# Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force

March 22, 2019, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Beaumont Community Centre
5204 50 Avenue
Beaumont, AB

*Lunch will be provided*

## 1. Opening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1 Quorum</th>
<th>Action: Confirmation</th>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.2 Call to Order</th>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec</td>
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<tr>
<th>1.3 Chair Opening Remarks</th>
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## 2. Approval of Agenda

<table>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec</td>
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**Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the March 22, 2019 meeting agenda.

## 3. Approval of Minutes

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec</td>
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**Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the November 23, 2018 meeting minutes.
4. **RAMP Planning Process Update**  
   *Action: Information*  
   *Lead: Chair Shaigec/Ms. Shuya*

5. **RAMP Refresher**  
   *Action: Information*  
   *Lead: Chair Shaigec/Mr. Bouma*

6. **RAMP Working Definitions**  
   *Action: Approval*  
   *Lead: Chair Shaigec/Mr. Bouma*
   
   **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the working definitions to inform the work of developing a Regional Agriculture Master Plan.

7. **Rural Fragmentation**  
   *Action: Information/Discussion*  
   *Lead: Chair Shaigec/Mr. Bouma*
   
   **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion on fragmentation as information.

8. **Rural Conversion**  
   *Action: Information/Discussion*  
   *Lead: Chair Shaigec/Mr. Bouma*
   
   **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion on conversion as information.

9. **Lunch**

10. **Urban Growth Plans & Perspectives**  
    *Action: Information*  
    *Lead: Chair Shaigec/Mr. Bouma*
    
    **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion on urban growth plans as information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11. RAMP Draft Policy Framework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action: Information/Discussion</td>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec/Ms. Shuya</td>
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**Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion of the RAMP Draft Policy Framework as information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. RAMP – Draft Policy Framework – Task Force Direction</th>
<th>Page 50 of 113</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action: Approval</td>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec/Mr. Steil, Mr. Bouma</td>
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**Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force direction be used by the working group to inform the development of RAMP policies for review by the Task Force.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. RAMP – Economic Development and Diversification</th>
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<td>Action: Information/Discussion</td>
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<th>14. RAMP – Engagement Plan</th>
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<th>15. RAMP – Communications</th>
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<td>Action: Information/Discussion</td>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec/Ms. Shuya</td>
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<th>16. Next Steps &amp; Meeting Date</th>
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<td>Action: Information</td>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec/Ms. Shuya</td>
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<th>17. Adjournment</th>
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<td>Lead: Chair Shaigec</td>
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**Optional/Supplementary Material:**
1. Fragmentation and Conversion in the EMR
2. Regional Agriculture Master Plan Reference Maps

**Recommended Motion:**
- That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion of the RAMP Draft Policy Framework as information.
- That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force direction be used by the working group to inform the development of RAMP policies for review by the Task Force.
Regional Agriculture Task Force
March 22, 2019

1. Opening

1.1 Quorum

1.2 Call to Order

1.3 Chair Opening Remarks

Our Values: Respect | Integrity | Accountability | Innovation
2. Approval of Agenda

- **Recommended Motion**: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the March 22, 2019 meeting agenda.

3. Approval of Minutes

- **Recommended Motion**: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the November 23, 2018 meeting minutes.
4. RAMP Planning Process Update

Ms. Shuya

- Task Force Direction – November 23, 2018
- Four Working Group Meetings
  - Meeting Outcomes
    - Common Terminology
    - Regional View of Rural Fragmentation & Conversion
      - Fragmentation – Municipal Subdivision Policy
      - Conversion – Municipal permitted and discretionary uses related to subdivisions
    - Review of Urban Growth Plans
    - An initial discussion on RAMP Policy Framework
  - Next Steps – Policy Development based on Task Force Direction
5. RAMP Refresher
Mr. Bouma

Growth Plan Objectives

6.1 Identify and conserve an adequate supply of prime agricultural lands to provide a secure local food source for future generations

6.2 Minimize the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses

6.3 Promote diversification and value-added agriculture production and plan infrastructure to support the agricultural sector and regional food system
Minimize the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses

Policies

6.2.1 The fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands shall be minimized when planning for and developing multi-use corridors. Where no reasonable alternative can be demonstrated, mitigation measures to protect prime agricultural lands and existing agricultural operations on adjacent and surrounding lands will be adopted and implemented to minimize and mitigate the potential for land use conflicts.

6.2.2 In the rural area, large contiguous agricultural areas will be protected and maintained to enable efficient agricultural production and to support the agricultural sector in the Region.

6.2.3 In the rural area, the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses outside the boundaries of urban communities may be considered for resource extraction uses, recreation corridors and development of major employment areas subject to meeting all of the following criteria:
   a. lands proposed for development are located within a proposed statutory plan or statutory plan amendment;
   b. an agriculture impact assessment has been completed to identify the potential adverse impacts of the proposed development on agricultural lands and existing agricultural operations on-site and off-site in the surrounding area;
   c. mitigation measures recommended through an agricultural impact assessment are incorporated in the planning and design of the proposed development to minimize potential adverse impacts on agricultural lands and active agricultural operations on-site and off-site in the surrounding area.

6.2.4 In the metropolitan area, the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses will only be considered when the proposed development meets all of the following criteria:
   a. the lands are contiguous with built-up urban areas and/or planned areas;
   b. the lands are required to accommodate municipal employment and population projections in accordance with Schedule 1;
   c. if residential uses are proposed, the lands are within a proposed statutory plan in conformance with the applicable minimum greenfield density identified in Schedule 6;
   d. an agricultural impact assessment has been completed to identify the potential adverse impacts on agricultural lands and existing agricultural operations on-site and off-site in the surrounding area.

6.2.5 An agricultural impact assessment prepared by a qualified professional shall be required when a new area structure plan proposes development in a greenfield area that contains prime agricultural land as identified on Schedule 1. The application and contents of an assessment may be subject to review following completion of the Regional Agriculture Master Plan. The assessment shall:
   a. describe the proposed development and contextual factors;
   b. determine potential adverse impacts on agricultural lands and active agricultural operations on-site and off-site in the surrounding area;
   c. recommend measures to buffer, mitigate and minimize potential land use conflicts.

Refer to Appendix D: Agricultural Impact Statement:
Scope of Work: for a detailed description of the scope of work of an agricultural impact assessment.
### Vision

*A thriving globally recognized agriculture economy embraced by the community and characterized by:*

- A secure agricultural land base
- Leadership in innovation
- Environmental stewardship

### Guiding Principles

1. Agriculture is a vital sector. It contributes to the economic, environmental and social well-being of the EMR. Its long-term future requires a set of environmentally sustainable land use, economic development, infrastructure and implementation policies and requires a holistic approach to stewardship and governance.

2. Agricultural land is a permanent feature of the EMR’s landscape and is a scare and irreplaceable resource that must be protected.
**Guiding Principles**

3. A thriving agriculture economy requires strategic investment in both hard and soft infrastructure to develop entrepreneurship and provide leadership to foster a dynamic agricultural business culture.

4. Broad regional public support is critical. Agriculture will be embraced by the community through the understanding of the relationships with food, the economy and the environment.

5. Success requires a collaborative approach including all orders of government, public and private agencies and NGO’s. EMRB is seen as leader and cannot achieve the vision alone.

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**6. RAMP Working Definitions**

Mr. Bouma
Planning without Borders

• Considering the land resource and policy directions regardless of municipal boundaries.

Note: It must be clearly stated that “planning without borders” is a process not the RAMP (Plan) itself with the objective to create a regional plan. The final RAMP will have distinct and delineated agricultural sub-areas. These are defined by common resource characteristics with distinct policy objectives, not by municipal boundaries.

Agriculture

• The growing, raising, managing and/or sale of livestock, crops, horticulture and agriculture related products or services including food, feed, fibre, energy and other complementary value added activities.
Agricultural System

- All of the economic, social and environmental components of a healthy agricultural sector.

Agricultural Land

- All land that is or can be used for agriculture.
Prime Agricultural Areas

- Those areas with a preponderance of lands with a LSRS* rating of 2 or 3 (~ CLI rating of 1, 2, and 3) as well as other important agricultural areas.

*LSRS is official, CLI for illustrative purposes only.

Agricultural Land Conservation

- The protection and sustainable management of agricultural land in a manner that integrates social, economic and environmental values.
Conversion

• The change in use of land from agricultural to non-agricultural use.

Fragmentation

• The division of agricultural land into smaller parcels or areas.
**Transition Lands**

- Agricultural lands designated for other uses in the future.

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**6. RAMP Working Definitions**

**Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the working definitions to inform the work of developing a Regional Agriculture Master Plan.
The Capital Region is losing agricultural land at much faster rate than the Calgary Region

While Edmonton and Calgary had similar population growth rates (12.1% vs. 12.6% from 2006 to 2011) farmland conversion was much higher in the Edmonton CMA than in the Calgary CMA. The loss of farmland in the Capital Region is:

- Approximately 3 times as much as in the Calgary region

In total 38,250 hectares or 94,515 acres has been converted within the Capital Region. Over 61% of these converted lands were prime agricultural lands (Class 1 & 2).

Note 1: CMA = Census Metropolitan Area

Note 2: The Alberta Land Institute is continuing to analyze these changes and will be providing more precise information in the near future

Source: Alberta Land Institute
Fragmentation: Current Situation

- Diversity of subdivision policies across the EMR
- Zoning allows the subdivision of quarter sections into smaller parcels
- Differing municipal standards on size (e.g., 80-acre splits, four 40-acre parcels, or 8 parcels in some small holdings areas, etc.)
- Different rules about subdividing out existing farmsteads and/or creating new building parcels
- Existing zoning will allow for significant continued fragmentation throughout the EMR
- Infrastructure (pipelines, powerlines) in provincial sphere.

Existing Subdivision Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leduc</th>
<th>Parkland</th>
<th>Strathcona</th>
<th>Sturgeon</th>
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<tr>
<td>As per existing MDP: Limited to one lot on high capability land (over 41% FAR).</td>
<td>Each 160 acre parcel can be subdivided into 4 titled areas in a variety of formats.</td>
<td>In the Agriculture Large Holdings and Beaver Hills Policy Areas – a first parcel out of an unsubdivided quarter section can be considered, consisting of: an equal split; a residential parcel; or a split along a natural or man-made severance. In the Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area, the minimum parcel size is 8.0 ha (20 acres) with a 200 m minimum width.</td>
<td>Maximum density for 160 acres is 4 parcels. Policy shall ensure that subdivision layout contains 2 Agricultural Parcels and 2 acreage lots (usually 2 x 80 acres and 2 residential lots)</td>
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<tr>
<td>As per draft MDP: One parcel per quarter – 32 ha (80 acre) split; farmstead (size limited to 1 ha or buildings and shelterbelt assoc. with residence); or residential (bare land 1 ha in size) depending on Agricultural Area.</td>
<td>New MDP proposes fewer subdivisions.</td>
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Fragmentation: Key Points

- Province expects EMRB to address fragmentation & conversion
- Fragmentation was identified as a major concern and constraint by all agricultural planning in EMR
- Fragmentation does not always lead to conversion, but may lead to uncertainty and inefficiencies - impacts are both direct and indirect
- Legislation in other jurisdictions (ON, QC, and BC) has reduced fragmentation
- Agreement that current trend in the EMR is problematic

Fragmentation: Implications

- A foremost issue identified by the Province & a major concern in EMR rural municipalities: must be addressed.
- Precedents elsewhere and input from EMR farmers say the less fragmentation, the better - fewer conflicts, less traffic, more assurance of the ability to farm long-term.
- Current subdivision policies vary, but considerable movement by some municipalities will be required.
- Changes in sub-division policies will be contentious. Mitigation measures may be required.
Leduc County
Subdivisions between 2003 & 2015

Leduc County
Projected subdivisions: 2016 - 2018
Parkland County
Subdivisions between 2012 & 2015

Legend
- Fragmented Parcels
- Parcels Fragmented into 5 or more

parkland county

Parkland County
Projected Subdivisions: 2016 to 2030

Legend
- >5 projected fragments
- <5 projected fragments
Sturgeon County
Subdivisions: Past (2006-2017 - faded yellow) and Projected (2018 to 2030 bright yellow)

Strathcona County
Subdivisions: Past (2006-2017 faded yellow) and Projected (2018 to 2030 bright yellow)
Fragmentation: Task Force Discussion

1. Desirability of a region-wide fragmentation policy?

2. Standards for reducing fragmentation? How do we make this happen?

3. Other issues/challenges?

7. Rural Fragmentation

• **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion on fragmentation as information.
Conversion: Current Situation

- Existing agricultural zoning allows a very broad range of both permitted and discretionary uses
- This allows conversion without rezoning
- Many of these uses are agriculture or agriculture-related, but many are not (airports, etc.)
- Agriculture-related uses are a ‘gray’ area: event facilities, farm vacation homes, veterinarians, etc.
- Uses include many non-agricultural uses, some related to the rural ‘community’ (e.g., religious assemblies)
- Potential for scattered conversion—creating conflicts and adds to uncertainty inhibiting long term investment
Conversion: Key Points

- Province expects EMRB to address agricultural land fragmentation and conversion
- A wide and diverse range of both permitted and discretionary uses are now taking place on agricultural lands. ‘Ag support service’ is a gray area.
- The real concern is long term or permanent conversion.
- How will we direct industrial and commercial uses to appropriate areas - hamlets; industrial parks?
- Big question re: Small Holdings: are they in demand for agricultural uses or ultimately CR? Note: 5,000 small lots identified. Do we continue with this policy?

Conversion: Example Uses

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<th>Examples</th>
<th>Leduc</th>
<th>Parkland</th>
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Conversion: Implications

- Conversion is a significant ‘sleeper’ issue - lands can be moved out of agriculture never to return with existing zoning.
- Range of allowed uses (permitted and discretionary) is large. All rural municipalities will need to limit/reduce this list—to those most dependent on the soil.
- Ability of rural municipalities to ‘convert’ lands into industrial, commercial or even residential areas is a concern to urban municipalities.
- Demand for small holdings for agriculture uses remains unknown. Concern is to limit conversion to ‘country residential.’

Conversion: Task Force Discussion

1. How to balance the need for certainty required for agriculture but allowing flexibility for other uses?

2. What range of uses should be allowed?

3. Other issues/challenges?
8. Rural Conversion

- **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion on conversion as information.

9. Lunch
10. Urban Growth Plans & Perspectives
Mr. Bouma

Urban Perspective: Current Situation

- Outward urban expansion occurs mostly on good agricultural land
- Footprint is reduced with higher density and infill
- Zoning that fosters agriculture but restricts sub-division and limits the range of agricultural development in transition areas (urban reserve zoning). This will make it easier to develop as well as reduce potential conflicts in the future.
**Urban Perspectives: Key Points**

- Urbans want 30-75 year supply for certainty for long-term planning.
- Most have annexed (or will be) large areas of agricultural land with a different interim zoning approaches (agriculture/urban reserve).
- Open to long term transition areas that would be for agriculture.
- How will farmers in urban agricultural areas be serviced in a similar manner as Ag Service Boards?
- Planning and/or implementing urban agriculture plans - focus on community building, not to provide major sources of food.
- Committed to interim agriculture on transition lands (those lands not needed for urban development in the foreseeable future).
- But don’t want to see development leapfrogging into the rural area.

**Urban Perspective: Implications**

- Urban municipalities want certainty regarding the capacity to grow as a foremost priority.
- Most growth areas provide a land supply from 30-75 years—some lands will not be required for decades.
- Urban municipalities are supportive of agriculture. Thus a balanced-certainty approach to planning is possible: long-term certainty for both agriculture & urban growth.
- Agriculture service agreements between urban and rural municipalities will be required. Precedents between Leduc County and the City of Edmonton are being set.
Urban Growth: Task Force Discussion

1. How to balance ‘certainty’ required for urban development/investments with ‘certainty’ required for long term agriculture?

2. How to support agriculture on transition lands in the interim/long term?

3. How to address staging issues?

10. Urban Growth Plans & Perspectives

• **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion on urban growth plans as information.
11. RAMP Draft Policy Framework

Mr. Steil

RAMP Draft Policy Framework

4 proposed planning areas

- Large Agriculture Holdings
- Mixed Agriculture/Environmental Lands
- Small Agriculture Holdings
- Transition Lands
RAMP Draft Policy Framework

Each sub-area has:

- A specific purpose
- Different policy issues
- Different potential implementation tools
- But all need to work together to achieve the RAMP Objectives
**Policy Framework - Large Ag Holdings**

**Vision:** Visual presence of healthy productive farms  

**Purpose:** Support long-term extensive agriculture by permanently conserving large contiguous areas of prime agricultural land  

**Issues:** Lack of certainty, fragmentation leading to conflicts, and loss of agricultural land  

**Direction:** Significantly reduce fragmentation & amount of conversion in conserved areas, provide certainty  

**Tools:** Designated conserved areas, zoning and subdivision, conservation easements, transfer development credits, LESA for discretionary uses, etc.
### Policy Framework - Mixed Ag/Enviro

**Vision:** A diversity of agriculture within a environmental protected area  

**Purpose:** Conserve areas of cropping and livestock with emphasis on protecting environmentally sensitive areas  

**Issues:** Similar issues to Large Holdings area, plus more enviro issues  

**Direction:** Significantly reduce fragmentation & conversion, protect environmental values  

**Tools:** Designated protected areas, zoning and subdivision, conservation easements, transfer development credits, LESA for discretionary uses, etc.

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### Policy Framework - Small Ag Holdings

**Vision:** Thriving local agri-food enterprises on smaller parcels  

**Purpose:** To provide clustered opportunity for specialty & value-added agriculture, potential for infrastructure  

**Issues:** Are there already enough small holdings, locational questions, how to ensure not just country residential  

**Direction:** Determine future demand and requirements before expanding current sub-areas or adding new ones  

**Tools:** Zoning and subdivision, staging tool, economic development and market development strategies, supporting infrastructure etc. Apply LESA when new areas are required
Policy Framework - Transition Lands

Vision: Keeping these ag lands productive

Purpose: To keep transition lands in productive agricultural uses as long as possible

Issues: How to manage staging of development to provide certainty to maximize agricultural productivity over time. Are there current lands that can be converted from potential development back to agriculture?

Direction: Determine staging/staging tool

Tools: Agricultural impact assessment, zoning and subdivision, staging tool, LESA, etc.

Policy Framework: Discussion

1. Is there clarity on the purpose of each sub-area?

2. Other issues/challenges?
11. RAMP Draft Policy Framework

- **Recommended Motion**: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the presentation and discussion of the RAMP Draft Policy Framework as information.

12. RAMP Draft Policy Framework - Task Force Direction

Mr. Steil
**Direction from the Task Force**

**Planning Assumption:**
The RAMP is predicated on the premise that the regional plan and policies should apply to defined policy areas, not municipal boundaries.

**Question:**
Does the Task Force agree with the ‘planning without borders’ approach? What concerns, if any, do you have with this approach? This means the same policies will apply to all municipalities by policy area within the EMR.

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**Direction from the Task Force**

**Planning Assumption:**
Agricultural sub-areas have been identified based on common characteristics across the Region and defined as a “policy area”. The preliminary policy directions identified by the Working Group are general in nature.

**Question:**
What additional direction does the Task Force want the Working Group to consider regarding the development of specific policies for each sub-area? How far can we go?
12. RAMP Draft Policy Framework – Task Force Direction

- **Recommended Motion:** That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force direction be used by the working group to inform the development of RAMP policies for review by the Task Force.

13. RAMP Economic Development and Diversification

Mr. Bouma
Economic Development & Diversification

Next Steps

1. Prepare opportunities/constraints briefing document - April 15
2. Assemble EMR Agri-food Industry Advisory Committee - in process
3. Request each EMR municipality to identify by April 30:
   - Top 5-10 agri-food/agri-businesses
   - Top 3 opportunities - new or emerging
   - Top 3 infrastructure requirements (hard or soft)
   - Other constraints
4. Conduct a daylong workshop - by end of June 2019

14. RAMP – Engagement Plan

Ms. Shuya
15. RAMP – Communications
Ms. Shuya

- What is needed to ensure key regional stakeholders are kept informed of the progress and status of the RAMP going forward?

- Specifically, Municipal Councils, Ag Service Boards and Land Owners (producers, developers and investors)
16. RAMP Next Steps

Ms. Shuya

Next Steps

1. Develop specific policies for each sub-area. Begin with Large Holdings. Follow with other sub-areas further to input from the Task Force
2. Prepare economic development and diversification briefing document
3. Proceed with opportunities and constraints re: economic development and diversification
4. Present where and under what conditions LESA will be applied. Fine tune LESA for specific applications
5. Agree on a consultation plan
6. First draft of the RAMP - date?
### Meeting Schedule & Work Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Group</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Task Force</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Board</th>
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| April 5       | • Large Holdings Policy Drafting  
                • Economic Development and  
                Diversification Discussion  
                • RAMP Table of Contents | April 26 | • Review and Refine | April 9 |
| May 17        | • Mixed Ag/Environmental Lands  
                • Small Holdings Policy Development | June 7 | • Review and Refine | June 11 |
| June 21       | • Transition Lands Policy Development  
                • Economic Development Opportunities and  
                Constraints Discussion | July 19 | • Review and Refine | |
| July ?        | • Policy alignment across all sub-areas discussion | August 23 | • Review and Refine | |
| September 13  | • Strategy Discussion for LESA - Refined LESA Tool and Applications  
                • Discussion - Draft Economic Development and Diversification Plan | October 4 | | September Board Retreat |
| October 25    | | November 15 | | October 8 |

17. Adjournment
Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force

Friday November 23, 2018
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Sturgeon County – Calahoo Community Hall
9, 54500, Range Rd 275 – Calahoo, AB

Members:
Rod Shaigec, Parkland County (Chair)
Michael Walters, City of Edmonton (Vice Chair)
Kathy Barnhart, Town of Beaumont
Nicole Boutestein, Town of Morinville (Alternate)
Tanni Doiblanko, Leduc County
Alanna Hnatiw, Sturgeon County
Paul Smith, Strathcona County
Larry Wanchuk, Leduc County (Alternate)

Technical Members:
Garett Broadbent, Leduc County
Joel Gould, Strathcona County
Darren Haarsma, Parkland County
Michael Klassen, Sturgeon County
John Knapp, Parkland County
Hani Quan, City of Edmonton
Karen Sundquist, Government of Alberta
Candace Vanin, Government of Canada

EMRB Staff:
Karen Wichuk, CEO
Sharon Shuya, Director, Regional Growth Planning
Loreen Lennon, Communications Manager
Stephanie Chai, Project Manager
Taylor Varro, Project Manager
Brandt Denham, GIS & IT Coordinator
Joseana Lara, Municipal Planning Intern
Carol Moreno, Project Coordinator

Guests:
A. Azad, Town of Morinville
Teaka Broughm, Town of Beaumont
Lindsey Butterfield, City of Edmonton
Leslie Chivers, Sturgeon County
Neal Comeau, Sturgeon County
Charleen Currie, City of Edmonton
Gibby Davis, City of Edmonton
Linton Delainey, Strathcona County
Trevor Duley, City of St. Albert
Jordan Evans, Leduc County
Susan Evans, Sturgeon County
Lydsay Francis, City of St. Albert
Wayne Groot, Interested Public
Ryan Hall, Strathcona County
Larissa Hepp, Sturgeon County
Greg Hofmann, City of Edmonton
Cory Labrecque, City of Leduc
Nancy Lyzaniwski, Strathcona County
Ann Manson, Interested Public
Reegan McCullough, Sturgeon County
T. McNab, Town of Morinville
Jacob Middelkamp, ASB Sturgeon County
Al Montpellier, ASB Sturgeon County
Robert Parks, Strathcona County
Peter Reeson, UDI
Shree Shinde, City of Fort Saskatchewan
Collin Steffes, Sturgeon County

Consultants
Bob Burden, Serecon
Jerry Bouma, Toma & Bouma
John Steil, Stantec
1. Opening

1.1 Quorum

Quorum achieved.

1.2 Call to Order

Chair Shaigec called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

1.3 Chair Opening Remarks

Chair Shaigec and Mayor Hnatiw welcomed the members of the Task Force and other guests.

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the Agenda of November 23, 2018 as amended.
Moved by: Mayor Doblanko
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

3. Approval of Minutes

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force approve the Minutes of September 21, 2018.
Moved by: Mayor Hnatiw
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

8. Edmonton Metropolitan Growth Plan – Policy Directions

Ms. Shuya led the Task Force in a review of the Growth Plan and its policy directions as valuable background information for the work of the Regional Agriculture Master Plan project. Members shared their comments and asked clarifying questions around the Growth Plan’s process and targets.

Councillor Walters stepped out of the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the EMRB GP Policy Directions presentation as information.
Moved by: Councillor Smith
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously
9. A Framework for Regional Agriculture Planning
9.1. Refining the Ag Boundary Discussion

Ms. Shuya communicated that the project team will continue their discussions in order to provide a recommendation to the Task Force.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force direct the working group to continue to refine the Agriculture Boundary based on the direction provided.
Moved by: Mayor Doblanco
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

4. LESA Regional Workshops

Mr. Bouma reported on the regional workshops to engage and gather feedback from municipal staff on the development of a LESA tool. Discussion followed around the need for clear policy objectives in order to apply the LESA tool. Mr. Steil offered some comments about establishing agricultural boundaries.

Councillor Walters rejoined the meeting at 10:24 a.m.

Break from 10:51 a.m. to 11:10 a.m.

4.1. Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the LESA Regional Workshop update as information.
Moved by: Councillor Walters
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

4.2. Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force direct the Working Group to apply the Planning Framework as approved September 21, 2018.
Moved by: Mayor Doblanco
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

7. Interactive LESA Tool Demonstration

Mr. Bouma provided an overview of the structure and scoring mechanism employed by the LESA tool and indicated work will continue in January to refine the tool based on clear policy direction.
Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the Interactive LESA Tool Demonstration as information.
Moved by: Mayor Doblanko
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

5. RAMP October 11, 2018 Luncheon

Ms. Shuya provided a summary of the salient points from the conversations between Task Force members and urban municipalities.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the RAMP Conversation with Urban Municipalities update as information.
Moved by: Councillor Barnhart
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

6. Regional Agriculture Master Plan

6.1. Vision for Agriculture

Mr. Bouma introduced the revised vision statement.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force endorse and recommend the Vision Statement for Agriculture to the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board for approval as amended.
Moved by: Mayor Doblanko
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: 6 votes in favour and 1 opposed. Carried.

Mayor Doblanko left the meeting at 12:02 p.m. and was replaced by Councillor Larry Wanchuk.

6.2. Guiding Principles

Mr. Bouma introduced the revised Guiding Principles.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force endorse and recommend the Guiding Principles to the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board for approval.
Moved by: Mayor Hnatiw
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

Break – 12:09 – 1:08 p.m.

Councillor Walters left the meeting during the lunch break.
10. Discussion from Audience

The Task Force received strong support and endorsement for the approved Vision Statement.

11. RAMP Communications Plan Update

Ms. Lennon provided an update on RAMP Communication initiatives and next steps. Chair Shaigec shared details on Parkland County’s ACP grant application to fund agriculture communications.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the RAMP Communications Plan update as information.

Moved by: Mayor Hnatiw
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

12. 2019 RAMP Task Force Meeting Schedule

Ms. Shuya presented the proposed meeting dates. Chair Shaigec took the opportunity to thank our meeting host team from Sturgeon County and the catering staff.

Motion: That the Regional Agriculture Master Plan Task Force accept the 2019 RAMP Task Force Meeting Schedule as information.

Moved by: Mayor Hnatiw
Accepted by: Chair
Decision: Carried unanimously

13. Next Steps

Ms. Shuya said the focus of the Working Group will be continuing to define the Agriculture Boundary and that the work will begin by examining Rural Fragmentation and Conversion.

Next Meeting

February 1, 2019, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Host municipality to be determined.

14. Adjournment

Chair Shaigec declared the Task Force meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.
### Large Ag Holdings

**Vision**

The presence of productive farms with large fields, healthy crops and modern/current livestock housing in all Counties is evident. Large-scale contiguous tracts of prime agricultural lands provide significant long-term economic, social, and environmental value to the EMR. There is a thriving variety of extensive ag operations of field crops and other enterprises including dairy, poultry, and livestock operations.

**Purpose**

To provide long-term certainty for large-scale agriculture as a key component of the EMR.

**Rationale**

Large Holdings represents the largest land use area in the EMR. The major proportion of agriculture production (crops and livestock) is generated by farmers on these lands. Total value of production is estimated at $600 million annually or approximately $850 per acre - ranging from a high of $4,000 per acre (potatoes) to a low of $300 on hay or pasture land. The average capitalization levels among this farming segment is in excess of $3.5 million and in some cases exceeds $10 million. (See Note).

The Growth Plan states, “The conversion of prime agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses is a significant issue for the Region and a fundamental challenge to a thriving agricultural sector.” The agriculture and food industry is a major economic driver in the EMR. Allowing investments to foster value-added agriculture and the diversification of the agricultural sector: Agricultural land makes significant contributions to natural capital and the community character of the EMR.

**Policy Directions**

The major policy issues are:

- how to provide long term certainty for agriculture
- how to reduce land use conflicts with non-agricultural uses.

These policies provide the necessary certainty for long term investment by:

- creating designated areas
- limiting conversion
- reducing fragmentation

Two key issues to be addressed are:

- the appropriate restrictions on subdivision
- the range of uses to be allowed.

The maximum positive impact for agriculture would come from significantly limiting conversion and fragmentation—leaving lands in quarter sections and not permitting non-agricultural uses.

**Potential Tools**

- New Growth Plan policies that limit fragmentation and conversion that are consistent across the EMR, including firm Growth Plan map areas
- Statutory plans and land use bylaws
- LESA could be used for determining limits on conversions or the choice of land parcels where supporting agricultural or community services can best be located
- ALSA tools like ag easements, transfer of development credit schemes, etc. could also be applied across the EMR.
- Further exploration required to determine applicability and suitability of tools
- Protection of environmentally sensitive areas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Area</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Policy Directions</th>
<th>Potential Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed AG/Enviro Lands</strong></td>
<td>A diversity of agriculture, including crops and livestock, provides optimum economic and social returns while protecting environmentally sensitive areas.</td>
<td>To conserve areas of mixed cropping and livestock, some with emphasis on protection of sensitive environments such as wetlands and small bodies of water.</td>
<td>While most of these areas are not the top soil classes, they are still important to the overall agricultural system in the EMR and are more valuable for agriculture if they are kept as large contiguous areas. (Also see rationale for Large Ag Holdings). Many of these areas are grey wooded soils (LSRS-4) and include a significant number of small lakes and wetlands. It is also important that the Growth Plan policies (such as Objective 2.4 to minimize and mitigate the impacts of regional development on natural living systems) are implemented in conjunction with agricultural policies. Revenue per acre on these lands is lower than large holdings and are more in the $100 to $200 per acre range although there are farmers who crop Class 4 soils very effectively ($300 to $500 per acre). These lands are also important grazing areas for cattle. In many cases these lands are part of commercial farming operations (owned or rented) with total investments in excess of $3 million.</td>
<td>The critical policy questions are twofold: • Protecting contiguous areas of farmland in a similar manner as in the Large Holdings area; • Conserving sensitive environmental areas that contribute to the maintenance of the water table, biodiversity, and to ambience and character of the area.</td>
<td>• New Growth Plan policies that limit fragmentation and conversion that are consistent across the EMR • Firm Growth Plan map areas • Statutory plans and land use bylaws • LESA, particularly with respect to environmental values will be useful here. In this sub-area, the LESA tool will be structured to provide a greater weighting to environmental factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small Ag Holdings</strong></td>
<td>A thriving local agri-food economy driven by producers operating on small plots that generate a range of high value products and services. Supported by compact areas of thriving value-added and specialty cropping areas creating sustainable jobs and economic prosperity in the EMR.</td>
<td>To provide clustered opportunity for specially and value-added agricultural operations on smaller parcels of land and some infrastructure.</td>
<td>To promote diversification and value-added agriculture production and plan infrastructure to support the agricultural sector and regional food system. This includes a wide variety of activities that will create jobs, diversification and stability in the agricultural sector. Although small ag holding comprises a relatively small area the value of production per acre can be high. For example, intensive greenhouse operations can generate revenues that are in the six or seven figure range. Specialized market garden operations can achieve revenues in excess of $50,000 per acre.</td>
<td>The critical policy questions and issues are: • What area of small holdings might be demanded by further value-added and specialty operations? • Are there already enough small holdings to satisfy future demand? • Where best to cluster small holdings given location criteria—what uses are better in urban industrial parks? • How best to ensure that small holdings are not simply a channel for country residential? Note: Other jurisdictions such as ON, QC, and BC have put a stop to small lot creation. Note: To date, the study process has not focused on the economic component of the value-added and specialty sectors, but the investment requirements for economic development and supporting infrastructure for fostering small ag will need to be considered. Further analysis is required of the demand by agriculture for small holdings vs existing available supply of such lands.</td>
<td>• New Growth Plan policies that define conditions when new applications for small plots will be considered • Firm Growth Plan map areas • Statutory plans and land use bylaws • Potentially need a staging tool to ensure that oversupply or non-agricultural use is not occurring. • Tools need to be designed to differentiate between fragmentation for agriculture and for other uses • Protection of environmentally sensitive areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Transition Lands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Area</th>
<th>Vision</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Policy Directions</th>
<th>Potential Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Parcels will vary in size. However, most parcels will be quarter sections (160 acres).** Estimated area size:  
  - Heartland – 43,000 acres  
  - Near urban centres – 103,000 acres  
  These lands have been mapped. Except for lands in the Industrial Heartland and scattered country residential, they are primarily within the metropolitan area boundary. Consideration will need to be given lands already designated country-residential and whether those would be included in Transition Lands.  
  The contribution of agriculture in the EMR is maximized over time with an increased sense of certainty.  
  The Growth Plan states, “The conversion of prime agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses is a significant issue for the Region and a fundamental challenge to a thriving agricultural sector.” However, in certain areas, the EMR benefits from conversion.  
  The impact of conversion on the agricultural system can be reduced, over time, by maximizing the agricultural certainty to the sector with more attention to staging.  
  Parcel size will vary in accordance to the differing sub-areas found in the transition land area. Economically speaking, these lands generate similar revenues per acre similar to the estimated by sub-area and parcel sizes described above.  
  Prevent premature fragmentation and conversion.  
  The critical policy question is how to manage staging to maximize agricultural certainty. It is probably easier in urban settings where contiguous development is the usual practice, but more difficult in areas such as the Heartland Industrial.  
  Another policy question is whether any lands designated for development, such as CR, should be re-designated to agriculture?  
  Plan for soil reuse after transition.  
  - New Growth Plan policies  
  - Agricultural impact assessments for plan areas to determine best staging strategies for development  
  - Staging strategies in statutory plans  
  - Consider incentives for conversion back to agriculture or reuniting of previously fragmented lands  
  - Further study required for potential tools that could help provide certainty with respect to time remaining for continuing operations  
  - Requirement for soil reuse  
  - Protection of environmentally sensitive areas |
RAMP Engagement Plan

Background

On February 8, 2018, the Board approved the Terms of Reference for the development of a Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) and land evaluation and site assessment tool, as further work to support the implementation of the Growth Plan.

The development of a RAMP and a land evaluation and site assessment tool will be firsts for this Region and will require the input from a range of regional stakeholders to ensure the Plan and its implementation respond to the future needs of the agriculture and agri-foods sector, while achieving the objectives identified for Agriculture in the Growth Plan.

On April 19, 2018, the RAMP Task Force approved the draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan, followed by Board approval on May 10, 2018 with the understanding the details of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan would evolve and be informed by the Board’s Public Engagement Policy.

On October 11, 2018, Public Engagement Policy G022 was approved by the Board. Policy G022 is intended to guide all Board stakeholder engagement activities.

Next Steps

EMRB Administration is looking to formalize the Stakeholder Engagement Plan to ensure we can collect feedback to inform the work of the RAMP over the balance of the project.

With one year left to go, EMRB Administration is looking for direction from the Task Force on:

- Confirmation of Primary and Secondary (or External Stakeholders)
- Recommended Timing and Number of Engagements
- Recommended Format, Level of Engagement and Location - i.e., local or sub-regional

To ensure we receive timely input on the direction and content, to inform the development of a Regional Agriculture Master Plan prior to completing the Plan in Q1 of 2020.

Attachments:

1. EMRB Policy G022 – Public Engagement
2. Draft RAMP Engagement Plan Framework, revised April 9, 2018
DEFINITION

The term “stakeholder” generally refers to any individual or group that, either positively or negatively, impacts or is impacted by the decisions and actions of an organization. Stakeholders are often categorized into two groups based on direct or indirect impacts.

**Primary or Economic Stakeholders,**
- Land Owners
  - Farmers
  - Investors
  - Developers
- Business Owners
- Municipalities
- Provincial Government

**Secondary or External Stakeholders,**
- Industry & Trade Associations
- Communities
- Academic Institutions
- Business Owners
- Municipalities
- Public
- First Nations
TIMING, in general: When and What?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approximate Timing of Content</th>
<th>Content up to and including Draft Policies</th>
<th>Final Policies</th>
<th>Draft Plan</th>
<th>Final Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Engagement - See G022 (or Below)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Primary Stakeholder Group A**
- Board
- Member Councils
- Province

**Primary Stakeholder Group B**
- Land Owners
- Business Owners
- Developers
- Investors

**External Stakeholders**
- Industry & Trade Associations
- Public
- 1st Nations
- Communities
- Other Municipalities

**Level of Engagement**
- I= Inform
- C= Consult
- Iv= Involve
- Cl= Collaborate
- E= Empower

Note: Economic Development & Diversification will be defined in the next couple of months.
Policy: G022 – Public Engagement

Effective Date: October 11, 2018

Approved by: Board

PURPOSE

To outline how the Board shall engage stakeholders on the Growth Plan and the Metropolitan Region Servicing Plan as per the EMRB Regulation.

To guide all Board stakeholder engagement activities.

POLICY

The Board is committed to transparent and accountable decision making, which includes engaging stakeholders in the creation of the Growth Plan and Metropolitan Region Servicing Plan as per the Regulation, Part 1, Section 3(1)(f)

*develop policies outlining how the Board shall engage the public on the Growth Plan and the Servicing Plan.*

GUIDELINES

1. The Board public engagement policy shall respect the authority and jurisdiction of municipal public engagement policies.
2. Engagement shall be done with purpose and clear expectations to avoid stakeholder fatigue.
3. Communications must be consulted in the initial development of all engagement plans.
4. Board members are ultimately accountable as decision makers, as per the Regulation.
5. For the purposes of the Board, public and stakeholders include:
   - Member Municipalities – Board Members, Elected officials, and Administration
   - Non-members Municipalities within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region – Elected officials and Administration
   - Other Governments - Provincial and Federal
   - Indigenous Peoples – Treaty 6 First Nations and the Metis Nation of Alberta within the Region
   - Experts – Regional Service Commissions and Relevant Industry and Organizational Experts
   - Public – Citizens of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region
**ENGAGEMENT PILLARS**

The placement of stakeholder groups in pillars below represents the *minimum engagement* sought with each regarding the Growth Plan and the Metropolitan Region Servicing Plan. Each stakeholder group may be moved along the *engagement continuum* as necessary per project outcome and Board preference. Upon commencement of a project or initiative, the appropriate level of public engagement on the continuum will be assessed and determined for each stakeholder group. Advocacy with the Provincial and Federal Governments is ongoing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Participation Goal</th>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.</td>
<td>Obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.</td>
<td>Work throughout the process to ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>Partner in decision process including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>Final decision-making.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM - INCREASING LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder minimum engagement</th>
<th>Member Municipalities</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Elected Officials</th>
<th>Board Members</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-member Municipalities</td>
<td>Administration and Elected Officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Governments</td>
<td>Federal Government</td>
<td>Provincial Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Peoples</td>
<td>Treaty 6, Metis Nation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Commissions, Organizations, Industry Experts</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Regional Residents</td>
<td></td>
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Dr. Jodi Abbott, Board Chair

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Revisions</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
</table>


Draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan

REGIONAL AGRICULTURE MASTER PLAN
REVISED APRIL 9, 2018

Sharon Shuya
EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGION BOARD
1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) is to identify targeted approaches to engage with a range of regional stakeholders in informing the work of a Regional Agriculture Master Plan. The Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board has identified development of a Regional Agriculture Master Plan as an implementation priority for the Growth Plan.

To ensure the Regional Agriculture Master Plan has the support of regional stakeholders, it is critical that the Plan responds to the challenges and opportunities facing the growth of the sector and works with stakeholders to explore ideas and solutions to ensure the long term viability and sustainability. Long term here defined as 30-50-100 years.

A comprehensive engagement plan will ensure the Task Force has the most current information and understanding of challenges and opportunities facing the agriculture and agri-foods sector. Working with regional stakeholders and leveraging local and expert knowledge, experience, and data and information will inform the direction, strategies, and priorities in the Regional Agriculture Master Plan.

This SEP will serve as a guide and will evolve over time as the project develops. The SEP is also closely tied to the communications plan for the project.

NOTE: This SEP framework addresses the needs of the Project, as they are known today. The Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board is in the process of developing a Public Engagement Policy to be completed in 2018/2019. Once in effect, this SEP may need to be adjusted to be consistent with the Policy.

1.2 Engagement Objectives

The process of stakeholder engagement will strive to achieve the following objectives:

- improve and facilitate decision-making;
- create an atmosphere of understanding that actively involves those directly affected and other stakeholders in a timely manner;
- provide these groups with sufficient opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns that may influence Project decisions; and
- develop long-term partnerships among the rural industries and regional stakeholders to support future planning and policy development.
1.3 Engagement Principles

The stakeholder engagement process is defined by a set of core values and provide the framework for all interactions with stakeholders.

- **Commitment** – is demonstrated when the need to understand, engage and identify the stakeholders is recognized and acted upon early in the process.
- **Trust** – is achieved through open and meaningful dialogue that respects and upholds a person’s or organization or community’s beliefs, values and opinions.
- **Integrity** – is established when engagement is conducted in a manner that fosters mutual respect and trust.
- **Respect** – is created when the rights, cultural beliefs, values and interests of stakeholders are recognized.
- **Transparency** – is achieved by being clear and open about the process, and providing timely responses to concerns.
- **Collaboration** – is encouraged among stakeholders when they work together towards workable solutions.
- **Openness and Learning** – is encouraged in a safe environment when one can explore new ideas, learn and apply information in ways that generate options collaboratively, and ensures engagement is effective and relevant.
- **Expectations** – are set when the purpose of the engagement and how much influence people will have on the outcomes is clear.
- **Inclusiveness** – is achieved through broad participation and supported by appropriate participation opportunities; and
- **Planning** – ensures the engagement serves both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of participants.

1.4 Engagement Process

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan will create opportunities to participate in formal and informal consultations to facilitate input, opinions, collect information, and stimulate discussion about ideas, options, directions, and possible decisions and associated implications. In this way, affected and interested stakeholders will have opportunities to provide input on policies and initiatives before they are finalized.

Several of the region’s municipalities have completed either an Agriculture Master Plan, Ag Strategies or Ag Studies, which involved stakeholders input. To that end, the involvement of regional stakeholders will be guided by direction from the Task Force for this project.
2.0 Stakeholder Analysis

2.1 Definition

The term “stakeholder” generally refers to any individual or group that, either positively or negatively, impacts or is impacted by the decisions and actions of an organization. Stakeholders are often categorized into two groups based on direct or indirect impacts.

In considering both the process and outcomes for the project, the Stakeholders have been divided into two groups largely based on their role. The two groups are Lead Government Agencies and Regional Stakeholders. Regional Stakeholders is further segmented into the Agriculture and Agri Food Sector, and then Key Stakeholder Groups.

2.2 Lead Government Agencies

The Lead Government Agencies include the Board, Member Municipalities and the Province of Alberta, in recognition of their roles as the decision-makers. The Board members, the Province and member municipalities will also have a unique role to play when it comes to communications.

The Board, member municipalities and the Province will be engaged throughout the process, as follows.

- The Board will be directly involved with vetting the work of the Task Force, approving project milestones and the final Plan.
- Member municipalities and their administrations will be a critical interface between the various local publics, regarding this project. They will require up-to-date information about the project, its progress, key decisions and opportunities to have input while being able to represent and communicate the importance and value of the project for the long term.
- The Province will be informed of the direction and outcomes of the project through information sessions at the ADM level (with affected Ministries) and through internal briefings, organized by the Land Use Secretariat and/or the Alberta Agriculture and Forestry representative(s).

2.3 Regional Stakeholders

Regional Stakeholders will be engaged based on the issues under consideration, and at the appropriate time in the process in order to gather data, information, and opinions, and to explore options and solutions relative to the project purpose and outcomes.
An initial list of regional stakeholders or publics has been identified and further segmented into two groups. The first is Agriculture and Agri-foods Sector. Note: under agriculture it will be important to recognize not only the producers but also land owners. The difference in interests, composition, and method of consulting/involving will need to be taken into consideration, between these two groups.

The balance of stakeholders have been lumped under Key Stakeholder Groups representing a range of interests be considered at some level.

As the project work plan is finalized this list will be refined in consultation with the Consultants, Task Force, and Working Group. Examples include, and are not limited to the following, in no particular order:

- Academic Institutions
- Other Orders of Government;
- NGO’s – includes producers, agriculture input providers, development industry;
- Businesses/ Other Industry- Non Agriculture
- Indigenous population
- Youth Groups
- General Public
- Media

Diagram 1.0

Agriculture and Agri-Food Community includes AG Producers, AGR Industry, AG Associations, AG Input Suppliers, Rural Businesses that support the sector, as examples.

* Note: A further distinction within Agriculture Is to recognize land owners as separate from producers.
To determine the role and level of engagement of the regional stakeholders, the working group completed an initial stakeholder mapping exercise, using the following approach.

2.4 Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder Mapping is a process that allows for the development of specific strategies and approaches to stakeholder engagement, based on an assessment of the stakeholder's impact on the project by understanding the level of influence/authority the stakeholder may have, and the its level of interest in the area or topic under consideration.

Due to the complex nature of developing a Regional Agriculture Master Plan, using this type of approach will be useful in ensuring the process focuses on those stakeholders who have a vested interest in the outcomes and overall success of the Plan. Understanding who should be consulted will be based on two factors: level of influence/authority; and interest. Proper planning can avoid/or mitigate potential impacts (positive and negative) that can arise from an inappropriate level of engagement, misunderstanding, or a lack of information.

Diagram 2.0 – Framework
2.5 Stakeholder Engagement – Regional Agriculture Master Plan

Diagram 3.0 below shows the results of the Stakeholder Mapping for the development of the Regional Agriculture Master Plan.

Diagram 3.0 – draft Stakeholder Mapping - RAMP

Stakeholder engagement will be an ongoing process as part of developing a RAMP. Stakeholder engagement will occur based on the direction of the Task Force in collaboration with the Consultants and the Working Group.

3.0 Other Considerations

While the main effort of this project will likely involve face-to-face consultation, the Task Force may consider other formats to allow any and all Stakeholders to provide input at any time.
throughout the process. Allowing Stakeholders the opportunity to provide comments, opinions, identify ideas and express concerns anonymously.

The use of other formats for input will be included in the discussion about the communications plan, and may include the use of a project landing page on the EMRB website to allow for interested stakeholders to participate in the process by leaving a comment or respond to questions or surveys, social media, etc.

4.0 Resources, Roles & Responsibilities

The following table outlines the roles and responsibilities to support the Stakeholder Engagements Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Roles &amp; Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Consultant                      | • Content  
  • Facilitate Session  
  • Documentation                                           |
| Regional Stakeholders           | • Attend  
  • Participate                                                |
| Task Force                      | • Attend & Observe  
  • Network                                                    |
| Working Group                   | • Attend & Observe  
  • Network  
  • Support                                                   |
| Board / Member Municipalities   | • Provide Venues ( for consideration)  
  • Attend & Observe  
  • Network  
  • Support                                                   |
| Province                        | • Attend & Observe  
  • Network                                                    |
| EMRB Administration             | • Logistics  
  • Attend & Observe  
  • Network  
  • Support                                                   |
6.0 Budget

The project work plan includes a number of Stakeholder Engagements to support the development of the RAMP and land evaluation and site assessment tool. The costs for these meetings have been included in the overall budget for the project, and assume that the member municipalities will absorb the cost of hosting the consultations.
1.0 Executive Summary

This document is a compilation of input received specific to the issues of fragmentation and conversion from four consultation processes conducted with rural municipalities in the EMR, namely:

1. Strathcona County – Agriculture Master Plan – commenced in 2014 and completed in 2015

Section 2.0 (pages 2-8) outlines the recommendations, principles and directions presented to each municipality. In some cases, these recommendations have been adopted in whole or in part; in other cases, the recommendations continue to be under consideration. These are presented for each County. In summary, a core focus in each county’s plan is to deal with uncertainty facing agriculture, the pressures on agriculture land, and the issues of fragmentation and conversion.

Section 3.0 (pages 9-42) presents the full range of input, comments and subsequent analysis for each municipality. All of the comments and associated analysis have been reported in either final or interim reports to the respective municipalities. Over the course of multiple meetings, consistent concerns emerged. In some cases, the comments listed within this document are not limited to the fragmentation and conversion issue alone, rather they pertain to direct and indirect impacts as well as the challenges associated with farming in the metropolitan region. In this regard, these comments provide important context to the overriding issues and the uncertainty facing farmers in the EMR.

The policies forthcoming from these four studies and the wide ranging input received clearly illustrate that fragmentation, conversion, the loss of agricultural land, the uncertainty with respect to where agriculture fits as a priority and the ability for farmers to foresee a long term future for agriculture in the EMR is under challenge. Hence the importance of the RAMP in addressing these issues.

Finally, the reader will note changes in formatting and/or presentation throughout the document. For the most part, we retained the actual formats found in the original documents.
2.0 Recommendations for each Rural Municipality

2.1 Strathcona County

Overriding Principle:

The conversion or fragmentation of large tracks, primary or unique agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses to accommodate growth (residential, commercial, industrial) will only be done as a last resort and in a manner that is predictable, fair and cost effective.

Recommendations Specific to Land Use and other By-Laws (Key Points)

1. That all further development for the purposes of industrial, commercial or residential be considered in a manner whereby the impact on agriculture and lands used for agriculture is minimized or enhanced.

2. That any application to re-zone lands currently zoned agriculture will require the undertaking of an Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) and that the results will be a key consideration in the final zoning decision.

3. That Strathcona County establish an agricultural easement and development credit transfer strategy.

2.2 Parkland County

Principle 2: Supportive land use policies—the design and implementation of land use policies that assure the long term future of agriculture. Further, these policies need to respond to the context of different areas. The principle is supported by twenty policy directions in four areas: growth management (5); fragmentation and conversion (9); other tools and approaches (4); and mapping (2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Manage growth, particularly through MDP policies, to acknowledge the needs of agriculture and minimize the non-agricultural development footprint.</td>
<td>Reducing the frequency, location and impact of subdivisions on agricultural land—the number one issue raised in the consultation process (Stakeholder input - see Appendix 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify the permanent long term agricultural land base in the MDP through the adoption of priority agricultural areas as shown on Map 4.1 along with supportive MDP policies.</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reassess the areas currently designated for future country residential development with a consideration to reduce these areas.</td>
<td>As above. Current supply is considerable and estimated to last until 2082 (Community Scan and Analysis, Parkland County-Report)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Work closely with the Capital Region Board to develop a harmonized agricultural land use policy for the Capital Region.
   A harmonized land use policy across the region moves toward creating a level playing field for agricultural land in the Capital Region.

5. Encourage other regulatory agencies to ensure the timely and effective reclamation of mined lands back to productive agricultural lands.
   Concerns were raised at focus groups, one on one interviews and public consultations. (Stakeholder input - see Appendix 3)

### Fragmentation and Conversion

6. Any proposal for conversion to non-agriculture uses in the priority agriculture areas, except for the first parcel out, would require an Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA).
   Reduce the frequency, location and impact of subdivisions on agricultural land—the number one issue raised in the consultation process. (Stakeholder input - see Appendix 3)

7. Develop terms of reference for two land use planning tools: the Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) and the Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA).
   As above. Also see an example of the LESA scoring system in Appendix 6

8. Allow three parcels on quarters that are either unsuitable or less suitable for agriculture to allow for residential clusters, subject to the evaluations conducted by AIA and LESA
   As above

9. In the next rewrite of the Land Use Bylaw, undertake to reduce the number of non-agricultural land uses permitted in agriculture districts.
   As above

10. Undertake to review bylaws etc. related to the establishment of agribusiness opportunities (e.g. food processing, urban/acreage agriculture) and make them more supportive to equine and local food development/initiatives.
    Ensure that agri-related value added opportunities are not unduly hindered

11. Introduce a new land use zone for small holdings agricultural (minimum size of 10 acres). This should be concentrated in one area and not be used as a back door for large country residential parcels. One regulation that might be applied is to ensure that any dwelling be located close to the road to ensure the parcel maintains maximum usability for agriculture. This would require setback requirements in the Land Use Bylaw. The small holdings area would be designated within the eastern priority agriculture area. It would be comprised of an area of good soils for market gardening and berry production and be in an area where small parcels (10 to 40 acres) are already prevalent as well as relative proximity to urban populations and road access.
    Sends a clear message that specialty production is a priority
    Reduce the frequency, location and impact of subdivisions on agricultural land—the number one issue raised in the consultation process
    (Stakeholder input - see Appendix 3)

12. Require that any applications for multi-subdivisions (more than four parcels), undertake a detailed soil survey to update Canada Land Inventory Soil Class information using an
    The current and the 57% or less requirement, may be out of date or inaccurate
    FAR ratings are based on visually...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragmentation and Conversion Overview</th>
<th>Input and Analysis within the EMR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accredited third party. (Note: this updated information will be used to update the Farmland Assessment Rating or FAR score).</td>
<td>assessed crop productivity and not soil capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: in the case of an application for multi-subdivisions, we would recommend the use of CLI Land Class information over FAR because of the potential inaccuracy of the FAR.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Any applications for multi-subdivisions will be required to undertake an AIA in addition to several additional criteria that need to be met. | As above |

14. Revise the Land Use Bylaw to include regulations for buffering of non-agriculture parcels from agriculture parcels (both Rocky View County and the BC Agriculture Land Commission have models that can be adapted for use in Parkland County). These would include fencing, berms, municipal reserves, setbacks, etc. | Considerable work that is transferrable to Parkland County is available and can be directly applied |
| See Agriculture Boundary Design Guidelines, Rocky View County as an example |  |

**Other Tools and Approaches**

15. Finalize the Transfer of Development Credits pilot project. This should be based on ‘one parcel out’—either a small farmstead or an 80-acre split on Priority Agricultural Land. Any additional subdivision, up to two additional clustered parcels could be considered, but would require the obtaining of subdivision credits from other land parcels. The sending and receiving areas would occur within the same priority agriculture areas. | A credit transfer system would enable subdivisions to be directed to areas that are less suited for agriculture |
| Reduce the frequency, location and impact of subdivisions on agricultural land – the number one issue raised in the consultation process |  |

16. Establish a mechanism for the purchase of agricultural protection easements by Parkland County through different sources. There are options for funding, such as a special levy, a land conversion fee, or donations, etc. | As above |

17. Support best practices on agricultural lands (through education, continuation of the ALUS program, and subdivision conditions) that ensure an environmental fit and less conflict with other uses. | Reinforces the importance of sound environmental practices |

18. Develop processes for educating rural and/or agricultural land owners regarding permit and regulatory requirements specific to agricultural related initiatives that are either new or an expansion of a current enterprise. | Need for information and education identified in the consultation process |
| (Stakeholder input - see Appendix 3) |  |
2.3 Leduc County

**Principle:** Recognize and protect the priority agricultural land

The land base in Leduc County varies greatly by soil quality and suitability for agriculture of different kinds. As a result, agricultural regions within Leduc County are not the same, given their soils and the growth pressures arising from their location and context. The impact of this is that all land is not equal in terms of the utility it provides as farmland and how it fits within the context of the County. However, there are areas that are worthy of long term protection for agricultural use.

Leduc County should protect long term priority agriculture areas. The designation of these areas shall be done on a comprehensive and systematic basis considering land suitability, contextual factors, and the protection of large contiguous areas by reducing and managing conflicting land uses.

In other words, acceptance of this principle means that any land use planning process must establish a robust set of policies and approaches that facilitate, or at the very least support, those types of agriculture that have the best fit and future in the County and reflect this in the decision making process. On the other hand, while agriculture is to have a high priority, it must fit within the multiple objectives the County seeks to integrate like economic development and environmental protection.

This principle, when combined with the previous principle, should lead to determining priority areas where agricultural lands are to be protected in the long term. It will also determine areas where conversion and subdivision will be permitted that will have the least conflict with agricultural uses.

**Principle:** Limit land fragmentation in priority agricultural areas

During the stakeholder consultation it became very apparent that fragmentation of agricultural land was felt to be as big of an issue as the absolute loss of the agricultural land base through conversion. There was a slight divergence between the requirements for large scale agriculture and those for smaller more intensive production. These two requirements have been accommodated in the strategy.

As a result, significantly reducing the level of subdivision in priority agricultural areas is established as an independent principle for the development of the Agricultural Strategy.

Fragmentation of agricultural land is just as much a problem as is the absolute loss of agricultural land through conversion, so fragmentation should be limited in priority agricultural areas.

This means that the land use policy process must provide a mechanism for the qualification and potential quantification of the extent of fragmentation when considering any land use decision in priority agricultural areas. Decisions must be based on an objective technical process that provides strict
guidance for the exercise of discretion, eliminating the potential for the perception of political interference. The perception of a political based decision making process will undermine the credibility of the decision making process—regardless of the accuracy of that perception.

Strict enforcement of this type of criteria would obviously create significant reservation from those who feel it is affecting the value of their surface rights. This protest is a reality to be accepted if the negative impacts of fragmentation on agriculture are to be avoided.

Ultimately, there is a need to recognize the diversity of agriculture, including the need to maintain large parcels as well as parcels appropriate for intensive agricultural production in order to, avoid conflicts with incompatible uses, etc. This is consistent with municipal land preservation schemes that have been used in both Canada and the United States. Any adjustment to priority areas (defined in Principle 2) must be clearly stated and the rationale must follow an accepted and transparent process.

Leduc County needs to send a clear and consistent message to all parties that the policy decisions about priority agriculture areas are firm and not subject to change. While discretionary uses may still be allowed in some areas of the County its use in “priority agriculture lands” would be limited. A clear signal of how the County is going to deal with land use zoning decisions provides certainty and will ensure that stakeholder expectations are set appropriately. Ultimately, there is a need to communicate that agriculture is of high on-going importance in Leduc County (i.e., it’s not just a land bank for future commercial and industrial development).

Fragmentation of agricultural land is just as much a problem as is the absolute loss of agricultural land through conversion, so fragmentation should be limited in priority agricultural areas.

The consultation process revealed that fragmentation of agricultural land was as big of an issue as the absolute loss of the agricultural land base through conversion. As a result, reducing the level of subdivision in priority agricultural areas is an important component of the future agricultural strategy as farms grow larger and conflict with non-agricultural users is to be minimized.

Strict enforcement of this type of criteria would obviously create reservation from those who feel it is affecting the value of their surface rights. This protest is a reality to be accepted if the negative impacts of fragmentation on agriculture are to be avoided. The following actions would be required:

1. In the agricultural priority areas, new Land Use Bylaw should be amended to limit subdivision and dwellings to that which is proposed in Table 1 below.

2. A formal agricultural impact assessment would be required for subdivision identified in Table 1. As part of this assessment it would be expected that the applicant be able to quantify that the impact of the obstruction would be minimal in terms of its effect on the typical farming operation.
### Table 1  Matrix of Priority Agricultural Land – County of Leduc

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture Priority Areas</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Permitted Subdivisions</th>
<th>Discretionary Subdivisions</th>
<th>Dwellings</th>
<th>Agriculture Impact Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A  Environmental Sensitive Agriculture</td>
<td>Along the North Saskatchewan River and some of the major lakes and the Minnetick Lake Sanctuary</td>
<td>1 parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or a CR) subject to EIA</td>
<td>1 principal, 1 secondary dwelling is discretionary</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  Genesee Reclamation for Agriculture</td>
<td>The coal mining area in the northwest portion of the County</td>
<td>To be established with reclamation plan/ASP</td>
<td>To be established with reclamation plan/ASP</td>
<td>To be established with reclamation plan/ASP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  West Agriculture</td>
<td>The areas around and west of Thorsby</td>
<td>1 new parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or a CR)</td>
<td>1 principal dwelling, plus 1 secondary dwelling for 80 ac parcels</td>
<td>For subdivisions smaller than 80 ac</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D  North Central Agriculture</td>
<td>Lands in the north central portion of the County both east and west of the development core of Leduc, Nisku, EIA, etc.</td>
<td>1 new 80 ac parcel</td>
<td>Existing farmstead</td>
<td>On existing parcels, but no new dwelling on remnant if CR lot is subdivided.</td>
<td>For farmstead parcels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E  South Central/East Agriculture</td>
<td>Lands south of Calmar, Leduc and Twp Road 500</td>
<td>1 new parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or existing farmstead, but not a new CR)</td>
<td>On existing parcels, but if creating a new parcel, no build on remnant parcel.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F  Agriculture Small Holdings/Country Residential</td>
<td>East of Beaumont to the CN Rail line</td>
<td>As per area structure plan, may include small holdings and CR</td>
<td>1 per parcel</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G  Agriculture Small Holdings</td>
<td>In the northeast corner of the County north of Twp Road 500 west of the CN Rail line</td>
<td>40 ac minimum, no CR</td>
<td>1 per parcel</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4 Sturgeon County

Direction: Nuanced Land Use Strategy

The assured long-term presence and vibrancy of agriculture requires a clear long-term land use strategy with associated policies supported by the agricultural community.

Sturgeon County currently allows a four-parcel policy for each quarter section (160-acre parcel). The policy which has been in place for over 20 years has several direct and indirect consequences. On the positive side the policy enables land owners/farmers to capture equity from their farm properties – particularly those who approaching retirement, while enabling other farmers to use this equity to purchase farmland further afield and distant to urban development thereby expanding their farm operations. On the negative side, the policy drives up the price of land putting it out of reach for many farmers. It has also resulted in an increase in the number of non-farm rural residents and accordingly an increase in rural-urban conflicts.

Land use and changes to existing land use policies is a very difficult and contentious issue. It is also a two-sided sword: on one side many farmers (and particularly younger farmers) feel very strongly about preserving top agricultural land and will argue that this should be the overarching principle for Sturgeon County; on the other side, farmers do not want to lose their ability to exercise the four-parcel-out option. Any change or restriction to this would be perceived as a direct loss of value (or equity).

The issue of subdivision on agricultural land is common throughout the Edmonton Metro Region. To this end, Sturgeon County together with the other municipalities will need to tackle this issue and address the following issues:

a. What areas or lands should be designated as priority agriculture and be such for the long term or even perpetuity?

b. What areas or lands should be designated as priority agriculture but regarded as shorter term or transitional as urban development and the local population continues to grow?

c. What can be done to direct development to seek out new solutions such as the clustering of development and increased density?

In response to these questions, Sturgeon County may wish to consider a more nuanced land use strategy which defines priority agriculture areas both long term and short term. This would be supported by new tools such as the establishment of development credits that can be sold from long term priority areas to areas more suitable for development and/or the clustering of development (more than 4 parcels on a quarter section). This would require the developer to purchase development credits from other land owners.
3.0 Detailed Comments and Input

3.1 Strathcona County: Input from Commercial Farm Sector: Highlights

Attending: 15 attendees representing 10 farms (5 from Scotford Colony; all crop producers; and 2 dairy producers)

What does Strathcona as a specialized municipality mean to you?

- HEADACHE!
- Urban and rural is not a good mix (a lot of agreement with this statement)
- Farmers are able to work with industry but not with urban residents
- Everyone wants to live in the country but not beside a farmer!!
- Traffic is a big issue – rush hour is dangerous!!
- People thinking they can use your property as they please – dumping stuff; quads running around; trespassing; donuts in my cornfield!
- Problems yet – but there may be opportunities to supply produce if you wanted to get in that business
- There are those who want to “save” farmland but here’s the issue: there is not a lot of purchasable land in the County that you can buy as a farm. Most is too expensive for farming.
- If we can sell our land (or if we are offered) for a good coin, we would be foolish not to take it and buy land elsewhere away from this area.
- People want all these market gardens – part of the local food movement. But they have no idea how much work it is!! And where would you find the labour?
- Special? It means that farmers get nothing – we are at the bottom of the barrel.

The challenges of farming in Strathcona County.

- The roads are too narrow – every time they pave, they don’t take the old road out. So each time, the road is 8 inches higher and one foot narrower. It is easy to roll equipment and you can’t pull over
- Why is the County allowing big Tank Farms to set up on good land just north of Highway 15? These should be on the sandy land further north
- The roads are busy and very dangerous?
- There is so much competition for land – the energy sector; for residential development; from industry!!
- Strathcona should forget developing the Bremner area – go to Colchester – that is much poorer
- Why not expand Ardrossan – that is a better place to grow?
- Even if Bremner is not chosen as a growth node, the land is going for $20,000 per acre – it is not affordable to a farmer. There are too many wealthy people from the City who can buy 40 or 80 acres for the price of big house – so rather than spending a million on a city lot, they take a chance and buy a property out here and sit on it.
- There is NO incentive for farmers to stay in the County – you stay here and farming is a pain in the butt with all the traffic, dangerous roads etc. Or you sell for big bucks
and move to an area that is agricultural and knows farmers!

- We farmed in what is now Sherwood Park. The pressures in Josephburg are now the same as in the Park some 30 years ago.
- If you want to keep any form of agriculture, don’t allow more sub-divisions
- I own land in the Bremer area – I would be OK to keep farming if I knew that I was going to be able to farm.
- One person said: where will we be in 20 years? Go big or Go home when it comes to farming. Can’t see much of a future in Strathcona (a very strong sentiment held by most of the group members).
- The issue is this: what does the County want? Commercial farms or market gardens? There is this fantasy that market gardening is so great. But who is going to do it? Where will the labour come from? Not sure if these operations are sustainable. Even Galloway and his raspberry path for U-Pick didn’t make it.
- In 20 years, the only entity able to afford this land will be big corporate farms

Question: Can the County take measures to slow things down or reduce the pressure on agriculture?

- Not sure – it may be too late
- Generally farmers will continue farming on the land in Strathcona if it is available. But there was a distinct feeling of resignation that it is just a matter of time before it will be necessary to move.
- One dairy farm located in the very north east part of the County – we have a new barn which we hope lasts for 20 years. Then we will see if and where we continue.
- Succession is a big issue. Whose kids want to go into farming? I

Other Challenges in Dealing with the County

- “They (County Administration) don’t know nothing about agriculture!!!!
- Lots of regulations and rules
- Recently the County was going to restrict transportation to less than 6 trucks coming to a site – anything more would require a permit. How is this going to impact anyone drawing silage? We had to fight like crazy to put a stop to this!
- People in administration have no idea of agriculture – no flexibility or understanding. They treat us like commercial businesses.
- All of a sudden one my “approaches” into one of my fields was taken out – no warning or information in advance. Gone! Then they expect me (with my big equipment) to use the same size of an approach as an acreage owner.
- I know a person who wanted to set up a “Paint Booth” (?). He got so much hassle from Strathcona that he went to another county with no problems. When he asked about a development permit, they said – what is a development permit?
- The County takes a “one size fits all approach.” Same approach whether you are big industry or a farmer. That makes it tough.
- It is easier to beg forgiveness than ask permission.
- A couple of years ago, the County seemed to have a “bee in their bonnet” about
weeds. Never seen so many weed notices?
• There are no policies supporting the farmer.
• Currently club root is a problem – it needs to be controlled. Eliminate movement from field to field especially dirt. Yet what happens, you see industry tearing up fields and trucks moving dirt - the roads are covered with mud. No cleaning is required – this does nothing but spread the problem.

What Should the County be doing?

• Start by being friends with the farmer
• Administration needs to be educated about farming and what it takes
• We need more flexibility regarding permits – when they are needed; what is required.
• We need an Agricultural Liaison person to represent us or explain to administration what we are doing

Other Suggestions/Actions that the County should take?

• Improve some of the roads – lower and widen them
• Somehow, make Administration more user friendly – have them appreciated agriculture and a set of priorities and policies that is friendly toward agriculture
• Administration seems totally focussed on Sherwood Park – they need to open their eyes to the entire county.
• Fix the roads
• Listen to the farmers
• Administration to give us the freedom to do what we need to do to farm
• Make permits more flexible – need people as part of the process who are accommodating
• Turn some of the back roads to gravel. This would keep undesirables away from these roads.
• Have more discussions like this with the Councillors
• Make sure that agriculture is considered in the Master Agriculture Plan – it has to give agriculture some certainty
• Loosen up on getting permits
• More discussions like this – make agriculture a priority. Take farmers advise into consideration
• We need education at every level – the Councillors; Administration and the school system.
• Stop developing sub-divisions. Bring the back roads back to gravel.
• There is no focus or support for agriculture – since AARD got out of extension, there is no point of contact within the County for agriculture. It used to be the Ag Office – now there is nothing!
• Change their priorities and not treat farmers as the bad guys in the country like the city people do.
Further discussion of key areas that may require ‘direction’ and recommendations as part the Agriculture Master Plan that will ultimately feed into the MDP. What policies are lacking, vague, too restrictive, or need to be changed. Note: I have summarized the comments provided in the Visioning exercise (see Attachment 2). Generally these fall into three categories: land use; awareness and education; and developing unique opportunities. Additional comments:

- Extent of Development – (establishing) boundaries?
- A detailed Agriculture Master Plan would provide government (Council?) with policies upon which decision making could be made.
- How to balance ag? Growth and urban growth
- Education of the value of good land – we protect sensitive lands but forget to protect good healthy lands.
- A framework for Councillors to hang their hat on and not being forced to consider all land for development
- MDP makes a statement about preservation of Class 1 & 2 soils but no other policy direction
- LUB needs to be further revised to support agriculture (i.e. horses are not seen as livestock)
- Class 1 and 2 soil development?
- Identifying other fragmentation of land – range and pasture also important
- Use of land – dealing with regional sprawl
- A clear definition of agriculture and the worth to Strathcona County
- Agriculture and its importance to the County’s well being
- Visibility and awareness of agriculture – have ‘points of interest’ along roadside to identify history and importance of each agriculture production area.
- Road side signs identifying ag. Production areas such as Beef Road; Beef Avenue
- Communication of agriculture’s importance to the County rate payers
- Plans for awareness, education, publicity
- Educating the public (both urban and rural) about issues surrounding agriculture growth and lifestyle.
- Administrative Integration – strategic plan alignment
- Definition of Agriculture – backed by research and data to support it.
- Define urban sprawl and the consequences of less fragmentation of farmland
- Need to share positive aspects of farming
- Economic Development must get involved in understanding/development of marketing
- Encourage small scale production – direction for education and public relations
- Allow for development of market opportunities
- Proximity to urban centres – opportunities for agri-tourism and farm fresh produce
- Urban councillors need to be educated re: the value of agriculture.
- Ag Master Plan must align with Council’s strategic plan
- Look at provincial support for Agriculture.
- Attracting and keeping new farmers/young people to the agriculture lifestyle.

### 3.2 Parkland County

#### A3.1 Focus Group Interviews

The three groups were comprised of a producer group in west Parkland (Tomahawk); a producer group in east Parkland (Stony Plain); and an equine group based in the Stony Plain area. A total of 27 individuals participated (average of 9 per group) in an open format in response to a similar set of questions to the individual interviews. Particular attention was paid to identifying both similarities and differences arising across the groups.

#### Table A3.3 Summary: Commercial Farm Sector – Tomahawk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Discussion</th>
<th>Summary of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>▪ Trend to fewer large full time farmers in turn leads to fewer services, local markets, local dealerships, a declining farm community&lt;br&gt;▪ Increased acreages/subdivisions reduces available land for farming – increased traffic, difficulties in moving equipment, more weeds, higher land prices&lt;br&gt;▪ Also significant vandalism and theft on farm properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Future</td>
<td>▪ See fewer larger farms – increasingly automated; continuing loss of farm community&lt;br&gt;▪ Also more niche small farms with direct sales – few (or no) middle sized farms&lt;br&gt;▪ More and more automation enabling farmers to get larger and no longer dependent upon hired labour which is hard and harder to secure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>▪ Niche artisan farms that are small – market direct&lt;br&gt;▪ West Parkland County is ideal for grazing cattle but numbers are down and fencing/pens are gone. Will cattle numbers come back?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues Requiring Clarity</td>
<td>▪ Education for public to appreciate agriculture (food producers)&lt;br&gt;▪ Incentives for start-up value added operations&lt;br&gt;▪ Zoning policies that are friendly to further processing&lt;br&gt;▪ Land use policy that minimizes rural living within mainstream agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Direction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Comments</td>
<td>▪ A general acceptance that mainstream agriculture is on the way out. Only a few large farms will be left.&lt;br&gt;▪ Some small speciality enterprises will emerge.&lt;br&gt;▪ Farmers are now so few, and have little or no voice politically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>See agriculture in decline; fewer farmers, loss of community, fewer services, more non-farm residents. Land for farming is becoming unaffordable; increased safety concerns due to traffic; vandalism is a concern; mining lands – a seed bank for weeds. In the future, see the trend to fewer larger farms continue; west Parkland County is ideal for grazing; some niche operations will emerge; more conflicts with non-farm residents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Most Significant Challenges

- Significant vandalism and theft with no convictions (non-responsive police); crime
- Roads that are not designed for big modern farm equipment/moving equipment
- Need for common road regulations across all counties in the province (different rules by different jurisdictions).
- Too much sub-dividing – sends the wrong message.
- Encroachment of acreages and subdivisions – leads to weed problems and raises land prices (hard for farmers to compete); loss of land to non-farm uses (acreages/gravel).
- Segmentation of land by subdivisions
- Surface Rights
- Lands held by Trans Alta – what is going to happen? These lands are also a major source of weeds
- Distance from key suppliers – parts, dealers are getting few and farther away; markets and services are quite distant
- Lack of local markets – too concentrated, hard to access; no place to market cattle; machinery dealer are farther and farther away

### Picture of the Future

- Wide diversity of sizes of operations – small operations with direct sales plus large mainstream operations
- Mix of agriculture and recreation
- Would like to see farm families being able to make a living on a section of land but this is never going to happen again
- Fewer and fewer farmers. Once the farming community had a 100 people to farm an area of land. Now you only need 2?
- More and more automation – GPS; self-driving vehicles
- See more smaller niche/artisan type farms
- You will either see bigger farms or small ones – no room for the middle sized farmer
- In areas of good land, you’ll see ‘mega’ farms – big guys who will rent the land with equipment all powered by automation

### Unique Opportunities

- Niche markets – organic products
- Opportunities for natural habitat
- The west part of Parkland County is ideal grazing area. But the infrastructure (fences, pens etc.) is gone. A lot of people got out of cattle after BSE
- Opportunities for enhanced grazing

### Top Issues that Require Clarity, Direction or Policy

- Education for the public to appreciate agriculture
- Incentives for new start-up operations/more incentives for value added agricultural facilities and businesses.
- Zoning policies that are friendly to further processing etc. Make it easier for them to operate
- Land use – need to minimize the desire for rural living vs. mainstream agriculture
- Uniform regulations for all counties for trucking
- More support for groups that are supporting agriculture within Parkland County such as the West Central Forage Association
- Reclamation of mining lands needs to be a higher priority – hold TransAlta accountable. Turn their land into an area for quads!
- More enforcement re: weed and pest control
- Can Parkland County allow for the zoning for an abattoir?

### Other Comments
- The Tomahawk group expressed a number of concerns about the long term future of agriculture. The comments included:
  - The handful of full time farmers that are left in the western area of Parkland County (fewer larger farms) and many other farmers taking off-farm employment. ‘You have to get bigger or you can’t compete!’
  - The high level of vandalism and theft that is taking place (originating from Drayton Valley) and the non-response from police
  - The general lack of respect non-farm people have for farmers – both in terms of how they farm (use of chemicals) and slowing traffic when moving equipment
  - Increasing number of acreages. To quote: ‘a good quarter is turned into 4 pieces of junk – all weeds and no production.’
  - Dangers in moving equipment
  - A sense the farmers are such a small minority that they have little or no voice politically
  - If you call Parkland County office, it is hard to get answers – you get the run around – I needed a wider access to get into my field.
  - With the many acreages, there are too many weeds – the weed inspectors are not doing a good job

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**Table A3.5**  **Summary: Commercial Farm Sector – Spruce Grove**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Discussion</th>
<th>Summary of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
<td>The growth of acreages/subdivisions restrict the ability to farm – reducing available land; increased traffic; increased land prices; land parcels are too big to look after but too small to farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roads (narrow and high) and traffic make moving equipment increasingly dangerous</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lack of understanding/appreciation for agriculture by Council and public at large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inevitability of being displaced because of urban growth in the eastern part of Parkland County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideal Future</strong></td>
<td>Farming (and Class 1 &amp; 2) farmland is protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More public appreciation, education and awareness</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Growth in small specialized operations supplying local food demand in the nearby large urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several farmers see little or no future for big farms in the eastern part of Parkland County due to inevitable urban growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td>Proximity to Edmonton creates opportunities for market gardens, berry farms, potatoes, vegetables, sod farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parkland County well suited to a wide range of speciality crops – pulses, lentils, corn. Well located on rail line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issues Requiring Clarity or Direction</strong></td>
<td>Improve road safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce lot size and impacts of subdivisions – save agricultural land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education programs targeted at school age children

Other Comments
Overall this group remains passionate about agriculture but have increasing difficulties seeing a viable future in the eastern part of Parkland County due to expansion on several fronts: Edmonton; Spruce Grove; Stony Plain; Acheson Industrial Park; transportation corridors. Other concerns include:
- Traffic and the dangers with moving farm equipment
- The availability of land to farm as operations grow in size
- Cost of land making farming unaffordable

Summary
Major concerns with development on two (or three sides) - the more development, the bigger the headaches! Major concerns with traffic, moving equipment safely, vandalism, trespassing! Lack of appreciation from Council and public. See a limited future agriculture; some see no future; inevitable urban growth; some specialty operations (market gardens; U-pick) will grow to meet local food demand; need for more public appreciation, education & awareness.

Table A3.6 Detailed Comments: Commercial Farm Sector – Spruce Grove

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Discussion</th>
<th>Key Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Most Significant Challenges | Acreage people restrict what we can do as farmers  
Continually making fields smaller by allowing one now three subdivisions per quarter  
Fragmentation of farmland into smaller parcels – more acreages restrict what we can do?  
County is encouraging this (subdivisions) – we should not allow 5 or 10 acre parcels  
Agricultural land is considered a holding zone for development – it should not be this way.  
The number of people living in proximity to the farm/amount of traffic/too many non-farm residents  
Urban encroachment with no consideration for the quality of land – it is destroyed for ever  
Our ability to expand (whether purchasing or renting land) due to the expansion of acreage development  
Too many big land parcels are being underused - they are too big to cut lawn but too small to farm  
Our biggest issue? The land parcels for subdivision are too big – these are not being looked after – it’s not good for anyone.  
How can we expand when everything around us is zoned country residential?  
Everything we used to farm is under pavement  
Traffic and traffic noise  
Acreage prices puts land prices out of reach for farmers  
Availability of land that is farmable  
Road maintenance and consideration for the importance of agriculture  
Moving equipment down the road/roads are narrow and unsafe  
Dangerous to move around – unsafe; impatient drivers |
- The transportation of farm equipment is extremely difficult
- Acreage owners do not understand or appreciate what good the farmers do.
- Require permits, permission to do anything on your land
- Introduction of weeds (kochia, scentless, chamomile) due to road construction equipment
- Illegal dumping of garbage on our land
- The dust from Acheson is killing us
- County Councils lack of policy regarding agriculture – they have no concept of what is going on
- Our Ag. Service Board does little to help agriculture
- We are 1% of the population – we are low on the totem pole

### Picture of the Future
- Farmers would be respected
- Farming becomes the first and foremost use of land
- Land freeze of Class 1 & 2 lands
- Zoning areas throughout Parkland County to agriculture (permanently)
- Would like to see Parkland County like Fraser Valley (where agricultural land is frozen)
- There would be value added industries in our Industrial Parks i.e. biodiesel, pasta plant etc.; more finished product
- Gov’t would pay for every student to attend a farm school – 1 week per year
- See more small agriculture holdings – berry farms, vegetables, operations to service Farmers’ Markets
- More acreages, more people, more development
- Land is too pricey to farm
- My crystal ball is cloudy – I don’t see a picture.
- As far as I am concerned, keep the public out of the country
- It’s time to leave – get out of Dodge!!
- We can’t stop Edmonton, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain from growing! But why not? Toronto has not annexed more land since 1980 and they have four times the population
- Edmonton is the same size as London, England which has 16 times the population! Why doesn’t it grow up!

### Unique Opportunities
- Close to urban centres for speciality crops and intensive livestock
- Good location to large market
- Market gardens, potatoes, sod farming, intensive rotations
- Value added. Finished products being processed
- Specialty crops, pulses, canola, corn? The markets and railways are here
- Lifestyle – our location near a big city is an advantage. My kids like farming here for that reason

### Top Issues that Require Clarity, Direction or Policy
- What can be done about the roads for safety? Keep the country roads as gravel.
- Right to farm/no more rules to restrict us
- Political will of county, province and federal government to support agriculture and save agricultural land
- Work with school system to set up educational programs on the farm – currently we have a class that spends 1 week at our place. The learning is incredible. We need to work with Parkland County and then young people so they know where their food comes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is it possible to allow two residents on the same farm yard? A lot of people would like their other family/parents to move onto the property. Currently you can’t get permits or subdivide to allow for this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Stony Plain group expressed many concerns about farming in the shadow of urban development which includes expanding Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, the Acheson Industrial Park as well as expanded transportation corridors. The following comments were made:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossing 4 lane highways is becoming very dangerous. Some of the overpasses are very narrow for the equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are more and more small holdings, making it more difficult to farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkland County seems more interested in developing acreages to generate taxes – not farming!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think Parkland County has any idea what a real farm is and what it requires. Do I need a permit for a pole shed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving equipment is getting harder – no shoulders; higher roads; impatient drivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We farm in 5 counties – Parkland County is the most difficult. It has the highest taxes and staff don’t understand the workings or needs of an intensive livestock operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are more and more subdivisions. This is both a blessing and a curse. It drives the price of land up (this is good if you want to sell or cash in; but this makes it difficult to farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion is getting difficult – more traffic; dealing with people; the price of land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a road is paved, it gets really dangerous. We would rather see Parkland County stick with gravel roads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We farm close to the Edmonton line – for us the farming in this area is over. Not a case of if but when we move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, we don’t not have a plan for agricultural land – we don’t do anything – we have a wasteful land use plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, agriculture has not been considered in county planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop looking at agriculture as only being 1% of the population but look at it as representing 33% of the employment/economy in Parkland County.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t forget agriculture – it is important. We will need 60% more food by 2050. And 1 out of every 8 jobs is related to agriculture &amp; food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Agriculture Department is the ‘end of the hall’ – it is the bottom of the barrel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Leduc County

Interview/Focus Group Themes: A Summary

1. **Leduc County – the best soils in Alberta!** In response to the question: what makes Leduc County ‘special’ or ‘unique’, the following comments were consistently heard from all the groups:

   “We have some of the very best farmland land anywhere in Alberta. Maybe the world!”

   “Three feet of black soil!! Does it get any better?”

   “Anything that can be grown in Alberta, can be grown in Leduc.”

   “We have the best of all worlds: great soils; great transportation services; proximity to a major market; opportunities for off-farm employment......”

   “Agriculture is important. Within certain parts of Leduc County it is extremely important!”

2. **Opportunities to intensify as well as enhance agri-business/value added enterprises** – many interviewees commented that Leduc County is well situated to develop more intensive food producing operations (market gardens, produce production, greenhouses) as well as downstream agricultural enterprises comprising primary processing, further processing or related value added and agri-business opportunities. Leduc’s location and access to transportation services and logistics (road, rail, and air) are cited as primary competitive advantages. Overall it is generally agreed that the economic development emphasis to date has been predominately focused on the oil & gas industry. However the time may well have come to shift emphasis and develop opportunities in the food and agriculture sector. The presence of the Food Processing Development Centre in the City of Leduc provides an opportunity to capture some of the business development opportunities generated by this facility. However, to advance these opportunities, a stronger vision and the application of resources by Leduc County will be required than what is currently in place.

   “We have top grade soils. The opportunities for market gardens should be huge!”

   “With our proximity to Edmonton, there should be lots of local food opportunities.”

   This whole area gets back to the issues of leveraging the reality that Leduc is sitting south of a large cosmopolitan area that has an insatiable appetite for land on which to develop.

3. **Loss of Agricultural Land** – the overall loss of agricultural land is the number one concern expressed by respondents contributing to the interview process. While this sentiment varies in intensity by region, nevertheless it is a concern that is prevalent across Leduc County. Those farmers living near Cities of Edmonton or Leduc expressed higher levels of concern. However farmers living in both the eastern and western parts of the County are also concerned.
Clearly those living in the areas that have been earmarked as part of the City of Edmonton annexation, face the loss of their lands. However those farmers further afield expressed concern about the ripple effect that annexation will have. In this regard, high prices paid for annexed land will in turn drive up the prices for land in the vicinity as displaced farmers bid up the price for land in the next concentric circle. This will in turn drive up prices further out, in effect impact all farmers. Furthermore, as farmers operating in proximity to urban areas lose land from their operations, it is more and more difficult for these farmers as well as other farmers who operate at a greater distance to find new land to rent as a replacement.

The concern is not limited to prime agricultural land (Class 1, 2 or 3). There are also concerns with the loss of lower quality lands in terms of their importance as pasture land for cattle or the ecological benefits from those lands that serve as a base for wildlife and contribute to maintaining water reserves.

The loss of land for agriculture is being experienced (and observed) in several ways:

- The actual loss of a land base for farming. This is particularly the case in the area south of Edmonton where several operators have lost several quarters of land. This not only impacts their ability to generate income, the ensuing competition to source land to replace these losses has intensified and in some cases, making it very difficult to replace.
- The incremental loss of land due to subdivisions. Every time an area is subdivided, land is being lost. However, what is particularly upsetting to many farmers is when a quarter section is sub-divided into four 40 acre parcels (or two 80 acre parcels) and the entire areas are no longer available for farming. In some cases, this is taking place when residences are situated in the centre of the property. We also heard of entire quarters being bought up by non-farm interests and being left idle. Many of these areas become infested with weeds or overgrown hay – thus increasing the risk of fire should dry conditions prevail.
- Decreasing and/or odd shaped field size – this is a concern to crop producers who operate increasing large equipment. Should a remaining field become too small or odd shaped (non-square corners or too narrow), farmers have little interest in cropping these areas.

To quote one interviewee who is committed to farming for the long term:

“ The County needs to be clear as to what lands are dedicated to agriculture. This is critical to our future!”

Other comments include:

“ It’s high time to protect farmland.”
“The rapid growth around (the City of) Leduc is concern. What is happening? And why?”

“Cannot growth be more concentrated?”

“Civilization eventually destroys its host. This is where we seem to be heading.”

“We need to protect Class 1 and 2 lands.”

“We need a land use plan that minimizes the impact of growth on agriculture.”

“Currently our land use plan or policies are all about the money.”

There also appears to be some confusion and/or concern over just exactly how much has actually been subdivided and removed from agriculture. This would suggest that we need to make sure that as part of the AS we have a method of recording and reporting on land loss and segregation.

4. **Need to limit sub-divisions** – there is strong agreement that limits need to be placed on the number of sub-divisions that are taking place within the County. Generally speaking, there is agreement that the sub-division trends currently at play are having and will have a very serious impact on the future of agriculture in Leduc County. The impacts by production sector are summarized as follows:

- **Crop producers** – this sector while relatively small in number, are expanding rapidly in terms of the acres being farmed. It is not uncommon to find producers farming in excess of 5,000 acres. These farmers require good quality agricultural land, large fields, accessible approaches and the ability to move large equipment. Any encumbrance or hindrance to these requirements begins to impact the viability of these operations and/or their long term considerations in terms of location.

- **Livestock producers (particularly dairy operations)** – the dairy sector is rapidly undergoing consolidation. Leduc County has a significant number of dairy producers those producers who are planning their future acknowledge that growth will be essential to continued viability. Thus they will be expanding herd size, their livestock and milking and livestock facilities and required land base to produce feed as well as accommodate manure. Thus the establishment of new acreages/residences in the vicinity of their operations poses a potential threat to their expansion capabilities.

All farmers agree that the growth of sub-divisions in the country drives up the price of land making it increasingly unaffordable for farmers to purchase it. In this regard, a common practice is for the new buyer of the land to parcel out the homestead or a new-division. To quote:
“If we have to pay $600,000 plus for a quarter and we then sell the homestead or a parcel for $250,000 or $300,000, this reduces my cost for farmland.”

This is course is a double edged sword – namely the measures taken to make agricultural land more affordable, are also the same measures that increase the number of non-farm rural residents and all the implications associated with this growing population.

The question of how to implement such limits to sub-divisions drew a range of responses. Not surprisingly the views on this issue are wide ranging: those who want to farm long term (and are arguably professional full time farmers for the long term), favour a total freeze on any further sub-divisions. In contrast, those who are approaching retirement age do not support any limits to their ability to sub-divide lands. Some even favour allowing more sub-divisions per quarter as a means to address rural-depopulation concerns (dropping school enrolment; diminishing businesses and services in the rural areas). Several raised a very problematic position held by farmers: in effect a two faced perspective of wanting to keep land in agriculture while farming but wanting the opportunity to subdivide when approaching retirements.

Overall, there was agreement on two key points: a) limit the size of sub-division parcels in areas of prime agricultural land; and b) direct the location of these parcels in such a location as to minimize the impact on agricultural operations on the remaining parcel.

“Subdivisions are popping up everywhere. The County needs to educate their planning staff how farming works and how these subdivisions impact our ability to farm.”

“The more you allow the more trouble you bring for agriculture.”

“If nothing changes, agriculture will stumble along and eventually disappear”

“The land use issue is central to any plan for agriculture.”

“Maybe the County needs to establish a greenbelt.”

“You can’t turn down all subdivisions. But maybe we need to deal with these on a case by case basis and have each case reviewed by people who examine the application from an agricultural and technical perspective – not political.”

Essentially the focus for many of the people is the need to intensify sub divisions when they are allocated. This position is consistent with the comments about being more prescriptive on where (within a given subdivision) someone is able to build. This also can be related back to the assessment of the ultimate impacts on agriculture that has to be measured and quantified.
5. **Impact of Acreages/Non Farm Residents** - this point is directly related to the previous point (need to limit sub-divisions). Much commentary revolved around the impact of non-farm residents living in the country including:

- Increased traffic making the movement of equipment both more challenging and dangerous. Many interviewees reported the incredible lack of patience displayed by drivers and the number of times they were the recipient of inappropriate hand gestures or other expressions of frustration.

- The lack of understanding (or appreciation) toward farmers in terms of what they are doing and why. There is a sense (strong in some cases) that many non-farm rural residents view the agricultural community as a bunch of “dumb farmers.” One respondent reported that he was reluctant to even tell his urban neighbours what he does given the increased negativism associated with modern farming practices.

- Nuisance complaints – we heard one example of a farm operator who was affronted by a neighbour trying to prevent him from moving his grain trucks from the field (apparently the neighbour thought that the movements were excessive and bothersome). Others reported complaints when they were spraying or combining late at night.

- Vandalism – the level of vandalism is profound. Almost all the people interviewed reported trespassing, tire marks in fields, cut fences and/or break-ins including theft. One interviewee reported seven (7) break-ins this past year.

- Loss of Community – several interviewees lamented the changes taking place and the ‘loss’ of community. Given that Leduc County is one of the original agricultural settlements in Alberta is has many intergeneration farms – strong communities of people who know each other, work together and help each other. This is changing. The increased presence of urban oriented residents has no interest in knowing their neighbours or being part of the community. As well, the impact of the mining sector on community life in the northwest central part of the County has been considerable.

- The emergence of ‘industrial scale’ businesses on rural acreages. From some of the comments this is a growing concern – operations that have grown to the point that they now involve a large daily movement of truck traffic as well as employees. Several respondents commented that these types of operations need to be located in industrial areas and question the extent to which the County is policing these developments.

Ultimately this area of comment relates to the need to ensure that the AS enshrines the right to farm in a way that is explicit and apparent to anyone who is moving into the region. This could potentially include consideration for the need to have an agricultural impact assessment competed prior to any change in the land use of a particular piece of property.
6. **Agriculture as a low (non) priority** – further to the previous point There appears to be strong agreement that agriculture is a very low priority for Council. Instead, the agricultural community perceives the priorities on the part of Council to be: a) industrial development in the Nisku Business Park; and b) expanding the tax base by allowing as many rural residences/acreages as possible. Comments included:

   “There are no full time farmers on Council.”

   “Council does not really understand agriculture. They really don’t know what is going on...”

   “When it comes to modern agriculture, the County Council is out of touch.”

   “Council seems focused on Nisku, the airport and more rural residents. I don’t see any real initiatives specific to agriculture.”

   “I don’t think Council understands the level of investment and the scale of business associated with our farming operations.”

   “We used to have a good Council that understood and appreciated agriculture. Now the focus is on Nisku, the Airport and annexation – not agriculture.”

   “I don’t see Council driving any real vision for agriculture.”

7. **Lack of Consistency re: Subdivision decision making** – perhaps one of the biggest features characteristic of Leduc County that emerged from the interviews is the observation that decision making with respect to what gets approved and how approvals are made, appears inconsistent at best and highly political (even arbitrary) at worst. Numerous examples were cited. What appears to be a common strategy for gaining multiple sub-divisions is to begin with an application for two x 80 acre parcels; follow in due time with an application for an additional lot from each 80. Thus the phenomenon of 1 parcel out becomes 4 parcels over time.

There is a strong sense that the process is highly political and in some respect, not a case of what is being sub-divided but who is making the application. A variety of views were expressed ranging from those who feel that the entire governance process is questionable; a decision making process that does not have sufficient understanding of agriculture or ‘feel’ for the impacts of sub-division on agriculture; to others who feel that the by-laws are in place – they are not being adhered to. Consequently, farmers have little confidence that the current Council is making decisions that are in the best interest of agriculture or even taking agriculture into consideration.

   “There is too much short term thinking on Council! This has to stop! And there does not seem to be any voice for farmers specific to the decision making.”
I applied to subdivide a property that had a FAR rating of under 40.8 and was denied. When I sold it to a real estate agent, he went before Council and got it approved! How does that happen?

This impression that there is a lack of consistency points directly to the governance process. As a result the AS needs to be able to provide some basic principles for how decisions can be made and how they fit within an objective and rational decision making structure.

8. The Need for Balance with respect to how planning is done – many of the interviewees recognize the need for a balanced approach to planning. The challenge is summarized as follows: how to balance the protection or support of agriculture with the need to grow the rural tax base by increasing the number of people living in the rural areas.

Many farmers recognize that non-farm rural residents are important tax payers and without them the level of services such as schools would likely decrease. Or they themselves would likely face increased taxes should non-farm residences be discouraged. However, the major question being asked is this: can rural residences be located in areas where agricultural land is less productive? At the same time, farmers are concerned about decision making processes, political influences and the how these may ultimately impact their ability to farm. Clearly farmers are easily outnumbered and will even be further out-numbered in the future as the number of farmers decrease. Consequently, there is a growing unease about the ‘ability to farm’ should a discontented group of rural residents decided to limit a particular type of agricultural enterprise or operation.

9. Need for Regional Approach – many interviewees commented that Leduc County does not operate in isolation but is part of the Capital Region. The recent intentions declared by the City of Edmonton and the Town of Beaumont annex Leduc County lands are a clear manifestation of this reality. Clearly all the municipalities in the Capital Region are striving to grow and maintain a healthy tax base. Thus any policies developed for agriculture and agricultural land must be developed in a regional context – Leduc County should not be developing policies that effectively drive growth away to municipalities that have more ‘favourable’ development policies.

10. Need for ‘education’ – perhaps one of the biggest issues raised by farmers across the County is the profound lack of knowledge and appreciation that non-farm rural residents have for farmers and for agriculture. It was not uncommon to hear the following:

“People today know NOTHING about agriculture.”

“Most non-farm rural residents have no clue what we are doing. And many could not care less!”

“Don’t people realize that when they move to the country, there are ‘country’ realities: livestock, equipment, smells, etc.?”
Consequently farmers are feeling a strong level of disregard and in some cases disrespect when they are working long hours to cultivate, seed or harvest. Some of the strongest negative emotions are exhibited when equipment is being moved on the roads. Two problems emerge: firstly, many roads are narrow or lack shoulders thus making it very difficult for the farmer to move to the side; and secondly, drivers are incredibly impatient and pass in an unsafe manner all the while uttering or gesturing unpleasantries.

Many interviewees felt that much more could be done to ‘educate’ or ‘engage’ non-farm residents with respect to knowing more about Leduc County as an agricultural municipality. Some feel very strongly that more should be done at the school level of integrate programming toward children. Others suggested a much more interactive ‘Agriculture or Farm Days’ or better still “Local Food Days” where people are encouraged to learn more about what is actually going in the County. This would of course require the organizing of events, site visits etc.

11. Impacts with Annexation – the prospect of losing land to the City of Edmonton is an undertone beneath all conversations and interviews. Most are very concerned with this development and the far reaching implications to Leduc County. Some feel strongly that Leduc County is being pushed around by the City, developer interests and parties that have more money and power. Others feel that Leduc County has been a bit soft on this issue and needs to fight back. Overall it would appear that there would be considerable support for Leduc County to make a strong case for agriculture and the protection of the lands that would otherwise be lost. That being said, there is also a sense of resignation: that growth is inevitable and nothing much can be done about it.

“ Edmonton is taking so much land!! Why?”

“ The City says it will protect agricultural land. The County is saying the same thing and that it has a better plan. But the County plan is not clear what they plan to do! “

Ultimately there is a need to work within the reality that annexation pressure will continue in Counties like Leduc. The AS needs to provide a very clear direction on the decisions that Leduc has made and then how they intend to actualize on them. In this way they can send a strong signal to all stakeholders that they ave staked a claim and have formally targeted it.

12. The Diversity of land/agriculture in Leduc County – agriculture and the land base is very diverse within the County. The central and northern parts of the County have large areas of prime agricultural land; the areas to the east and to the west are markedly different – namely areas of lower quality soils; wetlands; smaller fields etc. Thus any agricultural plan must both recognize these differences and accordingly accommodate them.
13. **Other Comments** – many interviewees made reference to the stripping of the top soils that has just recently taken place in the western part of the City of Leduc. Viewing this event has driven ranges of responses with some being quite visceral. Several were very upset to see this occurring calling it ‘heartbreaking’; others took a more resigned view and shook their heads about the seemingly inevitable advance of urban expansion. Yet others were quite eager to gain access to the black soils that are being removed and use these soils to improve their own fields (wet spots, low spots, areas of poorer soils). Generally, the restrictions preventing these soils from not being moved for better use elsewhere is not well received. As one interviewee commented:

“So it has club root? It’s not that we don’t already have it and don’t know how to manage it.”

After considering the situation and input from the stakeholders, four principles have been identified. Each has been defined with specific supporting elements. These principles are used to identify the relevant elements to be included in the future strategy for agriculture in Leduc County. They are as follows:

1. Leduc County formally recognizes and champions the importance of agriculture for its economic, environmental, and community contributions and is committed to ensuring its long-term viability in the County.

2. Leduc County should protect long term priority agriculture areas. The designation of these areas shall be done on a comprehensive and systematic basis considering land suitability, contextual factors, and the protection of large contiguous areas through reducing and managing conflicting land uses.

3. Fragmentation of agricultural land is just as much a problem as is the absolute loss of agricultural land through conversion to non-agricultural uses, so fragmentation should be limited in priority agricultural areas.

4. Agricultural should have a variety of targeted support and education programs to promote understanding and provide more certainty for the agricultural industry and ensure both traditional and value-added agriculture achieves their potential in Leduc County.
3.4 Sturgeon County

Highlights of Intensive Livestock Meeting

1. Agriculture is less and less of a priority for the County. It’s a numbers game – more and more rural subdivisions – we are outnumbered.

2. There is so much traffic – it is dangerous and the roads are being destroyed. Agriculture is definitely number 2 (or 3). Industrial land is far more important than agriculture. Also subdivisions are more important to the County than agriculture.

3. I think the County made a big mistake allowing 4 parcels out. Now we are subject to our non-farm rural neighbours.

4. The County is doing things that seem to contradict NRCB requirements. They allow people to build new residences which are too close to livestock facilities – this is real problem and restricts our ability to expand. It seems to be easier to build a livestock barn in the Fraser Valley than it is in Sturgeon County. They have a ‘right to farm’ and we don’t.

5. It is a nightmare to do anything with livestock in Strathcona County – but Sturgeon is heading in the same direction. This is not good!

6. Overall as livestock producers we don’t have much to do with the County – most of our interactions are with the NRCB.

7. We need ‘Right to Farm’ legislation. We follow the rules and do the best we can to look after our animals and crops. There is so much misunderstanding regarding what we do as livestock (poultry) producers – we are starting to feel the negative pressures. People just don’t know and assume the worst. The problems are with the media who really damage our reputation. But if the County were able to support agriculture and provide information – this could help offset the misconceptions. Can the County communicate better as to what is happening on the farm and inform non-farm people either living in the country or those who plan to move out into the country?

8. Our biggest issues are ‘encroachment’ – non-farm people living in the area and in some cases too close. If we had ‘right to farm’ legislation that is in black and white that would make it much clear. For example, if a neighbour builds a house on an adjacent lot, they need to abide by the minimum distance requirements as per the NRCB regulations. Currently this is not clear nor does the County seem to ensure that this is happening. This may impact my ability to re-build a barn or expand.
9. Why does heavy industrial land have protection but farms don’t have something similar? Industrial land has a buffer; residential areas have buffers! Why not farms? We are not protected!

10. If your neighbours change, you may be under new pressures.

11. The recent attempt by the County to address “agri-business’ bylaws was poorly communicated. People reacted and many over-reacted. Council pulled this – a good thing. The notion that you would not be able to anything after 7 pm, got people worked up.

12. Farmers have to be reasonable – you can’t have some spreading liquid manure five feet from a residential property. Or on a Friday before a long weekend. But most farmers understand this and act responsibly – they need to be good operators.

13. The County needs to defend the farmers against residents who may be living nearby. Farmers are simply outnumbered and this is a concern. “Right to Farm” legislation would solve a lot of problems. Leave the city folks in the city!

14. Defining agriculture and agri-business is not so easy or straightforward. Both are changing fast. But if an area is zoned agriculture, then make sure that it is constrained to agriculture activities. What about a welding or trucking shop on a farm that keeps growing? That is a tough issue.

15. Not too concerned about current zoning (4 parcels out of a quarter). I have no problem with this as long as we have right to farm legislation. Farming needs to be preeminent in agriculture/rural areas.

16. Discussion on the transfer of development rights: sounds like a good idea. But will it drive up the price of land? Some replied that this has already happened.

17. Value added opportunities are out there. Fraser Valley has a lot going on – also has a long season which allows for a broader variety of agricultural enterprises. People are looking for “food experiences.” Perhaps more opportunities for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA’s). Would a CSA be considered an agri-business? The definition of agri-business becomes very important.

18. Any definition or re-definition of agri-business needs to be reasonable. Who cares if some operation like Prairie Gardens is open to 9 pm. Don’t be overly restrictive. Be open to new opportunities and the interest in local food demand.

19. In conclusion, the livestock producers agreed that ‘Right to Farm’ legislation to protect their interests and allow them to operate is the most important issue to be addressed. They also expressed their desire to be involved in any consultation process that might shape this legislation or regulations.
Highlights of Crop Producer Group

1. I’m not sure about how much of a priority agriculture is to the County. It is certainly a priority for us.

2. Overall we see agriculture as being a very low priority for the Council and within the County. The focus has/is on the energy sector and Heartland. Also the County seems to focus on acreages – little to no focus on agriculture.

3. Most County employees are not aware of the size and scope of our agriculture or farm businesses.

4. Look at Strathcona County – that is scary! Urban rules in the country. We call the Strathcona Council the Business Prevention Council.

5. Sturgeon has several advantages: location; good infrastructure (transportation); good climate; some of the best and most productive soils in the province. Most of the land can be farmed without irrigation. And we don’t seem to get early frosts.

6. We have some of the best weather for crop production in North America. We have a unique climate – Bayer, who does crop research around the world, say that some of the best land and weather is here in Sturgeon and why they do plot research at the U of A Research Farm in St. Albert.

7. My grandfather located here because of the soils, climate and the ability to grow potatoes. We are told by our customer in Washington State and the Netherlands that this is best place for sourcing seed potatoes.

8. We also have access to water (North Saskatchewan River) for irrigation.

9. Sturgeon County has the most frost free days in Alberta. We have the highest likelihood of consistent quality crops in Alberta.

10. The issue of severances is a tough one. As farmers retire with 4 kids, they all want a piece of the pie. Can you stop this? We rent a beautiful farm that has been subdivided nine ways – it has destroyed the farm. This should never have been allowed.

11. It is better to have 3 small acreages and keep the large fields. This would still leave more than 150 acres available to be farmed. This would be better than 2 x 80 acre parcels with corner lots.

12. It seems that severance appeals all go in the favour of the people wanting more severances. What message does that send? If the County continually gives in, why have rules?
13. I know some guy who is paying $20,000 in taxes in Edmonton for his business; but if he buys 40 acres in Sturgeon, his taxes are $2,500. Is this fair? Does Sturgeon want to be the base for Edmonton businesses?

14. Another guy is building a shop on 2 ½ acres in a residential area. Lots of trucks moving in and out. Why is this happening? It seems that the County is being driven by dollars and cents!

15. We have to share the roads. Our equipment is bigger. What once took 10 farmers two weeks to cover, one farmer can do in a single day. Big trucks make the farmer look bad. But we need access to fields and the ability to move quickly.

16. We deal with a lot of urban/big city issues – we have a dead end road near us – lots of cars, drug dealers……

17. It is very difficult to expand if you are in the livestock business. We need ‘Right to Farm’ legislation.

18. The County needs to find a balance between urban/industrial development and agriculture. The County needs to go back and re-discover agriculture and realize how important it is.

19. Transfer of development rights might be a way to restore balance.

20. Encroachment is a big concern. More encroachment will lead to more problems. Higher densities of non-farm residents are a problem. Soon we may 100 people knocking on your door asking you to stop doing what you are doing.

21. Sturgeon is a good place for more value added businesses to locate. We have the labour, good road infrastructure, 2 railways, access to employment, technologies etc.

22. But there is not plan for agriculture in Sturgeon. We can easily be outnumbered. Keep the houses together. We would like to be like the Fraser Valley where agriculture is the number 1 priority.

23. For every development application, the County should ask two questions: a) does the development support agriculture; or b) does it interfere with agriculture.

24. Having a farm with 4 parcels (or 4 residences) is no problem if we have the right to farm legislation – the assurance that we can continue farming. And not something that can be overturned by some future Council.

25. Once you have people in the area, you have to deal with them. That can be a challenge especially those who know nothing about agriculture.
26. Farmers are getting bigger. At times of the year we have dryers going all night long. People complain – these are problems and will only get bigger!

27. All the County needs to do is clearly state that farming in the country comes first. Make agriculture a priority. That solves a lot of problems. The County needs to have our backs. Without their support, who is going to cover legal costs when we have to defend ourselves? What about the future when we have a 400 horse power autonomous tractor working at night? What kind of reaction is that going to create?

28. Traffic is a problem – it is very dangerous. We have had near misses with our trucks. Moving farm equipment makes it very dangerous. We don’t buy inputs from Ft. Saskatchewan since the traffic from the Heartland is so severe. We had to build more storage for inputs since it is so difficult to haul inputs when you need them.

29. Theft is a major problem – we spend a lot of money on security, gates, and cameras. The fuel has been stolen out of of combines! We are easy pickings.

30. People have no patience. They complain about dust and noise. One person asked me to come back and do my field work while he is working!!

31. The best thing the County can do is create awareness about agriculture. They could say much much more about agriculture including placing signs that say “you are entering an agricultural area.” Sturgeon County needs to tell people that agriculture is important and will be protected.

32. We are such a young count but so short sighted.

33. Agriculture has no voice. We are seen as criminals. No one speaks for agriculture – we are on our own!

34. Soil is the most important determinant. If you don’t protect good soils, you are waving goodbye to agriculture.

35. Don’t allow development on all four sides of a good agriculture property.

36. Soil is number 1. There has to be a balance.

37. Think in terms of the next 50 to 100 years. Keep the soil. Keep the density out of the rural areas. We need more protection and support from the County.

38. Sturgeon County needs to tell people that agriculture is important!
Prevailing Themes (based on input from all the meetings)

Introduction

The meetings, interviews and questionnaires generated a host of comments, insights and points of view. These are summarized and presented in the following themes. Note: not every viewpoint expressed by every individual has been captured. Rather the themes below represent the major body of comments and capture the most commonly expressed views by the Sturgeon County agricultural community.

Sturgeon County – The ‘Heart’ of Agriculture for the Region

The most distinctive theme emerging from the group discussions is the deep sense of history and pride exhibited by the Sturgeon County agricultural community. This sentiment was expressed in a variety of ways, attested by the following quotes:

“ We have some of the richest (deep black) soils that can be found anywhere in this province. Where can you find it any better?”

“ Our family has been here for over 100 years - five generations! And we have never had a crop failure!”

“ Being on the confluence of two rivers, makes Sturgeon County a rich area for agriculture.”

“ We have the most frost free days – essentially a micro climate with the rivers running through the County.”

There was considerable discussion about the quality of the soil, the favourable climate, sufficient rainfall year after year. In the minds of many farmers, the County is richly blessed specific to its ability to produce a wide range of field crops (grains, oilseeds, pulses and forages) as well as specialty and horticultural crops (berries, Saskatoons, vegetables, potatoes, peas, lentils etc.).

One particularly poignant comment was expressed by a seed potato grower. He has been told by two of his international customers (one from the Netherlands; the other from Washington State) that their Sturgeon County operation was a preferred source since year after year, his farm is a consistent supply of high quality seed potatoes.

Another characteristic unique to Sturgeon County which we heard repeatedly is the strength and depth of the agricultural community itself. Historically, Sturgeon County is home to some of the original homesteaders in Alberta. Significantly many of these families continue to farm the very same properties from where their ancestors began. To be sure, these families were attracted to the area for two main reasons: a) high quality soils; and b) location – proximity to the river system as well as St. Albert and Edmonton as emerging major urban centers. These factors have not changed. To quote one attendee:

“ We have the best of all worlds – some of the best soils and close to a major urban market (the Edmonton region).”
The location attribute drew additional comments that further affirm the favourable status of Sturgeon County as an agricultural municipality:

“ We can grow a lot of food here. If you consider the issue of food security, this will be more important into the future.”

“ Everything that can be grown in the region or Alberta for that matter can be grown here!! We can feed Edmonton!”

“ There are new opportunities. We are close to a big city; we have waste heat and CO₂; we can generate biogas from manure – lots of new avenues to consider.”

To summarize and based on the body of work we have done with several neighbouring counties on similar projects, we would offer this observation:

- Within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region, the pride and a sense of destiny with respect to agriculture being an importance part of the future runs deepest in Sturgeon County.

**Agriculture – Changing Dramatically and Changing Fast**

The face and structure of agriculture has changed dramatically and continues to change rapidly. The idyllic picture of a family farm with a few hundred acres and a diverse range of enterprises living peacefully in the undisturbed countryside has long passed. Instead today’s agriculture and the associated food industry bear little resemblance to what was commonplace just one or two generations ago.

Perhaps the significant point to be made is the changing definition of agriculture itself. When farms were relatively homogeneous, the definition may have been more straightforward. This is no longer the case with the advent of specialized farms, the focus on business versus ‘a way of life’, the now wide array of agricultural and food production enterprises combined with an even wider array of services ranging from agri-tourism, special food events and food experiences.

Some of major changes expressed by the discussions and comments made at group sessions are summarized as follows:

1. **The continued decline in the number of full time farmers** - main stream (or traditional) farming has become large scale with individuals farmers or family farms now farming thousands of acres or operating large livestock production enterprises. This trend has been in motion for the past 50 years and continues. Overall the number of producers in agriculture represents a very small proportion of the population – a mere 2 percent. Less than half of these (1 percent) actually farm full time.

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1 This overview of the changes in agriculture is in no meant to be comprehensive. It is meant simply to illustrate the degree of change that is taking place.
2. **The emergence of specialty and diverse operations and enterprises** – in response to the growing interest in local food, food experiences and related activities such as agri-tourism which includes a broad set of activities ranging ‘corn mazes’ to serving specialty summer evening dinners on white cloth tables in a field setting. The growth of this ‘specialty’ sector is dependent upon local demand, strong marketing programs, management skills and superb execution.

3. **Novel enterprises that in some cases are new to agriculture** – these include such examples as one farmer who has converted a hog production facility to the rearing of crickets as source of food protein; another producer converted a broiler chicken facility to the rearing ducks for the specialty Asian market; and the newly emerging cannabis sector. The growth of this sector remains unknown and is very much dependent of the emergence and support of an entrepreneurial class of individuals interested in starting new businesses.

Rapid change is accompanied with numerous issues many of which were readily identified and articulated at the input sessions:

- **Succession** – the question of ‘who will take over the farm’ is a pressing concern with many farmers especially those who have not grown to become larger operations and are close to retirement. For example at the Fedorah Hall meeting, growers in attendance called a vote – only one of eight in attendance had a son or daughter likely to take over the farm operation. The issue of succession is not limited to the traditional farming sector. Specialty operations such as greenhouse and market garden operators are also facing this concern. In many cases, the children of these operations do not want to take on the risk or work as hard as their parents.

- **Access to or the ability to attract labour.** This is a complex issue: first it is difficult to match wage rates being offered by industry and/or urban job opportunities situated nearby; second, the very nature of the work itself makes the attraction of labour to work on farms a perennial challenge; and third, finding or providing accommodation for seasonal labour. Further to this latter issue, it appears based on the comments provided, that the regulations allowing for the provision of seasonal housing and/or additional residences on a farm property is not an easy task. While this may be possible, the comments on this subject suggest that the many requirements make this quite difficult.

- **Future viability (and profitability) are key issues.** Establishing and maintaining profitable farm businesses is far from easy. Instead the sector is characterized by narrow margins, rising costs and no lack of competition. Generally there are three responses to these challenges: a) expansion – a direct reaction to declining margins thus the only way to maintain or increase farm income is to spread costs over a larger production base - hence the growth of the large acre crop producer sector. It is not unusual to find farm families who farm 10,000 acres and in some cases up to 60,000 acres. Typically much of this acreage base is rented. Also these farmers will seek out land in relative proximity to their home base, they increasing secure land at great distances such as neighbouring counties or even the next province; b) adding new value added
or related enterprises - such as an agri-tourist venture, the establishment of a high valued specialty crop (U-Pick or market garden); and c) off farm employment - to quote one contributor:

“ There is more money to be had by working in industry versus working in agriculture. If you have a choice between working in the oil and gas sector vs. the family, the choice is quite simple – working industry gives you more money and you have the weekends off!!”

- **An assured or clear future** – many questions are being raised about the availability of farm land for farming. The growth of the Edmonton Region and the growing presence of acreages or country residential properties are considered as major impediments to a long term future - a major concern among those full time producers in the process of expanding their operations. Specialty (or non-traditional) operators are very concerned about the regulatory environment and how this will impact what they may be able to do as they consider alternative enterprises to find new ways to remain viable. We heard the following comments:

“ Land for agriculture in the future is uncertain - what will the County do?

“ It seems easy to build houses or know what areas are dedicated to industry? What about agriculture?

Both these concerns are discussed in more detail in this report.

The changing nature of agriculture is also impacting support services or agricultural infrastructure. One producer noted that Sturgeon County has recently lost several agri-service businesses: a grain elevator; cattle buying station; and an egg grading station that used to be located in St. Albert.

To summarize with the words of another attendee:

“ Not many people farm full time. Farming is not feasible for most small farms. It’s hard to make a living. Selling to a developer looks attractive. People need off farm jobs. Don’t quit your job to be a farmer.”

### Increasing Rural-Urban Conflicts

The most common discussion point across all of the groups revolved around what can be termed as the rural-urban divide. This issue has several dimensions presented as follows with accompanying quotes:

- The lack of appreciation for and understanding of agriculture particularly among those recently arrived rural residents with such comments as:

  “ More and more people living in the country who don’t understand or appreciate agriculture.”
“People need to know what they are moving into - the country is for farming!”

“People don’t understand agriculture; acreage owners are not often longtime residents – they come and go.”

- Actual complaints or conflicts with non-farm neighbours:
  
  “Increased complaints about noise, dust, harvesting after 6 pm or at night. For example, farms in the area will operate 24/7 during the seeding and harvest periods – this generates complaints about the noise and in some cases the RCMP have forced farmers to shut down.”

  “People complain about noise, dust and equipment operating after 6 pm or on weekends. But what did they expect when moving to the country.”

  “Too much traffic on the rural roads – people driving too fast making it very dangerous.”

  “Acreages move in and then complain about manure and feedlots and hinder our operations.”

  “There are lots of complaints about noise, smell and dust, etc.”

- The declining influence of the agricultural/farm community:

  “We are outnumbered - do we need ‘Right to Farm” regulations?”

  “As a producer you are not important – there will be continued consolidation and then you’ll only have a handful of farmers.”

  “There are now so few farmers, we are easily out voted.”

  “The urban residents essentially have a veto – real agriculture doesn’t have much of a voice anymore”

- The changing nature of the rural community:

  “People don’t know what to expect when they come to live in an agricultural area – new people are not community minded and don’t appreciate agriculture.”

  “People used to wave when we met; now we get the finger!”

There were numerous comments on the need to “educate” those non-farm residents/acreage owners when moving into rural areas. Additional suggestions to address this growing concern include:
“There needs to be clearer rules for people when they move into the country – if you live in a farming area, they have to accept farming practices are taking place. People need to sign off that they understand this.”

“We need some type of conflict resolution or mechanism for neighbourhood disputes instead of the County enforcement of rigid bylaws.”

“A Code of the West is needed. There is a lack of continuing education.”

“There is a real need for an educational component for those who move out into the country.”

Clearly the agricultural community is feeling outnumbered and undervalued. Perhaps their biggest concern is a growing sense of vulnerability with respect to their voice within the local political arena and their very futures as farmers in a changing community. Some are openly questioning: “Are we going to face a voting body that may actually restrict our ability to farm?”

Need to Find a “Balanced” Approach to Growth

The Sturgeon County agriculture community is accurately aware of the fundamental challenge facing the County – in effect how to facilitate an agenda that generates growth (including increased tax revenues) without unduly limiting or restricting agriculture. This is a complex challenge indeed – a challenge that might be simpler if agriculture itself was assured of a positive economic future and the ability to make a living by farming the way it had been done in the past. But that is not the case. Consider these comments:

“Farmers are so few in number and without growth and more residents, who is going to pay the taxes?”

“Agriculture is changing but growth will happen. But we need to find new solutions and ways to grow up and not out. We also need to value food, food production and land that produces food.”

“Growth is going to happen - we can’t stop progress!”

But as many attendees commented, this will not be an easy task:

“There is a need to support agriculture but allow for flexibility - don’t be overly restrictive.”

“Flexibility and options for agricultural operations are one of the key needs.”

“Allow secondary businesses and value added; continue these as options.”
“We need flexibility in the way our farm operations will develop. This may include such elements as agri-tourism, events or new enterprises that are not strictly production agriculture. But these will be essential to the future viability of our businesses.”

There is general agreement that supporting or attracting more value added agriculture and food business would be a “good thing.” But while this is seen as positive, it is also a challenge:

“Value added/processing is good but it is a tough business. Note the loss of Sturgeon Valley Pork which seemed to be a good business but they could not compete with the big processors.”

“More value added opportunities would be great. And we have some good examples: Champion Pet Foods; the oat processing plant and the alfalfa dehydration plan. We need more of these.”

“Value added agriculture has not been doing well especially with respect to livestock farming. Actually few livestock producers are expanding. For example, there are only two pork producers left. And Sturgeon Valley Pork which was a great value added initiative, failed to make it.”

Protect Good Agriculture Land but……

No issue is more contentious or as potentially divisive than the subject of conserving agricultural land. Two major questions prevail:

1. Should agricultural land be preserved?
2. If yes, how should this be done?

There are two and very distinct sides to the land preservation issue. One the one hand, farmers who are committed to the long term favour the preservation of good agricultural land – in other words, limit fragmentation, small land parcels and the encroachment of non-farm rural resident. On the other hand, there is considerable support to maintain the current severance policy (four parcels out per quarter) and not restrict land owners from doing so. Interestingly many who favor preservation are also likely to support the continuation of the current severance policy.

Overall, there is general agreement that “the best land should be preserved and good land is worth protecting.” We heard this sentiment expressed at all the meetings. The following is the range of comments expressing this point of view:

“Building on #1 soil is foolish!!”

“There is no vision for agriculture!! It’s a case of preserving land until it is needed for something else!”

“Keep the good land and keep the farms going.”

“Agriculture is not valued!!”
“Good land is worth protecting.”

“Number 1 soil is important but Number 3 or 4 soils are also good for pasture/beef.”

“It really matters what the County thinks about land!”

“Good land never seems to get mentioned. The region should develop up and in not out! You are not getting the good land back!!”

“I have no stability. It seems to be easy to build houses anywhere. But what kind of future is that for me as a farmer?”

However we quickly heard another set of comments, some from the very same people who made the previous comments:

“Don’t limit 4 parcels out. We need to maintain flexibility.”

“The only way you can buy land to farm is to sell of an acreage.”

“A lot of farmers are counting on being able to sell acreages as a way to fund their retirement.”

“Farmers are land rich and cash poor.”

The major point of contention (and contradiction) revolves around the right to sub-divide. Very few farmers actually object to the four parcels per quarter policy – most farmers arguably support this policy. Yet many expressed little or no desire for neighbours particularly acreage owners who present nothing but problems, complaints and future conflicts specific to their farming operations.

Furthermore the right (and opportunity) to sub-divide is an important financial matter – those farmers who wish to retire, regard the opportunity to maximize the value of their property and the ability to sell off parcels as an essential source of funds for their retirement.

But what is to be done? Again we received a host of comments:

“The County needs to control development. It’s out of control. Lots of developments have flooding problems. Developers do what they want—leave problems for County and our taxes to fix. County doesn’t get it.”

“Sturgeon needs a long-term vision—100 or 200 years. Have a balance—is it possible? A challenge. We’re close to the opportunity of Edmonton market.”

“Acreages in every quarter—it’s a large problem. Too much traffic to move our equipment. City people drive too fast.”

“There’s talk about preserving land, but no one does anything. Urbans keep annexing.”
“Competition for land is fierce – too expensive for those wanting to start.”

“Change, development is inevitable.”

“There is a lot of speculative growth. Also annexed farmers move out and create more competition for less land making land very expensive.”

And some opposing points of view:

“WE’ve had lots of ag preservation but where did that get us? Market would have been better than central planning. If it’s in the public good, why should the farmers have to pay for it?”

“Let the market decide. Governments should not be imposing restrictions on farmers and what they chose to do with their land.”

“Don’t want a BC Land bank approach.”

The idea of transferring development credits attracted interest at the Namao meeting. Perhaps this is a tool for consideration that could be used to cluster development and at the same time enable farmers who don’t want to subdivide to capture the development value of their land.

“What if you don’t want to subdivide. If you could transfer your development credits, that may help put subdivisions in the right place.”

“Credits that would move subdivisions to other areas outside of agricultural land – you would get a better arrangement. Cluster development where you get better amenities, schools etc.”

Clearly the subject of agricultural land zoning, subdivisions, fragmentation are front and centre. How to deal with these issues will be challenging.

Other issues impacting agriculture

There were a number of comments made that address specific concerns. Some can be remedied easily. Others are much broader in nature. The comments include:

- County roads and bridges are inadequate for both agriculture and for general use.
- The standard for ditches is too low for modern equipment.
- The ditches are not being properly maintained and/or are being designed properly. They are growing up with brush and weeds – as a result water isn’t draining and this creates new obstacles and/or we are unable to work the field in those areas
- Not enough proper accesses is being allowed to enter fields. We need better field access.
- We need better infrastructure;
- Taxation is an issue now with more limits on income splitting
- Rules for subdivision and development make it difficult to keep labour on the farm

Summary of the Fragmentation Issue
Land fragmentation is a growing concern among many farmers in Sturgeon County. There are two major consequences. First, the increased presence of non-farm rural residents who typically have little or no knowledge of (or appreciation for) farming and the necessary practices that occur within a farming area creates problems. As a result, farmers are often subject to a range of complaints. In addition, the added traffic increases the dangers associated with the transportation of large agricultural equipment on rural roads. In many cases we heard reports of non-farm residents showing little patience leading to dangerous passing while dispensing verbal abuse or gestures to the farmer moving the equipment. In effect, a double jeopardy is at play: more rural residents lead to more traffic while growing farm operations lead to more equipment being moved on a regular basis—a situation that will only increase.

The second concern pertains to the actual availability and suitability of the farmland once a sub-division has taken place. If subdivisions are small, rectangular and in corner lots, the disruption to farming is minimal. However, if the subdivision is large and oddly shaped, the remaining lands may or may not be of interest to the farmer—particularly those lands that are being rented to crop producers since operating equipment in such land parcels may be challenging. Plus, the presence of neighbours raises concerns with respect to dust (in the case of tillage and harvest), drift (in the case of spraying of crop protection products), and noise that accompanies most field operations.

However, it should be pointed out that small parcels as a result of subdivision can also lead to the establishment of diversified and/or more intense agricultural operations. There is an increased interest in responding to the growing demand for local food and services. Many of the opportunities do not require large parcels of land and small parcels are better suited for these pursuits.
Regional Agriculture Master Plan Reference Maps

1. RAMP Reference Map 3: Agricultural Land Suitability Ratings – *Draft* – *August 30, 2018*

2. RAMP Reference Map 3.1: Agricultural Land Suitability Ratings with Agriculture Sub-Areas Overlay – *Draft* – *March 14, 2019*

3. RAMP Reference Map 4: Agricultural Constraints – *Draft* – *August 30, 2018*

4. RAMP Reference Map 4.1: Agricultural Constraints with Agriculture Sub-Areas Overlay – *Draft* – *March 14, 2019*

5. RAMP Reference Map 7: Agriculture Sub-Areas – *Draft* – *March 13, 2019*

6. RAMP Reference Map 2.1: Regional Commuter Shed with Agriculture Sub-Areas – *Draft* – *March 14, 2019*
RAMP Reference Map 3.1: Agricultural Land Suitability Ratings with Agriculture Sub-Areas Overlay

"Draft" - March 14, 2019

Soil Classification (LSRS)
- ≥40% Class 2 Soil (Prime)
- ≥40% Class 3 Soil (Prime)
- ≥40% Class 4 Soil
- ≥40% Class 5 Soil
- ≥40% Class 6 Soil
- ≥40% Class 7 Soil
- ≥40% Unrated Soil

Policy Tiers
- Metropolitan Area
- Metropolitan Core
- Rural Area
- Urban Service Area
- Municipal Boundary
- Federal Jurisdiction
- Regional Roads
- Water
- Built-Up Urban Area

*Draft* - March 14, 2019

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