



YOU ASKED. WE ANSWERED. TOWN HALL MEETINGS Q & A

We recently completed a week-long series of Town Hall meetings from March 23-28 in community halls throughout our County. Council invited the public to engage with them through community-led agendas, to tell them what was on their minds. Our goal, to keep you informed. Each night, the community was asked to make the agenda.

Below are some of the most asked questions, along with answers. If you were unable to make it to our Town Hall meetings, we invite you to have your questions answered by either calling the County at 403-742-4441, or engaging with us online. Visit our website at www.StettlerCounty.ca and click on 'Let's Talk'. Fill out the form, and we will take it from there.

SHOP/OFFICE COMPLEX

What will the new County Shop/Office cost?

We haven't reached the bid stage yet. We have finished an internal staff level assessment. We have considered what our Municipal government might like in 10, 15 and 40 years from now. We sent out an Expression of Interest and received over 20 applications from across Canada. Council narrowed the list down, and short-listed five potential contractors. Council met with, and interviewed the five potential contractors the first week in April. Council will now narrow the interested parties down to three and receive cost

estimates for management and design of the project. Council will make this decision on who to work with based on their interviews and cost estimates.

What are you building?

We are going to build smart, build with the future in mind, and get the best deal for our dollars. If it makes monetary sense to build in stages, then we will build in stages. If we can save money now, by building the complex together, then that is something we will consider.

Do we have a number in mind?

Obviously, we are hoping with the current economy and obvious interest in this project, that we will be receiving some competitive quotes. We are aware that average shop construction costs run \$200/SF, and office construction is around \$250-\$300/SF.

Why do we need to build anything?

Our current shop is 46 years old. It has some serious deficiencies. In addition to putting \$600,000 into the shop to fix immediate needs, our shop assessment determined a minimum of another \$1.5 million in required repairs and upgrades over the next five years.

Why don't you just upgrade the shop?

In addition to the \$1.5 million in 'known' deficiencies we need to correct, there will also



be 'unknowns' that we find along the way. Furthermore, our County 'Yard' is now in the middle of Stettler. Our neighbor to the west is Points West Living, a retirement home. While our County operations often are required to begin very early in the morning, we are now worried about how we are affecting our neighbors. We also have Town noise bylaws to respect. Bringing our large equipment into and out of a busy suburban neighborhood is not only less than ideal, it is also dangerous. Stettler Sports Park is right across the street.

But the office isn't that old, why are you considering an upgrade?

Our office is 26 years old. While it still has lots of life left in it, we have outgrown the space. Since it was planned and built in the 90's, the County has taken on several additional administration duties. We now manage and support the Shirley McClellan Regional Water Services Commission. We manage Stettler Waste Management Authority with transfer stations across the County. We also administer Stettler District Ambulance. We do not manage these additional duties for free. We are paid administration fees to manage these businesses, and take pride in our many efficiencies. We have more staff to support these extra duties.

Additionally, we are more computerized, digital and are proud to be leading edge in the determination of becoming paperless. With technology, comes staff to manage it. We are only considering building a Complex to continue our efficiencies if the numbers make sense. Furthermore, if we all move, we are then able to put our current site up for sale. All of these things will be considered.

What will you do with the old site?

If the decision is made that financially, the best choice is to build a County Complex in one stage, then our current 17 acre site in town which has been appraised at \$3.5 million, would be put up for sale. If it is not financially viable to build the Complex in one stage, then a shop would be built with office phases planned for future additions, and administration would stay put in our current building. This would mean we could not sell the current County site, and we would be operating two County sites for the time being. The decision to move everyone out of town at the same time would be an economic decision, our primary focus is a shop.

Will you have to reclaim the land at the old site?

The responsibility to reclaim our current site is something we have, not a result of us building or not building. It is required, and we will complete our due diligence, and thoughtfully reclaim the lands accordingly to environmental assessments, once completed.

How much did you pay for the new site?

We paid approximately \$4,000/acre for our 77 acre parcel.

Do you need that much land?

It was sold to us as a 77 acre parcel for a good price. We investigated several sites, and this was the best location, for the best price. After covering all the County's needs, we will consider future development or ideas for development of the remaining lands.



Q & A CONTINUED...

Where will the money come from? With our current economy, should we be building?

Construction is always best done when interest rates are low. We will consider borrowing costs after we receive estimates. If we are building a County Complex we also have the asset of our current site. The County has other land assets which we are considering selling. We have reserves, some earmarked for new construction and shop upgrades. Once project costs are determined, we will be able to consider all of these options.

How much do you have in reserves?

We have \$14 million in reserves, some earmarked for other projects.

How long of a term can you get on a low interest loan for the County?

Rates are at 2.7% for 30 years.

Following the conclusion of our Town Hall meetings, Council made the motion to proceed with the shop.

OTHER ISSUES BROUGHT FORWARD

Who is in charge of recycling?

We are struggling with the delivery of providing recycling for our area. Unfortunately, there are limited options to provide recycling in our current marketplace. Stettler Waste Management Authority's priority, as set out in their Strategic Plan is to Increase Diversion from our Landfills by fostering and encouraging Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. SWMA members are working hard to come up with alternative plans to support positive recycling programs for our future.

Stray Cats

The cost to spay a cat is around \$200. An epidemic of dropping cats in the County is a result of this high cost. Has the County considered this problem, and why don't we have or sponsor spay/neuter clinics in the County of Stettler?

Council will discuss this issue, and consider all costs and options of this request.

Explain what the loss of bridge funding means to the County?

Since we lost bridge funding through the Provincial Government, we are on our own. We do have aging bridges. If we lost all of our bridges tomorrow, it would cost \$36 million to us to replace them.

Why aren't road bans put on when it is wet (like summer 2014)?

Road bans are put in place when the frost is coming out of the ground. We monitor road conditions very closely and carefully. If needed, road bans are implemented. Farmers and transporters rely on the ability to move and transport their livestock and goods to make a living. We have to consider everything and everyone.

Do we have any pull with Alberta Transportation? We need to be able to move our grain when they call our grain. Road bans make it impossible.

Council will lobby Alberta Transportation on grain farmers' behalf.

Why is there dirt in our gravel?

We have gravel coming from four different pits. We are using a modified specification 420 to eliminate finds (dirt) on the bottom end. We always try to get a proper mix of gravel before we spread. However, there is always some sluffing on the gravel piles,

Why is it important to engage with us?

In December 2014 we visited Erskine to hear what was on our ratepayers minds. It was at this public meeting we were informed of an issue with Engine Retarder brakes being used along Highway 12 affecting peaceful life in Erskine.

We did not know this was an issue for Erskine residents before this meeting.

We were able to lobby Alberta Transportation on Erskine's behalf, and are proud to report very large signs have now been installed at either end of Erskine prohibiting the use of Engine Retarder brakes. Let your voice be heard. We're listening.

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Q & A CONTINUED...

and sometimes we get a bad scoop. We have been stockpiling all winter so we have a good reserve in place to meet our needs. We have an independent tester. All of the gravel going onto our roads meets the specifications. Gravel coming out of the Handhills pit is harder, but it is also more expensive. If you have a problem with gravel, please contact our office at 403-742-4441.

Do you winter gravel?

We have tried winter graveling, but we tend to lose some of the gravel in the snowplowing. There are pros and cons to doing this. If conditions warranted it, we would.

Are you putting a crown on the roads?

We endeavor to keep a 3% crown on all of our roads. Slowly, through maintenance, lips develop on the edges of the road. These need to be brought in to maintain a crown. To reestablish a crown you have to rebuild it. This cannot be done with gravel. Years ago, gravel was a little skinny and our roads suffered. These days our vehicles are bigger, heavier and moving faster. There is more traffic. Our school buses are empty and everyone is driving. There is more wear and tear on our roads. We are always aiming for the perfect road (with a 3%-5% crown). Our focus will be to take the lips off the edges and repair the crowns. This will take time.

Why is there no gravel on my road?

Please remember, the faster you travel on our roads, the more gravel you are flipping off of it. Our gravel budget is \$2.5 million for 2015. Roads and road maintenance make up 68% of the County budget. They are a priority. We currently are operating a comprehensive three year gravel program. Please refer to our website for a map of which roads will get coverage in 2015. As always, problem areas,

high traffic areas and ratepayer concerns will be addressed. If you have a problem, or feel you have been missed in our program, please contact us at 403-742-4441, or on our website at www.StettlerCounty.ca.

How can I get water to my farm?

The County has a policy to offer water to residences within one mile of our line. There is a \$10,000 hook up fee which can be paid in installments. If there are pockets of demand, and you have five or six neighbors in an area wanting water from the line, please contact us and cost estimates for construction can be looked at. We will always do our best to reach you.

Why do I pay so much for my acreage taxes?

For acreages the land is assessed at market land values which is determined by sales that have taken place up to June 30 of the previous year. Property sales can vary in the County, running between \$300,000.00 to \$750,000.00 depending how close the parcel is to Stettler. The taxes for acreages use the residential mill rate and is based on assessment of what was on the property as of December 31, 2014. All buildings are assessed on acreages.

Farm property (farmland) is assessed based on the productivity of the land where the province has set the formula or farmland rates and this type of land receives a separate mill rate. Where the residence is located receives a three acre site that is assessed at market land values and the balance of the quarter is assessed at farmland rates. The residence and the three acre site receive the residential mill rate. Farm residences can receive an exemption on the residences provided that they have the land base which is made up of their total farmland assessment.

Q & A CONTINUED...

Exemption on the first residence can receive up to a maximum of \$61,540 exemption and additional residences can receive \$30,770 exemption provided they have the land base. Attached garages are assessed on farm units.

Why don't we have a bylaw for cutting down trees?

This is something Council had not considered before. After a bit of research, our Director of Agricultural Services has found the issue of deforestation does fall under the Agricultural Services Board Soil Conservation Act. We are researching this idea further, and it will be brought up through our Agricultural Services Board.

Do you patch gravel?

Yes. We do spot gravel where it does not hold.

Why don't you spray the ditch after you brush it?

We do have a spraying program attached to our brushing program. If you don't spray it after you brush it will come up thicker. We have addressed the problem of these jobs not being completed together in a timely manner. You should see a noticeable difference in this program.

What is the PAWC program?

PAWC stands for Priority Area Weed Control. Currently we are in year two of enforcing weed control of Absinthe Wormwood, a noxious weed, in the following five Townships: 35-17; 36-21; 38:17; Rochon Sands Estates and 41-17. If your land falls within these Townships you will have received a letter from us. If you are interested in learning more about the PAWC program, please call Agricultural Services at 403.742.4441.

Why are you using carbide blades on the graders? Are carbide tips or standard/straight blades better?

We respect our grader operators ability to choose the best tool for the job. Just like any craftsman,

he will have his favorite tool for doing the job. We respect their decisions.

When can we have sewage in Red Willow?

A number of years ago we constructed a lagoon. We had plans for a collection system, but the cost per household was very high. It was too costly for residents to bear and it is tough to get grants for water and sewer. This is still in our long-term plan, dependant on funding. Presently sewer and water grants have been significantly cut back.

Could we charge more for others to dump in Red Willow lagoon and use these funds to offset and help fund sewer service?

Council will look into this option.

Can we get fire hydrants in Red Willow?

This would require a water reservoir and at this time it is not in the future plans.

What is Council doing to foster rural County Sustainability?

This is a province-wide problem. We have to encourage our kids to come back to their roots. We have to advocate for better internet service, that is a big deal to the youth, almost as big as the gravel. Before we attract people, we need to attract industry to our area.

We would like to thank everyone who came out to our week of Town Hall meetings. We heard new issues to address and good ideas to follow up on. Please continue to let your voices be heard. We are listening. Use our Ratepayer Request line at 403-742-4441, or submit your questions or concerns through our website at www.StettlerCounty.ca and click on 'Submit a Request'.