

Ward 6

UPDATE

May 2009

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Councillor, Ward 6

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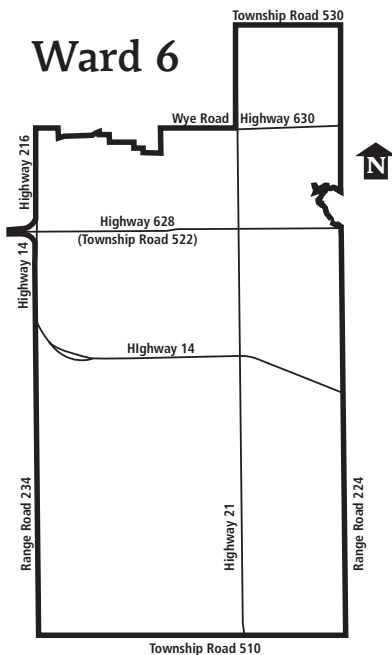
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Strathcona
County

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.

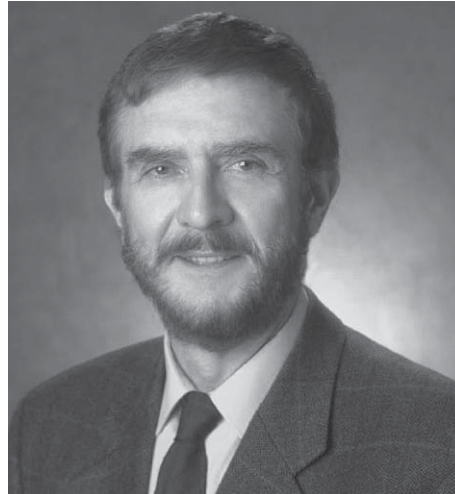
Ward 5, Councillor Jacquie Fenske, 780-464-8147

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

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

FSC logo

from your councillor



Councillor Alan Dunn

Saying what we mean...

Last month, Council passed an updated Strategic Plan. This document is intended to guide planning and decision-making for every aspect of Strathcona County jurisdiction and as such is supposed to be the overarching reference for everything we do. I did not vote for the Strategic Plan as I believed its flaws more than offset any possible value it may have. I'll not dwell on the details of why I am dissatisfied; Council did pass the document so further public debate is both pointless and inappropriate. I shall, of course, support the will of Council.

There was one specific clause in the Strategic Plan that I liked, but found troubling because of its implications and that is the unambiguous statement that Strathcona County will "preserve" agricultural land. I feel we have a bad habit in this municipality of saying the feel-good and politically

correct without any apparent intention to follow up. We pass bylaws that we do not enforce. We make promises to residents that we break when they become inconvenient and we make bold policy statements that are long on flowery language and short on action. This does not happen all the time, but enough to be unsettling.

In this case, we have a Strategic Plan that intends to "Preserve the lands that are best suited to agriculture..." and we have a Municipal Development Plan that contemplates a new "Urban Growth Area" right in the middle of the best agricultural land in the County, directly north of Sherwood Park. Maybe preserving agricultural land is a good idea—after all, we all like to eat. On the other hand maybe it is unreasonable to suppose that agricultural values always trump other considerations. There are good arguments on both sides of this issue; however, one does not have to be married to either position to realize that they cannot exist simultaneously.

To maintain credibility it is clear that one of these positions has to change. Otherwise, we earn the reputation that we cannot be depended upon to say what we mean. I propose to challenge Council to address this inconsistency by clearly stating our position and then by revising policy documents accordingly.

Festival Place and Council decorum

In April, Council decided to make some fundamental changes to the governance of Festival Place. The facility was and is owned by

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Ward 6

UPDATE

...from your Councillor continued

the County; however, the day-to-day operations were assigned to the Festival Place Society, a not-for-profit private organization charged with programming and operations of the building. This approach is similar to that used by the County for community halls and for smaller, simpler facilities such as these; it works reasonably well in most cases. Programming at Festival Place has been excellent over the past few years; the venue has attracted world-class acts that have been welcomed with great enthusiasm by the community.

A number of factors led to Council's decision to revisit the operational side. The facility is starting to show its age. It is a large and complex building. It will clearly benefit from the attention of a professional property manager such as the County. It always seemed unfair to saddle the General Manager of the facility with artistic direction, revenue generation and the technical work of maintaining the building. We would like him to focus on the attraction of quality acts—something he does extremely well—and leave the problem of who changes the light bulbs to someone else.

Another factor in the decision is the imminent completion of the new Community Centre. It was always intended to integrate the operation of Festival Place into the new complex with its library, council chambers, retail space, and other amenities. It makes sense to have the entire complex under common management.

The transition is proceeding quite smoothly. The Festival Place Society Board of Directors understands the need for the change and is being very helpful in handing over the reins.

This is not surprising as these folks have always shown dedication and enthusiasm for Festival Place. They, like all of us, want the best for this premium performance centre. The Society will eventually morph into one supportive of Festival Place in a variety of ways, though not involved with the nuts and bolts of the operation.

Employees of the Society are being absorbed into the County structure with no significant changes in their duties and responsibilities. It is in our interest to keep the expertise that has served us so well.

This entire process has been almost seamless—a well-thought-out plan, executed with care. The only flaw, if it can be called that, is the angry reaction of some members of Council. The violent fulminations in the press and intemperate language baffle me. This is, after all, simply an administrative decision and not one that challenges fundamental beliefs or ideologies. I would expect such emotional excess to be reserved for more earth-shattering issues than who vacuums the carpets in a community theatre.

This is not a question of whether or not we all agree on the issues. The democratic process depends upon a variety of opinions and points of view. Disagreement is therefore inevitable and healthy. However, for the process to work efficiently, all participants must follow certain rules of decorum and order. When some do not, this job becomes much more difficult and stressful. I can only speculate as to what motivates someone to be disrespectful of their colleagues, but I know that it is not in the best interests of the community.

Budget 2009

In these volatile economic times, establishing a meaningful budget is not easy. At least a recession can offer some small benefit in cost savings and as a result, the 2009 Budget will require a smaller tax increase than originally thought. Finance brought forward an increase of 6.18 per cent, a figure I had earlier predicted, rather than the anticipated 7.37 per cent. Council, somewhat arbitrarily, reduced this amount to 5.9 per cent. I would have been happy with the recommended figure as this provided a good balance between the maintenance of adequate reserves and a reasonable tax rate; however, Council wished to make a symbolic gesture by lowering the increase to below 6 per cent. The difference is nominal, perhaps in the range of \$20 per year for an average residence and is a rate that I believe we can live with.

Capital Region Board

After many long months of negotiations and meetings of Capital Region Board finally produced the long-awaited Growth Plan, and yet, we do not seem to be any closer to defining what a municipality can and cannot do. The Growth Plan, in spite of its volumes of paper, omits two vital pieces of information: the location of "priority" growth areas and the location of areas preserved for agriculture. Without this information and its acceptance by the province, we are no further ahead than we were a year ago. None of this is surprising. To prepare a growth plan for the entire region in the time available was a monumental, and as it turns out, impossible task. The plan is now with the Province. I guess it is up to them to decide what to do about this—either to send the plan back for further work by the CRB or arbitrarily establish growth and agricultural areas or fall back on the Municipal Development Plans of the municipalities. Whatever they decide, it is going to take more time.



Highway 21 regional park

Located at the corner of Highway 21 and Township Road 522, this park has become a popular location for residents and dog owners.

A number of years ago this area was the site of a regional landfill. Strathcona County has been monitoring the area and sought advice from Alberta Environment.

Since 1988, the County has carried out environmental assessments of the area and in 2002 identified activities that were required to remediate the site.

Background

A landfill operated at the site from 1959 to 1978. The wetlands in the park were created by the landfill operations. Over time, excavations created during the landfill operations filled with water and became wetlands.

Environmental assessments and findings

The assessments have confirmed that some environmental contamination has occurred. The results of the monitoring are consistent with what might be expected of a landfill site operated at the time this site was used for landfill.

Concentrations of oil and grease (hydrocarbons) were found east of the large wetland, the same area where surface contamination had been observed. Hydrocarbons were detected in the wetland. Since heavy hydrocarbons do not readily move through clay soils or groundwater, it is believed these materials were deposited directly into the wetland.

How is the area being remediated?

In order to prevent people or animals from coming into contact with hydrocarbons, a fence has been placed around the wetlands to prevent access. Over the past couple of years, layers of soil have been added to provide an extra buffer over the waste in the landfill.

Beginning next month, the County will excavate contaminated material and seal it within a clay berm on the site. To complete remediation of the site, the wetland will be drained, excavated and backfilled.

Further information is available from Heather Horner with Transportation and Agriculture Services, 780-417-7133.

Fill and earthworks concerns resolved

The concern about movement of fill into the County and the associated problems of contamination, disruption of water bodies and damage to habitat and roads has been dealt with.

At the March 17 Council meeting, the relevant bylaw was revised to bring this issue under control. The amendment covers a number of areas: road use, environment and planning.

The new rules are now in place. Anyone contemplating major earthworks should contact County Planning and Development Services.

Update on Range Road 233

Many residents have asked what is going on Range Road 233 South of Wal-Mart.

Here is the best information I have to date.

The work planned for Wallace Drive has been tendered with the intention to start construction in later this spring to complete the upgrade during the 2009 construction season including the removal of the Wal-Mart berm.

The County intends to secure the required property north of the Balmoral traffic circle this year, within the remaining budgeted funds. Twinning of this portion will depend upon the land acquisition, about half of which has been done.

The timing of the second roundabout south of Balmoral depends upon the timing of the new Golf Course development.

The first roundabout at Range Road 233 and Balmoral Way was completed and operational in 2008.

The completion of the two-lane upgrades to Range Road 233, south of Balmoral to Highway 628, including the trail on the west side and roundabouts, are in the County's current Five-Year Transportation Capital Plan. Timing is subject to development activity, completion of land acquisition and Council approval of construction funding.

Energy update

Enbridge Line 4 pipeline construction is now complete. The pipe has been hydrotested and final clean up and restoration is scheduled to begin early May on the south side of Highway 14.

There have been no further

proposals for wellsite development in Ward 6 since the Acquire proposals were put on hold.

For further information, contact Strathcona County's Energy Exploration Liaison, Lori Mills, at 780-416-6739.

Energy exploration

Looking for information or assistance on oil and gas development?

Strathcona County provides resources for residents.

Approachable and knowledgeable...

call Lori Mills at the Energy Exploration Liaison Office

780-416-6739

www.strathcona.ab.ca/energyexploration



2009 Rural Roadside Vegetation Control Program

Strathcona County continues to reduce our dependence on herbicide by following guidelines developed for the Rural Roadside Vegetation Control Program. This is accomplished through increased spot spraying and using reduced volume herbicides.

The goal is to keep rural roadsides free of weeds and brush. This adds to the safety of motorists by improving visibility at intersections and the ability to see wildlife at the roadside. As well, drainage is improved, weeds are controlled, and snow can be more easily cleared.

The Rural Roadside Vegetation Control Program will begin on June 1, 2009. All rural grid roads north of Township Road 534 will receive a broadcast application and all grid roads south of Wye Road will be spot sprayed.

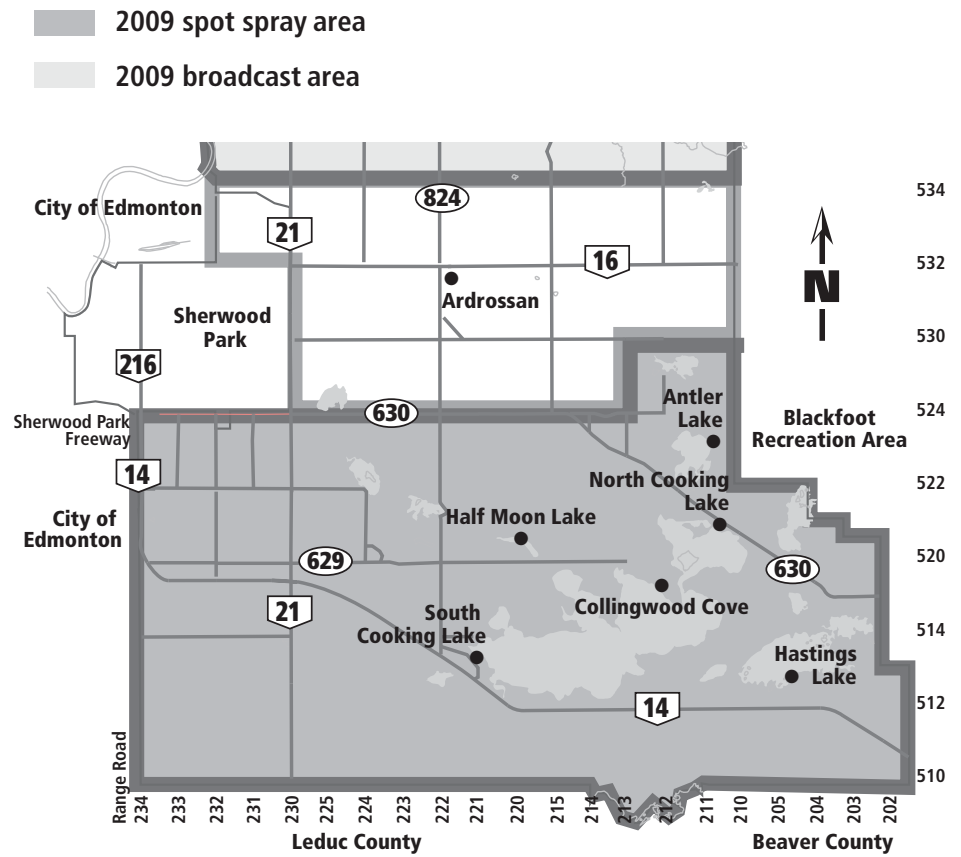
In all other areas of the County, and in all country residential subdivisions, herbicide will be applied by the spot spray method on noxious weeds and brush under two metres, as required.

Landowner Option Program

Rural residents have the option of controlling roadside vegetation adjacent to their property rather than having

this done by County staff. For more information, call Cindy Uden at 780-417-7146.

Residents' comments and questions are welcome. Please contact Joel Gould at 780-417-7134.



500 kV Power Line

Dave Quest, the MLA for Strathcona, succeeded in his motion to investigate having high voltage power lines installed underground. Support in the legislature was unanimous.

For a rookie MLA to actually get a motion to a vote, never mind passed unanimously, is an amazing accomplishment and demonstrates the level of support we are getting from Dave. The war is far from won; however, this gives me some cause for optimism that the tide may be turning.



Weekly organics collection starts week of June 15

From June 15 to September 15, organics will be collected every week for residents in Sherwood Park, including those who subscribe to weekly collection from Strathcona County in Fountain Creek Estates and Balmoral Heights.

Strathcona County decided to add the extra collection in response to residents' feedback last summer. A survey of residents indicated that most were in favour of weekly organic collection.

Weekly collection also applies in the hamlets of Antler Lake, Ardrossan,

Collingwood Cove, Half Moon Lake, Hastings Lake, Josephburg and North and South Cooking Lake.

For residents on acreages and farms, there is no change—organics collection continues every two weeks through the summer. Feedback from residents indicated that the majority of acreage and farm residents did not want the extra collection.

Remember to leave a one-metre clearance between carts and recycling to make sure they can be picked up safely.

