

# Special Areas Board Mandate and Roles Document

The Mandate and Roles Document for the Special Areas Board (“Board”) has been developed collaboratively between the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Board to reflect a common understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. The Special Areas Board manages over 2.5 million acres of public land in the province’s three Special Areas, which approximates 50 per cent of the land base in these areas. This land is considered to be susceptible to environmental damage and is considered to be ecologically sensitive. The Board also has a significant role in providing a broad range of municipal services, such as construction and maintenance of local roads, parks operations, and emergency and protective services, to this region in east-central Alberta.

## 1. Agency Mandate

The *Special Areas Board* is an agency of the Crown, reporting to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The mandate of the Board was established in 1938 with the passing of the *Special Areas Act*. An innovative, alternative form of government was required to help this part of east-central Alberta maintain its social and economic viability.

The Government of Alberta has given the Board the responsibility for delivery of the following services:

- provision of rural municipal government; and
- public land management for the area within the boundaries of the Special Areas as stated in the *Special Areas Act* RSA 2000.

## Mission

The Special Areas Board is dedicated to improving the quality of life of the residents of the Special Areas through the provision of cost effective, proactive, and responsive municipal services and effective long-term land and water management. The Board actively works to increase the population of the Special Areas and works to offer diverse opportunities to facilitate the growth of the region.

## Applicable Legislation and Regulations

The Board has responsibilities under, and is subject to, a number of statutes and regulations including:

- *Special Areas Act*
- *Special Areas Disposition Regulation*
- *Special Areas Service Fees Regulation*
- *Public Lands Act*
- *Application of the Public Lands Act Regulation*
- *Municipal Government Act*

- *Local Authorities Election Act*
- *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)*
- *Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (APAGA)*

## **2. Duties and Responsibilities**

The government is responsible for the legislative, regulatory, and policy frameworks in which the Board operates.

### **The Minister**

The Minister is accountable to the Legislature for the Board. The Minister reports to the Legislature on the affairs of the Board and answers questions about the Board.

The Minister:

- has many powers under Section 7 of the *Special Areas Act* and delegates some of those powers to the Board, and the Chair of the Special Areas Board under Ministerial Order No. MSL:009/15;
- recommends the appointment of the Chair, Special Areas Board based on her/his assessment that the candidate has the appropriate knowledge, skills, experience, and values to assist the Board in achieving its objectives and performing its functions;
- recommends the appointment of Board members based on the recommendation of the locally elected Advisory Councillors and evidence the appointees have appropriate knowledge, skills, experience, and values to assist the Board by providing direction on governance matters;
- monitors the operations and performance of the Board to ensure it is fulfilling its mandate in compliance with government policies;
- participates in the process of setting and monitoring the Board's strategic direction and targets; and
- conducts regular (at least every seven years) reviews of the Board's mandate and purpose to determine if the work of the Board is still relevant to the needs of Albertans, if it is aligned with government priorities, and if the operations and functions are being carried out in a manner that can achieve government objectives.

### **The Municipal Affairs Department**

- informs the Board of government policies and direction affecting the work of the Board;

- is the conduit to request approval from the Minister or Deputy Minister on matters not delegated to the Board; and
- provides organizational and support services such as Human Resources for the full-time managers to the Board.

### **The Special Areas Board**

The Board is responsible for the overall governance and management of its business and affairs. The Board guides the strategic direction; approves and monitors the business plan, operational plan; and financial results, and is ultimately accountable to the Minister. Board members must act ethically, honestly, and in good faith, leaving aside personal interests to advance the public interest and the mandate of the Board.

*The Board is responsible for:*

- identifying appropriate business processes to assist in fulfilling its mandate including:
  - the development of policies;
  - approval of expenditures; and
  - appointment of representatives to various committees and commissions.
- prudent fiscal management of Board revenues and oversight of operations; revenues are generated through local property taxation, the leasing of public lands, and other revenues collected for the administration of its municipal function;
- supporting the Department on a committee recommending to the Minister the appointment of the Chair;
- ensuring adequate plans are in place for Board and Advisory Council development and succession, and conducting an annual review of such plans;
- recruitment and retention of its supervisory and operational staff;
- monitoring the financial performance of the organization, ensuring with the advice of the external auditors, the financial results are reported on a timely and regular basis and in accordance with any legislated requirements and the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (this work is conducted through the Office of the Auditor General of Alberta);
- approving all matters which require Board approval as prescribed by applicable legislation and regulations. The Board recommends the Chair bring such matters to the attention of the Department, when necessary;
- providing an orientation to the particular practices of their organization, including their governance practices to elected Advisory Councillors and Board members (this function is assisted by the Director of Finance and Administration who conducts code of conduct and ethics training);

- preparing a business plan for each fiscal year in the form and at a time acceptable to the Minister. These documents are made available to the public through the annual Ratepayer Minute Book on the Special Areas Board website;
- addressing how the Board interacts with the public and establishing policies that clearly identify roles and responsibilities in the area of communication with the public (as a form of local government, the Board routinely seeks input from local residents, ratepayers, and businesses);
- engaging with other neighbouring local government authorities to establish a collaborative framework to approach services and project delivery that benefit the community as a whole regardless of municipal boundaries; and
- engaging in a strategic planning process which includes the consideration of the principal risks associated with the Board's business.

## **Board Chair**

With direction from the Board, the Chair represents its interests, as well as the interests of the Special Areas, in dealing with the Minister, the Department, stakeholders, and the community. The Chair reports to the Board and to the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Municipal Services Division of the Department ("Division").

The Chair is responsible for providing leadership for the Board and for effectively facilitating the work of the Board.

The Chair is responsible for:

- planning and managing Board meetings;
- providing the Minister with regular updates on the Board's operations and informing the Minister regarding emergent issues;
- ensuring the Board, and its committees, have opportunities to meet independent of management;
- administering the Code of Conduct and ensuring conflict of interest matters are addressed by the Board;
- ensuring all Board members comply with the Board's Code of Conduct;
- overseeing the day-to-day management of the Board;
- ensuring all material developments, and significant emergent issues of the Board, are disclosed to the Minister on a timely basis;
- ensuring programs and services are being delivered within the standards and policies of the Board and the Government of Alberta;
- overseeing compliance with all relevant policies, procedures, and standards by which the Board operates and ensuring the Board and its employees operate at all times in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, and to the highest ethical standards;
- establishing appropriate systems for the general administration and financial management and control of the Board;

- monitoring performance and taking corrective action when problems are identified;
- ensuring the proper management of the Board's risk in providing services and care of the organization's assets. The management of these risks is assigned to the Chair and the status is periodically reviewed by the Board. The Chair is charged with the responsibility to assure the Board and its committees are kept well informed of changing risks on a timely basis;
- providing support to the Board to allow it to carry out its governance responsibilities;
- working with the Board to prepare an annual business plan in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Minister;
- maintaining effective communications with senior staff in the ministry, other ministries as required, stakeholders, and other business partners;
- ensuring the Board conducts an annual evaluation and review of its performance, as well as the performance of its committees and the management team; and
- operating within the mandate, policies, standards, and budget approved by the Board and the Government of Alberta.

### **3. Recruitment and Appointment of Board Members**

Board members are appointed by the Government of Alberta and collectively constitute the Board. The Board will identify the values and competencies required for individual Board members. Values will include respect, integrity, impartiality, excellence, and accountability. Competencies will include strong listening and communication skills, skills in developing consensus, and an understanding of wise stewardship of resources.

Recruitment will be based on the locally elected Advisory Councillors who recommend one Board member in each Special Area. The recommendation is then forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs who presents to Cabinet.

The recruitment process will be led by the Chair of the Board in consultation with the Special Areas Advisory Council and the Division.

When a vacancy occurs, the Advisory Council will identify the competencies that need to be replaced and discuss then recommend the best Councillor for the role.

Conflict of interest and other screening shall be completed before the candidates are recommended to the Minister.

The Minister will recommend a replacement to the Board from the short list provided and the Division will coordinate the appointment process via preparation of an Order in Council for Cabinet consideration.

The individuals nominated to fill specific vacancies will be subject to the same screening processes.

Appointment is for a fixed term of up to four (4) years, with the potential for reappointment, based on successfully winning an election race in their subdivision.



#### **4. Interaction Between the Board and Department**

The Board collaborates with the Division on items not delegated to the Board by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, or on issues of mutual interest and concern. This occurs through regularly scheduled meetings between the Chair and the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Division, who also monitors and evaluates the Chair's performance and approves the Chair's compensation.

The Board may also on occasion meet with the Deputy Minister or the Minister of Municipal Affairs on issues that warrant such meetings.

As an agent of the Crown, and as a public land manager, the Board has a duty to uphold the obligations of the province to First Nations. On matters that may involve consultation with First Nations groups, the Board engages with the Department to determine the process related to Indigenous consultation.

#### **5. Administration**

##### **Review of the Mandate and Roles Document**

The Mandate and Roles Document shall be in effect for not more than three (3) years. It must be renewed or revised by the expiry date.

The Mandate and Roles Document may be amended at any time; any amendment must be signed by the Chair and by the responsible Minister.

##### **Transparency**

Copies of the Mandate and Roles Document will be filed with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Board. In support of the principle of transparency, this document will also be easily available to the public on the Board's website at [www.specialareas.ab.ca](http://www.specialareas.ab.ca) or the Municipal Affairs website at [www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca).

##### **Periodic Agency Review**

The mandate and operations of every public agency must, at least every seven (7) years, be reviewed by the responsible Minister. The next review for the Board will occur before May 2027.



Jordon Christianson, Chair  
Special Areas Board



Rebecca Schulz,  
Minister of Municipal Affairs

10th. February. 2023.

Date:

March 28, 2023

Date