

leadership • cooperation • respect

## *Common Bonds Agreement*

Intermunicipal Cooperation Plan and Protocols

Strathcona County ↔ City of Fort Saskatchewan



**leadership • cooperation • respect**



## Common Bonds Agreement

East entrance to downtown



Strathcona County Community Centre

### Reaching an Agreement

#### Why have an agreement?

The City of Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County share a 22.9 km. boundary along the southern and eastern edge of the City and the northwest portion of the County. This border has specific political, administrative and jurisdictional implications but, despite it, both municipalities have a desire to serve the best interests of the people in the region.

Historically the boundary region has been primarily agricultural with residents utilizing the services offered in both municipalities depending on their needs. Increasing growth pressures in both the County and the City led to the need for bilateral annexation. To this end a Boundary Accord was reached in 2001 seeking “to ensure the long-term stability of their respective boundaries to better provide long range planning, fiscal management and delivery of services...” (Boundary Accord, 2001). In addition, both municipalities agreed to work with each other to “prepare an Intermunicipal Communications Protocol and further define the criteria for moving through the stages of the intermunicipal issue resolution process.”

(Boundary Accord, 2001)



Current growth in the region is changing the dynamic of this interaction again and emphasizes the need to address matters jointly affecting the region. Although autonomous in their decision-making, each Council, administration and corresponding staff must consider the connections between them, identify their common interests and address the impacts of actions and implications of decisions with their neighbour.

### Shared sub-regional economies

Together, the municipalities are part of Alberta's Industrial Heartland, an area of 582 square kilometres that attracts major industries to the biggest industrial base in Western Canada. The commercial services sector and social infrastructure of both municipalities have grown as a result of industrial and residential expansion.

It has been identified that upon this foundation opportunities to cooperate may be realized. By

working together, both municipalities can rise above boundaries and politics for the prosperity of people in the region.



At Fort Saskatchewan Rotary Amphitheatre

### Impacting actions

As growth and development pressures increase, the effects on each municipality's ability to provide the necessary services for residents in the region are impacted. Development in either municipality may create the need for road improvements, land use revisions, servicing arrangements and services provided in the other municipality.

Being proactive in identifying the possible impacts, utilizing joint planning and sharing visions for the region will allow for more orderly development and reduce the risk of having an adverse influence on the other.

### Common interests

Working together, Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan have an opportunity to expand their common interests through joint advocacy in the region. The same is true of joint responses to regional, provincial and federal matters that affect both the County and City's intermunicipal boundaries and their ability to provide services efficiently and judiciously for residents of the region.

### Building on areas of opportunity

At various degrees of depth and intensity Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County have already achieved considerable cooperation and valuable interaction. The development of Intermunicipal Cooperation Protocols should at minimum maintain these communications but ideally will enhance and build on them.

Some examples where the municipalities currently have developed a high level of interaction and cooperation are FCSS, library systems, emergency services and economic development. These areas should be not only be identified and maintained but showcased and built on as illustrative of the advantages of a cooperative relationship.

Fort Saskatchewan

In other areas some cooperative arrangements exist however the necessity for extensive interactions or ongoing communication is not always necessary. Examples of this are corporate services and servicing arrangements such as the County providing sewer clean out to City residents. This does not mean periodic communication is not necessary; rather both municipalities are satisfied with the level of communication and cooperation in these areas.

There are some areas in which increased cooperative efforts will significantly benefit the region and reduce the likelihood of conflict between the municipalities. Some are not areas of contention, but provide opportunities to show increased leadership. However, in some cases it is possible that issues could arise if proactive measures are not taken. It is in these areas where the agreement defines a pathway to encourage interaction and creates occasion where cooperation may be mutually beneficial. A current inventory of these opportunities include:

- predictable framework for development
- planning for growth
- roads
- coordination and expansion of transit services
- providing a diversity of services: i.e. recreation
- water quality in river valley
- facilities sharing
- utilities and waste management



Strathcona County looking toward Fort Saskatchewan, at Trans Canada Yellowhead Highway 16 and Highway 21

## What does the agreement do?

The intermunicipal agreement is not only about addressing the actual issues at hand. It also establishes principles and process to direct the communication around these issues. The agreement is driven by three main purposes:

### 1. Defines joint philosophy and principles

- **Being descriptive rather than prescriptive:** Rather than prescribing rules, establish an environment that promotes the principles of cooperation, collaboration and interaction.
- **Commit to solving issues at their closest point of origin:** When issues or matters of opportunity arise, give the responsibility to address them to the people directly involved and with the greatest knowledge of the issues.
- **Need open/transparent “personal” relationship:** The municipalities desire that each level and department of the organizations

Shell Scotford, Strathcona County



Dow Canada, Fort Saskatchewan

knows its counterpart and is able to have communication that is open and frank so important matters are not left unaddressed.

- **Recognizing differences:** Increased cooperation and communication does not mean, “being the same”. Rather they should create understanding including recognizing differences and the rationale for each other’s perspective.
- **Continuity:** Encouraging a standard of interaction that will outlast political change.
- **Change the culture of interaction:** The agreement is focused on increasing dialogue and understanding throughout the two municipalities; political, administrative and operational.
- **Respect:** Acknowledgement and consideration of the other even when differences exist.
- **Autonomy:** Each municipality understands and maintains its responsibility to make decisions in the best interest of its residents.
- **Encourage opportunity for communication/interaction/dialogue:** Without creating rules, the protocols should encourage communication and dialogue to give opportunity to express and exchange information. In this way, achievements, challenges and differences can be understood quickly to avoid the development of misconception.
- **Learning:** Need to understand the rationale behind not agreeing.

### 2. Commits to consultation and cooperation

Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan intend to work together to formalize and enhance the working relationship between the two municipalities through the development of a guiding protocol. Creating this protocol will formalize, streamline and help to advance areas of intermunicipal interest. This includes addressing growth pressures with a common understanding, relating transportation needs, as well as developing common solutions or responses to broader issues that affect the joint boundaries.

### 3. Defines how problems will be solved

Cooperation, collaboration and a commitment to communication are not the same as seeing all matters the same way. In particular, in maintaining the unique identity, culture and autonomy of each municipality, it is likely there will be instances of differences in values, goals, beliefs and perspectives. In these instances there is a need to address problems in a predictable and efficient way to achieve an outcome or decision. In cases where differences remain, there has to be understanding of the basis of those disparities so the municipalities can continue to work together well.

#### Who manages the agreement and makes it work?

- a. **Role of Council:** Each Council retains the ability and responsibility to make decisions on behalf of its residents. By signing on to the agreement each Council is showing direction to their administration and staff by recognizing the cumulative value of the two municipalities dovetailing their interests. A commitment to increased cooperation from Councils will drive the need for increased communication at the administrative and staff levels. The Mayors' abundant interactions will be at the forefront of this relationship and they will be responsible for showing the leadership as champions for the elected officials.
- b. **Role of Intermunicipal Relations Committee:** The Intermunicipal Relations Committee will take on a more robust and expanded role based upon the agreement. The need for establishing a formal joint entity to provide guidance and direction on key areas of intermunicipal interest can be met through this existing committee with some broader membership and mandate.
- c. **Role of administration:** Administration will be the conduit through which the agreement is executed and is made durable. Administration brings continuity to the

relationship between the municipalities and has the ability to initiate communication on an as needed basis. Although operational staff may interact more frequently, administration is responsible for the big picture. Specific positions in each municipality will be designated as "Champions" of the agreement. Their knowledge of each other's municipality, structure and personnel is significant. All intermunicipal information will flow through and be managed by these Champions.

- d. **Role of staff:** Staff at all levels will be responsible to ensure the principles of the agreement are carried out operationally. This means that staff will work with their municipal counterparts to address issues that arise within the scope of their authority and mandate. Staff will also raise issues and be accountable for informing the appropriate levels of authority about matters that require attention for the mutual benefit of both municipalities.

Strathcona County Communities in Bloom



Fort Saskatchewan Downtown Fall Festival



## Living out the Agreement: The Protocols

### Building Intermunicipal Relationship Protocol

Both municipalities recognize a joint commitment to build a working relationship between Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan. That involves assuring that each municipality's elected officials, senior staff and operational staff understand the other municipality.

Because departmental divisions and responsibilities in Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan are not always fully aligned, each municipality will assure that all managers, directors and other senior staff are kept aware about the function of their counterparts in the other municipality. Understanding of and coordination with their counterparts will be regarded as a core competency for all senior staff. To accomplish this both municipalities will:

1. Include a commitment to intermunicipal cooperation at all levels of the organization through orientation sessions and job descriptions.
  - a. Each municipality will assure that newly elected officials and new staff receives, as part of their orientation, information about cooperation and collaboration between the municipalities. This should include specific information relevant to an area of operation that describes in operational terms the collaborative arrangements that affect specific staff.
  - b. Councillors will be asked to review this protocol upon election and commit to their understanding of its intention. Furthermore, all Council will, at various times, be asked to participate in the Intermunicipal Relations Committee to further their exposure to the issues between the municipalities.
  - c. All senior staff will have an appropriate level of understanding of the other municipality included in their job description. This includes meeting with their counterparts at least once each year.



Station #4 Heartland Hall, Strathcona County

2. Each municipality agrees to keep the other informed of its vision as it is projected and changed from time to time. Both municipalities will seek to align their visions in areas where there may be collaborative or cooperative opportunity. The municipalities will set their visions with regard to the general benefit of the region and its inhabitants and industries.
3. Each municipality agrees to include the other in its celebrations and ceremonies, engaging officials or staff at the appropriate level.



CN Station, Fort Saskatchewan

## Cooperation and Consultation Protocol

Both municipalities recognize a joint desire to create and action opportunities for increased cooperation and intermunicipal consultation in the joint interest of Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan. Both municipalities also acknowledge that they are legislatively separate and have distinct interests and cultures.

### Champions

In addition to the role of elected officials supporting this protocol, the municipalities agree to designate (at least) one “Consultation and Cooperation Champion” from each municipality. The Champion for Strathcona County will be the Director of Corporate Planning and Intergovernmental Affairs and for the City of Fort Saskatchewan the General Manager of Planning and Strategic Initiatives. A co-champion may also be designated. The Champions’ responsibilities include:

1. advancing, as one of the core competencies of their respective job responsibilities, intermunicipal cooperation and consultation between the municipalities;
2. management of the business of the Intermunicipal Relations Committee;
3. safe-keeping of the Common Notes of intermunicipal meetings;
4. process management of the Problem Solving Protocol.

To further the communication and opportunity for strategic and proactive action a number of committees will either be stimulated or created.

## Committees

### Intermunicipal Relations Committee

The municipalities will create an Intermunicipal Relations Committee (IMRC). The Intermunicipal Relations Committee will meet not less than four times per year. The Intermunicipal Relations Committee has responsibility to identify specific opportunities (programs, services, assets, initiatives, and strategies) for cooperation and collaboration and to action those opportunities. The IRMC will be composed of the following:

- Mayor and one Councillor from each municipality
- One additional Councillor from each municipality as a rotating position at each meeting
- City Manager, City of Fort Saskatchewan
- Chief Commissioner, Strathcona County
- General Manager of Planning and Strategic Initiatives, City of Fort Saskatchewan
- Associate Commissioner, Infrastructure and Planning Services, Strathcona County
- General Manager, Engineering and Public Works, City of Fort Saskatchewan
- Director of Corporate Planning and Intergovernmental Affairs, Strathcona County

### Senior Administration Committee

At a senior staff level, a Senior Administration Committee will be established. The Senior Administration Committee serves the IMRC and has responsibility to identify administrative areas where increased cooperation is desired. Where the desire for cooperation is identified, the Senior Administration Committee will assemble the appropriate personnel and ensure meeting of a Technical Group to support the cooperative opportunity. This committee is also responsible for specific operational areas, maintaining managers' knowledge of and interaction with municipal counterparts and committing to managerial meetings at least once per year. The Senior Administration Committee meets a minimum of twice per year. Composition of this committee includes;

#### City of Fort Saskatchewan

- City Manager
- General Manager, Planning & Strategic Initiatives
- General Manager, Public Works and Engineering
- General Manager, Corporate Services
- General Manager, Community and Protective Services

#### Strathcona County

- Chief Commissioner
- Associate Commissioner, Infrastructure & Planning Services
- Associate Commissioner, Corporate Services
- Associate Commissioner, Community Services
- Director, Corporate Planning & Intergovernmental Affairs



Rural Strathcona County

## Technical Group(s)

The Technical Group is a standing group in the specific area of Planning and Development. Due to the ongoing need for strategic and proactive interaction due to the number of issues that arise from this department, this Group meets on a quarterly basis. This group identifies issues emerging in each municipality and between both municipalities in Planning and Development, creates a prioritized plan for directing the matters through the coming year, and creates working groups with terms of reference for addressing identified issues. Additional “Technical Groups” may also be created for a specific time period as a response to a need for particular cooperation opportunities. Composition of this Technical Group will include:

### Strathcona County

- Director, Planning and Development Services
- Deputy Director, Land Use and Policy Planning Services (PDS)
- Manager, Transportation Planning (CPC)
- Manager, Public Works (TAS)
- Manager, Water and Wastewater Services (Utilities)
- Director, Corporate Planning and Intergovernmental Affairs

### City of Fort Saskatchewan

- General Manager, Planning & Strategic Initiatives
- Director, Planning & Development
- Senior Development Planner
- General Manager, Engineering & Public Works
- Director of Engineering Services
- Director of Public Works

## Common Notes

To promote a consistent and shared flow of information from intermunicipal meetings a set of common notes will be established. The common notes will be confidential and regarded as privileged until released by mutual consent of the Mayors. To generate the common notes, the following steps will be respected:

1. When any intermunicipal discussion or meeting occurs, the parties will take notes and make decisions about reporting out of information.
2. In the case of each such meeting, one municipality will be designated the “host” municipality and be responsible for generating the original notes from that meeting, including action points, information requests and points of circulation.
3. Once the host circulates the original notes, the other municipality must either sign off on the notes, sign off the notes with comments or edit the notes for further comment and recirculation.
4. Once signed off by both municipalities, the notes will be circulated at levels of the organization normally required by reporting relationships.
5. All common intermunicipal notes will be shared by and stored with both Consultation and Cooperation Champions and the Mayors offices.
6. Copies of the Common Notes will be regarded by both municipalities as the authoritative record of the discussion or meeting and, once released by mutual consent of the Mayors, may be shared with other staff and with the public.



1875 - 1885 North-West Mounted Police, Fort Saskatchewan

## Communication

Either prior to or after meetings of the Capital Region Board or Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association, designates from both municipalities to those organizations will meet to consider their views on any matters on agendas for those meetings.

Both municipalities will co-ordinate press releases on common public information through elected officials and the Consultation and Cooperation Champions.

## Problem Resolution Protocol

Both Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan recognize the need for a joint understanding about how to address conflict when either municipality is of the opinion that an obligation of the other under an agreement has been breached. Both municipalities want to resolve problems:

- at the earliest opportunity and at the point closest to where problems originate;
- in a swift, inexpensive and uncomplicated way;
- using a clear procedural pathway to a solution;
- to maintain a smooth working relationship even when disagreement survives.

It is acknowledged that the processes in this protocol are in addition to, and do not replace, processes and remedies provided in legislation or under existing agreements between the municipalities.

If an elected official, administrator or any staff person from either municipality thinks an obligation under an agreement between the municipalities has been breached, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Consultation and Cooperation Champion.

The Champion will inform their municipality's CAO of the complaint, will investigate it and, if it appears that a breach occurred, the matter will be brought to the attention of the other municipality's Consultation and Cooperation Champion.

Once that has happened, the matter may be resolved directly between the municipalities through informal problem solving discussions.

If the problem identified is not resolved through informal discussions, the municipalities agree to address it using the following processes. The municipalities have identified the attributes of a mediated process, (facilitated negotiation), as a preferential process to be encouraged. The municipalities may, by agreement, proceed directly to mediation without first exhausting an unassisted negotiation process.

1. First, ***through negotiation***: The municipalities will identify the appropriate personnel who are knowledgeable about the issue and those staff will work to find a mutually acceptable solution through negotiation.

Those in the negotiation will negotiate in *good faith* to find a solution.

Those in the negotiation will seek an *integrated outcome* in the decisions they make. An integrated outcome is one in which the parties elect to work together, integrating their resources, originality and expertise.

Those in the negotiation will attempt to craft a solution to the identified issue by seeking to advance the interests of all in the negotiation rather than by simply advancing their individual positions. The parties will fully explore the issue with a view to seeking an outcome that accommodates, rather than compromises, the interests of all concerned.

In that regard, negotiators will seek to:

- a. clearly articulate their interests and the interests of their municipality;
- b. understand the interests of other negotiators whether or not they are in agreement with them; and,
- c. identify solutions that meet the interests of the other municipality as well as those of their own.

Legacy Park, Fort Saskatchewan



2. Next, ***through mediation:*** If the issue cannot be resolved through negotiation, the municipalities will find a mutually acceptable mediator. For assistance finding an acceptable mediator, the municipalities may consult the Municipal Dispute Resolution Services at Alberta Municipal Affairs or may consult the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society. Mediation is a process of assisted negotiation in which the municipalities retain power over the substantive outcome of the negotiation and the mediator facilitates the process.

The mediator will be responsible for the governance of the mediation process.

3. Next, ***through final proposal arbitration:*** If the issue cannot be resolved through mediation, the municipalities will have the matter resolved by final proposal arbitration using a single arbitrator.

In final proposal arbitration, the arbitrator must conduct the proceedings on the basis of a review of written documents and written submissions *only*, and must determine each issue by selecting one of the final written proposals submitted by either of the municipalities respecting that issue; no written reasons are to be provided by the arbitrator.

If the municipalities can agree upon a mutually acceptable arbitrator, arbitration will proceed using that arbitrator. If they cannot agree on a mutually acceptable arbitrator, each municipality will produce a list of three candidate arbitrators. In the event there is agreement on an arbitrator evident from the candidate lists, arbitration will proceed using that arbitrator. If a mutually agreeable arbitrator is not found, Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society will make the selection of an appropriate practitioner.

Subject to the above definition of final proposal arbitration, the arbitrator will be governed by principles of natural justice and fairness and may make rules and procedures (including reasonable time limits), as the arbitrator shall see fit.



Broadmoor Lake Park, Strathcona County

## Common Bonds

The development of an Intermunicipal Cooperation Plan and Protocols is about more than geography and sharing a common border. Acknowledgement that the actions of one municipality affect its neighbour, shared economic drivers and common public interests that define the character of the region are the catalysts for these protocols. The protocols are designed to capitalize on the qualities of both Strathcona County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan. They also form a foundation for future discussions, supporting working together towards regional prosperity for their citizens and demonstrating leadership in cooperation for their regional partners. Anchored in consultation, dialogue and discussion, the protocols promote acceptance and understanding while recognizing the value of a defined problem resolving process when necessary. The Common Bonds Agreement will be of value to the region and an example for municipalities throughout Alberta.

### Acknowledgement

#### Strathcona County



Mayor Linda Osinchuk



Ward 1 - Councillor Vic Bidzinski



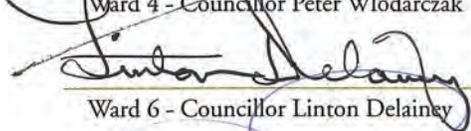
Ward 2 - Councillor Roxanne Carr



Ward 3 - Councillor Brian Botterill



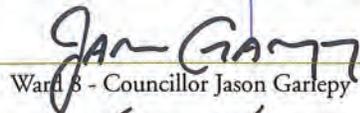
Ward 4 - Councillor Peter Wlodarczak



Ward 6 - Councillor Linton Delainey



Ward 7 - Councillor Bonnie Riddell

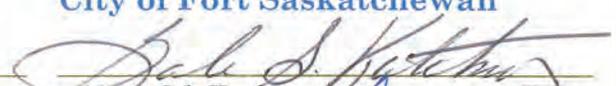


Ward 8 - Councillor Jason Garlepy



Acting Chief Commissioner - Kevin Glebe

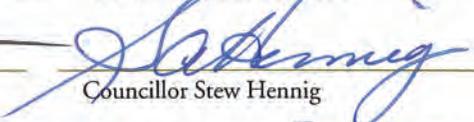
#### City of Fort Saskatchewan



Mayor Gale Katchur



Councillor Frank Garrisen



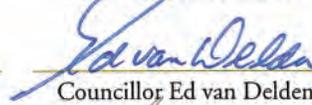
Councillor Stew Hennig



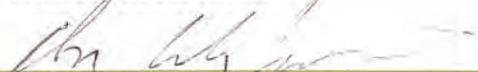
Councillor Tom Hutchison



Councillor John Mather



Councillor Ed van Delden



Councillor Don Westman



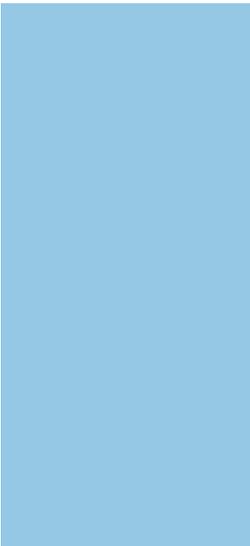
City Manager - Kelly Kloss

Signed this 27th day of June, 2012 — in the City of Fort Saskatchewan, Province of Alberta —  
in the presence of The Honourable Doug Griffiths, Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Millennium Place, Strathcona County



Dow Centennial Centre, Fort Saskatchewan



  
**STRATHCONA**  
COUNTY



  
CITY OF  
**FORT SASKATCHEWAN**