



# Local Government



Things to check out.



### Your Home

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### Saskatchewan Names and Places

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### You at Your Place

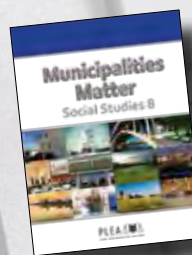
Imagine it's five in the morning and you are rudely awakened by your neighbour's frantically barking dog. You close your bedroom window and go back to sleep. Later that morning, you hop out of bed, have a shower, and get on your skateboard to meet your friends downtown.

Your day has just started, and already the decisions you have made are affected by the bylaws of the community you live in. The size of your bedroom window is likely determined by a municipal building code. Local bylaws can deal with neighbourhood problems like barking dogs. The water for your shower is likely provided by your local municipality. And traffic bylaws regulate the use of your skateboard.

As you can see, local government—also known as municipal or civic government—deals with all sorts of issues that are close to home. So what is local government? What exactly does local government do? And how can we influence local government so it has a positive impact on our lives? This issue of *The PLEA* explores these issues by explaining local government in Saskatchewan.



### Teachers



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## What is a Municipality?

South Saskatchewan River hills on Lake Diefenbaker in the Rural Municipality of Excelsior. (Large Photo)  
City of Prince Albert at sunrise. (Small Photo)

Whether we live on a farm, in a town, or in a city, most of us are residents of municipalities. Municipalities provide us with local governance.

The history of local municipalities in the land we now call Saskatchewan dates back to 1883. That is when the territorial government established a handful of local municipalities, as settlers began to occupy the land in greater concentration. However, it was not until 1909 that the Saskatchewan government began creating the municipalities we know today. Saskatchewan has urban, rural, and northern municipalities.

In the province's south, there are 459 urban municipalities:

- 16 cities
- 257 villages
- 146 towns
- 40 resort villages

Even though rural Saskatchewan is sparsely populated, it also requires municipal governance. In the south, there are 296 rural municipalities (RMs). Within these RMs there are small communities called hamlets. Hamlets have five or more occupied homes and ten or more lots administered by the RM. A hamlet can become an organized hamlet by an order of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Saskatchewan has 147 organized hamlets.

In the province's north, there are 24 urban municipalities:

- 2 towns
- 11 northern hamlets
- 11 northern villages

Northern Saskatchewan also has 11 unincorporated settlements, administered by the Northern Municipal Services branch of the Government of Saskatchewan.

### City, Town, Village: What's the Difference?

The type of municipality a community can become normally depends on its population:

- City – minimum 5000
- Town – minimum 500
- Northern Village – minimum 250
- Village, Resort Village, Northern Hamlet – minimum 100

RMs have no minimum population requirements.

Once a community reaches a minimum population, it can petition the Minister of Municipal Affairs to become an urban municipality. If it grows even more, the local government can make a request to become another type of urban municipality. For example, in 1906 Warman was established. In 1966 it became incorporated as a town. Then in 2012, Warman successfully petitioned the Minister to become a city, after the population grew to 7,084.

But what happens if the population falls? It will not automatically be reclassified. Instead, the council must petition the Minister for reclassification. For example, Scott came into existence in 1908. By 1910 its population hit 600, and it achieved town status. However, as of 2011 the population of Scott was only 75. Because Scott has never petitioned for reclassification, it is now Saskatchewan's smallest "town." However, if the population of any community falls the Minister could reclassify the community if to do so is in the public interest.



### THINK

Knowing your community creates a sense of place. What do you know about your home?

- What is the population? Is it very diverse?
- How does location and population shape its relationship with other communities?
- What public services and private businesses are there?
- Why did settlers choose the location?
- What events shaped its past?
- How has the environment impacted its development?
- Who first lived on the land? What Treaty agreements were made so it could be settled?



## Ghost Towns and Growing Cities

Saskatoon has been amongst Canada's fastest growing cities for the past decade. (Large Photo)

Bents, in the RM of Marriott, was incorporated in 1930. Its last business, the Pool elevator, closed in 1977. (Small Photo)

### Shrinking Saskatchewan: Ghost Towns

Though some municipalities in Saskatchewan date back to the late 1800s, most settlements sprung up in the early twentieth century when rail lines were built. So quick was the flood of settlers that Saskatchewan became the third-biggest province in Canada by 1911.

When Saskatchewan's population shifted from rural to urban, many of these small communities fell into decline. Population loss—often combined with unfortunate circumstances—left places like Girvan, Robsart, and Lemsford as mere shadows of their former selves. Other communities like Estuary, Govenlock, and Expanse became true ghost towns, with mere skeletal remains left.

When a town or village is shrinking out of existence, it is often no longer practical and sometimes impossible to have a local municipal government. When this is the case, the municipality's council can apply to be dissolved into the Rural Municipality in which it exists or the Minister of Municipal Affairs can order the dissolution. For example, in the RM of Osborne there are two former villages, Lockwood and Guernsey. Lockwood was dissolved in 2002 and Guernsey was dissolved in 2005. Both are now hamlets administered by the RM.

Sometimes when a municipality is entirely abandoned the town site may revert to privately-held property. For example, the ghost town of Bents—complete with an abandoned grain elevator, houses, and stores—exists entirely on privately-owned land. Formerly public spaces, like the town's streets, are no longer public. This means you need permission from the land owner to explore these towns.

### Growing Saskatchewan: New Cities

There is no standard world-wide definition of "city." In Saskatchewan, a city requires a minimum population of 5000. In Alberta, 10,000 people are required. New Zealand requires at least 50,000.

Other places do not rely on population for a city designation. For example, the United Kingdom defines cities by using such factors as the community's historical status and the presence of an Anglican cathedral.

Meanwhile, some jurisdictions have abolished "city" designations entirely. Quebec has no legal distinction between town and city, and Sweden calls all settlements kommun (Swedish for municipality).

With the population of several Saskatchewan towns recently moving past 5000, a debate has been ignited about what constitutes a "city." Is 5000 residents enough to constitute a city? Or are other characteristics required?

Consider what makes a "city":

- Does a "city" require a central gathering place for work and shopping?
- Does a "city" require cultural institutions, such as theatres and art galleries?
- Does a "city" require transportation hubs, such as public transit and air service?
- Does a "city" require substantial public buildings and public spaces like parks and libraries?

Using your answers above, create your own definition of "city." How would your definition apply to communities in Saskatchewan?



## What Does Municipal Government Do?

Public libraries are primarily the responsibility of municipalities. (Large Photo)

Local parks are created, maintained, and governed by municipalities. (Small Photo)

Think about the sidewalks and roads that link our neighbourhoods and communities together. Consider the complex planning needed to provide us with fire protection and public health care. Look at the laws that define what behaviour is acceptable in society. These and other features of our society are not just an accident or coincidence. Their presence is the direct result of government.

But what is “government”? Several years ago in their book *How are we Governed in the '80s?*, Ricker, Saywell, and Skotch put forth a definition of government. It is still relevant today:

*Government is the machinery that individuals set up to enable them to do with others what they cannot do on their own.*

From laws that protect society from theft to policies providing everyone with health care and K-12 education, governments ideally will act in ways that help society achieve its goals.

So we now know what government is. But *who* is government?

In Canada, our governments are an extension of all of us—the people. Citizens democratically choose governments to reflect our wishes for our society. This means that government must respond to the will of the people.

Because citizens choose governments, it is the responsibility of every citizen to be well-informed. After all, when we are better informed, we choose better governments.

### The Responsibilities of Municipal Governments

To understand how we, as citizens, can become involved in creating the rules that govern our lives, it is important

to understand that each level of government has different responsibilities. In addition to First Nations’ governments, there are three levels of government in Saskatchewan: Federal, Provincial, and Municipal.

Municipal Governments are given their powers from the province. Through bylaws and other actions, municipalities can deal with a wide range of matters including:

- health and safety of its citizens
- activities in or near public places
- vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic
- streets and roads
- property taxes
- utilities such as water
- sewage and garbage disposal
- local police and fire protection
- parks and playgrounds
- building codes
- public transit
- local roadways and parking
- nuisances, such as noise, junked vehicles and litter
- store hours
- curfews
- animals and dangerous dogs



#### THINK

From bylaws to bike paths, local government plays an important role in shaping the quality of our lives. Think about your day-to-day activities.

- In what ways is local government involved?
- Are there things that local government could do better?



## The People Who Govern Municipalities

The operation of a municipality requires that politicians and public servants work together. (Large Photo)  
Saskatoon Mayor Don Atchison with Stephen Harper, Brad Wall, and others at the University of Saskatchewan. (Small Photo)

Now that we have an idea of what aspects of our life are impacted by local government, we should get to know the people who make up our local government.

In Saskatchewan, municipalities are representative democracies. This means that we elect representatives to act on our behalf, to hear our concerns, and to ensure that the local government and the public servants who work for it act in our community's best interests as a whole.

In urban municipalities, we elect councillors and a mayor. In rural municipalities, we elect councillors and a reeve. Together, they make up what is called a council. They are responsible for bringing forth sustainable government and positive changes to communities. Therefore, they must:

- represent the public and consider the well-being and interests of the municipality
- help develop and evaluate the municipality's policies, services and programs
- participate in council meetings
- ensure that decisions of council are put into effect
- maintain the financial integrity of the municipality
- keep in confidence matters discussed in private at council meetings, until the matter is discussed publicly

In addition to the above duties for everyone on council, the mayor or reeve must also preside over meetings of the council, sign all bylaws that council passes, and sign many agreements into which the municipality enters.

Being a member of a local council is demanding work. Even so, the job in communities big or small is considered a part-time job. People on council often have day jobs in addition to their duties on council. However, in bigger cities the job of mayor is considered a full-time job. The mayor will often have an office and an assistant.

Because councillors attend council meetings, committee meetings, and community events, they often have to arrange their day-job schedules around these commitments. While councillors are not obliged to attend community events, a councillor can be removed from office for repeatedly failing to attend council meetings.

Perhaps the most important responsibility of our elected representatives is to hear the voices of everyone in the community. Remember: Governments are not put in place to impose their views upon us. As citizens, we democratically choose our governments to reflect our wishes for society.

**THINK**

Saskatchewan communities are becoming increasingly diverse, with people of different ages, genders, cultural heritages, and occupations.

- From a diversity perspective, does the local council look like your community?
- Would it even be possible for a council to exactly mirror a community's diversity?
- Because of the diverse nature of communities, why is it important that elected leaders learn about and take into account the concerns of all people in their community?

# Speak Be Involved Political



## Letter Writing

Writing letters and emails or visiting government representatives are effective ways to express opinions. Elected representatives are there to represent the concerns and interests of their constituents. Writing to them is a way to directly voice your concerns.



## Candidates and Political Parties

By helping a local municipal candidate or joining a political party you can learn more about the political and legal processes at work in Canada. You can also influence policies. Local candidates welcome young volunteers, and political parties even have youth chapters that provide opportunities to network and get involved.



## Petition Campaigns

Petitions are formal requests to government that can be signed by people who support the idea. They can be created either in paper form or online. Creating, promoting, and presenting petitions builds awareness of issues for both the government and the general public.

Even if you're not old enough to vote, your voice can still be heard. Often it's as easy as using the technology in your pocket! Here are just a few ideas—some traditional, some technological—to help you influence government and change communities.

# k Out

# ed in the System



## Postering

Many communities have public spaces where posters can be displayed. From concert announcements to information about public-interest issues, posters can bring awareness to issues, events, and causes that are important to the community.



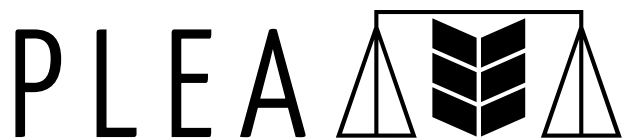
## Political Rallies and Protests

Political rallies and protests are surprisingly common. Peaceful assembly is our right, guaranteed in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Even if you do not support a cause, attending a rally or protest as an observer is a useful way to understand the multiple viewpoints that make up our society.



## Social Media

The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* gives us freedom of expression. Participating in blogs, online forums, and social media—as a poster, commenter, or simply a reader—allows you to express your thoughts and opinions while learning about the thoughts and opinions of others.



Legal Information for Everyone



## Council Meetings and Bylaws

The public is entitled to address their local government at council meetings. (Large Photo)

Council meetings discuss issues ranging from snow removal to public transit to parking bylaws. (Small Photo)

More than any other level of government, municipalities directly impact our daily lives. Over the years, Saskatchewan municipalities have struggled with issues such as store hours, smoking bans, casinos, curfews, garbage collection, recycling and road repair. The decisions they come to on these issues are made at local council meetings.

Local council meetings take place at regular intervals and are open to the public. At these meetings, council will debate and discuss the operation of the community, citizens are given the opportunity to speak about issues important to them, and laws governing the municipality are considered.

The laws made at a municipal level are called bylaws. Municipalities make bylaws for the “peace, order and good government” of the municipality, and for promoting the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

Bylaws can cover issues big or small. For example, the city of Saskatoon recently attempted to enact a city-wide anti-bullying bylaw. Meanwhile, the town of Shellbrook introduced a bylaw that limited garage sales after one went on every day all summer. As you can see, communities have the power to enact bylaws dealing with

quite a range of issues.

Passing a bylaw takes place in several steps. Once a council decides that a bylaw is needed, the community’s administration prepares a draft of the bylaw. The draft will be presented at a council meeting to be considered and voted on. Bylaws are considered and voted on in three stages, usually over the course of several council meetings. This helps ensure that the bylaws are given thoughtful consideration by council and the public has time to weigh in.

This bylaw creation process is largely open to the public. Citizens can speak at council to share their thoughts and concerns about local bylaws, or simply sit in on the meetings to observe debate and discussion. As well, municipal offices make documents publicly available so citizens can review things such as drafts of bylaws and reports to council.

Not all of council’s work is done in public, though. Councils and their committees can meet in private to discuss long-range or strategic plans and to discuss matters that cannot be discussed in public because of privacy legislation. However, all laws must be passed at public council meetings.



In their book *Democratic Schools*, Michael W. Apple and James Beane said that “Democracy is not simply a theory of self-interest that gives people license to pursue their own goals at the expense of others. The common good is a central feature of democracy.”

- What is the “common good”?
- How can local government ensure it works towards the common good?
- How can citizens ensure that their local government works toward the common good?





## Municipal Elections

Voters learn their poll location. Often larger communities will set up voting locations in individual neighbourhoods. (Large Photo)  
Most people over 18 can vote in elections in the municipality in which they are citizens. (Small Photo)

The people who govern municipalities are selected by the citizens of their community. The number of elected councillors generally depends on the size of the municipality.

### Urban Municipalities

Urban municipalities hold general elections every four years. If the community uses the ward system, each voter casts one ballot for a candidate running for council in their ward, and one ballot for mayor. If the community does not use the ward system, voters can cast ballots for as many council candidates as there are seats on council, and one ballot for the mayor. Urban municipalities hold their general elections every four years, on the fourth Wednesday of October.

### Rural Municipalities

Although the reeve and councillors of rural municipalities hold office for four years, the full council and reeve are not elected at the same time. One-half of the council is elected every two years. The reeve is elected every second election. Each division in a rural municipality elects a councillor while all eligible voters in the entire rural municipality can vote for the reeve. Rural municipalities hold their general elections every two years, on the fourth Wednesday of October.

### Organized Hamlets

Some organized hamlets elect a three member management board that reports to the RM council. Other

organized hamlets may be designated an electoral division of the RM in which they exist, so the hamlet will elect one councillor to RM council.

### Northern Municipalities

Like other urban municipalities, northern municipalities can be divided into wards where one councillor is elected from each ward or the councillors can be elected from the community as a whole. Mayors are elected from the community as a whole. Northern municipalities can choose to hold their general elections on the second last or last Wednesday in September or the first Wednesday in October.

### Resort Villages

Because some people only live in resort villages in the summer, they hold their general elections every four years, on a Saturday in July.

### Plebiscites and Referendums

Sometimes, certain issues can be put to a direct vote. Either the local council decides to have a vote on a matter, or community members petition for a vote on a matter. This type of vote is called a plebiscite if the results are non-binding. It is a referendum if the results are binding and the local government must act on them. Although plebiscites and referendums can be held at any time, they are usually held during an election.



There are three elements to every political ideology: a critique of society, a vision for society, and a means to achieve this vision.

- Has each candidate in your municipality clearly outlined these three elements in their election platform?

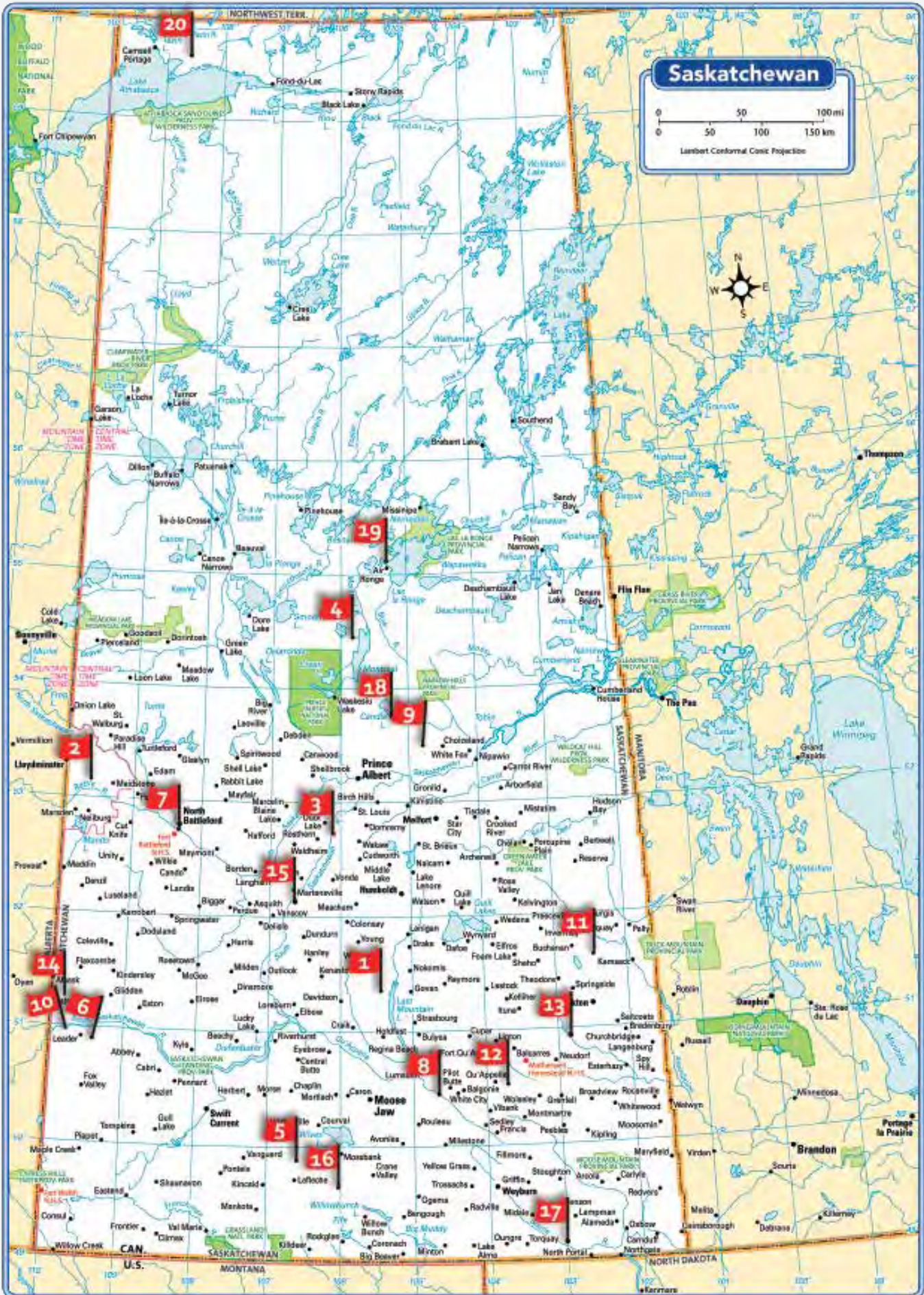
## Get to Know Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has diverse communities with great stories to tell. Match the numbers on the map to their corresponding communities.

- The original settlers of this south-central community were loyal to the British crown, giving the town and its streets royal names.
- In Scottish, a "burn" is a small creek. This town was named by combining the name of a railway official and a small creek near the town.
- This settlement was the place of the Métis' final battle of the Northwest Resistance, brought about by the refusal of the Macdonald Government to grant Métis the right to the lands they had settled on.
- This northern hamlet got its name from the Cree word for "swearing place", inspired by the difficult time the original inhabitants had settling there.
- This community was named by combining the last name of the town's founder with a French word meaning town.
- Reflecting the diversifying nature of Saskatchewan, this southwest town's all-girls Catholic school is now an all-boys Islamic college.
- This former capital of the Northwest Territories is home to Saskatchewan's first newspaper, the Saskatchewan Herald.
- When the capital city of the Northwest Territories was moved to a place called Pile of Bones Creek, the Governor General renamed the town something more suitable in honour of his mother-in-law, Queen Victoria.
- Once called Dorrit, this village is "Mile 0" of the Hanson Lake Road.
- This once-thriving town of 800 was ravaged by a series of mysterious fires and the bypassing of a branch rail line. It now is completely abandoned.
- This town was named by abbreviating the name Canadian Northern Railway.
- This town was the setting for the fictional town of Mercy on CBC's Little Mosque on the Prairie.
- The smallest city in Saskatchewan, it was named after the president of the Grand Trunk and Pacific Railroads. He lost his life in the sinking of the Titanic.
- Following the example of neighbouring Alsask, the name of this small community was created by combining the names of two other Canadian provinces.
- This city was formed in 1906 by its merger with two other settlements named Riversdale and Nutana.
- An Ojibwa word that means "to cook with stones", this town was named after the Northwest Territories district now covered by present-day Saskatchewan and Alberta.
- The slave-like conditions in the coal mines around this city spawned a strike in 1931.
- This resort village was named by Aboriginal inhabitants who said a great haunted light shone between two islands on the eastern side of a lake.
- This town's name is said to be derived from the French verb "to gnaw" as early explorers found evidence of beavers gnawing at trees in the area.
- This once-thriving community of nearly 3000 was virtually abandoned in 1982, following a series of mine closures.

### Get to Know Saskatchewan - Answer Key

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 11. Canora       | 1. Imperial    |
| 12. Indian Head  | 2. Lashburn    |
| 13. Melville     | 3. Batchoe     |
| 14. Mantario     | 4. Weyakwin    |
| 15. Saskatoon    | 5. Gravelbourg |
| 16. Assinibola   | 6. Prelate     |
| 17. Estevan      | 7. Battleford  |
| 18. Candle Lake  | 8. Regina      |
| 19. La Ronge     | 9. Smeaton     |
| 20. Uranium City | 10. Estuary    |





## After the Election

Skateboard parks, such as this one in Saskatoon's Victoria Park, are often created because young people become engaged in their community and speak out. (Large & Small Photos)

Democracy does not just happen on election day. It is every citizen's responsibility to learn about what's going on in their community and to get involved in the causes they believe in. One way to be an active citizen is to reflect on the election result the day after.

Consider the results of the municipal election in your community:

- What factors made the winner win and the losers lose?
- What role did the local media play in the election?
- What role did social media play in the election?
- What promises were made by the winning candidates? How can they be held accountable for these promises?
- How does the newly-elected council compare to the community's diversity? Has your community made progress in this area?
- What were the most significant events of the campaign?
- Did the elected candidates receive 50% or more of the votes? If not, is the majority truly being represented by our electoral system?
- What was the voter turnout? How does this compare to other municipalities?
- What do the results of this election mean for the municipality's future?

### Also from PLEA



#### *Our Government, Our Election: Second Edition*

This is PLEA's comprehensive teacher's guide to Saskatchewan government, politics, and elections.



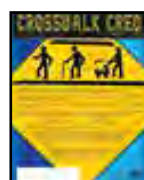
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