

## **INTERPROVINCIAL MEETING**

Date: November 29, 2024

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Place: TARA Centre, Evergreen Park

Present:

### **County of Grande Prairie:**

Bob Marshall, Reeve, Division 5  
Amanda Frayn, Deputy Reeve, Division 1  
Leanne Beaupre, Councillor, Division 3  
Steve Zimmerman, Councillor, Division 4  
Peter Harris, Councillor, Division 6  
Brian Peterson, Councillor, Division 7  
Bob Chrenek, Councillor, Division 9  
Julia Whittleton, County Manager  
Carol Gabriel, General Manager, Corporate Services and Strategy  
Shannon Baird, Executive Assistant to County Manager and Council

### **Peace River Regional District (PRRD):**

Tony Zabinsky, Director & Councillor, City of Fort St. John  
Reid Graham, Director, Electoral Area "B"  
Leonard Hiebert, Director – Electoral Area 'D'  
Dan Rose, Director – Electoral Area 'E'  
Olivia Lundahl, Electoral Area Officer  
Darcy Dober, Director & Mayor of Dawson Creek  
Travous Quibell, Director & Mayor of Hudson's Hope  
Kari Bondaroff, General Manager of Environmental Services

### **Saddle Hills County:**

Kristen Smith, Reeve, Ward 3  
Alvin Hubert, Deputy Reeve, Ward 2  
Danny Roy, Councillor, Ward 1  
Don Hoffart, Councillor, Ward 7  
Gerry Richard, Councillor, Ward 6  
Cary Merritt, Chief Administrative Officer

### **Clear Hills County:**

Amber Bean, Reeve, Ward 3  
David Janzen, Councillor, Ward 5  
Jason Ruecker, Councillor, Ward 4  
Abram Giesbrecht, Councillor, Ward 6  
Allan Rowe, CAO

The meeting was called to order at 10:16 am with Reeve Bob Marshall from the County of Grande Prairie chairing the meeting and welcoming the group.

Introductions took place and it was noted there were no additions to the agenda. A copy of the minutes from the last Interprovincial meeting on April 17, 2019 were attached to the Agenda for information.

## **5. Comparisons of the Alberta and British Columbia Municipal Structures and Interprovincial Meeting Purpose / Terms of Reference:**

Municipal Structures:

Joulia Whittleton, County Manager, talked about the differences between the political systems of British Columbia and Alberta. British Columbia has two-tiered structure, while in Alberta all municipalities are single tier organizations. In BC, the two-tiered structure includes regional districts, it also a tool for inter-municipal collaborations, sharing of services, as well as serving unincorporated (mostly rural) areas of the province. In Alberta, Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks are in place to foster intermunicipal services and costs sharing.

Terms of Reference:

While everyone thinks this meeting is a good idea, we still need to decide who should be invited to participate, who should chair the meeting, and other basic housekeeping matters. The County of Grande Prairie suggested a Terms of Reference be created.

Peace River Regional District (PRRD) explained the Regional District includes four rural electoral areas and seven municipalities. All Mayors sit on this board and any correspondence received goes to all municipalities.

- Electoral Area B
- Electoral Area C
- Electoral Area D
- Electoral Area E
- District of Chetwynd
- City of Dawson Creek
- City of Fort St. John
- District of Hudson's Hope
- Village of Pouce Coupe
- District of Taylor
- District of Tumbler Ridge

It was agreed that PRRD will be the body listed as a member on this inter-provincial committee since all municipalities and unincorporated areas have a seat at the PRRD table.

County of Grande Prairie, Saddle Hills County and Clear Hills County all explained their boundaries and a map was shown to PRRD outlining this.

**Action:** It was decided by the group that Terms of Reference should be established, and the Administrations would work together to draft one and incorporate the region map and include the MLAs and MPs in these meetings.

## **6. Health Care:**

The group discussed health care concerns and issues with crossing the border:

- PRRD talked about past problems with ambulances going across the border. Kinks have been worked out since this problem arose a few years ago, but certain places still need access to services, and some places in Alberta (such as Hythe and Beaverlodge) can reach these areas more rapidly than Dawson Creek. It was addressed how we can ensure that the communities directly over the border receive the services they require as soon as possible. Cross boundary Agreements are needed.
- It was noted that an Order in Council is required from the BC Provincial Government. County of Grande Prairie to speak with their Minister on what agreement is needed and the steps we need to take to complete this.
- It was noted that there are successful inter-municipal agreements despite being on opposite sides of the provincial border. The Toms Creek Fire Service has an agreement with Saddle Hills County for fire services provision in the Gundy area and this has been working well.
- Saddle Hills noted lots of their residents use Dawson Creek and some use Spirit River for accessing doctors.
- Mayor Dober noted that doctors in Dawson Creek struggle with the interprovincial patients. He was told that 8% of their patients are from Alberta. Billing and the services they are allowed to provide is a struggle. Cannot refer them to Grande Prairie they have to be referred within BC.
- Clear Hills County advised they rely heavily on STARS and they are supported mainly by the ambulance dispatched from Worsley
- PRRD advised it took them 4 years for BC provincial government to get a STARS Agreement in place and they use them as well.
- County of Grande Prairie noted that we must invite the MLAs and MPs to attend these meetings and have them assist with the Advocacy process as these are inter-provincial matters. Add this to the Terms of Reference.
- Mayor Dober noted there is a new hospital being built in Dawson Creek. Scheduled to be completed in 2026 and open in 2027.

- PRRD discussed a Mental Health and Addictions Wellness Centre they are building in Pouce Coupe. Broke ground this spring and will be open in early 2026. \$40 million dollar project with 55 beds with plans of expansion. Under partnership with the Northern Lights College, this facility will include the ARCH model elements of early recovery (withdrawal management/stabilization) housing units, addiction treatment housing units, recovery supportive housing units and a peer-led recovery center. The border does not define them, and they accept everyone, and this project is privately funded. The project also includes an Indigenous component and are a key funder.
- County of Grande Prairie advised a 50-bed long-term addiction recovery facility is being built in Clairmont. This is funded by the Province of Alberta with \$35 million in funding.
- County of Grande Prairie also noted that the Horse Lake First Nation has a recovery program on their traditional lands with focus on youth. They prioritize their people but do take others.
- Councillor Brian Peterson, County of Grande Prairie noted the Pearson Place (dementia and Alzheimer Care Facility), located in Hythe has been selected by the Alberta Government for memory care.

**Action:**

1. Administrations to gather information on what Mental Health and Recovery facilities are available in each area and share this between the PRRD, Clear Hills, Saddle Hills and Grande Prairie Counties.
2. Invite the MLAs and MPs to discuss inter-provincial advocacy related matters (health care, ambulance response, fire response, mental health and recovery facilities)

Seniors Care/Housing was discussed with each group:

- The County of GP explained the home care program offered by the County through the Family Community Support Services (FCSS) versus the home care services provided by Alberta Health Services (AHS). In the County FCSS is just the basic home care where AHS has nurses that provide services. FCSS Programs are not standardized, and each municipality can focus on the services they want to provide. All housing authorities operate under the Alberta Housing Act. The authorities are represented by appointed elected officials from the areas they serve. The housing authorities derive their requisitioning powers under this Act. Every taxpayer in Alberta pays taxes towards a housing authority through their municipal taxes, even if their community does not have a seniors housing facility within their boundaries.
- PRRD advised United Way manages funding for seniors in BC under a program called "Better at Home". However, they do not provide rural services.
- Saddle Hills County explained their FCSS home care process. The County hired a nurse practitioner that works out of their municipal office from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. and has 170 patients. Anyone can access this service.
- Saddle Hills County further advised that they offer a receipt-based home support program for seniors of up to \$400 annually (a subsidy through the municipality that

allows them to hire their own help with home care). There are currently 60 residents who signed up for the program.

- Reeve Bob Marshall, County of Grande Prairie discussed the proposed Maskwa clinic in Grande Prairie, the funding and how it is proposed to operate.

## **7. Wildfires:**

The group discussed communication and agreements. What do we need to do to make this more effective when a wildfire happens?

PRRD advised they have a resolution to reach out to their Alberta neighbors to discuss mutual aid.

The group discussed the following:

- Alberta has concerns with BC allowing forested areas to burn while this impacts Alberta's industry with loss of revenue.
- Setting up agreements and including the BC and Alberta Forestry in these discussions.
- Concerns and barriers with licensing rules for fire trucks crossing the borders.
- Differences in wildfire management. Wildfire responsibility is Provincial for BC. Alberta has Forest Protection Areas and anything outside of the Forest Protection Area is the municipalities responsibility, often supported by the Province.
- Utilizing private equipment resources during a wildfire. The County of Grande Prairie advised they utilize private equipment however, the individuals must be on the County's preapproved list.
- The County of Grande Prairie discussed the chain of command and how the Grande Prairie Regional Emergency Partnership (GPREP) works.

The PRRD also noted that the Canfor mill in Fort St John is closing on December 20, 2024, impacting 400 people without jobs.

Action:

1. Administrations to facilitate a meeting between their Alberta and BC counterparts and Fire Chiefs, with Forestry representatives from both provinces.

## **8. Solid Waste:**

PRRD is reaching out to the group to gather names and numbers from those involved with solid waste. Would like to get this information together now rather than later to start the conversation on "What are you doing". Contact information as follows:

Jouliia Whittleton, County Manager, County of Grande Prairie – [jwhittleton@countygp.ab.ca](mailto:jwhittleton@countygp.ab.ca)

Allan Rowe, Chief Administrative Officer, Clear Hills County – [Allan@clearhillscounty.ab.ca](mailto:Allan@clearhillscounty.ab.ca)

Cary Merritt, Chief Administrative Officer, Saddle Hills County – [cmerritt@saddlehills.ab.ca](mailto:cmerritt@saddlehills.ab.ca)

Kari Bondaroff, General Manager of Environmental Services, PRRD –

[Kari.Bondaroff@prrd.bc.ca](mailto:Kari.Bondaroff@prrd.bc.ca)

Action:

1. Kari Bondaroff will email to all parties to facilitate a first meeting/discussions regarding solid waste.

### **9. Invasive Plants:**

PRRD was reaching out to see what Alberta is seeing and what may be coming BC way. Toad Flax and Chamomile were concerns in BC and would like to work with Alberta before this explodes.

PRRD advised they were hosting a Strategic Plan and Profile of Invasive Plant Monitoring on Monday and welcomes anyone that would like to attend. Kari Bondaroff will provide information over the lunch break and will be looking for emails for those that are interested in participating from Alberta side.

PRRD also noted that Canada Thistle is uncontrollable and was removed from the BC list. It may be coming off of AB's list as well.

Councillor Bob Chrenek, County of Grande Prairie explained the Agriculture Service Board and how it works.

### **10. Water Security in times of drought:**

PRRD discussed what steps Alberta is taking to address drought in rural areas and noted that residents have started building larger dugouts to increase water supply.

Discussion took place on the following:

- Residents living close to the river may be allowed access through temporary diversion licenses. Water is a provincial resource in Alberta.
- Moving water from other people's dug outs that are not used for animals.
- Site C Dam update
- There is currently no agreement between AB and BC for water out of the Peace River.
- Peace River Water. Saddle Hills updated the group on their project with pulling water out of the Peace River by the Dunvegan Bridge and piping the water up the hill for servicing. They have received Provincial and Federal Funding.

LUNCH

The meeting recessed for lunch at 12:15 p.m.

### **11. Support For Twinning Highway to the BC Border:**

Reeve Bob Marshall, County of Grande Prairie discussed and updated the group on the advocating the County of Grande Prairie has been doing to the Province of Alberta. The County of Grande Prairie's current top priority is the SW Bypass around the City of Grande Prairie (Highway 40X). The next priority under consideration is the twinning of the highway to the BC Border. The County of Grande Prairie is looking for support from BC when the County starts

actively advocating for this project. The letter could be sent to the County from PRRD now so it is in place when the County is ready to move with this project.  
The group all noted they would be in favor of supporting this twinning project.

**Action:**

1. PRRD to send a letter of support for the highway to BC twinning project, with information as discussed, to the County of Grande Prairie including the following:
  - Cross border trade.
  - Travelling public and movement of goods.
  - Safety and emergency response.
  - Benefits to BC Communities (i.e. Dawson Creek).

**12. Rail Advisory Opportunity:**

Reeve Bob Marshall discussed the CN Rail and noted that there is one line through Jasper and one line to Dawson Creek but the trestle is of concern. If there was an option to get access to the other side this could potentially give us two access points and was checking on this status.

PRRD noted that the Prince Rupert Port Authority is a contact.

Discussion took place on the following:

- The County of GP is part of the Community Rail Advocacy Alliance (CRAA), which is a group of municipalities, industries, associations, and regions, bringing a united voice to government and the rail industry, calling for action to be taken to ensure our rail system gets back on track.
- Opportunity to get Federal, or maybe Provincial grants to do a study on a short line.
- From Hythe the line has been decommissioned.
- From Dawson Creek the rail is good. There is a train a day and the PRRD would be open to working with Alberta to look at this.
- Dan Rose noted a study had been done some time ago and would get a copy to share.

**Action:**

1. County of Grande Prairie to request Jordan Tidey, Economic Development Officer to put some information together on the rail opportunities and send out to the group.
2. Dan Rose to forward the BC rail study to all parties – Completed.

**14. Date and Place for the next Meeting:**

The group discussed the importance of today's meeting and meeting more frequently. Meeting Semi-annually to start was decided - June 2025 will be the next meeting, hosted by Saddle Hills County and then the next meeting will be hosted by Dawson Creek.

For Administrative contact purposes, the dedicated person for PRRD is Olivia Lundahl. CAOs as the official contacts for Alberta municipalities.

When selecting the dates, the MLAs schedules should be considered.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

DRAFT