

Ward 6

UPDATE

February 2009

Alan Dunn
Councillor, Ward 6

Office Phone: 780-464-8206

Fax: 780-464-8114

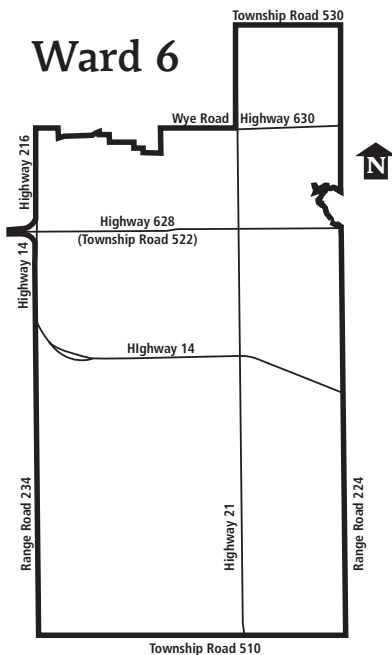
Email: dunn@strathcona.ab.ca



Strathcona
County

www.strathcona.ab.ca

Ward 6



Distribution of this newsletter

This newsletter is intended for residents of Ward 6, as shown on the map above. To economize, it is being distributed according to delivery zones established by Canada Post, which do not coincide with ward boundaries.

A limited number of households in Wards 5 and 7 may receive a copy as a result. If so, please enjoy the information and make note of the councillor for your area.

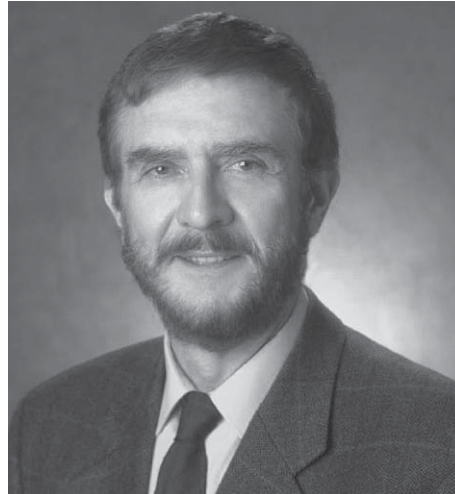
Ward 5, Councillor Jacquie Fenske, 780-464-8147

Ward 7, Councillor Glen Lawrence, 780-464-8003



This newsletter is also available at
www.strathcona.ab.ca.

from your councillor



Councillor Alan Dunn

Cell phones in vehicles

We are coming close to the end of this discussion. Soon Council will either support or defeat a bylaw restricting the use of cell phones by drivers operating motor vehicles. Here is what I hope to be my final word on this issue.

Distraction: Much of the opposing argument turns on the fact that there are other equally serious distractions and that it is therefore unreasonable to single out cell phones. To this I would answer that because there are other distractions, does not mean we should not address this one. We have other examples, alcohol blood limit for instance, where society addresses a narrow, though widespread and serious problem while ignoring others. Not all distractions are equal; talking on the phone and drinking coffee are NOT equally dangerous.

The research is quite clear that conversational distractions take the individual's concentration away from the immediate environment. I agree that other activities such as texting are as bad

or worse and I hope our bylaw will catch these as well.

Education and social context: Many have argued in favour of education and policy adjustment as a superior method of effecting behavioural change. While this approach may work well in groups with a high degree of group identification, it is less effective within a municipality where there is no loyalty or economic need to belong. To be blunt, a significant minority doesn't give a damn about the community or the safety of those in it. While they may cry crocodile tears at a pre-sentencing hearing, they are at heart not the slightest bit concerned about our wellbeing. Education can only work if the subject is being told something he/she doesn't already know. Who can honestly say that they don't know about the hazards of cell phone use while driving? Very often, enforcement has been not just the best tool but the only tool that has succeeded to any degree. A notable example is drinking and driving. After 40-plus years of education, nothing has had any impact but enforcement.

Lies, damn lies & statistics: I appreciate the value of good data and also recognize the difficulty in acquiring a complete and reliable data set. It is true that it is not possible to establish a hard cause/effect relationship between cell phone legislation and improved traffic safety from purely statistical evidence. There are simply too many variables to establish a valid correlation. In Alberta, police statistics do not even break out cell phones as a cause. No conclusions either for or against can be made unless the data is actually collected.

continued on page 2...

Ward 6

UPDATE

...from your Councillor continued

We are then left with making a decision based on other evidence. This includes academic studies, anecdotal evidence and individual accident reports. Here there is no ambiguity. That evidence is good enough for me. I am not prepared to wait indefinitely until the correlation has been mathematically established to the third decimal place.

Exceptions: Many appear concerned that certain professional groups — EMS, Police, and Fire Services — would be exempt from the cell phone bylaw. We also allow these folks to forego seat belts, to exceed the speed limit and run red lights. We tolerate these exceptions, as society believes there is a benefit offsetting the additional risk. As a pilot, I am familiar with the use of VHF communication for navigation and traffic avoidance in controlled airspace. Conversation is strictly limited to the job at hand and not to checking on the babysitter or closing a real estate deal.

Legal & Enforcement: Much has been made of the myth that existing laws already cover cell phone use. They do not. Both

“Dangerous Driving” and “Driving without due care and attention” consider cell phone use as a contributing factor only. Both require an extensive pattern of bad driving before a charge may be laid. Enforcement works if it is applied consistently and conscientiously; however, it requires clear and specific legislation to be effective.

Emotion: Some believe that this has become an emotional issue for me. This is truly not the case. I never intended to get into this, believing as I do that this is a Provincial responsibility. While community support for this is overwhelming, for me it is politically neutral as gains and losses in support will likely be about equal. Win, lose or draw I shall accept the result of Council’s deliberations with perfect serenity, knowing as I do that the Province will be unable to ignore the issue indefinitely and that I have done my duty in attempting to protect the residents of Strathcona County.



Respecting protected lands

Strathcona County will conduct on-going inspections of County Reserves and Conservation Easements in 2009. Environmental and Municipal Reserves are municipally owned parcels of land meant for public use. They may be used for parks, natural area conservation, recreation facilities, public buildings and schools. Conservation Easements on the other hand are privately-owned parcels of land. A Conservation Easement is an agreement between Strathcona County and a landowner to ensure that natural forests, wetlands, grasslands and lakeshores will be available for future generations to enjoy.

Protected public and private land is often taken advantage of by adjacent landowners. We would like to remind you of the Unauthorized Use of County Property Bylaw 8-2007 and the Unauthorized Use of Conservation Easements Bylaw 68-2005, both which can be found on the Strathcona County website. Please respect conserved land and do your part in helping to make Strathcona County a better place to live.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the use of these lands, please call Land Management Services at 780-464-8144.

Capital Region Board

The group of 25 municipalities that make up the Capital Region Board continue to make progress on the area’s first Regional Growth Plan. The Province has mandated that the plan be completed by April 1, 2009.

The first phase of the information and data collection process is complete and the process has included discussions with business organizations, industry, non-profit organizations, social, educational and environmental agencies; as well as staff from the member municipalities. Independent consultants lead the planning process and experts have been providing third-party feedback on the material that is being developed.

All committees have examined existing information and studies previously undertaken in our region, as well as investigating practices in other jurisdictions inside and outside of Canada. The full Board began to review initial concepts and draft plans in January. There will be an opportunity for individuals throughout the Capital Region to comment on the draft plans this month.

No one really knows how the CRB will evolve and to what extent it will have an impact on our municipality. Our first test was the refusal of the CRB to approve the Ardrossan boundary change. This surprising development told us a number of things, none of them good.

It called into question the real meaning of the concept of “grandfathering” as applied to the Municipal Development Plan (MDP). It seems that our costly and hard-won legal battle with the City of Edmonton to uphold the integrity of our MDP was for naught.

It also made it clear that the CRB intends to meddle in planning issues deep within municipal land areas and beyond those just along the boundaries between municipalities. I did not and do not support the Ardrossan boundary change as I do not believe the implications have been well enough thought out, nor do I believe the interests of existing residents have been adequately considered.

Nevertheless, it should be Strathcona’s decision to make, not that of some faceless regional bureaucracy.

Stock markets and oil prices have been in free fall since September, resulting in a global recession. Compared to the past few years, 2009 will not be great economically and Strathcona County's budget for the coming year reflects that reality.

While the budget is the result of an entire year of work, events of the past few months have had a greater impact. The original proposed municipal tax increase was an unrealistic 8.89 per cent. By chopping projects, we reduced this to an increase of 7.37 per cent. My personal shopping list was pared to two minor items, both of which are designed to produce net savings. We have cut vacant positions within Administration hoping that we can manage with fewer staff.

It is difficult to prepare a realistic budget in these tough times. Fuel costs are a huge item and forecasting these has been nearly impossible. Who would have thought that the retail price of gasoline would drop by 50 per cent in a few months? A one-cent change in fuel prices has a budget impact of over \$30,000. Is it realistic or prudent to assume this reduction is permanent and stable?

In other areas, falling prices have worked to our disadvantage. The falling stock market has impaired our investment revenues just as it has for those of you living on pensions and RSP income. Most of the planned upgrader projects have been cancelled or postponed. While this should not affect current tax revenues, there is a ripple effect upon business and

commerce that retrench in anticipation of declining markets.

Increasing demands

On the expense side, Strathcona is faced with ever-increasing demands for services and programs. Of the budget increase, 1.3 per cent is for service enhancements demanded by Strathcona residents—more frequent snow removal and an expanded transit service are two additional financial burdens supported through your taxes.

Recreation is another large expense. Last year Recreation, Parks and Culture accounted for over 20 per cent of tax revenue. This year, over half of the capital budget is earmarked for recreational facilities and still the clamour continues for more hockey rinks, more football

fields and baseball diamonds.

As much as everyone wishes to support programs for youth and others, these are very costly facilities, both to build and to operate.

There is good news, however. Since the 2009 budget was approved, re-estimates of industrial tax revenue together with lower forecast costs in some areas may result in a lower tax increase in the order of 6 per cent, an average dollar increase of less than \$100 per year.

Also, the 2009 budget calls for no increase in tax-supported debt. The budget remains a living document until May, at which time the mill rate is set for the year. Until then, we shall continue to adjust and revise, always with the goal of providing the best services at the lowest cost.

The cost of services: some examples

Often, it seems that folks find it hard to relate what they pay in taxes to the services they receive. Here are a few examples of the estimated annual tax cost to each residence for County services.

It assumes an average assessment and that capital items are paid in cash within the year. In reality, capital cost is spread over more than one year and is often financed with debt and interest paid over many years.

It also assumes the entire cost of the activity or project is paid for by municipal property taxes. In reality, the cost of activities and projects is also supported by user fees, grants and other non-tax revenues.

RCMP/Enforcement Services	\$117.08
Emergency Services	(Operations) \$139.20
Hockey/skating arena	(e.g.: Ardrossan expansion) \$262.35
P4 snow removal	(Sherwood Park only, Priority 4, residential) \$25.04
Rural Road Master Plan	(Overlay/paving/maintenance) \$116.66
Traffic light	\$2.59
One kilometre of new road	(Capital cost of engineering and construction) \$19.46

Rural roads: access to Highway 628 still a concern

I have been hearing complaints for years now about access to provincial Highway 628, the Whitemud extension, from Range Roads 231, 232 and 233.

During the rush hour, it is virtually impossible to either cross or make a left turn onto Highway 628. We have met with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation (AIT) numerous times to persuade them to provide traffic lights at one or more of these intersections.

AIT even carried out a traffic count that confirmed that control was justified.

No plans for lights

In spite of this, AIT maintains lights will not be required until Highway 628 is twinned, a project that is planned for 2013 or beyond. How many hospital beds we'll have to fill and how many junkyards we'll fill with demolished vehicles before the powers that be take the hint.

I realise that Ward 6 residents have

largely given up on this issue. Who could blame them? Sometimes it seems we are talking to a stump. Still, perhaps now would be a good time to reopen this issue. With the current economic climate, I would be surprised to see Highway 628 twinned any time soon.

Perhaps some public pressure would be effective. I invite anyone with an interest in this to contact me at 780-464-8206 or dunn@strathcona.ab.ca.

Group formed to oppose 500 kV power line

In spite of the economic downturn and the cancellation of many industrial projects, it appears to be business as usual in the power industry. The section of line to link generation in the Wabumun area to the Alberta Industrial Heartland and to Fort McMurray is still in the planning phase.

For the past year or so the Alberta Electric System Operator has been holding open houses in the area to gauge public reaction to this idea. AESO has directed the Transmission Facility Owners, AltaLink and EPCOR, to develop the Facilities Application that includes details about routing and siting. AltaLink and EPCOR have already begun a low-profile consultation process and have contacted a number of stakeholders in the area.

The current schedule indicates that AESO will file its Needs Identification Document and AltaLink and EPCOR will file their Facility Application with the Alberta Utilities Commission in October

2009. That both these applications are to be filed simultaneously implies a “fast-track” attitude to this project.

Proposed route would run along Range Road 233

Our concern remains that one of the routes under consideration would bring this power line, with its towers and infrastructure, to east of Highway 216 adjacent to Fountain Creek and the other subdivisions along Range Road 233.

An alternate route could be along Highway 21. Our position is that for health, safety, aesthetic and economic reasons we do not want a major overhead industrial power line running through Strathcona County, a densely populated urban area.

To give voice to this opposition, a formal organization has been set up: **Responsible Electricity Transmission for Albertans (RETA)**. For information on how to participate, contact Shirley Johnson at 780-416-0666.

Expanded fire and emergency services at Strathcona Airport (Josephburg)

As you may know, Strathcona County and Shell are already in a partnership for the enhancement of the Josephburg Airport. Recent improvements including a longer, wider runway and other amenities have been completed so that Shell can land larger corporate aircraft close to the Scotford facility in order to conveniently transport employees to and from the site.

To ensure that safety matches the performance of their new aircraft, Shell wants state-of-the-art airport fire trucks and crews available at Josephburg for departures and arrivals.

Shell and Strathcona have signed a Memorandum of Agreement for Strathcona to provide this service. One or two new fire vehicles would be provided and four additional Fire Fighters would be hired by Strathcona to crew them. Shell would pay 100 per cent of the cost of the vehicles, salaries, benefits and training. The vehicles

would become Strathcona assets and the Fire Fighters, Strathcona employees. The new assets would be required by Shell for one or two aircraft movements per day; during the other 22 or so hours, they would be at Strathcona's disposal and fully integrated into our fire service.

As a result of this arrangement, Strathcona receives valuable equipment and personnel. Shell receives access to the training, organization, bench strength and leadership of the finest Fire/EMS service in Alberta. Shell would not be able to provide this quality of service on their own at a reasonable cost; Strathcona would not be able to afford these additional assets without additional draws on tax revenues.

While this does not impact Ward 6 directly, it is another example of how cooperation with our resource companies makes life better for both sides and in the most efficient way possible.

Fill and earthworks: amendment being considered

In the November 2008 issue of this newsletter, I commented on the increase in the movement of fill into Strathcona County and how this has resulted in concerns about contamination of surrounding lands, disruption of water bodies and damage to habitat and roads.

I pointed out that at present, the County has no legal means to control the movement of fill, either removal or deposition, and that the Province has jurisdiction over waterways and drainage.

In response to my request, County Administration is considering an amendment to the Land Use Bylaw that is intended to address this issue. The amendment would be structured much like the current rules around operating gravel quarry operations and would similarly touch a number of areas: road use, environment and planning.

We expect to see this amendment introduced shortly so it will be in effect before the spring road bans are declared.

Spring-summer tour

Even this awful winter cannot last forever. As soon as the snow is more or less gone, I intend to get on my bike to tour around Ward 6 neighbourhoods and subdivisions once more.

This will be an opportunity to berate me about whatever concerns you about life in the County — roads, development, taxes, dogs, power lines, traffic...you all know the list. I look forward to talking to you at the door or would be happy to chat with groups of folks if that works better.

