

Ward 6

UPDATE

May 2008

Alan Dunn
Councillor, Ward 6

Office Phone: 464-8206

Fax: 464-8114

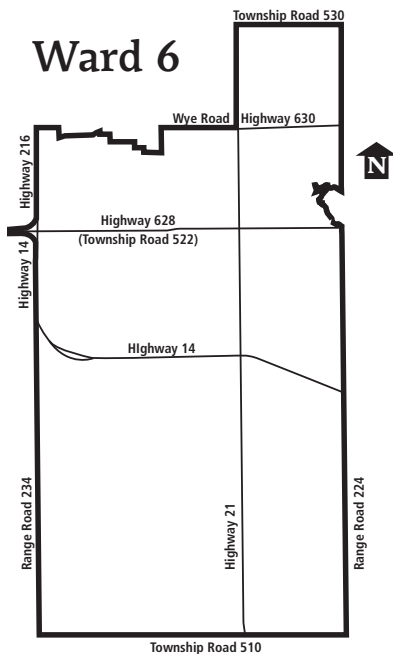
E-mail: dunn@strathcona.ab.ca



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.

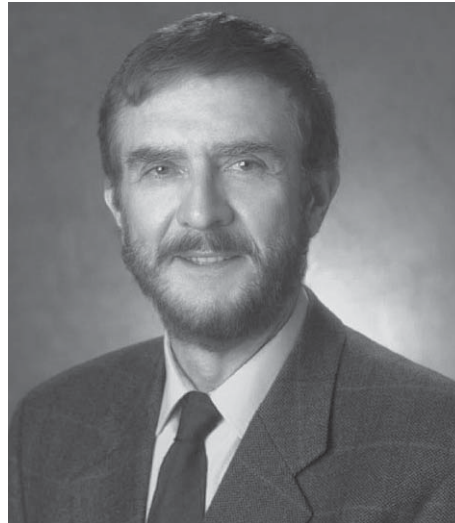
Ward 5, Councillor Jacquie Fenske, 464-8147

Ward 7, Councillor Glen Lawrence, 464-8003



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

from your councillor



Councillor Alan Dunn

Use of mobile (cell) phones in vehicles

On April 1, Council directed County administration to begin the research needed to create a bylaw controlling the use of cellular telephones while operating motor vehicles. Coincidentally, April 1 was also the implementation date for similar laws in the provinces of Nova Scotia and Québec.

Since I started talking about this issue earlier in the term, I have had a surprising amount of positive feedback. Most folks are quite militant in their support of this measure and it seems that nearly everyone has at least one anecdote about being cut-off, rear-ended or inconvenienced by drivers more interested in conversation than in driving.

University and other studies have shown that the distraction of a telephone conversation while driving is roughly equivalent to being legally impaired – the same as having had a few drinks

before getting behind the wheel. Other studies have stated that the accident rate of cell phone users is four times higher than the general driving population.

Some have noted that other activities – makeup, smoking, fiddling with CDs or children – may also be distracting and I agree; however, we cannot fix everything at once. Cell phone use is a good place to start, as it is relatively easy to enforce.

Others have suggested that the provincial government should introduce province-wide legislation. Once more, I agree. Unfortunately, unlike Strathcona County, the provincial government does not have a good record of providing leadership in this type of issue. Like the smoking bylaw, if we do not do it first, it will never happen.

The final argument against legislation is that it would be better to concentrate our efforts on a program to educate the public about the dangers of cell phone use.

Education for social change, unfortunately, has a very poor record of success. Education assumes that an individual will spontaneously change behaviour once s/he learns something that s/he does not already know. This never works for that minority of society too stubborn or dull to absorb new information.

No one would seriously substitute education for enforcement in the case of drinking and driving. The potential consequences are simply too serious to be left to good will and common sense. Cell phone use while driving belongs in this category.

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Councillor's message, continued from page 1

The use of cell phones while driving is only a tiny part of a much larger problem in Alberta and that is the fatalistic acceptance we have of injury-producing "accidents."

"Accident" is a word we like to use in order to pretend that folks are hurt or killed because of blind chance and that there is not much we can do about it. The reality is that "accidents" kill and maim more young Albertans than all diseases combined and that most of these events are the result of carelessness, indifference or false economy.

At a time when our health care system is being overwhelmed, we must reduce the demand on health services. There is a limit to how much tax money we can spend or how many physicians we can poach from the third world.

While there is nothing we can do about ageing, we can through research, education and legislation divert hundreds from Alberta's emergency rooms, saving millions of dollars not to mention misery and loss.

Injury Alberta is an organisation that I encountered while doing my cell phone research. Their self-imposed mandate goes beyond the use of cell phones in vehicles to encompass all aspects of injury management and prevention.

In the coming months I hope that we shall hear more from them; perhaps Strathcona County will also be able to participate in this initiative.

Solid waste management and the Garbage Man

As of the April 1 Council meeting we finally have our new waste management bylaw.

There has been an overwhelming demand by residents for curb collection of recyclables. This, together with the cost impact of the closure of the Clover

Bar landfill at the end of this year, has led to an urgent need to overhaul how we collect garbage and what we do with it.

The new system will allow for a more efficient collection of all solid waste and recyclables by automating much of the process.

The County will provide roll-out carts that can be mechanically emptied into the truck, saving time and labour. There will be four waste streams: regular garbage, paper recyclables (paper, cardboard, and newsprint), containers (plastic, glass and metal) and organics.

These will be picked up at your door on a fixed schedule – no more trying to sort out whether garbage day is Tuesday or Thursday this week!

No matter how carefully and thoroughly thought out a program may be, there are bound to be glitches.

The wording in the draft bylaw appeared to exclude one of the existing garbage collection contractors from

continuing his business in the rural areas.

The Garbage Man has always provided excellent service to his customers and is much beloved by them. Since I have been in this job, I have never seen such an avalanche of feedback from residents protesting against a new bylaw. The pressure of emails and telephone calls was unrelenting for weeks.

As a result, County Utilities quickly reworded parts of the bylaw; I made a motion to allow this company a temporary exemption from one or two of the recycling services in order to give them time to adapt to the changes.

I feel that this entire episode is a good news story that illustrates the democratic system at its best. Residents took a passionate interest in something of direct concern to them and were sufficiently committed to take action rather than passively accepting the situation.

County administration demonstrated flexibility and an interest in customer service by moving promptly to adjust their program. All we councillors had to do was put up our hands at the right time and it was done.



Making tracks: The Rural Roads Master Plan

Strathcona County's rural roads form a network that is essential to the movement of people and goods. It all began in the 1920s, when elevated graders, drawn by horse, built the County's very first roads. Now, Strathcona County contains over 1,000 kilometres of roadway.

In order to maintain such a comprehensive road network, Strathcona County created the Rural Roads Master Plan (RRMP) in 1995, which outlines a strategy to uphold a specific service level on our County's roads. The blueprint for the RRMP was determined by Strathcona County's residents, when, in 1992, the County held a series of open houses and public consultations.

Three years later, and after much consideration, the RRMP was implemented. The Plan covers the

majority of rural roads within the County (excluding those in hamlets). The primary goal of the RRMP is to continue to improve the characteristics of the existing road system and to meet public service level expectations within limited funding.

The RRMP is a hands-on working document used by Strathcona County's Transportation and Agriculture Services and Engineering and Environmental Planning departments to maintain and, over time, upgrade various components of the rural road system. The RRMP is periodically reviewed to ensure it reflects the needs of the community.

Strathcona County's Rural Roads Master Plan is the strategy behind our commitment of ensuring a quality rural road system.

To be continued in the next Ward 6 newsletter

What we get for our taxes

Over the past few years and increasingly since the municipal elections last year, I have heard the comment from residents that "...we get nothing for our taxes!"

This feeling is particularly strong in the rural wards where there is an assumption that all of the services and facilities go to Sherwood Park or the other hamlets and that not much is left for the rest of us.

At the outset, I need to point out that of all the taxes collected in Canada, municipalities see only about 7 per cent.

With that we must provide roads, police, recreation, ambulance, fire, social services, transit – the list is endless – together with the administrative services required to keep the whole works functioning efficiently.

That aside, it is reasonable to require proof that we in the rural areas

are in fact getting what we pay for. To do an immediate, thorough analysis would be a monumental task requiring resources that would then not be available for other priorities; however, a more limited study addressing specific areas is possible.

I shall be having these studies done on a piecemeal basis over the next year and while not rigorous, I hope that they will make the point, one way or another. (see **Cost of roads, next article**)

Post your address: a matter of safety

Is your address visible in front of your residence? Could ambulance or fire crews locate your home without delay?

Make sure your address is posted clearly in an obvious place next to the driveway at the property line, or on your mailbox or paper delivery box.

Cost of roads exceeds average municipal tax

The average 2008 tax assessment in the three rural wards is \$1,567 per single family residence. This is the amount that Strathcona County receives to help pay for municipal services, although the County collects more.

Between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of what you actually pay goes directly to the Province to support education, library services and other services not administered or controlled by the County.

The 2008 budget for the rural

road network works out to \$1,666 per residence. In other words, on average, taxes paid by the average rural property owner do not even cover the cost of roads, never mind other essential services.

Yes there are differences in road quality, and yes, some residents pay more than average.

Still, the trend is clear. We are able to enjoy our prosperous lifestyle because we are being bankrolled by industry and commerce.

Changes to Wye Road and Sherwood Drive

Congestion at the Sherwood Drive-Wye Road intersection has reached a critical point and must be addressed in view of the many new developments planned for Wye Road and points east. As reported recently in our local newspaper, Strathcona County Engineering and Environmental Planning is planning a jughandle road configuration to improve safety and traffic flows in all directions.

This would be part of a five-year plan to upgrade Wye Road. Construction of the eastern section encompassing Wallace Drive and crossing Wye Road at Ash Street would be completed in the 2008 budget year, together with widening a portion of Wye Road.

Public response to this proposal has been mixed. Some businesses and some residents have expressed vehement opposition because of what they see as a complex traffic flow that increases distances, travel time and reduces commercial exposure. Then there is the enormous cost, much of which will be borne by us, the residents and ratepayers.

This whole sorry situation is classic example of the outcomes of poor or non-existent planning. Years ago, a number of bad decisions were made by the councils of the day.

All these decisions had predictable negative outcomes. The commercial development where Wal-Mart is sited should never have been approved in its current configuration. Among other refinements, a service road should have

been provided along the south side of Wye Road.

Unfortunately, some thought the immediate need for the development more important than to provide for the rational future viability of the community. As is often the case, expediency and short-term thinking won the day. A delicious irony is that many of those who strongly advocated for the development either no longer live in Strathcona or never did live here, leaving the mess for the rest of us to deal with.

I have never been enthusiastic about the pace of development in this area or with tinkering with the road system to the potential detriment of the residents, yet I must grudgingly admit that Strathcona's Engineering and Environmental Planning department has come up with what seems a reasonable and necessary solution given the constraints. It is, as they would admit, far from perfect; however, no one qualified to have an opinion has so far proposed anything better.

In a perfect world, good planning and good political decisions would obviate the need for jughandles or similar band-aid solutions.

We do not, however, inhabit such a world and are condemned to live with the mistakes of our predecessors. The lesson to be drawn from this is that there is no substitute for careful, thoughtful long-term planning. Unfortunately, it is a lesson that we are remarkably slow – or unwilling – to learn.

Growth & development

Centre in the Park/Community Centre

The changes around County Hall seem to happen on a daily basis.

If you have haven't been by lately, you may be surprised to see a big hole where the County Annex building and staff parking lot used to be. The site is being prepared for the new community centre which will house the County Library, an agora (community meeting space) and additional County offices.

On April 22, Council approved the addition of a third floor to a portion of the Community Centre. This area will be finished on the exterior, with interior walls and partitions to be

completed later when occupation is required. Any space not immediately needed by the County can be leased to the private sector or other organizations until it is needed for municipal purposes.

This decision is similar to what Capital Health is doing in building extra space within the new Strathcona County hospital, in anticipation of growth.



For information on parking in and around County Hall during the construction please visit www.strathcona.ab.ca/Countyhallparking.



The Community Centre is under construction and scheduled to open in late 2010.

City of Edmonton appeals new MDP

The public component of the Municipal Government Board Hearing related to the City of Edmonton's appeal of Strathcona's Municipal Development Plan (MDP Bylaw 1-2007) concluded on March 25.

From March 17 through to the 25, the Board heard from witnesses called by both municipalities, as well as members of the public who wanted to express their opinions relative to Edmonton's submission that the County's long-range plan, (the MDP), was detrimental to their future.

Over the course of the next several weeks, the Board has requested that legal representatives from both Strathcona and Edmonton submit their closing arguments in written form. Upon

receipt of this information and after reviewing all documentation submitted over the course of the past eight months, the Municipal Government Board may take several months before tendering its written decision on the intermunicipal appeal.

South Wye Area

The trees have been removed for Phase I – Wye Road Crossing. The next activity will be the site grading and servicing. In preparation for the grading, a permit was recently issued to transfer fill from Phase II into Phase I. Although this work precedes any approvals on Phase II, it alleviates the need to truck in fill from other sites, thereby eliminating a significant amount of truck traffic on Wye Road.

Stoanshire takes shape

In early March, a design charrette was held with respect to 100 acres of land south of Wye Road and west of Range Road 231.

The word charrette describes an intense design and planning session involving a number of experts and community members to generate creative ideas for a complex project.

The purpose of the charrette was to gather input from the neighbouring residents, the landowners and County administration to determine the highest and best use of the lands.

The result was Stoanshire, a neighbourhood based on sustainable development. The development is planned to fit into the land as opposed to the land being shaped to accommodate development. When complete, Stoanshire is envisioned to include housing for a diverse cross-section of residents from young families to seniors in a healthy, community-focussed neighbourhood. The development is planned to accommodate 181 units.

The plan becomes a conceptual starting point for the proposed development of the lands. The next step for the developer is to conduct the various planning and engineering studies to determine the feasibility of the plan before bringing it forward to Council for consideration.

