

MD of Acadia No. 34

2017 Ratepayer Survey

The following pages contain topics and questions regarding the MD of Acadia's future and finances. The MD Council has several important decisions to make this coming year and would like feedback from as many MD residents and ratepayers as possible.

Please complete this survey by **Monday, February 6th, 2017.**

If you received this copy via post, there is a return envelope contained in the package. Simply return this document without postage to the Acadia Valley Post Office or with postage to any other post office. We hope for this survey to remain confidential so that people can freely share their thoughts, criticisms and opinions.

However, if confidentiality is not a big concern of yours, you may also return this survey in person to the MD Office or via email to md34@mdacadia.ab.ca.

Your participation is greatly appreciate and very helpful.

Thank you,

Council and Staff of the MD of Acadia No. 34

Box 30, Acadia Valley, AB T0J 0A0

Community Hall

Background: The current hall has a variety of structural and utility issues, with problems arising as recently as December 2016, when the main floor began to sag. Repairs were made, but issues such as this one seem to be part of a larger problem that includes roof trusses, exterior façade, electrical and plumbing. Council, the Community Club, and the Rec Club are of the opinion that demolishing the current hall and constructing a new one by 2022/23 would be the best solution from a long-term perspective. If this is the course we take, the MD will begin saving in 2016 through provincial and federal grant programs with little to no impact on property tax dollars. We are confident that the cost of operating a new hall would not be much different than the current hall considering the efficiencies of a new building and the inefficiencies of the current one.

What is your opinion?

___ Build a new Hall

___ Repair the existing Hall

___ Other (Please Specify: _____)

Comments:

Grazing Leases

The MD of Acadia owns 59 quarter sections of farmland and it rents 57 of these to ranchers. The average rental fee is about \$120 per year with an additional property tax bill of about \$110 (Both of these numbers are averages and depend on the quality of the land). These leases are rented on a 10 year auto-renewable agreement with no renewal fee, meaning that a rancher can lease this piece of land for his or her entire life. The leaseholder has the right to sell their lease to another rancher for any price they can agree upon and they can also borrow against this land with a financial institution. Furthermore, any leaseholders that have gas or oil wells on their municipal lease receive a 1/3 share of the surface lease payments those energy companies pay to the MD each year.

Topic A: Lease Contracts

Background: Having 10 year auto renewable leases with no renewal fees supports our areas ranchers by providing affordable land on which to run cattle. However, this arrangement can have a negative effect on those younger or just starting-up ranchers by not giving them access to public lands that some people may have held for many years.

Current lease contracts still have about 7 years left, but thinking long-term, council would like the public's opinion on these public assets. In your opinion, what is the best way to manage lease contracts:

Keep lease contracts the way they are.

Change the contract term to expire after a set-amount of time (i.e. 25 years). At which time, the lease would go back up for public auction.

Other (Please Specify: _____)

Comments:

Topic B: Oil/Gas Revenue Sharing

Background: As mentioned, the MD shares 1/3 of any surface lease payments from energy companies with the leaseholder (approximately \$10,500 per year total). Most leases do not have well-sites on them. And at present no wells on MD land are currently active (all are shut-in).

Should the MD continue to share 1/3 of this revenue?

Yes

No

Other (Please Specify: _____)

Comments:

Topic C: Misc. Questions

- 1) Should leaseholders be permitted to sell their lease on municipal land at any price they wish, or should this be capped to make it easier for new people to have access to MD land?

- ___ Yes, leaseholders should be able to sell their municipal lease at whatever price they wish.
- ___ No, the price should be managed to ensure others can have fair access to public land.
- ___ Other (Please Specify: _____)

2) Should the MD ever consider selling these 57 quarter sections of land should the need arise? (i.e. Significant financial hardship/Risk of municipal dissolution)

- ___ Yes, if there is a need, the MD should look at selling some/all of this land.
- ___ No, do not sell the land,
- ___ Other (Please Specify: _____)

Roads and Weeds

The MD would like to get feedback on certain aspects of our road and weed programs. Due to shrinking resources, we need to do more with less so it is essential that we are as efficient as possible.

Topic 1: Bladed/Back Trails

Background: 2016 was a special year due to the amount of moisture we had. This caused issues with many of our bladed and back trails; issues that we rarely or never had previously. The MD has approximately 100kms of trails, some are considered ‘Bladed Trails’ and some are ‘Back Trails’. The bladed trails are high use trails used by a variety of producers; back trails are low use roads that often only serve 1-2 producers. The MD grader visits bladed trails at least once per year but only goes to back trails when a complaint is made.

Since the 2016 moisture, many back trails are in need of repair. The MD does not have enough resources to repair all of them. Some farmers have asked the MD to ‘cost-share’ these repairs, with the MD supplying the gravel and the farmer paying for the trucking costs.

What do you think about maintaining these **BACK** trails?

- ___ It should be the MD’s responsibility
- ___ It should be the farmers responsibility
- ___ A cost sharing arrangement is most fair.
- ___ Other (Please specify: _____)

Comments:

Topic 2: Gravel Roads

Background: In 2016, our gravel roads were put under a lot of pressure due to the precipitation and the resulting softness of the roads. While complaints about washboard conditions were received, we did not hear many complaints about the overall state of gravel roads. So we would like to ask for your feedback on MD gravel roads and what roads may need more attention or gravel.

Comments:

Topic 3: Weeds

Background: The MD continues to battle Kochia on our roadways and noxious weeds in many of our ditches. We spend approximately \$25,000-\$30,000 on chemical every year to control these; however, we still struggle with spraying program success.

We are simply asking MD ratepayers for general comments on the weed control program and any problem areas they would like addressed or any suggestions they would like to offer.

Comments:

Topic 4: Misc. Questions

- 1) The MD plans on removing most oiled roads from the rural as they reach the end of their current life. Do you agree with this?

___ Yes

___ No

___ Other (Please specify: _____)

- 2) Many sidewalks in the hamlet have fallen into disrepair. For safety reasons, the MD plans on beginning a sidewalk repair program in 2017 with funds from our current road program? Is this ok with you?

___ Yes

___ No

___ Other (Please specify: _____)

Comments:

Misc. Topics

Topic 1: Oyen Doctor's Clinic

Background: The current doctor's clinic in Oyen is owned and operated by AHS, who pays the building's expenses. At present, there are plans for the MD, the Town of Oyen and Special Areas to build a new clinic. If this happens, the MD would partially own and operate it and costs that can't be recovered from the doctors would be ours. Furthermore, the capital cost of this building is expected to be between \$1.5 and \$2 million, of which the MD would pay 15% (\$225,000 - \$300,000). Since the MD does not have enough reserves to cover this expense and remain financially secure, we would borrow money. This could result in an increase to property taxes until this borrowed money is paid off, not including any additional operational cost.

While the current doctor's clinic is dated and needs improvement, it is a possibility that the three municipalities could instead fund a renovation to the existing clinic with AHS continuing to own and operate it. However, this option has not been fully explored.

What is your opinion on this?

___ Fund our share for a new clinic via borrowing and property taxes

___ Explore renovations to the existing clinic

___ Other (Please specify: _____)

Comments:

Topic 2: MD Dam Upgrades

Background: In 2016, the MD began a 10 year plan to upgrade the Municipal Dam Campground. This renovation is funded through a provincial grant program called MSI (Municipal Sustainability Initiative), so it does not come from your property tax dollars. Some further upkeep ideas that people suggested range from relatively small ones to large scale ones. Some of the simple ideas include: replace the aging picnic tables, install a net for badminton or volleyball, bring the beach back into shape and construct sun shelters/gazebos for picnic areas. Some of the larger scale ideas people proposed are to bring the Valley South Water line to the dam, replace the bathrooms, and install a sewer dump for RVs/trailers.

Of course with any project, we need to look at the immediate construction costs as well as the long-term operational costs.

What are your suggestions for improvements to the MD Dam?

Topic 4: Misc.

1) Would you like there to be a recycling drop off point for cardboard and paper in the hamlet?

Yes

No

Other (Please specify: _____)

2) Signage is an often discussed issue. Please check the below statements **if you agree** with them:

Welcome sign and lighting at the Hwy 41 entrance to Acadia Valley

Improved signage in Acadia Valley

Repair and Replacement of rural road signs

