

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

# Crosswalks, Flags, & “Neutrality” Bylaws

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Since 2006, the goal of Alberta Municipalities’ Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) initiative has been to support communities where all residents and visitors enjoy a sense of belonging and where diversity adds to the social and economic vibrancy of the community, improving the quality of life for all residents. Decorative crosswalks, flags, and symbols can be an important part of demonstrating a community’s willingness to embrace all residents, and visitors, and build relationships with neighbouring communities. The FAQ document is intended to provide information to support local decisions. It should not be construed as legal advice.

### What are “neutrality” bylaws?

“Neutrality” bylaws most commonly target 2SLGBTQ+ communities by attempting to restrict the public display of pride flags or rainbow crosswalks on municipal property, often premised on the belief that they are a distraction or political in nature. These bans largely began in the United States but have now started to spill into Canada. In Alberta, neutrality bylaws have also led to restrictions on Indigenous flags, Legion flags and flags representing neighbouring municipalities. “Neutrality” bylaws may be interpreted differently by different people, and many will see them as targeting specific groups in the community.

### What is the potential impact of such bylaws?

“Neutrality” bylaws can have social, emotional, and monetary impacts. They could affect a community’s ability to attract and retain residents who value plurality and diversity, and they can potentially dissuade tourism. They can also lead to some businesses questioning whether they want to operate in a community if there is a perception that the community does not provide a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. These bylaws can contribute towards polarization and make some community members question their safety and inclusion in the place they call home. Moreover, flags and decorative crosswalks can be seen as an important part of civic participation and celebration of diverse communities.

### Do rainbow or decorative crosswalks pose traffic safety issues?

No, in fact, research suggests the opposite. Studies conducted on decorative crosswalks by the City of Edmonton and the California Capital Area Development Authority found no increase in traffic safety issues for vehicles or most pedestrians. The City of Edmonton’s pilot project noted a reduction in dangerous behaviour from motorists when contrasted with regular control intersections.

Decorative crosswalks often heighten visibility and bring vibrancy to neighbourhoods, as well as a sense of joy to users. They also make visible statements about the importance of inclusion and diversity. A crosswalk is a reminder to look out for vulnerable people, respect their right of way, and

let them pass unharmed. A rainbow crosswalk does all this while showing members of a particularly vulnerable population that their community supports them.

### **Should taxpayers pay for rainbow or decorative crosswalks?**

Many rainbow or decorative crosswalks are paid for by private donations and painted and maintained by community volunteers. While rainbow or decorative crosswalks may cost a little more to install and maintain than traditional white or “zebra” crosswalks, they also serve important civic functions like neighbourhood beautification, enhanced visibility, community vibrancy, and demonstrated support for inclusion. When rainbow crosswalks are present with other decorative crosswalks and symbols, particularly those with Indigenous or ethnocultural themes, it signals an atmosphere that celebrates a community’s diversity.

### **Should municipalities fly only Canadian, provincial, or municipal flags?**

For decades, municipalities across Canada (and around the world) have flown various flags and displayed symbols to indicate their support for special days, historic events, festivals, and other community celebrations. “Neutrality” bans ignore Canada’s multicultural and pluralistic society and restrict important civic expressions supporting residents in your community. For example, some neutrality bylaws in Alberta prevent municipalities from flying Royal Canadian Legion flags that recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by veterans to our communities.

### **“What other organizations or resident interests could be impacted by a neutrality bylaw?”**

Using the same logic of “neutrality,” a precedent could be established that affects organizations like churches and other religious institutions, which may no longer be afforded preferential treatment and could be required to pay municipal property taxes based on “neutrality” in matters of religious, political, or other grounds. Visible recognition of public holidays and ceremonies (e.g., Christmas decorations and Remembrance Day symbols) may also no longer be permitted at municipal facilities or public property if “neutrality” is truly enforced beyond flagpoles and crosswalks.

### **What is the significance of flags representing other government entities such as Treaties, Métis governments and neighbouring municipalities?**

In Alberta, treaty flags represent agreements between the Crown, as represented by the Government of Canada, and First Nations in each [territory](#). Treaties and the Nations included within them represent sovereign government entities recognized in the Canadian constitution and are therefore distinct from political, religious, and social movements. More information on the First Nations organizations which represent Treaties in Alberta can be found [here](#).

The Government of Alberta also has relationships with Métis Settlements and organizations representing the Métis. Information on these relationships can be [found here](#).

While municipalities do not have constitutional standing, municipal governments are established by provincial legislation. Municipalities may fly flags representing First Nations, Métis governments, and neighbouring municipalities to represent government-to-government relationships.