

Cities and Their Relationship with Provincial-Municipal Associations

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon has been a long-standing and active member of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA). Recently, however, this relationship has been showing signs of strain due to policy, program, and organizational differences between it and the City. Is this common in Canada? What is the relationship between major cities and their municipal associations? What potential options could the City of Saskatoon adopt to either improve the relationship with SUMA or enhance its advocacy?

BACKGROUND

The referenced matter was considered as part of the verbal updates during the In Camera portion of the Governance and Priorities Committee meeting held on April 15, 2019. Upon rising and reporting, the Committee resolved, in part:

That the Administration report on the City's relationship with municipal associations.

CURRENT STATUS

The City of Saskatoon continues to be an active member of SUMA. The research for this report has concluded; and the analysis, findings, and options are presented for consideration.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The central objective of this report is to provide an overview of the relationship that large cities have with their provincial-municipal associations. The Appendix to this report blends a research review with an options analysis to give members of City Council a good understanding of why municipalities join associations, the different types of associations and how they operate, and approaches City Council can take to improve the relationship or bolster the City's advocacy.

To set the context for the relationship that cities have with their associations, the appendix compares and contrasts the similarities and differences of four primary municipal associations: two unified and two split. The unified associations are the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM). The split associations are SUMA and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA).

The Appendix reviews various aspects of each association—membership composition, governance structure, member services, finances, and membership fees—to illustrate how similar or different each association is. These are important features as they attempt to explain the approaches the associations take to managing membership cleavages.

Municipal associations provide two core functions: advocacy and member services. But the extent to which they deliver these depends largely on the composition of their membership and the presence of larger and smaller members (as measured by population). Associations that have a larger presence of smaller municipalities tend to place a greater emphasis on service delivery than advocacy.

In terms of membership composition, a statistical analysis was conducted to determine how dispersed the membership of each association is. The results reveal that SUMA's membership is dominated by villages (with 52% of the membership belonging to villages). It has the narrowest dispersion across various statistical measures, and is a more homogeneous association relative to the other associations.

All associations are governed by a Board of Directors, but the boards vary in terms of size and representation. SUMA has one of the larger boards and its composition is a blend of geographic regions and municipal types (e.g., cities or towns). Cities have stronger representation on the boards of the split associations than they do on the unified associations. However, unlike AUMA's Executive, SUMA only allows one major city to be represented.

In terms of fees, most associations use a regressive rate structure meaning that the rate declines with higher populations. Based on its fee structure, Saskatoon pays approximately \$108,000 (in 2019) to belong to SUMA. This is about double what Vancouver pays to belong to UBCM despite Vancouver being 2.5 times larger than Saskatoon. In contrast, the City of Winnipeg pays \$27,000 to belong to the AMM. The AMM has capped Winnipeg's fees at that amount, but it uses a combination of population and the tax base to determine its fees.

To determine the relationship cities have with their municipal associations, a total of seven interviews were conducted with City representatives from the largest city (or cities) in the province and association officials. The findings, as explained in section 5 of the Appendix, reveal that most cities have a strong relationship with their association.

Cities find that they are consulted widely on issues and do not lead policy or advocacy work, but provide feedback and input to the development of association positions. On the other hand, cities use the resolution process sparingly and sporadically, as they often do not need collective support for the advocacy positions.

While the Appendix does not contain any recommendations, it does provide five options for consideration that City Council can pursue. The options are listed as follows:

- Maintain the Status Quo
- Propose Governance Reforms
- Strengthen the City Mayors Caucus
- Create an Independent Cities Association
- Adopt the Toronto Approach

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The Appendix describes each option, addresses their implementation, implications, advantages, and disadvantages. Any of the proposed options could be implemented, but some require the support of the association and/or other Cities.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications for the various options are addressed in section 6 of the Appendix.

NEXT STEPS

At City Council's direction.

APPENDIX

1. Cities and Their Relationship with Provincial-Municipal Associations: Options for Consideration

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