

2022-07-14 Fort Vermilion Mitigation Meeting

Attendees:

Mackenzie County Council:

- Cameron Cardinal, Councillor, Ward 7
- David Driedger, Councillor, Ward 4
- Josh Knelsen, Reeve, Ward 1
- Garrell Smith, Councillor, Ward 6

Administration:

- Byron Peters, Interim Chief Administrative Officer
- Don Roberts, Director of Community Services
- Jennifer Batt, Director of Finance, Mitigation Coordinator
- Caitlin Smith, Director of Planning and Agriculture/Recording Secretary

Members of Public: 50

Councillor Cardinal called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Councillor Cardinal started with land acknowledgement and introductions of administration and Councillors.

Councillor Cardinal discussed the following:

- Addressed lack of communication between the municipality and the public.
- Asked for the community to share their vision for the future of Fort Vermilion as it will be only be a success if we work together.
- Addressed the Fort Vermilion flood issues.
- Mackenzie County did not receive \$47,000,000 that was promised from the province; the sum was shared with other flooded municipalities throughout the province.
 - Expense summary to date:
 - \$1.2 mil – hotel rooms
 - \$1.5 mil – temporary housing
 - \$3.6 mil – interim housing
 - \$100,000+ - in damages to housing
 - \$800,000 – Emergency Coordination Centre
 - \$6 mil – relief funding for affected individuals
 - \$10's of mil – Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) claims
 - \$10 mil – Mackenzie infrastructure – DRP applications
 - \$12.8 mil – Mitigation funding for relocation
 - \$10.1 mil – Social Housing (Boreal)
 - \$1.5 mil – Municipal Stimulus Program (Phase 1 construction; the County moved forward before approval)
 - \$900,000 – land purchase for relocation
 - Staff time is not accounted for – hours of work – there is still a municipality to run in the mean time

- The DRP is a provincial program, there is no municipality that runs this program.
- There is no municipal funding that can fund a disaster, there are several ongoing natural disaster claims within the County to date.
- It takes more than a few years to get paid back for the costs to respond to an emergency event.
- Fall 2020, Council and administration met with the province to determine how to move forward (5 options):
 - Stay
 - Lift existing homes
 - Barriers (tiger dams)
 - Building the berm
 - Moving of the community
- The berm would have cost \$50 mill, there is no guarantee that the berm will work.
- The Water Treatment Plant, Old Bay House, and Senior Centre are under the County insurance; there was a \$25,000 deductible before the flood. It has increased to \$250,000 after the flood. The County has purchased sand trap bags as a flood mitigation tactic for this infrastructure. Mackenzie County has been criticized for not being prepared for a future flood. We do have measures in place for a future flood.
- Tiger dams only work for seeping water, this would not work with the Peace River with the amount of ice on the river.
- The local drug store bought their own tiger dams, we need to be prepared.
- We are doing the right thing to move everyone out of the flood plain.
- 2020 after the flood, Council moved forward with Phase 1 (15 lots) which cost 1.5 mil.
- Phase 2 is a continuation of Phase 1 (51 lots) and all but 10 are spoken for to date.
- Phase 3 – 14 lots are all spoken for.
- Phase 4 – 58 acres purchased, reserved for anyone with an acre or larger lots.
- With the social housing grant, the homes have to be integrated into the community. 26 social housing homes allocated in Phase 2.

Question and Answer:

Public (P): Are the manufactured homes clustered together or dispersed?

Mackenzie County (MC): They will be dispersed throughout the subdivisions.

P: Are there going to be homes left on the east side of Fort Vermilion?

MC: We don't know, during the one on one meetings, options were given which included staying. In the future, DRP will only fund one more time. That is for any disaster.

P: That is not necessarily true, there could be a change in Government.

MC: True, we don't know whether or not the current provincial political party will remain. This is the program at this time.

P: Can you sell?

MC: Yes, you can sell your property.

P: Will any properties be available for other landowners?

MC: For the new developed land; the relocation program is in place until 2024. That will be a discussion with Council. The province is able to take the land back if it is not allocated.

MC: People were funded based on square footage and number of usable rooms (bedrooms). That was 100% pay out, it is now 90%.

MC: Mackenzie County received the grant with restrictions; this is a new program, the province wants full restrictions. Council agreed on limiting the restrictions. Any land acquired either through purchase, or land swap. There is no residential, commercial, industrial, and some recreational use. Yes, the County has to hold the insurance, going forward the community will have to use it. Possible uses are:

- Park space
- Seasonal camping
- Historical signage
- Walking trails

MC: The County is able to put an arbor in the flood plain.

P: Does that mean the County can put up the structure on acquired lands?

MC: No permanent structures.

MC: There are three governments entities that will own lands in the flood plains:

- Mackenzie County
- Social Housing
- Boreal Housing

MC: The future restrictions are residential, commercial, and industrial.

P: Did the entities pay for the land in the new development?

MC: Yes, they did.

P: Is there possibility for any other party to buy the acquired lands?

MC: No, they can't be sold for development by another entity.

P: Has Mackenzie County though about giving the land back to First Nations?

MC: We need to consider, what would they do with it?

P: Fort Vermilion would have no say in what happens in there.

P: We feel that we don't say now.

P: We should have Fort Vermilion members helping make decisions.

P: The First Nations and Metis would have their own communities that could develop lands as they see fit with similar development.

MC: This also falls back to the grant, if we default on the grant we have to pay it back.

P: Fort Vermilion feels that they don't have a say, and that there isn't enough representation in the room.

P: We feel you're not getting the support from the rest of Council, the community is not getting the chance to have that voice. There has been some minimal community engagement. There should be some stakeholder committee groups.

MC: We are trying; we wanted to have this type of community meeting and we were unsure on how to proceed. The province was going to support us but there were so many things up in the air. The agreement has only been signed a few months ago, there are no concrete decisions that has been made in the flood plain.

MC: There were limited options that the province is going to fund.

P: Meetings like this is great but which community members designed Phase 1,2,3, and 4. There were no community members at there meetings, none of those maps exist and

there is no information being pushed to the public. There should have been more communication. This is being brought to us after the fact. Everyone here hears all this stuff after it happens.

MC: We worked with the amount of land that we have available in order to move the greatest number of people. We were trying to come up with lot layout plans prior to development, you need to include your utilities, right of way's, lot sizes, minimum depth and width for lot sizes, all technical details need to be worked out.

MC: We tried to keep existing trees and the natural state and I will echo that we can do better. Councillor Cardinal is in everyday sharing what the community is saying. Previous Councillor Jorgensen was in regularly and Councillor Smith is getting more invested and they're sharing their constituent's thoughts.

MC: Phase 4 is not started, that is a fill storage site.

P: Can you explain the current land planning process?

MC: We need to be contiguous with lot layout, determine servicing capabilities, lot sizes, ensure we don't fragment the community, walkability to the complex, school, hospital, downtown, corridors connecting all of the that. Where it has been emphasized, we do need to create a new Area Redevelopment Plan. With the restrictions and what is in the flood plain we need to identify new residential, commercial, and industrial. We are helping to build the base concepts with what everyone wants to see in the flood plain. There should be opportunities for Area Redevelopment Plan community engagement there will be more maps, and concepts further in the process.

P: Why are the FN not getting this land back?

P: There is nothing for the off-reserve band members and Metis, Fort Vermilion people should be first. These are the people who invest in the community, we need to create a committee that looks after the community.

P: This is not a reserve, this is a municipality, there is only one nation invested and that is the Metis.

MC: If this would be passed on to North Peace Tribal Council, who cuts the grass, who maintains the area. If it's County owned, there are things that we have to get done. Councillor Cardinal and Councillor Smith are strong advocates for the community.

P: I would like to thank Jenn, Jackie, and Cam for their quick responses when dealing with mitigation.

P: Do we have any idea how much goes into developing a lot with foundations?

MC: Prices are going up; crawl spaces were estimated at \$35,000 at time of tender and basements are now estimated at \$50,000. Everything has to go out to quote and tender in order to be awarded. If you choose to upgrade, this cost is yours.

P: There should be community engagement, Bobbi Paul-Alook, President of Fort Vermilion Local Council 74, Metis Nation of Alberta, has come to the County as a representative and has requested for community engagement and that there be a stakeholder committee.

MC: The short answer is that we were not ready for it. At that time our focus as Council was to get people back into homes and to get the province to approve the grant. We were dealing with DRP and Municipal Affairs, we were dealing with the province. We want to move forward, what do we want to see in the future.

MC: A committee can head this going forward. We have a streetscape committee, right now we have \$50,000 to beautify downtown. Looking through the proposed MDP, we urge that the we make consultation a priority.

P: The Metis board has made attempts to work with the County. This has not gotten anywhere.

MC: This meeting is for everyone, we are not looking for just the residents within the community but for all those who call Fort Vermilion home.

P: When are the phases supposed to be completed?

MC: In terms of the relocation phases; we put our tenders out for Phase 2 and 3, the substantial completion dates are for August 2022.

MC: The ATCO transformers are potentially late with an expectation that the underground power material would arrive in 120 weeks. We are hoping that this would be in by November.

MC: Dirt is being moved this year and the chance of a substantial amount of homes being moved this year is slim. We are hoping that the remaining homes will be moved the following summer. We are adding trees, lighting, things to improve the esthetic in the new phases.

MC: Currently, our municipality is being looked at because we are further advanced than other municipalities in the mitigation program.

P: There has been anger, and apprehension from the crowd from the beginning of the event. There was never a group of people to talk to and there was fear mongering occurring. There wasn't a lot of talking about why it flooded, there wasn't a lot of information being shared and we hear that the roads might not get maintained for those still in the flood plain, etc.

MC: Council put in a moratorium to restrict development in the flood plain. We have limited information to relay, we did tell people we don't know if you will be able to get insurance, or if a bank would approve a loan. It was all unknown what would be allowed. There were comments made that should not have been made and the problem is taken care of.

P: How do we communicate after this?

MC: We can do better and hold additional meetings, we advertise on Facebook and on the website.

P: We hope the communication gets better, we want to have a say before these decisions are made. We want to have a say before Phase 4.

P: In future meetings, that minutes be shared with the community and that zoom capability be added and that an agenda be done prior to the meeting.

P: What if people want to buy their property back after the sale?

MC: Nobody HAD to move. Everyone was told the exact same thing, some have chosen to leave.

P: We hear that there was intimidation being used when meeting with affected landowners, that it is highly enforced, highly incentivized, especially when you're not allowing development permits which means landowners can't sell the property.

MC: MC has had 7 emergency events in 6 years, 2 of which were Peace River floods. What happens in those one on one meetings are private between the County and the landowner and all meetings have minutes, we didn't force anyone to move. We shared

all the information that we had during these meetings, we have had multiple meetings with several residents over and over.

MC: There is a lot of provincial or federal court decisions that tie into what a disaster recovery program will allow, rivers move over time. For example, the City of Edmonton was identified an area as high risk but allowed permits in the area and when it flooded again, the City was 100% liable. We have to protect ourselves and it's our job to make sure that all the landowners know the risk. A typical mortgage is 25 years there is a 1 in 4 chance that your home may flood in 1 in a 100-year flood.

MC: We can't imagine how difficult it is to go through this. There are so many deciding factors to make such an important decision such as financial, emotional, and other considerations.

MC: It flooded in 1934, and 1905, they were not prepared for a flood.

P: I have heard the messages that were relayed under our outreach recovery program, who wanted their support when dealing with the County. The people were told it was their choice, they were not pushed. If you're not in an agreement with the County we offer these services to all citizens not just Metis. Please reach out to Bobbi.

P: Why is the County set on underground power for FV?

P: Who likes the overhead powerlines? Only 3. Do people know that it will take longer and cost 8 times more.

MC: That is untrue, we have gotten quotes from ATCO, we have talked to all the residents.

Councillor Cardinal called a break at 9:00 p.m. and resumed the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

MC: What are we going to do with the flood plain after?

MC: Councillor Cardinal shared the City of Regina's planning; the city was built on a man-made lake and every tree was hand planted. Councillor Cardinal met with Magna engineering, they build storm ponds and not just a plain square but ones that are both functional and attractive. There are currently 4-5 storm water outlets in Fort Vermilion by the RCMP building, ATB, St. Mary's, and the Old Bay House that all dump into the river before the inlet for our drinking water.

MC: The amount of storm water will increase with the new subdivisions. An idea is to build a man-made lake and a storm drain. We start building these storm ponds and anything that overflows had time to settle the sediment and contaminants. After 2024, there are grants available for this type of infrastructure. After they are built we get carbon credits and we support the wetland. They have geodesic designs incorporated but we have to be respectful of the graves in Fort Vermilion. There are other options too such as trees, walking trails, and grassy areas.

P: There is fear that there will be a gravel pit, would we be able to use the material to help with construction. The only way that this is going to work is if there is 100% support.

MC: Gravel will be excavated out of the storm pond to support construction of the pond. Three levels of government have to support this as well. It doesn't have to be big or small as long as it works.

MC: What other legislative measures are we taking to development. Future restrictions of the land. We can't tie the hands of future government and future Council. The province listed the uses available in the flood zone.

P: Is it not true that the land be dedicated to environmental reserve to protect it?

MC: There was mention of a provincial park, if it is an environmental reserve, you can not cut the grass, use the pond, etc.

P: There is information available online regarding environmental reserve and there are additional uses available.

MC: We will continue to research.

P: In the Municipal Development Plan listed under flood hazard resiliency, agriculture is considered a use, this is supposed to be for all residents not just one user.

MC: It is a consideration but it is limitless on the potential of the area in the floodplain.

MC: Please share your ideas for the park areas, recreational uses such as basketball courts, outdoor activities, firepits, additional docks.

MC: There is a plan for another dock in Fort Vermilion this summer.

P: Is there a dock in La Crete?

MC: Yes there is a dock in Atlas Landing. During the Chuckegg Creek fire, a dock was put in and the province said agreed to it. We have several; 1 for Tompkins Landing area, Atlas Landing, and the old ferry landing on the north side. We are actively working on an additional dock in Fort Vermilion.

P: What about the RV park in Fort Vermilion?

MC: That RV park is private and they have chosen not to have it opened this year.

P: The future of the flood zone, is there a map of who will be left?

MC: Not at this time.

P: What if 20% of the residents decide to stay, what will happen then? Is the infrastructure to remain?

MC: Yes. We have to work around those and nothing will be in play after 2024.

P: Who is going to pay for this stuff after 2024?

P: As a Fort Vermilioner, I would not like to see a seasonal RV park in the acquired lands.

MC: The Planning department is looking at implementing a bylaw to restrict that use.

MC: Please call your Councillors with any concerns or ideas.

P: Do you have a date for the next meeting?

MC: No, we can set a schedule, minutes will be made available.

P: We ask for commitment that there is no cease and desist order for those who choose to stay. We as community members would also like to have a commitment to create that stakeholder committee. That committee can be created as a third party, more community meetings should be suggested.

P: This meeting shouldn't count towards the Municipal Development Plan and the Fort Vermilion Area Redevelopment Plan as thus meeting was not advertised as such. This was a loose discussion on what we would like to see going forward.

MC: We need to get thinking on the same page, we will do additional public meetings regarding the MDP and FVARP. We can not commit to anything on behalf of Council.

MC: Please note that your Councillors go hard for your community. There should be more onus on the community to go to Council meetings and make your voices heard.

P: Who awards the contracts?

MC: Every single contract has gone out to tender and not one local contractor has bid. This is taxpayer money and there is a process to use it.

Councillor Cardinal ended the meeting at 9:46 p.m.