
SUMA Position Statement

Urban governments make decisions all the time that determine a municipality's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Resources, such as reader-friendly information, risk assessments and funding must be made available to help municipalities adapt. SUMA is calling on the Government of Saskatchewan to take a leadership role by implementing a provincial Climate Change Adaptation Plan and offering predictable, long-term funding options to finance adaptation projects.

Key Messages

- There is the opportunity to build capacity in asset management, infrastructure, emergency planning and best practices.
- Funding must be made available for projects of all sizes, ensuring villages, towns and cities can adapt to climate change. This funding must be long-term and predictable as climate change, and the impacts it will have, is an ongoing issue.
- Resources in risk assessment, prioritizing impacts and choosing what initiatives to invest in are vital in developing an adaptation plan and should be made available to municipalities.
- In consultation with SUMA, the province needs to support municipalities in the process of adapting to climate change through legislation, funding, provincial targets and information databases.

Current Status

- SUMA has created an ongoing survey to learn what the greatest challenges climate change will pose to our members.
- The September 2015 issue of *The Urban Voice* highlights adaptation projects currently in Saskatchewan.
- This policy is to be discussed at the September SUMA board meeting.

Background

Climate change adaptation has been identified as an issue from coast-to-coast. Normal precipitation patterns will change and there will be an increase in extreme weather events that threaten life in urban municipalities. Some provinces are paving the way by implementing climate change adaptation plans that directly relate to municipalities and how they operate. Municipalities in Nova Scotia must produce a Municipal Climate Action Plan to be eligible to receive a portion of their gas tax. Alberta, with similar geography and economy to Saskatchewan, has made significant progress in adaptation. The province has created a Municipal Climate Action Plan focused on developing municipal adaptation plans, building capacity and taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) views the challenges climate change will pose to municipalities as a great concern. They strongly encourage municipalities to adapt, and have created the Green Municipal Fund (GMF) that assist municipalities financially. While it does not fund initiatives focused on adaptation, the fund is evolving to offer more flexibility for innovative projects. Adaptation projects are often viewed as being out of reach of smaller municipalities. While there are sources of funding available, such as the GMF, most of it is meant for large scale projects that small municipalities cannot afford even.

British Columbia has a Climate Action Revenue Incentive Program which benefits signatories of the province's BC Climate Action Charter. This conditional grant provides the equivalent of 100 per cent of the carbon taxes paid to fund adaptation projects. Federal funding programs are being utilized by municipalities in Ontario through the Climate Change Adaptation Program, Community Environment Fund and the EcoAction Community Funding Program. These funds aren't as limiting in their eligibility requirements as the GMF, meaning municipalities have more freedom in their choice of initiative.

Some communities in Saskatchewan have begun to adapt, regardless of not having a formal climate change adaptation plan. The rain barrel rebate initiative in Saskatoon promotes water conservation, an extremely important program as climate change will increase our risk of drought. The Town of Lumsden's investment in a new waste water treatment facility has made it more resilient to the risk of flooding. Certain Saskatchewan communities are beginning to adapt but the Government of Saskatchewan needs to provide leadership to grow this momentum.

Strategic Context

According to FCM, Canada's infrastructure deficit is significant and with the impact of climate change the deficit is expected to double. They believe that local governments are key in preparing communities; that is why they host webinars on adaptation, make planning guides and case studies available on their website, and have worked with the Partners for Climate Protection to administer the GMF. It has been noted that provincial support is vital in successfully adapting.

The issue of municipal climate change adaptation is a growing issue across the country. Last year's heavy rainfall lead to flooding, and many factors came together this year to create the devastating forest fires in northern Saskatchewan. This demonstrates municipalities are not free from environmental hazards so preparation is vital.

Contacts

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