

Topic: Amendment to Land Use Bylaw 2017-18 related to regulations and definitions for the Highvale End Land Use Direct Control District Regulations (DC Area 2) and Schedule 'C' Highvale Mine End Direct Control District Map.

Administration Recommendation:

1. That Bylaw 2025-08 receive first reading.
2. That a Public Hearing be scheduled for March 11, 2025 at 11:00 am to hear public comment on Bylaw 2025-08.

Introduction:

Administration is proposing an amendment to Land Use Bylaw 2017-18 for Section 9.3 Highvale End Land Use Direct Control District Regulations (DC Area 2) along with the associated DC Area Map, which identifies the area of application. The objective of this amendment is to align the County's development regulations with the Province of Alberta's strategy for catalyzing data centre developments, ensuring the County is positioned to harness the associated economic opportunities.

Facts (Background Information):

Proposed Bylaw 2025-08 is a Land Use Bylaw amendment for Section 9.3, which impacts a number of quarter sections within the Direct Control Area and former Highvale Mine Lands, south of Wabamun Lake. The Highvale Mine End Land Use Direct Control Regulations currently provides Council with ability to control and regulate all aspects of development, post-reclamation.

The Province of Alberta released 'Alberta's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Data Centres Strategy' in December 2024. This strategy outlines the province's commitment to attracting responsible investment into this growing sector and highlights the province's attributes such as: natural resource availability, cold climate, competitive tax rates, and a business-friendly regulatory environment that positions the province as a global leader.

As a result of the direction established in the strategy, Parkland County is aligning its development and regulatory framework to ensure it is positioned to capitalize on the economic opportunities provided by the development of data centres.

Administration is proposing to amend Land Use Bylaw 2017-18, specifically Section 9.3 and Schedule 'C' to allow for the land use 'COMPUTER, ELECTRONIC, DATA PROCESSING SERVICES' as a permitted use. This use class is defined as:

"development that may include the use of land, building or structure, or part thereof, for the research, development, input, prototypical manufacturing, processing and printing of data and which may include the design, manufacturing and warehousing of electronic equipment or software."

Administration is proposing to locate this use in areas with the least impact on agricultural land and existing residential uses. To ensure this new use is limited within the existing DC Area 2, Administration has identified site specific locations where COMPUTER, ELECTRONIC, DATA PROCESSING SERVICES will be permitted. The subject lands have been identified as the most ideal locations due to:

- Existing power generation and distribution infrastructure;
- Distance away from residential areas;
- Proximity to high-capacity roadways;
- Minimal environmental impacts; and
- Compatibility with reclamation plans for the mine areas.

Analysis

Administration conducted a review of the Province of Alberta's 'Alberta's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Data Centres Strategy', the County's Strategic Plan (2022-2025), and the Municipal Development Plan (Bylaw 2017-14) to inform the amendments to the Land Use Bylaw 2017-18. The following analysis provides direction and support for the proposed amendments.

1. Alberta's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Data Centres Strategy

- a. *Alberta will harness its abundant natural resources and innovative energy infrastructure to support the development of high-capacity solutions for AI data centres while being focused on keeping utilities reliable and affordable for Albertans.*
 - i. The Highvale End Land Use and Keephills Direct Control Districts contain areas that are compatible with energy generation, with historic infrastructure still existing.
 1. Location will enable off-grid and grid-connected power solutions that are compatible with the energy demands of Albertans.
 - ii. Highlighting where these developments are permitted in the current LUB will support a streamlined and predictable regulatory pathway for investors, supporting Parkland County's competitive advantage.
- b. *Leveraging Alberta's natural advantages and fostering innovation in cooling systems will ensure efficient, sustainable, and environmentally responsible operations.*
 - i. Parkland County is situated in Northern Alberta, benefiting from the cooling of long winters and reducing the need for expensive artificial cooling systems.
- c. *Alberta's government will work closely with local governments to attract investment and accelerate data center project implementation.*
 - i. The County is proposing these amendments to enable implementation and get ahead of provincial mandates.
- d. *Alberta's government will conduct a comprehensive review of all regulatory timelines associated with data center development to reduce red tape and shorten timelines for investment decisions and construction readiness.*
 - i. Current processes to approve data centers would have long timelines due to inadequate definitions and allocation of uses. Modernizing this section of the LUB will accommodate any potential developments and ensure that the County does not miss an opportunity for investments that support economic growth.

2. Parkland County's Council Strategic Plan 2022-2025

- a. *To explore strategies that encourage new businesses to locate in Parkland County, with strategic emphasis on Acheson and the Wabamun area (B1)*
 - i. Proposed amendments enable new and innovative businesses opportunities in the Wabamun area that are compatible with existing contexts.
- b. *To ensure that County Council is supported by a robust and current framework of bylaws, policies, and plans (D1).*
 - i. Proposed amendments ensures that current bylaws and policies are competitive and accommodating of industry trends, enabling clear and consistent decision making.
- c. *PILLAR A Complete Communities to ensure that County infrastructure meets the needs of residents, businesses, and industry.*
 - i. Proposed amendments direct development to locations that have existing supportive infrastructure that will not impact the needs of existing residents, businesses, and industry.

3. Parkland County's Municipal Development Plan (Bylaw 2017-14)

- a. *Policy 5.0.1 (a): The County encourages economic and employment diversification throughout the County where businesses will be supported by adequate infrastructure and transportation networks.*
 - i. The proposed amendments enable economic and employment diversification by directing the establishment of a new industry in an area with existing utility infrastructure, high quality roadways, and compatible neighbouring land uses.
- b. *Policy 5.0.8 (a): The County supports the continued operation and adaptive reuse of power generation facilities within Parkland County as an important source of local employment opportunities.*
 - i. The proposed amendments support adaptive reuse projects by co-locating computer, electronic, and data process services with existing power distribution and generation infrastructure. Co-location reduces the requirement for new utilities to be built to support these uses and allows for the ongoing utilization of existing infrastructure.
 - ii. The proposed amendments are expected to support future job growth in the technology and construction sectors.
- c. *Policy 6.0.1 (a): The County strongly encourages growth and development in the County's hamlets where the appropriate infrastructure and transportation networks are available.*
 - i. These amendments will accommodate development that would create a number of jobs in a region of the County that is transitioning from a historically coal-based economy to a more diversified economy. As development increases in this area, surrounding hamlets will be encouraged to grow and utilize the existing infrastructure and transportation network.
- d. *Policy 9.8.1 (a): The County will continue to promote and evolve the broadband network through the combination of tower and fiber expansions.*
 - i. Computer, electronic, and data processing services require fast and dependable internet. Future development of this use will expand broadband fibre into this region of the County. Expanded broadband provides an opportunity for rural residents in the area to have the option to connect to fibre once a development is established.

4. Public Engagement (see Attachment 2 – What We Heard Snapshot)

- a. Public Engagement consisted of one (1) Public Open House held on January 23, 2025, at Parkland County Centre from 4-7pm.
- b. The Open House was advertised through County social media, the County website, and the yourparkland.ca project webpage.
- c. Eight (8) members of the public attended the Open House and had the opportunity to review project boards, talk to County subject matter experts, and provide written comments.
- d. Twenty-eight (28) comments were received. Feedback supported Data Centre uses in the Highvale End Land Direct Control District, especially where lands have already been disturbed by mining and power generation uses, but voiced concerns about the impacts to:
 - i. Existing and future agricultural operations (loss of lands to expand operations);
 - ii. Noise, viewscape, lighting, internet speeds, and traffic;
 - iii. Electrical grid reliability and carbon footprint;
 - iv. Water consumption; and
 - v. Ability for the public to comment at further stages of the development process if Data Centres are allowed to be a Permitted Use.

Based on the policy analysis and feedback received, Administration has determined that adding the Use Class “COMPUTER, ELECTRONIC, DATA PROCESSING SERVICES” as a site specific Permitted Use would be appropriate to regulate and facilitate future development of data centres while protecting agricultural lands and residential development surrounding DC Area 2.

Key planning considerations for addressing the development of “COMPUTER, ELECTRONIC, DATA PROCESSING SERVICES” uses include delegating the decision making authority to Council and maintaining the underlying land use district of RE – Resource Extraction District, which will guide development setbacks.

Public Consultation

As per Council Policy C-AD51, an amendment to the Land Use Bylaw requires a Public Open House to engage with the public and interest holders on the proposed amendment.

County Open House

In support of the amendment to Bylaw 2025-08, the County Administration undertook one (1) In-Person Open House (4-7 pm, Thursday, January 23, 2025, Parkland County Centre) where the Administration presented the project background and proposed amendments.

Notice for the Open House was advertised on County social media, the County website, and the yourparkland.ca project webpage. Eight (8) people attended the event and provided the Administration with twenty-eight (28) comments and one (1) participant follow-up email.

Display boards and a What We Heard Snapshot of the event were uploaded to the project website to allow the public to review the items at a later date. On January 27, 2025, the project team notified the project subscribers, indicating the availability of the What We Heard Snapshot and Engagement Panels on the project website.

Feedback on the proposed amendments included the following:

Impacts on Agricultural Lands around Keephills Power Plant

- Loss of agricultural and grazing lands may impact future agricultural operations

Cumulative Impacts

- Impacts to residential, wildlife, and water resources
- Locate development closer to disturbed land and away from existing residences
- Additional power consumption creates a larger carbon footprint
- Energy requirements should not impact the stability of the power grid

Internet Access

- Take opportunity to connect the residents of Keephills to the fibre network
- Concern about impact to existing internet network

Light Pollution

- Concerns that additional lighting may create impacts to residents in the area

Preferred Location

- Locate near Sundance Power Plant within already disturbed land

Noise

- Concerns with potential noise impacts from this type of development

Thermal Pollution

- Concerns with the potential thermal pollution on water and air resources

Traffic

- Impacts to road access in the area
- Concerns with additional traffic increases
- Potential safety hazards to Range Road 40 due to existing ice and fog issues

Water Consumption

- Concerns with the potential water requirements
- Desire to understand the water use and potential impacts to water quality

General Comments

- Maintain the opportunity for the public to have input on the development process
- Consider changing the uses from permitted to discretionary
- Clarify if this form of development needs a reclamation plan

Legislative Public Comment Period Conducted by Administration:

Should Council choose to grant First Reading to the Bylaw, prior to the proposed Public Hearing, Bylaw 2025-08 will be circulated to relevant external agencies, adjacent landowners, and advertised in the newspaper and on the County's website in accordance with Section 606 of the *Municipal Government Act* (RSA 2000). Members of the public will also be able to provide feedback at the proposed Public Hearing.

Alternatives

1. Upon giving first reading, Council may schedule a Public Hearing regarding Bylaw 2025-08 on a date other than 9:30 a.m. March 11, 2025, in Council Chambers.
2. Council may defeat Bylaw 2025-08 at first reading.

Conclusion/Summary

Administration finds the proposed amendment supports and addresses current regulatory gaps in the Land Use Bylaw 2017-18 and recommends that Council give first reading to Bylaw 2025-08 and set a public hearing date to hear comments on the Bylaw.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Bylaw 2025-08

Attachment 2: What We Heard Snapshot

Attachment 3: Administrative Presentation

Attachment 4: Bylaw 2017-18 Redline

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