

Division 5 residents, landowners, and business owners,

I thought it was time for an update, including County news and some important information from the AUMA (Alberta Urban Municipalities of Alberta) and the RMA (Rural Municipalities of Alberta) virtual conferences. Please note that this is my interpretation of the information from the Conferences and not the view of Council. I try and provide as accurate a report as I can to keep you in the loop as to what is going on at both our Municipal level and the Provincial level of government.

### County Highlights:

- **COVID 19.** As of 4pm today (November 9<sup>th</sup>) AHS has placed Mountain View County and all our Urban partners with the exception of Olds on watch status (see below). The County continues to remain open to the public and our Council and committees are currently meeting in person, following the AHS guidelines for social distancing. Given the news from AHS, staff will be supported to work from home where possible and masks will be required within the office for both the public and staff. We continue to monitor the situation and take on board all recommendation from AHS. Our field staff are out doing their jobs as always and have been asked to limit their contact with the public and follow the AHS guidelines. The following information was provided by AHS:

At 4pm today, Mountain View County will move back to Watch Status on the [Provincial Relaunch Status Map](#). This includes all municipalities within the County's limits, except for the Town of Olds. I am able to share the following high-level data for the County:

- 15 active cases, for a case rate of 65.5 per 100,000 people;
- 6/15 have a known source of exposure (two are linked to outbreaks);
- 1 case is linked to travel outside of Canada;
- 8/15 have an unknown source of exposure.

Following the announcement on November 6 by Premier Kenney and Dr. Hinshaw, **areas under Watch Status will now have a mandatory 15 person limit on social and family gatherings** - indoors and outdoors - where people are mixing and mingling. This applies to all social gatherings, including but not limited to:

- banquets and award ceremonies;
- wedding or funeral receptions;
- luncheons or potlucks;
- parties: birthday, baby showers, retirement, dinners, backyard BBQs;
- other private social gatherings and functions.

This mandatory measure does not apply to structured events, including but not limited to:

- seated-audience conferences, sports and shows;
- dining in restaurants;
- fitness centres;
- funeral services;
- wedding ceremonies;

- worship services.

Additionally, all residents and visitors of communities on the watch list are recommended to adhere to the following voluntary measures:

- **Limit your cohorts to no more than 3:** your core household, your school, and one other sport or social cohort. Young children who attend child care could be part of 4 cohorts, given that child care settings have not been a high risk for spread.
- **Wear a mask in all indoor work settings,** except when alone in a workspace like an office or cubicle where you are safely distanced from others, or an appropriate barrier is in place.
- **Municipal Development Plan (MDP) Review.** The County passed the MDP back in 2012, and since that time it has served our land use planning well. However, as with every statutory plan, a regular review process should be put in place to ensure that it is evolving with the current needs of the community. Council made the decision in 2019 to open the MDP up to a review and has set the public hearing for the bylaw for November 18<sup>th</sup> at our regular Council meeting. The public hearing allows all our constituents to have input into areas of the plan they feel should be updated or altered. Please review the document on the County website and have your say. Information can be found on the County website at <https://www.mountainviewcounty.com/council-boards-services/resident-participation>
- **Bergen Road Construction Project.** This project has been part of the County's Long-term Infrastructure Plan for the past 4 years. The Contractor has decided to hold off on paving until the spring, as they don't feel that they will be able to get the right conditions at this point. There is some work that they have left to do to ensure the road is ready for the winter. County forces will maintain the road over the winter, with the Contractor taking back over in the spring to complete the paving portion.
- **Financial/Budget.** While Council was able to keep service levels unchanged for 2020 and will endeavor to keep the levels the same for 2021, we must prepare for possible revenue reduction, both through reduced linear tax revenue (predominantly oil and gas related) as well as anticipated reductions in Government grants. Depending on the final decision made by the Government on the Assessment Model Review for linear taxes, the County could lose millions of dollars in tax revenue. When it comes to oil and gas, the province sets the assessment values of linear property while Council has the authority to set the mill rate. Total property tax is a multiplier of assessment value and mill rate, therefore, a drastic reduction in provincial assessment could have an enormous negative impact on our municipal property tax revenue as the linear taxes make up some 60% of our tax base. Historically the County has received approximately \$4 Million through the Municipal Sustainability Initiative Provincial grant. This is an annual capital grant that is distributed to all municipalities (grant value is different for each municipality) to support capital projects, such as the previous Acme Road upgrade and the most recent Bergen Road construction project. We rely heavily on this grant as it provides the funding for most of our capital upgrade road projects and is integral for funding our long-range infrastructure plans. We already know that our bridge replacement program is very underfunded. When municipalities were initially downloaded the task of looking after bridge and bridge structures within their municipal boundaries the Province set up the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure

Program grant, which has been consistently reduced every year to essentially zero for Mountain View County over the last couple of years. As Premier Kenney has stated many times recently, Alberta is facing a huge fiscal problem and there will be a time of reckoning. He has stated that we need to prepare ourselves for more difficult decisions down the road. Your Council is working hard to ensure that we adopt the Provincial mandate of focusing on Lives and Livelihood. We are very fortunate that our Council, as well as the Councils before us have been fiscally responsible and as a result the County is in a very positive position. We will continue to focus our efforts on maintaining the services you rely on, as well as our contractual obligations to our urban partners for fire services and community, recreation, and culture funding.

- **HWY 584.** I already reported on this in a previous e-mail, but it is worth stating again. I would like to highlight that we have been given confirmation from Alberta Transportation (AT) that the HWY 584 project will be moving forward in 2021. We continue to lobby the Province and will not let up until this project is complete.
- **Community recreation and culture grant funding.** Just to highlight, the County does utilize tax dollars to support our Urban partners in operating their recreation facilities and libraries as we appreciate that many of our rural residents are frequent users of these facilities. In 2020 the total funding allocation was \$2.1M, with \$654K going to the Town of Sundre. This grant transfer is based on a signed agreement between the County and our urban partners.

#### Premier Jason Kenney Remarks at both the AUMA and RMA conference

- GDP is estimated to be \$300 Billion this year while 5 years ago GDP was \$360 Billion.
- Alberta took a different approach to the pandemic. We had the least restrictive conditions through the height of the pandemic compared to the US and Europe. We took the approach of public education and trust in people to do the right thing.
- Greatest impediments for attracting economic development are at the local levels. Please do everything you can at this time of crisis to remove any impediments to economic development so that as team Alberta we are all part of the recovery plan.
- We are facing a huge fiscal problem. Focus on lives and livelihood. In doing this we have gone into a huge financial debt and there will be a time of reckoning. We need to prepare ourselves for more difficult decisions down the road. We have had a collapse of a \$10 Billion dollar revenue from non-renewable industry to \$1 Billion this year.
- Everything we do in the time ahead of us must be to focus on hope and opportunity and preserving livelihood and economic recovery. At the heart of the economic recovery plan is to make Alberta the most attractive province to invest in.
- Alberta has signed a safe restart agreement with the Federal Government. The agreement identifies additional federal resources to support critical needs over the next 6-8 months. Additional information can be found here:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/intergovernmental-affairs/services/safe-restart-agreement/letters/alberta.html>

#### Q & A with Minsters

At both the AUMA conference as well as the RMA conference municipal leaders are fortunate to have a 1 to 1.5 hour Q&A period with Ministers. I have tried to highlight some of the most

relevant information from both conferences below by Ministry. Again, this is my best attempt at capturing both the question and answers.

### **Minister of Service Alberta**

(Q) Broadband for small communities, what programs / initiatives are being put in place to increase the access?

(A) We have a digital divide across Alberta and Canada. We understand how important connectivity is in the modern economy. It is very complex. Approximate costs to close the digital divide and reach the CRTC minimum in Alberta is more than \$2 billion. This needs to be addressed over time by all levels of government and private industry. We are developing a made in Alberta model which will require support from the federal government, municipal governments and private sector.

In addition to this I was able to ask the Minister what his plans were for incorporating low earth orbit satellite internet, and if this was part of the connectivity strategy, what the Alberta Government was going to do to push the federal government to reduce the red tape and allow this to occur. The Minister said that he was aware of the low earth orbit satellites and said that this would be looked at closely as an alternative to in ground fiber. He has already been approaching the federal government as this is part of their mandate. We were encouraged to hear that this is being considered as an option to increase rural connectivity because we are all well aware that the province does not have \$2.5 billion to spend on a broadband strategy at this time and we will need to rely more on the private sector to deliver.

### **Minister of Municipal Affairs**

(Q) Municipal elections, why is the Province adding referendums to local election? Will this happen in 2021?

(A) Voters have the capacity to deal with both local elections and referendums. This will increase the voter turn-out, which is a win for democracy all around.

I think we can expect to see a provincial referendum as part of the next municipal election. I was able to specifically ask the Minister if the referendum would include a vote on a provincial sales tax. Her answer was that although the PST referendum has not yet been discussed, nothing is off the table.

### **Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks.**

(Q) Will there be an update for regulations or investment into recreation in the eastern slopes?

(A) We definitely saw an increase in usage of provincial parks due to the pandemic. We have already committed to \$44M in park infrastructure upgrades and more \$9M in water crossings. We are still committed to passing a Trails Act which will include a Trail Access Fee that will create a stable funding stream for provincial parks including the management of the eastern slopes.

### **Minister of Transportation**

(Q) The cost of Class 1 licenses has become prohibitive. What are you doing about that?

(A) We are working on making Class 1 licenses less expensive and we have capped the cost at \$10K, which we hear is still too expensive. We are exploring options to further reduce the cost by potentially including a virtual option for some parts of the training as well as driving

hour credits and a possibility to gain training hours through an employer. We are working with the Ministry of Finance to review the insurance industry policy as well as we hear that the cost of insurance for new drivers is too high.

### **Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.**

(Q) Stumpage fees are very high. This cost is causing some issues with the forestry companies. What is the Province doing about reducing them or stabilizing them?

(A) The forestry sector has been an economic bright light for Alberta. We have a projection of \$350M from stumpage fees compared to \$1B from oil and gas, so from a government perspective this is great news and good for diversification. The cost of lumber has increased significantly due to the pandemic, with all the DIY projects which is a good news story as well. Due to the high demand we know that companies are concerned about the trees being removed now at the high stumpage fees that may not command the current price of lumber. We appreciate that prices go up and down and will continue to monitor this and work with industry.

(Q) Private industry is getting funding for agriculture research which may lead to biased decisions. How are you going to make sure this doesn't occur?

(A) Research is so important to the industry. Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR) is a new funding model created by the government, which will be led by a board elected by farmers through their respective marketing boards and commissions. Farmers and ranchers should be the decision makers of where research priorities lie. We have signed an agreement with RDAR and they are now accepting applications. The funding allocated is \$37M/Year for 10 years.

### **Minister of Energy**

(Q) Why won't the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) conduct cooperative proceedings with landowners and industry to cut down on red tape?

(A) We have established a red tape reduction committee within the AER to reduce red tape by 33% over the next 2 years, with an estimated \$1.2B savings to the industry. This will put them in a much better position to pay their bills. It should be noted that the surface rights board steps in when landowners are not receiving their lease payments, not the AER. We are working to reduce the backlog of files that the surface rights board is currently dealing with.

### **Minister of Health**

(Q) Communities were identified as urgently requiring urgent care beds, yet there hasn't been any capital funding announced. What is happening?

(A) The no capital announcement was the first phase and the second phase will be a capital phase with 4 components including an indigenous and refurbishment portion (ASLI 2.0 – Alberta supportive living initiative)

(Q) There is talk of opening centers outside the big centers for surgery. How can we get these proposals through so that small urban communities can help deal with the surgical backlog?

(A) If you have the capacity or room for capacity increase in your community please contact me and I will forward it to AHS. We are now at a 90% surgical capacity but need to get to 150% of pre Covid to clear the back log.

(Q) A large proportion of doctors would rather practice in urban versus rural. Is there an incentive for those that would be willing to practice in rural?

(A) We are buying spots in the 2 medical schools for rural students and they would be required to serve in rural for 3 years after graduation.

#### **Minister of Seniors and Housing / Minister of Health**

(Q) Different zones have different funding and costing models resulting in a different cost to provide the same level of care. Can we use one model?

Minister of Seniors and Housing

(A) 170 million \$ funding to support senior facility and health care in response to COVID. Health Minister.

(A) In 2009 AHS created 5 zones. Work has been happening over the last decade to try and get consistency of care. The entire spectrum of continuing care is being reviewed to determine what needs to be changed.

#### **Minister of Community and Social Services**

(Q) it is known that 1\$ invested in FCSS results in a 7-12\$ saving somewhere else in the system. Will you commit to FCSS funding?

(A) In the current budget there was a 100M\$ commitment to retain FCSS funding. I will engage with the community. We realise that we need to keep a commitment to social services, but you need to wait for further information.