

Christmas 2021 Newsletter to Mountain View County Residents, Division 4

First of all, and most importantly, on behalf of my wife Dennise and all of my family, I would like to wish everyone a very safe and happy Holiday season and a prosperous 2022. Mountain View County has many amazing amenities right here in our back yard, and I hope you have some time over the next few weeks to enjoy them with your family and friends. And here is hoping for a Covid free 2022!

Once again, I would like to thank the residents of Division 4 for placing your trust in me during the October election. Since being sworn in as your Councillor, I have enjoyed the job more than I even thought I would! As a new Councillor, I often feel “in the dark” when dealing with things like new procedures, policies, and budget. It has been a steep learning curve and I really do want to thank my fellow Council members as well as the County administration and staff for their patience. I’m forever stopping a meeting to ask for an explanation of “what exactly we are doing” and the others in the room are excellent at helping it make sense. As MV County residents, you really do have some great people working diligently on your behalf. If you know any of these folks and you get a chance, thank them for their hard work.

The purpose of these newsletters (which I am going to commit to do quarterly) is to keep my residents informed as to what Council has been doing on your behalf. While it will only be a snapshot, I encourage anyone who wants more information on any item to contact me directly. I am happy to have a phone call or meet for coffee anytime to discuss any issues. Your concerns are now my concerns, but the only way to find out is if you tell me. My contact info will be at the bottom of this newsletter.

Things I have been working on:

Roads – Beaver dams have been causing some danger to County infrastructure (roads and bridges)

- Drought conditions last year have resulted in many wetlands drying up no doubt adversely affecting our delicate ecosystem. There have been concerns raised about water use from ditches and trapping of beavers contributing to this issue.

County Operations has been very accommodating as I relay your concerns. They are mindful of water shortages and will monitor water usage from ditches as well as beaver control activities

- Deadfall being chopped and piled in ditches and allowed to accumulate. Dead or dying trees or those interfering with sight lines are cut during summer months. They are put through a chopper if possible, but often they are so dusty that they damage chopper blades. In this instance, the trees are cut into manageable pieces and piled to be burned when safe to do so. As a municipal resident, if you see any trees chopped and stacked in the ditches, feel free to help yourself. Please, only trees that have been cut by County crews and that are stacked in County ditches.

Deadfall in ditches is scheduled to be removed over the next few weeks (now that there is some snow, the piles can be safely burned). Sightlines are always monitored and dealt with. Here is a good place to remind everyone about the Mountain View County App. It is very handy and easy to use, and if you happen to notice any road issue, you can just record it directly from the road, and the GPS coordinates go directly to Operations to facilitate a fix.

Planning – I find this part of my job very interesting, trying to balance “what’s best for one vs what’s best for all”. This is one area that Administration and staff as well as my fellow Councillors are very knowledgeable, yet willing to look for ways to increase efficiencies (make it easier for applicants). I continue to fight for the rights of landowners provided they aren’t asking for anything that would interfere with a neighbor’s enjoyment of their own property. Trust me, we have many interesting discussions at MPC meetings, all with good intentions. This early in my career as your Councillor, I am happy with small victories. The appeal process for denied rezoning applications has very recently been “tweaked” so that what used to be a 6 month wait for an appeal hearing now can be less than 1 month. Seems like a small thing, but if you are on the waiting end of the stick, I think this is a huge move forward. Thanks to MVC Planning department for listening to my “rant” and providing a fix.

Airport Management Agreement – In the summer 2021, Council asked Administration to pursue interest in outsourcing management of the two county owned airports (Sundre and Olds/Didsbury). An RFP process was sent out and a successful bidder was selected. The details of the contract have been worked out, with a starting date of Jan 1, 2022. Hopefully this management agreement will benefit both County residents as owners of the airports and the pilots who use the facilities.

Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) – Hands down, this was the most informative and stimulating week so far as your Councillor. There are 69 rural municipalities in Alberta, and they meet twice per year for a conference. As a veterinarian, I have been to many conferences, and very often come away feeling “uninspired”. However, the RMA Conference renewed my faith in the potential of rural Albertans to stand up and make a difference. Rural Alberta residents have some very experienced, passionate, and intelligent people both locally and provincially, and when we get together and make our concerns known as one to Gov of Alberta, we have a much stronger voice.

The best sessions at RMA are Ministers Forums. Several (5-6) GovA Ministers sit on the stage and field questions from the audience (Councillors from all over Alberta).

Here are just some of the things dealt with at RMA:

- **Rural crime** and the lack of serious penalties for offenders, especially repeat offenders.
- **Mental health** and FCSS funding cuts, lack of access in rural Alberta.
- **RCMP vs a Provincial Police force (APP)** – This is going to be a hot topic moving forward and it appears that the GovA has a strong lean towards pursuing a provincial police force similar to Ontario / Quebec / Newfoundland models. The GovA has commissioned a study that they will present to MVC in the spring and I will certainly relay this info to residents. This affects all of us, so we need to be well informed.
- **Rural connectivity** – Covid has reinforced the need for reliable rural internet / cell phone coverage and service. Will this be fibre or satellite based? The GovA just released \$150 million in funding specifically for connectivity upgrades, and “more exciting news to follow” (those were the Minister’s words, not mine). During my nine months on Municipal Planning Commission, we have dealt with three new cell tower applications so this can only serve to increase internet / cell service to our rural residents.

- **Rural hospital boards** – There was discussion about bringing rural hospital boards back as it was felt by the audience that this level of administration would replace two levels of AHS.
- **Unpaid taxes** – Provincially, municipalities are owed close to \$200 million in unpaid taxes, mostly from bad players in the oil and gas industry. MVC alone is owed close to \$1 million. The fact that companies get away without paying their taxes means that the good ratepayers of our County end up paying more to compensate. GovA instituted Bill 77 allowing Municipalities to put a lien on surface equipment in an effort to secure back taxes. However, it became evident at RMA and through further investigation, that this bill might not have the teeth we are after. This has become an area of high priority for Council, not only unpaid taxes but also what is the plan for site clean-up of orphan wells. Any residents with expertise or thoughts on these issues, please contact me. I want to make sure I know what I am talking about as we move this forward, both locally and provincially.
- **Shortage of rural veterinarians** – this was brought up to Minister of Agriculture Nate Horner. He is aware of the issue and working on a solution. As many of you know, I owned Didsbury Vet Services for almost 30 years, I was one of the first instructors at the vet school (UCVM) in Calgary, and I sat on the admissions committee for 5 years. I have no stake in the game any longer, but as your Councillor, I understand the need for rural veterinarians. As I felt I might have something to add to this cause, I met with Minister Horner personally, and found out we know many of the same people. This started the ball rolling and MVC Council gave me the mandate to pursue a Resolution to go to this spring's RMA convention asking for more support for rurally inclined veterinary students to be admitted to vet school in Calgary. It must be worded carefully because we don't want to alienate our urban students. Hence, we are involving GovA, AbVMA, RMA, UCVM, MVC and anybody else interested to help draft this Resolution. The aim will be to help UCVM graduate more students who will enter and remain in rural practice. I am the first to admit that I am not an expert on governance, budget, policy, or procedure, but I think I got this one!

At our Council Organizational Meeting in October, each Councillor signed up for several committees. Here is a list of the ones I represent you on:

- Ag Service Board
- Red Deer River Municipal Users Group
- Strings and Keys
- Olds Regional Library
- ICC Sundre -working group between Sundre Council and MVC
- ICC Didsbury- working group between Didsbury Council and MVC
- Sundre Petroleum Operators' Group (SPOG)
- Municipal Planning Commission (MPC)
- Audit Committee
- Fire Guardians

Again, I want to wish everyone a very happy and safe holiday season. Here's to great things to come in 2022.

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