

FEBRUARY 12TH COUNCIL UPDATE

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DIVISION 4 SOLAR FARM APPLICATION HELD AT THIRD READING

An application to create a solar farm spanning six quarter-sections in Division 4 was held at third reading. The proposal, located close to Indus, will create the largest solar farm in Canada. Administration found the application to be compliant with policy.

Solar farms are a new concept to the County. To accommodate the request, the term “solar farm” must be added to the list of land uses under ‘Ranch and Farm’, which the land is currently zoned.

There was debate as to whether a solar farm should be considered as an agricultural or industrial pursuit. Administration believed the designation should maintain its Ranch and Farm status given that the land itself will not be altered and can easily be returned to agricultural at the end of the solar farm’s lifespan (20-40 years).

Questions also arose around how the solar farm would be decommissioned, and whether the land could still maintain some of its agricultural use while the solar farm was operational. It was determined that answers to these questions would be provided at subdivision.

All but Councillors Kissel and Gautreau supported the first two readings. Councillor Schule then made a motion to request that Council become the development authority over the application. His motion was approved unanimously.

For third reading to be successful, a motion requires unanimous consent. It failed as Councillor Hanson wanted additional information about how the County would tax the operation – would it be agricultural or industrial tax rates (the potential difference is hundreds of thousands of dollars). Hanson’s motion requesting the additional tax information failed 5-4, with only Hanson, Kissel, Gautreau and I in support. The application will come back for final reading on February 26th.

EAST BALZAC HIGH PLAINS DEVELOPMENT OUTLINE PLAN APPROVED

An application to approve the outline plan for Stage 4 and 5 of the High Plains' development in East Balzac was approved unanimously. The proposal sought amendments to both the Balzac East Area Structure Plan and the High Plains Conceptual Scheme. Administration deemed the application to be compliant with policy.

The application sought to have two quarter sections redesignated from Ranch and Farm to Industrial Activity District (I-AD) and Public Service District. Under an I-AD designation, the lands are intended for 'a range of industrial activity, including such activity that may have off-site nuisance impacts and the support services that may be associated with such activity.' Administration stated that the proposed land use is consistent with the Balzac East Area Structure Plan, which considers this area to be suitable for industrial and business uses that require larger lots and a reduced level of municipal services.

The applicant asked for a relaxation on the height restriction under the concept scheme, citing that 10m is insufficient considering the changing dynamics of warehousing. This was supported by Council. However, the applicant also wanted a setback relaxation to the current 50m from the Highway. It was determined that the 50m setback was not within Council's authority, that decision would have to be made by Alberta Transportation.

BEARSPAW'S INDIGO HILLS APPLICATION HELD AT THIRD READING

An application to redesignate the SE quarter section of Lochend Rd and TWP Rd 262 was held at third reading. The application sought to create 55 two-acre lots through an adjustment to the Bearspaw Area Structure Plan (BASP) and the approval of the Indigo Hills conceptual scheme. Administration stated the application was compliant with policy.

The application received over 50 letters of opposition and two letters of support. Those in opposition cited concerns over traffic, potential negative impacts on existing wells, wastewater and stormwater management, phasing under current policy, and wildlife.

Under the BASP, an important element of a conceptual scheme is the requirement to engage the public. The intent of these public engagement sessions is to make surrounding neighbours aware of the proposal and receive community feedback and buy-in. While the applicants claimed they had held these sessions and had addressed the feedback received, the amount of opposition indicated otherwise.

As a Councillor, my primary role is to not only ensure that an application follows policy, I must also respect the wishes of the community. When an application receives such overwhelming opposition, it cannot be taken lightly or disregarded. As such, I recommended refusal of the application.

My motion was supported 5-4 with support coming from Councillors Hanson, Henn and Kissel. I then made a second motion to hold the application at first reading and send the applicant back to work with the community to see if they would be able to address some of the concerns

raised. However, there was no appetite from the majority on Council who felt that the developer had done what was required of him. As such, I was only supported by Councillors Kissel and Hanson.

I truly believe that as Councillors our first priority is our residents, as such I held the application at third reading in the hopes that my fellow councillors would enjoy a sober second thought when the application returns on February 26th.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES FUNDING INCREASED

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) provides funding to programs that improve the social well-being of residents in the County. The program is funded 80% by the Province and a minimum of 20% by municipalities through a cost sharing agreement. Since 2000, the demand for FCSS funding has increased dramatically and prioritizing which programs to recommend for FCSS funding is becoming increasingly difficult.

The FCSS Board approves FCSS grants within the overall FCSS budget as determined by Council. During budget deliberations, Council requested that Administration review the grant funding formula.

For 2019, the gap between the funding requests and the actual grant funding available was approximately \$170,364. To address this identified gap, a request was made to change the cost-sharing agreement to reflect a 75:25 provincial/municipal contribution split. This would increase funding by \$71, 200 per year.

HWY 566 AND RANGE RD 11 IMPROVEMENTS

The County and Alberta Transportation have agreed, in principle, to enter into a cost sharing agreement for the upgrade of Highway 566 at Range Road 11 for the purposes of improving traffic flow in the area of West Balzac. The intended solution is to widen the road in and create a traffic circle.

The County and Alberta Transportation will enter into a cost sharing agreement for this work. The County will be responsible for 25% of project-related costs (\$900,000) and the Province will contribute the remaining 75% (\$2.7 Million). The Province will oversee project delivery and communications.

The County's portion will take \$600,000 from the Tax Stabilization Fund and \$300,000 from the Transportation Off-Site Levy Reserve. This is an intersection with known traffic issues. Recently a 4-way stop was introduced, however, all this has created is gridlock. A traffic circle should ameliorate this and reinstate traffic flow.

BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS FOR COUNCILLOR REMUNERATION AND REORGANIZATIONAL COSTS

Administration made a request to increase to the 2019 budget by \$136,200 to offset changes to Council's remuneration through the Federal Government's elimination of the Municipal Officer's Expense Allowance program.

Originally created to cover the expenses of public service work, these 'non-accountable allowances' were eliminated as part of the 2017 federal budget. The federal government eliminated these allowances (essentially one-third of a councillor's take home pay) by merging them with income. In essence, the federal government has downloaded the cost onto the municipal level.

To make things clear, Council has not received a raise. My biweekly take home pay with the one-third allowance was \$2,217.58. With the adjustment, my bi-weekly take home pay is \$2,219.08.

In 2018, under the direction of the Interim Chief Administrative Officer, Rick McDonald, a corporate re-organization review was undertaken. This Organizational restructuring was endorsed by Council on October 16, 2018. The redesign identified areas of resource deficiency, and it was determined that a budget increase of \$527,700 was required to fund salary, benefits, and related staffing costs (training, materials, and services). The request was supported unanimously.

EMERGENT MOTION TO INCREASE STAFFING IN LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

A request by Administration to increase the Legislative Services Department by two records clerks was approved unanimously. The need for the positions comes as a response to the increasing number of Freedom of Information and Privacy (FOIP) requests over the past number of years.

Council asked if it would be possible to make some of the information that is routinely FOIPed available to the public. Insinuations were also made by some councillors that requests were coming from a handful of requestees, however, these were deemed unfounded. Requests are common to municipalities and come from varying sources ranging from developers to lawyers to residents and cover a wide array of topics.

GRANT KAISER ANNOUNCED AS FOURTH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As part of the Organizational review, Rick McDonald had suggested that in addition to having three Executive Directors, the County should also create a position of Deputy CAO to assist the CAO in the day-to-day running of the organization. However, our new CAO, Al Hoggan decided that given the relatively small size of our municipality, the position was unnecessary and monies would be best allocated to a fourth Executive Director. As such, it was announced that Grant Kaiser will be the Executive Director of Community and Business Connections. Kaiser was previously our Director of Marketing and Communications.

FIREARMS BYLAW REVIEW

Deputy Reeve Schule and Councillor Henn brought forward their motion to amend the Firearms bylaw. The goal of their motion is to amend the current bylaw that was adopted last year, to only regulate the use of Firearms as defined in section 2 of the Criminal Code of Canada and not

regulate the use of Bows, Crossbows, or any other device that propels a projectile, as is currently defined in the bylaw.

The issue will be debated in Council on February 26th.