



# Healthy Alberta Communities

Convention Policy Paper

September 2010



## 1 INTRODUCTION

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Alberta municipal governments play an important and essential role in the health of their communities. The *Municipal Government Act*, in Section 3, lays out the purposes of a municipality:

- To provide good government,
- 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, and
- To develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

AUMA believes that building healthy communities is best done through partnerships – with governments, and between governments and citizens. AUMA's proposal for a formalized Provincial-Municipal Sustainability Partnership Agreement<sup>1</sup> (2008 AUMA Convention) would result in great gains for Alberta citizens and communities in the area of health. The proposed Agreement is based on outcomes – both provincial and local. Municipalities would be charged with achieving outcomes that are agreed to with the Province, and reporting on those outcomes annually as part of a Sustainability and Accountability System.

Sustainable land use planning, a core municipal function, is of great importance in ensuring healthy communities. Land use choices made by municipal elected officials result in municipal infrastructure and services that encourage and/or support citizens to be more healthy. Strategic land use decisions can result in greater community density, more walk-able communities and the creation of mixed use neighbourhoods allowing citizens to live, work, play and eat within their own neighbourhood. Municipal governments also make decisions related to recreation, parks, preservation/conservation areas, and transportation – all of which are intrinsically linked with the health of individuals and families. While health is not considered to be within the municipal jurisdiction, municipal governments have always played a role in health, through their decision-making and budgetary processes.

In 2010, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health produced the report: *A Foundation for Alberta's Health System*. The Minister's Advisory Committee mandate was to provide input on the legislative reforms necessary to "update current health legislation in a manner that will facilitate current and future health system initiatives". Upon reviewing the Report, AUMA felt that a contribution could be made to the provincial efforts through the development of a Policy Paper on Healthy Communities. This AUMA Policy Paper brings to the fore, the municipal government role in building healthy communities.

By virtue of the clear responsibility that municipal governments have for transportation, recreation and parks, and land use planning, the Policy Paper will focus on these areas<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.auma.ca/live/digitalAssets/21/21892\\_Provincial\\_Municipal\\_Sustainability\\_Partnership\\_1015.pdf](http://www.auma.ca/live/digitalAssets/21/21892_Provincial_Municipal_Sustainability_Partnership_1015.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> AUMA recognizes that the municipal role in building healthy communities is broader, and that creating safe communities through environmental health, injury prevention, crime prevention, policing, fire prevention and other emergency services, also leads to healthy communities. This Policy Paper focuses on certain aspects of healthy communities, but makes recommendations for future AUMA research and policy development.

## 2 BACKGROUND

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At the 2009 AUMA Convention, delegates voted on AUMA priorities for the coming year. One of the priorities chosen was “to develop policy in areas of provincial jurisdiction.”

With regard to social infrastructure, AUMA has adopted the following principles:

1. Federal and Provincial governments have primary responsibility to fund and support social infrastructure.
2. Municipal Governments have a role in social infrastructure.
3. Engagement, cooperation and flexibility to ensure local priorities are met are essential in meeting social infrastructure needs.
4. Municipalities, in the context of available resources and Council approval, may choose to deliver social infrastructure components.
5. Access to medical care and adequate police, fire and ambulance services are important components of the goal of social infrastructure to create and maintain safe and viable communities.

(AUMA 2010 Policy Statement on Building Communities)

Several AUMA resolutions have been adopted that call for action on healthy communities through recreation, parks, active transportation and sustainable land use planning. These resolutions are:

- AUMA’s 2009 resolution on funding for Major Community Facilities states:

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association urge the Government of Alberta to continue to fund the Major Community Facilities Program on an ongoing basis to allow for the proper planning to occur to see these projects completed for the benefit of Albertans.

- AUMA’s 2009 resolution on Urban Parks states:

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the AUMA encourage the Government of Alberta to include Urban and Regional Countryside Parks as an important part of the parks network in Alberta, and to work with AUMA to ensure that Urban and Regional Countryside Parks are further developed, maintained, enhanced and promoted in Alberta; and

**FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Government of Alberta commit to establishing a new Urban and Countryside Parks Program that would support municipalities in parks planning, parkland acquisition, park development, conservation, operations and promotions.

- AUMA has requested representation on the Parks Advisory Council that is outlined in the Government of Alberta’s 2009 Plan for Parks.
- AUMA’s 2009 resolution on trails states:

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association urge the Government of Alberta (Alberta Transportation) to adopt as part of its design standards and policies, facilitation of and provision for alternative modes of transportation such as cycling, running and walking and to consider the construction of trail systems as part of the building or rebuilding of roads and highways.

- AUMA’s resolutions related to sustainable land use planning are:

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association request the Government of Alberta develop a policy and regulatory framework which factors cumulative economic, social, environmental and health impacts of multiple developments in the approval process.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) adopt the 2007 President's Summit Land Use Planning Paper, which includes the following recommendations to the Government of Alberta:

1. Establish and test a new planning process strategy as outlined in the AUMA Sustainable Land Use Planning Paper (2007).
2. Establishment of a provincial land use planning body to develop and implement province-wide planning goals.
3. Development of enabling provincial legislation to authorize the Lieutenant Governor in Council to determine whether a growth plan is required for any region/area in the province.
4. Provincially mandated establishment of multi-jurisdictional planning processes to coordinate land use plans between municipalities and ensure consistency with provincial goals.
5. Encourage citizen involvement in the planning process.
6. Establishment of criteria or performance measures as part of land use plan development, against which a municipal or regional land use plan could be assessed.
7. Outline a common spatial vocabulary in the provincial Land Use Framework that describes the land use/land cover across the province.
8. Enable the use of scenario modeling tools by regions and municipalities through training, financial support and institutional strengthening.
9. Mandate the inclusion in municipal plans of a strategy for achieving intensification within identified areas. Regional plans should also identify major transit station areas and intensification corridors.
10. Determine, at the provincial/regional level, a system of greenbelts and urban growth boundaries to protect agricultural and other resource lands as well as conservation of natural areas.
11. Implementation of environmental overlays to protect water resources and other sensitive areas in order to preserve biodiversity and ecological integrity.
12. Encouragement of cluster or nodal development as an alternative to traditional development.
13. Encourage use of Transfer Development Credits (TDCs) as a growth management strategy by piloting a provincially supported planning/financial aid program for high-growth municipalities to develop a TDC scheme.
14. Enable processes for cost/benefit sharing (in terms of both revenue and infrastructure) between municipalities.
15. Implementation of a combination of regulatory and market-based approaches to land use planning and growth management.

- AUMA's resolutions that are more specifically related to health are:

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the AUMA request the Alberta Government Health and Wellness Department to include the AUMA as a major stakeholder in all future consultations regarding the renewed model for patient-centered and coordinated EMS to allow input on decisions that may have a negative impact on other municipal emergency services or cause increased costs for delivering these other services.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association requests that the Province of Alberta develop a model to encourage that resources are in place for the recruitment and retention of medical physicians and professionals particularly those in specialized practices such as Anesthetists, Obstetricians, etc... to ensure that residents in rural Alberta have access to such services.

### 3 MUNICIPAL ROLE IN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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The Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) report, *Healthy By Nature*<sup>3</sup>, outlines the health challenges that growing numbers of Albertans are facing. Increased incidence of type 2 diabetes and the doubling of number of overweight and obese children are two of the challenges that impact all Albertans as we seek ways to manage sky-rocketing health care costs. A 2008 Health Canada report estimates that “physical inactivity costs the Canadian healthcare system at least \$2.1 billion annually in direct health care costs, with an annual economic burden to taxpayers at \$5.3 billion”. There is much evidence for taking action to develop healthier communities presented in the ARPA *Healthy By Nature* Report, and AUMA refers members to that document for further information.

Municipal governments have core functions that relate directly to the health of their communities.

#### 3.1 Recreation

Municipal governments in Alberta – and particularly urban municipal governments - are responsible for both recreation infrastructure and recreation programming for community members. Recreation facilities have large capital costs, but contribute greatly to the community’s health. Recreation programs are offered for all community members, and range from sports programs to nature-related educational programs. Such local infrastructure and programs are designed with community needs in mind, and can go far in enhancing the health of the population, leading to a healthier and more vibrant community.

Unfortunately, provincial investment in local recreation infrastructure and programs has declined between 1988 and 2006. ARPA reports in *Public Funding of Recreation in Alberta*<sup>4</sup>, that:

municipalities fund recreational operating costs largely from their own-source revenues, including property taxes and user fees, and that dependency on local funding has increased over time. The share of funding attributed to senior government grants or transfers has declined from 10% in 1988 to 2% in 2006. During that same period the share of operational funding from general revenues or property taxes has increased from 72% to 76%, while user fees have grown from 18% to 22%. Over time, the province has broadly reduced municipal operating grants including those modest programs targeted toward recreation, and has increasingly focused its supports to municipalities through capital transfers with limited conditionality. (p. 8).

AUMA regularly requests increased provincial and federal investment in municipal infrastructure, and in recent years they have responded to requests for capital infrastructure. The amount of investment though, does not meet the demand for new recreation infrastructure, nor the need for innovative recreation programs that would help to create healthy communities by addressing the inactivity of Albertans.

Education, communications and promotions campaigns are also necessary in ensuring the health of Alberta communities. Healthy living campaigns should be supported and developed by the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada, with municipal governments playing an active role in getting the word out through local campaigns.

#### 3.2 Parks

At AUMA’s 2009 Convention, a resolution was adopted encouraging the Government of Alberta to ensure Urban and Regional countryside Parks are a priority in Alberta, and requesting a new Urban and Countryside Parks Program to support planning, parkland acquisition, park development, conservation, operations and promotions. Enhancing green space, parkland and a comprehensive trail system within and possibly between municipalities is key to a sustainable and healthy community.

When development/maintenance/enhancement of parkland has been carried out, it is important for municipal governments to communicate to citizens about the extraordinary opportunities afforded to them

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<sup>3</sup> ARPA. (Forthcoming). *Healthy by Nature: Up Close and Personal: Investing in Community Parks, Open Space and Nature Education*. Edmonton: ARPA.

<sup>4</sup> ARPA. (2010). *Public Funding of Recreation in Alberta: Final Report*. Edmonton: ARPA.

by being part of the community. Community events can be held in municipal parks, programs for children focusing on nature can be established, sport practices, training and games can occur in municipal parks. All of these opportunities to enjoy the space must be promoted and communicated to residents. Further, individuals and families can reap significant benefits to their health by using parkland space in their community. These benefits should be widely and effectively communicated to the public.

ARPA, in *Healthy by Nature*, outlines the challenge of a lack of parks and open space data (p. 49). AUMA views this as a challenge we could help overcome. A research project to establish baselines for parkland and open space in Alberta's urban municipalities would create a foundation for educating decision-makers in all orders of government. A comprehensive database with a plan to update it annually or bi-annually would go a long way in understanding and communicating the value of parks and recreation in creating healthy communities. Such a research project could be organized through the Protocol of Cooperation that AUMA has with ARPA.

### 3.3 Conservation of Land

It is also important for municipal governments to take into account non-programmed recreational areas, including conservation areas, or lands designated environmentally significant and therefore protective of land and nature. These areas are important to the health of individuals and families, but also to the health of the environment and our eco-systems. Municipal governments are wise to assist when they can, in preserving lands in ways that they were found before large populations of people changed the landscape.

### 3.4 Active Transportation<sup>5</sup>

Municipalities have a key role in promoting and creating an environment supportive of active transportation. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) defines "Active transportation" as human powered travel<sup>6</sup>. It refers primarily to walking and cycling, but also to in-line skating, skateboarding, wheel-chairing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The development of transit-centred transportation in communities also contributes to a healthier and more active community in that infrastructure must be in place for people to safely reach transit stops or centres without a vehicle.

Active transportation improves public health and reduces healthcare costs by fighting obesity and chronic illnesses like heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. It is emissions-free, making it a powerful tool in the fight against climate change and air pollution. Is accessible to children, youth, seniors, low income families and persons with disabilities who can be left out when transportation systems depend on cars.

AUMA recommends that the Government of Alberta take into account active transportation when provincial highways and roadways go through municipalities. For both safety and health reasons, trails that result in active transportation of the population should be a part of all roadway planning processes. In 2009, AUMA requested, via a Convention Resolution, that the Government of Alberta adopt as part of its design standards and policies, facilitation of and provision for alternative modes of transportation such as cycling, running and walking and to consider the construction of trail systems as part of the building or rebuilding of roads and highways. It is important that this request be emphasized in the context of healthy communities, and is therefore included in the Policy Paper. It is very important that the Government of Alberta and Alberta's urban municipal governments be coordinated in their approach to active transportation, and that full engagement between both orders of government be put in place when conducting planning for active transportation.

AUMA is encouraged by the news that the Government of Alberta is currently setting out a process to develop a 40 year transportation plan<sup>7</sup>, and urges the inclusion of active transportation in that strategy. When people are more active as they move from place to place, they enjoy the benefits of getting where they want/have to go, and also become healthier. All orders of government have a role to play in ensuring the funds are available for more active community transportation, in building active transportation infrastructure, and in educating citizens of the multitude of benefits that come from being active.

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<sup>5</sup> At times, the term "walkability" has been used to describe active transportation and the infrastructure associated with it. AUMA suggests that "walkability" is included in the broader concept of "active transportation".

<sup>6</sup> FCM. 2010. *Communities in Motion: Bringing Active Transportation to Life*. [http://gmf.fcm.ca/files/Capacity\\_Building\\_Transportation/CommunitiesinMotion-PUB-e.pdf](http://gmf.fcm.ca/files/Capacity_Building_Transportation/CommunitiesinMotion-PUB-e.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> July 5, 2010, *Edmonton Journal* "40-year transport plan paves way into future".

### 3.5 Land Use Planning

Land use planning (including inter-municipal and often regional planning) is a core function of municipal governments. Albertans' opportunities to become more active and healthy and enjoy parks and natural heritage depends in large part on municipal land use planning, particularly in urban areas, where the majority of Alberta's population resides. Sustainable land use planning, both municipally and regionally, has been a priority of AUMA for several years.

AUMA's Sustainable Land Use Planning Policy Paper (2007), recommends the development of comprehensive land use plans including the following strategies that would implement the plans:

- Urban Strategy
  - Existing and Future Growth Centres and Corridors
- Industrial Strategy
  - Major Industrial Nodes and Service Centres
- Agricultural/Food Security Strategy
- Housing Strategy
  - Sustainable Affordable Housing, Major Nodes for New Construction
- Infrastructure Strategy
  - Solid Waste Facilities, Wastewater Treatment Facilities, Potable Water Supply, Telecommunications, Flood Protection
- Transportation Strategy
  - Major Transit Corridors, Alternative Transportation Choices, Transit Oriented Development
- Environmental Management Strategy
  - Water Conservation, Aquifer Protection, Energy Conservation, Soils and Land Reclamation, Waste Reduction, Air Quality, Biodiversity, Parks and Protected Areas

The Sustainable Land Use Planning Policy Paper also speaks to intensification of land use, to create higher density neighbourhoods and the need for spatial planning and modelling that would allow for informed decisions on sustainable land use, leading to healthy communities. Transportation, active living, the environment, a healthy economy and society, are all intrinsically linked to sustainable land use planning.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The focus of this Healthy Communities Policy Paper has been narrowed to the municipal role in creating healthy communities through land use planning and urban community design, recreation, parks, conservation and active transportation. Beginning with a narrow focus will help AUMA achieve outcomes in this area over the coming year, and discover additional efforts that can be undertaken in the years to come. Healthy communities are important to all Albertans – in terms of enjoying a better quality of life, managing health risks for individuals, families and communities, and seeing efficiencies in the cost of health care.

### 4.1 Recommendations to the Government of Alberta:

1. THAT the Government of Alberta revisit AUMA's proposal for a formalized Provincial-Municipal Sustainability Partnership Agreement. The proposed Agreement is based on outcomes – both provincial and local. Municipalities would be charged with achieving outcomes that are agreed to with the Province, and reporting on those outcomes annually as part of a Sustainability and Accountability System. Such a partnership would allow for great progress on Alberta's defined health outcomes, through coordinated provincial and local action.
2. THAT the new *Alberta Health Act* place a priority on achieving health outcomes for Alberta by supporting healthy communities;
3. THAT the Government of Alberta work with AUMA to develop a new partnership program that supports the development of parks and recreation facilities – including capital and operating funding – that make for healthy communities;
4. THAT the Government of Alberta's comprehensive transportation plan include active transportation as a priority;
5. THAT the Government of Alberta adopt as part of its design standards and policies, facilitation of and provision for alternative modes of transportation such as cycling, running and walking and to consider the construction of trail systems as part of the building or rebuilding of roads and highways.
6. THAT the Government of Alberta partner with AUMA (and potentially the Government of Canada) to develop a healthy communities campaign that will be delivered both provincially and locally.

### 4.2 Recommendations to AUMA:

1. THAT the AUMA Board of Directors continue its work on building healthy communities, by exploring research projects in areas not addressed by this Policy Paper (e.g.: environmental health, injury prevention, crime prevention through social investments, poverty reduction, affordable housing).
2. THAT AUMA produce and publish a series of member notices on the municipal role in developing healthy communities.
3. THAT AUMA partner with the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), and approach the Government of Alberta to fund a project that would create an Alberta inventory of municipal parkland, infrastructure and activities related to parks and recreation.