

**REGIONALIZATION WORKING GROUP  
MEETING NOTES  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2019  
COUNTY OF NEWELL**

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** M. Douglass, County of Newell  
C. Amulung, County of Newell  
B. Morishita, City of Brooks  
J. Petrie, City of Brooks  
R. Wickson, Town of Bassano  
J. Seely, Town of Bassano  
T. Steidel, Village of Duchess  
K. Steinley, Village of Duchess  
B. Marshall, Village of Rosemary  
Y. Fujimoto, Village of Rosemary

**STAFF PRESENT:** K. Stephenson, County of Newell  
A. Martens, City of Brooks  
Y. Cosh, Village of Duchess  
S. Zacharias, Village of Rosemary  
T. Polowich, Contigo Business Services Inc.  
S. Yokoyama, County of Newell (Recording Secretary)

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

K. Stephenson called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

K. Stephenson introduced Tracey Polowich of Contigo Business Services Inc. who will be facilitating the meetings and open houses for the Regionalization Working Group.

**3. LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING**

The Letter of Understanding received from Contigo Business Services Inc. was reviewed. A. Martens advised that the City of Brooks has been approved for \$197,000.00 in grant funding for the Regionalization Project. He suggested that since the City will be responsible for payments regarding this project that the Letter of Understanding be made with the City of Brooks rather than the County of Newell.

**MOVED BY BARRY MORISHITA** that the Regionalization Working Group approve the Letter of Understanding for Consulting Services with Tracey Polowich of Contigo Business Services Inc. dated January 2, 2019.

**MOTION CARRIED**

Tracey Polowich assumed the Chair.

#### 4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

**MOVED BY MOLLY DOUGLASS** that the Regionalization Working Group Meeting Notes dated January 2, 2019 be adopted as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED**

#### 5. CALL FOR POST AGENDA ITEMS

There were no new items added to the agenda.

#### 6. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

**MOVED BY TONY STEIDEL** that the agenda be adopted as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED**

#### 7. REGIONALIZATION WORKING GROUP REVIEW

T. Polowich posed the following questions to the Regionalization Working Group (RWG) and asked each member to provide their thoughts to all or some of the questions.

- Why are you here?
  - What brought you here?
  - What are the desired outcomes?
  - What does success look like?
  - What are the benefits of working together?
- 
- RWG members shared their visions for the long-term success of the region, how we can work together to create efficiencies and discussed the struggles they currently face. Other members also shared their concerns about amalgamation and the need for additional information on proposed cost savings and other possible ways to collaborate without amalgamating.
  - The group reviewed the vision and guiding principles that were generated through the previous work with 13 Ways, Inc. After some discussion the members agreed that **“To secure a prosperous future we will work together as one community to inspire and prepare for change”** is still the Vision of this group.
  - T. Polowich suggested that the group select 5-7 of the proposed principles to guide how they will conduct themselves through this process. The Duty to Act in Good Faith, which is included in the ICF Regulation, was presented as another tool to guide the members. It was felt that all the principles presented were applicable but there may be some duplicate points in the two documents that could be combined.
  - T. Polowich recommended the municipalities continue working toward developing the required ICF documents for each area but also noted that within the next few months decisions will need to be made on whether each municipality wishes to proceed toward amalgamation.
  - Even though the vision of the future may not be the same for everyone around the table, members were reminded about the regional water project and how the municipalities worked together to achieve that goal.

- It was felt that all municipalities are on board with working together but some questioned if there were other alternatives besides ICF's and amalgamation.
- The difference between ICFs and joint services agreements were clarified. ICF's outline shared services, who should pay and how services such as transportation, water/wastewater, solid waste, emergency services, recreation, etc. should be provided. Other areas are covered through joint services agreement between municipalities.
- It was noted that the joint services agreements are not about cost saving but about helping the other municipalities by providing money or staffing. This does not change the bottom line or eliminate the duplication of staff and services which could amount to an estimated 15% cost savings.
- Some members felt that the risks to each municipality in the amalgamation process could be mitigated by including the items in the formation order for each municipality.
- It was noted that if a different level of service was requested by a municipality it could erode the cost savings for that individual area. It was explained that the MGA allows for different levels of taxation (for the 5 individual municipalities) and savings can also be realized by eliminating overlapping positions. The cost savings in one position over all municipalities is not necessarily the same; however, merging the various duties of that position with other established areas could still create a savings. This may also provide more opportunities to specialize in other areas.
- Is the current practice fair to our ratepayers or are we just supporting inefficiencies?
- From the discussion it was determined that the uncertain parties need a better understanding of the potential cost savings and to be assured that all options have been explored. It was also noted that ICF's are not required if the area amalgamates into a specialized municipality.
- Another available option would be for the City of Brooks, County of Newell and Town of Bassano to amalgamate and allow the others to join later if they choose. It was agreed that this was an alternative but not the ideal. T. Polowich asked the members that still had some uncertainties to bring forward specific items that they would like to explore further. She questioned those not ready to move forward what information they would need to proceed. The RWG will be encouraged to identify and discuss these concerns/barriers at future meetings.
- Discussion was held on how decisions of this group would be made going forward. It was agreed that decisions would be based on majority; however, all group members must be clear about the decision being made.
- Concerns were raised over the cost savings information provided in the last media release and whether it was necessary. Some members expressed concerns that we could be providing false news to the residents and that they would expect all the savings in their community. Other members felt that we must disclose all information we have unless there is a compelling reason not to.

Committee took a short break and reconvened at 10:58 a.m.  
B. Morishita left at 10:58 a.m.

## 8. OPEN HOUSES

The group listed the following expected outcomes from the open houses:

- Community fears
- Regionalization Working Group (RWG) to listen

- Educate the public (present info / ask what other info they need / provide info of what/how municipal services are provided now)
- Honest opinions from public (need information including pros/cons)
- Ensure public knows RWG is doing their due diligence
- Address misperceptions (i.e. one municipality is taking over)
- Get public talking about facts
- Community (what they want / what benefits can be achieved / “What’s in it for us”)
- Learn if RWG should continue this process (How to proceed if not RWG then how?)

#### Open House Meeting Format

- Open houses will be set up as a come-and-go.
- Information boards will be on display and handouts will be available for attendees to take home. This information will also be made available at each municipal office location.
- 4-5 tables with chairs will be provided at each location.
- RWG members agreed to attend as many of the open house locations as possible to hear concerns/feedback from each area.
- Questions can be asked to any RWG member in attendance or by completing a feedback form.
- The public is welcome to attend any of the six open house locations to gather information and provide feedback.
- Questions received from the public shall be directed to the municipality where the person resides for a response.
- The public will be updated frequently during this process and additional opportunities for feedback may be provided, if necessary.
- Information will be provided to the public prior to the open house meetings to allow them to be better informed prior to attending.
- Each municipality will look after providing snacks and beverages for their respective open house location.
- Municipalities were reminded to submit their bills for open house expenses to the City of Brooks for reimbursement.

#### Open House Information

- The group reviewed the draft open house information prepared by T. Polowich and A. Martens.
- The four topics included: Current Regional Profile; Overview of the Amalgamation Process; Benefits of Regionalization; and Considerations Needing Solutions.
- T. Polowich suggested the public be made aware that the goal of the RWG is to hear concerns/feedback, but amalgamation may still proceed if the group feels it is the best option.
- A. Martens noted that it would be helpful if the public could provide reasons for being either in favour or against this initiative. This information would give the group something to work toward.
- It was also noted that even though a plebiscite has been suggested for this decision it is not a requirement.
- The region already has areas of regionalized government such as school, fire, irrigation and health services.

- It is important to note that the amalgamation process can also be mandated by the government.
- T. Polowich also noted that amalgamation can help ensure compliance with municipal requirements and help to determine whether the municipality is achieving its outcomes.
- Concerns were raised over the actual savings that would be realized from reducing staff and taxes. T. Polowich asked the members who are still uncertain about the amalgamation process what amount of savings would be enough for them to consider this option?
- M. Douglass suggested the “Considerations Needing Solutions” section be reworded to “Challenges for Consideration”.
- Information handouts and the feedback form will be available at the open houses, municipal office locations and on the website once it is operational.
- Statistics on school amalgamation and how this can be a voluntary effort will also be included in the information provided to the public.
- Other challenges identified were loss of autonomy and new elected officials with a different vision. It was suggested that these challenges could be handled by including them in the formation order.

#### Frequently Asked Questions

- T. Polowich shared a FAQ list prepared by the City of Grand Prairie that could be used as a guide for this group.
- A. Martens will incorporate changes to the FAQ and circulate to the group.
- Each municipality will advertise all open house dates and locations on their municipal websites/bulletin boards.
- A. Martens will coordinate with the City Communications Officer to prepare open house advertisements for the local papers and radio station.
- No special invites will be sent out regarding the open houses at this time. It was questioned if this was a requirement. T. Polowich stated that it is a requirement of the amalgamation process to notify all local authorities that operate or provide services in the initiating municipality or any municipal authority with which it proposes to amalgamate. Since these were only open houses to gather information the group felt special invitations were not required at this time.

S. Zacharias left at 12:20 p.m.

## 9. MEDIA RELEASES

- The responsibility for preparing media releases will be rotated through the five municipalities in the RWG with the exception of Bassano whose staff member is not able to attend the meetings.
- Y. Cosh agreed to prepare the press release for this meeting.
- Any questions from the public regarding the media release will be directed to the municipal office of the municipality in which they reside.
- Members did not feel comfortable having one spokesperson answer questions for all the divisions. Each member of the RWG will answer questions regarding regionalization for their area.
- The City’s media list with the addition of Bassano Times will be used for all media releases.

- RWG members will be responsible for ensuring the media release information is shared with the other members of their councils.
- Each official media release will be advertised in the paper for one week.
- Ads for the upcoming open houses will be placed in the newspapers starting immediately until the last open house on March 13.

## **12. NEXT STEPS**

T. Polowich will prepare items to consider for the next meeting.  
M. Douglass agreed to chair the next meeting on March 6, 2019.

The group broke for lunch at 12:25 p.m.

J. Petrie left at 12:47 p.m.  
K. Steinley left at 12:53 p.m.

## **10. REGIONALIZATION WEBSITE**

- Discussion was held on the need for a regionalization website. The members agreed that having one site that each municipality can link to eliminates the need to maintain the information on each individual website.
- M. Douglass questioned whether the website could include a place where people can ask questions.
- A list of suggested website content was reviewed. All items except the creation of a separate Regionalization Facebook page were approved. Facebook will only be used to direct people to the website for more information.
- Contact information (email and phone numbers) for each municipal office will be included on the website.
- The top three domain name suggestions for the website were: rwg, regionalwg or regionalworkinggroup. These suggestions will be forwarded to the County IT department and they will begin the process to register a domain name.
- The logos from each municipality will be used on the website rather than creating a new regionalization logo at this time.
- Choosing the website design will be left up to County staff with the following guidelines: website must be easy to read, simple, not too busy and have bright pages, no dark backgrounds.

## **11. POST AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no post agenda items at this meeting.

## **13. ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 1:16 p.m.