

# ELECTION 2021

Federal Election Municipal Issues Backgrounder



# WELCOME TO THE FEDERAL ELECTION MUNICIPAL ISSUES BACKGROUNDER

During the 2021 federal election, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) is calling on all federal parties to present platforms that:

- a) Build more sustainable communities by providing much-needed economic support and broadband access;
- b) Build safer communities by working collaboratively to address mental health and addictions, provide national leadership in addressing drugs and gangs and assist communities with climate resilience; and
- c) Build better relationships by inviting municipalities to the table to discuss infrastructure priorities, RCMP policing, getting resources to market, and a carbon tax rebate for the municipal sector.

The following package provides key messages and background information on three major issues facing municipalities and relating to their relationship with the federal government:

1. **Building Sustainable Communities**
2. **Building Safer Communities**
3. **Building Better Relationships**

Under each section you will find items marked as **Needs** and **Fixes**.

**Needs** - We would like to see these changes as they would have a positive impact on our communities.

**Fixes** - We believe the federal government must revisit or reverse these decisions because of a negative impact on municipalities.

This information will ensure you are prepared to discuss and debate these issues with local candidates.

SUMA will provide additional tools for members during the election campaign. We have provided text for letters to the editor and candidates. We will also be providing regular updates on issues through email and our website, plus shareable social media content through Facebook and Twitter.



## NEED: PERMANENT DOUBLING OF THE CANADA COMMUNITY BUILDING FUND

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling upon the federal government to **commit to permanently doubling the Canada Community Building Fund** — formerly known as the Federal Gas Tax Fund — with a predictable annual growth rate that better reflects economic growth and construction costs. The Canada Community Building Fund is a core funding tool that empowers municipalities of all sizes to build better lives for all Canadians.

### BACKGROUND:

Municipalities collect just 10 cents of each Canadian tax dollar, yet are responsible for nearly 60 per cent of the public infrastructure, everything from transit and roads to water and waste. Each year, the Canada Community Building Fund supports the renewal of this infrastructure by providing predictable funding to municipalities of all sizes.

Currently, however, the fund accounts for only two per cent of municipal revenues while the list of unfunded infrastructure projects grows. The federal budget in 2019 included a one-time doubling of transfers, which was duplicated in 2021 to help municipalities cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Municipalities and our local economies have need for a permanent program to help address infrastructure shortfalls and stimulate economic growth. SUMA, in partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, is calling for a permanent doubling of the Canada Community Building Fund. And to maintain its effectiveness into the future, the fund's annual growth index needs a boost—from 2 to 3.5 per cent—to better reflect economic growth and rising construction costs.



## NEED: RELIABLE BROADBAND

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **increase the scope of partnerships and funding for broadband** to better serve Canadians in more remote areas.

### BACKGROUND:

Saskatchewan residents depend on broadband for education, business, and connection, regardless of whether they live in a city, a town, a village, or a northern community.

Saskatchewan's broadly dispersed population presents a challenge for standard broadband development. The federal government's broadband development plan focuses on incentivizing infrastructure development through grants to telecommunications providers. While this approach works well in more densely populated areas, telecommunications companies may still be unable to develop profitable business plans for more remote areas—even if their actual infrastructure investment is minimal.

The result of this approach will be those living in more remote communities receiving broadband last, if they do at all.

The Government of Canada must think outside the standard telecommunications box, and find additional partnerships to pursue broadband in Saskatchewan. This may include partnering with municipalities directly to provide end-of-line service, or national contracts with low-Earth orbit satellite internet providers.

All orders of government need to be brought to the table to find a way forward that will meet the needs of all the residents of Saskatchewan, and Canada as a whole.



## NEED: SUPPORT FOR RESOURCE COMMUNITIES

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **provide more support to resource communities** suffering from downturns in world markets and changes to environmental policies.

### BACKGROUND:

Saskatchewan has natural resource industries including oil, gas, potash, lumber, uranium, and coal, which provided more than 16 per cent of the provincial GDP in 2019. However, these industries are sensitive to changes in world markets and environmental policy, such as the decision to phase out coal-based electrical generation.

The people working in these industries are residents in our hometowns. They are our families, and our friends. They are a part of our community, and our communities depend on them. It is essential that our communities and their residents receive assistance, particularly in developing new economies to supplement natural resources where possible and replace them where they must be replaced.



## NEED: NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SAFETY

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **provide national leadership in public safety, including drugs, gangs, and root-cause crime prevention.**

### BACKGROUND:

Public safety is a responsibility, and a goal, shared by all orders of government. However, municipalities deal with the day-to-day effects of crime in our cities, towns, villages, and northern communities.

Drug-related deaths increased in 2020/21, due to the deterioration of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and an increasing availability of extremely refined and dangerous opioids on the streets, supplied and sold by gangs. Many communities have also seen an accompanying increase in violent, and particularly gun-related, crime as well, as gangs move through their boundaries.

Municipalities cannot deal with this alone, nor is the problem confined to justice and policing. The root causes of drugs, gangs, and street crime can be traced back to trauma, mental health issues, and poverty. Addressing these larger root causes will lead to better outcomes for individuals and communities, ending cycles of violence and crime.

Root-cause public safety initiatives cannot be solely a municipal responsibility, nor can dealing with gangs, drugs, and violent crime. A coordinated approach that brings together the federal, provincial, and municipal governments across Canada is needed to identify solutions that address our public safety needs.



## FIX: COORDINATED MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SUPPORT

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **facilitate a coordinated response to mental health and addictions in Canada**, involving provinces, territories, municipalities, and non-profit organizations.

### BACKGROUND:

While health and social services are primarily provincial responsibilities, all orders of government and various non-profit organizations have a direct role to play in planning and service delivery. A collaborative approach is essential to achieve significant results.

There are many areas related to mental health and addictions that could be focused on. Access to care is perhaps the most essential area. Proactive access to a mental health professional, such as a counsellor or psychologist, is not covered under federal/provincial health care, and even those that are lucky enough to

have employment-related health plans find they have a limited amount of coverage annually. Emergency access to a psychologist may be covered, but waiting lists are long, and programs may only cover one appointment per month.

Housing is also an important part of dealing with mental health and addictions, and there are often large gaps between homeless shelters and market-based rentals. Those suffering from mental health problems, or at risk of addiction relapse, may be unable to afford or maintain a rental agreement, forcing them back onto the streets.



## NEED: CLIMATE RESILIENCE

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **assist communities with becoming more climate change resilient**, to assist with the challenges of drought and other disasters. While the current focus on flooding resiliency is important, communities need to be prepared for all types of emergencies.

### BACKGROUND:

Scientific models agree that we can expect an increase in the number and severity of disasters as a result of climate change. As the owners of more than 60 per cent of public infrastructure, municipalities are on the front lines during these events, whether they are related to flooding, drought, severe heat or cold, or extreme weather events.

Building resilient infrastructure can significantly reduce the damage done during an emergency event, returning nearly fourfold the investment put into preparation and mitigation. Better preparations and more resilient infrastructure can also help to ensure that essential services, such as water and wastewater, continue to function in the event of a disaster. This improves safety for residents and continuity for business.





## FIX: A SEAT AT THE TABLE

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **bring in municipal associations to represent their members when discussing inter-jurisdictional priorities**, such as infrastructure funding streams and RCMP policing.

### BACKGROUND:

Municipalities are not defined in the Canadian Constitution, but are instead created under individual acts of the legislature in provinces and territories. As a result, municipalities and their representative associations are often left out of discussions between the federal and provincial/territorial governments when issues that directly affect them are discussed, such as infrastructure streams or policing.

Municipalities are the order of government closest to the people and have the best view of what is needed locally. As such, their opinions are irreplaceable—an essential part of understanding the needs of residents and how they can best be addressed.

RCMP policing is poised to be a particularly challenging federal/provincial/municipal issue in the near future. RCMP members have recently negotiated their first collective bargaining agreement with the federal government, which will lead to extensive salary increases dated back to 2017. While the province is the primary contract holder with the RCMP in Saskatchewan, many cities have their own municipal contracts, and nearly all smaller urban and rural municipalities receive and pay for RCMP services through an agreement with the province. Any cost increases that the province experiences, as well as any service disruptions or changes, will be felt by the municipal sector.

Informed decisions are good decisions; municipalities need to be at the table to provide the necessary context for federal and provincial decision makers.



## FIX: GETTING RESOURCES TO MARKET

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **improve the systems getting Saskatchewan's natural resources to market**, including the implementation of utility corridors, and the approval of pipelines.

### BACKGROUND:

Saskatchewan exports approximately 67 per cent of its products to world markets, including oil, potash, agricultural products, lumber, and uranium.

Getting resources to market often presents a challenge, given Saskatchewan's landlocked status. Most product is transported by rail, leading to situations where different products and carriers compete for rail space.

Transportation of dangerous goods by rail also increases the risk of large spills and disasters, over methods of transportation such as pipelines. This risk can be mitigated through stricter safety requirements, but never fully eliminated.

Pipelines provide an alternative to rail for oil and gas, but getting them built is often a challenge, due to various levels of approval, jurisdictions, and environmental sensitivities. Establishing national utility corridors would require significant consultation and review; however, once this has been completed, it would significantly ease project approval moving forward.



## NEED: MUNICIPAL CARBON TAX REBATES

### KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to meet its promise to **establish carbon tax rebates or programming for municipalities** to avoid unnecessarily and unfairly taxing them.

### BACKGROUND:

Carbon taxes are founded on the premise that the additional pain of paying the tax will reduce consumption of a particular product that causes emissions; they may also cause consumers to make different choices when purchasing things like vehicles.

Municipalities are already leaders in adopting more efficient technologies in order to save public funds. They also rely heavily on other orders of government to fund infrastructure and large

equipment upgrades, creating a closed funding loop where more money needs to be put toward those fund transfers so that the carbon tax portion of a project can be paid back. This puts the costs entirely back onto municipal taxpayers.

SUMA is asking the federal government to stand by the commitment it made to develop a straight rebate for municipalities, or a funding program to assist with the adoption of more green technologies, so that the money spent on the carbon tax is returned to the community, rather than transferred back to the federal government.





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