

Councillor Suzanne Oel – M.D. of Foothills Div. 4 Update 2017.11 & 12 (High Country News Article)

Festive Season: As we wrap up the celebrations for Canada's 150th Anniversary, we head into this time of year to celebrate traditions with family, co-workers and friends. Best wishes to you and yours! Looking forward to longer days starting around Dec. 21 :-)

AAMDC Conference: Our Foothills Council and staff reps attended the bi-annual convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, held in Edmonton, Nov. 14-17, 2017. Some highlights for you:

PERC (provincial education requisition credit): A well-received announcement came from Municipal Affairs on Nov 15, where they at last acknowledged the losses of our rural municipalities over the past few years. Municipalities (your tax \$) had to pay the education portion for Oil & Gas companies that were assessed by the province to pay linear or machinery and equipment taxes and were remiss in their payments. These taxes are assessed by the province, collected by municipalities and submitted to the province. This year the properties were reassessed so as not to have the municipalities on the hook to pay their education taxes. However, we were still out the education portion payed in previous years on their behalf. So, retroactive to 2015, we will now hopefully be able to recover the taxes through this program called "PERC" to the tune of about \$870,000 that MD taxpayers have had to cover.

Lively Resolutions Session: All 69 rural municipalities have the opportunity to bring forward issues to our association to lobby the provincial government. We meet 2x a year at our local zone meetings to bring resolutions forward and then, if passed at the local level, these resolutions make it to the convention floor, where they are presented and voted upon. Some hot resolution topics at this session on Nov. 15, were: disagreement with centralization of Industrial Property Assessment, request for coordination of planning for species at risk through the regional land-use plans, the length of time it takes for Water Act approvals for work done on municipal land, request to GoA to develop a communications plan to advise Alberta's agriculture sector of actual and intended changes to workplace legislation, lack of interest to merge the urban municipal association with the rural association because the rurals don't want to lose their voice (but still want to work together), interest to explore off-highway vehicle fees for a user-pay system on public lands, request for specialized clinical counselling and therapy for distressed emergency first responders, desire to review the Alberta gaming and liquor commission regarding charitable gaming to be more equitably accessible to rural organizations, concern over the lack of time being allowed to get organized for cannabis legalization, desire to stop the implementation of proposed federal tax reforms, request to integrate emergency social services into emergency management at the provincial level, concern with impacts of the builder licensing program, concern about reduction of representation of rural Albertans in Alberta's Legislative Assembly, support for the Trans Mountain Expansion Project, etc...

Bear Pit Session with Provincial Ministers: One morning during our conference is dedicated to meeting the government ministers in a forum setting where rural municipal councillors have a chance to ask questions on current issues. We filled the one & half hours with topics ranging from health care troubles to sustainable support for ag societies to roads & bridges to local special issues to "thanks" for the FCSS (family & community support services) funding. Some questions were answered; many were not. But decorum was kept through a well-organized moderated process by the AAMDC board. Following this, the Premier of Alberta gave her address to the Shaw convention centre crowd of rural councillors from all across Alberta, staff, urban & other guests and media.

My question to Alberta Environment & Parks: At the Bear Pit Session on Nov. 16, I posed the following: "Management of aggregate resources" has been a topic of interest to AAMDC for some time, with a resolution put forward in 2010 and "Got Gravel" report in 2013. In 2017, your department went out to stakeholders for discussion on surface water body aggregate policy, fish & wildlife considerations, reporting requirements and reclamation requirements. Your report "What we Heard on the Sand & Gravel Program" captures many comments, with the bottom line that stakeholders want more engagement. My question is: What is our plan? Our next step? We need gravel! It's a major resource for municipalities and industry. BUT, are we just going to mine it until it's all gone? OR, can we PLAN to: reclaim, innovate,

substitute material, create new material, get industry involved and strategize and plan for the future? AEP Minister Shannon Phillips answered with a “Yes”, and that this file had not gotten enough attention and their department will continue to work on it. That was a good answer for now. I will follow up on this over time.

Alberta Transportation Meeting: We had a chance to meet with AT staff about various Foothills projects. I brought up a few in our NW area. We still consider the request to improve the bridge over Fish Creek at Priddis on Hwy 22 to be a top priority. This continues to be on the “unfunded list” with the province. Next step would be updating engineering estimates. Not happening yet. Further, I thanked AT on your behalf for the work done on Hwy 762, in the approximate amount of \$11M. As you may have noticed, the road is finished with a lift of pavement, completed in 2017. The second lift will be applied in 2018 to finish off the project.

Education Session on Cannabis Legalization: Councillors and municipal staff have the opportunity to attend break-out sessions on a number of current topics. I chose this one because I wanted to hear the latest on where we are at with preparing for the legalization of recreational use, which is set for July 2018 by the Federal Government. As you may know, medical use is already legal. Foothills has already been getting things ready and now there is interest being expressed by companies to set up. We have worked out a Direct Control zoning for this type of operation (more details available upon request) and recommend that they be located in our industrial area. During the education session, we had a chance to hear from a cannabis producer, a municipality that has already worked with their community to get a facility in place, and a representative from the provincial cannabis secretariat (under AB Justice & Solicitor General). The provincial government has put together a framework with goals of: keeping the product out of the hands of children, protecting safety on roads, in workplaces and public spaces, protecting public health, and limiting the illegal market. Legislation is coming forward on driving safety, under the Alberta Traffic Safety Act (setting blood content limits, measurement devices, etc.), and retail aspects, which will have Alberta Gaming & Liquor Commission oversight. Taxes are yet being “hashed” over, since the work of regulating and follow-through enforcement is being downloaded to the municipalities. The Fed’s proposed tax-ratio is not acceptable to the province and municipalities. Education is a top priority since there can be issues with over-ingesting of edible forms of the product, due to delayed onset of effects, and there are many aspects of the cannabis product to learn about. There are over one hundred different “cannabinoids” in (medicinal) cannabis. The main two active components are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD), which are found in varying percentages across different strains of marijuana. THC is a psychoactive cannabinoid that is responsible for the “euphoric” feeling, while CBD is a non-psychoactive component... Another issue facing municipalities is the location of the retail premises. AGLC oversight will mandate stand-alone stores with buffers to sensitive establishments, except in rural and remote areas. Municipalities can fine-tune this part and have the discretion to custom design with their residents’ input. The jury is out on how this will all work out, since apparently Canada has sizable, entrenched illegal recreational-use markets already in place. However, the established system may be upset by the new “Canadian Way”. Or, it may be a non-event. Perhaps producers will go legal and create businesses where taxes can be obtained and prices kept competitive? Despite diverse perspectives on this, we are all caught in a race to get something in place by next year. More info: <https://www.alberta.ca/cannabis-legalization.aspx>

Special Guest Speaker: Major General Lewis McKenzie gave an inspirational presentation about leadership, on Nov. 16. In a captivating message mixed with excerpts of his tours of duty in peacekeeping and war, in positions of authority, the MG shared his wisdom and distilled points of characteristics and actions of true leadership. Very memorable! More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_MacKenzie

My Question to the leaders of the Provincial Opposition Parties: On Nov. 17, we had the chance to engage the 3 leaders (United Conservative Party, Alberta Party & Liberal) in a moderated forum setting. A very lively event took place where we dove into issues. We received comprehensive responses on topics from pipelines to health to education to rural support to Growth Boards being voluntary to Canadian strategy... At this session, I had a chance to bring up the topic of Rural 911 Dispatch, which you will know well from our campaign earlier this year. We’ve pretty much been buried on this now, so I wanted to ask these parties what they thought about the centralization of ambulance dispatch,

etc. I was pleased to hear that they would favour supporting local solutions and look at a common-sense approach. As you know, that is not necessarily common. I hope that at some point, someone will care enough to do something constructive to help solve these issues, which still continue. For more info: <https://www.fixrural911dispatch.com/>

For Other News & Updates:

Please visit my website: <http://suzanneoel.com/>

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All the Best! SO