



Village of Bawlf Annual General Meeting *April 14, 2009*

Mayor's "State of the Village" Address *(speaking notes)*

Introduction

- amazing how quickly a year goes by; term is already half-over
- gotten some idea of some of the highlights and accomplishments in 2008: a whirlwind of activity
- doesn't cover everything and doesn't even begin to reflect the amount of work that this Council and, especially, this Administration contribute toward making Bawlf a better place to live and raise a family
- would argue that our Administrative team of Lynn and Myrna is as good as any in Alberta
- elected a Council to change the way things were being done: a mandate that's certainly been taken to heart – Admin wishes it were sometimes a little less so!
- original plan was to staff the office with six person-days per week, but the work that's been required has necessitated about 7.5 person-days per week and even that's deceptive because our VM is putting in plenty of extra time that will be taken off as time-in-lieu in the summer, when things tend to be less hectic around here
- be all that as it may, my purpose here will be to outline some "big picture" things and some of our plans for 2009

Philosophy/Recurring Themes

- some small municipalities in Alberta have long-term "big picture" plans, such as sustainability plans and strategic plans in place; truthfully, most don't and we have, to this point, been in that category
- situation is different now: you should already have received questionnaires regarding what you want Bawlf to be over the long term: results of this survey will be compiled and will be part of the process used to formulate a sustainability plan, which includes a vision of Bawlf as we continue into the 21st century

- from that, the Village will develop a strategic plan, which is the fundamental basis on which all other decisions would be based: a road map to the future (more on that below)
- absence of such a plan to this point has been less than optimal; however, that doesn't mean that Council and Administration don't have a fundamental philosophy or a series of recurring themes that underpin everything we've been doing over the past 18 months
- these themes, we think, reflect your expectations of us as they were expressed during the 2007 election and the promises we made to you at that time
- regardless of what other plans we formulate and implement, these themes will remain at the root of the commitment that Councillors and senior Administration have made to the Village of Bawlf

Recurring theme #1: a constant desire to improve the process of municipal governance in Bawlf:

- not a terribly sexy thing, but it underlies everything else that occurs: poor process leads to poor decision-making
- seems simple, but the idea is to get the political and administrative process to run in a consistent, professional manner regardless of who occupies either the Village Manager's Office or the Council chairs
- examples include a more comprehensive and timely budget process, making by-laws available for public scrutiny and input after first reading; knowing certain things will be on Council's agenda at certain times of year, administrative research and recommendations for all policy decisions, and so forth
- could be five new Councillors after next election: they shouldn't have to re-invent the Administrative wheel; the process should already be in place for them to sit down and begin establishing policy, which is what they are elected to do
- our approach ensures that this is the way the process will work

Recurring theme #2: taking a leadership role in establishing co-operative undertakings with other municipalities: some form of consolidation is coming and we want to be proactive rather than reactive

- school districts went through it, the health regions went through it: it's a pretty safe bet that municipalities will go through it as well – it only remains to be seen what form it will take and where municipalities our size will end up in the shakedown
- stop and think about it: Flagstaff County (as an example): less than 10,000 people in its towns, villages, and rural areas, but how many dozens of Councillors and Administration people are there? Except for City of Camrose, Camrose County isn't that different
- Is this a case of over-governance and over-taxation or is it an opportunity for that many more civic-minded people to participate in community life and the democratic process? – that'll be up to the Province to decide

- my guess is that the Provincial Government will eventually implement some changes in governance that will fall somewhere in-between the extremes of the *status quo* on one hand and all small municipalities being forcibly folded into their surrounding counties on the other
- our Council's view is that if we take a proactive approach by establishing ways of working with neighbouring municipalities, the Provincial Government might look at our region as the leading edge of how change can occur without upsetting the entire apple cart (and we spend a *lot* of time making sure they know *exactly* what we're doing)
- we've initiated joint Council meetings with Rosalind, Daysland, and Strome and touched on a variety of topics in those meetings: bulk purchasing for more advantageous pricing, sharing personnel and equipment, and perhaps some more comprehensive undertakings such as a regional recycling co-operative (more on that later)
- on that last point, we're also working closely with all the other municipalities in Camrose County and the County Council itself
- overall, a more co-operative form of governance is coming to Alberta and we have every intention of ensuring that the Village of Bawlf is taking a leadership role in how that change might evolve

Recurring theme #3: responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars

- you'd think that this is self-evident, but it definitely doesn't work that way in many municipalities
- we continue to enjoy one of the lowest tax rates for a municipality this size in all of Alberta and, as I mentioned last year, we are one of very few municipalities whose taxes would actually rise if we were to dissolve and become part of the County
- we played some catch-up in 2008 but, even with that, we still managed to maintain our low tax status
- due to a Council and Administration that treat taxpayer money with the respect it deserves, we ended up with a bit of a surplus in 2008; that money will go to offset at least some expenses this year
- our rule is simple: if we can't look a Village ratepayer in the eye and justify an expense, then it's almost certainly not an expense that should be made
- this year, our primary objective was to keep average tax increases to an absolute minimum: under 5%; however, the Province has now thrown a wrench into those plans by raising the education tax a significant amount; we're not yet sure what the final number will now be
- one thing we will be looking at, though, is to distribute the tax burden a bit more fairly, possibly by going back to the system we used to have, which levied specific charges for specific purposes, such as recreation and fire protection

- we've not yet made any final decisions in that regard but you can rest assured that the system we ultimately use going forward will be fairest for all concerned
- as for debt, the Village continues to have none; the Village Office renovations will be covered almost entirely with Provincial grants and we continue to adhere to the pay-as-you-go philosophy to the greatest practical extent possible
- however, it is very likely that we would consider incurring some debt in order to address our long-term ongoing infrastructure needs: after all, it is unfair to ask all of you to pay today for infrastructure that will be used for many decades to come; it's only right to ask future generations to carry some of the burden for infrastructure that they, too, will be using
- furthermore, if federal money becomes available on the basis of matching provincial and municipal dollars, we would not hesitate to take advantage of that by borrowing for major roadwork
- to conclude on this point: we all take the role as keepers of the public purse very seriously: decisions we make both during budget deliberations and on a day-to-day basis reflect very clearly, I think, the trust you have placed in us as public officials

Recurring theme #4: the Village will play an active and visible role in the community

- Council and Administration believe that we must not only do our jobs, but that we must be *seen* to be leaders in our community
- as you know, we continue to send out our monthly newsletter, which now also goes to the surrounding community as well as to residents of the Village proper; our website is as comprehensive as any municipal website in the province and is relied on by residents and non-residents alike
- but Village visibility and community participation go much further than that
- for instance, we've established a very good working relationship with Bawlf School over the last year (Grade 6 class presentation/"Mayor for a Day", beverage container pick-up initiative, with \$ used for school band programs, speaking appearances at grad, the academic awards, and any other functions to which we are invited, student clean-up of the entire village in May; starting this year – sponsorship of a citizenship award at the School Academic Awards ceremony)
- community is stronger if Village and School work together and we are very proud of our relationship in that regard
- Village also tries to be present and visible in other community events and activities: we are in regular contact with other community groups, such as the Lions and the Lutheran Church
- we are also working very hard with arm's-length organisations such as the Library, the Rec Board, and Sanden Court, to ensure that our residents are receiving full value for the dollars that we allocate to those groups; we feel that this is part of our role as the community leaders you elected us to be and we expect no less from them than we expect from ourselves

- as an aside to those efforts, I also want to mention that we have an excellent working relationship with our MLA, Doug Griffiths (who was invited here this evening and had planned to attend, but was unable to do so), whose phone number we will be glad to give you if you want to discuss property tax with him...
- overall, we want the community to feel connected to the municipal leadership in Bawlf and for everyone to know that we are doing the jobs that you elected us to do

2009 Plans

- now that you have an idea as to how we approach our work, let me tell you at least some of the items at the top of our agenda in 2009; some are “sexy”, some are not, but all are critical

MSP

- biggest item slated for completion this year
- idea is to interact with individuals and groups in the community in order to forge a vision and a plan that expresses where we see ourselves being in the long term: we want to discover actions we can take now so that we leave our children and grandchildren with a wonderful place in which to live, work, and play
- as you know from the surveys you have already received, this plan will focus on 5 key dimensions of our community: the economy, the environment, cultural life, social life, and governance
- not only is this process a good idea in and of itself (and long overdue in Bawlf), it is *mandatory* in that we would cease to be eligible for Provincial grants, were we not to complete this plan by the end of this year
- fortunately, we don't have to do this either ourselves, or from scratch: numerous other municipalities our size in Alberta have already completed such a plan
- moreover, Camrose County has seconded a MS co-ordinator from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association in order to prepare such a plan at the County level and to assist all the municipalities in Camrose County to prepare our own plans
- you'll be hearing a lot more about this over the next while and I strongly urge each and every one of you to complete your surveys, if you haven't done so already, and to participate in the process as much as you are able because only then will the final document reflect who we are and what we want as a community
- they say that, “If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there”; the MSP is our “roadmap to the future” and it will be one of the best legacies we could ever hope to leave for both current and future residents

Infrastructure & Public Works

- **new Village Office:** sorely overdue; impossible for our Administrative team to work in the small amount of space it currently has
 - worked out an agreement with the Senior Society for use of the Senior Centre building and we are looking forward to sharing this facility with them
 - expect office to be completed sometime in May, on time and on budget; Grand Opening will follow sometime before the summer
 - look forward to being housed in a facility of which we can all be proud and to presenting a more professional image to residents and visitors alike
- **Lift station:** no end of problems over the past few years in terms of flooding, false alarms, etc.
 - will be completely upgrading it, as well as doing some other water & sewer-related repairs and upgrades
 - again, not sexy or highly visible, but absolutely necessary

Conservation

- don't have to be radical environmentalist to want to act in a responsible way with regard to the resources around us; addressing several issues in that regard
 - Recycling
 - to this point, we have had one of the most comprehensive recycling depots in the area, but Centra-Cam is dealing with its own recycling market struggles and is not picking up recyclables any further (we can take them there for now, but who knows how long that will last)
 - all other municipalities in the area are dealing with different versions of the same struggle
 - we are therefore, as a group, looking at all options, including a regional recycling co-operative that would possibly deal with Edmonton Waste Management, which is one of the pre-eminent facilities of its kind in the world
 - Compost area

Development

- have 7 lots coming on stream; infrastructure already paid for with previous grants, so ratepayers are not on the hook for any interest charges or other major expenses if they don't sell right away

Regional Children's Centre

- biggest and most important project of them all: RCC
- not actually a Village project, but it would be the most important development to occur in the Village in decades
- it will enhance the quality of family life, not only in Bawlf but in the entire region: in terms of Bawlf itself, it will have a significant positive impact on enrolment at the School, property values, business opportunity and profitability, & the Village's long-term viability
- land has already been donated by the BRSD; Committee had hoped for modular units; appears at this point that this won't happen, so construction from scratch looks like the most likely possibility – you'll be hearing a lot more about that as time goes on
- as I said, it's not a Village project but the Village will be doing whatever it can to assist in the project moving along; this will include some manpower in the early stages of construction and possibly some element of financial commitment, the nature of which will be discussed and determined once the Centre's capital and operating budgets are finalised

Conclusion

- overall, 2008 was an exciting, action-packed year and, despite the economic downturn, we expect 2009 to be no less so when all is said and done
- Village Council and Administration will continue to act responsibly, prudently, and in a way that continues to reflect the mandate that you gave us in the 2007 election
- we are all humbled by the responsibilities with which you've entrusted us and we hope that you're comfortable with the philosophy that guides us and the work we continue to do
- the fact that you're here this evening shows that you care as much as we do and we thank you for the opportunity to continue in our role as servant leaders in our community; it's an honour and a privilege

Thank you.