

8

How can citizens participate in local government?

Chapter Focus Questions

- What is the structure of local government in Alberta?
- How are representatives elected to form a local government?
- What responsibilities do local governments have?
- What do school boards do?

Rink Update!

Mr. Grundy walked in with a printed e-mail in his hands.

"Well," he said, "here's the news we've all been waiting for."

"Recess?" said Emily.

Mr. Grundy laughed. "Good one, Emily. Actually it's a letter from our local councillor about our proposal to have an outdoor rink and skating shack in the Wildrose area."

The class suddenly went very still, waiting for the result.

Mr. Grundy continued. "It's bad news — the rink has been turned down because the government's recreation planners felt there weren't enough below-zero days in winter now to warrant building an outdoor facility."

The class sighed in sympathy, but stopped when he held up his hand. "It's also good news — the councillors felt that if we could show public support for an indoor arena, they might consider this as an item on their next budget!"

The class broke out into cheering.

Mr. Grundy put up his hand again. "That's one of the great things about having representatives that are elected: they are always eager to listen to the people because they want votes! But here's the catch: how can we influence them to take action?"

What are we learning in this chapter?

This chapter analyzes the way that **local governments** are structured and how they function. Earlier on, in Chapter 2, you learned that governments have responsibilities to provide services, govern through laws, and support their work through taxes. This chapter deals with local governments specifically: the governments that run small communities such as hamlets and villages, and larger communities such as towns and cities, as well as First Nations authorities.

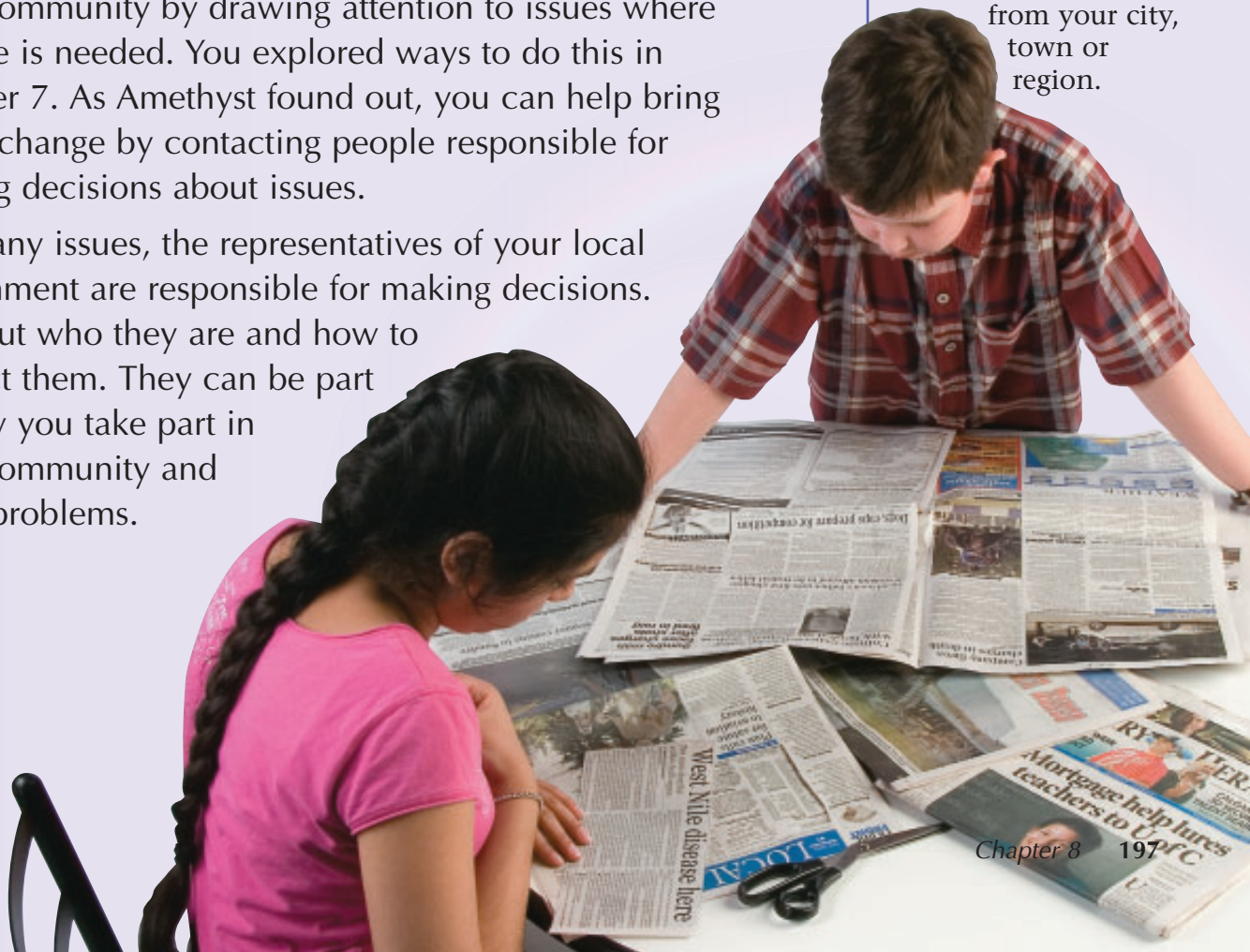
Why are we learning this?

Grade 6 students use many of the services local governments provide. For example, local governments develop and run recreation centres, neighbourhood parks, libraries and transit systems.

As a Grade 6 student, you can take part in the affairs of your community by drawing attention to issues where change is needed. You explored ways to do this in Chapter 7. As Amethyst found out, you can help bring about change by contacting people responsible for making decisions about issues.

For many issues, the representatives of your local government are responsible for making decisions. Find out who they are and how to contact them. They can be part of how you take part in your community and solve problems.

Look in your local newspaper for topics of concern in your neighbourhood and community. Newspapers have sections devoted to different kinds of news. You need the section that focuses on news from your city, town or region.



Chapter 8 Inquiry Task

SKILLS at Work

This task involves creating a strategy to solve a problem. Problem solving is a skill you can find in the Skills Centre. Check it out!
Problem solved!

- propose and apply new ideas, strategies and options, supported with facts and reasons, to contribute to decision making and problem solving



Creating a plan to take action on a local concern

Introduction

Imagine you're on your way to school one day and it strikes you that your neighbourhood has become defaced by graffiti. You notice spray-paint scrawls on fences, garages and houses. So much paint covers some of the local signs that you can barely read them. The problem seems to be getting worse.

You know that there is a **bylaw**, or local law, against defacing property. You think that maybe a bylaw enforcement officer could do something about the graffiti. But then, you think again: this problem seems more than one officer could handle. You are thinking that something needs to be done!

Or imagine that you've noticed more and more signs popping up along roadsides. The signs advertise garage and house sales, and painting and removal services. The signs make the roadsides cluttered and unpleasant. The grass along the roads is now trampled and pockmarked with holes. From hearing adults talk, you know that people are allowed to put up most of these signs. You wonder what can be done. Someone must have the authority to make a bylaw that would fix the problem. But who — and how?

The task

1. Choose a local issue that needs to be handled by an elected representative in local government.
2. Collect information and data about the issue. Reference your sources.

3. Work out how you will identify and contact the elected representative and how you will influence that person. (Hint: Refer to examples in Chapter 7.)
4. Record your plan in the form of a web.
5. TAKE ACTION!

Things to think about before starting the task

1. You need examples of local topics causing concern in your community. These examples can come from media or personal experience.
 - The media: Scan local newspapers or your community's newsletters, or catch the local news on the radio or TV.
 - Personal experience: You may know of a topic, because of concerns that you, your family or your neighbours have. Collect and document information on the topic. This might take the form of recording changes (e.g., noting new graffiti), taking photographs (e.g., signs along roads), or collecting data (e.g., the date, number, sizes and types of roadside signs).
2. You must sort through the issues to find ones that need the help of an elected representative rather than a bylaw/police officer or other government employee.



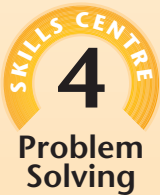
In 2001, these students in Provost put together a petition asking their local government to build a skateboard park. Today, you can visit it! The park features a steel structure with a quarterpipe, jumpbox, half pyramid, and a kinked grindrail, grindledge, square rail and grindbox.

What is the structure of local governments in Alberta?

SKILLS at Work

Everyone in Alberta has a local government. Use the information in this section to figure out what kind of local government you have. This will help you with your chapter task.

- apply new ideas, strategies and options to contribute to problem solving

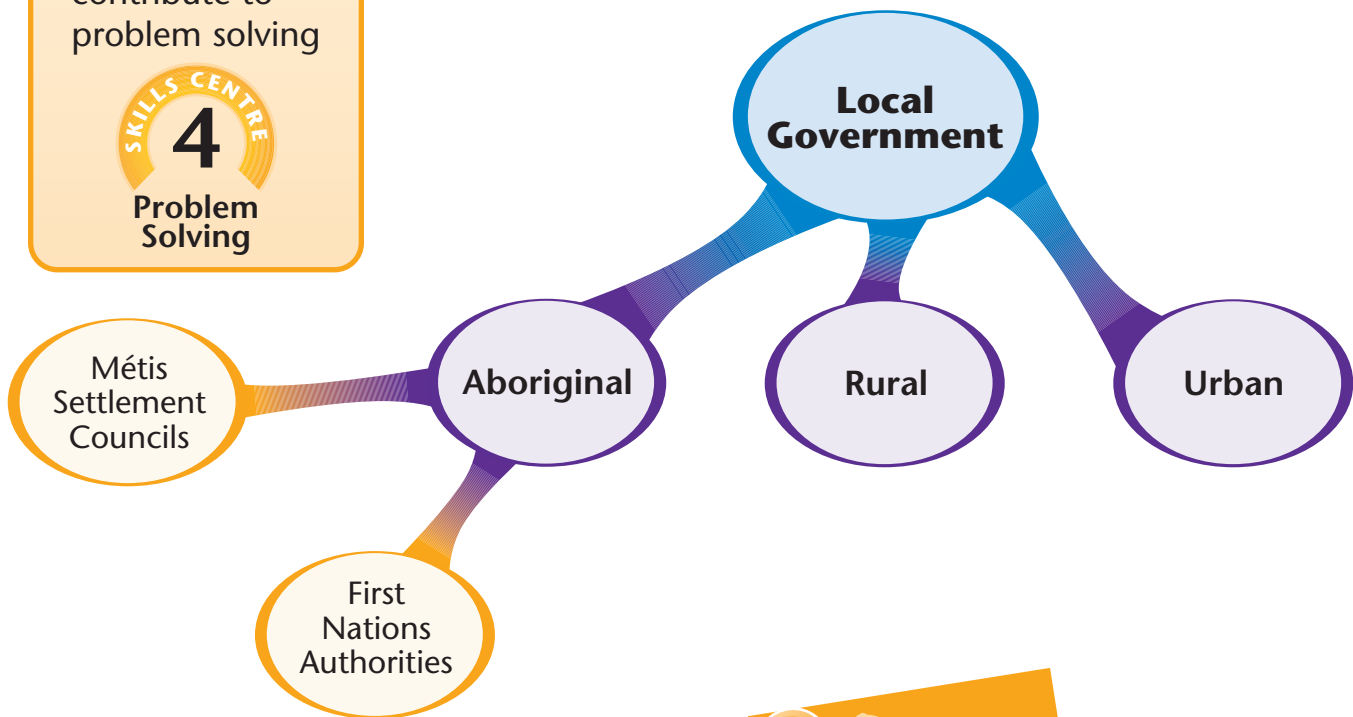


What's important?

Know that local governments are different for rural and urban areas, and for First Nations reserves and Métis settlements.

What forms of local government are found in Alberta?

People in Alberta have homes in urban areas, in rural areas, and on First Nations reserves and in Métis settlements. No matter where they live, Albertans have a local government that they elect. Local governments take care of local matters, such as roads, waste disposal, and housing developments.



Pause

How do the different kinds of local government in Alberta help create a well-functioning society?

Urban, rural and Aboriginal local governments in Alberta have different structures. Examine the examples on the next pages. How does each government meet the different needs of people in Alberta?



How do the different kinds of local government in Alberta reflect differences in where Albertans live and what they need? This photo shows a farm near the outskirts of Calgary.

Examples of Local Governments in Alberta

What's important?

Compare different kinds of local government.

City of Lethbridge



Population	82 000
Area	130 km ²
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- All citizens vote for all local representatives, including a mayor and 8 councillors. The mayor is the head of the city government.- The structure of the government comes from the laws of Alberta.

Mackenzie County



Population	10 000
Area	80 000 km ²
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The district is divided into 10 zones, or wards. Citizens in each ward elect a representative. The 10 representatives elect a reeve from among themselves, who is the head of the district government.- The structure of the government comes from the laws of Alberta.

Loon River Cree Nation

Population	450
Area	52 km ² , including <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Loon Lake Reserve- Loon Prairie Reserve- Swampy Lake Reserve
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The people of Loon River Cree Nation elect a chief and 4 councillors.- The structure of the government comes from the laws of Canada, because of the historic rights of First Nations. The people of Loon River Cree Nation are part of Treaty 8, one of the historic treaties negotiated between First Nations peoples and Canada's government.



Pause

Local governments can vary in size, numbers of councillors and structure. How do these differences in government show fairness and equity?



What's important?

Understand that the structure of local governments in urban areas is related to population size.

Village, town or city?

You need a certain number of people in an area to become a village, town or city.

As your population grows you can change your status or you may choose not to.

Fact Finder: Urban Municipalities

Urban areas all share one thing in common: people live close together. They have different populations, however, and this affects how they are governed. This page shows the different categories of urban **municipalities** in Alberta. These categories are created by Alberta's provincial government.

Cities

Population: more than 10 000

Number in Alberta, 2007: 16

Representatives:

- Mayor: head of government elected by all citizens
- Councillors (minimum 6): elected by all citizens (smaller centres), or elected to represent wards, or zones, by the citizens who live in the wards (larger centres)

Examples: Medicine Hat, Calgary

This is the city of Calgary.



Towns

Population: 1000 – 10 000

Number in Alberta, 2007: 111

Representatives:

- Mayor: head of government elected by all citizens
- Councillors (minimum 6): elected by all citizens

Examples: Magrath, Peace River



This is the town of Athabasca.

Villages

Population: 300 – 1000

Number in Alberta, 2007: 100

Representatives:

- Mayor: head of government elected by all citizens
- Councillors (minimum 2): elected by all citizens

Examples: Willingdon, Sangudo



This is the village of Cremona.

SKILLS at Work

How many cities, towns and villages does Alberta have today? Why might the numbers of cities, towns and villages change in Alberta over time?

- use examples of events to describe cause and effect and change over time



What's important?

Understand factors that affect the structure of local governments in rural areas.

Fact Finder: Rural Municipalities

The population of rural municipalities is spread over large areas.



Municipal Districts (also called Counties)

Number in Alberta, 2007: 68

Characteristics:

- Residents live on farms and in hamlets. Hamlets are centres with fewer than 300 people.

Representatives:

- Councillors (minimum 4): elected from wards, or zones
- Reeve: head of government elected by the councillors from among themselves

Examples: Cardston County, Greenview Municipal District

This is from Vulcan County.

SKILLS at Work

Why are rural municipalities larger in area than urban municipalities?

- identify geographic problems and issues and pose geographic questions



Specialized Municipalities

Number in Alberta, 2007: 4

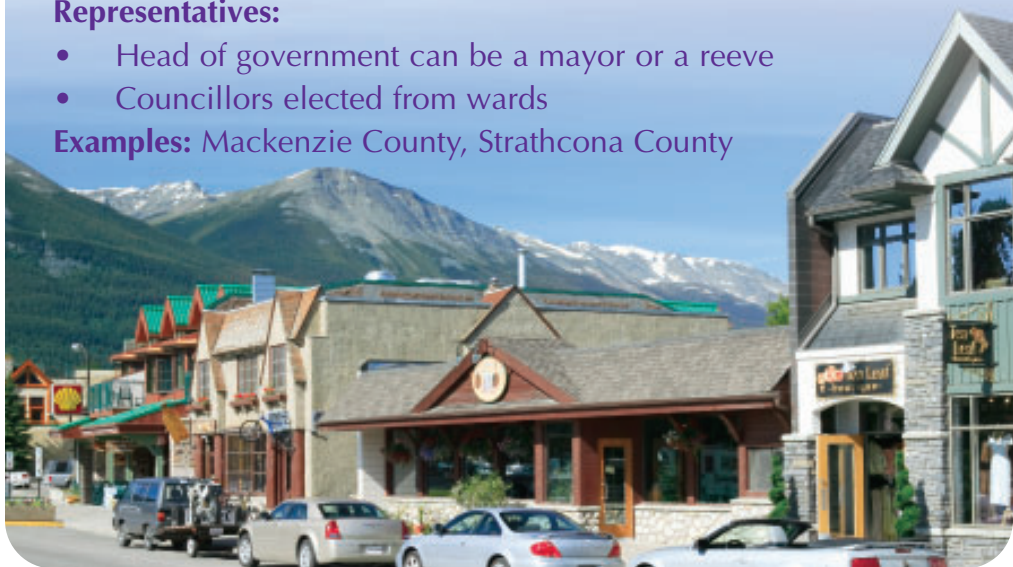
Characteristics:

- These are unique areas, such as very large areas with few residents, or large areas with a mix of rural and urban residents.

Representatives:

- Head of government can be a mayor or a reeve
- Councillors elected from wards

Examples: Mackenzie County, Strathcona County



The town of Jasper is a specialized municipality because it is in a national park.

What's important?

Understand that First Nations Authorities and Métis Settlement Councils reflect historical and other rights.



Pause

Think back to the rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. How do First Nations Authorities and Métis Settlement Councils reflect those rights?

Fact Finder: First Nations Authorities and Métis Settlements

Métis Settlement Councils

Number in Alberta, 2007: 8

Characteristics:

- Métis settlements are Métis lands established by Alberta's laws in 1990.
- Métis settlements reflect the rights of the Métis as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

Representatives:

- Chairperson: head of government chosen by councillors from among themselves
- Councillors (5): elected by all members of a Métis settlement

Examples: East Prairie Métis Settlement, Elizabeth Métis Settlement



Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement is located near Caslan.

First Nations Authorities

Number in Alberta, 2007: 44

Characteristics:

- **First Nations Authorities (FNAs)** come from the Treaty rights of First Nations.
- Treaties are historic agreements negotiated between First Nations and Canada's government. There are three main treaties in Alberta: Treaty 6, Treaty 7 and Treaty 8.
- FNAs govern reserves for First Nations established by the treaties.

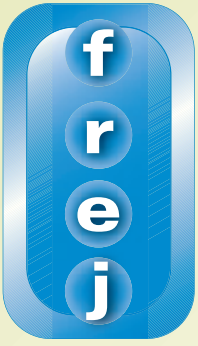
Representatives:

- Chief: head of government elected by all members of a First Nation
- Councillors (minimum 3): elected by all members of a First Nation

Examples: Siksika Nation, Bigstone Cree Nation

This is council office for Horse Lake First Nation.





Case Study:

First Nations Authorities

What's important?

Understand that First Nations Authorities provide a voice for their members.

SKILLS at Work

With evidence in this section, explain how FNAs reflect the following:

1. Democratic principles
 2. The rights and identity of First Nations peoples
- critically evaluate ideas, information and positions



What is unique about First Nations Authorities?

First Nations Authorities are similar to, and different from, other local governments in Alberta.

In some ways FNAs are like all local governments:

- FNAs are elected by the people they represent. The chief and councillors are responsible for making decisions on behalf of those who elect them. They make decisions based on what is in the best interests of the electorate. The procedures for electing FNAs differ from nation to nation.
- FNAs arrive at decisions based on a quorum. A quorum is a minimum number of representatives who must be present to make a decision valid.

FNAs also have some special procedures:

- Many FNAs consult Elders as part of the process of making decisions.
- They set their own rules about how often to hold elections: every three, four or five years. Other municipalities in Alberta must hold elections every three years.
- Major decisions, such as whether to allow resource development on their land, are made by a vote of the entire membership.

This photo from 2007 shows Chief Arthur Noskey and the Council of Loon River Cree Nation.



What's important?

Understand that First Nations Authorities belong to treaty organizations.

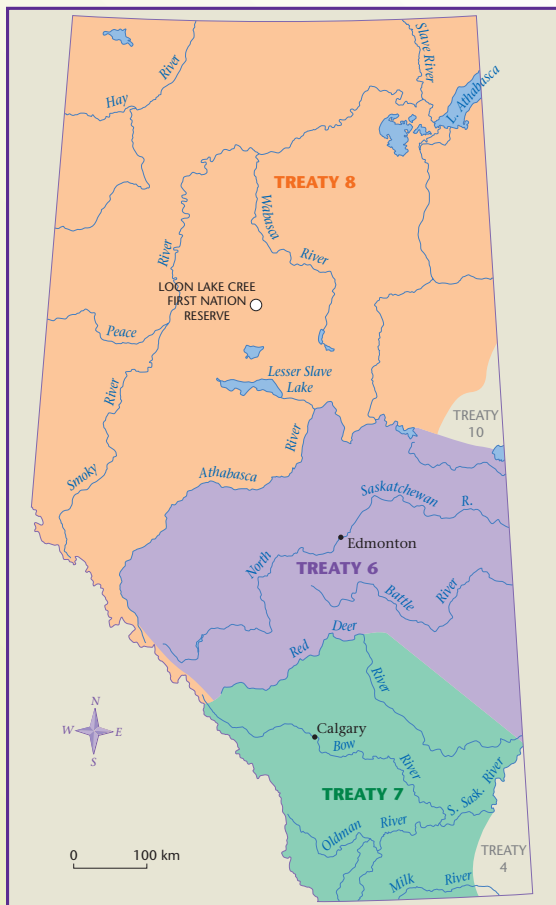
Profile: Treaty 8 Grand Chief Arthur Noskey

Chief Arthur Noskey “wears two hats.” He’s the elected chief of Loon River Cree Nation and the elected grand chief of Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta.

For Loon River Cree Nation, Chief Noskey is involved in decisions such as planning a new high school. The Nation wants a high school so that older students can stay home while completing their regular schooling.

Loon River Cree Nation is part of a larger organization that represents all 23 First Nations of Treaty 8. As grand chief of this organization, Chief Noskey meets with government and industry officials to ensure respect for First Nations rights and to develop opportunities for First Nations peoples.

Treaty Areas of Alberta



Chief Noskey has two offices: one at Loon Lake and the other in Edmonton, where Treaty 8 First Nations is based. Chief Noskey usually makes trips between his offices every week. How far does Chief Noskey drive between his offices?

SKILLS at Work

Treaty 8 First Nations hold an election for grand chief every three years. How could you use the Internet to find out who is the grand chief now?

- seek responses to inquiries from various authorities through electronic media



Critical Thinking

FNAs in Action!

SKILLS at Work

Use the images on this page and the next to identify ways that FNAs provide a voice for First Nations peoples in Alberta. How do the activities represented here provide opportunities for their members to foster their identity? Exercise their rights? Communicate with their representatives? Communicate with all Albertans?

- critically evaluate ideas, information and positions



First Nations Authorities sponsor powwows, which everyone is welcome to attend. This photo shows 12-year-old Robin Minde of the Kainai Nation dancing in the Grand Entry of the 2001 International Peace Powwow in Lethbridge.

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park celebrates the culture of the Siksika Nation. It sits on land where Treaty 7 was signed in 1877. The project took 30 years to complete. Over that time, chiefs and councils of the Siksika Nation worked to plan and raise funds for the project.





This is the Sawridge Inn in Jasper, a four-star resort owned and operated by Sawridge First Nation. This is one of many economic initiatives that the Nation is involved in.

This photo shows councillors of Bigstone Cree Nation, after signing an agreement with Canada's government in 2007 to add to the Nation's lands. The agreement upheld rights under Treaty 8 and took 18 years to negotiate.



Many First Nations operate their own schools, such as this school at Bigstone Cree Nation. The school offers programs that teach and celebrate the Cree culture. Here, Elder Pauline Ominayak from Sucker Creek First Nation talks to students.



Elders of Loon River Cree Nation do an environmental inspection of Loon Lake. The Nation is involved in mapping and maintaining traditional uses of the land, in consultation with the Elders. The Nation uses information about traditional uses of the land in negotiations about resource development with companies and Alberta's government.

How are representatives elected to form a local government?

What's important?

Know that local government is a kind of representative democracy.

All local governments in Alberta are elected at regular intervals. Urban and rural municipalities, for example, have elections every three years. During municipal elections, citizens also vote for school board representatives.

A municipal election is a six-step process.

Step 1: Nominating

A **nomination** is a formal proposal that a person become a candidate for an elected position. All candidates must fill out and sign a **nomination form**. Information about the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives is available online. Candidates are urged to consider the time and commitment required to be an effective representative, and how serving as a representative benefits society.

Nomination forms need a specific number of signatures from people who believe that the candidate is suitable for the position. The candidate also needs to sign stating that he or she is eligible, and will accept the position if elected.

Think About the Task

For your chapter task, you need to create a web that describes ways to influence your local government on a local issue. Why should you include the electoral process in your web? Identify opportunities for you to participate in the electoral process.

Nomination Form

Local jurisdiction: _____ Mackenzie County _____, Province of Alberta.

We, the undersigned electors of _____
(Name of Local Jurisdiction and Ward, if applicable)

nominate _____ of
(Candidate's Name)

_____ as a candidate at the
(Candidate's Street Address or Legal Land Description of Residence)

election about to be held for the office of _____ Councillor
of _____ Mackenzie County _____.

Signatures of at least **5 ELECTORS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE** in this election.

Printed Name of Elector	Street Address or Legal Land Description of Elector's Residence	Signature of Elector

Step 2: Campaigning

Many candidates for municipal elections set up a campaign office. A typical campaign office has telephones, wall maps, boxes of printed campaign literature, and photocopiers. Volunteers talk on the phones, seeking voter support for their candidate on election day. People talk about how the campaign appears to be going, and discuss the issues that interest voters.

Campaign literature can be delivered door to door. Many candidates also have signs made, and these can be placed outdoors, following strict guidelines about when, where and how. Often candidates will go door to door to introduce themselves, talk to voters and answer questions on local issues. Voters are encouraged to come out to vote, regardless of who they support.

Often, **debates** or formal discussions among candidates are organized.



Candidates may also be invited to attend **forums** or public meetings, where they take turns presenting their ideas to the voters and answering questions. Forums are often held at schools, when students can attend and form their own opinions about who is best suited for the responsibility.

Candidates for mayor of Edmonton participate in a forum at a high school in September 2007. Why are public forums for candidates important to democracy?

Pause

What is the importance of campaign literature, for the candidate and for the voter?

Sharn, Eric and Ivan examine campaign flyers from candidates for local government. The flyers describe the qualifications and ideas of people who want to become representatives. Think back to the candidate interview you prepared in Chapter 6. How could you use campaign flyers to evaluate candidates?



Step 3: Preparing the Polling Stations

Election days are always planned well in advance, and there are very detailed rules that specify exactly what is to happen, and the jobs people must do. Election workers are hired before the election and have training sessions for their jobs. Workers must take an **oath** of secrecy.

Polling stations are the places where people vote. Buildings that have large spaces and ample parking are booked, including community halls, libraries and schools. Maps are drawn up to show the location of **polling stations**. These maps are distributed, so that voters know where they must go to vote.

Election workers arrive at the polling stations early and set up tables and chairs. They make sure the ballots, or voting forms are ready, before the opening of the stations. Cardboard screens that shield voters as they mark their ballots are placed on separate tables. The ballot box is a very carefully guarded item. It must be observed by workers at all times and must be shown to be empty before any votes are placed in it. Then, it is carefully sealed shut except for the ballot slot. All votes must be accounted for and kept secret until counting time.



Voters cast their ballots in booths, like this one from the municipal election in Edmonton in 2007. The booths protect the secrecy of votes. Why do you think this might be important?

Pause

How does the electoral process for local governments reflect Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Review pages 124-129 in Chapter 5. Identify the parts of the Charter at work in the electoral process for local governments.

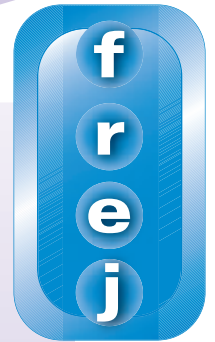
Step 4: Showing Eligibility to Vote

Electors are voters. Voters must be at least 18 years old. It is thrilling when a young person is about to vote for the very first time. Individual local governments have different ways for voters to prove their eligibility. Some require voters to sign a register. Others ask voters to produce photo I.D. If voters are uncertain about procedures, the election workers are there to help!

Step 5: Casting and Counting Votes

Municipal elections use one of two different ballots. One type, which is traditional, uses an 'X' to record the vote. Another type of ballot shows arrows, and these ballots go into an officially locked counting machine at the top of the ballot box. If the machine malfunctions, the votes will be counted by hand.

During the voting period, the candidates or scrutineers can come to observe that the election is being held fairly and honestly. A **scrutineer** is a person who has been approved to observe the voting and the counting. Counting is done by election workers specially trained for the job. Election procedures are set up to be fair, transparent and democratic.

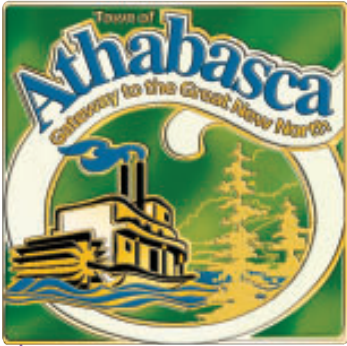


Step 6: Declaring the Outcome

A central election office is set up to collect the election results from all the polling stations. This can be a crowded area, full of election workers, candidates and their supporters. When workers have verified that all the results are in, the chief election official, the **returning officer**, presents the results. When the results are declared, the room erupts in cheers. In elections there are no real losers because everybody has had a chance to take part in a process that is fair and equal. Whatever the outcome, the candidates and supporters celebrate their hard work in the electoral process.

What's important?

Know how to participate in meetings of local government.



The town of Athabasca has council meetings the first and third Tuesdays of each month. Issues to go before the council must be submitted in writing, the Thursday before a regular council meeting. If you want to speak at the council meeting, you must limit your presentation to 15 minutes.

What happens at council meetings?

After voters elect their representatives, the representatives get down to the work of local government.

Each local government in Alberta has a place to meet, such as a city or town hall, a village office, or a council building. Councils usually meet twice a month and work out a meeting schedule a year in advance. Some post their meeting schedules online, so the public can easily look it up.

Local governments decide ahead of time what they will discuss at council meetings. These items form an agenda. This gives the council time to prepare. The **agenda** also informs citizens of what will be discussed, so they can attend meetings of particular interest.

Everybody, including Grade 6 students, is welcome to attend council meetings. An important feature of democracy is that everyone has the right to know what their government is doing. This is called **transparency**. Decisions made by governments need to be openly made, and the public has the right to contribute to or question decisions.

Council meetings provide you and others with a way to have a voice in the decisions of local government. For example, you can do the following:

- **Inform your councillor**

A councillor acts on behalf of citizens. All citizens can contact their councillor with requests. Councillors are accountable to the citizens who elect them, and it is their duty to make every effort to respond to citizens' concerns. Councillors can represent the viewpoints of citizens at council meetings.

Pause

How else could you take part in local government? Think back to the ideas you learned in Chapter 7.

- **Request to speak at a council meeting**

Individual citizens, groups and associations can request to be put on the agenda to speak at council meetings. Because there are many items that councils must consider and time is precious, it is polite to use this opportunity by being organized, brief and to the point. Grade 6 students have talked at council meetings about a great variety of things, ranging from environmental concerns to requests for funding.



Mayor Louise Krewusik and the Town of Grande Cache Council meet the last Tuesday of each month.

What to Expect When You Attend

The mayor or the reeve runs the meeting. They begin by “declaring the meeting open” and finish by “declaring the meeting closed.” A recording secretary writes down who attends the meeting, what is said, and any decisions. These notes are called **minutes**. The minutes from the previous meeting have to be approved to make sure that they are accurate. Imagine the problems that could result if a decision was recorded as being approved when it wasn’t, or vice versa!

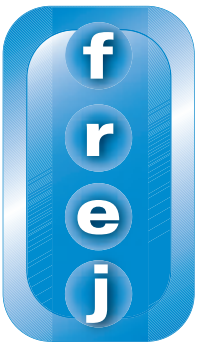
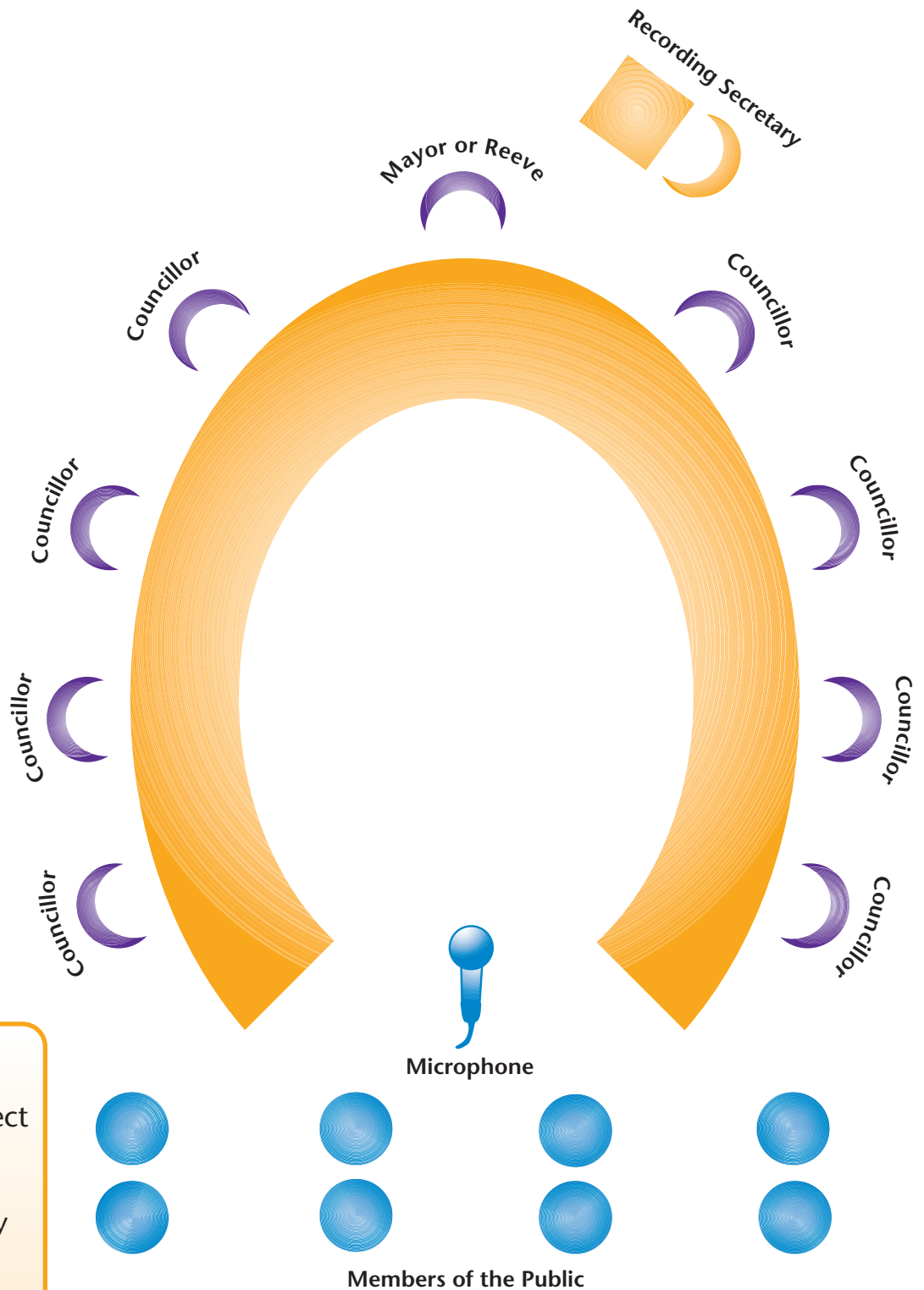
Many **council chambers**, or council meeting rooms, have microphones for the council and for visitors. It’s always exciting to have the chance to make a presentation to a council. Students are always welcome to speak and are listened to carefully and respectfully, and it is especially thrilling later on to see a record of the speech written in the minutes!

Robert Tarleck
Mayor of Lethbridge



Council chambers in urban and rural municipalities are different in one key way. Urban municipalities have an even number of councillors plus the mayor. Rural municipalities have an uneven number of councillors, including the reeve. This means that councils always have an odd number of representatives, which prevents tie votes.

An Example of a Council Chamber



Pause

In what ways does a council chamber reflect the four democratic principles: freedom, representation, equity and justice? Identify two examples, based on this diagram.

What responsibilities do local governments have?

A Whole Bunch of Holes

Brenna entered the classroom in a state. “It’s NOT my fault that I’m late!” she said. “The roads are full of HUGE potholes. One gave us a flat tire this morning. The holes just keep getting bigger. Isn’t it the county’s job to fix them? Why aren’t they doing that?”

Mr. Grundy put a gentle hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay, Brenna. Just get seated now. I’m happy, because you’ve given us a WHOLE new lesson.” When the class stopped groaning at his pun, he continued. “You know, Brenna,” he said, “you asked why the county isn’t fixing the potholes. The main reason is that it doesn’t have enough money for the asphalt and equipment to do the job right now.”

He continued. “Can you all remember last November when we had that really heavy snowfall? It lasted for almost a week.” The class nodded. “Clearing that snow cost the county hundreds of thousands of dollars. A lot of extra heavy equipment and dump trucks had to be rented, and the overtime costs were enormous. Then, we had another snowstorm in January. To cover the road-clearing costs, the county had to use other money — money intended for pothole repair this spring. Basically, the county has run out of money for road maintenance.”

The class was looking unhappy. Mr. Grundy walked over to his desk and started fishing around in his briefcase. He pulled out the local newspaper. “I noticed this morning that there were a number of letters to the editor on the topic of potholes. Let’s examine what they suggest.”



This giant hole appeared on an Edmonton road.

What's important?

- Assess information for bias, reliability and facts.
- Multiple points of view.

Mr. Grundy started reading the pothole letters, and he asked the students to critically respond to what they were hearing.

I am very unhappy with the state of our roads right now. I pay my taxes, and I expect some service in return. We had visitors from Australia who said they didn't have problems with road maintenance there. Perhaps the person in charge of our roads should visit Australia to learn about road maintenance.
Alice Jetison

Alex put up her hand. "I think this person has a biased view about things being better in Australia. Australia doesn't have snow, so sending somebody there to learn about road maintenance won't be helpful."

It has been suggested that the county spend less money on recreation so it can spend more money on road maintenance. It's a fact that everybody agrees with this view. Running hockey camps isn't as important as fixing holes in the roads.

Jim Durant, senior citizen

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Alexandre wanted to respond to this letter, because his hockey team practised every week and had games most weekends. "This person says that everybody agrees with them. I don't, so their statement is an opinion, not a fact. Hockey is fun for me and my friends, and we work hard. I think it's important to make sure there's enough money for sports like hockey."

Before Mr. Grundy read the next letter, he told the class that it mentioned a **bylaw**. He wanted the students to know that a bylaw was a local government law that applied to all citizens.

A
The county is responsible for damage to vehicles because of potholes. It needs to create a bylaw that says that people will be reimbursed if their cars are damaged. It's the city's duty.
Karen Li, new car owner

Emaeth wanted to speak about this letter. "I'm not sure that this person has got correct information. This morning my Mom said that she's glad the county isn't responsible for damage to cars, because the county couldn't afford to pay for all the repairs. I think that the letter states an opinion, not a fact. I don't think the county has a duty to make a bylaw."

I want to speak about the pothole problem. As reported, the county used up the money it had for pothole repairs. The reason was two unusually heavy winter snowfalls that nobody could have predicted.

It is up to the county council to make decisions to solve this situation. Councillors can decide whether to fix the potholes now. If they choose to fix them now, the county will need to collect more in taxes. Citizens need to communicate their wishes to their councillors, so councillors can make an informed choice.

Patrick Smith, Manager, Road Maintenance

Ivan responded. "The manager of road maintenance says that this problem can only be solved through the decisions of elected representatives. He's paid to take care of the roads and so I believe that his information is reliable."

SKILLS at Work

Examine news about a topic of concern in your area. What examples of fact, opinion and bias can you find?

- assess significant local and current affairs from a variety of sources, with a focus on examining bias and distinguishing fact from opinion



What's important?

Know how taxes are determined.

Filling In with Taxes

The next day, Mr. Grundy showed the students a form that said "Property Assessment and Tax Notice" at the top. He explained that he wanted to show what was involved in getting more **taxes** — to repair potholes, for example.

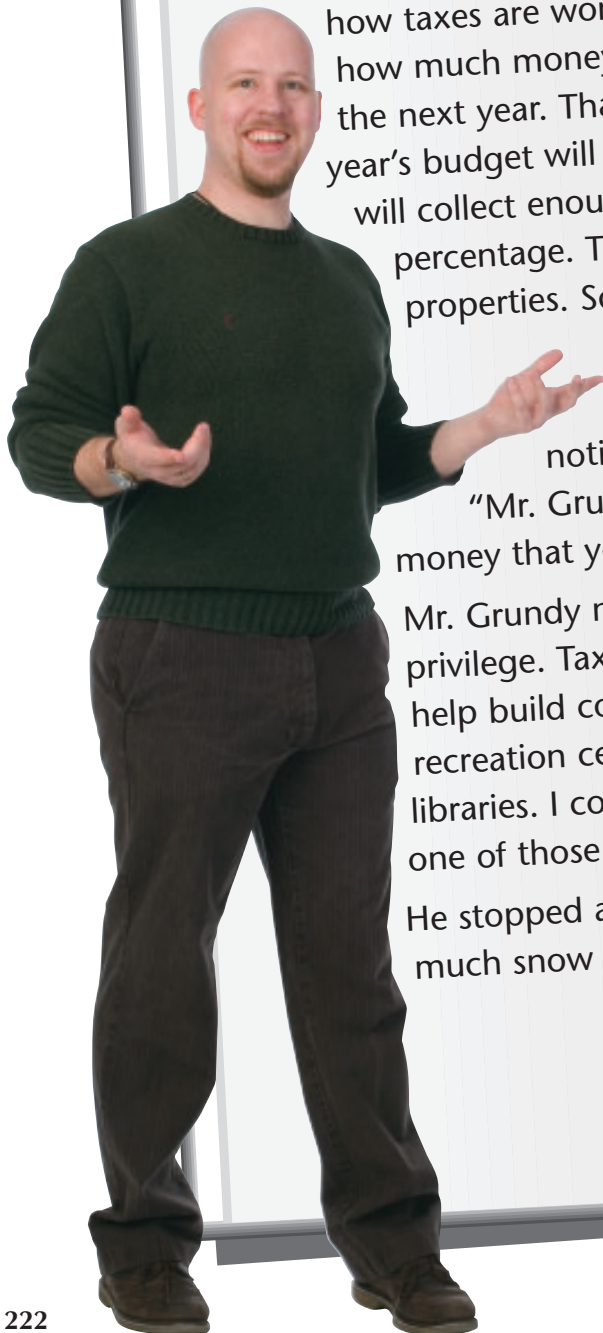
"I want to show you my yearly local tax notice, and explain how taxes are worked out. Our elected councillors estimate how much money will be needed to provide services for the next year. That helps them decide what their next year's budget will be. Then, they set the tax rate so they will collect enough money. The tax rate is like a percentage. This 'percentage' is applied to all properties. So, properties worth more always pay more."

Ivan was looking at the amounts on the notice carefully, particularly the figure circled.

"Mr. Grundy," he said, "that is a whole lot of money that you paid."

Mr. Grundy nodded. "Yes, it is, but I look at it as a privilege. Taxes are a way for us to work together. They help build communities where we all belong, with recreation centres, street lights, seniors homes, and libraries. I couldn't begin to pay the full costs of even one of those services on my own."

He stopped and then laughed. "And, depending on how much snow falls, I might even get my potholes filled!"



CENTRAL MUNICIPAL DISTRICT PROPERTY ASSESSMENT AND TAX NOTICE

Assessment Class	Assessed Value of Property	Tax Rate	Property Tax
Residential	\$361 000	7.4458	\$2687.94
TOTAL			\$2687.94

EDUCATION/SCHOOL TAXES are 38.16% of Total	Tax Rate	TOTALS
Alberta School Foundation Fund	2.8411	\$1025.64
OTHER TAXES are 2.24% of Total	Tax Rate	TOTALS
Library	1335	\$38.10
Seniors Services	0332	\$11.99
Recreation Centre	1167	\$10.09
MUNICIPAL TAXES are 59.60% of total	Tax Rate	TOTALS
Municipal	4.4380	\$1602.12

Pause

Should taxes be based on percentages, or should everybody pay exactly the same amount? What is fair, and why?

TOTAL	
DUE BY	29 JUNE \$2687.94

What kinds of taxes are there?

This tax notice is about property taxes. Property taxes are one kind of tax. Other kinds of taxes include income tax and sales taxes.

Local governments do not collect income tax or sales taxes, but part of the money they have still comes from these taxes. This is because governments that do collect these taxes — including Alberta’s government and Canada’s government — provide money to local governments.

Income taxes are based on a person’s income, or how much money he or she earns. People who make more money pay more income tax. Sales taxes are based on what a person buys. People who buy more things, and more expensive things, pay more in sales taxes.

What's important?

Understand factors that affect taxes.

SKILLS at Work

How could you use software to create a graph using the data in the chart on this page?

- use geographic tools, including software, that assist in preparing graphs and maps



Geographic Thinking

What affects the taxes local governments collect?

In the story on page 222, Mr. Grundy explains that taxes are funds collected by governments to pay for services. Local governments make decisions about how much to collect in taxes at council meetings.

Examine the data on taxes in the chart below. What patterns can you identify? What factors affect how much a local government collects in taxes?

Location	Population 2006	Property Taxes Collected 2006
City of Red Deer	82 971	\$ 57 551 070
Municipal District of Big Lakes	5644	\$ 7 479 297
Town of Canmore	3578	\$ 1 611 682
Village of Coutts	364	\$ 216 382

Think About the Task

What connection might decisions about taxes have to your chapter task? How could you find out when your local government might discuss taxes? Flip back to page 216!

What's important?

Investigate services provided by local government.

What services does your local government provide?

The blue pages list contact information for your local government and for Alberta's government. Make sure you get the right section! You can use the blue pages to find phone numbers. Some local governments also list URLs for the Internet in the blue pages.

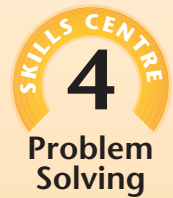
The blue pages are like a "who's who" for your local government. It lists information for the following:

- The **mayor** or **reeve**. This person is the head of your local government. A mayor is elected by all voters. A reeve is elected by the councillors of a rural government.
- **Councillors**: They are elected by all voters or by the voters of a particular ward. The blue pages is a good place to figure out if your local government has wards. You could make a call to find out what ward you're in. Be ready with your address.
- The **chief administrative officer**, or **manager**. This person is hired by your local government and is not elected. The manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of local affairs.
- **Departments**. A **department** is a part of local government with a particular job, such as water services. Departments have employees who provide the services. Checking out the blue pages is one way to investigate what services your local government provides.

SKILLS at Work

How could you find out what services your local government provides?

- select and use technology to assist in problem solving



What's important?

Compare services provided by different local governments.

What services do different local governments provide?

Mr. Grundy's tax notice shows the services his taxes pay for. Different local governments provide different services with the taxes they collect. Examine the data in the following chart. Why are there differences? Think about population size and physical area.

Is this service provided by local government? Y=Yes N=No S=Sometimes	Explanation
Ambulance S Aboriginal S rural Y urban	Cities have their own ambulance services. Other local governments often work together to provide a regional ambulance service.
Health Services S Aboriginal N rural N urban	Health services are available in every part of Alberta, but generally they are not provided by local governments. They are provided by Alberta's government. The exception is First Nations Authorities (FNAs). Many FNAs provide health care services through agreements with Canada's government, based on their Treaty rights.
Fire Department S Aboriginal S rural Y urban	Some FNAs and rural governments have fire departments with full-time staff. Others have part-time or volunteer staff.

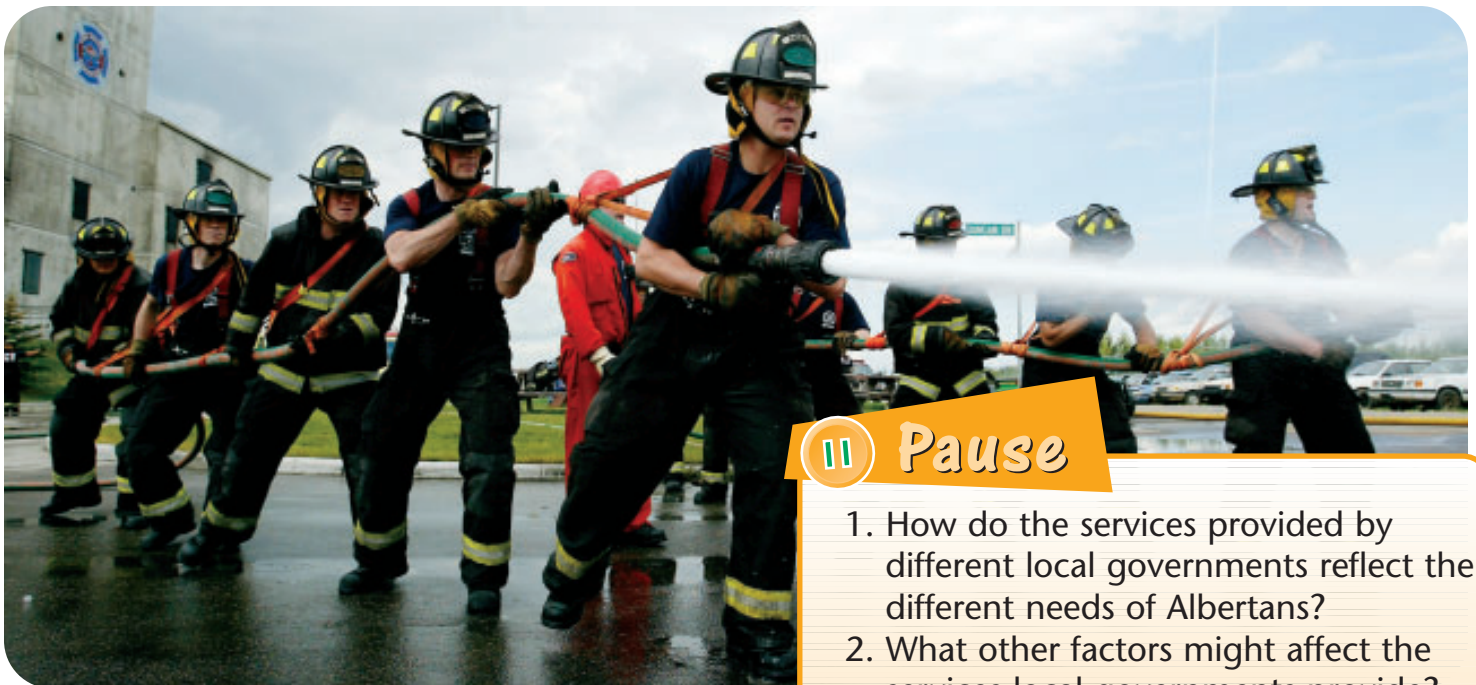


Many local governments operate swimming pools. How do swimming pools benefit Grade 6 students?



These rodeo grounds are in Ponoka. Where and when does your local government make decisions about recreation facilities? How do these decisions affect Grade 6 students?

Is this service provided by local government? Y=Yes N=No S=Sometimes	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Explanation</h2>
Police S Aboriginal S rural Y urban	Most rural governments do not have their own police. Their policing is provided by the RCMP. Some FNAs, such as Saddle Lake Cree Nation and Tsuu T'ina Nation, have their own police departments.
Public Transit N Aboriginal N rural S urban	Most cities have transit systems.
Recreation Y Aboriginal Y rural Y urban	Rural governments provide recreation areas such as camp sites and rodeo grounds. Urban governments and FNAs often provide recreation centres.
Road Maintenance Y Aboriginal Y rural Y urban	All local governments are responsible for public roads.
Waste Management Y Aboriginal Y rural Y urban	All local governments provide secure areas, such as landfills, for waste disposal.
Water and Sewage S Aboriginal S rural Y urban	In rural areas, most people provide their own water and sewage systems. In urban areas, local government provides this. Many FNAs provide these services.



Pause

1. How do the services provided by different local governments reflect the different needs of Albertans?
2. What other factors might affect the services local governments provide?

These firefighters are training in Edmonton.

What are bylaws?

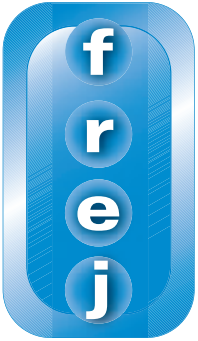
Bylaws are local rules that everyone must follow, or face a warning or a fine. Local governments consider and pass bylaws at council meetings.

Local governments are responsible for many matters that affect people day today.

Medicine Hat: Bylaws

Medicine Hat has at least 43 bylaws which are wide-ranging and include the following:

- Cat Bylaw #3382
- Dog Bylaw #3183
- Garbage Bylaw #1805
- Graffiti Bylaw #3679
- Land Use Bylaw #3181
- Noise Bylaw #1926
- Outdoor Burning Law #2703
- Parks Bylaw #2527
- Skateboarding Bylaw #3506
- Street Bylaw #1556



Pause

Which of these bylaws would affect you? Why?

Some local governments have bylaws regarding stray and lost animals. Why might this be important? How might this affect you?



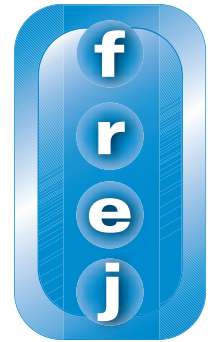
What's important?

Understand why local governments pass bylaws.

Sometimes it is easy to understand the purpose of something if you consider what would happen if it wasn't there. Imagine a community that didn't have bylaws. Dogs could run everywhere and make messes on playing fields. Skateboards and rollerblades could be used anywhere, without thinking of pedestrians. Drivers could park anywhere and people could leave their garbage lying all over the place. What would the result be?

Communities pass their own bylaws to ensure that their community is safe and runs smoothly.

All citizens are expected to know what the bylaws are, and obey them. Bylaws are listed and can be found in a number of places: at city, town or county halls, on the web or on local signs. Bylaws are enforced by government employees such as police officers, special constables or bylaw enforcement officers. Bylaws also list the fines or penalties that can be given for breaking the bylaw.

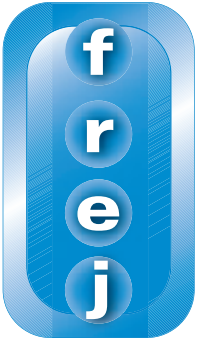


Pause

In what way do bylaws show justice?



Passing a Bylaw: Democracy in Action



New bylaws are passed and changes made to existing bylaws at council meetings. Any person or community group can make a presentation at a council meeting. However, motions, or proposals of bylaws, come from elected councilors. A motion has to be read and considered three different times before it is voted on in council. People who either support, or oppose the motion, have these three opportunities to give their opinions. The next step in the process happens when the council votes. A vote in favour means that the motion will become a bylaw.

Pause

Why is it important that the public can attend most meetings of their local government? How does this reflect democratic principles?

Think About the Task

The issue for your chapter task might connect to bylaws passed by your local government. If it does think of a way to include the step of investigating bylaws in your web.



Looking at an Example of a Local Bylaw – Medicine Hat and the Graffiti Bylaw

In 2006, Medicine Hat had an outbreak of graffiti that many people found offensive and an eyesore. A motion to pass a graffiti bylaw was read three times at open council meetings. It was then voted on, passed and signed by the mayor and city clerk of Medicine Hat. This is a summary of the bylaw:

Name of the Bylaw: The Graffiti Bylaw

Definitions

- “Bylaw Enforcement Officer” means any person employed by Medicine Hat to ensure laws are kept
- “Graffiti” means words, figures, letters or drawings scribbled, scratched, painted, sprayed, written, drawn or applied on premises without consent of the owner

Graffiti Prevention

- No person shall apply Graffiti
- Owners or occupiers of premises shall ensure graffiti is removed within 7 days of receiving notice from a Bylaw Enforcement Officer

Coming into Force

- This bylaw will come into force on July 1, 2006.

Specified Penalties

Offence	Amount
• Applying Graffiti	\$ 2500.00
• Failing to remove Graffiti	\$ 50.00
• Possession of a Graffiti instrument	\$ 1000.00



Youth in Action Against Graffiti

Strathcona County was hit by graffiti in 2007. Many road signs were covered with paint and more than \$100 000 worth of damage was done to local buildings and fences. The Strathcona Youth Council decided to take action to help clear up the graffiti and to help get ready for the Western Canada Summer Games which were to take place there, later in August.

Youth council members are in grades 7 to 12. They are young people who want to help other youth, develop leadership skills, and be involved with their community. The council organized a painting-bee on Sunday, June 24th, 2007. This was publicized on the county website and through word of mouth. All interested residents were invited to lend a hand.

Youth council president Alanna Gould said, “Not only does graffiti cost in clean up, but it puts a blotch on our community pride and feeling of safety.” The council members also decided to talk to their peers about the many ways that this had affected the community. Cathy Olesen, mayor of Strathcona County responded to the action of the Youth Council by publicly thanking them and encouraging residents to join in the painting.

Pause

How does graffiti affect a community? Whose responsibility is it to eliminate graffiti? Why?



What do school boards do?

What's important?

Understand the role of school boards.

An Education in Education

What's an education tax?

Toba was looking carefully at the residential tax notice that Mr. Grundy had tacked to the bulletin board. He noticed that there were several special items. He understood taxes for recreation centres and seniors' care. He was, however, puzzled by the tax for the Alberta School Foundation Fund, and asked what it was about.

"Everybody benefits from education. It helps young people like you become active citizens with jobs and goals for the future," Mr. Grundy explained. "So, all property owners pay an education tax or school tax. This money goes to school boards."

Toba was looking puzzled again. Mr. Grundy said, "I think you're wondering what a **school board** is."

"I guess so," said Toba. "Is it our principal and teachers like you?"

"Not quite. Teachers and principals work for school boards as employees. A school board is an elected group of people called **trustees**. They are elected at the same time as local government representatives. They are entrusted with making decisions and policies for schools in their area."

Pause

All property owners pay school taxes — those who have children in school and those who do not. In what way is this fair and equitable? (Hint: Think about how education contributes to a well-functioning society.)



What kinds of school boards are found in Alberta?

School boards receive taxes to pay for the services they provide. This means they are **publicly funded**.

Schools Without School Boards

Alberta charter schools offer programs with a special focus such as religion, science or music. They don't have a local school board, but teach the Alberta curriculum. First Nations are in charge of their own schools, and often offer language and culture programs along with the regular curriculum.

- **Public school boards** are responsible for schools that are available to any member of the public.
- **Separate school boards** are usually for students of the Roman Catholic faith. The reason has roots in Alberta's past, when the majority of people living in the province were either Roman Catholic or Protestant.
- **Francophone school boards** are responsible for the education of Francophone students in the French language. They can be either Catholic or public. They were created to meet Francophones' constitutional right as an official language minority group in Alberta.

What kind is your school board? How do you find out?



Pause

How do Francophone school boards reflect the rights of official language minorities in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Check back to the Charter, on pages 124-129.

What's important?

Recognize that school boards make decisions about schools.

How do school boards affect Grade 6 students?

"Mr. Grundy, what have school boards got to do with us?" asked Alex.

Mr. Grundy had a hot-foot answer. He quickly lined the students up for a tour around the school. Before they left the classroom, he said, "School boards make decisions about how much money from taxes each school has to spend. Let's find examples of what our school **budget** pays for."

They went to the library. Books and the technology equipment were obvious examples of where the school spent money. Next, the students went to the office. Mr. Grundy found the school calendar and pointed out the professional development days. "Do you know what professional development days are? PD days! That's when students stay home and teachers take training. The school budget pays for professional development." He asked the principal if the students could look at the school's budget online. Using this, he pointed out that all the staff salaries, including his, came from the school's budget. So did expenses like heat and electricity.

"Besides money," he continued, "our school board decides the aims and goals for education. Each year, the school board sets learning priorities, such as improving the scores of Grade 6 students on achievement tests, or lowering the number of student sick days."

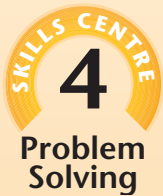
Just as he said this, he grabbed a tissue and sneezed. "I hope there is an item for tissues on our budget!" he said as the class headed back.



SKILLS at Work

Brainstorm ways to find out about the school board responsible for your school. What way is most effective, in your opinion? Explain your choice.

- propose and apply new strategies and options, supported with facts and reasons



When the students had settled back in class, Mr. Grundy continued their education on education.

He showed the students a news story about a school board decision to close an elementary school. Parents and students had organized a **rally**, where people got together to support keeping the school open. Young and old speakers talked about the importance of the school to their community. One man talked with passion about the three generations of his family that had attended the school. Some of the students and parents at the rally had placards, and they marched to the school board offices to make their point.

School board trustees listened to the concerns of the students and parents, but still voted to close the school. One trustee explained that there were problems with the school's crumbling foundations. She said fixing the old school would cost more than building a new school.

The class was surprised to hear that. Ivan spoke up. "I can see why the school board made that decision, but I can also understand why the community opposed it."

"Yes, it was a hard choice to make," said Mr. Grundy. "That's why it's important to take part in school board decisions — because they affect you and your community."

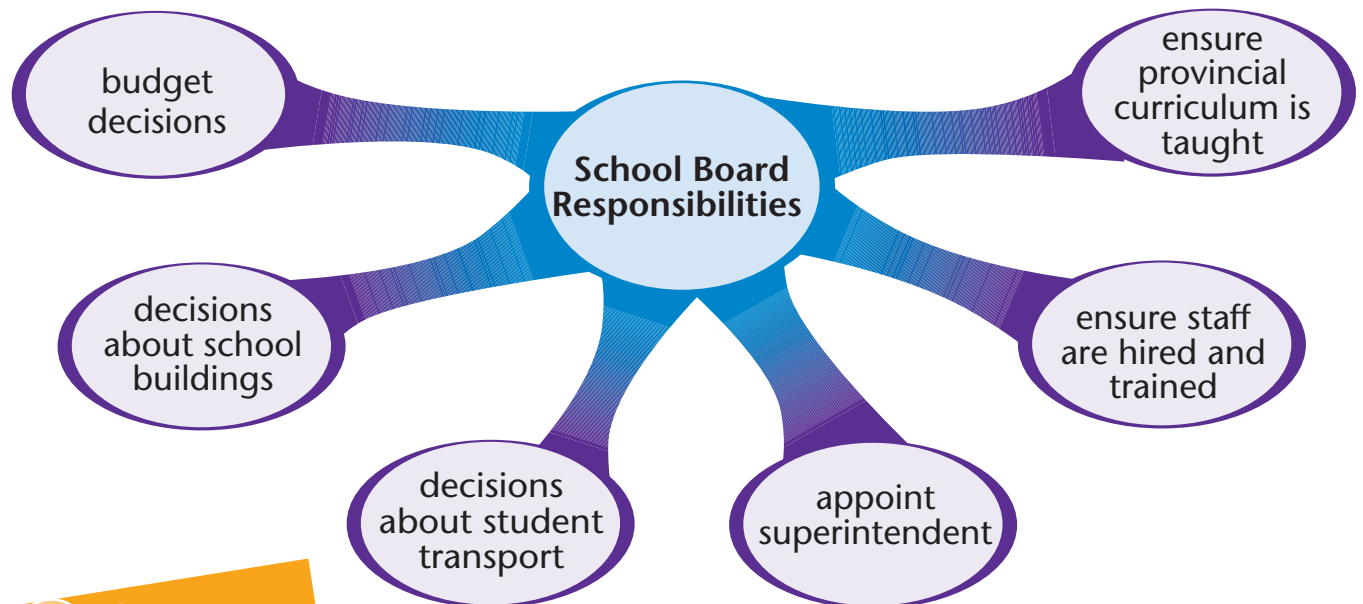
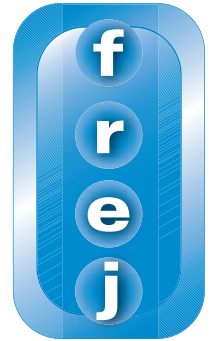
This photo shows a protest against the closure of High Park school in Edmonton in March 2007. What evidence can you see that students can take part in decision making about schools?



Why are school boards important?

School boards are an important part of local government. School boards are elected during municipal elections. There are 62 school boards throughout Alberta. Each board has a specific number of elected trustees. The Alberta provincial department of education gives money to each school board, depending mainly on the number of students the board is responsible for, and special needs. It is up to each school board to decide how that money will be used within their school district.

Some school boards direct decisions about how individual schools should spend money. Other school boards allow individual schools to make those decisions themselves. School boards decide what educational services and programs need to be provided, and appoint a superintendent to ensure their decisions are carried out. Both the superintendent and the board need to make sure that students have the programs, the staff, the equipment and the buildings that are needed.



Pause

Education money is distributed based on student numbers and student needs. Is this fair and equitable? Why?

What's important?

Know how trustees uphold the principles of democracy.



I've been a school trustee for around 20 years. Catholic School Board trustees enhance, protect and promote Catholic education, which is constitutionally protected. Trustees are always in touch with our local schools and communities. This helps us decide where schools, technology labs or portables are most needed.

An important part of the job is to keep education in front of the government and public. We prepare kids for life, and so trustees need to lobby for education to be the right kind, so our children can grow into democratic citizenship.

— Ted Paszek, trustee, Elk Island Catholic School Board,
Elk Island Alberta.



At one time in Alberta, districts could raise their own school dollars through taxation. This created inequality as some districts were richer than others. Now each district gets education dollars from the provincial government based on their number of students and their needs. This is much more democratic.

Being a school trustee is about participating in democracy. Holding elections for trustees is a democratic process. The best part of being a trustee is that we are contributing to the education of society and helping to make society better.

— Bob Huff, trustee, Wolf Creek Public Schools,
Ponoka/Lacombe, Alberta.

Sue Huff

Putting kids first



"Children sometimes get lost in the shuffle of bureaucracy, policy and procedure. Education is not about numbers. It's about kids."

— Sue

SUE HUFF IS A DEDICATED PARENT.
As an active mom of a grade 4 and a grade 7 student, Sue knows what it's like to have children in school today.

SUE HUFF HAS PASSION AND DRIVE.
Sue has the skills to bring ideas forward and to create positive change. She's receptive to new ideas and she has the courage to take a stand.

SUE HUFF IS A SKILLED COMMUNICATOR.
An award-winning writer, film-maker and performer, Sue knows how to deliver a message effectively and bring issues to the public's attention.

On October 15,
please vote

238 Sue Huff

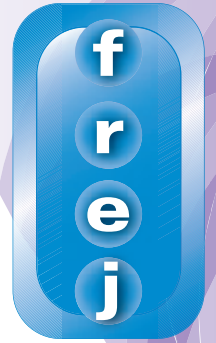
for Public School Board Trustee (Ward C)

Pause

How is your education helping you grow into active citizenship?

Sue Huff was elected a trustee of the Edmonton Public School Board in 2007. This is her campaign literature. What are her qualifications for being an elected representative?

Review! Review!



1. **How does your local government compare with a different type of local government?**

What is the same and what is different? Make a chart to show this.

2. **How are representatives elected to form a local government?**

Show the process in a series of freeze-frame theatre segments.

3. **What responsibilities does your local government have?**

Use a graphic organizer to illustrate how your government is responsible to you. Include ways in which you are responsible to your government.

4. **What do school boards do?**

Go to the website of your local school board. Be a fact finder. Use these facts as evidence to show the range of responsibilities that your school board has.

