

Beaverlodge Town Hall Report

Tuesday, September 27, 2022
7-9pm, Community Centre



Prepared by: Holly Sorgen, EmPower Up!

Summary

Jeff Johnston, CAO for the Town of Beaverlodge approached Holly Sorgen to facilitate a Town Hall meeting, specifically to consult with the community on a variety of subjects and to reinforce Council's commitment to consistent communication with its residents and business community.

The meeting began with a welcome from the mayor and then Jeff presented an update of the Town and Council's Strategic Goals and Actions. He outlined each area and progress made in each, taking questions along the way. 25 residents attended this portion of the meeting.

Holly then introduced the concept of the consultative portion of the session, including – goals of the session, the process, namely roundtable discussion topics, recording and reporting and Council's commitment to ongoing connections and communication.

The goals of the consultation session included:

- Engage a good cross section of the community and its residents from young families to seniors
- Identify opportunities for the Town
- Close the loop on the conversations
 - Commitment to:
 - Listen
 - Discuss
 - Communicate
 - Act, when able and logical

17 people continued into the consultation portion of the session. The group that participated was a wide cross section of the community, including those representing the recreation sector, business owners and advocacy representatives, young families, and seniors.

8 Questions were asked of the group and each table discussed each question, recording answers and reporting back to the larger group. The following is a breakdown of the high-level trends, commonalities, and recommendations for future action for the Town, residents, and business owners.

Findings

Given the beautiful weather that evening, it was a pleasant surprise to have the number of participants who attended and contributed to the session. This is indicative of an engaged community, and the diverse nature of the participants was also a positive as those who attended represented a multitude of interests, backgrounds, experiences, communities, and interest groups.

Business

As a highly engaged group, those in attendance also identified ways the community and the business community could be engaged at higher levels to assist Council and Administration in some of the “work.” One suggestion that came out of the meeting was to create a Residential Development Committee to engage residents, developers, etc. to inform the housing development process.

It was also suggested to strengthen the Economic Development committee, engaging more business owners in informing economic development activities as it relates to business retention, business attraction, import replacement (buy local) and strengthening the overall local business environment. There appears to be strong support in the community for the local Chamber of Commerce so the further development of a relationship between the economic development committee and the Chamber is and should be a priority, especially as it relates to connecting with the business community.

If the committee has not yet engaged in economic development training, a further recommendation may be to engage in economic development training that is offered through many venues included Economic Developers of Alberta, and several post-secondary institutions in Alberta, including SAIT Polytechnic. University of Waterloo offers a designation in Economic Development and have recognized the EDA courses as part of the building blocks to designation. EDA also has a unique offering specific to Elected Officials for Economic Developers.

The Economic Development Committee can then inform Council’s business development strategy specifically related to the areas identified during the consultation – tax incentives, business development incentives, a local procurement policy, etc.

Health

Access to healthcare and healthcare professionals remains a priority for residents, which is the same for the entire Northwest region. With that in mind, it is imperative that council continue to advance the P3 arrangement they are developing to build a new health facility and continue work with PHAC to ensure the facility is sufficiently staff.

As a regional hub, the Beaverlodge health facility can house primary care, acute care, and tertiary care as a one stop shop and/or the Town can consider create a health and wellness cluster for the community to further develop and full-service regional health cluster that serves all manner of healthcare and wellness needs. Strategic, regular communication to the community is essential as the plans for the new facility advance and progress.

Next Steps:

Given the excellent turn out, engaged group and Council commitment to regular communication and consultation with residents, it is recommended that similar type events are hosted once per year, in Fall, to gather data, feedback and information/recommendations from residents and business owners. Other communication events such as Coffee with Council will also continue to be valuable to the consultation process.