

Dear Stakeholder:

In June and July 2025, Municipal Affairs held engagement sessions regarding potential legislative changes to require each municipality establish a level of service for their fire service and to gather feedback on related supports from the Government of Alberta.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their valuable time and insights to this engagement. Municipal Affairs has developed a What We Heard report, which I am pleased to share with you as a valued stakeholder.

I am also pleased to share that following this engagement, Municipal Affairs is not considering legislative changes at this time. Instead, my department will work with municipal associations and fire service stakeholders through the Provincial Fire Liaison Committee to explore, develop, and implement additional supports to assist interested municipalities in defining a fire level of service.

If you have any questions regarding this engagement or next steps, please reach out to the Office of the Fire Commissioner at firecomm@gov.ab.ca.

Sincerely,



Dan Williams, ECA
Minister of Municipal Affairs

Attachment: Report: Fire Level of Service 2025 Engagement – What We Heard



Fire Level of Service

2025 Engagement – What We Heard

Municipal Affairs | September 2025

Overview

Municipal Affairs conducted engagements in June and July 2025 to gather input on the feasibility of requiring Alberta municipalities with fire services to establish a council-approved minimum level of service. The engagement focused on adding a requirement into the *Municipal Government Act* and identifying the supports or guidance the province could provide to assist municipalities in developing their service levels.

Following these engagements, Municipal Affairs is not considering legislative changes at this time and will move forward with non-legislative means to support interested municipalities to develop a level of service.

Methods

Consultation was conducted through four engagement sessions, a survey, and an invitation to submit written responses to Municipal Affairs. This engagement was focused on participation from the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA), the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association (APFFPA), Alberta Municipalities (ABMunis), the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), and municipal chief administrative officers (CAOs) or equivalent.

Additionally, the Metis Settlements General Council was invited to participate as Metis Settlements are impacted by provincial legislation and may be affected by changes in requirements for fire services that neighbour Metis Settlements.

Understanding Levels of Service

Some stakeholders requested more clarity on what a level of service includes and the scope of services fire departments deliver above and beyond fire suppression. Stakeholders requested additional clarification on what is involved with drafting a level of service and conducting fire service-specific community risk assessments.

Participation

Engagement Sessions – engagement sessions were held on June 23 and 24, and July 9 and July 16 and had over 200 participants. The first session targeted the AFCA and the APFFPA, and the final session targeted the RMA, ABMunis, and the Mid-sized Cities Mayor’s Caucus. The June 24 and July 9 sessions were open to all invited stakeholders.

Survey – the survey launched June 6, 2025, and closed on July 11, 2025, and a total of 314 survey responses were received with 131 being complete (all questions answered). Seven additional written responses were also received.

Profile of Survey Respondents

Demographic Breakdown

Summer Village or Village	16.15%
Town or City (population under 20,000)	34.16%
City (population 20,000 or more)	13.04%
County or Municipal District	31.06%
Special Area or Improvement District	0.62%
Metis Settlement	0.62%
Fire Service Representative	4.35%

Fire Service Type

Career fire service	9.49%
Combination (both full-time firefighters and paid-on call)	30.38%
Paid-on-call (firefighters receive compensation for services)	29.75%
Volunteer (firefighters receive no compensation for service)	21.52%
Mutual Aid Agreement (the municipality does not have a fire service but contracts services under a formal agreement)	8.86%

Common Themes

Current State

23.72 per cent of survey respondents reported that their municipality currently did not have a level of service for their fire service, while 12.18 per cent were unsure if their municipality had a level of service. While this reflects the understanding that most municipalities in Alberta have a level of service, it also highlights a potential gap for Alberta’s municipal fire services.

Some stakeholders reported an opportunity for more awareness for local elected officials on the scope of fire services provided in communities.

There is a significant range in the services provided across the province and sometimes even within the same municipality (particularly large rural municipalities with a wide geographic range and unique needs in communities across the municipality).

Many stakeholders indicated that some services, such as ice rescue and medical calls, are provided informally without being included in a level of service

and suggested an opportunity to increase awareness surrounding budgeting and risk management.

Municipal Autonomy and Authority

Stakeholders were generally not supportive of a legislative requirement to establish a level of service. Feedback strongly suggested municipalities should retain autonomy to determine service levels in a manner that fits their communities. Stakeholders indicated municipalities are in the best position to assess local risks and determine what their fire service will respond to or what other mitigation is needed. Almost all stakeholders emphasized the importance of councils retaining the ability to tailor service levels to local resources and risks.

A majority of stakeholders indicated that a council approved level of service could strengthen the relationship between municipal leadership, local elected officials, and the fire service. However, most stakeholders also stressed the importance of avoiding a one-size-fits all approach as it could impact local viability and retention for volunteer departments.

Financial Barriers and Operational Considerations

Almost all stakeholders noted that municipal financial constraints and the lack of additional funding were significant barriers for the fire service and level of service development.

Municipal stakeholders acknowledged municipalities could modify or discontinue certain services to address budget and staffing pressures; however, many also noted potential resistance from fire service personnel. Moreover, a few stakeholders noted that defining minimum service levels may result in demands for expanded services.

Retention was a concern for local fire services, particularly for departments that rely on volunteers or paid-on-call firefighters. Stakeholders indicated volunteers find it challenging to find time to attend required training while maintaining full-time employment outside the fire service. This can impact their ability to consistently meet a level of service.

Stakeholders acknowledged inconsistent service levels between counties and partner municipalities. Many municipalities anticipate relying on regional or mutual aid agreements to fulfil the response needs of the region. This was provided as an example of why

stakeholders felt levels of service were best determined at the local level.

While it was acknowledged that establishing a level of service could help inform funding, training, and equipment needs, stakeholders raised concerns that it takes time and appropriate staffing levels to conduct a community risk assessment, develop the level of service, adjust municipal budgets as required, and for firefighters to meet training and competency requirements.

Provincial Supports

Almost all stakeholders suggested they would welcome further provincial support to help municipalities develop and improve service levels.

Most stakeholders advocated for supports to build municipal capacity to tailor their fire services to meet community needs. Additional education was requested for local elected officials regarding municipal fire services and the risk associated with not appropriately defining a level of service and the importance of training and equipping to that level of service.

Most stakeholders advocated for additional non-legislative measures, including tool kits, templates, benchmarks, best practice documents, and guidelines, all centralized under the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Stakeholders would also appreciate more training and awareness regarding existing tools and resources.

For additional information, please contact the Office of the Fire Commissioner at firecomm@gov.ab.ca.