

**REGIONALIZATION WORKING GROUP
MEETING NOTES
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 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
T. Rose, 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
S. Yokoyama, County of Newell (Recording Secretary)

ABSENT: R. Wickson, Town of Bassano
T. Polowich, Contigo Business Services Inc.

1. CALL TO ORDER

M. Douglass called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

2. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

An error in the spelling of Douglass was noted under Item 2.

MOVED BY JOHN PETRIE that the Regionalization Working Group Meeting Notes dated February 6, 2019 be adopted as amended.

MOTION CARRIED

3. CALL FOR POST AGENDA ITEMS

The following item was added to the agenda.

- Press Release

4. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

MOVED BY KOLE STEINLEY that the agenda be adopted as amended.

MOTION CARRIED

5. VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES REFLECTION

RWG members reviewed the vision and guiding principles established at the February 6, 2019 meeting.

Arrived at the Meeting

J. Seely arrived at 9:06 a.m.

6. OPEN HOUSES

The format from the first four open houses was discussed.

Each of the members that attended one or more of the open houses provided their thoughts.

- open house format changed and evolved due to public feedback
- Bassano was quiet, people were not expecting a round table discussion but did ask a lot of questions
- Rainier attendees got engaged very early in the meeting and asked questions throughout the evening
- attendance at each location has been very good
- approximately 400 people have attended the first four open houses, higher numbers than those experienced in Flagstaff County discussions
- M. Douglass advised that the preliminary Flagstaff Intermunicipal Partnership report is available to view at myflagstaff.ca
- most of the concerns raised were anticipated
- residents wanted more information and a plebiscite
- people need to be made aware that these first meetings are to gather input and that additional information will be prepared prior to the next round of open houses

RWG members agreed that the following areas could be improved for the March open houses:

- restrict opening statements to 2 minutes to allow more time for questions
- have only one representative from each municipality provide an opening statement
- provide all instructions and information to the public at the beginning of the open house

Arrived at Meeting

Tom Rose arrived at 9:22 a.m.

- provide links to each municipality's financial statements on the website
- include financial information prepared by K. Stephenson on the website
- inform public about the website and attach web address to pamphlets
- provide copies of media releases
- during opening statements, facilitator to ask audience to keep questions/comments to 2 – 3 minutes to allow the opportunity for more questions
- RWG members agreed to build a business case using NRSC as an example to show comparisons of the current structure, what regionalization would mean to this service and the fully amalgamated model. The CAO's will work together to prepare this information for the next RWG meeting on April 3rd.

- a complete list of all areas where the municipalities work together should be included on the website as they are not all listed in the brochure

7. PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The RWG reviewed the questions received from the four open houses and the draft responses prepared by T. Polowich.

- It was suggested that all information received by the RWG should be shared on the website. The public can then choose to view the raw information that has been gathered from the public or the summary of questions and answers provided.
- Any sensitive information or personal attacks on the feedback forms will be removed before they are posted. A statement will be included on the website to advise the public that personal attacks will not be allowed.
- The website should also state that the RWG does not have the answers to all questions at this time.
- The submission reply notice will be changed to advise that questions will be answered as soon as possible rather than within 2 working days to allow the feedback to be reviewed by the RWG at the next meeting.
- The website should also note "Answers may evolve and/or be supplemented after the RWG goes through the process".
- Residents who have supplied an email address with their questions will receive a direct response.
- It was requested that the statement "The library boards for each municipality may also be amalgamated into one board serving all the libraries in the region." be removed from the response regarding funding for libraries.
- Under the Services heading, the responses for how the schools and hospitals would be affected were changed to read "There will be no effect on the hospital in Bassano. There will be no effect on the schools."
- Ag Societies were discussed, and it was agreed that regionalization or amalgamation should not affect these groups or their operations. If they ever decide to dissolve, they would become part of the municipality in which they reside.
- RWG members discussed the costs for police services.
- It was also suggested that the website include:
 - terminology / definitions
 - a list of Hamlets within the County of Newell
 - a map of the region
 - definitions of regionalization and amalgamation
 - What is a municipality, hamlet, village, town?
 - how a mayor / reeve is selected

Members discussed the plebiscite question at length.

- It was agreed that there is not enough information at this time to decide if a plebiscite will be held or what the question would even be. The RWG's first priority is to make sure everyone is informed.
- It has not yet been determined if this project will even go ahead.
- The RWG will continue talking about this question and a decision will be made after the next round of open houses.

8. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

A discussion was held regarding the possible number of representatives that would be required under the proposed new governance model.

- Residents of the smaller areas expressed concern about losing their voice in a single governance structure and believed that the concerns of the City of Brooks would take precedence.
- The following governance structure options were suggested:
 - 5 Rural, 5 City
 - 4 Rural, 4 City and a Mayor
 - 3 County, 3 Municipalities, 3 City
- The pros and cons of electing a mayor or selecting the mayor or reeve from within the council members were discussed.
- It was suggested that the structure selected may end up being an equal number but not equal population.
- It was also noted that the Minister may not sign the order if he doesn't feel it fairly represents all areas.
- K. Stephenson provided some information on the governance structure for the Municipality of Wood Buffalo and advised that their council members did not all represent equal populations.
- Regardless of the model chosen council members would need to represent everyone in the region.
- A suggestion to split the region into eight portions with Brooks as the centre was made. However, with this model all council members elected could potentially be from within Brooks.
- RWG members agreed to continue discussions on the proposed governance models with their individual councils.

9. DUCHESS / ROSEMARY

The following questions and concerns were expressed by the members from Duchess and Rosemary:

- change to a suggested "county style" taxation model which will not be beneficial for low income homes
- concerned that services, such as snow removal within the smaller municipalities would change to Brooks' policy
- fearful due to past linear shared funding model as conditions imposed on this funding did not allow municipalities to use it toward the greatest needs in their community
- fearful of the loss of decision-making power
- Have yet to see what smaller municipalities will gain - how will it be better for the residents? Currently don't have debt and live within means to provide for the residents.
- Items required to move forward with this process include:
 - representation for the smaller municipalities
 - more of a vision and involvement in the process and financial numbers
 - input from small muni's about the amalgamation process is heard and valued
- Need to see the benefits of amalgamation – not opposed to working together where it makes sense but have yet to see what will be gained through amalgamation.

10. POST AGENDA ITEMS

- S. Zacharias will prepare the press release for this meeting.

11. NEXT STEPS

The next meeting is scheduled for April 3, 2019.

12. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.