

(DRAFT)

Open House Highlights: October 28, 29, and November 4, 2015

Emerging Themes

The following is a preliminary DRAFT summary of the discussion highlights. These will be analyzed further and should not be taken as definitive or final.

1. **Farming is a business** – in effect a big business requiring lots of land; a business-like approach; the ability to grow; the ability to produce increasing volumes due to narrowing margins. In this regard, there will be fewer and fewer full time farmers. Farmers are now farming large acreages, use large equipment; and will be moving equipment from farm to farm and in some cases, considerable distances. Note: several people commented that farming has changed so much – “you could (before) make a living on a half section. Now you need at least three sections.” Also, it was commented that “successful farms are inter-generational farms.”
2. **Land (and land use policy)** – the long term availability of land for farming is the number one issue determining the future of agriculture in Parkland County. Crop farmers need large acreages with large fields – thus encroachments by sub-divisions and non-farm rural residents are problematic. Livestock producers (dairy in particular) need large areas to grow forages and the ability to spread manure without complaints. Further they need a minimum distance from residents to accommodate the expansion of facilities, thus any new sub-division in the vicinity of their operation poses a potential threat to expand. Also raised was increased nuisance complaints from nearby residents who complain about noise, smell, sprays, dust, equipment on the road.

Note: there is general agreement that changes to the land use policy will be challenging. Many farmers are expecting to be able to ‘capture value/capitalize’ from the sale of sub-divisions for retirement. Some farmers in east Parkland see the continued consumption of agricultural land for development as inevitable and are looking to sell and in turn buy lands in other counties. Several have begun this process.

Other suggestions include: limiting the size of subdivided parcels (2 acres) and “clustering” parcels in such a way as to maximize the remaining land for farming. The subject of Transferring Development Credits was viewed as interesting but potentially complex and difficult to make work.

3. **The focus on economic development, infrastructure and entrepreneurship are suited to emerging operations or businesses who are responding to local food opportunities.** Parkland County is in a position to better support small enterprises that can increase the food producing capacity within the County. These small enterprises, in turn, create more market demand from larger farmers / producers. For example, a thriving equine sector needs hay which local farmers can supply. Or, a local beef processing plant could stimulate a Parkland County packing, feeding and cow-calf rearing industry.
4. **Leadership and facilitating future leadership will be a big challenge** – one attendee privately commented: “Welcome to the apathy of agriculture!” One such group is the West Central Forage Association, however it is facing challenges.

Comments on the draft ‘Vision’ were limited. The full time farmers have their own vision (let us run our farms – let us grow – stay out of our way..... etc.) and regard the vision as more suitable for emerging operations. Several younger attendees commented privately that they found the ‘vision’ to be exciting and appreciated Parkland County for undertaking the Future of Agriculture Study.

One farmer at the Tomahawk meeting summarized the discussion as follows:

1. Most of the forces impacting agriculture are beyond the influence of the County – prices; markets; demand and supply factors; people wanting to buy land; investors in land; prices of land.
2. The County needs to be realistic and focus on small and practical things such as:
 - a. Providing a place or service for us to dispose of chemical containers and plastic (silage covers)
 - b. Maintaining approaches or access/entry ways to fields (critically important).
 - c. Maintaining weed control on sites that are not being properly managed.
 - d. Policing and reducing the level of vandalism and trespassing which is considerable.
 - e. Providing a weigh scale to enable farmers to know exactly what loads are being carried and hence be better able to abide by road bans or weight reductions.

Some bigger issues that warrant consideration include:

- A Land Use Policy that limits land speculation that makes farming unaffordable.
- Limit the degree of land fragmentation. The worst case scenario is 4 parcels of 40 acres – none of which is kept in agriculture. Thus you create an agricultural wasteland.
- “Education” – can the County assist in creating awareness and appreciation for farming. The public is uninformed. Appreciate the farmer for producing the food you eat

Dot Matrix Exercise findings

Each attendee was asked to make a first and second choice in terms of which “draft principles” they thought were most important to the Future of Agriculture in Parkland County.

	Tomahawk		Blueberry		Woodbend		Total		WEIGHTED: Points: 2 for first, 1 for second
	First	Second	First	Second	First	Second	First	Second	
Principle 1 Integrated Approach	0	2	0	4	7	6	7	12	26
Principle 2 Supportive Land Use Policies	4	0	7	0	6	6	17	6	40
Principle 3 Entrepreneurial Culture	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Principle 4 Fostering Local Leadership	0	2	0	3	1	4	3	7	13

Conclusion:

- Findings from the engagement sessions show a focus on the importance of land use (principle 2) but as part of an integrated approach. A third focus was on fostering a sense of local leadership.
- Tomahawk and Blueberry findings on the principles were similar. Woodbend participants stressed the integrated approach (principle 1) with less focus on land use (principle 2).

Attachment 1: Tomahawk Meeting notes

Parkland Future of Agriculture

Tomahawk Public Meeting

October 28, 2015: 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Attendees:

Parkland: Duncan Martin, Martin Frigo, Deanna Cambridge

Consultants: Jerry Bouma, John Steil

Public: 5, but one didn't stay for the presentation and discussion

1. Duncan Martin introduced the meeting and welcomed those for coming
2. Jerry Bouma presented a PowerPoint on the project to date.
3. Discussion, Comments, Questions/Answers
 - Small communities like Tomahawk are a dying breed
 - Struggling: people dying, moving, giving up
 - Some revitalization in places: lots of acreages at Half Moon
 - No new people, it's sons and daughters of existing people
 - People on acreages are not becoming part of the community
 - We are the business owners, new people would bring in competition
 - Some people have 80 acres and just let it go—won't even take the hay off
 - Land prices are increasing
 - It's a generational issue to some degree
 - It's all about volume, margins are small, volume is the answer
 - Entrepreneurial discussion is not a real issue for larger farmers
 - I'm lucky enough to farm full time, most don't
 - Years ago you could make a living on a half section, now you need at least three sections
 - Land use policy is the big issue
 - It's about the land
 - There is a need for the County to deal with the land use issue
 - Cut a quarter section into 40's and it's just a wasteland now, the land is gone
 - Land use is the only real issue
 - Needs a stable land base
 - We're competing at Drayton Valley land prices
 - Some guys just live on subdividing, a developer from St Albert—it's not just the farmers
 - County wants more taxes from country residential but don't really provide more services for it
 - Introductory discussion on Transfer of Development Credits
 - Subdivisions aren't a big problem around me, it's stable now but see it changing, some areas are adding lots of new parcels (ex., 22 parcels in 2 miles)
 - I'm SE of Pit 8/9, only three farmers left, everyone else is bought out
 - Reclamation may come into play at some time
 - When you take the school out, no 7-11, people don't want to come out
 - There is some pressure from non-ag people
 - Can sometimes rent their land
 - Bought and took the yards out

- Lots of fragmentation
- Stop fragmentation—would give more certainty
- What is the definition of sustainability?
- What about all these new requirements for A+W, Macdonald's, Subway, etc.
- Do people know they are eating Australian beef?
- Environmental sustainability
- Discussion about sustainability should include the idea of growth/expansion for agricultural operators in the long run, can't just be a steady state
- What is the County's vision?
- We need education for city kids about the realities. Need to present a positive view. Farmers provide food.
- Issues around GMO canola
- Need to recognize the market issues
- It's hard to make everything co-mingle in one area—how to manage all this?
- Turnout? Everyone is busy these days. As always.
- What is included in infrastructure? Examples: equine trail systems, local food systems
- Some of these are not that relevant to the large scale crop farmers
- Options: incubators, grazing institute, etc.
- How about building a feed lot. Partnership of calf, grain, land, but need money to start and hard to compete with the 'big operators'
- Ranchers Own in Acheson failed from lack of capital
- There are good ideas, but lack of capital is always an issue
- Question: if you could stress just one thing that the County should do, what would that be? Get land values down, prices too high.
- How can policy influence the value of land?
- Don't exacerbate the market by allowing more fragmentation. So we can compete.
- We need to learn how to do more on a piece of land.
- We have a societal problem, people are throwing away food.
- We have to make it while we can.
- We need a market to sell into.
- County could help with the local food market. Advocate, help.
- It's hard now to get started in agriculture.
- You are either big or you are specialized.
- Horse people are buying my hay.
- More marketing resources
- Need to be community minded—this goes back to education.
- Issue of legality, re farm tour, etc.
- Appreciate the study, but most of the issues facing agriculture on a world scale—we can't do much at the municipal scale
- Just trying to make a living because we love it
- County can only do the small things, no one can lower the land prices
- Don't take away our approaches (issue at secondary highway)
- Deal with the basic things: snow plow, landfill, etc.
- Help us with our theft and vandalism issues
- Dangerous to cross highways.
- Access to water

- Weigh scale – would be very helpful
 - What about what is allowed and not allowed? Some of the oilfield operations seem large and are damaging roads.
 - Support for a change to reduce the amount of parcelization? Yes, from those who as they are interested in farming, not development.
 - Consider the intent of ALUS—protect environment, etc., replace habitat.
4. Dot exercise: the four attendees added 'dots' indicating that the "land use" question was the most important. Second priorities were split between "integrated approach" and "----"

Adjourned at 8:45 PM

DRAFT

Attachment 2: Blueberry Meeting Notes

Parkland Future of Agriculture

Blueberry Public Meeting

October 29, 2015: Open house 6:00 PM, 7:00 PM to 8:45 PM

Attendees:

Parkland: Duncan Martin, Krista Quesnell, Scott Kovatch

Consultants: Jerry Bouma, John Steil

Public: 7 attendees

1. Duncan Martin introduced the meeting and welcomed those for coming
2. Jerry Bouma presented a PowerPoint (approximately half an hour) on the project to date.
3. Discussion, Comments, Questions/Answers
 - Margins not there for local food
 - Already working hard, limit on time spent on local food initiatives, etc.
 - There is no organized voice of agriculture in Parkland, Alberta, or Canada (they do this in other countries)
 - Don't see anything about environment protection, sensitive areas, etc.—must be included
 - Need reclamation—not waiting 25 years.
 - Not a lot of poultry organizations provincially
 - Issues: age of farmers, hard to get capitalized
 - Hard to find a site for intensive agriculture (given NRCB requirements)
 - Opportunities for local food: majority like the idea but don't want to pay for it, excitement, issue is how much work it takes, margins are small, need leadership in the area (County can help)
 - Need a definition of 'sustainability'—address issues of environment, economics, and community
 - Needs promotion
 - Needs leadership
 - Farmers want to capitalize
 - High value of land hinders expansion
 - Most important issue is land use
 - If we don't figure out land use, it's all a waste
 - What makes it hard are the extremes of issues—from Edmonton to Tomahawk, it's all different
 - Theft is a major problem
 - Farmers wanting to retire—are they going to be replaced?
 - Owning land and farming land are two different things
 - Risk in renting—can be sold out from under you (e.g., uncertainty of renting from mine from year to year)
 - Logistical problems, with off farm jobs, especially when land is dispersed
 - Can't make a living on 100 cows
 - We have some acreage—bought it for the country lifestyle, but being inundated by country residential subdivisions
 - See the land disappearing, more subdivisions
 - Money talks

- You need the land
- 4 parcels out, people will charge more for it and the average farmer can't afford to
- Could still rent, but can't afford to buy more land
- Farms: traditionally based on working for little, then cashing out
- Ones coming in now have a more business idea, to make it go
- Lots of uses not popular with others, animal impacts
- Intensive ag is one way to go (but public prefers old style farming
- This is the same for honey, cropping, etc.
- Some negativity around all types of agriculture
- Discussion about how transfer of development credits systems work
- Does it make sense to try and change policies?
- To move development to lesser quality land
- Need for a more nuanced system
- The regulation for TDC would be horrendous
- Maybe farmers should just get further out of town
- I'm 68, maybe we should cash out like all the other neighbours
- I'm in supply management. We have a quota. Everyone is wrestling with the same commodity issues—to cap right to produce , just like land
- Grandfathering policy might be necessary
- It has potential, what could it look like in 50 years?
- How could municipalities maintain this?
- Vision? Sustaining what we have or doing better?
- Is sustainability the right word?
- It means different things to different people
- You want to maintain what you have (just not going back) or doing better?
- Ag needs to be seen as a viable business (it needs infrastructure)
- Need both environment policies and social license for agriculture
- 'increased sustainability'
- Systems approach, can't act in isolation, need to work with other organizations, other municipalities, producer groups, etc.
- Key components must be working together
- It's a multitude of factors
- Thanks to the County for doing this
- CRB might be a good forum for policy
- This study goes to inform the MDP, then that goes to the CRB
- Supply and demand. Should we protect land (we haven't yet) or just let the market work—let ag go farther out
- Is the time to do something now?
- The value of ag: economics, environmental goods and services, community character, lifestyle, etc.
- Public values at the local level
- Lands further out would require more inputs, more fertilizer would have impact on water, etc.
- Ontario went with the greenbelt
- Municipality needs to look at the public good and the long term future
- The good part of TDC recognizes value of ag land and return some money to owner without developing

- In Europe, they value food more so pay more for food and they value land
- Entrepreneurial culture—is this a municipal responsibility? Is this something universities should teach—this is a bigger question
- We should lobby for this.
- Need a mentorship program. How about apprenticeship for agriculture like other trades, etc.
- Farmers doing off farm jobs and it's tough to get time to participate
- Can County get young people to get involved then lead
- Needs training as part of the process
- On right track, easy to get caught in the weeds
- Keep some focus on the big picture, work out details
- Got to start somewhere, so go for it
- It's going to be a challenge
- How much can the County actually do?
- So much of it is supply and demand, the economic issues
- How much influence does the County have?
- On the right track by just doing something
- Need to work with the region
- Need to work with the province
- Have to start somewhere
- Nothing is going to suit everyone
- People are having to make compromises
- Council used to be all farmers, now only one farmer on Council. The rest need help to understand.

Adjourned at 8:45 PM

Attachment 3: Woodbend Meeting Notes

Parkland Future of Agriculture
Woodbend Public Meeting

November 2, 2015: Open house 6:00 PM, 7:00 PM to 9:05 PM

Parkland: Duncan Martin, Deanna Cambridge

Consultants: Jerry Bouma, John Steil

Public: 17 attendees

1. Duncan Martin introduced the meeting and welcome those for coming
2. Jerry Bouma presented a PowerPoint (approximately half an hour) on the project to date.
3. Discussion, Comments, Questions/Answers
 - Terrific info, etc., but one thing missing is the family farm. The ones that are successful are intergenerational—hand down the knowledge and the equipment, etc. You don't start out with 160 acres and be successful. It can provide a good living for a lot of people.
 - Information obtained by going out to the community. Other meetings, but attendance was low. It comes from about 75 people in a County of 30,000 plus. Is this representative? If more people spoke up, would it be different. You've asked people, but the right people? Have you got the right viewpoints—to be able to go forward.
 - You advertised, but not very hard—the County doesn't really care?
 - Minimizing the fragmentation of ag land? I do subdivisions. You're not going to get rich on farming. Some smaller family farms need the money from subdivision. Selling the subdivisions allows people to get into the farming business.
 - The big farmers near the growth centres—the land is too expensive to get into farming.
 - Give you credit for doing this. Farmers are only a small percentage of the population in tgeh County.
 - Successful farms are intergenerational farms—they found a way to do it.
 - Most owners buy land not to farm it, but as an investment.
 - Our County allows lots of subdivision. Commercial industrial in Lac Ste. Anne.
 - The impact of being near a big centre.
 - There are farmers here—not people living on the acreages. This shows the disconnect that we have between sectors. TransAlta. Acheson. People don't look at it as a community.
 - We are a business, we want to make some money.
 - The fragmentation is positive for some, but it causes its own problem. Encouraged by the idea of transferring of development rights.
 - I agree with some of the summary, but not all of it. Some will still be here.
 - Discussion of transfer of development credits.
 - Does someone act as a middle man?
 - Will it be an administrative nightmare?
 - All land is not equal—we've paid big dollars in some areas closer to centres.
 - A perspective on different directions/geographies.

- Devon and these other places are annexing thousands of acres. Etc.
- People want to go to centres—that's where the best agricultural land is.
- East Parkland has an un-strategized future.
- The land idea is a good idea, but would need a coop approach. Some of the problems in business is raising capital. How does this work for the next generation. In farming the big problem is to raise cash—the unrealized value of the land.
- You have to figure out the density.
- The big disconnection is between urban and rural.
- Great ideas, beautiful thoughts—I don't know the next steps.
- My strategy is to partner with the previous generation. The only option is to cash out and move farther out. Not a great picture in the broad view. Partnership cooperative approach vs. something more entrepreneurial.
- Who provides the leadership? Is it the County's agricultural field man? Why isn't he here? Need someone there plugging it—if it's going to go anywhere. County has to take the bull by the horns. There is great potential—fertility, etc. That poor land is still going to have a good canola crop. Someone has to do the leadership. Maybe they can hire someone that is more than just a field man.
- If you want to quit wasting land—only allow 2.5 acres. That's enough. No 40s, no 10 acres. Some of these businesses should be in Acheson.
- It only allows three new parcels. That isn't going to use up all the good land.
- Transfer between quarter sections.
- Cutting into 40s, that may be okay for a sheep farm.
- You need more land to be viable.
- There is a market there from a larger population.
- We don't have the water for greenhouses.
- The County has been helpful.
- Maybe move some of this to higher value agriculture—that needs infrastructure.
- Diversify.
- Training is important.
- Equine—would like a public use arena like in Thorsby would be fabulous. Our pony club has a place—needed a fence to get us insurance. The nearest place is near Beaumont.
- We bought in Lac Ste. Anne—don't know how you are going to overcome urban and industrial. Our new land isn't going to be as good—no potatoes, etc. How are you going to protect the good vegetable land? We'd like to farm south of Spruce Grove forever.
- You need to be talking to others who might want to start a raspberry farm—all of us are already in place with big operations.
- You need diversity, etc., creativity, to start something based on high land prices.
- I've been here all my life. Had to go through Edmonton Planning board to build my house in the 80s.
- Parkland used to be all rural, agriculture. What are we? Does our vision provide for ongoing agriculture?

- Youth. How many want to be farmers? Not many farm families left. We need young people? It's a challenge.
- Should we be looking at places like NAIT to encourage this?
- There are young farmers out there—you'd have to get their interest somehow. Some kind of event. You have to expose them at a young age. All young kids know about farming is from nursery rhymes.
- Quit pushing the farmers further and further out.
- Forage group is an advocacy group. There are few farm/ag related groups in the province.
- You want to get everyone together. Fewer walls, encompass more people.
- The school system needs to help the farm kids.
- We do more equine facilities, etc., like trails along the river (but lots of private land). Chickakoo is not a very big facility. Maybe reclaimed mine lands.
- You've been a tremendous moderator. And Duncan too.