



Council Highlights

A Strategic Session is a standing Committee of Council for the purpose of reviewing specific municipal matters in an informal meeting setting.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

Portage Pool staff trained Council in CPR and the use of the AED located at various County facilities, in the event of cardiac arrest.

Visitor Information Centre (VIC)

The County's Visitor Information Centre, located at McArthur Place, is currently run by the Lac La Biche and District Chamber of Commerce. The County contracts this service out to the Chamber of Commerce at a cost of \$65,000 per year and also provides the VIC space at McArthur Place. This contract will end in May 2016.

Studies have shown that VICs are an important service that can persuade visitors to stay in communities for a longer period of time by highlighting events and destinations not commonly known. (For example, a visitor arriving in late July may choose to stay longer after learning about the Lac La Biche Pow Wow Days on the first weekend in August.)

Administration presented Council with information on the general requirements for a successful VIC, including:

- Highway or major route access;
- Indoor and outdoor spaces for public use;
- Nearby amenities like walking trails, picnic tables, playgrounds, splash park or beach;
- Clean washrooms;
- Free Wi-Fi;
- Food services, whether vending machines or restaurant;
- RV parking up to 48 hours;
- Water and disposal service for RVs;
- Boat launch;
- Gift shop;
- Outgoing staff.

In 2014, Administration completed a research project to ascertain best practices and locations for a VIC in the County. Some of the potential locations identified by the study (which included public consultation) for VIC sites were:

- The southeast corner of the Highway 36 and 881 intersection;
- The south side of the access road to Alexander Hamilton Park;
- Squirrely's Point;
- McArthur Place.

McArthur Place was identified by the study as the best place for the VIC, which aligned with the input received from public consultation.

After going over the information provided by Administration, Council discussed their desire to have a regional VIC system with a manned site in Lac La Biche and Plamondon as well as unmanned information kiosks in outlying parts of the community (i.e. Rich Lake, etc). This would be part of a long-term solution. In the meantime, Administration will prepare a Request For Proposal (RFP) soliciting Visitor Information Centre services, incorporating the best practices discussed during the Strategic Session.

Local Improvement Options for Rural, Multi-lot Subdivisions

Council directed Administration to develop a policy for local improvement taxes to help bear the cost to surface or resurface existing rural subdivision roadways. (The County requires developers to pay for paving new subdivisions.) A local improvement tax is charged to landowners toward the cost of a construction project—in this case the construction of a road surface—that benefits only one portion of the County, rather than the whole County. As a result, the project is paid for, in whole or in part, by the residents who benefit from the improved service.



Strategic Session
January 19, 2016

To prepare for the development of this Local Improvement Policy, Administration researched the local improvement practices of neighbouring municipalities. Practices varied widely amongst municipalities.

Some municipalities, like the MD of Bonnyville and Athabasca County, fully fund the construction of rural subdivision roadways when budget allows. Mackenzie County has a general local improvement policy where the County pays 70 per cent of the local improvement cost, if initiated by the County. They are currently considering an increase to the portion paid by the landowner, however.

Brazeau, Cypress, Lacombe and Parkland Counties all have local improvement policies for surfacing rural multi-lot subdivisions. The policies set a minimum parcel number (between two and five) and required that the average parcel size be less than 10 acres. At least 50 per cent of the parcels must be occupied, the construction project must represent an increase in service—not a repair—and the request for the project must be initiated by a petition from residents. The local improvement tax is levied over 10 years. Cypress and Lacombe Counties hold the landowners responsible for 100 per cent of the cost of the project. Parkland County charges 60 per cent of the cost to the landowners while Brazeau County charges 40 per cent.

Administration has recommended that County residents not be charged less than 50 per cent of the cost of a local improvement, as this requires the municipality to pass an additional bylaw to spend money on the project. This bylaw must be advertised for 60 days and residents in other areas of the County may petition against the use of tax payer dollars on a local improvement. Any amount 50 per cent or over does not require this process. Administration recommended a 60/40 resident/County ratio.

After discussion, Council directed Administration to conduct further research on the cost of varying levels of surfacing improvements—cold mix, asphalt—and to look into General Municipal Servicing Standards requirements for low volume subdivision roads.

Local Improvement Options For Urban and Rural Roadways and Other Surface Infrastructure

Administration will prepare options and recommendations for the following areas of inquiry. Council will then deliberate and provide direction to Administration for the development of a general local improvement policy (which could include curb, gutter and sidewalk upgrades, lighting and landscaping upgrades and road improvements).

Administration's research will provide varying municipal practices for the following areas:

- What projects will the municipality fund at large?
- What projects will the municipality initiate local improvements for?
- What projects will the municipality refrain from initiating improvements for?
- Does asset condition determine whether the municipality initiates improvements or what the cost sharing will be?
- What percent of the project's total cost will be borne by the landowners? What percent by the municipality?
- Will the cost sharing be different depending on whether the municipality or the landowners initiate the local improvement?
- What type of assessment would be used to calculate tax owed, i.e. parcel assessment, a unit of frontage or a unit of area, and to which type of infrastructure project would it apply?
- Will the age of the infrastructure in question determine whether a local improvement is charged?
- Will applicable taxes be calculated differently for lots that are nonresidential/commercial/industrial/unoccupied or zoned a certain way?
- What extenuating circumstances would exempt a landowner from being subject to the tax, i.e. location/shape/feature/zoning of property prevents property from receiving benefit from the work, or work is required to repair damage caused by underground utility work.
- Over what period of time the tax will be levied?

Options for these questions will be researched by Administration and provided to Council for their discussion and direction at a future Council meeting.