

COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

MARCH 26, 2012



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY
Cultivating Communities

COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning was launched on Tuesday, July 6, 2010. This 17-member committee was given a mandate to help the Reeve and Council define the direction of growth in Rocky View County.

Council's review of the Task Force Report and the Growth Management Strategy has been extensive. The executive summary provides our thoughts on the 10 subject areas identified in the Task Force report. Detailed responses to the Task Force original observations and recommendations follow this summary. A revised Growth Management Strategy will be presented to Council in the first half of 2012.

1.0 COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Council agrees with the Task Force on the need to improve two-way dialogue with residents. As a consequence, we identified communication as one of our priorities in the 2011–2013 Corporate Strategy. Council intends for the County to become less reactionary and issue driven in its communications. The strategic plan also recognizes the importance of formal councillor communication with residents and improvement in this area is one of our objectives. As always, we are available to directly discuss any matters of concern with residents.

Council understands the public's desire for meaningful input into development proposals. County staff is reviewing the process by which it evaluates development applications and is considering various methods of improving public engagement.

2.0 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Rocky View County is subject to growth pressures not found in many rural areas because of our proximity to the City of Calgary. The Municipal Government Act places the responsibility for addressing growth pressure on Council by allowing for plan approval addressing the "orderly, economical, and beneficial development of settlement patterns." The intent of all planning documents like the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) is to encourage predictable and orderly development that is economically feasible, while reducing spur-of-the-moment decisions.

The majority of areas identified for residential development in the GMS are hamlets with varying degrees of planning approval and development. Hamlet residential development is not to mirror the density or design of our urban neighbours.

Council expects Administration (Rocky View County Staff) to evaluate residential applications using the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) or, if located within an Area Structure Plan (ASP), the respective ASP. Development consistent with the MDP or ASP should be allowed to proceed. When making decisions, we use these plans as the benchmark to judge proposals. Council may consider proposals that vary from the strict requirements of an MDP or an ASP; however, such proposals should be sensitive to local context and community, and be in alignment with the broader Rocky View growth strategy. Overall, we feel the best approach with an application that substantially differs from an Area Structure Plan is to amend the ASP first.

Council recognizes landowner's desire to maintain flexibility to develop their land. In order to support the farm community, the adopted Agriculture Master Plan recommends greater flexibility for agricultural subdivisions. When considering land use flexibility, Council must balance individual landowner desires with the direct impact on neighbours and the financial impact on all residents. Council believes the amount of residential development in agricultural areas merits further exploration during the rewrite of the Municipal Development Plan.

Finally, Council agrees the onus for providing infrastructure rests with the developer and revenue derived from a residential development should meet or exceed operational costs. Most municipalities find this difficult to achieve. One approach Council has used to address this imbalance is to develop regional business areas with the goal of contributing net revenues to the entire County.

3.0 COMMERCIAL / INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Council agrees with the Task Force regarding the timing and type of commercial/industrial development should be driven by the marketplace and must provide a net cost-benefit to the County. Council believes the County has a role to play in directing where development occurs.

As the Task Force observes, the County has a lower than average commercial/industrial to residential assessment ratio. Lower than average ratios can only be sustained by increasing residential taxes. This was the primary reason Council encouraged and facilitated business development with the goal of maintaining a sustainable residential tax rate.

Council is aware of residents' concern regarding the County's provision of infrastructure to implement its commercial/industrial strategy. We agree infrastructure should be a developer's responsibility, but there may be occasions when the County must provide infrastructure to a particular area to fix a problem or to provide important transportation links.

Council believes the planning guidance provided by Area Structure Plans (ASP) should be the benchmark by which commercial/industrial development applications are judged. Although, we have the legal ability to make decisions not in conformity to an ASP, Council feels the best approach with an application substantively differing from an ASP is for the applicant to amend the ASP first; a process requiring public consultation and a public hearing.

4.0 WATER AND DEVELOPMENT - SERVICING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Water is one of our most important resources. The County is developing a potable water strategy addressing the need for the establishment of a long-term, safe, secure, and economically viable potable water supply for its residents and businesses. The strategy will guide the management of existing and future water systems; ensure the County's future water needs are met; and determine what role, if any, a utility corporation might play in supporting the strategy.

When considering development approvals the County ensures there is a sufficient water supply as a condition of subdivision approval. It is up to the applicant to demonstrate this and any failure or change in ground water supply is the landowner's responsibility.

The County is a participant in all watershed groups active in the County and has adopted all completed watershed management plans as guiding documents for the long-term management of our region's watersheds. In addition, the County participates in other water-related strategies and initiatives when the opportunity arises such as the Bow River Basin Council.

5.0 AGRICULTURE

Council recognizes the importance of supporting agriculture and providing flexibility to the industry as it develops and changes with time. Council has adopted the Agriculture Master Plan (AMP), which recommends greater flexibility in land use; emphasizes the responsibility of new development to limit its impact on agricultural operations; and supports industry diversification. The AMP recommendations will be implemented through an updated Municipal Development Plan; changes to the Land Use Bylaw; and other initiatives by the Agricultural Services Department.

6.0 FINANCE/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Fiscal responsibility is important to Council and is a critical component of our corporate strategy. Decisions made today will impact the municipality far into the future. We also recognize the marketplace will be the primary driver of residential, commercial and industrial development in the County.

Council is committed to steadily decreasing municipal debt and increasing the non-residential contribution to our tax base. We are developing tools to assess the fiscal impact of growth, which will allow us to make more strategic development decisions.

One of our concerns, is the limitation under the Municipal Government Act to impose development levies for soft infrastructure (fire halls, recreation centres, etc.). We will continue to press the Provincial Government to change this legislation.

Council recognizes the importance of road infrastructure for the agriculture industry and attempts to keep up with the demands equipment places on the road network. Road infrastructure is one of the four key priority areas in the Corporate Strategy.

7.0 INFRASTRUCTURE OTHER THAN WATER

Council agrees with the Task Force observations that the rural community's expectations for amenities differs from their urban neighbour and we cannot provide all the services of an urban municipality. Over the past few years, the County has conducted several studies to gain insight on which amenities residents require and how we might meet those requirements. Council is looking at creative and cost-effective solutions to deliver identified needs.

Council acknowledges the importance of providing "big picture" direction to development proposals. We support developing technical documents such as the servicing strategy, water strategy and master drainage plan development, which provide high level development direction.

8.0 OPEN SPACES

Council recognizes the value of open space to existing and future residents particularly as it relates to residential development.

Council recently adopted the Parks and Open Space Master Plan which addresses the function, type and desirability of open space. The County will implement this plan through the Municipal Development Plan; development application approvals; and other initiatives of the Municipal Lands department.

Council has no expectation that agricultural land is to be used as open space, nor is there any County policy promoting the use of agricultural land as open space. Most open space land in Rocky View is publicly owned by the County. Ownership comes as a consequence of municipal and environmental reserve dedication at the time of subdivision. There are no set criteria when municipal reserves are dedicated as land or as cash-in-lieu. Council determines this, based on development proposal, external stakeholder comments existing plans and administrative recommendations.

Where land is not taken as municipal reserve, a cash-in-lieu payment is taken instead. This payment is distributed to Rocky View Schools and the local recreation district. Spending recommendations by the local recreation district are based on their respective Master Recreation Plans.

9.0 PROVINCIAL POLICY CONTEXT – CALGARY REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Rocky View County places great importance on its relationships with regional neighbours and the Province. Council's aim is to foster and build these relationships through formal and informal avenues. This broad approach represents a commitment on the part of Rocky View to the betterment of the region and the Province. However, Council feels strongly the need to act in the best interests of the County as a whole and the interests of its individual residents. The County was concerned with the Calgary Metropolitan Plan (CMP) direction regarding density, access to regional servicing, and the double-majority voting system; and could not vote in favour of the CMP. Under policies of the Plan, the County was unable to remain a member of the Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP) and left. Should the CRP implement affiliate membership options, or amend its policies, Council may consider participating as an affiliate member in order to represent the County.

10.0 NATURAL RESOURCES

Council recognizes the impact gravel extraction and oil and gas exploration have on adjacent development and the road network. The County does not regulate the petroleum industry and cannot collect road use payments from the petroleum industry. The County receives a payment from the gravel industry based on the weight of gravel hauled. This payment is dedicated for road maintenance.

Council agrees a comprehensive gravel policy should be developed. Policy should examine a variety of matters including the relationship of gravel extraction to residential development and gravel pit operating procedures.

INTRODUCTION

The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning was launched on Tuesday, July 6, 2010. This 17-member committee represented our diverse community and was given a mandate to help the Reeve and Council define the direction of growth in Rocky View County. The Task Force submitted a final report to Council outlining matters considered, observations and recommendations. This document responds to the report.

Council thanks the members of the Task Force for their time and effort in the preparation of the report. The observations were thoughtful and many will be incorporated into Rocky View County's future planning.

Council also thanks County residents whose input shaped the recommendations. We look forward to further resident participation as the County uses the Task Force Report and other documents such as the Parks and Open Space Master Plan and Agriculture Master Plan to rewrite the Municipal Development Plan. This project will commence in 2012.

Task Force members heard a variety of opinions and presentations about growth in the County. These were categorized into 10 sections and condensed into a series of observations followed by recommendations. In many cases, Task Force members agreed and in some cases they diverged in opinion.

Council's response to the Reeve's Task Force takes a parallel form to the Task Force Report: observations followed by responses to specific recommendations. Similar to the Task Force Report, we agree on many items and diverge on others. In some cases, we were already implementing specific recommendations, a point speaking to another Task Force recommendation: the need for better communication. In other cases, we agree with specific recommendations and have started to implement them. Sometimes, we have a different viewpoint from the Task Force and in those cases, we have provided an explanation.

Council's review of the Task Force Report and the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) was extensive. We attended 15 workshops and engaged in wide-ranging discussion on the Task Force recommendations and growth direction. Following this response to the Reeve's Task Force a revised Growth Management Strategy will be presented to Council in the first half of 2012.

MEMBERS

Reeve	Rolly Ashdown
Division 1	Rick Butler
Division 2	Kim Magnuson
Division 3	Margaret Bahcheli
Division 4	Rolly Ashdown
Division 5	Earl Solberg
Division 6	Greg Boehlke
Division 7	Lois Habberfield
Division 8	Al Sacuta
Division 9	Paul McLean

Additional information

- Reeve's Task Force Report
- Growth Management Strategy and Report
- Council Roadmap

Available at www.rockyview.ca or phone 403-230-1401

SECTION 1.0

Communications and Public Engagement

REEVE'S TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. Communication and public engagement processes are very important to the residents of Rocky View County. They want to be involved at the start of the process and they want to be partners in the future growth and planning of the County.
- ii. Generally speaking, Rocky View County does a good job of communicating information to its residents. The six main methods of communication currently employed by Rocky View County are:
 - a. the web site
 - b. the newspaper/Rocky View Weekly
 - c. letters/notices
 - d. public open houses
 - e. the Vantage Point magazine
 - f. the business office located at 911 32 Avenue NE Calgary
- iii. However, there is room for improvement in engaging residents in a two-way dialogue on key issues. People not only need more frequent forums in which to express their opinions, they need to feel they have been heard, understood and have had a voice.
- iv. There was evidence of public confusion on key information related to Rocky View County operations, which points to a need for more effective communications. For example, various individuals at the Task Force public engagement sessions provided vastly different figures and understandings regarding the level of debt currently carried by Rocky View County. In addition, although four public open houses were held on the Growth Management Strategy initiative, there were a significant number of attendees at the Task Force public meetings who were not aware of the Growth Management Strategy and its recommended framework for growth management.
- v. Going forward, complete and effective public engagement processes on growth, planning and development initiatives will be essential to avoid disengagement, suspicion and criticism from Rocky View residents. For example, the current public open house format used in the development/planning process does not effectively engage residents in the process. As evidenced by the response to the Task Force public engagement sessions, there is an appetite for a more interactive engagement of citizens on key issues. Rocky View County has an opportunity to take a leadership role in creating more effective communication and public engagement processes related to development and growth management.
- vi. It is the responsibility of every citizen of Rocky View County to make a concerted effort to remain informed through reading the newspaper, visiting the County website, talking to their local Councillor, attending public open houses and engagement sessions, and becoming engaged in their community.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Council recognizes the County has struggled in its efforts to communicate and agrees with the Task Force recommendations. As a result, we will improve communication and ongoing dialogue with Rocky View residents, the Provincial government and the region. Council has identified communications as one of its priorities in the 2011–13 Corporate Strategy. Some of the three year communication goals are:

- Improve the quality of communication, dialogue, and engagement with each community.
- Each of the Councillors in the nine County divisions will establish a communications approach that is appropriate to that division.
- Ensure residents receive answers, help and guidance in a timely manner.

In working towards these goals, Council intends for the County to become less reactionary and issue driven in its communications, thereby, establishing an ongoing meaningful dialogue with the public, the Province and the region.

In addition, Council recognizes communication from the development community regarding a specific proposal may be confused with County endorsement of that project. Council does not endorse any development proposal prior to formal consideration at a public hearing.

Additional Information

- Council's Corporate Strategy is available at: www.rockyview.ca.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (1.A)

To ensure there is openness and transparency surrounding the work of the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning, Rocky View Council should release the Task Force's Final Report to the public in a timely manner.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

On January 24, 2011, Council released the Task Force's report to the public and accepted it for information. The report was made available through a media release, an article in the March/April 2011 issue of the Vantage Point and by posting it on the Rocky View County website.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (1.B)

To place a renewed emphasis on communication and citizen engagement, Rocky View should revise its Mission Statement Goals by adding "The County shall place a high priority on communication and public engagement on all matters."

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Communications is important to Council and is one of the four components of our Corporate Strategy; however, we intend Rocky View's Mission Statement to be general and not reference any specific strategy.

Council feels the importance of communication is inherent in the Mission Statement, which states Rocky View will "effectively provide municipal services that cultivate and support our distinct communities." This can only be achieved through effective communication and public engagement. Through implementation of the Corporate Strategy, appropriate times and techniques for communication will be identified and implemented.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (1.C)

To enhance citizen engagement, Rocky View should encourage all Councillors to hold public engagement meetings in their respective divisions at least once a year, to formalize a structure for listening to residents about their issues and needs.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council's strategic plan recognizes the importance of councillor communication with division residents and improvement in this area is one of our objectives. All councillors are encouraged to hold at least one public meeting per year in their division. County staff is supporting Council in this objective by setting up a framework in which meetings are consistently held. As always, we are available to directly discuss any matters of concern with residents.

Additional Information

- Councillor contact information is available at: www.rockyview.ca.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (1.D)

To streamline the development and citizen engagement processes, Rocky View County should establish Planning Advisory Committees (PACs) in each major area of the County. The PAC's should be made up of representative community members who, in accordance with set Terms of Reference, would provide Rocky View County with feedback, facilitate communication and public engagement, and provide a link between the developer and the community for major development applications. The PACs are not intended to be a mechanism to delay decision-making.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council is confident the communication objectives of our strategic plan will improve community consultation and engagement; therefore, it is our preference not to establish Planning Advisory Committees (PACs). Each Councillor was elected by their residents who best understood their needs and these councillors should be able to represent their communities. Councillors are always available via email and telephone, so residents can easily make their preferences known. In addition, with the implementation of recommendation (1.C) above and the use of opportunities outlined in (1.E) below, the need for PACs should be diminished.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (1.E)

To ensure the onus is on the proponents of development to engage the public for proposals. The proponent should be required to outline a comprehensive plan for a public engagement process and to indicate how that process will be communicated to the public.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council understands the public's desire for meaningful input into development proposals. We feel this input is imperative to creating great communities. Currently, there are several methods for public input, these include:

- required public engagement when a proponent proposes amendments to an Area Structure Plan;
- opportunities for input into Conceptual Schemes or other local planning documents prepared by the proponent;
- written or oral comments to Council through public hearings for Area Structure Plans, Conceptual Schemes, and land-use redesignation applications; and
- one-on-one discussion with your Councillor regarding applications or proposals.

Finally, County staff is reviewing the process by which it evaluates development applications and is considering various forms and requirements of public engagement by the proponent.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (1.F)

To promote effective communications, transparency and accountability, Rocky View County should:

- i. Ensure information regarding County finances, debt limits and net debt are routinely and effectively communicated to the public.
- ii. Review the structure and management of the Rocky View County website to ensure it is: user friendly, is updated in real time with the most current information, and the links to materials are functional and correct.
- iii. Reformat the traditional open house-type public information session to a model that is more interactive and provides meaningful opportunities for public input and engagement.
- iv. Make Council agendas available, in a visible location, so that any interested parties attending Rocky View Council meetings are able to follow along with Council's deliberations.
- v. Provide an opportunity via its website for residents and other interested parties to "sign up" for updates or information distribution on specific issues or initiatives.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

(i) Council agrees budget information could be more effectively communicated with the public. County Staff is currently working with Council to achieve this. Currently, budgets are communicated to the public via several methods:

- a. RVC website Annual Report
- b. media releases
- c. council meetings and updates
- d. Vantage Point
- e. social media mentions

(ii) Rocky View has undertaken an audit of its website to evaluate its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. The findings of this audit have provided direction for content redevelopment, content strategy, updating the information architecture and restructuring the navigation and design. The website will be updated in 2012.

(iii) In accordance with our Corporate Strategy, Rocky View will undertake a communication review to assess how the County can best communicate with the public and stakeholders and develop a three-year Corporate Communications Strategy. As a part of this process, we will explore alternative forms to the traditional open house.

Rocky View intends to take a new approach to engaging the public when we rewrite the Municipal Development Plan. As part of that strategy, the County will use new engagement techniques to better communicate with, and reach out to, the public. Engagement should start in mid-2012.

(iv) Council notes this concern and agrees agenda information could be more readily available to the public. At the moment, Council agendas are available online one week prior to Council meetings. Hard copies are available at reception. Through the website audit, more effective ways of providing this information on our website will be explored. In addition to the website and reception, we are looking at other formats in which agendas could be made available to the public.

(v) There are existing methods whereby the public can sign up for updates and information. Events and matters of importance in Rocky View can be accessed by signing up for RSS feeds or by visiting www.rockyview.ca. Updates on ongoing projects are provided on a project by project basis.

Additional Information

- Updates and information are available at www.rockyview.ca.

SECTION 2.0

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

MAJORITY HELD PUBLIC INPUT AND REEVE'S TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. A majority of those who provided input to the Task Force expressed opposition to the “drawing of lines,” where the County decides through a Growth Management Strategy, or some other policy or regulatory mechanism where development will be allowed (or not allowed) to occur.
- ii. The majority also indicated they are not in favour of high density urban development within Rocky View County boundaries (growth nodes). This opposition to nodal development was primarily based on concerns related to core infrastructure needs, servicing demands and costs, as well as the potential to shift the political balance of power in the County.
- iii. The most common reasons cited for opposing high density urban development in Rocky View were:
 - a. Rocky View is a rural municipality and should maintain its rural character. Further urban-type, high density development should only occur within established urban centres, namely: the City of Calgary, the City of Airdrie, the Town of Cochrane and the Town of Chestermere.
 - b. There is no demand for urban-type servicing levels in Rocky View County.
 - c. A shortage of water resources should preclude high density development in the County.
 - d. The costs of servicing nodal development (with urban-level servicing) would ultimately be borne by all taxpayers in the County.
- iv. A majority of the landowners (both farmers and acreage holders) the Task Force heard from are not opposed to reasonable levels of further country residential development (even at densities greater than 2-acre parcels), provided that:
 - a. The development has a country residential flavour.
 - b. The County is not involved in providing services.
 - c. The development is consistent with the character of the existing community and its existing densities.
 - d. Infrastructure is upgraded on a proactive basis to sustain existing development and to handle any increase in population.
 - e. The marketplace is the main driver of development.

MINORITY HELD PUBLIC INPUT AND TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- a. The County does not exist in isolation and must work within other provincial and municipal land use planning frameworks (Alberta Land use Framework, the Calgary Regional Plan, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, etc.).
- b. The Growth Management Strategy was a well-thought out document that provides real guidance for rational development.
- c. Questions on the future of residential development are premature until studies on the availability of ground and surface water resources have been completed.
- d. Growth nodes are a viable mechanism for concentrating expected growth pressures and protecting farmland, low density development areas and open spaces. They should be supported in certain areas of the county.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Council is responsible for the implementation of the Municipal Government Act (MGA), which is the provincial legislation under which the County operates. One of the most difficult tasks is to implement Section 617, which allows for the preparation and adoption of plans for the orderly, economical and beneficial development of settlement patterns “without infringing on the rights of individuals for any public interest except to the extent that is necessary for the overall greater public interest.” The intent of plans such as a Municipal Development Plan or the Growth Management Strategy is to encourage predictable and orderly development that is economically feasible, and at the same time, reduces spur-of-the-moment decisions.

Council is reviewing the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) in light of the Reeve's Task Force (RTF) recommendations: particularly those, recommendations addressing residential development. Below is an explanation to clarify several points regarding the GMS:

- i. The majority of the areas identified for higher-density residential development are hamlets that already have varying degrees of planning approval and development (e.g. Bragg Creek, Cochrane Lake, Balzac, Delacour, Kathyrn and Langdon).
- ii. The GMS focus on areas of higher density development and was not intended to prohibit development elsewhere. Council's intent was to (i) continue to allow first parcel outs on every quarter section (Municipal Development Plan); (ii) examine alternative parcel options for agricultural lands as part of the Agriculture Master Plan; and (iii) allow newer forms of country residential development elsewhere in the County. At the same time, the GMS was to honour the direction of higher order planning documents being prepared at the time, such as the Calgary Metropolitan Plan and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan.
- iii. Although this was not clearly articulated in the GMS as we might have wished, the higher density residential developments that were described were not to mirror the densities of our urban neighbours. Community cores were envisioned as hamlets of a scale slightly larger than what now occurs in Langdon. These communities would retain a small town rural atmosphere. Growth Nodes were to be more urban in nature; however, even these densities would not mimic larger cities. One of the points of contention the County has with the Calgary Metropolitan Plan is its emphasis on high density (eight to 10 units per gross acre) residential housing in order to be provided regional utility servicing.

Regarding Growth Nodes, Council, similar to the RTF, is of mixed opinion. Some of us support the concept and some of us do not. Council does agree that if this type of development occurs, the market will drive demand, the developer will be responsible for all development costs, and long-term operational costs must not impact other parts of the County.

Additional information

- Rocky View County Municipal Development Plan: www.rockyview.ca
- Municipal Government Act: www.qp.alberta.ca
- Calgary Metropolitan Plan: www.calgaryregion.ca

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (2.A)

All residential development should be subject to proven:

- i. Sufficiency of water resources
- ii. Wastewater treatment capacity
- iii. Legal means of access

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council is required by the Municipal Government Act, Water Act, the Subdivision and Development Regulations, and County policy to address these technical requirements as part of any subdivision application. Recent County technical initiatives include (i) testing and adopting the Alberta Municipal Affairs "Model Process" for developments using private sewage treatment systems and (ii) developing policy regarding the density of private sewage systems. Council would also like to improve performance on the downstream effects of stormwater movement.

Additional information:

- Alberta Water Act: environment.alberta.ca
- Subdivision and Development Regulations: www.canlii.org
- Infrastructure and Operations Policy: www.rockyview.ca
- Alberta Municipal Affairs Model Process: www.rockyview.ca

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (2.B)

Rocky View should strive to bring its policies regarding residential development in closer alignment with surrounding rural municipalities and to create greater flexibility for landowners wishing to develop their land.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council's expectation is that when the County is considering new policy, County staff examines other jurisdiction's policies; however, Council believes Rocky View County is subject to growth pressures not found in many rural areas because of our proximity to Calgary. Our unique situation sometimes requires unique solutions.

Council recognizes landowner's desire the flexibility to develop their land. Recent initiatives allow first parcel development on any unsubdivided quarter sections and the Agriculture Master Plan recommends greater flexibility in agricultural subdivision in order to support the farm community. Implementation of the Agricultural Master Plan will occur through county wide initiatives including the rewrite of the Municipal Development Plan and a Land Use Bylaw update. When considering land use flexibility, Council must balance individual landowner desires with the direct impact on neighbours and the financial impact on all residents.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (2.C)

In areas where there is an existing Area Structure Plan, future country residential development may continue to occur, provided:

- i. The development is in accordance with the existing planning documents.
- ii. The development is of a similar density and scale to the surrounding area.
- iii. Wastewater treatment capacity complies with the provincial Standard of Practice.
- iv. There is an adequate supply of potable water.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

(i & ii) Although some Area Structure Plans are dated, Council expects County staff to formally evaluate residential applications using the Area Structure Plan in which it is located. When making our decision, we use the Area Structure Plan as the benchmark to judge a proposal, while considering staff's recommendation, public input, and other agency comments. Council may consider proposals that vary from the strict requirements of an Area Structure Plan; however, such proposals should be sensitive to local context, sensitive to the broader Rocky View context, and should meet the expectations of the community.

(iii & iv) Council agrees with the principle that residential development consistent with the Area Structure Plan should be allowed to proceed if it meets technical requirements. Council would also add stormwater and transportation to the list.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (2.D)

The owners of a quarter section of land should be allowed to subdivide it into a maximum of four parcels provided other requirements for residential subdivision are met or proven out. If a quarter section is subdivided into less than four parcels:

- i. The subdivision application should set out where the additional parcels will be sited in the future, or
- ii. Be two 80-acre parcels, or
- iii. Be one first parcel out that cannot be further subdivided.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council amended the Municipal Development Plan to allow all quarter sections a first parcel out, if it meets technical criteria. We welcome the recommendation of the Agriculture Master Plan to amend the Land Use Bylaw to allow a greater variation in agriculture parcel size. Some of Council agrees with the recommendation to allow four parcels per quarter section, while others wondered whether it would be consistent with provincial planning documents. Council feels the proposal merits further exploration during the rewrite of the Municipal Development Plan and consideration of locational criteria (roads, utility infrastructure, views etc.); impacts on adjacent landowners; and overall fiscal impacts.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (2.E)

All other residential development proposals should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The proponent (developer) should show:

- i. The development will maintain a country residential density and flavour.
- ii. All necessary infrastructure (including, but not limited to: water, sanitary sewer, transportation, regional drainage, and open spaces) will be provided at no net cost to Rocky View County.
- iii. The future tax revenue to be received from the development should be at a sufficient level to cover future servicing and operating costs.
- iv. The development should comply with planning regulations, guidelines and documents.
- v. The developer must consult with and make a reasonable effort to address any surrounding or impacted landowner concerns.
- vi. A plan for dedicating additional open/green space (beyond legislated requirements for municipal and environmental reserve) to be owned/managed collectively by the landowners in the development area.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

(i) The Municipal Government Act obligates Council to consider all development applications that are proposed outside an Area Structure Plan. In doing so, Council uses existing plans and policies (such as the Municipal Development Plan, the Growth Management Strategy) and other relevant factors. One of the most important factors we consider is the compatibility of the proposed development with existing local development.

(ii & iii) Council agrees with the Task Force that the onus for providing infrastructure rests with the developer and revenue derived from a residential development should meet or exceed operational costs. Most municipalities find this difficult to achieve. One approach Council has used to address this imbalance is to develop regional business areas with the goal of contributing net revenues to the County. Council has requested County staff develop a fiscal-impact model which estimates the fiscal repercussions of specific developments and the overall impact of cumulative developments.

(v) As discussed above in the communications section, the County will look at ways to improve developer communications.

(vi) Dedication beyond what the County can legally require is up to the developer. Management of open space is discussed in our Open Space response (section 8.0).

SECTION 3.0

COMMERCIAL / INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. The marketplace should be the primary driver of future commercial/industrial development in Rocky View.
- ii. Rocky View currently has a lower than average amount of commercial/industrial assessment (see Financial Sustainability section) compared to other urban municipalities.
- iii. The provision of infrastructure within a commercial/industrial development should be the responsibility of the developer.
- iv. Municipal transportation infrastructure that links commercial/industrial development to the larger community needs to be planned and upgraded by the County on a proactive basis to sustain existing development and to handle any increase in intensity of development.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Council agrees the marketplace should be the primary driver of when commercial/industrial development will occur. Council also believes the County should provide direction on where development occurs, as it provides certainty to residents and landowners. Currently, Area Structure Plans and the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) provide this direction. Council is reviewing the commercial/industrial direction of the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) in light of the Reeve's Task Force (RTF) and community input.

As the Task Force observes, the County has a lower than average provincial commercial/industrial to residential assessment ratio. Lower than average ratios can only be sustained by increasing residential taxes. This was the primary reason Council encouraged and facilitated commercial/industrial development. The goal of this strategy is to maintain a sustainable residential tax rate.

Council is aware of the residents' concern regarding the County's provision of infrastructure to implement its commercial/industrial strategy in the Balzac area. Council agrees infrastructure should be a developer's responsibility. As part of the recently approved CN Rail inter-modal facility in the Conrich area, all utility servicing costs were front ended by CN.

The final RTF observation seems to be somewhat in conflict with its previous observation, as it recommends proactively investing in transportation infrastructure to deal with a potential increase in development. Council agrees there may be occasions when the County must provide vital infrastructure to a particular area to fix a problem or to provide important transportation links. One of the ways the County finances these investments is to charge a one time Transportation Levy on all new residential and industrial development. The majority of the money collected (70 per cent) is pooled and retained in the local area where it was generated. The remaining money is placed into a pool for transportation improvements within the larger quadrant the development occurred in.

Additional Information

- To view the Transportation Offsite Bylaw Levy visit www.rockyview.ca or phone 403-230-1401.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (3.A)

Rocky View County should devise a commercial/industrial development strategy to promote appropriate commercial/industrial development in the County (where the marketplace is the primary driver of such development). The Strategy should:

- i. Encourage small business growth and development.
- ii. Include criteria for commercial/industrial development with limited servicing/infrastructure needs.
- iii. Address the infrastructure and servicing needs of any commercial/ industrial development.
- iv. Promote the success and growth of small commercial/industrial developments by providing flexibility for growth and expansion on existing sites.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees an update of the 2003 economic development strategy is required. The County's Economic Development Manager is working on a revision and expects it will be ready for review this year. Despite the current economy, the County has a large inventory of serviced and unserviced commercial/industrial land that is continuing to be developed. Council supports the recommendation to promote the success of small business and is considering providing that direction in the Growth Management Strategy. Council also adopted the Agriculture Master Plan, which looks at ways of improving value added and onsite business opportunities for farmers.

Additional Information

- To view the economic development strategy visit www.rockyview.ca or phone 403-230-1401.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (3.B)

Inside an Area Structure Plan, commercial/industrial development should only be approved in accordance with the plan.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council believes the planning guidance provided by Area Structure Plans (ASP) should be the benchmark by which all development applications should be judged; however, Council weighs many factors in making a decision. Although Council has the legal ability to make decisions not in conformity to the ASP, Council feels the best approach with an application substantively differing from the ASP is for the applicant to amend the ASP first. Any ASP amendment requires public consultation by the proponent and a public hearing.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (3.C)

Outside of an Area Structure Plan, commercial/industrial development proposals should be considered on a case by case basis; with special consideration given to their impact on neighbouring landowners and/or businesses.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council uses the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) as the benchmark to evaluate all applications falling outside the boundaries of an ASP. We recognize each application is unique, and in addition to considering MDP policy, Council considers other agency comments and public input. One of Council's most important deliberations is the impact any development has on adjacent neighbours.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (3.D)

Commercial/industrial developments should only be approved if they provide a net cost-benefit to the County.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees with this recommendation. As part of Council's decision-making tools, County staff will develop a financial-impact model. The model will provide a cost-benefit analysis for a proposed development, and provide a municipal wide analysis of the tax balance between various land uses. This fiscal analysis will be one of many inputs Council will utilize when considering a development proposal.

SECTION 4.0

WATER AND DEVELOPMENT – SERVICING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. The Province has said it will honour the “First in time, first in right” principle, but it is also considering re-allocation of water licenses (for surface water). Currently, the ability to buy, sell and trade water licenses is not completely clear.
- ii. Residents and businesses in Rocky View County are currently supplied with water via: Co-ops, wells, cisterns (haul-in), private utilities or the City. They may be supplied in the future by a Rocky View utility (such as Aqueduct).
- iii. The Province is taking a lead role in managing water resources. Many groups are participating in water study and discussion. Interprovincial as well as inter-municipal issues exist.
- iv. A moratorium exists on new water licenses on the Bow and Elbow Rivers.
- v. The City of Calgary may be prepared to supply water service to future development in Rocky View County, provided such development meets City of Calgary density requirements (urban density).

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Potable water in Rocky View is a matter of great importance. Council is taking steps to secure this resource under County jurisdiction; however it does not intend these costs be borne by Rocky View residents.

The County is developing a potable water strategy for the provision of a safe and reliable supply of potable water to residents and businesses. The strategy will guide the management of existing and future water systems, ensure the County’s future water needs are met, and determine what role, if any, a utility corporation might play in supporting the strategy. The strategy and supporting studies will provide Council with the information required to make decisions on water provision, and will help to position the County for discussions with the Province.

REEVE’S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (4.A)

Rocky View County should develop a comprehensive Water Management Strategy that promotes and encourages water conservation and clearly communicate that strategy to the public.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees with this recommendation and is developing a water servicing strategy. A draft document is being prepared by County staff that will address the need for establishing a long-term, safe, secure, and economically viable potable water supply. It is expected to be presented to Council in 2012. Council supports water conservation and has included a water conservation strategy prohibiting the use of potable water for irrigation the East Balzac Business Area.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (4.B)

When considering the approval of new development, RVC must ensure there is a sufficient, sustainable water supply that is proven out as a condition of development approval.

- i. Intensive multi-home or commercial developments relying upon groundwater should be directed to use an off-site water supply as part of their development approval.
- ii. For smaller, less intensive multi-home developments, if RVC has granted subdivision and development approval based on proven groundwater supply, the onus for any failure or change in groundwater supply should be placed upon the developer/landowner.
- iii. The public must be meaningfully engaged in current and future development approval processes to address the significant concerns that have been raised regarding the impacts of development on water supply and demand.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees with this recommendation. Council currently views the proposed water strategy as an important component of any application. The County considers water provision when considering a change in land use (re-zoning), and some Council members believe this should be a mandatory requirement. Council would like to note that in many cases the Province is the technical approving authority of water applications. Alberta Environment advertises all commercial and residential water allocation requests online and the County will display this information on its website.

(i) Intensive development (less than two acre lots) such as a hamlet, requires a communal water source from either ground water (e.g. Langdon, Elbow Valley) or surface water (Balzac). Policy 411 outlines requirements for servicing residential water and sewer systems.

(ii) Council agrees with this recommendation. It is the County's current practice that the onus for any failure or change in ground water supply should be placed upon the developer/landowner.

(iii) As outlined in communications section item 1.E, the public has several options on how they may express their concerns related to water or any other matter to Council, and we are working to expand and improve these opportunities.

Additional Information

- To view Policy 411 - Residential Water and Sewer Requirements visit www.rockyview.ca or phone 403-520-1401.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (4.C)

Rocky View County needs to take a proactive, cooperative, and solution-driven role in working with the Provinces, other municipalities, watershed groups, and other stakeholders on water-related strategies and initiatives.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council believes water is important matter for Rocky View, the region and the Province. The County participates in all watershed groups active in the County (Nose Creek Watershed Partnership, Elbow River Watershed Partnership, Jumping Pound Watershed Group) and has adopted all completed watershed management plans as guiding documents for the management of our region's watersheds. In addition, the County participates in other water-related strategies and initiatives when the opportunity arises such as the Bow River Basin Council and a ground water monitoring study with the University of Calgary.

Additional information

- Rocky View Watershed Groups: www.rockyview.ca
- Bow River Basin Council: www.brbc.ab.ca

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (4.D)

Rocky View County should avoid taking ownership of, or responsibility for, any new or existing water co-ops or companies.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council understands the Task Force's financial concern related to this matter. However, there may be special cases where this is necessary. Therefore, the County must develop policy for taking ownership or assuming responsibility for any new or existing water co-ops or companies. County staff is preparing a Water Strategy that will aid in this decision-making. Where the County takes ownership, it is on the basis the existing users must finance and provide an up-to-date system prior to County acceptance.

SECTION 5.0

AGRICULTURE

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. Agricultural operators should not be viewed as regular property owners. They deserve special consideration due to their lifestyle and long-standing stewardship and attachment to the land.
- ii. Increased urbanization and growth pressures are having a profound impact on the future of agricultural land and operations in rural/urban interface areas surrounding urban centers. The most serious impact is a financial one, where the escalating price of land in the urban fringe area makes agricultural operations cost prohibitive.
- iii. Although there are no legal “property rights” in Canada, the land belongs to the person holding the land title which should afford certain privileges.
- iv. It is important to avoid the “drawing of lines” that takes away the inherent right of a landowner to determine how his or her land should best be used going forward. Agricultural landowners require greater flexibility around determining how their land is used or developed.
- v. The current County process to develop an Agriculture Master Plan is a welcome initiative. The Agriculture Master Plan should promote the diversification of agriculture in Rocky View County.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Since the incorporation as a municipality in 1956, the agricultural industry has played a dominant role in Rocky View. This role has been overshadowed in the last 15 years by urbanization and growth of our urban neighbours and the subsequent pressure on the County’s land base.

Council recognizes the importance of supporting agriculture and providing flexibility to the industry as it develops and changes with time. As part of this support, the County has amended the Municipal Development Plan to allow first parcels out on any quarter section. In addition, we have implemented Policy 411, which reduces the servicing requirements for agricultural subdivisions. Council also adopted the Agriculture Master Plan. We welcome its recommendations to allow a greater variation in parcel size, simplifying the requirements for agricultural subdivision, and to reduce the cost and time of subdivision by removing the need to redesignate (re-zone). At the same time, Council has an obligation to treat all its residents as equal partners and cannot confer special considerations on any one group.

Additional Information

- To view the Agricultural Master Plan visit www.rockyview.ca.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (5.A)

The development process for Rocky View County's Agricultural Master Plan must include significant opportunities for agricultural landowners to have undiluted input to Rocky View Council.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Multiple opportunities for public input have been provided during preparation of the Agricultural Master Plan. These include focus groups, community open houses, information sessions, multiple surveys, and a website dedicated to the plan. These approaches do not limit residents from directly contacting their Councillor for informal discussion. Council welcomes informal one-on-one public input or more formal input at committee meetings or public hearings.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (5.B)

Where different land uses such as agricultural operations and country residential development abut, the onus should be on the developing party to create a natural/ecological buffer area/space between the two different land use types.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees the onus should rest on the proponent of new development to provide an effective buffer within the proponent's land. However, Council recognizes each situation may be unique in terms of scale and land use, therefore, the appropriate buffering method should be determined at the project proposal stage.

This issue is not directly addressed in the County's Municipal Development Plan; however, policy 4.2 discourages intrusive or incompatible land uses in predominantly agricultural areas of the municipality. The Agriculture Master Plan (AMP) includes several recommendations related to land use planning and mitigation, which address things such as responsibility for provision of buffers (the developer) and buffering techniques. The AMP will be a foundation document feeding into a rewrite of the Municipal Development Plan.

The County's Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDP) created with neighbouring municipalities address protection of agricultural land and land-use transition. Future IDPs will increase the emphasis on these topics.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (5.C)

Rocky View County should review its policies, regulations and permitting systems with a view to facilitating enhanced on-farm development opportunities, value-added initiatives and small business generation.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees. We supported and adopted the Agriculture Master Plan (AMP). A major intent of the plan is to support diversification of the industry. One goal is to improve the regulatory framework and facilitate more on farm business opportunities. Recommendations include: allowing farm-gate sales, increasing opportunities for home-based business related to agriculture, and allowing small scale agricultural processing on existing agricultural parcels.

The AMP recommendations will be implemented through an updated Municipal Development Plan; changes to the Land Use Bylaw; and other initiatives by the Agricultural Services Department.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (5.D)

The onus must not be on agricultural operators to provide “open spaces” for the benefit of their country-residential or urban neighbours.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Although this perception may exist we believe it to be a communication problem, as the County does not require agricultural landowners to provide open space for residential landowners or for urban neighbours. The recently adopted Parks and Open Space Master Plan and the Growth Management Strategy does not include privately owned land in the open space definition.

Converting private land to public open space is only considered when a residential or business subdivision is proposed. In these cases, any public land that is dedicated as open space is identified as municipal reserves (as required by the Municipal Government Act), and are allocated from the parcel proposed for development.

Additional Information

- To view the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, visit www.rockyview.ca.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (5.E)

To support and facilitate ongoing agricultural operations in Rocky View County, road infrastructure should be built and maintained to a level that will support the safe and timely movement of agricultural equipment and loads.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Construction and maintenance of roads is the most costly item in the County's budget, accounting for approximately 50 per cent. Council recognizes the importance of road infrastructure for the agriculture industry and attempts to keep up with the demands equipment places on the road network. Road infrastructure is one of the four key priority areas in the Corporate Strategy.

Council supports recommendations of the Agriculture Master Plan, which calls for enhanced subgrade, improved levels of service, and improved connectivity. To the best of our financial ability, we will implement this recommendation.

Additional Information

- To view Council's Corporate Strategy, visit www.rockyview.ca.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (5.F)

An education program should be developed for members of the public moving into agrarian areas of the County on "what to expect" when living next to an agricultural operation and promoting the importance of Rocky View County's agricultural base.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

The County produces "Code of the West" brochures, which describe the benefits, challenges, and responsibilities of living in a rural area. We agree with recommendations of the Agriculture Master Plan that distribution of this information should be improved. At the same time, Council believes the farm community must be aware of the impacts of residential subdivision on agricultural areas.

Additional Information

- To view the Code of the West, visit www.rockyview.ca.

SECTION 6.0

FINANCE/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. The marketplace should be the primary driver of future commercial/industrial development in Rocky View.
- ii. Rocky View currently has a lower than average amount of commercial/industrial assessment (see Financial Sustainability section) compared to other urban municipalities.
- iii. The provision of infrastructure within a commercial/industrial development should be the responsibility of the developer.
- iv. Municipal transportation infrastructure that links commercial/industrial development to the larger community needs to be planned and upgraded by the County on a proactive basis to sustain existing development and to handle any increase in intensity of development.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Fiscal sustainability and continued economic development of Rocky View is important to Council. Decisions made today will impact the municipality far into the future. Council agrees the marketplace will be the primary driver of commercial/industrial development; however, Rocky View can make the County an attractive place for businesses to locate.

Council is developing goals and tools to ensure it has the best information available when making financial and economic development decisions. These include:

- i. A commitment to steadily decreasing municipal debt.
- ii. Establishing an optimal residential/non-residential tax split while remaining attractive to our commercial and industrial residents.
- iii. A review of development fees and levies to ensure they fully recover our costs.
- iv. Development of a financial impact model to demonstrate the affect development will have on county finances.

Implementation of the goals and tools outlined above will be monitored through performance measures to ensure the fiscal and economic viability of Rocky View is maintained.

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REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (6.A)

Due to the level of public concern expressed about Rocky View County indebtedness, the County should make every effort to avoid an increase of current indebtedness for projects similar to and including the East Rocky View waste/wastewater project.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council supports this approach. For example, all utility servicing costs for the recently approved CN Rail inter-modal facility are being front ended by the developer. Council has approved a debt policy that is consistent with provincial requirements. The County's debt is approximately 70 per cent of the provincial limit. In addition, County staff is reviewing all offsite levy bylaws to ensure they reflect full cost recovery.

Additional Information

- To view the County's debt policy, visit www.rockyview.ca.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (6.B)

Rocky View County should retain operational control and majority ownership of Aqueduct and the East Rocky View water project.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Rocky View County is currently undergoing an independent review of the merits of owning and operating a utility corporation (Aqueduct). Pending this review and subsequent recommendations, Council will consider our position.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (6.C)

Rocky View Council should direct County staff to prepare a cost/benefit analysis for development projects currently in the planning, development and approval process. The cost/benefit analysis should align with the Cost of Services Study and weigh the lifetime servicing/operational cost of the development to the County versus the projected revenue to the County from the development. Developments with a potential net servicing cost to the County should not be approved.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees with this approach. Council is aware development has associated capital and operating costs and informally takes municipal finances into consideration when making decisions. Council has recently directed County staff to develop a fiscal impact model, which will provide a cost-benefit analysis for proposed developments, and a municipal wide analysis of the tax balance between various land uses. The fiscal analysis will be one of many inputs Council will use when considering a development proposal.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (6.D)

Rocky View Council should appoint a panel to investigate the status of the infrastructure deficit in Rocky View County, to determine whether current spending on maintenance of infrastructure assets is in line with the depreciation of these assets, and to develop a strategy for addressing the infrastructure and/or maintenance deficits.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council recognizes the concern regarding the infrastructure deficit, particularly as it pertains to roads. As part of our Corporate Strategy, we have requested a multi-year capital plan for road construction and maintenance supported by technical data and budget money.

Liabilities and risks assessments are being undertaken as part of the Corporate Strategy; therefore, Council believes a panel is unnecessary at this time. The County currently monitors the status of its infrastructure deficit and depreciation and is exploring methods to communicate this information more effectively.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (6.E)

In the event the provincial government chooses not to allow rural municipalities to levy developers for amenities (i.e. social services, protective services, parks, recreation, transit, recycling, etc.), Rocky View County should research and explore other mechanisms that could be used to achieve the same purpose.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

As recognized by the Task Force, the Province only allows the County to impose levies on certain types of hard infrastructure such as roads and utilities. On two occasions, Council has initiated motions to the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC). These motions request the Province allow municipalities the ability to levy other infrastructure such as fire halls and recreation centres. To date, the legislation has not been changed.

The County currently requests a voluntary recreation contribution with approval of a subdivision application. The requested donation is \$800/acre for commercial development or \$800/door for residential development. These funds are put towards new or expanded recreation amenities. Since its inception in 2005, the County has collected approximately \$447,000. Council continues to pursue other options to obtain additional recreation funds.

Additional Information

- For information on County recreation visit: www.rockyview.ca.
- For information on the AAMDC levy response visit: www.aamdc.com

SECTION 7.0

INFRASTRUCTURE OTHER THAN WATER

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. What is not in the comments may be as telling as what was there. There is no sense of any major demand for the County to provide additional infrastructure.
- ii. The overwhelming number of comments regarding infrastructure related to taxpayer concerns over being burdened with the cost of providing infrastructure and wanting more control over who is deciding how and where infrastructure is needed.
- iii. The two observations above provide an indicator that residents do not want Rocky View to be like an urban center that is expected to provide a full spectrum of infrastructure across its boundaries. Instead, they reveal the more rural attitude of “let me look after myself” and the desire for a means of managing development to ensure there is respect for neighbours/community, the environment and long-term sustainability.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Council agrees with the Task Force observations. Over the past few years, the County has conducted several studies to gain insight on which amenities residents require and how we might meet those requirements. Council believes Rocky View communities should reflect their rural heritage, with fewer services than an urban centre.

Council is looking at creative and cost-effective solutions. Options include partnering with neighbouring urban municipalities for facility development and using voluntary recreation contributions to increase funds available to communities.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (7.A)

Rocky View should avoid becoming like a metropolitan center that is responsible for providing a full spectrum of infrastructure, except in very specific/unique areas.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees with this recommendation. Rocky View does not intend to provide all the services of an urban municipality. In its review of the Growth Management Strategy, Council will consider the level of services the County will provide to the various forms of development. Council will carefully evaluate the costs of providing these amenities with the goal of minimizing the operational cost to the taxpayer by having the benefiting community responsible for upkeep and maintenance. Council supports the development of creative solutions for the provision of services such as partnering with neighbouring municipalities or voluntary recreation contributions.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (7.B)

Rocky View County should create methods whereby landowners can develop their lands in ways that are self sustaining and respectful of adjacent landowners, while providing overall “big picture” direction to development proposals to coordinate infrastructure requirements and sound engineering practices.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees infrastructure coordination is important. It forms part of our approach to assessing and directing development locations. We support developing technical documents such as the servicing strategy, water strategy and master drainage plans, which provide high level development direction. With regard to agricultural land, the Agriculture Master Plan includes recommendations that provide agricultural landowners with greater flexibility on parcel size and business opportunities. When assessing applications, Council and County staff strive to ensure infrastructure like roads and stormwater are coordinated.

SECTION 8.0

OPEN SPACES

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. Having a variety of open spaces is very important to residents of Rocky View.
- ii. Open spaces should be provided where there is housing but not necessarily where people are working.
- iii. Agricultural operators are not willing to preserve their land as open spaces for other peoples' benefit unless they are compensated for the land area left as open space.
- iv. Rocky View County does not currently have a Parks Department. The seven County Recreation Boards are responsible for the determination of open spaces, whether it is dedicated as land or cash in lieu is paid, and these Boards are also responsible for the management of open spaces under their purview. The Recreation Boards need to educate residents on the role they play in managing open space.
- v. The Municipal Government Act in the Province of Alberta compels a person/company subdividing any land over two acres to dedicate 10 per cent of the land area being subdivided as municipal reserve/ open space or pay cash in lieu of dedicating the land. Careful consideration should be given to using the cash in lieu option.
- vi. Ownership of the open space should be in the name of the party or parties maintaining it.
- vii. The maintenance of open space should be paid for by the communities/people that use that open space.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Council recognizes the value of open space to existing and future residents particularly as it relates to residential development. As discussed in the Agricultural section, there is no expectation that agricultural land is to be used as open space, nor is there any County policy promoting the use of agricultural land as open space.

Open space that is not dedicated as municipal reserve remains under the control and responsibility of the local landowners, either through a condominium corporation or a lot-owners association. This land often has restrictions on general public access. Where land is dedicated as municipal reserve for a park or pathway, the general public has access to this land. The majority of County owned parcels are maintained by the County. Where more intensive management is required, (e.g. Langdon), a Special Recreation Tax Levy pays for maintenance. Alternatively, where local homeowners derive a benefit from public land, their homeowners' association may be responsible for maintenance.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (8.A)

Rocky View County should complete an inventory of all open space/parks/municipal reserve under their ownership or control and determine the classification of the various types of open space (this recommendation is currently being carried out as part of the County's Open Spaces initiative).

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees and observes an inventory was completed in support of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan. The inventory is updated on a regular basis and has been captured in the County's internal GIS database. The County provides for a nominal fee air photos and maps showing various GIS data sets, including municipal land.

The County has also completed a policy and procedure to identify and evaluate any surplus County land that could be considered for sale.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (8.B)

Rocky View County should prepare a Report on the amount of funds in the cash in lieu of reserve account, set priorities for utilizing these funds, and develop a decision-making framework to meet those priorities.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

The County keeps a record of the cash-in-lieu funds for each recreation district. These amounts are reported to the local recreation board and are available to the public on request. The use of this money is prioritized by the 10 recreation boards based upon their individual Master Recreation Plans and municipal documents such as the Municipal Needs Assessment. Council is reviewing this model in light of the need to also support larger regional recreational needs.

As background on cash-in-lieu, the Municipal Government Act allows the County, at the time of subdivision, to require dedication of 10 per cent of the subdivided land for a school, park, or pathway. It doing so, Council considers input from various sources (see below 8.C).

If there is no need for a school, park, or pathway, the County has the option of requiring cash-in-lieu of a land dedication. Although not obligated, the County has entered into a voluntary agreement with Rocky View Schools to split cash-in-lieu on a 50/50 basis. The County then allocates the majority of its 50 per cent share to the local recreation district and distributes the balance to the other recreation districts.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (8.C)

As part of its Open Spaces Review, Rocky View County should prepare a report on the function and type of open space in the County, establish criteria for where open space is desired, and specifically set out criteria for when cash in lieu of reserve is a preferred option for meeting the requirements of the Municipal Government Act.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

As part of the terms of reference set by Council, the Parks and Open Space Master Plan addresses the function, type, and desirability of open space, particularly as it relates to connecting the municipality.

There are no set criteria when municipal reserves are dedicated as land or as cash-in-lieu. Council determines this at the time of subdivision, based on:

- i. the proponents plan;
- ii. external stakeholder comments including school boards, applicable recreation boards, Alberta Trail Net, and intermunicipal partners;
- iii. regional needs as defined by existing pathways, Area Structure Plans, and Rocky View County's Parks and Open Space Master Plan;
- iv. administrative recommendation.

SECTION 9.0

PROVINCIAL POLICY CONTEXT – CALGARY REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. The provincial government has clearly stated its intention to require municipalities in the Calgary region to engage in regional planning initiatives. In the Capital Region, regional cooperation has been legislated via the formation of the Capital Region Board.
- ii. The CRP was a key driver of the “growth nodes” concept and the high urban density thresholds contained in the Growth Management Strategy. City of Calgary servicing of the proposed growth nodes hinged on adhering to high urban density thresholds.
- iii. If Rocky View County is to prosper in the future, it needs to hold onto its land base and resist urban annexations. It cannot continue to be a land-bank for its urban neighbours.
- iv. Projections have been made that the Calgary Region will have a population of 2.8 million people in 60-70 years. The Task Force is of the general opinion that these population projection numbers should be re-evaluated.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Rocky View County places great importance on relationships with regional neighbours and the Province. Council's aim is to foster and build these relationships through formal and informal avenues. These avenues include intermunicipal agreements and plans; participation in partnership associations, committees; and collaborations. This broad approach represents a commitment on the part of Rocky View to the betterment of the region and the Province. Our objective is to improve communications with our regional and provincial counterparts in an effort to build understanding rather than partaking in issue-driven communication.

However, Council feels strongly that it also needs to act in the best interests of the County as a whole and the interests of its individual residents. Rocky View County left the Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP) in 2009 due to concerns with the content of the Calgary Metropolitan Plan (CMP). The County's main concerns were the CMP's requirements surrounding density, access to regional servicing, and the proposed double-majority voting system. On July 5, 2011, the current Council reaffirmed these concerns by identifying the benefits and concerns of participating in the CMP. At the same time, Council indicated that it may consider participating in the CRP as an associate or affiliate member. Council stance was reinforced by an Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) position paper on forced regionalization. The AAMDC notes the provincial history of forced regionalization has created as many problems as it solves.

Council has worked cooperatively with its urban neighbours when it comes to discussions about their growth and annexation aspirations.

Council also wonders about the regional population projections and believes that the rate of growth may have slowed in the last few years. Nevertheless, the regional population has increased: from 1996 to 2011 the County's population increased from 19,888 to 36,461. Council understands the Task Force concern about not acting as a land bank for its urban neighbours, but if Rocky View prevents those municipalities from growing, the County may be placed in a position of accepting even more residential growth than was contemplated in the Growth Management Strategy.

Additional Information

- Calgary Regional Partnership: www.calgaryregion.ca
- AAMDC article on forced regionalization:
<http://www.aamdc.com/news-release/500-forced-regionalization>

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (9.A)

Given the current framework of the CRP, the Task Force supports the stand taken by Rocky View County to withdraw from the partnership.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council would like to thank the Reeve's Task Force for their support in this matter. On June 19, 2009, Council voted against the Calgary Metropolitan Plan due to concerns raised by Council and concerns expressed by Rocky View residents. Under policies of the Calgary Metropolitan Plan, the County was unable to remain a member of the Calgary Regional Partnership. Council formally left the partnership in September 2009. Although the County is not a member of the CRP, County staff does attend some of the staff committee meetings as observers.

Council would like to reiterate that the County firmly believes in the importance of intermunicipal and regional relationships as they present opportunities for resource sharing, partnership, collaboration, communication, and good governance.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (9.B)

Rocky View County should initiate a dialogue and cooperation with its rural counterparts in the region to form a "rural bloc" that could counter-act the unacceptable aspects of the current CRP and regional planning frameworks.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Rocky View County communicates regularly with its rural counterparts and has discussed concerns related to the CRP; however, Council feels it is important to communicate with all municipalities in our region, as there are many urban municipalities who share certain County concerns. This network allows Council to build relationships and support while allowing the County to maintain its municipal autonomy and speak directly to County priorities and resident's needs. Council notes that the Town of Crossfield, an urban municipality, has recently withdrawn from the CRP.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (9.C)

Rocky View should only consider returning to the Calgary Regional Partnership table if the terms of reference are re-constituted to provide the necessary balance and weighting of votes to better protect Rocky View's interests and if there is some modification of the density requirements linked to the provision of urban servicing.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council shares the concerns of the Reeve's Task Force regarding the current voting structure and prescribed servicing densities. Council reaffirmed these concerns as part of a CRP update on July 5, 2011. Rocky View does not intend to seek full partnership in the CRP under the current policies and membership structure. Should the CRP implement affiliate membership options, or amend its policies, Council may consider a voluntary membership in order to discuss items that affect the County.

SECTION 10.0

NATURAL RESOURCES

TASK FORCE OBSERVATIONS

- i. There is a need for more certainty around the approval and siting of gravel operations in the County.
- ii. If there is an existing Area Structure Plan that deals with gravel operations or other natural resource extraction, it should be given due consideration.
- iii. The municipal aggregate levy allows Rocky View County to collect \$.25 per tonne for gravel produced in a municipality.
- iv. Rocky View County should continue to work towards obtaining compensation from all types of industry (gravel operators, oil and gas operators etc.) to mitigate the impact of heavy industrial traffic on municipally-owned infrastructure.

COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

Council recognizes the impact aggregate extraction and oil and gas exploration have on adjacent development and the road network. The County's does not regulate the petroleum industry and cannot collect road use payments from the petroleum industry. The County receives from the gravel industry a payment of \$0.25 per tonne of aggregate hauled. This money goes into segregated reserves for road maintenance and not to general revenues.

REEVE'S TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION (10.A)

Rocky View should develop a comprehensive plan and policy on how to deal with gravel resources in the County, the siting and approval of gravel operations, and the mitigation of impacts on surrounding land uses, groundwater resources and residents.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Council agrees gravel policy should be developed Council will consider adding it to the County's long-term objectives and budgeting cycle. It has been the County's experience that the quality and success of gravel-pit operations vary from well-mitigated high-quality operations to eyesores that impact residents. Policy should examine:

- separation of residential development and operating pits
- haul routes and impact on County roads
- impact on water resources
- phasing
- noise
- hours of operation
- air quality
- screening

SECTION 11.0

Appendices

A. WEB LINK SUMMARY

Visit www.rockyview.ca for information on the following:

- Reeve's Task Force Report
- Growth Management Strategy and Report
- Council Roadmap
- Council's Corporate Strategy
- Councillor contact information
- Rocky View County Municipal Development Plan
- Infrastructure and Operations Policy
- Alberta Municipal Affairs Model Process
- Transportation Offsite Bylaw Levy
- Economic development strategy
- Policy 411 - Residential Water and Sewer Requirements
- Rocky View Watershed Groups
- Agricultural Master Plan
- Parks and Open Space Master Plan
- The Code of the West
- County debt policy
- County recreation

Other links:

- Municipal Government Act:
www.qp.alberta.ca
- Calgary Metropolitan Plan:
www.calgaryregion.ca
- Alberta Water Act:
environment.alberta.ca
- Subdivision and Development Regulations:
www.canlii.org
- Bow River Basin Council:
www.brbc.ab.ca
- AAMDC levy response:
www.aamdc.com
- Calgary Regional Partnership:
www.calgaryregion.ca
- AAMDC article on forced regionalization:
<http://www.aamdc.com/news-release/500-forced-regionalization>