

The Parkland County of 2009

As one year ends and a new one begins, we find ourselves reflecting on the year that past, the failures and the successes, the losses and the gains, the challenges and the triumphs. The media capitalizes on this need to reflect on the past year and bring to us the traditional “Year in Review” stories, complete with commentaries on the economy, celebrity scandals, people we have lost, disasters, celebrations, and everything in between. Somehow, we accept these stories as being the dialogue of our life for that year. It seems almost silly to provide a local commentary when we have been given the gift of global events that we can adopt as being part of our year. But was “our” year so global?

Certainly social media has helped firmly establish the concept of a global community, a community that extends beyond our borders, giving us the ability to converse on a grander scale. While the appeal of being part of something larger than ourselves is very alluring, we cannot forget what is going on in our own back yards. Property taxes are not collected for global infrastructure – they go towards the infrastructure and services that help in your daily life. They go towards the essential elements that create the community in which you live. They are an investment in your life and your future. And with each election, you grant Parkland County Council the privilege of building and managing your community and your investment.

So, for a moment, set aside the global dialogue. Reflect on the year at the local level – the level on which you live your daily life - the most important level.

After one of our final Council Meetings for 2009, Parkland County Council sat around the boardroom table and each of us shared what we believed to be the County’s successes in 2009. Despite economic downturns, disasters, celebrity scandals, and other global events that defined the year, 2009 was a good year for Parkland County. Here are Parkland County’s highlights of 2009.

Gravel – specifically gravel hauling – was a big issue for Parkland County Council in 2009. The nature and extent of complaints by residents regarding gravel trucks in the County prompted swift and firm action. At the end of the day, we came to an understanding and agreement with the gravel pits and the haulers, which has resulted in fewer complaints and what we believe to be a stronger and better relationship.

Gravel will also play a role in Parkland County’s future economic viability with the 2009 purchase of two quarters of land with known gravel reserves. Gravel is a valuable resource in the ongoing development in the capital region and our residents will benefit from our management of this resource within our municipal boundaries.

During tough economic times, it is easy to question why government would proceed with major infrastructure projects. Why spend so much money when times are tough and people are struggling? The reality is that it is these types of projects that keep people employed and postponing projects would negatively affect our residents and local businesses and further delay economic recovery. The Federal Government introduced stimulus funding through the Building Canada Fund to help drive the economy forward and Parkland County was the recipient of significant grant dollars to help move some important and significant projects forward.

One project was the West Parkland Sewage Lagoon project. With the closure of the Seba Beach Lagoon in 2009, managing wastewater became a very important priority for west County residents. Parkland County retained Stantec Consulting Inc. to look at different options available for sewage treatment. After exploring all options, expanding the Entwistle Lagoon made the most sense. The project will exceed current Alberta Environment requirements, it will improve the sustainability of the lagoon, it fits within the very tight timelines imposed by the Building Canada Fund – Infrastructure Stimulus Fund grant, and it is within budget. We will also be able to explore other improvements to the site, such as controlled vehicle access, alternative power supply, improvements to odour control and allowances for future advanced treatment options. For the Entwistle residents, it means a superior, sustainable sewage lagoon with greater capacity, longer life, and improved environmental standards at no cost to them.

Another project that received significant grant funding is Parkland County's Intelligent Community initiative. Rural connectivity became an important strategic goal for this Council and the progress we have made has exceeded our expectations. What began as a relatively simple concept – expand affordable, reliable wireless internet access throughout Parkland County – has evolved into a forward-thinking and comprehensive plan that will see Parkland County become an "Intelligent Community," a community in which broadband technology is fully utilized by residents, businesses and the County for a range of communication, learning, business, marketing and economic development purposes. 2010 will be a very exciting year as we see the construction of the towers and watch our vision turn into reality.

There is no question in our minds that we were successful in our grant applications due in part to the significant support of our two Members of Parliament – The Honourable Rona Ambrose, Edmonton-Spruce Grove, and The Honourable Rob Merrifield, Yellowhead – and our two MLAs – The Honourable Doug Horner, MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and The Honourable Fred Lindsay, MLA for Stony Plain. We are fortunate to have such strong support from our Federal and Provincial representatives and thank them for their support and leadership.

Parkland County also took on issues that were of significant concern to our residents, including sour gas development and proposed electrical transmission lines.

Issues regarding sour oil and gas development really came to a head in 2008 with the proposed number of sour wells in close proximity to the Hamlet of Tomahawk. Although Tomahawk appeared to be the focal point, it was an issue prevalent throughout Parkland County with the amount of oil and gas development within our boundaries. In December 2008, Parkland County Council passed the Industrial Activity Emergency Response Plan Review and Approval Bylaw 60-2008 to ensure industry and regulatory agencies were aware how important to us is the safety and well-being of our residents. That bylaw prompted several meetings throughout 2009 with the ERCB and Government of Alberta agencies including Alberta Energy, Health, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs and Alberta Emergency Management Agency. By the end of 2009, the Steering Committee, which included representatives from Parkland County and the Government of Alberta agencies, made huge strides in addressing Parkland County's issues and concerns by recommending changes to the ERCB's Directive 71. This was a very significant achievement for the County in 2009 and is reflective of our commitment to make positive change for our residents.

This commitment was further demonstrated when Parkland County became aware of the proposed routes for the Heartland transmission lines, particularly the route in the eastern portion of Parkland County. After hearing from residents and special interest groups regarding the potential impacts of the proposed route, Parkland County made a firm stand through our support of a resolution through the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties that the Heartland transmission lines should go through the route as originally planned in the Edmonton Transportation and Utility Corridor with the lines buried where possible and appropriate. As the decision has yet to be made by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), Parkland County will continue to monitor this issue and take advantage of opportunities to reaffirm our position that the lines should not be built within Parkland County.

Being responsive to the needs of the community has been a high priority for Parkland County Council and we have taken very pro-active steps to reach out to the community, not only listening but hearing what the public has to say and working to effect change. Part of that has also meant engaging the people within the County. One exciting initiative is turning Parkland County into an ACE Community – an active, creative and engaged community where people want to live, work, play and visit. This initiative was launched late in 2009 in the Hamlet of Entwistle in the western end of Parkland County. The commitment shown by the participants is very exciting, and enthusiasm is growing! Stay tuned in 2010 as we watch how Entwistle grows as an Active Creative and Engaged community!

2009 also saw another successful year in supporting the arts in the community with the Parkland County Municipal Art Program. Now in its third year, the County's art collection has grown substantially thanks to a number of purchases from local artists, including youth artists. We are extremely proud to be able to support the arts in our community and extend our gratitude and thanks to SMS Equipment. SMS Equipment provides the funding for the Municipal Art Program; without their support, we would have no Municipal Art Program. Be sure to check out the collection when you come to Parkland County Centre and other facilities, including SMS Equipment offices.

Another success in 2009 was when Parkland County was once again selected to be a host municipality in the Alberta Municipal Affairs Internship Program. This program was developed to provide young adults interested in a career in municipal government with an opportunity to learn on the job. That Parkland County was once again selected to host both a municipal intern and a planning intern is credit to the strong leadership and governance in our organization. Even more rewarding was when our first intern was offered – and accepted - a management level position in another community. We are very pleased to be part of a program that creates the leaders of tomorrow.

We have a very strong team in Parkland County. Our Administrative team works very hard to bring Council's vision to reality and provide quality services to our residents while maintaining lower tax rates. Your Council has worked well together as a group making decisions for the future of Parkland County. But our true strength as a community lies with the people who live here. In 2010, we will again be looking for your input on a number of issues and initiatives. This is your community and your tax dollars. The best decisions we can make are those in which we have received your input. Be part of the level of government where you have the strongest voice and can help direct the future of your community.

2009 was a tough year, but we are a strong community. Whatever challenges we experienced with the economy, we can stand up, dust ourselves off, and take on the next challenge that comes along. We are Parkland County, where opportunity awaits. In 2010, we will make the most of the opportunities that await all of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Wiedeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rob" written in a more compact, stylized manner and the last name "Wiedeman" written in a more extended, flowing script.

Mayor Rob Wiedeman