

Assessment & Tax Specialized Municipality Overview

Overview of Department

We annually prepare property assessments for one of the largest and most complex assessment bases in the province, enabling a fair and equitable distribution of property taxes amongst residents, businesses and industry.

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

Tax revenue from urban and rural properties are pooled and shared across the county.

Challenges experienced in dealing with different property types leads to staff engagement.

Smaller staff compliment can efficiently handle workload that would otherwise be maintained by two offices.

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

One residential tax rate - all residential properties pay the same tax rate. Perception of service levels can vary between urban and rural ratepayers.

One non-residential tax rate – all non-residential properties pay the same tax rate. Annual regulated assessment changes do not align with market value changes (heavy industrial facilities vs commercial properties). An assessment base with a large regulated component may experience tax shifts when market values out pace regulated values on a year over year basis.

Assessors require a broader scope of knowledge in dealing with a more diverse range of property types in urban and rural settings.

Different assessment legislation applies to urban and rural service areas creating inequity among similar property types.

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Residential Waste Management Services

Overview of project/service

Waste collection services from Strathcona County include a curbside waste, organics and recycling program. This is supplemented by community recycle stations in both urban and rural locations that provide diversion opportunities for recycling, yard waste and Enviroservice materials.

Curbside waste collection services are available to all Strathcona County residents. Collection is mandatory in all hamlets, while rural property owners have the ability to 'opt in' to County services, contract their own private collection or manage their own waste depending on the size of their property.



Serving

Strathcona County currently provides curbside services to approximately 80% of the residential sector. Curbside collection services are provided to the following number of households:

- 21,824 households - urban Sherwood Park (including multi-family)
- 1,247 households - rural hamlets
- 4,106 households - rural customers

The community recycle stations are available for both residential and commercial use.

Partnerships

Strathcona County externally contracts all of its collection and processing services to the private sector.

A joint inter-municipal partnership has been developed with the City of Fort Saskatchewan to provide access to their recycle and transfer station for northern Strathcona County residents. In addition, Strathcona County is a participant of the Capital Region Waste Minimization Advisory Committee; a forum for information sharing that brings together regional stakeholders in a cooperative, collaborative effort to implement joint waste minimization strategies and solutions.

Residential curbside services are a full cost recovery service funded through utility rates charged to customers on a monthly or quarterly basis.

The community recycle station services are supported through the municipal tax base. Some recycle products collected through these services are supported by the provincial stewardship programs (household hazardous waste, electronics, paint, tires and oil).

Successes

- Curbside waste collection service is a self-sustaining operation requiring no property tax support.
- Strathcona County is currently a leader in residential waste management services in the province, as residents are achieving 60% diversion from landfill.
- Strathcona County is the only municipality providing direct collection services to rural properties in the province.

Challenges

- Maintain appropriate levels of service and standards with increased growth.
- Maintaining equity in service provision, as rural properties have the option to 'opt out' where all other areas are mandatory collection.
- Maintaining efficient rural collection services for three stream collection requires specialized collection vehicles. A deviation from standard urban collection in terms of frequency of collection and sizing of carts for rural may need to be considered.
- Rural collection on properties adjacent to Provincial Highways requires specialized collection directly on private property.

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Water Servicing

Overview of project/service

Strathcona County provides safe, reliable potable water with a variety of service levels to our customers through multiple reservoirs (with a total water storage capacity of 116.9 million litres), three truck fills and 560 km of water transmission and distribution mains.



Serving

Strathcona County Utilities supplies potable water to many customers in the County including Sherwood Park, rural hamlets, country residents and local industries. We operate three main types of distribution systems which are urban water (fully pressurized system), rural water (low pressure/trickle fill system) and bulk truck-fill water.

Partnerships

Strathcona County works with regional partners to ensure safe water distribution in the region. We are a member of the Regional Water Customers Group which includes several municipalities that purchase treated potable water from Edmonton-based EPCOR Utilities. We are also a member of the Capital Region Northeast Water Services Commission, the Capital Region Vegreville Corridor Water Services Commission and the Highway 14 Water Services Commission.

Cost/source of funding

Water servicing operations is fully funded through utility rates charged to customers on a monthly basis. There are two types of fees for water servicing on a customer bill.

1. Fixed Charges: This covers water meter replacement and billing costs. This is also used in the rural water system to help cover incremental infrastructure costs to provide water.
2. Volumetric Charges: All other costs to provide water service to customers are charged through a volumetric rate. There are different volumetric rates for the urban (fully pressurized system), rural (low pressure / trickle fill system) and bulk truck fill.

Capital investment in the water system is funded through a combination of reserves, debentures, development levies and grants from other levels of government.

Successes

- Water servicing is a self-sustaining operation requiring no property tax support.
- Collaborating with regional partners through the Regional Water Customer Group to efficiently provide water service to residents.
- Operating diverse levels of service to maximize municipal water servicing to both urban and rural customers.

Challenges

- Maintaining appropriate levels of service and standards with increased growth.
- The capital cost and cost recovery for providing various levels of service.
- Recruiting and maintaining a full complement of qualified operations staff.

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Wastewater Servicing

Overview of project/service

Strathcona County provides our diverse customers with a safe, reliable and environmentally responsible wastewater service by effectively operating and maintaining 388 km of wastewater trunks and collection mains.

Serving

Strathcona County Utilities operates and maintains wastewater systems for the Hamlets of Sherwood Park, Ardrossan, Josephburg, Collingwood Cove, Half Moon Lake, Antler Lake and South Cooking Lake. This includes the infrastructure from the property up to and including the lift stations, force mains and lagoons.

Strathcona County also requires new country residential developments in the Country Residential Policy Area to be serviced with a piped pressure sewer system utilizing the septic tank effluent pump (STEP) concept.

Partnerships

Strathcona County supports regional wastewater cooperation and is a member of the Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission (ACRWC), which comprised of 13 municipalities. The ACRWC operates a wastewater treatment plant where the sewage from Sherwood Park (and soon to be Ardrossan) is discharged for proper treatment and disposal. Another portion of Strathcona County's sewage discharges to the Gold Bar Wastewater Treatment Plant which is owned by the City of Edmonton and operated by EPCOR Utilities.

Cost/source of funding

Wastewater servicing operations is fully funded through utility rates charged to customers on a monthly basis.

Sherwood Park and Country Residential residents pay volumetric treatment charge to have wastewater treated by the Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission or the Gold Bar Wastewater Treatment Plant. These customers also pay a separate charge for the operations and maintenance for the wastewater system.

Rural hamlets of Ardrossan, Josephburg, Collingwood Cove, Half Moon Lake, Antler Lake and South Cooking Lake currently pay a flat monthly charge for the operations and maintenance for the wastewater system.



Successes

- Wastewater servicing is a self-sustaining operation requiring no property tax support.
- Collaborating with regional partners through the Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission to efficiently provide wastewater service to residents.
- Operating diverse levels of service to maximize municipal wastewater servicing to a variety of customers.
- The STEP wastewater collection system has environmental benefits and potential decreased health risks compared to the onsite treatment and disposal systems.

Challenges

- Maintaining appropriate levels of service and standards with increased growth.
- The funding and cost recovery of the STEP wastewater collection system for new Country Residential developments.
- Existing Country Residential property owners must apply for the STEP wastewater collection system in accordance with the local improvement process contained within the Municipal Government Act.
- Recruiting and maintaining a full complement of qualified operations staff.

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Planning & Development Services

Overview of Department

Planning & Development Services consists of 87 employees, who provide services to the citizens of Strathcona County within the following areas:

- Development permitting and enforcement;
- Safety Codes Act compliance and enforcement;
- Long range planning;
- Subdivision and land use bylaw amendments;
- Engineering review for development proposals and applications;
- Environment and open space planning;
- Land Management and right-of-way planning

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

- Able to provide a wide range of services to County residents without having to contract to consulting companies (e.g. engineering consultants or safety codes agencies)
- Able to plan for the fringes of the urban service area without having to deal with issues related to annexation.
- Reduced amount of notifications or referrals to adjacent municipalities (i.e., no towns or villages within the boundaries which could cause processing delays).

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

- Bylaws that encompass the entire County are more wide-ranging and complex than those that deal only with an urban or rural municipality.

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Communications

Overview of Department

In support of Strathcona County's strategic direction and business goals, the Communications Department advances the reputation and positive image of the organization through open, transparent and meaningful stakeholder communication. Communications' activities can be broadly grouped into six core business functions:

Communications planning – delivering communications plans and programs to advance the organization's strategic and/or business objectives

Stakeholder relations - advancing Strathcona County's relationships with its key stakeholders, including citizens, community organizations, businesses, staff, County suppliers, other levels of government, and all other individuals and groups with whom Strathcona County works and/or serves

Digital media – building on strong web presence and adopting new technologies and approaches to facilitate improved dialogue and to reach citizens where they are found

Production services - marketing and communications tools to build awareness, understanding and support for the organization, its programs and services

History and heritage - increasing public awareness and appreciation of Strathcona County's history and heritage

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

From a communications perspective, the biggest advantage of being part of a specialized municipality is that it gives us a fuller and more interesting story to tell. We have it all – urban, rural, industrial – which makes us unique.

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

Communicating with a diverse, highly dispersed audience, located in both urban and rural settings, can present a challenge due; primarily, to differences in:

- methods available to communicate (newspaper and internet delivery is spotty in rural)
- citizen perception, needs and/or information requirements for specific messaging

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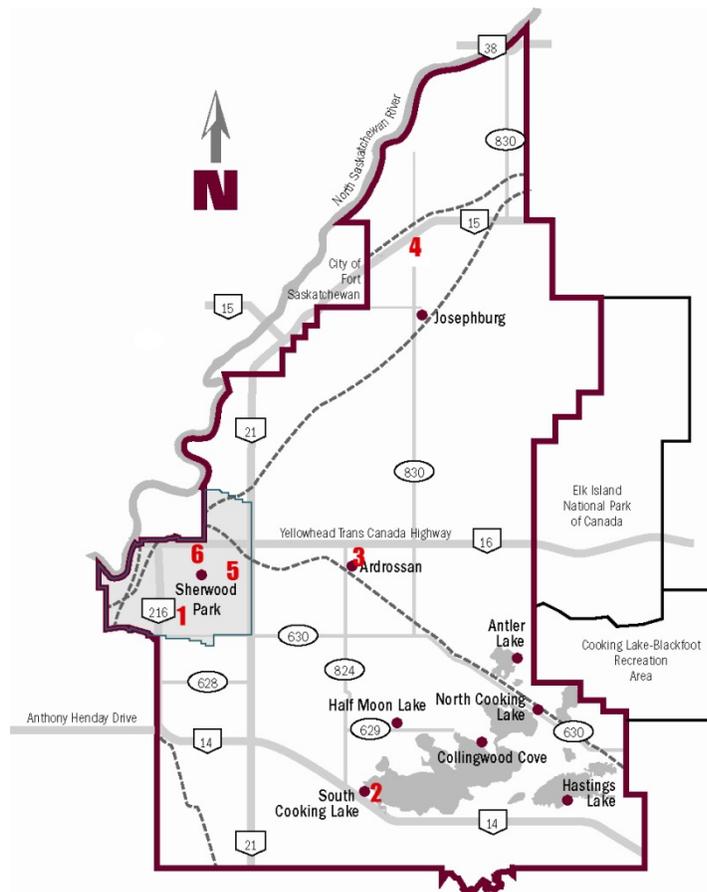
Emergency Services

Overview of Department

SCES is a fully integrated service delivering fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS) under contract to provide four ambulances 24/7 to Alberta Health Services. SCES is a combination department with 155 full-time and approximately 30 part-time (volunteer) officers and firefighters. All full-time firefighters are also trained at the emergency medical technician or paramedic level. SCES operates from six stations – full-time stations 1, 5, and 6 are in Sherwood Park (urban service area) and station 4 is near Josephburg in the Industrial Heartland, part-time station 2 is in South Cooking Lake and station 3 is in Ardrossan. All calls in the part-time response areas also receive a response from the nearest full-time station.

SCES also operates an Emergency Communications Centre (ECC) that answers both 911 and dispatches over 30 fire departments. Additionally SCES has an Occupational Health Safety and Training Division, a Fire Prevention and Investigation Division, and an Emergency Management Division which includes Community Safety Education.

The Management Team consists of the Fire Chief, three Deputy Chiefs and two Assistant Chiefs. Total staffing is 202 full time (179 are IAFF) and approximately 50 part time/casual staff in operations, ECC, and public education.



Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

- Single management team structure for entire municipality (no district chiefs).
- One department budget, one business plan, one master plan, one strategic plan.
- Integrated fleet management plan and ability to shift resources between stations as required.
- One training methodology, one set of Standard Operating Procedures.
- All emergency incidents receive the nearest and most appropriate response, regardless of location.
- Increased level of service provided to rural areas (urban standard equipment and level of training, full-time response supported by part-time resources).
- One ECC dispatching fire and rescue resources.
- Opportunities to apply for grants/funding that are available to both urban and rural areas.
- More trained staff available to manage the Emergency Operations Centre and other non-response emergency management activities, resulting cost savings associated with training.
- More efficient use and coordination of resources for response to mutual aid requests.
- More efficient coordination of disaster response (debris management, damage assessment, long term recovery) by working to one set of priorities.
- More coordinated emergency planning process (prevention/mitigation and preparedness).
- More efficient coordination with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

Examples of benefits:

1. The full-time staff at station 4 (Heartland Hall) are there because of the industrial risk profile, but provide an urban service level to a large rural area.
2. The Superior Tanker Shuttle Service Accreditation provides reduced insurance rates to several thousand rural residents because of the combined locations and resources of both full and part time stations.

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

- Response time standards are different: 8 minutes urban, 17 minutes rural.
- Availability of part-time staff for initial response in the part-time rural station areas.
- Ensuring that the various priorities for the existing areas and communities are covered/considered.

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Economic Development and Tourism

Overview of Department

Business Attraction

Market the advantages of community in order to attract new business investment appropriate to the community. This area of business is important to keep the community economically resilient and to provide an expanded level of services that are locally available. Attending investment conferences, providing market information, site selection packages are all initiatives used with business attraction functions.

Development Attraction

Advocate on behalf of the development industry to ensure that the community is well prepared for desired development opportunities. Activities work toward Strathcona County remaining competitive in the developer marketplace. Facilitating the development process, education (public presentations), and communication between non-residential, and residential stakeholders are all necessary to realize desired development opportunities and remain competitive.

Business Retention

Support the needs and interests of the existing business community in order to continue their contribution to the community. This is accomplished through programs such as the business mentorship program, business visitations and assessment of business need among others.

Business Expansion

Support the existing business community in their efforts to grow or diversify their businesses. Providing research, network and market information, and facilitating the expansion needs of the business are hallmarks of this core business.

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

- Staff of eight with specialized skills such as graphic design, web design, data base
- Ability to train and attract staff from across Canada
- Attend local, regional and international conferences for economic development based upon business case and budget
- Work with regional groups such as Alberta's Industrial Heartland (AIH), Greater Edmonton Economic Development Team (GEEDT), Alberta Economic Developers, Economic Developers Association Canada (EDAC) International Economic Developers Association (IEDC), International Council of Shopping Centres (ICSC) at the board level
- Work with both AUMA and AAMDC
- Being embedded within the IPS Division for development permit activity

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

- Balancing both urban and rural development
- Working on large industrial projects in the AIH heavy zoning and transitional zoning with timing which takes three to five years
- Impact of the CRB on land use decisions
- Capital cost of infrastructure within the AIH area and timing
- Staff turnover. Train and develop managers and coordinators to "gold level of service" and then have other municipalities in the area approach them with a higher pay grade

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Family and Community Services

Overview of Department

Family and Community Services is a municipal program funded in part by the Alberta Government and Strathcona County. Family and Community Services provides a variety of social programs to positively affect the quality of life for our residents. The social needs of our community are ever changing and preventative social initiatives are created to respond to community trends. We are committed to increasing the ability of individuals, families and communities to prevent or address social problems.

Our department provides four core functions in the delivery of preventative social services that enhance the well-being of our residents.

Individual and Family Supports

We provide a variety of direct services for individuals and families who face challenges in their daily lives and provide a range of community support services.

- Individual supports include Counselling, the Family School Liaison Program, Trauma Support for children and youth, Parent Teen Conflict Resolution and at-risk youth supports.
- Community programs include Parent Link, Family Day Homes and municipal subsidy administration. Parent Link, in particular, provides a range of services and has an extensive presence in rural communities through play groups and family activities.

Outreach Supports

A range of frontline services are provided in the home and community to ensure access to support and to reach out to marginalized and/or vulnerable populations. These supports typically focus on residents with complex needs that require assistance beyond traditional in-office supports and solutions. The following outreach supports are offered in rural and urban communities throughout Strathcona County.

- Home Visitation (long-term support for parents and parents-to-be in raising children 0-5 years to be healthy, safe and secure)
- Home Support (light housekeeping, caregiver relief and assistance with personal care and medications)
- Seniors Outreach (assists seniors and their families to maintain wellness and independence through emotional supports, supportive referrals, interventions and advocacy)
- Youth Outreach (supports and empowers youth to make positive choices and connect with resources and support)

Developing Community

The wellbeing of individuals and families is closely tied to the wellbeing of the community. Community development is about working collectively in ways that aim to empower communities and increase community wellbeing. It involves engaging people in a process of identifying issues and coming together to find solutions. These functions include: social research and planning, community capacity building, social need identification, volunteer engagement, connecting communities and social advocacy. These processes are enriched by diverse perspectives of rural and urban communities. Working collaboratively with residents, other departments, community organizations and Alberta Health Services has proven to be instrumental in developing plans, such as the Older Adults Plan, to address community needs.

Community Education

Residents of all ages are provided the opportunity to participate in learning opportunities that facilitate personal growth and skill development; increased awareness of community resources; and support and enhance their quality of life. Learning opportunities include workshops, conferences, support groups, community directories, community events and awareness campaigns. The location of community events such as the Seniors' Week Celebration alternates annually from urban to rural.

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

There have been a number of advantages to the specialized municipality model for Family and Community Services, both from a community development and service delivery perspective.

- Economy of scale is a notable advantage of a specialized municipality. With a larger population, there are more resources to offer a wider range programs and services in comparison to a smaller rural community. This creates increased opportunities for operational efficiencies. For instance, when a new play group is developed and implemented in urban neighbourhoods, it doesn't require a lot more resourcing to build on the success and recreate or adapt the model for rural communities.
- From a financial perspective, there have been increased opportunities to access provincial and federal grants. We are able to apply for programs that target urban and/or rural communities, rather than being limited to one or the other.
- Our municipality has been chosen to host programs that receive provincial funding, such as Home Visitation and Parent Link, in large part due to our ability to reach a population with a rural and urban mix.
- We have access to no-cost spaces in the rural areas, such as community halls, schools and parks. This provides rural residents with the opportunity to participate in free programming in their own communities, such as parenting workshops, play groups and family gardening projects.
- We have the ability to provide a number of in-home services, such as Seniors Outreach, Home Visitation and Home Support Services. This helps ensure our services are more accessible to rural residents.

- The collaborative nature of our work supports opportunities to build strong working relationships with other departments and agencies and learn from one another's experiences with service delivery in rural communities. This has allowed us to create efficiencies through partnerships and adjust our approach to meet the needs of rural residents.
- The population size, diversity and funding opportunities in our municipality allow for creativity and responsiveness in planning, programing and service delivery to meet the needs of urban and rural residents.

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

There are also a number of challenges in servicing urban and rural residents.

- Specialized municipalities must consistently use a rural and urban lens when planning services. Balancing the diverse needs and costs of rural and urban areas is essential and can be complex.
- It is critical to gain a good understanding of the nuances of communities within the rural area of a specialized municipality, including hamlets, rural residential areas and farms. The needs can be quite diverse and adaptability is essential.
- Taking services out to sparsely populated areas can cost considerably more and is not always feasible. Hence, rural residents travel to the urban centre to access some of our services. This is also the case for other community programs and services. Since transportation can be an issue for some residents, it is important to develop creative ways to increase accessibility and minimize barriers.
- Increased costs are also associated with staff expenses when providing in-home or mobile services to a large rural area. In Strathcona County, staff can travel up to 40 minutes per way to provide in-home supports.

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Recreation, Parks and Culture

Overview of Department

Recreation, Parks and Culture strives to generate opportunities for the benefit of Strathcona County residents that enable the pursuit of healthy lifestyle choices.

- Provide year round unstructured and programmed activities for individuals and families of all ages and abilities to enjoy.
- We provide support to community organizations in their delivery of services, provide grants to organizations and support their applications to other levels of government
- We operate cultural and recreation facilities. We maintain all developed open spaces including parks, boulevards, playgrounds, outdoor rinks, sports fields trails and environmental education areas. We install and conserve public art throughout the community

Core Business Functions

- Recreation - Provide people of all ages with safe, available and accessible indoor recreation choices at a number of rural and urban facilities to build a healthy, active community
- Parks – Provides a diverse range of safe, accessible and well maintained open spaces, urban forests and outdoor recreation, education and environmental opportunities that encourage physical activity, personal growth, skill development & mental well being
- Culture – Provide a diverse range of cultural services for all ages for enjoyment, creativity and community cultural development in the visual arts, performing arts and heritage services

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

- Community development – Community self-sufficiency, volunteer development, support systems that enable community group success, community pride in diversity of opportunities
- Utilization maximization – critical mass is required for optimization
- Community gathering spaces – both rural and urban
- Subject matter expertise – in all matters inside the department and between departments
- Blended Rural and Urban opportunities – availability, consistency in service, service delivery, awareness
- Invested community committees with County wide representation – sport allocation: outdoor fields, indoor fields, ice and aquatics
- Community partners – stewardship, volunteers, rural and urban mix
- Consistency in operations – application of standards, public safety, fees and charges, regulatory conditions, product quality

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

- Rural sense of neighborhood – mind set of neighborhood (hamlet) vs. overall community
- Cost comparison to smaller centers to the north and east, City of Edmonton to the west
- We have operated in this fashion since the area amalgamation of two recreation departments in the early 80's. It is built into the fabric of our community wide focus and service culture.

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Transit

Overview of Department

Strathcona County Transit (SCT) provides four types of bus service:

- Commuter transit (and park n' ride) between Sherwood Park and Edmonton
- Local transit within Sherwood Park
- Special event services (like today's tour)
- Specialized door-to-door transit for persons with disabilities.

SCT grew out of private bus operators and became a municipal service in 1977. Today it has: 1.5 million trips a year, a fleet of 86 buses, three buildings, an annual net operating budget of \$13 million, and a staff of about 160 individuals. Value of capital assets is around \$57 million. In 2014 SCT launched Alberta's first double-decker buses.

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

Mass transit is a service often found only in urban areas. Low ridership and high costs make it uncommon in rural areas. Nevertheless, there are advantages in a rural/urban specialized municipality:

- Single jurisdiction eliminates concerns about outsiders using the service (compare with Spruce Grove and Parkland County).
- Greater funding and higher overall service levels (compare with St. Albert).
- Decisions to extend fixed-route service are governed by one council with no inter-municipal agreements necessary. Currently, there are no such extended services.

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

- Rural areas and small communities typically cannot support transit service. There is no fixed-route service outside of Sherwood Park. Specialized transit is the only service provided in the rural parts of Strathcona County.
- Rural residents have mixed feelings towards mass transit. Some perceive it as a wasteful urban amenity. Others draw comparisons with services in Sherwood Park, rather than other rural counties. This can create arguments about equity in urban/rural services.

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Transportation and Agriculture Services

Overview of Department

The department maintains approximately 1300 km of rural roads, 400 km of urban roads, and 200 km of trails, as well as traffic signals and right-of-way management. We are also the first point of contact for drainage issues, resulting from blocked culverts and beaver dams in the rural area, or blocked catch basins in the urban area. The Agriculture Services branch supports the unique needs of our rural residents and implements programs as recommended by the Agricultural Service Board. These programs and services include landowner education, rural roadside vegetation management, weed and pest control services, as well as soil and water conservation.

Advantages of Specialized Municipality Status

In a specialized municipality, similar maintenance techniques and road treatments can be used in both urban and rural situations. Economies of scale can be realized by combining rural and urban work under one contract. Having qualified and experienced staff who can share their time between rural and urban work is a benefit, as this reduces the need for consultants. From a transportation engineering perspective, it is an advantage to have in-house expertise to address the rural challenges that would normally have to be resourced externally. This allows us to offer greater diversity of work to individuals looking for more challenges than the typical urban practitioner.

We are able to better utilize a diverse range of equipment. For example, our grader fleet, used in rural areas during the summer, can be used for winter operations in our urban areas. In addition, materials from urban functions (like asphalt millings) can be used on our rural roads.

Having one individual oversee all roadway permitting allows us to find a balance between high traffic roads and low volume vulnerable roads.

Because of the rural component to our municipality, we are required to have an Agricultural Service Board. The Province provides grant funding that we utilize for weed and pest programs that in turn benefit both our rural and urban communities.

Challenges of Urban/Rural Servicing

Varying levels of service are often seen as a problem by some of our suburban residents. As an example, many look for an urban road standard for a rural grid road system. On the other hand, our rural roads are snow ploughed much more often than our urban residential roads.

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