



Implications of AI for Municipal Governance in B.C.

Ankita Goyal
October 2025

Introduction

In response to rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and its growing impact on public service delivery and policy-making, this report was created to help British Columbia's mayors, councillors, regional directors, and school board trustees understand why recent AI developments are directly relevant to municipal governance. AI continues to grow and influence how we live and work, and local governments are discovering its potential to improve processes, save money and better serve their communities.

Currently, 23% of Canadian municipalities are using AI and over half are actively exploring or planning adoption (*AI In Action: Powering Canada's Local Governments*, 2025), driven by demands for more efficient services, better decision-making, and stronger community connections. This brief provides an overview of recent AI developments and examines their implications for municipal governance in B.C. It is designed for local electeds seeking to navigate AI's complexities in a practical, responsible way.

The brief begins with a timeline of [major AI governance milestones from 2020 to present day \(2025\)](#), and then is broken down into four thematic areas:

[\(1\) global and Canadian examples of AI use in municipal governance \(spanning service delivery, education, and city operations\);](#)

[\(2\) the opportunities AI offers local governments \(from efficiency gains to improved planning and service innovation\);](#)

[\(3\) the threats and risks AI poses to municipalities \(including algorithmic bias, misinformation, privacy/surveillance concerns, and procurement pitfalls\);](#)

and [\(4\) a curated set of **resources** available to support local governments and school boards in B.C. to adopt AI responsibly.](#)

Major AI Developments in Canada (2020–2025)

Year	Event
2020	Canada Joins Global Partnership on AI (GPAI): Canada becomes a founding member of the GPAI, focusing on responsible AI governance and global collaboration.
	BC COVID-19 Virtual Assistant: B.C. deploys an AI chatbot to address public health inquiries, handling 1.75 million questions, showcasing the potential of AI use in crisis communication.
2021	Federal AI Adoption Expands: <u>Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)</u> uses AI for case triaging, while <u>Statistics Canada leverages AI for data analysis</u> .
2022	Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA) Introduced: Bill C-27, including AIDA, is tabled to regulate private-sector AI systems, emphasizing risk mitigation and transparency.
	Pan-Canadian AI Strategy Renewal: Continued funding for AI research institutes (MILA, Vector, AMII) under the 2017 Pan-Canadian strategy, bolstering federal leadership in AI research.
2023	AIDA Companion Paper Released: Proposed regulations for the federal Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA) examine compliance timelines and high-risk AI systems, particularly relevant for HR managers, compliance officers, legal teams, and AI system deployers.
	B.C. Drafts Responsible AI Principles: The provincial government publishes guidelines for public-sector AI use, stressing ethics, transparency, and public engagement.
	Public Call for AI Oversight in B.C.: The provincial government's privacy commissioner and ombudsperson urge public consultation on AI policy to address privacy and equity risks.

2024	<u>Generative AI Guidance for Public Servants</u> : The federal government releases best practices for generative AI use in daily work, including risk management and disclosure protocols.
	<u>Canadian AI Safety Institute (CAISI) Launched</u> : The institute focuses on AI safety research and coordination across governments and industry.
	<u>Ontario Passes Bill 194</u> : The bill mandates transparency for AI use in public-sector bodies (schools, hospitals, police), setting a precedent for provincial regulation.
2025	<u>AIDA Legislative Collapse</u> : Bill C-27 dies on the order paper following the January 2025 prorogation.
	<u>Federal AI Strategy 2025–2027 Launched</u> : This strategy focuses on four priorities: Central AI capacity, policy and governance, talent development, and transparency/public value.
	<u>B.C. Advances Local AI Policy</u> : The province develops AI frameworks for education (K–12 digital literacy) and public services, emphasizing Indigenous data sovereignty.

Together, these milestones mark a shift from exploratory use of AI in crisis contexts to the development of formal governance structures and oversight mechanisms in Canada. The collapse of AIDA in early 2025, despite years of groundwork, highlights the volatility of federal AI regulation, placing a greater onus on provincial and municipal actors to build adaptive, locally responsive AI strategies. For B.C.'s municipalities and school boards, understanding this evolving landscape is critical to navigating regulatory uncertainty, mitigating risk, and leveraging AI in the service of the public good.

AI Adoption in Local Governance: Canadian and Global Trends

Around the world, cities are experimenting with AI tools to improve local governance, public services, education, and urban planning. Canadian municipalities are part of this trend, albeit in early stages. A [2024 MNP Municipal Report](#) found that while many local governments in Canada are considering AI adoption, only 22% have defined it as a strategic priority in the next 3–5 years (MNP & Leger, 2024). This cautious approach is often due to limited capacity and concerns about privacy and cybersecurity (both of which 67% of municipalities rank as a top priority). Despite these concerns, a growing number of municipal initiatives illustrate the promise of AI at the local level.

International networks (such as the Bloomberg-backed [City AI Connect](#) platform that links cities experimenting with generative AI) are available for municipalities to share initiatives and best practices with AI (*Welcome to City AI Connect*, n.d.). In Canada, informal collaborations via the [Federation of Canadian Municipalities](#) or [Municipal Information Systems Association \(MISA\)](#) are emerging to discuss AI in city hall settings.

This section highlights several real-world examples – both international and domestic. These cases illustrate what is possible with AI at the local level, providing models that B.C. communities might learn from or adapt.

Citizen Services and Engagement

Many cities have introduced AI chatbots to handle routine inquiries and service requests. The City of **Buenos Aires, Argentina**, launched an AI chatbot named “Boti” in 2019, which has the capacity to handle eleven million conversations in one month. “Boti” has become “a preferred channel” for citizens to access city information, including queries on COVID-19, bike-share registrations, and social assistance information (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2023).

Canadian municipalities are following suit, with B.C. government agencies jointly deploying an AI virtual agent during COVID-19, which successfully fielded millions of questions from the public (Province of British Columbia, 2025).

Cities are also using AI to enhance non-emergency information gathering (3-1-1 phone lines) and public engagement systems. In the City of **Chicago, United States**, an AI-powered chatbot called [Chat with CTA](#) was created to interact with bus riders to gather reports of problems and ideas for improvements in transit service (Jackley, 2024). The City of **Dearborn, United States**, is exploring AI translation tools to make its website content accessible in Arabic and Spanish, bridging language gaps for its significant Middle Eastern and Hispanic populations (Jackley, 2024).

Education (K-12 Schools)

Local school boards are beginning to integrate AI into teaching and administration. A notable Canadian example is the **Ottawa Catholic School Board**, which in Fall 2024 implemented a policy on classroom AI usage (The Canadian Press, 2024). Instead of banning AI tools, the Board introduced guiding principles for responsible use across all grade levels. Students can now use AI (such as ChatGPT) to brainstorm ideas, solve math problems, summarize readings, or draft essay outlines. Teachers also use AI to create lesson plans, adapt materials, and receive quick feedback on assessments. The emphasis is on augmenting learning and teaching – using AI to personalize education and save time on prep – while also teaching students about AI literacy and academic honesty. Other school districts across Canada are closely watching this model as they consider their own strategies (The Ottawa Catholic School Board, 2025).

City Operations and Infrastructure

AI is being deployed to make city operations smarter and more efficient in areas such as transportation, maintenance, and urban planning. The **City of Pittsburgh, United States**, uses an AI-based traffic signal system, "Surtrac," to analyze live video feeds of key intersections. By detecting traffic conditions in real time, the AI can dynamically adjust signal timings to reduce congestion and engine idling, helping Pittsburgh move toward its goal of cutting transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.).

In *Australia*, a coalition of local councils managing a combined 650,000 km of roads is testing an AI road monitoring system. Mounted with sensors, the system uses machine learning to detect early signs of pavement deterioration, alerting public works crews to fix small cracks before they turn into potholes.

Even autonomous vehicles are being trialled at the municipal level: in 2024, the **Dallas–Fort Worth region in the United States** began testing self-driving freight trucks on highways between cities, with safety drivers on board, to evaluate potential efficiency in goods movement (Seeley, 2023). The hub-to-hub model being tested involves autonomous trucks handling long-haul highway segments, with human drivers managing local operations at each end. This approach aims to unlock significant efficiencies, allowing trucks to operate around the clock while enabling local drivers to focus on shorter, more predictable routes.

Urban Planning and Environment

City planners are tapping AI to support data-driven decision-making. Digital twin

technology – virtual 3D models of cities – has begun to incorporate AI simulations, with **Wellington, New Zealand** and **Singapore** developing digital twins of their cities (*These 5 Cities Are Making Innovative Use of Generative AI*, 2025).

In **Singapore**, the digital model is now being enhanced with over 100 generative AI solutions as part of a national initiative. One such use is enabling urban planners and engineers to quickly generate and evaluate different design options. For instance, generative AI can model various traffic or land-use scenarios in a digital twin to see potential impacts before any real construction.

Similarly, **Barcelona, Spain**, employs AI in a very practical environmental application: the city's park department uses AI to analyze sensor data (soil moisture, weather forecasts) and automatically adjust irrigation schedules in public parks (Libelium, 2024).

In another innovative project, researchers in **Amsterdam, Netherlands** are using AI to design new sustainable materials for construction – effectively an AI that “invents” eco-friendly materials at the molecular level for future use in city infrastructure (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2024).

Public Safety and Policing

Several cities have begun to use AI in policing and emergency response to detect crime patterns faster than humans can. However, experts have begun to raise valid concerns about AI use in surveillance/policing and the risk to civil liberties and privacy.

In **San Francisco, United States**, the police use machine learning to analyze past incidents and flag crime spikes, helping adjust patrols proactively (Jackley, 2024). In **Atlanta, United States**, the airport has begun to utilize AI in surveillance to manage its security lines (Yamanouchi, 2023). To estimate how long it will take passengers to go through security checks, the airport employs a complex system that combines sensors and artificial intelligence. The Swiss technology company Xovis created this system, which tracks passenger flow and estimates wait times using a variety of 3D sensors mounted in the ceilings above security queueing zones. However, cities such as San Francisco have banned facial recognition due to privacy issues (Conger et al., 2019).

Opportunities of AI for Local Governance

AI offers several compelling opportunities for local governments in B.C..

In a 2023 survey, [two-thirds](#) of local governments reported they are exploring AI's potential, and leaders identified transportation, infrastructure, and public safety as areas with the biggest potential gains from AI. The experiences of early adopters suggest that, with proper governance, when implemented responsibly, AI allows municipalities to stretch limited resources further and enhance the quality of services for residents.

However, it is important to note that these opportunities do not emerge automatically – they require deliberate implementation, training, and iteration. AI projects should start with clear objectives (e.g., “reduce permit processing time by 50%” or “improve waste recycling rates via better route planning”). Success needs measuring, evaluation, and monitoring to ensure the AI is meeting those goals without unintended risks.

Key opportunity areas include:

Increased Efficiency and Cost Savings

AI boosts efficiency, allowing municipalities to maintain or improve services despite limited resources. Once set up, systems like chatbots can scale at low cost, handling 100 or 1,000 queries with equal ease. Automation also speeds up tasks like permits, renewals, and reporting, delivering faster results for residents and saving costs through reduced backlogs and overtime. However, increased automation may also raise concerns about job displacement or reduced roles for municipal employees, particularly in administrative functions.

The **Province of B.C.** saw this with its [COVID-19 digital assistant](#), which operated 24/7 and resolved the majority of questions without human intervention. Another B.C. success involved robotic process automation (RPA) bots in a provincial benefits program – in the first year, these bots completed 46,000 service requests, saving an estimated 11,000 staff hours that could be redirected to complex client support (Province of British Columbia, 2025).

Better Decision-Making and Planning

AI excels at analyzing large datasets, detecting patterns and forecasting trends – capabilities that can significantly inform local decision-making. For example, neural network models can project regional population growth and housing demand, enabling school boards and city planners to anticipate capacity needs. By uncovering connections that are not obvious through intuition alone, AI supports evidence-based interventions and helps direct limited public resources where they will have the greatest impact.

Improved Service Quality and Accessibility

AI can enhance the convenience, personalization, and inclusivity of public services. Chatbots and virtual assistants allow residents to pay bills, access information, or report issues anytime from home, improving service satisfaction.

AI can also help tailor services to individual needs and boost accessibility. For example, a city's recreation system can recommend activities based on past participation, or vision-impaired residents can use image recognition apps to navigate public websites and buildings.

Several cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, utilize AI to analyze social media sentiment in real-time or simulate policy outcomes during consultations, making services more user-friendly and supporting greater public engagement (Credence Research, 2025).

Strategic Capacity and Innovation

Investing in AI strengthens the strategic capacity of local governments by modernizing infrastructure, improving decision-making, and enabling more efficient service delivery.

Municipalities are using AI to manage and interpret data from sources like IoT sensors, open data platforms, and administrative systems—helping them plan more effectively for areas like traffic, air quality, and public health. Cloud-based AI tools also enhance cybersecurity and system reliability. Municipalities piloting AI for smart energy use, autonomous shuttles, or building management often attract research funding and top talent. By automating routine tasks such as sorting feedback or generating reports, AI allows staff to focus on high-value work that requires human judgment, like community engagement, service design, and policy development.

Threats and Risks Posed by AI to Municipalities

Despite the aforementioned opportunities, local governments must contend with the significant risks and challenges associated with AI adoption. If unaddressed, these threats can lead to public harm, erosion of trust, and costly failures. Recognizing and mitigating these risks is essential for municipalities in B.C. as they implement AI.

Below, we examine several of these risk areas:

Bias and Equity Concerns

AI systems can unintentionally replicate and amplify societal discrimination because they are often trained on internet-scale data that reflects existing racial, gender, and class biases. (Technologies, 2022). In government, this can lead to biased decision-making across hiring, policing, and/or service delivery. In high-stakes areas such as hiring, policing, or child protection, AI should inform—not replace—human judgment.

B.C.'s Ombudsperson and Privacy Commissioner explicitly warned in 2023 that government use of AI poses “threats to fair treatment and people's rights” if not carefully governed (Office of the Ombudsperson, 2023). For example, predictive policing in several U.S. cities has indeed targeted minority neighbourhoods, leading to significant public backlash and policy reversals. For example, cities like **Oakland** and **Santa Cruz** in California discontinued their use of predictive policing after finding that bias embedded in the data resulted in over-policing of communities of colour (Center for Democracy and Technology, 2025).

To reduce risks, governments must test AI for bias, use diverse data, involve affected communities, and ensure human oversight of AI. [Canada's AI Code](#) and [B.C.'s principles](#) outline these steps.

Misinformation and Accuracy of AI Outputs

With the rise of generative AI, another risk is the spread of misinformation, such as fabricated news articles, inaccurate medical advice, or false legal interpretations produced by AI systems. Furthermore, heavy reliance on AI could introduce subtle errors that go unnoticed without human review. The federal government has advised that users need to treat “**generative AI with a healthy dose of skepticism**”, holding them accountable for double-checking content (Think Digital, 2024).

The federal government has also noted the risk of AI being misused for disinformation campaigns and election interference – a threat that extends to the municipal level, where smaller scale but impactful influence operations could occur (for example, automated fake “public comments” on a contentious city proposal)

(Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2024). Cities should also consider creating policies on deepfakes and AI-manipulated content.

Privacy and Surveillance Risks

AI relies on large amounts of data, some of which may be personal or sensitive. Municipal uses of AI can thus raise privacy issues, especially if data about residents is collected or analyzed in new ways. Facial recognition is a prime example: it has been piloted for security in airports and by police, but privacy commissioners in Canada have largely opposed its widespread use due to its intrusive nature and propensity for errors, particularly false matches for BIPOC individuals.

In B.C., any AI that processes personal information must comply with privacy laws (such as FOIPPA) and should undergo a Privacy Impact Assessment. Yet, the complexity of AI can make it hard to fully audit what data is used and how.

There is also the concern of data breaches – if a municipality entrusts data to an AI cloud service and it is hacked, large troves of citizen information could be exposed. Even anonymized data can sometimes be re-identified with AI's pattern-finding abilities, blurring the lines of privacy. Oversight officers in B.C. have called for clear legislation to ensure AI use "protects the interests of British Columbians" – particularly strong privacy and accountability safeguards (Office of the Ombudsperson, 2023).

Municipal officials should heed these calls and consider adopting a privacy-by-design approach for AI projects: minimizing personal data collection, using de-identified or aggregated data whenever possible, implementing robust security, and being transparent with the public about what data is being used for which AI services. Additionally, surveillance-capable AI (like CCTV analytics, drone monitoring, and license plate readers with AI) should undergo public consultation and clear policy setting. Several cities, including *Amsterdam*, Holland and *Helsinki*, Finland, have instituted "algorithm registers" to disclose AI systems in use and foster transparency (Parker, 2024).

Procurement and Accountability Challenges:

Acquiring and deploying AI systems presents unique difficulties for municipal governments.

One major concern is the "black box" nature of many AI algorithms – the internal logic can be opaque, making it hard for officials to understand how decisions are made. This raises issues of accountability: if the AI makes a flawed recommendation that leads to harm, who is responsible – the vendor, or the city that adopted the tool? Government auditors have highlighted the risk of public agencies using inscrutable "black box" algorithms that lack external scrutiny and explainability (AI Procurement in a Box: AI Government Procurement Guidelines Unlocking Public Sector AI, n.d.. For

municipalities, this risk can be mitigated by demanding algorithmic transparency in contracts.

Another procurement challenge is over-reliance on vendor claims – the “AI solution” market is full of hype, and public sector buyers must be vigilant to ensure a product actually performs as advertised on relevant data. If not carefully evaluated, an AI procurement can waste money or even backfire. A known example is from Jefferson County Public Schools in **Louisville, Kentucky, United States**, where in August 2023, AlphaRoute’s AI-designed bus routes, intended to address a driver shortage, resulted in widespread confusion, long delays, stranded students, and cancelled classes. The district quickly reverted to manual adjustments (TRAVIS LOLLER, MATT O’BRIEN and BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press, n.d.).

Skills and knowledge gaps are also a risk – municipalities may not have AI expertise on staff, leaving them reliant on external consultants or vendors.

Finally, there is the legal compliance aspect: upcoming laws (such as AIDA) could impose obligations on operators of AI systems. If a municipality unknowingly deploys a “high-impact” AI system, it might eventually be subject to federal requirements (impact assessments, monitoring, etc.). Currently, the Government of Canada provides an [**Algorithmic Impact Assessment tool**](#) to evaluate the risk level of an AI system before implementation (Secretariat, 2024).

Public Trust and Legitimacy

Beyond the technical risks, there is a broader governance challenge that if AI is used in ways the public perceives as secretive, unfair, or beyond the control of elected officials, it can erode trust in local government.

A survey by the Ada Lovelace Institute in the UK found a “persistent, systemic deficit in public understanding” of how AI is being used in government decision-making (Parker, 2024). This lack of transparency can lead to a legitimacy crisis if controversial AI-driven decisions come to light.

Municipalities must ensure transparency in their AI initiatives to sustain public trust. This includes disclosing where AI is being deployed, the types of data being used, and the oversight mechanisms in place.

Proactive engagement with residents can help build legitimacy and reduce the risk of public backlash. **Table 1** below highlights examples of such engagement from select Canadian municipalities.

City	Engagement Mechanism	Description
Toronto	Digital Infrastructure Public Advisory Panel	Advisory body of municipal and private partners ensuring digital projects reflect community needs, including Sidewalk Labs (Sidewalk Labs, n.d.).
Montreal	AI Ethics Declaration Consultation	Public consultation with Mila research institute shaping the city's ethical AI governance framework (Mila, 2024).
Vancouver	Digital Strategy Engagement	Surveys, workshops, and public meetings co-designed an inclusive and accessible digital strategy (City of Vancouver, n.d.).
Edmonton	Open City Initiative	Public forums advanced transparency, citizen participation, and open data governance (City of Edmonton, n.d.).

Table 1. Public Engagement Initiatives on AI in Canadian Municipalities

It is also critical that AI is not seen as a way to abdicate responsibility. Elected officials should avoid the temptation to blame “the algorithm's decision” and remain accountable, using AI as a tool rather than a shield. By preserving human control and justifying decisions, municipalities will reinforce that democratic values still guide governance, even in a data-driven era.

Conclusion

The rise of AI offers a powerful opportunity for local governments to innovate, deliver services in more responsive and effective ways, and glean insights that make our communities healthier, safer, and more sustainable. At the same time, AI serves as a reminder of the enduring importance of governance fundamentals. Technology does not replace the need for sound policy; rather, it heightens it. The municipalities and school boards that will thrive in the AI era are those that marry technological savvy with a strong ethical compass and a commitment to public engagement. B.C.'s tradition of progressive, community-centred governance provides a strong foundation to build upon.

By staying informed and engaged with the rapid developments in AI, local elected officials can ensure that this powerful tool is wielded wisely – amplifying human potential and democratic values in service of the public good.

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Centre for Civic Governance
Suite 440, 789 West Pender Street,
Vancouver, B.C. V6C 1H2

 604-408-2500

 info@ccg.eco