

Rural Municipality of McKillop No. 220

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Notice to Ratepayers

February 28, 2018

Reports from the February 24th Ratepayers Meeting

There are three ways to get information from the February 24, 2018 Ratepayers Meeting that was held in Bulyea earlier this week.

- 1 This mailout contains a short report on the main takeaways – the major topics taxpayers are talking about and what the RM is doing. This will also be posted to the RM's website: **rmofmckillop220.com**.
- 2 The RM's website also has a longer digest of the more-than-two-dozen topics that were covered at the meeting.
- 3 You can also listen to the recorded audio of the entire meeting. That is found on the website as well.

Main Takeaways from the Ratepayers Meeting

The Public Meeting Process

People responded very positively to the meeting process.

- The invitation to send in questions in advance was very popular, and resulted in a very large number of important questions, which were then sorted into more than two dozen different categories. Questions from each category were then directed to the Reeve for a response at the meeting. In addition, people asked questions from the floor at the meeting.
- Attendance was very high. It was standing room only at the Bulyea town hall, with more than 150 people attending.
- The meeting went past its three-hour timeline to fit in all the people at the microphone – and virtually everyone in the room stayed to the very last question.

The Reeve also responded to requests for meeting reports by assuring ratepayers that reports of the meeting would be promptly circulated and posted to the RM's website.

Fox's Point

There was strong support for RM protection of Fox's Point. The Reeve asked if anyone was against support, and there was no one. The Reeve said that Council's position was that if support for protection is so strong, the RM needs to give the strongest support possible to the land, without giving up land or ownership. The process decided upon was chosen as the strongest support. This involves adding the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF) to the legal title, and working with Nature Saskatchewan to develop a plan for how Fox's Point will be managed as a protected natural area.

The main criticism was whether there were other partners that would provide protection as strong or stronger than the SWF partnership. The Reeve said Council concluded the SWF and Nature Saskatchewan plan was the best option.

Members of the Fox family were in attendance to confirm the family's support for Council's decision, and an SWF representative answered questions.

RM Administration and Finances

The Reeve fielded a large number of questions based on widely circulated rumours about poor financial administration and Council meeting management. He pointed out that:

- **Legal services** – The attendance of the RM's lawyer at meetings ensures proper processes are followed at every step.
- **Planning and development** – The engagement of a municipal planner will lead to a new Zoning Bylaw and Official Community Plan to resolve issues of poor planning over recent decades, and to establish a process so that proper development of properties occurs in the future.
- **Finances and financial management** – Financial approval processes have been reviewed and revised, the auditor's report has been received and approved, all expenditures have to be approved by Council, and the RM is working within its budget, with every expectation that tax rates will remain unchanged in the year ahead.
- **Council** – Councillors are recused from discussions and decisions on any matter that might involve a conflict of interest.
- **Office personnel** – Personnel changes are being made to improve service in the RM office, and changes will continue in the months ahead.

Communications

Council is investing in improvements as a result of a strong demand from ratepayers for more timely and comprehensive communications.

- **Planned enhancements** – Initial recommendations have been received from the communications consultant and are expected to be approved and implemented.
- **Early improvements** – Some early changes are already happening. The meeting marked the start of collecting ratepayers' email addresses so that emails can eventually provide more timely and less costly communications than postal mail.

Legacy Projects

The Reeve responded to areas where much criticism has occurred. These are the “legacy issues” that the current Council inherited from past Councils. He said the Council is determined to clean up these longstanding matters, though they will take time:

- **Sundale** – The water and sewage system is owned by the developer and provided to residents through their agreement with the developer. Now that the developer is no longer operating the water plant, the RM is trying to help residents by providing a plant operator. But the plant is still owned by the developer and residents still pay the developer, not the RM, for sewer and water services.
- **Lagoon** – The sewage lagoon was built a number of years ago at a scale three times larger than is needed. As a result, there isn't enough liquid to keep the lagoon cells wet, so the bottoms and walls of the cells dry up and deteriorate. This is a costly project where poor planning in the past has resulted in financial challenges for the RM today. The RM is searching for a suitable solution, but that solution is not yet in sight.
- **Councillor issue** – The previous Council cited a Councillor for alleged conflict of interest, and that issue – which led to a costly court case – is being resolved by the current Council. The court case was held in 2017, and the RM is now awaiting the judge's decision.
- **Landfill and garbage** – There are two major issues for ratepayers:
 - In 2014 the landfill had to be closed because of damage from heavy rains. The landfill is run by a separate Authority, which expects it to be operational again this year. The cost of trucking garbage to the Regina landfill has necessitated a surcharge on tax notices.
 - Meanwhile, the current garbage collection system is old and outdated. There are different services and costs for different types of residents. The current RM Council is developing a new bylaw this year that will establish a standard system of garbage collection for everyone in the RM.

Rural and Urban

Ratepayers raised concerns about the different expectations and demands of rural, agricultural residents on one hand, those that are clustered in resort areas along the lakeshore on the other hand. This tension was evident in the meeting. Ratepayers raised questions about representation and about equitable taxes and services, about a petition to change division boundaries, and about options for resort areas to become urban municipalities so that they have autonomy to govern themselves. In some cases it led to angry words between urban and rural people.

The Reeve pointed out the complexity of the issue in an RM where the population has grown enormously in lakeshore development. He explained that options for resolving the challenges cannot be enacted by the RM, but must be decided by the provincial government, which has so far not indicated what options it might approve. More consultation will be necessary within the RM before the provincial government will decide.

The Reeve pointed out that the RM Council is elected to represent all the ratepayers – and that to serve in a way that is balanced and acceptable to all groups is, in itself, a demanding challenge.

More Details and Questions

Other items were raised at the public meeting. To see a longer report, or to listen to the audio recording of the meeting, please go to the RM's website.

Howard Arndt, Reeve

Michele Cruise-Pratchler, Administrator
