



## Village of Bawlf Annual General Meeting *April 22, 2010*

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

#### **Introduction**

- another whirlwind of a year: where does the time go?
- 2009 a year in which much progress made – some of it tangible and visible, such as new municipal complex, while some more subtle and less evident, but no less important, such as Bawlf's leadership role in numerous regional initiatives
- overall, this is not the same Village as it was 2.5 years ago, when this Council first elected; not even the same it was a year ago, but the type of change in approach that we have implemented represents a fulfilment of the mandate this Council was given in the 2007 election and we are proud indeed of that progress
- of course, in October of this year, there will be an opportunity for residents to pass judgement on whether Council's decisions have lived up to expectations
- naturally hasn't all been smooth sailing, but the journey to a worthwhile destination never is
- however, we remain convinced that our destination of being a top-tier municipal organization for a municipality of this size, one that serves its residents in the most effective and efficient way possible and one that sets the standard for other municipalities to follow, is the right one

#### **Points of Pride**

before going on, I want to thank my fellow Councillors for their synopses and mention that I am very fortunate and proud to be surrounded by elected people of this calibre

I think we all need to be aware of the level of dedication, commitment, and knowledge that exists among this group

colleagues spoke of specific activities and accomplishments throughout 2009, but I want to draw attention to some "bigger picture" points of which I think we can all be proud.

**First point of pride is our relationship with Camrose County and all the other municipalities within our County borders.**

when I speak to my counterparts in towns and villages in other counties and tell them about our excellent working relationship with Camrose County, they are envious of the mutual trust and open channels of communication that we enjoy and it's amazing what you can accomplish when that kind of trust exists

I am proud to say that Bawlf has been able and willing to take a leadership role in this process

of course, it helps when you have a County Reeve who is all about finding ways to work together

Reeve Don Gregorwich is a public servant of the highest order & I think we should all be thankful that he takes the approach he does

in Camrose County, we have quarterly Mayors/Administrators meetings, with an eye on finding areas in which we can collaborate and co-operate

are discussing many issues, but three specific accomplishments so far:

1. purchase of a shared sewer flush truck unit
2. postings to the new Assessment Review Boards (10 shared people from all across the County vs. three from each municipality)
3. obtained grant to explore instituting a regional emergency services liaison

think what we are doing across the County matters? April 28<sup>th</sup>: despite initial scheduling issues, all four area MLAs attending our Mayors/Administrators meeting for a "bear pit" session; don't for a moment think that they don't see the value of what we are doing

Ladies and gentlemen, this is **good** for Bawlf: collaboration will lead to ever-increasing cost savings and operational efficiencies, but without any important loss in local decision-making

**Second point of pride is our strengthened relationships within the community.**

includes our relationships with Bawlf School, the Bawlf Community Builders, the Family Day organizing committee, the Recreation Board, the Bawlf Public Library, Sanden Court, the Regional Children's Centre, the Lions, and the Senior Society

several elements to strengthening these relationships, some involving direct Village participation, some involving financial commitment, some involving informal personal participation, such as when individual Councillors lend a hand by attending meetings on their own time or working casinos, and some simply involving clarification of our communication channels and roles relative to each other

it's not so much the specifics, though, as it is the Village taking a leadership role by setting the tone for individual and group initiatives to flourish

in other words, community groups need to know that what they're doing is encouraged and appreciated and that they are indeed a part of the "bigger picture" of making Bawlf a better place to live

two community initiatives I'll mention in particular:

### Bawlf School

when we were first elected in 2007, it's safe to say that there was almost no working relationship between the School and the Village (not that there was animosity; simply that there was no collaborative community approach between the two organizations)

now, 2.5 years later, there are so many points of co-operation and contact, it's difficult to remember them all (Grade 6 Mayor for a Day contest, joint Village clean-up, cross-advertising and participating in each other's events, to name just a few)

this past year, we built on the relationship even more, firstly by inviting our MLA to join me in teaching a class on government to the Grade 6 students as part of the "Mayor for a Day" process; secondly by sponsoring a citizenship award for Grade 12 students, and thirdly by inviting community members to come to Bawlf School and learn basic computer skills from the Grade 8 students

now, with the Children's Centre set to be built this year, the opportunities for the School, the Playschool Society, and the Village to work together even more are virtually limitless

### Bawlf Community Builders (2<sup>nd</sup> community initiative I want to mention)

committee that came about as a result of the Municipal Sustainability meetings that were held last year

job is to co-ordinate activities and projects that reflect the types of initiatives that we all identified as enhancing our community well-being in the long term

two of these issues, which were identified both in the meetings that were held and in the surveys we sent out, were **social events** and **beautification**

our Community Builders started working on this last year by hosting a community Grey Cup party and this year by planting flowers in various places around town (meet May 20 at the Fire Hall at 7 PM if you want to help plant)

these are the types of initiatives that strengthen the ties that bind within a community and I'm very pleased to say many people in Bawlf have taken to heart the idea that individual initiative is the key to building a sense of community

the job of "building community" is never done, but I will repeat what I've said since I was elected: those of us who want to see a stronger community need to be the change that we want to see

Council can set the tone, and I'm hoping we've done that, but then it's up to each and every one of us to take the next step to make Bawlf the community it could be

**Third point of pride is that fact that, in the process of doing what we've done over the past year and, indeed, over the past 2.5 years, we've managed to keep our tax rate one of the lowest in the province for a municipality this size.**

every decision we make is made with the bottom line in mind

no wasteful spending

we go over our budget line by line every year to ensure that we are getting the most from the tax dollars with which we have been entrusted

if you still have doubts, go ask people in some of our neighbouring communities how they feel about their taxes; you'll find that we in Bawlf are in a good situation indeed

Again, ladies and gentlemen, these are points of which we can all be proud as Council and Administration continue to seek better ways both to **do the right things** and to **do things right**

## 2010 plans

### Capital spending

As was mentioned in the January newsletter, Council recognizes that there are some capital items that need attention **now** and we are therefore making the commitment to proceed with these in 2010. These include:

a **new Village fire truck (new to us, anyway)**, since the old one is no longer re-certifiable

**reconstruction of Macrae Street from Alberta Avenue to Martin Avenue**; we're hoping not to have to replace water & sewer lines but we certainly will be doing the sub-grade/base prep, with paving to follow within 1-2 years;

completion of the **sewer lift station renovations**; and

an investment in the **Regional Children's Centre**.

Village Council recognizes that a project such as the reconstruction of Macrae Street is a significant undertaking for a municipality of Bawlf's size but there comes a point at which, as most of us know, remediation cannot be delayed any longer

However, significant infrastructure work in a municipality of **any** size necessitates borrowing and ours is no exception: we cannot both be debt-free **and** replace our aging roads and lines. This is no different in larger centres, who also fund major construction with a combination of grants, reserves, and debt

Moreover, there is the issue of fairness. There is no reason why current ratepayers should have to pay for major construction solely out of general revenues or reserves when ratepayers from the next 40 or 50 years will be using that infrastructure as well. Spreading the costs out over 25 years or more is both fair **and** prudent and is by far the best way for the Village to address its needs as we head into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

## Taxation

2010 a year in which old is new again

we used to have a series of flat taxes, which are a set amount that everyone pays for specific services, such as parks and recreation, fire protection, and street maintenance

these were eliminated some years back in order to re-jig the mil rate so that we would be eligible for certain grants that were available at that time

idea of the flat tax is that everyone should pay a minimum amount of tax regardless of property value because everyone is entitled to the same minimum level of service

we didn't go to the same extent that some other municipalities have but, in the interests of fairness, we thought that some level of minimum tax is necessary

bottom line is that that many people will see either no, or very little, tax increase, while some of the smaller or older houses, including mine, will see an increase this year

### *The role of the Provincial Government*

however, with regard to taxes, I think it's important that everyone realizes the role that the Provincial Government has played in any increases that might occur

sound like a broken record because I found myself having to say the same thing at last year's meeting

in 2007, the Province rolled out its Municipal Sustainability Initiative, which would consolidate a number of grants into two payments: one for operating and one for capital projects; designed to provide some consistency and dependability in municipal funding

Yet, every year since then, there has been either a cut to MSI funding, an increase to the education portion of the property tax, or both.

This year, the combined cut to MSI and increase in the education tax amounts to about \$14,000, which is a huge amount of money for a small municipality; this is an average of \$82 per household in Bawlf

we feel that, if the Province needs to balance its books via a combination of cuts and tax increases, it should do so directly, and not via the municipalities

the Provincial Government will tell you that they've not raised taxes this year, but the fact is that they have: they're simply doing it through the municipalities and leaving us to explain that to you folks

if this is a concern to you, I strongly urge you to contact either Mr. Griffiths, our MLA, or the Premier – they need to know how these decisions affect us and I can certainly promise you that I'll be taking that message loudly and clearly to our area MLAs next week

### Concerns around the community

want to bring my remarks to a close by commenting on something we've heard around town, namely that we're trying to run the Village "as if it were a city" and that this has resulted in what some perceive as occasional conflict between the Village and certain groups

my first response is: how would it even be possible to try running the Village like a city, considering our small staff and limited hours?

but I will tell you this: Council and Administration **are** trying to run the Village on the basis of what the Municipal Government Act demands: nothing more, but certainly nothing less and in Bawlf, like in many small communities throughout Alberta, those processes haven't always been fully understood or strongly adhered to

now, we may be only a village of just under 400, but the process of who reports to whom and how that's done within the context of the budget cycle is the same whether you're Bawlf, Camrose, or Edmonton: Council has one employee (the Village Manager) and that employee supervises all the other people who work for the Village either directly or indirectly

this has meant some change in the way things are done and, naturally, some people are uncomfortable with that change, which is understandable because no one likes too much change too quickly

unfortunately, this sometimes leads to what others perceive as conflict but what Council and I simply see as the natural process of discussion and negotiation as we improve our operation going forward

in the 2007 election, we all heard loud and clear that there were a whole bunch of things that needed to be done differently in Bawlf and, in my mind, that's exactly why this particular group of Councillors was elected

we weren't elected to stand back and let things be; we weren't elected to hide our heads in the sand and we certainly weren't elected because "good enough" was good enough

we were elected to take a community leadership role and, as my counterpart in Daysland recently said, if you're not breaking precedent, then you're not showing real leadership

well, ladies & gentlemen, we've not been afraid to break precedent, and we've not been afraid to demand accountability from everyone in our organization, including ourselves, and we've not been afraid to have high expectations, we've not been afraid to operate at the highest standard that a municipality this size can achieve, and and we've most certainly not been afraid to adhere to the MGA

if this is what garners the criticism that we are somehow trying to be "like a city", then so be it

Are we perfect? – no

Is the job finished? – not by any means

Have we made mistakes in the process? – absolutely, and we accept full responsibility for those

but the essence of leadership is not being afraid to make mistakes and a willingness to break precedent, with an eye on creating something much better when all is said and done

as I've said many times before, all we are doing is ensuring that we have the right people, the right facilities, and the right processes in place so that this multi-million dollar corporation called the "Village of Bawlf" provides us, as ratepayers, with maximum value for our tax dollars

Ladies and gentlemen, when I ran in 2007, one of my personal campaign statements was a desire to see Bawlf as setting the standard in municipal governance and I can tell you that we are seen as leaders among our peers

I can't attend a function where other municipal officials are present without being asked how we are handling a given situation

"What's Bawlf doing about this or that?" our Village Manager and I often hear from peers

and why is that?

because they see us setting the standard in administration

because they see us setting the standard in our relations with the province

because they **certainly** see us setting the standard in how we communicate

but mostly because they know that we've not been afraid to show leadership, both within our community and among our communities

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2007:

we were asked to communicate better – we're doing that

we were asked to professionalize our operation – we're doing that

we were asked to help foster a better sense of community – we're doing that

we were asked to show leadership, and ladies & gentlemen, **we are doing that**

in October, everyone will have the opportunity to tell us, your servant leaders, whether we've lived up to expectations in those areas or not

we're confident that the things on which we've focussed this term have enabled Bawlf to become what it **should** be, so that the next Council – whomever it may include – can concentrate on making Bawlf what it could be

Thank you