



Village of Rycroft

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VIABILITY REVIEW 62 RECOMMENDATIONS LAST UPDATE: March 21, 2023

Below is “Appendix G: Recommendations for the Long-Term Sustainability of the Village of Rycroft”, and an update to what Council has accomplished to date since they were published in December 2017:

SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

1. consider the issues identified in the Viability Plan and all the recommendations of the Viability Review Team, and adopt a written plan of how council intends to implement the recommendations in the first month following acceptance of the Viability Review report by the Minister of Municipal Affairs;

Council engaged Dr. Gord McIntosh to lead them through a Strategic Planning Session to determine their priorities and develop a plan in January 2018, September 2018, October 2019, and December 2021. In November 2022 the Strategic Planning Session was lead by the CAO. The strategic plan and updates appear on the Regular Council meeting agenda twice per month.

This living document of the 62 recommendations from the Viability Review was created and has been updated as things progress, with the most recent copy posted on the webpage for the public’s information. An annual strategic plan is in place and is available at every Council meeting.

An update was sent to the Minister in November 2018, and again in March 2019. Council received approval from the Minister for their progress in June 2019 and followed up with a meeting with the Minister at AUMA in September 2019. Updates were also approved before June 2020, 2021, and 2022. This is the final update report as required, as the annual updates were requested until 2023.

Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

2. complete an assessment of all new legislative requirements resulting from the review of the Municipal Government Act, and ensure all new requirements are planned and budgeted for including councillor training, a public participation policy, a municipal development plan, an intermunicipal development plan and an intermunicipal collaboration framework;

5 Council members attended a “Muni’s 101” course in Peace River in January 2018. Councillors have also attended courses in the areas of Emergency Management, Planning and Development, Economic Development, 13 Ways to Kill a Community Workshop, various other EOEP courses, and have attended G5 Meetings regularly with Regional partners.

A new Code of Conduct Bylaw was approved at the June 6/18 regular meeting of Council. A Public Participation Policy was approved at the regular meeting of Council on June 19/18.

The MD of Spirit River, Town of Spirit River, and Village of Rycroft hired ISL Engineering through a competitive bid process to update the Land Use Bylaws, Municipal Development Plans, and Intermunicipal Development Plans. All plans were approved by bylaw in December 2019.

An Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework Agreement with the MD of Spirit River was approved by both parties in March 2020.

Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

3. identify various means to communicate with the community including how council and administration will share information to residents on an ongoing basis, and further development of the village website for posting of village bylaws, council agendas and minutes, and explanation of changes in service delivery and utility rates;

All Council meeting minutes since 2018 have appeared on the webpage, once they are approved by Council. Council meeting agenda packages are posted on the website by Friday before the meeting. Information is commonly shared on our Facebook page to alert subscribers to happenings. The Village has a regular weekly page in the Central Peace Signal newspaper, delivered by mail to every resident. A new website was launched in July 2019, and the webpage is updated on a regular basis. Any changes to service delivery or utility rates are advertised and noted in the minutes. The new utility rates in January 2019 and the lowering of the municipal tax rate in June 2019 were well communicated through the webpage, Facebook page, newspaper, and utility bills. If any new methods of communication are presented, we would take advantage of them. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

4. determine and advertise all council meetings and ensure council business can be accomplished without the need to call special meetings except for emergent issues;

Meeting dates are set for the year at the annual organizational meeting, and are advertised in the newspaper, webpage, and the Village Facebook page. It is a goal of Council not to have any Special Council meetings. In fact, Council had called only 2 Special meetings for emergent issues (budget plan and emergency plan water break) both in 2018; Council has not had to call a Special meeting since then. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

5. prior to the next municipal election, develop a nomination package for prospective councillors, and host information sessions on what it means to be an elected official, describe the opportunities and challenges facing the village, how these align with the responsibilities of being a councillor, and encourage residents to consider running for council in the next municipal elections;

Administration has organized an orientation binder including Terms of Reference for all Village committees which was presented to Council at the October 26, 2018 Organizational Meeting. For the 2021 Election, a comprehensive package was created and is available on the webpage for prospective elected officials under the Council Information tab. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

6. consider reducing representation from five councillors to three if in the next municipal general election, nomination day is held over due to insufficient nominations or if council is acclaimed;

There were 7 candidates for 5 positions in the October 2021 Election.

7. complete the review of village bylaws and policies, to ensure that existing bylaws and policies are compliant with current and proposed provincial legislation and that they meet the needs of the village, within 12 months of the report being accepted by the Minister of Municipal Affairs;

Bylaws and Policies are reviewed and updated as required. Council has approved many bylaws and updated all their policies by August 2019, all posted on the webpage. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

8. revisit the 2009 Municipal Corporate review and the 2010 Inspection Report to ensure that the relevant recommendations have been addressed;

The 2009 Municipal Corporate Review, and the 2010 Inspection Report have been addressed and were reviewed at the August 21, 2018 Council meeting. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

9. participate in orientation training following general elections and bi-elections;

5 Council members attended a “Muni’s 101” course in Peace River in January 2018. There was Council orientation training for elected officials made available after the 2021 election, as per the MGA.

10. continue to support and enable councillors to take advantage of training opportunities provided by Municipal Affairs and the provincial associations;

Council participated in MUNI’s 101, Emergency Management for Elected Officials, EOEP Economic Development, Planning and Development 101, AUMA conferences, 13 Ways to Kill a Community Workshop, G5 meetings, “Service Excellence” Leadership Forum, and other training opportunities. Council annually budgets funds for Elected Official training, and future training opportunities will be made available as they are presented. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

11. review and update the 2010 long-term strategic plan; and

A strategic plan for Council was developed in January 2018. This was reviewed and updated at the Strategic Planning session in September 2018. Council adopted a 3-year operating and 10-year capital plan November 2018, and updated annually since. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

12. adopt a Municipal Development Plan and an Intermunicipal Development Plan.

ISL Engineering was the consultant. Both Bylaws was approved at the December 4, 2019 Regular meeting of Council. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

13. continue involvement in regional committees making a significant contribution to the viability of the area and the village;

The Village is involved in several Local and Regional Committees. All Council members regularly attend the G5 meetings when schedules permit. The Boards and Committees list is on the webpage under the Council tab.

14. pursue innovational ways to enhance regional partnerships that would provide programs and services to Rycroft residents in the most effective and efficient manner, and avoid duplication to achieve effective management of the public purse;

The Village works closely with the G5 (Rycroft, Spirit River, MD of Spirit River, Birch Hills County, Saddle Hills County) on the Medical Clinic Administration, Regional Water Project, Emergency Management, and any other regionally beneficial initiatives. As stated, we also updated our planning documents with our partners. We are working with the MD of Spirit River to address the annual flooding situation in the community where, through the ICF agreement, the MD has purchased property and is working on managing the drainage system into the Village with its new development west of the Village.

15. prior to undertaking any major capital projects, the village should consult with neighbouring municipalities to see if there are opportunities to reduce costs by collaborating;

The Village is always working with the G5 partners. We are worked with the MD of Spirit River with the same Engineering consultant (MDP Engineering) towards a strategy to eliminate/reduce the annual flooding impact. The Village has partnered with the Town of Spirit River and the MD of Spirit River to secure an ACP grant to complete and upgrade their critical planning documents. We will watch for future opportunities. The G5 CAOs do meet regularly for lunch/information sharing meetings when possible.

16. in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities, develop an intermunicipal collaboration frameworks that lists services provided by each municipality, shared intermunicipal services, and services provided by third parties;

The ICF with our only ICF partner, the MD of Spirit River was approved by both parties in March 2020.

17. participate in the development of a regional economic strategy that allows for participation from residents, local businesses, and other regional organizations;

The Village does work with the G5 partners when an Economic Development opportunity presents itself. A G5 Economic Development Committee was established, although it has been inactive since the loss of the Saddle Hills County Economic Development Officer position.

We successfully secured a CARES grant and worked with PREDA with the objective to create a functional economic strategy with a concise and doable action list for the municipality to follow to encourage new developments and potential expansions. Council approved the report and provided direction in August 2019.

The MD of Spirit River has taken the lead to create an economic development video presentation for the MD, the Village of Rycroft, and the Town of Spirit River that is to be delivered in the summer of 2023.

18. consider operational efficiencies, increases in the level of services, and potential costs savings that could result with respect to a shared water treatment operator or an agreement for services with a neighbouring municipality; and

The Village has a contract with Aquacor Water and Environmental Inc. (formerly GWST) to provide water services to 2023. The contract was just re-advertised and is on the Council agenda March 21/23 for approval. The Village Public Works Foreman successfully completed tests in January 2019 and is now a certified Level 1 Water/Wastewater Operator. The other Public Works employees are strongly encouraged to work towards their certification.

The G5 Municipalities were successful in securing a grants for the regional water plan, where a raw water line will be constructed from the Peace River, Dunvegan bridge area. An engineering firm was hired to develop a detailed design, and the project is underway. Parties have also worked to determine a governance structure for the future regional water utility.

19. develop contingency plans to address the potential change in revenue.

Council eliminated the Alberta Treasury Branch loan of nearly \$600,000 at the end of November 2018. This will eliminate a ~\$55K annual payment. Council signed a funding agreement with Saddle Hills County in December 2018 guaranteeing an annual funding source of \$500,000 for the next four years. Council recently renewed the agreement for a one year period.

A reserve fund policy was adopted in September 2018 to ensure funds are put away for future capital needs. Council changed the utility rate schedule effective January 2019 so that the water and sewer utilities are to be cost recovery, and that will increase monthly cash flow for operations. Council updates the capital budget plan every year, and analyzes costs vs benefits. All available grant opportunities are considered. Council has consistently added to the Village reserve fund accounts.

OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

20. determine if staffing is at an appropriate level for village services and programs as part of the annual budget process, complete the long-term staffing plan, and develop a staff succession plan;

Council evaluates all services and programs at the annual strategic planning meeting and subsequent budget meetings as an ongoing exercise. Administration and Public works have daily and monthly staff meetings to share information, working towards developing staff for succession planning.

21. continue to include resources for staff training in the annual village budget; and

Every department has and expends an annual training budget.

22. develop and implement a records management and retention policy to ensure that village records are properly maintained and stored.

Records Retention and Disposal Bylaw 87-08 is in place. Council will review and update as necessary. Major purging of files occurred in August 2018, and annually after that, and is now current.

FINANCIAL STABILITY

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

23. based on legislative requirements resulting from the review of the Municipal Government Act, adopt a three-year operating plan and a five-year capital plan updating them annually;

2019 to 2021 provisional operational budget and 2019 to 2028 capital budget was adopted at the November 27, 2018 Council meeting, then updated annually. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

24. as part of the annual budget process, undertake a service capacity review to align program and service levels, council and residents' expectations, and available resources and funding;

Ongoing: Council considers all services and service levels as part of the annual budget process.

25. provide information to village residents and property owners through a year-end report outlining how the previous year's revenues, including property taxes, were expended on village programs and services as part of a strategy for taxpayers to better understand how property tax dollars are spent and the value received from them;

Annual Financial Statements are approved in April and are public information posted on the website. The revenues and expenditures information is clearly laid out in the annual budget meeting package, and always available for review. The budgets are also updated and placed on the webpage under the Financial tab.

26. establish a Reserve Fund Policy to ensure that monies are available should an unexpected event occur that:
- a. includes an infrastructure reserve funded through a combination of revenue from property taxes, additional taxes, and user fees;
 - b. clearly defines for what purposes the infrastructure reserve and operating reserve can be used; and
 - c. provides a mechanism for council to review reserve levels on an annual basis to ensure adequate levels are maintained;

Reserve accounts were established, and new policy was adopted by Council at the September 18, 2018 regular meeting of Council. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

27. review financial reports on a quarterly basis, in accordance with established financial procedures and release the reports to the village residents in council meeting agenda materials;

A quarterly report appears on the Council meeting agenda for Council's approval. Standard practice is in place. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

28. as part of the annual budget process, complete a service capacity review to align service levels and council expectations with resources and funding by reviewing:

- a. programs and services the municipality provides or could provide;
- b. current service levels and potential service levels; and
- c. resources required to provide the services;

Council considers all services and service levels as part of the annual budget process. This is an ongoing practice.

29. maintain the contracted assessment services;

The contract with Northern Sunrise County expired in April 2019, then was renewed for another 3 years from May 2019 to 2022; and another 3 year contract was signed for 2023 to 2026. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

30. review the property tax due dates and penalty schedules to be comparable with neighbouring urban municipalities;

Property tax notices are sent out in April/May and are due at the end of June. Our closest neighbouring urban municipality, the Town of Spirit River, has a tax payment date in August. We find our dates consistent with most urban municipalities and conducive to a better cash flow system for us. Penalty dates for 2020 were adjusted due to Provincial Government order. Penalty dates were returned to where they were historically for 2021 taxes, and future.

31. continue to follow the provincially legislated tax recovery process;

A Tax Sale was held October 2018 and November 2019. 12 properties were available. As no bidders attended, all defaulted to the Village. The Village continues to take ownership in order to have some control over their re-assignment. The Village has Realtors and has advertised the properties for sale. There was no tax sale in 2020. The Village gained another property at the 2021 Tax Sale, and another in the 2022 Tax Sale.

32. set up allowances for unpaid taxes if necessary;

The Village is set up for allowances for unpaid taxes, as noted in the annual financial statements. Tax Installment Payment Plan for residents and businesses is in place. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

33. review revenue sources to ensure that a proper balance between property taxes, special taxes, local improvement taxes, franchise fees, and user fees exists;

Council has revised utility rates to become cost recovery starting in January 2019. Council will review the revenue sources again in the next budget cycle. Council increased the ATCO Electric Franchise Fee from 6 to 7% in April 2020.

34. develop a policy for imposing special taxes and local improvement taxes properties in the village for projects in the village including imposing the tax in respect of property in an area that will benefit from a specific service, purpose, or project and not impose the tax on the whole village;

Local Improvement Tax system is already in practice. A Local Improvement Tax policy was adopted by Council at the May 21, 2019 regular meeting of Council. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

35. develop a policy that describes how revenues from franchise fees will be expended; and

In a survey of regional municipalities, no one has a policy. All revenues contribute to the general operating fund. Franchise fees are reviewed annually. No policy will be developed at this time.

36. reconcile all outstanding grant funding, within three months of this report being approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, to determine the current state of the village finances and project funding for future capital upgrades and projects.

On July 4, 2018 we received MSI Capital funds from 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018; later received 2018 MSI Operating funds; and 2017 Gas Tax Funds. Paperwork was amended for the past MSI and Gas Tax Funds, and all projects and SFEs are updated regularly.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

37. develop and adopt a ten-year rolling capital plan that:

- a. prioritizes the identified upgrades in the infrastructure audit in accordance with the following criteria: public health, environmental impacts, public safety, present level of service, and degree of maintenance required; and
- b. includes proposed revenue sources balanced between property taxes, fees for services, utility reserves, and grant funding;

10-year capital plan was updated in July, then updated and adopted on November 27, 2018 with all requirements. It is updated annually during the budget planning process, with expense plan and funding sources. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

38. ensure that all maintenance, repairs, or replacement of mechanical, electrical, or structural components of municipal buildings and facilities is completed by a qualified trades person;

Where a specialist is required, they will do the work.

39. develop an asset management plan including policy and procedures for annual review; and

An asset inventory has been collected and is evaluated annually.

40. ensure that all municipal buildings are compliant with current Occupational Health and Safety requirements.

No non-compliance discovered to date. Regular inspections are on-going.

SERVICE DELIVERY

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

41. develop a long-term utility operations and maintenance plan and ensure it is followed through policy;

Included in the operational and capital budget. An annual utility operations and maintenance plan is in the Public Works work plan. Utility rates are adjusted in the Master Rates bylaw, in effect in January 2019, and reviewed annually.

42. consider different options for service delivery and determine how water and wastewater services will be provided and funded prior to the contract with Aquatera ending in 2019;

The Aquatera Water Services contract was terminated. The Aquacor (formerly GWST) contract ends in 2023. We advertised and Council will determine its direction at the March 21, 2023 Regular Council Meeting. Council adopted new utility rates so that water, sewer, and solid waste are all at cost recovery plus starting January 2019.

The Village Public Works Foreman successfully completed tests in January 2019 and is now a certified Level 1 Water/Wastewater Operator. The Assistant Foreman is also working towards his certification.

43. include solid waste management in the annual service capacity review during the budget process;

The solid waste management service is reviewed by Council at budget time. GFL Environmental had the contract to December 2020. Then the contract was publicly advertised and received 3 bids. Then we subsequently renewed again for another 5 years after the incumbent contractor - GFL Environmental won the bid.

44. continue to review utility rates annually as part of the budget process including the rate structure for non-residential and commercial use;

New rates adopted starting January 2019. Council reviews the rates annually at budget time.

45. consider a utility fee structure based on a flat administration fee, reserve contributions for future infrastructure projects, funding of amortization expenses, and a cubic metre consumption fee that also funds;

A utility fee structure based on a flat administration fee, reserve contributions for future infrastructure projects, funding of amortization expenses, and a cubic metre consumption fee were considered and adopted at the November 7, 2018 regular meeting of Council. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

46. develop a policy that any surplus funds collected through utility billing is transferred to capital reserves for future capital projects associated with the utility;

Reserve funds were established by policy in September 2018. Council has consistently over contributed to utility reserve funds annually in order to build healthy reserve accounts.

47. complete review of the policies for road, sidewalk, and property maintenance; and

Council adopted policies in August 2019, and are reviewed as required. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

48. develop a municipal development plan, update the land use bylaw and enter intermunicipal development plan discussions with neighbouring municipalities within 12 months of acceptance of the Viability Plan by the Minister.

Project started in August 2018. 3 Bylaws passed on December 4, 2019. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

49. consider establishment of an economic development committee with a clear mandate that allows for participation from residents, local businesses, and regional organizations;

We were approved for a CARES grant to work with PREDA, with the objective to create a functional economic strategy with a concise and doable action list for the municipality to follow to encourage new developments and potential expansions. The report was approved by Council in August 2019.

The G5 established an Economic Development Committee, with the first meeting in June 2019.

50. continue to celebrate, support, and provide financial assistance to community groups;

We advertise annually for Community grant applications in the Central Peace Signal closing October 15. In 2018, 4 groups submitted requests. All grant applications were approved at the Council Budget meeting November 27, 2018. The same process is carried out annually. Council budgets funds and hands out grants to community organizations that add to the quality of life for people in the region.

51. evaluate financial support for community groups annually as part of the budget process;

This is reviewed by Council in the strategic plan and at budget time. Requests for Community Grant applications are advertised with an October 15 deadline for Council consideration. The return on investment for all grants will be evaluated with reports at the completion of the projects. This is an annual process.

52. develop a policy and procedure, including an application process, for gifts to community groups including financial assistance and gifts in-kind, such as water services, for operations and maintenance and capital funding;

Policy and procedure are in place. Requests for Community Grant applications are advertised annually with an October 15 deadline and are reviewed by Council at budget time. Ad hoc requests are considered by Council on Council meeting agendas.

53. seek legal and risk management advice in respect to current practices of operations and maintenance of village owned properties by volunteers;

An insurance valuation inspection was completed in 2018. Recommendations were followed up and completed as necessary. Operations use best practices.

54. separate the operation of the library board from that of the village;

The Library Board is its own entity. Council approved a lease for the building in May 2018. Council has an appointed member on the Library Board. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

55. access advice from the Libraries Branch of Municipal Affairs to ensure the library operates in accordance with the Alberta *Libraries Act*;

A Council member is a member on the Rycroft Library Board. The Board got advice and followed the Act when we created the lease in May. Bylaw 194-18 Rycroft Library Board was updated and approved, and again in December 2020. Council appoints all Rycroft Library Board members. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

56. continue participation in the Grande Spirit Foundation;

Council has an appointed member on the Board. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

57. continue to participate in the regional FCSS program; and

Council has an appointed member on the Board, and appoints 2 public members. Council considers this recommendation to have been addressed.

58. celebrate the contribution of community volunteers during volunteer appreciation week.

Council has advertised the Stars of Alberta Volunteer Program on their page in the Central Peace Signal, and on the webpage. Council can budget for this community program.

Risk Management

The Village of Rycroft Council and Administration should:

59. develop a plan to address the possibility of ATB financial demanding payment on the loan;

The ~ \$600,000 ATB loan debt was eliminated at the end of November 2018.

60. continually review Occupational Health and Safety requirements to ensure that the village is compliant with current requirements;

This is an ongoing practice. Administration and staff continually review and inspect to ensure compliancy.

61. consider developing policy for a formal health and safety program; and

Council updated and adopted policy HR.02 Health and Safety in August 2019. Regular monthly joint Health and Safety meetings are included as part of the staff meeting.

62. continue current bylaw law enforcement.

Council has budgeted to retain its contract bylaw services.

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