



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Future of Agriculture Study - Council approval of vision, principles and public engagement plan

Introduction:

This is a continuation of the Future of Agriculture Study. Phase 2 of the project will provide a vision, principles, and recommendations to support a healthy agricultural industry in Parkland County.

Facts (Background Information):

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

- Council received the Future of Agriculture Study phase 1 Situation Report as information in November 2015.

SUMMARY

In May 2015, Parkland County began work on the Future of Agriculture Study. The study is divided into two (2) phases:

Phase 1 – Has been completed as the "Situation Report" on the current state of agriculture in Parkland County. This phase outlines current agricultural characteristics, statistics, and trends in agriculture that have been observed in the County. The Phase 1 "Situation Report" was informed by statistics from Statistics Canada and findings from select meetings with different agricultural sector representatives, residents, and agricultural stakeholders in Parkland County.

Phase 2 – Provides a vision and principles, in addition to recommendation(s) and scenario(s) to support a healthy agricultural industry, diversify and support new and expanding agri-businesses, agri-food and agri-tourism in Parkland County.

VISION AND PRINCIPLES

Administration requires an approved vision and principles to complete the Future of Agriculture Study. The vision and principles, once approved will help guide the development and completion of recommendations to assist in supporting and diversifying the agricultural community and industry in Parkland County. A draft vision and principles for the project have been prepared. The draft vision and principles will guide the completion of the Future of Agriculture Study, and has been shared with residents and stakeholders at public open houses held in late fall 2015. The vision is:

A vibrant agricultural and food community characterized by its diversity, creativity and entrepreneurship, focused on sustainability as well as new opportunities in the Capital Region.

The principles are:

Principle 1: Integrated approach – a recognition that a viable agriculture and food sector will require an integrated and supportive set of policies including land use, economic development and infrastructure investment.

Principle 2: Supportive (enabling) land use policies – namely the design and implementation of land use policies (that respond to the context of different areas) that assure the long term future of agriculture.

Principle 3: Entrepreneurial culture - building & supporting an entrepreneurial business culture for the development and attraction of diversified progressive agribusinesses and agri-tourism opportunities.

Principle 4: Fostering local leadership – the creation of new momentum for a range of potential new directions and initiatives requires strong committed local leadership both within the community and politically.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Completed engagements

Administration and the consultants have completed extensive engagements with agricultural producers, sector representatives, businesses, and residents to date on the Future of Agriculture Study. Engagements completed include:

1. Open House session – An Open House session was held in the east, central and west parts of the County. The purpose was to review background data, project information, and the draft vision and principles with residents and stakeholders. The Open Houses occurred in late October and early November 2015.
2. In person and one on one focus groups – The in person and one on one focus groups resulted in meeting and surveying 88 key agricultural stakeholders within Parkland County and the surrounding area. This included:
 - Agricultural producers (beef, dairy, vegetable and crop sectors);
 - Specialty/value added producers;
 - Agricultural and Rural Life Advisory Committee, ALUS members and county staff and;
 - The equine sector.

Future engagements

The public engagement plan is required for phase 2 of the Future of Agriculture Study. Administration will proceed with phase 2 public engagements once Council has approved the public engagement plan (see attachment 3).

Administration will undertake public consultation for phase 2 in late spring of 2016. The consultations will align with the consultation requirements outlined in the Draft Public Consultation Policy and the phase 2 public engagement plan. The main elements of the phase 2 engagements include:

1. Survey – the purpose of the survey will be to allow all residents of Parkland County and stakeholders to comment on the vision, principles and the future of agriculture in Parkland County.
2. Individual letters will again be sent to the agricultural stakeholders inviting them to the final Open House session for input on phase 2 and the project as a whole.
3. Open House – the purpose of the final Open House will be to review the phase 1 report, present the vision, principles and study recommendation(s) to receive input on the phase 2 report.

While the survey will be available to all residents of Parkland County, Administration will also try to also focus notification and engagement efforts to residents of County Residential subdivisions, small to medium-sized producers, and specialty producers.

Conclusion/Summary:

Together, phase 1 and 2 of this project will complete the Future of Agriculture Study for Parkland County. Administration will proceed with completing phase 2 of the Future of Agriculture Study and intends to present the final Study to Council in June 2016.

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