

City of Medicine Hat Inspection

Summary

About municipal inspections

The *Municipal Government Act (MGA)* grants elected municipal governments the authority and responsibility to make decisions. It also enables residents to hold their elected councils accountable. The *MGA* respects local government autonomy. The Minister of Municipal Affairs may intervene in municipal decision-making or operations only in limited circumstances. An inspection is a legislated mechanism that allows the Minister to intervene in municipal matters at a municipal council's request, in response to a sufficient petition, or on the Minister's initiative. In practice, the power to order an inspection is used rarely and reserved for significant governance concerns.

In a democracy, some decisions made by elected representatives may not be popular with everyone. Municipal inspections are not intended to address situations where a council's decisions are unpopular. Inspections and any resulting actions are focused on improving municipal governance and operations.

How we got here

In October 2024, the former Minister of Municipal Affairs ordered a municipal inspection of the City of Medicine Hat following a formal request from city council.

Conducting the inspection

The former Minister appointed an independent inspector, Ian McCormack of Strategic Steps Inc., who is a consultant with experience working with municipalities across Alberta and Canada. Following routine practice, the ministry met with the inspector at the outset to outline procedural fairness requirements. Detail on the inspector's process is in the inspection report.

After the inspection

On April 8, 2025, the Inspector submitted the inspection report to the Minister and the City of Medicine Hat council and chief administrative officer (CAO) concurrently. On April 22, 2025, the ministry and the inspector presented the inspection report to these city officials in a closed session of a council meeting. The ministry also provided a list of potential directives under consideration, and council and the CAO were given a deadline of May 23, 2025, to provide feedback to the Minister. The Honourable Dan Williams was appointed as Minister of Municipal Affairs on May 16, 2025. The Minister received two written responses from city officials and considered them, along with the inspection report, in making his decision.

What were the main findings of the report?

The inspector concluded that the city was being managed in an "irregular, improper, and improvident" manner, and made over 60 recommendations for the city to consider.

While the inspector identified several instances of legislative infractions, the inspector found that the primary concerns affecting governance in the City of Medicine Hat were based on broken or damaged interpersonal relationships.

Minister's directives

An inspection report may identify areas of concern, and the Minister may order directives to address those concerns. To issue one or more directives, the Minister must consider that the municipality is managed in an irregular, improper, or improvident manner.

Directives are binding. If a directive is not followed to the Minister's satisfaction, and the Minister considers that the municipality continues to be managed in an irregular, improper or improvident manner, and all reasonable

efforts to resolve the situation have been attempted and remain unsuccessful, the Minister may make further orders, including withholding grants, suspending bylaw-making authority, assuming bylaw-making or policy-making authority in place of the council, or dismissing council members or the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO).

The Minister has issued three directives to the City of Medicine Hat:

1. Council and the CAO are to review all recommendations in the inspection report, as well as all findings of irregular, improper, or improvident management of the City of Medicine Hat, and provide a report to the Minister on the city's plan to address each recommendation in the inspection report or explain why action has not or will not be taken for any individual recommendation(s);
2. The city must publish the inspection report on the city's website, and make copies available upon request, subject to the city's fees for providing a photocopy; and
3. Council, the CAO, and the designated officers of the municipality must complete respectful workplace training that meets the approval of the Minister.

Next steps

The city must report to the Minister on its actions to address the directives within set timelines. Municipal Affairs will monitor the city's progress. Upon request, the ministry may provide supports to the city, such as advice, training, and grant funding for intra-council conflict resolution.

Further information

A full copy of "Municipal Inspection Report: City of Medicine Hat 2024/2025" by Ian McCormack of Strategic Steps Inc. is at alberta.ca/municipal-inspection-reports.