

Municipal Program (Manifesto)

2023 – 2027

Aurland Centre Party



Independence and Democracy

Aurland Centre Party is a guarantor for Aurland as a separate municipality to ensure a healthy local democracy with good opportunities for representation from all parts of Aurland. Decisions made based on local knowledge, *close to people*, are the best decisions.

simultaneously, all municipalities in Norway, regardless of size, are expected to handle an equal number of tasks. Therefore, it is in many cases necessary to cooperate across municipal boundaries to ensure good and sustainable services.

In political matters we need to ally ourselves with other similar municipalities to ensure political influence towards central authorities. For instance, by fighting for the right to keep our concession power revenues¹, which are essential if we are to maintain a high-quality level of public services. Aurland, along with other municipalities hosting hydropower plants, must actively uphold the social contract that underlies our demands². A social contract that is under constant attack from central bureaucrats and experts.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Ensure favourable conditions for development and welfare within the framework of being a separate municipality
- Cooperate across municipal boundaries to ensure good and future-proof services
- Actively participate in membership organizations such as the Municipal Sector Organization (KS) and the National Association of Hydropower Municipalities (LVK) and participate in influencing activities towards central authorities
- Maintain our local arrangement in which our concession power revenues provide stable and affordable electricity prices for our inhabitants
- Exercise responsible management of our concession power revenues to ensure that future generations also can benefit from them
- Be an active participant in ongoing and potential future conservation processes to ensure local involvement and consideration of local interests
- Preserve the UNESCO World Heritage and enhance the local involvement and sense of connection to it

¹ Concession power refers to the revenue generated from hydropower resources. Some rural municipalities, including Aurland, heavily rely on this revenue to maintain services and infrastructure. The Norwegian government grants concessions to companies to operate hydropower plants, and some of the revenue and an amount of electrical power must be given to the local and regional municipalities.

² Under this social contract, host municipalities provide access to their natural resources, such as rivers and waterfalls, for the construction and operation of hydropower plants. In return, the municipalities expect fair compensation in the form of concession power revenues.

A Good Municipality for Young People and Families

It should be good and safe to grow up in all villages within the municipality. Young people who wish to establish themselves should feel confident that there is access to good municipal services and amenities, regardless of where they choose to settle. Additionally, the voluntary sector contributes to a lot of activities and offerings for children, youth, and their families. It is important to support this, as it provides significant added value and ensures activity throughout the entire municipality.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Continue our work improving conditions for play and recreation throughout the municipality
- Ensure a safe journey to school for all children and youth in the municipality
- Maintain kindergarten and school offerings in both Flåm and Aurland as long as it is sustainable when considering *the best interest of the children*³
- Advocate for reliable commuter routes, allowing residents to live in Aurland while attending school or working in Sogn or Voss
- Conduct a review of fees for kindergarten and after-school programs with the goal of improving the financial situation for families with young children

A Good and Safe Municipality Throughout Life

In Aurland municipality we must aim to provide safety and compassionate care for users, regardless of their life situation and whether they have access to resourceful relatives. People should be able to live in their own homes for as long as possible if they can and wish to do so. At the same time, we must be able to offer varied housing solutions tailored to each individual's needs.

We aspire to ensure that elders have meaningful days and access to daily activities. Seniors are an important resource for our society, and many are in good health and have a desire to be active participants in community life. Therefore, arrangements should be made to enable individuals to utilize their remaining capacity for work.

Aurland also aims to be a safe and supportive municipality for individuals facing physical or mental challenges, regardless of when they may occur in life. We want to ensure that everyone has a life characterized by dignity and care. Individuals should feel confident that the municipality will provide support when needed, and next of kin should feel that the municipality is there for them as well, when assistance is required.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Ensure good collaboration and sustainable resource utilization between the nursing home and home-based services
- Strengthen the home-based services with the aim of increasing the level of care provided to those living at home
- Ensure that the housing and activity services⁴ have the resources to offer young people a dignified experience and active participation in decisions regarding their daily lives
- Explore the possibility of having the telephone line at the doctor's office open for a longer period during work hours

³ This is a fundamental principle in Norwegian law and places the child's well-being, development, and rights at the centre of decision-making processes. It emphasizes that the needs, and perspectives of the child should be given primary consideration in all actions and decisions that may affect their lives.

⁴ This unit (In Norwegian called «Bu- og miljøteneste») provides services to children and young individuals with disabilities, up to the age of 67. This includes services for individuals with intellectual disabilities, other cognitive impairments, and services for individuals with long-term needs related to substance abuse and/or mental disorders.

- Support the expansion of the "strong and steady"⁵ program beyond its current offering in Flåm, if desired
- Enable all Seniors, beyond those residing in the nursing home, to purchase meals there and socialize together.
- Ensure the availability of an analogue alternative to digital forms when contacting the municipality to accommodate those who are not digitally confident.
- Allocate resources for a contact person dedicated to elderly people, enabling those in need to safely reach out to the municipality.
- Explore the possibility of conducting conversations with all individuals over the age of 75 who wish to have them, to assess their future needs and provide advice for the best possible aging experience.
- Maintain agreements regarding municipal service points⁶ and consider the possibility of expanding the system.

A Competent Health and Emergency Sector

Primary healthcare services, ambulance services, fire and rescue services, and the police are all important factors that collectively represent the emergency preparedness in the municipality. Some responsibilities lie solely with the municipality, some require collaboration with others, and some tasks are not directly delivered by us but can be influenced by us. Additionally, there is a voluntary apparatus that contributes significantly alongside the public services. We must ensure good coordination among all these entities and demand local knowledge and quick response times.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Support the local Red Cross and Aurland Sanitetslag, and continue the collaboration agreements
- Ensure a competent local medical office, and work towards reducing the reliance on substitute doctors
- Advocate for increased resources for the police, aiming for enhanced presence and more local tasks
- Collaborate closely with the police on preventive work
- Keep up the good work of the Aurland Fire Department, ensuring good working conditions and clearly defined responsibilities in relation to other emergency services like the police
- Put pressure on Helse Førde⁷ to strengthen ambulance response times with the goal of at least achieving the national target

A Thriving and Future-Oriented Agriculture and Business Sector

In Aurland, we have a good coexistence between agriculture, tourism, and the rest of the business sector, with synergies that have led to high growth and increased employment over the past 30 years.

In our future policies, we will support what is already established and facilitate new businesses, prioritizing within local capacity and tolerance limits. Aurland municipality must take both a global and local responsibility by emphasizing climate and environmental considerations.

⁵ In Norwegian: «Sterk og stødig». It is a program providing group training for senior people.

⁶ Municipal service points are agreements between the municipality and a local entity – to provide some services with easy availability and to assist people who might need it. For now, there is one such service point in the Undredal local shop.

⁷ Helse Førde is our regional specialized health care provider, as well as provider of emergency ambulance services.

Aurland municipality will continue to be business-friendly, prioritizing low taxes and fees for the business sector. We will support business initiatives with expertise, guidance, and assistance, including by using our local business fund.⁸

We desire an agricultural sector where farmers primarily focus on food production. Therefore, we aim to work towards agricultural policies that stimulate increased food production. At the same time, it's great that some find other ways to supplement their income.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Facilitate a future-oriented and sustainable business environment that develops and collaborates with already established industries
- Foster collaboration and community within the business sector, including through close cooperation with INKON (Aurland Business Council)
- Ensure the establishment of shore power for cruise ships in Flåm and achieve the electrification of the entire destination
- Follow up on recently adopted climate and environmental ambitions in the municipal plan, including goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and to become a low-emission community by 2050
- Stimulate business development in the whole of the municipality and incorporate it into municipal plans and initiatives
- Work towards providing access to shared office spaces for those who desire it.
- Support and utilize the expertise in the Nærøyfjord World Heritage Park along with the other founding municipalities
- Explore the possibility of establishing favourable investment loans for the agricultural sector
- Support the plans for establishing a World Heritage Centre through joint funding with the other founding municipalities, the regional municipality, and the state
- Support and collaborate with local development environments such as the Sogn Agricultural School and Sognefjord Business Incubator⁹
- Support Visit Sognefjord but also demand accountability and results from the company
- Implement the master plan for tourism in Sogn and ensure that the municipality addresses its responsibilities in collaboration with partners
- Maintain the positive trend of preserving and increasing arable land
- Develop a grazing plan to document the use of grazing areas in the municipality, with the goal of preserving grazing quality and showcasing natural resources
- Support initiatives in fruit and berry production, as Aurland is well-suited and has potential in this sector
- Ensure the preservation of active farms that produce food throughout the municipality

Vibrant and Thriving Villages and Communities

We must create attractive, safe, and good environments throughout Aurland municipality. Residents should feel a sense of possibility and optimism, whether they live in Aurlandsvangen, Vassbygdi, Flåm, Undredal, Gudvangen, Bakka, or any of the surrounding communities. We need to establish a plan to ensure that those who wish to settle in these areas can do so.

⁸Some of the money generated by the concession power is allocated to a business fund where local start-ups and established businesses and farmers can apply for financial aid. This fund is called «Konsesjonsavgiftsfondet». More information can be found on the municipality's web page.

⁹ Sogn Jord- og Hagebruksskule & Sognefjorden Næringsshage

We must have effective procedures for plan revision to maintain an updated knowledge base and direction for development throughout the municipality. At the same time, we need to challenge regional and national authorities that seek to override local discretion in assessment matters. The coexistence between tourists and permanent residents must be further developed with the goal of creating a village environment that benefits everyone.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Develop and maintain the town centre areas in the municipality with the goal of creating even more pleasant and attractive meeting places that benefit both residents and visitors
- Work towards securing landslide-prone roads and advocate for a national policy that prioritizes safe roads
- Support the pilot project for establishing a destination contribution program¹⁰ and ensure that Aurland municipality becomes a part of the project
- Collaborate with businesses and volunteers to improve toilet facilities and waste management throughout the municipality
- Introduce residential obligation (buplikt),¹¹ with an exception for next to kin, aiming to ensure access to year-round housing throughout the municipality
- Explore the possibilities of the municipality subsidizing (beyond cost) plot developments that would otherwise be unfeasible due to high costs, to release more land for housing purposes and at the same time alleviate pressure on agricultural land
- Follow up on the trail and pathway plan¹², while maintaining a good collaboration with landowners and volunteers
- Continuously work on developing land for residential purposes in all villages to ensure access to residential plots
- Allocate suitable areas for tiny houses in new and, if possible, in established residential areas
- Continue efforts to realize a walk and bike road between Aurlandsvangen and Flåm in collaboration with external funding, and maintain our demand for contribution from the Norwegian Public Roads Administration (Statens Vegvesen)¹³
- Be open to considering taller buildings as a strategic tool in land use policy to ensure continued business and housing development while reducing pressure on agricultural land
- Assess the possibility of implementing environmentally friendly hydropower projects in protected rivers, when it proves to be the best alternative for flood control¹⁴

¹⁰ The destination contribution program involves charging a small fee to visitors upon their arrival or departure from the destination. The collected funds are then utilized for a range of purposes, such as infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and improving the overall visitor experience.

¹¹ Residential obligation policies are often implemented in areas where there is a concern about a shortage of permanent residents. These policies aim to prevent properties from being used for other purposes than permanent residence. Our main goal is to prevent short term rental activity in residential houses and appartements. People will still be able to rent out parts of their own home. House owners may also rent out the house to others long-term, to fulfil the obligation. Implementing such a policy only affects future new owners of the properties, as it cannot be implemented retroactively.

¹² «Sti- og løypeplanen»

¹³ The E16 road between Flåm and Aurland is owned by the state.

¹⁴ Protected rivers are a state matter, so the municipality cannot decide in this matter without getting regional and national acceptance. Aurland Centre Party thinks that this may be a best course of action to prevent future floods like the catastrophic 2014 flood. Hydropower infrastructure would enable some regulation of the amount of water in the watercourse.

- Ensure that individuals who wish to construct or renovate buildings receive support and guidance throughout the process, so they do not lose hope due to a complicated bureaucracy
- Ensure sensible management of plans and regulations that take local discretion into account and challenges regional and national authorities when necessary

Culture and Volunteering Activities in the Whole Municipality

Aurland shall aim to be a cultural municipality, with a strong municipal cultural sector and a music and culture school that collaborates with the volunteer cultural life. Volunteering fosters local engagement, community, inclusion, and strong local communities. Youth and community centres are important gathering places that ensure good facilities for cultural activities throughout the municipality.

Sports and outdoor organizations provide a foundation for better public health, increased participation, and inclusion. The municipality must collaborate with all these stakeholders and encourage activity throughout the whole municipality. Investing in the volunteer sector yields significant value for society, as every crown invested provides multiple returns.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Work towards ensuring that everyone, regardless of their financial position or place of residence, can participate in voluntary activities
- Strengthen the municipal music and cultural school and ensure access for children throughout the municipality
- Ensure the presence of well-functioning sports facilities
- Rehabilitate the sports hall in the AIS building and turn it into the municipality's cultural stage
- Allocate resources to support voluntary cultural and sports initiatives, including supporting a possible establishing of a Volunteer Centre¹⁵
- Explore the possibility of establishing a cultural coordinator position
- Better the program for municipal investment support for youth and community centres in the municipality, to ensure a strong cultural offering throughout the community
- Preserve our cultural heritage in collaboration with volunteer organizations, landowners, and the Nærøyfjorden World Heritage Park.
- Ensure Aurland municipality supports and assists the Otternes Foundation

Immigration and Inclusion

Aurland community is a diverse society with residents from all over the world. Some are labour immigrants, others have fled from war and conflict, while others again may have found love locally and decided to settle here.

In Aurland, everyone who comes here, whether temporarily or permanently, should feel warmly welcomed. Both the municipality, volunteer-sector, and private individuals have a responsibility to ensure that our new residents feel like part of the local community. Aurland is known as a rural municipality that against all odds have a growing population, and we aim to continue this trend, which requires that our new residents feel a sense of belonging in the municipality and may eventually choose to establish permanent residency here.

¹⁵ A Volunteer Centre (Frivilligsentral) refers to a local organization or facility that acts as a hub for volunteer activities and coordination within a community, such as helping the elderly, organizing cultural events, providing support to local initiatives, or assisting with social services.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Ensure that new residents receive information about the municipality and its offerings, as a minimum available in Norwegian and English
- Ensure that important information is also available in English and that newcomers can get in touch with English speakers in the municipal administration
- Support and contribute to adult education programs for Norwegian language training for labour immigrants and other newcomers, preferably in collaboration with SJH (Sogn Jord- og Hagebruksskule)
- Follow up on requests to settle refugees and create the best possible conditions for their inclusion, safety, and dignity
- Support initiatives by volunteers aimed at integrating new residents into our community

A Healthy Mountain and a Pure Fjord

In Aurland municipality, large parts of our areas are located 1000 meters above sea level. These areas have been crucial throughout countless generations for grazing, hunting, fishing, and recreation. Similarly, the fjord has been an important source of food that we have harvested from.

Aurland Centre Party believes that a solid foundation for a sustainable future is to consider and assess the consequences for nature and wildlife in all plans and actions, from the bottom of the fjord to the top of Blåskavlen.¹⁶ We also believe that the fjord and mountains have an intrinsic value through traditional hunting and gathering, which all our inhabitants should be able to enjoy.

Aurland Centre Party wants to:

- Work towards rebuilding the wild reindeer population in Nordfjella Zone 1 after the CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease) eradication, in close collaboration with local wildlife management, neighbouring municipalities, and central authorities
- Emphasize and prioritize the habitat of wild reindeer in planning processes, ensuring that the rehabilitated wild reindeer areas have at least the same quality as before the eradication
- Work towards preserving traditions and knowledge about wild reindeer and hunting, even during the absence of wild reindeer in Nordfjella Zone 1
- Facilitate hunting and fishing as shared local values, allowing as many people as possible to participate
- Advocate for a genuinely cleaner fjord being the result of the protection of Sognefjorden, to improved conditions for wildlife and plant life¹⁷
- Actively participate in the revision processes in relation to the Aurland hydropower facilities, aiming to maintain a good coexistence between power production and natural qualities
- Ensure effective municipal wildlife management, in collaboration with neighbouring municipalities
- Support the work of local organizations involved in fish and wildlife management

¹⁶ Our highest peak

¹⁷ The Norwegian state has an ongoing conservation process regarding Sognefjorden. Aurland Centre Party wants to ensure the conservation has clear goals and effects, and make sure we do not end up with side effects and consequences for local development that are beyond the intentions of the conservation.