

# Backgrounder: **Big Cities Charter**

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In Alberta there is an urbanization rate of 80 per cent. Approximately 60 per cent of Alberta's population lives in Calgary or Edmonton.

The purpose of enacting a Big Cities Charter for Alberta's two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton, is to give both cities the tools and resources needed to compete with other cities on a global scale.

Municipal governments are not currently recognized as a level of government in the Canadian constitution. As a consequence, municipal governments do not have the autonomy required to exercise adequate powers or command sufficient revenue resources to meet the local needs and expectations of the communities they serve.

This is why other cities in Canada, such as Toronto and Winnipeg, have enacted a version of a Big City charter. In the international community, the concept of a city charter is the norm, not the exception.

For example, in the State of New York, municipal autonomy is based on the bill of rights for local governments recognized in the constitution of the state. The bill of rights sets out express powers, privileges and protections for local governments.

A proposed Charter for Calgary and Edmonton would:

- Give Calgary and Edmonton a seat at the provincial table in areas of direct municipal responsibility, such as affordable housing, transportation, wastewater management and waste management.
- Benefit the economy and create jobs by giving cities the ability to offer incentives or credits, or to enter into partnerships in major infrastructure projects.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities and promote accountability – local matters should be dealt with locally, not between various levels of government.
- Achieve the optimal balance between Calgary and Edmonton's need for greater autonomy and the interests of the province in protecting its spheres of responsibility.
- Position Calgary and Edmonton to be more effective against other global competitors.
- Enable the Big Cities to enter into agreements with all levels of government, including the federal government.

**It's time.**  
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