this practice were to be challenged, there is a risk that a court may apply a strict interpretation to the *Municipal Government Act* and Meetings Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation. This risk potentially increases with each additional member of council that attends the meeting in-person at the same place as the CAO.



Given there is risk with this practice, municipalities are strongly encouraged to obtain advice from their legal counsel before proceeding to ensure council is fully aware of any risk exposure, especially if there are any contentious matters being addressed during a meeting that is conducted in this manner.

Municipal Affairs will be exploring whether some aspects of the regulation might be incorporated into

### Municipal Advisory Services

If you have further questions, please call: 780-427-2225 or toll-free by first dialing 310-0000 or email [ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca](mailto:ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca)

the *MGA* on a permanent basis.

## Mask Distribution

**Is there a plan in place to get non-medical masks to Albertans that do not have access to drive-thru locations across the province?**

**YES.** Those communities with less access to the primary distribution networks have been contacted to request the delivery of a bulk supply of masks to be repackaged and distributed to their residents in a safe manner. The mask distribution program is intended to supplement an individual's efforts to acquire non-medical masks. Albertans who wish to use non-medical masks are encouraged to purchase their own supply from local retailers in addition to using those provided by the province.

**Is it mandatory for Albertans to wear masks in public?**

**NO.** However, the province strongly encourages Albertans to use masks or face coverings in situations where maintaining a physical distance of two metres is not possible. While wearing a non-medical mask has not been proven to protect the person wearing it, it may be helpful in protecting others.

## Alberta Biz Connect

Alberta Biz Connect provides workplace guidance and support to businesses and non-profits. The online tool also provides sector-specific guidelines to ensure businesses can reopen safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses with questions regarding the relaunch can [email the Biz Connect team](#). Common questions are also posted [online](#).

## General Questions

**Can a special meeting of council be cancelled by giving notice in written form if it has already been called and the agenda has been posted?**

**NO.** The only means to cancel a special meeting that has been called but is no longer required is to call another special meeting to cancel that upcoming meeting. There is no provision in which council can cancel meetings in written form. During COVID-19, this could be done with less than 24 hours notice, if, two-thirds of council agree in writing before the meeting and the meeting is conducted in accordance with the Meetings Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation ensuring that the public has a means to electronically observe or listen to the meeting.

**Are the Premier and Minister's telephone town hall meetings expected to continue?**

**YES.** The state of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on municipalities continues to change daily. The town hall meetings will continue to be scheduled until they are no longer required.

**Is the province planning on making a stimulus announcement for municipalities?**

**YES.** The Government of Alberta is in the advanced stages of determining options to help stimulate local economies and is working closely with the federal government on federal infrastructure and emergency operating funding. Any announcements will be made as soon as decisions are finalized.

**Is the province providing other support to municipalities?**

**YES.** The Government of Alberta recently approved the release of disaster relief funds so that those who suffered losses are able to rebuild and avoid unnecessary red tape. Recovery caseworkers with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency are available to help residents and businesses with their applications. The application process is online at [www.alberta.ca/DRP](http://www.alberta.ca/DRP).

The province is also having ongoing conversations with partner provincial governments to find mitigating ways to relax and/or make the Pacific Northwest Trade Agreement, with respect to procurement, more efficient and palatable to the current times.

## Additional Resources

Alberta municipal associations continue to provide comprehensive resources to assist members during the pandemic. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association has developed a webpage to act as a quick first reference with links to credible sources for up-to-date information at <https://auma.ca/business-services/employee-benefits/employers/covid-19>. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta's COVID-19 response hub is accessible via <https://rmaalberta.com/about/covid-19-response-hub/>.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities continues to compile a list of links and resources for municipalities. <https://fcm.ca/en/resources/covid-19-resources-municipalities>.